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# Competing Responsibilities: Moving Beyond Neoliberal Responsibilisation

Susanna Trnka and Catherine Trundle

*Ideas of responsibility pervade social life, underpinning forms of governance, subjectivities, and collective relations. Inspired by current analyses of neoliberal projects of ‘responsibilisation’, this paper examines modes of responsibility that extend, challenge, or co-exist with neoliberal ideals. Our aim is twofold: first, we wish to broaden current scholarly understandings of how neoliberal ‘responsible’ subjects are nested within multiple frames of dependencies, reciprocities, and obligations. Secondly, we articulate a framework for conceptualising responsibility that places responsibilisation alongside relations of care and social contract ideologies—three modes of inter-relationship that we see as underlying the ‘competing responsibilities’ inherent in contemporary social life.*

*Keywords: Responsibility; Responsibilisation; Neoliberalism; Care; Social Contract*

Responsibility is a multivalent concept and practice that is central to contemporary social life. Notions of responsibility are pervasive, visible in forms of governance, emerging and enduring subjectivities, and collective relations in a wide range of settings. It is, moreover, a theme that runs, albeit often implicitly, through a wide range of anthropological and other social science literatures. Recent scholarship in particular has spotlighted the significance of ‘responsibilisation’ as a key element of new forms of self-governance and subjectivity (see, for example, Rose 1996, 2007; Shamir 2008; Zigon 2010).

In this article, we propose a wider framework for examining responsibilisation in and amongst competing modes of responsibility.<sup>1</sup> We do so out of concern that the term ‘responsibility’ has been colonised in public life and political rhetoric by neoliberal discourses of responsibilisation. In response, we argue for an anthropological approach to responsibilities that reclaims the multiple meanings and enactments of this concept. Our aim is to draw upon a wide body of anthropological literature in order to show

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that across many current social and cultural contexts, ‘responsibility’ can be viewed through the lenses of care relations and social contract ideologies, effectively countering the increasingly prevalent tendency of public and political figures to define and discuss responsibility in largely neoliberal terms.

If we consider Barry Barnes’ statement (2000, 8) that ‘all societies are systems of responsibilities’, then an examination of responsibilities, in terms of both how they are envisioned and how they are allocated, has long been at the root of anthropological enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as suggested by Max Gluckman (1972), many classic anthropological texts easily lend themselves to being re-read as accounts of responsibility and obligation. Gluckman expanded upon Edward Evans-Pritchard’s enduring fascination with ‘how in various types of groups individuals are held responsible for the injuries and misfortunes which befall the group and its members’, reformulating this as ‘a problem of crucial importance in human society everywhere’ (1972, ix; see also Douglas 1980). Through analyses of religion, morality, politics, community, gender, kinship, or healthcare, anthropology has frequently taken note of responsibilities, albeit often under the rubric of other themes.

### Responsible, Neoliberal Subjects

First used in English during the 18th century, ‘responsibility’ is etymologically rooted in the 12th and 13th centuries, in practices within the Christian church of singing or stating liturgical ‘responses’, taking on the additional meanings of being capable of responding to a question, accusation, or request (Oxford English Dictionary 2012). In contemporary usage, ‘responsibility’ is often used to reference individual or collective accountability through judgments of one’s rational capacities, assessments of legal liabilities, and notions of moral blame. Issues of responsiveness and answerability as well as agency are thus at the heart of how responsibility has long been envisioned (*cf.* Kelty 2008).

One of the theoretical domains in which responsibility has recently been highlighted is in relation to newly emerging neoliberal citizen-subjects. Engaging Foucauldian insights into techniques and technologies of the self (see, for example, Foucault 1988), Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose have examined responsibility as a facet of emerging neoliberal forms of governance that are portrayed by their proponents as enabling individuals’ ‘independence’ and ‘empowerment’. Despite significant debate over the increasing variety of social and political forms that are categorised as ‘neoliberal’ (Goldstein 2012; Hilgers 2012) and suggestions that many formerly ‘neoliberal’ states may in fact be shifting into ‘post-neoliberalism’ (Jessop 2013), there is general consensus across much scholarship that the terms ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘neoliberalisation’ (*cf.* Peck and Theodore 2012) refer to a set of ideals and practices that involve a shrinking state mandate, deregulation and privatisation, a faith in markets to govern social life, and an increased emphasis on personal choice and freedom. Miller and Rose chart the rise of such ‘advanced’ liberal forms of state-citizen relations and corresponding subjectivities since the 1970s, describing a socio-political transformation that

‘entailed a new conception of the subjects to be governed; that these would be autonomous and responsible individuals, freely choosing how to behave and act’ (2008, 18).

