

RESPONSIBILITY ACROSS CULTURES: UNVEILING LINGUISTIC NUANCES

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Article Info

Keywords: Transnationality, Responsibility, Linguistic Diversity, Cultural Perspectives, Cross-Cultural Communication

DOI

10.5281/zenodo.10567407

Abstract

This paper delves into the intricate dimensions of transnational perspectives on the concept of "responsibility" by conducting a linguistic exploration across diverse language groups. Focusing on languages from the Indo-European, Semitic, Altaic, and Philippine groups, the researcher engages with educated speakers to unravel the roots and definitions of "responsibility" in Latin, Greek, English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, Finnish, Turkish, Korean, Tagalog, and Pampangan.

The investigation reveals a fascinating tapestry of cultural and temporal nuances surrounding the understanding of "responsibility" globally. Despite a shared semblance of the concept across various cultures, disparities emerge, highlighting the intricate interplay between linguistic diversity and cultural perspectives. This examination sheds light on how the notion of "responsibility" is shaped by linguistic influences, reflecting the rich tapestry of global cultures. As the linguistic definitions traverse through Latin and Greek roots to the contemporary languages of English, German, French, and beyond, a mosaic of meanings unfolds. The study observes variations in the conceptualization of "responsibility" in languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Finnish, Turkish, Korean, Tagalog, and Pampangan, offering insights into the unique cultural lenses through which responsibility is perceived.

The findings underscore the dynamic nature of linguistic constructs, emphasizing the evolving nature of "responsibility" across cultures and over time. This exploration not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the semantic richness of the term but also prompts reflection on the implications for cross-cultural communication and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Introduction

I. Linguistic definitions of responsibility

In view of the fact that this paper will focus especially on issues of transnationality, it would be useful to begin with some linguistic definitions of "responsibility" across language groups. The researcher is familiar with or has reliable access to educated speakers of languages from the Indo-European, Semitic and Altaic groups, as well as two languages from the Philippines. The following discussion will explore the roots and definitions of the word "responsibility" in Latin, Greek, English, German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, Finnish, Turkish, Korean, Tagalog and Pampangan.

This quick survey suggests that in cultures across the globe there does exist a commonly held notion of "responsibility," but that it differs to a greater or lesser extent across cultures and over time.

Indo-European languages

Greek and Latin. If one consults *moral responsibility* in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, one finds a lengthy discussion of the Aristotelian heritage of the question of responsibility (SEP 2008). Yet, in fact, there was no single word for "responsibility" in either Greek or Latin (Robinson 1962: 277). In a review of Arthur W.H. Adkins work, *Merit and Responsibility: a Study in Greek Values*, Robinson notes that Adkins explores such concepts/ terms as *aitios* ("culpable"), *anaitios* ("blameless"), *ethelōn* ("to wish to do," "to mean to," to purport"), *hekōn* ("willingly," "purposely," "of free will") and *akōn/ aekōn* ("involuntary," "against one's will"). He notes, however, Adkins seems mainly to be concerned about the absence in Greek of an English concept called "responsibility" (Robinson 1962:277). Latin roots are often cited for "responsibility" in English and the Romance languages. In an article on the biological roots of language the authors discuss at length the roots of the English word "responsibility."

Responsibility is constructed from the Latin root *respons-* and the suffix *bilem*. *Respons-*, in turn, results from the combination of the prefix *re-* with the verb *spondere*, which we translate as to make a solemn pledge. The resulting compound, *respondeo* found use in contractual settings in which an engagement was reciprocated (Ernout4, s.v.). In Latin, the root verb was applied to pledges of a religious nature, in particular ones in which the father promised (*spondet*) his daughter (*sponsa*) to the bridegroom (*sponsus*—a word that survived into Middle English) (Ibid.). Our word *spouse* is a derivative of these uses, as is *sponsor*, for which the ecclesiastical use retains the old meaning: —one who answers [is liable] for an infant at baptism (OED, s.v.). With the *re-* prefix attached, *respondeo* was initially applied to oracles, whose predictions were made only after a pledge was received. This use conserved the legal and religious applications of the root in the word *responsum* (Ernout, s.v.). *Respond-ere* subsequently lost its technical flavour and came to be used as —answer (I) or —respond (II) in the common language (Ibid.). (Jennings & Verbaudhede 2010: 2).

And so on the authors analyze the suffix *bilem* and the implications of the passive and active uses of "passive adjectives in -ble" (Jennings & Verbaudhede 2010: 4), without ever addressing the fact that the English word itself did not come into use until the past few centuries, and it is a matter of debate whether or not it did so in conscious "dialogue" with Latin.

English, French, Spanish.

Karlheinz Stierle, in an article entitled "Interpretations of Responsibility and the Responsibility of Interpretation," notes that It is striking that this central term of modern moral philosophy is of a rather recent coinage, not much earlier than the French Revolution (1994:853). The Online Etymology Dictionary cites 1787 as the earliest known manuscript evidence for the English word "responsibility." "Responsibility" is in turn cited as a derivative of "responsible:"

1590s, "answerable (to another, for something)," from Fr. *responsible*, from L. *responsus*, pp. of *respondere* "to respond"...Meaning "morally accountable for one's actions" is attested from 1836. Retains the sense of "obligation" in the Latin root word.

The Spanish *responsibilidad* is derived from the same Latin root, though it is not clear when the word came into use. What we can say with certainty is that none of the words derived from the romance language root are derived directly from a Latin word for "responsibility:" they are all more recent coinages.

German. The German word for "responsibility" is *verantwortung*, based on *Antwort*, answer (Stahl 2004: 45). Thus, implied in the word *verantwortung* is a process of answering a question, which like the English and Latin involves more than one person. The "German prefix ver-... may be either an intensive or, conversely, a privative, a negation" (Miller 2005: 74). Given that all the other Teutonic words for responsibility also involve sometimes almost literally "answering," it seems clear that the *ver-* prefix of the German *verantwortung* is an intensive and not a privative.

