



Editorial: Approaches to the Concept of Global Responsibility in Politics, Science, and Philosophy

Mats Andrén

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

mats.andren@lir.gu.se

Abstract: The special issue starts off from the conviction that the way to dissect the complexities and contradictions inherent in the concept of global responsibility is to unveil its historically defined contexts and meanings. The essays demonstrate how political thinkers, philosophers, and scientists have struggled to define global responsibility since the postwar period and examine the specific possibilities and shortcomings of different philosophies and political ideas in this regard. First, the editorial sets out the rationale behind the approach and relates it to previous research. An exploration of various aspects of the concept follows, as well as reflection on its uses in the present. Finally, the five included essays are presented.

Keywords: Anders, Günther; Jaspers, Karl; Jonas, Hans; historical contexts; history of concepts; the atomic bomb; environmentalism; global threats.

In the face of threats such as nuclear war and climate change, there is an urgent need for well-defined concepts and clear-headed thinking that transcend cultural, political, and territorial boundaries and antagonisms. The quest for an environmentally friendly world requires global responsibility, yet this concept is clouded by differing interpretations and, in disputes, it is being challenged. A viable concept of worldwide responsibility must consider what is defined locally as an immediate threat, yet which is comprehended globally merely as a slowly growing threat. It must reconcile the specific local perspectives with global approaches. To persuade citizens, civil society, and political leaders to act against global threats, a sensitive use of the concept of global responsibility is required.

This special issue is based on the idea that the best way to understand the complexities and contradictions of the concept of global responsibility is to explore

its historically defined meanings. This will help in providing a historical understanding of today's political issues and will help define a contemporary concept of global responsibility. Hence, global responsibility must be defined against the backdrop of historical experiences. Only through an in-depth examination and a constructive redefinition of the concept will it be possible to define it in a way that is applicable to present-day concerns. The essays in this issue aim to demonstrate how scientists and philosophers have grappled with the definition of global responsibility since the Second World War, and to explore the specific strengths and weaknesses of different philosophies and political ideas in this regard. This special issue provides food for thought for further examinations of current issues and for constructing a concept of global responsibility that can effectively address impending and future threats.

Although present-day discourses on environmental issues and climate change include the notion of global responsibility, it can be argued that this idea predates the environmental movement of the late 1960s. Likewise, the concept of global consciousness predated the iconic Earthrise photograph taken from Apollo 8 on Christmas Eve in 1968, which is often cited as a pivotal moment in shaping global awareness. It was in the context of the early postwar years that a growing transnational awareness emerged alongside the so-called one-worldism, represented by the activities of public intellectuals and the United Nations. Yet to be told is the little-known history of how the postwar idea of a responsibility for humanity and the world was initially sparked by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the beginning of an international nuclear arms race and the threat of immediate disaster. I have argued elsewhere that the formative period began in 1945, when talk of world responsibility emerged, referring to calls for humanity to unite to avert its own atomic extinction.¹ Therefore, the origin of the idea of global responsibility dates to the latter half of the 1940s and the entire 1950s.

The public intellectuals who took part in the corresponding discourses can be categorized politically as liberals, conservatives, social democrats, or communists. Some were scientists, philosophers, or theologians; others were novelists. Some participated in anti-nuclear and environmental movements; many participated in transnational exchanges, and some in politics. They repeatedly voiced calls for international governance and a world government. They took action by publishing pamphlets, articles and books, and by organizing congresses. They represented many nationalities, and to paint the whole picture, it is necessary to consider transnational perspectives. The scientists and philosophers not only followed the debate in other European countries and the United States but also clearly recognized the nuclear and environmental perils as transnational. Significantly, several of the key intellectuals were themselves involved in transnational exchanges and ventures across Western Europe's territorial boundaries themselves, such as the Russell-Einstein Manifesto from 1955 and the Pugwash association of scientists, which was founded two years later.

¹ Mats Andrén, "Karl Jaspers on the Atomic Bomb and Responsibility," *Existenz* 14/2 (Fall 2019), 1-9.

