

THE ETHOS OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

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Aim: The aim of this article is to examine whether and to what extent reference to collective responsibility is present in current public discourse, in which contexts it functions, and what are the ways in which it is justified.

Project/methodology/approach: The article provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the presence of the issue of collective responsibility on the Internet, in the National Library catalogue, the National Corpus of Polish, and public opinion.

Findings: The research allows us to conclude that in different segments of public discourse collective responsibility is present with different intensity. It is commonly found in the statements concerning current social and political phenomena, where the existence of a certain ethos of collective responsibility can be observed. In this area it is also widely endorsed and its diverse justifications are formulated. This happens in spite of the prevailing convictions of ethicists as well as in defiance of the principles of law which allow only individual responsibility.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis revealed the ubiquitous presence and widespread approval of collective responsibility, hence a little more attention was paid to some current issues present in public discourse. Future research may focus on exploring the limits of reference to collective responsibility.

Social implications: By demonstrating the prevalence of the phenomenon of collective responsibility, the results of the study shall help to make public opinion more sensitive to the need to seek the limits of its application.

Originality/value: What is original of this study is the thesis about the widespread approval of collective responsibility, demonstration of the ways of justifying it and the method of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content of the Internet, the National Library catalogue, the National Corpus of Polish, and public opinion concerning the presence of the explored issue. The conclusions presented in the article are important for ethicists, especially those dealing with the issue of responsibility, as well as for public opinion, as they reveal the dangers of uncritical references to collective responsibility.

Keywords: ethos, responsibility, collective responsibility.

Category of the paper: Research article.

1. Introduction

The inspiration for the interest in the issue of collective responsibility is Russian aggression against Ukraine. This aggression was met not only with (fairly common in our cultural circle) disapproval, but also approval for the imposition of sanctions on Russia. While the imposition of sanctions on specific individuals responsible for certain acts does not raise objections, the imposition of sanctions on the state and consequently on its inhabitants, regardless of their individual participation in the war, means the application of collective responsibility and should arouse opposition among those who approve only of individual responsibility. However, nothing like this has occurred. The emerging objections to the sanctions have different origins than disagreement with the application of collective responsibility.

The circumstances of the approval of the sanctions imposed on Russia, the expectation of the worsening of the economic situation of Russia and consequently of Russians, allow us to assume that, contrary to the dominant opinions of ethicists as well as the views present in the public discourse which stress the legitimacy of the application of individual responsibility, collective responsibility is widely approved.

The aim of this analysis will be an attempt to reconstruct this area of collective awareness which can be called the ethos of collective responsibility. In our definition of the ethos we follow Maria Ossowska, who writes that it is "the general orientation of a culture, its adopted hierarchy of values, either formulated explicitly or that can be read from human behaviour" (Ossowska, 1973, p. 5). Therefore, the ethos of collective responsibility consists of the following elements: frequency of occurrence in different areas and the ways of justification.

2. Defining the subject of the study

The subject of our interest is the presence of the concept of collective responsibility in the selected areas of public discourse: Internet, the catalogue of the National Library of Poland, the National Corpus of Polish, the views of researchers of this issue, public opinion. We believe that an attempt to determine the frequency of occurrence of the concept of collective responsibility in the public sphere will allow us to provide an answer to the question about the prevalence of this issue in public discourse.

The article makes an attempt to justify the hypothesis that the phenomenon of collective responsibility is very common; even more: contrary to the dominant opinions, collective responsibility turns out to be approved. Two approaches are used to justify the hypothesis. Firstly, the relative frequency of these three terms: responsibility, collective responsibility and individual responsibility is sought. The frequency of their occurrence is checked on the Internet

(Google search engine), in the catalogue of the National Library and in the National Corpus of Polish. The search for the frequency of their occurrence in the above listed sources is based on the assumption that these are such significant collections that they should reveal proportions between the search terms. Additionally, any guidelines concerning the content attributed to collective responsibility are also sought in the listed collections. Secondly, the opinions of the selected researchers on collective responsibility are traced; they will allow our study to be situated in a broader context. Thirdly, our analysis focuses on the statements on the chosen issues, in which the issue of collective responsibility occurs and which are present in the public sphere (including the press, the Internet).

