# From Gross Misconduct to Responsibility

Vinca Bigo
vb243@cam.ac.uk
Associate Professor at Euromed Management

**Abstract**

In 1987 the Brundtland Report did much to popularise the notion of 'sustainable development'. The report offers us the following definition: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Two decade on, the literature on the subject is prolific. Very often, the sustainability has been defined along three dimensions: environmental, social and economic, so-called triple bottom line. The importance given to each typically varies according to the interested stakeholders.

There is an aspect of sustainability, however, that has received comparatively little attention, but on which sustainable development crucially depends. And this is the question of responsibility. Responsibility is of course a key tenant of governance. For development to be sustainable it needs to be conducted in a responsible manner. Recent events in global markets indicate, in no uncertain terms, the potentially dire consequences of inappropriate governance.

I propose in this paper to flesh out the notion of responsibility, an under theorised aspect of governance and sustainability. I argue that a responsible, and so sustainable development, involves both a particular orientation of care or concern, and a human capability to produce caring outcomes. As such, responsibility is not a strictly deontological concept, according to which a set of categorical rules or imperatives are imposed upon as individuals. It is better understood as a human disposition that we individuals need to actively develop in our relations with others, where our psychological mind frames affect the way we interpret events and states of affairs.

## Introduction

In 1987 the Brundtland Report did much to popularise the notion of 'sustainable development'. The report offers us the following definition: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[1]. Two decade on, the literature on the subject is prolific. Very often, the sustainability has been defined along three dimensions: environmental, social and economic, the so-called triple bottom line. The importance given to each typically varies according to the interested stakeholders.

There is an aspect of sustainability, however, that has received comparatively little attention, but on which sustainable development crucially depends. And this is the question of responsibility. Responsibility is of course a key tenant of governance. For development to be sustainable it needs to be conducted in a responsible manner. Recent events in global markets indicate, in no uncertain terms, the potentially dire consequences of inappropriate governance.

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[1] http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Sustainability/Older/Brundtland_Report.html

The objective of this paper is to flesh out the notion of responsibility, an under theorised aspect of governance and sustainability. I shall argue that a responsible, and so sustainable development, involves both a particular orientation of care or concern, and a human capability to produce caring outcomes. As such, responsibility is not a strictly deontological concept, according to which a set of categorical rules or imperatives are imposed on individuals. It is better understood as a human disposition that we as individuals actively develop in our relations with others.

I explore the notion of responsibility as a capability[2], one that can be seen to vary with gender, and that is closely connected to our capacity to care. Thus, to arrive at a notion of responsibility in a global economy, in the context of markets and human aspirations to well being and flourishing, I must draw on economic, philosophical, psychoanalytical, and gendered analytical theory and perspectives.

In the first section, I draw out the distinction between ethics and morality. In section two, I discuss the possibility of being a realist about either. I next discuss features of widespread and traditional approaches to responsibility, whilst presenting my own definition. In the following two sections, I explore the relation between responsibility and gender, and between responsibility and care, and how both enrich our understanding of the concept. Before concluding my paper, I explore implications of my analysis towards shaping (more) responsible individuals.

**Ethics and morality**

Before examining the notion of responsibility more closely, I wish to say something about the distinction between ethics and morality. It seems to be a quasi necessary step to arrive at a clear understanding of responsibility, for responsibility is a form of both ethics and morality, and we must be clear about the differences in play. In essence, *morality is concerned with actual moral behaviour or actions.* And I take *ethics to be guiding of morality. Morality can then be defined as the domain of applied ethics.* In other words, I distinguish between a framework of ethical 'rules', on the one hand, and the often complex concrete situations in which moral actions take place, on the other.

Thus when leaving the realm of ethical abstraction, we are necessarily placed in a context in which ethical norms and values begin to be *applied*, and at which point we enter the realm of morality. Typically, contexts complexify matters considerably. The imperatives "do not lie", or "do not kill", are examples of ethical positions. But under certain circumstances, for example, it will be found that lying saves lives, whilst in

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[2] I am aware that the term 'capability' is deployed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Whilst I do engage with these authors elsewhere in my work, the meaning of 'capability' here is not restricted to the one intended by Sen. Indeed, following an article by Sabina Alkire (2005), one in which she endeavours to clarify some of Sen's central concepts, it transpires that "capabilities are various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve... Put differently, they are 'the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value'" (Alkire 2005:2). On the face of it, responsibility, as I intend it in the present paper encompasses both functionings and capabilities. Thus, when employing the term capability, capacity, and ability, I do so in a wider sense than utilised in the capabilities approach.

the abstract lying is mostly universally considered to be a bad thing, and in all likelihood is too.

