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ONTOLOGICAL FUNDAMENTS OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN ACTIONS

Foreword

In this paper on the nature of the human being's responsibility for his actions I deliberately omit the controversy surrounding the determinism/indeterminism problem. To be sure, the free-will issue plays a prominent and very important role in any models of human responsibility and is the most frequently disputed issue in this discussion, for the human being is responsible insofar as his decisions can be said to be free. Though no less important, the interconnection between the subject, his action and its consequences on the other hand receives less attention, and yet – though it is no less important: the way in which this interconnection is conceived can have weighty repercussions in practical life, and unfortunately not all approaches are appropriate or adequate.

1. Explication of the Terms Deed and Responsibility

A *deed* is the accidental (non-essential) dynamic expression of a conscious substantial subject, i.e., of a *person*. We speak of a deed when an intentional and purposeful influence is brought to bear on some other substance (person or thing). A synonym for deed is *action*,

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the difference being that a deed can be predicated only of persons whereas an action can also be attributed to things. In what follows the two terms will be used interchangeably.

A deed arises as the result of a freely-willed decision of a subject. Physiologically considered a deed involves the expression of the potential energy at the disposal of an organism stored in the muscles of a given part of subject's body as kinetic energy. Once a sufficient amount of muscular activity has been exerted, the psychic stimulus has fulfilled its function; and the brain receives the signal from the senses controlling the activity that the effect of the activity coincides with the agent's intention. An automatic, unconscious action is not a deed, and the mere attraction or repulsion occurring in physical force-fields is neither a deed nor an action. An action involves a change on both sides of the relation: a diminution of energy in the active terminus, and an addition of energy to the passive terminus. St. Thomas Aquinas employs ontological language in this regard and expounds a twofold conception: The human being is both 1) *suppositum*, i.e., a substance bearing his deeds as accidents, and also 2) a subject, in light of his capacity for deeds.²

Responsibility is an indissoluble link between a deed, including its effects, and the human being who is its originator and source. T. Ślipko employs two terms in this connection: *accountability* and *responsibility*. Accountability here is „the causative dependence of the accomplished deed upon the human being who has accomplished it, in light of which the deed belongs to him and can be said to be his property.“ [...] „Responsibility in this context means just such a proprietorship in the subject, thanks to which the good or bad inherent in his accomplished deed becomes an ingredient in the moral content of his personality, with the result that he bears the consequences of the deed.“³ In the term *accountability* we find the causal-existential aspect stressed: in the term *responsibility*, the specific content. What Ślipko calls „accountability“ will constitute the focus of our inquiry in the discussion which follows.

Going further, we can now proceed to distinguish *formal responsibility* from *material (or contentual) responsibility*. Formal responsibility involves the causal attribution of deeds performed; material or contentual responsibility concerns the object(s) of the deed. The former refers to our own action or that of another, insofar as that other's action depends on us (parents, for example, are responsible for the actions of their children). The latter refers to the specific issues involved at stake,

² S. Th. I, q. 3, a. 6; q. 29, a. 3.

³ T. Ślipko, *Zarys etyki ogólnej [Compendium of General Ethics]*, Kraków 1984, p. 386.

for being a subject includes the capacity to take one's object(s) into consideration.⁴ Let it be noted that the weightier the effects of an action, the greater the material responsibility. If for example a deed brings about an alteration in a substance which however is not in itself a functional whole, and if its state before or after the deed is of a matter of relative indifference for life, then responsibility for such an action is not great; – an example would be the splitting of a stone with a hammer. If on the other hand a deed handicaps or even precludes the development of a given life-system, the responsibility is greater. When the object of such a deed is a human being, a being endowed with particular dignity, the responsibility becomes weighty indeed.

Yet however interesting the issues involved in material or contentual responsibility may be, our concern here will be with formal responsibility as described above.

