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**"Shared Social Responsibility"**
*Reflections on the need for and supply of "responsible" patterns of social action*

"Responsibility" is a three-dimensional concept; accordingly, whenever we use it, three implicit questions are being raised and need to be answered. First, *who* is responsible? Second, what is the range or scope of the responsibility in question: to *whom* and *for what* does someone's responsibility apply, and where are legitimate limits of acting as "one's brother keeper"? Third, *to whom* is the agent in question responsible (meaning: by whom can she be *held accountable*) - be it in the present retrospect of what the agent *has* done so far, be it in the future retrospect of what she *will have done* at a later point?[1] In the formal sense suggested by these three questions, *all* responsibility is "social" in that it refers to a social interaction in which an agent (A), a category of people and concerns affected by the agent's action (X), and a monitoring observer (M) (and be it only an agent's self-monitoring conscience) are implied which determines whether or not A has complied with the duties of her responsibility. Depending on the answer, sanctions may range from public praising to public shaming to personal feelings of guilt. Sanctions also include formal criminal punishment and the imposition of legal liabilities of those who are found (in court) to have violated their responsibility. Furthermore, responsibilities are subject to an ongoing process in which they are assigned, contested, and redefined through formal legislation as well changing social norms.

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[1] For a lucid conceptual analysis of these various aspects of "responsibility", see Günther 2006.

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The notion of "shared social responsibility" plays an increasing role in public policy discourses of many (though not all, cf. Konstantinides and Scholz 2010) European states and, in particular, the Council of Europe. The latter is in the process of adopting it as a programmatic formula that is supposed to capture the aspirations of a specifically "European" notion of social order. However, the concept and its users sometimes appear to mix up two ideas that we may want to keep separate for the sake of analytical clarity. On the one hand, "*shared* responsibility" refers to well-known problems of collective action and the production of public goods for which "all of us" (i. e., all of their beneficiaries) are responsible to contribute through sharing the costs, efforts, and burdens involved. The other understanding associated with "shared *social* responsibility" invokes a norm of redistributive solidarity which requires the relatively well-to-do to share their resources with others.

The concept of responsibility also occupies an important place in both *sociological theory* and the *philosophy of social justice*. As to sociology, responsibility denotes the reflexive awareness of actors of the demands moral, social, and legal *norms* make upon their behavior in the light of the consequences of one's action. Max Weber's famous notion of *Verantwortungsethik* (*vs. Gesinnungsethik*) can be criticized for being almost empty concerning those norms, with the only remaining ethical imperative being that agents must consider and reflect on the consequences of their (in)action. More substantial norms that define corresponding responsibilities of compliance can be subdivided into legal, moral, and social norms. (Elster 2007) They differ according to their respective enforcement mechanism. If we fail to perform duties as defined by *legal* norms, *state* actors will step in and *coerce* compliance. If we fail to comply with *moral* norms, the inner voice of *conscience* will step in and generate feelings of *guilt* as a sanction. Finally, if we fail

duties as defined by *social* norms, we will be *shamed*, *treated with contempt*, *ostracized* etc. by *others* in whose eyes we have lost our worthiness of *recognition* for what we have done or failed to do. What makes *social* norms special in comparison to the two other types of norms is their lesser degree of *counter-factual validity*. In particular, legal norms are robust in the sense that, no matter how many people violate them how many times, they *continue* to assert their validity (until, that is, they may undergo a formal revision). Morals norms, as backed by considerations such as "everyday Kantianism" and generalizability, will not lose their validity (but can arguably even gain in force) by the evidence of their being widely violated and the *indignation* triggered by this evidence. In contrast, social norms (such as the expectation that parents supervise their children's homework, the observance of dress codes in funerals, standards of marital fidelity, neighborly help etc.) seem to be much less immune to the impact of their empirical violation. For as people are seen to be unwilling or unable to observe specific social norms, the latter can lose their validity and literally evaporate. What sustains the validity of social norms is the (fallible) *trust* in their validity, i. e., their bindingness for others. Yet violators can simply choose to move out of the reach of those who try to shame, ostracize or express their contempt in response to their violation of social norms, thus rendering the specific sanctioning mechanism of this kind of norms inoperative (to the extent, that is, it is not additionally supported by either moral or legal underpinnings).

