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responsibility, *n.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /rɪˌspɒnsɪˈbɪlɪti/

, U.S. /rəˌspɑnsəˈbɪlɪdi/, /riˌspɑnsəˈbɪlɪdi/

Frequency (in current use):

Origin: Formed within English, by derivation. **Etymons:** RESPONSIBLE *adj.*, -ITY *suffix*.

Etymology: < RESPONSIBLE *adj.* + -ITY *suffix*: see -BILITY *suffix*. Compare French *responsabilité*...

1. Capability of fulfilling an obligation or duty; the quality of being reliable or trustworthy.

- 1642 H. PARKER *Vintners Answer* 20 The same Indentures were drawn also by the Kings Councill, in whose judgement and responsibility, the Vintners had reason to confide.
- 1798 *Oracle & Public Advertiser* 14 July 3/3 The Plaintiff might be right in referring to his Learned Friend, Mr. Knowlys, of whose responsibility there could not be the smallest doubt.
- 1821 T. SMITH *Attempt to define First Princ. Polit. Econ.* v. 37 A person or persons in whose responsibility the people of a country have a confidence.
- 1879 *Albany Law Jrnl.* 9 Aug. 115/2 He goes to his own broker, in whose responsibility he has confidence, and deals with him.
- 1955 *Science* 13 May 687/2 He demonstrated responsibility, honesty, self-discipline, and personal integrity to an outstanding degree.
- 2006 G. P. BEDUNNAH *Nevada: Our Home* i. 16 When you get your homework done on time, or when you do something your parents have asked you to do, you are showing responsibility.

2.

a. The state or fact of being accountable; liability, accountability *for* something. Freq. with *claim, take*.

diminished, self-responsibility: see the first element.

- 1737 O. SEDGEWICK *World turn'd Inside-out* vii. 102 If the Effects exceed his Responsibility, his Conscience, if he had any, will never acquit him of the Deficiency till made up, or atton'd for.
- 1763 *Select Coll. Lett. Govt. Eng.* II. 4 Responsibility is the necessary attendant of the service which give [sic] the capacity to advise.
- 1784 *Narr. Proc. & Deb. East-India Affairs* 19 Mr. Dempster said he had no objection..provided the bill was so drawn as to place the responsibility for making such a dividend on the Directors and the Company.
- 1874 A. H. SAYCE *Princ. Compar. Philol.* viii. 305 It is only when the conception of the individual has been reached that the idea of responsibility begins.
- 1915 A. L. BENSON *Way to Prevent War* 48 Long after the bones of his victims had mouldered in the grave, Bismarck told the truth as to why they died and took responsibility.
- 1974 *Black Panther* 19 Jan. 3/1 A communique signed by the Symbionese Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack.
- 2003 *Outside* Oct. 65/1 Teenage pranksters claimed responsibility for the 15 interconnected circles that turned up in June in a wheat field near Fairfield.

b. The state or fact of being in charge of or of having a duty towards a person or thing; obligation. Freq. with *for*.

- 1765 *Let. to E— of B—* 9 Is there then no appellation in our language for this minister, and no minister; this adviser without office or responsibility?
- 1788 A. HAMILTON et al. *Federalist* II. lxiii. 193 Responsibility in order to be reasonable must be limited to objects within the power of the responsible party.
- 1797 E. BURKE *3rd Let. to Member Present Parl.* 164 Where I speak of responsibility, I do not mean to exclude that species of it [etc.].
- 1814 *Edinb. Rev.* Feb. 530 His tract on ministerial responsibility..is an admirable discussion of one of the most important institutions of a free government.
- 1853 T. H. HUXLEY in *Life & Lett.* (1900) I. 114 Having rushed into more responsibility than I wotted of.
- 1911 *Amer. Jrnl. Sociol.* 17 264 Are we justified in drawing the line of social responsibility and service sharply between Americans and non-Americans?
- 1928 E. O'NEILL *Strange Interlude* II. 66 Looks damnably upset... Wants to evade all responsibility for her, I suppose.
- 1947 *Rev. Politics* 9 365 There prevails in Mr. Eyck's book a high sense of the historian's ethical responsibility.

2007 R. LOVEGROVE *Silent Fields* ii. 33 They took on increasing responsibility for the removal of competing vermin through their own resources.

†**c.** *U.S.* The ability to pay a debt or contract. *Obs. rare.*

1828 WEBSTER *Amer. Dict. Eng. Lang.* II. *Responsibility*, ability to answer in payment; means of paying contracts.

3.

a. With *of*. The fact of having a duty to do something; (also) an instance of this.

1776 D. HARTLEY *Substance Speech in Parl.* 16 Any Bank..may be broken, notwithstanding a very certain final *Responsibility* of paying Twenty Shillings in the Pound.

1785 J. HATSELL *Precedents* (ed. 2) III. 177 The resolution of the 11th of December has no other intention than to transfer the *responsibility* of receiving or refusing the petition from the House to the Ministers of the Crown.

