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Moral Paradigms of Intergenerational Solidarity in the Coronavirus-Pandemic

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Abstract: Solidarity between generations served as a prominent but controversially discussed normative reference point in public debates about the Coronavirus-pandemic. The aim of this contribution is the empirical reconstruction and ethical evaluation of prominent notions of intergenerational solidarity and their underlying assumptions in the public media discourse on the pandemic in Germany. After a brief introduction to the concept of intergenerational solidarity and the pertinent discourses during the pandemic, we present the results of a comprehensive qualitative content analysis of 149 articles from leading media in Germany. On this basis, we carve out three typical understandings of intergenerational solidarity: (a) communal care, (b) mutual support, and (c) responsible use of freedom. We discuss these understandings and the underlying 'moral paradigms' and evaluate their theoretical and practical implications from an ethical point of view, drawing conclusions for discourses on future societal crises.

Keywords: intergenerational relations; solidarity; generation; ethical analysis; media debate; public discourse

1 Introduction: The Ongoing Controversy about Intergenerational Solidarity in the Pandemic

"It is […] an imperative of intergenerational solidarity that children, adolescents and young adults must not be left alone in their emotional distress", the German

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Ethics Council explained in the aftermath of the Coronavirus-pandemic (2022, 3). "Young people have voluntarily and consciously shown the solidarity that had been asked of them during the acute phase of the pandemic in the interest of old, ill or otherwise vulnerable persons. […] Intergenerational solidarity will be experienced as unilateral if those who have shown solidarity are not shown solidarity in return when they need it." (ibid.)

The statement reminds us that the idea of solidarity between generations was a crucial yet controversial normative reference point in the public discourse on the Coronavirus-pandemic in Germany (Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller, and Schweda 2021; Zimmermann, Buyx, and McLennan 2023). However, it also makes clear that the pertinent moral and political controversies about intergenerational solidarity have not become obsolete after the official end of the 'global health emergency'. In fact, they apparently form the basis for new normative 'imperatives' regarding the present and the future and hence still call for conceptual clarification and ethical resolution.

The public media discourse has been identified as a prominent site of this ongoing controversy, the "continuous 'battlefield' regarding the meaning of solidarity" (Kneuer et al. 2022, 367). Here the legitimacy of public health-measures is discussed and evaluated in the context of more general concerns regarding individual liberties and responsibilities, social cohesion and conflict, and public welfare. In this sense, this discourse can be seen as an important arena in which individual experiences, needs, and interests are articulated, general societal values and norms are (re-)negotiated, and political (inter-)action takes place (Ellerich-Groppe 2023). The relevance of the concept of solidarity in German media during the pandemic has been investigated in first quantitative studies (e.g., Zimmermann, Buyx, and McLennan 2023). However, an in-depth analysis of the variety of concrete interpretations of solidarity in the public media discourse is still missing, especially with regard to relations between generations.

The aim of this contribution is the empirical reconstruction and ethical evaluation of prominent notions of intergenerational solidarity and their underlying assumptions in the public media discourse on the Coronavirus-pandemic in Germany. The national context appears interesting as it is characterized by a developed welfare state faced with rapid population aging, concomitant policy challenges and continued public controversies on relations between generations (e.g., Schulz 2023; Schirrmacher 2005). Our considerations are based on a comprehensive content analysis of pertinent newspaper articles from *DIE WELT*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *taz.die tageszeitung* from March 2020 to July 2021. We first provide a brief introduction to the concept of intergenerational solidarity and a short overview of the specific context and pertinent controversies during the first three waves of the pandemic in Germany (Section 2). We then explain the methods of our media

discourse analysis in more detail, including the composition of the sample and the analysis of the newspaper articles (Section 3). Based on our empirical material, we carve out three typical understandings of intergenerational solidarity in the German public media discourse: (a) a communitarian notion of communal care for the weak and vulnerable, (b) an egalitarian concept of mutual support for one another, and (c) a liberalistic ideal of responsible use of individual freedom. As the analysis will show, each of these notions is embedded in a set of more encompassing assumptions regarding human nature and the texture of the social fabric that point far beyond the pandemic itself and ultimately touch upon fundamental viewpoints regarding the moral constitution of contemporary societies (Section 4). We discuss these 'moral paradigms' of intergenerational solidarity and evaluate their theoretical and practical implications from an ethical point of view, drawing conclusions for discourses on relations between generations in future societal crises (Section 5).

2 Intergenerational Solidarity as a Contested Category in the Public Discourse on the Coronavirus-Pandemic

With the spread of the Coronavirus in early 2020, calls for solidarity between generations became ubiquitous. In contrast to previous debates on intergenerational conflicts in the context of the climate crisis (von Zabern and Tulloch 2021), 'all together now' suddenly seemed to be the prevailing public and political stance. 'Solidarity' served as a prominent buzzword to justify extensive measures to combat the novel and unpredictable virus and to motivate the population to stick together (Hangel et al. 2022; Kieslich and Prainsack 2021; Kieslich et al. 2023; Liekefett and Becker 2021; Schmitt and Rademacher 2024; Zimmermann, Buyx, and McLennan 2023; for a critical perspective cf. Flynn 2022).

Especially in the beginning of the pandemic, heads of governments and international organizations frequently addressed the need for solidarity with older people (Berrocal et al. 2021). In Germany, Chancellor Merkel established a narrative of solidarity that emphasized the protection of public health as a key element of her communication during the pandemic (Kneuer and Wallaschek 2023; Mintrom et al. 2021). In France, President Emmanuel Macron stressed that "[w]e must show solidarity and a sense of responsibility" and called upon the French citizens to devise "new forms of solidarity between generations" (Macron 2020). In a similar vein, the WHO Regional Director for Europe urged the public to "act in solidarity" and be "supporting and protecting older people" (Kluge 2020).

Such appeals to intergenerational solidarity could also be observed in civil society and public media discourses. “Live in a way that the old can survive” seemed to become the categorical imperative of the pandemic (El Ouassil 2020; own translation). Many commentaries stressed the relevance of solidarity of the young with the old (e.g., Haan 2020; Seyffarth 2020) and members of younger generations were expected to accept considerable sacrifices in terms of individual liberties, personal wellbeing, and socioeconomic welfare to protect the lives and health of the vulnerable group of older people (Graefe, Haubner, and van Dyk 2020). For example, adolescents were called upon to stay at home and young families were advised neither to visit the grandparents nor to draw on their services as babysitters. There were also numerous public pleas to help older fellow citizens in the crisis, for example by going to the groceries for them or supporting them in other areas of life (e.g., BAGSO 2020). These omnipresent appeals for solidarity with the old were frequently interwoven with negative images of old age as feeble and dependent and thus underline that the pandemic also reinforced negative stereotypes of older people and worked as a “catalyst for ageism” (Barth et al. 2021), including “compassionate ageism” (Ayalon et al. 2021; Døssing and Crăciun 2022; Köttl, Tatzer, and Ayalon 2022; Meisner 2021; Ng, Indran, and Liu 2022; Vervaecke and Meisner 2021).