2. The Link Between Deed and Subject

On what does an action depend in the course of its performance? On an act of the will, a decision? Or on the *person* himself, who constitutes the center of all decisions and is thus the locus of all conduct? The answer is that all these factors can be said to 'cause' the deed: in an immediate way, the decision; mediately and ultimately the 'person'. „From the person flows not only the decision but also the sustaining of it in the course of its realization.”⁵

To be responsible for his deeds, however, the person must remain identical despite all modifications. According to the Thomistic system the ontological grounds for identity in a person is the *soul* as substantial form. It is the soul which organizes matter as a functional whole.

A further condition necessary for personal responsibility is that the person be the source of a given decision, and consequently of its execution. The human being is not simply a kind of strainer through which a steady stream of environmental impulses passes, some of which depositing a residue, while others leaving no trace behind them. Karol Wojtyła distinguishes two moments here: the 'happening' within the human being and the acting of the human being. In the former the subject is passive, undergoing some activity whose determinative source

⁴ Hans Jonas, *Zasada odpowiedzialności. Etyka dla cywilizacji technologicznej*. Transl. M. Klimowicz, Kraków 1996, p. 167-171.

⁵ R. Ingarden, *Wykłady z etyki [Lectures on Ethics]*, ed., A Węgrzecki. Warszawa 1989, p. 303.

is other than what he identifies as his 'I'; in the latter the subject experiences himself as a cause, an initiator; his conscious commitment comes into play. „Acting as such depends for its presence on the human being; it is he who initiates it and maintains it in its course.”[...] „There is a clearly experienced causal link between a person and his act as a consequence of which each person, – each concrete human „I“ must acknowledge his act as the effect of his own agency and in this sense acknowledge it as *his own*, and furthermore, in view of the moral character of his act, he must acknowledge it as falling within the domain of his responsibility.”⁶

Wojtyła limits his discussion to a phenomenological description of the experience of causality, interpreting ethical causality from a Thomistic point of view. Today however, as technology, and especially information technology, expands at such a rapid pace, the discussion has taken a further turn: To what extent can the psychical dimension of the human being have an impact upon the material sphere where the law of the conservation of energy is operative? „Can something *de novo* be added to an already existing sum of physical values, – something which cannot be explained internally, something which is not already intrinsic or inherent within the physical system itself?”⁷ If so, how do we then safeguard the law of the conservation of energy? As a way of explaining the psychical influence of the human being upon matter Hans Jonas puts forth a the following hypothesis as a way of explaining the psychical influence of the human being upon matter: The relation *consciousness-world* is two-directional. The action of consciousness upon the world is based on *information* – that is, on the influence of the world upon consciousness. In his activities then the conscious subject is both passive and active. Receptivity and spontaneity, experience and understanding, feeling and willing are linked.

Taking this as a departure point, we can construct a model of a freely deciding and acting subject. On the 'edge', as it were, of the physical dimension of our brain there is something like a porous wall making osmosis possible, and on the other side there is a different dimension or order of things – a psychical domain. The two-directional interpenetration between the orders is so balanced, that the law of the conservation of energy is left intact. A seemingly minor impulse from the psychic side can bring about vast effects within the physical system, and vice versa: an insignificant piece of information from without can initiate an immensely important idea. The psychic domain is ruled by

⁶ K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, [The Acting Person], Kraków 1985², p. 87-88.

⁷ Hans Jonas, op cit, p. 382.

laws other than those which prevail in the physical realm. In the former, understanding, meaning, intentions and values are determinative. This is where free decisions are taken.⁸

This model allows us to reconcile our incontrovertible human conviction as to the causal effectiveness of our „I“ with the physical principle of determinism and the conservation of energy.⁹

In our present reflections however our chief concern is with the nature of the link between an act, together with its effects, and the acting subject *after* the activity as such has ceased. What is the state of affairs once the act's effect has been produced? Can we still speak of a connection between the act and the consequence? Or is the link broken? And if it is still intact, in what does this link now consist? How these questions are answered will be decisive for arriving at a solution to the ontological problem of responsibility for deeds.