3. Dictionary perspective of collective responsibility

Several popular dictionaries of the Polish language provide slightly different definitions of the term collective responsibility. In the oldest *Słownik języka polskiego* (Dictionary of the Polish Language), edited by Witold Doroszewski, there is no separate entry on collective responsibility. There is only the entry responsibility, in which the passages concerning collective responsibility appear; these are the following: "A sense of personal responsibility of individuals for themselves and a sense of collective responsibility for the fate of the nation should be strongly cultivated (...). Collective responsibility 'the responsibility of the whole community for the acts of individuals'" (Doroszewski, 1963, p. 760).

In the later *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego* (The Universal Dictionary of the Polish Language), edited by Professor Stanisław Dubisz, collective responsibility is characterised as follows: it is "a principle that the whole group to which a person belongs is responsible for an offense committed by this person" (Dubisz, 2003, p. 1165).

In turn, online *Wielki słownik języka polskiego* (The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language) describes the term collective responsibility in the following way: it is "a principle according to which the whole group to which a person belongs is responsible for an offence of a given person, and it is the whole group that should bear the consequences of this offence". Then several statements referring to collective responsibility are quoted.

Although the definition of collective responsibility presented in *The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language* is the most extensive, at the same time it is too narrow as it assumes that bearing collective responsibility is a consequence of someone's individual action and links collective responsibility with guilt; whereas we are faced with situations in which we assume the existence of collective responsibility although it is difficult to identify individual perpetrators (or perhaps there are none at all) and thus to speak of guilt. This is the case in the situations of collective repression of people by multiple occupiers. Besides, *The Great Dictionary* does not include the situation captured in the phrase attributed to Norwid:

"The homeland is a great collective duty". We think that among the above-mentioned dictionary definitions, the characterisation of collective responsibility present in the *Słownik języka polskiego* (Dictionary of the Polish Language), edited by Mieczysław Doroszewski is the closest to those understandings that occur in the public sphere. Therefore, this definition is the basis of our analysis. Collective responsibility is understood by us as bearing consequences by the entire group for the acts of other people (not necessarily belonging to that group) or as attribution of agency to the entire group, regardless of the participation of its members in causing unfavourable events, as well as imposition on all the members of the group some obligations to perform a certain action or refrain from it.

4. Opinions of the selected philosophers on collective responsibility

In the Polish philosophical literature the issue of collective responsibility has not received much attention. By way of example, we shall, on the one hand, refer to the way collective responsibility is defined in encyclopaedias of philosophy, and on the other, we shall present several approaches to the issue proposed by the selected individual authors.

In *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* (The Universal Encyclopaedia of Philosophy...; www.ptta.pl/pef) there is no entry for collective responsibility; there is not even an entry for the term responsibility. The same lack can be observed in *Słownik społeczny* (Social Dictionary) (Szlachta, 2004). An extensive entry on Collective Responsibility is present in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu>). In the entry on collective responsibility the concept is not defined. It is argued that collective responsibility is associated with collective actions taken by groups – which is surrounded by various controversies, in particular, concerning the question whether these groups have to meet the same stringent conditions of moral responsibility that individuals do.

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy distinguishes between two types of collective responsibility: responsibility for what happened (traditional backward looking collective responsibility) and for what will happen (forward looking responsibility). It also points out several controversies concerning collective responsibility, in particular: whether a group can be the subject of collective moral responsibility; whether moral responsibility can be distributed across individuals of a group for the acts committed by others; whether in practice collective responsibility can be enforced both against individuals and groups; what conditions should be met for collective responsibility to be considered legitimate. In response, a variety of solutions are presented, which aim to question the sense of collective responsibility.

According to Karl Jaspers (Jaspers, 1979), who analyses the guilt of Germans for their actions during the Second World War, moral judgements always concern only the individual, not the collective. However, Jaspers allows for the political responsibility of the nation for its