I interpret the discourse on responsibility[2] that is seems to be spreading in both academia and among policy elites[3] as a symptom and reflection of the perceived need to strengthen and defend

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[2]  As mentioned, the discourse on "responsibility" does not only play a role in debates on invigorating forces of civil society and social order. It is also central to the liberal-egalitarian theory of *distributive justice* ("luck egalitarianism"). The latter claims that inequalities are normatively unproblematic only to the extent that they

social order against its decay that is brought about by the prevailing theory and practice of socioeconomic libertarianism. The concomitant symptoms of state weakness nourish a vision of social order that is essentially based upon the voluntary and *informally* controlled compliance with *social* norms - in spite of their vulnerability to decay resulting from non-compliance.

If people's, as well as all kinds of organized stakeholders', actual everyday behavior is to be informed by the voluntary compliance with the *social* norm that the burdens of responsibility are to be shared, what is called for is obviously some method to assign shares to actors. As the review of policy literature states, "consensus is unlikely, however, on how much responsibility each party should bear in the future".[4] (24) Absent such consensus and institutional method to reach it, and as soon as the sharing of responsibility is perceived to be somewhat costly to those who share, everybody just may wait for everybody else to do his share, in which case cooperation and solution of collective action problems is unlikely to be set in motion in any durable fashion. The easiest way out is to allocate responsibilities according to the logic of liabilities in civil law: every actor is responsible for compensating the damage he has demonstrably inflicted upon oth-

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demonstrably derive from and correspond to what people are *responsible* for (i. e. their efforts, ambitions, decisions, choices), not from conditions and circumstances that are beyond their control. (Cf. Dowding 2008) An analogous standard of justice applies in criminal justice, where the defendant is due to be sanctioned in strict proportion to a rights violation he is demonstrably responsible for.

[3] Examples of the latter include appeals to "corporate" social responsibility as well as to the charitable engagement of actors within "civil society". Also, the widely commented upon transition from concerns with *government* (i. e., activities originating with state institutions) to those with *governance* (resulting from the multilateral cooperation of state institutions and non-state stakeholders) belongs into the same context. (Offe 2009) Individual citizens are also addressed by policy makers, and sometimes so with good reasons, as being ultimately responsible for policy outcomes, as in health, labor market, migrants' integration, and environmental policies. Albena Azmanova (2010) has called this move "citizen responsibilization"; she highlights its implications of *sauve-qui-peut* risk privatization and subsequent victim-blaming. These transitions correspond to shifts from the rather exclusive reliance on legal norms to the (additional) reliance on social norms.

[4] Page references in the following are to Konstantinides and Scholz (2010).

ers. Yet most damages are diffuse as to both their causal actors and those affected. Another rule for allocating responsibility shares is the rule that "responsibilities are proportionate to the *possibilities* [my emphasis, CO] open to [people]" , which is theoretically neat yet calls for a procedure of possibility assessment. Nor does the thorny problem of determining shares go away by routine appeals to a "common duty of everyone" (12), the "dialogue between all the relevant stakeholders" (21), "a sense [or "culture"] of shared responsibility" (29), or an "operational vision of shared responsibility" (35) etc.

It should be clear from these distinctions that things can go wrong in a number of ways. For instance, A is assigned a responsibility to do X yet is un*willing* to accept it, thereby violating, as the case may be, a legal, moral, or social norm of responsibility (think of a parent who is unwilling to care for his or her child). Yet the rejection of responsibility out of unwillingness may be more easily excused if the (assumed) beneficiary is not one's child or some other concrete person, but "all of us". For in this case, every agent's willingness to do "my" share is, except for quite exceptional situations, contingent on the perceived willingness and ability of *others* to reciprocally do *their* share. Also, A can (claim to) be un*able* to perform ascribed responsibilities, in which case it appears *unfair* to burden him with them. Finally, the monitor M may mis-attribute some failure to comply with the demands of responsibility,  as in the case of victim blaming, scapegoating, rationalization of personal failings, or an agent's claiming of credit for good deeds that, in fact, others have performed. Sometimes it is next to impossible to find out, and to agree upon, to whose (in)action (un)desired outcomes can be causally attributed, and who is to be blamed or praised for (not) having lived up to his responsibilities; if so, any judgment on the part of M is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. A further problem with the monitoring agency M

emerges if it lacks the unbiased neutrality that is needed for credible statements on whether or not A has actually, in line with her responsibilities, performed X.[5]

