

Introduction

by
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This volume is comprised of eighteen chapters written to celebrate the sixty-fifth birthday of our good friend and colleague, Gerhold K. Becker. Entitled *Responsibility and Commitment*, the Festschrift reflects central concerns and values in Becker's spiritual and intellectual life. The volume's four sections—"Ethics and Personhood," "Theology and Religion," "Philosophy and Philology," and "East Meets West"—circumscribe what we believe to recognize as the four major academic interests the honoree shares with his friends and colleagues worldwide.

Becker belongs to the relatively few Western scholars who have served philosophy and religion departments at Asian universities. By dedicating his career for almost two decades to Hong Kong and more recently to Thailand, he has brought the West much nearer to the East. Considering with hindsight what has brought us so close together across borders and oceans, we recognize that the most crucial component is the sharing of core values—responsibility and commitment being two of the mainstays.

Given Gerhold Becker's cross-cultural interest and influence, it seems profoundly meaningful that the design of the book cover, developed by a phenomenologist-turned-photographer and graphic artist (Meinolf Wewel), integrates the Festschrift's two title words in German and in Thai—the dedicatee's mother tongue and the language of his current teaching environment. Instead of including a straightforward translation of these same words into Chinese, I have proposed a sublimely beautiful line from a Chinese poem written by Wang Chang-ling of the Tang dynasty, reproduced here in seal script engraved by Chan-fai Cheung, another Hong Kong friend of Gerhold's and the author of one of these festive essays. The poem describes the Tang poet bidding farewell to a friend in the course of this life's journey, and alludes to the unfailing faith he has in the core values that have guided their lives.

We dedicate this poem, especially its last strophe, to Gerhold Becker, a wayfarer among cultures, a conveyor of humanistic learning and values, and for all of us from both the West and the East, a most treasured friend:

寒雨連江夜入吳，平明送客楚山孤；
洛陽親友如相問，一片冰心在玉壺。

王昌齡：〈芙蓉樓送辛漸〉

In the cold, misty evening rain,
I made my way along the river into Wu,
And in the clear dawn light I bid you farewell,
lonesome as the hills of Chu;
Should friends and family in Loyang ask
where my life's journey has strayed,
Tell them I have my heart kept
like a slice of ice in a chalice of jade.¹

As an international scholar, Gerhold Becker's presence in Hong Kong between January 1986 and July 2004 was by no means limited to his many contributions to his university and the governmental committees on which he served. He became well-integrated into the intellectual community of Hong Kong, established deep intellectual friendships with scholars in different fields at various other tertiary institutions, took part in their activities on a regular basis, and contributed substantially to a broad range of intellectual forums. Among many similar connections, his bond with the Department of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong is particularly notable. As a former chairman of this department, and most importantly as a personal friend, I cannot remember how many intellectually inspiring and socially delightful hours we have spent together discussing issues of common interest. In real sense, I can say that over these years Becker has played a role in shaping the intellectual landscape of our already vibrant department. Although we have missed him dearly since his departure from Hong Kong, his colleagues here are glad to know that this good friend has made arrangements to continue teaching, for the time being at least, at one of the great universities in Bangkok, Thailand. Thus his intellectual ardor can make a difference in the life of yet another sector of the global academia.

¹ Wang Chang-ling (698 CE-756 CE), "At Hibiscus Inn bidding farewell to Xin Jian." The English translation is mine, with suggestions by Roger T. Ames.

During his sojourn in Hong Kong, Becker involved himself way beyond university research and teaching. He was instrumental in the founding of Hong Kong's first Centre for Applied Ethics and served for several years on various government committees devoted to questions of Bioethics. It was from these various platforms that Becker found the theoretical training he had received in Europe of meaningful application in promoting literacy in applied ethics. Over the years of his leadership, the Centre for Applied Ethics became a hub for interdisciplinary and cross-cultural discussions, and as such, brought Becker into contact with scholars of applied ethics worldwide, several of whom have also written for this Festschrift.