government and recognises that judgements in terms of collective responsibility are extremely widespread. Rev. Jan Piwowarczyk (Piwowarczyk, 1985) approves of collective responsibility, although he does so conditionally. He rejects Karl Jaspers' theory concerning the issue of collective responsibility of Germans. Jaspers' proposal, he writes, is individualistic, assuming that the nation is an agglomeration of individuals; while, according to Rev. Piwowarczyk, the nation is not a random collection of people; it is a moral unity, a solidaristic group. The degree of solidarity also implies the degree of responsibility, that is participation in collective responsibility. Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1987), on the other hand, is a strong opponent of collective responsibility. She writes that if collective responsibility were to be allowed, individual responsibility would not be possible, and this would mean that the perpetrators of Nazi crimes would be exonerated. Jacek Hołówka (Hołówka, 2001) analyses several issues traditionally categorised as collective responsibility but rejects such a qualification. He stresses that guilt and responsibility are always individual: "Collective responsibility is always a fiction. The responsible one is that who plans, chooses, decides and acts. Responsibility always falls on individuals, even if it is difficult to weigh and judge their guilt after many years" (Hołówka, 2001, p. 365). On the other hand, Jarosław Warylewski and Jacek Potulski (Warylewski, Potulski, 2007) put forward the thesis that technological progress, globalisation and the increasing importance of economic turnover lead to the growing importance of the collective entities and, consequently, of their responsibility. At the same time, while their civil, administrative liability is recognised, the problem of criminal liability of collective entities is not universally accepted. Yet, this is changing. Both among researchers of this issue and in some countries there are emerging concepts and laws which provide for the possibility of criminal liability of collective entities, treating these entities analogously to individual persons. The authors also remind that the problem of criminal liability of collective entities was present in the earlier legal systems. A change occurred at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Janina Filek (Filek, 2014) writes in a similar vein, acknowledging that individual responsibility is taken for granted, but also argues that today's social transformations make us consider the possibility of responsibility of collective entities (especially companies). The different types of moral responsibility of corporations are pointed out by Tomasz Kwarciański (Kwarciański, 2016). The author distinguishes the following stances in the dispute over the possibility and validity of attributing moral responsibility to corporations: "1) denying moral agency of corporations and thus the possibility of attributing moral responsibility to corporations, 2) approving moral agency of corporations and their moral responsibility, 3) attributing moral responsibility to corporations while at the same not granting them moral agency" (Kwarciański, 2016, p. 92). He goes on to state that two types of argument are used in the dispute: argument from analogy and pragmatic arguments. Argument from analogy draws attention to the similarities or their lack between the human person and the corporation, while pragmatic argument emphasises the fact that granting moral status to the corporation is a necessary condition for achieving the desired practical goals. Kwarciański also notes the problem of bearing the consequences by

employees and other stakeholders for the actions taken by the corporation. He points out that even in the case of individuals the consequences borne by them affect not only the perpetrators of the act but also those surrounding them.

The transformation in the understanding of responsibility, including collective responsibility, is also highlighted by Andrzej Kiepas (Kiepas, 2015). The author presents the conditions of responsibility of societies (science and technology) for innovations. At the same time, while in the analyses of responsibility, including collective responsibility, some subjects (individual or collective) are mentioned, Andrzej Kiepas pays attention to the responsibility of technoscience, which certainly does not have the features of a subject.

5. Entries about responsibility on the Internet

Nowadays the frequency of the occurrence of different content on the Internet is undoubtedly one of the indicators of the interest in a given issue. We have searched through Polish Google pages for the presence of these three keywords: responsibility, collective responsibility, individual responsibility.

The number of pages on Google (Poland) about responsibility (accessed 3.04.2023):

- Responsibility: approximately 88 million pages.
- Collective responsibility: approximately 310,000 pages.
- Individual responsibility: approximately 28 million pages.

As we expected, the Internet has the highest number of pages about responsibility in general, followed by individual responsibility and the fewest pages for collective responsibility. Let us try to find out with what frequency Internet users chose the analysed keywords in 2022.

The frequency of choosing the keywords concerning responsibility according to Google Trends (<https://trends.google.pl>) in 2022 (accessed 3.04.2023):

- Responsibility: from 39 to 100 per day.
- Collective responsibility: from zero to 100 per day.
- Individual responsibility, according to the system: too little data.

The data which we obtained is surprising. In 2022 the keyword individual responsibility was of no interest to Internet users. The number of people interested in the keyword individual responsibility is too small for detailed data to emerge. In contrast, the other search terms attract the interest of a comparable (small) group.

Let us see what are the ways in which collective responsibility is understood in the most frequented sites on the Internet (Google, keyword collective responsibility, <https://www.google.com>). We believe this is a significant guideline indicating the presence of the issue of collective responsibility in public discourse and the ways in which it is understood. We took into account several dozen of top-ranked text pages, excluding video pages.

