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Moral Inscriptions: Politics and the Rhetoric of Responsibility

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**MORAL INSCRIPTIONS: POLITICS AND THE RHETORIC OF
RESPONSIBILITY**

by

STEVEN PLUDWIN

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York**

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

MORAL INSCRIPTIONS: POLITICS AND THE RHETORIC OF RESPONSIBILITY

By Steven Pludwin

Advisor: Professor Alyson M. Cole

This dissertation advances two interrelated claims. First, I examine the concept of responsibility and show how it operates as a rhetorical form that mediates a large segment of political life. Framing responsibility as a distinctly political problem, I argue that it functions to produce, discipline and govern subjects as well as legislate forms of identity, difference and community. Second, I argue that the definitional space of responsibility is not sacred, but contested. It is within this contested space that political battles regarding how we ought to understand the world and what it means to live in common with others plays out. Focusing on the ways in which responsibility is used to impose order allows me to understand how a politics of responsibility impacts discussions as far ranging as political violence, economic crisis and environmental policy.

Acknowledgements

When I began this project over four years ago, I scribbled down a quote from Marx's preface to the first edition of *Capital Volume One* about the difficulty of beginnings. At the time, I think it was my naïveté that led me to believe that I would have to go it alone, further amplifying the difficult road that I imagined lay ahead. Fortunately, the dissertation provided me with an opportunity to learn something about the people that I had spent years surrounding myself with. This project is as much the result of countless hours of individual effort as it is the result of their collective insight, wisdom and support.

I am especially grateful to my committee – Professors Alyson Cole, Ros Petchesky and Linda Alcoff – who have graciously given of that most precious commodity – time. Throughout this process they have each offered helpful commentary and incisive criticism that have pushed me to probe the deepest layers of my work and truly uncover the relevance and implications of my project's contribution. Their combined efforts have been crucial to the development of this dissertation from its inception to its completion.

I am particularly indebted to my advisor, Professor Alyson Cole. She has had a profound impact not only on this project, but on my intellectual and professional development as well. Her work has inspired me, her commentary has guided me, and her pedagogy has informed the way I look at the world. I am the lucky beneficiary of Alyson's thoughtful mentorship and continued advocacy. This project would not have been possible without her ongoing intellectual and professional support.

Though there are a number of friends and colleagues who have played an integral role in the development of this project. Two stand out and deserve special recognition.

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Finally, my wife Elizabeth Swearingen's patience and love have been the ingredients that made this project possible. I was lucky enough to meet her just as I was embarking on this journey, and she has been present for every twist and turn I have taken. Her words of encouragement, her unyielding faith, and her ability to love me unconditionally, have kept me stable, and most importantly, happy. She has made me a

stronger thinker, a more creative soul, and above all else, a committed joy-seeker. I can say without any uncertainty that this would not have come to fruition without her support.

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Chapter One: Introduction: Toward a Politics of Responsibility

That lambs dislike great birds of prey does not seem strange: only it provides no ground for reproaching these birds of prey for bearing off little lambs. And if the lambs say among themselves: "these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is as little as possible like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb – would not he be good? There is no reason to find fault with this institution of an ideal, except perhaps that the birds of prey might view it a little ironically and say: "we don't dislike them at all, these good little lambs; we even love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

The condition of possibility of this thing, responsibility, is a certain experience of the possibility of the impossible: the trial of the aporia from which one may invent the only possible invention, the impossible invention.

- Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*

Let's begin with a true story. On April 20th, 2010 a gas explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig stationed in the Gulf of Mexico. Within two days, the rig had sunk and an oil leak that would last more than three months, wreaking havoc on an entire ecosystem, had begun.¹ Years later, the environmental, economic and psychological effects of the Deepwater Horizon spill continue to be felt.² Predictably, and almost instantly, the rhetoric of responsibility came to dominate and shape the discourse surrounding the ecological crisis. Political actors, pundits and commentators from across the political spectrum made the

¹ For resources on the Deepwater Horizon spill see, for example, the U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Response and Restoration: <http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/deepwaterhorizon>, For an excellent account of the rig's final hours leading up to the explosion see, David Rohde David Barstow, Stephanie Saul, "Deepwater Horizon's Final Hours," *The New York Times*, December 26, 2010.

² For examples of the oil spill's continued economic impact see: Laurel Calkins Allen Johnson Jr., Margaret Cronin Fisk, "BP Spill Victims Face Economic Fallout Two Years Later" *Bloomberg*, February 23, 2012. For continued environmental impact see: Suzanne Goldenberg, "Study Links BP Oil Spill to Dolphin Deaths," *The Guardian*, December 18, 2013. For psychological impacts see: Sparkle Roberts Lynn M. Grattan, William T. Mahan, Jr., Patrick K. McLaughlin, W. Steven Otwell, and J. Glenn Morris, Jr., "The Early Psychological Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on Florida and Alabama Communities," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 6 (2011).

question of responsibility central in an attempt to explain the event by unearthing the responsible party, or parties, at the heart of the devastation. Forbes magazine best articulated this fervor with a three part series on its Corporate Social Responsibility Blog under the very literal, if not revealing, headline, “The BP Oil Spill: Who’s Responsible?”³

By May 1st, the Obama Administration named British Petroleum (BP), the company in charge of the drilling, as the responsible party.⁴ Shortly thereafter, US Attorney General, Eric Holder, announced that the federal government would open a criminal inquiry into the oil spill to ensure that none of the responsible parties escaped accountability.⁵ BP reacted quickly by announcing major changes in its corporate structure, as well as a review of risk management protocols, and initiated a public relations campaign with an emphasis on the company’s response to the disaster. Under the slogan, “Making it Right,” BP launched a variety of advertisements, as well as a digital media campaign, in an attempt to demonstrate that they were doing everything they could to take responsibility.⁶ The intended message was clear (if not messy, linguistically speaking) – we are responding by

³ See for example, Dirk Olin to The CSR Blog, May 17, 2010., Elliot Clark *ibid.*, May 18, 2010., Richard Crespin *ibid.*

⁴ Bryan Walsh, "With Oil Spill (and Blame) Spreading, Obama Will Visit Gulf," *Time*, May 1, 2010.

⁵ Helene Cooper and Peter Baker, "U.S. Opens Criminal Inquiry into Oil Spill," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2010.

⁶ To be sure, the Making it Right campaign was an all out public relations offensive that deployed just about every type of communications platform from traditional print and television ads to online and social media messaging as well as short form video content that typically showed BP workers “on the ground” with members of the local community. However, not surprisingly, the dissonance between BP’s public relations efforts and its lobbying efforts in Washington could not have been greater, which of course raises an important question as to what “taking responsibility actually means. See for example, British Petroleum, "Making It Right," (2010). and Scott Edwards, "BP: Making It Right (for BP)," *The Huffington Post*, February 8, 2011.

taking responsibility and performing responsibly in response. However, though BP came out in the early days of the crisis to assume responsibility for their role in the Deepwater Horizon mess, it did not take long for them to begin ascribing responsibility to others. In preparation for the impending lawsuits, BP began pointing the finger at contractors Halliburton and Transocean Ltd., operators of the Deepwater Horizon rig.⁷

President Obama also deployed the language of responsibility when referring to his own role in stemming the crisis, stating, “in case you’re wondering who is responsible, I take responsibility...it’s my job to make sure everything is done to shut this down.”⁸ An important affective assemblage that included heartbreak, regret, rage and indignation also accompanied Obama’s calls for responsibility. “I’ve seen rage from him,” then-Press Secretary Robert Gibbs commented. He has been in a whole bunch of different meetings – clenched jaw – even in the midst of these briefings, saying everything has to be done, I think this was an anecdote shared last week, to plug the damn hole.”⁹ Indeed, Obama’s emotional state served as a critical gauge by which observers assessed whether or not he was responding to events in an urgent and decisive manner.¹⁰

⁷ "BP Will Pay for Gulf Oil Spill Disaster, CEO Says," (NPR), Tom Bergin and Ayesha Rascoe, "BP Points Fingers in Oil Spill Blame Game," *Reuters*, September 8, 2010.

⁸ Neal Connan, "Obama on Oil Mess: I Take Responsibility" in *Talk of the Nation* (NPR).

⁹ Ruth Marcus, "During Oil Spill Crisis, Do We Need Obama to Play Angry Daddy?," *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2010.

¹⁰ Writing for *Salon*, reporter Alex Pareene catalogued the number of high profile commentators that criticized the president for not being “angry enough” in his reaction to unfolding events. For example, Pareene highlights an actual line of questioning from CBS White House correspondent Chip Reid that asked for specifics regarding whether or not Obama felt rage or frustration and even asked if Obama was yelling and screaming in response. See, Alex Pareene, "Why Won't Obama Just Get Even Madder About This Oil Spill?," *Salon*, June 2, 2010.

Nearly four years later, the Deepwater Horizon spill is back in the news. BP, despite much organizational handwringing and its insistence on “making it right,” is now engaged in legal battles disputing a 9.2 billion dollar settlement ruling by a New Orleans court for victims of the oil spill not covered in BP’s initial settlement offers, making it clear that “making it right” does not involve ensuring financial remuneration for all impacted parties.¹¹ BP’s intransigence, however, is instructive of the ways in which the public face of “taking responsibility” is performative, diverging sharply from the private back rooms occupied by lawyers and lobbyists whose sole responsibility lies with protecting profits and shareholder interest and not with ensuring justice or restitution for the victims.

Beyond the BP oil crisis, responsibility discourse pervades American politics, animating and shaping conversations as diverse as immigration policy, environmental politics, health care reform and economic crisis. Obama began his presidency by heralding a call for a “New Era of Responsibility” in his in first inaugural address, and titled his first budget proposal: “A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America’s Promise.”¹² Not to be outdone, Obama’s

¹¹ The issue is a complex one from a legal standpoint. Though BP brokered an initial settlement in March 2012 prior to a non-jury trial regarding liability for the Deepwater Horizon explosion and subsequent spill, the settlement “excluded claims of financial institutions, casinos, private plaintiffs in parts of Florida and Texas, and residents and businesses claiming harm from the Obama administration’s deep-water drilling moratorium prompted by the spill. It also didn’t cover claims by governments.” As a result, a class action lawsuit was ultimately filed against the company, which is now being disputed on the grounds that the plaintiffs do meet the legal standard for a “class.” For more background on the dispute, see Laurel Brubaker Calkins and Margaret Cronin Fisk, “BP Oil Spill Settlement Fight Wages On,” *Insurance Journal*, January 13, 2014.

¹² Laura Meckler and Jonathan Weisman, “Obama to Call for a New Era of Responsibility: Huge Crowds Gather as First African-American President Takes Office;

opponents have made their own calls for responsibility, mostly in response to what they decry as the irresponsible practices of the current administration.¹³ Indeed, across the political spectrum from Left to Right, political actors advocate and deploy responsibility in one form or another. Indeed, in contemporary American politics, invoking the language of responsibility has become something of a requirement.

With all the talk of responsibility there is, of course, that which goes unspoken. Accordingly, understanding the politics of responsibility requires attention to spaces and absences, noticing where calls for responsibility appear and where they do not. The ubiquitous nature of responsibility cries out for what Gayatri Spivak calls a “reexamination of the familiar,”¹⁴ interrogating calls and failures to call alike insofar as they are part of a distinct American political culture of responsibility. It is precisely at this juncture of reexamining the familiar that my project begins to take shape. This dissertation holds that the rhetoric of responsibility is central to American political life and even constitutes a critical

Aides Expect Steps on Iraq War, Bank Policy This Week," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2009. See also, Office of Management and Budget, "A New Era of Responsibility: Renewing America's Promise," The White House, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/fy2010_new_era/A_New_Era_of_Responsibility2.pdf.

¹³ In fact, throughout both of Obama's terms in office his opponents have consistently labeled him either irresponsible and have accused his administration of encouraging irresponsibility in the American public. From the Affordable Care Act role out to Benghazi, his administration has been continuously criticized for its absence of accountability. See for example, "The Obama Administration, Why Is It Not Accountable?," in *The O'Reilly Factor* (Fox News)., Ron Fournier, "President Obama and His Gang That (Still) Isn't Shooting Straight," *National Journal*, November 18, 2013., Ruth Marcus, "Benghazi, Obamacare and the Absence of Accountability," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2014; Sean Sullivan, "Rand Paul: It's Irresponsible of Obama to Talk About Default," *ibid.*, October 6, 2013.

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1st American ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

theater in which and through which American politics is carried out. Simply put, responsibility does political work. This project aims to demonstrate responsibility's specific political functions.

In attempting to queer the familiar, a number of questions animate my thinking. How is responsibility used to make claims about political life? When and why do we begin to speak in these terms? What is at stake in the rhetoric of responsibility? What authorizing and legitimating functions does responsibility perform? What conceptions of subjectivity and political community do articulations of responsibility both rely upon and conjure? What imaginings of the present, past and future do uses of responsibility call upon and help produce?

This study examines the political work of responsibility by analyzing a series of concrete political problems - the economic crisis of 2008, the question of torture post 9/11 and debates concerning environmental policy - in which responsibility rhetoric does not simply circulate, but dominates the conversation. To make responsibility a political problem is to attend to how it is used, by whom and with what effects. Rather than approach responsibility as a pre-discursive concept or an a priori moral value – a fixed value that precedes politics – I trace the mutually constitutive relationship between responsibility and politics that functions to produce, discipline and govern subjects as well legislate forms of identity, difference and community. Mutually constitutive because while responsibility rhetoric is used to address subjects and shape narratives around political events, its various meanings and uses emerge within the context of political norms, ideological commitments and discursive regimes of power. In this

regard, I take as my aim the desire to understand responsibility in terms of what William Connolly referred to as “not only the discourse of politics but also the politics of discourse.”¹⁵ To do so, I attend to responsibility as a rhetorical form that produces specific ways of seeing and thinking political moments, impacting and limiting the range of appropriate responses and precluding certain questions while opening spaces for others. In approaching responsibility rhetorically, I am able to discern the politics at stake when it comes to not only what can be said but also what can be heard.

Of course, this raises a number of initial problems. What exactly does it mean to “make responsibility a political problem?” How do I demarcate what is germane to the political and what lies beyond the scope of this inquiry? At the outset I want to acknowledge the inherent complexity that comes with designating something a “political problem.” In fact, Sheldon Wolin recognizes the question, “what is political” to be one of the most basic problems “confronting the political philosopher when he tries to assert the distinctiveness of his subject matter.”¹⁶ Expanding on the idea that the political theorist’s field of inquiry is in fact a matter of marking a distinct disciplinary territory around specific ideas, he goes on to clarify that:

Concepts like power, authority, consent and so forth are not real things, although they are intended to point to some significant aspect about political things. Their function is to render political facts significant, either for purposes of analysis, criticism, justification, or a combination of all three... When such concepts become more or less stable in their meaning, they serve as pointers

¹⁵ William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993). Preface to the Second Edition

¹⁶ Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004). 5

that “cue” us to look for certain things or to keep certain considerations in mind when we try to understand a political situation or make a judgment about it. In this way, the concepts and categories that make up our political understanding help us to draw connections between political phenomena; they impart some order to what might otherwise appear to be a hopeless chaos of activities; they mediate between us and the political world we seek to render intelligible; they create an area of determinate awareness and thus help to separate the relevant phenomena from the irrelevant.¹⁷

Similarly to Wolin, I place responsibility in the pantheon of core political concepts along side power, authority, and consent because responsibility, as I demonstrate throughout this project, is used time and again to render political facts significant, to create interpretive frames through which we come to understand political events and to provide a foundation for making political judgments. However, it is precisely the ways in which responsibility is used to, in Wolin’s terms, mediate between “us and the political world” that this project seeks to interrogate.

The Problems of Responsibility

The study of responsibility is complicated by a number of factors, metaphysical as well as methodological. Although on the surface the language of responsibility is a familiar component of public discourse, that familiarity is a reason to pause. Opening the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) means confronting a litany of different words that are often, in everyday language, used interchangeably with

¹⁷ Ibid. 7

the terms responsible and responsibility: *accountability, liability, blame, guilt, reliable, trustworthy, respectability, answerable, rational, and cause*.¹⁸

It is not surprising that the OED offers such a range of definitions for a concept as complex as responsibility. Definition, as Raymond Williams suggests, is a problematic endeavor. He argues that dictionaries perform the act of definition by fixing meanings to words within the finite space of a specific place and time.¹⁹ And when it comes to dealing with concepts, such as responsibility, the limitations of definition are even more apparent. Definition, “for those (words) which involve ideas and values, is not only impossible but an irrelevant procedure.”²⁰ Williams is helpful here in highlighting the fact that the task of definition is beside the point. The important work does take place somewhere else. But where?

In some sense his argument on the limitations of definition echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblances.”²¹ For Wittgenstein the important work to be done does not reside in isolating a core or essence to the meaning of responsibility that can then be found in all words associated with it. Meaning, for Wittgenstein, is about usage. As a result, Wittgenstein suggests that we view the myriad number of definitions and associated terms as “a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and crisscrossing.”²² Similarly, in *The Terms of Political*

¹⁸ Oxford University Press., Oxford English Dictionary, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), <http://dictionary.oed.com/> For subscribers only; follow links to resource.

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Rev. ed. (London: Fontana, 1983). 17

²⁰ Ibid. 17

²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968).

²² Ibid. 66

Discourse, Connolly provides further insight into the difficulty associated with defining concepts. He argues that, “to define a concept is necessarily to connect it with several others that need clarification if the first is to be clear, and those others are in turn connected to a still wider network of concepts deserving of equally close attention.”²³

That both Wittgenstein and Connolly use the term “network” to describe the challenges of conceptual definition is instructive. Viewing the OED entry on responsibility as evidence of a network rather than a linear page of sequential definitions helps illustrate the way in which all of these terms are not only related but also interactive. It is in the constant and continual play of these terms that we can see both the absence of a single core as well as the ways in which the concept of responsibility, like all language, operates metaphorically.²⁴ However, while thinking politically about responsibility requires attending to definitional attempts to stabilize meaning and the contexts in which these definitions emerge, ultimately, both Williams and Wittgenstein elide the politics of definition. In addition, while Connolly does take seriously the political stakes involved in contestations over the terms of political discourse, his focus remains fixed on laying bare the philosophical basis for why conceptual clarity remains elusive in the hopes of refining our understanding of politics.

By examining responsibility as rhetoric, I seek to not only interrogate uses of the word itself but instead the entire network of metaphors, related terms and linguistic conventions, which involves attempts to fix and stabilize meaning at

²³ Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*. 3

²⁴ Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978).

particular moments and on particular bodies. A crucial part of my project in the coming chapters is to examine these attempts at stabilization with an eye towards how they mobilize and operate in conjunction with other discursive and emotional regimes.²⁵ When responsibility (or its larger network) is invoked, it presents an opportunity to reflect on how, when and why it is being put into practice.

To complicate matters further, responsibility often appears in public discourse accompanied by a range of adjectival modifiers. In addition to speaking in terms of responsibility, there are those moments where people speak in terms of *moral responsibility*, *political responsibility*, *social responsibility*, *corporate responsibility*, *legal responsibility*, *personal responsibility*, *sexual responsibility*, *environmental responsibility*, and so on. However, far from clarifying, these adjectival modifiers generate their own set of questions. What rhetorical work do these modifiers do in relation to responsibility? When are these modifiers deployed most often? Indeed, these adjectival modifiers conceal and suppress the political nature of responsibility, cloaking the politics at work regardless of the specific modifier responsibility traffics under at any given moment. As I demonstrate in Chapters Three and Four, to speak of personal, corporate or even environmental responsibility is to mark those categories as something other than political. By attempting to carve a space for responsibility outside of political discourse, adjectival modifiers operate like Ranciere's notion of the police, shouting: "There is no politics here, there is nothing to see here, there is nothing

²⁵ For a deeper exploration of the term, "emotional regimes," see William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, U.K; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

to do but move along.”²⁶ In response, an important take away of this project is to push back against the apolitical framing of responsibility by exposing the various ways in which responsibility often operates as a powerful rhetoric of depoliticization.²⁷

In the face of so much definitional confusion, theorists often rely on etymology as a pathway towards conceptual clarity.²⁸ The OED identifies the etymology of responsibility in the Latin, *respondeo* and the now obsolete French, *respondere*, which are roots of the word response, meaning to answer to, or to promise in return.²⁹ However, methodologies concerned with etymology are also problematic. Calling upon etymology to legitimize a specific way of defining or thinking about a concept should provoke suspicion. In part, because etymology in its attempt to return to origins seeks to recover lost truths or meanings rather than engage with the ways in which language and meaning making actually function. Reliance on etymology also means an escape from, rather than a confrontation with, responsibility’s political uses and grasps at semantic closure by imposing

²⁶ Davide Panagia, *The Political Life of Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). 121

²⁷ Here I am greatly indebted to Wendy Brown’s analysis of tolerance as a discourse of depoliticization in her book, Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006). Here she argues that depoliticization “involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual on the one hand, or as natural, religious or cultural on the other. Tolerance works along both vectors of depoliticization – it personalizes and it naturalizes or culturalizes – and sometimes it intertwines them.” (15) Specifically, I take up these themes in relation to responsibility in chapters two, three and four.

²⁸ No doubt there are a number of thinkers in the Western cannon that return to etymology time and again in the course of their arguments including Frederic Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and Quentin Skinner.

²⁹ Oxford University Press., *Oxford English Dictionary*.

meaning construed as originary and foundational.³⁰ Indeed, the question of who guards the archive of meaning and who can lay claim to its contents also complicates any sense of a simple or objective return to origins.

Accordingly, this is not a project of definition or an attempt at reclaiming the long lost origins of responsibility. Yet, to begin with the persistent problems of definition and etymology do provide an important entry point for making responsibility a distinctly political problem. Definitions and origins, after all, are themselves political. For instance, while not eliminating confusion, a brief turn to responsibility's etymology does signal its social and relational character. Thinking about the relationship between responsibility and response provokes the question, to whom, or to what, am I responding? In this regard, responsibility always implies the existence of another, of something other than and beyond myself. But to approach responsibility as a political problem means treating these questions – to whom, for what and how do I respond to the Other, as well as to which Others I am supposed to respond, as questions that do not stand outside of or adjacent to political life.³¹

³⁰ For instance, in Jacques Derrida's work, *Archive Fever*, he argues that the search for this type of foundational truth, "is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement." Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). 91

³¹ For more on the relationship with the Other as it relates to responsibility see, Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998); Emmanuel Lévinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, 1st ed. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985); Emmanuel Lévinas and Nidra Poller, *Humanism of the Other* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). While I am certainly influenced by the Levinasian claim that the encounter with the other is the primary and foundational component of human existence, I want to maintain, as I do throughout this project, that this encounter is

Genealogies of Responsibility

Thus far, I have focused my attention on responsibility's semantic terrain.

However, to remain fixated on definition would be to maintain a faith in language that is not really there, moving us closer to responsibility as an object of desire and further away from responsibility as a political problem. In this regard, I am informed by Nietzsche's critique of conceptual thinking. For Nietzsche, concepts, like responsibility, do not tell us anything objective about the world; they do not help us arrive at the essence or nature of that which they designate. All concepts have a history and the conceptual language we use is always tied to convention, context and, most importantly, power.³²

To be sure, responsibility has had a distinctive genealogy in Western moral and political thought. The dominant approach has been to treat responsibility as a pre-discursive concept – something that inheres within an individual that is both discoverable and factual. As Marion Smiley argues, many contemporary moral and political thinkers treat responsibility “as a fact about

not simply an ethical one as if we could enact a hard boundary between the ethical and the political. Instead, my project emphasizes the ways in which the ethical and the political are implicated in one another in the sense that the question of the Other is always one that is politically bound and designated. As I demonstrate extensively in chapter three, the question of the Other, as it relates to responsibility, is an integral question for determining modes of political violence and political action.

³² For more on Nietzsche's critique of conceptual thinking, see for example, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub., 1997); Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and R. J. Hollingdale, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

individuals.”³³ Preoccupied with questions such as, under what conditions can someone be held responsible for their actions, to whom or to what are we responsible, and in what way ought we be responsible, Western conceptions of responsibility take as their starting point a number of metaphysical and ontological assumptions regarding the nature of the self and the world in which that self exists.³⁴ Responsibility is positioned within a matrix of causality, agency, will and intention – subjects that author, subjects of self-mastery, and subjects that say “I.”

It is in this sense that Joel Feinberg claims that there is an absolute responsibility within the power of the agent and argues for a notion of “real responsibility” that is “distinct from a practical responsibility relative to the

³³ It’s important to note that in this passage, Smiley is engaged in a specific critique of the deontological view of moral responsibility offered by John Casey in his 1971 article, “Actions and Consequences.” However, she extends her critique to include other prominent thinkers in the canon of moral philosophy, including John Harris and Dennis Thompson, who all, despite their differences, rely heavily on the factual discovery of free will as a precursor to designating moral responsibility and blame to individual actors. Marion Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community: Power and Accountability from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). 106, 146

³⁴ For examples of approaches to responsibility that take these questions and assumptions as their point of departure see, A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility; A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960)., Gerald Dworkin, *Determinism, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility*, Central Issues in Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970); Ronald Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?: Principles for a New Political Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006)., Joel Feinberg, *Doing & Deserving: Essays in the Theory of Responsibility* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970); *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 7th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1989)., Peter A. French, *Collective and Corporate Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)., Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975)., John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); *Political Liberalism*, The John Dewey Essays in Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: with, the Idea of Public Reason Revisited* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999)., Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and Its Critics*, Readings in Social and Political Theory (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

principles and values of a particular community.”³⁵ This suggests, no doubt problematically, that all that is needed are appropriate methods, standards and even the right judges to get us there – to get us to the Truth. Because contemporary thinking about, and uses of, responsibility continue to bear the traces of this genealogy, in this section I briefly map the development of the concept of responsibility through the intellectual traditions of Aristotle and Kant – the two key poles of the Western tradition vis-à-vis responsibility.³⁶ As my analysis shows, their works are important not only for the conceptions of responsibility they offer but more so for the politics of responsibility they attempt to suppress.

In Book Three of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces questions that have long preoccupied moral and legal scholarship’s emphasis on responsibility as accountability and blameworthiness.³⁷ How can we know who is

³⁵ For example, in his discussion of the difference between legal and moral responsibility, Feinberg argues that when it comes to assigning blame, “even after legal responsibility has been decided there is still a problem – albeit not a legal problem – leftover: namely, is the defendant really responsible (as opposed to responsible in law) for the harm? This conception of a “real” theoretical responsibility as distinct from a practical responsibility “relative” to the purposes and values of a particular legal system is expressed very commonly in the terminology of “morality” – moral obligation, moral guilt, moral responsibility.” Feinberg, *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*. 30

³⁶ No doubt in my consideration of Aristotle and Kant there are many important aspects of the Western tradition that I am consciously omitting including an analysis of Judeo-Christian traditions as well the British liberal tradition best exemplified by Locke’s work in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. However, because my project is a political analysis of how responsibility operates as rhetoric and not a history of responsibility, my emphasis on Aristotle and Kant is allows me to work broadly within the two most important traditions providing the foundation for contemporary uses and understandings of the concept.