The content of X, i. e. the social and substantive range of responsibilities, can vary widely. At one extreme, *individuals* are assigned the responsibility to care for *themselves* at any given point in time. A famous saying[6] comes fairly close to this extreme: "If you need a helping hand, look at the end of your right arm!" From that point zero of individual, self-centred responsibility[7] (at which all the three categories of agents I distinguished above - A, X, M - collapse into one), we can conceptually move in three directions.[8] One is the growing *temporal* inclusiveness, as illustrated by de la Fontaine's tale of the grasshopper and the ant, with the former being held responsible not just for the momentary, but for the *far-sighted* care for itself. The grasshopper has failed its responsibility by failing to think of and prepare for the coming winter, thus violating some (social) norm of prudent *solidarity with one's future self*. Secondly, responsibility can be extended in the *social* dimension (ranging from "my partner" to "all of mankind"), or the number

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[5] An illustration of this problem is the virtually universal absence of independent evaluation mechanisms in activities related to "corporate social responsibility" (CSR). Instead, we often find a fusion between A and M in CSR, resulting in a self-laudatory exercise of agents who pass favorable judgment about their own activities.

[6] It has originally been used by Abraham Lincoln who addressed it to the slave owners. Today, its analogue is commonly used when mainstream politicians address the long term unemployed in order to "activate" them or blame them for showing insufficient responsibility for the improvement of their condition.

[7] This notion of responsibility as *self*-responsibility (cf. the role of "*Selbstverantwortung"* in German labor market policy) indicates that the concept of responsibility does not necessarily overlap with that of *solidarity*, to say nothing about *altruism*.

[8] Max Weber's notion of an "ethics of responsibility" (*Verantwortungsethik*) would be worth discussing here at some length. In Weber's view, A is clearly restricted to the holders of elite positions of political leadership, M cannot be specified (due to his "warring gods" view of a world that is "ethically irrational", as proponents of an "ethic of conviction" fail to realize) and X, while, according to Weber, certainly not being the democratic sovereign by whom the political leader might be held responsible, is rather someone who will look back (from the mist of the future, as it were) and validates the ancestor's action as having in fact been "responsible".

and categories of people who are intended to benefit from "my" responsible action. Thirdly, we can also think of extending responsibility even further by demanding that agents must be *attentive to* and *knowledgeable about* events, developments, and causal links that frame the situation of their action. As Thunder (2009: 261) puts it, this *cognitive* dimension of "social responsibility requires both a certain habit of 'seeing' or noticing social needs, and the disposition to respond to them intelligently". For instance, acting responsibly as a parent presupposes that s/he must seek information and education about the nutritional needs of (young) children; s/he must be aware of the risks that lead to child obesity, etc. Likewise, military commanders are formally held responsible, according to the principle of "command responsibility", for knowing not just what they *happen* to become aware of but also "what they *could have* known", had they applied the appropriate scrutiny, about action taken by their troops in combat. Hannah Arendt has even spoken of citizens' "duty to know".

In all three of these dimensions - temporal, social, cognitive - which define the extent of responsibility, we can easily imagine demands to become exaggerated and plainly unrealistic. Such is the case when someone were to demand that the responsible citizen must be concerned with the *long term* effects of all of his action upon *all his fellow citizens* (if not fellow human beings), and be so on the basis of the *fullest available knowledge* about the world in which he acts. While this extreme is plainly worthless in normative terms, the opposite extreme of "presentist" libertarian self-reliance is equally hard to defend. As a consequence, we can safely draw two generalizations. First, the content of any realistic notion of "responsibility" is always somewhere "in between" those extremes. Second, and because there is no reliable yardstick for measuring the "appropriate" range of some individual's responsibilities, this range will be, and unavoidably largely

remain, contested and shaped by the comparatively weak forces of *social* norms. Moreover, policies of disciplining, educating, normalizing, activating and guiding people to behave more "responsibly" often border on a paternalistic control of behavior and the implied threat of victim blaming (following the logic of "I told you so…"). The issue here is to develop standards of *fair* "responsibilization" and the adequate endowment of non-state actors with the resources and conditions under which they can actually engage in responsible practices (an issue to which I shall return at the end of this essay).