The ‘responsible citizen’ itself is, however, a much older concept (Kelty 2008). Originating during the French Revolution and related shifts towards democratic government, ‘responsibility’ became a necessary—but also naturalised—capacity of individual personhood and rights as universal suffrage in Western Europe transformed ideas about where responsibility for governance was vested (McKeon 1957). As McKeon argues,

the earlier formulation of this conviction tended to be restrictive: representative government or democracy will work only if the people is ready for it, that is, responsible. The reformulation inverts the relation: responsible government depends on a responsible people but a people acquires responsibility only by exercising it (1957, 24, as quoted in Kelty 2008, 10).

In a similar vein, Marshall’s (1950) analysis of changing forms of citizenship through the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, reveals how a certain form of citizen-subject, imbued with specific civil rights and a new-found sense of collective loyalty and responsibility to contributing to society, coincided with the extension of formal political rights.

But while responsibility has been a key means of constituting the citizen-subject over the last two centuries, what ‘responsibility’ signifies has significantly shifted during this period (Kelty 2008) and is frequently used today, in both scholarship and public life, to refer to a set of specific techniques of constituting the self in relation to government and society at large. In 2013, the social media site LinkedIn released a list of the ten most ‘hackneyed words’ its members use, and ‘responsible’ topped the list.<sup>3</sup> From attempts by the ‘Family Responsibilities Commission’ in the Northern Territories of Australia to instil norms of ‘respect and responsibility’ in local aboriginal families,<sup>4</sup> to calls for senior nurses in Scotland to take more ‘responsibility and accountability’ for cleaning up their workplaces (BBC News 2012), ‘responsibility’ and the ‘responsible citizen’ have become a buzzword for the adoption and internalisation of some of the core ideals of neoliberal governance. In 2012, for example, the Deputy Mayor of Wellington, New Zealand could refuse residents’ requests to put up barriers at a crosswalk where numerous pedestrians had been hit by buses, on the grounds that it is not up to the city to provide such protection as ‘personal responsibility remains key’ for pedestrian safety (*The New Zealand Herald* 2012).

These instances highlight one of the central themes of neoliberalism, namely, the portrayal of personal choice and autonomy as the means through which responsibility is enacted. In recent decades this ideal has cut across the political spectrum, evident in both right- and left-wing government policies. In democratic countries such as the United States, Britain, Australia, or New Zealand, even left-leaning governments have, for example, treated ‘the poor’ as a social problem that requires welfare programmes to responsabilise and empower citizens so that they may help themselves and fulfil their human ‘potential’ (see, for example, Cruickshank 1999). John Clarke

offers a vivid description of how such discourses, in this case from Britain's 'New Labour' government, promote an image of citizens as

the bearers of responsibilities as well as rights ... [entrusted with] the responsibility to produce the conditions of one's own independence—ideally by becoming a “hard working” individual or family. ...Citizens must manage their lifestyles so as to promote their own health and wellbeing. Members of communities must eschew anti-social behaviour so as to promote harmony ... Parents must take responsibility for controlling and civilizing their children (2005, 451).

The paramountcy of the self-actualised and self-managing individual is central to such neoliberal visions. As Michael Freeman and David Napier write, '[a] responsibilized society does not see individuals as socially situated but as autonomous actors making choices that determine their lives' (2009, 403). And yet, as in Clarke's formulation of responsibility above, descriptions of the self-managing individual frequently reveal a subject entangled within widespread ties, dependencies, and duties to others. Indeed, autonomy and choice may not always be realised, or even desired, despite being fundamental to neoliberal representations of the self (Rose 2001).

One of the avenues through which neoliberal notions of the responsible individual are often inculcated is in practices of audit and accountability that promote particular kinds of self-surveillance and self-assessment techniques (Shore and Wright 2011). Responsibility becomes a form of reflexive prudence, and individuals and collectives must increasingly conduct moral evaluations of their actions in relation to their potential effects, calculating and designing their life course in ways that attempt to mitigate harm and risk, and maximise benefit to themselves and others (Giddens 1999). Such enactments are, moreover, staged not only for the self but also with respect to a broader audience as accountability provides evidence to others that one has prudently enacted one's responsibilities. A broader scope for understanding 'rituals of accountability' (Power 1997) thus enables us to see how both personal and institutional responsibility are surveilled from above and below: that is, by the state, the media, public groups, and individuals.