Like the Romance roots, all of the Teutonic words also imply at least two parties in a relationship of asking for and answering for something. Indeed it is interesting that the Teutonic cognates of *answer* also frequently bear the same sense of solemnity, obligation and even judgement that the Romance root *spondere* does.

Semitic languages

Arabic. The Arabic word for "responsibility" is *mas'uliyah*. The root of *mas'uliyah* is *sa'ala*, which is the verb "ask." The prefix *ma-* means "one who".

One who asks a question is *sa'il*, while one who is asked a question and presumably is expected to give an answer is *mas'ul*. Thus, implied in the word *mas'uliyah* is a process of asking and answering a question, which involves at least two persons.

Hebrew. The Hebrew word for "responsibility" is *achrayut*, and its root is *acher*, "other," as in "another person" (Olitzky & Isaacs 1997: 231-2; Ginsburgh 2004:12; deWet 2005:39). *Achrai* is the Modern Hebrew word for "responsible," and the *ut* suffix renders it to "responsibility." The earliest known occurrences of *achrayut* appear in the legal texts of the Mishnah:

A guardian who has "achrayut" (sic) over property is responsible to replace the goods with others, if they are lost or stolen (*Bava Metzia*, 3:11.) Land over which "achrayut" applies must be mortgaged to meet other obligations (*Kiddushin*, 1:5).

We might translate the word as "othering," since there is no direct translation into English which captures the importance of the "other person" to the connotations of *achrayut*.

The word is widely used, with a variety of connotations, in Modern Hebrew. Orthodox Jews regard *achrayut* as the religious obligation "to improve or rectify a given situation." *Achrayut* is used politically and militarily to refer to leaders' responsibility for the results of their decisions. In the 20th century *achrayut* takes on a deeper philosophical meaning as the ethical foundation of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, the famous Jewish thinker. Levinas held that "otherness" is fundamental to human existence that we can never fully comprehend another (*acher*) and that all human existence turns on our efforts to bridge otherness. Moral responsibility, for Levinas, arises from this effort, which is called *achrayut*. (Katz & Trout 2005:157ff.).

It is worth noting that modern Hebrew, while founded on biblical Hebrew, is a relatively new language largely created by only a few individuals only a little over a century ago (Mirsky 2008). As such it is a living perspective on the ways that existing older roots (e.g., *achrayut*, *spondere*, *ansvar*, etc.) are shaped to serve new semantic requirements. In 2006 the constitutional committee of the Israeli Knesset, in a special conference on forms of government, endeavored to coin a modern Hebrew word for "accountability." The new word is *achrayutiut*. Israeli Michael Jaffe, a well-known pro-democracy blogger, ridicules the new coinage: The morphological English

equivalent of *achrayutiut* would be something like "responsibility-ism" or "responsibility-ness," a far cry from "accountability" (Jaffe 2006).

What is interesting here is that *achrayut* does, in fact, capture the sense of moral responsibility to others contained in the word "accountability" but one suspects that the blogger is more familiar with the sense of the English "responsibility" than the Hebrew roots of the word *achrayut*. One has to wonder just how aware of the deep Latin *spondere* were those who coined the word "responsibility" in English.

Altaic languages

Altaic languages are interesting because they span such an enormous swath of the globe, inscribing an arc from Finland to Turkey and Central Asia (e.g., Uzbek, Kazakh) to Korea. The author has a minor familiarity with Turkish, and was able to find online materials for the Finnish and Korean the latter supported by a friend who knows the Korean script.

Finnish. The Finnish word for responsibility is *edevastuu*. Although there are several other words which can mean responsibility, *edevastuu* is the most frequently found on the web, and is used in such expressions as moral responsibility" (*moraalinen edevastuu*) and "corporate responsibility" (*jaffestynyt edevastuu*) (Kaivola & Melen-Passo 2007:31). A recent document on Finnish Christian responsibility for climate change states:

The earlier Finnish language form of the word 'vastuu' (responsibility) is 'edevastuu' (be liable for something). Already in the language of Mikael Agricola, this refers to legal terminology and shows what the issue is especially in the Old Testament Bible ethics: In front of God, humans are liable for their actions and omissions (ELCF 2008: 26).

Further investigation reveals that *vastuu* itself can mean "responsibility, liability, accountability, answerability, answerableness." The prefix *ede-* translates loosely to the English pro- or pre- (Teachinfo: Finnish 2010) -- suggesting that "responsibility" is understood to be something that exists before the fact, prior to an action or event for which one is accountable.

Turkish. The Turkish word for responsibility is *sorumluluk*. The *sor-* root includes a constellation of meanings related to questions, questioning, asking. The verb "to ask" is *sormak*, and the word for question or interrogation is *soru*; for question or inquiry, *sorgu* (Redhouse 1975: 460). Once again the word for "responsibility" returns to the idea of response, of answering what is asked of one.

Korean. Korean, as an Altaic language, is in the same family as Turkish and Finnish. Korean is, however, written in a script which combines Chinese ideograms with Korean phonetic characters, and which builds words by combining ideograms with grammatical morphemes (Omniglot 2010). The basic word for responsibility in Korean is 책임, *ch'aekngim*. It is listed by one source as meaning "accountability, blame, buck, charge, fault, responsibility, trust" (Ectaco 2010); another lists "imperative; commitment; a responsibility or promise; state of being liable; needing a trustworthy person to do it; the proper sphere or extent of your activities; the condition of being responsible; nuisance; responsibility; duty; obligation; liability; blame" (bluedic 2010). Though the author was unable to find reliable information about the root of the word, it is clear that once again there are legal and obligatory connotations are important to the concept of responsibility. There seems to be a stronger dimension, in Korean, of blame and fault, as well as trustworthiness, which is interesting.

Asia-Pacific region

Tagalog and Pampangan. The author does not read any Asian scripts nor have access to educated speakers. In an effort at least to extend this inquiry further south and east across the globe, we did a random sampling of fourteen speakers of Tagalog and Pampangan, both languages (not dialects) from the Philippines.