The first place is occupied by the concept of collective responsibility present in Wikipedia (Wikipedia, pl.wikipedia.org/wiki). The readers of the entry learn that collective responsibility is collective, disciplinary punishment used in closed institutions (boarding schools, military units, prisons, psychiatric facilities). The entry collective responsibility in The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language (Wielki słownik języka polskiego..., wsjp.pl) is high on the list, although lower than Wikipedia.

Many times what comes high on the list is the information about a law addressing the issue of collective responsibility. Here, the phenomenon of collective responsibility is treated as something ordinary, yet, requiring good specification of the conditions of applicability. Among the texts on the responsibility of collective entities, we can also mention an article by Janina Filek on the responsibility of a collective entity (Filek, 2014). Several pages of the article are devoted to opposing the application of collective responsibility to a group of students. In this context, there is a reference to the educational law, which states the illegality of collective punishment of students. Also, a few times one can come across some pages concerning the acts of forcing employees to agree to bear collective responsibility for company property losses which occurred during work, and a broader statement indicating the necessary conditions for accepting joint responsibility for entrusted property. Among the pages analysed there is also one dedicated to the collective responsibility for rubbish, which should be borne by tenants. Several times, in other places one can find pages devoted to the responsibility for acts committed during the communist era. These are both statements approving and opposing this form of responsibility. Further down, there are a few pages concerning the use of collective responsibility by Germans during the Second World War, which express explicit opposition (warning) to this practice.

Among those analysed there is a page devoted to English translations of a dozen examples of the use of the term collective responsibility. The examples provided include: responsibility of road users for road safety; opposition to collective responsibility as injustice; responsibility of families in Poland during the German occupation; collective responsibility for crimes committed in the name of the Reich; collective responsibility of the commune (in former centuries) for duties to the lord. Further down there appear similar translations into German.

Apart from the article by J. Filek, cited above, Internet user can come across several authorial statements: a column by Maciej Kawałko (Judge of the District Court in Szczecin) about the responsibility (duty) obliging one to get involved in the life of the collective, especially (in the case of judges) by the creation of a senior judge's house (Kawałko, *Odpowiedzialność zbiorowa*; <https://ingremio.org>) or a statement by a blogger, Jesuit Stanisław Biel on collective responsibility. While analysing the opinions of the prophet Ezekiel, Biel questions the concept of collective responsibility. He argues that everyone takes a personal responsibility for his or her life; however, we have also a duty to admonish our neighbour when he or she sins (Biela, 2020; jesuici.pl/2020/09).

A review of the dozens of the top-ranking pages on collective responsibility on the Internet reveals that the Wikipedia entry comes first on the list of most frequented pages and at the same time collective responsibility is most often associated with the responsibility of collective entities, collective responsibility of employees and students. Less frequently there appear pages on the responsibility for the acts committed during the times of the People's Republic of Poland and the Second World War. Other understandings of the term occur even more seldom. The judgments of the phenomenon are various. The predominant view acknowledges the existence of collective responsibility and then demands the formulation of the conditions for its application. In the case of responsibility for the acts committed in the People's Republic of Poland the judgments are contradictory: both approving and denying it.

6. The entry collective responsibility in the National Library catalogue

We investigated the popularity of the issue of responsibility in the resources of the National Library catalogue, that is, marking the texts whose titles contain the relevant words (responsibility, individual responsibility, collective responsibility). In our opinion, the frequency of occurrence of these terms in the titles of books and articles proves their attractiveness for researchers. Undoubtedly, the terms mentioned may also occur in the texts with other titles, however, we consider the presence in a title as particularly significant.

Below we show the presence of the titles containing a keyword in the National Library catalogue (National Library Catalogue, catalogues.bn.org.pl, accessed 3.04.2023):

- Responsibility: in 8537 titles,
- Individual responsibility: in 15 titles,
- Collective responsibility: in 65 titles.