The ethical is merely taken as *what applies throughout*, because it is posited before moral behaviour is enacted. Thus, some may argue that to flourish, if that is the goal, one must act in accordance with a specific set of pre established ethical rules, whatever the context. In this instance, morally good behaviour will be considered as sticking as close as possible to the specified ethical imperatives. Alternatively, it may be thought that the most appropriate course of action requires us to follow a different *a priori* established rule. The latter may be for instance that one should take decisions about one's moral action according to the specific relational context. In order words, the a priori rule in such cases is to establish *a posteriori* what behaviour is best adopted.

In practice, we can't ignore relational context. Nor can we ignore certain often specific moral principles for action. This is true whether the principle is to let our actions be guided by context or whether we buy into a set of stark *a priori* rules of a specific nature, such as not lying. The principle is perhaps best illustrated if one has an *a priori* principle of not causing harm to others. For, to apply this rule requires us to understand and adapt to context. Conversely, adopting an *a priori* principle resting one's moral decisions on relational context will at some point or other call on the moral actor to take a stance on whether it is harmful, or not, to lie, kill, to steal, and so on. Indeed, moral actors will during her lifetime acquire a position on these issues, partly by being conditioned, partly by personal discernment, a position that will be revealed in her moral decisions, even when the moto is to act according to relational context. Consequently, moral actors can in the end be seen to strike a balance between adapting certain principles to various circumstances.

The objective in this paper is to explore what constitutes and enables responsible actions. Consequently, my focus will be primarily on morality, or moral actions, though I will contextualise my notion of responsibility by rendering explicit its ethical dimension.

### Can we be realists about ethics and morality?

I have indicated that morality is concerned with actual moral behaviour or actions, and that ethics acts as a guide to morality. Morality is connected to our actions (and thoughts) that take place in specific contexts that typically not known in advance. Consequently, moral decisions are often complicated to make, and moral behaviour equally often difficult to judge.

Both ethical standards and moral behaviour are in fact subject to discussion and disagreement. Especially in the domain of applied ethics, that is, morality, we will be confronted with differences in evaluation and judgment. Different cultures and traditions have over the time produced different moral codes of conduct. Such codes are implicitly and/or explicitly backed by the community, that is, there is a written and/or tacit collective agreement. Their violation will likely be sanctioned in one way or another. Sanctions may include shaming, financial penalty, bodily sanctions, and so on.

But we can be realists both about ethics and morality. This is so because the ethical decree that killing, for instance and as a general rule, obstructs flourishing is either true or false. One can be right or wrong about it. Equally, actual ways of behaving make a difference human flourishing, and, as such, there is a reality as whether they contribute to or impede flourishing. Assessments may be very difficult to make, but whether in ethically or morally, there is a truth of the matter. Agreement has little to do with it, for truth is not a matter of a majority being convinced of a particular matter. This is not to take away the merits of democracy, in particular, of processes of participative democracy. Indeed, such processes of exchange, may be most helpful in being able to correctly answer ethical and moral questions.

Differences in what is considered ethical and moral emerge out of specific cultural contexts. For instance, the Global North has a tendency to think of human flourishing, whereby nature is considered subservient to human needs, and is thus seen to serve to facilitate the former. The Global South has a take on flourishing, where nature is often associated with the Divine. Nature's flourishing is then often as high on the agenda as human flourishing (Shiva 1989). The difference in approaches means that we start off with different notions of flourishing. Thus, different contexts will often involve different notions of well being, histories, material circumstances, involving human actors with varied personal backgrounds and experiences.

So, each context will produce different moral and ethical frameworks. Ethical norms are in place before actions are undertaken. Ethical abstractions will likely be more universally agreed upon, than actual moral conduct. As indicated, however, there is a truth about their effects on flourishing, whether we get it right or not, and whether or not there is agreement on the matter. Holding this belief is to be a realist about ethics and morality.

