Responsibility on the Internet

Aleksandra Budzisz
The Jerzy Kukuczka Academy
of Physical Education in Katowice,
Faculty of Humanistic Foundation of Physical Culture,
Mikołowska 72A, Katowice, Poland
E-mail address: aleksandra@budzisz.com

Abstract

The explanation of the responsibility theme is based on distinctions concerning the physical world and the world of Web. There are theses that claim that the world of the Web exists on equal rights with the physical world. In both realities the context of individuality may be seen from the perspective of existence and presence. The issue of responsibility is based on deliberations of two philosophers – Roman Ingarden and Hans Jonas. Ingarden described its ontological and axiological forms, whereas Jonas explored the issue of the responsibility seen as a vision of the new ethics that results from the needs of technology. Those philosophers made an important distinction between positive responsibility and the responsibility that is based on power and the possibility of fulfilling the positive values and the general idea of a man.

Keywords: Responsibility, Philosophy, Internet.

Existence

The physical world. The physical world is constituted and available for people through the reference to the human body, where relations and cognition have their beginnings. For each individual person existence in the physical world is a border realm of defining their own individuality. It is the individuality that liaises with the sense experiences, and is the source of interpersonal cognition, which has its foundation in physicality. The meaning described by corporeality allows us to reach out to other individuals; when the body moves, the gesture will or will not be noticed. The human body is a physical and mental link to the person's life and its surroundings. Thanks to the physicality, a mental image of the body is created in the mind, an image that refers as well to the position and function of particular organs, as to the cohesion of the whole organism.

World of the Web. The existence in the World of Web is anchored in the experiences of the physical world, however, they are defined by completely different

characteristics. One of the them is fictionalization, which concerns perceiving the world of the Web as an analogy to the physical world, where personal experience, and the history of cognition are mediated. Another characteristic is interactivity, which is understood as the certainty of reaction and means that every action has its feedback – either from the structure of the online world or from the other man. These hypotheses describe different ways of existence – such as acting or perceiving, which constantly switch and change. Another characteristic of existence of the online world is changeability, which refers to the structure built on contents that are constantly implemented and updated, thus their relevance is variable. The concept that relates to the earlier descriptions is communication.

"The communicability of the Web does not only allow for individual contributions of people into a collective medium, but it actually encourages people to do so. As a result both processes and the social organization that is created as their result are at the same time collective and individual. (…) At the moment when they merge into the Web, their openness creates an alternative, new quality that relates to both individual and collective aspects. The openness is one of the most valuable qualities that are currently possessed by humanity" (De Kerckchove, 2001, s. 27)

The communicability as a new form of coexistence, assumes fully aware involvement of an individual in the common medium, followed by co-creation of the collective space. The world of the Web requires being active, therefore implementing contents that state the openness of its users, who share both themselves and their knowledge.

Presence

The existence of two separated spheres of reality defines the space, in which an individual can exist. The conscious form of deciding where a person appears is presence. The world of the web might be described with presence on either technical or qualitative level.

Technical presence. The technical conditions of presence refer to the IP, cookies and content. Each individual who decides to enter the online world is externally defined by an IP address, which is assigned by an internet provider – it is an external form of identification of the appearance and presence in that reality. Cookies might be characterised as online memory, which is based on files installed on the computer and records of the browser's history. Because of the individual existence of people in the Web it is the content that matters the most, as it concerns the input that is consciously shared by an individual as something worth sharing and proliferating.

The technical aspect of the online world is also shown in the way we make analogue connections and through the forms which are available for the user. It refers to passive devices, such as cables and fibres, which passively liaise with the creation of the online reality. The devices such as routers, modems or mobiles are the active ones that, within the proper protocol, provide services such as www, communicators, Second Life or e-mail.

Mediating of the presence in the online world allows formulating the idea of the computer understood as the final part, a specific kind of extension, which simultaneously becomes both the plane of existence and the content that is thought and implemented.

"We create the extensions of ourselves, much like remote eyes and ears (webcams and mobile phones) and expand our memory (the abundance of details you can search for online). They become the structures through which we connect with the world and other people. Those structures may in turn change the way we perceive the world and ourselves" (Lanier, 2001, p. 7).

The extension of human being via the device understood that way becomes the extension mediating the sight through a camera, the hearing and conversations through a microphone, and the memory through saving and processing of the recorded data. Involving the media defined in such way in perception of both physical and online reality changes our individual perception. Moreover, using sense extensions defined in that way, which work within interface and software, causes them to become the frames of life, in which the physical presence in the online world is denoted and defined with photography as an external memory file. Presence interlaces with both realities within one click.

Qualitative presence. Qualitative presence is based on technical settings, however, it also describes more specifically the ways of being online.

"It is obviously the body that allows us to gain lots of information. Human bodies communicate with each another on levels that are often ignored by the mind. After years of unremitting fascination with the issue of presence (…) in my opinion there are four significant conditions for experiencing the presence, which occurs in telepresence" (De Kerckchove, 2001, p. 81).

