The Politics of Responsibility

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Introduction: on responsibility, politics and contemporary Australia

'Responsibility' is a ubiquitous theme in contemporary Australia. It is writ large in institutional politics and social policies that aim to engineer and reward personal responsibility. This is particularly evident of course in the field of social welfare where the principles of mutual obligation scaffold government policy (Centrelink 2002; McClure 2000). Much emphasis is placed on the responsibilities of individuals for themselves, to themselves, to others and to the government. Accompanying this is increasing interest in corporate responsibility and corporate citizenship (Cronin 2001). Responsibility – especially getting the right mix of the governmental, the corporate and the personal – shapes mainstream political discourse. To some extent, discourses about responsibility and 'the right mix' offer a mode of distinguishing the political parties and framing political choices.

Alongside the domains of the institutional and governmental, and sometimes in response to them, the politics of responsibility has taken rather different forms most especially in the calls to non-Indigenous Australians to take responsibility for the past treatment and present positioning of Indigenous people in the political community and national imaginary. Here the emphasis is on a richly conceived collective responsibility that defies conventional interpretations of responsibility as individualised accountability for actions personally undertaken or neglected. The recent debates on Australia's approach to asylum seekers and refugees has also appealed to Australians' sense of themselves as participants in a political collectivity

with responsibilities that are both more than and less than those captured within the ambit of citizenship and the nation state.

In addition to the material prepared by campaigning and policy groups that seek policy changes on reconciliation, state responses to refugees and broad social justice issues, a philosophically shaped literature has developed. Within this, theorists such as Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd, Rosalyn Diprose and Linnell Secomb have extended insights from philosophers including Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy to analyse Australian conditions and the possible meanings and ethics of responsibility (Gatens and Lloyd 1999; Diprose and Secomb in Healy et al eds 2003). Both the campaigning and the philosophical writings argue for the embrace of collective responsibility but they also question what that means. Not only is the meaning of responsibility carefully examined, but frequently so too is the meaning and nature of the "subject" of responsibility: who is the 'I' or 'we' that might take responsibility? Responsibility is simultaneously pursued and problematised. However, it is noteworthy that the insights from this literature are not taken up in the governmental and policy focussed discussions of responsibility and the latter is the weaker for it.

This paper is part of a larger project that brings these two literatures into conversation with each other in a critical examination of the character and ramifications of politicised responsibility in Australia today. Here the specific focus is the argument that Australian society is increasingly fragmented, civility and mutuality are moribund and, that 'all-round' intensification of responsibility is an

essential requirement in redressing this situation, for generating civic renewal and the creation of a society that can thrive in the uncertain conditions of the 21st century. Some version of this argument is presented by both the major parties and it is a recurrent theme in media diagnoses of the troubles of our times. One of the strongest advocates of this position is Mark Latham who summarises his perspective (coming from what he describes as the 'new radical centre') as follows:

> The guiding principle of the new radical centre is to hold the cohesiveness and fairness of society together through new expressions of personal and collective responsibility. During this era of globalisation and insecurity, each of us as individuals plainly need to do more to advance our own interests – to study harder, to prepare and save more effectively for an uncertain future, to work smarter, to develop the competitive skills that deliver job security in an open economy. But just as much we also need to do more together – to look out for each other, to aid those who are struggling to help themselves, to support each other in the values and interests we hold in common. The new radical centre is best understood as a political assertion of this heightened sense of responsibility, not just in the relationship between citizens and government, but also between citizens and society. (1998, xxxi)

Latham has consistently advanced these claims in his numerous speeches and other substantial publications (in Botsman & Latham 2001; Latham 2003). His work is a significant intervention into the debates about responsibility and is here subject to a close reading.

The paper begins with a contextualisation of Latham's perspective that links his arguments for more 'all-round responsibility' to his diagnosis of the socioeconomic challenges of the present. The second section examines in detail the idea of 'all-round responsibility' and highlights the incommensurabilities of power and position that this further entrenches. These incommensurabilities indicate some problems with the claim that greater responsibility leads to a heightened responsivity of citizens to each other and to the generation of new forms of mutuality. This claim is further challenged in the following section where the links between politicised responsibility and public resentment are explored. The last section turns to the question of "the subject" of responsibility. Here some insights from the philosophic literature are particularly cogent. Overall, as the conclusion explains, the current argument that the intensification of responsibility – individual, corporate, governmental - is unambiguously good and can massage into existence new modes of public mutuality is not convincing.