In the further course of the pandemic, a shift in the interpretation of solidarity could be observed in the public discourse. Just as the high level of general solidary support in the first phases (Bertogg and Koos 2021) decreased (Ntontis et al. 2022; see also Kaup et al. 2022), similar changes could be observed regarding intergenerational relations (Bergmann, Hecher, and Sommer 2022). Thus, in contrast to initial appeals to protect old and vulnerable fellow citizens, an increasing number of voices reversed the direction of solidarity between generations and tended to place the responsibility to a greater degree on the side of the old (Bal et al. 2022; Stok et al. 2021). One prominent example is the discussion about an impending triage of scarce intensive care resources like respirators that was pervaded with suggestions for age-based rationing (Rueda 2021). With regard to infection control measures like lockdowns, there was an increasing expectation towards the old to put aside their own needs to enable more freedom and the continuation of public and economic life for younger generations. The same acts formerly praised as solidary were now increasingly framed as an “expensive protection of the old” (John, Schnauder and Thaler 2020; own translation; see also Graefe, Haubner, and van Dyk 2020). An age-related differentiation of measures was proposed (Fifka 2020), comprising pleas for a voluntary self-isolation of senior citizens (Haarhoff 2020) or even the suggestion that they should sacrifice their lives to save the future of their descendants and the younger generations (Barrett, Michael, and Padavic 2021).

When effective vaccination became available in the beginning of 2021, the fair distribution of the still rare vaccines between the different age groups was discussed controversially (Russell and Greenwood 2021), once again fueling ageism and heated debate (Bacsu et al. 2023). While the trope of the 'vulnerable old' was now used to justify their prioritization in the context of vaccination, the image of the 'privileged old' emerged, accompanied by the concern that the previous solidarity of the young remained largely unrecognized and unrequited (Allen et al. 2021). This impression seemed to intensify as the harmful consequences of pandemic policies for the mental health, psychological wellbeing, and personal as well as socioeconomic development of children, adolescents, and young adults came into public view during the following year (Hafstad and Augusti 2021). The notion of a so-called 'generation corona' emerged in which accusations of favoring the old at the expense of the young formed the basis for increasing calls for more solidarity with the neglected younger generation, as in the recommendations of the German Ethics Council (2022).

This cursory overview of the discourse underlines the relevance and at the same time ambiguity of the concept of intergenerational solidarity in public discourses during the pandemic. This is confirmed by first quantitative studies that show the importance of the concept and its diverse and dynamic application. Thus, Zimmermann and colleagues distinguish a huge heterogeneity of actors and contexts in which the concept of solidarity was applied in German media coverage, from symbolic declarations and calls for protective behavior to justifications of COVID-19 policies (Zimmermann, Buyx, and McLennan 2023). However, not only the contexts of use, but also the understandings of the concept of solidarity were rather diverse. Stressing the need to stay at home in order to flatten the curve and protect vulnerable 'older' people apparently evokes other notions of intergenerational solidarity than insinuating that 'the old' must sacrifice themselves to protect the prospects of younger generations.

In general, at least three conceptual traditions shape contemporary understandings of solidarity: the Christian, the nationalist, and the socialist tradition (Sangiovanni 2015). The Christian and especially catholic tradition refers to a universal community of all human beings in divine creation (Bayertz and Boshammer 2009). During the French revolution, the ideal of fraternité gained momentum and served as a starting point for a new line of interpretations, such as French solidarism (e.g., Bourgeois 2020). Here, we find already traces of the liberal nationalist idea of solidarity that assumes a shared (national) identity as the basis for solidarity (Sangiovanni 2015, 342). In the labor movement, the concept of solidarity was used as a 'Kampfbegriff' in the fight of the working class for an improvement of their social and political situation (Bayertz 1998; Bayertz and Boshammer 2009), combining elements of a shared experience and action (Sangiovanni 2015, 341).

Regarding intergenerational relations, especially the aspect of social cohesion is emphasized. Starting from the work of Bengtson in the 1970s, the concept of intergenerational solidarity provided a theoretical framework for relations between generations within a family but also in broader societal contexts (Bengtson and Oyama 2010; Bengtson, Olander, and Haddad 1976; Silverstein et al. 2002).

Regardless of the heterogeneity of historical origins and ideological contexts, it is possible to identify certain recurring conceptual key elements in the different notions and conceptions of solidarity that can provide the basis for an overarching working definition. Hence, the general idea of solidarity can be understood as *a commitment to carry costs or to make a contribution in or towards a group based on subjectively meaningful similarities* (e.g., Prainsack and Buyx 2011; Bayertz 1998; Löschke 2015; Forst 2021; for the following cf. Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller, and Schweda 2021; Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; see also Ellerich–Groppe 2022; Ellerich-Groppe 2023). According to this working definition, a first important aspect of solidarity is the relation to *a group*. One shows solidarity within or towards a specific group (Taylor 2015; see also O'Neill 2002). Secondly, solidarity involves a *commitment*, a special relation between the parties involved that is usually based on similarities perceived as meaningful (Bayertz 1998). Thirdly, based on this identification and feeling of connectedness, solidarity demands a *contribution*, a willingness to carry costs, accept a burden or a responsibility, act jointly or make efforts in order to achieve a specific end or normative goal (cf. Sangiovanni 2015; Löschke 2015; Forst 2021). This commitment is sometimes also expressed in terms of a (solidary) responsibility (Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020).

With regard to intergenerational relations, these aspects of solidarity are sometimes difficult to identify and to interpret in a plausible way (for the following cf. Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller, and Schweda 2021; Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020). This concerns the definition of the generations as well as their relations to each other and what the respective generations can expect due to these relations. First, the *groups* that are addressed as the respective subjects and objects of intergenerational solidarity can vary. Age groups cannot always be clearly delineated and are heterogeneous in themselves, and there are different understandings of generations, e.g., as birth cohorts, positions in the reproductive cycle of a family, or collectives shaped by shared historical experiences. In this context, the underlying commonality that forms the subjectively meaningful foundation of solidarity also plays a decisive role. This becomes especially clear in a crisis where individuals at different life stages are endangered in different ways so that it can be hard to identify common ground for solidarity (Prainsack 2020; Prainsack and Buyx 2011; Schaubroeck and Hens 2022). Secondly, understandings of intergenerational solidarity can also vary in view of the *commitments*, that is, the specific moral bonds that are assumed between these generational groups and that can range

from asymmetrical relations of unidirectional gratitude or guilt to rather balanced and symmetrical relations that include a reciprocity over time. Thirdly, the *costs* of intergenerational solidarity can also vary in kind as well as in extent, e.g., a certain effort or expense for the sake of the solidary group.

3 Investigating the (Re-)Negotiation of Intergenerational Solidarity in the Public Media Discourse

Media contributions appear as a promising starting point for an in-depth-analysis of appeals to intergenerational solidarity in the public discourse on the Coronavirus-pandemic in Germany. 'Traditional' media experienced a "renaissance" during the pandemic (Boeff and Kirfel 2020; Der Standard 2020). While this renewed interest may have been driven by a need for reliable information, the controversial character of the pertinent media discourse also points to its normative significance as an essential and popular source of inspiration and influence (Amann, Sleigh, and Vayena 2021). It has been well established that the media play a decisive role in framing discussions and shaping perceptions in the field of public health (Henderson and Hilton 2018). Accordingly, media coverage on COVID 19 has also become the subject of an increasing number of studies since the beginning of the pandemic (for Germany e.g., Amann, Sleigh, and Vayena 2021; Nienhaus 2023; Zimmermann et al. 2021).

