

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this 21st century, Europe faces a number of major changes in society that seriously undermine the social achievements of the last century:

- the rise in poverty, inequalities and unemployment and social insecurity has meant, among other things, that even the prospect of starting a family is becoming virtually unattainable for many young people;
- ageing of the population means we need to rethink the type of social contract to be made with the youth of today, bereft of any certainty in their future, and strike a balance between the aspirations and rights of different generations;
- the difficulty in preserving commitment to universal protection and rights for everyone – ideas which since the 1950s have been linked to material growth – may result in the abandonment of long-term visions in favour of short-term results, carrying the risk of irreversible damage to one of Europe's most important common assets;
- the increase in migration and asylum applications multiplies the risk of violations of fundamental rights of the most vulnerable and calls for urgent decisions on reception policies;
- climate change means we have to take new criteria into account in the economic choices we make, especially in the use of non-renewable resources, reducing waste and seeking out opportunities for self-fulfilment and self-assertion other than unnecessary consumption;
- mistrust of democratic institutions and growing doubt about the effectiveness of their responses jeopardise their legitimacy, significance and ability to mediate, prompting citizens to withdraw into fear, or worse, to consider violence as a response to insecurity.

Such developments come about in a context of interdependence heightened by globalisation which, while it may create opportunities, exacerbates competition for natural resources and investment. Such changes make Europeans aware that poor people from other continents also aspire to well-being, yet the distribution of employment opportunities is, unfortunately, increasingly linked to reduced wages. It is against this background of acute tension that the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the European Union, wishes to reflect on the concept of shared social

responsibility in order to ensure a dignified life and well-being for all, future generations included, and to harness the energy and intelligence of citizens and all stakeholders to focus on this objective and the policy decisions and actions needed to achieve it.

There are several factors that show why we need to explore other ways of sharing responsibility.

First, there are the shortcomings in public institutional arrangements to manage such change and resolve new conflicts. Admittedly, states have shouldered social responsibility by creating standards and principles of solidarity and protection and have reformed certain institutions to deal with new problems such as climate change and responsibility for future generations. Nonetheless, given the complexity of the problems and in the absence of shared social responsibility with citizens and private players, the public authorities find it hard to come up with solutions and decisions able to garner the support of the stakeholders concerned (both weak and strong). Many major problems remain without an appropriate political response or, worse still, are used as a means of increasing fear, as has happened in the field of migration and asylum. Controversial reform is undertaken without consulting all interested parties, even though such consultation would lead to greater awareness of what was being requested of them, as witnessed by the absence of any young people in negotiations on pension reform. Citizens are asked to make an effort – for example, by reducing energy consumption and avoiding waste – without any open dialogue, based on clear information accessible to all, on the consequences for the environment and society.

Second, there is the gap between vision and behaviour, between the formal recognition of rights and fundamental principles (such as universal protection, social justice, respect for the environment) and current practice which pays scant regard to such principles. This has the result of sapping confidence in our ability to control societal development, undermining the legitimacy of the reference frameworks built up over a long period with so much effort, and making it difficult to transmit these references to future generations. Young people in particular often see that behaviour is out of line with declared principles or is guided solely by short-term motivations, emphasising a culture of instant results or, worse still, seeing the future as a convenient place to offload the negative external consequences.

Third, and linked to the above, are the conceptual and methodological failures to understand collectively the challenges, to clarify and lay down our priorities in a context of social justice and to harness skills. These failures can be seen in particular in the inability to develop the knowledge relevant

to common aims, while creating the moral motivation and capacity to act. Accordingly, we need to create opportunities for and tools of deliberative democracy, alongside those of representative democracy, to promote forces for concerted proposals and mutual commitment and recognition, all of which are indispensable in the genuine democratisation of social life.

The fourth factor placing the question of sharing responsibilities on the agenda is the lack of any mechanisms to control the way we respond to the challenges facing society and the use of natural and financial resources. Since political action and decisions on production arrangements remain confined to sectoral aspects and responsibility for action is defined within the activity parameters of each entity, the evaluation of results is of necessity somewhat biased. Nor is it subject to the considerations of other players, especially those who bear the brunt of the decisions or the externalities of the choices made without having been given the opportunity to take part or express their approval or disapproval, as is the case with public over-indebtedness and the over-exploitation of environmental resources, both of which sign away the future of the new generations.