**Responsibility: a moral duty?**

Responsibility is often thought and spoken of as a *moral* duty or obligation. Arguably it is no less an *ethical* duty. So when is responsibility moral and when is it ethical? Well, take parents for instance. They are pretty much universally, *a priori* considered to be responsible for looking after children. We are here in the realm of the ethical. But parents in some instances fall gravely and/or permanently ill, in which case they can no longer realistically look after their off springs. Morality is concerned with behaviour in practice. In this instance, the morally 'right' thing to do is likely to transfer the responsibility of looking after the children to one or more able adults instead.

As indicated, in this paper, my focus is primarily on responsibility in respect of morality. This is just because I wish to take the concept 1) beyond its more abstract ethical dimension, and 2) into the realm of morality, and so practice in context, but also 3) beyond the notion of responsibility as mere obligation, to examine 4) the ability or capability to behave responsibly.

Duties or obligations are difficult to envisage outside a community (at the limit we may have here a community of one, as our conscience gives us a sense of obligation, and disciplines us to act in this or that way). The obligation not to lie, for example, is an ethical principle that may or may not be adopted by the community. But if adopted,

the community will typically put in place sanctions to enforce the principle. Correspondingly, responsibility has long been understood by philosophers[3] over the centuries as an *obligation* with possible sanctions of some kind being applied upon transgression.

It is none too surprising that over the centuries moral character and integrity have been centrally discussed in moral/ethical scholarship. For human behaviour is at least in part contingent on the character of the moral actor. Individuals were thought of as needing to master the darker side of their character, their inner monsters and demons. Such mastery was assumed to be largely an act of *volition*. Though often recognised to be emotionally complex, the emphasis was on will power to conquer one's weaknesses. *Rational reasoning* and introspection, and mind over body have been commonly advanced as vectors for developing one's moral character. The approach is largely voluntarist. Yet moral behaviour is, as indicated, tied to human practice. It is questionable therefore that mere will power constitutes a sufficient and satisfactory criterion to scrutinise and produce responsible outcomes.

In truth, neither voluntarism, nor determinism, constitute adequate paradigms to frame moral behaviour. No doubt free will is necessarily assumed if we are to impute responsibility on one or several actors at all. It is useless, however, to cast a person as perfectly free in his or her actions. In reality, external circumstances, and a person's particular dispositions, will in part enable, and in part constrain, of his or her choices.

It was not until the onset of contemporary psychoanalysis and deconstructivist trends, including social constructivism and post modernism, that persons came to be understood in terms of their life histories, and their upbringing. It is only fairly recently in the history of philosophy that thought is given to the many unconscious ways in which during the early years human beings react to their environment. The human environment is constituted of close ones, loved persons and objects, transitional objects, hated and loved ones (Klein 1948, Winnicott 1965), but also of the wider societal and natural environment, which through human practice, contributes to reproduce and transform norms, values and beliefs. Thus, we observe over the last century the emergence of scholarship in moral psychology (Gilligan 1982, Nussbaum 1990, Murdoch 1992).

It becomes apparent that to 'operationalise' the notion of responsibility requires moving beyond mere obligation, and to examine personal life histories. In particular, I want to focus on *responsibility as capability*. It is in this sense that I define responsibility as *the ability to take into account, in our conception and our actions[4],*

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[3] This approach to responsibility is the product of work by essentially male philosophers and research communities. Arguably, scholarly production may have yielded different notions of responsibility with female scholars, or both genders, contributing to theory, a point to which I shall return in due course.

[4] I differentiate here our conception of things at any point in time and actions that result from such a conception. I am well aware that a conception is never in fact static (that nothing in the universe is) and as such it may well be defined as an action. This is true especially when we take into account the discovery that the mere fact of the presence of an observer makes a difference to quantum physical outcomes (Bohr 1934).

*the nature of 'things', including their capacities and vulnerabilities, whether these 'things' are persons (including ourselves), or things such as for instance ecosystems.*[5]

I should add that though this definition is wide enough that it does not necessarily entail that the ability to be responsible be used to further flourishing. For the purposes of this paper, I intend responsibility to be oriented to enhancing the flourishing of all.