They can be defined as telepresence, which has its foundation in the source of presence, which is perceiving and being perceived. It is connected with co-using of the shared space – electronic or virtual (Facebook, Second Life) and shared time, which occurs when at the same moment of the absolute time an individual both appears and becomes noticed. The last, but the most important part of telepresence is sharing a pause, which refers both to sensing someone's presence, as well as to the moment of suspense that occurs between one person's action and another person's reaction.

Another qualitative form of presence is the interactivity of the acting subject, which is active functioning.

'Interactivity is an extension of touch (…). Another crucial issue concerning interactivity is that it undoes what has been created by the perspective – it restores the activity of the spectator'. (De Kerckchove, 2009, p. 50).

Interactivity based on acting allows a travesty of the Cartesian maxim into 'I click, therefore I exist'.

Presence can be discussed in terms of immersion, which refers to conscious and active submerging in the online reality that is based on the feeling of presence; the feeling that occurs in space other than the physical reality. The last trait is intentionality, which defines an individual's awareness and his willingness to move the sphere of presence from the physical world to the world of Web. We can focus intentionally on the aware presence, in which the carnality is abandoned and both sen-

suality and consciousness are mediated – like focusing our sight on the light of the device, the sounds of actions taking place in our surroundings or computer music, and submerging in the online world, which means becoming active.

'We are heading for perceiving of the electronic environment as an electronic realism that is treated as an alternative to the reality of the sphere of being, which is human reality' (Ostrowicki, 2008, p. 2).

The described conditions of both the existence of the world as an online reality and the presence (technical and qualitative) are defined as being equal to the physical world. The virtual sphere that is willingly chosen for an individual's presence to appear becomes its aim; also, through a personal and conscious choice of the online world it establishes its equality with the physical world. An individual who decides to appear and disclose his presence in the online world (at the same time maintaining conscious coherence with the physical identity) is a subject to moral discussions.

The phenomenon of responsibility is a specific form of morality that is worthy of more thorough research.

Responsibility

The phenomenon of responsibility, considered as a philosophical issue, excludes the notion of a legal responsibility, which is based on adjudication of the offence, and penalty. Moral responsibility may be characterised with elements such as: subject (consciously acting person), object (action of the conscious individual), instance (an authority that states the responsibility), tribunal (judges person [subject] for some action [object], according to given responsibility [instance]) after: (Filek, 1999, p. 113).

Situation of responsibility. The systematic approach to the phenomenon of responsibility was presented by Roman Ingarden, who illustrated it with the situation of responsibility. It is a conception of the responsibility that is strongly related with possibility of fulfilling the positive value that is concluded within each action. The positive aspect of the responsibility allows values to appear whereas its negative aspect annihilates their potential of existence. Within the negative aspect of responsibility we may talk about bearing the responsibility, which refers to past actions and are their consequences. Another form of negative responsibility is calling somebody to account for some previous actions. The positive aspect of responsibility appears in situations such as: taking the responsibility for someone (decision of taking into care) and acting responsibly (concentrating on current situation and acting consciously in terms of responsibility) after: (Ingarden, 1973, p. 78).

The presented levels of responsibility may exist independently, in relation to each other or as consequences of each other. The issues of calling somebody to account for their actions and bearing the responsibility are the most common context of the responsibility considerations; both of them are related with past actions and being accounted for them. Looking at the phenomenon of responsibility in the frames of action and online life its most relevant aspects are the ones

that concentrate on possibilities and time frames that concern either the present or the future.

"Taking responsibility is not only an experience, it is a real psychological act that leads to some kind of the essential internal readiness" (Ingarden, 1973, p. 80).

The phenomenon described as acting towards the future is an act of consciousness and internal readiness for constantly taking responsibility and acting responsibly. The consciousness settles the real individual presence; it defines the world that a person emerges in. At the moment of choice, both of the worlds (physical and online) are considered to be equal ones and the key to choosing one's sphere of appearing is the choice between the possibilities offered by particular realities. Depending on a situation the decision might be different and effect as a conscious presence in one of the two worlds. The choice of the world is a conscious and voluntary decision, which defines our future potential and holds the responsibility for annihilating the values. Therefore, to talk about the responsibility, it is necessary for a subject (person) to be free (in his/her own actions) and appear in the conscious presence in the world that is chosen individually as a place of existence.

"To be a source point of all possible decisions that are based on the understanding of the situation in the aspect of value and to be able to fulfil one's intentions is constitutive for a person. It is typical personal character of the human individual that creates an essential, but insufficient condition for being responsible for something that has or has not been done." (Ingarden, 1973, p. 82).

