

Class 2: The Politics of Responsibility

**PPE Workshop Mumbai
The Politics of Freedom**

16 May 2016

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Overview

1. Introduction: The problems
2. Preliminaries
3. The elements of responsibility
4. Causal contribution
5. Avoidance potential
6. Responsibility voids
7. Voting and responsibility
8. Conclusion: The burdens of freedom

1. Introduction : The Problems



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NATION, CURRENT AFFAIRS

Luftansa flight from Munich suffers 22-hours delay in Mumbai after tyre burst

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | ASHITA DADHEECH

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Updated May 15, 2016, 3:18 pm IST

According to airport sources, the tyres were completely destroyed and the iron beneath it was visible.



📷 Lufthansa flight LH764 from Munich stuck at the airport in Mumbai on Saturday after four of its tyres burst on landing Friday night. (Photo: PTI)

Mumbai: A Lufthansa aircraft, carrying 163 passengers from Munich in Germany to Mumbai, experienced a tyre burst at the main runway at

1. Introduction: The Problems

Since responsibility is part of freedom's intrinsic value, we would like to know when we can be said to be responsible for an outcome.

- **Problem 1:** Responsibility is a fuzzy concept (just like freedom, justice, democracy,)
- **Problem 2:** We have only limited control over the world: can we ever be responsible for an outcome?
- **Problem 3:** The outcomes of our actions often depend on what others do – can we ever ascertain what our exact share was?

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2. Preliminaries

- Freedom of the will versus social freedom
- Individualism: ethical, methodological, ontological
- Prospective responsibility or retrospective responsibility

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3. The Elements of Responsibility

A person is responsible for a certain outcome x if, and only if, she:

- is a moral agent (i.e. has the relevant moral capacity)
- made a causal contribution to x
- had a reasonable opportunity to do otherwise (and could have known he had so)

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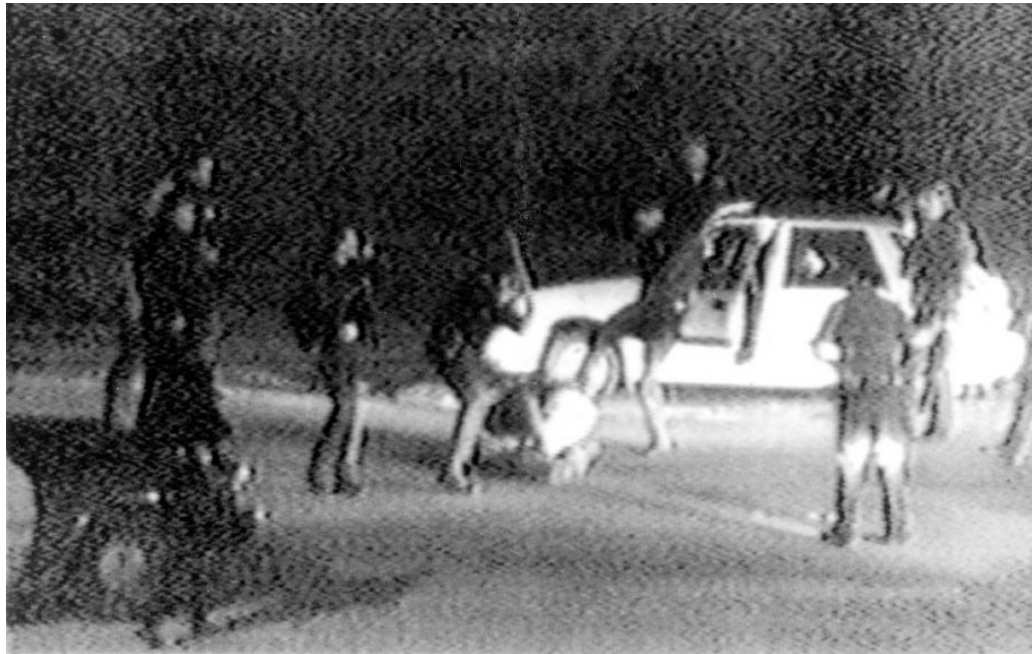
4. Causal contribution

Proposal 1: The but-for test

Your action was *necessary* for the outcome to emerge: but for your action, the outcome would not have resulted

4. Causal contribution

Problem: Overdetermination



4. Causal contribution

Proposal 2: The sufficiency test

Your action was *sufficient* for the outcome to emerge.