Most human beings are born with the ability to behave responsibly. The capability to be responsible is part of our individual potential, but personal path ways will variously affect each and every one of us to develop this capability. Our psychological mind frames affect the way we interpret events and states of affairs, which will in run affect our ability to act responsibly as we will in greater detail below. In addition, it is possible for individuals to have developed their capacity to behave responsibly. They have actualised this potential. They are capable of responsible action. It is yet a further step as to whether persons will choose and/or can under the circumstances actualise their capability into responsible acts.

Below, I examine in further detail what shapes individuals, their personality and consequently their ability to be responsible.

**Gender and responsibility**

If personality makes a difference and if personality is understood as the product of individual pathways that result in psychological dispositions, then in so far as path ways are marked by *systems of differentiation*, the latter will play a role in shaping character and moral behaviour. One such system of differentiation is gender. Sex and gender can be defines as follows[6]. I quote:

"Gender, I suggest, is bound up with one such system of identification and differentiation, one that (as it happens in seemingly all societies so far) serves to privilege some over others. Essential to such a system are the following two components:
1) a distinction repeatedly drawn between individuals who are regularly/mostly observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction and others who are regularly/mostly

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[5] The ability to be responsible to begin is principally genetic, though even prior birth, the infant has already been influenced by its environment, the mother's womb, her vibrations, her emotions, her voice, that of the father, and so on. The very fact that a person is able to cope, and operate in the world is proof of responsibility. For one could not possibly function in the world without taking into account and acting according to its nature, and the nature of things situated in it. One exception to (and further evidence of) this rule is found in the case of severe autism, where individuals appear unable to perceive the world as it is, being in many ways disconnected from it. They are consequently not able to cope either. These people do not have the capacity to be responsible for them selves, or other things and persons.

[6] This definition is the result of joint discussions by members of the Cambridge Social Ontology Group (CSOG). The group has refined its understanding of the categories of sex and gender by devoting several sessions to the themes. The definitions that follow are the fruit of interactions within the group, though they do not necessarily correspond to a unanimous take on the concepts by every one of its member. Which ever way, I have quoted the definition as made 'public' through a paper published by Tony Lawson in 2007.

observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction.

   2) a set of mechanisms or processes which work in any given society or locality to legitimise/motivate the notion that individuals regarded as female and those regarded as male ought to be allocated to, or to have allocated to them, systematically differentiated kinds of social positions, where the nature of the allocations encouraged need not, and typically does not, reflect any commonalities or differences located at the biological level" (Lawson 2007: 151).

Now, gender has been explicitly linked to moral orientation by moral psychologists, during the second half of the last century. In the 1960s, studies by Kohlberg (1966) sought to understand the development of infant morality. Kohlberg focused especially on adolescent boys and their moral development. Gilligan criticised "moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, in his theory of infant moral development, for focusing too much on boys' experiences, and for neglecting different ways of apprehending morality, such as constructed and experienced by girls [(1982)]. She argues girls, and later women, are much more concerned with the effects of their moral behaviour on others, and with preserving harmonious relations. Their emphasis is often to seek to protect the other person's feelings and to show empathy, when deciding how best to behave. Boys, and later men, following their gender script, tend to place the emphasis on rules or injunctions, where separateness is the primary emotion." (Bigo and Gray 2009).

The theory of an *ethics of care* originated Gilligan's critique of what she termed and contrasted with an *ethics of justice*. "The latter is based on moral injunctions that, according to Gilligan, do not sufficiently reflect relational contexts." (Bigo and Gray 2009). But, to be accurate, the two stated forms of ethics are in fact both about justice. Thus, justice and care are not oppositional paradigms. The ethics of care is just as concerned with achieving justice, as the 'ethics of justice'. Consequently, the justice paradigm should not be the domain reserved to 'other than empathy driven' moral actions (Bubeck 1995). The same view is defended by Gheaus:

> "The ethics of care, and especially the way in which it relates to theories of justice, has been one of the major streams in feminist ethics and political theory over the last decades. While the initial focus was on the conflicts between care and justice, recent theories argue in favor of understanding justice and care as complementary, and not opposing values." (Gheaus 2010:1).