Notably, the concept of global responsibility was shaped by Western European intellectuals, carrying an internal contradiction in its claim to be global. In order to expose the concept to, and learn from, non-European and non-Western perspectives, a global approach would need to include the work of philosophers from countries such as China, Japan, and Ghana; for example, the writings of Mou Zongsan and Daisaku Ikeda, and Kwasi Wiredu's comparison of African and Western conceptions of morals and his discussion of a decolonization of Western concepts such as the concept of human rights.

Reputable historical studies have examined the Manhattan Project and the development of nuclear weapons, as well as the suffering experienced by those in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a growing interest in the cultural representations of the atomic bomb in the 1940s and 1950s. For instance, Peder Anker has investigated how the United States' industry and government transformed the image of nuclear technology from being a threat into a mere feature of popular culture. He contrasts the elitist history of the bomb with a people's history that brings forward the exploitation of First Nation miners involved in the uranium extraction, as well as the consequences faced by the inhabitants of the Pacific islands used for testing.² Nevertheless, very few studies have examined how intellectuals responded to the atomic bomb and its deployment during this time. Of particular interest is Michael Bess' relevant comparison of four peace activists, including the Hungarian physicist Leo Szilard, who struggled to come to terms with his own contribution to the development of the atomic bomb.³ Christoph Laucht is one of the few researchers who have investigated the role of transnational networks of scientists in raising awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons.⁴ Jodi Burkett has demonstrated the connection between awareness regarding nuclear

² Peder Anker, *For the Love of Bombs: The Trail of Nuclear Suffering*, London, UK: Anthem Press, 2025.

³ Michael Bess, *Realism, Utopia, and the Mushroom Cloud: Four Activist Intellectuals and their Strategies for Peace, 1945-1989*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.

⁴ Christoph Laucht, "Scientists, the Public, the State, and the Debate over the Environmental and Human Health Effects of Nuclear Testing in Britain, 1950-1958," *The Historical Journal* 59/1 (March 2016), 221-251.

danger and the rise of environmentalism. She argues that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament initially held anthropocentric views on nuclear fallout, which during the 1960s shifted toward more ecocentric stances.⁵ In summary, although there is a growing body of research on post-war internationalism, little or no historical research has been conducted on the concept of global responsibility.

The Concept of Global Responsibility: Five Dimensions

Considering the dual threats posed by the atomic bomb and the environmental issues highlights various dimensions of the concept of global responsibility. Let me address five of these dimensions, all of which are relevant to this special issue.

Firstly, in response to nuclear weapons, a threat was recognized that was both immediate and global. Many intellectuals voiced fears that a nuclear war would have disastrous consequences on a worldwide scale, with some asserting that it was almost inevitable. In his contribution to this issue, Ettore Costa shows that before Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed, but after Germany had surrendered, Szilard and other researchers at the Manhattan Project presented a petition against using the atomic bomb, as this would leave the United States with the responsibility for pushing the world over the threshold to a destruction beyond imagination.⁶ Lewis Mumford described the atomic bomb as a cosmic event that endangered all forms of life on Earth, forcing humanity to ponder how to survive the threat. He placed his hope in "our own sense of responsibility,"⁷ believing it would lead to the formation of a world government. He explicitly begged for the United States to initiate a reformation of the United Nations in a way that would make its charter "an instrument of universal law" (PS 43) and put the control of the nuclear weapons in its hands, to avoid any misuse of the new technology from the

USA or any other power. The United States had put the peril to the world and it was they who should initiate such a change. The alternative, he said, was to "escape responsibility" (PS 43). Thus, responsibility was called for in the face of a global nuclear disaster. However, as a pillar of environmentalist thinking, global responsibility addressed incremental threats that were gradually causing increasingly grave consequences for the biosphere. Hans Jonas argued that the cumulative impacts of modern technology were irreversible, which was his key reason for advocating a new theory of responsibility.⁸ Karl-Otto Apel discussed the ecological crisis resulting from the scientific-technological civilization that distinguished industrial society, and he addressed the need for a macro-ethic of responsibility that embraced humanity and the planet as a whole.⁹ Thus, the first dimension implies that the concept of global responsibility has inherited two grounds: one addresses the threat of an abrupt planetary disaster, and the other that stresses the slow-growing global threats.

