situated in a world where talk is about beauty, joy, pleasure, hopes, dreams, sorrow, mourning, rebirth. The United States is a very moralistic and litigious society. The threat of suing for one’s rights is never far below the surface in disagreements. When these rights are brought up, duties should be too. However, we could also look for ways to speak in which neither rights nor duties govern the conversation.

We will continue to need the protection of rights, such as life, liberty, and—in Jefferson’s phrase—the pursuit of happiness. The government can only promise to allow the pursuit, not guarantee the happiness. The government should not unduly interfere in how an individual pursues happiness, but the government has to protect that space by seeing that individuals or groups do not violate the basic rights. John Stuart Mill, the apostle of liberty, could still speak of “things which wherever it is obviously a man’s duty to do he may rightfully be made responsible to society for not doing.” Those duties, Mill says, are “assignable obligations” on the part of another. Thus, for Mill both the rights and the duties are “responsible to society.” I have expressed some doubt that society can be the ultimate reference for “responsible to.” Nonetheless, both rights and duties depend on the experience of being responsible to someone or something.

I do not propose to take out the word “society” and replace it with another term. For the present, no single term will do. Responding to is at the heart of life; the range of its objects includes elements that are more particular than society, as well as realities greater than society. The ecological movement may eventually help us to recover our relation to a reality immeasurably greater than the human.

Instead of urging people to accept their responsibilities, we would do better to try to develop their capacity for response. People who are responsive—to beauty in nature, to care for family and friends, to the intellectual excitement of learning, to the satisfaction of artistic work—will generally accept that they have some duties or obligations. They are responsible for their actions as law-abiding citizens. Such people do not generally feel the constraint of law. Instead the law can function educationally by encouraging or discouraging behavior. The law guides “individual choices as to behavior by presenting them with reasons for exercising choice in the direction of obedience but leaving them to choose.” That would be a new legal framework for responsible people, for those who can listen to guidance, make up their own minds and act without coercion.

CHAPTER 4

SELF-DIVIDEDNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

This chapter addresses the question What is personal responsibility? The addition of the adjective “personal” is something of a puzzle; all responsibility would seem situated in the person. Nonetheless, when responsibility is being urged on people, they are usually told to take personal responsibility. Is that in contrast to “impersonal”? Or is the adjective redundant and simply added for emphasis?

One possibility is that personal responsibility is used in contrast to some kind of collective responsibility. The insistence on the personal is in contrast to the government or other organizations having the responsibility. This meaning often does seem to be the case. The adjective “personal” is often a code word in such things as a proposal to cut welfare benefits.

A term that is related to personal is “individual.” But both in etymology and ordinary usage, individual has some different connotations. In the first chapter I said that responsibility is a bridge over five divisions, one of which is the opposition of individual versus collective. The contrast in that language is between one unit and many units. “Individual” means what is not divided, what is the ultimate unit in a measuring of people or things.

For addressing the rift between the individual and the collective, the discussion of this chapter has to be joined to the following chapter. There is a problem on both sides of the individual/collective divide; each half requires extensive surgery. Because one cannot say everything at once, the discussion of this chapter could be misread as affirming a private, individualistic (rather than personal) responsibility.

My first step in trying to avoid such a misreading is to use personal rather than individual as the basis of this chapter. I have admitted that “personal” is sometimes just a throwaway term, unthinkingly used to
indicate the speaker is serious. Nevertheless, it is the right term to begin with in transcending a split between the individual and the collective.¹

The term person has a somewhat strange etymology and origin. A person is someone who speaks through a mask. The term person comes late in philosophical history, not from the Greek philosophers but from controversies in early Christian history. It was coined as part of a pair with “nature.” Whereas nature is the answer to the question “what,” person is the answer to “who.” The law courts and the psychologists have controlled the term’s meaning in recent history, but the original meaning has not disappeared.

Two notes of “person” are relevant to the present discussion. The first is that persons are speakers; the oral/aural metaphor which is at the base of responsibility is embodied in persons. A person is related by address and response to other personal beings. The second note is that a person is not transparent; something is hidden behind the mask. At least two different questions (who, what) can be asked about personal beings. Within a person there is always some dividedness. There may even be more than two elements within the person, but in any case the personal is not a simple, indivisible unity.

The person is certainly not transparent to an onlooker and usually not easily explainable to himself or herself. Otherwise, the plays of Shakespeare and most of the world’s literature would not exist; nor would lawyers, psychotherapists, priests, social workers, and most of the “helping professions.”² And yet it is amazing how many theories of human action assume that human beings are rational agents who calculate the benefits of a course of action and proceed accordingly. Economists are often criticized for failing to incorporate any psychological complexity into their theories.³ Even sophisticated theories such as John Rawls’s A Theory of Justice are criticized for assuming a simplistic idea of the individual who calculates decisions on a rational basis.⁴

Mary Midgley notes that the powerful impact of Freud has been due largely to his injecting other motivation for human action than a calculus of self-preservation.⁵ Freud highlighted the fact that people often do not know why they are doing what they are doing, that what may seem reasonable to a person is coming from nonconscious drives. The unmasking of our seemingly rational life had also been undertaken by Karl Marx. Ironically, but not inconsistent with either Freud or Marx,

their followers have become entangled with their own ideological masks. So long as persons remain speakers of language, the mysteries of human motivation and the dangers of destructive action are not likely to dissolve into a clear liquid.

Given this incapacity of a person to master its own self, what can be said about taking personal responsibility for one’s life? As a lifelong goal, that may be a realistic hope. But what one can hope to do today is to accept responsibility for those actions that are sufficiently under one’s control. Such responsible actions are possible for nearly everyone. And some behavior in each person’s life is not under the direct control of the person, but there may be steps that would eventually lead to a more direct control.

