# Chapter 8
# Towards a post-Levinasian understanding of responsibility: the Weberian contribution of Apel

I have argued that there is a significant similarity between Weber and Levinas in their reflection on responsibility. Particularly, Weber's distinction between an ethic of principle and an ethic of responsibility highlighted and clarified the implications of Levinas' notion of responsibility, especially its implications on the political plane. There is a further advantage of this comparison, and of the correspondences that have been indicated, namely that it helps us to better situate Levinas within a spectrum of ethico-political issues. When the debates concerning Weber's position and possible responses to them – in other words, the broad tradition of reflection on responsibility in the wake of Weber – are considered, it could suggest ideas for further reflection on Levinas and thus enrich the resources available for his project on responsibility and justice, albeit in the form of a post-Levinasian theory of political responsibility. In this short Chapter, such inspiration will be drawn from the work of Karl-Otto Apel. Since one could consider this choice of interlocutor as unexpected, a number of remarks of justification and orientation are in order.

## 1    JUSTIFICATION: APEL
### AND THE UNAVOIDABILITY OF RESPONSIBILITY

In order to engage with a (non exhaustive) series of these thorny political issues in connection with Weber's notion of responsibility, I draw from the later work of Karl-Otto Apel. This does not mean that I consider him the ultimate

authority on Weber, nor does it imply that I shall advocate his discourse ethics. Rather, Apel is interesting for the current project because of the fact that he, coming from his particular Kantian perspective – a perspective that he himself described in his later work as a species of ethic of principle (*Gesinnungsethik*) – explicitly attempts to reflect on the shortcomings of his own principled ethical perspective under stimulation of Weber's notion of the ethic of responsibility. Apel is further also important for the current project because since his transformation of metaphysical philosophical approaches to ethics he has attempted to displace the monological approach of the solitary ethical subject with the collective ethical effort – which is exactly one of the deficiencies that I have indicated in Levinas. In the development of his own ethics of responsibility, Apel showed great sensitivity for the means required for ethical action and for the fact that these means should in our era be reflected upon in a global perspective – hence contributing to another deficiency indicated in Levinas. Finally, he seems suitable to use as thought partner for Levinas in reflecting on the Weberian issue of context and means-specific consequences of ethical conduct, exactly because he shares with Levinas (whatever the differences between them might be[1]) the desire to anchor ethics in a context-independent and universally valid justification.

What does Apel teach us when he situates himself in *Diskurs und Verantwortung* (*Discourse and responsibility*) explicitly in relation to Weber?[2] In this re-interpreting and critical appropriation of Weber's notion of responsibility, of which I have shown the correspondences with Levinas', what hints can we get for the direction in which we can think with Levinas against Levinas?

In order to exploit this appropriation of Weber by Apel for our considerations of Levinas, a few remarks have to be made to situate this development in Apel's thought. Why would a philosopher that – at least in his own estimation – disposes of an ultimate philosophical foundation (a *Letztbegründung*) for ethics, give himself anew over to the task of a fundamental

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1   The comparison of Levinas and Apel has thus far not drawn much attention from the scholarly community. However see Michael Barber, "The vulnerability of reason: the philosophical foundations of Emmanuel Levinas and K.O. Apel", in *The prism of the self: philosophical essays in honor of Maurice Natanson.* Steven G. Crowell (ed.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995, pp. 93–106. Barber has subsequently attempted to deploy his coordination of Levinas and Apel for an ethical reflection on affirmative action in *Equality and Diversity: Phenomenological Investigations of Prejudice and Discrimination.* Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2001 (see Chapters 5–8). Noteworthy is also the last section of Sophie Loidolt's *Anspruch und Rechtfertigung: eine Theorie des rechtlichen Denkens im Anschluss an die Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls.* Dordrecht: Springer, 2009.