The papers in this volume – divided into two parts, Part I focusing on the challenges and Part II on the strategies of shared responsibility – offer food for thought and suggest possible avenues to explore to address the political and institutional shortcomings which are leading our societies to an impasse and to fear. Although it is difficult to reach consensus on these challenges, it is nonetheless essential, in a context of profound interdependence, for a debate on responsibilities to be placed at the heart of the European agenda. The fact is that interdependence radically alters the impact of choices and decisions, including private choices in the use of resources and generation of waste. Even private choices which maximise utility and individual well-being can have negative consequences for more general equilibriums.

These papers – written by both renowned academics and young people starting out on their professional life – reflect on the challenges of transitions in the organisation of individual and community public life; they ask questions which cannot be answered by existing institutional and political arrangements. In order to build new arrangements, the political objectives to be institutionalised need to be promoted by deliberative processes in which both strong and weak players can – through impartial agreement – identify common targets.

The solutions to be found cannot focus solely on economic aspects; they must also take account of other key dimensions, such as confidence, socially available or unused resources (such as moral and affiliation

resources) and other factors which play a part in motivating co-operation. In order to find winning solutions for everyone, rather than continuing to create victims, we need to incorporate long-term visions into the short-term approach.

In order to address these challenges, responsibilities – as these papers point out again and again – are no longer simply private, legal or sectoral; they are common. This is why we set shared and consensus-based objectives – with the participation of the weakest members of society and taking into account future generations and common goods as key factors in prioritisation – for our society and its administrative structures, which need to find a new direction to their action.

Accordingly, there is an urgent need to address the the configuration of responsibility in Europe, because we are currently witnessing a process of disorganisation, with the multiplication of conflicts, negotiations that break down from the very beginning and similar problems. Even forming governments is difficult in certain cases. Democracy presupposes the ability to resolve conflicts through institutional mediation and acknowledgement of solutions as effective and legitimate. We face a series of unresolved problems – such as religious intolerance, intolerance of minorities and other forms of rejection of democratic process – which show that unless we move towards the equitable sharing of social responsibility, by experimentation and researching appropriate methods, there is a risk of stagnation on a political level of our ability to analyse, engage in dialogue and resolve conflicts, in other words our ability to govern, at a time when the challenges facing society require genuine progress in these areas.

Shared social responsibility is a concept which challenges the inefficiency of the fragmentation and pursuit of objectives decided upon without consultation and dialogue; at the same time we must bear in mind the need for structures and individuals to have autonomy of action and decision-making. Fragmentation imperils the future of our societies and prevents any social innovation in response to the above-mentioned challenges.

Which means that in order to promote shared social responsibility, public authorities have a key role to play. They must be able to grant legitimacy to multi-player areas of deliberation, where both weak and strong, public and private stakeholders decide by means of impartial agreement – with due regard for the authority differential – to give priority to arrangements satisfying several requirements: making what has been achieved in the social sphere irreversible, reducing the negative effects of decisions on the weakest or on those who have been unable to express their interests, drawing up a realistic idea of progress and restoring confidence in the

future and in others on the basis of reciprocity in commitment; in short, making all interested parties able to act as one and interact.

The papers in this volume put forward a wealth of ideas to this end and offer a contribution to the major public debate that needs to be held on these questions which are so vital for the European society of tomorrow. We hope that you will find these papers thought-provoking.