Today both Tagalog and Pampangan commonly use the Spanish word for "responsibility" *responsibilidad*. There exist, however, old indigenous words for "responsibility:" Tagalog *pananagutan* is still known and understood, but all fourteen interviewees said that it is only used in discussions of history. They reported that they are taught the word in history classes, but in common parlance the Spanish cognate is used. Initially the speakers reported that there is no difference in connotation between the two words, but that they are interchangeable. Four interviewees, however, went back to teachers and older relatives with the question and returned to say that *pananagutan* is understood as something like "conscience" an internal sense of empathy and responsibility which "comes from the heart," or "is in your spirit." *Responsibilidad*, in contrast, is the legal or social obligation to redress a wrong, help others, obey the law, etc.

Interestingly, the three speakers of Pampangan knew both the Tagalog *pananagutan* and Spanish-derived *responsibilidad*, and they knew that there exists an indigenous Pampangan word but none could remember it. This suggests a very interesting "double linguistic colonialism:" first Spanish replaced Tagalog, and then eventually modern Tagalog "colonized" Pampangan.

The most striking similarity amongst the various linguistic groups is the frequent reoccurrence of "answer" and "respond" in the root of words for "responsibility." Hebrew and Arabic offer interesting contrasts to the Indo-European and Altaic examples. The Arabic word is derived from the verb "to ask" which still implies an answer or response. Hebrew, however, refers to quite a different concept the "other." What the words share in every language surveyed is the implication that at least two persons are involved in any concept of responsibility responder and respondee, asker and agent, self and other. Thus somehow the sense of obligation, accountability, and response must be something that is shared amongst the members of a community, however small. Another interesting theme emerges from this inquiry: words are changed, exchanged, shaped, colonized and consciously coined. Most of the Indo-European words for "responsibility" are relatively recent. Arabic *mas'uliyah* has inevitably been shaped by its use in the religious texts of the Qur'an and Hadith. The Hebrew *achrayot* has not only been shaped by its use in the Mishnah, but by the re-invention of Hebrew in the modern period, and by the ubiquitous use of English in Israeli society. The Tagalog and Pampangan examples further suggest the transformation of notions of responsibility as military, economic and cultural colonization occurs.

It is questionable how far the deep linguistic roots of the words actually inform us about modern conceptions of responsibility. What we can certainly say is that the concept involves a shared sense of obligation amongst at least two people (but probably more), and that the concept is not precisely the same across cultures and over time. It might be more useful to explore more thoroughly the modern cultural contexts, the "shared sense," of the *use* of the word, the way people actually behave in situations which call for whatever is commonly understood as "moral responsibility." Let us turn now to a brief discussion of the concept of "responsibility" in western philosophy as a background for considering this shared sense and behaviors associated with it.

II. A brief overview of the philosophy of moral responsibility Responsibility, free will and determinism

Moral responsibility is reaction towards something either with praise or blame. We use praise or blame, however, in different ways depending on whether we see actions as moral choices or as mechanical cause-and-effect associations. For this reason the problem of freedom of will vs. determinism is fundamental to the philosophy of moral responsibility.

The long philosophical interest in moral responsibility is associated with a commonly shared idea that we ("persons") are distinct from other creatures. Although there are similarities between persons (human beings) and other living individuals, persons are different from those other individuals. One of the differences that distinguish persons from other creatures is that we typically believe that persons are morally responsible agents: they have control over their actions.

If we (persons) do things because we are forced to do them by laws of nature, then how can we choose to do the right or wrong things? Are we able to choose what to do or how to do it? If God determines what we do, then are we truly able to choose how to act? Some would consider that we give up our special status as "persons" if we do not have control over our actions (and are therefore not morally responsible).

In order to explain or define moral responsibility it is important to clarify its conceptual definition. Any discussion of moral responsibility should include criteria for being a moral agent. It should investigate the reasons behind doing something right or otherwise. The definition should explain situations where moral responsibility is applied to an action of our choice. For example, it is fair for us to be responsible for our behaviors, but not for the mistakes of the others. It would be useful to review quickly the history of thinking about moral responsibility in the west, as a common basis for further discussion.

Greek texts such as Homeric epics in the eighth century BC provided a point of departure for the philosophy of moral responsibility. In these texts, behaviors of people were considered as worthy of praise or blame. *Fatalism* describes the view that our deeds are predetermined either by God or other powers like fate or the zodiac. The fatalist view holds that we are only able to do what has been determined for us without questioning it or even trying to escape from it. *Fatalism* underlies the notion that one cannot be held responsible for things one has been forced to do without having the ability to decide. Aristotle's writings addressed fatalism with different explanations. He suggested persons are not obliged to do things compulsorily: they are able to choose whether to do these things or not. In short, he argued that humans have free will. We can't be held responsible for things others force us to do, but as long as we have minds to think we need to be aware of our actions, and we assume control over our behaviors. There is uncertainty about exactly what Aristotle's thinking was regarding praise and blame. It is not clear whether praising or blaming a person for his actions responds to something basic in the actions which "deserve" praise or blame. It is possible that he wanted to say that responsibility is one way to adapt the actions of a person in response to punishment or reward. The latter view is only acceptable if we have a universal code of actions that sets the rules for our behaviors.

The first position that the agent is blamed or praised according to whether or not the action deserves praise or blame is called the merit-based view. The latter position in which blame or praise is used to change agents' behaviors is known as the consequentiality view.

Fatalism is also called determinism. Causal determinism includes scientific and theological determinism. Scientific determinism holds that there exist both universal predetermined conditions and laws of nature. Like *fatalism*, scientific determinism holds that everything happens as per the laws of nature. We cannot "decide" on what to do. Theological determinism maintains that God has sovereignty over everything: as an omnipotent and omniscient power God determines our actions and so we have no control over them. Opposing fatalism and causal determinism is the idea human actions are important and freely arrived at. In between these two positions is the idea that we have the choice over our actions no matter if they were determined or not, because we have reason which helps us to choose from apparent variables even if God already knows what we will choose.