What surprises is the scant presence of the phrase collective responsibility, and even less of individual responsibility, in the titles of books and articles. The number of texts with the term collective responsibility in the title is even lower than the statistics on the National Library's website show. It is caused by the fact that a considerable number of texts are marked because of the presence of the term collective work. The following issues constitute the subject of interest in the texts with the phrase collective responsibility in the title: collective responsibility in general, concerning tenants, concerning the Polish population of the Biłgoraj powiat during World War II, in criminal law, in corporate crime, in a situation of accidental coincidence of names, corporate responsibility, in social reporting. The texts whose titles contain formulations on corporate social responsibility, technology, marketing, health sector or airlines can also be included in this category (the National Library catalogue).

7. The presence of the phrase collective responsibility in the National Corpus of Polish

According to the self-presentation on the website of the National Corpus of Polish (NKJP) (Narodowy Korpus..., nkjp.pl/), the Corpus is a collection of diverse texts from the earliest times to the present day. It allows one to search for typical usages of single words or phrases as well as other information about their meaning and function. It was created between 2008 and 2012 and is a joint initiative of several scientific institutions, carried out as a research-development project of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. It has about 1500 million words in its entirety, and about 250 million words in a balanced collection (with respect to the genre and subject). The NKJP has also tools for searching the resources. We used the PELCRA search engine to search the NKJP for the already highlighted phrases concerning responsibility. Since the balanced collection is intended to be more representative of Polish language texts, we decided to use it to search for the phrases of our interest.

In the in the balanced corpus of the National Corpus of Polish, the presence of phrases concerning responsibility looks as follows:

- Odpowiedzialność (Responsibility): 12133 times.
- Odpowiedzialność indywidualna (Individual responsibility): 5 times.
- Indywidualna odpowiedzialność (Individual responsibility): 9 times.
- Odpowiedzialność zbiorowa (Collective responsibility): 57 times.
- Zbiorowa odpowiedzialność (Collective responsibility): 18 times.

In the NKJP's balanced corpus the phrase responsibility occurs 12133 times, while individual responsibility - contrary to the expectations based on the belief that the endorsement of individual responsibility dominates - is present only fourteen times, much less frequently than collective responsibility, which occurs seventy-five times.

In the balanced corpus the phrase collective responsibility occurs in the following contexts/areas (National Corpus..., nkjp.uni.lodz.pl):

- civilised countries approve of individual responsibility; the development of civilisation consisted in abandoning collective responsibility,
- it used to exist at some time in the past: in the Middle Ages, in the past, in the People's Republic of Poland, during Stalinism,
- in some countries there is a sense of collective responsibility,
- monopolists, including banks, apply collective responsibility,
- it functions under special conditions: German occupation, against soldiers subordinated to a unified command, against members of organisations considered criminal,
- it exists when there is group solidarity, identification with the national community, being in a group encourages the application of collective responsibility, the homeland is a collective duty, it is selectively applied to different groups,

- it lies at the heart of racial hatred,
- it is present in the VAT law; insurance companies use collective responsibility in the payment of driver's insurance,
- it is applied to train passengers, family members, members of a housing association, inhabitants of some town: for the bad acts of some members of this local community, residents of a building, a housing association for bad rubbish collection, emergency workers,
- government is collective responsibility,
- elites are responsible for the fate of the country,
- companies have collective responsibility for the actions of another company,
- it is present in advertising campaigns.

The above review demonstrates that the authors of the quoted texts noticed the presence of collective responsibility in many areas of social functioning. Their attitude to this phenomenon is not very diverse: distance or opposition prevail. The approval of collective responsibility is present in few texts; in these cases such statements appear: collective responsibility is acceptable in certain situations, when a military unit is under a single command, it is permissible when an organisation or an institution has been criminalised, additional punishments cannot be considered collective responsibility, elites are responsible for the fate of the country. The authors of the quoted texts also note the dual nature of collective responsibility and consequently a dual attitude to it is present in some of the texts. We are not responsible for the sins of our ancestors, but still, if we identify with a certain community, we cannot reject them. The dual attitude consists in approving the actions of the community with which we identify while rejecting the actions of an alien group.

8. The issue of collective responsibility in the current public discourse

The perception of collective responsibility is noticeable in many areas in the current public discourse. We will highlight a few of them which we believe are currently the most common and frequently justified in our cultural circle: war, international sanctions, responsibility for the past and future, the role of discriminatory stereotypes and the role of algorithms.