Gilda Farrell

*Head of the Social Cohesion Research and Development Division
DG Social Cohesion
Council of Europe*

PART I

CHALLENGES OF SHARED SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

JUSTICE, SUSTAINABILITY, DEMOCRACY

SHARED SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE NEED FOR AND SUPPLY OF RESPONSIBLE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL ACTION

*Claus Offe*¹

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 (held to be) responsible? Second, what is the range or scope of the responsibility in question; to whom and for what does someone's responsibility apply, and what are the legitimate limitations to the responsibility to act as "my brother's keeper"? Third, to whom is the agent in question responsible (meaning: by whom can she or he be held accountable, or to whom is he or she answerable) – either in respect of what the agent has done so far, or in respect of what he or she will have done at a later point? In the formal sense suggested by these three questions, all responsibility is social in that it refers to an interaction in which an agent (A), a category of people and concerns affected by the agent's action (X) and a monitoring observer (M) (even if only an agent's self-monitoring conscience) are involved, determining whether or not A has complied with the duties of his or her responsibility. Depending on the answer, sanctions may range from public praising to public shaming or personal feelings of guilt. Sanctions also include formal criminal punishment and the imposition of legal penalties on those who are found (in court) to have violated their responsibility.

The notion of "shared social responsibility" that plays an increasing role in the public policy discourse of many European states (though certainly not all, cf. Scholz with Konstantinidis 2011) often appears to mix up two ideas that need to be kept separate for the sake of analytical clarity. On the one hand, "shared responsibility" (in the sense of burden-sharing) refers to well-known problems of co-operation, collective action and the production of public goods. Such problems can be solved only if (ideally, all of) those who stand to benefit from their solution are placed in a position of sharing in the costs and efforts involved, by accepting an obligation or responsibility. The other understanding often associated with shared social responsibility refers to a norm of sharing one's resources with others by engaging in or complying with redistributive measures in favour of the less privileged. While there can be overlaps between these two interpretations (burden-sharing and redistribution), I shall focus here on the first understanding of shared responsibility.

1. Professor of Political Science, Hertie School of Governance, Berlin.

Arguably, the concept of responsibility occupies a central place in both sociological theory and the philosophy of social justice, including criminal justice. In sociology, responsibility denotes the reflexive awareness of actors of the demands that all kinds of norms make upon their behaviour. Norm-guided behaviour differs from affective, habitual or conventional modes of social action in that it is motivated by the awareness of norms and the (contingent) readiness of the actor to comply with those norms. “Responsible” behaviour responds to the claims made by norms, and responsibility in this sense can be defined as a meta-norm: the norm that norms should be complied with.

There are three kinds of norms which demand our responsibility to comply: legal, moral and social norms (Elster 2007). They differ in their enforcement mechanism (although empirically many norms are simultaneously legal, moral and social, thus relying on all three of those mechanisms). 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 is supposed to step in and generate feelings of guilt as a sanction. Finally, if we fail in our duties as defined by social norms, we will be “horizontally” shamed, held in contempt or ostracised by others in whose eyes we have lost respect and worthiness of recognition.

What makes social norms special in comparison to the two other types of norm is their lesser degree of counterfactual validity. In particular, legal norms are robust in the sense that, no matter how many people violate them and no matter on how many occasions, they continue to assert their validity (until, that is, they undergo a formal revision that must comply with legal/constitutional procedures). Moral norms, as backed by considerations such as “everyday Kantianism” and generalisability, do not lose their validity (but may 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 at funerals, standards of marital fidelity, neighbourly help and so on) seem to be much less immune to the impact of their empirical violation. As people are seen to be unwilling or unable to observe specific social norms, the latter can lose their validity and simply evaporate. What sustains the validity of social norms is the (fallible) confidence in their continued validity, that is, their binding nature for others. Yet violators can simply choose to move out of the reach of those who try to shame, ostracise or scorn them in response to their violation of social norms, thus rendering the specific sanctioning

mechanism of this kind of norm inoperative (to the extent, that is, that it is not additionally supported by either moral or legal norms).

I interpret the discourse on responsibility² (that seems to be spreading in academia and among policy elites³) as a symptom and reflection of the perceived need to strengthen and defend social order against the decay that is caused by the prevailing theory and practice of socio-economic libertarianism. The resulting symptoms of state weakness encourage a vision of social order that is essentially based on voluntary and informally controlled compliance with social norms – in spite of their vulnerability to decay from non-compliance.