An example of the intersections of the ideas of risk, accountability, and responsibility can be seen in the Australian government's recent 'emergency' intervention in aboriginal communities of the Northern Territories. Here responsibility and risk are interwoven with racial ideologies, forms of entrenched inequality, and modes of power. In 2006 state agency reports—exemplars of bureaucratic techniques of audit and surveillance—revealed that a liberal politics of self-determination (Kowal 2008) was 'failing' local indigenous communities, where social dysfunction and abuse were supposedly endemic. As a consequence the government instigated a set of paternalistic interventions that involved monitoring income use, school attendance, family life, and employment, in order to reorient social life, cultural values, and individual behaviour towards acceptable liberal norms. Altman and Hinkson show that the state defined their actions 'as acting responsibly and decisively to reduce the risk posed by a section of its citizenry who represent a refusal to conform to mainstream social

values' (2010, 185). At the same time, the state sought to craft new neoliberal subjects in such at-risk communities, and offered a

radically new interpretive framework as a basis for policy making—one that looks beyond colonial experience and governmental neglect to place the onus on Aboriginal people to themselves take responsibility for their actions ... [it] is a radical form of cultural redevelopment modelled around the fostering of self-respect and individual responsibility (2010, 190).

Neoliberal ideals of accountability, risk, and responsibility can thus curtail certain freedoms and choices in order to enable other, more valued forms of autonomy and empowerment.

The same neoliberal processes that highlight the importance of granting individual freedom, choice, and autonomy thus simultaneously constitute new relations and dependencies. They can also create the potential for new forms of social action. Indeed, when responsibilities are divested from the state, they do not always fall upon individual actors; rather in some cases, new collectivities emerge. What has been called 'the death of the social' thus simultaneously created new notions of 'community' and spaces for collective action and responsibility (Rose 1996).

One emergent form of collective social responsibility is that of biosocial communities in which citizens come together around a specific health issue to educate and support one another and further state and corporate interest in their health concerns. Such communities do not merely attempt to fill in the gaps of services vacated by the state, but rather make claims for new forms of social inclusion. Engaging in discourses of responsibility and accountability, these groups direct demands towards the state, (private or public) scientific entities, and corporate business, seeking not only care, research, and investment, but also the extension of decision-making beyond both the state and the realms of scientific enterprise through public-private 'partnerships' envisioned to enable greater degrees of 'patient choice' (Epstein 1998).

Another form of collective action emerging out of neoliberal ideals occurs when market entities attempt to render their actions socially and environmentally accountable and responsible. Since the late 1960s/early 1970s, 'Corporate Social Responsibility' or CSR programs, which attempt to build public trust and moral standing through the language of accountability and responsibility, have been instituted by a range of national and transnational corporate organisations. These programs entail two levels: both the undertaking of projects that focus on social and environmental improvement (as it aligns and supports profit-making by the corporation) and the publicly visible recording of these projects through various practices of reporting and accounting that legitimise and frame action as morally virtuous and responsible (Welker 2009).

Akin to biosocial communities, CSR programs reflect a central principle of neoliberalism, namely the dispersal of the responsibilities of the state to other entities such as the family, the private corporation or civil groups, as well as individuals. But while CSR reflects 'the tendencies of corporations to assume socio-moral duties that were

heretofore assigned to civil society organisations, government entities and state agencies' (Shamir 2008, 4), it also involves the constitution of collective ties and entities in which new responsibilities are created and older responsibilities exposed or erased. As Smith and Helfgott (2010) demonstrate in their analysis of corporate social responsibility movements in Peruvian mining industries, by foregrounding the company's responsibility to the wider community and environment, new groups became 'stakeholders', and older collective identities and forms of responsibility receded: 'Whereas before the 1990s "mining" meant both companies and workers, today it seems to mean only companies and communities, with labour subsumed within companies' (2010, 23). Corporate social responsibility is thus often circumscribed, with certain responsibilities enacted in order to foreclose others. These new forms of responsibility can, moreover, usually be explained in relation to the logic of markets and their drive for expansion; while CSR demonstrates the emergence of new rhetorics of moral responsibility, as many scholars point out, ultimately CSR works to de-radicalise alternative intentions, motivations, or effects that may lie within or emerge from its dynamic structures (see, for example, Frynas 2010).

As these diverse examples demonstrate, there is no singular response to how neoliberal visions of the responsibilised citizen-subject are enacted. Nor are neoliberal rhetorics promoting the autonomous individual watertight. Indeed, many modes of collective association exist under the framework of neoliberal governance. Our point here, however, is that despite its flexibility, neoliberalism cannot encompass the breadth of subjectivities and collective relations that constitute contemporary enactments of responsibility.

### **Competing Responsibilities, Relations of Care, and Social Contract Ideologies**

Despite the pervasive and diverse deployments of neoliberal rhetorics of responsibility, in everyday practice, responsibility entails a much broader range of meanings. Cross-cutting forms of identities and collective and interpersonal ties can sometimes intersect, and at other times contest, neoliberal frames. Social actors, moreover, move between different moral, ethical, and affective valences of what it means to be 'responsible' subjects without necessarily feeling conflicted, in need of resolution, or necessitating 'moral breakdown' (Zigon 2010). Like shifting linguistic registers, such differences are not necessarily perceived as contradictory but can be easily encompassed within a single individual. Sometimes they constitute overlapping ethical domains.