8.1. War and collective responsibility

Wars have been a common phenomenon both in the past and today. The consequences of wars are borne both by their initiators and, above all, by those affected by aggression. The consequences are various: death, disability, material loss, but also accusations formulated by an aggressor about victims' guilt for the outbreak of war. Evaluations of wars vary and are

formulated from different points of view. The theories of just wars define the conditions when the use of various forms of collective violence against others is justified (Wyszczelski, 2009; Walzer, 2010). The sides involved in the conflict provide numerous justifications for their actions. Referring to one of the most important issues present in the public discourse, Russia's war with Ukraine, we can see how the Russian authorities (although a similar mechanism is present in analogous situations) constructed such justifications early enough (Domanska, 2021; Labuszezewska, 2023) and quickly disseminated them, thus leading to the widespread approval of the war among Russian citizens and the approval of the situation in which the Ukrainian population bear the negative consequences of the war. These consequences, to varying degrees, also affect the inhabitants of many other countries. The protracted war forces changes in justifications, therefore while initially the Russian government and Russians justified the aggression by pointing at Ukraine, over time their justifications refer to the actions of the US and the West (Gutkov, 2023). In response to Russia's actions it was decided to impose international sanctions on the aggressor.

8.2. International sanctions

Various types of sanctions are imposed on the states and societies which violate the international order, particularly those that are aggressors or are condemned for other negative phenomena, such as human rights violations (Menkes, 2011). Sanctions are imposed on both states and particular individuals. Consequences (sanctions) are imposed not only on states or their leaders directly responsible (to some extent) for aggression or other forms of violations of the international order, but, in fact, also on other residents of the state. It is expected that sanctions will worsen the situation of the people, regardless of their individual contribution to the negative actions of the state, thus leading to a change in the state's policy. The inhabitants of the sanctioned state are accused of complicity in the condemnable actions of the authorities. The most recent example of the use of sanctions are those imposed on the Russian Federation, numerous representatives of its authorities and those supporting the authorities. The assessment of these sanctions in the public discourse is varied, including critical ones, with critics primarily raising the issue of their effectiveness, the violation of the interests of the states applying them. At the same time, questioning the use of sanctions due to the rejection of the principle of collective responsibility is rare and is associated with the reluctance of the mainstream opinion. The arguments justifying the collective responsibility of the citizens of the aggressor state point out that Russian society stands in solidarity with the authorities and that ideologies justifying the actions of the authorities prevail in the country. It is stressed that Russians are guilty of or complicit in the war with Ukraine and war crimes because they voted for Putin despite the war in Georgia or the annexation of Crimea. Among the opinions collectively blaming Russians and thus justifying the use of collective responsibility, one can also notice those that refer to the idea of *russkiy mir* (the Russian world) (Skwieciński, 2022), *russkaya Dusha* (the Russian soul) (Who Fights..., *tv.p. info*, 2022), hatred of the West (Shahaj, 2023), but also the passivity of the

Russians (Gallamov, wiadomosci.wp.pl, 2023); however a small part of these opinions oppose the war waged by Russia, and slightly more state that starting the war with Ukraine was a mistake (Survey..., www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne, 2023).

8.3. Responsibility for the past

The consequences for the past deeds of ancestors fall also on successive generations. Groups (nations, states, social classes) are held collectively responsible and blamed for various acts committed in the past, which are today (though not exclusively) deemed vile. People (groups of people) who consider themselves to be descendants of the victims demand various forms of reparation, whether symbolic (apologies) or material (compensation, reparations). One of the consequences of the treaty ending the First World War was the imposition of an obligation on Germany to make reparations for the damage and losses suffered as a result of warfare (54th Treaty of Peace between..., isap.sejm.gov.pl, 2023). The last instalment concerning reparations for the First World War was paid in 2010, thus it affected several successive generations. A similar situation occurred after the Second World War. As a result of the decisions of the victorious powers (particularly at the Yalta Conference in February 1945), Germany was obliged to pay reparations. All German citizens incurred the costs of reparations, regardless of their individual contribution to the outbreak of the war and the conduct of hostilities. The problem of reparations (compensation for losses incurred as a result of warfare) is not only a historical phenomenon; it is also perceived as significant and relevant in today's discussions, for example, present in Polish-German relations. The majority (57%) of CBOS respondents (Poles about Reparations..., cbos.pl, 2022) approve of the Polish government demanding reparations from Germany. In contrast, unsurprisingly, in Germany 75% of respondents oppose paying reparations to Poland (Wasilewska, 2023, events.interia.pl/country). While supporters of reparations place responsibility on past and present generations of Germans and blame them for the losses caused by the war, opponents differentiate between responsibility and blame. They are willing to burden with responsibility and blame the people living in Germany during the war but reject such an approach for contemporary generations (Walenciak, 2022).

