

*The Era of Responsibility: Human Duties as a Complementary Approach to the  
Human Rights Discourse / Tomer Shadmy*

While the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the century of human rights, the current century may prove to be the century of human responsibilities. The present study suggests that we are on the edge of a new normative era.

The recent changes in the way states function, the increase in power of non-state actors and the prevailing realization that many of the most pressing issues are the result of actions made by actors' network, all call for a change in our normative vocabulary.

The study examines the hypothesis according to which a centralist system, such as a powerful state, act in accordance with the concept of rights in order to mediate between the government and its subjects, while a decentralized system, like our current global world, need the concept of responsibility in order to provide dignity and welfare.

The first part of the present study brings together different legal mechanisms<sup>1</sup> from different realms of the law and frames them together, as one phenomenon - the reemphasis of the concepts of responsibility.

The second part of the study presents the claim that those recent attempts to redefine the concept of responsibility are limited in their ability to regulate the current reality.

While the purpose of the new legal mechanisms is to respond to the challenges of the neoliberal era, their conceptual horizon is embedded in the existing order, and they do

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<sup>1</sup> For example: "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) doctrine, Corporate Social Responsibility trends, Private Codes of Conduct and unilateral act of legislation

not have the appropriate normative vocabulary to describe and regulate relationship of interdependency which are characteristics of our current world.

The lack of appropriate theoretical framework is not just a result of the current neoliberal vocabulary, but rather a product of the liberal tradition itself, which finds it hard to provide a theoretical framework for the conceptualization of responsibilities towards others (in contrast to self responsibility).

The last part of the study suggests an alternative analytical and a contextual interpretation for the concept "responsibility". The study examines whether the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, who focused on responsibility and interdependency and used a hybrid of the western enlightenment philosophy as well as Jewish philosophy, can contribute to the development of an integrated jurisprudence of rights and responsibilities, compatible with our current decentralized world.