Section I, which focuses on "Ethics and Personhood," begins with Georges Enderle's essay "Rediscovering the Golden Rule for a Globalizing World." Appearing in one form or another in nearly every culture of the world, the Golden Rule is arguably one of humanity's most common spiritual assets. Enderle rethinks the issue by reappraising the validity of the Golden Rule in various human contexts in our increasingly globalized world. He ponders on whether an in-depth reflection of the Golden Rule might yield for humankind a set of empathetic, autonomous, fair, prudent, and sustainable precepts that can provide a framework for handling global ethical issues. By exhausting the historical origins and the structural elements of the Golden Rule, by elaborating on its multi-faceted dimensions, by clearing up some misconceptions, as well as noting and amending its limitations, Enderle proposes that, in parallel to other equally important approaches such as human rights, the gold of the Golden Rule should be mined again. As such, it can be reinstated as a shared heritage that might help provide some common ethical ground with worldwide acceptance in a globalized world not only of moral relativism and religious pluralism, but also of shared challenges.

Jing-bao Nie's essay tackles the idea of person, a fundamental notion of Western humanism that also finds various forms of expression in the East. The argument is largely a recapitulation of and elaboration upon discussions on this theme as documented in the two volumes Becker edited some ten years ago. Nie finds the theoretical aspects of these discussions so abidingly important and the practical aspects so pressingly urgent that he, following in Becker's footsteps, characterizes these discussions on personhood as "Exploring the Core of Humanity." In his considerations on "Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Concept of Personhood," Nie highlights the psycho-physical, biological, social, moral, metaphysical, theological, cognitive, semantic, and cross-cultural themes of these discussions and shows how such a joint forum could promote understanding of the issues at stake.

Elizabeth Telfer's chapter addresses "Responsibility and Humor." Telfer suggests that while humor is something we often take for granted, it is actually a factor we should deliberate upon carefully with Aristotelian prudence if we want to exercise and enjoy it in a way that is responsible to others. Humor has the power to enliven human relationship, but at times it can also be a source of distress. Whether humor (say, in the form of a joke) causes distress or not depends both on the intention and attitude of the one who laughs and on the perception and tolerance of the one being laughed at. So, according to Telfer, humor requires that both sides of the laughing behavior engage in deliberate moral reflection. It is in this way that Telfer induces us to think of different scenarios and of those aspects of humor and laughter that suffuse personal relationship in human society—humor among friends, offensive humor, humor as political criticism, and so on.

In "Intrapersonal Ascriptions of Responsibility," Maureen Sie reappraises the common belief that responsibilities are clearly ascribable to moral persons. She does this as a response to the challenges of new findings made available from behavioral, cognitive, and neuroscientific researches. Starting from social phenomena such as "normative expectations" and the "adaptive unconscious," Sie reports that contemporary research is tempted to use the so-called lack of "agential transparency" as a ground for suggesting that we finite persons can hardly expect to be directly aware of what drives are affecting us, or to be in full control of what we are doing. Sie then proposes that such new research findings, instead of exempting us from bearing responsibility for our own deeds, give us the signal that we should be more mindful of such behavioral complexities. By becoming more introspective of these more subtle aspects of our actions and decisions, we can render ourselves more responsible persons. For this reason she emphasizes the unusual adjective "intrapersonal" and makes "intrapersonal ascription" a new dimension of responsibility.

Section II, centering around religion and theology, opens with Robert Gascoigne's essay "Human Dignity within Secularity: In the Light of a Theology of Church and Kingdom." Gascoigne takes up the challenge laid down by Gerhold Becker some eight years ago when he insisted that the sanctity and dignity of human personhood based upon the Christian Trinitarian mystery is no longer a shared basis in contemporary discussions. Gascoigne tries to make sense of Christian theology's contribution to human dignity in our increasingly globalized, secular world under the banner of a "theology of kingdom." He starts with a reappraisal of the historically controversial teachings of Joachim of Fiore on the three ages of

history. By citing medieval and contemporary debates over the need to have an age of Spirit that might overshadow the definitive role of Christ in salvation, Gascoigne hints at the possibility of affirming the presence of Spirit within all history. In such a broadened conception, an “age of Spirit,” remains for the Christians themselves also an age of Christ. At the same time, it makes allowances for the spiritual wisdom of other religions as well as philosophical traditions, and opens up a common space for human dignity, within the church and in secular society alike. Gascoigne then discusses the central issues of human suffering and freedom of conscience, and suggests that Christians should, in the name of human dignity, find ways to play a more positive role in secular affairs while remaining loyal to their own faith.

