

SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Collective Responsibility: The Problem of Its Conceptualization in Moral Philosophy

Roman PLATONOV

Abstract. This article considers whether the idea of collective responsibility is relevant to the problems of morality and whether it is amenable to conceptualization in moral philosophy. It examines the discussion of collective moral responsibility from two angles: problematization of collective action and problematization of the collective agent, with a focus on revealing the specificities of the individual moral agent as the main topic of moral philosophy.

The author demonstrates that the principle of conceptualization of collective moral responsibility is a reduction: The collective agent and collective actions are seen as forms of the individual agent and his actions by isolating the characteristics of the individual agent and his acts that warrant ascribing moral responsibility to them. This article determines types of such reduction: reduction to the individual, and reduction of qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Reduction to the individual leads to objectification of the individual, stripping him of agency in terms of the attribution of responsibility, but viewing him as the agent in terms of fulfilling a responsibility (the morally paradoxical status of the object bearing moral responsibility is called “noxa”). Reduction of characteristics does not make it possible to consider the collective agent a morally valid agent in its own right. Instead of a substantive definition, the collective agent is accorded merely a formal definition, with the main thought operation being analogy and association, which precludes considering reduced forms of the collective agent to be totally valid. Thus, the division of methods of conceptualizing moral responsibility into individualistic and holistic advocated by some researchers is not valid, because holism is essentially exhausted by the analogy and association of characteristics of the collective agent with those of the individual agent.

The article concludes that the problem of collective responsibility lacks an adequate object, although the formal definition of the collective agent is

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sufficient for the legal regulation of collective activity without turning to morality.

Keywords: ethics, morality, responsibility, collective moral responsibility, agent, moral agent, collective agent, noxal responsibility, political responsibility, noxal.

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Although the history of culture knows some practices of collective responsibility that have certain moral content,¹ the problem of collective responsibility as such is fairly new to moral philosophy. The objective stimulus for its discussion was arguably World War II and the Vietnam War, but even then the problem was primarily seen in legal and political terms [3; 18], considering the moral approach to be theoretically untenable. For example, Hywel Lewis holds that “value belongs to the individual and ... it is the individual who is the sole bearer of moral responsibility” [18, p. 17]; Hannah Arendt rules out even law, because “legal and moral standards ... always relate to the person” [2, p. 148]. If we add the prewar work of H. Gomperz, who takes the same stand on the relation between individual and collective responsibility [15], the dominant attitude to moral studies becomes clear. As the debate evolved, moral studies were referred to as “methodological individualism” [37], which boils down to the proposition that “all social processes and phenomena should be explained through reduction to the principles that control individual behavior” [30, p. 77].²

However, successful development of the topic of collective responsibility in law theory, most notably Joel Feinberg’s typology of such responsibility [8], stimulated discussion in general. Since the late 1960s, the number of publications on this topic has been increasing; it was included in the subject field of morality, and a tentative demarcation was made between individualistic and holistic approaches to moral responsibility. It was a tentative demarcation, because individualists were merely critics of collective responsibility; the issue was not about different approaches to the study of collective responsibility (Angelo Corlett [7] is a rare exception). Conceptual problems were identified – collective action and the collective agent – which constitute the problem of the conceptualization of collective responsibility in general and its moral version in particular. It should be noted that this problem has never been theoretically grounded in moral philosophy – its relevance being attributed exclusively to the need to control increasingly complicated human activities. For the same reason, a separate ethical discourse has not been established, with discussions constantly turning to judicial practice, legal clashes, and resorting to legal arguments. All too often the specific character of the phenomenon of morality is ignored, which is a problem for contemporary analysis of moral responsibility in general, even individual morality, which renders meaningless the very word “moral.” A telling example is the recent Russian research project “The Phenomenon of Moral Responsibility,” in which the purported analysis of the structure of