4. Causal contribution

Problem: An outcome may be the result of many individual actions, none of which is sufficient



4. Causal contribution

Solution: NESS-test

An action (or omission) causally contributed to x if it is

1. an element of a set of conditions S that is sufficient for x , and
2. its membership of S is necessary for that set to be sufficient

Or: it is a necessary element of a sufficient set for x .

4. Causal contribution

(If you're interested in game theory, it is good to know there are nice game-theoretic renditions of the NESS-test)



4. Causal contribution

- **Example 1: Election results**
- Example 2: Police abuse
- Example 3: Climate change

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5. Avoidance potential

Recall: A person is responsible for a certain outcome x if, and only if, she:

1. is a moral agent (i.e. has the relevant moral capacity)
2. made a causal contribution to x
3. had a reasonable opportunity to do otherwise (and could have known he had so)

5. Avoidance potential

We say that a person had a reasonable opportunity to do otherwise if she had an alternative action

1. that had a lower probability of forming a NESS-condition for x , and
2. for which it is reasonable to say that she could have chosen it.

5. Avoidance potential

- Example 1: The bank clerk
- Example 2: Gender stereotyping



5. Avoidance potential

- Example 1: The bank clerk
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6. Responsibility voids

Many hands problems:

	Serious danger?	Device effective?	Costs bearable?	Should we do it?
Group 1	No	Yes	Yes	No
Group 2	Yes	No	Yes	No
Group 3	Yes	Yes	No	No

6. Responsibility voids

Many hands problems:

	Serious danger?	Device effective?	Costs bearable?	Should we do it?
Group 1	No	Yes	Yes	No
Group 2	Yes	No	Yes	No
Group 3	Yes	Yes	No	No
Final Decision	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

6. Responsibility voids

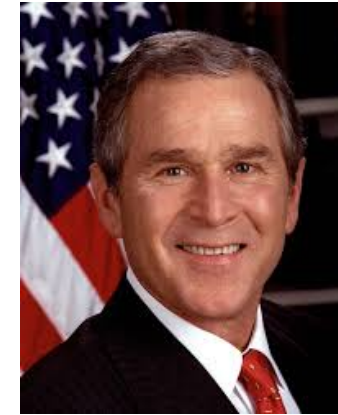
Is it a responsibility void (i.e. a situation in which no one is responsible)?

- They all formed a NESS-condition for the outcome
- They did have an opportunity to do otherwise (act strategically)
- But is it reasonable to say that they *could have acted* strategically? An open question.

7. Voting and responsibility

National results:

presidential candidate	political party	electoral votes	popular votes
George W. Bush	Republican	271	50,456,002
Al Gore	Democratic	266 ¹	50,999,897
Ralph Nader	Green		2,882,955



Florida results:

Presidential Candidate	Vice Presidential Candidate	Political Party	Popular Vote		Electoral Vote
George W. Bush	Richard Cheney	Republican	2,912,790	48.85%	25
Albert Gore Jr.	Joseph Lieberman	Democratic	2,912,253	48.84%	0
Ralph Nader	Winona LaDuke	Green	97,488	1.63%	0



8. Conclusion: The burden of freedom

- **Problem 1:** Responsibility is a fuzzy concept (just like freedom, justice, democracy,)
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- **Problem 1:** Responsibility is a fuzzy concept (just like freedom, justice, democracy,) **Well...**
- **Problem 2:** We have only limited control over the world: can we ever be responsible for an outcome? Yes
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8. Conclusion: The burden of freedom

- Intrinsic value of freedom: relation with responsibility
- On the account presented here, we are responsible for many more things than we may think
- Being responsible is a crucial element of our moral agency, but it is not necessarily a joyous thing: the burden of freedom.