



Centre for

**Global  
Cooperation  
Research**

## INEF Workshop

in Collaboration with Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21)

## **Responsibility and Judgment in a World of Complexity**

The workshop began with a presentation by Prof. David Chandler (PhD), University of Westminster and Senior Fellow at Käte Hamburger Kolleg (KHK) / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (CGCR) on “Ethics of Responsibility”. He pointed out the necessity to rethink the concept of responsibility, arguing that there was currently a process of ‘socialisation’ of responsibility as a product of the non-linear understanding of politics in an age of complexity. Looking at developments and shifts in the understanding and construction of the West’s responsibility for intervention, David Chandler distinguished three dynamics: first, a *direct* responsibility for the outcome of intervention, as during the 1990s, when the West assumed traditional political responsibility, in the sense of actively bringing democracy and peace to other regions; second, an *indirect* sense of responsibility for the (intended or unintended) side effects and consequences of international institutional frameworks on developing states, posing barriers to development and democracy in these countries which has developed since the 1990s; and third, the assumption that the West is *not responsible* at all.

David Chandler argued that there has been a shift in the understanding and framing of political responsibility, from the traditional paternalist constructions (‘the West’ bringing democracy and peace to developing countries, while assuming that ‘others’, i.e. domestic elites etc., were responsible for the crimes and human rights abuses that had made the intervention necessary) to a ‘new paternalism’, where we recognise our indirect social or societal responsibility for our choices and actions and for the consequences of our behaviour. The liberal-modernist framing of responsibility (to the self or to the community) in a world of states is, as Chandler argued, replaced by a flatter ontology of indirect responsibility for indirect market outcomes. From a sociological point of view, there is no distinction between the market and the people. Accordingly, due to our associational interconnections and our relational embeddedness in a world of complexity, we have agency and become responsible for every potential consequences that might occur – but are incapable of actually taking responsibility.

In his comment, Prof. Jan Aart Scholte (PhD), University of Warwick and also a Senior Fellow at KHK/CGCR asked whether there has really been an ontological shift in societal relations in the sense that the world has changed from a world with linear causations to a complex world, arguing instead that there is now rather a new way of thinking about social relations. He questioned that in a world of complexity individual and collective actors are unable to effectively take responsibility, contemplating that although taking responsibility may be more complicated nowadays, it is nevertheless

possible. Jan Aart Scholte also asked whether the 'new paternalism' was really new or something that could be traced back to colonial times.

In the ensuing debate, participants highlighted the difference between the ontological notion of the human being as having a free will and the epistemological level regarding our thinking about the world. Furthermore, participants argued that notions of global responsibility beyond the Western discourses should not be ignored. Controversies arose on the issue whether the Post-Washington-Consensus, based on New Institutional Economics, should be seen as a move taken by the International Financial Institutions to shift responsibility completely to governments in developing countries or whether it still implied a 'hidden conditionality' and, thereby, interference from outside. Furthermore, the role of the state was contested: While some argued that the state, enacting a general will, should simply restrain irresponsible consumption or production patterns by declaring them illegal, David Chandler pointed out that the state according to the dominant discourse was increasingly acting through markets, trying to educate people through these mechanisms.

Many speakers stressed that complexity is a subjective, not an ontological category. According to one view, creating and increasing people's access to knowledge was seen as key to developing a person's morality and ability to judge. Others, however, warned against correlating justice with knowledge, arguing that there are moral principles which are not dependent on the specific situation or information someone has or does not have. At the end of the discussion, several participants emphasised the differences between 'responsibility' and 'accountability': One view held that accountability and responsibility have the same meaning, and that the difference mainly regards whom you are responsible/accountable to (God, religion, the nation, the state). Another proposal brought forward the idea that responsibility could mean to continually be reflexive about relationships and consequences of relationships.