responsibility and its conditions sidestepped the question of the specificity of morality and consequently the impact of this nature on the structure and conditions of responsibility. As a result, while the analysis of responsibility is thorough and merits attention, it has no connection to morality itself [20].³ The importance for the study of a given problem as a moral one – its explicit inclusion in the field of morality and moral specification in defining key concepts – is highlighted by the conceptualization of agency. Whereas in law, political science, and economics, the concept of agent is purely formalistic – i.e., expresses just the form of our thinking from cause to effect – in morality, the agent is scrutinized substantively, that is to say, in its ultimate goals and meanings (ethics is perhaps the only discipline in which Aristotle’s final cause has remained; this is why moral problems have always revolved exclusively around the individual). Therefore, concepts of agency developed in other disciplines, even philosophical ones, prove unfit for the study of morality [4].

All this causes us to ask: Why is the problem of collective responsibility relevant to ethics? Does it not drop out of the subject field of morality (for example, like the concept of *perpetuum mobile* from the paradigm of modern physics) when everybody is concentrating on collectivity and no one on morality? To that end, I will consider two areas in which the discussion of collective responsibility is developing – i.e., collective action and the collective agent – not in terms of historiography or theoretical nuances in the contemplation of collectivity, but from the standpoint of the specificity of the moral agent.

Collective Action: Reduction to the Individual

On the whole, the problem of collective action consists in determining the processes that, on the one hand, cannot be reduced to the actions and interests of individuals, and on the other hand, constitute a whole formed as a result of individuals acting jointly. Peter French draws attention to the fact that something similar is recorded in day-to-day language as “the class of predicates,” which can be attributed only to collectives: a dissolved government, the team that lost the game [12]. A collective action is analyzed through the conceptualization of various connections between individual actions that are secure and strong enough to ensure not only the coordination and coherence of individual actions but opportunities and results an individual cannot achieve [21], as well as intentions not reducible to individual interests [13; 14], without causing what Brook Sadler calls “the specter of shared mental states and hence of shared minds” [33]; although some try to achieve unity of action through “full consent of the will” [19, p. 155].

On one hand, the key intention here is the opposite of reduction, such that we can safely exclude from the problem area of collective responsibility the apportionment of blame and responsibility among individuals, like punishment for crimes committed by a group of people or in collusion, when “what is to be judged is ... this very person, the degree of its participation” [2, p. 148]. In other

words, the collective, too, is excluded as a collection of individuals. In Feinberg's classification – “liability without contributory fault,” “contributory group fault: collective and distributive,” “contributory group fault: collective but not distributive” – only the last one remains relevant [8, pp. 681-687]. Also excluded is the case of an individual being complicit in actions through conscious and free choice, even if symbolic (in the form of approval, etc.); that option is presented in Gregory Mellema's concept of “qualifying action” [25; 26].

On the other hand, the individual is not fully absolved of responsibility. For example, Raimo Tuomela proposes to define collective action, on the contrary, through the individual, as being embodied in the individual [36]. Another frequently proposed approach is the concept of “vicarious responsibility,” which shifts to the individual responsibility for the actions of other members of a collective simply because they belong to the same community. This applies to the concepts of “shared responsibility” being developed by Larry May, whereby “each member [of a community] should feel some responsibility for what the other members do” [22, p. 11], and of “metaphysical guilt,” put forward by Karl Jaspers,⁴ on whom May (among others) relies. Although Jaspers separates “moral guilt” and recognizes collectivity only in the framework of “political guilt,” first and foremost as the acceptance and experiencing of all negative consequences, [17, pp. 55-56], he defines metaphysical guilt as an expression of the solidarity of every man with every man, its source being the profound unity of the whole human race [ibid., pp. 65-66], realized individually.⁵ The metaphysical ground of my being cannot be anything but binding on me (it is the essence that precedes existence). Would I be human if I renounced the underlying foundations of humanity? Mention should also be made of the wholly populist concept of “loosely organized” groups proposed by Howard McGary, which reduces the qualifying act to the self-identification of the individual – for example, it is enough to identify oneself as a white male to become responsible for racism and sexism [24].

