

Am I my brother's keeper? Grounding and motivating an ethos of social responsibility in a free society

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A free society requires a citizenry that is capable of taking personal responsibility for bettering their lot, and voluntarily promoting and protecting public goods such as education, health, public order, peace, and justice. Although the law backed by force can have some success at compelling people to make contributions to the public exchequer, refrain from criminal activity, honor legal contracts, and so on, an economically and politically free society cannot rely exclusively on the threat of coercion to induce in citizens a sense of social responsibility. On the contrary, a free society depends on a well-entrenched sense of responsibility that is internalized and actualized by citizens in their everyday lives. But any realistic attempt to frame an ideal of social responsibility must confront two serious challenges presented by the complexity and scale of modern societies, namely the challenge of knowing the *content* of our responsibilities and the challenge of finding the *motivation* to discharge them. With these challenges in view, this essay assesses the power of prevailing accounts of citizenship to generate an effective sense of social responsibility, and proposes some guiding principles to inform a broader theory of responsibility that might synthesize the strengths of political accounts while transcending some of their limitations.

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that is internalized and actualized by citizens in their everyday lives, and passed on to the next generation. But any realistic attempt to frame an ideal of social responsibility must confront two serious challenges presented by the complexity and scale of modern societies, namely the challenge of knowing the *content* of our responsibilities and the challenge of finding the *motivation* to discharge them. With these challenges in view, this essay assesses the power of prevailing accounts of citizenship to generate an effective sense of social responsibility, and proposes some guiding principles to inform a broader theory of responsibility that might synthesize the strengths of political accounts while transcending some of their limitations.

I begin by rehearsing some familiar arguments for the proposition that a free society, that is, 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. I then highlight two daunting hurdles that confront the practice of responsibility in post-industrialized societies: what I call the *epistemic and motivational burdens* of social responsibility. Thirdly, I argue that a broad range of influential accounts of citizenship (specifically, liberal, civic republican, libertarian, and cosmopolitan), while offering complementary strategies for solving the epistemic and motivational problems, ultimately offer an incomplete solution on account of the limits inherent in the role of citizen as a source of moral orientation in a complex, globalized, and highly role-differentiated social world. Fourthly and finally, I propose some guiding principles for a broader and more adaptable ideal of responsible agency, and suggest that by both encompassing and transcending political roles, an ideal developed along these lines may offer a more complete response to the epistemic and motivational challenges.

The need for social responsibility

As reflected in the title of Bernard Mandeville's famous (or infamous) essay, 'Private vices, publick benefits', one influential strand of modern thought, spanning a distinguished list of thinkers including Thomas Hobbes, James Madison, Benjamin Constant, and Immanuel Kant, suggests that the modern polity no longer needs the sort of public-spirited citizenry so highly prized by ancient authors like Aristotle and Cicero.¹ On the contrary, according to many modern thinkers, the art of politics is pre-eminently the art of pitting selfish interest against selfish interest, of channeling people's private acquisitiveness and self-interest towards *public* benefits that they themselves do not intend. Something like Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' (Smith 2003 [1776]) or Friedrich Hayek's 'spontaneous order' (Hayek 1960) providentially arranges for people's private interests to converge on the good of the whole polity.

This Mandevillean approach, in spite of its continuing influence, is not widely defended by political theorists today. Many theorists, including Rawlsian liberals, perfectionist liberals, and so-called 'communitarians', reject the notion that private vices or self-interest add up to political flourishing, no matter how ingeniously political institutions are designed. Quite to the contrary, there is a growing realization of the pressing need for a citizenry that owns up to its social responsibilities.² By social responsibility I do not mean the wholesale negation of private interests or concerns. Rather, I have in mind the capacity to situate one's immediate interests and those of one's closest family and friends within a broader social world with its own set of goods and demands that have some legitimate claim upon our attention. A sense of social responsibility is premised on an awareness that I am not a completely disconnected atom: I am, like it or not, connected to a larger social network, and I have responsibilities of care towards my fellow human beings and towards the world we co-habit.³ To have a sense of social responsibility is to see beyond my own narrow interests and to have an outward-looking mentality; to be willing to do my part to further the good of my fellows and to further, however modestly, the good of my surrounding society and polity. It involves a recognition that insofar as I benefit, in whatever way, from participating in the social order, I have a responsibility to contribute towards its maintenance, or, where necessary, towards its improvement.

Put a little differently, social responsibility is essentially a proactive sensitivity to the needs and interests of one's social environment and those who share the same social space, broadly construed.⁴ One might describe it as a kind of moral responsiveness to one's fellow humans, a capacity to blend a genuinely caring attitude towards others with respect for their independence and autonomy as critical components of human well-being. The socially responsible person has the 'eyes to see' both the implications of his immediate obligations (say towards family or business) and more generally, social problems in need of remedy, as well as the courage to apply his particular talents to the fulfillment of his obligations and the remedy of some of the problems confronting his society. Insofar as social responsibility requires both a certain habit of 'seeing' or noticing social needs, and the disposition to respond to them intelligently, it cannot be reduced to the ability to follow rules: rather, it consists in a certain type of character and way of perceiving the world.⁵

The principal burden of this essay is not to demonstrate the need for a well-entrenched sense of social responsibility, but to show that, once admitted, this need can only be satisfied by a normative ideal that both synthesizes and transcends traditional ideals of citizenship. Nonetheless, to help motivate the argument, it is worth rehearsing some of the main arguments that have been advanced by modern commentators to show that a widely dispersed sense of social responsibility cannot be replaced by rational self-interest: first, the independent spirit required to resist potential abuses of government cannot be maintained without a habit of attentiveness to public interests.