2   It should at least be noted that there is in this book no reference to Levinas.

conception of ethics? It is because Apel's *Diskurs und Verantwortung* is written in response to his realisation of a shortcoming in his established discourse or communicative ethics (*Diskursethik*), namely when it is confronted with the question of practical application. The problem is, according to Apel, in a profound manner part of the transcendental pragmatic ultimate foundation (*transzendentalpragmatische Letztbegründung*) of ethics and the discourse ethics that flows from it. Put quite simply, the transcendental pragmatic foundation of communicative ethics relies (for internal reasons that need not be discussed here) on a counter-factual anticipation of an *ideal* communicative community (*kontrafaktische Antizipation einer idealen Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*),[3] but this *a priori* differs in an essential and practically irresolvable manner (*prinzipiellen, faktisch nie völlig aufhebbaren Differenz*)[4] from the *actual* communicative community and its historically constituted morality. Now, whereas the detail of this project is not of concern here, it is important to note that *Diskurs und Verantwortung* is presented explicitly as one of two strands by which Apel considered it important to develop his initial project of re-conceiving philosophical ethics – and consists of reflection on the conditions for the application or gradual realisation of the ideal communicative community in a lifeworld that consists of different real communicative communities.[5] Without regard for the time that separates the current historical communicative communities and the (never fully attainable) ideal communicative community, the consequences and side effects of the application of the communicative ethics in the present, would render this ethics *irresponsible*. This problem is seen by Apel as more than merely that of the application of general principles to particular situations; rather, because of the radical historical constitution of the difference between the ideal and real communicative communities, the very reasonability with which it could be expected of people to adhere to discourse ethics is destabilised. This could be illustrated with an example.

"How should one act at the same time in terms of a universalistic moral principle of reciprocity and responsibly, in a lifeworld in which something like legal safety – that is, above all protection against violence, but also corruption-free application of laws – in the State, let alone in international relations, cannot even be guaranteed without exception?"[6]

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3   DV 9.
4   DV 9.
5   Cf. DV 8.
6   DV 242, see DV 139 for a different example. It should be noted that this example immediately places the question of the global dimensions of responsibility in the centre of reflection, since it poses the question concerning the ways in which marginalised regions and groups are interconnected with the rest of the world.

A second type of reflection on ethics (called *Begründungsteil B*) is thus required to cope with the historically situated application of communicative ethics[7] since this dilemma cannot simply be addressed from and by means of the transcendental pragmatic ultimate foundation of ethics, or as Apel recognises,

"a *morally sensible new beginning* in the sense of the perfectly understandable demand, for example, for the settlement of all conflicts of interest by 'practical discourses' [is] in principle impossible."[8]

At this crucial point, Apel himself presents this challenge to his work in Weberian terms, and this is where Apel becomes interesting for our purposes.[9] Without a further reflection on the historically contingent application of discourse ethics, the latter will merely lead to irresponsibility:

"it should be clear that the unconditional compliance with the ideal principle of a communicative ethics – 'act in such a way, as if you were a member of an ideal community of communication!' – just as the unconditional compliance with Kant's 'categorical imperative' would come to a *principled ethical* [*gesinnungsethische*] maxim, which would 'leave the responsibility to God'."[10]

In order to avoid this, Apel then takes up the challenges in *Diskurs und Verantwortung* of conceiving the

"historically related application of the communicative ethics as ethics of responsibility".[11]

Even if we were to have an ultimate foundation for ethics, it would then be either impotent, or potentially harmful – in any case, irresponsible – to deploy it without consideration for the historical context of action. Or more generally still, the ethical meaning of action cannot be thought of merely in context-independent terms. And this is exactly the problem that I have pointed out in Levinas (however much his ethics may be different from that of Apel): he seems to have believed that the *a priori* validity of the ethical affectedness by the other would suffice to express (as good as is humanly possible) the interests of the others. I have argued that this is not necessarily the case. Conse-

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7 DV 11.
8 DV 10.
9 One could also trace the essential development of Apel's appropriation of Weber in his interview with Michelini in "Ética del discurso y globalización. La ética ante las coerciones fácticas e institucionales de la politica, el derecho y la economía", in *Erasmus, revista para el diálogo intercultural* 2/2, 2000, pp. 99–119, see especially p. 100.
10 DV 10, my emphasis, the last phrase quoted is from Weber's PaB.
11 DV 10.

quently, I could re-formulate my own project in Apelian terms as the quest for a historically situated realisation of the ethicity of the plurality of contradicting others as ethics of responsibility or as political responsibility.