Reiner Wimmer in “Categorical Analysis of Religions: A Step on the Way Toward Interreligious Peace” tries to lay out a frame of reference for understanding and comparing the basic tenets of various religions attitudes. He first divides religious attitudes into four successively profound categories (divine presence in the world, divinity in humanity, uniqueness of divinity, and divine incarnation), the first two being a matter of divine experience, the latter two a matter of personal, transrational belief. Wimmer uses these categorial layers as measuring rods for interreligious comparisons, and proposes that compatibilities or incompatibilities between various religions should be differentiated into intercategory and intracategory aspects. In so doing, the likenesses and discrepancies between religious attitudes can be identified and classified. The more serious and more fundamental discrepancies can be distinguished from the less serious and less fundamental ones, enabling us to bring focus to the most crucial compatibility among them. To exemplify how such categorial analysis can be applied, Wimmer discusses in turn the intercategory compatibility of Greek, Roman, and Hindu religions, the intracategory compatibility of philosophical Daoism and meditative Buddhism leading to some form of convergence, the intracategory incompatibility of the three Abrahamic revealed beliefs in their Only God, and so on. By proceeding to the fourth category of belief in Incarnation, i.e., the mystic, transrational union of God with humanity and world, Wimmer suggests that believers attaining such a level of paradoxical belief, instead of taking an exclusive attitude toward one another, can choose to understand the message of salvation in a symbolic sense that encompasses all humanity, including fellow “monotheistic believers” and “unbelieving cousins.” Wimmer’s categorial analysis of religions promises a step toward interreligious peace, as it reveals for humankind “a

shared awareness of spirituality.” My additional concern is only that, for interreligious peace to truly have a chance, such an analysis needs to avoid the kind of overt “inclusivism” that Hans Küng has criticized.

In his neatly structured essay, “The Globalization of Responsibility: Marginal Notes on Ethics and Religion,” Michael Sievernich undertakes some ethico-religious as well as socio-political reflections on the notion of “responsibility” with respect to its “contexts,” its “concepts,” and its “contours.” In the section on “contexts,” he laments that the increasing complexity and pace of modern “global” society have brought about not only global cooperation, but also global violence, global sorrow, and global poverty, all of which make global justice and global solidarity a new global responsibility. In the section on “concepts,” Sievernich offers a critical discussion of Max Weber’s *Verantwortungsethik* with its idea of the accountability for the consequences of one’s actions, and pleads for a synthesis of accountability with correct intentions. With regard to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s article about “evolution of responsibility in the world,” Sievernich concurs that a more complex world calls for a greater range of responsibilities, which should also include the positive outcomes of our actions in the world. A third position Sievernich outlines is that of Hans Jonas who, in his famous book *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, advocates that in our age of dangerously tempting technology we require a future-oriented ethics that will make us answerable for the sustainability of genuine human life on earth, rather than for other more short-sighted consequences. In the final section on “contours,” Sievernich outlines the need to link responsible political actions to “success” and bearing “good fruits.” In a brief reflection on the etymology of the word *Verantwortung* he underscores the “responsorial” character of responsibility. In this light he maintains that ethical issues, which always make us answerable to Others (for Sievernich predominantly to God), should be considered “not the first but the second word.” Concluding his reflections on “the globalization of responsibility” by quoting two important passages from the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et spes* (#34 and #55), Sievernich reasserts the key role religion must play in an age of hybris and crisis.