Now after an act has been performed we might describe the situation as follows: Our own muscular energy has been transferred to other substances which has left them either deeply (substantially) changed or superficially (accidentally) changed. The acting subject has expended and thus lost some of his energy. The kinetic experience has been registered in his memory along with sensory impressions of the effect of his act upon its object. The entropic process has intensified within the system. An irreversible operation has taken place owing to which the effects of the act have been definitively achieved.¹⁰

If then the act as such has ceased and there remains only 1) a human being whose energy resources have been somewhat diminished and 2) another substance (human being or thing) modified by that act, why does ordinary language persist in linking *subject* with *act*? Why does common linguistic practice refer to responsibility for an act and its effect, though the act as such has long since been terminated? Why for example do we speak of a painting and its painter, or of a piece of music and its composer – as if a connection between the producer of the work and the work itself were still operative, though at the moment the painter is not painting and the composer is not composing? Why have copyright laws been established to protect the rights of an artist

⁸ Ibid., p. 385-386.

⁹ I leave out Jonas's consideration of the freedom of the will in light of indeterminism in quantum physics. For a discussion of the philosophical implications of the so-called orthodox interpretation of quantum theory, see my article in „Forum Philosophicum” 3 (1998), p. 77-95.

¹⁰ Cfr. S. Ziemiański, *Związek argumentu kinetycznego z argumentem entropologicznym* [*The Connexion of the Kinetic Argument with the Entropological one*], „Studia Philosophiae Christianae”, ATK, 7 (1971), p. 288-9.

or author against unauthorized reproduction, and why do we speak of plagiarism when these rights have been transgressed? Why is it reasonable and just when someone receives praise or blame for a given work? And why is a person who has caused damage or injury called a culprit – though the censurable deed is no longer taking place and all that remains of it are its effects and a memory of it?

3. The Utilitarian Solution

In pragmatist systems the concept of responsibility is little more than a convenient means at the disposal of an instance of authority for controlling the actions of individuals and groups, or a pedagogical tool for encouraging positive behavior and discouraging negative behavior, now and in the future. In such an approach an ontological explanation of a link between act and effect is of no interest; the concern is rather with the achievement of a desirable goal. To that end, particular persons or social groups endeavour to exert a prophylactic and/or therapeutic influence on others, making use of a variety of affirmative measures so as to increase the sum-total of behavior deemed to be advantageous. At the same time these persons or groups defend themselves against asocial individuals or criminal elements, making use of procedures to discourage conduct perceived to be as negative. This defense might make an appeal to the reasonability and will of the individual, counting upon a prudent comprehension of the fact that certain actions will cause injury not only to others but to the given individual himself. This defense might also take the form of disciplinary training, brainwashing, or manipulation through other socio-technological methods, with no regard for human dignity. In drastic cases forced inactivity, physical confinement and isolation may be employed.

Such an approach finds its ontological roots in phenomenalism, and is linked to the „ethics without subject” which followed upon the Lockean and Humean denials of substance, whereby ‘the human being’ is a series of experiences following one upon the other, a swarm of phenomena, an instance of statistically repeating events which are nevertheless unaccountable and possessed of no necessity. In this view there is no such thing as ‘nature’; only concrete events can be said to count. Thus one needs to keep an account of pleasures and ills and proceed in such a way as to achieve a balance in favour of the former. The chief consideration in these accounts might be the individual, egotistically considered, or might be the community at large, with which the individual sympathetically identifies himself and which, when benefited, works in turn to the advantage of the individual.

Yet this utilitarian picture of things is generally held to be unsound. The conviction remains that the human being is not only the incidental performer of effects which themselves appear as a temporal-spatial succession of psychical events. The belief persists that the human being is responsible for his acts and their predictable results, both at the time of his action and thereafter; that he is a subject: perduring, definite, conscious, free; that the ontic link between a conscious „I“ and the effect of its freely performed act persists.