Which actions am I morally responsible for? The answer to that question pushes us to another level of questioning: I am responsible for what I am responsible to. This principle lies on the side of “is” rather than “ought”; it is not a moral principle stating what should be. Nevertheless, it is a necessary but neglected step in deciding moral responsibility. A person carries out morally responsible actions in relation to what is heard. Moral deficiency is mostly a hearing failure. “The general recipe for inexcusable acts is neither madness nor a bizarre morality but a steady refusal to attend both to the consequences of one’s actions and to the principles involved.”⁶

This formula may seem to be a complicated way of saying that vice is ignorance, a position often attributed to Socrates. That position is salvageable if ignorance is understood as complex. When ignoring and not just a lack of information is indeed the problem, moral failure can follow. Central to medieval moral theology was the category of “culpable ignorance”; people are indeed ignorant of their duty, but they are so because they have deceived themselves.⁷

“Responsible” is a useful term to get behind the self-deceptions and find out how progress could happen. Instead of assuming entities such as free will, reason, or “the affective domain,” one can discuss a single dialectic of responsible to and responsible for. This simple line of inquiry does not deny the value of sometimes discussing will and reason, intelligence and emotion, instinct and drives, self-interest and benevolence. But it is also possible to summarize the moral problem by asking to whom and to what are we responsible. Moral improvement comes about by broadening and deepening the range of that response. That can sound simplistic if one neglects the fact that
Self-Dividedness and Responsibility

not recognize a division of elements within the human being. At least since the rise of reflective self-consciousness in history, the pattern has been one of postulating a certain kind of dividedness in life and then, especially in religious practice, providing a way out, a way toward healing or unity. The descriptions of a brokenness or multiplicity are endless, varying in the severity of the conflict perceived.

The crudest picture would have the two elements, A and B, as good and evil. The solution would be for A to escape from or destroy B. In this case, the "self" turns out to be not the tension of A and B, but instead A temporarily imprisoned in B. This philosophy or religion has always been attractive. The enemy being clear, there is no listening needed. At times of historical crisis, the attractiveness is increased. In the middle of famine, plague, or war, the idea that an evil power reigns in history and in human bodies seems plausible, and one's only recourse is to identify with the pure spirit that is on the side of good.

The world's major religions and philosophical schools usually have a more complex play of forces. Instead of A versus B, there may be a C that mediates or casts a swing vote. Or instead of A versus B, further analysis reveals A1A2 versus B1B2 with possible conversation between A1A2, B1B2, A1B1, A2B1, and almost a dozen other possible combinations. The aim of such inner conversation is not to do away with the elements but to keep them in proportion and maintain a unity of harmonies. The yin/yang distinction in Taoism is an example of a gentle, peaceful division in which passivity is revealed as a kind of action, and harmony thereby becomes possible. Less well known is the Jewish yetzer hara/yetzer hatov. The split between the passive hatov and the aggressive hara can lead to evil acts; the latter as the basis of greed or lust is the more suspect. But the remedy is not to banish either principle; it is to establish a fruitful tension in one's life.

Greek philosophy, with the rise of a more reflective and speculative outlook, described sharper tensions and contrasts. In Medea appears the following line: "I know indeed what evil I intend to do; but stronger than my deliberations is my thymos which is the cause of the greatest evils among mortals." Pitted against deliberation on good and evil is an inner force or drive, thymos. The term is sometimes translated as "spiritedness," a reality that challenges cold, sober, rational calculation. Plato uses this same term, thymos, as the swing vote or crossover element in the conflict of reason and emotion. If thymos can be induced to serve on the side of reason, then the three elements can.

Self-Divided: The Record

The contention that the person is always self-divided is not just a theory of one school of philosophy or psychology. The difference between "I" and "me" is encoded in all of our conversations, including the silent ones in our own heads. The subject who uses the nominative pronoun is distinguished from the object who can be spoken about in the third person: him, her, it. The I and me are not necessarily at war with each other; they may very well be in agreement. Even to know that, however, the I has to listen to yearnings, impulses, and tendencies of me. The historical record shows that the elements that make up the self or person are not always in accord.

It would be difficult to find either a religion or a philosophy that did.
live in a well-ordered life. In contrast, the man who gives in to super-
icial desires will lead a disordered and unhappy life. Of the tyrant,
Plato concludes: “Just because he always does what he pleases, he
never succeeds in doing what he really wishes.”

St. Paul in the Christian New Testament had and still has a profound
impact on Western religion and philosophy. Paul’s Epistle to the
Romans poses the dilemma of the self divided against itself: “I do not
understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the
very thing I hate.” Augustine and Luther became the interpreters of a
Pauline doctrine of universal bondage in sin. The need was for a savior
who could break out of the prison from the inside of human nature.

The Christian doctrine of an incapacitated will directly challenged
the Greek explanation of vice as ignorance. Yet the two were able to be
blended, at least by Augustine and the Middle Ages, if not by Luther.
At times this cooperation provided subtle analysis as in the moral the-
ology of Thomas Aquinas. The popular version of Christianity, how-
ever, has often been a simplified Platonism in which body is at war
with soul. The sensual, especially sexual, drives of the body are
thought to tend to evil; the beleaguered will, representative of the soul,
tries to withstand the onslaught of the senses. When that image reigns
there is not much room for being responsible to one’s bodily self.
Responsibility is to God and to the grace of God which frees the will.

The Christian doctrine did offer an explanation of the experience of
self-dividedness. Paul, Augustine, and Luther struck a resonant chord
in describing a free will that was not free; from their origin humans
cannot quite master their own tendencies. The Times Literary Supple-
ment once said “The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically ver-
ifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.” This is a slight exaggeration
since a doctrine of “original sin” is only one way to interpret the expe-
rience; nonetheless, the doctrine did ground Christianity in the most
powerful of human experiences. As Austin Farrer says: “The person
doing evil never says to himself: ‘I want this,’ but something like ‘this
is what I do, must do.’” The will freely succumbs to some larger force
operating within the person.

Modern philosophy from the beginning was intent on banishing the
interlocking doctrines of original sin, redemption, bondage of the will,
liberation by grace. But after several centuries of explaining evil in
strictly rational terms, thinkers in the twentieth century have had to
confront stark images of evil and human destructiveness at an
unprecedented level. In the twentieth century, philosophy, science,
and the arts have produced other descriptions of the inner conflicts
that give rise to self-destructive behavior and outward violence.