Latham's responsibility: living and relating in 21st century Australia.

Latham's insistence that Australia requires increased responsibility from individuals, corporations and communities is a consequence of his diagnosis of our times; a diagnosis that echoes the writings of other 'Third Way' theorists (e.g. Giddens 1998 and 2000; Barber 1996). These have been extensively and critically discussed in Australia (see e.g. Johnson 2003; Bacchi & Nursey-Bray eds 2001). The following is therefore, just a brief review of key themes. For Latham, the most striking feature of

the present, which is also its challenge, is that we are living through multifaceted economically instigated transitions. These affect how we produce, consume, communicate and interact with each other in all contexts from the personal to the local, the national and the global. Most significantly, he believes that we are shifting from an industrial to an information age and that the industrial socioeconomic divisions (especially labour and capital) are therefore no longer pertinent, or not as pertinent as they used to be. Further, the older ideological positions associated with the left (labour) and right (capital) neither offer plausible analyses of the present nor political guidance for future directions (Latham 1998; 2003; Latham in Botsman and Latham 2001). From this, issues the challenge of how to think differently and create alternative political frameworks. And, as is well known, in Latham's view, the direction to be pursued is 'beyond left and right', the elaboration of a 'third way', a politics of the 'new radical centre'.

According to Latham, new modes of political analysis and action are needed, modes that allow a critical embrace of the challenges of the present. He suggests that the age of transition, which is also the age of intensified globalisation, is marked by the increasing inefficacy and fiscal unsustainability of the welfare state, the emergence of new information elites and changing labour force conditions (1998; 2003). Additionally, the economic transformation has brought about widespread social transformation that for many people, and Australian society as a whole, is overwhelmingly negative: 'With the erosion of traditional institutions, society has entered a period of moral confusion. People are longing to belong – to rediscover the

shared values and trust of a good society. They want to focus on relationships and morality much more than economic policy.' (2001c in Botsman and Latham, 249)

Throughout his writings, Latham emphasises the cohesiveness, the civic-mindedness and mutuality of the world we have lost, a world in which, allegedly, people felt secure, connected and trusting. A world that has been replaced by 'a decline in social connectedness', in which the capacity of citizens and/or civil society to act as 'rule-makers' has been minimised and in which 'the relationship between states, markets and society has become imbalanced.'(2003, 232 and 234). Interestingly, despite sometimes close attention to documenting his claims, Latham does not offer any real evidence of this sense of loss and yearning that he believes marks the 'politics of public culture' (2003, 20) or, of exactly when, and for whom, this idealised inclusive community of the past existed. It is a recurrent theme, though, amongst like-minded third way proponents. Benjamin Barber – political theorist and erstwhile advisor to President Bill Clinton – identifies similar developments in the United States and, again without supporting evidence, a 'yearning for community', the need for a 'common identity or a collective membership.' (1996, 154)

What these yearnings, problems and transitional moments signify to Latham is the need for new forms of governance in which the state 'enables', rather than dictates, where solutions to social and political problems are 'community-led' (Latham 2001c in Botsman and Latham, 249), where political power is 'devolved' and 'de-hierarchised' (2001c) and where social fragmentation is countered by 'mutual trust', 'mutual recognition' and a reinvigorated civic life. This requires the development of new forms

of citizenship (Latham 2001b in Botsman and Latham) and 'a new kind of solidarity, one that crosses economic and class boundaries, one that goes beyond personal identities and prejudices.' (2003, 28) It is about relationships between citizens, not (or not primarily) about relationships between citizens and governments. And central to all this, perhaps even the glue around which everything coheres, is responsibility – 'all-round responsibility': 'Responsibility from all, opportunity for all: that's what I call a good society.' (Latham 2004a, 6)

Responsibility, citizenship and mutuality

'Responsibility from all' is at first glance an attractive idea. But what exactly does it mean? The easy answer is that we must all be responsible for ourselves and to 'the community' (however that is understood) and that, by virtue of membership in a political community, we incur obligations to each other. We should be both responsible to others and responsive to the needs of other members of the community – provided, of course, that they too are recognisably responsible citizens. The devil is in the detail. Once we delve in more depth into the arguments around responsibility it is quickly apparent that we are not all responsible in the same way, or for the same things. A differential responsibility prevails that exposes the fragility of the connections between the responsibility, responsivity and mutuality that Latham and others would craft. Two examples will illustrate this; firstly, the contrast between individual and corporate responsibility and secondly, the contrast between the obligations of welfare recipients and those of the 'officially independent' who are obliged to respond to the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged.