Therefore, the death or contraction of public spirit or social responsibility is effectively the death or contraction of political freedom.⁶ Second, to the extent that citizens refuse to take charge of their social world in a *voluntary* capacity, they create a vacuum which gets filled by the impersonal presence of a coercive State. In other words, to the extent that a socially responsible citizenry disappears, the State is likely to become more totalizing and manage more aspects of people's lives. Third, many invaluable social services, that the State either could not afford to undertake, or could not undertake with the same level of personalized care and attention to detail, are made possible by citizens' effective sense of social responsibility. To mention a few examples: providing a decent education to those who have 'slipped through' the cracks of mainstream educational institutions; caring for the elderly and sick, often in mediocre working conditions or on low salaries; ministering to the socially marginalized or disadvantaged, such as single parents, the unemployed, the homeless, and victims of sexual abuse; monitoring and maintaining a cleanly environment and a healthy ecosystem; and reporting suspicious activity in one's neighborhood.⁷

Fourth, an active orientation towards common goods and shared concerns normally draws citizens into collaborative relationships with each other that foster habits of cooperation, trust, and reciprocity. Public-spirited attitudes and behaviors thus cultivate a wealth of self-reinforcing 'social capital' without which social life would either collapse, or grow vulnerable to high transaction costs, economic inefficiency, and widespread social insecurity and distrust.⁸ Finally, social and political conflicts cannot be contained and resolved based on a strictly rights-based philosophy, or based on the premise of wholly self-interested bargainers. One of the hallmarks of a heightened sense of social responsibility is the willingness to bear certain costs and sacrifices for the sake of civic harmony and justice. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. forewent his interests in a quiet, trouble-free life, and effectively sacrificed his own safety and tranquility for the cause of racial justice.⁹ Similarly, the political and territorial dispute between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland could not have been resolved without a willingness on both sides to compromise some of their deep interests for the sake of the public dividends of peace.¹⁰

The epistemic and motivational burdens of social responsibility

Now that we have reviewed the main arguments for the necessity of social responsibility in an economically and politically free society, let us consider two impediments to such responsibility: what I call the *epistemic and motivational burdens*. Briefly, the epistemic burden of social responsibility is the difficulty of both knowing where my responsibilities lie and of being sufficiently familiar with the relevant facts to be able to act effectively. The motivational burden, on the other hand, is the difficulty of being sufficiently

motivated to take responsibility for the lot of persons and groups beyond my doorstep. As I show in this section, the epistemic and motivational hurdles appear so formidable that they threaten to incapacitate citizens from developing and acting on an effective sense of social responsibility.

We have inherited profound structural transformations in the social order that introduce novel challenges for the practice of social responsibility in the modern world as compared with pre-modern, and especially ancient societies. Two developments in particular impose a severe epistemic strain on the practice of social responsibility: first, the proliferation and mobility of social roles and second, globalization.¹¹ The first makes the identification and allocation of responsibility rather difficult to grasp, whether across society as a whole, or simply within one person's life. If I occupy multiple and relatively specialized roles, which connect my loyalties to multiple associations from the family to the State, sometimes on a long-term basis and other times temporarily, on what basis can I carve up my responsibilities towards diverse persons and groups in need of attention or assistance? If I occupy multiple communities, how robust and far-reaching are my responsibilities towards each one? Human associations typically require ongoing maintenance, financial support, and oversight by their members. But *how much* time, energy and money one ought to devote to institutional maintenance is not easily settled if one inhabits a range of different institutions. For example, what does a working parent owe to her family, her business, her church, and her local neighborhood? These associations are not closely integrated with each other, nor are their demands coordinated by any central body. Knowing how to carve up one's responsibilities among diverse associations and roles is no easy task, and though social norms may establish some parameters (e.g. parents have a responsibility to see to it that their children receive an education), the details cannot be settled a priori by any general social norm due to the complexity and variation of people's social roles and allegiances.

Similar epistemic difficulties for social responsibility arise from the ways growing social mobility, global communication, global commerce and even global politics are creating an increasingly integrated and interdependent world. The borders of the nation-state are much more porous than they once were, as centers of power and influence such as the United Nations, the World Bank, OPEC, the Internet, and global media corporations cast their nets across innumerable political jurisdictions. There is a sense in which the globalization of commerce and politics connects us both to our fellow citizens and to the rest of the world as never before.¹² In a globalized and increasingly interdependent world, many of us feel a tangible sense of responsibility for the fate of our polity and of the world. But the unprecedented scope of our relationships makes it very difficult to competently specify the subject-matter and beneficiaries of our responsibilities: on the one hand, due to the imposing scale of the nation-state and of a global society, it is difficult to decide *which* individuals and groups I am responsible to. To say that I am equally

responsible to *all* renders responsible action completely impractical. Opting for this or that group for no special reason seems arbitrary and gratuitous rather than *responsible* in the ordinary sense of the term. On the other hand, even assuming we can non-arbitrarily specify the beneficiaries of our responsibilities, there remains the difficulty, at least for remote individuals and groups, of securing adequate information to competently meet our responsibilities towards them.¹³