A word of caution on justice, for it may be seen to implicitly or explicitly make reference to a community, one which enforces sanctions when one of the commonly agreed upon set of rules/laws is transgressed. Justice may indeed presuppose that there is a society with a system of justice in place. This is not however how I intend the term. For if there is a truth about flourishing then there are norms and moral actions that are consistent with such flourishing. It is such norms I take to be just, and oriented to achieving justice.

In practice, some kind of mix of ethics and morality tends to be adopted, whereby both *a priori* abstractions and *a posteriori* solutions adapted to the relational context are sought, even when gender trends and differences are observed. I must add here

crucially that gender differences reflecting Gilligan's observations will find expression both in the ethical and the moral realm. The distinction is not one of justice versus care, but of what *kind* of ethics and what *kind* of morality. Ethics, whilst more abstract, universal and *a priori* can be all about care, for there can be, a universal tendency (over a group or population of woman for example) to favour empathy as a moral rule to further flourishing[7]. And morality or moral action, whilst more concrete, context based, and made up of actual actions, may yet produce an orientation that is inherently about rule following in practice! Having clarified my notions of ethics and morality, of responsibility, and discussed the ethics of care, I will now to take a closer look at the concept of care, and how it relates to responsibility.

**Care and responsibility**

There are in the ethics of care references to the notion of care that warrant closer inspection. Indeed, the term care has various meanings, and I wish to make explicit which inflections of care are presupposed in the ethics of care, and further how these inflections relate to the notion of responsibility.

I have elsewhere advanced a three fold definition[8] or *ontology of care*, which can be summarised as follows: $care_1$, the labour of looking after other persons or things, including both the process of such labouring and its output (Bigo and Gray 2009). $Care_2$ is the attention with which we perform our acts in order to ensure that the desired result is achieved. $Care_3$ is our feelings of concern that motivate our acting in this or that way (our Leitmotiv).

Recall that I have chosen to focus on responsibility as a capacity. In doing so, it is my purpose to move beyond mere obligation or imperative to unpacking what it takes to bring about responsible action. I have defined responsibility as *the ability to take into account, in our conception and our actions, the nature of 'things', including their capacities and vulnerabilities, whether these 'things' are persons (including ourselves), or things such as for instance ecosystems*.

A first point to note is that we can see how $care_2$ and $care_3$ underpin the capacity to behave responsibly. Moral actions call on care under the aspect that involves 'applying oneself', which I have termed $care_2$, but also under the aspect involving 'feeling concerned by', $care_3$. Care1, the task of looking after, the labour (as a process) and its outcome, are further the result of responsible behaviour.

The ethics of care, we recall, describes (and advocates) an emphasis on empathy in motivating moral decisions and in establishing ethical standards. Thus, care in the context of such an ethics focuses primarily on $care_3$, in so far as it describes an orientation motivated and underpinned by considerations of empathy. In its limit case, when taken to its logical conclusion, empathy is to be one with. This is the definition of empathy adopted by the online Webster dictionary:

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[7] Universalisations have no content *a priori*. Just as post modernism universalises about there being only differences, the ethics of care may be seen as universally privileging empathy.

[8] By ontology I mean (the study of) the nature of a domain of reality.

> "**1 :** the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused with it
> **2 :** the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; *also* **:** the capacity for this".

Thus taking on board Webster's definition, responsibility, as defined above, and empathy, akin to care$_3$, we see once more, are closely connected.

Thus, we can see how care and responsibility interrelate. Below I want to look in more detail at the 'operationalisation' of responsibility. In other words, how can the capability be favoured and develop, rendered active? I suggested earlier that are born with the possibility to develop the capability to be responsible, in our actions and orientations. Individual experiences in growing up and throughout a life time may harm that capability, or to the contrary allow it to be developed, bearing in mind that processes of morality may differ with gender.

If responsibility requires us, as I have indicated, to correctly capture the nature of, and to act by taking into account this nature, then we might argue that a successful ontologist will favourably develop his or her capacity to be responsible. Digging a little further, it transpires that to be aware and take care (in the sense of care$_1$) of the true nature of some other person or thing requires us to view the world as it is, and not as we, or indeed the person, wish it to be. A big contender for distorting reality and producing inaccurate representations of course is *fear*.