### *The need for social responsibility*

Apart from strategic attempts of governing elites to "outsource" responsibilities that were previously assumed by public agencies to corporate actors, civil society, and individual citizens, three other considerations may play an additional role in explaining the new emphasis on governance and "responsibility sharing". First, at the level of international (i. e. essentially "stateless") policy making, the negotiated sharing of responsibilities among sovereign states appears to be the only means (beyond the limits of super-power unilateralism, that is) to achieve the production of global and international public goods (such as security and climate-related policies). Here, shared responsibility means the negotiated sharing of commitments and burdens among sovereign states. Second, it is well known that the provision of public (as well as most private) services is subject to the logic of co-production.[9] This often requires the co-presence of the two sides, as in the doctor-patient relation: The provider of services cannot start the "production" before the client/consumer is present and provides his "local knowledge". Also, the client him-

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[9] For an original normative argument for co-production as a form of non-market reciprocity, see Cahn 2004.

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self has typically a productive (if subordinate) role to perform in the service transaction, as when the patient is actually taking the medication or the student is doing the homework assigned. The client's role also includes the performance of a (often rapidly increasing) share of IKEA style self-service. All of these transactions are governed by social (e. g., professional) norms which specify which side is supposed to share what kind of responsibility in the essentially *joint* effort of service provision.

A third - and in my view most important and least explored - challenge to which responsibility sharing must be seen as a rational and promising response is this: We live in a world where solutions to many policy problems can only be found if political elites succeed in enlisting not just the general support of constituencies, but a problem-specific involvement and enlightened cooperation and supportive action of specific categories of citizens and situations. For instance, while criminal wrongdoing is entirely framed, defined, monitored, and sanctioned by legal norms and the institutions that are charged with the task of enforcing them, "nutritional wrongdoing", i. e. the eating (and feeding others) of food that is known to be detrimental to the duration and quality of human life, is something that cannot fully be enforced and monitored through regulatory agencies of the state. It must be corrected and overcome by invoking individuals' informed responsibility to rationally adjust their life styles. What public policy must rely on in this policy area  is the "soft" control mechanism of *social* norms which lead people to do the "right thing" *out of an informed sense of other-regardingness and future-regardingness*.

Many of the policies to which this applies have to do with the human body and its physical and social environment. Examples of policies where such appeal to the social norms and responsibil-

ity are widely used include water conservation, preventive health-related behavior (from H1N1
to HIV), nutrition, child protection, drug and substance abuse, the control of violence, gender
and intercultural relations, environmental-friendly consumption styles, mobility behavior, etc.[10]
In these areas, policies are harder, at times even impossible to police and enforce, compared to,
say, building codes or product regulations. The success of these policies depends upon the pru-
dent, voluntary, considerate, civilized etc. compliance of citizens with *social* norms and the re-
sponsibilities prescribed by them. In all these areas, the citizen can neither be effectively *coerced*
nor effectively *incentivized* to do what needs to be done in the interest of the provision of collec-
tive goods (and the minimization of collective "bads"). That is to say, if the policy succeeds at
all, it succeeds through the responsibility people are willing to practice.  In these and other policy
areas, citizens have come to be, it seems, in the role of the ultimate executive agents of public
policies.[11]

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[10] In a manuscript, aptly titled "The Powerlessness of Powerful Government", Stein Ringen (2005, 11) argues
that it is no longer enough for governments to legislate and enforce laws and regulations, nor to steer citizens'
behavior through subsidies, transfers, taxes, and other monetary incentives. I addition, and increasingly so ac-
cording to the author, they operate, and need to operate, through a third family of policy resources that the au-
thor calls "signals": "Signals are suggestions from the government. It encourages or recommends certain
choices, actions or mind-sets, and discourage others. … People are endlessly being told by their governments
how to behave and what to do and not do. We are recommended to eat healthy food, to not smoke, to not drink
and drive, to save more and spend less, or the other way around if the economy is lax, to take holidays at dif-
ferent times of the year, to use public transport, to practice safe sex, to keep children at home and off the
streets at night, to not call out the doctor needlessly, … to not litter the landscape, … to buy home-made prod-
ucts, to pick up and dispose of dog droppings, to economise with water and electricity, to wash our hands be-
fore eating, to pay careful attention to consumer information on food products, to make ourselves computer lit-
erate, to take exercise. … Hardly anyone or any activity is free from advice from government about what to do
or how to think. Campaigns for or against this that and the other are a constant feature of modern governance."