For us, it is important to reveal the principle of reducing collective responsibility to individual responsibility in whatever form it is preserved when conceptualizing collective action, when the functionality of the collective agent is posited but the individual is not totally excluded. Schematically, such conceptualization simply reproduces the structure of collective criminal liability, which is well described by Feinberg as “surety,” ensured by a “high degree of ... group solidarity, given some reasonable degree of *control* over those for whom they [those held vicariously liable] are made sureties,” something that is possible only in small systems of social organization that are fairly homogeneous and have existed for a long time. Large and dynamic systems call for a different mode of control [8, pp. 680-681]. Having adopted this similarity as added proof that the problem of collective responsibility is alien to moral philosophy, let us specify the moral problem of reduction to the individual.

In general, the concept of vicarious liability has also been borrowed from law,⁶ where, according to Feinberg, it expresses “authorization, hierarchy, mastership, and suretyship” and where substitution has clear-cut legal forms. In the second edition of his article “Collective Responsibility,” he traces the historical roots of

collective responsibility to noxal responsibility [9, pp. 229-230]. It is there that we find a feature that does not matter for jurisprudence but is very important for ethics. It is this feature that makes the types of ascribing responsibility examined by Feinberg, which are quite suitable for law, as well as all their echoes in the discussion on collective moral responsibility, unsuitable for morality, because they turn out to be merely veiled variants of reduction.

Noxal responsibility, according to Oliver Holmes, is characteristic of many ancient cultures (the best known example is Xerxes, who orders the sea to be whipped). It owes its name to the fact that it was enshrined in Roman law. *Noxa* (guilt, harm, crime) is ascribed to an inanimate object or animal, which had to be punished just like a human being – that is, they were seen as agents. However, if they were chattel, they were deprived of agency in favor of the owner (it is important to note that this also applied to humans, slaves, and children), so that their owner decided their fate, acting as an intermediary in apportioning responsibility in one of two ways: *noxae deditio* (surrender of the culprit) or *noxae dandi* (compensation of damage), in which case punishment was left to the owner's discretion. This led to a paradox: The property of being noxal/guilty was ascribed to the object, but through the medium of the agent who owned it (noxal lawsuits were addressed to the owner) [16, pp. 11-18]. This paradox constitutes the aforementioned feature. But for a more precise description, we also need to separate the concept of responsibility into ascribing and implementing responsibility, since this dichotomy is the essence of reduction. On one hand, responsibility is shifted to the person recognized as the agent, and on the other hand, those appointed as objects may still be punished (vestiges of such responsibility can be seen in the responsibility of parents for their children and owners for their pets).

Reduction to the individual is a way of attributing moral responsibility to me while bypassing my agency – i.e., it is a mechanism of objectification in order to ascribe to me responsibility that is not mine (at this moment, I must not be seen as “I,” that is, as an agent) and to force me to fulfill a responsibility (thus restoring agency to me precisely in this aspect of fulfillment). Herein lies its obvious amorality, and it is now clear why the concept of collective moral responsibility suits totalitarian regimes. The collective agent is a transbuffer that stands between you and your action, but through it, responsibility for the action is distributed. The difference between moral noxal and legal noxal responsibility is best illustrated by the image of a whipping boy who is whipped instead of the prince.

The transformation of a moral agent into a noxal one can be seen as a clarification of Arendt's idea. By separating guilt and responsibility, she defends the individual from objectification. Guilt is possible only in [the individual's] personal act; the attempt to ascribe responsibility [to an individual] based on retrospective collective guilt, on the one hand, “exculpates to a considerable degree those who actually were guilty,” and on the other hand, turns [the individual] into “a mere cog who acted only upon superior orders,” whereas treating him as a personality, even to determine his punishment (but punishment for his specific participation), returns to him his agency. “It is the grandeur of court proceedings that even a cog can become a person again” (as has been mentioned above, in this

context Arendt sees legal and moral norms to be on a par, both applying to the individual) [2, pp. 147-148].

