"Exploring the concept of Responsability : Legal, Etical, and Social Dimentions"

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Abstract: *This article explores the relationship between the concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and responsibility. It begins by defining the notion of responsibility and then analyzes its link with social issues. A symmetrical link between CSR and responsibility is established, followed by a study of consumers' responsibilities towards different stakeholders. Responsibility is described as the situation of a person who must react to a reality and accept the consequences of his or her actions, encompassing both civil responsibility, which implies an obligation to make reparation, and moral responsibility, which concerns the conscious actions of an individual.*
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I. Introductions

The concept of responsibility is both complex and multidimensional, encompassing legal, ethical and social aspects that shape our understanding of individual and collective obligations in various contexts. In law, responsibility is often associated with reparation for damage caused, whether civil or criminal, while at the moral level, it questions the choices and values that drive our actions. In an increasingly interconnected world, this notion takes on particular importance, particularly within companies, where social and environmental responsibility (CSR) becomes essential. The article therefore explores the different facets of responsibility, emphasizing the connection between legal and ethical dimensions, as well as the impact of consumer choices on society and the environment. Through this analysis, we will see how individuals and companies can navigate their legal obligations, ethical values and social expectations, while contributing to sustainable and responsible development.

1. The multiple meanings of the concept "Responsibility":

In the broadest sense, responsibility specifies "the situation of the person who must react to a reality and the person accepts and suffers the consequences of his actions" (Orsoni.J et al, 2004). Thus, "civil liability" agrees with the obligation to repair, to the extent and in the form prescribed by law, damage caused to others. Moral responsibility, punishable or not by law, applies to the situation of a conscious person with regard to acts that he has recently accepted, or even more wanted.

The concept of responsibility is anchored in the academic world of legal sciences. It is it or rather its definitions and the debates that arise from it will be the subject of this section. We will also try to bring together the legal aspect of responsibility and its ethical aspect.

1.1 The legal aspect of liability

The concept of liability seems today to be frozen in its traditional legal usage. In civil law, liability is determined by the obligation to repair the damage that a person has caused by their actions as well as by their negligence or imprudence. In criminal law:

Liability is determined by the obligation to bear the penalty. However, it is beyond the semantic field of the response verb (of, to) that we must seek the fundamental concept of liability. In fact, the concept of liability is closely linked to the semantic field of the verb "to attribute responsibility". It is through this relationship that we understand how the concept of responsibility exercised in the legal sense is identified with the sense of attribution of moral responsibility. Originally, the concept of attribution was based on the need to attribute an event to its agent. Then, the notion of attribution gave way to that of punishment, that is to say the obligation to repair the damage or to bear the penalty. It is from this evolution, from attribution to punishment, from punishment to fault, that the concept of responsibility was born. At this stage, the notion of responsibility only concerns the guilty author. We note that the attention is shifting from the supposed author of the damage to the victim, who suffers the damage allowing him to claim compensation : one is no less responsible for something

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than for someone. It is this shift towards the victim that makes possible a change in understanding towards the concept of liability without fault. Indeed, in contemporary times, the need to consider this new dimension of responsibility is felt, while the notions of solidarity, risk and security gradually replace the notion of fault: the notion of solidarity imposes "The need to execute". For this reason, Engel describes this evolution as a process from the management of personal failures to the social management of risks.

1.2 The ethical aspect of responsibility

Hans Jonas (1998) shows that we cannot limit ourselves to a legal understanding of the principle of responsibility. On the contrary, the concept of morality is becoming increasingly important in the concept of responsibility. For example, what we believe we are entitled to expect from a company, that is, what we attribute to its scope of "social responsibility", is more important than responsibility strictly authorizes it to assume. A moral principle is a purely formal principle that does not directly prescribe any content. It is others who specify the contours of responsibility, and you must be prepared to assume your responsibilities before them. Thus, the concept of responsibility, understood in a moral sense, imposes new constraints: being prepared to make concrete decisions in front of those we love, accepting the conflicts they create, accepting "responsibility".