During the Medieval period causal responsibility occupied the core of the western philosophy concerning moral responsibility. Debate on both freedom and responsibility generated two issues; if God is all-good and omnipotent, who is responsible for evil and who assumes control over bad behaviors? And if everything is predestined by the omniscient God who knows everything, how can we decide on our actions and be held responsible for them? With the emergence of scientific method during the Enlightenment period scientific determinism began to prevail over theological determinism. With scientific method it is possible to hypothesize laws which determined events in the world, to suggest that everything is subject to the laws of cause and effect. These views have serious implications for the idea of free will, and therefore for the philosophy of moral responsibility. If all of our actions have their

roots in natural law and they can be explained by its laws, we are not free to choose our actions. The view that causal determinism cannot be reconciled with free will is *incompatibilism*, determinism and free will are incompatible.

It is possible to argue, however, that in spite of the existence of a scientific worldview which gives explanation for everything in the universe, still responsibility can work. We still can choose what we want to do and, thus, be held responsible for these actions even if they are causally determined. This view, in which freedom of will co-exists with determinism, is called *compatibilism*.

The uncertainty in Aristotle's concept of moral responsibility was that it is not clear whether he is a "consequentialist" or endorsed a merit-based theory of responsibility. To put this into the language of the recent history of moral responsibility, usually "incompatibilist" argue for a merit-based theory, which in turn assumes that we can act upon our knowledge of what is right or wrong. In contrast, "compatibilists" tend to be consequentialists in terms of their views about determinism, praise and blame, even though they argue that we have free will in our actions.

By the mid-20th century thinkers started to focus on a different form of merit-based view, and to ask whether there is only one particular concept to explain moral responsibility. The recent focus was on the outward behavior of the agent regarding his action, and upon the outward expression of praise or blame by the person who holds the agent responsible for his actions. In any moral act there is an agent who acts and a "holder responsible," who judges the agent's action. By a consequentialist "holder" this action might be evaluated as worthy of either praise or blame. The judgment of the consequentialist is generated from the view of cause and effect by which the holder expects to influence the behavior of the agent by praising or blaming. From a merit-based view, which focuses on the moral responsibility of the agent, an action might be evaluated as morally responsible if this action was intrinsically good, because the agent has the choice to do otherwise (bad or wrong action). This view proceeds from the merit-based "holder's" assumption of the free will of the agent. The merit-based view depends on the assumption of freewill and many philosophers of ethics maintain that free will and causal determinism are incompatible.

Peter Strawson and the problem of determinism

From the 1960's on, Oxford philosopher Peter Strawson worked toward establishing the existence of a commonly shared spatio-temporal framework by which humans comprehend the world and relationships with others. In a famous essay called "Freedom and Resentment" (196) Strawson tried to resolve the dispute between compatibilists and incompatibilists by establishing that both were wrong. He argued that moral responsibility is not a theoretical frame through which people behave. It is rather a combination of various attitudes springing out of our interaction with each other. These attitudes were designated by Strawson as *participant reactive attitudes*. Because they are a) normal attitudinal reflection to the others' good will, ill will or disregard.

And b) articulated by someone who is involved in a proactive participatory relationship. This relationship proceeds in a reciprocal way. The "participants" in situations of moral agency are bound by interpersonal relationships and share certain attitudes and assumptions about good will, ill will and indifference to each other. He calls the whole construct of moral actions, responsibility, praise and blame "*participant reactive attitudes*" and their associated practices (Strawson 1960: 4ff.).

To put this another way: when I hold someone responsible for his behavior, it means that I expect him to share my attitudes about right and wrong, and to behave towards me (or whoever) with a certain amount of good will and I expect that he shares that expectation.

There can be some exemptions from the reactive attitudes. An incapable person within a moral community can be excused for his mental incapability or his very young age (irresponsible). We make exceptions we excuse people from these shared attitudes in extreme circumstances (like an emergency), an accident (i.e., when they have no control over the situation), or if they are not able to participate in the "moral community" (for example a small child, an insane person, a senile person). The fact that it is only in unusual circumstances that we excuse people from responsibility, that we excuse them from appropriate responses, proves the rule that the human norm is to expect a "moral" response. We assume free will by assuming and expecting anyone who is not in extremis to take responsibility for his actions (Strawson 1960:4).

Thinkers tended to over-rationalize moral responsibility. They assumed that to hold a person responsible for something it means that his behavior needs to go through a set of objective requirement of responsibility. Strawson thinks that humans belong to communities through which they interact according to their natural logic and not according to a set of objective universal objectives. In their communities, humans can exchange thoughts and expectations with each other.

While it appears that Strawson holds a compatibilist, merit-based position as a moral philosopher, in fact does not matter to Strawson whether we are causally determined or not: human beings are psychologically programmed to participate in social groups. Even if it were possible to give up these social reactions to each other, we wouldn't because as humans we need to live in a community, and the community depends on practices which promote good will. The practice of responsibility, promoting good will, isn't "true" or "false" it exists (Strawson 1960:3). Strawson believes that humans participate socially in their moral communities by default (Strawson 1960: 4). Whether or not we are causally determined is not important. Communities are based naturally on practice of responsibility that promotes good will: if someone practiced or performed moral responsibility on a level reached or exceeded our expectations of good will, then he merits and deserves our praise (Strawson 1960:5-6).

Strawson's theories neatly sidestep the philosophical impasses of determinism and free will, consequentialism, merit-based moral theory, compatibilism and incompatibilism, by referring us back to the "commonplace" practices of humans living in community. His concept of responsibility requires the presence of a community at least two people answering for an action and answering to someone with a set of expectations which imply the social norms of a larger community.

The survey of linguistic forms with which we started this discussion reinforces Strawson's theory: across the globe the words for "responsibility" imply exchange between at least two people, "answering" to others for their actions. The words consistently carry hints of the wider society legal and religious pledges, bonds of conscience, social expectations of trust and blame: ethical systems. Indeed Strawson argues that humans are "hard-wired" for community. Whether we have free will or not, we behave as though we do.

He argues by exception the rule that we expect people to take responsibility for their actions, we react and respond to each other as responsible beings and expect others to. These sets of responses and expectations Strawson calls the "reactive attitudes" of the participants in a given situation. Praise, blame, or other reactions are conditioned by a web of expectations, "associated practices" of the larger community and the institutions which structure the community.