Peter Neuner in “Ecumenical Commitment: Reflections on the State of the Ecumenical Movement” understands ecumenism not in the broader sense of the word as interreligious dialogue, but in the traditional, narrower sense as the attempt for all Christian churches or denominations to seek consensus in doctrine and unity of faith. While the idea of ecumenism can be traced back to late antiquity, its importance has been heightened since

the Lutheran Reformation in the 16th century. With the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches, new hope for the bridging of the schism seemed to be in view. However, as Neuner observes, the absence of any constructive followup and the incessant controversies over the definition of unity, of ministry, of ecumenism, and even of the very word “church” itself, render the situation much less promising than one might suppose. Neuner also reminds us that in contemporary society, the waning of ecclesiastic influence and the upsurge of free-floating lay religiosity has made the commitment to ecumenism an even more difficult task. With such societal changes as a backdrop, Neuner suggests that both the Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches have a sufficient number of concrete issues to handle, so that ecumenism in the original unitarian sense may no longer be realistic or must at least be conceived differently.

Section II concludes with Peter Fumiaki Momose’s contribution “The Responsibility of the Christian Faith in Today’s Pluralism: The Theology of Karl Rahner in an Asian Context.” Deeply rooted in the Japanese heritage, Momose seeks to make sense of the faith of Christianity for those Japanese Christians who are aware of Japan’s own religious tradition. By expounding Rahner’s theological notions, particularly those of revelation and incarnation, Momose explains that despite their Christian origin, these notions are in fact rooted “universally” in the innermost depths of human existence, thus bringing home the appeal, the meaning, and the intellectual honesty for Japanese Christians to adopt a seemingly foreign doctrine.

Section III of this Festschrift consists mainly of chapters in philosophy, with the exception of one on related philological issues. As a humanistic discipline, philosophy shares with religion and theology the concern for the ultimacy of human existence, or as Heidegger puts it: Philosophy is “something to do with the whole, something extreme, where an ultimate pronouncement and interlocution occurs on the part of human beings.” It is thus that this section begins with Chan-fai Cheung’s essay “Boredom and the Beginning of Philosophy,” in which the author traces the footsteps Heidegger has left us in his search for the fundamental meaning of philosophy. While reconfirming the importance of “moods” or attunements for Heidegger, Cheung singles out “boredom” as most crucial in triggering the search for the meaning of Being. After distinguishing three senses of boredom, Heidegger guides his readership to focus on the third kind. This he depicts as profound boredom, which is not boredom by something or boredom with some situation, but the very boredom of one’s own individual

existence, from which one needs to find a way out all by oneself. This, then, is the “beginning” of philosophy, which points inevitably to the quest for the meaning of one’s very self.

By contrast, Kajornpat Tangyin’s essay “Reading Levinas on Ethical Responsibility” starts with the note that for Levinas, philosophy begins rather with “the face of the other.” This relation to the other constitutes the true demand for the “ethical.” It is before the face of the other that one always needs to respond, to behave in a “responsible” manner. With his repeated quotation of the Jewish proverb “the other’s material needs are my spiritual needs,” Tangyin observes that Levinas brings philosophy down from its abstract ideas into concrete, interpersonal, moral experience. According to Tangyin, the notion of responsibility for Levinas should be reckoned in the first place not from the vantage point of the I; much less should this responsibility depend on “my” knowledge of the other. Instead, it should be focused on the Other *per se*. Tangyin explains further that for Levinas, ethical responsibility is in fact non-reciprocal or “asymmetrical” in the sense that the true moral duty toward others requires one to do one’s best for others without asking for a return of favor, thus transcending one’s egoism. This, as intimated in a citation from Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, is “the very basis of ethics,” which for Levinas has priority over all other philosophical concerns. In Tangyin’s own words: “Just as Heidegger’s *Dasein* was a move beyond Descartes’s *cogito*, Levinas’s for-the-other is a movement beyond Heidegger’s ontology.”