We can thus see that the contemporary notion of responsibility is a split between lawand morality. H. Jonas's (1998) interest in modern technology and his insistence on transforming the excessive promises of technological progress into threats make it necessary to demand a new ethics capable of mastering the dangers of technology. Indeed, the increasing number of threats to life on Earth raises the fundamental question :

- given the recognized responsibilities of human beings towards our fellow human beings, should we not generate thoughts of greater responsibilities?
- What obligations do we really have towards the beyond?
- How can we create an ethics that makes humans responsible for the permanence and quality of their own species, as they are for all life that permeates the face of the planet?

2. The social in relation to responsibility

Responsibility is imposed first on another person, while the word "social" assumes other entities than the subject: because of this symbiotic relationship, society remains a general term when it is integrated into the entity "enterprise"

It may be that the concept of responsibility is so complex because it is unimaginable outside the social sphere. Because there is responsibility only because there is an Other first (which can also be realized through nature in general, the Other designates any entity other than the subject) we find ourselves responsible for the Other. Finally, the notion of responsibility is part of a broader field, that of justice. However, debates on justice are framed in cities. Aristotle saw the city as a social whole, harmonious and ordered, inseparable from justice.

Similarly, a little later, Cicero argues that the public cause must be the cause of the entire nation. "Justice teaches us that we must consider the interests of all humanity, give each what he deserves and not take what belongs to others." Some people may wonder about the meaning of the adjective "social" when talking about social responsibility. First of all, it can be understood as the desire to improve living conditions, including the material situation of members of society and companies. "Social" would therefore be a translation of the desire to reduce this conflict and organize individual support on a solidarity basis. Today, the term "social" no longer only designates social classes, but its definition extends to society as a whole without distinction of individual categories. This study examines the term "social" in its broadest sense. For us, the term designates all areas of activity of a company that differ from purely economic activity. For this reason, the general term "social", which is often imposed on companies, encompasses various issues such as internal social practices, social practices within cities and environmental practices.

Indeed, there is increasing talk of corporate social and environmental responsibility. This additional name is very revealing of the current perception of the company to put ecology at the heart of its responsibility policy. Increasingly, companies are seeking to move away from traditional controls and focus on creating three added values: economic, social and environmental.

This environmental management is a means of creating value for companies and a source of innovation. It goes beyond a current issue to become a real strategic issue. More importantly, it creates sustainable added value for public companies and initiates a new logic to ensure the sustainability of companies. In a more general sense, CSR emerges from the harmonious development of three interdependent dimensions:

- The economic component is linked to the creation of wealth and the improvement of material living conditions.
- The social component includes the areas of health, education, housing, employment, intra- and intergenerational justice and the prevention of social exclusion.
- The ecological component is concerned with the conservation of the environment, species, natural and energy resources.

2.1 CSR and CSR are two symmetrical terms:

❖ **Who are the stakeholders for CSR ?**

Based on stakeholder theory, which is the foundation of corporate social responsibility, parallels can be drawn with CSR. Freeman (84) and Carroll (89) have made this theory one of the foundations of CSR. Using this paradigm, CSR responsibilities can be effectively analyzed. There are two types of CSR issues.

Either business-oriented or ethically oriented. A utilitarian view of "personal profit orientation" and a prescriptive view of "ethical orientation". In other words, managers are torn between "instrumental" behavior, which aims at goals and results, and "mental behavior", which targets one's own values and does not consider the fatality or determinism of events. In fact, in practice, managers and companies oscillate between two moral extremes (Orsoni.J (1989)).

A "personal profit oriented" view would consider the interests of stakeholders as a condition of the consumer's interest. His willingness to make an effort for his stakeholders depends on whether he overcomes the excesses of the consumer society or overcomes the food crisis… This direction is for the profits of companies, and here It is part of the theory of means that obliges the consumer to implement a response, adapting to the expectations of the stakeholders. The "ethical" vision focuses on the moral obligations of consumers.