If we wish to re-conceive of 'responsibility' as it is increasingly being cast in both public and scholarly debate, our perspectives must be broadened to encompass these other forms of ties, obligations, duties, and reciprocities that lie alongside, challenge, or are reconciled with those of responsibilised, neoliberal subjects. A related point has recently been made by Ferguson (2012) in his call to reconceptualise 'responsibility' in order to reveal the limits of neoliberal discourses of responsibilisation and the forms of structural violence that they often actively obfuscate. Ferguson

furthermore suggests we need to recast our understandings of 'state responsibility' in light of new, transnational political, social, and economic formations, including corporate actors who transcend state boundaries.

We suggest that one way of beginning to address this need is to foreground two overlapping realms in which we see many enduring forms of responsibility enacted; namely, relations of care and social contract ideologies. Highlighting these two aspects as central components of 'responsibility' will, we hope, enable scholars to highlight acts of recognition and forms of dependence and inter-dependence that challenge some of the assumptions and principles of responsabilisation promoted by neoliberal thinking.

### *Care as Inter-Relationality*

Obligations and ties enacted through relations of 'care' constitute a key, if often understated, form of responsibility in contemporary social life. Care is enacted across various levels of relationality, manifested through intimate, face-to-face relationships (such as between parent and child) or in relationships between collectivities (for example, teachers and students; citizens and the nation). Below we examine examples ranging from religious charity to kinship and sexuality. Crucial to these examples is the distinction between care and neoliberal conceptions of responsibility, the latter of which, as we have highlighted, foreground the 'autonomous' individual as making his or her own 'choices' about how to act. In contrast, the relations of care that we discuss here are constituted through the dual aspects of recognition and action motivated by one's commitment to the welfare of the other.

In her influential comparison of the meanings of 'choice' and 'care' in practices of modern healthcare, Mol (2008) argues that, inspired by neoliberal models of personhood that centre on the value of choice, individual patient choice is increasingly cast as an unquestioned social good, associated with rights, autonomy, and empowerment, and often contrasted with 'paternalistic' control and constraint, and patient passivity. Mol suggests, however, that we step outside of neoliberal frameworks to consider how healthcare is practiced when predicated upon the logic of care. Unlike models of patient choice, relationships of care, she asserts, cannot be reduced to a transaction, with clear beginning and end points of responsibility, but involve open-ended relationships in which power is negotiated between parties. Importantly, such relationships of care do not require affective qualities such as love, affection, and intimacy, but can be uncomfortable, conflicted, or even pro forma and emotionally uninvolved.

In many circumstances, care can thus be best understood in relation to responsibility rather than love. Rather than enabling choice and independence, this type of care necessarily involves taking responsibility for recognising what needs to be done for another (Gilligan 1982; Held 2006). Sometimes this involves negotiation, and at other times it involves taking over the capacity of making decisions (Mol 2008); what it does not necessarily involve is handing the responsibility for decision-making over to the other. In contrast to neoliberal rhetorics of 'partnership' which

emphasise the equality and agency of both sides (however superficial such rhetorics may be), relations of care are not inherently equal but may allow for different degrees of dependence and need. They may, furthermore, sometimes allow for shifting roles and obligations and are not necessarily contingent upon each partner upholding his or her side of the exchange.

One notion of care that has a long lineage in Western thought is the Christian principle of having an obligation to promote the wellbeing of the wider community and extend compassion towards the vulnerable. Often conceived of as an imperfect attempt to reciprocally respond to God's gifts and sacrifices, it frequently involves a duty to use one's God-given talents for the greater good as well as extending charity and goodwill to 'the poor' (Elisha 2008).

Elisha's (2008) study of US evangelical Christian churches' engagements with charity recipients demonstrates how such forms of compassionate care can exist in dialogical relationship with neoliberal ideals of accountability that require charity recipients to demonstrate responsible use of charitable support. Elisha notes that these ideals can be linked to the principles of neoliberalism and 'popular support for the state's role in facilitating welfare privatisation and in concomitant ideologies of personal responsibility that fuels evangelical forays in to the welfare area' (2008, 158). However, alongside ideals of personal responsibility and accountability exist Christian notions of an 'empathic, unconditional benevolence' (2008, 156) based on visions of a common humanity that elides social differences and casts Christian responsibility as the unconditional response to those in need. In such cases, Christian care and neoliberal forms of accountability coexist, without subsuming one another.