To define the range of responsibility, Ingarden discussed the behaviour and the effects that it causes. The behaviour is a process that must have an active beginning; however, it may be also be passive participation. A conscious and active acting through mediation of the subject's intentionality allows its consideration in the terms of responsibility. However, it is not the sole condition; another one refers to the personal level of awareness during the deed. That means that the actions, for which people might be responsible, are not temporary, one-time acts; they are more like a multifactorial process that is composed of the various stages within the space time.

Roman Ingarden's philosophical advise of the phenomenon of responsibility arises innately within the context of the values and actions that lead towards fulfilling or abandoning them.

Such perspective defines actions in the present or future (as representations of the positive responsibility), as well as in the past (representation of the negative responsibility). It allows definition of one's actions in the future and to fulfil the values and, consequently, to acquire higher awareness of one's actions. Acting in such way emphasizes those of the values that are defined by the choice and implementation of the decision, which is acting responsibly. Situations that are refer to responsibility have the qualities of being either positive or negative – if responsibility is considered in aspect of past actions, instance or tribunal it is based on the negation of the positive values; therefore, the negative values appear.

Fully conscious, responsible acting is a phenomenon that refers to the future;

it allows the positive values to appear through the response to other people's call to account for one's actions.

Power responsibility. The notion of responsibility, understood as an issue related to fulfilling the possibilities and its consequences is presented by Hans Jonas.

"The first and the most general condition of responsibility is causative power, the fact that actions influence the world. The second condition is that those actions have to depend on the causer. The final condition is the causer being able to predict the effect of his actions. If those essential conditions are fulfilled the »responsibility« is possible" (Jonas, 1996, p.167).

The perspective is an alternative way of understanding responsibility. The main assumption of the perspective is the causative power that is focused on possible actions, which may actually influence the world. Another assumption is causer's freedom, which is defined as control and means that he has real influence on the currently taken actions. The third assumption concerns the predictability of the results, which is the ability to make deductions (ability proper to healthy and mature people that are conscious of their own actions). Jonas also distinguishes different types of responsibility: formal and material. Formal responsibility refers to legal responsibility; however, material responsibility is more significant in terms that it is defined as semantic or positive responsibility. The material responsibility involves the causer in future and makes him responsible for the object, values and people.

In the case of formal responsibility there is an assumption of the necessity of the causer being accountable for his deeds. Such perspective includes both the responsibility and the punishment for not taking the action. It is a negative approach, which refers to past situations that cannot be altered. In the terms of the online world, which is built on the perspective of the future, developing the issue of the material responsibility seems to be more reasonable.

"However, there is different concept of responsibility which does not concern accounting ex post facto for what has been done; it concerns defining what is yet to be done in the future" (Jonas, 1996, p. 170).

The material responsibility, defined as positive obligation of power, concerns the possibility of fulfilling the values. In that way taking the responsibility is an ethical act that is adequate for the present time, in which time emphasis is being taken from the past to specify the potency of the future.

 Responsibility understood in a specific way is thinking ahead; it is based on power, understood as a potential of realizing the values and responding to another (sometimes weaker) man's call. Such a way of understanding responsibility allows one to consider responsibility as the part of the online world, which is constantly being developed by people on a technical level and by individuals that are present in it (people who fill the sphere with content).

Summary

An Individual, who is anchored in the physical world and prolongs the existence of the online world may fulfil the phenomenon of responsibility through conscious

presence in the online reality. In the perspective of an entity the issue may be considered in two ways – as a responsibility for ourselves to ourselves (the object of responsibility understood as the identity presented online). The other form of the responsibility refers to the relation with another person, which is constituted through the conscious appearance in the online world and during the contact of the individuals. Both approaches are related to each other because of the character of online world, in which the phenomenon of responsibility might be considered. Through the positive accepting of the responsibility in the context of the future, which is based on the technological potential (the reality of the online world is understood as a technical world and the person that is present in it has real influence on the shape of the world) an individual might have the responsibility for fulfilling the values and the idea of a man.

Positive consideration of responsibility in the online reality is based on coherence of an individual's identity in both physical and online world. However, it is important to be aware of the issue of anonymity, which is not without significance in the deliberated context. The anonymity may first appear on the technical level – in the case of masked IP it is impossible to make an online presence. From the point of view of the qualitive presence hiding or appearing as a false identity excludes both the presence, as well as the responsibility. For the phenomenon of responsibility to appear it is essential to fulfil the existence as well as the presence (technological and qualitive). Moreover, being present in the online world as a fake identity (separated from the physical identity) is realizing the negative values; it is based on falsity and affects the image of oneself in the world of Web. An individual presented in such way may be the subject of only legal or negative responsibility, which concerns accounting for the actions that are related to his fake image and their consequences.

To sum up, the phenomenon of the responsibility can be undertaken by an individual who maintains coherence with the corporeality and consciously fulfils both the conditions of the existence and of the presence in the online world. Therefore it is possible to fulfil the positive values through self-creation and relations, in which the subject of the action is taking responsibility for the values and the idea of a man.

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