Latham is very clear that any intensification of responsibility must apply equally to the powerful and the powerless:

> New forms of governance are needed to generate active well-being: social investments, lifelong learning and the devolution of service provision, each underpinned by policies of mutual responsibility. This principle should apply across the board, to the rich as well as the poor. … Social democrats need to bring the corporate sector into the net of mutual responsibility. (2001c in Botsman and Latham, 258)

He is quite specific about the kinds of obligations that corporations have to the communities or nations in which they are located and argues that corporations should only be eligible for government assistance if they abide by a 'Code of Corporate Citizenship' (2001c, 258). There is growing interest in corporate citizenship and corporate responsibility and an increasing number of companies pursue philanthropic, community partnerships and other strategies that might indicate both responsibility and responsivity. However, as Cronin concludes from her survey of recent research: 'while many Australian companies see these issues as part of their core business, many more see stakeholder engagement as a community strategy.' (2001, 13) The bottom line *is* the bottom line. However, even if all major corporations in Australia committed to a rich version of corporate responsibility, would this imply some sort of equity in the demands for responsibility directed at the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless? The answer is clearly no.

When corporate and individual responsibilities are referred to as if they are interchangeable, indicative of, in Latham's terms, 'responsibility all round' or 'all shoulders to the wheel', the specific modality of those different responsibilities is disguised. 'The powerful' rarely exist as individuals with responsibilities instead they are the embodiment of capital. Their responsibility is second-order, mediated, channelled through the contingent geographies of investment and infrastructure and their function as owners, employers or managers. Their responsibility is depersonalised, corporate-collective, specific, yet because depersonalised, abstract. It is claimed that they have responsibilities to their local communities but it is recognised that these will always be offset by their responsibilities to their shareholders. In contrast, the responsibilities of the poor, the weak, and the disadvantaged are direct, immediate. "The community', the 'hand that feeds them', demands the personalisation of responsibility and failure to display this is responded to with proscription of their lives and heavy penalties. What sense does it make here to speak of mutual responsibility as if what is exchanged is somehow equivalent?

The policies that cluster under the heading of 'mutual obligation' also indicate incommensurability in responsibilities, this time in the contrast between the responsibilities of the 'officially dependent' with those of the 'officially independent'. And there is no better place to start in demonstrating this than with the government's bald statement of the meaning of 'mutual obligation' on the Centrelink website:

> If you are looking for work, the Australian community supports you in many ways, for example by paying income support, offering Centrelink self help facilities and referral services. Mutual obligation is about you giving something back to the community which supports you. This means you are expected to actively look for work, accept suitable work offers and undertake extra activities to improve your chances of finding work.' (2002, 1)

The overall tone or dynamic is one of generosity versus debt rather than equally mutual obligation. This inequality or 'one-sidedness' is also identified by Richard Curtain (2002) who has undertaken comparative research on the meanings and implementation of mutual obligation schemes in the United Kingdom compared with Australia. He observes that mutual obligation in Australia is 'punitive in tone' and, though there is considerable focus on the responsibilities of citizens, there is much less on what the government's obligations might be (which is in stark contrast to the UK experience) (2002, 2 and 3). Jeremy Moss (2001) makes a similar point. He notes that the policy of mutual obligation provides no clear statement on what 'obligations' are and how they might strengthen our commitments to each other. He draws our attention to the fundamental imbalance in the relationship that is "after all" based on unequal power and coercion. He distinguishes 'having obligations' from 'being obligated': 'Someone has political obligations where they, for instance, freely consent to authority or a contract … But when circumstances force them to act in a certain way they are obligated.' (2001, 6). It is a significant point and it can be pushed a little further. For example, consider a situation where an obligation is apparently 'freely' contracted into (where say the ideas of self-improvement and 'giving-back' have

become a part of the identity and aspirations of the welfare recipients and they have 'freely' embraced their obligations) and where those obligations are matched by more viable levels of income support, appropriate training and so on. Does this situation illustrate a relationship of mutual reciprocity? If by mutual reciprocity we mean that we are obligated in the same way, to the same extent, through shared commitment and equal recognition, then the answer is no.