Besides these epistemic burdens of social responsibility, there are also significant *motivational* burdens. First of all, where the precise effects of one's actions are relatively obscure, where there is no obvious basis for identifying the specific individuals and groups to whom one is responsible – or for carving up one's responsibilities among diverse individuals and groups (assuming the domains of responsibility can be identified) – and where it is extremely difficult to acquire the relevant information, there is little incentive to undertake far-reaching social responsibilities. The amount of intellectual deliberation and research required in order to overcome the epistemic hurdles is so costly that many citizens would be unlikely to make the attempt. Secondly, remote and diffuse objects such as geographically, socially, and culturally 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.¹⁴ There seem to be two factors in particular that move people to take an active concern in one another's flourishing: personal affection and accountability. Both are uniquely favored by personal relationships such as those of spouses, siblings, and close friends. Personal interaction over time can generate and sustain bonds of affection that move people to care about each other's lives and accommodate each other's interests even at personal cost. In addition, the predictability and regularity of interaction render the parties involved directly accountable to one another for their actions. Thus, the fear of disappointing a friend or family member may compensate for the ordinary human tendency toward egocentrism.

But what comparable sources of motivation towards mutual responsibility can we find among citizens of liberal democracies and citizens of the world? Although individual citizens and citizen groups may be personally acquainted, we can be certain that the vast majority of the world's (and indeed the nation's) population will remain strangers to us, strangers who inhabit a broad spectrum of social circles, cultural enclaves, churches, and worldviews.¹⁵ If we cut loose the ties of kinship, personal affection, and direct personal accountability, how can we reasonably expect people to muster up any genuine commitment to each other's interests beyond a bare allegiance to democratic procedures and rule of law? Is it not fanciful to expect people to consistently care in a real and consequential way about the interests of someone so remote that the chances of encountering her, let alone moving in her social circle, are slim to non-existent? Perhaps a moral hero could be

motivated by an emotionally austere sense of duty to care about the interests of his fellow humans, near and far. But presumably, a plausible ideal of social responsibility is not just intended for saints or moral heroes, but for decent yet ordinary ‘flesh-and-blood’ human beings.

The limits of prevailing models of citizenship and responsibility

With the dizzying complexity, role differentiation, and scale of modern social life, one of the pressing tasks confronting political and social theorists is to develop an account of social responsibility that is both normatively attractive and sociologically plausible. One obvious direction to look for such an account is to theories of citizenship. In a sea of idiosyncratic and shifting roles and ambiguous responsibilities, one of the few stable, quasi-universal, and publicly recognized roles is that of the citizen. Before considering some of the prevailing views of citizenship, let me explain in a little more detail why citizenship seems a promising starting-point for an account of social responsibility.

At the most general level, the concept of citizen implies membership of, and participation in, a human community with a shared life and shared goals. To be a citizen is to inhabit a social role – that is, to stand in a certain relationship with specific others, a relationship defined in part by one’s contribution towards a shared social order and towards the welfare of its members. Like other social roles, to inhabit the role of citizen is to share certain goals and standards of behavior with other holders of the role. Citizenship, in this sense, is a complex social practice with its own internal standards of excellence.¹⁶ To descend to particulars, the role of citizen traditionally implies participation in a more or less complete or self-sufficient community;¹⁷ substantial agreement on the overarching goals of the community, in particular matters of justice and public advantage or utility;¹⁸ a partial responsibility for, and capacity to further, the flourishing of the community in collaboration with other citizens; and a visible public status, including the possession of rights, responsibilities, and obligations that are the concern of the wider community and not just of the parties immediately implicated.¹⁹

Why turn to the concept of citizen for an account of social responsibility? First, because unlike the concept of, say, *person*, the concept of citizen is already rich with implications of sociality, tradition, and participation in a tangible, historically situated community. Therefore, citizenship seems to imply fairly directly some ‘concrete’ or situated notion of social responsibility that seems more immediate and psychologically compelling than a generic responsibility towards humanity. Second, the role of citizen combines two features that any general and compelling theory of social responsibility probably requires, viz. publicity and universality. On the one hand, citizenship is a pre-eminently *public* role, insofar as it cuts across many particular and private allegiances and demands the attention and recognition of society at

large: This makes citizenship an ideal vehicle for the cultivation and socialization of responsibility in a world of fragmented roles – above all, it provides a public basis for holding people accountable for their actions. On the other hand, citizenship may provide a basis for a universal theory of social responsibility because it is a virtually universal role: after all, the vast majority of residents of any given society normally are citizens. And even those who lack formal citizenship, such as resident aliens and visitors, frequently do *informally* hold and exercise important rights and responsibilities traditionally associated with citizenship, such as the duty to pay taxes and the right to a fair trial.

Different theories of citizenship offer different resources for tackling the epistemic and motivational burdens of responsibility in large-scale, complex, and role-differentiated societies. After considering the pros and cons of several prominent conceptions of citizenship in light of this problem, I shall propose some guiding principles for a more comprehensive and powerful theory of social responsibility, based on the complementary strengths of several prominent approaches to citizenship. I consider here four accounts of citizenship meant to represent credible versions of the liberal representative, civic republican, libertarian, and cosmopolitan traditions respectively. My analysis is not meant to capture all the nuances of each tradition, nor will it focus narrowly on a single representative author. Instead, I consider the best resources available on a charitable reading of each tradition for tackling the epistemic and motivational burdens of social responsibility. In other words, the strategy is not to exhibit the limits of every conceivable account of citizenship, but to expose the limitations of a broad-ranging selection of accounts, considered as tools for grounding and motivating our social responsibilities. This selective approach advances the argument in two important ways: first, it shows that the limitations of political approaches to social responsibility are by no means confined to a narrow universe of accounts of citizenship; and second, it brings out the strengths and weaknesses of diverse traditions, which can serve as an invaluable foundation for building up a more comprehensive account of social responsibility, as we shall see in the concluding section.