4. Religious Traditions

In the Hindu tradition, as well as in Buddhism and Jainism, we meet the conception of a link between a deed and its effects not unlike that described in our section 2 above: the conception of *Karma*. The term derives from the Sanskrit root *kr-*, meaning „to act“. In the *Vedas* the word *Karma* signifies an act of religious worship, specifically a sacrifice believed to conduce to unity with the divine and to guarantee our happiness. The *Vedas* distinguish three kinds of *Karma*: *pratiṣiddha* – a salvific act; *kāmya* – an act performed to fulfill a specific desire; *nitya* – a recurring act, whose performance is obligatory and constitutes a necessary condition for salvation.¹¹ With the Aryan conquest in the sixth century BC and the religious syncretism which followed, the meaning of the term *Karma* underwent a change. *Karma* lost its salvific significance and began on the contrary to be perceived as an obstacle to liberation. The accent fell on the *effects* left by the *Karma*-act – the *vāsāna*, which we can translate as imprints, marks, stamps. *Karma* became linked to the idea of *Samsāra*, the endless round of births and deaths – a term which had already appeared in the *Upanishads*, approximately 1000 BC. The law of *Karma* then came to rest on three fundamental premises: 1) The series of rebirths is causally linked, such that *Karma* is inherited; 2) the *consequences* of good or evil acts are ethically different: a good act has a meritorious effect – *dharma*; an evil act has a blameworthy effect – *adharma*; 3) reincarnation is irrefutable.¹² At the moment of death the *vāsāna* accumulate in the human being's memory, i.e., in the human being's material consciousness (*citta*), which after his death passes into another human being or into an

¹¹ Cfr. H. Von Glasenapp, *Die Philosophie der Inder*, Stuttgart 1974³, p. 146.

¹² Cfr. L. Podzorski, *Prawo karma [The Law of Karma]*. Wrocław 1993; also F. Tokarz, *Z filozofii indyjskiej. Kwestie wybrane [Selected Issues in Indian Philosophy]*, I-II. Lublin 1990.

animal. These *vāsāna* determine the body, the life-span, and the general nature of future experiences (agreeable or disagreeable). The reborn human being receives three kinds of *Karma*: 1) *prārabdha* – ‘fresh’ *Karma*, in which is contained the destiny of this particular being; 2) *samcita* – the cumulative *Karma* resulting from the deeds of one's former existence(s); 3) *āgamin* – future-oriented *Karma*. In a liberated human being, a *jīvanmukta*, only *prārabdha* is still operative; the other two kinds have been annihilated.¹³

Different conclusions were drawn from the teachings concerning *Karma* and *Samsāra*. The monastic *Sannyasin* used to abstain from any kind of acts. Devotees who follow the *Bhagavadgita* on the other hand are encouraged to engage in disinterested action; if one cannot refrain from personal desires, then one can still practice *bhakti*, that is, acts of loving devotion and trusting reliance in Krishna who has the power to override the law of *Karma* and bestow his grace upon the human being.¹⁴ The idea of *Karma* was introduced for psychological reasons: the prospect of several lifetimes allows one the hope that sooner or later one will attain salvation. (Considering however the human inclination towards evil one might well doubt that transmigration in itself could offer much hope of a change in this regard.)

In the Christian tradition we find something comparable to *Karma*, though without resorting to a mechanism for delaying a final settlement of the accounts with regard to one's actions. In the light of a singular and unique Last Judgment in the Christian tradition, *responsibility* for one's actions takes on a special weight and seriousness.¹⁵ An ongoing link between a subject and his deeds is thus affirmed. In *Revelations* we read, „Their deeds will follow them”.¹⁶ Now how is that to be understood? After all the deeds are not substances, not independent beings. They won't follow the subject the way chicks follow the mother hen. Do they perhaps ‘follow’ us as marks upon our psyche, or in our memory, or in God's memory? Do they leave engrams upon our surroundings? The text alone does not permit an answer, nor does it explain the nature of the link between a subject and his acts. But whatever else can or cannot be said, that *link* is the necessary condition for a future

¹³ Cfr. König-Waldenfels, *Leksykon religii. Zjawiska – dzieje – idee [Lexicon of Religions: Phenomena – History – Ideas]*, transl. P. Pachciarek, Warszawa 1997, p. 183-184. See also H. Von Glasenapp, *Die Nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1957, p. 118.