If the everyday behaviour of individuals and organised stakeholders is to be informed by voluntary compliance with a social norm that the burdens of responsibility should be shared, there must obviously be some method to assign shares of the burden to actors. As Scholz and Konstantinidis (2011) say, “consensus is unlikely, however, on how much responsibility each party should bear in the future”.⁴ Without such consensus and an institutional method of reaching it, as soon as the sharing of responsibility is perceived as costly by those who share, they may all just wait for everybody else to do their share, in which case the synergy of co-operation and the solution of collective-action problems are unlikely to be set in motion in any durable fashion. One rule for allocating responsibility (mentioned in passing in Scholz with Konstantinidis 2011) is the rule that “responsibilities

2. The discourse on responsibility plays a role in debates on invigorating forces of civil society and social order, but it is also central to the liberal-egalitarian theory of distributive justice (luck egalitarianism), which claims that inequalities are normatively unproblematic only insofar as they demonstrably derive from and correspond to what people are responsible for (their efforts, ambitions, decisions, choices), not from conditions or circumstances beyond their control (such as place of birth or genetic inheritance); cf. Dowding 2008. An analogous standard of justice applies in criminal justice: those convicted are penalised in strict proportion to the violation for which they are demonstrably responsible.

3. Examples of such discourse among policy elites include appeals to “corporate” social responsibility or the charitable engagement of actors in “civil society”; the widely commented-upon transition from concerns with government (that is, activities originating with state institutions) to those with governance (resulting from multilateral co-operation of state institutions and non-state stakeholders) falls into the same context (Offe 2009). Individual citizens are also addressed by policy makers, sometimes with good reason, as being ultimately responsible for policy outcomes, for instance in health, labour market, migrants’ integration and environmental policies. Albenaz Azmanova (2010) has called this move “citizen responsabilisation”; she highlights its implications of *sauve-qui-peut* risk privatisation and subsequent victim-blaming. These transitions correspond to shifts from exclusive reliance on legal norms to the additional reliance on social norms.

4. Page references in this paragraph are to Scholz with Konstantinidis 2011.

are proportionate to the possibilities open to [people]”, which is theoretically neat – “can implies must”, the inverse of the lawyers’ *ultra posse nemo obligetur* – 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” (p. 12), the “dialogue between all the relevant stakeholders” (p. 21), “a sense [or culture] of shared responsibility” (p. 29) or an “operational vision of shared responsibility” (p. 35).

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 unwilling to accept it, thereby violating 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 specific person, but “all of us”. For in this case, every agent’s willingness to do “his” or “her” share is, except in quite exceptional situations, contingent on the perceived willingness and ability of others to reciprocally do their share. Also, A may (claim to) be unable to perform assigned responsibilities, in which case it appears unfair to burden him or her with them. Finally, the monitor M may misattribute some failure to comply with the demands of responsibility, as in the case of victim-blaming, scapegoating, rationalisation of personal failings or an agent’s claiming of credit for good deeds that others have performed. Sometimes it is almost impossible to ascertain, and agree, to whose (in)action the (un)desired outcomes can be causally attributed, and who is to be blamed or praised for (not) having discharged his or her 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 his or her responsibilities, performed X.⁵

The content of X – 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 saying⁶

5. An illustration of this problem is the virtually complete absence of independent evaluation mechanisms in activities relating 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 make favourable judgments about their own activities.

6. It was originally used by Abraham Lincoln who addressed it to the slave owners of his time. Today, its equivalent 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.

comes fairly close to this extreme: “If you need a helping hand, look at the lower end of your right arm!” From that point zero of individual, self-centred responsibility⁷ (at which point all three categories of agent identified above – A, X, M – merge into one), we can move conceptually in three directions.⁸ One is by extending temporal inclusiveness, as illustrated by La Fontaine’s tale of the grasshopper and the ant. The grasshopper has failed in its responsibility to care for itself by not thinking of and preparing 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 humankind” or perhaps the number and categories of people who are intended to benefit from “my” responsible action. Thirdly, we can 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.⁹

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 he or she must seek information and education about the nutritional needs of (young) children; he or she must be aware of the risks that lead to child obesity. 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” 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 – that define the extent of responsibility, we can easily imagine demands that become so exaggerated as to appear plainly unrealistic. Such is the case

7. This notion of responsibility as self-responsibility (cf. the role of *Selbstverantwortung* in German labour market policy) indicates that the concept of responsibility need not overlap with that of solidarity, to say nothing of altruism.