What seems most strange in surveying modern thought, from the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, is that Christian doc-
trines were not so much banished as dressed up in more presentable
appearance. The splits of body and soul, reason and will, man and
beast, not only survived but were sharpened further. But now the
means for dealing with the splits had been dismissed without being
replaced. René Descartes is usually credited with being the first of
modern philosophers. His search for an indubitable first principle led
him to a thought, the thought of “I exist.” He could then only establish
a connection to the external world by trusting that God would not
deceive him. As Etienne Gilson said of Descartes, when he searched
his own mind for an answer, what he found was the catechism
answers he had learned as a child.

The catechism may have been a voice in Descartes’s mind, but he
was looking rather than listening. What he discovered by looking for
the truth was a thinking mind with no firm relation to a living organ-
ism. One of the most perceptive comments on Descartes’s experiment
is by Timothy Cooney in Telling Right from Wrong. Concerning
Descartes sitting in his room and systematically doubting until he
reached his one certain idea, Cooney says it is unfortunate he did not
stay at his task for another five or six hours. He then would have cried:
“I’m hungry.” And his second certainty would have been: “I know
how to satisfy my hunger.” Instead of knowledge being equated with
abstract conceptions, knowledge would have had an ethical dimen-
sion from the beginning. “Our ability to satisfy some of our desires is
our most certain link between mind and world.” Or in the terms I
have suggested, our ability to act, including the act of speculative
judgment, starts with our being responsible to our own desires and
interests. The moral life is not a separate sphere tacked onto a theoreti-
cal outlook and built on a shaky premise of free will.

Freud’s work was shocking to people for several reasons, one of
which was the undermining of free will. The human being was por-
trayed as a product of forces outside of conscious awareness. The self-
dividedness was at first described by Freud with the contrast of
conscious and unconscious. Later he elaborated his description as a
split between “I” and “it,” with another player, the “over it” holding
some of the balance. Freud was enough of a man of his time to equate the "I" with reason and to look to rational control as the answer. In the United States a popular Freudianism was propagated as an optimistic belief that by getting rid of repressions and external restraints we would all become "adjusted." Freud's own view remained darkly pessimistic; the search for pleasure always remains at odds with culture or civilization. The individual could only hope to progress from hysterical misery to common unhappiness.

Are we better off after the Freudian revolution? We certainly talk more about problems that had been hidden, especially sexual problems. Freud and his successors have given us ways to understand the dynamics of human personality. The result has been a dismantling of many external restraints on behavior. It is not clear that personal understanding and "self-control" have adequately developed as a substitute for outside control. John Stuart Mill writes of the world Freud was born into: "In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship." Mill's pleas for liberty from restraints in that context now have to be read in a radically revised context.

Whether or not we are better off, we do seem challenged to be "responsible for" in ways no previous century has felt burdened. Some people are enthusiastic about this new responsibility; with our new insights into human personality, we will be able to take on more responsibility for it. Erich Neumann has been one of those enthusiasts of depth psychology. He has an essay comparing the "new ethic" and the "old ethic." His interesting choice to represent the old ethic is St. Augustine. The difference between the two ethics, says Neumann, is captured in a text where Augustine "thanks God that he is not responsible to Him for his dreams." While in Neumann's new ethic we are responsible for our dreams, Augustine was concerned about the One to whom he is responsible.

Augustine, in contrast to many modern rationalists, would have taken dreams seriously as revelatory of life. What he denies is that he is responsible to God for them. Neumann's ethic also denies that we are responsible to God. The real difference would seem to be that Augustine's denial relieved him of a burden, but the twentieth-century ethic throws the burden back on us.

Neumann surely does not wish to burden us with responsibility for all the contents of our dreams; that, say, dreaming of murder makes one responsible for murder. What he presumably wishes to affirm is that unconscious processes and conscious life are integrally related. Our conscious acts are influenced by forces outside of our direct awareness (as Augustine well knew), and dreams are a connective link. Our conscious acts do influence what we dream and vice versa. What we are responsible for shades off into areas beyond our immediate, direct, and conscious control, because we can indirectly influence that area.

William Butler Yeats, in the frontpiece of a collection of poems, Responsibility, quotes from what he calls an old play: "In dreams begin responsibility." There is a positive as well as a negative possibility implied here. Dreams are not necessarily a museum of unspeakable horrors and sick longings. For the man such as Yeats who would write a poem, he has to respond to his dreams. For a man or woman to do anything, dreams are an important source to listen to because they both reflect and influence conscious life. The "daydream" more than the night dream is closer to conscious control, closer to what we are responsible for. But the determination to bring all dreaming under control would block the well of inspiration that Yeats is naming.

I would be wary of anyone taking "full responsibility" for what he or she does. The person who says that is often clamping a stiff rational control upon drives, desires, and dreams that refuse to be so ordered. It is similar to a person claiming to speak "the whole truth." That is an admirable aim, but it is not within the ability of persons to speak the whole truth. They can make a series of true statements (which is in fact all the court can demand). The whole truth is not within their purview, which is why confirming evidence is required in a court. And the person trying to take full responsibility for what he or she does is limited to responding to the partial truth available.

One could have almost guessed that the letter which O.J. Simpson wrote to his wife after beating her and which she kept in a safety deposit box begins: "I've taken full responsibility for this." Like millions of others before him, Simpson was not lying. He simply had no grasp of what had impelled his violent action. Without a wider and deeper responsibility to self, taking full responsibility is a dangerous illusion.

The case is most tragic when the victim of abuse is the one who takes "full responsibility." Greg Louganis, in his autobiography, describes being beaten and raped by someone who at their next meeting acts as
Guilt and Criminality

Responsibility is closely related to but should be distinguished from guilt. The immediate occasion for talking about responsibility is usually the failure of responsibility. However, to understand failure one has to keep in mind what success is. The idea of “responsible to” is positive in meaning. People are regularly responsive in ways that are expected and at times in ways highly praiseworthy. People are also “responsible for” all the good human actions performed each day.

As human beings have increasingly taken responsibility for everything, they have also taken on the burden of every failure and deficiency. And in this situation, responsibility and guilt are more likely to blur together. An exploration of responsibility is too quickly assumed to be asking “who is guilty?” And that locks the question into a calculus of x is or is not guilty. The question takes the form of a court trial that presumes at the end either a judgment of guilty or not guilty.