There is by now a vast body of literature coming out psychology and psychoanalysis, and further contribution in economics (see for example, Elster 2010) on the subject of fear and distortions. Fear is a common fate of humanity, in so far we are born dependant, vulnerable, undifferentiated from the mother, and mortal. Processes of differentiation and individuation provoke fear and anxiety, as part of the normal course of identity formation. We typically develop a series of coping mechanisms to 'defend' ourselves in a world that (we on occasion perceive as threatening and which) can be unpredictable. In her discussion of Rosenfeld, Mary Morgan (1999) points out that the difficulty to recognise separateness can lead to distorted representations of objects. Indeed,

> "Psychoanalytic theory is replete with assessments of how the processes of gaining awareness of (i) difference and (ii) mortality are anxiety provoking as the infant necessarily senses its lack of total control. The outcome, typically, is that the original delusion is (often painfully) replaced with a more realistic relation to the world (Mitchell and Black, 1995; Tishkowski, 2006). But the process is one that is potentially traumatic and inhibiting (see, e.g., Freud, 1933; Klein, 1948; Kristeva, 1998)" (Bigo 2008: 751).

Clearly, the more we distort, idealise, devalue, etc. the less we are aware of the actual nature of some other, person or object towards which we are to adopt a responsible orientation. The less too we are able to empathise with this other. Moral psychologist, Iris Murdoch (1992) devotes a great deal of time and space to

examining the moral person with his or her fears and weaknesses, as well as dreams and (creative) fantasies. The ground she covers mostly supports my own thesis. She does not however explicitly theorise gender in relation to moral conduct and responsibility.

Now whilst early experiences of individuation causing fear and anxiety are common to children of both sexes, we saw that Gilligan observes differences in boys' and girls' way of relation to empathy and morality. Consequently, having established empathy to be a key aspect of responsibility, there seem to be a strong argument to take into account the gender dimension, when we study responsibility.

Incidentally, the notion of care has been adopted by certain both western and eastern philosophical trends. Thus for instance in 1927, Heidegger in *Being and Time*, discusses the possibility to correctly comprehend the world. When describing the world, we formulate and theorise, which necessitates a process of abstraction from our objects of study. Consequently, we cannot do the world justice in our representation of it. We cannot describe and experience it fully as it is, at one and the same time. Doing the world justice is to correctly interpret it, and to avoid distortion we must become it. Justice can be employed here in the sense of being loyal to what 'just is'.

And it is probably no coincidence that Heidegger explored the notions of care (Sorge), concern (Besorgen), and being present or in the world, so we may faithfully render it. This brief quote by Heidegger is a salient example of his interest in the notion of care: "because Dasein, when understood ontologically, is care. Because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein, its Being towards the world …is essentially concern (Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 84).

Empathy or care in this sense is commonly encountered in eastern philosophy. We find it, for example, in Zen traditions that orientate the spiritual seeker to contemplate so as to 'become' the object of contemplation. However interesting, I cannot here further explore such wider philosophical horizons.

Below, I draw out some of the consequences that ensue from the approach to responsibility adopted in this paper. In particular, if the capacity to adopt a responsible orientation is gender related, what may constitute key leverages to creating generations of more responsible citizens?

**Responsible citizens**

Responsibility constructs itself in a relation between the self and that, which is different from us: others (or other things). As such, it relationships between sexes (the most universal source of difference in social reality) constitutes a space for responsible action. Gender differences and gender relations are essential to identity formations. These relations are often marked by inequality, and where patriarchal norms, values and institutions are operational, we have a system in which the feminine is systematically cast as inferior to the masculine.

Part of the explanation for the gender hierarchy is that processes of differentiation and individuation often generates intolerance of difference. There are of course plenty

of other spaces in which differences result in expressions of intolerance. Take cultural and religious difference for example. The root cause for the various manifestations of intolerance, we noted, is fear, a fear of loosing one's sense of identity. Thus, we observe fear of difference being played out in family context, but also in the international political arena.

What is clear is that fear and intolerance contravene the capacity to behave responsibly. Consequently, an in depth examination of that which drives the need for our ontological security, but also the desire (beyond need) to construct and develop one's identity, is necessary so we can begin to bring relevant answers to the way in which responsibility is developed in the face of difference.