## 2   FROM A WEBERIAN APEL TO A WEBERIAN LEVINAS

If we then consider what Apel judged the strong and weak points of Weber's theory of responsibility, it would help us to clarify the challenges faced by Levinas' (largely) similar theory of responsibility.

The *first* major contribution of a historically situated notion of responsibility is that it takes the question of *strategy* for ethical thought seriously. The fact that an ethics of responsibility would be sensitive to the historical circumstances and means in and by which actions are to be accomplished – the blindness of a principled ethical approach in this regard may do more harm than good – implies that ethics necessarily has to think strategically.[12] Although the question of strategy is not developed by Levinas, the path from the Saying to the Said and the concomitant insistence on calculation doesn't exclude it.[13] However, it should be evident that a true Levinasian would always submit a previously adopted strategy to scrutiny under the inspiration of the ethical appeals of the others. One could certainly not find fault with this – as long as one thinks in a context-independent manner about it. But as soon as one thinks about strategy in a strategic manner, it becomes clear that whoever continues to constantly revise an adopted strategy will undermine that strategy and will be an unreliable ally in the "resistance against evil". Or if the question of the efficiency with which one opposed injustice or served the interests of the others is taken seriously – as it should be in calculations about justice – the strategies for the efficient pursuit of justice will necessarily require trade-offs between the appeals of the different others – trade-offs of which Levinas is not able to draw the limits or provide a frame for their ethical reflection. Thus Apel's identification of the issue of strategy supplements our considerations about collaboration and co-responsibility in Chapter 7 (§2.2). Strategy cannot be given serious thought without taking the other as ethico-political agent seriously and thus strategy and co-responsibility imply each other.

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12   Cf. DV 62.
13   See Chapter 7, § 2.2.

*Second*, instead of storming into every situation armed with the good will of an ethic of principle in the belief that this will suffice to actualise the integrity of morality in that context, the adherent of an ethics of responsibility *à la* Apel

"supposes on the contrary, that he/she has to take up the historically given conditions of calculable success for action"

since the

"problem raised hereby encounters its material manifestation, not under the *optimal* conditions of the evolution of the moral consciousness […], but under conditions under which moral conduct can often appear as *unreasonable to demand* [*unzumutbar*]."[14]

The reason why, according to Apel, adherents of an ethic of principle find this conclusion difficult to make is because in human history the ethic of principle was the way in which the obligations valid for the intimate circles of orientation (family and neighbourhood) have been generalised and even cosmopolicised.[15] It should, however, be clear that these principles of intimate relationships cannot simply be applied to modern ethical problems involving either large groups (e.g., classes of society), or modern technical means,[16] or non-human victims (e.g., the ecosystem).[17] Therefore,

"[w]hat would be called for in the present crisis of the technico-scientific civilisation on a planetary scale, is […] something like an ethics of common responsibility of solidarity for humanity in the sense of a communicative negotiation of interests and advice on situations [*eine Ethik der gemeinsamen solidarischen Verantwortung der Menschheit im Sinne einer kommunikativen Interessenvermittlung und Situationsberatung*]."[18]

Although I shall not follow Apel in the way he responds to this challenge, I fully subscribe to this estimation of what our times require (as explained above). Apel's appropriation of Weber's notion of responsibility also challenges Levinas: reflection on ethics cannot circumvent the question of the context of ethical action since this is part of the very meaning of the ethical (which Levinas never recognised or conceded) and this would hold even if Levinas' idea about the ethical meaning of the face of the other is accepted as it is. Consequently, it is impossible to take the manner in which the context-specifics of ethical action contrib-

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14  DV 242.
15  DV 23.
16  Apel clearly draws on Jonas here.
17  Cf. DV 23.
18  DV 23–24.

ute to the constitution of the meaning of the ethical seriously without reflection on the nature of the means by which ethical agents act. This involves, of course, the entire spectrum of technical and institutional means from the smallest to those that constitute the global dimension of human existence.[19] This also means that we have to reflect on our contemporary situation that differs greatly from the situation known to and described by Weber. Furthermore, the context-specifics, the technical means and the scale of responsibility, necessarily entail re-affirming the bearing of co-responsibility on responsibility (see previous point).