Secondly, when recounting the history of the concept of global responsibility since the 1950s, one notices an additional dimension relating to the present and the future. This is evident in the various ways in which different philosophers have approached responsibility. Among these philosophers are Günther Anders and Karl Jaspers, who both sought ways to oppose the contemporary nuclear threat by acknowledging global responsibility. However, Anders also discussed responsibility for the future, pleading for the recognition of the not-yet-born and advocating the inclusion of people from distant eras, as if they were present in the now. He points out to his readers that "every responsibility is related to the future."¹⁰ When discussing environmental threats in particular, Jonas emphasized the importance of taking

⁵ Jodi Burkett, "The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Changing Attitudes Towards the Earth in the Nuclear Age," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45/4 (December 2012), 625-639.

⁶ Ettore Costa, "Fermi's Children: The Global Responsibilities of Italian Scientists after the Nuclear Bomb," *Existenz* 20/1 (Spring 2025) yyy-zzz.

⁷ Lewis Mumford, *Programme for Survival*, London, UK: Secker & Warburg 1946, p. 43. [Henceforth cited as PS]

⁸ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, transl. Hans Jonas and David Herr, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984. [Henceforth cited as IR]

⁹ Karl-Otto Apel, *Diskurs und Verantwortung: Das Problem des Übergangs zur postkonventionellen Moral*, Frankfurt am Main, DE: Suhrkamp, 1990. [All translations are mine. Henceforth cited as DV]

¹⁰ Günther Anders, *Die atomare Drohung: Radikale Überlegungen zum atomaren Zeitalter*, München, DE: C. H. Beck 1981, p. 86. [All translations are mine. Henceforth cited as AD]

responsibility for future generations, moving beyond an anthropocentric philosophy that had focused on contemporary conditions, and assuming responsibility for the entire biosphere (IR 6-8). Kristin Shrader-Frechette employed the notion of responsibility to the rights of future generations, emphasizing the uncertainty that comes with storing and managing nuclear waste.¹¹ Based on their research, my own study on the legitimacy and ethics of nuclear waste highlights the importance of adequately defining the time horizons of responsibility.¹² In the case of waste produced by hazardous processes, it must be isolated or neutralized. Nuclear waste has a time horizon of isolation for at least one hundred thousand years. An alternative is to develop transmutation technology to reuse reactor waste, thereby reducing the disposal period to around one thousand years. Another time horizon is the period during which nuclear technology will be used to generate energy. Based on the available uranium resources, this is currently estimated to last approximately six centuries. These time horizons that extend far into the future can be contrasted with the relatively short lifetime of a nuclear reactor. It generates energy for approximately six decades, after which it must accumulate sufficient financial resources to assume responsibility for the nuclear waste disposal well into the future.

A third dimension can be identified among critics of Jonas' theory of responsibility for the future, who recognized its failure to consider the difficulties humans face in the present. On the one hand, global responsibility concerns the protection of humanity and the biosphere. On the other hand, it concerns equity and solidarity. Building on Jonas' work, both Karl-Otto Apel and Peter Kemp recognized the need for a novel ethics in response to modern science and technology, which was most evident in nuclear weapons and the environmental crisis. Kemp applied Jonas' insights to the repercussions of postwar technology for both the present and the future.¹³ Apel stressed that global responsibility cannot be limited

to saving humanity and keeping the biosphere intact, but must also include liberation and the realization of humanity. Therefore, they both added the concepts of global equity and fairness. Apel demonstrated that the critique of progress need not be one-sided by linking the idea of responsibility for the future to the potential for ethical progress. He argued for the necessity of ethical progress when he demanded

in the current crisis situation, it is *necessary* to follow a *principle of progress* together with the *imperative of preserving human existence and dignity*. [DV 216]