While these and similar acts of charity might be represented through the rhetoric of brotherly love, such affects are not essential to these relationships. In fact some forms of compassion require a detachment from the intimacy of giving in order to ensure responsible, fair treatment of recipients. Trundle's (2014) research on a church food bank in Florence, Italy, for example, illustrates how caring for food bank recipients required volunteers to demonstrate a responsible ethos of 'disinterested equality'. In trying to enact an effective, fair, and sustainable charity system that could continue to care for people over the long term, volunteers became preoccupied with ensuring that their limited food resources were distributed evenly, that all recipients were treated the same, and that none were favoured over others. In practice, this meant not being affected by some recipients' stories of hardship and pleas for extra support. Enacting compassion to the recipients as a collective (in providing for them all, week in and week out) meant not letting one's judgement be clouded by compassion for any one individual who made a case for being exceptionally needy. Maintaining this ethical stance of distance meant in turn that volunteers did not learn much about the lives and struggles of charity recipients. By focusing on the ethical moment of giving when food and clothing was handed over to recipients, volunteers did not account for the effects of their gifts on individual lives and could not measure their charity's efficacy in addressing need or building self-sufficient recipients. Here, ideals of charitable care necessarily negated neoliberal notions of accountability and

personal empowerment that are so often evident in contemporary forms of charity and development. At the same time, however, this example illustrates how ideals of responsible care can become entangled with other logics within neoliberalism. The volunteers' ethical stance ultimately aligned with the principle that, outside the care offered at the food bank, it was the recipients' personal responsibility to use the charity to improve their own lives. By focusing only on the ethics of care in the gift exchange moment, the volunteers' method necessarily bracketed from view wider questions of social justice and entrenched social inequality.

Another realm in which relations of care are distinct though often intertwined with neoliberal modes of responsibility is that of kinship. Parenthood and childhood in present-day Western society are being re-shaped by neoliberal contexts which demand different kinds of behaviours and capacities (Tap 2007). The categories of mother, father, and child, the forms of relationality they require, and the sorts of (maternal, paternal, and filial) responsibilities they entail, are re-shaped but never fully encompassed by the values of the neoliberal order. A telling example is Ong's (1999) account of 'flexible citizenship'. Ong describes how transnational Chinese subjects are shaped by the citizenship and residency regimes of specific nation-states and the logic of the marketplace, as well as by Confucian ideals of filial piety (*xiao*) and *guanxi* networks that govern relations between culturally defined superiors and inferiors, such as fathers and sons; husbands and wives; older brothers and younger brothers, *etc.* (Ong 1999). Confucian ideals are neither reshaped by neoliberal logics nor seen as antithetical to the laws of the marketplace and citizenship requirements, but it is precisely the intersections of flexibility, Confucian piety, and market logics that 'provide the institutional contexts and the webs of power within which Chinese subjects (re)locate and (re)align themselves as they traverse global space' (Ong 1999, 113).

While many of the examples above suggest that at the core of care is an enduring commitment, care can also be a process that is fleeting and circumscribed. Fundamentally it is a commitment to the welfare of the other—a duty of care—no matter how brief it might be. It is, moreover, a duty that does not necessarily supersede other kinds of ties; care might lie in conflict with the values of neoliberal forms of responsibility, but can also be incorporated alongside practices that employ the logic of choice.

In a revealing ethnographic example, Adam (2005) analyses sexual behaviours among gay and bisexual men in Toronto, Canada in order to foreground the co-existence of different forms of moral reasoning that are enacted through intimate engagements between new sexual partners. Examining the revived phenomenon of unprotected sex, Adam describes a trend towards 'neoliberal responsabilization' whereby men assume personal responsibility for avoiding exposure to HIV to the extent that they lay blame exclusively upon themselves if they become HIV positive. In a similar vein, men who engage in unprotected sex justify their actions by invoking responsibility as a framework for *self*-protection that does not require them to protect their new partners. Adam found that for many men, '[unprotected] sex is justifiable

through a rhetoric of individualism, personal responsibility, consenting adults, and contractual interaction' (2005, 339).

However, many of the same men blame themselves if they inadvertently expose their partners to HIV. One man described being so upset to have potentially infected a casual partner that he insisted on finding immediate post-exposure treatment for him. Adam suggests that such 'instances of disruption ... expose the limits and failings of the rhetoric of [neoliberal] responsibility' that these men so wholeheartedly engage in as it cannot 'account for the much more complex motivators and vulnerabilities that characterise real human interaction and it denies the vulnerabilities, emotions, and tough dilemmas faced by people in their everyday lives' (2005, 343–344). What is significant for our argument here is Adam's careful depiction of intimate relations as entailing multiple framings of responsibility and at times necessitating a switch between neoliberal logics of self-responsibility and care of the self, and other forms of interpersonal responsibility and obligation.