[11] To be sure, in some policy areas governments are well able to back up, as it were, signal-based policies by
monetary incentives and eventually by coercive forms of intervention. Anti-smoking polices are a case in
point. But such reliance on more traditional instruments of government is unpromising to counterproductive if
it comes to matters such as environmentally sound consumer behavior. Here, people need to be *persuaded* in
order for the policy to succeed.

To overstate my point here, we might say that all of us are affected by (and therefore legitimate stakeholder in) what everyone single one of us does (or fails to do) not just in political, but also in private life. We are all (and are increasingly made to be) aware of the fact of *interdependence* and its challenges. The way "you" educate your children, organize your consumption and mobility behavior, control your "carbon footprint", your everyday interaction with minorities and dissenters, your health behavior etc. is known to impact, in its long term and aggregate effect, upon the environment, the supply of human capital, climate change, health, forms and intensity of cultural and political conflict, patterns of urban life, among others. This awareness of externalities and interdependencies (from which not even the residents of gated communities can fully escape) calls for and drives, or so I have argued, the cultivation and expansion of the demand for responsibility and its fair sharing. Policy analysts converge on the diagnosis that we need *more* responsibility than we actually see practiced in social reality: *demand for responsibility exceeds it supply!* As David Thunder (2009: 560) summarizes:

> "A society that enjoys political and economic freedom cannot provide its members with a minimally decent way of life unless many of them have an active, outward-looking sense of responsibility for the lot of their fellow citizens and for the health of their social environment."

If such sense of responsibility wears thin, the foundations of social order are seen to be jeopardized, leaving behind a chaotic, unstable, and potentially despotic condition of exclusion, fragmentation, and *anomie*. Arguably, the now evident limits of the libertarian public philosophy, according to which the very notion of "society" is a mere phantasm[12], have sharpened the percep-

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[12] cf. Margaret Thatcher's famous statement in an interview of Oct. 31, 1987: " You know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families. ..People must look to themselves first." http://briandeer.com/social/thatcher-society.htm

tion of the losses and dangers associated with a doctrinaire market-centred view of social order and social progress. At the same time, rich literatures on civil society (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Offe (2000)), on social capital (Putnam et al., 1993) and solidarity (Karagiannis, 2007) have helped to sharpen the awareness of the fact that the state's logic of coercive enforcement of laws and contracts and the market's logic of self-centered partners in exchange do not, by themselves, add up to a foundation of robust social order. Some items in this literature echo the Tocquevillean insight that it is only due to the "art of association" and citizens' voluntary involvement in them that society can defend itself against the ever-present dangers of despotism.

A further reason why the discourse on responsibility appears to have moved up on the list of priorities of governmental and supranational organizations is likely to have to do with, as hinted to above, the *chronic need of most governments to unburden the state budget by replacing state-organized and state-financed programs and services by voluntary ones which are provided for by civil society actors*. In this perspective, the appeal to citizens' responsibility and self-discipline, as well as their readiness to engage in the voluntary provision of services through the donation of time, skills, and private funds is just the flip side of chronic symptoms of fiscal stress. Much of it can be seen as a continuation of privatization moves of the heydays of neo-liberalism, with the difference that this time it is not the market to which services are being devolved, but civil society and the responsibilities assigned to civil society actors (such as charitable foundations, corporations, associations, religious communities, and individual citizens). Thunder (2009, 562), citing the brilliant anti-statist conservative manifesto of Berger and Neuhaus (1977), enumerates some items to be transferred into the sphere of civic responsibility:

"providing a decent education to those who have 'slipped through' the cracks of mainstream educational institutions; caring for the elderly and sick, often in mediocre working conditions or on low salaries; ministering to the socially marginalized or disadvantaged, such as single parents, the unemployed, the homeless, and victims of sexual abuse; … and reporting suspicious activity in one's neighborhood."

Reviewing this list, it cannot escape the attentive reader, however, that every single one of these items is one that might also alternatively be taken care of, and more evenly and universalistically so, by properly funded and professionally operated welfare state institutions and their regulatory and compensatory capacities, such as a decent school system, social security and long term care institutions, minimum standards for working conditions and wages, unemployment insurance, rent-controlled housing, and adequate police protection. The policy of substituting public services and social rights with private charity can be criticized on two counts. First, voluntarism in the provision of social services, as it comes from third sector organizations, foundation, individual donations, and NGOs, is known to be much more *unevenly distributed* across social space and time than is the case with the services that are provided by welfare state organizations that operate through budgets, rights, and entitlements. For instance, in the case of natural catastrophes such as major earthquakes, normally massive donations tend to flow in that come from individual, institutional, and international donors (contingent, to be sure, on the degree of media attention the case receives and the international standing and reputation the respective country enjoys); yet such waves of enthusiastic solidarity and help coming from non-state actors often tend to be short-lived, following the attention cycle, while the long term assistance needed tends to remain in the hands of state agencies and largely state-subsidized organizations such as the Red Cross. Secondly, the outsourcing of provision of services to civil society actors tends to suspend and water down the *monitoring function* M that I referred to above: Virtually nobody bears ac-