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that news media do not simply provide a mirror image, an objective representation of social reality. Their perspective is always shaped by certain 'filters' such as particular editorial policies or commercial strategies. Yet they constitute an important arena for the public circulation, deliberation, and negotiation of issues, interpretations, norms, and values in a society. In this function, they do not only transport neutral information and rational arguments but also convey sentiments as well as implicit and collectively shared societal ideas (Peters 1994; Ullrich 2008). By analyzing the public media discourse, it is therefore possible to reconstruct what is taken for granted and thus usually remains largely implicit in a society, e.g., ideas of aging, social cohesion and intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, gaps, shortcomings and systemic distortions in the media discourse can be identified and criticized, thus contributing to a more comprehensive and balanced debate.

The basis for our analysis of intergenerational solidarity in the public media discourse in Germany was a sample from prominent national newspapers. These newspapers can be understood as leading media that are usually considered as

observing and reflecting societal developments; therefore they enable an effective and efficient examination of current and developing affairs in a society (Jarren and Vogel 2009, 71). At the same time, newspapers remain an important and trustworthy source of reliable information that "can serve as a proxy for reporting across other channels" (Amann, Sleigh, and Vayena 2021; cf. also Zimmermann et al. 2021, 4).

Our analysis focused on articles published in the three major daily newspapers *DIE WELT*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *taz.die tageszeitung* (print and online) between 01 March 2020 and 31 July 2021. All three have a wide national and even international circulation, target a large and heterogeneous readership, and allow to follow the media discourse on a daily basis. The sample thus comprised a variety of publicist perspectives addressing a range of social milieus with different moral and political orientations (conservative, liberal, and progressive). At the same time, it offered a promising combination of topical daily news reports and more elaborated, reflexive and general commentaries on intergenerational solidarity. The selected time frame spans the first three COVID-19 waves in Germany and therefore covers the dynamic development of pertinent public debates in a particularly dramatic phase of the pandemic.

Relevant articles were systematically collected via the archives of the respective publishers and the database WISO (www.wiso-net.de). If a newspaper offered stand-alone online articles in addition to its print edition, these were also included in the search. To identify relevant articles, the search string "Corona AND (solidarity OR responsibility) AND (generation OR (old AND young))" was used.[1] After screening for duplicates (e.g., print and online versions with identical wording) and checking for thematic plausibility and relevance, 149 of the 248 articles found were included in the sample. A benchmark for thematic relevance was that an article contained at least one paragraph offering a reflexive discussion of generational relations in connection with the Coronavirus-pandemic. Summaries and shortened duplicates of other articles, as well as transcripts of live tickers and letters to the editor, were excluded.

All articles were coded according to the principles of qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2018; Mayring 2022) using the software MAXQDA. To operationalize the concept of solidarity for the empirical analysis, we developed a heuristic framework encompassing the above-mentioned working definition as a starting point

1 The compilation of the search terms took place in an iterative process aimed at a short and concise search string. For example, the inclusion of the term 'COVID' was tested but did not generate any additional significant results and was therefore not further pursued. The original German search string was 'Corona AND (Solidarität OR Verantwortung) AND (Generation OR (alt AND jung))'.

to explore different understandings of solidarity regarding intergenerational relations (cf. Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller, and Schweda 2021). The coding process started with deductive coding to structure the empirical material. To this end, we established a codebook comprising broad categories such as 'solidarity', 'responsibility', 'relation of actors' and 'moral concepts', as well as respective sub-codes. For example, to reflect the central conceptual elements of our working definition of solidarity, the codebook included the sub-codes 'soli-subject' and 'soli-object' to identify the solidarity group, 'soli-identification' to consider the commitment and 'soli-contribution' to detect aspects of costs, burdens, or responsibilities.[2] Furthermore, the codebook contained keywords for each category to facilitate coding. We first checked for intercoder reliability within the research team. To this end, two researchers coded the same sub-sample of five articles, discussed controversial and contradicting codings and adjusted the codebook afterward to ensure the consistency of coding. The coding and interpretation were conducted by a trained and experienced researcher and accompanied by regular feedback and supervision. In the coding process, particularly significant sections were identified for a more fine-grained ethical content analysis focusing on different aspects of solidarity, for example, the subject and object of solidarity, the carried costs or contribution, the foundations, and the temporal horizon. This in-depth analysis served as the basis for a typology of different notions of intergenerational solidarity in the German public media discourse (Kuckartz 2020).

4 Notions of Intergenerational Solidarity in the Public Media Discourse in Germany

In our analysis of the public media discourse on the pandemic, a variety of understandings of solidarity between generations emerged. Overall, three typical notions can be distinguished: A communitarian notion of intergenerational solidarity as communal care focuses on the asymmetrical and unidirectional protection of older people as a dependent and vulnerable group (4.1). By contrast, an egalitarian ideal of intergenerational solidarity as mutual support conceptualizes relations between generations in terms of symmetrical and reciprocal interactions among different but interdependent members of society (4.2). Eventually, a third, somewhat indirect notion frames intergenerational solidarity as a result of mature and self-reliant citizens' responsible use of individual freedom (4.3). The three groups represent ideal-types that usually do not occur in pure form in the material. As a

2 A translation of the final codebook can be found in the appendix.

closer analysis reveals, all three are associated with comprehensive conceptual pre-assumptions and moral implications, for example, regarding the constitution of personal identity and the relation between individuals and society.

4.1 #StayHomeForGrandma – Solidarity as Communal Care

Especially at the beginning of the Coronavirus-pandemic, a notion of intergenerational solidarity as 'communal care' was dominant in the public discourse in Germany. The following quote from a (younger) commentator of *DIE WELT* shows essential elements of this type: "*Now the Corona-crisis is here – and a whole generation can prove that they, too, are willing to make sacrifices in order to protect the old and weak, and thus society as a whole*" (Seyffarth 2020).[3]

In this comment, a clear separation of the *subject and object of solidarity* is made: The addressed 'subject' is the entire younger generation that is supposed to care for the wellbeing of the especially vulnerable and to show solidarity with them. In a similar manner, Chancellery Minister Helge Braun demanded "*solidary sacrifice*" from the young and expressed "*the hope that it was only a matter of getting through the coming winter*" (Gambone 2020). In the commentary "*Stubenhocker* [stay-at-homes] *for Future*", the young are addressed as a "*protesting generation*" that used to manifest its solidarity "*with the marginalized groups of society*" in the streets but is now supposed to stay away from the streets and at home to show solidarity with the weaker members of society (Kuhn 2020).