The fourth dimension concerns the semasiological and onomasiological characteristics of the concept of global responsibility. The former is based on the various meanings that a word can acquire over time and across cultures, whereas the latter concerns phenomena or concepts and the notions users apply when describing them. In other words, the concept is represented not only by the combination of the two words global and responsibility but also by similar expressions such as responsibility for humanity, the planet, and the world. For instance, Jaspers uses the word responsibility alongside discussing how the atomic bomb poses a deadly threat to humanity. Taking responsibility for humanity stood out as his response to predictions of the outcome of a nuclear war. Anders associated the word responsibility with plenty of statements regarding the threat of humanity's annihilation. On one occasion, he almost used the phrase of global responsibility when he explains:

If we do not want to fall short morally regarding the performance of our products (which would mean not only deadly shame, but also a shameful death), then we must ensure that the horizon of what concerns us, that is, our horizon of responsibility, extends as far as the horizon within which we can strike or be struck; thus, it becomes global. [AD 95]

Jonas contrasted responsibility for the future generations with the ethical vacuum of an epoch marked by nihilism, the threats of modern technology, the idea of progress, and the possibility of mankind's collective suicide. Apel talked about the perils of nuclear war and ecological destruction that affect "humanity as a whole" and urged humans "to jointly assume the moral responsibility" (DV 42). Thus, to gain a fuller picture of global responsibility as a historical concept, both semasiological and onomasiological aspects must be considered

¹¹ Kristin S. Shrader-Frechette, *Burying Uncertainty: Risk and the Case Against Geological Disposal of Nuclear Waste*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

¹² Mats Andrén, *Nuclear Waste Management and Legitimacy: Nihilism and Responsibility*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012.

¹³ Peter Kemp, *Das Unersetzliche: Eine Technologie-Ethik*, Berlin, DE: Wichern-Verlag, 1992.

A fifth dimension concerns the issue of who should take responsibility. In this dimension, responsibility can relate either to specified agents or to broader phenomena represented by cultural categories, as well as to ideas such as cosmopolitanism, world government, and humanism. One example of assigning responsibility to specific actors is Claude Robert Eatherly, one of the seven pilots of the Hiroshima mission, who requested to be held responsible for reporting clear visibility to the actual pilot in charge to drop the bomb. Yet this pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets, reportedly had no regrets about dropping the bomb. Others argued that responsibility lay with Harry Truman, then President of the United States, for ordering the operation,¹⁴ or with the American government for setting the Manhattan Project in motion. Physicists such as Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein felt responsible. The Pugwash movement stressed the unique responsibility of scientists. Günther Anders warned against viewing an atomic war as a kind of collective suicide, for when everyone was guilty, no one had to carry the guilt. Instead, he distinguished between those responsible for creating the bomb and those who had the power to use it, and everyone else who would be victims of nuclear war. The latter group had a responsibility not to remain passive, but to act against the threat.¹⁵ Anders advocated activism in the form of protests, demonstrations, and workers' strikes, among other measures (AD 46, 52-3).

Jaspers had a different view. Shortly after the war ended, he briefly mentioned the atomic bomb in the context of the destruction caused by the European powers and their weaponry. Here, Europe was held responsible not only for creating world wars and nuclear weapons, but also for setting things right again, as Europe had created a spirit that Europe itself had to overcome. It had the responsibility for the future of Europe as well as for the rest of the world,

and it was up to Europe to rectify its wrongdoings. This could be achieved by promoting the positive aspects of European heritage, such as upholding the ideals of humanity and freedom. Thereby, the intention should not be to dominate, but to foster equality among cultures and states, creating

a world where people liberate each other and attend with one another in mutual concern.¹⁶