In the model of Carroll (1979), which proposes to reconcile the two perspectives "business" and "ethics", the CSR can be translated as "self-interest" or "ethics". Archie B. Carroll (1979) developed a model linked to the Anglo-Saxon world represented by a pyramid with four levels. : Economy (Level 1), Legal (Level 2), Ethics (Level 3), Philanthropy (Level 4). Application of the analysis of Carroll (1979) to consumers:

➢ **1st level:** Economic responsibility: Profitable. At the economic level, consumers buy goods and services that meet their needs at a lower cost while taking into account social and environmental aspects.

➢ **2nd level:** Legal obligations (compliance with laws, respect for the rules of the game). Regarding legal aspects, consumers act within the proposed legal framework and reject companies that do not respect the law.

➢ **3rd level:** Ethical responsibility (obligation to do what is right and fair, just and equitable to avoid harm). The modalities, norms and societal expectations considered fair are part of ethical consumption.

➢ **4th level**: Philanthropic responsibility (being a good citizen); Finally, the philanthropy level represents the set of actions undertaken to become a citizen consumer.

However, Carroll does not take into account the interactions between the different levels (for example the positive impact of philanthropy on economic performance). The four levels of responsibility overlap and often contradict each other. Achieving these values depends on consumers' awareness of social responsibility and taking into account budgetary constraints. Behavioral reactions can be significant. Consumers systematically engage in the purchasing process or symbolically blame large companies for their fraudulent behavior while ignoring their own behavior. Like CSR, CSR has different geometries (societal, social, ecological and environmental) and a multi-level coverage (collective and personal). It is the complementary and irreducible logic of discourse (inferential discourse) and action (substantive action), leaving a gray and fuzzy area around the evaluation questions (the actions and principles that inspire the action). The multi-party agency relationship (Hill and Jones, 1992) does not apply to consumers who are not supervised by any of the parties. Moreover, the benefits of CSR do not always outweigh the costs, and the benefits of CSR cannot be measured in monetary terms, but rather in terms of the quality of consumption. It is about understanding the purchasing process and responding to the citizen role of the consumer. Although little attention has been paid in the management literature to the obstacles and difficulties of the return on investment of CSR, it is also true that CSR clearly has costs (financial costs, search for information on products, unavailability of ethical products (e.g. you can't get a good product, you don't have your own favorites, etc.). But there are also the risks of CNSR (Non-Socially Responsible Consumption), aiming for the lowest price regardless of responsibility, exist:

▪ Environmental risks and work accidents seen as resulting from the desire to reduce costs to obtain the lowest prices.

▪ Risk of social conflict due to demands for wage reductions. This means that the product may be withdrawn from the market for a certain period of time.

▪ Political or social risks related to health problems, poverty, etc. Consumption choices can lead to the poverty of many employees in the chain and negatively impact the consumer's environment.

2.2 Consumers face their own responsibilities:

Consumers are now aware of the challenges of sustainable development. Their reactions to irresponsible corporate behavior have been widely studied. However, the ambiguity of its designation has often been concealed. Research on the concept of CSR tends to be more or less supplanted by research on consumers' behavioral responses to responsible corporate behavior. Thus, CSR uses its purchasing power to protest against certain corporate practices. For Smith (1987, 1990, 1996) boycotts are the most obvious example of CSR, followed by Kosinets and Handelmann (1998), Friedman (1985, 1991, 1996), Sen, Gülhan-Kanli and Mowitz (2001), And then John Klein follows. (2003), Klein and John Smith (2004). Growing consumer concerns about

social and environmental issues are leading to new forms of consumption and are part of an increasingly sophisticated and growing protest movement (Fournier, 1998).

Citizen or "engaged" consumption. Companies have quickly understood the risks of giving socially responsible consumers a voice and are now more cautious.