The *objects* of this solidarity are sometimes quite broadly understood as the "*especially vulnerable groups of our society*" (von Hirschhausen et al. 2020), those "*who are hit particularly hard by this crisis, regarding health, financially and personally*" (von Hirschhausen et al. 2020). However, the focus clearly lies on "*the many isolated older people*" (Kutz and Haist 2020) who are frequently singled out as the primary recipients of intergenerational solidarity. The old and people with pre-existing conditions are at a particularly high risk (WELT 2020a) so that the population beyond retirement age needs special protection (WELT 2020b). Other groups are mentioned much less frequently as addressees of solidarity, for example, children who are severely affected by school and daycare closures and suffer from restrictions (Lehmann 2021; Süddeutsche Zeitung 2021a), children with disabilities (Gerner and Schindler 2021) and young adults at the beginning of their working lives (Bergmann and Wilke 2020). This sweeping juxtaposition of the young and the old is pervaded by age-related stereotypes such as the 'vulnerable old' and the 'healthy

3 All quotations from the media discourse have been translated by the authors and are set in italics.

young', for example, when "*the old and weak*" need to be protected by the whole young generation (Seyffarth 2020).

With regard to the *solidary contribution*, this type of intergenerational solidarity is framed as a transitive and asymmetrical relation that implies need and dependency on the one part as well as strength and care on the other. An active subject – the 'young generation' – is supposed to show solidarity with a (passive) object, in most cases generally addressed as 'the old'. This caring relationship becomes manifest in acts of protection and support that are sometimes framed as merciful or charitable deeds (Karig 2020). They can comprise concrete assistance with everyday chores ("*going to the groceries, walking dogs or taking away mail*" (Badawi 2020); "*carrying things up and garbage down*" (Kutz and Haist 2020)) but also generally observing and following the imposed rules of infection control "*out of consideration*" (Dribbusch 2020; cf. also WELT 2020f). Yet even smaller acts of support are associated with costs, occasionally also with "*sacrifice*" for those acting in solidarity (Adler 2020; Seyffarth 2020; Wöckener and Rettig 2020). Given the previous state of intergenerational relations, this selfless caring out of solidarity is by no way self-evident, as the 73 years old actor and writer Edgar Selge makes clear in a column that describes his initial fear that the "*generation internship*" will now take back "*what we have stolen from them*" (Selge 2021).

The *motivational foundation for solidary action* is the identification with those affected in one's personal environment (such as own grandparents) (Alberti 2020) and the "*fear for relatives*" (Gräff 2020). However, also self-efficacy, the feeling to be needed and to have a purpose, is mentioned (Arnu 2020). At the same time, it becomes apparent that the unequal distribution of health risks can be an obstacle for solidary action. Thus, one article expresses the concern "*that younger persons are increasingly rebelling against the measures because they do not feel affected by the dangers of an infection*" (WELT 2020e). A comment in the *taz* even states bluntly that "*a shared interest […] does not really exist*" (Boehme-Nessler 2020). This reinforces notions of a solidarity that go beyond the tit-for-tat logic of rational transactions. Solidarity is "*no cheap exchange deal*" but entails "*standing up for the weak, no matter what. Because when it is connected to conditions, it becomes void*" (Kraft 2021). A source for this notion of unconditional solidarity as asymmetrical and unidirectional care for the weak is sometimes seen in "*Christian ethics*" where "*a human life may not be sacrificed*" (Bauer, Bärnthaler, and Wagner 2020).

This type of solidarity often transports an *understanding of societal coherence* that pitches the 'we' of society against the Coronavirus as the "*invisible enemy*" (Wernicke 2020). In this context, the vision of *one* society appears to be compatible with the recognition of a variety of groups with different needs and vulnerabilities. This inherently differentiated community is seen at a crossroads due to the

Coronavirus-pandemic. An article in the *Süddeutsche* states: "*If we do not succeed in protecting our weak and getting through the next weeks in a halfway dignified manner, we do not deserve any better. […] If we do not muster the minimum of honor to save lives, we might as well give up our species*" (Karig 2020). A lack of protection of the old would amount to "*an appalling form of desolidarization*" (Fischer 2020). Likewise, simply isolating the weak and those at risk appears unacceptable since it would go against "*our image of man*" (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2020), as former Chancellor Angela Merkel explained. Thus, demonstrating care for the weak is understood as a fundamental test of societal "*humanity*" (Klute 2020a).

These quotes also indicate the *temporal horizon* of this notion: Intergenerational solidarity as communal care refers to the immediate present but at the same time interprets it in a much more comprehensive historical context. The current emergency is defined as a decisive societal challenge, a watershed moment in history. One article explains: "The Corona-crisis is a challenge for the solidarity between the generations" (Laschet 2020). Elsewhere, there is even talk of a test that the whole country is facing (Wernicke 2020). On the one hand, this perspective transports a conservative sense of time oriented towards the preservation of past achievements and the defense of the moral and legal status quo in a time of crisis. On the other, the momentousness of present decisions and actions is pondered in light of the future history of humanity as a whole. "*Will we later be depicted as a society that, in the greatest need, thought of its weakest and made this not only a charitable project for a day or a week, but learned the long-term lesson that it can only work together? Or will they describe cold, inhuman considerations according to which the value of an old human life counted less than that of a medium-sized company?*" (Klute 2020a)

All in all, this perspective expresses a communitarian viewpoint that frames solidarity between generations in terms of communal care for the weak and vulnerable. Depending on the specific focus, the goal of solidarity is the wellbeing of the most vulnerable and the values and humanity of the community as a whole. This view includes elements of unidirectional commitment, supererogatory virtue, and magnanimous sacrifice that transcend the transactional rationale of symmetrical and reciprocal relations and exchanges between individuals, and is sometimes linked to notions of Christian charity and beneficence. At the same time, it runs the risk of creating generational divisions between superior active providers and inferior passive recipients of solidarity and promoting biased age stereotypes that can contribute to the overburdening of the allegedly strong young and the othering, stigmatization, and exclusion of the allegedly feeble and dependent old.

4.2 'We Are All in the Same Boat' – Solidarity as Mutual Support

While appeals to the unidirectional solidarity of 'the young' with 'the old' were particularly prominent at the onset of the pandemic, another type of intergenerational solidarity soon entered the picture, emphasizing the mutuality of solidarity "*of young and old persons*" (Haunhorst 2020) alike. Accordingly, the decisive question is articulated by the former chair of the German Ethics Council, Peter Dabrock – "*to what extent the young have to show solidarity with the old – and conversely, how much solidarity the old have to muster with the young. What is proportionate?*" (Dabrock 2020)

In contrast to solidarity as communal care, where the *subject and object* of solidarity can be clearly assigned to the different age groups, 'the young' and 'the old' figure alternatingly as subject and object of this type of solidarity. Just as all members of society should show solidarity with each other and feel mutually responsible for each other, so the 'old' and the 'young' are equally subject and object of solidary relations. This corresponds to an idea of intransitive solidarity; the relationship of those acting in solidarity is based on interdependence and reciprocity. Interestingly, this reciprocity is especially emphasized when it is missing. Thus, the article "*Thank you for nothing*" states with regard to the situation of the younger generations: "*But as a young person you already ask yourself, what has happened to the appeals for more solidarity by the politicians: Were they only one-sided?*" (Balbieber 2021) Another article states: "*However, solidarity remains an empty phrase if it does not go both ways*" (Bahr 2021). From this perspective, it does not appear justified "*to invoke a special duty of the youth in the pandemic*" (Haunhorst 2020). Instead, the general claim is: "*Every person can make a difference*" (Karig 2020) and "*do something against the virus – on every new day and just by such easy things as maintaining social distancing and sacrifice*" (Berndt 2020); all "*have to buck up once more*" (Kastner, Breit-Keßler, and Frey 2020).