8. Max Weber’s notion of an “ethics of responsibility” (*Verantwortungsethik*) would be worth a longer discussion here. In his view, A is clearly restricted to top political leaders, M cannot be specified (due to his “warring gods” view of a world that is “ethically irrational” as, in his view, proponents of an “ethic of conviction” fail to realise) and X, while (according to Weber) certainly not the democratic sovereign by whom the political leader might be held responsible, is someone who will look back (from the mists of the future) and assess the ancestor’s action as in fact “responsible”.

9. This cognitive responsibility can also apply retrospectively, as it requires the awareness and appreciation of relevant events and conditions in the past.

if someone were to demand that responsible citizens must be concerned with the long-term effects of all their actions on all their fellow citizens (or all human beings), on the basis of the fullest available knowledge about the world in which they act. While this extreme is plainly worthless in normative terms, the opposite extreme of “presentist” libertarian self-centeredness is equally hard to defend.

As a consequence, we can safely make two generalisations. First, the content of any realistic notion of “responsibility” is always somewhere between those extremes. Second, because there is no reliable yardstick for measuring the appropriate range of a given individual’s responsibilities, this range will be, and largely remain, contested and shaped by the comparatively weak forces of social norms. Policies of disciplining, educating, normalising, activating and guiding people to behave more “responsibly” often border on paternalistic control of behaviour and the implied threat of victim-blaming (using the logic of “I told you so”). The issue here is to develop standards of fair “responsibilisation” and adequately endow non-state actors with the resources and conditions that allow them to engage in responsible practices (an issue to which I return at the end of this paper).

Apart from strategic attempts by governing elites to “outsource” responsibilities to corporate actors, civil society and individual citizens, three other considerations may also play a role in explaining the new emphasis on governance and responsibility sharing.

First, at the level of international (essentially “stateless”) policy-making, the negotiated sharing of responsibility among sovereign states seems to be the only way (beyond super-power unilateralism) to achieve the production of global and international public goods like security and climate-related policies. Here, shared responsibility means negotiated sharing of commitments and burdens.

Second, it is well known that the provision of public (as well as most private) services is subject to a logic of co-production. This often requires the physical co-presence of the two sides, as in the doctor–patient relationship: The provider of services cannot start the “production” before the client/consumer is present and provides his or her “local knowledge”. Also, the client 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 (frequently rapidly increasing) share of “self-assembly” in the style of flatpack furniture. All these transactions are governed by social (e.g. professional) norms that

specify which side is supposed to take what responsibility in the essentially joint effort of service provision.

A third – and in my view the most important and least explored – challenge (to which responsibility sharing may be seen as a much needed and promising response) is this: we live in a world where many policy problems can be solved only if political elites succeed in enlisting not just the general support of constituencies, but the problem-specific involvement, enlightened co-operation and supportive action of specific categories of citizens. For instance, criminal wrongdoing is entirely framed, defined, monitored and sanctioned by legal norms and the institutions that are tasked with enforcing them. In contrast, nutritional wrongdoing – 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, but just corrected and overcome by invoking individuals' responsibility and educated awareness.¹⁰ What public policy must rely on in this policy area (and many others, often relating to the physical and social integrity of the human body) 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. Examples of policies where appeals to social norms and responsibility are widely used include water and energy conservation, health-related behaviour (from H1N1 to HIV), child protection, drug and substance abuse, non-violence, gender and race relations, environment-friendly consumption and mobility style.

The practice of responsibility is widely and uncontroversially claimed by normative theorists (other than neo-liberals) to be a civic/political virtue – an attribute of an ambitious version of citizenship. In contrast, social scientists and policy makers may ask, in an empirical and functional perspective, what determines the need for and required kind and level – the demand side – of “responsible” behaviour of citizens. Most of the academic and political literature on the topic seems to converge today on the diagnosis that we need more responsibility than we actually see practised in social

10. It is worth mentioning that many of the social pathologies that plague advanced societies – addictions, violent crime, teenage pregnancies, increasing divorce rates, pathogenic malnutrition, mental health problems – have been shown (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010) to correlate strongly with the degree of income inequality. Therefore it seems consistent to suggest that egalitarian solutions to “my brother’s keeper” problems are not just intrinsically desirable for their own normative sake; they are also instrumentally preferable as promising (partial) remedies to those social pathologies.

reality: demand for responsibility exceeds its supply! As David Thunder (2009: 560) summarises:

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.