¹⁴ Cfr. J. Gonda, *Les Religions de l'Inde, I. Védisme et hindouisme ancien*, Paris 1962, p. 248-253.

¹⁵ „It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement.” (Heb 9: 27).

¹⁶ Revelations 14: 13.

reward or punishment. Christian faith offers the hope of a possible cleansing of one's sins after death – „but only as through fire”.¹⁷

5. Towards a Philosophical Solution

At this point we might attempt a hypothesis as to the relation between an action and its effect. Now actions, inasmuch as they constitute a change, modification or alteration, can be said to have the same aspects as do beings, namely, existential and essential: existential, because in the substance which they affect something new appears and henceforth exists; essential, because the content – the structure or form – of the cause is now replicated in another. We could of course try to follow the trail of the ontic information which has been transferred in the action. This would lead us ever further from the acting agent, following an ever-expanding wave of actions back towards a horizon ever further removed from our subject. However the local movement must be acknowledged as a state (a quality), and it is an action which has called forth the local movement. Thus the acting subject continues to own that movement which exists as the effect of his activity on the plane of existence. Moreover the termination of an activity is only apparent. Though the macroscopic ordered movement ceases, the microscopic random movements of the particles nevertheless perdure as a continuation of the reactions initiated by the human being's act. These movements *in se* are not capable of re-ordering themselves.

A case can also be made for the strict relationship between the content of a cause and the effect of that cause. This is to say that if the content inherent in the human being's action is replicated in the objects towards which it is directed, then it is in principle the same content designed and intended by the acting subject. Thus we can say that an author's concept still belongs to him, regardless of whether the concept is still in his mind or has been transferred 'outside' – i.e., onto paper, marble, computer diskettes or any other material, however different, distinct, and removed in time and space from the concept's creator. The creator cannot repudiate his work because the relation *pattern* – *copy* is real and independent of one's will. Though he sell the rights to his work he remains its originator. This principle holds regardless of the material in which the original structure presently appears or how many copies have now been produced; what counts is its uniqueness and individuality – its testimony, as it were, to its origin and creator.

¹⁷ I Cor 3: 15.

The creator himself is altered by the production of his creation; he is in a sense no longer the same after the work as before. Though the processes of entropy take their toll on his memory, though the information concerning the work he created grow ever fainter, though the work be recalled with satisfaction or with distaste, it nevertheless remains forever his own. The creative activity is a manifestation of his native talents or a witness to his diligence and education. With each production he gains new experience and in this sense too the work leaves its mark on him.

By analogy we might apply these considerations more generally to all acts, good or bad. Even after the cessation of an act it is still attributable to its author. Ślipko describes the link between an action and a subject as follows: „The moral worth of an act permeates the spiritual center of the person performing it and shapes that person internally [...] A process of interior formation is thus at work – the shaping of his moral personality; indeed, in this process the fundamental direction and inner core of his moral personality become manifest.”¹⁸

6. Conclusions

From this conception of responsibility we may draw the following conclusions:

1. Since as *person* the human being is responsible for his actions and their effects he should arrive at his decisions only after much mature reflection. Before acting he needs to run a kind of mental experiment, attempting to achieve a measure of clarity as to the possible consequences of his action. His model should be „Prometheus” – the far-sighted, and not „Epimetheus” – wise only after the damage has been done.