From this perspective on intergenerational solidarity, it depends on the individual circumstances which *contribution* is appropriate: "*What is dispensable in the current crisis and what one 'starkly misses', strongly depends on one's own age and life concept*" (Haunhorst 2020). Thus, many articles emphasize that the life stages 'childhood' and 'youth' are somehow special (e.g., Diesselkämper 2021; Nida-Rümelin 2021) and understand these specificities as a decisive criterion for the appropriateness of the contribution. In this sense, the young have "*simply other living conditions*" (Laskus and Sharma 2020) that largely lack public attention (Andresen 2021). In a similar vein, an article states with regard to lockdowns and other restrictive measures that it may be "*not that difficult to take a break*" (Friedrich 2020) for those that have already collected a wealth of experience over

decades, and that sacrifice is much more comfortable when you are 50 than when you are 20 (Klute 2020b). Hence, this type of solidarity aims at a just, appropriate distribution of contributions and burdens, always in proportion to the respective life stage and individual competences (Prantl 2021). Sometimes this just distribution almost amounts to a 'quidproquo'-rule. This becomes clear when a commentator asks in view of the solidary contributions of the young in the early stages of the pandemic: "*What can a society that has invoked solidarity for months now do for the young?*" (Diesselkämper 2021) The idea that the young have already shown their solidarity and now deserve a reciprocation of solidarity in return (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2021b) also motivates suggestions to lower the voting age to 16 in recognition of the solidarity and responsibility of the younger generation during the pandemic (von Bullion 2020).

The *foundation* of this type of intergenerational solidarity lies in the "*slow re-awakening of a feeling of mutual dependency*" (Arend 2020). Thus, many commentators refer to a shared human vulnerability (Buyx 2020) that becomes manifest in a variety of frailties during the pandemic (Karig 2020). This makes clear that "*[s]olidarity is not something for the others who are not that strong and smart as we are. We all need solidarity because without the others we are only weak and limited*" (Bude 2020). In contrast to the first type's emphasis on the special vulnerability of particular groups, we now find a more egalitarian ideal of solidarity based on a fundamental anthropological vulnerability and interdependence. Even though this basic vulnerability may have different manifestations depending on the different life stages, it persists throughout the whole life course. Against this backdrop, the common enemy 'coronavirus' that affects us all can symbolize this shared concern. Thus, it can weld together the population (Karig 2020) and underline that we are all "*in the same boat*" (Buyx 2020; cf. also Reder 2021). At the same time, in the face of the different concrete health risks, doubts about the viability of this common ground are voiced in the discourse (Boehme-Nessler 2020; WELT 2020e).

These remarks already hint at an underlying *idea of society*. They invoke the image of a community of destiny in which everyone is "*in the same boat and shares certain risks*" (Buyx 2020). Yet, the corresponding perspective does not gloss over the diversity of individual needs and interests. Instead, there are controversial debates about the adequate organization of equal participation in an aging society. The desire to consider all members of society appropriately is articulated in the following comment: "*In an ageing society, not the old have to be protected against discrimination but the young against marginalization*" (Matzig 2021). In general, it becomes apparent that society needs social cohesion and cooperation between generations (Hauptmann and Die Junge Gruppe der CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag 2021; WELT 2020g). Accordingly, a group of young politicians warns that the virus

must not be allowed to "*divide young and old*" (Hauptmann and Die Junge Gruppe der CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag 2021).

This understanding of society is *politically* reflected in the welfare state which is interpreted as a form of "*institutionalized solidarity*" (Arend 2020). Thus, a comment in *DIE WELT* declares: "*Germany is a welfare state that depends on the solidarity of each individual. Conversely, the individual benefits from this solidarity if he or she needs it one day. The welfare state is based on individual solidarity – with the individual prospect to receive support at some point in the future and to be comprehensively secured*" (Rüddel 2020). Regarding intergenerational relations, the idea of "*institutionally solidified solidarity of the previous generations*" (Kempe 2020) is mentioned, especially in connection with the pension guarantee. In this context, it is considered important to set up "*the welfare state in the long term in a way that the young do not suffer*" (Schröder 2020) and to "*keep in mind the intergenerational justice in the social security systems*" in general (Kuhle 2020). Here, once again, we can observe the continuation of mutual dependence and the resulting responsibility for each other that characterizes this view of solidarity. Also, people's behavior in the pandemic can thus be seen as a continuation and concretization of the normative foundation of the welfare state in the face of a current crisis.

The *temporal horizon* that the understanding of solidarity as mutual support can integrate differs from the one of solidarity as communal care. While the latter focuses on the actual present emergency, the claims of solidarity as mutual support reach further in time. They span not only the different phases and waves of the pandemic that are considered as parts of an overarching process and set into relation to each other. Rather, those acting in solidarity generally take responsibility for each other over longer periods of historical time. Accordingly, inequalities in taking responsibility can – and should – be compensated over time. An example for this idea of reciprocity over time can be found in the demand that the failures of the older generations regarding global warming should be compensated by taking more responsibility in the current crisis (Haarhoff 2020). A similar idea is also invoked when an author condemns a "*pattern of intergenerational injustice*" (Balbieber 2021) with regard to the financial costs of the pandemic. Thus, it is seen as a huge challenge "*to recover all the money that is spent now to save companies from bankruptcy*" (Behbehani 2021; cf. also Kretschmer 2020; Poschardt 2020). At the same time, the pandemic is understood as an opportunity to develop intergenerational perspectives for future crises (Hauptmann and Die Junge Gruppe der CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag 2021), although this notion is also met with skepticism, for example in warnings against the "*next diffuse intergenerational contract to which no one adheres*" (Diesselkämper 2021).

All in all, this view of intergenerational solidarity as mutual support expresses an egalitarian perspective. Solidarity between generations is not a moral one-way

street but rests on symmetrical and reciprocal responsibilities between interdependent and interacting individuals with fundamentally similar, albeit varying needs and vulnerabilities. The underlying normative ideal is the vision of a society of equals that give and take each other their respective dues over time. Instead of virtues of care and charity, this understanding of intergenerational solidarity puts greater emphasis on principles of justice and the fair distribution of burdens and benefits. Yet, the equitable application of these general principles may sometimes show a certain tendency of relentless reckoning and petty counting up that can lack sensitivity to special needs and desolate circumstances.

4.3 'Those Who Protect Themselves Promote Public Welfare' – Responsible Use of Freedom as Indirect Solidarity

The third type frames the responsible use of individual freedom itself as a specific form of solidarity. Based on the vision of a society in which "*free and mature citizens*" act "*in maximal self-determination*" (Rüddel 2020), the appropriate exercise of this self-determination is interpreted as an indirect or even unintentional kind of solidary action. One commentator describes this idea by reference to Adam Smith's image of the invisible hand that links the pursuit of individual self-interest to the promotion of the common good: "*This disease is the ideal-typical liberalistic disease. Nothing protects the community better than when the individual only looks after him- or herself. It is a paradox – but those who protect themselves promote public welfare*" (Adler 2020).