³⁷ Of course, it’s important to note that, as Marion Smiley reminds us, the term moral responsibility has in fact only been in “use for two centuries.” She cites Alexander Hamilton’s 1789 *Federalist Papers* as well as Pascal’s 1656 *Letters Provinciales* as two of the first recorded uses of the term. In addition, Alasdair MacIntyre in, *A Short History of*

and who is not responsible? When is it appropriate to hold someone responsible for his or her actions? In response, Aristotle makes the dual issues of causality and voluntariness central to the concept of responsibility. Responsible actors in the Aristotelian sense are those who can be said to have caused or made something happen. But on what grounds can someone truly be said to have been the cause of something or, in Aristotle's words, "the author" of his or her actions? For Aristotle, the answer to this question turns on making a crucial distinction between voluntary and involuntary action: "Since moral goodness is concerned with feelings and actions, and those that are voluntary receive praise and blame, whereas those that are involuntary receive pardon and sometimes pity too, students of moral goodness must presumably determine the limits of voluntary and involuntary."³⁸

Aristotle proceeds to a discussion of the voluntary by first considering what constitutes involuntary action. Specifically, there are two criteria for involuntary action: acts that happen by force, what Aristotle refers to as compulsion, and acts that happen by ignorance. In terms of force, "An act is

Ethics, reminds readers that, "the concepts of duty and responsibility in the modern sense appear only in germ or marginally; those of goodness, prudence and virtue are central." This of course begs the question as to how I can justifiably make use of Aristotle's work in a section outlining a genealogy of responsibility if he never in fact used the term. However, despite the fact that Aristotle did not specifically deploy the concept of responsibility, he did write extensively on issues of causality and blame. Additionally, while Aristotle's discussion of voluntariness differs from modern conceptions of free will, I demonstrate the ways in which demarcating voluntary from involuntary action provides a foundation for later conceptions of responsibility and in fact continues to play a role in understandings of contemporary issues around personal responsibility, blame, victimhood and dessert. For more on the difference between Classical and Modern ethics see, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, Fields of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan, 1966). 84, Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community: Power and Accountability from a Pragmatic Point of View*. 35

³⁸ Aristotle et al., *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Further rev. ed., Penguin Classics (London, Eng.; New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004). 50

compulsory when it has an external origin of such a kind that the agent or patient contributes nothing to it; e.g. if a voyager were to be conveyed somewhere by the wind or by men who had him in their power.”³⁹ In this regard, acts of compulsion are acts in which there is a complete absence of choice and the exercise of agency is impossible. In these cases, the individual cannot be said to have caused anything to happen. Importantly, given that constrained actions are connected to both the capacity to act and the possibilities to do so, here Aristotle opens the door for thinking about responsibility as contingent upon one’s ability to respond.

Aristotle also makes a number of important distinctions between involuntary and non-voluntary action as well as between actions done through ignorance and actions done in ignorance. To begin, Aristotle argues that, “Every act done through ignorance is non-voluntary, but it is involuntary only when it causes the agent subsequent pain and repentance.”⁴⁰ Aristotle introduces the category of non-voluntary as distinct from involuntary in this situation to distinguish individuals who, following a discovery of what they have done, would not have chosen otherwise.⁴¹ Here, Aristotle makes emotional dispositions, such as remorsefulness and regret, crucial components of how we ought to understand levels of culpability and blameworthiness. But what is most important is that this idea continues to impact debates about responsibility in the present. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, where I discuss the image of the “responsible leader” who licenses the use of torture against potential terrorist suspects, Aristotle’s argument regarding the recognition of wrongdoing and the willingness to feel

³⁹ Ibid. 50

⁴⁰ Ibid. 52

⁴¹ Ibid. 52

pain associated with doing harm continues to play a central role in our understanding of what it means to be responsible.

When making the distinction between actions that are done “through ignorance” and actions that are done “in ignorance,” Aristotle invokes the famous example of an individual who acts while intoxicated. Being drunk, for Aristotle, does not exculpate an actor from being responsible for his actions. In these circumstances, Aristotle traces actions that occur while under the influence back to a moment of voluntary action. That is, the decision to drink in the first place, which is ultimately a question of virtue and character. As Alasdair MacIntyre argues, for Aristotle, “ignorance of what constitutes virtue and vice is not exculpatory, but is indeed what constitutes vice.”⁴² It is only ignorance of particular circumstances that excuse an individual’s actions as involuntary.⁴³

In light of this discussion of all things involuntary, what exactly constitutes voluntary action? For Aristotle, “if an involuntary act is one performed under compulsion or as a result of ignorance, a voluntary act would seem to be one of which the originating cause lies in the agent himself, who knows the particular circumstances of his action.”⁴⁴ No doubt there is much in this short sentence to unpack. First, Aristotle places an emphasis on causality and the relationship between responsibility and the ability of an agent to cause or make something happen. Second, Aristotle raises the stakes by moving from a simple

⁴² MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*. 70

⁴³ Aristotle writes that what “makes an act involuntary is not ignorance in the choice (this is a cause of wickedness) nor ignorance of the universal (for this people are blamed), but particular ignorance, i.e. of the circumstances and objects of the action; for it is on these that pity and pardon depend, because a man who act in ignorance of any such detail is an involuntary agent.” Aristotle et al., *The Nicomachean Ethics*. 53

⁴⁴ Ibid. 54

discussion of causality to the question of knowledge. As opposed to the ignorance that surrounds involuntary action, the responsible agent is an agent who knows. The responsible decision hinges on an agent who acts voluntarily, and who is able to deliberate and make choices.

But a pressing question remains: How do we clearly demarcate the voluntary from the involuntary in order to arrive at an answer to the questions of causality, deliberation and choice that Aristotle places at the heart of responsibility? This question is even more crucial given that Aristotle himself continues to run into actions that blur the lines between the voluntary and the involuntary and thus cannot be so clearly categorized.

For example, Aristotle contends with a number of potential borderline cases in which the line between absolute compulsion and individual choice is not so clear. In these cases, including situations in which choices are made under duress or the threat of violence, Aristotle is willing to allow that context and circumstances may in fact dictate whether or not we ought to see the action as voluntary or involuntary.⁴⁵

And it is precisely at this juncture that the politics of responsibility suppressed by Aristotle's attempt to formulate a normative ethics reveals itself. In advancing a deconstructive reading of Aristotle, Francois Raffoul suggests that

⁴⁵ Aristotle gives the examples of acts done through fear or for what he describes as an "admirable purpose; e.g. if a tyrant who has a man's parents and children in his power were to order him to do something dishonorable on the condition that if he did it their lives would be spared, and if he did not they would be put to death: in these cases it is debatable whether the actions are voluntary or involuntary. A similar difficulty occurs with regard to jettisoning cargo in bad weather. In general no one willingly throws away his property; but if it is to save the lives of himself and everyone else, any reasonable person will do it." *ibid.* 50

the strict separation between the voluntary and the involuntary, the responsible and the irresponsible, cannot and does not hold. Rather, they imply one another, spilling over into and informing one another. Using Derrida as his guide, Raffoul argues that “being responsible could be traced back to irresponsible or irresponsible foundations, and a certain undecidability between responsibility and irresponsibility may be discerned.”⁴⁶ Otherwise, Raffoul asks, “why would Aristotle take such pains in trying to distinguish between them?”⁴⁷ Indeed, in Book Three, Aristotle makes no less than the following four sets of distinctions when trying to define a sphere of human agency and responsibility: voluntary vs. involuntary, decision vs. wish, decision vs. opinion, and finally, the possible vs. the impossible.⁴⁸

My analysis takes Raffoul’s argument a step further. Moments of undecidability require decision. Politics enters the conversation precisely at this moment of the undecidable. As the recent financial crisis of 2008 or explanations surrounding Hurricane Katrina demonstrate, determinations of causality are not objective descriptions, a subject I tackle in greater detail in Chapter Three. While Aristotle treats causality as a pathway to responsibility it is actually the case that attributions of responsibility work to produce the cause or origin of an action.

⁴⁶ Francois Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). 41

⁴⁷ Ibid. 41

⁴⁸ Following his discussion of voluntary action, Aristotle proceeds throughout the rest of Book Three to continue making crucial distinctions between specific aspects of moral conduct in his attempt to demarcate a specific space of what constitutes responsible action. See, for example, Section Two of Book Three, titled, “Moral conduct implies choice, but what is choice? It must be distinguished from desire, temper, wish and opinion.” See also, Section Three of Book Three, titled, “If choice involves deliberation, what is the sphere of the later? And, “Deliberation is about means, not ends.” Aristotle et al., *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

Additionally, in making the determination of what is and what is not voluntary, Aristotle is invested in marking a sphere of responsibility and responsible action by demarcating its scope and limits.

In short, Aristotle is engaged not in ethical *description* but *inscription*. Or, as Raffoul puts it, “It is clear that Aristotle is not content with simply describing a phenomenon, but is actually establishing such a sphere by distinguishing it from those domains where we precisely have no agency.”⁴⁹ Aristotle’s take on responsibility thus not only relies on metaphysical assumptions of causality and individual agency, but works to produce a conception of the responsible subject. The political implications of these assumptions could not be more serious. By demarcating that which is specifically up to “us” and within “our” control, Aristotle illuminates one of the principle ways in which subjects of responsibility are produced. In reading responsibility as a form of political rhetoric my project demonstrates how narratives of causality and control shape ways of seeing the political, and contribute to the production of specific subjects and behaviors deemed blameworthy, often inspiring suspicion, rebuke and even violence.⁵⁰ As Raffoul notes, it is “not insignificant that Aristotle begins his treatise on

⁴⁹ Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*. 49

⁵⁰ An excellent example of one of the ways in which this plays out in contemporary American politics is in regard to what Alyson Cole calls “True Victim” status. She argues that the most important virtue of True Victimhood is innocence, which is applied in two distinct ways: “First, with respect to his victimization, the victim’s innocence must be complete and incontrovertible. True victims have not contributed to their injury in any way. Second, the victim is morally upright; he must be pure. This totalizing conception of innocence encompasses every facet of the True Victim’s character.” Alyson Manda Cole, *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War on Welfare to the War on Terror* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007). 5

responsibility with the general problematic of blame-assigning and punishment.”⁵¹

Notwithstanding Aristotle’s responsible subject of causality and self-mastery, contemporary thinking about responsibility owes as much if not more to Enlightenment and early liberal thinking that elevates the rational, free and choosing subject to an uncontested level. The notions of autonomy and choice central to Immanuel Kant’s work on metaphysics and moral philosophy serve as what Annika Thiem has called, “the bedrocks and fighting concepts of liberalism,” and continue to provide a starting point for debates about accountability and blame as well as political and social obligation. Like a ghost, Kant’s work continues to haunt contemporary thinking about responsibility, most famously (and hauntingly) embodied in A.W.H. Adkins’s claim that “we are all Kantians now.”⁵²

Similarly to Aristotle, Kant places both agency and causality at the heart of thinking about responsibility and in so doing attempts to designate a sphere of responsible action as that which is self caused, that which is beyond our control, and that which is caused by nature. However, unlike Aristotle, Kant’s subject operates with a more radical sense of freedom, what Kant called “transcendental freedom;” a subject with the capacity for spontaneous action, with “the power to begin a state on one’s own.”⁵³

⁵¹ Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*. 42

⁵² Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values*. 2

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, Werner S. Pluhar, and Patricia Kitcher, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Unified ed. (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub. Co., 1996). 535

Kant's individual is a subject possessing a stable, dehistoricized capacity for reason. He is a choosing subject, endowed with a self-legislating, autonomous will that precedes acts and norms. As he argues in Part Two of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "Freedom in the practical meaning of the term is the independence of our power of choice from coercion by impulses of sensibility...the human being has a power to determine himself on his own, independently of coercion by sensible impulses."⁵⁴ Aristotle's gesture towards the social basis of responsibility and its relationship to capacity are effaced by Kant's emphasis on the freedom of individual will and the possibility of spontaneous action.

For Kant, it is this conception of freedom that "lies at the foundation of all moral laws and accountability to them."⁵⁵ Without this conception of freedom, responsibility for Kant would not be possible. As Theodor Adorno remarks, the problem of moral philosophy in Kant is "the problem of freedom," and more specifically, the freedom of the will...[as] a form of behavior that is not ruled by the causality of nature...For if I simply act in conformity with causality, [instead of as a self-cause] I shall not actually be present as the agent that somehow has to make decisions about an action."⁵⁶ In this regard, Kant tethers the idea of free will directly to the concept of responsibility and the possibility for a subject to become a responsible self. Simply put, we have the freedom to choose and as a result we are responsible for the choices we make. Kant stresses this point in *Religion*

Within the Limits of Reason Alone:

⁵⁴ Ibid. 536

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant and Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2002).

⁵⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 1st. ed. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2001). 26, 27

Man must make or have made himself into whatever, in a moral sense, whether good or evil, he is or is to become. Either condition must be an effect of his free choice; for otherwise he could not be held responsible for it and could therefore be morally neither good nor evil. When it is said, man is created good, this can mean nothing more than: He is created for good and the original predisposition in man is good; not that he is already actually good, but rather that he brings it about that he becomes good or evil, according to whether he adopts or does not adopt into his maxim the incentives which this predisposition carries with it (an act which must be left wholly to his own free choice).⁵⁷

For Kant, to be a person, to be human, is to be bound to the idea of self-responsibility. In fact, it is the capacity for freedom and thus the capacity to be responsible for one's self that distinguishes persons from objects and animals. It is the responsibility and the possibility of being responsible for one's actions that divides the human from the non-human, the subject from the object, the person from the thing.⁵⁸

But what are the political implications of this ghostly inheritance bequeathed to us by Kant? As I show in Chapter Two, the twinning of responsibility and personhood points toward ways in which responsibility and designations of responsibility are often used in politics to mark the limits of human life. The category of humanness is not an objective category but rather dependent on that which it excludes – the non-human and the inhuman, which for

⁵⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Harper Torchbooks the Cloister Library, (New York: Harper, 1960).

⁵⁸ For example, Francois Raffoul points out that Kant specifically states in *The Metaphysics of Morals* that while a person is “a subject whose actions can be imputed to him, a thing is that to which nothing can be imputed.” See, Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*. 60 In addition, Kant makes the distinction between human freedom and the human ability to act as self-causing agents and the type of causality that moves animals in his discussion of transcendental freedom in the Critique of Pure Reason, stating that “The human power of choice, although an *arbitrium sensitivum* [sensory power of choice], is an *arbitrium* not *brutum* but *liberum*,” by which he means not animal, but free. Kant, Pluhar, and Kitcher, *Critique of Pure Reason*. 536

Kant include the irrational and the irresponsible. Thus, to speak of the connection between personhood and self-responsibility already presupposes an answer to the question of who is capable of responding, and designates in advance those who possess the capacity for rational action and responsibility.

To be sure, Kant treats these as metaphysical questions. My concern, however, is to trace the legacy of the responsible/irresponsible binary and its relationship to humanness in order to expose its important role in the construction of “knowable” others. A political approach to responsibility requires interrogating the ways in which this binary has played a crucial role in the construction of specific notions of community and has functioned as a foundational component of projects of expansion, colonization, domination and exploitation. The use of what Abdul JanMohamed has referred to as “metaphysical matter of facts” about individuals, groups and entire populations have long functioned to authorize violence and the governance of entire populations, allowing the perpetrators of such acts to disclaim responsibility in the name of responsibility.⁵⁹ As a result, the question of who is capable of being responsible cannot be severed from the highly racialized and gendered development of the category of humanness itself.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985).

⁶⁰ See Linda Martin Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)., Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993)., Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge Classics (London; New York: Routledge, 2002)., Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)., Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought: [with New Afterword]*, 1992 ed., Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992)., Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988)., Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political*

Additionally, the centrality of agency, free will and choice to Kant's work continues to inform contemporary thinking about responsibility.⁶¹ Indeed, in debates over free will and social or scientific determinism, Kant's ghost haunts and produces anxiety in those who remain wedded to maintaining the strength of strictly agent-centered accounts of responsibility. Lars Hertzberg provides a useful illustration of this concern in his article, "Blame and Causality," where he writes, "Many of us, from time to time, have been haunted by the following thought, one day science will tell us about the causes of human behavior and when that day comes, we will no longer be able to hold people morally responsible for their actions."⁶² Similarly, Isaiah Berlin has lamented the possibility that social determinism might lead to the collapse of responsibility altogether, and with it the death of attendant concepts – guilt and innocence.⁶³ The specters that haunt and produce anxiety in Hertzberg and Berlin reveal an allegiance to a moral imaginary that sees the social as undermining subjectivity, agency, independence and freedom rather than being one of its enabling conditions.

This egocentric notion of responsibility emerges most vividly in Kant's response to the question, "What is Enlightenment?" Enlightenment for Kant is

Demonology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987)., Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁶¹ Accordingly, MacIntyre makes the claim that "for the majority of philosophical writers, including many who are self-consciously anti-Kantian, ethics is defined as a subject in Kantian terms. For many who have never heard of philosophy, let alone Kant, morality is roughly what Kant said it was." MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*. 190

⁶² Lars Hertzberg, "Blame and Causality," *Mind* LXXXIV, no. 1 (1975).

⁶³ Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability*, Auguste Comte Memorial Trust Lecture, (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

first and foremost a call for individuals to be responsible for themselves by using their individual reason to break free from the dominance and reason of others: “Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another.”⁶⁴ But most importantly, Kant makes responsibility a matter of maturity, positioning personal enlightenment against immaturity and irresponsibility. Failure to take responsibility for oneself is construed as a failure and abdication of will. As Kant argues, “Self incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere Aude! Have courage to use your own reason – that is the motto of the Enlightenment.”⁶⁵ Consequently, those who fail to take up the mantle of the Enlightenment due to lack of courage and resolution are depicted as failing to own up to their responsibility and thus a potential target of derision and blame:

Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction (*naturaliter maiorenes*), nevertheless remains under life long tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians. It is so easy not to be of age.⁶⁶

Unworthy of our sympathy or responsiveness, those who fail to take up the position of self-enlightenment are met with moralizing judgment by Kant. The irresponsible are lazy; they are cowardly; they lack power; they are timid; they are weak willed. It is also of no small consequence that Kant genders his understanding of who possesses the will to assume responsibility for themselves

⁶⁴ See, Immanuel Kant, “Was ist Aufklärung?” reprinted in Michel Foucault, Sylvère Lotringer, and Lysa Hochroth, *The Politics of Truth*, Semiotext(E) Foreign Agents Series (Los Angeles, CA.: Semiotext(e), 2007). 20

⁶⁵ Ibid. 20

⁶⁶ Ibid. 20

to break free of their self-imposed masters, arguing that while “the step to competence is held to be very dangerous by the far greater portion of mankind,” it is the “entire fair sex” that sees enlightenment as both difficult and dangerous.⁶⁷

The political implications of responsibility/irresponsibility as a matter of choice are serious. As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, Kant’s conception of self-responsibility intersects with the logic of the market in contemporary American political culture. There it finds its fullest expression in the neo-liberal discourse of personal responsibility, giving rise to what Wendy Brown calls the “moral subject as entrepreneurial subject.”⁶⁸ An individual “who rationally deliberates about alternative courses of action, makes choices and bears responsibility for the consequences of these choices.”⁶⁹ Again, as with Aristotle, we are faced with the question of what is, or should be “up to us.” How this question is answered, however, has a direct impact on everything from healthcare debates to social welfare policy, battles over reproductive rights and the politics of addiction.⁷⁰ Specifically in the ways in which responsibility becomes a method understanding who deserves or is worth of sympathy, social obligations and responsiveness and who deserves blame, suspicion and derision.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 20

⁶⁸ Wendy Brown, *Edgework : Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005). 44

⁶⁹ Ibid. 43

⁷⁰ One contemporary example of how designations of responsibility function politically is in the area of child rearing and contraception. For example, as Rosalind Petchesky argues, “As a consequence of the sexual division of labor around childbearing, the main responsibility for contraception and pregnancy lies not with ‘couples’ but with women...Most of these women retain the primary responsibility for household maintenance and child care, despite working hard and long hours outside the home – a situation commonly known as the ‘double day.’” Rosalind P. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom*, Longman Series in Feminist Theory (New York: Longman, 1984). 104

Destabilizing the Foundations of Responsibility

To be sure, many thinkers have troubled this particular genealogy of responsibility. As previously mentioned, Nietzsche makes morality a problem by disturbing the typical approach to conceptual thinking taken by most in the Western philosophical tradition.⁷¹ Against philosophers claiming the mantle of belief or objectivity, Nietzsche criticizes thinkers like Kant, who profess faith in universal notions of morality, ethics and reason. In reference to many of his philosophical predecessors, Nietzsche argues that “Systematizers” like Kant, “practice a kind of play acting in as much as they want to fill out a system and round off its horizon, they have to try to present their weaker qualities in the same style as their stronger – they try to impersonate whole and uniformly strong natures.”⁷² On the contrary, for Nietzsche, responsibility (and morality more generally) cannot be easily systematized since morality is never divorced from history; morality is always interested, bound to and constituted through relations of power.⁷³

⁷¹ Taking issue with the typical approach to moral philosophy, Nietzsche writes, “As is the hallowed custom with philosophers, the thinking of all of them is by nature unhistorical... The way they have bungled their moral genealogy comes to light at the very beginning, where the task is to investigate the origin of the concept and judgment ‘good.’” Nietzsche, Nietzsche, and Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 25

⁷² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Maudemarie Clark, and Brian Leiter, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 318

⁷³ For example, Book Two of *On the Genealogy of Morals* is in many respects a genealogical inquiry into the historical evolution of the concept of responsibility. This is perhaps most evident in the beginning of Section Two, where following a brief discussion regarding the development of the idea of promising, Nietzsche writes, “this precisely is the long story of how responsibility originated.” He then proceeds to give a full account of the “history of responsibility” throughout the rest of the chapter. Nietzsche, Nietzsche, and Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 58

In making morality an object of critical inquiry, Nietzsche launches a full-scale assault on the metaphysical ground established by both the Aristotelian and Kantian traditions. For Nietzsche, the pillars of responsibility – causality, free will, rational agency, choice and voluntary action – are not givens upon which a coherent concept of responsibility can or should be built. On the contrary, they are fictional conventions that bear the imprint of human invention, long since forgotten.⁷⁴ For example, in response to the Kantian notion of agency that rests upon an idea of transcendental freedom and spontaneous action, Nietzsche sarcastically asks, “What can be our doctrine alone? That nobody gives human beings their qualities, neither God, nor society, nor their parents and ancestors, nor they themselves (the nonsense of this last notion we are rejecting was taught by Kant as ‘intelligible freedom...’).”⁷⁵

Because our internal drives are not transparent to us, Nietzsche regards the idea that humans are free, that we consciously know what we want, and that as a result we are responsible for our actions, as a delusion. As he remarks in the opening to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, “We are unknown to ourselves, we men

⁷⁴ Interestingly, forgetting plays a crucial role for Nietzsche in that it allows people to live and act in the world. Examples of this type of thinking abound in his writing. For instance in the *Genealogy of Morals* he writes that, “there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness.” *ibid.* 58. However, this type of active forgetting is pitted in Nietzsche’s work against a tendency so common in philosophy to naturalize and de-historicize concepts in the name of objectivity or truth. However, for Nietzsche, it is clear that truth, and specifically moral truth, is in fact a matter of convention (and invention) and not a matter of discovery. As he writes in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, “Truth which shall count as truth from now on is established. That is to say, a uniformly valid and binding designation is invented for things, and the legislation of language likewise established the first laws of truth.” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Duncan Large, *The Nietzsche Reader*, Blackwell Readers (Malden, MA ; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006); Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense*, trans. Daniel Brazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979). 81

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*. 36

of knowledge – and with good reason...we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we do not comprehend ourselves, we have to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law ‘Each is furthest from himself’ applies to all eternity – we are not ‘men of knowledge’ with respect to ourselves.”⁷⁶ In stark contrast to the Kantian link between freedom and responsibility, for Nietzsche, the sovereign individual, who makes promises, keeps his word, exhibits self-control and can thus be said to be responsible, has a much less noble origin. The responsible subject is actually formed through the legal conventions of credit and debt. Specifically through discipline, subjection, the internalization of guilt, and the desire to punish:

It was in this sphere then, the sphere of legal obligation, that the moral conceptual world of ‘guilt,’ ‘conscience,’ ‘duty,’ ‘sacredness of duty’ had its origin: its beginnings were, like the beginnings of everything great on earth, soaked in blood thoroughly and for a long time. And might one not add that, fundamentally, this world has never since lost a certain odor of blood and torture? (Not even good old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty...) To ask it again: to what extent can suffering balance debts or guilt? To the extent that to make suffer was in the highest degree pleasurable, to the extent that the injured party exchanged for the loss he sustained, including the displeasure caused by the loss, an extraordinary counterbalancing pleasure: that of making suffer...⁷⁷

In this regard, responsibility for one’s self functions as an internal disciplinary mechanism operating as what Nietzsche calls a “dominating instinct.”⁷⁸ This argument challenges notions of free will and rational consciousness as foundational for responsibility, instead pointing toward the constructed nature of

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, Nietzsche, and Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 15

⁷⁷ Ibid. 65

⁷⁸ Nietzsche argues that the “privilege of responsibility, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate, has in his case penetrated to the profoundest depths and become instinct, the dominating instinct,” which according to Nietzsche is eventually named conscience. Ibid. 60

responsibility and the role that responsibility plays in the process of subject formation.

Similarly, Nietzsche also dispenses with causal relations and attributions of responsibility as narratives that are attached to events after they have already occurred in order to explain them and render them intelligible. As he remarks in one of the most famous passages from the *Genealogy*, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the doer is a fiction added to the deed.”⁷⁹ For Nietzsche, cause and effect do not simply exist as objective facts about the world in which we live. Instead, “in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces.”⁸⁰ What is most problematic, however, is that “once the cause had been introduced after the fact, it is then said to exist prior to the event, an event that has now been translated into necessity and meaning.”⁸¹ In calling attention to this ex post facto attribution of causality, Nietzsche exposes responsibility’s reliance on forgetting as a condition of possibility. What is forgotten, specifically, is that the causal narrative is not the Truth or an objective description of a situation, but an inscription; an act that makes meaning.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that to refer to something as a fiction or construction is not to deny its real effects and consequences. On the contrary, it allows us to probe the material physical and psychic violence done by such constructions. Nietzsche invites us to become attentive to narratives of cause and effect and the ways in which responsibility, in its relationship to causality,

⁷⁹ Ibid. 45

⁸⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Gay Science; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 1st ed. (New York,: Vintage Books, 1974). 112

⁸¹ Nietzsche, Nietzsche, and Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. 45

operates as a convention, a conceptual tool that allows for the stabilization and interpretation of actions, moments and events.

It is often assumed that the exposure of concepts as constructed or as fictitious ultimately leads to nihilism, a charge that has been leveled against Nietzsche himself.⁸² However, to speak of the constructed and contested nature of responsibility is not to render it inconsequential; a charge to which Nietzsche vehemently objects.⁸³ The truth, in fact, is precisely the opposite: fictions are where the action is and most importantly, where the politics of responsibility becomes visible. By resisting the enclosures of dehistoricized and naturalized concepts, Nietzsche helps put responsibility back on the political map. In effect, by troubling the metaphysical ground upon which responsibility supposedly stands, Nietzsche foregrounds responsibility as a site of inquiry rather than one of passive obedience.