The contrast between the more general individual responsibility of members of the Australian community and the individual responsibility of the welfare recipient is also thrown into sharp relief in the McClure Report (2000) which inspired the changes to social welfare policy. The Report states that ideas about individual responsibility are 'deeply embedded within the varied cultural traditions that constitute the Australian community' (2000, 39). The report illustrates these responsibilities with examples such as:

- 'Providing assistance to friends and neighbours in need (informal social assistance)
- Taking an active interest in matters that affect our neighbourhood, state and country.
- Working with others to address matters of shared concern…
- Through gifts of time and money, support other members of the community working to address issues that impact upon us all.'

Such responsibilities recognise, accentuate and enhance the independence of these subjects of obligation. Compare 'gifts of time and money', the positioning of the responsible agent (the 'officially independent citizen') as creditor and distributor of largesse with the responsible agent who is in debt to the community by virtue of receiving unemployment benefits and must offer up her/his labouring, or volunteering body in payment of the debt. There is a substantial difference between 'giving to' and 'giving back'. Christine Everingham (2001) similarly observes that despite the government's stated interest in facilitating 'community relations of mutual dependence', the policy of mutual obligation '… is promoting a totally one-sided experience of community. Only those in receipt of welfare will experience themselves as being dependent on society as a whole.' (2001, 112)

If the primary objective of mutual obligation is to discipline the poor and stimulate a more extensive sense of social duty in other people, this lack of equivalence is not necessarily a problem; however, this is not the usual argument. Instead, mutual obligation is commonly presented as part of a more wide-ranging governmental interest in the revival of civic culture and the devolution of administrative if not political power. It aims to contribute to the elimination of social exclusion and the overcoming of personal dependence. Yet, by positioning the obligated welfare recipient as a potentially suspect, dependent debtor, it re-creates social exclusion. It issues a paradoxical and impossible command: 'You are obliged to be independent and the pathway to independence is to embrace your dependence and the debt that incurs.'

These examples demonstrate that the links between responsibility and mutuality are by no means straightforward despite the fact that they are frequently coupled together. They also indicate some reasons why we might question the plausibility of the argument advanced by Latham and others that increased 'all-round' responsibility will foster an accentuated responsivity of citizens to each other and deepen the mutuality and strength of social connections. To be fair, Latham's mutuality cannot be reduced to a simplistic formula of responsibility=responsivity=mutuality. For him, mutuality also involves the devolution of political power, the strengthening of communities, the construction of 'new networks of association and common purpose' (2000, 3) and a conversion of 'the ideals of social capital … into democratic practice' (2000, 5). It is a complex and carefully elaborated argument. However, threaded through his diverse forays into mutualism is the emphasis on responsibility. There may be responsibility without mutualism but there cannot be mutualism without responsibility. There is no avoiding the problem. If 'responsibility' has this logical and adhesive function yet, as has been demonstrated, its mobilisation is fraught with tension and ambiguity, then it may be the loose thread through which the carefully knitted components of Latham's argument unravel.

So far, the analysis has highlighted the incommensurabilities and the lack of equivalence in governmental and other institutional sites where the politics of responsibility are enacted. The problems are not 'simply' imbalances of power but involve questions of meaning, of lived experience and of the complexity of inter-subjective life more broadly. I will now outline two further and inter-related

dimensions to the problem of arguing for responsibility. These also cast doubt on the strength of the connections between responsibility, responsivity and mutuality. The first of these can be simply put: the demands on individuals of living with an ever expanding sphere of things for which one is responsible is already too burdensome and the intensification of responsibility is more likely to foster resentment than a desire for mutuality. The second dimension, which follows from the first, concerns the "subject" of responsibility. Here I draw on the more philosophical literature referred to in the introduction to question the imagination of the 'I' and the 'we' on which contemporary calls for greater responsibility rest.