While not requiring long-term commitment, such moves demand attentiveness and a willingness to respond. Even more fundamentally, they require the act of *recognition*, as prior to attempting to further the needs or interests of the other, one must first recognise not only the existence of the other, but of an 'other-in-need'. Indeed, as Elise McCarthy argues, 'Responsibility [as] a guide to ascertaining appropriate conduct ... would seem to presuppose a field of recognition—literally recognising one's self, one's place and one's time vis-à-vis others' (2007, 4). It is this act of recognition that then allows one to take up the duty of care and shoulder the responsibilities of not only one's self but of another.

### *Social Contract Ideologies*

Another form of recognition not so easily visible within responsabilisation rhetorics is that of belonging to a larger collective organised through relations of reciprocity, often expressed through ideologies of 'social contracts'. While ideals of care highlight ties of dependency, social contract ideologies reveal a myriad of inter-dependencies that emerge within larger collectivities.

The underlying premise of social contract ideologies is that members of a group relinquish a portion of their individual autonomy and responsibility in order to gain protection and security and ensure that the wider collective assumes some measures of responsibility for/over them. Conceptualisations of such an exchange of responsibility have a long legacy within Western philosophical thought. Plato's *Crito* dialogues, for instance, demonstrate the notion of a 'necessary' exchange between citizens and society. *Crito* details how instead of decrying Athenian society and its laws which have imprisoned and sentenced him to death, Socrates argued that his very existence and life itself have been enabled by the law and that he is thus obliged to obey it; it has responsibility over him, and he has responsibility towards it (Plato 1907 [360 B.C.E]).

Numerous influential theories of social contracts have followed, suggesting various accounts of the evolution of political life. Whilst Hobbes (1963 [1651]) argued that

through the social contract people invest a strong sovereign with absolute authority and responsibility, relinquishing a portion of their freedom in order to escape a 'brutish' state of nature and gain the protection offered by society and politics, for Locke (1967 [1699]) life prior to the social contract was governed by laws of nature and if those collectively entrusted to rule become tyrannical and irresponsible, then the social contract could be overthrown. Rousseau (1762) in turn maintained that the first form of social contract protected the interests of the elites and argued for the need for the 'general will' to drive direct democracy. Multiple imagined contracts can thus be invoked, with Plato, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau's models each investing responsibility in distinct actors and processes.

A recent iteration of the notion of social contracts is Ghassan Hage's concept of 'mutual obligation' (2003). Writing against neoliberal conceptions of society and paranoid forms of nationalism, Hage articulates an alternative vision of society, as one that distributes hope and recognises and honours its members.

It is when we have a society which, through the bodies that govern it, feels "obliged" to offer spaces that "honor" its members as "important" human beings, and when these members, in turn, experience an ethical obligation towards it which means nothing other than becoming practically and affectively committed to it, caring about it that we have a structure of "mutual obligation" (Hage 2003, 148).

Crucial to Hage is that fact that social contracts are not reducible to the calculated exchange of rights between 'homo economicus' and the state, but intersect with ideas of care and commitment, fundamentally driven by reciprocity rather than self-interest.

However, as many scholars have demonstrated, the ideal of social contracts contrasts with the political arrangements putatively enacted in its name, as what we take to be the rational 'rule of law' often entails considerable levels of violence against those who are governed (Asad 2003). Furthermore, both the idealised image and the practice of social contracts for most of its history have sidelined women and children, slaves, and others as incomplete subjects 'unworthy' of membership (Young 1989). Social contracts are thus best understood as ideologies which mask other forms of relations, including exploitative ones (Rawls 1971). These forms of 'mutual obligation' are, moreover, usually not consciously adopted or entered into; no one chooses to enter into a social contract as a 'free', 'rational' actor (Held 1993). Rather, we are socialised within its ideology and rhetoric to envisage a certain kind of responsible individual and collective social responsibility (Rawls 1971, 13). The motivations for enacting such responsibilities at any given time are as likely to include affect or sensation as they are moral or ethical decision-making (Trnka, Dureau, and Park 2013).

Our point here is that ideologies of social contracts rest upon long-standing notions of relations between self and state, or self and collective, that cross-cut neoliberal values and ideals of the individual and his/her place in society. The notion of social contracts is broader than neoliberalism; it is not incompatible with it, but exceeds it.