In the 1990s, Nike became the target of numerous allegations, including the exploitation of third-world children and the living and working conditions of employees in "sweat shops." Individuals combine their public roles as private persons with their roles as consumers in the context of purchases (Baron, 2003). Shaw and Newhom (2002) argue that ethical consumers are responsible for their own discussions about awareness of social and environmental impacts" Brooker (1976), such as sustainable development or buying green products (Berger and Corbin, 1992). Jensen (1998) talks about "political consumption" from the Danish reactions to Shell during the sinking of the Brent Spar platform in the North Sea in 1995 and the French nuclear tests in the Pacific to determine the "political consumer". Social responsibility is individual responsibility are consumption choices to achieve collective well-being (Bisaillon, 2005). People who demonstrate social responsibility actively participate in collective action to enforce their rights. Just like voting, to express your opinion.

On the other hand, group purchases of certain products deemed fair, called "boycotts" (Friedman, 1996), are less common than boycotts. The negative form of CSR is actually the most common.

Rather than supporting responsible companies, people are more likely to refuse to buy certain products from companies they perceive as irresponsible (Mohr, Webb, and Harris 2001). Corporate social responsibility initiatives have a much smaller impact on consumers (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001; Thiery and Jolibert 2003; Swaen 2004). Consumer choices based on perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Carrigan and Attala 2001; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001) are also less common.

Another form of CSR is consumption reduction (Shaw and Newholm 2002). For Etziono (1988), these are moral commitments that contradict consumers' needs. The desire to consume less is a form of environmentally friendly consumption, described by Leonard-Barton (1981) as "a lifestyle aimed at maximizing control over one's daily activities and reducing use and dependence".

Overall, consumers feel invested with a certain responsibility and social obligations in the face of the irresponsibility of certain organizations (Putnam and Muck, 1991). However, this risks penalizing irresponsible companies and can discourage the efforts of companies acting for society. There is a tendency to systematically reject social and environmental responsibilities on society rather than considering their own responsibilities, as evidenced by the refusal of plastic shopping bags in supermarkets, led by retailers. The customer himself remains passive. In fact, the purchasing process depends on the level of social responsibility of the company (Mohr, Webb, Harris, 2001). He rarelytakespersonalresponsibility, heemphasizes.

The socially responsible consumer recognizes his or her ability to change the environment and express social values (Chebat, 1986). However, entrusting consumers with a mission to protect people and their environment is not without risks. We do not have all the information we need to make rational decisions. Are we now better placed to find a compromise between short-term gratification and protecting broader environmental interests? And at the mercy of murder squads and prostitution, will socially responsible consumers really take all the cards in hand to produce coherent policies? Depending on the level of conviction consumers have that the power they hold through their own actions can help them effectively protect people and their environment, consumers feel connected to their true mission and aligned with their beliefs. The more passionate a person is about their choice, the less external factors influence their preferences. Each consumer has great power, but is generally unaware that his or her purchases are intrinsically based on economic criteria (Dickinson and Hollander, 1991). His or her propensity to act in favor of his or her environment also depends on the hierarchy he or she establishes with his or her stakeholders. Behavioral and non-behavioral responses depend heavily on the development of a sense of social responsibility. Consumer rationality is limited by the information available to consumers, the additional costs of socially responsible consumption, and the manipulation of corporate seduction.

II.   Conclusion

The notion of responsibility, whether legal, ethical or social, is of capital importance in our contemporary society. Through the analysis of the different dimensions of responsibility, we have noted that it is not limited to legal obligations or ethical standards, but that it is part of a broader framework of social justice and solidarity. Companies, in particular, are now called upon to integrate social and environmental responsibility into their business model, thus meeting the growing expectations of consumers and society. Furthermore, the role of the consumer is evolving, moving from a simple economic actor to an engaged participant, aware of the impact of their choices. This paradigm shift underlines the importance of education for responsibility which transcends simple economic considerations to embrace a more global vision of collective well-being. In short, responsibility must be seen as a dynamic process, where everyone, whether individual or company, is encouraged to take into account not only their own interests, but also those of others and the planet. It is in this

quest for balance between personal and collective responsibility that we will be able to build a more just and sustainable future, where everyone's actions contribute to improving living conditions and preserving our environment.

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