Liberal citizenship

Let us begin with the liberal representative account of citizenship, as defended, for example, by Mill (1991), Rawls (1999 [1971]), and Dworkin (1977). This account puts a good deal of emphasis on the protection of citizens' private liberties and rights – their freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of association, economic and artistic freedom, and more controversially, some welfare rights such as healthcare and education – but views citizens' positive responsibilities towards society and the world as largely (though not exclusively) mediated through political

institutions. Liberals in this mold are the first to admit the problem of scale, but maintain that the civic bond, and the sense of mutual responsibility and goodwill, can be effectively mediated through the laws, customs, and institutions of the liberal polity. Insofar as citizens are aware of each other's basic rights, and aware that their interests are served by public institutions which they support, there is a minimal sense of reciprocity and goodwill that prevails in society. This goodwill may be expressed through modest acts such as paying taxes, obeying the law, tolerating diverse lifestyles, and respecting other citizens' rights. Insofar as there is a shared sense of justice (however tenuous), a shared commitment to constitutionalism, and a sense of mutual goodwill, we could even say that the polity is held together by a bond of civic friendship – more generalized and mediated than the 'thick' civic friendship of the ancient polis, but real, nonetheless.²⁰

The liberal answer enables citizens to play a modest role in exercising their responsibilities towards the world, simply by voting, paying their taxes, and respecting people's rights. Their social responsibilities are mostly delegated to their political representatives and the main epistemic burden falling upon the citizen is to select a responsible or conscientious official, and be sufficiently aware of political and social issues to hold the elected official accountable for his actions. The beauty of liberal citizenship is that it requires relatively little of ordinary citizens beyond a general awareness of the issues of the day and a familiarity with the character and competence of potential and actual representatives. However, liberal citizenship still fails to convincingly address the epistemic burden of social responsibility. Citizens should be armed with sufficient information to hold their representatives accountable for their delegated responsibilities, while agents of the state should be sufficiently sensitive to the particulars of people's lives to serve people's genuine interests rather than some misconceived preconceptions about their interests. But a 'general concern' for the welfare of other citizens is not sufficient to further their concrete interests, since this requires a more particular form of knowledge than a constitution, a political culture, or even a rigorous civic education can normally convey. And shifting the epistemic burden onto political representatives and experts cannot close the epistemic gap (though it may narrow it), since the expert knowledge of a few, insofar as it is based on generalized patterns and average types, cannot be adequately sensitive to the particulars of persons and situations 'on the ground' to accurately and consistently assess and adapt to their physical, psychological, and economic needs. For these reasons, it seems unreasonable to expect citizens, their representatives, or other agents of the State to be in a position to adequately further the interests of citizens in general (as opposed to selectively further the interests of *this or that* citizen with whom they happen to be well acquainted).

Liberal citizenship can go some way towards lessening the motivational burden of social responsibility. After all, it does provide people with a shared

role, a shared political culture, and a shared civic education (whether through formal schooling or informal inculturation), all of which remind them of their social and political responsibilities. However, there are limits to the level of responsibility the representative model can support: while social and legal norms may motivate citizens to observe the legal rights of those with whom they have little or no personal acquaintance, it is much harder to see how social and legal norms can motivate citizens to go beyond proceduralism and show a practical and robust concern for each other's concrete welfare in the absence of a personal acquaintance or affective ties with the objects of their beneficence. To the extent that the exercise of our responsibilities requires significant financial or personal sacrifice, whether in the shape of a tax increase, some form of voluntary aid, or community service, we normally require a concrete connection with or personal affection for the beneficiaries of our acts. A commitment to the general welfare of humanity or even the general welfare of our fellow citizens, in the absence of some stronger psychological connection, seems too abstract and emotionally austere to consistently motivate citizens to undertake costly social responsibilities.

Civic republican citizenship

The civic republican model of citizenship has a strongly virtue-based and participatory strand that can be traced back to authors such as Aristotle, and a neo-Roman, rights-based strand that has been uncovered by authors such as Quentin Skinner (1998, 2008) and Philip Pettit (1997). To the extent that the latter emphasizes mechanisms for controlling and holding accountable those capable of exercising arbitrary power, it seems to me, at least viewed as a theory of social responsibility, to come quite close in spirit to representative liberalism, notwithstanding the different ways it conceptualizes political freedom.²¹ As such, the more germane strand of republican thought for our immediate purposes is the neo-Aristotelian, participatory strand.²² Civic republicanism thus construed is less emotionally austere, more public-spirited, and more focused on direct civic engagement, than the liberal representative model. One of the premises of this brand of civic republicanism is the insufficiency of representative government as a substitute for personal civic engagement, deliberation, and public action. Without disparaging the private freedoms of liberal citizenship, civic republicans (or at least those I am now considering) emphasize the value of self-government and of civic engagement both for individuals and communities, and the importance of a shared sense of purpose among citizens. Direct civic engagement is valued not only for its essential contribution to private liberty and security, but for its own sake, as an expression of human autonomy. Civic republicans generally favor more decentralized political institutions, more public venues of deliberation and debate, more direct democracy, and a more rigorous system of civic education.²³