The incompatibility of the role of the noxal with the moral agency of the individual shows that only the complete elimination of reduction to the individual can bring collective responsibility into the realm of morality. In other words, the collective agent must be a moral agent in the full sense of the word, being thought guilty and responsible in terms of the attribution and fulfillment of responsibility. The most succinct wording of the problem has been proposed by Martin Benjamin:

How ... can a system or collective be morally responsible for injustices or evils without that responsibility being fully distributed among some or all of its members?

Equally important is another question: "But what can it mean to condemn and blame a collective entity"? [5, pp. 95, 97].

The problem is easily solved in the legal domain. For example, if an enterprise dumps waste without authorization, the enterprise is fined. The agent's complicity in the act is determined legally; likewise, the collective agent is defined as a "legal person," which makes the enterprise bear responsibility. The fine is paid by the firm and not by workers out of their wages, unless it is established that the dumping of the waste was the result of their negligence; the firm is liable by its property and not by the property of the workers; insurance, etc. may be envisaged by law. The head of the firm may be personally responsible if he ordered the dumping (some offences may envisage confiscation of his personal property); the relation of the agency of the head of the firm, as well as the accountant or rank-and-file worker, to the agency of the firm itself is determined legally (right of signature, etc.). For example, if as a result the enterprise is shut down and the firm goes bankrupt, the workers will have to look for another job; in that sense, they will experience the consequences in the same way they would experience the consequences of an economic crisis or a hurricane, but their property will not be confiscated to pay the firm's debts. Thus, all relations are explicit, the status of the collective agent is defined formally, but that is sufficient. But the moral conceptualization of the collective action is by no means so cut and dried, and it is unclear what morality can add to the legal regulation.

The Collective Agent: Reduction of Characteristics

A collective action must be attributed to somebody/something, and the actor must be thought of as equally integral and single. Researchers conceptualize the collective agent by determining it qualitatively and quantitatively. The first consists in searching for sufficient characteristics and has become the main subject of discussion; the second is less pronounced and concerns the boundaries of the agent. Excessively metaphysical and fantastical options have not gotten much traction: Nobody looks for the aforementioned specter of shared minds; all searches are aimed at the rationality and even emotional life of the collective agent.

French identifies several qualitative characteristics, which can be generalized into two: (1) the existence of a rigorous decision-making procedure supported by clearly defined functions of every individual (roles) and ensuring adequate planning and goal-setting (adequacy means taking into account external factors, such as the goals of other agents)⁷; (2) institutionalization in these procedures of collective experience, which in large part determines the decisions that are made. All this makes the existence of the collective higher than the individual – i.e., independent of who its concrete members are [10]. Christian List and Philip Pettit are developing a similar set of characteristics describing the management of a corporation as a rational and normatively defined choice based on an institutionalized decision-making procedure [19]. Some even try to find analogues of the feeling of guilt and shame [6].⁸ French proposes considering a symbolic action of a member of the collective (for example, an official apology of the head of a corporation) to be a genuine expression of the emotional experiences of the collective agent, which looks downright surreal even in extreme speculative descriptions [11].