Resentment and the burdens of responsibility

Underlying the debates about responsibility, the requirement of civic revival and new modes of public mutuality, is a wide-ranging institutional and governmental preoccupation with the kind of person or citizen who is needed for the future and the type of skills, capacities, competencies that are required for successful participation in life, work and the polity in the 21st century. At issue is not only participation in the existing polity, but also participation in the creation of the polity to come. Within these debates a distinctive figure emerges, the ideal responsible worker-parent-citizen. The production of this responsible citizen is an explicit educational aspiration that can be traced from kindergarten through to university. Responsibility is to be recognised and rewarded indeed, it is demanded. The end-product citizens are not only competent in life, citizenship and inter-personal relationships; they are also *responsible for* that competency. They must be made, and make themselves into, a life-

long learner, an effective parent and a responsible, respectful and active member of a plural and multi-cultural society. The burdens of responsibility are large. In Latham's revitalised social democracy, refreshed citizens equipped with core-competencies, must not only be able to perpetually reinvent themselves to deal with a changing and uncertain world, but also to reinvent their own communities. They are charged with the responsibility of 'Building a Nation from our Neighbourhoods' (2003).

The responsibilisation of worker-parent-citizens is not confined to Australia but is a characteristic feature of late-modern life in western liberal democracies (and perhaps elsewhere) in which: 'The well-being of all …has increasingly come to be seen as a consequence of the responsible-self government of each.' (Rose 1999a, 264). But what are the subjective and inter-subjective effects of all this 'responsible self-government', this 'double movement of autonomization and responsibilization'? (Rose 1999b, 174) According to William Connolly (1991) they are far from beneficent and he finds that in the United States he finds they are intimately connected to a cultural malaise of generalized resentment – an argument that plausibly be applied to Australia.

Connolly argues that the demand that we 'take as our project, the making of our lives' is not a recent requirement. Rather, the stress on autonomized responsibility is at the historical centre of liberal-democratic citizenship. (1991, 20 and 21) In the present, the scope of responsible citizenship is a complex web of relations and requirements. His analysis (1991, 21) is worth quoting at length:

> Individuals are responsible not merely for particular actions, but, to varying degrees, for the character they develop, the stability of their mental lives, the careers they nurture, the quality of their love lives, the way their children turn out, the level of income they "earn", the social recognition they attain and so on. Background notions and institutions of love (where each chooses the other free from traditional constraints), self-responsibility (where one is held accountable for what one does and becomes), equal opportunity (where one's career and income flow from one's own ability, effort and luck), individual freedom (where the consequences of one's actions are linked at least loosely to intentions that go into them), and citizenship (where each plays a part in shaping rules and laws governing all) – each of these practices is enabled and confined by relations it bears to the others.

However, and perhaps one should say 'on top of all this', the institutional and bureaucratic context in which these responsibilities are realised (or not) has shifted so that 'One must now program one's life meticulously to meet a more detailed array of institutional standards of normality and entitlement.' (1991, 21) Failure to do so may result in the application of disciplinary regimes or social and economic marginalisation. This sense of disciplinary confinement also fosters the production of a state of 'dependent uncertainty' as anything one has responsibly achieved might be lost, superseded, become irrelevant to the times, and so on (1991, 23) In turn, this exacerbates existential resentment and incites animosity toward anyone who appears to escape these obligations. "If I suffer, so should you" – which puts a rather different spin on the idea of 'mutual obligation'. Resentment is especially directed at the

'officially dependent' by the 'officially independent'. In Australia this is demonstrated in the frequent hostility to economic support for Indigenous communities that sharply contrasts with the respect usually granted to economic support for farming communities (presumably Indigenous farmers might be positioned in either camp).

The implication of Connolly's analysis is that, far from decreasing resentment and building feelings of mutuality, the demand for greater responsibility may inspire further resentment. 'All round responsibility' might indeed stimulate 'all-round resentment'. There is a clear comeback position that Latham, and others, might have to this analysis. Latham could reasonably point out that his proposals for increased responsibility go hand in hand with a decrease in bureaucratic and governmental power. After all, he fervently commits himself to the devolution of power. As a consequence of this, his version of contextualised responsibility could counteract and undermine the existing problems, such as bureaucratic domination, that Connolly identifies. It is a reasonable argument, but it fails to take account of the ambiguous logic distinguishing feature of the new modes of governance that accompany the further responsibilisation of life.