Burdening people with responsibility for the past not only involves demanding compensation (reparations) but it also takes more symbolic forms: apologies from state leaders, leading politicians associated with states, groups which did harm in the past. Sometimes such apologies do take place, which proves the belief that there is collective responsibility for the ancestors' acts and that it is legitimate to bear the consequences for their actions.

A part of the phenomenon of collective responsibility for the past is cancel culture. Some scholars perceive it as an example of moral absolutism or new totalitarianism, supporting their view by referring to the common practice of using contemporary arbitrary rules to judge people and phenomena from the past. People living in the past are punished in a symbolic way (toppling of monuments), some groups of people who are identified with the past evil politics

are condemned (Kuryła, 2021, klubjagiellonski.pl; Kuczyńska, 2020, krytykapolityczna.pl). However, contemporary politicians and groups of people are also stigmatised for failing to condemn the past bad deeds (exploitation of slaves) (Another Country..., Rzeczpospolita, 8 May 2023).

8.4. Responsibility for future

Alongside collective responsibility for the past, collective responsibility for the future is developing. This type of responsibility has a form of a postulate and also concerns an unspecified entity or entities (Lukaszewska, 2020; Kiepas, 2015; Kuzior, 2007; Friday, 2016; Mandle, 2009). The present generation is considered responsible for numerous future situations concerning the very shape of societies, states, economy, technology, science, artificial intelligence, environment, the quality of life of future generations. Different rules are being developed in each of these areas, the violation of which gives rise to negative individual but also collective consequences. What turns out to occur particularly often is the accusation of today's generations of destroying the natural environment (climate), disregarding the future consequences of present actions and omissions. The discussion on the responsibility for the future of the Earth takes place at different levels: scientific or philosophical, and it concerns, among others, the issue of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene (Jasikowska, Palasz, 2022), but also international, global and European politics, where decisions are made to introduce inter-state environmental regulations. The understanding for the collective responsibility of contemporary generations for the future is also visible in public opinion surveys. These surveys report that the inhabitants of Poland are very much concerned about the state of the Earth's environment (Ecological Awareness of Poles, www.cbos.pl, 2020) and, as they declare, take various actions to contribute to some changes, recognising that everyone is responsible for this state.

8.5. Discriminatory stereotypes and collective responsibility

There are numerous stereotypes present in public discourse, some of which involve placing collective blame and responsibility on different groups. People belonging to these groups are discriminated in various ways, while their individual behaviour or abilities are not taken into account. Most often this stereotyping concerns national, class, religious groups, groups distinguished by sex, gender identity, place of origin. Regardless of their individual characteristics or behaviour, these groups suffer various negative consequences of such stereotyping: lack of access to work and good workplace, occupation of the lowest places in the social structure, negative opinions. This is often linked to their racialisation, which involves linking ancestry with specific characteristics, as well as with the place assigned in the social hierarchy (Wielgosz, 2021). In result, we learn that some peoples are 'fit' only for low-prestige jobs (Sapieżyńska, 2023) politicians steal (Kaczyński, gazetaprawna.pl, 2023), lie (Mearsheimer, 2012; Cipiur, bank.pl, 2022), doctors are corrupt (Doctors are..., Wprost,

7.09.2006)¹, the poor are lazy², immigrants threaten us³, political opponents deserve a negative opinion (Płociński, 2019, www.rp.pl).