Initiating a Politics of Responsibility

⁸² For examples see, Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche and Nihilism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 1., and William Vollmann, "Friedrich Nietzsche: The Constructive Nihilist," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2005. Ironically, of course, Nietzsche viewed an uncritical stance toward and acceptance of the given morality as the epitome of nihilism itself. For example, in Walter Kaufman's biography of Nietzsche he demonstrates the way in which Nietzsche characterized much of the philosophical work of his age as nihilistic and "believed that, to overcome nihilism, we must first of all recognize it." Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *Nietzsche, Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974). 110

⁸³ As Raffoul notes, Nietzsche was insistent on the fact that making morality a problem and exposing it as the product of "error" was actually about "reengaging our tradition and its concepts, an attempt at reevaluating its values, that is, reevaluate the value of values..." Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*. 81

Writing prior to the 2010-midterm elections, David Brooks dedicated his column to an examination of what he called, “the responsibility deficit” in America.⁸⁴ In the article, Brooks laments a loss of accountability and taps into public resentment over the severed “connection between action and consequences” in American life, arguing, “what the country is really looking for is a restoration of responsibility.”⁸⁵ To be sure, Brooks draws his inspiration from lawyer and author Philip K. Howard who writes extensively on the ways in which the American political and legal systems continue to undermine the personal responsibility of ordinary citizens.⁸⁶ Both Brooks and Howard, are part of a larger chorus who treat responsibility as an object of loss, something that must be recovered and something that we must get back to, calling for clear moral standards and increased personal accountability or objective conceptions of obligation, in order to redeem our cultures, our communities, and ourselves.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ David Brooks, "The Responsibility Deficit," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2010.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See for example, Philip K. Howard, *The Death of Common Sense: How Law Is Suffocating America* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1994); *Life without Lawyers: Liberating Americans from Too Much Law*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); *The Lost Art of Drawing the Line: How Fairness Went Too Far*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2001); *The Rule of Nobody: Saving America from Dead Laws and Broken Government*, First edition. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

⁸⁷ Highlighting a loss or death of responsibility is in fact one of the key rhetorical moves used by political actors in disarming policy prescriptions. For example, recent debates around the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) were flooded with commentary by opponents of the law that decried the Act as yet one more example of the erosion of personal responsibility in contemporary America. Some even went as far as sounding the death knell for responsibility in light of the laws passage. See for example, Vik Khanna to The Health Care Blog, July 14, 2013; Ed Rogers, "The Insiders: Obamacare Discourages Work," *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2014.

However, these “knights of responsibility” (as Derrida refers to them) fail to acknowledge responsibility’s deeply paradoxical nature.⁸⁸ Derrida highlights the aporia that lies at responsibility’s core, namely that we are responsible and can act responsibly only while simultaneously acting irresponsibly. By acting responsibly, “I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the others whom I don’t know.”⁸⁹ How then are we to conceptualize what it means (or should mean) to be responsible to others? To ourselves? Or, to use the language of liberal political theory, how are we to distribute our obligations and responsibilities in the face of not just the other who stands directly in front of us, but everyone else? For Derrida, it is clear that there is no objective or simply just distribution; rather, “There is no front between responsibility and irresponsibility, but only between different appropriations of the same sacrifice, different orders of responsibility.”⁹⁰

What changes when we begin our analysis with the idea that responsibility is in fact impossible and paradoxical rather than wholly rational and knowable? I argue that beginning from this position actually opens up the possibility of thinking politically about responsibility and allows us to interrogate the ways in which the rhetoric of responsibility does important political work. Beginning from a space of impossibility reveals precisely why it is important to become attentive to the articulations and representations of responsibility that abound in political life. If it is the case that responsibility always fails in one sense and achieves or

⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida and Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death; &, Literature in Secret*, 2nd ed., Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). 68

⁸⁹ Ibid. 69

⁹⁰ Ibid. 70

authorizes in another, then it is imperative to examine exactly how and why it fails and succeeds, but also, and more importantly, what types of responsibility succeed and why? When do they succeed? In relation to whom? In what contexts? The political and ethical injunction offered to us by Derrida is deceptively simple: pay attention when engaging in a language-game as familiar as responsibility in contemporary politics.

The Political Work of Responsibility

Political life is always in flux and cannot and should not be wholly fixed.⁹¹

Responsibility rhetoric creates a narrative by which political moments and the political itself may be rendered fixed and intelligible. Attributions and definitions of responsibility attempt to stabilize that which cannot be stabilized. This stabilization is often done by conceiving of responsibility as that which is beyond the political, something from outside that can be brought in as a moral claim or Truth about the world.

In this regard, the rhetoric of responsibility appeals to a desire to escape groundlessness and instability. However, responsibility's role in fulfilling this desire does not operate outside of political contexts. Not every narrative of responsibility, not every causal attribution, not every definition of obligation or impulse to blame will satisfy this desire for fixity and stability. Even Nietzsche points to the fact that successful narratives of stabilization are those that are most

⁹¹ In one sense, Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision* can be read as an exploration of the ways in which different theorists in the Western canon have dealt with the dynamic and often chaotic nature of political life, from Plato's attempt to stabilize the disordered world of politics with the world of the forms to Hobbes' imposition of the leviathan and Machiavelli's recognition of contingency as a constitutive feature of political life. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*.

familiar to us.⁹² That sense of familiarity provides comfort but, of course, what is comfortable and what is familiar do not lie outside of the juridical and normative frameworks that are the stuff of political life. Throughout this project I demonstrate the ways in which politics and responsibility are mutually constitutive, entangled, not aligned serially. Responsibility is contested space. Accordingly, I offer an analysis that foregrounds the relationship between responsibility and discourses of power, ideology and normativity.

Responsibility does political work by operating as a knowledge claim about Others, ourselves and the world. It is, as Connolly has described it, Janus-faced, “both indispensable to social practice and at the same time productive of injustice within it.”⁹³ Rather than simply calling attention to those who should be held responsible, ascriptions of responsibility may actually serve to produce the subjects it marks. Similarly, conceptions of responsible action do not simply refer but instead function in a number of ways as both repressive and productive. For this reason, I envision three concrete principles of responsibility that I explore in greater detail throughout the following chapters. First, responsibility constructs and authorizes specific conceptions of political and communal life. Second, responsibility plays a key role in the process of subject formation, marking the boundaries of the normal and abnormal, the acceptable and pathological. Third,

⁹² As Nietzsche argues in *Twilight of the Idols*, “Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown – the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states.” But, he argues, “only our most habitual explanations” will “abolish the feeling of the strange.” This is a subject I take up in greater detail in Chapter Three with an analysis of responsibility and the economic crisis of 2008. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*. 62

⁹³ William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). 96

responsibility mediates political reality by structuring the horizon of possible ways to perceive and respond to problems, which means that it plays an integral role in conditioning what we can see and hear as well as how we evaluate the political.

Such a move requires that responsibility be situated within specific historical, cultural and discursive contexts. As Connolly points out, responsibility is not a simple universal, but particular as well as contingent. Reflecting on current uses of responsibility, he suggests, “In other times and places it [responsibility] was not so agent-centered as it is today: the primary locus of responsibility was often the family or the clan rather than the individual...and sometimes the gods absorbed a portion of the guilt; if not the responsibility, moderns distribute among themselves.”⁹⁴ Connolly illustrates responsibility’s ontological instability, characterized by shaky ground and constant movement. A floating signifier, responsibility attaches itself to a diverse array of ever-shifting entities. Accordingly, “The history of Western thought is full of attempts to relocate the locus of responsibility: from humanity to the gods, from god to humanity, from collectivity to the individual, from the past to the present, and again, from the individual to a new vision of collectivity.”⁹⁵

This suggests that it is possible and even necessary to speak of different objects of responsibility, subjects of responsibility, sites of responsibility and

⁹⁴ Ibid. 96. It’s important to note that Connolly’s point here is not exactly novel. There are a host of contemporary thinkers who have tracked the movement of responsibility in this way, most notably, MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics.*, Smiley, *Moral Responsibility and the Boundaries of Community: Power and Accountability from a Pragmatic Point of View.*, and Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁹⁵ Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox.* 96, 97

practices of responsibility that conjure and rely upon different conceptions of self, time, place and community. In examining responsibility as a political problem, I read for these movements and attend to the discursive regimes and ideological strategies associated with these shifts. Emphasizing responsibility as a form of rhetoric, with a focus on meaning-making and language use, allows for political analysis because it provides the tools with which to probe specific conceptions of responsibility being offered at particular moments and in response to specific sets of circumstances. In so doing, my analysis interrogates what is done in responsibility's name and under its authority.

Structure of Argument

Recently, a great deal of scholarly work has attempted to rethink responsibility in an attempt to move it away from the paradigms of accountability and obligation in order to sever responsibility from its linkages to the autonomous liberal subject.⁹⁶ While this diverse body of work provides an important touchstone for my project and informs my thinking about responsibility, I depart from these concerns

⁹⁶ A great deal of this work has been influenced by Levinas' work on responsibility as first philosophy. Under the broad heading of what's come to be known as the ethical turn, many contemporary thinkers have emphasized the response aspect of responsibility and specifically the relationship with the Other as the fundamental relation constitutive of responsibility. No doubt, this is a great simplification, and these works vary a great deal, however, examples of this approach include, Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Peter Baker, *Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995); Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London; New York: Verso, 2008); Chad Lavin, *The Politics of Responsibility* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility*; Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); Annika Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility*, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, Oxford Political Philosophy (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

because mine is ultimately not a project that seeks to formulate a normative ethics or conceptualize new grounds for responsibility. Rather, by placing responsibility in discrete political contexts, I propose to create what Michel Foucault called, “an ontology of the present,” by which he meant, an understanding of the range of values, experiences and possibilities that comprise our present political moment.⁹⁷

With this task in mind, I examine three specific political contexts in which responsibility has played a crucial role in shaping public perception and engagement. In Chapter Two, *Tragic Heroes and Torturable Bodies: Terror and the Politics of Responsibility*, I argue that torture discourse in the United States following 9/11 has been dependant upon a problematic politics of responsibility that is inextricably bound to an Orientalist notion of irresponsibility. Torture discourse helps to produce an image of the responsible leader that mirrors the liberal subject of choice, autonomy and accountability. Far from possessing a purely rational basis, more specifically, the image of the responsible leader emphasizes a set of emotional performances that include remorse, guilt, and regret. This stands in contrast to the image of the irrational Islamic subject cast as a product of a “culture of death” that forecloses the possibility of agency and responsibility. As opposed to the responsible leader, these emotions are not evidence of morality and remorse, but an irrational and irresponsible subject ruled by rage, anger and resentment.

I read these two discourses as parallel to one another to see how they continually reinscribe a mind/body split that distinguishes the reasonable from the

⁹⁷ Michel Foucault and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988). 87

irrational and the responsible from the pathological. Most importantly, American torture discourse uses responsibility to humanize and make visible the leader as an individual while the terror discourse renders the Islamic subject irresponsible and thus non-human. I therefore address the ways in which responsibility operates discursively to humanize and constitute visible, legible subjects. This framework places responsibility at the center of thinking about who has access to the category of the human and how exclusion from that category works to produce torturable bodies that are subject to cruelty and violence.

In Chapter Three, *Rogue Traders, Suspect Citizens and the Invisible Hand: Crisis in the Theater of Responsibility*, I examine the relationship between responsibility and the economic crisis of 2008 in order to demonstrate the role responsibility discourse plays in framing ways of understanding and responding to political problems. Specifically, I argue that within the context of that crisis, there was a marked shift from an anthropomorphizing “market-talk” that displaces human agency to an active naming and production of blameworthy subjects. This, I suggest serves a political and ideological function by focusing attention on individuals and groups and away from a confrontation with the normative and systemic violence of capitalism itself. By attending to the multiple corollary discourses of responsibility through which that economic crisis was and is framed, I catalog the ways in which responsibility renders political moments intelligible through ascriptions of blame and accountability. I suggest that in order to respond effectively to normative problems, systemic violence, and structural injustice it is important to first deconstruct the economic discourse that shuttles between a

market-centered model of responsibility and an agent-centered blame model of responsibility, both of which serve to sustain the sanctity of the market.

In Chapter Four, *Whose Future? Environmentalism and the Queering of Intergenerational Responsibility*, I explore the role responsibility plays in constructing and authorizing specific conceptions of communal life. I do so by exploring the idea of responsibility to future generations, and argue that an environmental politics organized around an ethics of intergenerational responsibility is bound to a heteronormative conception of the future. To rework these norms I ask the following: what categories underpin, define and delimit our imagination of the future? I argue that notions of environmental responsibility are already prefigured by and built out of assumptions regarding what is and what is not worth sustaining for the future. Drawing upon and in dialogue with scholarship from queer theory, I advance a conception of responsibility that operates in what Judith Halberstam refers to as queer time and place – a set of practices that operate against the logic of a future tied to reproducing the heteronormative family and heterosexual desire. I argue that this framework both challenges the idea of intergenerational responsibility and allows for a rethinking of the temporalities and subjectivities theorists bring to bear in their engagements with environmental politics.

Finally, in Chapter Five, *Rhetoric and the Violence of Responsibility*, I reemphasize the core argument of this project – that is, that responsibility as rhetoric does significant political work. But I also offer some pointed takeaways regarding the intimate relationship between responsibility and violence. In

recasting responsibility in light of its relationship to violence, I conclude by reflecting on the ways in which responsibility is used to mark the very limits of human life and offer a framework for approaching the question of whose lives count as livable?

Ultimately, this project is about more than just a simple act of unmasking the unspoken truth of responsibility in the face of so many operations that work to conceal its political force. Rather, it is my intention to demonstrate the significance of responsibility's political uses not only because we often miss them but also because we are often implicated in them. In this regard, if my project disturbs the familiarity of responsibility for the reader, allowing that reader to confront responsibility as a rhetorical inscription and not an objective description of people and/or events then I will have succeeded. In working to recast our orientation towards the use of moral language in politics it is my hope that ultimately we begin taking responsibility for the rhetoric of responsibility itself, and all of its attendant concepts, especially when they are used in our name and in the name of justice.

Chapter Two: Tragic Heroes and Torturable Bodies: Terror and the Politics of Responsibility

But what is especially intriguing is the ingenuity of liberal discourse in rendering inhumane acts humane. This is certainly something that savage discourse cannot achieve.

Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing

On November 5th 2001, with the smell of ash and smoke still engulfing lower Manhattan, *Newsweek* published a bluntly titled article, “Time to think about Torture.”⁹⁸ The article foreshadowed many of the tropes now associated with 9/11. In particular, it previewed the dominant discourses of trauma and victimization that would emerge to shape September 11th as an event replete with its own signifiers, symbols and meanings. Most importantly, the article played with a now familiar theme that the America of September 10th no longer existed. This argument was meant to imply that the world had fundamentally changed, ushering in a new and more dangerous epoch of international politics, violence and warfare. Indeed, in a direct challenge to Francis Fukuyama’s claim that “we had entered the end of history back in 1992,⁹⁹ September 12 marked a new – and worse – beginning for history. Accordingly, the article suggested the it was time to “take the gloves off,” and proclaimed, “In this autumn of anger, even a liberal can find his thoughts turning to torture.”¹⁰⁰

It is within this highly tense and emotionally charged context that a public discussion regarding the necessity of torture as a component of the tactical and strategic apparatus to deal with the threat of terrorism began to take shape.

⁹⁸ "Time to Think About Torture," *Newsweek*, November 5th 2001.

⁹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York and Toronto; Free Press: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992).

¹⁰⁰ "Time to Think About Torture."

Twelve years later, in the wake of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and the publication of what have now come to be known as the “torture memos,” much debate has focused on whether or not those involved in the U.S. torture program should be held morally and legally accountable for their actions. There is no doubt that a number of important ethical and legal questions have been raised regarding the torture of detainees held in U.S. custody, the rendition of terror suspects to international black sites for torture by allied regimes, indefinite detention and the denial of due process to those categorized as enemy combatants. However, I want to begin with Paul Kahn’s assertion that “theory’s role must be to explain torture as a political phenomenon, not to simply identify it as a legal violation,” which “can only be achieved by examining the manner in which violence creates and sustains political meaning.”¹⁰¹ With this in mind I ask, how is torture being talked and thought about in the United States. How is it being talked about in relation to terror? What assumptions and extant discursive and ideological systems prefigure these responses?

In this chapter I argue that torture discourse in the United States is dependent upon a problematic politics of responsibility that is inextricably bound to an Orientalist notion of irresponsibility. Torture discourse helps to produce an image of the responsible leader that mirrors the liberal subject of choice, autonomy and accountability. Far from possessing a purely rational basis, more specifically, the image of the responsible leader emphasizes a set of emotional performances sublimated to reason that include remorse, guilt, and regret. This, in

¹⁰¹ Paul W. Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror, and Sovereignty*, Law, Meaning, and Violence (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). 4

turn, stands in contrast to an image of the irrational Islamic subject cast as a product of a “culture of death” that forecloses the possibility of agency and responsibility. As opposed to the responsible leader, the emotions emphasized here are not evidence of morality and remorse, but an irrational and irresponsible subject ruled by his emotions – rage, anger, and resentment.

Accordingly, I read these two discourses as interdependent, highlighting the ways in which they continually reinscribe a mind/body split that distinguishes the reasonable from the irrational and the responsible from the pathological. Most importantly, American torture discourse uses responsibility to humanize and make visible the leader as an individual while the terror discourse renders the Islamic subject irresponsible and thus non-human. I therefore address the ways in which responsibility operates discursively to humanize and make subjects visible. This framework begs the question of who has access to the category of the human and how exclusion from that category works to produce torturable bodies that are subject to cruelty and violence.

Dirty Hands

The question of torture and the problems it poses for liberalism predate post-September 11th discussions and the War on Terror.¹⁰² Most famously, within the Western philosophical canon, the torture problem has been represented within the framework of the problem of dirty hands. For this reason I turn to this literature to

¹⁰² See e.g. Henry Charles Lea, *Torture, Sources of Medieval History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1973). Daniel P. Mannix, *The History of Torture*, Sutton History Classics (Phoenix Mill, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub., 2003); John M. Parrish, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

understand how the problem of torture produces and relies upon a specific type of responsible subject in the image of the responsible leader. In particular, I seek to examine how this image is made legible and visible through its juxtaposition against a parallel discourse about terrorism that takes shape through the construction of an irresponsible Other.

In the now famous essay, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," Michael Walzer defines the problem of dirty hands as a paradox in which:

“...a particular act of government (in a political party or state) may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong. The innocent man, afterwards, is no longer innocent. If on the other hand he remains innocent...he not only fails to do the right thing (in utilitarian terms) he may also fail to measure up to the duties of his office.”¹⁰³

Simply put, Walzer here attempts to engage the paradoxical situation that arises frequently in political life where, as the colloquialism goes, one might have to “do bad in order to do good.” Crucially, the problem of dirty hands, according to Walzer, is not anomalous or exceptional but rather a constitutive feature of political life.

The dilemma of dirty hands rests upon certain assumptions and implicit arguments about the nature of political life and the conditions that give way to extraordinary action. Most importantly, it assumes the existence of a moral sphere that can be identified and known and that lies external to not only the political world but also the material world in general. This assumes the existence of a space external to politics in which certain universal standards of conduct bind moral agents and insists that one is able to know what constitutes moral and

¹⁰³ Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1973). 3

responsible action in a purportedly non-political sphere. It is this moral sphere that constantly runs up against and gives way in the face of the political challenges of contingency, exigency and necessity.

For instance, Max Weber asks pointedly in “Politics as a Vocation,” “what relations do ethics and politics actually have?”¹⁰⁴ The question already assumes the potential for conflict between what Weber classifies as an “ethic of ultimate ends” where one acts in accordance with prefigured ends and principles regardless of the costs, and an “ethic of responsibility,” where one must account for the consequences of their actions.¹⁰⁵ Weber argues that the potential for conflict between different codes of ethical conduct is ever-present in politics, where “No ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of ‘good’ ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones.”¹⁰⁶

Weber ultimately assumes that any man built for politics and political life must accede to the harsh reality that he will have no choice but to violate accepted moral norms and be tragically altered as a result. The only suitable disposition for Weber’s responsible leader is that of living in the tense and paradoxical space between the “ethic of ultimate ends” and the ethic of responsibility.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Walzer’s formulation builds upon a tension between conflicting responsibilities

¹⁰⁴ Max Weber, Hans Heinrich Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946). 118

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 120

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 121

¹⁰⁷ For instance, Weber writes, “Whoever wants to engage in politics at all, and especially in politics as a vocation, has to realize these ethical paradoxes. He must know that he is responsible for what may become of himself under the impact of these paradoxes.” *ibid.* 125

that arise as a result of the office or position that an individual inhabits. The problem of dirty hands posits that to engage in political life is to be confronted with situations in which the unthinkable becomes not only thinkable, but also necessary and thus doable. John Parrish emphasizes this idea in his definition of dirty hands, arguing that, “it has long been a truism that significant moral dilemmas arise more frequently within the political arena than they do anywhere else. Power seems to invite its practitioners to do what would be unthinkable to them in ordinary life.”¹⁰⁸ This idea that different spheres of life will require individuals to assume and perform differing responsibilities that may conflict with one another harkens back to Kant’s essay, “What is Enlightenment?” which posits that while one might be responsible – as a cosmopolitan scholar and citizen of the world – for thinking for one’s self, speaking out, and criticizing freely, the individual in his official capacity as a soldier or state official is bound to fulfill those obligations that arise as a result of his position.¹⁰⁹

This public-private split is basic to Western configurations of responsibility. It is also essential to the way in which torture is situated in the framework of the dirty hands narrative at the center of liberal discourse; while the political leader may abhor the violence of dirty hands as a man, in taking on the responsibility of his office, he understands that this is what must be done. In this regard, the dirty hands literature constructs an image of the tragic hero who is

¹⁰⁸ Parrish, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand*. 2

¹⁰⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What Is Enlightenment*, 2nd ed., The Library of Liberal Arts (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995).

forced to sacrifice his sense of morality for the sake of others in a moment of emergency.

However, most importantly, for Walzer and others working in the dirty hands tradition, the paradox between action that might be politically necessary but also morally wrong is never entirely resolvable.¹¹⁰ Indeed, recognition that the act in question will violate moral norms lies at the heart of seeing dirty hands as a moral dilemma in the first place. While the utilitarian position would dismiss this moral dilemma by insisting that the only tenable moral and ethical position is that which maximizes the greatest good and minimizes the greatest harm for the greatest number, the dirty hands position sees an irreconcilable conflict wherein the action remains simultaneously right and wrong.¹¹¹ As Stephen De Wijze contends, "The primary insight arising from dirty hands scenarios is that it is possible for an action to be justified, even morally obligatory, yet nevertheless somehow also wrong."¹¹² The persistence of the conflict, ironically, fortifies both the actor's sense of responsibility and recognition of his humanity.

Up until this point I have focused on some general aspects of the problem of dirty hands. However, a crucial question remains. Exactly what type of action constitutes dirty hands? Is it any action violates the assumed backdrop of moral norms? Is it only the most extreme types of actions that fall within the realm of physical violence and harm? Indeed, the question of which actions fall within this category have been the subject of philosophical debate, in part because Walzer

¹¹⁰ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands."

¹¹¹ Parrish, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand*.

¹¹² Stephen De Wijze, "Tragic Remorse: The Anguish of Dirty Hands," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 7, no. 5 (2005).

presents his readers with two very different and extreme examples of dirty hands in his article – the politician who lies and makes backroom deals to win an election and the politician who licenses the torture of a suspected rebel in captivity.¹¹³ It is not my intention here to rehash these debates or to iron out the ambiguities of how one defines actions that constitute dirty hands. Instead, since my focus is the question of responsibility, I turn to the dirty hands literature to examine how it positions torture within this paradoxical space of doing the unthinkable or doing wrong in order to do right.

Ticking Time Bombs and Liberal Hearts

Walzer situates torture within the now in/famous framework of the “ticking time bomb scenario,” in which a political leader “is asked to authorize the torture of a captured rebel leader who knows or *probably* knows the location of a number of bombs hidden in apartment buildings around the city, set to go off within the next twenty-four hours.” He orders the man tortured, convinced that he must do so for the sake of the people who might otherwise die in the explosions – even though he believes that torturing is wrong, indeed abominable, not just sometimes, but always.”¹¹⁴

That the ticking time bomb scenario used in Walzer’s article has become famous is no trivial matter. In other chapters throughout this project, I devote a

¹¹³ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." See also, David P. Shugarman and Paul Rynard, *Cruelty and Deception: The Controversy over Dirty Hands in Politics* (Peterborough, Ont. and Australia: Broadview Press: Pluto Press, 2000); Stuart Hampshire, *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹¹⁴ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." 9

great deal of space to analyzing the specific rhetoric of political actors. In this chapter, I engage with the philosophical underpinnings of the dirty hands argument precisely because of the way in which it became ubiquitous following 9/11. The question of dirty hands, the ticking time bomb, and its use as a justification for torture found its way into just about every discussion regarding how to rationalize the practice of torture against suspected terrorists during interrogation. Given the rarity with which philosophical arguments become part of popular discourse, my intention here is to spend time with not only the original texts themselves but the most recent uses of this line of thinking to rationalize torture with what Michael Rogin refers to as the “liberal self-image.” In my use of the dirty hands framework, I therefore do not claim that this is how President Bush or any of his cabinet members and senior advisers saw themselves during the course of their actions. I restrict my analysis to the phenomena itself.

Following September 11th the hypothetical example began to proliferate beyond philosophical debate and into popular discussions about torture in television and print media.¹¹⁵ It became a familiar dramatic set up in widely popular television shows like *24* and films like *Batman: The Dark Knight* and *Unbreakable*. Indeed, even the then director of the CIA Leon Panetta got in on the act when he assured Congress that “If we had a ticking bomb situation, and

¹¹⁵ For examples see: Frontline, “The Torture Question: Is Torture Ever Justified,” PBS., Charles Krauthammer and Andrew Sullivan, “Case Study: Terrorist Hides Bomb. Terrorist Is Captured, but Won’t Speak. Is Torture O.K.?” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2005., Joseph Lelybeld, “Interrogating Ourselves” *ibid.*, June 12, 2005., Alfred W. McCoy, “The Myth of the Ticking Time Bomb,” *The Progressive*, October 2006., Emily Messner, “Does Torture Work,” *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2005., Lance Morrow, “Torture and Terrorism: The Ticking Time Bomb Theory,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2006.

obviously, whatever was being used I felt was not sufficient, I would not hesitate to go to the president of the United States and request whatever additional authority I would need.”¹¹⁶ These examples all point toward the fact that though Walzer’s argument dates back to the 1970’s it has indeed become the hegemonic lens through which the problem of torture is represented in contemporary America and thus worthy of interrogation (no pun intended).

From the outset then, contemporary discussions about torture in the West arise in response to the dynamics of a terrorist threat. Moreover, in these discussions, torture is pitched at the register of a moral dilemma, something that makes us uncomfortable and uneasy. This plays on the cultural assumption that liberal societies are uncomfortable with violence and the notion that not only do certain types of violence not come easy to “us,” but in addition, run counter to a coherent set of values and moral norms. As Parrish suggests, conflicts about dirty hands persist “because they are motivated by a fundamental incommensurability among our most deeply felt human demands, and by a moral schizophrenia that seems to increasingly characterize our late modern condition.”¹¹⁷

The notion that liberalism is indeed uncomfortable with violence and inimical to torture has no shortage of supporters. For instance, Michael Ignatieff in his argument for the permissibility of torture in specific instances writes, “There is not much doubt that liberal democracy’s very history and identity is tied up in an absolute prohibition of torture... Liberal democracy stands up against

¹¹⁶ Mark Mazzetti, "Panetta Open to Tougher Methods in Some C.I.A. Interrogation," *The New York Times* (2009), http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/us/politics/06cia.html?_r=1.