2. One often hears something to the effect that „Evil must be distinguished from the evildoer.”¹⁹ In light however of our considerations

¹⁸ „Odpowiedzialność w świetle etyki chrześcijańskiej” („Responsibility In Light Of Human Ethics”), in: *O odpowiedzialności. Moralny wymiar odpowiedzialności w życiu publicznym. Materiały III Jagiellońskiego Sympozjum Etycznego. (On Responsibility: The Moral Dimension of Responsibility in Public Life)*. Materials of the III. Symposium on Ethics at the Jagiellonian University). Cracow, June 4-5, 1990. Edited J. Pawlina, Cracow 1993, p. 15.

¹⁹ Cfr. G. Vandervelde, *Liberté et création dans l'enseignement de Jean-Paul II*, „Nouvelle Revue Théologique”, 119 (1997) p. 407: „A person takes precedence in importance to all else and should not be evaluated only with respect to his deeds, whether

above this popular wisdom stands revealed as erroneous. For one thing, if we were to consistently apply the principle which underlies it we would need to separate the heroic act from the hero, the sanctity from the saint. But if goodness cannot be considered separately from the person doing good, then evil cannot be bracketed off from the one who perpetrates it. For another thing, if someone consciously and voluntarily intends harm or injury to another then the imagining of it is already blameworthy, for the content of the mental picture is irreconcilable with the inalienable dignity of the other as a person. As a mental picture the offense is still potential and not actual, yet the way to its actualization has already been prepared and might be realized easily enough, in the course of which real damage would be inflicted on the *person* of another human being. Thus we can understand why Christ condemned even the intention and mental enactment of adultery.²⁰ Though in juridical practice the principle *De internis non iudicat praetor* („The judge does not pass judgment on interior acts”) prevails, a wrong intention nevertheless stains a human being morally no less than a wrong deed. In support of that popular saying („Evil must be distinguished from the evildoer”) the analogy of an illness is sometimes employed. The idea is that the doctor distinguishes the patient from the illness, and combats the latter while protecting the former – *ergo* we should combat the fault and protect the one at fault. To me the logic here seems faulty. An illness truly is something other than the person who is suffering from it; there are bacteria or viruses at work which have attacked the human organism; there is too little or too much of a certain substance. A wrongdoing on the other hand permeates the wrongdoer so deeply as to constitute a part of his spirit, manifesting something of his innermost core, the innermost direction of his personality. In this case there can't be a question of quarantining, amputating or extracting one from the other. Only an interior conversion can effect something here: the offending person must reject the offense himself and denounce it as blameworthy. Where censurable habits previously reigned he must strive to implant positive and legitimate ones, leading to actions which would accord with and enhance the dignity of those they will affect. Such a conversion cannot be regarded as if it were simply a washing away of some soil or smudges upon the soul; rather it entails a profound change of heart and attitude.

good or evil. (Not: „You are a liar”, but „You have lied.”) On the other hand a person is judged on the basis of what he himself has done on this earth.”

²⁰ Matt 5: 29.

3. The question arises: Is a human being corrupt or base because one of his deeds is corrupt or base? What if the other deeds he performs at the same time are praiseworthy?

A twofold answer is called for. According to a venerable principle, *bonum ex integra causa, malum e quolibet defectu*. (Something is good when totally good; it is bad when there is any deficiency.) The justness of this principle is unmistakeably revealed in functional or synergetic systems where the breakdown of one part will paralyze the whole system; it's then *all or nothing*. The principle has further applications: A thing can legitimately be called 'clean' only when there is no trace of a stain on it. If even a small spot of mud is in evidence we call it 'soiled'. Similarly a human being becomes somehow 'bad' once the decision to commit a 'bad deed' has been taken, however small the 'bad deed' may appear. But now the second part of our answer takes a more appealing, more clement approach by stressing what is good in the human being, for one grows worse only slowly, step by step. Though a reprehensible act stains his conscience, good attitudes are still present and operative, attitudes which would enable him to abjure the evil he has perpetrated and make amends for it. There is no one who is absolutely and in every respect 'bad'.