Civic republican citizenship tackles the epistemic and motivational hurdles of responsibility in the following way: citizens come to learn and care about each other's lives through an intense program of civic education and direct participation in political decision-making. While civic republicanism does not reject delegated power, it insists that direct participation in the political order is the key to informing and motivating citizens about their public responsibilities. Public engagement and deliberation with one's fellow citizens can familiarize citizens with the 'meat-and-potatoes' of their social responsibilities and of the particular circumstances of their society, alleviating the epistemic burden, while a shared affection for their nation or polity, and an attachment to honor and reputation, can motivate citizens to honor costly social responsibilities such as enlisting in the army, serving in public office, or endowing a community service project.

I find this approach appealing but ultimately insufficient, for a number of reasons: first, this model of citizenship, assuming it can be put into practice, seems to solve the epistemic and motivational problems only at the local level. Civic republican citizenship works best at the level of small-scale, local government, where citizens are geographically and socially proximate to each other. At the local level, citizens may realistically familiarize themselves sufficiently with the particulars of each other's lives to pass laws and policies that are responsive to them. Furthermore, through frequent interaction and some degree of first or second-hand familiarity, citizens may form genuine bonds of affection and accountability with each other sufficient to motivate them to undertake their social responsibilities. When we look beyond local government, however, civic republicanism seems to be caught in a dilemma: either the level of solidarity and common purpose shared on a large scale is insufficient to ground far-reaching social responsibilities, or a political creed is developed that inculcates in citizens a sense of shared purpose and affection capable of grounding social responsibility on a large scale. If the former is true, then civic republicanism has difficulty grounding and motivating large-scale social responsibilities. If the latter is true, then we run the risk of submerging important information about people's lives under a simplistic ideology, and endorsing a civil religion that disrespects the particular contours of people's cultural and social identity, thus violating what William Galston (2002) calls people's 'expressive liberty'.²⁴

Libertarian citizenship

Libertarian citizenship is more detached and minimalistic than either liberal or civic republican accounts. It is inspired by the image of man as a self-possessing creature who freely chooses his commitments, and associates with others based on his private interests, including his interests in social service and in following the dictates of his conscience. Libertarian citizenship singles out a juridical and moral status of immunity from interference by other

citizens or by the state, and more positively, a freedom to dispose of one's property and person according to one's convictions, provided one respect a similar freedom on the part of other persons. This vision of citizenship can be traced back to Locke's notion of self-ownership combined with the general conditions of peace and security under which man can develop his faculties free from deliberate interference by his fellows.²⁵

Libertarian citizenship attempts to solve the problem of social responsibility by shifting the burden of responsibility away from the role of citizen and statesman and onto the 'free market' of human associations that a minimal state permits. Since it is in people's interests to collaborate constructively in order to attain their purposes, they will naturally join associations that can effectively serve their shared interests. The government may provide a basic infrastructure of rights and liberties within which associations can be formed, dissolved, and developed. On this view, there is no single 'public good', or if there is one, it is very minimal, perhaps extending to matters like public safety and freedom of contract. But there are many private goods that can be most effectively served by associations (e.g. cultural, religious, and ethical goods). The libertarian answer to the problem of social responsibility is to parcel it out to private associations and thus cut down the epistemic and motivational burdens to manageable proportions. What we think of as the 'public good' is thus reduced, for the most part, to the sum of private associational and individual goods, which in turn can best be furthered by people who are invested in them psychologically or emotionally (and thus motivated to form associations), and who have the relevant information to hand (since private associations will generally either serve restricted categories of interest, or be of a manageable size). Examples of associations that may be capable of serving social needs effectively are the Boy Scouts, trade unions, health clubs, environmental awareness groups, churches, universities, and law firms.

Now, the libertarian answer, though not without its appeal, has a number of problems: first, even if we interpret 'interests' very broadly, to include interests in philanthropy and social service, the privatized model of social responsibility is defective insofar as it reduces citizens' responsibilities to their private preferences. By interpreting the concept of social responsibility as a decision of private conscience or personal preference, libertarian citizenship weakens the concept considerably. First, by separating the practice of social responsibility from the role of citizen, and associating it with private roles, it renders it less vulnerable to public discussion and critique – something that is particularly disturbing given the wide spectrum of possible associational goals, ranging from wicked and irresponsible to socially beneficial and praiseworthy. Second, in divorcing social responsibilities from the realm of citizenship as such, libertarianism threatens to fracture the polity into a sea of conflicting and potentially even mutually destructive associations, and provides little or no basis for articulating responsibilities that extend far

beyond discrete associations. In short, libertarian citizenship may provide the simulacrum of an ethos of social responsibility, but in practice it ends up dissolving citizens into an ocean of incommensurable factions. The concept of social responsibility risks being reduced to a personal prerogative, interest, or preference.