¹¹⁷ Parrish, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand*. 12

torture because it stands against any unlimited use of public authority against human beings and torture is the most unlimited form of power that one person can exercise over another.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, David Luban argues that liberalism stands in opposition to torture not out of compassion but rather because of torture’s intimate relationship to cruelty and tyranny. For Luban, the history of torture “has always been bound up with military conquest, regal punishment, dictatorial terror, forced confessions and the repression of dissident belief – a veritable catalogue of the evils of absolutist government that liberalism abhors.”¹¹⁹

In response, I want to suggest that positioning torture as a dilemma within the dirty hands framework helps humanize violence, which in turn allows the liberal heart to overcome its supposed dis-ease with torture. The question of torture within the dirty hands framework rests upon the dual criteria of urgency and necessity. In terms of urgency, the ticking time bomb scenario is one in which there is little to no time. Every second counts and every second that goes by is a second closer to detonation. As a result of the urgency and exceptionality of the situation torture becomes a tragically necessary departure from moral norms, producing what Oren Gross refers to as a “tension of tragic dimensions.”¹²⁰ It is in this context that Ignatieff argues for what he calls a “lesser evil morality,” in which it might be necessary to torture even if it represents a departure from a liberal sense of morality or commitment to democratic values such as respect for

¹¹⁸ Michael Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*, Gifford Lectures (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). 136

¹¹⁹ David Luban, "Liberalism and the Unpleasant Question of Torture," *Virginia Law Review* 91, no. 6 (2005).

¹²⁰ Oren Gross, *Law in Times of Crisis: Emergency Powers in Theory and Practice*, Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 488

human rights and dignity. The argument depends on his supposition that “democratic evil is the evil of good intentions, necessary because of evil people.”¹²¹

But in what context does it become necessary to torture? Luban suggests that liberalism’s dilemma with torture may be reconciled through arguments that cast torture as an instrument employed to extract the information necessary to save lives.¹²² This is of course a moment where the moral arguments about torture are fused to pragmatic aims. Walzer’s responsible leader is one who tortures not out of a desire to enact cruelty or participate in brutality, but rather for instrumental reasons – to achieve the most desired and most incontestable ends – the saving of innocent lives.¹²³ Notwithstanding the work of those who have criticized the use of torture as a method of extracting reliable information, arguing that individuals under conditions of extreme stress and subject to brutal conditions of physical and psychic violence will not produce reliable information there are those, such as Fritz Allhoff, who have argued that the only context in which liberal societies should opt for torture is in the context of producing information.¹²⁴

Finally, the dilemma of dirty hands and the supposed conflict between the practice of torture and liberalism has given way to debates about the possibility of making torture a more “responsible” practice in terms of both procedure and tactics. In this vein, Alan Dershowitz has made arguments in favor of what he

¹²¹ Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*. 10

¹²² Luban, "Liberalism and the Unpleasant Question of Torture."

¹²³ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands."

¹²⁴ Fritz Allhoff, "Terrorism and Torture," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2003).

calls “torture warrants” that would require a political official to obtain a warrant from a judge prior to licensing torture as a way to regulate the practice and force public justifications of such dire actions.¹²⁵ With regard to tactics “Much of the legal discussion about torture revolves around the decision as to what precisely constitutes torture.”¹²⁶ Both domestic and international law attempts to parse the differences between torture, and cruel and inhumane treatment. Similarly, the torture memos were attempts at construing the precise nature of what does or does not constitute torture in order to establish the acceptable threshold for conduct by officials and interrogators. In these debates, the liberal problematic becomes a matter of “identifying the justifying exceptions and defining what forms of duress stop short of absolute degradation of an interrogation subject.”¹²⁷ However, what escapes legal categorization is the bodily dimension of torture that constitutes more than calibrated levels of pain or force to include the total domination and humiliation of the victim, coupled with the ascription of responsibility for that pain to the victim himself.¹²⁸

Torture and the Making Human of Responsibility

While most philosophical and legal scholarship on the question of torture explores the problem of responsibility from the perspective of a conflict between politics and ethics, what has gone unexplored is the way in which this work is itself a part

¹²⁵ Alan M. Dershowitz, "The Torture Warrant: A Response to Professor Strauss," *New York Law School Law Review* 48 (2003).

¹²⁶ Orren Gross, "Chaos and Rules: Should Responses to Violent Crises Always Be Constitutional?," *Yale Law Journal* 112 (2003). 232

¹²⁷ Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*. 141

¹²⁸ See e.g. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

of a larger discursive apparatus that produces a liberal political imaginary regarding the relationship between ethics, politics and violence. As Talal Asad argues, “The interrogation center is not merely a source of information and a place where abuse may happen. It is a site where a particular kind of identity is typified and dealt with.”¹²⁹ In the following sections I examine how torture and terror discourses function in tandem to contribute to an epistemology of responsibility that produces torturable bodies, responsible subjects and irresponsible cultures. Attending to this epistemology of responsibility is crucial for thinking about how certain individuals and cultures are produced as “responsible” and how others function as “irresponsible” constitutive exclusions. Such distinctions draw on a host of asymmetrical oppositions familiar to colonial discourse such as: individual/culture, secular/religious, mind/body. For instance, as Abdel Jan Mohammad writes in the “Economy of the Manichean Allegory,” “The dominant model of power and interest relations in all colonial societies is the Manichean opposition between the superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist representation – the Manichean Allegory – a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotions, rationality and sensuality, self and other, subject and object.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Talal Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, Wellek Library Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). 30

¹³⁰ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1.

Within this framework I highlight the binary opposition between responsibility and irresponsibility. In fact, the historical development of liberal responsibility that relies upon a matrix of causality, agency, will, and intention arises out of the imagined opposition between individualism, reason and autonomy on one side and culture, unreason and religion on the other.¹³¹ However, what is most interesting is the way in which this opposition has functioned politically to distinguish between groups and populations, advancing logics of ruling and doing violence to others while reconciling the use of violence with what Michael Rogin refers to as “the liberal self-image.”¹³²

Though despite the fact that it is this very opposition between responsibility and irresponsibility that licenses the torture of specific groups of people, it is precisely the inability of liberalism to be reflective about its relationship to violence that leads Paul Kahn to argue that, “In truth, liberalism has nothing interesting to say about torture.”¹³³ However, in his dismissal Kahn misses the dynamic relationship that exists between current debates about torture and their reliance on a conception of liberal subjectivity and personhood. The very idea of who may be tortured and what violence is justifiable relies upon the way in which liberal thought and practice makes use of the concept of responsibility to render certain individuals visible within the category of the human and certain individuals outside the framework of dignity, rights and recognition.

¹³¹ See e.g. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹³² Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

¹³³ Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror, and Sovereignty*. 5

For instance, Kahn goes on to argue that, “The modern liberal state was to be a state in which individuals could flourish in the pursuit of life plans that they chose for themselves. This state was willing to abandon torture and instead try to respect an ideal of Kantian morality – to treat everyone with the dignity due to an autonomous rational agent... This vision of security, respect and mutual well being has been at the heart of the project of the liberal nation state.”¹³⁴ Yet, Kahn fails to engage the way in which the liberal project and the production of liberal subjectivity has always relied upon and been produced in relation to its “Other.” This is no minor or trivial point given that the Kantian ethics that Kahn invokes are in fact based not on difference but similitude. Responsibility to others is constituted by the proper recognition of another ego, another rational and willing agent, who is both autonomous and self-legislating.

For Kant, to be a person, to be human, is bound to the idea of self-responsibility. The capacity for freedom and thus the capacity to be responsible for one’s self distinguishes persons from objects—responsibility and the possibility of being responsible divides the human from the non-human, the subject from the object, the person from the thing.¹³⁵ Similarly, for Locke, the idea of personhood is directly linked to the concept of responsibility. Writing in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke distinguishes the categories of man and person, identifying man with the body and personhood with

¹³⁴ Ibid. 7

¹³⁵ See e.g. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What Is Enlightenment., Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Harper Torchbooks. (New York: Harper, 1960); *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck, 3rd ed., The Library of Liberal Arts (New York; Toronto: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1993).

consciousness and rationality.¹³⁶ The idea of self-reflection and the ability for a person to reflect on his past and future actions is a crucial feature of moral agency. To be a person in the Lockean sense is to be capable of receiving praise, blame and possessing the capacity to obey the law. It is this conception of responsibility and subjectivity that has become the bedrock of modern liberal thought and practice.

But to return to a question I posed in the introduction to this project, what are the political implications of this ghostly inheritance bequeathed to us by both Locke and Kant? The twinning of responsibility and personhood points toward the ways in which responsibility and designations of responsibility are often used in politics to mark the very limits of human life. The category of humanness is not an objective category but rather dependent on that which it excludes – the non-human, the inhuman, which include the irrational and the irresponsible. Thus to speak of the connection between personhood and self-responsibility already presupposes a designation based upon who is seen as possessing the capacity for rational action and responsibility.

My intention, however, is to trace the legacy of the responsible/irresponsible binary and its relationship to humanness in order to foreground its important role in the construction of knowable others – specifically, others that can be tortured. A political approach to responsibility requires interrogating the ways in which this binary has played a crucial role in the construction of distinct notions of community and has functioned as a

¹³⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A.D. Woozley (New York: Meridian, 1974). See Book 13.

foundational component of projects of expansion, colonization, domination and exploitation. The use of “metaphysical matter of facts” about individuals, groups and entire populations have long since functioned to authorize violence and the governance of others, allowing for disclaiming responsibility in the name of responsibility. Thus, the question of who is capable of being responsible cannot be severed from the highly racialized and gendered development of the category of humanness itself.

Those positioned outside the framework of personhood constituted by a specific conception of autonomy, rationality and most importantly, responsibility that is both highly gendered and racialized have continuously become the licensed targets of violence. It has been a constitutive part of the liberal project to secure its boundaries and police its borders through this regulation and production of identity and difference. This in turn has allowed for the practice of liberal violence in the name of responsibility against irresponsible “Others.”

Imaging/Imagining the Responsible Leader – Torture, Reason, Emotion

Weber and Walzer focus exclusively on the individual political actor, politician or leader, and not broader institutional or bureaucratic structures of decision-making. This is important to remember because the discourse of torture runs through the individual – and specifically, an individual that is the product of a host of cultural and metaphysical assumptions about the self. But what is implied by this focus on the individual rather than collective publics? What conception of responsibility does it produce? How does it frame the question of torture? In this section I argue

that in addition to providing a specific framework for conceptualizing the question of torture, the dirty hands literature also works to construct an image of the responsible leader. This image produces an epistemology of responsibility that relies upon a reinscription of the metaphysical tropes and assumptions of liberal subjectivity as well as a typology of moral emotions that casts the responsible leader as a sympathetic and tragic hero, while occluding cultural and institutional elements from consideration.

To focus on the responsible leader is first and foremost to individuate the question of torture, reducing it to specific instances and moments of decision. The question of torture becomes a matter of contingency and not a question of culture—a moment, a decision, a choice, but not a structural, social or cultural problem. The focus is on the individual and the traits of the individual that allow him to act autonomously, to make this decision through rational calculation and deliberation. Weber, for example, writes that the crucial characteristic of the political leader is “his ability to let realities work on him with inner concentration and calmness.”¹³⁷ Responsibility in this picture is dispositional, a state of maturity in which reason plays a crucial role. The psychic state of the responsible leader is important since the responsible leader is able to resist being overtaken by his passions and keeps them controlled and in check. In short, when it comes to the problem of torture in the West – individuals matter. This will be important to revisit to when considering how the discourse of terror in the West functions within a framework of cultural discourse that collectivizes responsibility, punishment and suspicion.

¹³⁷ Weber, Gerth, and Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. 115

Parrish notes that the “standard model of the dirty hands problem...confronts a lone heroic political actor, who faces an inescapable moral dilemma in which he is asked to sacrifice his own moral purity on behalf of the public good.”¹³⁸ Parrish’s remark here is especially telling because it demonstrates how dirty hands casts the responsible leader as a tragic hero, like Oedipus who can’t help but to seal his own fate. This leader is depicted as a victim of the circumstances in which he finds himself – an inescapable moral dilemma where even the “right” choice will be “flawed” or “wrong” in some way. However, in the face of the necessity that renders the political actor incapable of escaping the moment of decision, he still makes a choice; he still exercises reason and acts – sacrificing his own moral purity for others.

Walzer similarly casts his political actor in a sympathetic light, as an individual with the best of intentions, a good man faced with the inescapable corruption, violence and dirty deeds endemic to the realm of politics. Walzer plays on this notion of sacrifice in arguing that “Knowing all this or most of it (that political life requires this dirtying of hands) good and decent people still enter political life, aiming at some specific reform or seeking general reformation. They are then required to learn the lesson Machiavelli first set out to teach: ‘how not to be good.’”¹³⁹ While the responsible leader may abhor violence and torture as a man, his position as a political leader forces him to concede to the necessity of these tactics.

¹³⁸ Parrish, *Paradoxes of Political Ethics: From Dirty Hands to the Invisible Hand*. 15

¹³⁹ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." 6

The political actor of dirty hands takes responsibility for his actions. But what exactly does it mean to “take responsibility” in this situation? As I stated earlier, the problem of dirty hands relates to actions that are paradoxically and simultaneously both right and wrong. In this scenario, the responsible leader acts out of a deep sense of obligation and commitment, but also understands the weight of his actions and can be held accountable for what he has done. For instance, Weber argues that the specific “honor of the political leader, of the leading statesman, lies precisely in an exclusive personal responsibility for what he does, a responsibility he cannot and must not regret or transfer. It is the nature of officials of high moral standards to be poor politicians and above all, in the political sense of the word to be irresponsible politicians.”¹⁴⁰ The responsible leader does not apply the famous Machiavellian maxim “se guarda al fine” as he is not cast as an instrumentalist. Instead, this responsible leader does not let himself off the hook, regardless of necessity and in spite of outcomes. Instead, he uses the moment of necessity to which he reacts to frame his very willingness to take responsibility. “Even though they were moved by moral considerations or obligations to commit moral violations, the result is dirty hands, the loss of moral innocence and the knowledge that they have been a willing and active causal link in the furthering of evil projects.”¹⁴¹ At the same time, the context within which he operates comforts the responsible leader and justifies his actions.

Within this context, knowledge plays a crucial role in the production of the responsible leader. The responsible leader knows what he is doing, knows

¹⁴⁰ Weber, Gerth, and Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. 95

¹⁴¹ Wijze, "Tragic Remorse: The Anguish of Dirty Hands." 5

what choice he is making, knows the gravity of the choice but, most importantly, responsibility requires an acknowledgement that one has engaged in morally dubious actions. In this sense, the image of the responsible leader produced by the problem of dirty hands bears a strong relation to the Lockean subject of responsibility – an individual who has knowledge of his actions and owns up to them.¹⁴² This mode of responsibility, in fact, *requires* ownership and an acknowledgement that simultaneously allows the public to “know” him as responsible.

It is at this juncture of “knowing responsibility” that the emotional dimension of dirty hands becomes transparent. The dirty hands literature builds a link between responsibility and a certain identifiable emotional disposition. Specifically, it evokes the idea that emotional responses and the visibility of these responses render intelligible a sense of being responsible. The responsible leader not only acts with his head but with his heart, his soul; he feels the gravity of his actions. The responsible leader does not decide to get his hands dirty lightly; he feels the impact of his action beyond the immediate consequences in relation to some sense of a higher morality. Either way, the responsible leader must feel. More importantly, he must feel in a *certain way*. I want to suggest that these theorists establish a category of what I refer to as “responsible emotions.” Emotions that these theorists see as comporting with reason, emotions that bear a certain relation to a sense of conscience and the mind – anguish, guilt and remorse.

For example, Walzer argues that “We know he is doing right when he makes the deal because he knows he is doing wrong. I don’t mean merely that he

¹⁴² See e.g. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

will feel badly or even very badly after he makes the deal. If he is the good man I am imagining him to be, he will feel guilty, that is, he will believe himself to be guilty. That is what it means to have dirty hands.”¹⁴³ Interestingly, Walzer fuses feeling and being together when he insists that feeling guilty means to believe that one is no longer morally innocent. In so doing, he gives feeling and emotion an ontological valence that makes the responsible leader an emotional figure: “It is by his feelings that we know him.”¹⁴⁴ These feelings of guilt function not only as internal state for the responsible leader but also as public evidence for his capacity to be a responsible leader. Walzer’s responsible leader does not simply suffer. He suffers publically. “His willingness to acknowledge and bear (and perhaps repent and do penance for) his guilt is evidence, and it is the only evidence he can offer us, both that he is not too good for politics and that he is good enough.”¹⁴⁵ The outward display of emotion humanizes and is a part of the making-visible of responsibility. This outward movement serves as evidence that in spite of the reprehensible actions engaged in or authorized by this individual, he has retained his humanity.

To be sure, Walzer is not the only theorist to foreground emotions in this way. Stephen De Wijze, identifies the emotional disposition of the political actor as a key component of the problem of dirty hands. Wijze advances the idea of tragic-remorse, which he defines as “a sentiment that acknowledges the difficulty that moral agents sometimes encounter when seeking to do the best they can in circumstances where the immoral projects of others leaves choices only between

¹⁴³ Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." 8

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 13

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 9

bad or evil.”¹⁴⁶ In this regard, the projection of immorality onto the Other is distinct from the loss of moral innocence experienced by the responsible leader. Wijze then differentiates tragic-remorse from simple remorse arguing that; “unlike remorse it does not involve any wish that the wrongful act should not have been performed, since it was also the right thing to do.”¹⁴⁷ For Wijze, tragic-remorse accompanies the moral pollution and shame one feels for having acted wrongly even in the face of necessity. Once again, this sentiment operates as an indicator of the acknowledgement that one has violated moral norms and engaged in reprehensible ways. In this regard, similarly to Walzer, Wijze imagines the responsible leader as a sympathetic and tragically heroic figure who is a victim of circumstances beyond his control, and yet acts for the greater good of others, sacrificing his own moral sensibilities in the process.

Critically, Walzer and Wijze rely upon and make use of certain emotions as markers of the responsible leader. Furthermore, these theories suggest that the emotions bear a more base and primordial – and as a result trustworthy and verifiable – truth of the subject, as though feelings reveal truth in a way that language cannot, subject as it is to potential manipulation. Used in this way, emotions play a significant role in constructing an epistemology of responsibility. The message here is clear: without these emotional signifiers we will not be able to recognize our leaders as responsible, and most importantly, as still retaining their humanity when they act abhorrently.

¹⁴⁶ Wijze, "Tragic Remorse: The Anguish of Dirty Hands."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

In addition, this strategy emphasizes specific types of emotions – guilt, remorse, and regret. In so doing, this emphasis constructs a typology of moral/responsible emotions that focus heavily on cognition and seem to compliment and comport with rather than subvert reason. Walzer and Wijze’s responsible leader feels through thinking about and acknowledging what he has done. Yet, there is something rationalistic about this treatment of the emotions that emphasizes reason, knowledge, cognition and reflection as opposed to the visceral, the instinctual and the bodily. These emotions do not overtake reason, but rather work in relation to it. The responsible leader in these images does not become a slave to his passions but lives in dialogue between reason and emotion.

It is important to note that for both Walzer and Wijze emotions are not decisive factors in decision-making. Both emphasize emotions that come into the picture retrospectively after the decision to torture has been made and highlight how engaging in actions that are morally wrong makes one feel. For Walzer and Wijze, torture brings on a working through of suffering for the torturer. However, they do not consider how emotions might play a role in the decision making process itself, eliding the possibility that torture policy and decision-making might itself be affective. Instead, their view suggests that the responsible leader employs reason to make his decision and then feels retrospectively. In this sense Walzer and Wijze split reason from emotion as if to cue the reader to think about tough decisions as those that are made in the most responsible fashion – where one exercises autonomy, judgment, reason and choice unclouded or contaminated by emotional contagion.

To be sure, in the wake of the Obama administration's move to investigate the abuse of prisoners by the CIA during interrogation, remarks made by Bush and Cheney have been cited as evidence that they are anything but remorseful for their actions. However, in their defense of torture tactics, or what they continue to refer to as "enhanced interrogation," both Bush and Cheney, discuss the decision to torture within the larger framework of liberal rationalism and responsible decision making. Though there are no expressions of outright remorse or guilt, their rhetoric gestures towards the difficulty of the decisions they made and the urgency and necessity that guided their reasoning. Most important are the ways in which the defense of torture makes use of the binary between reason and emotion in the act of decision making itself, a point he emphasizes as critical for how America as a nation approaches the question of violence. For example, Cheney, in response to Eric Holder's investigation, remarked that Americans "know the difference between justice and vengeance"; he insisted, moreover, "along the way there were some hard calls. No decision of national security was ever made lightly, and certainly never made in haste...for all that we've lost in this conflict, the United States has never lost its moral bearings."¹⁴⁸

Doubly Bound – Irresponsible Subjects, Torturable Bodies

To this point I have explored the ways in which torture discourse in the United States is structured by the problem of dirty hands. This it does, moreover, by individuating the question of torture through a focus on the singular political actor,

¹⁴⁸ "Transcript of Dick Cheney's Remarks on National Security." Rachel Swarns, "Cheney Offers Sharp Defense of C.I.A. Interrogation Tactics," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2009.

in turn producing an image of the responsible leader. However, this imaging of the responsible leader is constituted as much by that which it leaves invisible – the question of who exactly is in the torture chair? How does one become, what Talal Asad refers to as, a “torturable body?”¹⁴⁹ Who, in fact are these bodies? In a way, the abstract discussions about torture induce a disembodied forgetting of the materiality of torture. In part, I argue, this is the case because those bodies that are subjected to torture have already been produced as torturable prior to the moment of torture itself. In this section I attend to the ways in which some bodies become torturable and the targets of specific types of violence.

Shortly after September 11th, then Vice President Dick Cheney remarked, “We are dealing here with evil people who dwell in the shadows planning to commit international violence and destruction.” Combating the enemy in this context, Cheney suggested, requires that we “meet the enemy where he dwells.”¹⁵⁰ When read in conversation with the problem of dirty hands, Cheney’s comment underscores the extent to which the ticking time bomb scenario always ticks against a larger backdrop of other potentially ticking bombs and a contextualized and “known” enemy who deploys the tactics of hidden explosives, operating willingly and comfortably in Cheney’s shadows. In this sense, one never simply licenses the torture of an abstract individual, but instead, an imagined, and collective enemy. While the question of torture is individuated by the image of the responsible leader, the enemy is pluralized, depicted as an undifferentiated, homogenous and violent collective.

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*.

¹⁵⁰ “The War in the Shadows,” *The Economist*, October 24th 2001.

But how does one imagine the enemy? As we'll see, imagining the enemy is in many respects what Foucault referred to as an operation of power/knowledge. Indeed, Cheney's remarks underscore the idea that "we" know our enemies on more than just a superficial level. Instead, we know who the enemy is at their core. However, Cheney's purported knowledge in fact serves to produce the enemy in a way that recalls Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism* that "knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient."¹⁵¹ In this regard, a crucial step in producing a torturable body is the transformation of the Islamic subject into an epistemological object to be captured.

While the question of torture is considered through the image of the paradigmatic liberal subject, the discourse on terrorism speaks not in terms of individuals but instead, in terms of collectives, peoples and most importantly, cultures. As Richard Jackson argues, "A ubiquitous feature of contemporary terrorism discourse, observable in a great many political, academic and cultural texts, is a deeply problematic notion of 'Islamic Terrorism,' a term that comes laden with its own set of unacknowledged assumptions and embedded political-cultural narratives."¹⁵² Jackson highlights that this discourse draws upon a long-standing tradition of colonial imaginings. While I want to build on Jackson's point and engage this historical framework, I also suggest that the collective Islamic subject produced in this discourse bears a certain relationship to responsibility that is governed not by a sense of individual personhood and autonomy, but by his location in a larger cultural and religious framework.

¹⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism*. 40

¹⁵² Richard Jackson, "Constructing Enemies: Islamic Terrorism in Political and Academic Discourse," *Government and Opposition* 33 (2007).

Ultimately it is the transformation of religious and cultural difference into “moral and metaphysical difference” that has the most significant consequences for imagining the enemy and producing a torturable body.¹⁵³

For example, Mahmood Mamdani argues that “culture-talk” became the distinctive explanatory framework employed to render intelligible the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Mamdani defines “culture-talk” as a mode of discourse, which “assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. Culture-talk, for example, qualified and explained the practice of ‘terrorism’ as ‘Islamic.’ ‘Islamic terrorism’ is thus offered as both description and explanation of the events of 9/11.”¹⁵⁴ In this regard, culture-talk functions to construct a certain space of meaning around events by attributing causality to a specific type of subjectivity that it calls into existence through its very attribution.

Mamdani situates his conception of culture-talk in a broader framework that draws upon the usual suspects of Orientalist discourse like Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis, both proponents of the now in/famous “clash of civilizations” thesis that construes post-Cold War conflict as emanating not from political or ideological differences, but rather from cultural ones.¹⁵⁵ As Huntington writes, “the great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural...the principle conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations...The fault lines

¹⁵³ JanMohamed, "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature."

¹⁵⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004). 17

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 20

between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”¹⁵⁶ Of course, Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis rests upon a politicization of culture and begs the question as to what exactly is meant by culture or a cultural explanation.

Indeed, what is at stake in Huntington’s politicization of culture is a specific relationship to culture. It is in this sense that the culture-talk that Mamdani highlights functions as an argument about responsibility. While torture discourse relies upon a liberal framework that construes responsibility on an individual basis and in relation to a process of rational and autonomous deliberation, the discourse of the War on Terror produces an image not of the responsible subject but of a culture of irresponsibility. Islamic culture in this discourse is inscribed not as a function of choice but rather as dominant, demanding capitulation and obedience from its adherents. This is juxtaposed against a secular, liberal conception of culture that imagines the individual’s relationship to culture as something one does rather than something one is. Wendy Brown points to this juxtaposition in her critique of how liberal tolerance functions as a disciplinary and governing apparatus - “We” have culture,” she writes, “while culture has “them,” or “we” have culture while “they” are a culture. This asymmetry turns on an imagined opposition between culture and liberal moral autonomy, in which the former vanquishes the latter unless culture itself is subordinated by liberalism.”¹⁵⁷ The presumed dominance and imagined absence of choice and autonomy in Islam function to produce the image of an irresponsible culture whose members and adherents lack the capacity for

¹⁵⁶ Huntington Samuel, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 22 (1993).

¹⁵⁷ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006). 151

subjectivity, ownership and moral decision-making. The absence of these bedrock elements so crucial to the Western concept of personhood works to transform the Muslim body into an object, outside the category of the human.