In this section, I explore further the question why the functional demand for citizens' sense and practice of responsibility is so acute and rising, as is indicated by the urgency with which the Council of Europe and numerous others are pursuing research and policy initiatives throughout the OECD world. Many writers, academic as well as non-academic share the concern that without policies that can help to strengthen citizens' sense of responsibility, the very social order of these societies will be in jeopardy, 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 illusion,¹¹ have sharpened the perception of the losses and dangers associated with a doctrinaire market-centred view of social order and social progress. At the same time, a wealth of literature on civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992; Offe 2000), social capital (Putnam et al. 1993) and solidarity (Karagiannis 2007) has helped to sharpen awareness of the fact that the state's logic of coercive enforcement of laws and contracts and the market's logic of self-centred partners in exchange do not, by themselves, add up to a foundation of a 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 it that society can defend itself against the ever-present dangers of despotism.

Let me elaborate further on explanations which can account for the rising need of post-industrial societies for social responsibilities that are voluntarily accepted and discharged by citizens without them being politically mandated or economically incentivised. First, the co-operative dispositions of citizens and their voluntary compliance with declared policy objectives have become the strategic variable in many policy areas. 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,

11. Cf. Margaret Thatcher's famous statement in an interview of 31 October 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>).

enforce laws and regulations, and steer citizens' behaviour with subsidies, transfers, taxes and other monetary incentives. Increasingly, according to the author, they also operate, and need to operate, through a third family of policy resources that the author calls "signals":

Signals are suggestions from the government. It encourages or recommends certain choices, actions or mind-sets, and discourages 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 different 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 products, to pick up and dispose of dog droppings, to economise with water and electricity, to wash our hands before eating, to pay careful attention to consumer information on food products, to make ourselves computer literate, 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.

In these and other policy areas, citizens have adopted, it seems, the role of the ultimate executive agents of public policies.¹² Many of these policies have to do with the human body and its physical and social environment. In these areas, policies are harder (sometimes impossible) to police and enforce compared to, say, building codes or product regulations. The success of these policies depends on the prudent, voluntary, considerate, civilised compliance of citizens with social norms. Examples are policies of preventive health, nutrition, sex life or drug use; the control of violent crime; citizens' behaviour in families, gender relations, intercultural relations and schools; and the patterns of consumer behaviour and mobility behaviour which have direct impacts upon the physical environment, including climate and the sustainability of ecosystems. In all these areas, the citizen can neither be effectively coerced nor effectively incentivised to do what needs to be done in the interest of the provision of collective goods (and the minimisation of collective bads). That is to say, if the

12. Indeed, in some policy areas governments are well able to back up signal-based policies by monetary incentives and then by coercive intervention. Anti-smoking policies are a case in point, but reliance on such traditional instruments of government is unpromising and even counterproductive when it comes to matters like environmentally-sound consumer behaviour. Here, people need to be persuaded in order for the policy to succeed.

policy succeeds at all, it succeeds through the responsibility people are willing to practise – their degree of other-regarding and future-regarding dispositions.

To overstate my point here, we might say that all of us are affected by (and therefore legitimate stakeholders in) what every 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, organise your consumption and mobility, control your carbon footprint, interact with minorities and dissenters, your behaviour affecting your health – all these are known to impact, in their long-term, aggregate effect, on the environment, the supply of human capital, climate change, health, the forms and intensity of cultural and political conflict, patterns of urban life and other things. Everyone else's pattern of spending and saving determines my job security. And, of course, the same applies vice versa. This awareness of interdependence (from which not even the residents of gated communities can fully escape, though with them we may encounter a highly asymmetrical kind of interdependence) calls for and drives the cultivation and expansion of the demand for responsibility and its fair sharing.

