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ORIGINAL PAPER

Responsibility as a Lost Value: Bioethical Consequences of Ideological Polarization

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Abstract:
This paper examines ideological polarization in post-communist societies as a crisis of public responsibility rather than merely a clash of political positions. Its objective is to offer a normative analysis of how generational discontinuity, technological acceleration, and democratic disillusionment contribute to the erosion of responsibility as a civic virtue. Methodologically, the paper adopts a conceptual and philosophical approach, drawing on the works of Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, Hans Jonas, Charles Taylor, and Gregory Bateson to clarify the ethical dimensions of polarization. The analysis argues that polarization intensifies through processes of schismogenesis and reshapes individual moral experience by fostering moral fatigue, identity defensiveness, and selective responsibility. As civic responsibility weakens, public discourse contracts into ideological loyalty, reducing the space for dialogical engagement. The paper further explores how this civic fragility affects bioethical deliberation, transforming principled moral reasoning into symbolic political positioning. It concludes that rebuilding responsibility as a public virtue—understood as conscious participation in the formation and maintenance of shared social frameworks—is essential for stabilizing democratic coexistence. Without such renewal, democratic institutions risk remaining formally intact yet ethically fragile.

Keywords: *public responsibility, ideological polarization, post-communist societies, civic virtue, bioethics, democratic fragility.*

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Introduction

Post-communist societies are not merely experiencing political disagreement; they are confronting a crisis of public responsibility. The rapid transition from enforced ideological unity to pluralistic democracy did not allow sufficient time for the cultivation of stable civic habits. Instead of gradual normative development, many societies entered a period of accelerated transformation marked by generational discontinuity, technological disruption, and democratic disillusionment.

The resulting polarization is not simply ideological diversity. It manifests as distrust, mutual delegitimization, and the weakening of dialogue. As Hannah Arendt (1958) reminds us, political life depends upon the existence of a shared world in which individuals appear before one another as interlocutors rather than adversaries. When this shared world fragments, plurality turns into antagonism.

The analysis offered here is conceptual rather than empirical; it seeks to clarify normative dynamics rather than measure them statistically.

This paper approaches the phenomenon normatively rather than descriptively. It does not seek to provide a comprehensive political analysis of post-communist transformation. Instead, it argues that polarization reflects a deeper erosion of responsibility as a civic virtue. When individuals, institutions, and political actors cease to perceive themselves as co-creators of shared social frameworks, fragmentation intensifies.

The aim of this paper is to hold up a mirror to this condition. It suggests that rebuilding responsibility as a public virtue—rather than merely as a private moral disposition—is foundational for restoring meaningful dialogue and stabilizing democratic life. Bioethics, situated within this broader moral climate, inevitably reflects the health or fragility of the public sphere in which it operates.

Generational Discontinuity and Civic Fragility

The democratic transition in post-communist societies was marked by rapid institutional reform but slower moral consolidation. Parliaments, constitutions, and electoral systems were established within a relatively short period of time. Yet the cultivation of civic virtues—trust, dialogical patience, long-term orientation—requires generational continuity rather than legislative speed.

The result has been a structural asymmetry between institutions and habits. Formal democratic mechanisms exist, but the ethical culture necessary to sustain them remains uneven. Public trust in institutions is frequently low, political participation oscillates between apathy and emotional mobilization, and public debate often shifts quickly from disagreement to moral condemnation.

This instability becomes especially visible in generational relations. Older generations, having lived within a system of imposed ideological certainty, often interpret rapid cultural change as loss of orientation. Younger generations, shaped by digital acceleration and global narratives, may perceive inherited norms as restrictive or irrelevant. The gap is not merely a matter of taste or lifestyle; it concerns divergent understandings of authority, responsibility, and social obligation.

Intergenerational dialogue therefore becomes strained. Instead of serving as a space of transmission, it increasingly functions as a space of mutual incomprehension. The absence of shared narratives weakens the continuity through which civic

responsibility is cultivated. Responsibility ceases to be a practice learned through example and becomes instead an abstract expectation.

Technological acceleration intensifies this divide. Digital environments reward immediacy, visibility, and emotional resonance. Public positioning becomes rapid and performative, often detached from sustained reflection. Algorithms reinforce existing preferences, narrowing exposure to alternative perspectives. Under such conditions, disagreement easily transforms into moral polarization.