All these characteristics may well work as criteria for describing and assessing forms of organization of activities – for example, in jurisprudence – because you need a formal agent. Controlling specific actions is the task of law; laws are always written in detail for specific tasks (except for a constitution). The characteristics you need are determined by specific tasks – thus a public organization is distinguished from a commercial one, a state organization from a publicly funded or an autonomous one, etc., by prescribing to them or prohibiting certain strictly defined actions. But that is not enough for morality, because you cannot have two moralities, one for individuals and another for collectives – unlike law, for example, which is different for physical and legal persons. Accordingly, a collective moral agent must be as full-fledged as an individual agent, but that is unattainable. Whatever characteristics you may come up with, they will always be contemplated only by analogy: Decision-making corresponds to thinking, planning to intention, and experience to something between memory and the will (you simply do not have a different reasonable basis). You may, under the pretext of “anthropological prejudice,” reduce the complexity of a human’s inner life to two or three characteristics and thus analytically equate a collective agent to an individual agent, which is what French does (and again, this may work for the law). But for morality, you thus end up with agency defined according to just three characteristics, which would mean that these characteristics are sufficient for man to be moral. Now imagine such a man – you would probably consider him a sociopath or mentally impaired and steer clear of him. But even if you correlate all aspects of an individual’s inner life, you cannot avoid using analogy as a method. Yes, the decision-making process is akin to thinking, but no more than that. What, then is, the argument? The duck test?

Such persistent simplification of morality problems (and consequently moral life) is puzzling in its primitiveness, especially when it disguises itself as analysis. To level the playing field, the individual, too, should be considered at the level of systemic processes (biological, chemical). Such reduction is partially possible,

but some part of the individual inevitably falls out of view. In considering systems as individuals not by analogy and outside the framework of the conventions of natural language, we inevitably ascribe to them what is lost in reducing man to the physical processes that constitute him. This is not about consciousness but about the fact that it is because of man's consciousness that many things exist for him – namely, what we call culture. It is in the cultural space that there exists “the normatively significant,” the valuable. The same goes for goal-setting per se, which is based on man's narrative about himself, which is itself a product of culture. Where is the culture of collective agents in which their goals/values are formed?

Another problem is the establishment of the boundaries of the collective agent in space and time (again, easily solved legally). I have already mentioned McGary, who reduces the individual to two characteristics thought to be sufficient to extend the boundaries of the collective agent to include all white males. The extension takes place not only in space but also in time based on solidarity, practically reduced to self-identification [1], and on abstractly determined benefit from past injustice and harm [23; 32]. Such reductions can be countered by Jaspers's explanation. In daily life, people tend to judge “people collectively,” to mistakenly confuse “the generic with the typological conception.” Group characteristics (“the British, men ... the young,” etc.) “never fit generic conceptions under which the individual human beings might be classified, but are type conceptions to which they may more or less correspond,” which is why such a description precludes the possibility of seeing the individual completely. As for “the thinking in collective groups,” which has lasted “for centuries,” Jaspers attributes it to “hatred among nations and communities” [17, pp. 34, 35]. However, the aforementioned metaphysical guilt (also political with Jaspers) uses a single characteristic to dramatically extend the boundaries of the collective agent to the state and all humankind. This can be countered, of course, by pointing to the distinction between, for example, the benefit from the consequences of harm and the actual causing of harm [35] or, more effectively, by clarifying the connections within the group to establish its borders, but the latter practically adds nothing to Mellema's “qualifying action.”

Can we think of ourselves as something larger than we are in our immediate needs? Yes, we can. But where should we stop? Why should this consciousness have corporate or political borders outside our immediate individual actions? We know the boundaries of our immediate needs (not in the rigorous sense of “knowledge,” but they are objective for us). But what are the boundaries of the expanded agency to which I must correspond? Are the boundaries of our associations based on language, race, passport, or employment contract (but are documents, again a legal solution)? We see that the main operations when contemplating collective moral responsibility are association and analogy, which rules out clear inter-agency proof. In short, they alone constitute what can be called methodological holism in morality. Meanwhile, contemplating collective legal responsibility, for example, implies deduction, because in this case the collective agent is the starting premise determined by a legal act, as are the action of such an agent and the situation of the action. Collective legal responsibility operates

in a legally constructed space, its objectiveness stemming from the relationship between the legal definition and reality. Moral theory cannot – has no power to – construct entities, because self-construction is impossible in principle. So it has to turn to reality directly – or rather, through an existing type of rationality. Here it becomes clear that such turning to reality is nothing more than an association and an analogy. As a result, the qualitative and quantitative positiveness of the collective agent as moral remains unclear.