Historically, this imagined opposition has served to license violence against those seen as lacking the capacity for moral autonomy. For example, Mamdani, citing the work of Slovenian historian Tomaz Mastnak, notes that “the point of the Crusades was not to convert Muslims but to exterminate them” specifically because as Mastnak argues, Muslims were seen as lacking the capacity to choose conversion.¹⁵⁸ As he argues: “The Muslims, the infidels, did not have freedom of choice, they could not choose between conversion and death because they were seen as inconvertible.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, it is this same depiction of Islamic culture in opposition to a secular-liberal, and as a result responsible, Western subject that continues to traffic in the discourse on terrorism, serving to produce torturable bodies that lie beyond the boundaries of personhood. In this regard, secular-liberal societies become representations of “responsible cultures” while Islamic culture is cast as “irresponsible.” In certain respects this juxtaposition draws on very familiar and well-trodden colonial binaries. As Said remarked on the operations of colonial power, “On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural

¹⁵⁸ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. 26

¹⁵⁹ See Tomaz Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002). cited by Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. 26

suspicion; the latter are none of those things.”¹⁶⁰ Whereas the responsible leader is depicted as capable of separating his obligations and sentiments into their appropriate spheres of action through the liberal distinction between public and private or the secular separation of church and state, the Islamic subject is rendered incapable of negotiating these types of boundaries. In fact, the Islamic subject through the combined absence of liberalism and secularism is imagined to lack any separation at all.

This opposition is perhaps no better exemplified than it is by the sexualization of torture in the post-9/11 context and the ways in which sexuality and gender have been used as a key tactic in the interrogation of suspected terrorists.¹⁶¹ In addition to the abuses at Abu Ghraib, in which smiling female soldiers posed with detainees on leashes who were both naked and hooded, sexualized tactics, including “the feminization and homophobization of the male enemy’s body – through raping prisoners or forcing them to sodomize or urinate on one another or crawl naked like dogs or wear hoods that resemble burqas,”¹⁶² were central to U.S. interrogation of prisoners.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Said, *Orientalism*. 49

¹⁶¹ See e.g. Zillah R. Eisenstein, *Sexual Decoys : Gender, Race and War in Imperial Democracy* (North Melbourne, Vic.: Spinifex, 2007)., Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases : Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Rosalind Petchesky Sonia Correa, Richard Parker, "At the Outer Limits of Human Rights: Voids in the Liberal Paradigm " in *Sexuality, Health and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Kelly Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War : Iraq, Sex, and the Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁶² Sonia Correa, "At the Outer Limits of Human Rights: Voids in the Liberal Paradigm ".

¹⁶³ For example, in her book, *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex and the Media*, Kelly Oliver details “a midnight session in which a female army interrogator unbuttoned her uniform ‘almost like a stripper,’ rubbed ‘her breasts against,’ the prisoner’s back, and then later ‘placed her hands in her pants,’ and wiped fake menstrual blood on the prisoners face.” To be sure, this is but one of the many examples Oliver cites to highlight

Reliance on these tactics, however, plays directly into cultural assumptions regarding Muslim and Arab sexuality and grow out of a long-standing Orientalist depiction of the male Arab subject as both sexually repressed and sexually perverse. Echoing Said's conception of the relationship between knowledge production, violence and colonial conquest, Seymour Hersh, demonstrates that the 1973 book by Raphael Patai on Arab culture and psychology, entitled, *The Arab Mind*, which contains a 25-page chapter detailing the rules and restrictions that govern sexual relationships between men and women, as well as the publicly humiliating nature of homosexuality for Muslim men, received considerable attention from military and diplomatic officials with significant influence on post-9/11 military and detention operations.¹⁶⁴ Puar argues that it is "exactly this unsophisticated notion of Arab/Muslim/Islamic cultural difference – in the singular – that military intelligence capitalized on to create what it believed to be a culturally specific and thus 'effective' matrix of torture techniques."¹⁶⁵ The assumption made at the highest levels of the U.S. military industrial complex was clear: "Muslim men will be particularly susceptible to sexualized degradation."¹⁶⁶ This assumption, which directly impacted the choice of interrogation techniques is yet another example of how the torturable body is produced. As opposed to the calculating and rational Western-leader who makes decisions regarding the use of torture in a responsible manner,

the role played by women in the interrogation and torture of male prisoners as well as the centrality of sexuality and gender to the process of interrogation itself. Oliver, *Women as Weapons of War : Iraq, Sex, and the Media*. 26

¹⁶⁴ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages : Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Next Wave (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). 83

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 84

¹⁶⁶ Sonia Correa, "At the Outer Limits of Human Rights: Voids in the Liberal Paradigm".

the enemy is constructed as a knowable group – undifferentiated, unified and homogenous, with a limited capacity for agency beyond the dictates of their cultural affiliations.

The opposition between responsible and irresponsible subjects is also exemplified by the juxtaposition between Western-liberal orientations towards emotion and the emotional disposition of Arabs and Muslims. Just as the emotions come to play a central role in the torture debate's construction of an epistemology of responsibility, so too do they play a role in producing their Other – an epistemology of irresponsibility around the Muslim subject. Just as in the dirty hands literature we come to know our leaders as responsible through their emotional performances, the emotions displayed by the Islamic subject become evidence of his irrationality, his immaturity and irresponsibility. For instance, Lewis in *The Roots of Muslim Rage* writes that

In moments of upheaval and disruption, when the deeper passions are stirred, this dignity and courtesy toward others can give way to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred which impels even the government of an ancient and civilized country – even the spokesman of a great ethical religion – to espouse kidnapping and assassination, and try to find, in the life of their Prophet, approval and indeed precedent for such actions.¹⁶⁷

What is interesting here is the way in which Lewis uses emotional categories – of rage, resentment, and anger – as the markers of truth and knowledge about Islamic subjects. Here, Lewis creates a category of “irresponsible emotions,” or, emotions that are indicative of irresponsibility – of a subject who lacks the maturity to respond and react to situations deliberately or reasonably. In this instance, the Islamic subject becomes disrupted in a moment of urgency and

¹⁶⁷ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990.

contingency and becomes a slave to his passions rather than in control of them. As opposed to the image of the responsible leader in the dirty hands literature who deliberates rationally and coolly even when faced with the challenges of urgency and necessity and then feels retrospectively, emotions here are a part of the decision making process itself. These emotions according to Lewis, overtake the Islamic subject who succumbs to its passions. Who in turn displays precisely the “wrong” relationship between thought and emotionality.

While this emotional disposition has long been wielded as a marker of racial and sexual difference, Puar has recently noted the ways in which Orientalist associations of sexual perversity and depravity serve to construct the “Muslim body as pathologically sexually deviant and as potentially homosexual,” solidifying the notion that “Underneath the veils of repression sizzles an indecency waiting to be unleashed.”¹⁶⁸ The association of the Muslim subject with deviance, pathology and perversion, join together to reinforce the image of the Muslim body as a dangerous, uncontrollable and irresponsible body in need of discipline and punishment in the name of our security.

It is crucial to note, however, that while contemporary culture-talk borrows significantly from the Orientalist discourse of the colonial past, it does not simply rehash it. For example, Mamdani demonstrates the ways in which culture talk vis-à-vis Muslims functions along two lines – the pre-modern and the anti-modern:

One thinks of pre-modern peoples as those who are not yet modern, who are either lagging behind or have yet to embark on the road to

¹⁶⁸ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Next Wave (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). 87

modernity. The other depicts the pre-modern as also the anti-modern. Whereas the former conception encourages relations based on philanthropy, the latter notion is productive of fear and preemptive police or military action.¹⁶⁹

What is interesting here is the way in which this places the Islamic subject in a double bind. He is at once pre-modern and anti-modern. However, this double bind is very much an argument about responsibility. A specific type of responsible subject is rendered visible by this cultural discourse. On the one hand, pre-modern culture-talk casts the Islamic subject as *incapable* of catching up to the West, on the other hand, however, the anti-modern Islamic subject is depicted as *unwilling*. Thus the Islamic subject is at once both unable and unwilling, “not only incapable of but also resistant to modernity.”¹⁷⁰ In exchange this double bind helps construct distinct conceptions of responsibility on the part of the West.

To be sure, this double bind is itself constitutive of a post-colonial moment. Whereas colonial discourse, from Rousseau to Hegel to Conrad, focused largely on a language of inability in order to license domination in the name of the civilizing discourse of benevolence that is most famously encapsulated by Kipling’s “white man’s burden,” a post-colonial discourse emphasizes the abdication of responsibility as a matter of will on the part of former colonial subjects, which in turn renders them as potentially threatening as well as non-compliant and thus torturable.

This reminds us that the concept of violence always functions within concrete cultural contexts. Violence in the torture discourse is depicted as a tactic,

¹⁶⁹ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*.

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¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 19

a regrettable one, but a tactic nonetheless that is simultaneously a response to a set of conditions, if not always principles. Torture is portrayed as something that liberals do unwillingly and only in moments of great urgency and necessity. However, representations of the enemy make use of a different relationship to violence. While violence is something that liberals do, violent is not something that “they” are. Violence for liberals is a choice, whereas violence for “them” is ontological. For example, Emran Quershi and Michael Sells note that both Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis claim “violence is inherent to Islam because of its essential distinction between the ‘House of Islam’ and the ‘House of War.’”¹⁷¹ This position, they state, leads Huntington to argue that faced with an enemy that is both comfortable with violence and inherently hostile means that “we should adopt a posture that treats Islam as the enemy it is.”¹⁷²

Similarly, Ignatieff justifies his “lesser evil morality” by noting that “we are faced with evil people and stopping them may require us to reply in kind.”¹⁷³ The implications here are clear. For Ignatieff, liberal democracies are inherently good, but are sometimes forced to engage in violence for the sake of protection, security and defense. In this framework, violence, including the violence of torture is portrayed as a tactic, a strategy, an action but not ontology. Liberal democratic peoples might engage in evil when a situation calls for the adoption of such tactics, where as, on the other hand, the enemy *is* evil. Evil is what “we” might do, but evil is who “they” are, a part of their very being. Interestingly, even

¹⁷¹ Emran and Sells Qureshi, Michael A., ed. *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003). 12

¹⁷² Ibid. 13

¹⁷³ Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*.

Ignatieff admits that a major problem with the U.S. strategy was that it failed to target individuals and instead punished and targeted collectively. And yet, he does not pause to consider how or why something like this could happen. Nor does he reflect upon how his own argument about “evil people,” operates within the very same logic that licenses this type of collectivizing of an imagined enemy. Is this a coincidence or something more fundamental to liberalism itself?

Conclusion

Reflecting on the torture and detention regimes implemented by the U.S. government following 9/11, Talal Asad finds it most remarkable that amidst all of the debates concerning the legality of torture as a practice or the efficacy of torture as a tactic, there remains a lack of overwhelming public outrage in the face of this violence.¹⁷⁴ To conclude this chapter, I want to take a moment to pause and consider Asad’s point. How are we to understand the absence of outrage on the part of citizens living in the West? The answers, I suggest, lie in the two interrelated discourses of torture and terror I’ve examined in this chapter, and specifically in the crucial role the concept of responsibility plays in both.

On one hand, Asad’s remark seems to be a bit tongue in cheek. He follows up his surprise by identifying one of the key ways in which liberal subjects tolerate the violence of torture. Specifically, he notes that when it comes to violence against others, “the liberal sensibility is more discriminating in this matter than one might have thought.” For even the most well intentioned liberals, it seems clear that, according to Asad, “in a war against barbarians, the use of

¹⁷⁴ Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*. 33

cruelty has always been more acceptable than it has been against civilized enemy populations.”¹⁷⁵ As we’ve seen, the terror discourse helps render the Muslim body as something other than human by, in part, positioning that body within the framework of a larger culture of irresponsibility – lacking the capacity and will for the exercise of reason, choice and moral autonomy.

In this regard, the concept of responsibility plays a fundamental role in maintaining and policing the exclusionary boundaries around the category of personhood – who we see as worthy of our compassion, our empathy and understanding and those we see as dangerous, unstable, threatening and in need of discipline, punishment and regulation. As a result, the responsibility for torture can be disclaimed in the name of responsibility for the nation.

However, there is another way in which we might think through the lack of public outrage. This, I suggest, has to do with the absence of collective responsibility that is all too integral to the way in which the paradigmatic dirty hands scenario functions. The image of the responsible leader produced in the dirty hands literature relies on the quintessential liberal framework that privileges individual reason, deliberation and decision making, devoid of any larger context or social structures. Most importantly, the dirty hands framework allows for transference of responsibility from the larger citizenry to a specific political actor by emphasizing the important role that guilt plays in the public recognition of him as a responsible individual. Ultimately, it is this type of thinking that exculpates wider democratic publics from truly grappling with what Hannah Arendt referred

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 33

to as a distinctly political form of responsibility.¹⁷⁶ That is, the responsibility not for what one has done but for what has been done in one's name.

¹⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 1st ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2003). 157

Chapter Three: Rogue Traders, Suspect Citizens and the Invisible Hand: Crisis in the Theater of Responsibility¹⁷⁷

The government is promoting bad behavior. Because we certainly don't want to put stimulus forth and give people a whopping \$8 or \$10 in their check, and think that they ought to save it, and in terms of modifications...I'll tell you what. I have an idea.

You know, the new administration's big on computers and technology-- How about this, President and new administration? Why don't you put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages; or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water?

- Rick Santelli, CNBC

Beginning in 2008, the language of economic crisis came to dominate American political discourse. This language raises a series of difficult questions such as, how did we get here, what is to be done, and who exactly is the “we” that is in crisis. Parsing the language of crisis is no simple task. Amid the numerous accounts of what caused the crisis, as well as the abundance of solutions proposed to bring the crisis to a swift conclusion, one thing is certain: crises disorient rather than clarify. Indeed, the economic crisis of 2008 raises larger questions about the nature of crisis itself. How do we make sense of crisis? More importantly, how are moments of crisis narrated and explained?

In this chapter, I argue that the rhetoric of responsibility plays a central role in stabilizing moments of crisis through narratives of causality, blame and accountability.

¹⁷⁷ An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *New Political Science* Volume 33, no. 4 (November 2011): 613-615

Specifically, I analyze the multiple corollary discourses of responsibility that emerged around the 2008 economic crisis and argue that the language of responsibility that lies at the heart of American political self-identification serves to deflect attention away from powerfully organized social interests and the violence of economic institutions. By attending to the multiple discourses of responsibility through which that economic crisis was framed, I suggest that, particularly through ascriptions of blame and accountability, the rhetoric of responsibility helps mediate crises and establishes a boundary between what is and what is not considered a moment of crisis. This renders political moments intelligible, structuring public perception of economic crisis and delimiting possible responses to it.

Natural Forces and Invisible Hands: Market Talk in (sort of) Ordinary Times

At 9:30 A.M. EST the opening bell rings at the New York Stock Exchange and trading commences. Even before this ritual begins, commentators and pundits, economists and casual investors alike have been talking for hours—about what we can expect from the market, assessing and anticipating its movements and flows. Surrounded by line charts and graphs that gauge the market’s “pulse,” a roundtable of financial experts banter about the relationship between the “health” of the market and that of the nation. Others talk about the need for an “adrenaline shot” in the form of stimulus spending. The scene here is like the early shift in a hospital emergency room, preparing for unknown patients certain to be coming

through the double doors. From the language of health and sickness, to metaphors of the body, the market sounds, feels and begins to look real.¹⁷⁸

And yet, there is nothing exceptional in what these commentators say or how they say it. The anthropomorphic language recalls David Brooks' observation that in "normal times, the free market works well," which underscores the way crises operate as markers that divide the normal from the exceptional.¹⁷⁹ But if a crisis is understood as a break with normalcy, then the question remains; what differentiates a moment of crisis from a normal state of affairs? In this section I examine how discussions of the economic system in "ordinary times," to use Brooks' characterization, are dominated by a depoliticizing discourse that attributes responsibility to other worldly and incontestable forces.

To be sure, political and economic commentators "often frame discussions of inequality in a curiously passive, technical and distinctly apolitical way."¹⁸⁰ As an example, Larry Bartels cites an article in *The Economist* that notes that, "After 2000 something changed. The pace and productivity gains have been steered towards the highest earners, and towards companies whose profits have reached record levels of GDP."¹⁸¹ Examples of this depoliticizing rhetoric abound, as when Bush administration Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson noted that, "as our

¹⁷⁸ I should note that while writing this chapter I spent a significant amount of time watching financial news programs on both *CNBC* and *Bloomberg*. Though this first person narrative is meant to serve more as an allegory, it is in fact a fairly accurate depiction of what early morning financial markets' news looks like.

¹⁷⁹ David Brooks, "The Bailout Artists," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2008.

¹⁸⁰ Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Princeton University Press, 2008). 20

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* 20

economy grows, market forces work to provide the greatest rewards to those with the needed skills in the growth areas...this trend is simply an economic reality and it is neither fair nor useful to blame any political party.”¹⁸²

Similarly, in her ethnography of Wall Street, Karen Ho found that traders often blame mechanisms of market causality for their own job insecurity. In her interview with Raina Bennett, an analyst laid off by Lehman Brothers in early 1999, Ho observes a tendency to “[portray] markets as capricious forces of nature, unpredictable, unstoppable storms,” against which individuals are helpless. Bennett blames the market for her loss, which “could not justify a group of this magnitude....”¹⁸³ Importantly, Ho makes the explicit link between Bennett’s job loss and a particular notion of responsibility at work in her characterization of downsizing: “By naturalizing the agency of downsizing in markets and market cycles, she [Bennett] dispersed responsibility from particular investment banking actions. What is missing is an analysis of how the values and practices of investment banks helped to construct both ‘the market’...and their approach to employment and the workplace.”¹⁸⁴ Indeed, her attribution of downsizing, unemployment and instability to autonomous market forces is not anomalous to, but quite representative of, how investors and financial professionals talk about the world they inhabit.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid. 29

¹⁸³ Karen Zouwen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). 232

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 234, 235

¹⁸⁵ Ho’s book is littered with examples of Wall Street professionals who operate with a notion of market-based causality as a primary explanatory framework for economic indicators like downsizing and unemployment. The “tautological answer of market causality,” she argues, “leaves the culture of investment banks and corporate decision-

What is especially telling in this discourse is the use of terms like ‘something,’ ‘it seems,’ ‘market forces,’ and ‘economic reality,’ each of which conjures an air of distance from and lends objectivity to economic phenomenon, producing a productive ambiguity that leaves the inner workings of the economy shrouded in mystery. The discourse at work presents such shifts as both normal and inevitable, hence presenting no cause for alarm. Moreover, these seemingly objective attributions of causality also depoliticize questions of economic importance by positioning responsibility for the market and the larger economy as something outside of human decision-making and control. However, this way of speaking allows us to miss the fact that economics is a discursive practice despite its doctrinal adherence to positivist methods. In fact, it is this very denial of rhetoric that contributes to its force.¹⁸⁶ As Deirdre McCloskey argues, “The scientific study of finance...claims to reach beyond anecdote and parable to the dignity of science. The rhetoric of science since the seventeenth century has been that science is outside of rhetoric.”¹⁸⁷

Far from anomalous, these discursive frames are part of a tradition within both classical liberal economics and neoliberalism to naturalize and

making largely uninterrogated and elides the fact that market prescriptions are social actions taken by cultural institutions.” *ibid.* 243

¹⁸⁶ For an argument about the denial of rhetoric as a powerful rhetorical force see, Gerald B. Wetlaufer, "Rhetoric and Its Denial in Legal Discourse," *Virginia Law Review* 76, no. 8 (1990). On the use of reason and positivism as a form of rhetoric see, Daniel Skinner, "Theory Beyond the Rhetoric-Reason Divide: Hobbes, Semantic Indeterminacy and Political Order," *The Review of Politics* 73, no. 4, 561-580 (Fall 2011).

¹⁸⁷ Deirdre McCloskey, *How to be Human*: Though an Economist* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000) 123

anthropomorphize the market.¹⁸⁸ This tradition, in turn, presents market forces as a product of nature, a rhetorical move that severs the economy from political life. Accordingly, in the *Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault identifies a shift that occurs in the middle of the eighteenth century wherein markets become sites of truth, as objects “that obeyed and had to obey ‘natural,’ that is to say spontaneous mechanisms.”¹⁸⁹ As Foucault explains, the market functions as a site of what he calls “veridiction,” a kind of litmus test of what is and what is not true.¹⁹⁰ But what truth does it advance? Foucault argues that the market illuminates not only what is true in terms of economic practice but also what is natural and true in terms of governmental practice: “inasmuch as prices are determined in accordance with the natural mechanisms of the market they constitute a standard of truth which enables us to discern which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous.”¹⁹¹ Consequently, the truth of the market becomes a force that governments must obey since it is on this basis, and only on this basis, that the

¹⁸⁸ For examples see: Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); P. J. and Smith O'Rourke, Adam, *On the Wealth of Nations*, 1st ed. (New York, Berkeley, Calif.: Atlantic Monthly Press; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2007).

¹⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, Michel Senellart, and Collège de France., *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79* (Basingstoke, England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 31

¹⁹⁰ Foucault notes that in as much as the market “enables production, need, supply, demand, value, and price etcetera, to be linked together through exchange, the market constitutes a site of veridiction, I mean a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice.” *ibid.* 32

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* 32

distinction between good and bad governmental practice can be made. That the market is natural, good and true becomes both familiar and self-evident.¹⁹²

Yet, the discourse of the market is seldom grasped as discourse, in part because it is precisely the purpose of neoliberal economic language to place its behaviors “beyond good and evil.” In this way, market rhetoric plays an important role in the advancement of neoliberal projects, which if they were observed as neoliberal, rather than natural, projects, would expose the political dimensions of supposedly natural behaviors.¹⁹³ In other words, it would make clear that the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith is always governed by real – often dirty – hands; exposing the man behind the supposedly unguided capitalist curtain.

David Harvey notes that the advancement of neoliberalism was “masked by the rhetoric of “individual freedom, liberty personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade,” all of which served to “[legitimize] draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate class power.”¹⁹⁴ However, in his passing reference to the rhetoric of neoliberalism, Harvey suggests that this is all “just rhetoric,” simply providing cover for capital rather than telling us something important about capital itself. In so doing, Harvey engages in the well-known Marxist tendency, illustrated clearly in *The German*

¹⁹² For additional examples regarding the market as natural and self-evident see: James G. Carrier, *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture*, Explorations in Anthropology (Oxford; New York: Berg, 1997).

¹⁹³ See e.g. Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁹⁴ *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*. 10

Ideology, to discount the rhetorical structures of capitalism as so much “theoretical bubble blowing.”¹⁹⁵

In taking the rhetoric as my object of inquiry, I do not want to simply swap the materiality of capitalism for the immateriality of language. Quite the opposite. I aim to interrogate the rhetoric of capitalism to examine precisely how it captures and organizes a material base. Here I take my cue from Foucault’s assertion that “the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent, ” exposing them “so that we can fight them.”¹⁹⁶ This requires a critical encounter with the concepts, rhetoric and discursive patterns that over time become the naturalized truth so that, as Nietzsche reminds us, we may remember that concepts have histories, and as I stressed in the introduction to this project, languages do not simply refer to things in the world.¹⁹⁷ In this view, the language game of capitalism does not simply provide cover for the systemic violence of capitalism but is itself a key vehicle through which that violence is wielded. In fact, the reason why the conditions of capitalism and its systemic violence are rendered invisible is precisely because its rhetoric and discursive regime

¹⁹⁵ In the opening to *The German Ideology*, Marx begins with a critique of the Young Hegelians in order to demonstrate the opposition between a materialist and idealist critique of social conditions. Harvey here engages in a similar tendency in his splitting of rhetoric from materiality as if rhetoric merely provided cover under which the real material work of capital is done. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998).

¹⁹⁶ Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2006). 41

¹⁹⁷ For examples see: Nietzsche, Nietzsche, and Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals*; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*.

constantly escapes critical reflection. What would happen if we, to invoke the language of James Carrier, make the discourse of the market “strange” rather than ordinary?¹⁹⁸ Might it alter our ability to respond to capital?

Rhetorical Strategies of Neoliberal Economics

Naturalized and anthropomorphic rhetoric dominate “normal” neoliberal economic analysis, performing several functions. To talk about the market as natural is to attribute responsibility to forces beyond human control. At its simplest level, to anthropomorphize is to give human characteristics to that which is not human – to an object, an animal or abstraction. These strategies construct the market as no mere human agent, but something more powerful, even otherworldly. When markets are treated as mystical fountains of authority, circumstances and events appear inevitable and natural. Above all, market discourse constitutes a brand of responsibility made possible by the erasure of human agency.

Hence Iris Marion Young identifies markets as a critical means by which actors can avoid taking responsibility.¹⁹⁹ Markets operate as arguments about causal relations that appease liberal sensibilities by emphasizing a discourse that, as Young explains, centers on “actors treating products of human action in particular social relations as though they are things or natural forces.” – as the

¹⁹⁸ Carrier, *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture*. 1

¹⁹⁹ Young, *Responsibility for Justice*. 153

rhetorical justification for reification and its psychoanalytic cousin, market fetishism.²⁰⁰

Young's piece sharpens our understanding of neoliberal market discourse. Yet, to speak of market discourse, as a means of avoiding responsibility through the reification of market concepts is to miss that capitalism, read rhetorically, both blames and exculpates, disclaiming responsibility in the name of responsibility. By invoking the language of reification, Young speaks in a register that opposes ideology to Truth, even as abstract concepts such as the market do not reduce, simply, to ideological reifications. They are, as Ho suggests, "important formulations through which finance speaks," and as a result, "even in their opaqueness, are culturally significant and needed to be taken seriously, interrogated, unpacked."²⁰¹ I want to underscore the importance of seeing economic models in their fully rhetorical light so that we may see – in pursuit of a clearer understanding of responsibility – that the truth of neoliberal economics is to a large extent "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms"²⁰² designed to navigate and explain through a carefully delineated politics of responsibility.

This representation of the economy "empties capitalism of its social and political content" because it casts the laws and forces of the market as natural and

²⁰⁰ Given this tendency to treat products of human action as the result of natural forces, Young argues that, "We then react to the constraints we experience, or sometimes the opportunities for action they make possible, as like spiritless natural causes, little different in principle from the weather." *ibid.* 154

²⁰¹ Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. 154

²⁰² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). 46

immutable entities.²⁰³ The logic of the invisible hand and the naturalness of the market are painted as both separate from and outside the control of politics. Consequently, these strategies are indicative of the ways in which the rhetoric of responsibility is often used as a rhetoric depoliticization, transforming political questions of class power, exploitation, and domination into technical questions of neoliberal economic calculation devoid of culpability or redress. Rising economic inequality, the ever widening gap between the rich and the middle class and the almost complete erasure of the poor from public discourse in America are not considered to be exceptional, and as a consequence do not warrant the urgent responses associated with crisis. Indeed, they are rendered non-response-able.

At the same time, to criticize market discourse as a form of responsibility rhetoric that erases human agency is not to simply call for a reaffirmation of a fictional “I” or a liberal subject. Instead, by revealing that which remains concealed in the discourse of the market we can see that these realities are not the outcome of natural and disembodied forces but rather the direct result of complex social relations, class power dynamics and partisan politics. In this clearing, Brooks’s observation takes on new meaning: “In normal times the market works well.”²⁰⁴ In normal times indeed.

Crisis in the Theater of Responsibility

To this point, I have suggested that the language of crisis contests presumptions of normalcy. To call something a crisis is to signify that a situation is exceptional,

²⁰³ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). 19

²⁰⁴ Brooks, "The Bailout Artists."

abnormal and even pathological. Crises thus serve as markers to distinguish normality from deviance. Crisis, understood as an event, ruptures the everyday, transcends the status quo and represents a radical break from what was taking place before its onset. As such, it counsels an urgent departure from usual procedures of response.