These developments are observable not only in electoral behavior but in everyday communication: the shortening of argumentative exchange, the preference for declarative certainty over dialogical uncertainty, and the growing suspicion toward institutions and media. The cumulative effect is a civic environment in which responsibility is no longer experienced as a shared orientation toward common life, but as selective loyalty within ideological boundaries.

In addition to generational misunderstanding, post-communist societies face a deeper challenge: democratic disillusionment. The initial enthusiasm of the early transformation period was often followed by economic instability, corruption scandals, and uneven institutional development. For many citizens, democracy became associated not with shared empowerment but with unpredictability and disappointment. This experience has ethical consequences. When political structures fail to deliver perceived fairness or stability, trust erodes not only in institutions but in the very possibility of common orientation.

Trust is not merely a psychological disposition; it is a normative condition of civic life. It presupposes the expectation that others will act within shared boundaries of accountability. In societies marked by historical rupture, this expectation is fragile. The collapse of one ideological system did not automatically generate a new, coherent moral framework. Instead, many communities entered what may be described as a normative vacuum—a space in which inherited certainties had lost authority while new norms had not yet achieved legitimacy.

Charles Taylor (2004) emphasizes that social imaginaries provide the background understandings through which common practices become meaningful. Where these imaginaries fracture, individuals struggle to interpret public life as a cooperative project. In post-communist contexts, rapid exposure to global narratives, market individualism, and digital acceleration has often outpaced the gradual formation of shared civic meaning. The result is not pluralism grounded in mutual recognition, but parallel moral vocabularies competing for dominance.

This condition intensifies generational asymmetry. Older citizens may interpret democratic instability as proof that normative cohesion is unattainable, while younger generations may perceive inherited caution as moral stagnation. The absence of sustained intergenerational dialogue transforms historical memory into suspicion rather than into resource. Democratic fragility thus emerges not solely from institutional weakness but from the incomplete transmission of civic responsibility across time.

Polarization as Escalation: The Logic of Schismogenesis

Polarization does not arise solely from disagreement; it intensifies through patterns of reciprocal reinforcement. Gregory Bateson (1972) described such processes as schismogenesis—situations in which opposing behaviors escalate in response to one another, generating widening differentiation rather than correction.

In polarized post-communist societies, ideological camps increasingly define themselves not only by their own commitments but by opposition to the perceived excesses of the other. Each side interprets the other's rhetoric as confirmation of threat. Defensive reactions are read as aggression; calls for protection are heard as exclusion. The cycle reinforces itself.

This dynamic shifts public engagement from deliberation to positionality. Arguments are framed less as attempts at mutual understanding and more as declarations of alignment. The moral vocabulary of public life becomes simplified: complex ethical questions are translated into binary categories of loyalty and betrayal.

Such escalation reflects moral immaturity rather than moral strength. It privileges intensity over reflection and certainty over responsibility. What appears as firm conviction often masks the inability to tolerate ambiguity or to remain present within disagreement.

The logic of escalation narrows the space for reflective self-critique. To question one's own camp risks internal suspicion; to acknowledge nuance risks perceived weakness. Responsibility gradually shifts from orientation toward shared coexistence to strategic defense of group identity.

This transformation directly affects fields of applied ethics, including bioethics. When public discourse is governed by escalation rather than deliberation, bioethical debates risk becoming extensions of ideological struggle. Questions concerning life, autonomy, or justice are no longer approached as shared moral problems but as symbolic markers of political allegiance.

The erosion of dialogue is therefore not accidental but structural. When public interaction becomes governed by escalation, responsibility is reinterpreted as loyalty rather than accountability. Civic life transforms from cooperative construction into competitive survival.

Beyond reciprocal rhetorical escalation, polarization in post-communist societies increasingly assumes an epistemic dimension. Disagreement is no longer interpreted merely as divergence of opinion but as evidence of moral or intellectual deficiency. Cass Sunstein (2017) demonstrates that group polarization intensifies when individuals deliberate primarily within like-minded circles. Exposure to homogeneous perspectives does not moderate convictions; it amplifies them. In such environments, positions shift toward greater extremity, while alternative viewpoints are perceived as irrational or threatening.

In post-communist contexts, where trust in institutions and media remains fragile, this dynamic acquires particular force. Citizens who already harbor suspicion toward official narratives may retreat into alternative informational ecosystems. Digital platforms, structured by algorithmic personalization, reinforce confirmation rather than confrontation. What appears as freedom of information thus becomes selective exposure. The public sphere fragments into epistemic enclaves that rarely intersect.