In this perspective, the *subject of solidarity* does not directly refer to an *object* in a transitive way. Instead, the responsible use of individual freedom itself inevitably entails the avoidance of harm, promotes the wellbeing of other members of society and thus ultimately advances the common good. The starting point is the conviction that as autonomous citizens, individuals generally bear responsibility – "*for their own behavior, but also for protecting themselves against dangers*" (Haarhoff 2020). There are manifold references to this understanding of civic responsibility in the discourse, also from the point of view of the older generation (WELT 2020c, 2020d, 2020g). In contrast to the notion of solidarity as communal care, it implies that the old are not addressed as mere passive objects and recipients of solidarity but position themselves as self-dependent subjects who take their fate into their own hands and act in responsible ways. In an article entitled "*Lock us up*", a group of older people even rejects the paternalism of protective measures altogether and instead calls for the "*voluntary self-isolation of those endangered*" (Haarhoff 2020) for the sake of younger generations. The article declares: "*We do not agree that a mass of young fellow citizens, single mothers, family mothers and fathers, count-*

less employees are unilaterally held accountable for the survival of us older people" (Haarhoff 2020).

From this point of view, the *solidary contribution* of free and mature citizens generally consists in "*[a]cting in a responsible way*" (Wierth 2020) in order "*to protect themselves and others*" (WELT 2020a). Accordingly, the responsible exercise of individual freedom is associated with a number of requirements like the independent acquisition and evaluation of information: "*[T]he mature citizen must […] learn about the virus*" (Kuhle 2020) in order to be able to make his or her own well-considered decisions. For example, this can mean that everybody considers for themselves "*which public events they still attend*" (WELT 2020b). In this vein, such "*self-responsible action in maximal autonomy*" can also entail subsidiary self-help (Rüddel 2020). Eventually, however, the individual citizens also have to be careful that "*their behavior 'does not turn out to cause harm to another'*" (Wernicke 2020), as the German politician Armin Laschet is quoted in an article in the *Süddeutsche*. In this sense, "*it would be appreciated if every citizen were aware of the value of freedom, always connected with responsibility for the common good*" (Papier 2021). Others also claim this "*twofold responsibility: for their own and for the collective*" (Dribbusch 2020). From the viewpoint of the older generation, this can ultimately also mean "*that WE OLDER PEOPLE isolate ourselves at home for a longer time and that we let the young and very young out again, soon, and that all the retired persons and pensioners that have lavish retirement pays, pensions, and income from assets, rentals and leases, become financially involved*" (Haarhoff 2020).

The *motivational foundation* of this indirect understanding of intergenerational solidarity in terms of responsible exercise of individual freedom is complex and ambivalent, and the extent of the actual impetus of solidarity and the explicit concern for societal welfare can vary considerably. At least two interpretations can be reconstructed. The first one corresponds to the aforementioned notion of the invisible hand: Individuals are ultimately motivated by self-interest, but under adequate societal framework conditions, the pursuit of individual self-interest at the same time automatically promotes the wellbeing of others and advances the common good. In this context, the welfare of others or of the community as a whole do not appear as direct objectives but as unintended 'byproducts' of responsible individual behavior. By contrast, the second interpretation echoes the Enlightenment's ideal of the self-dependent autonomous citizen who acknowledges taking responsibility for the societal consequences of his or her actions as the flipside of individual freedom. From this perspective, the freedom of others and the common good are considered as pre-conditions of one's own freedom. In addition, responsible action in consideration of the common good can help avoid more drastic measures that would restrict one's own freedom (Berndt 2020). In this sense, responsible behavior can be seen as an act of solidarity that helps uphold freedom. For example, one

commentator states that a fast re-opening of restaurants and culture or leisure facilities amounts to an "*act of solidarity*" (Janisch 2021).

This already points to the fact that this indirect understanding of solidarity is usually based on a liberalistic *ideal of society* that assumes intricate and largely oblique interdependencies between individual freedom on the one hand and the liberal structure of the social system as a whole on the other. The fundamental normative principle seems to be that "*freedom allows people to lead their lives according to their own ideas – as long as they do not interfere with the legitimate rights of fellow human beings*" (Höffe 2021). Another commentary encapsulates the underlying model of society in the common image "*that the freedom of one person always ends at the tip of the nose of the other*" (Tiedemann 2021). Hence, although individual freedom is clearly considered as central and paramount, this freedom is neither arbitrary nor boundless but proves to be conditioned on – and therefore necessarily implies – the acknowledgment of the corresponding freedom of all other individuals. Altogether, this perspective thus pictures society not so much as a community held together by strong ties of affection, morality or mutual support, but as a system of coordinated individual freedom. Accordingly, social care and solidarity are not denied but either appear as unintended side-effects of citizens' self-interested endeavors or are understood in an instrumental way, for example in the sense of "*protecting older people and risk groups […] in order to preserve more freedom for the rest*" (Bauer, Bärnthaler, and Wagner 2020).

In accordance with this perspective on society, the corresponding *political view* identifies the rule of law as the institution that enables the peaceful coexistence of free individuals as citizens of a liberal polity. This first and foremost includes warding off excessive restrictions of freedom on the part of government authorities. As free citizens, all individuals have "*inalienable civil liberties, they are not subjects*" (Papier 2021). Because the realization of these liberties is anchored in the "*constitutional state*", political restrictions of individual freedom "*against valid constitutional law*" (Papier 2021) are not considered legitimate and acceptable, even if they are justified by reference to solidarity. Accordingly, a politician from the German Free Democratic Party, Konstantin Kuhle, criticizes "*the voluntary relinquishment of self-determination and the longing for authority*" he observes in public attitudes towards the infection control measures in Germany as "*inscrutable*" (Kuhle 2020). Beyond the protection of civil liberties against repressive policies, however, the liberal state is also supposed to intervene whenever individual freedom becomes irresponsible and transgresses the rights of other citizens, for example, "*where the exercise of personal freedom by a few can existentially endanger the lives and health of a great many others*" (Altmaier 2020). In this vein, welfare can also be regarded as an expression of democratic freedom of choice. Even if "*freedom is*

in any case more important" than welfare, society may well decide to restrict it in favor of welfare (Tiedemann 2021).

The *temporal dimension* of this indirect understanding of intergenerational solidarity in terms of responsible exercise of individual freedom frequently also comprises a broader diachronic view on the ongoing emancipatory process in which civil liberties are successively achieved, sustained, and expanded. A contribution by German philosopher Otfried Höffe in *DIE WELT* spells out this historical perspective: On the one hand, there is a responsibility to preserve the extent of individual freedom that was achieved in past fights for liberal democracy, and to defend it against regression into obedient subservience and authoritarian traditions of oppressive government, especially in the German context (Höffe 2021). On the other, there is also a responsibility for the continuity and expansion of individual freedom in the future. The state and its citizens are seen as having an obligation to ensure the further existence of the liberal constitutional order in the future as well as maximum freedom for future citizens. This also holds true beyond the pandemic, for example, in the admonition not to take on too much government debt to combat the COVID-19 crisis so that "*coming generations […] remain free to pursue their own policy projects*" (Höffe 2021). In this sense, taking more responsibility today in the context of the pandemic can be interpreted as an act of solidarity with future generations.