1841 DICKENS *Old Curiosity Shop* I. xvii. 184 Then the entertainment began.; Mr. Codlin having the *responsibility* of deciding on its length.

1881 W. COLLINS *Black Robe* viii. 81 I took the *responsibility* of leaving him undisturbed.

1916 T. S. ELIOT *Let.* 5 Nov. (1988) I. 157, I have certainly reason to be proud of my family: the way they have accepted the *responsibility* of helping me, without a single murmur, has been wonderful.

1950 *Sport* 22 Aug. 4/4 He has handed over the *responsibility* of taking penalty kicks to left-back 'Jock' Ferrier.

2006 *N.Y. Times* (National ed.) 19 June A14/3 Employers often turn to labor contractors to assemble crews of workers—transferring onto them the *responsibility* of checking the paperwork.

b. A burden, task, or assignment for which one is responsible.

1779 *Scots Mag.* Sept. 477/2 In civil commotions, and in great national wars, those men take great *responsibilities* upon themselves who refuse proffers of accomodation.

- 1797 E. BURKE *Third Let. to Member Present Parl.* 164 That confidence..fixes a responsibility on the Ministers entire and undivided.
- 1847 C. BRONTË *Jane Eyre* I. iv. 56 Anxious to be relieved of a responsibility that was becoming irksome.
- 1880 *19th Cent.* Apr. 687 As the responsibilities became greater and warfare more scientific.
- 1900 H. S. HOLLAND *Old & New* 97 Whether East or West, we all with one consent excuse ourselves from our responsibilities.
- 1959 *Listener* 26 Feb. 363/1 What special or new responsibilities do these developments place upon industry?
- 2008 *Total Politics* Aug. 30/2 Further harmonisation could work if member states embraced Europe a la carte and accepted the core responsibilities of membership.

c. A moral obligation to behave correctly towards or in respect of a person or thing. With *to*, *towards*, or *for*.

- 1780 M. MADAN *Thelyphthora* I. 412 Men of rank and fashion, who are now turned loose on the lower order of females, and debauch them at free cost, without being under the least responsibility towards them.
- 1830 C. FRY *Listener* II. xlv. 252 The child committed to them [sc. teachers] they receive as from the hand of God: the responsibility to the confiding parents for intellectual cultivation,..is less considered that the responsibility to God to nurture them for him.
- 1898 J. C. COLLINS in *Minutes National Council Congregational Churches* 306 In every city there are thousands who have not the Gospel. We have a responsibility for them.
- 1930 *Math. Gaz.* 16 p. xii, She mentioned the responsibility towards the community of those who have had training in the exact studies.
- 1971 K. AWOONOR *This Earth, my Brother* xiv. 176 For him the responsibility towards Amamu was almost religious; it was something for which in the distant hereafter he would be called upon by Allah to give account.
- 2005 *Wall St. Jrnl.* (Central ed.) 18 July R4/3 But the way to fix things is..to talk about what the market demands and the responsibility to your business.

d. A person for whom one is responsible.

- 1832 F. MARRYAT *Newton Forster* II. xviii. 262 [He] would hand over to Newton's charge any one of the unmarried responsibilities.
- 1873 S. OWEN in W. F. Jamieson *Clergy Source of Danger* (ed. 2) 260 The lady here involved is a resident of Newark, N.J., is a married woman, and has two infant responsibilities.
- 1936 M. A. VON ARNIM *All Dogs of my Life* I. 71 Are not five children,..serious responsibilities?
- 1998 *Billboard* 26 Sept. 24/3 They form an unlikely team and get each other out of one jam after another, despite Buddy's repeated attempts to shed his young responsibility.

†4. A person to whom one is responsible; a person in authority. *Obs. rare.*

- 1893 E. DOWSON *Let.* c22 Mar. (1967) 275, I have to let the responsibilities know exactly how many people I have invited.

PHRASES

on (also upon) one's own responsibility: under one's own control, at one's own risk; so as to be solely accountable; *spec.* without reference to a higher authority.

- 1792 J. FENNELL *Rev. Proc. at Paris* 204 They have been forced to submit to the direction of the Assembly, the exercise of that power they held on their own responsibility.
- 1802 *Naval Chron.* 7 325 An Officer, who, in the absence of the person appointed to command, undertook it upon his own responsibility.
- 1827 R. SOUTHEY *Hist. Peninsular War* II. 746 He was made to understand that any risk which he incurred would be upon his own responsibility.
- 1890 H. M. STANLEY *In Darkest Afr.* II. xxxv. 421 It was then I proposed to him, solely on my own responsibility, that he should take service with the British East African Association.
- 1902 *Nation* (N.Y.) 20 Nov. 398/1 Prehistorians had long known of a gentleman..who had long excavated on his own responsibility.

- 1955 *Mod. Lang. Rev.* **50** 305 The absolute freedom of the hero to act according to the dictates of his own nature and consequently upon his own responsibility.
- 2003 S. GRISTWOOD *Arbella: England's Lost Queen* v. 269 To negotiate, on her own responsibility, with any foreign prince would be at once impracticable and quite definitely treasonous.

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