This fragmentation reshapes moral perception. When opposing camps inhabit distinct informational worlds, shared factual reference points diminish. Ethical disagreement then loses its common ground. Instead of arguing about the interpretation of shared realities, groups contest the legitimacy of the realities themselves. The result is moral simplification: complex social issues are reduced to binary moral scripts, and compromise is interpreted as betrayal.

Such simplification is particularly destabilizing in societies undergoing continued institutional consolidation. Democratic norms require not only legal structures but habits of interpretative charity—the willingness to assume that opponents act from intelligible

motivations. When polarization erodes this assumption, public discourse shifts from deliberation to denunciation. The opponent is no longer mistaken but malicious.

This epistemic hardening reinforces schismogenesis. Each side's intensification becomes justification for the other's escalation. In post-communist societies, where historical experiences of ideological imposition remain vivid, this cycle can reactivate latent fears of domination. Defensive rhetoric is therefore amplified not only by contemporary disagreement but by unresolved historical memory.

Polarization, in this sense, is not simply excessive disagreement. It is the gradual erosion of shared interpretative frameworks. Without such frameworks, responsibility cannot function as accountability within a common world. It becomes instead loyalty within segmented moral communities.

The Individual in a Polarized Society: Moral Fatigue and Identity Fragility

The effects of polarization are not confined to institutions or public debate. They penetrate the moral experience of individuals. In environments characterized by constant antagonism, the capacity for sustained reflection weakens. Public discourse becomes emotionally saturated, and moral positioning demands immediacy.

Under such conditions, individuals often experience moral fatigue. The persistent requirement to declare allegiance, to defend identity, or to respond to perceived threats narrows the space for contemplative judgment. Instead of participating in shared deliberation, individuals are drawn into reactive alignment.

Polarized societies also destabilize identity. When shared narratives weaken and generational continuity fractures, individuals struggle to situate themselves within a coherent civic horizon. The absence of stable mediating structures—family traditions, civic associations, trusted institutions—reduces opportunities for gradual moral formation.

In this context, ideological belonging can provide temporary clarity. It offers structure in the midst of uncertainty and recognition in the midst of fragmentation. Yet such clarity often comes at the cost of complexity. The individual may gain certainty but lose openness; gain solidarity but lose dialogue.

Responsibility, in this environment, becomes selective. It is exercised toward those within one's perceived moral community and suspended toward those outside it. The willingness to remain in difficult conversation diminishes. Moral responsibility contracts from a civic orientation toward coexistence into a protective posture toward identity.

This contraction has existential implications. When individuals no longer experience themselves as co-creators of a shared world, their relationship to public life shifts from participation to reaction. Democratic citizenship becomes episodic rather than formative. Engagement is triggered by crisis rather than sustained by commitment.

Such developments do not necessarily produce apathy. On the contrary, they may generate intense activism. Yet intensity is not equivalent to responsibility. Without reflective distance and dialogical openness, activism risks reinforcing the very fragmentation it seeks to overcome.

Responsibility as a Civic Virtue

If polarization reflects a crisis of public responsibility, the response cannot be merely procedural or institutional. Responsibility must be reconsidered as a civic virtue—one that structures how individuals inhabit shared social space.

Responsibility, in this sense, is not reducible to compliance with law nor to private moral sentiment. It is the conscious recognition of interdependence within a common world. As Hannah Arendt (1958) argues, political life emerges in the "space of appearance" where individuals act and speak before one another. This shared space does not sustain itself automatically; it depends upon citizens who are willing to remain present within plurality rather than retreat into isolation or antagonism.

Public responsibility therefore entails more than holding opinions. It requires participation in the ongoing formation of social frameworks—what Charles Taylor (2004) describes as "social imaginaries," the shared understandings that make common practices possible. These imaginaries are not neutral; they are shaped through discourse, habit, and example. To withdraw from this formative process is not neutrality but abdication.

Democratic coexistence depends not only on the protection of rights but on voluntary self-limitation. This self-limitation is not a negation of freedom; it is its condition. Without some degree of restraint, freedom degenerates into competitive assertion. Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) observes that when moral language loses its grounding in shared virtues, it collapses into emotivism—claims of preference rather than reasoned judgment. In such contexts, responsibility ceases to be a cultivated disposition and becomes an episodic reaction.