All in all, understanding intergenerational solidarity in terms of a responsible use of individual freedom seems to express a liberalist perspective that promotes an empowering view of individuals. Taking responsibility for others and the common good is seen as the flipside and necessary precondition of the self-determination of autonomous, self-dependent citizens. The underlying normative ideal is the vision of a liberal society and constitutional state where the rule of law guarantees the coordinated maximization of individual liberties. By contrast, more traditional, communitarian or egalitarian understandings of solidarity that emphasize obligations towards others or the collective as such tend to be perceived as a potential threat to individual freedom and a liberal political order. Therefore, this perspective ultimately does not offer much support or legitimation for comprehensive infection control policies and interprets the necessity of restrictive measures as a symptom for the failure of individual autonomy and responsibility.

5 Discussion and Conclusion: Intergenerational Solidarity for Future?

In the public media discourse on the Coronavirus-pandemic, a variety of notions of intergenerational solidarity came to the fore. In our analysis, we elaborated three

main types that each interpret and accentuate solidarity between generations in a different way. While the notion of intergenerational solidarity as care for the vulnerable old expresses a transitive, unidirectional model, the idea of solidarity as mutual support presumes symmetrical and reciprocal interactions between equal interdependent members of society. By contrast, the perspective of an indirect solidarity effectuated though the responsible exercise of individual freedom points to a seemingly paradoxical anti-collectivist notion of solidarity. All three types coexisted in the discourse but there were changes over time as the first one was clearly dominant in the early phase of the pandemic and later competed with the second and third.

In the closer analysis of these three main types, it becomes clear that none of the identified understandings of intergenerational solidarity simply corresponds to a clear-cut and self-contained conceptual definition or an explicit theoretical conception. Instead, each of them seems to represent a complex 'thick concept' that encapsulates a whole bundle of much further reaching and more encompassing assumptions regarding anthropology and social ontology. For example, these may include a specific view of the individual as a vulnerable and dependent creature in need of care and support, or as a resilient and autonomous agent in charge of him- or herself; or a picture of society as a strong primordial collective based on deeply rooted bonds and shared values or rather as a free, purposeful association of independent and self-interested individuals.

In analogy to Kuhn's (1970) use of the concept in the theory of science, these bundles of underlying assumptions could be termed 'moral paradigms': a kind of basic model of the moral world that defines the essential features of moral agents and the fundamental constitution of morally relevant relationships and interactions, and thus helps to shape our conceptual understandings and moral argumentations. These moral paradigms are not to be confused with a system of explicit normative premises from which a specific conception of intergenerational solidarity can be logically derived. Rather, such conceptions themselves seem to point to more comprehensive and largely implicit moral and political worldviews that lend plausibility to concrete normative arguments and judgments. For example, the moral paradigm of a family whose members are irretrievably connected by close and asymmetrical relations of affection and care suggests a different understanding of intergenerational solidarity than the paradigm of a contract which free and equal partners can enter or leave on a voluntary basis.

Against this backdrop, a media discourse analysis of intergenerational solidarity in leading newspaper articles during the Coronavirus-pandemic not just highlights the ambiguous and at times controversial publicistic uses of a topical moral and political buzzword. It also appears as a promising starting point for gaining insights into prominent perspectives on the fundamental moral constitution of

contemporary society and its (re-)negotiation in light of incisive crises and disruptive developments that carry the potential to change moral views and moral reasoning (Cappelen et al. 2021). Such an analysis can help reconstruct how these societies think about themselves, their elementary building blocks and constitutive normative structures and resources, and the foundations of social cohesion as well as legitimate political agency. At the same time, it also allows us to identify, interpret and criticize elements of this web of beliefs from the point of view of a normative moral and political philosophy with regard to their coherence, persuasiveness, and acceptability. This facilitates conceptual clarifications and normative discussions which can be relevant for the public deliberation of impending challenges of generational relations.

Regarding the idea of intergenerational solidarity as *communal care*, for example, the distinction between young 'subjects' and old 'objects' of solidarity calls for critical consideration. First, the underlying stereotypes of a special neediness of old age may raise sympathy for the precarious situation of *some* older individuals but can also lead to a form of ageism, be it depreciative or benevolent (Meisner 2021; Ng, Indran, and Liu 2022; Vervaecke and Meisner 2021). Indeed, the resurgence of such age stereotypes was frequently discussed in the course of the pandemic (Ayalon et al. 2021; Fraser et al. 2020; Pelizäus and Heinz 2020; Previtali, Allen, and Varlamova 2020). Given the heterogeneity of the older population, such stereotypical images appear inappropriate and can effectively undermine the autonomy and social standing of senior citizens. There is the risk of a "paradoxic inversion" (Honneth and Sutterlüty 2011; own translation) when appeals to solidarity with 'the old' ultimately result in the othering, stigmatization, and exclusion of old age as feeble, inferior, and dependent. Moreover, one-sided appeals to solidarity with older persons may also neglect the specific vulnerabilities of children and adolescents and could be seen as a problematic responsibilization of younger generations. This became particularly clear in the aftermath of the pandemic when the costs of infection control measures for the mental health and social wellbeing of younger people moved to the center of public attention and were critically discussed in the face of further demands to close schools and recreational facilities in the context of an impending energy crisis due to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Thus, the pandemic made clear that solidaristic discourses' inherent potential for bias, discord, and polarization needs critical reflection (Stjernswärd and Glasdam 2021).

In the approach of intergenerational solidarity as *mutual support* between generations, the underlying notion of a 'community of fate' between older and younger people deserves critical consideration. First, although this approach expresses a decidedly egalitarian perspective, it is in danger of neglecting social inequalities within the postulated group. Despite the idea that the burdens of the crisis must be distributed in a fair way, the relevant standard of fairness is not specified. Without

a clear standard, however, existing inequalities may be reinforced and new ones created. Secondly, an intransitive idea of solidarity within a group always raises the question of who belongs to this group and under what conditions (Ellerich–Groppe 2022). Thus, also regarding the Coronavirus-pandemic, solidarity could be "used as a social-diagnostic lens to focus on and criticize problematic exclusions caused by current political developments" (Dübgen, Kersting, and Reder 2022). This also touches upon the aspect of the normative status of solidarity: The recognition of basic needs and the protection of fundamental human rights should not just be a question of solidarity that ultimately depends on an individual's membership in a particular group, but a matter of universal normative standards of human dignity and justice. This also applies to ongoing debates about the future of social security systems and the right to healthcare for older people, or about the duty to counteract climate change in order to preserve acceptable living conditions for future generations (Lewis 2017; Page 2006). In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that intergenerational solidarity is only "[o]ne of many perspectives of intergenerational relationships" (Roodin 2011).