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countability for the volume, quality, professionalism, durability, and fairness of the services provided other than the donors themselves. These two points suggest that, in terms of designing new policies for the assignment of responsibility, we should be somewhat reluctant in joining the widespread enthusiasm for transferring responsibilities to civil society and "third sector" actors.

Even today, most of the responsibilities we assume for "others" (corresponding to *altruism*) or "all of us" (corresponding to *solidarity*) do not result from voluntarism and choice on the part of responsible agents, but rather from formal *institutions* that *commit* us to serving others without leaving us much discretion on whether we chose or refuse to do so responsibly. These institutions - the system of taxes and transfers, social security, public education being the most important examples - are examples of self-binding acts of pre-commitment: At their origin stands the political, collectively binding *choice*, made in the past by some winning coalition of political forces, that it should *no longer remain a matter of choice* and the voluntary adoption of responsibilities whether or not, for instance, the unemployed are granted unemployment benefits. Instead, this becomes a matter of formal rights and entitlements. In this perspective, the genesis of the welfare state can be seen as a process leading to the *institutionalization* of responsibility which makes it viable even in the *absence* of supporting motivations. In this perspective, institutions can be compared to the auto-pilot of an airplane which unburdens the pilot (for a while) from the actual practice of his responsibility. To be sure, there have always been attempts to *re-open that choice*[13], be it in the form of political challenges to institutionalized responsibilities, be

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[13] Examples are to be found in ultra-libertarian social movements such as the "Tea Party" in the USA of 2010. A rather bizarre example is to be found in a recent campaign that the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2009) has inaugurated when he denounced the state as a "money-sucking monster" and progressive income taxes as "expropriation" of the industrious forces in society. He calls for an "antifiscal civil war" at the end of which, he

it in the form of private circumvention, evasion, and sabotage of tax and social security institutions.

Also, authors have argued for the need to get people involved into voluntary other-regarding and future-regarding responsibilities and communal self-help because such involvement is seen to increase the *quality* of services provided and the *adequacy* of solutions found. The suggestion here is that devolution of competencies to small local bodies (which comprise all those directly "affected" by problems at hand) would activate the ability of local populations to find out, in a process of deliberation, what their *needs* actually are; it would also bring to bear their *local knowledge* on how these common needs can best be met - rather than leaving the design of solutions to experts, managers, and administrators. (Fung and Wright 2001) Local actors, as opposed to outside experts, are supposedly "sufficiently familiar with the relevant facts to be able to act effectively". (Thunder 2009, 562) As Fung and Wright emphasize and convincingly illustrate on the basis of several case studies, a precondition of success of such local voluntary initiatives is that they, while remaining under the supervision and control of superordinate agents, be granted formal decision making powers and other resources that allow them to actually decide upon and implement solutions; responsibility must be "empowered" - a point to which I shall return at the end of this essay.

Not all cases where "more responsibility" is being called for, however, lend themselves to such empowered devolution. As Thunder (2009, 564) rightly observes "remote and diffuse objects such as geographically, socially, and culturally [one might add: temporally, CO] distant persons

suggests, society would be "reinvented" by abolishing "coercive taxation" and replacing it with donations the wealthy would proudly opt to make in favor of the public interest. - For a spirited critique cf. Honneth 2009.

and groups are less likely to engage the moral imagination than objects closer to home such as the fate of one's immediate family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues." Yet arguably the most urgent need for people taking responsible action occurs exactly in areas where responsible agents and the beneficiaries of their agency are far remote from each other - be it remote in *space* (when the issues is protecting others from human rights violations and helping them to maintain their material level of subsistence through development programs) or remote in time (as in all environmental problems and those of climate change). In such cases, feeling and acting responsibly for the benefit of remote others can be a morally highly demanding matter, as there are no ties of *mutual* obligation and direct cognitive accessibility to facilitate that action.