Guilt can be an appropriate feeling when one has clearly failed to do one’s duty. But responsible to/responsible for is about shades of difference, various degrees, and a constantly changing process. In that process, if guilt comes in at all, it should be near the end. The court must sometimes say that someone is guilty for having violated the law. The individual person usually does not have to make such a judgment. A person can judge another’s behavior as wrong while leaving open the question of moral guilt. Even when someone does something wrong, guilt is at the extreme of a continuum that includes shame, remorse, regret, feeling tainted, and so forth.

In trying to get rid of feeling guilty before a heavenly tribunal, the twentieth century sometimes seems to have pulled down the feeling of guilt as a suffocating cover. Heidegger’s idea of guilt is that “human existence is guilty to the extent that it factually exists.” Karl Jaspers distinguishes a metaphysical guilt from a moral guilt. Jaspers was struggling with the problem of a collective responsibility on the part of the German people for Nazi crimes. Jaspers’s metaphysical guilt makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world.” As with Heidegger’s metaphysical use of guilt, saying that all are guilty evacuates particular judgments of guilt. Guilt should be the result of someone doing something despicable, knowing that it is despicable, and knowing that alternative action is possible.

In contrast to guilt, responsibility is a never-ending process of listening and speaking that involves a person to varying degrees, directly and indirectly. The degree of responsibility for unethical behavior depends on excusing factors. Sometimes actions are done inadvertently, especially when the moral weight of the action is slight. J. L. Austin writes: “I did it inadvertently” will do as an excuse for treading on a snail, but not for treading on the baby.” That is, treading on a baby needs a better excuse than “I just wasn’t paying attention to what I was doing.” In that instance, I am responsible for inattentively being responsible to. Aristotle believed that there were some offenses (for example, matricide) for which there was no excuse. These days we can find an excuse for just about any action, which may mean that we understand human action better or else that we are lax in accepting responsibility.

I think that Bruce Waller goes too far in what he calls “non-fault naturalism.” For Waller, since we are incapable of sorting out good people from bad people and passing judgment on who is at fault, we should stop altogether judgments of fault. “The non-fault naturalist will be drawn to the conclusion that fundamentally there is little difference between the vicious and the virtuous: There but for a few differences in fortuitous environmental contingencies go I.” It is possible, however, to have an alternative to his choice between harsh judgment of fault and judgment of non-fault. This other possibility is that we are each at fault on specific occasions; that we are fallible in judging our own faults, let alone those of others; that we ought to resist passing definitive judgments on the persons of others, but we can and sometimes should judge that certain actions are at fault.

Criminals are people who have committed grave faults and are judged to be adequately responsible for what they have done. The community sometimes has to restrain a person and deter future violations. “Swift and certain” response is the only kind that is likely to be effective if the purpose of punishment is both to improve the person as well as protect the community. Gregory Vlastos credits Protagoras as the first Greek to clearly distinguish revenge and punishment.
than two millennia ago, Protagoras taught that “men do not punish others for natural or chance defects, but they punish them for failure to learn. In fact, in civilized societies, punishment is a sort of teaching.”\textsuperscript{33} Unfortunately, what Protagoras took as the mark of civilized societies has never entirely triumphed in the civilized world. It is obvious that if the state punishes by putting prisoners in brutalizing prisons, the purpose is not to improve the prisoner. Whatever may be the purpose, what is in fact taught is brutality.\textsuperscript{34} The recidivism rate of a typical prison provides ample evidence of the success of the teaching.

The alternative to educating the criminal away from crime is a view of punishment as the restoration of a balance in the universe. Much of religious history seems influenced by a mystical sense of pain being expunged only by the exacting of equal pain. The executor of the pain usually has to be thought of as a representative of divine judgment. Where there is no God assumed, pain for pain seems only to be revenge, an attitude prized by nobody, and one all but certain to cause more violence.

Dostoyevsky seems to have believed that society had to balance suffering and that “psychologically the criminal needed his punishment to heal the laceration of the bonds that joined him to society. So in the end Raskolnikov the murderer thirsts for his punishment.”\textsuperscript{35} There may be some limited validity to this principle that punishment is good for the criminal and is even desired by the criminal. George W. Webber, who has spent decades educating prisoners, says: “The guys take responsibility for what they did. But they can say, ‘Look, I messed up, I’ve done awful things, I’ve committed murder, I deserve punishment, yet at the same time I was victimized by a vicious, corrupt, awful society that never gave me a chance.’”\textsuperscript{36}

Obviously, an educational principle does not extend to capital punishment, which is based on despair of ever healing the bond to community. Other than feeding a feeling of revenge, there are not even plausible arguments in support of capital punishment. It has been abolished almost everywhere in the civilized world, though it has made a strange and frightening reappearance in the United States.\textsuperscript{37} In 1846, when capital punishment was in fact rare in the United States, a legislator said: “After every instance in which the law violates the sanctity of human life, that life is held less sacred by the community among whom the outrage is perpetrated.”\textsuperscript{38} That sentiment had seemed to penetrate the country a century hence but to have receded in the subsequent half century.

One aspect of capital punishment that is relevant here is the fact that condemned killers sometimes say they deserve it. “Many a murderer,” writes David Dennett, “has no doubt of his own culpability.” Of the condemned, brutal murderer Richard Harris, Dennett writes: “It is noteworthy that Harris seems to accept responsibility for his life.”\textsuperscript{39} I think that what is more noteworthy is that Harris is wrong in accepting responsibility for his life. If Harris had accepted responsibility for certain acts and had accepted that punishment was appropriate, then he might have been on the road to not being a criminal. Capital punishment renders the issue moot.