The willingness to limit one's immediate preferences for the sake of coexistence reflects ethical maturity rather than weakness. It presupposes recognition that one's freedom unfolds within networks of mutual dependence. Hans Jonas (1984) extends this insight temporally: responsibility binds present action to future consequences. A society oriented exclusively toward short-term ideological victory undermines its own long-term stability.

Responsibility as a civic virtue includes several dimensions:

- acknowledgment of interdependence across ideological and generational lines;
- commitment to sustained dialogue even in conditions of disagreement;
- readiness to accept partial limitation of one's preferences for the sake of common life;
- long-term orientation toward collective consequences rather than immediate triumph.

Such responsibility cannot be imposed solely by institutions. It must be cultivated through education, example, and public discourse. Institutions may represent collective will, but they do not substitute for individual moral agency. Democratic fragility emerges precisely when responsibility is outsourced—when citizens expect institutions to preserve civic order while disengaging from its ethical maintenance.

In polarized post-communist societies, rebuilding responsibility as a public virtue does not require ideological uniformity. It requires the recovery of habits that sustain shared space: patience in dialogue, willingness to endure ambiguity, and readiness to recognize opponents as participants in the same civic world.

Without these habits, democratic systems may remain formally intact while ethically weakened. Responsibility, stripped of its civic dimension, becomes either privatized morality or ideological weapon. Neither sustains pluralistic coexistence.

Moral fatigue in polarized environments is not merely emotional exhaustion; it represents a deeper weakening of moral orientation. When individuals are continuously exposed to conflictual narratives, urgent moral claims, and escalating rhetoric, the capacity for sustained ethical reflection diminishes. Constant exposure to antagonism fosters reactivity rather than deliberation. Over time, this reactivity becomes habitual. Moral judgment shifts from careful evaluation to rapid categorization.

This process affects identity formation. Charles Taylor (2004) argues that identity is shaped within frameworks of significance that provide orientation and meaning. Where such frameworks are unstable or contested, individuals experience difficulty locating themselves within a coherent moral landscape. In post-communist societies, where inherited narratives were delegitimized and new narratives remain fluid, identity often becomes defensive rather than dialogical. It is constructed not primarily through shared projects but through contrast with perceived adversaries.

Selective responsibility emerges from this defensive posture. Individuals may feel intense moral obligation toward members of their own ideological community while suspending similar concern toward those outside it. This is not necessarily conscious hypocrisy; it is a structural consequence of fragmented moral horizons. Responsibility becomes bounded by identity rather than extended across difference. The ethical imagination narrows.

The long-term effect is a transformation of civic participation. Instead of perceiving themselves as contributors to a shared social world, individuals may begin to experience public life as an arena of symbolic struggle. Engagement becomes episodic and crisis-driven. Between moments of mobilization, withdrawal and cynicism grow. The oscillation between intensity and disengagement further destabilizes democratic continuity.

In post-communist contexts, this fragility is compounded by unresolved historical ambivalence toward authority and collective narratives. Where trust in institutions remains conditional and generational transmission incomplete, individuals often lack stable mediating structures that support gradual moral development. The result is heightened vulnerability to polarization: identity provides certainty, while shared responsibility appears abstract.

Rebuilding civic responsibility therefore requires addressing not only institutional reform but the moral experience of individuals. Without spaces that encourage reflective engagement across difference, moral fatigue hardens into indifference or hostility. Democratic resilience depends upon cultivating capacities for sustained attention, interpretative generosity, and dialogical patience—virtues that counteract the narrowing tendencies of polarized environments.

Freedom, Self-Limitation, and Democratic Responsibility

The crisis of responsibility in post-communist societies cannot be understood without addressing a deeper tension at the heart of democratic life: the relationship between freedom and self-limitation. The transition from authoritarian rule to democratic pluralism was widely interpreted as a liberation. Political freedom, freedom of speech, and economic autonomy were embraced as long-awaited correctives to imposed uniformity. Yet the ethical dimension of freedom—its internal discipline—was less systematically cultivated.

Under communist regimes, limitation was externally enforced. Normative boundaries were imposed by state ideology, often suppressing genuine moral agency. The

rejection of that system understandably generated suspicion toward any language of constraint. In the early years of transformation, the expansion of freedom appeared synonymous with the removal of limits. However, democratic freedom differs fundamentally from liberation from oppression. It presupposes not only rights but also the capacity for voluntary restraint.