The idea of the 'enabling state' expresses Latham's commitment to the dispersal of power, the de-bureaucratisation of society and a new role for government as 'a facilitator of community projects and social outcomes, rather than a director of passive programs and laws.' (2001c in Botsman and Latham, 248) It implies a decrease in governmental power and an increase in the power of organisations,

individuals and communities. However, the enabling state signals not so much a decrease in governmental power but a shift in the mode of governance – towards what Rose refers to as 'government through freedom' or 'government through community' (1999a xxiii, 1999b: 176). And, as Rose observes (1999b, 170) in an analysis of some similar themes in the work of Alistair MacIntyre, what we witness is an 'attempt to create, by political action, that which is to be the counterweight and antidote to political power itself.' Community – the space to which power is devolved – is both an alternative to governmental power and an intense site of governmental activity. Rose (1999b, 167-168) explains that advocates of this new 'third' space of community power differ in a number of ways but what they share is the following paradox:

> On the one hand, the third space … appears as a kind of natural, extra-political zone of human relations; and this 'natural-ness' is not merely an ontological claim but implies affirmation, a positive evaluation. On the other, this zone is identified as a crucial element in particular styles of political government, for it is on its properties and on activities within it that the success of such political aspirations and programmes depend. This third space must, thus, become the object and target for the exercise of political power whilst remaining, somehow, external to politics and a counter-weight to it.

One of the outcomes of the transformation in the mode of governance is greatly energised political interest in the creation of new kinds of people, in new kinds of political subjectivity that will enable the accentuated responsibilisation of

individual and communal life. In addition to the examples of this interest provided above, we could note the animation of this desire in current national and international efforts to identify key competencies and embed them in national programs of skills development. This extends from the international participation in the OECD's DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) project (Trier October 2001), through the graduate attributes programs in Australian universities, to the current debate over the teaching of values in public schools.

Not only does 'government through freedom' involve paradoxical relations of power, but also, the effects of such government are not predictable. As Rose observes, it '… multiplies the points at which the citizen has to play his or her parts in the games that govern him. And, in doing so, it also multiplies the points at which citizens are able to refuse, contest, challenge those demands that are placed upon them.' (1999a, xxiii) Where do these insights lead us in terms of the argument that increased responsibility should inspire heightened responsivity to others and to a stronger sense of mutuality? I think to an open-minded scepticism. The scepticism is drawn from the many reasons provided that cast doubt on the capacity of increased responsibility to decrease public resentment. The need for open-mindedness is encouraged by the recognition that the enactment of the politics of responsibility, or of 'government though freedom' is an unstable, uncertain process. In this, there is scope for people to rethink and perform the spaces of responsibility differently, to refuse the juridical and the disciplinary. They might for example insist on taking responsibility for a past they did not physically

live within and the importance of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

“The subject” of responsibility

Underlying all perspectives on responsibility are assumptions, or occasionally explicit arguments, about what being responsible means. Conventionally, responsibility is understood as being accountable, as a rational phenomenon as a property of the subject who enacts, or fails to enact, it. It is something that may be chosen, avoided, demanded. It is a quality or an ethical orientation that is distinct from its performance. Although Latham is a leader in contemporary policy debates about responsibility, his understanding of the concept, and of what it means to be a responsible person is utterly conventional and rather limited. He provides some discussion about who is responsible for what and to what degree but these are largely quantitative questions. When he fleshes out his use of responsibility in speeches and writings he presents the issues as stark and obvious – people either choose responsibility or they refuse it.. His tone varies from admonitory to downright brutish. Responsibility is being accountable for your own behaviour. And if you are not, then the state must intervene.

Responsible parents make sure their kids go to school, that they know where they are at night (2004b). If they do not exercise their responsibilities they should be subject to an imposed ‘parental responsibility contract.’ (2004b, 2) Responsible people ‘work hard’, ‘study hard’, look for work if they are unemployed. (2004b, 1)

Responsible people are decent hard working folk and they are with the Labor tradition: 'Our early leaders such as Curtin and Chifley, had no time for indecency and irresponsibility.' (2003, 26) And they do not participate in action groups in support for asylum seekers: 'The first priority for a just society is to help needy people within the collective boundaries of the law. The first priority of …[Labor for Refugees]… is to find excuses for people who break the law.' (as quoted in Grattan & Banham 2002, News 4)

At issue here is not whether Latham is right or wrong in his emphatic pronouncements on responsibility but whether his approach to responsibility is compatible with the facilitation of civic revival and the new mutuality that he so desires. It is possible that his approach would foster a new mutuality but whether it would be quite the mutuality he is after is another matter. If responsibility is energised juridically and held together through the logic of a social contract and norms of propriety, then regimes of surveillance and discipline will be required. Rather than stimulating responsiveness, an innovative mutuality, an opening up to different others, it is likely to produce closure around established identities and exclusionary norms of conduct and a desire for sociocultural police.