Killers have been taught that moral responsibility is the mark of the human. One way for them to affirm their dignity in the face of dehumanizing incarceration and execution is to “accept responsibility.” As their last thread of dignity, accepting a degree of responsibility can be healthy. But an acceptance of capital punishment by the prisoner does nothing to exculpate the executioners. The prisoner has bought into a view of responsibility, expressed by John Spenkinkel, the first person executed in Florida after the resumption of capital punishment: “Man is what he chooses to be. He chooses that for himself.”\textsuperscript{40} Perhaps this Sartrean posturing provided some manner of relief for the prisoner. Intelligent people in the criminal justice system have no excuse for thinking that the criminal accepting responsibility for his life in any way justifies taking that life.\textsuperscript{41}

**Freedom and Self-Governance**

Behind the discussion of guilt, culpability, and crime is one of the ultimate philosophical issues: the nature of freedom. I do not propose to offer any solution to this much debated topic. However, the play between responsible to and responsible for throws light on a few aspects of human freedom. Popular speech tends to identify freedom with free will or choice or “making decisions.” Philosophical discussions of freedom tend to subvert popular images and assumptions.

The Greek idea of freedom did not assume a free will. The basic freedom was that of movement: “I can” rather than “I will” was the criterion of freedom. Aristotle’s term,\textit{hekousion}, is usually translated
to use violence, but rather their being nonviolent means they must use their imaginations to form their whole way of life consistent with their convictions.45

The path to greater control of self has its own strict discipline, but it is not much concerned with will control. The choice to do good is easy—if the whole body is aligned on that side. Human beings do decide, a word that means "to cut." The will acts similar to a film director. The director sees various takes on a scene from the imagination and finally says "cut, that's a wrap." Freedom is exercised through a negation of other possibilities. Sometimes when everything works together exceptionally well the director has only one take on the scene. Freedom does not necessarily mean choosing between A and B; it can simply mean saying yes to A by saying no to all else.

Paradoxically, then, the responsible person might move in the direction of fewer choices. Freedom need not mean a "wide range of options." At the least, those options need not include self-destructive paths. A person responsible to his or her organism will come to exclude many possible choices as stupid or evil. David Dennett asks: "Doesn't a considerable part of being a responsible person consist in making oneself unable to do things one would be blamed for doing if one did them?"46

What would be the culmination of this process of exclusion? Can the paradox be sustained that freedom would mean acting as one must? In relation to the widespread assumption that freedom means always being able to do anything I choose, such a notion of freedom sounds self-contradictory. Indeed, we seem to have gone full circle to the earlier quotation of Austin Farrer that the person doing evil never says to himself "I want this," but "this is what I must do."

There are some characteristics that apply both to the unfree person, submerged by an impersonal force, and to Max Weber's "mature man" who finally decides: Here I stand I can do no other. Not only Martin Luther but numerous other great characters in history have fearlessly stood up before tyranny and declared: I cannot, I will not be moved. Everything has led up to that moment so that the "I" does not flinch, whatever the repercussions. The difference between the two ends of the spectrum of freedom is nicely captured by Michael Polanyi: "While compulsion by force or by neurotic obsession excludes responsibility, compulsion by universal intent establishes responsibility. . . ."
The freedom of the subjective person to do as he pleases is overruled by the freedom of the responsible person to act as he must.47

Most of us most of the time play in the middle range, compelled in neither of the two ways Polanyi cites. We value our choices, and we rightly use choice as a test of freedom: I could do something different from what I am doing. The claim to be doing what I must is always a dangerous one. At best, it is often premature; at worst, it is the claim of charlatans and deluded cranks with a future likely to be disastrous. The tragic thing about human affairs is that we all work with fallible criteria in judging ourselves as well as others. Often it is only after a person’s death that we recognize cases of heroic freedom. John Brown can be a hero of the twentieth century after being shot as a criminal lunatic in the nineteenth. Joan of Arc becomes heroine and saint centuries after being thought of as a foolish and headstrong hearer of voices.

The attempt to imitate the determined hero is dangerous. Each person has to find a path by listening to his or her own life in all the particularities of time and place. A rush to reach the place of a vocation where I do what I must do can lead to following a Jim Jones or David Koresh, or, less apocalyptically, to living in a desert retreat or an urban ghetto when one is not prepared to do so.

Even marriage vows, despite the commonality of the practice, are an extraordinary claim to know oneself well enough to say: I forsake all others and “plight my troth with thee.” The divorce rate suggests a problem in being responsible to oneself and others before one can claim to be responsible for marriage vows. A complaint after the wedding that “I want my freedom” is evidence that the vow was not an act of freedom, even though there was no external coercion. “Playing the field” is desired by the person who has not reached the freedom of saying and knowing with the whole self what it means to say: This is the one.

David Dennett argues that freedom does not mean I could have done something different. After the fact, it is clear that all of the process that led up to the moment would have that outcome and only that outcome. Freedom is not an exception to natural causality nor is it the insertion of arbitrariness. Dennett cites a medieval moral doctrine that the most saintly and blessed are those unable to sin.48 There is a danger here of overemphasizing the culmination of the movement at the expense of our day to day experience. For medieval theology, the

blessed in heaven and the human nature of Jesus are incapable of sin. The rest of us are in a different position.

While it is true that what I did in the past—in those exact circumstances—I could not do otherwise, the future holds different possibilities. “It is not the capacity for choice but the evaluation and formation of wants that is central.”49 That is, I can learn from the past so that in similar circumstances (they will never be the same), I can do better than in the past. “The free man,” writes Buber, “intervenes no more but at the same time he does not let things merely happen. He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world.”50

When a faculty of will is thought to dictate orders to the body, the implied image has reason and will at the top of a pyramid. The body with its senses, emotions, and drives is imagined to lie underneath, always threatening to erupt. And when the reason cannot placate primal urges, the only defender against chaos is “will power.” The will does not know what is far beneath it; trying to find out what is there would be a distraction from making hard choices, or might entice the will to drop its guard.