4. A voluntary destructive action intended against another human being, leading perhaps even to that person's death, constitutes a grave offense. However, such a deed strikes at its author as well, for he too is a human being, not essentially different from and no less vulnerable than any other, and through his conduct he has tacitly consented to becoming the object of a similarly destructive action himself. In a sense then the perpetrator thus becomes responsible for his own real or potential injury.

5. An authentic and honest repentance is accompanied by the sincere effort as well as the desire to rectify the wrongs which have been done, restoring the injured party to his original state as far as possible. Is such a conversion of heart possible without God's assistance? Philosophy does not settle this issue; theology answers the question in the negative.

7. Recapitulation

In our reflections above we have attempted to show the ontological grounds of responsibility based on elements of classical ontology applied to an interpretation of human behavior. We have seen the importance of carefully considering the circumstances surrounding our potential acts, even those acts of a seemingly playful nature, in a genuine effort to foresee as far as possible their long-range as well as their proximate

effects. Once performed it will not always be possible to control the successive causes which have been set in motion, nor to reverse the possible damages.

Here we have considered only one aspect of responsibility: the link between an action and its effect. We have not taken up the issue of free will or the problem of the moral values which determine an action as 'good' or 'evil', though these are no less essential for ethics. What we have presented here is a hypothesis, a sketch awaiting further discussion.

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ONTOLOGICZNE PODSTAWY ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI ZA CZYNY

Streszczenie

W artykule rozważa się problem związku czynu i jego skutku z podmiotem działającym. Związek ten nazywa się odpowiedzialnością. Ponieważ jednak odpowiedzialność ma przynajmniej dwa aspekty: formalny (przyczynowy) i materialny (treściowy), a pierwszy z nich jest rzadziej analizowany, autor ograniczył się do jego rozważenia. Zwrócił szczególnie uwagę na problem związku czynu z podmiotem działającym po ustaniu działania.

Jednym z warunków odpowiedzialności za czyny jest, by człowiek był prawdziwym źródłem swoich decyzji, tzn. naprawdę działał, a nie był tylko biernym podmiotem, w którym coś się dzieje. Mamy świadomość tego, że jesteśmy autorami naszych czynów. Trudniej jest przedstawić mechanizm oddziaływania naszej sfery psychicznej na świat materialny. Dokonuje się ono za pomocą wpływu minimalnych energii psychicznych wyzwalających potencjał energetyczny naszego organizmu. Zaproponowana przez pragmatystów interpretacja utylitarystyczna rozwiązania problemu odpowiedzialności człowieka za jego czyny jest niewystarczająca. Propozycja religijna odwołująca się do koncepcji karmana nie ma obiektywnego uzasadnienia, co najwyżej psychologiczne. Wiara chrześcijańska mówi o odpowiedzialności za czyny, nie podaje jednak ontologicznego wyjaśnienia związku między czynem i podmiotem.

Z filozoficznego punktu widzenia związek czynu z podmiotem działania posiada aspekt istnieniowy i treściowy. Od strony istnienia czynowi towarzyszy ubytek użytecznej energii w podmiocie działającym, pojawienie się jej zaś w innej osobie lub w przedmiocie, na które się działa. Od strony treści związek ten polega na pozostawieniu w pamięci człowieka śladów tej formy, która została przedmiotowi nadana, ponieważ nie ma akcji bez reakcji. Zarówno czyn zły jak i czyn dobry modyfikują wewnątrz człowieka tak, że staje się on, w zależności od tego co czyni, zły lub dobry.

Autor wyprowadza kilka wniosków ze swego stanowiska: Nie można oddzielać winy od winowajcy. Natomiast istnieje pewna ograniczona możliwość naprawiania wyrządzonego zła. Czyn zły odbija się rykoszetem na jego sprawcy i powoduje w nim skazę moralną. Fakt ten stanowi wezwanie do dokładniejszej refleksji nad konsekwencjami każdego czynu.