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978-1-107-08272-4 - Extraordinary Responsibility: Politics Beyond the Moral Calculus

Shalini Satkunanandan

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Extraordinary Responsibility

Careful attention to contemporary political debates, including those around global warming, the federal debt, and the use of drone strikes on suspected terrorists, reveals that we often view our responsibility as something that can be quantified and discharged. Shalini Satkunanandan shows how Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, Weber, and Heidegger each suggest that this calculative or bookkeeping mindset both belongs to “morality,” understood as part of our ordinary approach to responsibility, and effaces the incalculable, undischageable, and more onerous dimensions of our responsibility. These thinkers also reveal how the view of responsibility as calculable is at the heart of “moralism” – the pettifogging, mindless, legalistic, excessively judgmental, or punitive policing of our own or others’ compliance with moral duties. By elaborating their narratives of a difficult “conversion” to the open-ended and relentless character of responsibility, Satkunanandan explores how we might be less moralistic and more responsible in politics. She ultimately argues for a political ethos attentive to how calculative thinking can limit our responsibility, but that still accepts a circumscribed place for calculation (and morality) in responsible politics.

Shalini Satkunanandan is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of California, Davis. She is a past Harper-Schmidt Fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at the University of Chicago. Her work on responsibility in politics and on the role of secular “faith” in law has appeared in *Political Theory*, the *American Political Science Review*, and *Law, Culture and the Humanities*.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page vii
Introduction: Distracted by Calculation	I
PART ONE CALCULATION AND INDIRECTNESS	
1 Nietzsche: Morality’s Debt Perspective	27
2 Heidegger: The Calls of Conscience and Calculation	51
3 (In)Calculable Conversion	73
PART TWO THE MORALIZERS’ CRITIQUE OF CALCULABLE RESPONSIBILITY	
4 Plato: The Philosopher’s Turn from Debt Justice	93
5 Kant: The Extraordinary Categorical Imperative	125
PART THREE TURNING FROM MORALITY IN POLITICS	
6 Weber: The Ethos of Politics Beyond Calculation	149
7 <i>Darkness at Noon</i> : Mis-turn from Morality	171
Conclusion: Attention to Calculation	185
<i>Notes</i>	197
<i>Bibliography</i>	235
<i>Index</i>	247

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Acknowledgments

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

ix

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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