If freedom depends on being responsible to, a different image emerges. The place to listen is from the center rather than from the top. Instead of a bulwark or a dictator, freedom requires an emptiness, a space for listening. The governing is along democratic lines with voice and vote for every concentric circle out from the center. As in every democracy, there are competing interests whose cooperation can be gained only with patience and negotiation. Drawing upon Bishop Butler’s eighteenth-century political metaphor for conscience, Mary Midgley writes: “What rules is our own center. It is indeed a ‘governor’ but not an alien, colonial one. It is our own sense of how our nature works.”51

The moral problem here is not usually violent eruptions of uncontrollable force but rather the fragmenting of forces that have to blend into a unified self. Midgley comments on two furious letters to the editor in a newspaper, one angry at cigarette advertising, the other angry that there is candy at the supermarket checkout counter. The angry letter writers are saying: How dare you set me against myself. “Perhaps it is a perfectly proper protest against fissiparous forces too strong for the center to cope with.”52

What is wanted by our senses and drives is good, otherwise it
would not be wanted. But because of competition among our desires, the center must try to find what is good in a stronger sense, what the organism as a whole wants. The votes must be lined up before cutting off debate as a decision. Reason supplies an evaluation of past successes and the likelihood of unified action now. Reason's chief tactic is often delay. "Waiting makes real wishing possible and real wishes make waiting possible."53

Beyond Our Control

Before describing further the self-governing process it is necessary to admit that there are human failures who cannot or do not succeed in this process. Some human beings have been so maimed at birth or have experienced such trauma during life that their freedom is completely impaired. Since the last century, these people are said to have a mental disorder. It took a long time to establish a clear demarcation between the insane ("unhealthy") and the criminal.54 The criminal is held responsible for illegal acts; the mentally insane are to be treated as lacking responsibility for their actions. And, of course, it remains the case that we are sometimes unsure whether a particular person is in the one condition or the other.

The puzzling and confusing situation is people who are seemingly "normal," functioning as ordinary citizens. But at some moments or in some area of life, they claim to be and/or appear to be incapable of acting freely. In the past, this condition was assumed to be an unusual exception. Today an increasing number of people claim that their freedom has been so violated that in a specific area of life they should not be held responsible. A man's excuse for beating his child is that he was beaten as a child. Or a girl's excuse for shooting her father is that he has sexually molested her.

It would be dangerous if a society could no longer recognize immoral behavior or if it no longer had sanctions against it. To excuse a person for mitigating circumstances can be distinguished from condoning a person's bad behavior. As to whether a person should be "held responsible" for the bad behavior, we would do well to think in degrees. The jury may have only the choice of guilty or not guilty. But in asking the question of responsibility, both of others and ourselves,

the question is usually how far we are responsible and how we might take the next step toward greater responsibility.

Instead of dividing the world into victims and nonvictims, we might better realize that each person has areas of life not completely under his or her control. Some people have suffered more than others, but an exemption from responsibility for their actions would not be a help to them. Whatever genetic and hereditary factors are combined with a person's upbringing and surroundings, response to the present and responsibility for present action is possible.

People entangled in bad behavior that has gone on for years cannot just suddenly do the right thing. What they can do is something better than the self-destructive behavior they have been engaging in. It may still be bad behavior, but relative to the past it is better behavior. Changing "behavior," that is, the external part of human activity, is to be combined with a change of attitude. The person has to "accept" (a more appropriate word than "take") some responsibility for some actions. No more and no less should be demanded.

Glenn Loury properly distinguishes between fault and responsibility, but his use of this distinction fails to clarify the problems of the black underclass he is describing. Loury writes that "whatever fault may be placed upon racism in America, responsibility for the behavior of black youngsters lies squarely on the shoulders of the black community itself." He attributes both too much and too little to the black community. Not the black community but the black youngster is responsible for his or her behavior. And the white community no less than the black has to be responsible to the problems of black youngsters. Members of the black community can be responsible for changing the conditions of these youngsters' lives, but the black community cannot do it alone. "Fault" can be assigned not only to racism but to particular actions of government, business, and educational leaders.55

The classic case to study for severe impairment of freedom is alcoholism. Aristotle thought that acting under the influence of liquor simply added a second level of blame.56 We are more understanding, having decided to call alcoholism a "disease." Like other drugs to which the body can become addicted, alcohol consumption overwhelms the self. The center cannot hold. The person who for whatever genetic and environmental reasons cannot control the use of alcohol has to avoid it altogether. Alcoholics Anonymous is rightfully famous for having developed an effective program of treatment. It has at times
been criticized for embracing too much Christian language, but its main strategy has proved remarkably successful. If anything, it suffers from too much success and the inevitable imitations that can trivialize the approach.  

Alcoholics Anonymous is a story of responsibility. It embodies many of the distinctions proposed in this book. First, the person who up to this moment was only a drunk has to say aloud: I am an alcoholic. Speaking the name is indispensable. Then one has to be responsible to oneself at a deeper level than heretofore. This is helped by being responsible to a community and one person in particular within the community. All of this is in relation to being responsible to a “Higher Power.” Then one has to accept responsibility, not for the rest of one’s life, but for one’s actions one day at a time.

As for the past, one has to be responsible to it, gaining whatever understanding is possible while not drowning in guilt. The appeal to a greater power is a move that relieves a person of being the only cause of his or her situation. Accepting that experience and explanation allows one to be responsible to the community members who are a permanent auxiliary. Failure is not unexpected or terribly surprising, but it does not have to be total reversal. Some of the steps can be quickly retraced, and the issue can be brought back into focus: To whom and to what are you now responsible? Are you willing to accept responsibility for your next step?

The experience of Alcoholics Anonymous has valuable lessons to teach both to people with other severe addictions and also to the general population. Drug treatment programs have little chance of success unless they incorporate something similar to AA’s understanding of responsibility. Thirty-day treatments of rich people that pronounce individuals cured or aggressive police action in urban ghettos are inadequate responses. Alcoholics Anonymous is a constant reminder of what a comprehensive struggle with addiction entails.

What AA can teach the wider population is exposed to being trivialized by innumerable programs that imitate the “Twelve Steps.” In a country that thrives on therapy, the mechanics of these programs can be a temptation more than a cure. That is, many people are all too willing to say that whatever their failing, it is not their fault, it is a disease deserving of sympathy. And since it is a condition they are not responsible for, what they look for is therapy rather than moral improvement. The peculiar approach of AA is that while using the language of dis-

ease, the program is still moralistic in its demands. One starts with a permanent condition that is not one’s fault; but every action in relation to that condition is one for which the person must accept responsibility. Many of the programs that imitate AA do not maintain this tension of responsible to and responsible for.