In his first short article on the atomic bomb, published in 1950, he described the bomb as symptomatic of a society in which the desire for power knew no bounds, violence was perpetrated without restraints, and human freedom was disregarded. He believed that the individuals needed to change their lives and ways of thinking in order to create an ethical revival that would render the atomic bomb impossible.¹⁷ In his main book on the atomic bomb, published in 1958, he discussed the responsibility of scientists and politicians, thereby demonstrating the commitment needed from individuals and defined groups to act. However, he concluded that the ultimate responsibility for not using nuclear weapons lay with humankind, and he argued for the creation of an ethos of peace that would spread through daily interactions and ultimately influence politicians.¹⁸ In short, Jaspers placed responsibility on individuals, but primarily emphasized the importance of relating responsibility to Europe and its ideas, as well as to the creation of a worldwide ethos of peace. By contrast, Anders recognized the collective actions provoked by the nuclear threat. Toward the end of the section "On Responsibility Today," he addressed the ministers of war and announced a global international movement of goodwill (AD 51). He mentioned gatherings in Japan, Vienna, and München, the former two attended by ten thousand people or more (AD 51, 54), and argued that an anti-nuclear movement was forming that undertook a two-month long

¹⁴ A presentation by Carlin Romano at the 2024 World Congress of Philosophy in Rome provides a breakdown of President Truman's psychological and philosophical approach to authorizing the use of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: <https://youtu.be/IdQJZ8wX9wc>.

¹⁵ Günther Anders, "Über die Bombe und die Wurzeln unserer Apokalypse-Blindheit," in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen, Band 1: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der Zweiten Industriellen Revolution*, München, DE: C. H. Beck 2018, pp. 233-324, here pp. 283-4.

¹⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Europa der Gegenwart*, Wien, AT: Amandus 1947, pp. 35-9.

¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, "Das Gewissen vor der Bedrohung durch die Atombombe. 1950," in *Rechenschaft und Ausblick: Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Karl Jaspers, München, DE: R. Piper and Co. 1950, pp. 314-320.

¹⁸ Karl Jaspers, *The Atom Bomb and the Future of Man*, transl. E. B. Ashton, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

march from Hiroshima to Tokyo, which was joined by all together hundreds of thousands of people who joined for a shorter or longer distance (AD 53-4). He discerned a "Hydra of the goodwill" at which people "from all enterprises, organizations, groups, classes, religions" were partaking (AD 53). In his "Attempt to Formulate a Hippocratic Oath," Anders addressed the irresponsibility of people doing work that might appear harmless but contributed indeed to the production of atomic bombs and thereby to the annihilation of humanity. He pleads with every one of them not to take any part in such scientific, technological, or administrative tasks (AD 137). Thus, Anders both argued for political action and identified the formation of a global movement that expressed political will and was able to put pressure on politicians and state leaders to dismantle the nuclear threat.

Jan Patočka is another example of how responsibility can be attributed to specific agents and broader phenomena. In his *Heretical Essays* he discussed lack of responsibility in Europe and its technological civilization, as represented by the world wars and the development of weapons during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Patočka was clearly critical of European culture as it had developed since the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. He generalized the reasons for this lack of responsibility and did the same when he emphasized a more fundamental European heritage: specific ideas originating in the classical philosophy of ancient Greece, such as the value of truth and the notion of nurturing the soul.¹⁹ However, for Patočka responsibility contrasted with the mechanistic way of thinking, which trivialized life and reduced it to fit the demands of technological civilization. Instead, responsibility only had meaning when it was associated with solidarity, opposing ethnic divisions and state borders.²⁰ That is, responsibility can only exist through the actions of individuals.

¹⁹ Jan Patočka, "Europe and the European Heritage until the End of the Nineteenth Century," in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, transl. Erazim Kohák, Chicago, IL: Open Court 1996, pp. 79–93, here pp. 82–3, 88.

²⁰ Jan Patočka, "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?," in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, transl. Erazim Kohák, Chicago, IL: Open Court 1996, pp. 106–18.

