
Kathryn Sikkink: *The Hidden Face of Rights: Toward a Politics of Responsibilities*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020. Pp. xvii, 184.)

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Responsibilities should accompany rights, for the protection of rights alone will not yield the world we want absent our personal contributions. That is the message reiterated throughout *The Hidden Face of Rights*. Kathryn Sikkink's goal is not to reform human rights law and she abjures the effort to incorporate the language of responsibilities into human rights treaties. Rather, she wants to encourage a widespread sense of responsibility to achieve the justice and benefits that are only partially secured by means of the legal protection of human rights. The concern is not with formal rights but informal acts of righting.

Employing terminology from Iris Marion Young's *Responsibility for Justice*, Sikkink focuses on *forward-looking* responsibilities. The modifier indicates that everyone who is connected to an injustice or social problem—not just states, business corporations, or institutions—has a responsibility to work towards its remedy. Forward-looking responsibilities are contrasted with backward-looking ones—legal liabilities that make one accountable in the eyes of the law.

The Hidden Face of Rights is autobiographical because Sikkink believes our forward-looking responsibilities are always “idiosyncratic” (147). Accordingly, Sikkink limits discussion to issues that align with her own interests, values, and experiences, including climate change, voting, digital privacy, and digital misinformation. These are important issues. In addressing them, however, Sikkink neglects important distinctions. She does not delineate different levels or types of responsibilities, and makes no distinction between responsibilities and norms.

Not all responsibilities are created equal. One might argue, as does Holly Lawford-Smith (*Not in Their Name: Are Citizens Culpable for Their States' Actions?* [Oxford University Press, 2019]), that those whose participation in a political regime is limited to citizenship do not have the same level of responsibility for a state's actions as those who serve in administrative or legislative roles. Sikkink does not differentiate levels of responsibility or indicate why certain responsibilities should be of concern rather than others. Is it my responsibility to protect the environment by advocating regulatory constraints on business, or to liberate free enterprise by urging the removal of environmental regulations? Is it my responsibility to help citizens gain a stronger voice in public affairs, or cultivate their heightened deference to governmental authority? The answers, apparently, depend only on my personal values and interests. Sikkink gives no justification for viewing the responsibility to combat climate change, which she deems important, in a different way from the responsibility to combat jaywalking. Presumably, if one is captivated

by crosswalks and left cold by carbon, that is sufficient reason to focus on the former and ignore the latter.

The distinction between responsibilities and norms is also neglected. While Sikkink discusses norm formation and transformation, she does not differentiate norms from responsibilities or provide a means of assessing them. Rather than classify norms as good or bad, she maintains, it is better simply to say that “there are norms with which one agrees or disagrees” (18–19). No methods or criteria are provided for evaluating norms or determining when and how they become responsibilities. As Sikkink makes a number of references to the Trump administration, I will hazard one myself to get at the importance of the distinction between norms and responsibilities.

In late 2020, Rudy Giuliani served as head lawyer for President Trump’s effort to invalidate the results of the presidential election. During a hearing in Michigan, Giuliani loudly passed gas. Late-night comedians had a field day. Now it is a norm to withhold flatulence in indoor public spaces. And though Giuliani’s emission could be described in many ways—embarrassing, obnoxious, funny—the word *irresponsible* does not come to mind. In the absence of any significant evidence of fraud, Giuliani did act irresponsibly in trying to overturn the results of the presidential election. He also acted irresponsibly in encouraging a crowd of Trump supporters to have a “trial by combat” the day before a riotous mob stormed the Capitol in a violent attempt to derail congressional validation of the electoral votes. But it was only the hot air coming out of Guilliani’s mouth that justifies the charge of irresponsibility. Norms and responsibilities are not (always) the same thing.


While *The Hidden Face of Rights* makes repeated reference to theorists such as Iris Marion Young, Hannah Arendt, Onora O’Neill, and Max Weber, it is insufficiently grounded in scholarship and conceptual argument to yield anything approaching a theory of responsibility. Admittedly, that is not Sikkink’s goal. Rather, she wants to provide a “framework” for thinking about responsibilities “politically” and “strategically” such that we may more effectively accomplish world betterment (2, 3). In this respect, *The Hidden Face of Rights* is primarily a work of advocacy.

Sikkink observes that lecturing people on their responsibilities is not an effective way of getting them to take action. Regarding the responsibility of students to vote, for example, she recommends “creating new norms” through a “fun and festive” campus climate filled with parties and bingo nights that create a “buzz.” The intent is not to persuade students that they have serious political obligations. Rather, the goal is to mobilize “the full range of human emotions and motivations” such that students feel “it’s cool to vote” (12, 103). Here Sikkink claims to be following Young in advocating political responsibilities not as obligations that derive from citizenship but as products of “social connection” (44).

The task of getting people to fulfill their responsibilities, it appears, can and should be carried out with the same marketing techniques exploited by advertisers to get people to buy the latest fashions and gadgets. Key to the effort is

the creation of new norms. That the norms in question are actually responsibilities, Sikkink suggests, is best left unsaid. These days, responsibilities simply do not trend well. And if one cannot completely avoid using the *r*-word, it should only be employed as a means of avoiding terms that are even less cool, such as *obligation* or *duty*, which are not considered “persuasive” in our times (37).

We live in a consumer culture that is notably narcissistic (Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic* [Free Press, 2009]). In such a culture, a sense of individual entitlement overpowers the recognition of responsibility. Sikkink maintains that responsibilities are the hidden face of rights. She seems to be saying that the face of responsibility is also best hidden from view, the better to achieve the social and political changes one agrees with in a culture that cannot be persuaded we have any real obligations or duties.

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Hélène Landemore: *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. xviii, 243.)

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If you have not read Landemore, and you are interested in democratic innovation, then I would suggest you really have not been reading. *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* cracks open the oyster of closed, modern, representative democracy and, with the deft articulation of key historical debates and how they relate to contemporary political events, it offers the new model of “open democracy” for adoption in polities both large and small.

Open democracy is defined as a practicable model of representation which is brought to life when a government or a state institution or procedure can demonstrate it has met its five minimal criteria. These are (1) that all members of, say, a polity seeking to use open democracy have equal chance of participating (i.e., participation rights) which is guaranteed by lottery; (2) that the means through which an output like agenda setting or policy recommendations is to be reached must be deliberative in practice; (3) that such work is *not* constrained by supermajoritarian hurdles but rather simple majoritarian ones (otherwise final decisions can languish or, indeed, be improbable