Thought of in this way, the invocation of crisis should provoke critique. How exactly do we understand moments of crisis? How do we respond to them? By shaping their representation, the frameworks through which a crisis is mediated helps determine our comprehension of crises – their causes, effects and implications. Such frames are therefore simultaneously productive and repressive, working to define and delimit the field of intelligibility, including the Truth of crisis itself. As Derrida suggests, “The representation of crisis and the rhetoric it organizes always have at least this purpose: to determine, so as to limit it, a more serious and more formless threat, one which is, in fact, faceless and nameless...By determining it as a crisis, one tames it, domesticates it, neutralizes it – in short, one economizes it.”²⁰⁵ But how does one economize an economic crisis?

From the beginning of the 2008 crisis, commentators asked, “Who is responsible?” The implication is clear: if the economy is in crisis, it is broken, and if it is broken, there must be responsible agents who did the breaking. Is it the banking industry? Bear Stearns? AIG? Deregulating politicians, past and present? Irresponsible loan recipients who should not have accepted sub-prime mortgages?

²⁰⁵ Jacques Derrida and Elizabeth Rottenberg, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002). 71

Alan Greenspan? Bernard Madoff? Business schools? Wall Street culture? American culture? For this reason, the narrative of crisis is largely transmitted through and mediated by a language of responsibility that shifts the discourse from the natural and the necessary to an active naming of responsible parties in an attempt to provide adequate and satisfying responses to the question of causality. These attributions then link causality to a notion of moral responsibility that ties active naming to guilt, blame, retribution and punishment.

Subjects of (Ir)responsibility – Rogue Traders, Suspect Citizens

In the wake of the financial crisis that began in 2008, *Time* magazine identified “25 People to Blame for the Financial Crisis.”²⁰⁶ The article amounted to a virtual “perp walk” using a slide show format in which each slide contained a picture of the suspect in question standing in front of a mock mug shot backdrop. From individual actors like Countrywide’s co-founder Angelo Mozilo, to former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, to the less specific and broader group of “American consumers,” the article provides an explanatory framework for the economic crisis that operates through the isolation of specific individuals and groups as irresponsible, blameworthy and guilty. The article’s format is telling because the slide show itself isolates and removes a sense of interconnectivity between the parties involved. The viewer’s experience is structured by isolated and individual slides and the absence of any representation of social connectivity.

²⁰⁶ “25 People to Blame for the Financial Crisis,” *Time*. (2009)

The article is representative of the general tendency within public discourse to explain crisis through narratives of blame and responsibility.²⁰⁷ For example, in response to the events in 2008, Thomas Friedman wrote that it was a “near total breakdown of responsibility at every link in our financial chain, and now we bail out the people who brought us here or risk a total systemic breakdown. These are the wages of our sins.”²⁰⁸ These two sentences illustrate multiple uses of responsibility operating through the register of accountability and blame. Friedman points to a pervasive failure of responsibility, yet also singles out an unspecified group of people who are responsible for having brought us to the brink. And yet, the logic of necessity that Friedman invokes to justify the bank bailout rests upon the notion of communal failure wherein responsibility becomes the burden of the entire community; in both a retributive and redemptive way, “we” will pay for “our” sins.

Others, such as John Steele Gordon, were more precise in their assessments. Writing in *The New York Times*, Gordon argues, “There is no doubt how we got into this mess. To be sure there is plenty of blame to go around; greed, as it periodically does when traders and bankers forget the lessons of the past clouded judgments.”²⁰⁹ At the same time, some singled out “the guilty men of Wall Street,” arguing about who the world’s worst and most villainous banker was, brooding over whether Dick Fuld, former president of Lehman Brothers, was

²⁰⁷ It is important to note that as of March 2014, a Google search using the terms responsibility and 2008 financial crisis yielded close to 34 million results.

²⁰⁸ Thomas Friedman, “All Fall Down,” *The New York Times*, November 26, 2008.

²⁰⁹ John Steele Gordon, “Greed, Stupidity, Delusion and Some More Greed,” *ibid.*, September 22, 2008.

a more detestable specimen than the rest of his peers.²¹⁰ Still others directed responsibility toward the “shocking failure of government regulation,”²¹¹ while foreign commentators did their part to nationalize and localize the blame, as when French President Nicholas Sarkozy and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi both remarked pointedly “that the crisis has come from America.”²¹² In addition, documentary films like Michael Moore’s, *Capitalism: A Love Story*, and Charles Ferguson’s Oscar winning film, *Inside Job*, sought to explain the economic crisis by identifying guilty parties.²¹³ Indeed, Ferguson paused at the beginning of his Oscar acceptance speech to reflect on the fact that “not a single financial executive has gone to jail and that’s wrong.”²¹⁴

At the opposite end of the spectrum, some commentators point to the failings of suspect citizens and the loss of morality, decrying the “culture of debt” that led to the economic crisis and the moral hazard that deregulation did not cause, but enabled. In a now-famous outburst, CNBC commentator Rick Santelli opined from the floor of the Chicago Exchange, “This is America! How many of you people want to pay your neighbor’s mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can’t pay their bills? Are you listening Mr. President? The government is promoting bad behavior...Reward people that can carry the water rather than

²¹⁰ Daniel Gross, "The Guilty Men of Wall Street," *The Economist*, 2008.

²¹¹ Editorial Section, "Absence of Leadership," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2008.

²¹² Katrin Schwartz and Nelson Bennhold, "European Leaders Vow to Fight Financial Crisis" *ibid.*, October 5, 2008.

²¹³ Michael Moore, "Capitalism: A Love Story," (2009); Charles Ferguson, "Inside Job," (2010).

²¹⁴ AP, "Charles Ferguson's Oscar Speech Rips Wall Street: 'Inside Job' Director Levels Criticism During Acceptance," *The Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011.

drink the water.”²¹⁵ Brooks widens the net, asking, “Who’s not to blame? The mortgage brokers were out of control. Regulators were asleep. Home buyers thought they were entitled to Corian counters and a two story great room... This was an episode of mass idiocy.”²¹⁶ As a result, he asks, “Why should the government do anything? Shouldn’t people be held responsible for their stupidity and greed? Our economic system is based on the idea that people take responsibility for their own decisions.”²¹⁷ It is important to note that arguments such as Santelli’s and Brooks’ not only link personal responsibility to an assessment of what caused the crisis, but bear the familiar marks of retribution and punishment.

To be sure, arguments for the restoration of a sense of personal responsibility fit into a larger discursive framework that has been identified with the rise of neoliberal ideology.²¹⁸ However, to simply dismiss these arguments as ideology obscures the subtle ways in which the targets of personal responsibility discourse are often racialized. While some commentators pitch their criticism at the level of the nation as a whole, various conservative commentators define suspect citizens through categories of racial identity. For example, Neil Cavuto commented that financial institutions should be held responsible for “lending to minorities and other risky folks,”²¹⁹ and Michele Malkin emphasized the fact that

²¹⁵ "Santelli's Tea Party," CNBC, <http://video.cnbcm.com/gallery/?video=1039849853>.

²¹⁶ Brooks, "The Bailout Artists."

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ See e.g. Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. and Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

²¹⁹ Media Matters, "Cavuto Suggests Congress Should Have Warned That Lending to Minorities and Risky Folks Is a Disaster," <http://mediamatters.org/mmtv/200809190021>.

“half of the mortgages to Hispanics are subprime.”²²⁰ Both suggest that a loss of personal responsibility in America is coupled with an overall decline of American values of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency, and a loss of American (read: white, Christian) culture.

The idea that individuals abdicated their personal responsibility raises the question: who exactly are these suspect citizens, and how are they also constituted through the discourse of responsibility? Brooks’ meditation on why people should be held responsible for their actions buries the fact that while certain individuals will be required to demonstrate that they are taking responsibility, others will escape this burden. Brooks’ comment provides a prototypical approach to responsibility that takes the concept as a pre-discursive and objective description of facts in the world rather than a product of a political culture.

From Invisible to Visible Hands

In the last section I showed that crisis interacts seamlessly with a broader discourse that hails the market as an otherworldly agent of truth and necessity. Moments of crisis demand not only a response but also an answer to the question of how the crisis came about in the first place. For instance, conceptualizing financial crisis as an event, as something that transcends the ordinary, suggests that a specific conception of responsibility will emerge to represent the crisis. But how do we make sense of this framing of events as manifestations of individual responsibility, accountability, fault, and blame? What does it mean to be held

²²⁰ Michelle Malkin, "Kill the Bailout: Illegal Immigration and the Mortgage Mess," <http://michellemalkin.com/2008/09/24/illegal-immigration-and-the-mortgage-mess>.

responsible or to assume a greater share of responsibility? Even a cursory analysis makes clear that the language of responsibility is neither benign nor neutral. Thus, to make sense of this framing requires returning to one of the three concrete principles of responsibility that I outlined in this project's introduction. Specifically, how responsibility is often used to mediate reality, conditioning what we can see and hear as well as how we evaluate the political.

The search for beginnings and origins is inextricably linked to a conception of responsibility as accountability and blame that runs through the Western tradition. For instance, as Francois Raffoul argues in his recent work, *The Origins of Responsibility*, Western conceptions of responsibility as accountability operate with a host of assumptions about the self and the world in which that self exists. Responsibility is positioned within a matrix of causality, agency, will and intention. Aristotle, in his discussion of moral responsibility in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, makes the question of causality central to the concept of responsibility. Simply put, for Aristotle, responsible actors are those who can be said to have voluntarily caused or made something happen in the world. For Kant, it is his argument regarding the nature of human freedom and the subject as self-cause in the Critique of Pure Reason that allows for what Kant refers to as the imputability of actions to human subjects. Yet, this tradition has rarely noted that to plot origins is itself a political act.

Rather than simply calling attention to those who should be held responsible, an ascription of responsibility *produces* the subjects it marks. In a similar vein, Judith Butler argues, "to be addressed is not merely to be recognized

for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible.”²²¹ Subjects of responsibility become recognized and recognizable not prior to discursive regimes but insofar as they are constituted by them. In this sense, responsibility operates not as a simple description, but a moral inscription that simultaneously isolates, binds, produces and disciplines. In so doing, responsibility narratives structure ways of perceiving and responding to social problems, making visible a certain knowledge of the world while rendering invisible that which falls outside its boundaries of truth.

Ascriptions of responsibility within the liberal tradition that cast a gaze on individual agents as blameworthy focus public attention by, as Chad Lavin observes, “establishing the limits of possible and appropriate targets for political attention.”²²² From greedy bankers to greedy unions, discourses of responsibility bring characters to life in relation to a larger narrative about the economy. This reminds us that responsibility is representational, a frame through which we tell stories about ourselves, but also a mechanism for ordering reality to make sense of a world that often appears, and is, very much out of order. But why these particular stories?

The question of causality and its relationship to responsibility is fraught with difficulty. For Nietzsche, the search for a causal agent is reflective of a psychological desire for certainty, a need to stabilize and allay feelings of fear and anxiety that emerge in relation to the unknown and perhaps the unknowable. To pose and answer the question of causality helps render a disorienting and

²²¹ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997). 5

²²² Lavin, *The Politics of Responsibility*. xii

destabilizing moment intelligible and knowable. As he argues in *The Twilight of the Idols*, “Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown - the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none.”²²³ Responsibility operates as an object of desire that ossifies in the face of a crisis that produces anxiety and fear. Nietzsche’s contention is that the causal explanations that work are those we find comforting and familiar, which suggests that not just any explanation will serve as a satisfying response to the question of causality. Indeed it is only “our most habitual explanations” that will “abolish the feeling of the strange.”²²⁴ Responsibility serves to stabilize the unstable, to make the strange ordinary.

But how do we make sense of precisely which explanations will produce that feeling of comfort? Answering this question requires moving beyond the language of desire and psychology to a more sustained political critique that examines how desire, familiarity and comfort emerge and exist discursively within institutions of power. With this in mind I turn to Foucault’s work in order to build a bridge between Nietzsche’s critique of causality and the current narratives of responsibility circulating as explanatory frameworks for the financial crisis.

Foucault opens *The Order of Discourse* by reflecting on the anxiety that having to begin or locate a point of origin produces. He argues that one does not begin *ex nihilo* but rather within a space already prefigured by the discursive

²²³ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*. 62

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 62

regimes of systems and institutions.²²⁵ Foucault's suggestion illustrates that as disorienting as a moment of crisis might be, ideological and discursive systems have already constructed spaces from which explanatory narratives about crisis can emerge. Most importantly, he shows that discursive systems have built-in capacities to deal with and thus respond to crises. He argues that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role it is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events."²²⁶ Foucault here affords a way of understanding the shift from market-talk that displaces human agency and renders invisible the everyday violence of capital to the active blaming of individuals and groups. This approach highlights the way in which liberal capitalism calls upon its built-in mechanisms to contextualize responsibility so as to exculpate itself, or disclaim responsibility in the name of responsibility.

Within the context of the economic crisis, the shift from market-talk to an active naming and production of blameworthy subjects serves a political and ideological function by focusing attention on specific individuals and groups and away from a confrontation with the normative and systemic violence of capitalism itself. In a moment of economic crisis one cannot merely say, "This is simply the natural force of the market at work," since such a statement would certainly raise questions as to the soundness of the broader system. The restaging of responsibility to the active "discovery" of guilty parties helps maintain the integrity of capital and sustain the mythology that the market is rational, objective,

²²⁵ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*. 215

²²⁶ *Ibid.* 216

and natural, but had been undermined and polluted by a few bad apples. The discovery of guilty parties preserves the notion that the system would work fine were it not for the negligent and deviant conduct of certain rogue individuals. In the name of restoring the market to its pre-crisis state of normalcy, the multiple corollary discourses of responsibility thus stage crisis by isolating those who have committed crimes against “nature.” These ascriptions of responsibility produce a unified, autonomous and rational subject that wills and acts prior to history, beyond power relations, outside of accepted norms and disconnected from inherited social institutions. Although this may be helpful in speaking to specific instances of personal injury, as Lavin argues, “it all but proscribes that possibility that political phenomenon do not result from the acts of individual agents or that politics depends upon unwilled and superbly complicated institutional arrangements embodied in bureaucracies, markets and traditions.”²²⁷ Exemplary of this way of thinking are the personal responsibility narratives that chide segments of the American citizenry for racking up debt and taking on mortgages that they “knowingly” could not pay back. These ascriptions erase a historical context in which the ideal of home ownership and the ownership of property exist as normative values at the core of American culture. This erasure and forgetting both operate as not only modes of stabilization but also as modes of depoliticization. In addition, they conceal the way in which easy access to credit and debt spending become core components of post-Fordist economies in the

²²⁷ Lavin, *The Politics of Responsibility*. 14

wake of wage stagnation and the decline in labor power and unions vis-à-vis employers.²²⁸

The localization of responsibility around specific targets of blame ensures that these larger systemic issues remain unseen, unexplained and altogether free from interrogation. The isolation of responsible parties frees us from the burden of probing deeper into the normative and systemic violence of capitalism. As Young argues, the blame and fault model of responsibility, “[pins] responsibility on one agent in order to absolve others.”²²⁹ I want to push this point further to argue that the blame model of responsibility at work here not only conceals capitalism’s systemic violence, but is itself a part of the that very systemic apparatus. It exculpates the system of capitalism through the isolation of individual agents.

There is something else at work in the blame model of responsibility, namely that those personal responsibility narratives intended to explain how and why financial crisis occurs suggest that crises of capitalism are also crises of liberalism.²³⁰ In this regard the movement from the abstract agency of the market to the active naming of responsible subjects not only conceals the structural violence of capitalism but also aims to fill in cracks and fissures in the metaphysical edifice that a financial crisis produces. In other words, it is precisely when the world seems completely unstable and beyond individual control that the

²²⁸ For more on how the current financial crisis is linked to these developments see, Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism*.

²²⁹ Young, *Responsibility for Justice*. 11

²³⁰ Foucault raises this relationship in his third lecture on biopolitics in, *Foucault, Senellart, and Collège de France, The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79*, pp. 69-70

move is made to shore up the concepts of individual freedom, choice and responsibility rather than confronting the messy reality of situated actions. Is it any surprise then that the discourse of personal responsibility proliferates rapidly within the context of neoliberal financialization, increased globalization, corporate mergers and the centralization of finance capital? The economic crisis thus culminates in a kind of legitimacy crisis, not just for capitalism as a system, but also for liberalism itself.

Conclusion - From the Non-Response-Able to Response-Ability

But what then does this mean for political action, perhaps within the context of progressive political projects? Do we need a subject of blame or responsibility in order to respond in politically efficacious ways? To interrogate responsibility is not to disable it as a concept or induce political paralysis. Political response must first take shape through a careful consideration of the process of production through and by which one becomes a subject of responsibility in the first place in order to contest those very designations. Exposing the workings of power is a necessary exercise of any progressive politics because the possibility of responding requires making visible precisely that which is concealed through those attributions of responsibility that currently dominate neoliberal and market discourse. This, moreover, we must do to both grasp and reject the too-simple, too-seductive binaries on which capitalist discourse thrives, forcing us to attend to the ordinary, every-day violence of capitalism itself.

With all the talk of responsibility what really suffers is the potential for a certain type of response-ability—an ability to respond effectively to normative problems, systemic violence and structural injustice. My analysis suggests that responsiveness is limited because of the mystifications generated by economic discourse that shuttles between a market-centered responsibility and an agent centered blame model of responsibility, both of which serve to sustain the supposed sanctity of the market.

The language that anthropomorphizes and naturalizes the market disclaims responsibility and suppresses modes of political redress by casting the market system as external to political life. Within this framework, inequality, joblessness, homelessness and environmental degradation are not considered exceptional, but evidence that the natural forces of the market are working accordingly. On the other hand, the narrative that seeks to identify particular agents as responsible for the economic crisis elides the possibility that the crisis might be the result of systemic aspects that are constitutive of, rather than aberrant to, neoliberalism. Hence, “the very idea that this might be the fundamental core of what neoliberalization has been about all along appears unthinkable.”²³¹ Mediated through discourses of responsibility as accountability and blame, the crisis is painted as the unfortunate byproduct of mismanagement, propagated by greedy bankers and suspect citizens who lost their moral compasses of personal and fiduciary responsibility. In both instances, however, the market is always doing its job, functioning according to nature, breaking down only as a result of individual

²³¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. 119

irresponsibility and personal failing. This rendering of responsibility, in other words, serves to reinforce the idea that the system itself remains in tact.

In *Precarious Life*, Butler attempts to reformulate the concept of responsibility by asking the reader to engage the difficult task of thinking about the conditions within which subjects emerge and act.²³² This requires careful consideration of how people live and operate as embedded subjects in the world where the conditions of action are made possible by those structures and institutions that call them into being. To be clear, my approach to these questions (like Butler's) does not absolve individuals or institutions in a zero-sum game of responsibility. Nor does it seek to produce yet another abstraction – the market as guilty, or capitalism as a blameworthy agent. Rather, it confronts the ways, in which the isolation of responsible parties exculpates wider publics and institutions –including capitalism itself – from the burden of probing the normative and systemic violence of neoliberalism, while disciplining specific segments of the population.

Unfortunately, attempts to explain are often taken as calls to exonerate.²³³ However, as Butler notes, to think in terms of conditions or possibilities of human action in no way forecloses the possibility of action: “Conditions do not act in the way that individual agents do, but no agent acts without them. They are presupposed in what we do, but it would be a mistake to personify them as if they

²³² Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

²³³ Butler has this problem in mind with the title of her piece, “Explanation and Exoneration, Or What We Can Hear,” *ibid.*

acted in the place of us.”²³⁴ This allows us to acknowledge that Bernard Madoff needs to be in jail while, at the same time, we might take seriously his claim that many of those around him, including deregulating politicians and the financial services institutions with which he did his business are also, at least to some degree, culpable. It is too simple, and naïve, to believe that parties “did not know.” Such admissions clarify the most problematic and seductive aspects of liberal responsibility and raise critical questions. Crucially, however, this questioning must be part of contemporary engagements with crisis, even as redress is sought in the more limited contexts that liberalism offers. The pay-off, however, is that such clarity allows us to respond to economic injustice above the rancor of blame and indictments, courtrooms and prisons, while also remembering that the justice we seek is always, to some extent, to come.

²³⁴ Ibid. 11

Chapter Four: Whose Future? Environmentalism and the Queering of Intergenerational Responsibility

Human beings are created through the conjugation of one man and one woman. The percentage of human beings conceived through non-traditional methods is minuscule and adoption, the form of child-rearing in which same-sex couples may typically participate together, is not an alternative means of creating children, but rather a social backstop for when traditional biological families fail. The perpetuation of the human race depends upon traditional procreation between men and women.

- Judge Robert Jones, Federal Judge, *Sevcik v. Sandoval*, District Court of Nevada

In his 2006 film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, former Vice President Al Gore addresses the reality of climate change and its implications for people around the globe.²³⁵

But in highlighting the inherent danger of continuing to deny the on-going erosion of the Earth's atmosphere, Gore's message is not merely scientific. Instead, Gore's appeal is both moral and political. In the film, Gore plays the role of partisan politician turned impassioned academic, pressing his audience to focus not only on the structural causes of climate change but on behavioral changes they may adopt in their everyday lives to collectively reverse its negative effects.

I begin this chapter with Gore's film, however, not because of its moral message but because of the way in which he presents that message to the audience. Gore's narrative is deeply personal. After providing his audience with a quick primer on the science of climate change, he quickly shifts into a different register. Departing from discussions of atmospheric pressure and carbon emissions, he tells the story of almost losing his son at the age of six. Narrating over screen shots of his children and images of himself beside his son's hospital bed, Gore conveys passionately to his audience that as a result of this event, "his way of

²³⁵ Davis Guggenheim, *"An Inconvenient Truth,"* (USA, 2006).

being in the world changed.”²³⁶ In fact, it is this event, Gore tells us, that lead him to “dig in on climate change.”²³⁷

Gore’s message is clear: the near loss of his child serves as a watershed moment. In almost losing a child, his thinking about the environment is transformed, as he contemplates the fragile and tenuous nature of the future for the first time. Building on this realization, Gore moves from contemplating the fragility of his child’s life to the fragility of the Earth’s existence, shifting from a possible future in which his child no longer exists to the possibility of the world, as we know it, no longer existing for his child. Harnessing the affective power of this image, Gore levels a challenge to his audience at the end of the film regarding the need to take action on the issue of climate change. Future generations, he suggests, “will ask themselves, what were our parents thinking? We have to hear that question from them now.”²³⁸ This emotional narrative is leveraged continuously throughout the film as the camera shifts between Gore at the lectern and images of Gore’s family, his childhood, and scenic shots of his rural upbringing.

Gore’s role as a parent serves as his point of entry into the problem of climate change, in general, and is formidable in shaping his thinking about environmental responsibility in particular. The ethical imperative of environmentalism is tethered to his responsibility as a father. As a result, the underlying “inconvenient truth” of Gore’s film is the need for a strong father to save Mother Earth. More broadly, however, is Gore’s message that to abdicate

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

our responsibility to the environment is to abdicate our responsibility to the future, represented symbolically in the image of the child. This narrative, I suggest, is instructive of a larger trend that is ubiquitous in environmental discourse, stretching from political rhetoric and public policy all the way to popular culture and the halls of academe.

While in Chapter Two, I focused on the ways in which responsibility rhetoric is often used in the face of a crisis to create a narrative of past events that attempt to explain the present, in this chapter; I take the relationship between responsibility and the future in environmental discourse as my primary focus. Taking this relationship as my point of departure, I ask how we make sense of the future's centrality to present day arguments about environmental responsibility? What categories underpin, define and delimit our imagination of the future? In response, I argue that rhetorical deployments of responsibility to the future are already prefigured by and built out of assumptions regarding what is and what is not worth sustaining for the future. As a result, interrogating the discursive uses of responsibility to the future provide insight into who and what we see as vital to our political community in the present.

Given the long-standing association of homosexuality with death and toxicity, I argue that environmental responsibility, framed as an investment in future generations, is bound to a heteronormative conception of the future – a future contingent on the regulation of sexual desire and the normative reproduction of white, heterosexual families.²³⁹ Through its emphasis on children,

²³⁹ While this imagery and the identification of homosexuality with death will be discussed throughout this chapter, see for example, Lauren Gail Berlant, *The Queen of*

environmental futurity actually forecloses the possibility of collective responsibility by directing our attention toward the privatized space of the family. Using the oppositional images of the irresponsible queer and the blameless, innocent child, I open up space for rethinking the temporalities and subjectivities brought to bear in engagements with environmental politics and probe the larger role that conceptions of responsibility play in constructing and authorizing communal life.²⁴⁰

Planetary Redemption Song – The Future, the Child and Environmental Responsibility

Environmentalism raises the specter of responsibility in a number of ways.²⁴¹

However, the future plays a crucial role in structuring conceptions of

America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship, Series Q (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*; Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act Up's Fight against Aids* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

²⁴⁰ In calling into question what I identify as the heteronormativity implicit in the discourse of futurity central to environmental responsibility, I take my queue from the instructive work currently being done in the field of queer ecology that specifically seeks to “probe the intersections of sex and nature with an eye to developing an environmental politics that demonstrates an understanding of the ways in which sexual relations organize and influence both the material world of nature and our perceptions, experiences and constitutions of the world.” Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010). 5

²⁴¹ From a consideration of the appropriate moral relationship of individuals to their natural world to debates concerning the proper distribution of burdens and benefits in environmental policy, as well as questions of global environmental justice, there are no doubt a number of ways in which responsibility is central to environmental issues that are well beyond the purview of this chapter. For examples see, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Ted Benton, *Natural Relations: Ecology, Animal Rights, and Social Justice* (London; New York: Verso, 1993); Murray Bookchin, *Toward an Ecological Society* (Montréal; Buffalo: Black Rose Books, 1980); John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Roderick Nash,

environmental responsibility and helps to define an understanding of whom we are responsible to as well as how far our commitments ought to extend. From political and philosophical debates around intergenerational justice to the plotlines of major Hollywood blockbusters, the concept of futurity and responsibility to the future casts a large and looming shadow over the present. This suggests the need for a closer examination of the idea of responsibility to the future and the role it plays in constructing our moral and political imaginaries. The question, as has been the case throughout this dissertation, is not what does responsibility to the future mean, but rather how does this idea of responsibility to the future operate in political discourse around environmentalism? To what end and with what effects?

In his most recent book, *Eaarth*, environmental activist Bill McKibben notes that futurity is often central to political rhetoric and policy debates around environmental issues.²⁴² Indeed, recourse to arguments about the safety and security of future generations is so popular that it cuts across party lines in American politics.²⁴³ Citing the 2008 presidential election, McKibben argues that both candidates spoke about global warming and climate change mostly in the future tense, invoking the necessity of preventing ecological crisis in order to safeguard future generations.²⁴⁴ Most importantly, however, is the way in which

The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics, History of American Thought and Culture (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Steve Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Karen Warren and Barbara Wells-Howe, *Ecological Feminism*, Environmental Philosophies Series (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Young, *Responsibility for Justice*.

²⁴² Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*, 1st ed. (New York: Time Books, 2010). 10

²⁴³ Ibid. 11

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 11

responsibility to future generations commonly took shape as the responsibility to save “our” children and grandchildren. For both President Obama and Senator John McCain, the image of the child was integral to the ethical and moral imperative of environmentalism.