No doubt there are problems in peoples’ lives that are out of their control. Some of these problems are bodily addictions; at least the body is so habituated to the practice that a change cannot be accomplished simply by making a firm resolution on December 31. One has to listen to the body and enlist others in support to stop smoking tobacco, eating sweets, or drinking Pepsi Cola. The body has its own logic that must be listened to.

Some apparent addictions do not seem to be based in the genetic code or in bodily conditioning. Gambling or shoplifting or sexual exhibitionism destroys many lives; those who suffer from one of these self-destructive behaviors feel captured by an alien force. The plight of such people deserves some combination of sympathy for the condition along with a demand for responsible action within that condition.

The issue of personal control can be brought home to everyone with the issue of diet. All of us have a diet that began developing at birth, if not a few months before. It is almost impossible to make fundamental changes in one’s personal diet, although over a period of years a person can make some significant shifts. Letters regularly appear in the newspaper that begin “I have tried every diet there is. . . .” The inevitable conclusion is that nothing works for me and therefore you should feel sorry for me. The person who has tried every diet would first have to discover that he or she has always had a diet. One cannot go on and off diets. One has to discover what one’s diet is and some of the reasons why it is what it is.

The situation in the United States would be amusing if it did not include such economic fraud, personal frustration, and disastrous health problems. While starvation remains the common condition around the world, the United States agonizes over an obesity problem in a third of the population. And a large part of the other two-thirds seems obsessed with the latest diet fad or with feeling guilty over eating a piece of chocolate cake. Never has any country at any time been so awash in data about healthy eating. But the information does not seem to translate into people eating healthful and enjoyable food.

Tens of millions of people seem blinded to their own eating pattern
and to their ability to improve it. They are at the mercy of a forty-billion-dollar diet industry that finds an endless stream of takers. The failure rate for these products is somewhere between 95 and 100 percent. The people buying the products know the failure rate; it is their own experience. You can hardly turn on a television program without hearing of a product that will take off ten pounds in two weeks or your money back. What is enticing is that the claim is correct. While a person tries to lose weight, the body cannibalizes itself, assured that after a short wait the pressure will be removed and the body can resume the pattern it has had for decades. For most people, it is not that difficult to lose ten pounds in two weeks or whatever the ad maker claims. What is nearly but not totally impossible is to change one’s diet.

Genetics and heredity make control of weight more difficult for some people than for others. Each of us has to respond to our own makeup whatever it is. Similarly, some people were more fortunate than others in the developing of diet in childhood. That, too, must be responded to, whatever was the wisdom or ignorance of one’s parents. Some people have more money to spend on better quality food; it is not easy maintaining a healthful diet for oneself and one’s children in poverty. Ironically, however, poor people are not the ones on television saying they are not responsible for their poor eating habits.

Overeating (or undereating) is not a grave moral problem in itself. However, the moral life is buttressed by daily rhythms and routines. In most traditional religion, there is considerable attention to how people dress, what and when they eat, the times at which they go to sleep and arise, how they exercise, when they remain silent, and so forth. Today these daily manners are usually overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant when experts talk about “making good decisions.” Traditional practice presumed that if you take care of the small things, you will not have to agonize over the big things.

The point of discussing diet here is not to point a guilty finger at overweight people. Many of them are drowning in guilt already. The reason for the discussion is that one’s diet is almost a perfect experience to analyze for being responsible: to and for. Everyone has a daily experience of what the question is. Practically everyone has blind spots in understanding his or her diet and how to find one’s ideal diet. To handle this issue in an appropriate way one has to be aware of and respond to the heredity and condition in which one was born; one has to be responsible to past eating habits that still affect the organism; one

has to be responsible to easily available material on healthful diet; one has to be responsible to family and friends with whom one shares meals; one has to be responsible to people in the world who are undernourished. Instead of torturing myself with guilt because I have enough to eat, an appreciation of good food should compel me to help others who lack food. If one is responsible to one’s diet, then responsibility for what one eats is done without difficulty and without destroying the simple, human pleasure of sharing food and drink.

The other area that affects everyone and requires responsibility is sexual feeling and expression. There are many parallels with what has been said of diet. We are each born with predispositions that condition all of our sexual experience. In the twentieth century, we have discovered how important is early childhood experience. There will probably never be a firm statistic on how many children are sexually abused, but even estimates on the low side are frightening. Especially during the last decade a culture of sexual victims has arisen. No one doubts that there are adults who were horribly abused as children, but a whole industry of memory recovery is generating intense debate and criticism. Without having to go into the details of that debate, I can reassert the principle that all adults have to respond to the childhood that fate or providence has given them.

Nearly all adults have some difficulty in responding to sexual life because of distortions in childhood and because of the continued warping of vital information. As with information on nutrition, the country brims over with sexual talk. Yet people, especially in the teenage years, are often astoundingly ignorant of elementary information. By most indicators, progress over the last half century in understanding one’s own sexuality and living at ease with one’s sexual practice has been slight. Unfortunately, it took the AIDS epidemic to force into the open some frank discussion of sexual hygiene and the practices of birth control. AIDS has created new awareness and spread information; it has also increased anxiety and done little for sexual joy.

Sexual life, like diet, is important to a moral life and for similar reasons. It is a way to be responsible to oneself every day and through that responsibility find a bond with other people. Sadly, that is not usually the way guardians of morality think of sexual life. Sex is feared as the leading eruptive force under the will. Any time it spills out into the public arena, there are anxious cries to tamp it down, get it out of sight. At times in life people do need strong safeguards, but overall
they eventually have to accept their sexual condition, whatever it is, and be responsible for their own sexual practices.

Present attitudes and policies have generated a multibillion dollar pornography industry which is in the open and an unimaginable underground industry. Pornography gets tied in with prostitution and drugs, destroying untold lives. Periodic raids on particular establishments do nothing except move the problem for a while. Perhaps the saddest fact is that pornography does not even do what it promises to do, which is to supply erotic stimulation to undernourished sexual lives and imaginations. When the legal restraints were removed several decades ago, there was a wild rush to say the forbidden word and to show the previously censored activity. Having done that, pornographers had nowhere to go; they seem not to know what eroticism is. The product became joyless and unimaginatively repetitious.