Kwok-ying Lau’s contribution “Non-Familiarity and Otherness: Derrida’s Hermeneutics of Friendship and Its Political Implication” is closely related in theme to the previous essay. By outlining the traditional conceptions of friendship as based on the principle of “sameness” (kinship, brotherhood, or fraternity), Lau brings out Derrida’s attempt to found a “heteronomic” conception of friendship. By focusing on Montaigne’s lament “O my friends, there are no friends,” and by shifting the accent within the phrase from the judgment on the absence of friendship to the interjection (apostrophe) “O,” Derrida shows the dictum to be not a mere complaint but rather a longing or the “call” for future friendship through infinite responsibility and respect for the Other. Like ethical responsibility for Levinas, ideal friendship for Derrida should also be asymmetrical (or dissymmetrical according to Lau). Following this futuristic-heteronomic line of thought, Lau considers Derrida’s reflections on friendship to have established a philosophy of hope that should help constitute a more meaningful and harmonious social space. It might even provide valuable hints for a future agenda in international

politics that transcends narrow-minded national interests and leads to a “new internationalism” or a “new cosmopolitanism.”

Rudolf Post’s uniquely interesting essay, “*Verantwortung* and *Verbindlichkeit* in German: A Study of Lexical History and Semantic Change,” tackles the two captioned notions of this Festschrift from a lexical-semantic point of view. On the one hand, it shows how the two words have developed from a concrete, juridical notion to cover the more abstract areas of morality and social interaction. On the other hand, with reference to related words in the same lexical fields such as “*anda-/anti-/ante/Antwort*,” “*schulta/schulde*,” “*phlegan/Verpflichtung*,” “*triuwa/Treue*,” Post also demonstrates how, through linguistic means such as action noun formation or “calques,” the meanings of the captioned words can benefit from both indigenous German and foreign linguistic resources, contributing to a semantically more enriched and philosophically more profound German idiom, as transmitted through history up to the present. In short, Post’s chapter is a vivid demonstration of Wilhelm von Humboldt’s basic conception that language is not a mere instrument of thought, but evolves like an organism.

In his chapter “Kant’s Possible Contribution to Natural Law Debates,” Tze-wan Kwan first reminds the reader that the natural law debates owe their origin to the *Physis-Nomoi* controversy in Greek antiquity over the nature of justice. By pointing out the etymological kinship of the Greek word *dikaion* (justice) with *dichaion* (halver, divider), Kwan maintains that justice has to do from the outset with the need to tell (divide) right from wrong. Regarding the natural law controversy, Kwan distinguishes between two levels of debates: jurisprudential debates and metaphysical debates. He observes that on the jurisprudential level, natural law is always ready to concede to positive law a certain pragmatic primacy, because only positive law can guarantee day-to-day law and order. However, as positive laws are only man-made and can for various reasons be fallible, natural law claims back its metaphysical primacy as a “higher law” and as an appeal to final justice. In contemporary society, such an appeal is particularly applicable to scenarios such as dictatorship, tyranny of the majority, civil disobedience, basic human rights, international justice, and the like. However, in spite of the great appeal of natural law, its epistemological basis has been questioned since antiquity. In this chapter, Kwan relates the idea of natural law (or *Naturrecht* in Kant) back to Kant’s categorical imperative and argues that they both exhibit the same structure of “analogy of nature.” Just as the categorical imperative, being always formulated in the subjunctive mood, is not a real law of nature, but only borrows from the latter its lawfulness so as to give room for the moral agent to be self-legislative and

self-commanding, we also do not need to really “prove” the prevalence of justice in nature to be able to justifiably uphold natural law as a demand for higher justice upon the overt failure or abuse of legal positivism. In this way, Kwan suggests that Kant has implicitly paved the way to save natural-law theory from the assault of “two millennia of metaphysical mist,” as launched by the legal-positivistic camp.

The fourth and last section of the Festschrift, which deals with the theme “East meets West,” begins with Daryl Koehn’s chapter “Dignity in Western and Chinese Culture: Theoretical Overview and Practical Illustrations.” As the title suggest, the chapter is divided into two parts. In the theoretically conceived first part, Koehn compares the Western and Chinese ways of conceiving dignity. Drawing on two five-part sets of planes, she depicts the former as innate, absolute, inalienable, internal, and spiritual, the latter as acquired, conditional (role-specific), alienable, face-involving, and material. Koehn also demonstrates how discrepant expectations might arise if we confound Eastern conceptions of dignity with Western ones in real-life situations. In the practically oriented second part, Koehn shows with thought experiments in business ethics how a deeper and more balanced view might resolve such discrepancies.