In post-communist contexts, this distinction has often remained underdeveloped. The historical memory of coercion has shaped a cultural sensitivity to restriction, even when such restriction is self-imposed for the sake of coexistence. As a result, appeals to responsibility may be interpreted as disguised attempts at control. The language of duty risks being conflated with the language of domination. Yet without some form of internalized self-limitation, pluralistic societies struggle to sustain stability.

Hannah Arendt (1958) argues that political freedom exists only within a shared space where individuals appear before one another as equals. This space does not regulate itself automatically. It depends upon citizens who recognize that their freedom unfolds in relation to others who are equally entitled to act and speak. In post-communist societies, where public trust was historically distorted by surveillance and ideological conformity, rebuilding this shared space requires more than institutional reform. It requires the cultivation of habits that restrain the impulse to transform disagreement into exclusion.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) provides a further lens through which to interpret this fragility. When moral language becomes detached from shared practices, it degenerates into emotivism—expressions of preference rather than reasoned argument. In societies emerging from imposed orthodoxy, the temptation to redefine freedom as unbounded self-assertion is understandable. Yet unbounded assertion undermines the very practices that make communal reasoning possible. The absence of a shared ethical vocabulary intensifies polarization, as claims are interpreted as identity markers rather than invitations to dialogue.

The digital transformation of public discourse has amplified this dynamic. Cass Sunstein (2017) demonstrates how echo chambers and group polarization reinforce existing convictions while marginalizing dissenting perspectives. In post-communist societies already marked by fragile intergenerational trust, algorithmic segmentation deepens epistemic separation. Freedom of expression, while formally expanded, becomes structurally narrowed by informational self-selection. The result is not pluralism but parallel monologues.

The problem, therefore, is not freedom itself but its reduction to immediacy. Democratic responsibility demands a form of temporal awareness: the recognition that today's assertion shapes tomorrow's civic climate. Hans Jonas (1984) emphasizes that responsibility binds present agency to future consequences, particularly in technologically advanced societies. In post-communist contexts, where rapid modernization has occurred within a compressed historical timeframe, the long-term consequences of public rhetoric are often overshadowed by short-term political gain.

Voluntary self-limitation must therefore be reinterpreted not as surrender but as participation. To restrain one's own rhetoric, to resist escalation, or to remain in conversation with ideological opponents is not weakness; it is a contribution to the preservation of shared civic space. The refusal of self-limitation may appear courageous, yet it frequently accelerates fragmentation. Democratic maturity lies not in the intensity of conviction but in the capacity to inhabit disagreement without dissolving into hostility.

This reframing is particularly urgent in societies whose historical trajectory has produced deep ambivalence toward authority. Where past regimes abused the language of

collective good, contemporary citizens may hesitate to accept any appeal to common responsibility. Yet the alternative—an exclusively individualistic conception of freedom—risks reproducing instability in a different form. A society of individuals unwilling to limit themselves cannot sustain durable institutions, nor can it cultivate the trust necessary for bioethical deliberation.

Freedom and responsibility must therefore be understood as mutually conditioning rather than opposing principles. Freedom without responsibility fragments into competitive assertion; responsibility without freedom stagnates into conformity. Post-communist democracies confront the challenge of holding these principles in tension while reconstructing trust across generational and ideological divides. The ethical task is not to diminish freedom but to deepen it by embedding it within practices of self-limitation that protect the conditions of common life.

Bioethics as a Mirror of Civic Responsibility

Bioethics does not operate in a vacuum. Although it presents itself as a field of principled reasoning, its deliberative quality depends upon the broader moral climate in which it unfolds. The conditions of public discourse inevitably shape how ethical arguments are articulated, interpreted, and received.

In polarized societies, bioethical debates often become extensions of ideological struggle. Questions concerning autonomy, dignity, reproductive ethics, end-of-life decisions, or public health policy are framed less as shared moral inquiries and more as symbolic markers of political allegiance. The language of rights and the language of protection harden into opposing moral vocabularies.

This shift reflects what MacIntyre (1981) describes as the fragmentation of moral discourse: when shared frameworks dissolve, ethical argument is reduced to competing assertions of preference or authority. In such an environment, bioethics risks losing its deliberative depth. Principles are invoked strategically rather than reflectively.