All of the aforementioned reduced forms of agency may be suitable for sociology, political science, and especially jurisprudence. But for ethics they merely multiply entities needlessly (there is nothing in the proposed moral regulation of collective activity that has not been manifested through law), but worst of all, these are distorted entities – distorted morally, leading to objectification of the real moral agent: the individual. The healthiest approach, in my opinion, is that of John Searle [34]. What is called a collective agent in this discussion is for him a “social object,” while substantivization of the given objects is merely a consequence of the structure of natural language – predication of the “government has made a decision” type that French speaks about. In other words, the collective agent, if not defined exclusively in terms of its function, is nonsense, jabberwocky. Essentially, it is an object, a process, the continuous possibility of activity, as Searle defines it.

In this connection, it would be appropriate to note that the juxtaposition of methodological individualism and holism in the discussion of collective moral responsibility is untenable. Such methods simply do not exist in moral philosophy. They have been imported together with the problem of collective responsibility from sociology and law without any grounding and adaptation. The foreignness of methodological individualism makes it impossible to adequately defend or dispute it. Defense boils down to non-methodological general references to the progress of rationality that sees blood vengeance [30, p. 74] as an example of collective moral responsibility. However, blood vengeance was not properly an example of some archaic holism; it was basically individualistic, no matter how important blood was considered to be. Feinberg, for example, describes it as “surety” under conditions when “the policing function” was imposed on “local groups themselves,” and, citing Leonard Hobhouse, includes blood vengeance in what he calls “collective-responsibility arrangements” [8, p. 679], whose essence is not that the individual is not differentiated from the gens in some archaic thinking, but in rationally understood reciprocity of social interactions in the absence of a third party regulating these interactions. An individual without relatives was perceived in the same way as an application for a loan without collateral is perceived today, which was why dealings with such people were avoided; conversely, without kinfolk who could stand up for you, there was no guaranteed protection of rights. Blood vengeance was abandoned not because our thinking became more rational, but because the structure of society changed.

Critique turns out to be a rhetorical gimmick – an imagined partition of the methodological space occurs, creating the illusion of an alternative. Meanwhile, methodological non-individualists continue searching for the agency of the

collective, corporation, or system. Methodological differences fall by the wayside when the system has to be practically turned into an individual, and then the whole problem of responsibility must be developed in the same way. This is not a special method: In moral philosophy, there has never been an agent other than the individual; even God was seen as personal, as an individual. Accordingly, if you want to introduce in moral agency the subtype “collective,” you should, first, not view [the agent] as an individual; and second, you must justify the very act of introduction rather than partitioning the methodological space as if to claim in advance that you have your own place and that the entire scope of the previous issues of moral agency was merely a particular case.

The problem of collective responsibility as such does indeed reflect the problem of controlling human activity, which is growing increasingly complicated and generating ever larger and more differentiated structures of activity. But moral regulation of supra-individual processes is impossible and even anti-moral, for it is a totally different subject field of activity. Morality remains in the realm of a personal act, expressing the phenomenon of agency in human activity; it is not fit for regulating supra-individual processes where you have to invent quasi-objects to create the illusion that the subject field is the same. A morally thinking person who turns to his conscience, feels shame, and reflects about his action is a normal person; one who presents moral demands to processes and structures is indeed like Xerxes who tries to whip the sea. The fact that we can think in the categories of collectivity does not mean that these categories can be part of our thought about morality; it is an aberration of our thinking, supported only by associations and analogies. If one aspires to sound thinking, one should eliminate such mistakes in the same way one abandons rhetorical speculations.