McCain, for example, emphatically argued in a speech on foreign policy to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council that now is the time “to get serious about substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the coming year or we will hand off a much-diminished world to our grandchildren.”²⁴⁵ Similarly, children and grandchildren also played a central role in the Obama campaign’s messaging on environmental issues. Asked at the Democratic Candidates Compassion Forum in 2008 to convey a sense of how he related his religious faith to his science policy, Obama replied, “Part of what my religious faith teaches me is to take an intergenerational view, to recognize that we are borrowing this planet from our children and our grandchildren. And this is where religious faith and the science of global warming converge.”²⁴⁶ Notably, from the campaign trail to his second term, Obama’s symbolic use of children continues to be a feature of his administration’s environmental policy discourse. In his second inaugural address, Obama provided the answer to Gore’s rhetorical question, declaring, “The debate is settled. Climate change is a fact. And when our children look us in the eye and ask if we did all we could to leave them a safer, more stable world, with new

²⁴⁵ Russ Britt, "McCain Calls for Greater Fight on Global Warming: In Foreign Policy Address, GOP Candidate Tempers Iraq Stand," *MarketWatch, The Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2008.

²⁴⁶ Barack Obama, interview by Jon Meacham, April 13, 2008, Messiah College.

sources of energy, I want us to be able to say yes, we did.”²⁴⁷ To underscore this point a bit further, in President Obama’s Climate Action Plan, released in June 2013, the word children is used four times in the first page and a half while the term future generations comes up four times in the first two as well. In addition, future generations and children or future children are often used interchangeably, in tandem or concurrently. For example, the policy brief begins by stating that, “we have a moral obligation to future generations to leave them a planet that is not polluted and damaged. Through steady, responsible action to cut carbon pollution, we can protect our children’s health and begin to slow the effects of climate change so that we leave behind a cleaner, more stable environment.”²⁴⁸

Writing about the ubiquity of future oriented rhetoric in discussion about environmental policy, McKibben urges his readers to Google “global warming and grandchildren.”²⁴⁹ In addition to yielding over half a million results, the comments, which range from Barbara Boxer to Arnold Schwarzenegger, make clear that the image of the child and responsibility to future generations is a rhetorical form that appeals to all sides of the political spectrum. However, McKibben, concerned primarily with calling his readers to immediate action, quickly dispenses with his interrogation of futurity to force his readers to look at environmental catastrophe in the present tense. For McKibben, ecological disaster

²⁴⁷ Terrell Johnson, "Obama Says 'Climate Change Is a Fact' but Offers Few Clues on Action in State of the Union Speech."

²⁴⁸ Executive Office of the President, "The President's Climate Action Plan," ed. Executive Office of the President (Washington, D.C.: June, 2013).

²⁴⁹ McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. 12

is not on the distantly approaching horizon, it's already here.²⁵⁰ While McKibben's effort is indeed an important and laudable one, I'm not comfortable with moving on from the rhetoric of environmental responsibility and planetary redemption in the name of our future children just yet. While McKibben rightly criticizes this emphasis on futurity, he does not pause to reflect on the consequences of this discourse for environmental responsibility itself, let alone the ways in which these appeals are central to the ways in which responsibility, as I've argued throughout this project, is used rhetorically to create specific ways of seeing and responding to political problems or the ways in which responsibility is used to authorize specific conceptions of communal life.

Just-us: The Environmental Ethics of Saving the Future

To this point, I have demonstrated the ways in which future generations and the image of the child factor into mainstream discourse around environmental politics. In the following section, I ask what role responsibility to future generations plays in shaping questions of environmental policy and ethics. Specifically, futurity is germane to arguments around the principles of intergenerational justice and equity, defined in its broadest sense as fairness between generations.²⁵¹ The problem of

²⁵⁰ To be sure, McKibben is concerned with the way in which an emphasis on future generations misses the reality of the significant and dangerous changes that have already occurred in to the Earth's natural environment. In fact, the title of his book, *Eaarth*, adds an extra "a" to the spelling of Planet Earth to direct the reader's attention to the fact that our planet has already been so fundamentally altered by climate change that we can no longer call it by its original name. We are in need of a new name to recognize that we are indeed living on a new, more dangerous, and rougher planet.

²⁵¹ "Climate Justice: An Intergenerational Approach," Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice. For additional background on intergenerational justice see also, Avner De-Shalit, *Why Posterity Matters: Environmental Policies and Future Generations*,

intergenerational justice, however, is not simply a matter of academic debate but rather a central component of contemporary debates taking place around global climate policy.²⁵² Highlighting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) commitment to protecting the "planet's climate system for the benefit of future generations of humankind, Steven Vanderheiden notes that "contemporary debates about environmental issues such as climate change, in which present policy choices predictably affect those conditions under which future persons will live, usually take at least some obligation toward future persons as a bedrock assumption."²⁵³

However, while Vanderheiden establishes the centrality of the future to debates around environmental justice, his focus, like much of the literature on intergenerational justice, is concerned less with interrogating the assumptions that travel under the sign of the future and instead is focused on locating a ground for ethical and political commitments to future generations.²⁵⁴ This is because while Vanderheiden sees the claim that we have a responsibility to future generations as

Environmental Philosophies Series (London; New York: Routledge, 1995); Andrew Dobson, *Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*; N. Fotion and Jan Christian Heller, *Contingent Future Persons: On the Ethics of Deciding Who Will Live, or Not, in the Future*, Theology and Medicine (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997); Ernest Partridge, *Responsibilities to Future Generations: Environmental Ethics* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1981); Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*; Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*.

²⁵² The 2013 Report of the United Nations Secretary-General titled, "Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations," cited "concern for future generations as a guiding principle of international norms." United Nations Secretary-General, "Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations," (United Nations General Assembly).

²⁵³ Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 113

²⁵⁴ See e.g. Dobson, *Fairness and Futurity: Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*; Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses.*, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press, 1984).

intuitive, he argues that the principle lacks any a priori justification as to why “we might be obligated to assume potentially high costs for the benefit of persons whom we will never meet and about which we know very little.”²⁵⁵ Of course, Vanderheiden, writing in the tradition of liberal political theory, writes about future persons in the abstract. Similarly to the Rawlsian “original position”, Vanderheiden’s consideration of responsibility is disembodied, eliding the powerful impact that race, class, gender, sexuality and geography have on determinations of moral obligation and political commitment.²⁵⁶

For Vanderheiden, the questions are clear: on what basis can we justify the claims of future generations on the present one and how exactly can we, or do we, determine what is owed to future generations? Finally, how much of a sacrifice should we assume in the present in order to preserve the planet for future generations. As a result, for Vanderheiden, the question of intergenerational justice, the linchpin of environmental responsibility, is transformed into a question about debt: how can we justify “costly commitments to maintaining climatic stability”²⁵⁷ for future generations? How much and what exactly is owed?

No doubt, Vanderheiden’s project is an important one, especially considering that many of his interlocutors see absolutely no defensible reason to alter present behavior in light of responsibility to future generations. Probably the

²⁵⁵ Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 112

²⁵⁶ This criticism has been leveled against liberal political thought at great length. For examples see, Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Pateman, *The Sexual Contract.*, Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

²⁵⁷ Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 113

most famous of detractors comes in the form of Derek Parfit's "non-identity problem," which reduces to the following: any policy or individual choice we make in the present will have a direct impact on producing the future world that will emerge as a result of these choices.²⁵⁸ Therefore, "we cannot say that our choice harms any particular individuals, since "if we had chosen Conservation [over depletion], this would not have benefited these people, since they would have never existed."²⁵⁹ No future person whose existence depends on our present choice of depletion could regret our having made that choice, and as a result, cannot claim to be harmed by it. Echoing Doc Brown's warning in the popular science fiction film *Back to the Future*, had we chosen otherwise, they never would have existed.

In addition to the non-identity problem, Vanderheiden also has to contend with those who argue that grounding present environmental commitments with an eye towards the future are tied to the question of whether or not future generations will in fact have a basis upon which to hold past generations accountable.²⁶⁰ However, even Vanderheiden's laudable attempt to provide a secure foundation for responsibility to future generations ultimately leads down a familiar path. That is, a reading of responsibility that fails to consider the assumptions that underlie

²⁵⁸ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*. See specifically Part 4.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 366

²⁶⁰ For example, Vanderheiden writes that, "Absent identifiable parties that can lodge a valid claim against the present generation to limit its consumption in the interest of avoiding harm to them, or at least parties whose interests can be demonstrably and adversely affected by our present patterns of resource use, there would appear to be no defensible basis for the claim that we ought to manage our resources for the benefit of as-yet nonexistent persons. If depletion is morally wrong, it is unclear who is wronged by it." Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 125

the concept of the future he is working with. As a result, to a consideration of the future and its underlying assumptions is where I turn next.

Responsible Sex Acts and the Heteronormative Future of Environmental Discourse

The previous examples make clear that discussions of the future and environmentalism are heavily filtered through the image of the child.

Consequently, when it comes to the rhetoric of responsibility to future generations, sex and sexuality are always in the background, if not an explicit part of the conversation. An investment in the future is positioned as an investment in the health and security of “our” children; responsibility for the environment depicted as responsibility to future generations (“our” children and “our” children’s children) and conversely, a failure to act with an eye towards the future is both morally reprehensible and a failure to meet obligations to “our” children. Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, what the rhetoric of responsibility to future generations makes clear is that “familial and sexual arrangements are clearly important to environmental issues.”²⁶¹

Even Vanderheiden, guided by concern for identifying philosophical grounds for responsibility to future generations cannot avoid the specter of sex. This becomes evident in his discussion of whether or not future generations possess valid rights claims we should take seriously in the present:

Can rights be held by persons who do not yet exist and so are not actual people? - Suppose that they did. Counting all the possible

²⁶¹ Noel Sturgeon, "Penguin Family Values: The Nature of Planetary Environmental Reproductive Justice," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona and Erickson Mortimer-Sandilands, Bruce (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press).
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sperm-egg pairings in one of my political theory courses, there are a great many possible persons whose right to exist stands to be violated by the failure of various combinations of students to bring them about. Can we say that some possible person has been wronged, in this case? Were this a legal as well as a moral right, should the state redress it by forcing some particular pairing? Since it would be physically impossible for all possible persons from my class to be brought into existence, do my students have some obligation to bring as many possible persons into existence as they can.²⁶²

Without wading into the details of where Vanderheiden takes this argument, the reproductive schema at work in his thought experiment makes clear that even in the discourse of distributive justice, sex, and specifically, reproductive, heterosexual sex, does important work.

In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Sarah Ahmed argues that, “There is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialize in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including those bodies that are recognized as familiar and friendly, and those that are considered strange.”²⁶³ Ahmed’s observation generates important questions for understanding the rhetoric of responsibility to future generations in environmental discourse. Who are the friendly bodies in the imagined future community? Who are the strangers? Given the continual twinning of environmental responsibility and the image of the child, is intergenerational justice is implicitly heterosexual? Is the future in question, always already heteronormative.

Undoubtedly, considerations of human survival and the future of the planet have long been tied to specific conceptions of sexuality and the idea that

²⁶² Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 128

²⁶³ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Transformations (London; New York: Routledge, 2000). 40

specific sexual practices are indicative of responsible sexual behavior. As Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson argue in their work on queer ecology, heterosexuality, as an adaptive capacity, remains central to ecological thought.²⁶⁴ They note, “In this model, heterosexual reproduction is the only form of sexual activity leading directly to the continuation of a species from one generation to the next...If the ability of a species to survive in its environment is tied to reproductive fitness, then ‘healthy’ environments are those in which such heterosexual activity is seen to be flourishing.”²⁶⁵ The associations of nature, health and sustainability with reproductive sexual behavior have helped establish a foundation for thinking about evolutionary advantage and disadvantage as linked directly to specific sexual orientations and types of sexual behavior.

The perceived dependence of biological reproduction on heterosexuality, along with the conception of reproductive heterosexual activity as healthy, places it squarely in the register of responsible sexual behavior. In the context of environmentalism, reproductive heterosexuality gains its normative force as the responsible form of sex through the assumption, highlighted by Noel Sturgeon, “that heterosexuality is the only form of sexuality that is biologically reproductive.”²⁶⁶ By establishing a link between heterosexuality, reproduction, nature and sustainability, the normative power of heterosexuality is continuously reinforced by an environmental discourse that places the image of future generations and the responsibility to children at its center. This, despite the fact

²⁶⁴ Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. 10

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 10, 11

²⁶⁶ Noel Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009). 123

that biological reproduction does not require compulsory heterosexuality and, in some cases, may in fact be harmful to the reproductive process.²⁶⁷

But perhaps some of the strongest expressions of heteronormative force in environmentalism can be found in films that feature ecological disaster as their central premise. Consider, for example, Roland Emmerich's film, *The Day After Tomorrow*. In the film, years of unregulated climate change have led to a global temperature shift in which ongoing ice and snowstorms featuring unprecedented frigid temperatures make major parts of the Northern Hemisphere uninhabitable. The film's central character, Sam Hall, played by Jake Gyllenhall, is the son of a known paleoclimatologist, Professor Jack Hall, played by Dennis Quaid, whose warnings about climate change and atmospheric shifts have gone unheeded by the United States government and the agencies for which he works. As the storm grows in intensity, Sam, who was in New York City to participate in an academic decathlon, takes shelter with a group of his friends along with a number of other people struggling to survive inside the main branch of the New York Public Library.

²⁶⁷ For example, in "The Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Difference, Linda Martin Alcoff argues that "Putting biological reproduction as the basis of sexual difference is not the same thing as putting heterosexuality at the basis or linking heterosexuality with reproduction in a broad sense. Under some contextual social conditions, compulsory heterosexuality is demonstrably hurtful for reproduction, failing to provide either the support or the nurturance necessary for a successful pregnancy, sufficient infant care and childcare, and all that is necessary for the development of mature and reasonably functional human beings. Compulsory heterosexuality can contribute to the extreme vulnerability of mothers to violence and abuse. What is vital for reproduction is a child's access to a somewhat stable group of caring adults." Linda Martin Alcoff, "The Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Difference," in *Feminist Interventions in Ethics and Politics: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, ed. Jean Keller Barbara S. Andrew, Lisa H. Schwartzman, Feminist Constructions (Rowman & Littlefield). 33

Though separated from his parents, Sam is hunkered down with his female love interest, Laura, played by Emmy Rossum, who also happens to be one of his decathlon teammates. As the two exchange stories and personal experiences while attempting to ride out the storm, Laura, reflecting on their prospects for survival, exclaims regretfully that she's spent so much of her time preparing for a future that most likely no longer exists; a future that looks to be impossible in the face of ecological disaster and almost certain death. In response, Sam reveals why he joined the decathlon team in the first place - to be closer to her. After a slight pause, they share their first kiss.

The kiss is meaningful in terms of the relationship between futurity in the discourse of environmental responsibility and normative heterosexuality. Following her expression of regret about a lost future, the kiss hints at the sexual conduct that may in fact save the future; that may allow the future to have a future. However, the diminished future does not become a justification for "deviant" sexuality. Instead, in the following scene, as Laura becomes gravely ill due to an infection, Sam risks his life to procure antibiotics from an abandoned cargo ship marooned in the ice outside of the library. By risking life and limb to save her, he works to save their potential future relationship, and as a result, the idea of the future itself.

At the same time that Sam puts himself at risk in the name of love, his father is also engaged in risking his life to save both his son and, ultimately, his wife. By the film's conclusion, Sam's father survives the impossible journey, travelling into the eye of the storm from Washington D.C. to New York City on

foot while the rest of the country's inhabitants flee south, to reunite with his son, Laura and the other remaining survivors. Sam's mother, Lucy, also manages to survive the impossible and eventually reunites with her husband and son, which allows for the restoration of the traditional family structure amid the chaos of environmental catastrophe. In this regard, the film accomplishes what Noel Sturgeon argues in her critique of environmentalism in popular culture, namely that the film equates "the restoration of natural harmony with the restoration of the two-parent suburban family."²⁶⁸

To be sure, *The Day After Tomorrow* concludes with a "queered" future as inhabitants of the Global North immigrate to and are welcomed by Global South nations. In a reversal of contemporary immigration patterns, Americans enter Mexico in droves. This conclusion is pure fantasy fulfillment with both the despair of ecological disaster giving way to the promise of global unity – a theme made popular by the movie *Independence Day*, another Emmerich film.²⁶⁹ In addition, the quid pro quo of debt forgiveness in exchange for opening the borders also allows for a complete erasure of colonial legacies and post-colonial aggression. But even in this newly queered future, the promise of "normalcy" and the abatement of social anxiety hinges on the complete and orderly restoration of the heterosexual family structure. At the end of the film, the Hall family, which had been separated by geographical distance and the uneven distribution of ecological disaster, is made whole again south of the border. This final act of

²⁶⁸ Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural*. 110

²⁶⁹ Michael Paul Rogin, *Independence Day, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Enola Gay*, BFI Modern Classics (London: BFI Pub., 1998).

familial restoration drives home the integral relationship between responsibility, heterosexuality and futurity in mainstream environmental discourse.

Irresponsible Queers and Deviant Mothers: Fear of a Gay Black Chinese

Planet

Responsibility, as I've argued in previous chapters, always works to produce, and in fact relies upon, its irresponsible other. But who or what exactly is the irresponsible other of reproductive heterosexuality? Juxtaposed against the image of the healthy, responsible and adaptive heterosexual stands the queer, the homoerotic and sexually deviant, associated with danger, sickness, pollution and toxicity. Against the future made possible by responsible heterosexual behavior, the queer endangers the very possibility of the future itself. As Lee Edelman argues, "The stigmatized other in general can endanger our idea of the future, conjuring the intolerable image of its spoliation or pollution, the specter of its being appropriated for unendurable ends; but one in particular is stigmatized as threatening an end to the future itself."²⁷⁰ Given the fact that futurity is always already positioned against queerness, any invocation of the future in environmental discourse demands an interrogation of the assumptions that underpin that imaginary future.

Speaking specifically about the discrimination against sexual minorities for most of the twentieth century, Ladelle McWhorter places these associations of queerness with pollution and toxicity in the historical context of the race hygiene and race betterment movements of the early part of the 20th century. As she argues,

²⁷⁰ Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. 113

“queer people – like dark-skinned people, disabled people, chronically ill people, and so on – were degenerates who might contaminate the bodies and bloodlines of the evolutionary avant-garde and thus derail Homo sapiens’ biological advance. These people were held to be, literally, biological enemies of the human species.”²⁷¹ Paranoia surrounding the potential for contamination also extends to the supposed purity of the national body, which has deep roots in American political life and can be traced back bio-legal norms like the “one drop rule,” which classified any individual with just 1/32 of black blood as black, and as a result, ineligible for the rights and protections of full American citizenship.²⁷²

As opposed to the language of health, nature and responsibility tied to reproductive heterosexuality, ecological metaphors of disease, pollution, toxicity and contamination have long been called upon to describe homosexual desire and sexual expression. These metaphors found their sharpest expression in the homophobic characterizations of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s. The twinning of homosexual desire and illness open the door for gay sex acts to be construed as more than merely unnatural but instead as acts that bring disease – as acts of death.²⁷³ This idea is exemplified by Senior Editor John Langone’s now

²⁷¹ Ladelle McWhorter, "Enemy of the Species," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona and Erickson Mortimer-Sandilands, Bruce (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010). 75

²⁷² Beth Berila, "Toxic Bodies? Act Up's Disruption of the Heteronormative Landscape of the Nation," in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality and Activism*, ed. Rachel Stein (Rutgers University Press, 2004).

²⁷³ For a thorough discussion of these representations of the AIDS crisis see, *ibid.*; Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act Up's Fight against Aids*; Michael C. Clatts and Kevin M. Mutchler, "Aids and the Dangerous Other: Metaphors of Sex and Deviance in the Representation of the Disease," *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 10, no. 2-3 (1989); Paula A. Treichler, "Aids, Homophobia and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," *Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (1987).

(in)famous *Discover Magazine* article, in which he concluded that “AIDS isn’t a threat to the vast majority of heterosexuals,” but rather “the fatal price one can pay for anal intercourse.”²⁷⁴

Most notably, however, is the way in which representations of the AIDS epidemic were tinged with the moralizing language of guilt, blame and dessert as victim status was often denied to dying individuals on account of what was seen as their own irresponsible behavior. As Susan Sontag notes in her analysis of *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, “The unsafe behavior that produces AIDS is judged to be more than just weakness. It is indulgence, delinquency – addictions to chemical that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant. The sexual transmission of this illness, considered by most people as a calamity one brings on oneself, is judged more harshly than other means – especially since AIDS is understood as a disease not only of sexual excess but of perversity.”²⁷⁵ To take Sontag’s analysis a step further, I want to suggest that the associations of AIDS with homosexuality and irresponsibility gesture toward the ways in which the rhetoric of responsibility plays an essential role in policing the national body. In the context of the AIDS epidemic, responsibility and blame do the work of distinguishing between those to whom our sympathies and obligations should extend and those who threaten our health, safety and longevity because of their own deviance. The

²⁷⁴ The article also makes the claim that AIDS “may have come to the United States by way of Haiti, a popular vacation spot for homosexuals.” John Langone, “AIDS: The Latest Scientific Facts,” *Discover* (1985). For additional analysis on the Langone article, see Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of Aids* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

²⁷⁵ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor; and, AIDS and Its Metaphors*, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1990). 113, 114

irresponsible homosexual other is thus firmly identified as the carrier of disease with the potential to contaminate and endanger the nation's future.²⁷⁶

But the historical context that McWhorter provides – linking queer toxicity to issues of race and culture – is instructive for thinking about queerness more expansively to include not only homosexual behavior but also any sexual practices portrayed as irresponsible. By now it should be clear: the question of the future in environmentalism concerns itself with sex. That is, who is having sex with whom? Who should and shouldn't be having sex? As a result, the regulation of specific types of sexual conduct and desire through the moral rhetoric of irresponsible sexual behavior extends beyond homosexual activity to the reproductive activities of non-white populations both inside and outside of the United States. It is at this juncture that homophobia, xenophobia and racism, converge around the rhetoric of responsibility in an effort to ensure the safety and security of the national body in both the present and the future tense.

For example, working within the Malthusian tradition, Paul Ehrlich made the question of overpopulation and population control a core environmental issue.

²⁷⁶ Of course, it is important to note that the conception of queerness in opposition to humanity is not merely a historical footnote. The idea that queers are subhuman continues to find adherents in the present, made evident most recently by former Senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum, who in his address to guests at the 2013 Value Voters Summit expressed concern for gay rights as part of a larger anti-human agenda. Amanda Marcotte, "Value Voters Speakers Blame Civilization's Decline on Gay People, the Pill," *Slate*, October 14, 2013. More recently, these ecological metaphors have been the go to rhetorical ammunition for public officials looking to criminalize gay populations in urban areas. When discussing issues such as "cruising" and homosexual activity in public places, officials often use the language of urban decline stitched together with the rhetoric of contamination and the disruption of nature. See for example, Andil Gosine, "Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona and Erickson Mortimer-Sandilands, Bruce (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010).

The central conceit of Ehrlich's original argument was a prediction that overpopulation would ultimately result in global famine as consumption needs outpaced the availability of resources worldwide.²⁷⁷ However, at the heart of discussions regarding overpopulation is a racially motivated concern over the uncontrolled reproduction of poorer, non-white populations around the globe. As Andil Gosine argues, central to the discourse of overpopulation has been the idea that global ecological disaster is the fault of "child-bearing (or potentially child-bearing) women from Asia, Africa and South and Central America, as well as First Nations and non-white women in North America," who have "overpopulated the earth," and placed "too much pressure on its natural resources."²⁷⁸ Gosine's argument gestures towards the fact that a consideration of what sex acts are considered responsible along with the question of who should and should not be reproducing are crucial to arguments around environmentalism and the future.

Despite the dated and largely discredited nature of Ehrlich's theories, they remain a staple of much contemporary mainstream environmentalist discourse.²⁷⁹ For instance as Gosine notes, in *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore remains committed to the Malthusian rhetoric he adapts from Ehrlich's book, citing the disaster of uncontrolled population growth on numerous occasions. But most tellingly, are the ways in which these references in Gore's film are coupled with on screen images of people of color, from Hurricane Katrina to the Global South.

²⁷⁷ Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, Rev. & expanded ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971).

²⁷⁸ Gosine, "Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature." 149

²⁷⁹ See e.g. Garrett James Hardin, *The Ostrich Factor: Our Population Myopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Bill McKibben, *Maybe One: A Case for Smaller Families* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

The abundance of non-white faces in the context of unbridled population growth not only works to induce anxiety about the future but also helps to construct a visual narrative of responsibility. The underlying message suggests that the reproduction of specific populations possesses dangerous consequences for the Earth's future. Irresponsible sex acts are those that involve the unregulated and rampant reproduction of non-white and non-Western populations.

In contrast to the implicit racial undertones of Gore's message, there is no shortage of evidence that makes explicit the relationship between overpopulation and race. For example, in a *Foreign Affairs* article from 2010 titled, "The New Population Bomb," author Jack Goldstone notes that while Ehrlich's worst fears regarding global famine and overpopulation have not come to pass, there is still much to be wary of.²⁸⁰ Specifically, Goldstone argues that international security in the twenty-first-century "will depend less on how many people inhabit the world than on how the global population is composed and distributed: where populations are declining and where they are growing, which countries are relatively older and which are more youthful, and how demographics will influence population movements across regions."²⁸¹ Citing a decline in the population growth of developed nations, Goldstone emphasizes the "alarming challenges" that will accompany the fact that "most of the world's expected population growth will increasingly be concentrated in today's poorest, youngest and most heavily Muslim countries" as well as urban centers in the "world's

²⁸⁰ Jack A. Goldstone, "The New Population Bomb: The Four Megatrends That Will Change the World," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February (2010).

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

poorest countries, where policing, sanitation, and health care are often scarce.”²⁸²

Goldstone’s warning then gives way to a larger description of demographic shifts from Europe in the beginning of the 18th century to the present that have accompanied “the West’s relative decline.”²⁸³ The message here is - the wrong people are having sex, leaving the future in question.

Another stark example of this is evident in environmental journalist, Alan Weisman’s latest book, *Countdown*. He sets out to explore the environmental dangers associated with “the exploding human population,” asking, perhaps rhetorically, in his subtitle whether or not tackling the population issue is indeed “our last, best hope for a future on earth?”²⁸⁴ Though Weisman does admit that, “any discussion of population that doesn’t include the USA would be pointless, let alone racist,” he quickly pivots to a language of equivalency, arguing, “Fair or not, in today’s global ecosystem everyone’s presence matters.”²⁸⁵ By collectivizing responsibility, however, Weisman effectively negates the uneven development of climate change in which the carbon emissions and pollution of the world’s richest nations, including the United States, have contributed far more to global warming, as well as environmental crisis and degradation, than nations in the Global South.²⁸⁶ In addition, his language of equivocation and the idea that “we’re all in this together,” erases what Rob Nixon refers to as “slow violence”

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Alan Weisman, *Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?*, First edition. ed. (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013).