As an explanatory tool Strawson's "participant reactive attitudes and associated practices" have the advantage of being adaptable to different cultural settings, to describe transnational experience.¹³ In the final section of this discussion we will apply Strawson's construct to three different situations which involve minor, but real transnational miscommunications about the concept of responsibility.

III. Applying Strawson's model of moral responsibility to transnational encounters

In the following examples¹⁴ we will examine the "reactive attitudes and associated practices of the participants" in three transnational encounters. By associated practices we mean the expectations which shaped/ motivated the reactive attitudes of the participants, and the institutions which frame such expectations.¹⁵

Example 1: The automobile accident

An American woman was driving on a work errand with a local businessman and professor whom she had known and worked with for many years. Both live in a Jordanian town, the town where the professor grew up. When they were just outside town they encountered an accident between two local cars, and a crowd of locals who had gathered there. The professor slowed down, and the American said, "oh, I hope you're not going to stop and get involved." He insisted on stopping, however, and spent twenty minutes or so mediating between the people involved, intervening in an argument that threatened to turn into a fight, and even raising his voice a few times. He returned to the car when the argument had been settled, and he had played a pivotal part in solving the dispute. The American was impatient to move on, and she commented on the fact that "no one in the U.S. would have stopped in fact we would go out of our way to avoid being involved."

The professor apologized for making her wait, but explained that it was necessary for him to stop that it was expected. She explained that she could see that it was useful that he stopped but in the U.S. it would be considered "not her business."

The professor explained that people in small towns in Jordan know each other and in case of any accident they expect anyone they

know to stop and help each other. He asked her what would happen in the U.S. if she were in such accident how would she feel if people just passed by and didn't offer any help? He speculated about how bad he himself would feel if he were in such a situation and people were to pass by without getting involved or offering help.

She explained further that she wouldn't expect people to stop in the U.S. there are institutions (the Highway Patrol, AAA, etc.) which handle these situations. It is "not her responsibility." In fact, she might worry if a stranger, particularly a man, were to stop and offer help. But she admitted she could see that the professor had played a beneficial part in the accident scene they had just left.

...the fact of our natural human commitment to ordinary interpersonal attitudes... is part of the general framework of human life, not something that can come up for review as particular cases...

...the one who presses this question has wholly failed to grasp the import of the preceeding answer, the nature of the human commitment that is here involved: it is useless to ask whether it would not be rational for us to do what is not in our nature to (be able to) do" (Strawson 1960: 4).

¹³ ...an awareness of variety of forms [which these human attitudes may take at different times and in different cultures] should not prevent us from acknowledging also that in the absence of any forms of these attitudes it is doubtful whether we should have anything that we could find intelligible as a system of human relationships, as human society (Strawson 1960: 6).

¹⁴ The author was involved more or less tangentially in each of these situations. For the purposes of this paper he was able to interview at least some of the key participants in each example to follow up on their reactions, expectations and motivations. In each case he posed the following questions: what were your reactions to the situation? what did you expect to happen? After the second questions, he simply pressed the interviewees about "why do you think you had those expectations? – repeating the "why" sometimes several times. Only at the end of the interview did he invite the participants to reflect explicitly on the cultural constructs which may have shaped their reactions and expectations.

¹⁵ ...It is not only the moral reactive attitudes towards the offender which are in question here. We must mention also the selfreactive attitudes of offenders themselves. Just as the other reactive attitudes are associated

with a readiness to acquiesce in the infliction of suffering on the offender within the 'institution' of punishment, so the self-reactive attitudes are associated with a readiness on the part of the offender to acquiesce to such infliction without developing the reactions (e.g., of resentment) which he would normally develop to the infliction of injury on him; i.e., with a readiness, as we say, to accept punishment' (Strawson 1960: 6).

The participants on whom we will focus are the American woman and the professor.

The American's reactions to the accident and to the professor's intent to stop and get involved were irritation and confusion. She was irritated because of the delay in the work errand. She was confused because she didn't understand why they were stopping at a situation which did not seem to involve them.

When the professor saw the accident scene he was worried, because an argument was clearly starting between the victims and bystanders. He was curious to see who was involved and what had happened, and concerned lest someone were injured in the accident or were to become injured in the ensuing argument.

When the author interviewed the American, the latter explained that for her the accident was "none of our business," and they had work to do. Her priority was to focus on this work errand, and not become distracted by "situations that didn't involve us." The American pointed out that in her own country she would not, unless she thought were a life-or-death situation, stop at an accident scene she would call 9-1-1 and report the accident. Indeed, she added, even in a life-or-death situation she would become involved at some risk to herself, because of the possibility of lawsuits. It was better to refer the problem to the appropriate authorities and professionals. She reiterated that the accident is "not her business" the work is.

The professor on the other hand explained that although he didn't know the accident victims, he knew they were from his community, so he was obliged to stop. He was worried because of the brewing fight, and felt it was his duty and his priority at that moment to try to settle the dispute. He explained what he called "the culture of *hosheh*" the tendency in any dispute for Jordanians to take firm sides and eventually brawl.

Pressed further, the professor explained that in the view of his community it was his responsibility to stop. If he didn't know the actual victims, he might know their brothers or parents, or someone in the crowd might know him and report that he had simply driven past. No work errand would excuse him in that case. Pressed again about why the community had such expectations of him, he explained that in tribal law a third party *must* step in if asked to a situation to mediate a dispute and that stepping in was expected even if not asked. Pressed further he said that tribal law is founded on *shari`a* (Islamic) law, and quoted the citation from the *Qur'an* which demands him to mediate.

Urging the American to explain her prioritization of the work errand, she explained that there is a strong ethic of privacy and individualism that Americans observe involving yourself in "other people's business" can often lead to resentment or even anger. She speculated that there is a reason why there are "impersonal" systems, businesses or institutions the police, emergency services, insurance companies, etc. which serve as neutral intermediaries between people, and people prefer to rely on them. As for her attitudes about work somewhat at a loss she admitted that this was simply what was valued in her family, in her culture. Work is the priority, and she prides herself on being dependable, reliable and thorough in any work commitment.