The logic of schismogenesis (Bateson 1972) further intensifies this tendency. As opposing camps escalate their rhetoric, bioethical positions are interpreted not on the basis of internal coherence but through the lens of ideological affiliation. A proposal is evaluated not for its moral reasoning but for the side it appears to strengthen.

Responsibility, under these conditions, becomes distorted. Instead of functioning as accountability toward vulnerable persons and future consequences, it is redefined as loyalty toward one's ideological community. The ethical horizon narrows. Long-term considerations—so central to Jonas's (1984) understanding of responsibility—are often subordinated to immediate symbolic victory.

Bioethics thus becomes a sensitive indicator of civic health. Where public responsibility is cultivated, bioethical disagreement can remain robust yet dialogical. Where responsibility erodes, even principled debate becomes adversarial.

This does not imply that bioethics should aspire to neutrality devoid of conviction. Rather, it suggests that the capacity to hold conviction while sustaining dialogue depends upon civic virtues cultivated beyond the disciplinary boundaries of bioethics itself. When public responsibility weakens, bioethical reasoning reflects that weakness.

The erosion of civic responsibility therefore has consequences beyond political culture. It reshapes the interpretative environment in which ethical decisions concerning life, vulnerability, and justice are made. In this sense, the fragility of public responsibility becomes a bioethical concern.

A further consequence of polarization for bioethics lies in the transformation of normative reasoning itself. In stable deliberative environments, ethical principles function as orienting tools that facilitate careful balancing of competing values. Autonomy, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence are interpreted within a shared expectation of good faith. In polarized contexts, however, these principles risk becoming symbolic resources deployed to reinforce prior ideological commitments.

This instrumentalization alters the structure of argumentation. Instead of asking how principles should be interpreted in light of complex human situations, participants may begin by identifying which principle aligns most closely with their pre-existing position. Ethical vocabulary then functions defensively rather than reflectively. The principle of autonomy may be invoked as absolute individual sovereignty, while appeals to justice may be framed as collective protection against perceived moral threat. The subtle balancing characteristic of bioethical reasoning gives way to categorical assertion.

Such distortion does not necessarily indicate bad faith. Rather, it reflects the broader civic climate in which ethical discourse unfolds. When public debate is shaped by suspicion and escalation, even well-intentioned professionals are influenced by the surrounding atmosphere. The capacity to acknowledge uncertainty or to revise one's position in light of new arguments may be perceived as weakness rather than intellectual integrity.

In post-communist societies, this vulnerability is intensified by the relatively recent institutionalization of bioethics as an academic and professional field. Where ethical committees, regulatory frameworks, and public deliberative traditions are still consolidating, polarization can exert disproportionate influence. Bioethical discourse may become entangled with broader cultural conflicts, reducing space for nuanced evaluation.

Reaffirming responsibility within bioethics therefore requires conscious resistance to this instrumentalization. It entails preserving the conditions under which principles can function as guides rather than as weapons. This involves maintaining openness to plural perspectives while refusing reduction of complex ethical dilemmas to ideological slogans. Bioethics, precisely because it addresses questions of life, vulnerability, and dignity, depends upon a civic environment capable of sustaining trust and interpretative charity.

Conclusion: Responsibility After Polarization

The analysis presented here has not sought to identify a political culprit nor to defend a particular ideological position. It has attempted to offer a reflective account of a condition observable in many post-communist societies: the erosion of responsibility as a public virtue.

Polarization, intensified by generational discontinuity and technological acceleration, has reshaped the moral atmosphere in which public life unfolds. When dialogue contracts and distrust expands, responsibility is easily reinterpreted as selective loyalty rather than shared accountability. The consequences extend beyond political culture; they permeate the ethical climate in which institutions, professions, and disciplines—including bioethics—operate.

Rebuilding responsibility does not require ideological uniformity. It requires the cultivation of habits that sustain plurality without collapsing into antagonism: the willingness to remain in conversation, the readiness to accept partial limitation of one's preferences, and the recognition of interdependence across generational and ideological divides.

Such habits cannot be legislated into existence. They must be practiced. Democratic structures may endure formally even in the absence of civic virtue, but their stability becomes increasingly fragile.

The question, therefore, is not whether polarization will disappear. The question is whether societies marked by historical rupture and accelerated change can recover responsibility as a shared orientation toward common life. Without such recovery, freedom risks becoming expressive rather than sustaining, and democratic coexistence increasingly reactive rather than formative.

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