Latham illustrates no awareness of debates about responsibility and collective life outside 'Third Way' concerns and his own electoral preoccupations. Further, he makes no attempt to consider his understanding of responsibility in light of the significant interest in responsibility that others in Australia have expressed in relation to such areas as reconciliation and refugee policy. This is not particularly

strange as he is often hostile to the politics or political insights of 'new' social movements that he frequently, and inaccurately reduces to 'identity politics'. He believes that they foster resentment and are too abstract and preoccupied with symbols. (Latham 2003; Johnson 2003) However, as these alternative public calls for responsibility explicitly link responsibility with responsivity and the rethinking of collective identity, it is a significant omission. It impoverishes his capacity to fully apprehend the politics of arguing for responsibility. Such apprehension is not without precedent in the history of the Labor Party. Most notably, it was central to Paul Keating's famous 'Redfern Park speech' that launched the International Year for the World's Indigenous People in 1992 (in Ryan ed. 1995, 227-231).

So what is Latham missing that he might gain through a broader consideration of responsibility? (Which is not to discount that the reverse also could be true – that Latham's perspective may offer critical purchase in analysing those other approaches.) The social movements referred to above, and the associated theoretical literature challenges us to think about responsibility outside the domains of the juridical and the individual. They emphasise the affective dimensions of responsibility, sociality and community. (see Gatens and Lloyd 1999; Gaita 1999; Rossiter 2002; Healy et al eds 2003). Further, they do not take responsibility to be a self-evident given, an individual practice contained within the logic of possessory relations. In particular, these more philosophical writing problematise "the subject" of responsibility and illustrate that responsibility is not something a pre-existing individual has or does, but rather, is one of the paths through which subjects are formed. (Gatens and Lloyd 1999, Rossiter 2002)

In Latham's argument about responsibility and mutuality there is a leap from the responsible individual (person, institution, corporation) to the responsive society. To put it crudely, he believes that if there is a lot of responsibility present in different locations that this will produce mutual respect and recognition: 'I am responsible, I can see that you are responsible therefore, we have a connection, a basis for mutual respect'. However, once we factor in the lack of equivalence of different kinds of responsibility and between differently positioned subjects of responsibility, the 'natural' emergence of revivified sociality does not seem likely. Instead, we might think of sociality as the process through which responsibility and a greater responsivity to different others may be constituted. In this process the responsible 'I' does not precede the responsible 'we'. They are mutually constitutive and responsibility is not the foundation of mutuality, mutuality is the dynamic through which responsibility, or responsivity, may be an outcome. This 'mutuality' will inevitably be conflict ridden, and should be; for it involves the most challenging tasks of negotiating relations of identity and difference and the elaboration of how 'we' imagine ourselves and how we would like to collectively live together in the 21st century. Although Latham is frequently scathing about identity politics, 'abstract' intellectuals, and (like John Howard) what is seen as a preoccupation with 'symbolic' rather than pragmatic concerns (see Latham 2003, especially parts 1 and 2) he might find that there is much to gain through engaging the literature on responsibility produced by these social movements and 'abstract intellectuals'.

Conclusion

The idea that an intensification of 'all-round' responsibility is imperative as Australians ease themselves into the uncertainties of early 21st century life and try and establish new modes of mutuality suited to the challenges of the present is, in some ways, an attractive one. However, it all depends on what is meant by 'responsibility', 'all-round' and 'mutuality' and how the 'challenges of the present' are understood. As this paper has demonstrated, the argument advanced by Mark Latham for increased responsibility, in the hope that an enhanced mutuality and civic renewal will result, is riddled with problems. The accentuation of individual responsibility does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes in terms of social trust, responsiveness to others and so on. The burdens of individual responsibility have become so acute that intensification of responsibility risks stimulating resentment, disregard or hostility to others and the loss of social trust and empathy. At the same time though, responsibility for self, and to others, may be a vital communal aspiration, an ethical imperative for how we may live together in heterogeneity, with difference and even, in conflict.

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