Patočka's essays on responsibility were written in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s, placing them in the context of dissidence against the ruling Communist Party. When Jacques Derrida discussed responsibility, drawing in part on Patočka, his context was the period following the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Like Jaspers and Patočka, Derrida viewed the European heritage as having two sides, arguing that responsibility should be accompanied by a critical approach to identifying solely with singularities that can be "individual, social, national, state, federal, confederal." In contrast to this, he emphasized "the responsibility of testifying for universality."²¹ Among other things, he examined the responsibility to condemn totalitarian dogmatism and to preserve a democratic society that makes promises for the future (OH 78). This conclusion is relevant to the contemporary uses and meanings of the concept of global responsibility.

In the Present

In the present, notions of global responsibility are activated not only to threats of nuclear war and incremental ecological devastation but also in reaction to manifold fears, such as pandemics, antibiotic resistance, waste of consumer lifestyle, and especially the threat of continuously increasing climate catastrophes, as illustrated by activists such as Greta Thunberg or David Wallace-Wells. They are both echoing the claim by Ulrich Beck that

The world risk society opens up a moral space that might (though by no means necessarily will) give birth to a civil culture of responsibility that transcends frontiers and antagonisms. The two sides of global risk are, on the one hand, the traumatic experience of the vulnerability of all and, on the other, the resulting responsibility for all, including one's own survival.²²

The concept of global responsibility is used in policies such as the United Nations Resolution 70/1, Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the European Union's

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, transl. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 72–3. [Henceforth cited as OH]

²² Ulrich Beck, *German Europe*, transl. Rodney Livingstone, Malden, MA: Polity Press 2013, p. 36. [Henceforth cited as GE]

Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS). However, Germany's former foreign minister and vice-chancellor Joschka Fischer is correct in doubting the ability of the present system of international affairs to tackle, for instance, socio-economic challenges that are linked to climate change. The main obstacle being that sovereignty of the nation-states limits joint action. Fischer writes:

The central conundrum of the climate crisis is that we must rely on the structures of a global system based on the egoism of nation-states...The idea of global responsibility to maintain the basis for our common survival is alien to such a system. Coming to grips with this disconnect will be the great challenge of the 21st century.²³

Jan Zielonka agrees on the limitations of the nation-states and suggests empowering actors on other levels. Both local and transnational constituencies offer perspectives that complement and go beyond what the nation-states have managed to implement.²⁴

To this, I wish to add that users of the concept should also be open to critical discussion of the meanings they ascribe to it. Critical considerations concern whether the uses and meanings reflect a culture that transcends frontiers and antagonisms or instead reflect the stigmatization of the other within a narrow cultural context. As this special issue demonstrates, it should be noted that the concept of global responsibility has multiple meanings across contexts and is used by different speakers.

Nevertheless, the ideology of authoritarian populism that rejects cosmopolitanism and opposes migration, international institutions, and the climate change agenda does not promote a global responsibility that focuses on equity and solidarity with present and future generations, advances dialogue, and fosters the transcendence of cultural and political borders. The neoliberal globalist agenda of unregulated trade does not promote global responsibility. It is also not endorsed by conservative nationalist sentiments, which reject internationalism

and perceive globalism as a threat to national and local identities.

On The Contributions

At the 25th World Congress of Philosophy in Rome in 2024, the Karl Jaspers Society of North America organized a session that explored the concept of responsibility, with a particular focus on the notion of transcending borders to embrace the entire world. The papers presented at the session have been refined into the essays comprising this special issue. Together, they feature various facets of the concept of responsibility.

The first contribution, by Ettore Costa, examines the critical discourse that emerged among natural scientists warning of the consequences of nuclear weapons. As experts presenting their case to the public, they played a pivotal role in raising awareness of this threat. Costa analyzes two Italian scientists: Edoardo Amaldi, a physicist instrumental in initiating CERN and the European Space Agency. He supported Pugwash from its inception and was closely associated with it. Adriano Buzzati-Traverso, however, was a world-leading genetics researcher. He was the first president of the Italian Pugwash group and had a key role in rebuilding his field of study in Italy after the Second World War. The article skillfully traces how these scientists embraced the concept of global responsibility and how their work offered different interpretations of scientists' roles.