A further reason why the discourse on responsibility appears to have moved up the list of priorities of governmental and supranational organisations is likely to have to be, as hinted above, the chronic need of most governments to unburden the state budget by replacing state-organised and state-financed programmes and services by voluntary ones provided 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 fiscal stress. Much of it can be seen as a continuation of the privatisation of the heyday of neo-liberalism, with the difference that this time services are being devolved and responsibilities assigned not to the market but to civil society and its 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 marginalised or disadvantaged, such as

single parents, the unemployed, the homeless, and victims of sexual abuse; ... and reporting suspicious activity in one's neighbourhood.

Reviewing this list, it cannot escape the attentive reader, however, that every single one of these items is one that might alternatively be taken care of, and more universalistically, by properly funded and professionally operated welfare state institutions with 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 criticised on two counts. First, voluntarism in social services, from third-sector organisations, foundations, individual donations and NGOs, is known to be much more unevenly distributed across social space and time than services that are provided by welfare state organisations 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 from individual, institutional and international donors (contingent, of course, on the degree of media attention the incident receives and the international standing and reputation of the country in question); yet such waves of enthusiastic solidarity and help coming from non-state actors 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-subsidised organisations such as the Red Cross. Second, the outsourcing of services to civil society actors tends to suspend and water down the monitoring function M referred to above: virtually nobody bears accountability for the volume, quality, professionalism, durability and fairness of the services provided other than the donors themselves. These two points suggest that, in designing new policies for the assignment of responsibility, we should be somewhat hesitant about 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 scope as to whether we choose or refuse to do so responsibly. These institutions – the legal system of taxes and transfers, social security and public education being the most important – 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 whether or not, for instance, the unemployed are granted unemployment benefits should no longer remain a matter of choice and dependent on the voluntary adoption of responsibilities. 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 institutionalisation of responsibility which makes it viable even in the absence of supporting motivations on the part of citizens. In this perspective, institutions can be compared to the auto-pilot of an aircraft, which unburdens the pilot (for a while) from the actual practice of his responsibility. Of course, there have always been attempts to re-open that choice,¹³ either in the form of political challenges to institutionalised responsibilities, or in the form of private circumvention, evasion or sabotage of tax and social security institutions.

There is a third criticism of reliance on voluntarism. Authors have argued that people need to get involved in voluntary other-regarding and future-regarding responsibilities and communal self-help because such involvement is seen to increase the quality of services and the adequacy of solutions. 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 identify, 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 emphasise and convincingly illustrate on the basis of several case studies, a precondition for the success of such local voluntary initiatives is that, while remaining under the supervision and control of superordinate agents, they 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.

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) inaugurated when he denounced the state as a “money-sucking monster” and progressive income taxes as “expropriation” of the industrious forces in society. He called for an “antifiscal civil war” at the end of which, he suggested, society would be “reinvented” by abolishing “coercive taxation” and replacing it with donations that the wealthy would proudly opt to make in the public interest. For a spirited critique, see Honneth 2009.

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 [and, one might add: temporally] distant persons 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 remote from each other – be it remote in space (when the issue is protecting others from human rights violations and helping them to maintain their material level of subsistence through development programmes) or remote in time (as in all environmental problems and those of climate change, in our approaches to which we determine, for better or worse, the living conditions of generations to come). In such cases, feeling and acting responsibly for the benefit of remote others can be morally a highly demanding matter, as there are no ties of mutual obligation and direct cognitive accessibility to facilitate that action.

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 committing tax fraud). In the case of positive responsibilities, individuals by themselves normally lack the material and organisational resources needed for “making a difference”, except for very small social units. Individuals, if their perception is that they are the only ones who care, will also easily be discouraged from complying with standards of positive responsibility demands, if they see themselves in the position of the “suckers” 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 yours, or assist me in doing my part.” Responsibility does indeed thrive on being shared, and being shared visibly. If we are to believe claims of a secular decline of “social capital” – that is, the capacity to co-operate 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 such a 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 (for instance, through consumer surveys or the surveillance of entire populations through 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 neighbourhoods 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 neighbours has actually been ready to donate, nor how much and for what purpose.