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ In his discussion of climate change and justice, Vanderheiden notes, “For the most part, the nations and peoples that are expected to bear the brunt of climate-related damage are among those least responsible for the GHG pollution causing climatic problems.” Vanderheiden, *Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change*. 81

against the world's poor. That is, the long lasting and often invisible violence that accompanies the impact of war, militarism and toxic waste disposal on the environment, which disproportionately impact the world's most vulnerable citizens.²⁸⁷

Ultimately, while the future remains uncertain, one thing seems clear: environmental responsibility to future generations possesses these subtleties that depict homosexuality as well as non-white reproductive heterosexuals as a threat to a sustainable future. Their significance as the irresponsible other of environmental discourse derives "from their manifestations as oppositional subjects, as the Others through whom the white subject can make sense of himself, and upon whom anxieties can be focused."²⁸⁸

The Future is Queer Stuff

Lee Edelman opens his most recent book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, with a section entitled, "The Future is Kid Stuff." It is no accident, then, that I've titled the concluding section of this chapter, "The Future is Queer

²⁸⁷ For example, in his introduction Nixon highlights "Places like the Marshall Islands, subjected between 1948 and 1958 to sixty-seven American atmospheric nuclear 'tests,' the largest of them equal in force to 1,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs. In 1956 the Atomic Energy Commission declared the Marshall Islands 'by far the most contaminated place in the world,' a condition that would compromise independence in the long term, despite the islands' formal ascent in 1979 into the ranks of self-governing nations. The island republic was still in part governed by an irradiated past: well into the 1980s its history of nuclear colonialism, long forgotten by the colonizers, was still delivering into the world 'jellyfish babies' – headless, eyeless, limbless human infants who would live just a few hours." Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). 7

²⁸⁸ Gosine, "Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature." 155

Stuff.” In my less than subtle nod to Edelman, I want to begin by not only thinking with him but against him as well.

To review, Edelman’s argument, which has been instrumental in my critique of environmental discourse centered on a responsibility to future generations, goes something like this: the image of the child has become a ubiquitous feature of our national political discourse. To invoke the child is to create an argument that is as compelling as it is irresistible in what Edelman refers to as its “self-evidence” and one-sidedness as an unquestionable value.²⁸⁹ After all, who does not want to be seen as being on the side of the children, and consequently, the side of true innocence, the side of hope and the side of the future? This emphasis on “reproductive futurism,” however, comes at a cost. That is, according to Edelman, it “imposes an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”²⁹⁰ By identifying the extra-political force of arguments made in the name of children, Edelman gestures towards the way in which environmentalism cast as a responsibility to future children works to stabilize political debate and solidify communal boundaries.

In the face of reproductive futurism’s hegemony, Edelman makes the following wager: “what would it signify,” he asks, “to not be ‘fighting for the

²⁸⁹ Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. 2

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 2

children?”²⁹¹ Acknowledging that queerness is in fact the side not fighting for the children, his ultimate response is to embrace the pessimism, hopelessness and anti-futurity leveled at queer identity rather than resist it. Instead of affirming any positive social value, Edelman finds the ethico-political imperative of queerness in its outright rejection of any claim to a hopeful future, concluding his first chapter with an emphatic cry: “fuck the future.”²⁹²

It is important to consider that Edelman’s rejection is not a detour into nihilism. Rather, Edelman is forcing his reader to consider what, if any, future might exist for those who have been repeatedly excluded from the present, for those whose very existence has been associated with threatening the very possibility of the future? The answer is, under the continuation of the current social order, none at all; “There can be no queers in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all.”²⁹³

I want to steer Edelman’s important insight back to the central argument of this chapter. There is no doubt that the idea of the future is problematic. As I’ve demonstrated, an environmental politics centered on responsibility to the future and to future generations serves to reinforce and reproduce the normative power of reproductive heterosexuality as natural and responsible. This it does, moreover, through the othering of homosexual desire and non-white reproductive sex as

²⁹¹ Ibid. 3

²⁹² Towards the end of his first chapter, “The Future is Kid’s Stuff,” Edelman is at his most rhetorical forceful and his most polemical: “Fuck the social order and the child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the New; fuck Laws both with capital l’s and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.” *ibid.* 29

²⁹³ Ibid. 30

toxic and irresponsible. These arguments about responsible and irresponsible sexual identity and relationships inscribe the future with an exclusionary component. In effect, the rhetoric of responsibility tied to sexual practice, reproduces an image of the future that unfortunately looks much like the present, riddled with homophobia, racism and xenophobia in spite of overwhelming lip service to the practice of liberal tolerance.

To be sure, the use of children in the context of political argument extends to a number of issues beyond environmentalism. For example, Lauren Berlant, argues that from the Regan era to the present, a “familial politics of the national future came to define the urgencies of the present,” and notes a significant transformation whereby “a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children.”²⁹⁴ Indeed, in contemporary American politics, in debates on everything from national debt to entitlement reform, where there are issues that conjure future repercussions, recourse to arguments invoking responsibility to “our” children are never far behind.²⁹⁵

The embodiment of pure innocence, the child represents not only vulnerability but blamelessness as well. As such, they don’t simply deserve our

²⁹⁴ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. 1

²⁹⁵ As just one example, fiscal responsibility and the “debt crisis” are often framed within the context of responsibility (or conversely, irresponsibility) to our children. Again, this is a form of argumentation that cuts across party lines. For instance, in 2010, then Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, argued that, “Addressing the challenge of our national debt requires bold leadership and tough choices from members of both parties. Our children and grandchildren are counting on us to chart an effective course toward responsible stewardship of the public purse.” Jackie Calmes, “Pelosi Names 3 to Obama’s Deficit Panel,” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2010. In response, Chairman of the House Committee on the Budget, Republican Paul Ryan wrote, “Today, our leaders are again making the tragic choice to mortgage our children’s future.” Jeb Hensarling and Paul Ryan, June 21, 2010.

care; they require it. In this regard, the child stands in as a future victim in need of rescue, which requires that adults take responsibility for their irresponsible actions in the present. This innocence and blamelessness associated with children allows an ethic of responsibility to them and future generations to stand in as the quintessential figures in whose name the planet should be redeemed since they will, as the argument goes, inherit a planet beset by environmental catastrophe by no fault of their own.

What makes the image of the child so compelling is the fact that it operates within the context of what Edelman calls a “social consensus that such an appeal is impossible to refuse,” precisely because it appears as both a natural and self-evident truth.²⁹⁶ In its self-evidence, responsibility to children and responsibility in the name of children command acquiescence, operating as non-negotiable and beyond argument. As a result, rhetorical deployments of responsibility to children can fly below the radar of political argument. Undetected and infallible, to fight for children and their futures is to ascend to a moral high ground that stands not only outside of but also above partisan rancor.

But notwithstanding its apolitical appearance, throughout this chapter I have demonstrated that responsibility to children and future generations does important political work. Specifically, environmental discourse that emphasizes responsibility to children actually serves to foreclose the possibility of collective action by directing public attention toward the privatized sphere of the family. In so doing, this rhetoric serves to instantiate what Berlant calls the, “intimate public sphere,” rendering “citizenship as a condition of social membership produced by

²⁹⁶ Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. 2

personal acts and values, especially acts originating in or directed toward the family sphere.”²⁹⁷ This, of course, raises a number of serious questions about who can lay claim to membership in the American political community as well as who an environmental discourse that relies upon responsibility to the future speaks to and for.

By directing attention toward the private sphere of the family, environmental responsibility framed in this way removes the vulnerability of collective action as well as thinking through the difficult question of who actually comprises the collective body. To invoke the terminology of “our” children begs the question as to which children are being spoken about? Which parents? What about those without children? Those outside of hetero-reproductive relationships? These are no doubt incredibly messy and difficult questions that require serious thinking and debate precisely because they impact not only a sense of future obligations but also present commitments. As a result, confronting these questions may actually serve to increase vulnerability rather than security in the face of issues that are inherently marked with uncertainty such as global warming and environmental crisis. It is in this regard that responsibility operates rhetorically to perform a stabilizing function by directing our attention to the privatized family. This is a space in which there are no strangers or others who require a response, a space that allows for a disclaiming of responsibility in the name of responsibility by absolving the public of the need to take responsibility for contemplating these difficult ethico-political questions about community and collectivity.

²⁹⁷ Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. 5

But if, as Ahmed argues, “a queer politics which refuses to organize its hope for happiness around the figure of the child or other tropes for reproductivity and survival is already alienated from the present,” what hope might there be for the future?²⁹⁸ Is Edelman right? Is it time to abandon all hope? In one sense, Edelman’s rejection is valuable. Most notably, because it helps shine a light directly on what Gosine calls, the “sexual blind spot in environmentalism,” in which the “paradigm of natural heterosexuality overrides the obvious existence of plenty of non-reproductive sexual options that might be more ecologically appropriate.”²⁹⁹ But beyond unmasking the normative heterosexuality embedded in environmental discourse’s commitment to the future, how might we use this rejection to rethink responsibility?³⁰⁰ To do so, requires reading Edelman’s rejection of reproductive futurity in concert with Judith Halberstam’s argument for thinking in “queer time.”³⁰¹

For Halberstam, “queer time” develops “in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction.”³⁰² However, while queer time develops out of the experience of gay communities battling with the AIDS epidemic at the close of the twentieth century, Halberstam, similar to my more expansive reading of queerness throughout this chapter, understands queer time as a way of rethinking temporality beyond sexual identity. Rather than being

²⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010). 162

²⁹⁹ Gosine, "Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature." 177-179

³⁰⁰ Here I take my queue from Sara Ahmed and Michael Snediker, who suggest that Edelman’s “queer embrace of negativity might be optimistically motivated.” Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*. 161

³⁰¹ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*.

³⁰² *Ibid.* 1

restricted to the idea of a diminishing future, Halberstam's queer time concerns the production of what she calls, "alternative temporalities" that lies outside of those paradigmatic markers of experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction and death."³⁰³ It is this emphasis on alternative that provides an entry point into seizing Edelman's critique and investing it with potential for rethinking the uses of responsibility and the future in environmental discourse.

Placing responsibility in queer time, I argue, would serve to disjoint our temporal investment in an environmental discourse tethered to producing a future in the image of a politically troubled present. To think responsibility in queer time would emphasize resistance to the closure of political imagination in the name of planetary responsibility and redemption committed to sustaining a future that refuses to question the social and political exclusions already prefigured as a constitutive part of that future. Instead, responsibility in queer time would allow for a future that is not fate, that is yet to be written and its inhabitants and ways of life yet to be determined.

³⁰³ Ibid. 2

Chapter Five: Conclusion: Rhetoric and the Violence of Responsibility

We need norms in order to live, and to live well, and to know in what direction to transform our social world, we are also constrained by norms in ways that sometimes do violence to us and which, for reasons of social justice we must oppose.

- Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*

Asked toward the latter part of his life how he came to define his interests in a series of diverse subjects, from the penitentiary system to powerful discourses of medicalization and public health, Foucault explained that he was motivated by a very basic and fundamental question. That is, the desire to comprehend what is happening around us; to inquire, “What is our present?”³⁰⁴ Inspired by Foucault’s commitment to critical inquiry as a form of political work, I began this project with similar intentions. I set out to make sense of our present through an examination of the responsibility rhetoric that abounds in 21st century American politics. To be sure, my project has remained largely grounded in critique, intent on pulling apart the rhetorical constructions of responsibility that inform and shape political life. However, the sheer ubiquity and continued proliferation of “responsibility-talk” begs the question – why responsibility? Why now?

Responsibility, Rhetoric and an Ontology of the Present

Throughout this project I have sought to demonstrate how responsibility functions as an inscriptive rather than descriptive political concept. By making responsibility a specifically political problem, I have emphasized that responsibility does not simply reduce to a question of uncovering levels of blame

³⁰⁴ Foucault, Lotringer, and Hochroth, *The Politics of Truth*. 129

or accountability. In studying responsibility through the lens of rhetorical analysis, I have shown how a diverse range of political actors use responsibility to secure political positions as well as construct compelling narratives and representations of political events. I have also demonstrated that uses of responsibility are themselves embedded in and often constitutive of the problems of inequality, neo-colonialism, racism, gender bias and sexual discrimination that pervade American political life. To do so has allowed me to illustrate the contested nature of responsibility as well as emphasize the repressive and productive political work responsibility rhetoric does.

To this point, my objective has been to uncover the ways in which responsibility mediates and shapes political life. From the economic crisis of 2008 to the debates regarding the uses of torture following 9/11 and the ongoing discussions regarding political and ethical commitments to environmental policy and activism, responsibility produces specific ways of seeing, thinking and feeling political moments. For example, in my analysis of the financial crisis of 2008, I demonstrated the constitutive role responsibility rhetoric played in masking the normative violence of capitalism by analyzing a shift in economic discourse from an anthropomorphic representation of the market to the active naming of blameworthy subjects who could be identified as responsible. In this regard, responsibility rhetoric was central to stabilizing the crisis by providing a familiar framework of accountability and blame through which it could be understood and internalized.

In my discussion of torture discourse following 9/11, I demonstrated how the rhetoric of responsibility served to humanize and justify acts of violence by constructing an image of the responsible leader who reluctantly overcomes his disease with violence in the name of protecting the nation. At the same time, responsibility rhetoric played a crucial role in rendering the targets and victims of that violence irresponsible, non-human Others against whom torture and detention was not only legitimate but acceptable as well. This chapter placed responsibility at the center of thinking about who has access to the category of the human and how exclusion from that category works to produce torturable bodies that are subject to cruelty and violence.

Finally, in my chapter on mainstream environmentalism's discourse of heteronormative futurity, I explored the role that responsibility plays in authorizing specific conceptions of communal life. Rather than take for granted uses of responsibility to future generations in debates around environmental policy and ethics, my analysis made visible the ways in which responsibility rhetoric is used in the present to delineate between what is and what is not worth sustaining for the future. In similar fashion to examples from earlier chapters, I once again made clear that the normative force of responsibility is, at least in part, derived from the continual production of irresponsible, and in this case, homosexual and non-white, others.

In each one of these examples, responsibility rhetoric also worked to condition and limit the range of appropriate responses to political problems while precluding certain questions altogether. Responsibility accomplishes this by

constructing a conception of who belongs inside the political community and who needs to be kept outside its borders. This, I suggest, is directly related to the ways in which responsibility arguments invoke specific conceptions of community and belonging by not only providing a distinct vision of “being-in-common”³⁰⁵ but also by acting as liminal markers that structure the boundaries of community, notions of correct action and normal behavior. Responsibility rhetoric produces a field of political intelligibility around specific events, bringing actors into being, inscribing and proscribing particular modes of subjectivity. It does this by always calling forth its irresponsible other: the suspect citizen whose greed caused the economic crisis, the irrationally dangerous Islamic terrorist ruled by rage and resentment, the toxic homosexual endangering the health of the community and the poor, non-white mother putting a sustainable future at risk by draining vital and scarce resources. It is for this reason that responsibility carries with it an intense set of political stakes. The rhetoric of responsibility strikes at the heart of Judith Butler’s question as to “who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?”³⁰⁶

The Violence of Responsibility

In the history of political and moral thought, responsibility has often been associated with attendant political concepts like justice, freedom, obligation and duty.³⁰⁷ However, one of the crucial insights of my project is the close

³⁰⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). xxxvii

³⁰⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. 20

³⁰⁷ Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*.

relationship responsibility actually bears to the political concept that many thinkers, save Machiavelli, Hobbes and Fanon, prefer to exclude when cataloging the pantheon of core political concepts. That is, the specific relationship responsibility has to violence.³⁰⁸

At its core, the violence of responsibility inheres within what Heidegger referred to as the “metaphysics of presence” and what Derrida would later go on to explicitly call the “violence of metaphysics.”³⁰⁹ This is specifically evident in the ways in which the rhetoric of responsibility focuses public attention by creating explanatory frameworks that appear as Truth. The appearance of responsibility as Truth, however, exists only at the expense of actually being able to clearly identify the structures of power that condition its very appearance. This is precisely why I have stressed that utterances of responsibility rhetoric cannot be taken for granted, and demand our critical attention despite their familiarity. Rhetorical deployments of responsibility are directly involved in the production of reality. As such, I have stressed that any time responsibility is invoked, whether it is in the context of economic crisis, debates over the use of torture, or

³⁰⁸ It is important to note that there have been numerous studies that have focused on the relationship between violence and responsibility from the perspective of moral philosophy and ethics. These studies have largely focused on the attempt to designate individual and collective responsibility for specific acts of violence or the legitimate boundaries of moral conduct in relation to violence in the context of armed conflict and theaters of war. For examples see, Sandra L. Bloom and Michael Reichert, *Bearing Witness: Violence and Collective Responsibility* (New York: Haworth Maltreatment and Trauma Press, 1998); C. A. J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); John Harris, *Violence and Responsibility* (London ; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980).

³⁰⁹ See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). and Martin Heidegger and David Farrell Krell, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)*, Rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008).

environmental discourse, we pause to reflect on how it is being used, by whom and to what ends.

But my project makes clear that what is at stake in this reflection is not merely an assessment of proper language use (as if such a thing actually existed). Instead, as my chapter on torture discourse in post-9/11 America reveals, from the theoretical problem of dirty hands to the physical reality of Abu Ghraib, the stakes are nothing less than the bodies and communities that responsibility rhetoric leaves marked in its wake. While my examination of responsibility rhetoric in the 2008 economic crisis called attention to the ways in which shifts in neo-liberal economic discourse mask the systemic violence of capital itself, subsequent chapters on torture and environmental politics highlighted that responsibility and violence go hand in hand not only at the systemic level but also at the level of the individual, by producing a category of subjects that are acceptable targets of violence and/or political exclusion. In short, my project has continuously demonstrated that designations of responsibility are used politically to mark the very limits of human life.

By calling forth its irresponsible other, responsibility rhetoric is often used by political actors to render specific subjects altogether excluded from the normative category of humanness. But in their exclusion, the irresponsible and blameworthy are far from invisible. Rather, they are highly visible and vulnerable – constantly watched, criticized and questioned. At best, they are disregarded and discarded as unworthy of our communal obligations and empathy. At worst, they are literally marked for death; made the legitimate targets of torture, indefinite

detention and other horrific acts of violence. In this way, responsibility exposes certain bodies to physical harm while at the same time humanizing the use of violence by others.

The idea that the irresponsible deserve what they get and get what they deserve – whether it is queers dying of AIDS or people losing their homes during the foreclosure crisis or addicts that wind up on the street – has tremendous currency in an American political culture that places such a strong emphasis on the individual and the individual’s power to make him or herself regardless of social circumstances or historical context. As Judith Halberstam argues in the *Queer Art of Failure*, “Believing that success depends upon one’s attitude is far preferable to Americans than recognizing that their success is the outcome of the tilted scales of race, class and gender.”³¹⁰ However, the cost of this type of thinking, Halberstam notes, is an emphasis on personal responsibility, “meaning that while capitalism produces some people’s success though other people’s failures, the ideology of positive thinking insists that success depends only upon working hard and failure is always of your own doing.”³¹¹ The notion that the irresponsible and blameworthy get what they deserve also places a limit on our sense of communal obligations to extend care and concern the way we would to seemingly responsible, and thus deserving, citizens while at the same time

³¹⁰ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

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³¹¹ Ibid. 3

bolstering an affective and psychological dimension to being a responsible and “morally worthy” member of the community.³¹²

Rethinking Responsibility

Though my project has centered on subjecting responsibility to critical analysis, this does not equate to arguing that we should do away with responsibility altogether. In critiquing responsibility I am not denying its necessity as a political and moral concept. All too often, critical projects and projects of reclamation are cast as mutually exclusive. My aim has been to demonstrate that the foundation or ground for any future project that attempts to reclaim responsibility for progressive or liberatory political aims requires rhetorical and deconstructive analysis precisely because it is a useful tool for reminding us that political language must not only be the starting point of political analysis, “but the place where paradoxes and suppressions of power relations can be charted.”³¹³ As such, the rhetorical analysis of responsibility provides an entry point for future projects of reclamation because it brings us face to face with the politics of responsibility rather than a fictive space in which responsibility as a concept can be severed from power relations, social context and cultural norms. Though a full normative project is beyond the scope of this current work, what follows is a brief description of some considerations that can serve as the basis for further study and analysis.

³¹² Alyson M. Cole, "Therapeutics of Blame: Blaming Victims and Victims as Blamers," in *The Cult of True Victimhood: From the War Welfare to the War on Terror* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

³¹³ Daniel Skinner and Steven Pludwin, "Unsought Responsibility: The U.S. Supreme Court and the Politics of Passive Writing " *Polity* 45, no. 19.

What makes responsibility so vexing is precisely the fact that in spite of its problematic nature and intimate relationship to violence, it is, as Connolly reminds us, “necessary for political life;” necessary because we live, not as isolated individuals, but as deeply relational beings.³¹⁴ As Annika Thiem argues:

None of us live as fully self-sufficient, autonomous beings; we are implicated in the lives of others not only at the beginning and end of our lives, but all throughout them. We live with others, proximate to others whom we encounter personally, whom we might encounter, or whom we might wish that we would need not encounter, and with others whom we might never meet directly, but whose lives and plights are nonetheless enmeshed with ours, and not always for the better.³¹⁵

I want to conclude by asking how, given Thiem’s insistence on relationality, interconnectivity and interdependence, might we reconsider the uses of responsibility for the future of political life?

One of the things I have found throughout this project is that while interconnectivity is an inescapable fact of political life, responsibility is often used to deny that reality as well as the vulnerability and instability that it creates. A prime example of this is the rant from CNBC commentator Rick Santilli that I discussed in Chapter Three. At the height of the financial crisis in 2009, with countless numbers of Americans facing foreclosure, eviction and, in many cases, homelessness, Santelli, broadcasting from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, put the crisis in stark binary terms. On one side stood the winners, responsible citizens who saved judiciously and acted financially prudent. Opposite them, the “losers,” who, as a result of acting irresponsibly, bore the sole

³¹⁴ Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*.

³¹⁵ Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility*. 225

responsibility for the dire straights they found themselves in. When Santelli suggested that the Obama administration “put up a website to have people vote on the Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages; or would we like to at least buy cars and buy houses in foreclosure and give them to people that might have a chance to actually prosper down the road, and reward people that could carry the water instead of drink the water,” he was met with overwhelming cheers in support.³¹⁶ Rather than invoke responsibility as call to think collectively about human vulnerability and suffering or to reflect upon the complex ways in which global finance exposes everyday individuals to a host of factors beyond their control, Santelli’s rant, which was not unique in its tone or set of targets, was an explicit denial of collective vulnerability. The conception of responsibility at work in his rant proves insufficient for providing a foundation for ethical and political engagement that reflects the shared instability of human existence. It also fails to provide a sufficient framework for thinking about the ways in which, for example, global capitalism, simultaneously speaks the language of individual agency and personal responsibility while negating the actual force of individual decisions.

It is not surprising then that from the economic crisis to fears of an uncertain and unsustainable future, the rhetoric of responsibility abounds in the face of events that are potentially destabilizing. As we’ve seen, responsibility rhetoric often acts as a mode of stabilization by appearing as that which is beyond the political, a moral truth about the world that lies beyond contestation. In these instances, responsibility and especially the personal responsibility of liberal and

³¹⁶ "Santelli's Tea Party".

neo-liberal discourse is used to deny the scariest and most destabilizing fact of political life and human existence – that our actions impact the lives of others, that we are implicated in the actions of others and that we live lives that are never wholly our own. What’s more, the things that impact our lives are often not even proximate to us – but instead exist only as distant abstractions. Furthermore, while we live lives often enhanced by others, we are sometimes compromised or made vulnerable by them. In the face of vulnerability, the violence of responsibility is a reactionary tool. It is not surprising then that lamentations about the loss of personal responsibility in America often go hand in hand with expressions of regret over America’s decline and the loss of American power. It’s also telling that the same people often make these types of statements.³¹⁷

But what might it mean to rethink and reinvest responsibility in a different way - With an altogether different orientation toward the other and otherness in general? The answer lies not only in the practice of resignifying responsibility in the context of progressive political projects but also in establishing a normative basis upon which responsibility can be thought anew.³¹⁸ Here, I am inspired by Judith Butler’s argument in *Undoing Gender* that while resignification is indeed an important political practice,

The norms that we would consult to answer this question cannot themselves be derived from resignification. They have to be derived from a radical democratic theory and practice... One must make substantive decisions about what will be a less violent future, what will be a more inclusive population, what will help to fulfill in substantive

³¹⁷ See e.g. Alyson M. Cole, "9-1-1: The Nation as Victim," in *The Cult of True Victimhood: For the War on Welfare the the War on Terror* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

³¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004). 224, 225

terms, the claims of universality and justice that we seek to understand in their cultural specificity and social meaning.³¹⁹

But on what basis can we begin to reclaim and resignify responsibility for progressive aims, especially considering that, as Oliver reminds us, “Butler’s theory of performative resignification needs to be supplemented with a theory that can explain how to distinguish between conservative and liberatory resignifications.”³²⁰ This is especially the case because while rhetorical analysis is indeed critical to unmasking responsibility as a production that relies upon, and is also constitutive of, an exclusionary set of norms, rethinking responsibility requires that we move to not only destabilize that normative foundation but also begin the process of asking what norms might work in their place. We must also ask on what grounds uses of the rhetoric of responsibility can be called out as evidence of bad faith in order to distinguish progressive and liberatory uses of responsibility from violent and reactionary ones. In this regard, Oliver’s theory of false witnessing can prove helpful. For Oliver, a false witness and false witnessing are narratives that, instead opening up a space for dialogue and thoughtful responsiveness, “attempt to close off response from others, otherness or difference.”³²¹ I want to extend Oliver’s conception of false witnessing to think about ways in which we may begin to assess claims of responsibility and uses of responsibility rhetoric that actually run counter to a conception of responsibility that opens a space for understanding our sense of subjectivity and sense of self as rooted and embedded in a larger social context.

³¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York ; London: Routledge, 2004). 225

³²⁰ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing : Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). 113

³²¹ *Ibid.* 19

As opposed to the false witness of responsibility, rethinking and reclaiming responsibility requires learning to embrace the instability of political life as well as the ambiguity and the vulnerability that accompanies living in a world with others. Second, it means embracing a world and a nation steeped much more in difference than in the similitude so essential to the foundational components of Enlightenment morality and ethics. Third, it demands acceptance of the complexity of political life and the idea that events in the world cannot and will not be reduced to the simplicity of causal narratives, attributions of blame or accusations of guilt—in short, a willingness and a courage to confront the messy nature of political life. Any project that looks forward towards a normative project of reclamation must take seriously the idea that rhetorical constructions that disclaim responsibility in the name of responsibility, or (as in the case of Rick Santelli) that use responsibility to seek to deny the fundamental interconnections between individuals and their larger social/political contexts, would in fact be a form of responsibility as false witnessing.

Given the ways in which, as I have highlighted throughout this project, responsibility as a form of political rhetoric derives its force from a host of ontological assumptions, norms, and discourses of power, reclaiming responsibility for progressive aims is certainly no easy task. Pierre Bourdieu argues that, “from a strictly linguistic point of view, anyone can say anything just as the private can order the captain to clear the latrines; but from a sociological point of view, it is clear that not anyone can assert anything or else does so at his peril.” In taking the rhetoric of responsibility as the focus of my project, I have

demonstrated the necessity of assuming the wager that Bourdieu's private makes. It is imperative to assume the role of the private in Bourdieu's formulation in order to assert all that the everyday uses of responsibility omit and attempt to silence. By struggling against the all too familiar deployments of responsibility that abound in American political life we begin to piece together a more comprehensive picture of what is actually taking place, producing a better understanding of what our present is. To borrow a phrase from Hannah Arendt "there exist today as many signs to justify hope as there are to instill fear."³²² We must continue to confront the discursive frameworks of power and its contradictions head on in an "attempt to think together what our present vocabulary presents to us in terms of opposition and contradiction."³²³ This commitment will no doubt guarantee the development of counter-narratives, despite attempts to ensure otherwise.

³²² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³²³ *On Revolution*, Compass Books, (New York: Viking Press, 1965). 224

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