Cosmopolitan citizenship and its limits

Modern philosophers operating in the tradition of natural rights have developed various conceptions of cosmopolitan citizenship that are not necessarily designed to destroy local citizenship, but to frame and condition it.²⁶ Conceptions of cosmopolitanism might be helpfully divided into two categories: moral cosmopolitanism, which essentially maintains that we have certain moral obligations that extend in principle to all humans (e.g. Singer 1972, Unger 1996); and political cosmopolitanism, which affirms the same thing, but also makes a case for some form of global political governance that reaches beyond conventional interstate cooperation (e.g. Held 1995, Archibugi 2008). The moral foundation of both forms of cosmopolitanism is typically some conception of the universal dignity of the human person, as reflected in such documents as the Declaration of the Universal Rights of Man and the UN Charter for Human Rights.

From these very broad outlines of cosmopolitan citizenship, we can begin to perceive some of its strengths as well as limitations as a vehicle for social responsibility. As a way of capturing our moral responsibilities, it seems to take advantage of the psychological pull of the language of citizenship to make such responsibilities more politically charged and psychologically salient: if nothing else, if we think of ourselves as global citizens, we may be more likely to transfer our sense of civic responsibility to our global relationships. However, moral cosmopolitanism still suffers from two problems: first, philosophically, the concept of citizenship seems to be doing very little work – after all, moral cosmopolitanism can be perfectly well conveyed with the language of human rights and responsibilities divorced from the more politicized language of citizenship. Second, whether or not we use the language of citizenship, the fact remains that far-flung responsibilities towards distant others, however cleverly they may be marketed, raise similar (and possibly even more severe) epistemic and motivational difficulties to those raised by the liberal representative model of citizenship, insofar as they requires people to be both knowledgeable about potential distant beneficiaries, and motivated to come to their assistance.

Now, political cosmopolitanism can acknowledge that an institutionally thin account of cosmopolitan responsibilities appears psychologically and epistemically problematic, but argue that certain sorts of institutional reform can make cosmopolitan citizenship and its responsibilities come alive in

people's lives. Thus, appeals have been made to formal and informal global norms and certain forms of international governance that complement or in certain instances displace local authority, e.g. the International Criminal Court, the United Nations, the World Bank, and so on. In part, this appeal works within existing transnational institutions, while in part, it proposes to reform them in a variety of ways.²⁷ However, the fact remains that most international governance is likely to remain in the hands of elite experts who have a more or less attenuated relation to ordinary citizens. Although global institutions can realize some share of people's global responsibilities, this does not yet solve the problem of how ordinary people are to identify and enact their personal responsibilities towards the world. Like liberal representative government, it provides one part of an answer – namely, the delegation of responsibilities to experts – but it shares liberalism's difficulty in motivating people to care about responsibilities towards distant others, and it is also runs up against the limitations of large-scale, bureaucratic administration of tasks aimed at the good of particular persons with particular situations and needs. Finally, nobody has yet devised a reliable mechanism for making transnational bodies genuinely responsive to the approval or disapproval of their citizens and beneficiaries, but this sort of responsiveness is crucial if responsibilities are to be fairly and effectively discharged in the long run.

Beyond citizenship: towards an ethos of multi-dimensional responsibility

So far, we have considered some of the strengths and weaknesses of prevailing models of citizenship as possible foundations for a doctrine of social responsibility. The liberal representative model, though providing tools for a partial, institutionally mediated ethos of social responsibility, is epistemically and psychologically handicapped by the remoteness of citizens from each other's lives, as well as the remoteness of the State from citizens' lives. The civic republican model, while it provides some tools for connecting citizens in a shared public space, works best at the local level, but seems dangerous and inadequate for large-scale politics. The libertarian model of citizenship, while it does a good job at highlighting the potential of voluntary associations to render discrete social responsibilities epistemically and motivationally accessible to citizens, fails to provide the basis for a general theory of social responsibility because it has no way to convincingly articulate broader social responsibilities that extend beyond private associations and are not simply the outcome of individual preferences or choices. And finally, the cosmopolitan model, while it does allow for the realization of some delegated global responsibilities, falls prey to the same difficulties that beset the liberal representative account, insofar as it requires citizens to care for and be informed about a vast number of remote persons, and it mediates responsibility through large bureaucratic

institutions which have difficulty adapting themselves to unique situations and needs on the ground.

The question I would like to explore here is whether we can frame the issue of responsibility in a way that affirms the strengths, while overcoming some of the limitations, of the aforementioned views. I believe we can, but the first step to doing so is to acknowledge that the role of citizen, important as it is, can only offer a *partial* basis for an ethos of social responsibility. That is because the role of the citizen is not only empowering but restricting. Insofar as it levels and simplifies the social landscape, rendering salient one form of association – say, the association of the State, or of humanity – above all others, it overlooks, or at least tends to downplay, more personal connections such as friendship and family ties, neighborhood ties, and other associational allegiances. It is the abstracting and ‘flattening’ effects of citizenship – its tendency to push into the background the more intimate ties of intermediate associations – that make it epistemically and motivationally insufficient as a platform for social responsibility. On one hand, the complex web of responsibilities and relationships associated with the broad range of roles people inhabit, whether their responsibilities qua parents, or neighbors, or friends, or clients, or youth leaders, or professors, or waiters, extends far beyond anything that could be captured by the role of the citizen. On the other hand, the generic and ‘one-size-fits-all’ character of the civic bond only allows for a highly mediated and impersonal form of caring, which seems unlikely to consistently support a robust and demanding sense of personal responsibility for the common good.²⁸