With regard to the approach that frames the responsible exercise of individual freedom as an indirect form of intergenerational solidarity, especially the position of the subject of solidarity raises ethical questions. At its center is the idea of a free, autonomous individual that may be loosely connected to society but perceives this society primarily as a framework condition facilitating his or her own freedom. The underlying ideal of autonomy places high demands on the mature and self-dependent individual that can appear challenging, especially for those who are ill-equipped for meeting such sophisticated requirements. Furthermore, the ideal of a largely unencumbered self has been subject to continued philosophical critique, especially addressing the question of whether the value of the community is appropriately considered in such approaches (e.g., Sandel 1984). Eventually, the idea of an indirect or secondary solidarity could undermine the value of solidarity itself. More than in the other approaches, values of care and solidarity are at risk of being neglected and degraded to merely instrumental elements in the moral economy of a liberal society. This risk is also discussed in debates on the 'responsibilization of aging' in light of neoliberal governmentality that call for a critical reflection of the hidden societal functions and framework conditions of contemporary active and productive aging policies (Schweda and Pfaller 2020).

Overall, the concept of moral paradigms of intergenerational solidarity can thus provide the basis for a closer and in-depth ethical analysis that elaborates and examines the underlying ideational background assumptions of common moral and political claims and positions in contemporary public debates. In this vein, the concept can also serve as a conceptual bridge between ethical theorizing and the experience-based moral knowledge and competence of lay people. Thus, it also

offers connections to approaches in empirically informed and pragmatist ethics "that highlight that lay people's normative reasoning should be taken seriously when exploring ethical concerns" (Lucivero et al. 2022). Furthermore, by broadening the ideational background of notions of intergenerational solidarity, the concept of moral paradigms can also provide a critical perspective on the category 'generation' itself and its entanglement with other morally relevant aspects. This comprises the question of how intra- and intergenerational relations can be balanced and how the concept 'generation' intersects with other social categories such as class or gender (on the crisis as an amplifier of social and gender inequalities, cf. e.g., the summary in Ohlbrecht and Jellen 2021). This may also help to understand, when an intergenerational perspective is really helpful to understand moral conflicts and when it runs the risk to conceal other, more fundamental moral questions, such as socioeconomic inequalities (Butterwegge 2009).

Our study has a number of methodological limitations that give reason for further research. Thus, our sample only comprised leading newspapers, which may imply a certain age and educational bias, and should therefore be supplemented by analyses of other media, such as tabloids and social media, but also other arenas of the public discourse like the parliamentary debate (cf., e.g., Börner and Sasse-Zeltner 2023). Our analysis also primarily concentrated on the content of notions of intergenerational solidarity in the public media discourse so that further research should take a closer look at concrete actors and pertinent social positions, constellations, and power structures. It should especially address the question of which narratives and justifications are applied in the discourse as well as "which political and cultural articulations are played out in an attempt to establish hegemonic formations" (Henderson and Hilton 2018, 373; on narratives cf. also Ellerich-Groppe and Schweda [forthcoming]). Furthermore, the exclusive focus on the German discourse makes it difficult to distinguish generalizable insights from national specificities and therefore should be complemented by international comparative studies, for example, comparisons of the relevance of solidarity in general (cf., e.g., Voicu et al. 2021) or of pandemic narratives and policy responses (e.g., Narlikar and Sottilotta 2021). Overall, the qualitative design of our study only provides limited insights into quantitative relations and proportions of public positions and therefore should be complemented by broader quantitative research (e.g., Zimmermann, Buyx, and McLennan 2023).

Our analysis explores the variety and heterogeneity of notions of solidarity between generations in the public media discourse about the Coronavirus-pandemic. In particular, it highlights the rich ideational backgrounds that shape these notions and lend them intellectual depth and intuitive moral plausibility. The closer empirical and ethical examination of these 'moral paradigms' of intergenerational solidarity is not just a dutiful historical exercise of coming to terms with a

complicated chapter of our recent past. By helping to clarify fundamental ideas of the moral constitution and fabric of contemporary societies, it also has significance for the deliberative self-reflection and democratic decision-making of these societies in the face of impending future crises. Indeed, in their critical discussion of the "unreciprocated solidarity" of the young during the Coronavirus-crisis, the German Ethics Council emphasized the enduring relevance of the controversy that "does not only apply to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, but to any crisis whose management affects society as a whole. […] This also holds true for the current energy supply crisis due to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and, in the middle and long term, especially for dealing with the global climate crisis" (German Ethics Council 2022, 4).

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Appendix

PRISMAE: Codebook for the ethical analysis

Last updated: 10.11.2021

Methodological remark: The ethical concepts brought to bear in the material are not necessarily articulated in moral-philosophical terminology and their conceptual implications cannot be identified without further interpretation. This codebook is intended to provide the basis for an initial overview of the material in which passages for more in-depth, nuanced ethical analyses can be filtered out.

The following applies to all codes: Initially, the texts are to be coded broadly, including sufficient context in order to facilitate working with the individual text passages in the detailed analysis. As a general rule, codes are applied to passages of at least one sentence. Furthermore, coding is conducted aspect by aspect. This means that a new code is assigned for each additional aspect. The respective coded aspect is noted in a memo. Working hypotheses for initial interpretations are also noted in memos.

Code	Remarks	Subcode (if applicable)	Remarks
Speaker position	Text passages that provide information about the respective position of the speaker are coded this way.		
Solidarity	Any text passage in which a reference to solidarity is made is coded this way. The concept should be understood broadly here, as outlined by Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller and Schweda 2021. (Keywords include, e. g., community, sense of community, belonging, connection, standing up for each other, connectedness)	**Soli-subject** **Soli-object** **Soli-contribution** **Soli-identification**	
Responsibility	Any text passage in which the responsibilities of different persons or groups are addressed is coded this way. The concept should be understood broadly here, as outlined by Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller and Schweda 2021. (Keywords include, e. g., need to, could, should, may, guilt)		
Relation(ship) of actors	Any text passage in which the relation between different people or groups of people is addressed is coded this way.	**Duty/obligation**	A duty or obligation is discussed.
		Dependency	The degree of dependency between one or more individuals/groups is described. This includes different degrees of dependency (dependence, interdependence, independence).

Code	Remarks	Subcode (if applicable)	Remarks
		Reciprocity	The relationship between one or more individuals/groups is described as reciprocal or non-reciprocal.
		Symmetry	Text passages in which the symmetry or asymmetry of a relation is discussed are coded this way.
Moral concepts	Any text passages that refer to further moral concepts are coded this way (especially if they represent values and norms that could represent the normative goal of solidarity or that may provide the basis for responsibility). (cf. also the relational model in Ellerich-Groppe, Schweda, and Pfaller 2020; Ellerich-Groppe, Pfaller and Schweda 2021)	**Freedom**	
		Care	In contrast to the code 'Well-being' as the aim of an action/the content of a responsibility, this code refers to the corresponding attitude of actors.
		Justice/fairness	
		Well-being/welfare	In contrast to the code 'Care' as the attitude of actors, this code refers to the corresponding aim of an action/content of a responsibility.
		Sustainability	
		(Ideas of a) **Good Life**	
		Fundamental rights/rights	
		Dignity	

Code	Remarks	Subcode (if applicable)	Remarks
Moral paradigms	Any text passage pointing to moral paradigms is coded this way. Such passages provide the starting point for subsequent detailed analyses and are ideally annotated during the coding process with a memo explaining why they were coded accordingly.	**e. g., charity, social contract, etc.**	
Time	Any text passages revealing different temporal frames of reference are coded this way. (Keywords: too early, too late, in time)		

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