When the interviewer returned to discuss the topic a third time, she suggested that she shared a "Protestant work ethic" common to "WASP society" in the United States. She said she felt that the issue of privacy is actually rooted in the strong ethic of individualism assumed by most Americans and nourished by the fact that American communities and families are extremely fragmented it is highly unlikely that you would know the accident victims, even if they lived in the same town. She admitted that if she *knew* the cars involved she probably would stop, if it looked serious, but that (ironically) if the authorities were there she would probably be barred from interacting with the victims.

It is evident that both participants had a strong sense of responsibility in this situation: the American to her work, the Jordanian to his community. Their reactive attitudes were likely praiseworthy within the framework of the "associated practices" specific to their respective communities; but their communities' expectations of them, these associated practices and the institutions which inform them, are almost diametrically opposed.

Example 2: a romance

A European student came to Jordan for her research. As part of her research, she audited the classes and worked in the office of a local business owner and teacher in the university department teaching her subject area. For nearly a year the student and business owner worked together and corresponded regarding her work, during the course of which a friendship developed between them.

While she was living in the Jordanian community as part of her research, she embarked on a romantic relationship with a young local man who had helped her with her research. Members of the local community, knowing the "mentor relationship" between the business owner and the student, came to him with concerns about the nature of the relationship, and particularly the character of the young man. The "mentor" spoke to the student, relating the voiced concerns and sharing his past experiences with ill-fated relationships such as the one she was becoming involved in. He attempted to explain the local cultural context in which the relationship was developing especially as the young man was often described as an "opportunist" and "womanizer."

The student was angered by the mentor's advice, and asked him to confront the young man himself with his accusations. He demurred, saying that he simply wanted to share the community's and his own concerns, for her benefit. She told him that she would terminate the relationship.

The next exchange between the mentor and student was a text message, in which the student wrote that the matter was none of his business, she felt embarrassed to have let him interfere as he had, and that it was not even a matter for her mother or father's concern. Her personal life was purely her own responsibility. Several text messages were exchanged, during which the mentor tried to explain that her welfare was naturally his concern. She reiterated that he was violating her privacy and trespassing the limits of their friendship. The mentor was to have taken her to the airport at the end of her stay, which was nearing, and she refused this favour.

The following day she went to his office to return some paperwork, and in discussing the matter he apologized and she repeated that she was angry with his behaviour. Only when the mentor repeated his apologies and promised never to interfere in her personal life again did she leave him with a hug.

Upon her departure the mentor wrote her a brief email wishing her safe return to her country and success in her studies. She replied briefly upon her return. A few days later she followed with another, lengthy email explaining that she felt she must distance herself from the mentor, lest she be hurt by him again. The mentor replied that he could not continue the seemingly circular discussion of something that he had not felt in the beginning was a mistake, but that had evidently angered her.

For all intents and purposes the friendship ended at that point. The mentor could not understand what had gone wrong, and assumed that there were personal reasons underlying the student's behaviour.

Some weeks later, however, he posed this story hypothetically to an American woman of similar background who had been living in Jordan for over fifteen years. The American responded exactly as the young European had, with the proviso that she did, likewise, understand why the mentor had behaved as he did.

The participants on whom we will focus are the student and the mentor.

The student reported her reaction to the mentor's behavior as anger, hurt, resentment and, ultimately rejection of his stated reasons for behaving as he did. She was angry because he had interfered in the most personal of relationships, invaded her privacy, "ruined" her last days with the young man,

The mentor was at first concerned and worried on her behalf, then shocked and disappointed at her response, and finally resentful of her rejection of both his advice and his friendship. The emphasis in the student's conversation and emails with the mentor were her independence from others' opinions, her trust in her own decisions about relationships, her personal privacy and "the boundaries of friendship." She saw herself and her growing romance as independent of the surrounding community and her friendship with the mentor. Her choice of relationships, especially romantic ones, was "purely personal" independent even of immediate family members.

The mentor was acting on the assumption of his community that as an older male friend and, to some extent, colleague of the young woman he was responsible for her welfare. The community members who came to him with reports of her relationship expected him to act on the information.

It is standard procedure in traditional Jordanian communities to give character references to people who get involved in any kind of relationship but particularly "romantic" ones. The community expected him to discuss their concerns with the student and expected, furthermore, that she would be open to his advice.

The author did not have a direct interview with the student regarding the institutions which may have shaped her behavior. He does notice, however, certain parallels with the American interviewed in Example 1, above, e.g., the emphasis on individualism and privacy. The American informant in Example 2 (see n.16) supported this conclusion. She also suggested that modern Euramerican social norms the media culture of romance, the likelihood that most people will have sex before marriage, usually in their teens, the practice of choosing your own spouse ideally on the basis of "romantic" attraction all frame the student's reactions. She added that once students leave the family for college or to live outside their parents' home, they are generally quite independent in sexual matters. Furthermore, romantic matters are usually sexual matters, and they are regarded as extremely private and personal.

The mentor cited many of the same motivations as the professor in Example 1. It is typical in Jordan for a guest to become associated with a family. Even extended family structures are very tightly knit, and responsibility is assumed amongst all the members. Since the community is mostly extended family the vast majority belong to the same tribe this sense of responsibility extends beyond the family to the tribe and the larger community. There simply is no aspect of life which is "purely personal."

The American interviewee pointed out that although there is a strong "mythos" of love and romance in Arab culture, the fact of marriage is very pragmatic. Families typically approve of or even choose the spouses for their children/ siblings based on practical considerations such as economic status, class, physical beauty, childbearing and tribal relationships. It is also assumed and overwhelmingly the case that this choice will be a lifetime choice, and so it is taken extremely seriously by all involved. And *everyone* in the family is involved. The student's assumption of independence in such matters could not be more misplaced in the Jordanian context.

Furthermore, the student is viewed by the community the tribe as a guest, and his function as a mentor and "older brother" is reinforced by very strong rules of Bedouin society about guests and hospitality. Not only is it an obligation to offer water and food even to strangers and to "protect" them, the lavish hosting of guests contributes significantly to a family or host's status in the wider community. A well-known Hadith says, "When a guest arrives he is a prince; as long as he stays he is a subject; when he leaves he is a poet" (Bukhari 6011).