If we are to improve on citizenship as a vehicle for social responsibility, we need to develop an account of responsibility that can encompass more dimensions of human relationships than citizenship typically does. In the space remaining, rather than advancing a positive account of social responsibility, I will provide a very rough outline of its basic parameters and structure. Such an account must meet at least five conditions: first, we require a standard of social responsibility that can have public standing in a large-scale, role-differentiated society, cutting across diverse roles and social contexts. Second, we must set aside the expectation, hope, or assumption, that such an account will have a specifically political character – that is, that it will be defined fundamentally in terms of a relationship to political institutions, collective self-government, or participation in a specific regime or polity. Given the complexity, inter-connectedness, and heterogeneity of social roles and relationships, the primacy of politics as the driving force of a functional social order is no longer convincing, if it ever was. Third, it seems unrealistic, given the complexity and proliferation of social roles, to hope that a modern social ethos of responsibility can be transmitted or represented by a single well-defined role (say, the role of citizen, consumer, or clan member). Fourth, if we want an ethos of responsibility to take root in people’s psyches, and have some salience in their everyday lives, it must not only accommodate, but

affirm, the value of partial or 'parochial' attachments as a legitimate guide to responsible action. And finally, if we want an ethos of responsibility to promote an acknowledgement of our more distant and impartial ties and responsibilities, it must find a way of making responsibilities towards distant individuals and groups psychologically and cognitively accessible, without denying the force of more partial and 'parochial' attachments.

Keeping these conditions in mind, an adequate account of social responsibility could be divided into three parts: first, rules of thumb for helping people discern their responsibilities; second, virtues that can assist people in both discerning and enacting their social responsibilities; and third, social institutions that might support the practice of responsibility. Rules of thumb might include some general principles for helping people to appreciate the peculiar force and intensity of special responsibilities while respecting the more mediated claims of comparatively remote responsibilities. Virtues would model the character traits required in order to both discern and act on one's responsibilities in a modern society. They would likely include such dispositions as practical wisdom, moral sensitivity, generosity, creativity, and courage. But clearly, neither rules of thumb, nor virtues, provide a sufficient basis for the practice of responsibility. We would require an account of social institutions that shows how people's social relationships shape their attitudes and behavior in the direction of social responsibility, and make responsibilities psychologically salient and cognitively accessible to agents. For example, certain social institutions might afford people opportunities for mediated service (e.g. paying taxes or voting for a political representative), while others might offer occasions for more immediate forms of service (e.g. serving on a committee or jury, volunteering at a homeless shelter or literacy program), capable of engendering strong psychological connections with persons outside one's immediate social space.

* * *

I began this essay by reviewing some familiar arguments for the proposition that a free society cannot provide its members with a minimally decent way of life unless many of them have an active sense of responsibility for the lot of their fellows and for the future of their surrounding society. I then highlighted two salient obstacles confronting the practice of social responsibility in the contemporary world, namely the epistemic and motivational burdens. With these hurdles in full view, I assessed a broad range of accounts of citizenship and suggested that the complementary insights of such accounts, though they went some way towards lessening the epistemic and motivational burdens, at best offered a partial solution to the problem of responsibility. Tracing this inadequacy to the limits inherent in the role of citizenship, I suggested some very general guiding principles for a broader ethos of social responsibility that might encompass the role of the citizen but also be flexible

enough to encompass a wide array of other associational allegiances. An adequate account of social responsibility would need to work out some guiding principles to inform responsible action, as well as an account of the virtues and institutional infrastructure that could support the practice of responsibility.

An account of social responsibility developed along these lines, though no panacea for our social problems, might offer a more complete response to the epistemic and motivational challenges than that of prevailing ideals of citizenship. This is because rather than privileging one association, say the state or global civil society, over others, such an ideal, as I envisage it, seeks to accommodate the force of distant and impartial claims as well as the force of the claims of family, friends, and neighbors. It recognizes, with liberalism and cosmopolitanism, the power and necessity of mediating and representative political institutions, especially at the national and transnational levels; while it recognizes with civic republicanism the need for direct civic engagement and affective ties with one's fellows. Finally, it acknowledges with libertarianism the social benefits of non-governmental associations, but views them as nested within larger associations which also place legitimate claims on us, and views people's associational allegiances as imposing duties of care rather than merely reflecting the outcome of private choices or preferences. But it is more capacious than civic ideals of responsibility insofar as it acknowledges and is careful to accommodate the fact that social responsibility is expressed through a wide variety of nonpolitical or transpolitical roles and associations. Though I have done little more than present an agenda for a theory of social responsibility, I hope these reflections at least open up a promising avenue for future inquiry.

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Notes

1. For one prominent example of the ancient praise of public-spiritedness, see Cicero's *On the republic*, in Marcus Tullius Cicero (1928). For arguments that attempt to ground public goods in private interests, see Mandeville (1970 [1714]); Hobbes (1994 [1651]); Constant (1988 [1819]); Madison's Federalist 10 in Madison *et al.* (2003 [1788]); and Kant, 'Perpetual peace: a philosophical sketch', in Kant (1983 [1795]).