One site in which social contract ideologies have been used to temper neoliberal perspectives of responsibility and culpability has been when the state steps in to assume risk and responsibility for the negative consequences of corporate actions. A recent example is the 2008 economic bailout package in the United States through which the federal government assumed the risk for private debt in order to prevent a wider economic collapse, thereby superseding the norms of the free market to protect wider social wellbeing. As numerous commentators through the decades have put it, such are the dynamics of a capitalism that requires us to privatise the profits and socialise the debt (see, for example, Harcourt 2011). In a similar vein, following the massive gas leak disaster at an American-owned Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal, India, in 1985, the Indian government assumed responsibility for the victims. Claiming that they were unable to effectively represent themselves in a court of law, the Indian government passed the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster Act, effectively asserting responsibility to speak and act for the victims' wellbeing, while stripping them of their rights to sue Union Carbide (Das 1996). Perhaps even more striking was the newly independent Ukrainian state's assumption of responsibility for the after-effects of the Chernobyl disaster. Asserting that the previous Soviet government had not fulfilled the fundamental responsibilities of the social contract by appropriately responding to Chernobyl's many victims, the new Ukrainian state legitimised itself through the provision of disability support (Petryna 2002), embracing liberal democracy and the capitalist market, albeit refracted through enduring socialist values of welfare and self-actualisation.

While we have so far examined the examples of the US economic bailout, Bhopal, and Chernobyl in terms of state-citizen relations, many of these also include public demands for responsibility made upon private corporations. Indeed, as our earlier discussion of CSR indicated, corporations are held to account not only for their viability in terms of generating profit but on the basis of publically-perceived moral values. Part of the motivation for CSR programs lies in the fact that beyond the self-managing, self-auditing subject, neoliberal responsabilisation promotes forms of public presentation and display that fall in line with much wider moral principles. This aspect of 'being held to account' deals less with meeting targets, legal requirements, and verifying productivity, and focuses more on public forms of moral reckoning as the means by which individuals and entities build trust and collective ties through displays of responsible behaviour—that is, are they acting for the benefit of the wider public good? Even though CSR projects are often moulded in ways that promote the corporations' more primary motivations towards profitability, their very existence recognises other kinds of standards and moral values being accorded importance alongside those of the production of capital, as well as the failure of previous models of free-market capitalism to deliver significant and widespread social benefits. In effect, the corporation is being positioned as another participant in the reciprocities that are taken as fundamental to the (state-citizen) social contract.

### The Multiplicities of Responsibility

Drawing on two final examples that highlight the myriad of ways that responsibilities might be enacted through the interplay of inculcations of 'responsibilisation', notions of care and ideologies of social contracts, we suggest that competing responsibilities are evident even—or perhaps *particularly*—in domains where there is a strong emphasis on responsibilisation and self-governance. The realm of healthcare provides many trenchant examples of responsibilisation programs that successfully devolve some forms of decision-making onto patients and yet also encounter significant counterpressures through the persistence of pre-existing networks of responsibility and care (Davis 2012; Fordyce 2012; Rose 2007; Zigon 2010) and, we would add, relations and expectations underpinned by social contract ideologies.

One example is self-managed care programs for chronic illnesses such as asthma. As Susanna Trnka's (2014) work demonstrates, in countries such as the US, Australia, and New Zealand, a major aspect of the drive to responsibilise asthma sufferers entails patients learning to adjust their own medication in response to self-administered respiratory tests. When the patient is a child, such oversight commonly devolves upon his or her parents (Trnka 2014; Trnka and McLaughlan 2012). International guidelines promoting self-managed care can, however, be interpreted and implemented in multiple ways, depending on pre-existing notions of where responsibility and accountability for healthcare lie. In the Czech Republic, for example, a common form of treatment for children with asthma includes sending them away from home, for up to six weeks each year, to take part in live-in spa programs that include rigorous, daily doctors' reviews and stringent drug and physiotherapy regimes (Trnka 2011). Here the authority and oversight of medical professionals and the need to train children, and the parents who accompany them, comply with rigorously controlled regimes of care supersedes moves towards inculcating increased self-reliance.

At the same time, in contrast to many Western nations where asthma is largely viewed as an individual health concern, in east and central Europe, citizens' groups mobilise to lobby local officials and the state government to adopt increasingly stringent limits on pollution emissions.<sup>5</sup> A recent petition to limit the activities of steelworks giant ArcelorMittal in Ostrava, for example, garnered over 19,000 signatures and led to the city of Ostrava initiating a court case against the Czech government. Indeed, such is the extent of public demonstrations highlighting the dangers of air pollution on children's respiratory health that they have been credited with contributing to the dissolution of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1989 (Vaněk 1996).