8.6. Algorithms as a basis for collective responsibility

Nowadays, there is a tendency to regulate many social phenomena by referring to data sets created by using statistical methods and statistically constructed algorithms. The motives for this practice are (at least officially) noble. What is accentuated is the concern about fairness, security, objectivisation of criteria of access to various goods, their rationalisation and meritocracy. As a consequence, algorithms create differentiated sets of people who suffer the consequences of being included in a group, regardless of whether they individually possess certain characteristics. The research proves that the use of algorithms discriminates various groups which are deemed minorities. This is particularly the case for women, who are discriminated in their access to various goods (e.g. jobs), regardless of their competence (Perez, 2020). Another example relates to the calculation of car insurance premiums. Their amount depends on the average accident rate and the costs incurred by the company. The premium also depends on an individual factor, that is the behaviour of a driver; however, certain groups (young drivers) pay higher premiums, regardless of their individual behaviour (Why young drivers..., cuk.co.uk/advice, 2023). There also exists geographical crime profiling aimed to identify the areas at risk of crime (Mordwa, 2019). In some countries the police distinguishes certain areas as being at risk of potential crime, treat their residents as prone to crime, direct more forces there and, as a result, find a higher number of violations of the law.

9. Conclusions

The above analysis revealed the diverse presence of collective responsibility in different areas of public discourse. Collective responsibility is present and noticeable on the Internet, the National Library catalogue, the National Corpus of Polish, yet, disproportionate to its factual

¹ Later CBOS surveys do not confirm this opinion. In the survey from December politicians are in the first place (52% respondents) and the health service is in the fifth place (23% respondents). See: Różne barwy korupcji w Polsce. Komunikat z badań CBOS (Different Faces of Corruption in Poland. CBOS Research Report), Grudzień 2021, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2021/K_151_21.PDF, 4.05.2023.

² This is what 56% of CBOS respondents thought in June 2017: Społeczne postrzeganie ubóstwa. Raport z badań CBOS (Public Perception of Poverty. CBOS Research Report), June 2017, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_083_17.PDF, 9.11.2022.

³ According to a survey conducted by CBOS in 2015, 81% of internet users had negative opinions about immigrants. The dislike results from the difference in religion and culture, the belief that they are aggressive towards white women, bring diseases, take advantage of social benefits. See: Polacy o uchodźcach – w Internecie i w 'realu'. Komunikat z badań CBOS (Poles about Refugees on the Internet and in 'Real Life'. CBOS Research Report), November 2015, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2015/K_149_15.PDF, 4.05.2023.

significance. It is treated as something strange and alien because only individual responsibility is considered appropriate.

The occurrence of collective responsibility in public opinion proves that both its widespread presence and approval. Collective responsibility concerns a great number of phenomena. In this article we have pointed out a few of them which, as we believe, are most frequently present in today's public opinion. Hence, we can speak of the ethos of collective responsibility as a hierarchy of values approved by various groups, which consists in charging entire groups with the consequences for the acts attributed to others. The list of consequences imposed on groups which were to bear collective responsibility is extensive and includes various forms of condemnation, disapproval, ostracism, material and financial sanctions, barriers in employment, impediment (ban) in travelling. More or less perfunctory justifications for imposing collective responsibility can be traced in public opinion. These are the following:

- a) it is justified by duty; one would like to say "pure duty": homeland is a collective responsibility; goals of science, technology should be good "by nature";
- b) it is justified by an important purpose: opposition to aggression, human rights violations, prevention of crime, substantive, objective selection of candidates for employees, students, fair evaluation of the past, concern for the future of humanity;
- c) an analogy between individual and collective responsibility is sought by attributing to groups a subjective action, that is the one which characterizes individuals. The nation of an aggressor state is united by an imperial ideology; the group to which we apply collective responsibility is made up of people guided by an evil ideology, of lazy, stupid, evil individuals;
- d) practical justifications: maybe not everyone in an aggressor's group is equally responsible but we cannot leave the situation unresolved; sanctions affecting all members of a given group (on the basis of solidarity) are necessary.

Collective responsibility exists as a social phenomenon which is described and assessed to varying degrees in public awareness; nevertheless, contrary to the views of many researchers or ethicists, it occurs more frequently than individual responsibility. The concept of collective responsibility includes intertwined (though not always clearly distinguishable) issues: causation, that is, participation of the group or group members in doing evil, and bearing the consequences as a result of belonging to the group (negative moral, legal, economic sanctions, disciplinary penalties). The question of moral assessment of this form of responsibility is difficult to determine unequivocally; it depends on many factors, such as: the degree of identification with a given group, the degree of approval or disapproval of actions or omissions in social life, following stereotypes in the perception of social groups, and many others. Therefore, this question undoubtedly requires further research

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