The personal dividedness that is the theme of this chapter has almost always been associated with the sexual division of the human race. Yin and yang are often referred to as masculine and feminine principles. Western thought traditionally identified the rational spirit with men; the body, with its uncontrollable drives, was attributed (by men) to women. One can hardly doubt that the division of the sexes and the experience of self-division are somehow related, but not in the simplistic way of saying that men are rational, women are nonrational.

No solution to self-dividedness can be effective without including attention to sexuality. That does not mean a direct attack on what are thought to be immoralities. Rather, the question of homosexuality, which has finally begun to be discussed in the last thirty years, is one key to everyone’s sexuality. And changes in the relation of men and women promise to alter in drastic ways how to be responsible to oneself and to others.

**Voices Within**

As the previous section indicates, being responsible so as to achieve greater control of one’s actions means attending to voices that speak to us. There are always competing voices in the different levels of our lives. Sometimes we cannot tell if the voice is our own from an earlier time or if the voice belongs to someone else. Nonetheless, there would be no voice at all unless there were beings beyond us, calling us to engage ourselves with a reality that goes beyond our self.

A popular notion of “conscience” as a voice that tells us right from wrong is an oversimplified version of how we judge the rightness or wrongness of an action. We have a conscience because we have a consciousness; the two terms have a common root. The basis of right and wrong is implicit in our first grasp of consciousness, and except for the mentally sick person, the voice of conscience is never entirely stilled. Vaclav Havel writes: "We must trust the voice of our conscience more than that of all abstract speculations and not invent other responsibilities than the one to which the voice calls us." 60

Conscience nevertheless needs education, a practice in the skill of sorting out which voices selectively to attend to. 61 Education in this context need not mean years in school or courses in ethics. A caring childhood probably does more than anything to develop a sensitive conscience, even though the buzz of ordinary life can obscure what moral sensitivity a person has. Hannah Arendt states the paradox of conscience by saying that only really bad people have clear consciences. 62 Those trying to do their best usually have some feelings of failure and guilt. Help can come from enlightening the conscience with information; most people’s sexual lives are not that startlingly different, but they may feel guilty if they know little about statistics on sexual practices. Conscience is a power to know, not a magic storehouse of truth.

In the movie *Silkwood*, the heroine, Karen Silkwood, is not a very admirable person. However, she stumbles on knowledge of dangerous practices in the nuclear power plant. Taken to Washington, she is told by union leaders that she has a “moral imperative” to do something. Although she is barely aware of what the words mean, they strike a responsive chord. She goes home and starts doing courageous things to amass knowledge and organize the workers. To her confused and questioning boyfriend she says: I have a moral imperative. As Thomas More says in *A Man for All Seasons*, sometimes a person has no choice except to become a hero. A voice is heard demanding an answer, and the person, sometimes to his or her surprise, responds. Other voices had prepared the way, though which ones are often lost in the thicket of memory.

Pity the person who early in life shuts out the voice of parents or caretakers because survival seems at stake. The rap musician Tupac
Shakur, on the way to a prison cell, said: “My mother was a revolutionary Black Panther and all that. But I also saw my mother as a crack addict. So I answer to no one. I follow my heart.” Journalist Murray Kempton responded in his elegant prose: “The child is well advised to distrust any heart that instructs him to answer to no one.”60 The choice, as Kempton indicates, is not between listening to one’s heart or listening to another person. We listen with the heart to voices. How well we listen and to whom we listen depend on many factors, some beyond our control.

A person who was inundated with foolish, abusive, or criminal voices early in life is going to have difficulties later on, unless circumstances provide a wealth of countervailing voices. Nevertheless, each of us retains the ability to be responsible for responding to, for taking a step away from whatever bondage the past leaves us in. A man at age thirty-five or sixty-five can one day stop blaming his parents or an unfortunate accident for all the woes of his life. It is not the time to declare: “I am responsible for my life.” But it may be the time to say: “Being responsible to my life, I accept responsibility for taking a step toward reform of this life.”

I have restricted this discussion of voices mainly to other people, especially parents and friends. “Human beings,” wrote John Stuart Mill, “owe to each other help to distinguish the better from the worse, and encouragement to choose the former and avoid the latter.”64 There are other voices and other connections than those I have adverted to, the description of which belongs in the next chapter. Especially in our day, there are groups and organizations and institutions that are inevitably part of being responsible to. Personal self-dividedness cannot be solved exclusively by interpersonal exchanges. Or put somewhat differently, the physical individual that is a human person is related to other large entities that have some of the characteristics of a person. It is to interaction with these constructed persons that we turn now.

CHAPTER 5

CORPORATELY RESPONSIBLE

This chapter extends the discussion of the previous chapter by extending the meaning of the term “personal.” It deals with bodies (corporations) of more than one human being that have characteristics of the personal. This extension of “personal” stretches the term beyond common usage, but a basis for so using the word goes back in history for many centuries. Some corporations have long been recognized as legal persons. However, it is often assumed that such a use is a “convenient fiction.” The issue of responsibility raises a question whether the personhood of corporations is morally real or just a figure of speech.

I wish to emphasize that there are two distinct questions at issue in this chapter which is entitled “corporately responsible.” Consistent with the distinction used throughout this book, one has to ask about being responsible to corporations before asking whether and how corporations are responsible for actions. The first question is important on its own terms and would deserve attention even if the answer to the second question were that corporations are not morally responsible for anything. I think that corporations do have responsibility for some actions. But that question is best addressed only after exploring how corporations of many kinds are involved in every act of responsibility.

This chapter, therefore, not only follows chapter 4 but dovetails back into its meaning of personal. I have said that these two chapters are an attempt to overcome the split in modern ethics between individual and collective. Chapter 4 was mainly concerned to show the inadequacy of “individual”; this chapter does the same with “collective.” Both are concerned with the “personal” as an alternative to the split itself of individual and collective. Persons are beings that can be responsible for actions; before that, persons are beings that listen and