As in so many healthcare situations, one cannot speak of responsibility here without cutting across multiple domains. These include the patient's relationship to him/herself as a responsible self-governing subject and relationships within the family, most notably between parent and child, that are central to both decisions about how drugs and other modes of care are utilised and the instilling of appropriate modes of self-governance in children. Other forms of responsibility and care are at play in relationships between patients and doctors, raising issues of who is accountable

for particular aspects of healthcare; between citizens and the corporations held responsible for damaging the natural environment; and between patients and the governments they hold accountable for corporate activities and ultimately for their wellbeing. These relationships, moreover, take place in political contexts characterised by ongoing re-adjustments of relations between states and citizens through the increasing adoption of neoliberal values, as well as in the Czech context, the radical reformulation of state-citizen relations as part of dismantling the socialist state. While each of these domains is arguably central to understanding the complexities of the treatment and prevention of health conditions such as asthma, they involve different kinds of social contract ideologies, exchanges and reciprocities of trust, care, accountability, and obligation and thus require a more comprehensive analytical framing of what competing responsibilities might entail.

A second example of intersecting responsibilities is that of Commonwealth nuclear test veterans' demands on the British government (Trundle 2011a, 2011b). In the 1950s, thousands of servicemen from the UK and New Zealand attended the British nuclear testing program in the Pacific, and decades later attribute their illnesses to radiation exposure. Drawing on ideals of the social contract, nuclear test veterans argue that they were expected to obediently place themselves in harm's way, and were motivated by a desire and a duty to care for and protect the nation. In exchange, they expected to receive preferential healthcare and benefits from the state as they aged, and to be publicly honoured by society for their sacrifices.

Yet the British state continues to deny that test veterans suffered exposure to radiation, and curtails the material benefits to which veterans believe they are entitled. The state claims that many of test veterans' health problems are linked not to the hazards of service, but to personal lifestyle choices that involve smoking, alcohol, and diet. The state attempts to responsabilise servicemen to make good choices and recognise individual risk factors. Veterans interpret such moves towards responsabilisation as forms of abandonment. In such a context they switch their understandings of the social contract from a desire for care to a need for recognition and culpability, and many have begun to demand monetary compensation. Responsibility here takes a more punitive form, less contingent on ideals of sacrifice, care and interdependence, and centred instead on the desire for restitution. This demonstrates how even within the practices of care and ideologies of the social contract, diverse and conflicting responsibilities can intersect and emerge. Capturing contemporary enactments of responsibility, therefore, involves attending to how understandings of responsibility are flexibly and dynamically transformed over time, and how groups compete over the meanings of responsibility in public life.

## Conclusion

While we have shown some of the multiplicity of responsibilities possible in social life, the examples we have offered also suggest the limits that social actors face in enacting various forms of obligations, duties, and ties. Simply put, there are occasions in which

actors must choose between various relationships, ideals, obligations, and dependencies, each demanding attention and time. Our aim here has been to expand the conceptual framework through which responsibility is considered in order to shed light upon these sometimes competing and sometimes complementary modes of engagement. While we see neoliberal modes of responsabilisation as increasingly pervasive and powerful technologies of governance, we also see the need for anthropological analyses of competing responsibilities that reveal how neoliberal 'responsible' subjects exist within a matrix of dependencies, reciprocities, and obligations.

We have foregrounded some older and enduring views of responsibility not in order to subvert emerging understandings of neoliberal responsabilisation but to enable us to examine how a multiplicity of responsibilities can work with and against each other, sometimes reinforcing neoliberal responsabilisation, and at other times existing alongside or undercutting it. Our goal has been to broaden scholarly discussions of what we see as a key concept in both anthropological discourse and twenty-first-century social life. Relations of care and social contract ideologies, which foreground forms of dependency, interdependency, and recognition that are often downplayed by neoliberal rhetorics, offer robust conceptual and empirical challenges to the expansion of neoliberal notions of responsibility, and broaden the definition of responsibility in scholarly and public debate.

## Notes

- [1] Versions of this paper were presented at the American Anthropology Association annual meeting in 2011 and at the EASA European association of Social Anthropologists conference in 2012. Many thanks for insightful commentary and feedback to Cris Shore, Christine Dureau, Jarrett Zigon, Chris Kelty, Anke Schwittay, Julie Park, Anita Lacey, Amanda Gilbertson, and Charlotte Joy. We would also like to thank Tom Strong, Matthew Trundle and Mark Busse for alerting us to a number of helpful references.
- [2] Given the broad range of meanings of responsibility, we have restricted our examination to particular types of social relationships, leaving aside debates over the environment (see, for example, Ingold 2000), linguistics (for example, Hill and Irvine 1993) and anthropological ethics (for example, Shore and Trnka 2013).
- [3] The results came from a survey of English language LinkedIn profiles. See: <http://blog.linkedin.com/2013/12/11/buzzwords-2013/>
- [4] See: <http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/cape-york-welfare-reform-fact-sheets/family-responsibilities-commission>
- [5] Whilst not as extensive, recently there have been moves towards increased environmental activism around asthma in the US (see Brown, Morello-Fosch, and Zavestoski 2011.)

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