Ola Sigurdsson takes the reader to Jaspers' encounter with the theologian Karl Barth at the University of Basel, where Jaspers held a professorship from 1948 until his retirement in 1961, and where Barth was a theology professor. Sigurdson examines the concept of responsibility through the dual approaches of Jaspers and Barth, offering valuable insights through a close reading of their key works and correspondence in Basel. Jaspers referred to their relationship as a loving struggle, meaning that although they disagreed frequently, they nevertheless engaged in discussion. Sigurdson's analysis clarifies how they related the idea of responsible action of the individual to particular practices and to universalism.

The third essay by Astrid Grelz draws attention to some of the earliest substantial philosophical tracts on the atomic bomb. Günther Anders emphasizes the prospect of an impending apocalypse, stating that we must confront not only the reality of individual death

²³ Joschka Fischer "National Egoism versus Planetary Responsibility: Tackling the Climate Crisis is Fundamentally Incompatible with our Understanding of Sovereignty," *Social Europe* (23 August 2021), <https://www.socialeurope.eu/national-egoism-versus-planetary-responsibility>.

²⁴ Jan Zielonka, *The Lost Future: And How to Reclaim it*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2023, p. 220.

but also the possibility of humanity's extinction. He argues that, before the atomic bomb, humans were mortals; however, the bomb had endowed them with a radically new kind of nature and existence. Severed from their geocentric pride, humans had become mere "cosmic backwoodsmen" (AD 173). Importantly, Grell's contribution demonstrates that Anders articulated an imperative of global responsibility before Jaspers and the environmental ethicists of the 1970s, such as Jonas. Grell traces the development of Anders' ethical imperative and considers how it might continue to operate in the works of Jaspers and Jonas. Ultimately, she argues that, although a line of continuity can be established between Anders and Jonas, distinct discontinuity emerges between Anders and Jaspers.

In the fourth contribution, Eddo Evink highlights the strength of Patočka's concept of responsibility by contrasting it with the approaches of Emmanuel Levinas and Derrida. Evink illuminates disturbing lacunas in the explorations of responsibility by the two French phenomenologists and suggests a way forward, drawing on Patočka. While all three emphasize that a key aspect of responsibility is how individuals relate to the world, Patočka points out that responsibility is inner-worldly, relating always to the contexts in which humans live.

In this respect, Patočka stands closer to Anders and Barth than to Jaspers. What they all have in common is their assertion of an individual responsibility that transcends egoistic personal interests and legal accountability—a responsibility that encompasses the world: global responsibility.

The final contribution concentrates on the importance of recognizing the link between responsibility and vulnerability. This aspect is central for Alina Marin, who discusses the implications

of applying Jaspersian and phenomenological approaches in psychopathology and psychiatric treatment. Her focus is on freedom and responsibility. By exploring how these concepts are interconnected in Jaspers, she argues that integrating them into psychopathology can facilitate a therapeutic relationship that recognizes the patient's freedom and supports the clinician in taking responsibility for protecting vulnerable patients.

Vulnerability and the associated demands for responsibility are decisive aspects of a reasonable concept of global responsibility that is fit for purpose in the present day. Paul Ricoeur has argued that an emphasis on vulnerability in the concept of responsibility emerged in both law and ethics during the last decades of the twentieth century.²⁵ This central insight illuminates much of the contemporary struggle with responsibility, particularly in the context of global threats. As Beck has aptly put it, global risks come with

the traumatic experience of the vulnerability of all and... the resulting responsibility for all, including one's own survival. [GE 36]²⁶

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Responsabilité et fragilité," *Autres Temps. Cahiers d'éthique sociale et politique* 76/77 (2003), 127–141, here pp. 129–30.

²⁶ Acknowledgement: I am very grateful to Ettore Costa and Ola Sigurdsson for all comments, encouragement, and their involvement with this project. Many thanks to the experts acting as anonymous reviewers of the contributions. My gratitude also extends to the team at *Existenz* for its meticulous editing. Special thanks go to Helmut Wautischer for his acute and constructive comments on my editorial.