2. Stephen Macedo, for example, maintains that the virtues of a liberal citizen include 'appreciation of inherited social ideals, an attachment and even an altruistic regard for one's fellow liberal citizens' (Macedo 1990, p. 271). William Galston points out that a viable liberal polity requires citizens who exercise fiscal restraint (Galston 1991, pp. 224–225). Other works emphasizing the need for a virtuous and responsible citizenry include Berkowitz (2003); Glendon (1991); and Sandel (1982).
3. Thus, the notion of social responsibility as I understand it has a close affinity to the 'ethics of care'. For example, social responsibility, like the feminist ethic of care, cannot be reduced to contractual rights and obligations. Cf., *inter alia*, Noddings (1984); Gilligan (1982); and Held (2006).
4. This view of responsibility is partly inspired by Niebuhr (1963), especially the idea of an outward-looking, other-oriented moral perspective.
5. The importance of moral vision and sensitivity to the good of others as an aspect of good character transcending conformity to rules is discussed by Blum (1994) and Murdoch (2004 [1971]).
6. The importance of a public-spirited citizenry as a guard against despotism is a recurring theme in de Tocqueville (2000 [1835]), who argues that a self-absorbed citizenry is a recipe for 'soft despotism', e.g. Part IV, chap. 6, 'What kind of despotism democratic nations have to fear'.
7. The social contributions of intermediate associations are discussed by Berger and Neuhaus (1977).
8. See Putnam (1994, 2000) and Fukuyama (1996) for treatments of the crucial role of trust in a free society.
9. The inevitability of unequal sacrifices in social conflicts, and the need to give them public recognition, is emphasized as part of a larger treatment of racial conflict in the United States by Danielle Allen (2004), especially in chapters 3 and 4.
10. For an account by the principal external broker of the deal, see Mitchell (2001).
11. For a provocative discussion of the ethical significance of roles in pre-modern and modern societies, see MacIntyre (1981, pp. 32–35). The locus classicus on the modern proliferation of social roles is Simmel, 'The web of group-affiliations', in Simmel (1955 [1908]).
12. See *inter alia* Giddens (2003) and Kellner (2002).
13. For example, there is information about the real-world effects of economic and political interventions that may either be unavailable or unreliable. A case in point is the long-term effects of development aid in developing countries, a subject on which there is very little systematic information available. On this point, see Wenar (2006).
14. This brings to mind Alexander Hamilton's observation that '[i]t is a known fact in human nature that its affections are commonly weak in proportion to the distance or diffusiveness of the object' ('Federalist 17'), in Madison *et al.* (2003 [1788], p. 87). Cf. Meyer (2000) for a similar discussion of the difficulties of motivating people to care about remote groups and individuals, though mainly in connection with intergenerational responsibilities. Andrew Dobson (2006) suggests that making our causal responsibility for certain outcomes in other people's lives salient may motivate us to act on our responsibilities towards distant others. But of course, this does not solve the epistemic problem, since it fails to establish the scope of our responsibilities, and presupposes a problematic premise, namely, that we can in fact fairly reliably know what the remote effects of our actions are in a highly complex and globalized society.

15. Of course, I am assuming a culturally diverse nation here. Some nations, such as Malta, are much less pluralistic than others, such as the United States, Canada, and France.
16. See MacIntyre (1984, pp. 186ff), for a discussion of practices and goods internal to them.
17. Aristotle understood a ‘complete’ community as one that is self-sufficient or capable of supporting the full development of the human being, physical, moral, and intellectual. See, for example, Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. I, 1252b27–30.
18. Here, I follow Aristotle’s account of political life (*Politics*, Bk. I, 1253a7–18).
19. For a concise historical overview of the main conceptions of citizenship, see Heater (2004).
20. This ‘thin’ and mediated form of civic friendship is defended by Schwarzenbach (1996) and Irrera (2005).
21. The main distinction, as articulated by Pettit (1997), is between freedom as non-interference and freedom as non-domination. On Pettit’s interpretation, the former is typical of standard liberal accounts of politics, while the latter is a unique contribution of the neo-Roman republican tradition.
22. By passing over the neo-Roman strand of civic republicanism, I do not mean to imply that it has nothing to say about the burdens of responsibility. Frank Lovett (2001), for example, has suggested that freeing people from unequal and arbitrary forms of control or dependency (the essence of domination) requires a more egalitarian distribution of resources. However, the non-domination approach is not as directly and overtly concerned with the psychological and normative foundations of citizens’ positive responsibilities as other more participatory, neo-Aristotelian theories of republicanism. Thus, in the limited space available I have chosen to restrict the present discussion to the more participatory strand of republican thought.
23. Authors who view citizenship roughly along these lines include Spragens (1999), Barber (2003), and Dagger (1997).
24. By ‘expressive liberty’, Galston means ‘the absence of constraints imposed by some individuals on others, that make it impossible (or significantly more difficult) for the affected individuals to live their lives in ways that express their deepest beliefs about what gives meaning or value to life’ (Galston 2002, p. 28).
25. For Locke’s doctrine of self-ownership, see especially Locke (1988 [1689]), *Second treatise*, chap. 5, ‘Of property’. For more recent defenses of a libertarian social order, see Nozick (1974), Rasmussen and Den Uyl (2005), and Kukathas (2003).
26. For an elegant overview of the emergence of cosmopolitan thought in the ancient world, starting with the Cynics and Stoics, see Appiah (2006, pp. xiii–xv).
27. For a brief defense of a modest conception of cosmopolitan citizenship that emphasizes realistic engagement with existing institutions as well as aspirations of institutional reform, see Dowder (2000).
28. The language of ‘common good’ has fallen into disuse in many circles. However, it has prominent defenders, including Jacques Maritain and John Finnis. Finnis defines the common good as the material, economic, social, and psychological, conditions necessary for human flourishing. See Finnis (1998), Maritain (1973), and Keys (2006).

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