*The declining supply of social responsibility*

In order to serve others or "all of us" in ways that standards of responsibility require, you need *others* to join the action. That applies at least when we deal with *positive* responsibilities (the assumed duty of A to *do* X), as opposed to the *negative* responsibility to *refrain* from something that would be irresponsible to do (such as littering the park or failing to drive carefully). In the case of positive responsibilities, not only do individuals normally lack the material and organizational resources needed for "making a difference", except for very small social units. Individuals, in case they perceive to be the *only* ones who care, will also be easily discouraged to comply with standards of positive responsibility if they see themselves in the "sucker" position of complying with norms that nobody else accepts as binding, and making sacrifices for causes that nobody else shares. Hence in order to assist others (thereby fulfilling positive responsibilities), we need the assistance *of* others for both instrumental and motivational reasons. The reasoning is: "I do my part if you do your part, or assist me in doing my part." Responsibility does

indeed thrive on being shared, and visibly so. If we rely on findings that claim a secular decline of "social capital", i. e. the capacity to cooperate and join forces and resources with others (Putnam, 2000), the result is compelling: As many people have lost their social capital, the initial conditions for such "joining forces" and sharing responsibility tend to be absent. In this situation, people may feel an abstract obligation to act responsibly yet do not see the agents to do it *with*, and therefore will easily give up.

This effect may even be exacerbated by a condition one might call the "invisibility of the other". While monitoring and supervision of the other becomes ever more sophisticated in the *vertical* dimension (be it through consumer surveys of marketing agencies and large corporations, be it through the surveillance and policing of entire populations through technologies such as CCTV), people seem to know less and less about each other in the *horizontal* dimension. In contrast to fund raising strategies that were widely used a generation ago - when donations were collected in neighborhoods through door-to-door campaigning with the help of lists in which every donor could see how much previous donors had actually donated - today's strictly unobservable electronic transfer of money does not allow us to get an idea of who among our neighbors has actually been ready to donate how much and for what purpose.

Sociologists try to capture these and related phenomena by the concept of *individualization* (Bauman 2001).By that, they refer to a tendency of societal modernization which posits the individual (as opposed to collectivities such as classes, nations, groups, organizations, communities, families etc.) as the ultimate unit of social life and social action. Under the influence of individualization, persons conceive of success and life satisfaction as something that primarily results

from the prudence and luck with which they "game" market forces, rather than from the efforts of collective actors (states, trade unions, cartels) to curb them. At a time when, under the on-slaught of market orthodoxy, all kinds of collective actors experience the defection of members and when democratic states and their governments suffer from their citizens' disaffection, indi-vidualist conceptions of the world spread by default. Diversity, distinctiveness, and the cultiva-tion of individuals' special tastes, styles, preferences, choices, and identities are being empha-sized by consumers whom the market and the media supply with ever more sophisticated means to signal their uniqueness to others. Also, individualization is often seen as the flip side of glob-alization, as the latter tends to liquidate remaining collectivist arrangements of common protec-tion and common agency. To the (considerable) extent this description of trends and tendencies in modern OECD societies is accurate, it is entirely unsurprising that the notion of responsibility is in the process of losing much of its bindingness and normative validity. Its supply is dwindling while the demand for it, and hence its scarcity, grows ever greater.

Finally, *flexibility* and social *mobility* (upward, downward, spatial, between jobs, between in-come brackets, across family situations) as well as the spread of labor market and social security precariousness cannot but de-motivate practices of responsibility. Precariousness, as well as the anticipation of the risk of losing one's socio-economic status, shrinks the horizons of other-regardingness and future-regardingness, as it makes solidarity with others as well as the far-sighted solidarity with one's future self  appear largely "unaffordable" at any present moment.

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*Re-balancing the demand and supply of social responsibilities*

The policy question resulting from this tale of increasing demand and shrinking supply is simple enough. To quote Thunder (2009, 574) once again: What is the design of "social institutions that might support the practice of responsibility … [and] shows how people's social relationships shape their attitudes and behavior in the direction of social responsibility and makes responsibilities psychologically salient and cognitively accessible to agents"? As an answer to that key question, moralizing appeals to encompassing values and identities are evidently not good enough, although they belong to the standard repertoire of political leaders. An example is Barak Obama's appeal in his victory speech of 2008 when he addresses the nation's citizenry: "This victory is only the chance for us to make that change … It cannot happen without you. So let us summon a new spirit of patriotism, of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in." In a more sober tone, the Canadian sociologist Benoit Lévesque (2005, 48) states the goal "to improve civic engagement and responsibilities" and recommends the promotion of consumers' and savers' reorientation of their spending and investment decisions. Even here, the question remains how the consumer can be motivated to pay comparatively higher prices by complying in his shopping decisions with "fair trade" agreements, or the investor to sacrifice a margin of his potential return by engaging in "responsible" finance, such as investment in micro credits.