Ole Döring’s contribution, “The Possible Role of Religion in Secular Bioethics: Reflections on the Case of China,” first gives us a general survey of the recent development of religious activities in China, persuading us that religion there is silently gaining in audience and importance. Following in the footsteps of Georg Simmel, Döring distinguishes between *religion* as a cultural practice and *the religious* as the intuition of “heart-and-mind” about the dependence of human existence on a transcendent realm beyond. Of these two, Döring’s emphasis is obviously on the latter, the religious, on account of its role in “supplementing” (but not replacing) sheer technical rationality that leaves basic and ultimate questions unanswered. Einstein’s quasi-Kantian dictum, “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind,” which the author cites in this context, appears to me to be especially telling. For Döring, religions as cultural traditions are more historically bonded, whereas the religious as religiosity is more universally rooted in human nature. Along this line of thought, Döring seems to suggest that while religion is not a suitable guide for bioethics, the religious in humans can play an important role in providing bioethicists with fresh resources for reflection in their decision making. This is especially true for contemporary China, where the religious landscape is so heterogeneous and the practices of religion are still so vulnerable.

Eva Man's chapter "Some Reflections on Cultural Policy Addresses and Women's Rights in Hong Kong," has, so the author attests, grown out of her discussions with Gerhold Becker on the issue some years ago. In the first part of the chapter, with reference to some cultural policy documents from Europe, Man outlines the areas of attention she thinks should be relevant for any fruitful reflection upon the role of women in cultural and artistic activities. She then turns to "the case of Hong Kong" by focusing on some of the Hong Kong Legislative Council's cultural policy papers with the aim of examining to what extent those "areas of attention" have received due consideration. Her observation is that Hong Kong has regarded cultural and artistic activities basically as "gender-neutral" and "monolithic," with the result that the possible needs and rights of the female part of the population never come to the foreground. In the concluding sections, Man recapitulates some points from a historical perspective and suggests measures a responsible government might take to bring about improvements in this record.

This last section as well as the volume as a whole is concluded with Stephan Rothlin's short but thought-provoking sketch, "Training Students in Responsibility and Social Commitment: Fragments of a Concept for an 'Oriental University'." Rothlin outlines how urgently various aspects of Asian values are in need of reorientation, particularly in response to the challenge of the West. By citing Rabindranath Tagore's forecast of the advent of "The Hour of Asia," Rothlin reminds us that many disturbing things are still prevailing in Asian education as, for example, the distortion of historical facts, indoctrination and brainwashing, brain drain, over-orientation towards the West in terms of "success," and so on. He concludes that economic development alone will not suffice to truly bring about "The Hour of Asia" in any real way. What Asian universities need is the vision to provide an education that fulfils its role of "formation" (*Bildung!*), in other words, an education that inspires students and teachers to grow in their ethical awareness as well as in their commitment to society and to the global community. As unpopular as Rothlin's reflections might sound to educators in Asia, it nonetheless brings out relevant issues that merit our serious attention.

The eighteen contributors to this volume come from a variety of backgrounds. We have disparate academic interests, and on some important overlapping issues, we might have very different perspectives. But we all share one thing in common: our deep and abiding respect for Gerhold Becker

both as a person and as a scholar, an esteemed friend and colleague who has made a sustained contribution to humanistic education across his career. Indeed, with respect to responsibility and commitment, Becker is for us a role model. At various points over our lifetimes and for very different periods of time—from shared boyhood exploration (Rudolf Post) to a relatively recent collaboration in Bangkok (Kajornpat Tangyin), the path of Gerhold Becker's life and work has crossed our own, leaving behind intellectual as well as emotional footprints. We take this opportunity to wish our friend Gerhold, who has contributed so much on this road of common quest, many more fruitful achievements and many more years of a most enjoyable life with his dear family.

A final word is due regarding the responsibility for and commitment to this volume. Although I am deeply honored to have had the delightful role of editor, I must confess that its publication would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of all the authors and the sustained help of various editorial assistants, translators, and clerical supporters backstage, who prefer to remain anonymous but to whom I owe my most profound gratitude.