

On some criminological aspects of responsibility (from the postmodern perspective)

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The norm by which each individual is responsible for his acts, is deeply rooted in any hierarchically organized social life or, more precisely (at least from the perspective of evolutionary or neo-Darwinist psychology), already in human nature, where it figures as an emotional disposition (a source of an inborn »sense of justice«) on which rests mutual altruism (a principle meaning repayment of good by good and of evil by evil). However, the realization/application of this general norm is in general rather unequal or selective (determined also by status, class and individual/subjective factors) in terms that those who are objectively the most »responsible« are only exceptionally penalised for their harmful and/or unlawful commissions and omissions. Even more, they are disproportionately rewarded for their activities (the social utility of which is not at all self-evident or is at least questionable). To make things worse, this often happens even in cases when they should actually be in/formally punished.

This is not at all the only problem, though: the principle of responsibility has been seriously threatened (should we write »disintegrated«?) also because of the rapid development of natural and social sciences (and their more or less successful syntheses); their findings convincingly refer to the concept/assumption that a man (namely every individual) is in fact a »victim« of genes and environment, i.e., a sort of (biochemical) »robot«, driven (determined or programmed) by forces of which he is usually unaware. If this is true, then, strictly regarded, it is not possible to hold anyone to account for either his merits or guilt for what he has done (which is consequently not the expression of the »free will« of his on-physic/spiritual »self«) then the difficult question arises as to what to take as grounds for reward and punishment (two basic pillars of social control), without which it is not possible to imagine an ordered society. In connection with this dilemma, the fact must not be forgotten that sincere belief in an individual's freedom and rationality has nevertheless extremely important control, prevention and disciplinary effects, although it might be entirely unjustified from the rational and scientific point of view.

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