The proverb refers to the fact that the guest is treated like a prince but is subject to the host's tyranny in every detail; and so treated, he will sing his host's praises to the world. The mentor reported this to explain that the student, as long as she is guest in the community, must conform to local expectations. The mentor referred to religious references for both the community's responsibility to care for its members and for the host's obligation to his guest. In the Hadith a "correct" verse relates: "The example of the believers in caring and mercy to each

other is as a single body. If one organ suffers or hurts, then all the other organs show and feel the same pain" (Bukhari 6018).

The expectations and associated practices of the respective communities a contemporary European country and a traditional Jordanian town are clearly very different. Yet both the student and mentor believed themselves to be behaving "responsibly."The institutions which shaped their actions and their "reactive attitudes" to the confrontation between their two worldviews supported the "responsible-ness" of their attitudes and actions. And yet they were nearly opposite, and the conflict was never resolved.

Example 3:A frightened tourist

A guide was with his group hiking in Jordan. The group included the guide himself, a local guide, and five French and American guests. The guests were two women and three men.

The tour was slated as an eco-/adventure tour, and the guests themselves had requested challenging physical activity for 3-8 hours each day. Planning for such a tour had passed through many stages. The guide had told the guests over email about the level of difficulty of such hikes and he asked them to bring proper shoes and clothes to be able to do the hike. This was the tenth day out, and all had engaged in long, difficult hikes, bouldering, horse and camel riding and climbing.

This day's program was to hike from the mountains 1300m. above sea level down to down to the Rift valley 200m. below sea level. On the day of the hike the guide's American colleague explained to the guests how difficult this hike would be. Four-wheel drive vehicles took the group off-road to the trailhead and before the vehicles departed, the guide explained once again that the hike would be steep, often without more than a goat-trail to follow. Then the vehicles departed to meet them at the bottom, and the hike began.

At the beginning everyone seemed fine. The guide was helping everyone, particularly one of the female guests, who gradually started getting worried. As the track became steeper she started crying and repeating how difficult it was for her. Sometimes she was walking, but sometimes she sat down meanwhile the group moved forward without stopping or even thinking to quit.

All of a sudden, the frightened woman started shouting at the guide. In a raised voice she told him, "you should have warned me in advance about this difficult hike." He was shocked, but it seemed that the other guests were ignoring her.

He told her, "I'm so sorry my friend; I have never meant to frighten you. At the same time you have been warned and told exactly how the hike would be".

She shouted, "no, you never told me."

The guide looked to the other members, including the frightened woman's husband, waiting for them to support him and to tell the

woman that he warned everybody, but they didn't say anything. The whole group continued walking for indeed there was no other choice, the whole group being far from a road the frightened woman continued crying and shouting. The guide tried to talk to each of the guests separately, asking them to encourage her or even to stop her shouting at him, but again, they said nothing and left the woman to shout and cry. In a conversation with the husband the local guide urged him (in Arabic) to tell the husband to deal with his wife, but the tour guide chose not to translate the request. Although uncomfortable with the situation, the guide continued to help the woman, trying to get her to forget about her fear and to continue but each time he held out his hand to help her she dismissed him, telling him to "go ahead."

The five-hour hike finished at the point where the American colleague and another driver were waiting with the cars to transfer

the group to the camp. The guide took over driving the car that the frightened woman was riding in. He tried to speak to her in a casual way, but she ignored him. When they arrived in the camp he explained the situation to his colleague. The colleague then told him that the other guests had, on the ride into camp, already told her the story.

They had begun by saying to her jokingly, "You have no idea how close you came to losing your partner today." She had laughed with them, but when the story came out she defended the Jordanian guide by saying as he had that the woman had been adequately warned. The other guests agreed the other woman guest said she had been present when the colleague discussed it at breakfast in the morning.

Back in camp, the group bathed and changed and then, as usual, gathered around for drinks as the sun began to set all but the frightened woman. They were joined by three other guests who had chosen an alternative activity that day. The American colleague joined them, sitting next to the frightened woman's husband.

After only a few minutes, the husband told her in a very logical fashion that probably in the future they should give more

quantitative descriptions of the hike (number of meters of descent, a "scale" of difficulty, a description of terrain) just to "cover" themselves; but he asserted that he believed that even if they had done so, the woman would have attempted the hike anyway. He did not defend or accuse his wife. The Jordanian guide was not sitting with the group.

Finally the frightened woman joined the group, who were talking about a variety of subjects. At a pause in the conversation, the woman told her story in a calm, but assertive voice. The American colleague responded, once again, that she and her colleague felt they had described sufficiently the difficulty of the hike. The woman asked, clearly skeptical, if she, the American guide, had done the hike herself. The American guide responded that yes, she, much less physically fit than the guest, had done the same hike twice and that together with her colleague they had taken another guest who had loved the hike. The conversation was circular going back over the same points several times. Two of the other female guests supported the American guide's assertions, reminding the woman of the breakfast conversation to no avail. A silence fell. The American guide finally said, "You know, [X], the bottom line is "

Tension could be felt in the group about what she was going to say, and how the woman would react.

"—the one thing that [the Jordanian guide] and I never intended was for you to be scared. The last thing we expected or wanted was for you to be frightened. I'm truly sorry you were scared, that's not what we intended." At this the frightened woman stood up and asked the guide to come and give her a hug, and the matter seemed to be closed. The group moved on to other topics of conversation.

When the two guides sat together early the next morning to talk over the day, the Jordanian voiced his puzzlement over the whole thing. He didn't understand why no one had defended him, tried to help the frightened woman, or at least tried to intervene. The American responded that basically they thought it wasn't their business they didn't want to get involved.