That this problem is alien to moral philosophy manifests itself in the difficulty of conceptualizing the collective agent, something the law does not encounter, owing to its specific character. The total lack of disciplinary reflection on such a spontaneous transfer of an alien theme into moral philosophy due only to external circumstances and not the development of moral research further distorted the subject field of ethics, as discussion began to be held from the standpoint of allegedly different methodologies. The agent here is generated in hindsight: It is not the existence of the agent that makes action possible, but supra-individual processes need a source in the shape of an agent who can be held responsible for the processes. In other words, we see here what happened at the early stage of the emergence of religious ideas – namely, the anthropomorphization of an element. If there is thunder, there must be someone responsible for thunder. Faced with the elements not of nature but of social systems, the reasoning is the same, as people look for new Zeuses under the guise of an imagined struggle against individualism. The discomfort of losing control prompted our ancestors to adopt rituals of communicating with deities (make a deal, beg, curry favor with). Apparently, it also leads today to the search for collective entities, or rather, entities generated by collective activities; we fear the emergence of social interactions as consequences that cannot be reduced to the sum of individual acts. We do not say that we cannot do anything about it, that it cannot be foreseen or controlled; we say that it cannot

be done through morality. There is no morality that emanates from something and not from someone. The reason is not that we had it impressed upon all of us by Kant, but that morality as a phenomenon belongs to the being of man in his single, particular act. Morality is about determining the righteousness of an act in the particular, which the individual may not see himself; it is self-control and self-development from within. Morality is at work even where there is no one around except myself. As the only witness of myself, I generate my moral agency; all the rest can be established by the law. There is not specificity of morality. Without it, morality collapses into law, and ethics into jurisprudence. Morality has no witnesses other than the moral agent himself. That is why it is precisely the agent's reflexive experiences (fear/shame, conscience, joy) – not by analogy – and his self-consciousness as self-testimony that are key to understanding agency, and not planning or the capacity to think as such. They are important for existence in general, and not for moral existence in particular; they are necessary but not sufficient conditions. By analyzing them, you examine activity in general and not a moral act. This is not because somebody (for example, Kant) sees morality this way, but because morality cannot in principle be seen in any other way if it is not to lose its subject field. Morality cannot be added to something – e.g., a system, a structure, a machine, a program – nor is there a need to do so. It is enough to put our morality into the way we control systems and machines, provided of course that we do control them (but that is another problem).

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Notes

- ¹ Andrey Prokofyev classifies them by type: inherited guilt, traditionalism, terrorist revolutionism and totalitarianism [30, pp. 74-75].
- ² Max Weber developed this method in the framework of sociology to make clear the object of research and not to multiply entities. The question as to what extent its use with respect to morality is justified will be considered below.
- ³ This was pointed out during the discussion of the results of this study at the RAS Institute of Philosophy: “nothing will change if we replace in the whole text the specifying concept ‘moral’ with any other: ‘esthetic’ and even ‘culinary’” [29, p. 44]. Our colleagues from the St. Petersburg State University agreed with this assessment almost verbatim: “the word ‘moral’ in the above propositions can be replaced by any other adjective – ‘political,’ ‘economic,’ ‘social,’ etc. ... The word ‘moral’ does not add anything content-wise to the concept of responsibility [27, pp. 44-45] (quoted from [28, p. 97]).
- ⁴ In the context of Jaspers’s argument, the difference between guilt and responsibility is unimportant.
- ⁵ In effect, it is the metaphysical ground for morality as such, so that in this sense, the distinction between metaphysical and moral guilt is contingent. It can only be understood in context: Jaspers, observing the collapse of all institutions, the impotence of all cultural achievements, including those of law and morality, in the face of war and Fascism, rescues for himself the ground for the morality of man, carrying him out of ruined morality like a child out of a house on fire. Only by partaking of something larger than man and culture can one hope to find a constant in being human not to lose faith in everything. That is why God occupies a special place in Jaspers’s thinking.
- ⁶ The accepted term in Russian jurisprudence is “substitutive responsibility.”
- ⁷ Prokofyev notes that French considers the “capacity to take into account the plans and interests of others” an important characteristic [30, p. 78].
- ⁸ For more detail, see [31].

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