Sociologists try to capture these and related phenomena by the concept of individualisation (Bauman 2001). By that, they refer to a tendency of societal modernisation to posit the individual (rather than classes, nations, groups, organisations, communities, families etc.) as the ultimate unit of social life and social action. Under the influence of this tendency, persons perceive success and life satisfaction as something that primarily results from the prudence and luck with which individuals play market forces, rather than from the efforts of collective actors (states, trade unions, cartels) to curb them. At a time when, under the onslaught of market orthodoxy, all kinds of collective actors are experiencing the defection of members and when democratic states and their governments are suffering from their citizens’ disaffection, the individualist framing of the social world spreads by default. Diversity, distinctiveness and the cultivation of individuals’ special tastes, styles, preferences, choices and identities are being emphasised by consumers whom the market and the media supply with ever more sophisticated means to signal their uniqueness to others. Individualisation is often seen as the flip side of globalisation, as the latter tends to liquidate any remaining collectivist arrangements of common protection and common agency. To the (considerable) extent that 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 binding nature and normative appeal.

Finally, flexibility and social mobility (upward, downward, spatial, between jobs, between income brackets, across family situations) as well as the spread of labour market and social security precariousness cannot but demotivate practices of responsibility. Precariousness and fear (especially of losing one’s socio-economic status) shrink the horizons of other-regardingness and future-regardingness, and make solidarity with others

and the far-sighted solidarity with one's future self appear unaffordable at any given moment. The paradox is that it is exactly under conditions when responsibility and solidarity are most urgently called for that they are least likely to be forthcoming.

The policy question resulting from this tale of increasing demand and shrinking supply is simple enough. To quote Thunder once again: what is the design of "social institutions that might support the practice of responsibility ... [and] show how people's social relationships shape their attitudes and behaviour in the direction of social responsibility and make responsibilities psychologically salient and cognitively accessible to agents"? (2009: 574). As an answer to that key question, moralising appeals to encompassing values and identities are evidently not good enough, although they belong to the standard repertoire of political leaders. An example is Barack Obama's appeal in 2008 to the nation's citizens: "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 that the goal is "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 consumers can be motivated to pay comparatively higher prices by complying in their purchasing decisions with fair trade agreements, or investors motivated to sacrifice a margin of their potential return by engaging in responsible finance, such as investment in micro-credits.

Let me propose, in conclusion, four promising rules of thumb for dealing with the dilemma of failing practices of responsibility.

First, we need to understand and appreciate that the promotion of civic responsibility and co-operation 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 that encourage and help develop (through other means than mere 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 deter-

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

mines the availability and distribution of those resources? Here is their answer: "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" (ibid: 97-8). For instance, public policies can have the side effect of spreading distrust among ordinary citizens towards each other when they operate on the premise that the latter are either largely incompetent or unwilling to co-operate 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" (ibid: 103).

Second, I want 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 outside labour markets and the labour contract. While such policy innovations are welcome because they create time for caring, there are two inconsistencies here that are hard to defend. First, why should only those caring activities find support in policy programmes whose beneficiaries are family members of the care-provider? Why not extend such subsidised free time to other practices of responsibility which benefit the wider community? (Cf. the proposal of a "participation wage" in Atkinson 1996). Second, why are donations in monetary terms widely recognised and supported by tax exemptions, but not donations on which people spend time rather than money (perhaps just because they do not have enough of the latter). Visionary proposals, such as the one suggested and developed 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 that would make it inviting, attractive and more widely accessible. Many countries have reformed their legislation on foundations and large donations. But much more can be done for the objective of providing legal frameworks for co-operatives, private associations, philanthropic voluntarism and the provision of services to specific target groups.

Finally, transparency is decisive, because it provides the much-needed cognitive support for responsible action. Such cognitive support is needed in two dimensions. First, not just the media but also public authorities need to bring to the attention of potential volunteers the projects and other kinds of civic engagement that 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 inattention, ignorance of and affective distance from the needs and problems of others. Most of us speak most of the time with, and are knowledgeable about, the likes of ourselves: a state of suburbanisation 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 actually engage in practices of shared responsibility – and also what 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.