"But even her husband," said the Jordanian, "didn't try to help her or speak with her about her feelings, her fear." The American replied that, based on what the husband had said to her the night before, she felt that the husband didn't approve of the woman's behavior and didn't want to get involved. She observed that the two other women had only voiced what they themselves had heard, but didn't want to get further into the discussion. To the American this seemed reasonable. The Jordanian remained hurt and confused by the situation. In the remaining two days of the trip it was not discussed again.

This example is notably more complex than the previous ones, because it involves more participants. We will look at the Jordanian guide, the frightened woman and the French and American guests. Though the woman was not subsequently interviewed, some of the guests were.

The reactive attitudes changed during the course of the situation. During the hike itself the Jordanian guide was at first worried and surprised at the woman's discomfort. As the day wore on he felt unjustly accused by her, angered by her refusal to accept his offers of help, and resentful of the scene she was causing worrying about its impact on the others' enjoyment of the day. He was also disappointed that the other guests did not offer support either to the woman or to him.

The frightened woman was manifestly frightened, and she said as much. Her fear seemed also to result in anger and a feeling of betrayal. She repeated that she had not been warned about the difficulty of the hike, she wouldn't have gone if she'd known, etc.

The group was disengaged. They did not offer help. They did not engage with either the woman nor did respond to the guide's request. The guide describe them as "carefully disconnected."

After the hike, when he tried to normalize the interaction with the woman, the guide felt ignored and rejected, which resulted in vengeful feelings, which he tried to suppress. As the evening wore on he felt more and more annoyed, and decided to withdraw himself from interaction with the group.

The frightened woman calmed down considerably and became more rational but she did not change her feelings about the hike itself, and she seemed determined to establish the fact that she had been threatened unnecessarily and not treated properly. By the end of the evening however without setting aside her convictions she seemed to want to restore good feelings within the group. After the hike the group began to express worry on behalf of the guide though not to the guide himself. They expressed disapproval of the woman's emotional display and were dismissive of concerns she expressed. The guide reported that he had expected the woman to have listened to his reassurances, to have responded to (accepted) his efforts to help especially since she expressed fear of the steep terrain, and had expected that once she rejected his help she would eventually calm down (she cried and shouted for at least three hours, he calculated). Of the group he expected support of his position (that she had been sufficiently informed of the hike's difficulty). Moreover, he expected them, and especially her husband, to help the woman herself to calm her, support her and help her physically.

What the frightened woman expected is not clear except that she did not expect such steep terrain and had expected to be better informed before the hike. During the hike it is difficult to understand what she expected, since she rejected the guide's help. After the hike it appears that she expected to win the support of the group by reviewing her experience. The guests reported later that they expected the guide to handle the situation as part of his professional responsibility. They did not want to get personally involved in an emotional situation.

Several aspects of this example differ from the previous two. The frightened woman never accepted either the guides' or the other guests' attempts to "re-frame" her experience and incorporate it smoothly into the rest of the group's experience. Her unwillingness to discuss her feelings beyond her complaints makes it very difficult to understand what framed her attitudes and expectations especially since guides and group agreed that she had indeed been informed about the hike, and she had enjoyed very difficult hikes on previous days. We can, however, make some useful observations about the reactive attitudes and associated practices of the guides and the other guests. The guide appears to have been operating under two sets of expectations: his reactions as a Jordanian Muslim and his reactions as tourism professional. As a Jordanian male he expected the woman (indeed any guest) to take his advice and accept his help.

It is also as a Jordanian that he is frustrated and disappointed with the behavior of the guests and especially the woman's husband, whom he expected to engage in the situation and settle the conflict. The woman's behavior

initially concerned him, but eventually angered him and made him feel vengeful and resentful. The guide did not, however, express his disappointment to the guests. He continued to try to help her during the hike. He did not express his disappointment about the husband he actually chose to edit out the annoyance expressed by the local guide in Arabic. Later, rather than expressing his feelings of resentment and revenge which would be acceptable in a Jordanian setting he simply withdrew from the group. Though his reactions issued both from cultural and professional expectations, his "associated practices" of his profession determined his visible responses.

The guests appealed to the Jordanian guide as the mediator during the hike and, afterwards, to the American guide as a mediator in the situation. Both in the car after the hike (separated now from the two people who had played the main roles in the conflict) and sitting in camp in the evening, the American guide was asked to play a role in resolving the conflict. To some extent the open conflict was resolved, though the frightened woman was never comforted or persuaded that her behavior had been inappropriate. The guests later said that they had appealed to her not as an American, but as a professional who had not been directly involved in the emotional situation, and whose responsibility it was to help solve it. In sum, the guests were looking for the most "impersonal" mediator, and it was her responsibility to mediate because she was a professional guide. In a curious way this reminds us of the American woman in Example 1: in an emergency situation it is most effective to appeal to an impersonal, neutral professional to intervene in the problem. On the hike the best choice was the Jordanian guide whose professional responsibility it was to handle the situation. After the hike it was the American guide, more removed from the emotional content of the situation. It is perhaps curious or poetic that it was relatively "personal" gestures a personal apology and a hug that concluded the whole discussion.

More interesting, perhaps, than detailing again the differing sets of "associated practices" and the institutions (Islam, Jordanian Arab identity, Euramerican social norms, etc.), is to point up the dual roles of the Jordanian guide. Certainly the guides and guests all felt they were behaving responsibly. The Jordanian's decision to override one construction of "responsibility" with another suggests an opening, or bridge, to cross the gap between expectations produced by complex sets of institutions nations, ethnicities, political positions, religions, etc. in different societies, or even within the same nation.

Conclusion

The linguistic survey with which we began our discussion hinted that although there seems across cultures to be a common idea responsibility, people actually *practice* responsibility within complex and differing webs of expectations and response, according to complex institutions which structure their communities in quite different ways. Applying Peter Strawson's helpful understanding of the "participant reactive attitudes" and associated practices which shape practices of responsibility to three real-life situations underscored how different equally "responsible" behaviors can be in transnational encounters. It seems to this author that the investigations here point to a need to understand precisely what happened, in an unreflective way, in Example 3, when one person was faced with two potentially conflicting constructs and chose to "edit" them into a single set of responses. Understanding this choice might lead us to an understanding of how to align diverse constructs of responsibility.

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