Further, responsibility entails that a balance, between the following of *a priori* ethical principles, more easily defended abstractly, and context specific moral practices established *a posteriori*, be successfully arrived at. The privileging of empathy and context specific decisions, on the one hand, or, of pre ordained sets of rules, on the other, can be a feature of both one's ethical *and* moral orientations. We did find that there is an observed tendency for males to be bound to *a priori* rules, and females to *a posteriori* context dependant decision making. In so far as the ability to behave responsibly hinges on finding a balance between the two tendencies, our moving away from current gender stereotypes should on the face of it be a constructive move.

To achieve change at such a deep level likely entails new more gender neutral family configurations, with truly shared parenting responsibilities, on the one hand. On the other, such change requires societal, especially professional attitudinal and organisational changes, capable of espousing both parents in their roles as carers. Such attitudinal changes are advocated by certain militants in favour incorporating care responsibilities in definitions of citizenship (Sevenhuijsen 1998). Feminist economists have also for some time argued that we should balance care responsibilities between the sexes, as capitalism and patriarchy free ride on women's free and/or cheap reproductive labour (Benaria 1979,  Foblre 2001, Elson 2006).

Different ways and abilities to be responsible are in part determined, we saw, by the development of gender identity. But the gender script is itself a product of context. By being very often those most directly confronted with the impact of changes in the environment on humans, women tend to be in a 'privileged' position to become responsible ecologically sensitive agents. They are able to empathise with ($care_2$ and $care_3$) and care for ($care_1$) the environment. Not surprisingly, the 'green' literature makes explicit references to both care and justice, urging us to incorporate ecological concerns. Indeed, Madhu Suri Prakash reminds us that:

"Over thirty years ago, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* urged us to broaden our ethics of justice and care, including besides humans all the other creatures/forms of life with which we must share our air, fire, water, and soil. Snauwaert's emphasis on ecological care and justice is most welcome." (Prakash 1995)[9].

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[9] Rachel Carson's seminal text *Silent Spring* (1962) sets the scene for much of the eco feminist theory that has emerged over the last few decades.

In sum, generations of responsible citizens must consist of individuals that have been able to individuate and develop their personality, without systematically and defensively distorting the world. To achieve this, children must be brought up in relatively emotionally secure environments. Second, since responsible orientations require a balance of *a priori* and *a posteriori* ethical and moral reasoning, we can aim to shape individuals who, as they move away from gender stereotypes, move away from stereotypical extremes. Third, positions occupied in varying contexts matter irrespective of gender, when it comes to adopting an ethical moral stance. Consequently, the more people, across strata, are exposed to and gain awareness of ideas, situations, environments, and practices, which are key to our flourishing, the more we will likely produce citizens able to act responsibly, with a view to flourishing.

### Concluding comments

In sum, I want to stress the need for a multidisciplinary approach to responsibility, to underpin a socially sustainable development. More specifically, my project is to seek out the particular conditions necessary for responsibility that can underpin socially sustainable development.

Responsibility involves tolerance and respect, particularly in relation to difference. I must reiterate the centrality of the relation between men and women. One mark of irresponsible behaviour is manifests itself in unequal opportunities granted to men and women, issues which lies at the heart of the feminist emancipatory project. I can, of course, point to many cases of inequality and intolerance between other groups. But I choose to concentrate on gender relations for a number reasons. As mentioned earlier, gender is the most universally present social category that giving rise to social differences. In addition, gender differences, as they currently stand and/or are perceived, and gender relations can give us an insight into fundamental questions, such as the definition of the self, loss of identity, fear of the unknown (of difference and of death), factors that affect and explain the ability to take into account vulnerabilities, needs and desires of others, and so act responsibly.

Thus the way people immerse themselves in society and their ability to act responsibly will depend in part on their psychoanalytical histories that are manifest in gender relations. Crucially, gender relations can act as a vector for change, one that can support emancipatory initiatives for development. Being capable of adopting a responsible orientation will further depend on the contexts that shape individuals, and on the specific circumstances in which moral action takes place.

To conclude, responsibility is a human capacity that may or may not be developed, and that may or may not be manifest in individuals and their actions. Responsibility is, I have argued, best understood as a capability that emerges in the development of identity, as we overcome our fear of otherness or difference. As such, it is a most essential human capability that underpins the possibility of sustainable human development and flourishing.

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