Let me propose, in conclusion, four rules of thumb by which the dilemma of failing practices of responsibility might be dealt with in promising ways. First, we need to understand and appreciate that the promotion of civic responsibility and cooperation is (some might say: paradoxically) largely a matter of *public policy*. It is not the *retreat* of the state that lets civil society flourish; it

is rather the outcome of public policies which encourage and help develop (through other means than mere elite rhetoric) the willingness and ability of citizens to assume and share social responsibilities.[14] In their analysis of determinants of the highly unequal distribution of health outcomes, Hall and Taylor (2009) conclude that these unequal outcomes are determined by what they term "social resources". But what determines the availability and distribution of those resources? Here is the answer the authors provide: "… our analysis suggests that public policy making can … be seen *as a process of social resource creation or erosion*…Public policy can influence the structure of social relations." (2009, 97-8; my emphasis) For instance, public policies can have the side effect of spreading distrust among ordinary citizens when they operate on the premise that the latter are either largely incompetent or unwilling to cooperate in the attainment of policy objectives. Policies and administrative agencies can strengthen or encourage social networks and their capacities for enhancing responsibilities, or they can do the opposite. The authors suggest that "governments should pay as much attention to the conservation of social resources as they do to the protection of natural resources." (103)

Second, I wish to suggest that the distribution of *discretionary time*, demonstrably one of the most potent indicators of well-being and life satisfaction (Goodin et al. 2007), is a highly promising field of public policy aiming at the strengthening of active civic responsibility and its sharing. What we already see is a trend in family related and long-term care related social policies and services to create time for carers and caring, and increasingly so *paid* time, the remuneration of which is intended to (partly) offset the opportunity costs incurred by persons who provide care

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[14] After all and symptomatically, it was a commission of the German federal legislature, *not* a civil society actor, which has inaugurated the discourse on "civic engagement" (Deutscher Bundestag 2002) in Germany.

outside of labor markets and the labor contract. While such policy innovations are welcome as they are creating time for caring, there are two inconsistencies here that are hard to defend. For one, why should only those caring activities find support in policy programs the beneficiaries of which are *family* members of the care giver? Why not extend such subsidized free time to other practices of responsibility which benefit the wider community? (cf. the proposal of a "participation wage" in Atkinson (1996)) For another, why are donations in monetary terms widely recognized and supported by tax exemptions, but not those donations on which people spend *time* rather than money (perhaps just for the simple reason that they do not have enough of the latter)? Visionary proposals such as the one suggested and elaborated by Coote et al. (2010) extrapolate the same idea of making discretionary time available on a massive scale that would be used for the practice of shared responsibility.

Third, the practice of social responsibility needs an *institutional shell* which would make it inviting, attractive, and more widely accessible. Many countries have reformed their legislation regulating foundation and large donations. But much more can be done for the objective of providing legal frameworks for cooperatives, private associations, philanthropic voluntarism, and the provision of services to specific target groups.

Finally, *transparency* is decisive, as it provides the much-needed *cognitive* support for responsible action. Such cognitive support is needed in two dimensions. As to the first of them, not just the media but also public authorities need to bring to the attention of potential volunteers what projects and other kinds of civic engagement are available for the "investment" of time, monetary donations, or expertise. As I suggested before, much of civil society exists today in a state of

what one could call "cognitive closure" - a condition of ignorance, inattention, and affective distance to the needs and problems of others. Most of us speak most of the time to - and are knowledgeable about - the likes of ourselves - a state of *suburbanization of the mind.* As to the second dimension of transparency, people need to know, given the *opaqueness of civil society to itself,* *who* and *how many* of their fellow citizens are actually engaging in practices of shared responsibility - and also: what do they actually *accomplish* by doing so. It is ultimately only the cognitive reassurance that others are doing "their share" as well that can establish and maintain "my" sense of shared responsibility and civic engagement.

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