But, *third*, Apel makes his approach to Weber very cautiously. When he criticises Weber's notion of responsibility, it has almost always to do with the manner in which it is demarcated from the ethic of principle, and the socio-historical implications of this distinction. After all, Apel doesn't abolish his *a priori* (deontological) ethics. An ideal politician needs both a true consciousness of responsibility and a fundamental ethical orientation for political decision-making.[20] Exactly this ethical orientation is absent from Weber, or rather, pushed back to a domain outside of public debate and scrutiny – a fact that is implicitly recognised by Weber in his schematisation of ethical orientations as either an ethic of principle or an ethic of responsibility (according to Apel's reading). In this, Weber would be a typical representative of what is, according to Apel, the major ailment of Western normative thought, namely the

"dualism, or to be precise, the complementarity of value-neutral rationality and the irrational choice of ultimate axioms of judgement".[21]

Apel explains that Weber is one of the "co-founders of that *system of complementarity of the Western ideology* [*Komplementaritätssystems der westlichen Ideologie*]" according to which

"the praxis in the public domain of life – in the spheres of politics, law and science – has to be regulated exclusively from the value-neutral rationality of science and technology, and thus the guidelines for goals and judgement have to derive from agreements in the sense of democratic majority decisions. In contrast, morality – just as religion – has to be exclusively a private matter."[22]

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19  Here the concern for the largest, global range of reflection on political responsibility – expressed especially in Chapter 3 – and that of the inevitable reflection on the means of responsible political action – introduced especially in Chapter 6 – are thus re-introduced from another angle.

20  Cf. DV 39–40.

21  DV 56.

22  DV 56–57.

Hence Apel's characterisation of public or political decision-making in the frame of Weber's thought on responsibility as irrational.[23] This inherent irrationalism of political responsibility would then be at the origin of the tradition of criticism against what is considered to be Weber's decisionism.

This criticism of Apel's is aimed at a Weberian responsibility as practised under normal circumstances and that entails isolated political decision-making in the face of the particular needs of a situation. However, even though the entire thrust of Apel's ethico-political reflection is aimed at "saving" politics from this "irrationalism", he doesn't deny that in extreme cases or borderline situations (*Grenzsituationen*) one could still be forced to that kind of decision. But as far as Apel is concerned, this is only a valid manner of responding to highly *exceptional* circumstances.[24] This important concession to what he considers to be irrationality is given a very specific place within his description of the requirements for a new theory of responsibility, the thrust of which I have fully supported – I cite the same passage, this time fully:

"However, what would be called for in the present crisis of the technico-scientific civilisation on a planetary scale, is much *more* than an ethics of existential borderline situations – an ethics that could *even possibly* [*womöglich*] depend on irrational final decisions. What is called for is something like an ethics of common responsibility of solidarity for humanity in the sense of a communicative negotiation of interests and advice on situations."[25]

Apel thus acknowledges for all his transcendental pragmatic foundation of discourse ethics, some form of ethics that would be more than, but not excluding,[26] an ethics of existential extreme situations, which can arrive at responses to those exceptional situations, only by means of ultimately non

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23  Cf. DV 40.

24  In the current study, I shall not enter into the detail of the thorny issue of exception in its relation to the debates concerning decisionism. My reader will not be surprised to hear that I find a certain form of decisionism – a decisionism of application, but not a decisionism of foundation – one of the possible manifestation of Levinas' ethics (for the distinction see Eckard Bolsinger "Was ist Dezisionismus? Rekonstruktion eines autonomen Typs politischer Theorie", in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 39/3, 1998, pp. 471–502, here p. 472). I have indicated one way in which to consider Levinas' ethics in relation to Schmitt's thought on political theology and sovereignty in "The State and politics in a post-colonial, global order. Reconstruction and criticism of a Levinasian perspective", in *SA Publiekreg* / *SA Public Law* 24/2, 2009, pp. 352–369, here § 5.

25  DV 23–24, I emphasise "even possibly".

26  Apel says explicitly of this kind of situational ethics that it "doesn't meet the requirements of the moment", but adds: "although it is by no means obsolete, as the borderline situations of solitary decision definitely exist (situations in which everyone has to choose his/her gods, as M. Weber said […])" (DV 23).

reason-bound decisions – i.e., under these circumstances a Weberian re-sponsibility without any recourse to a deontological ethics or to an ethic of principle would be in order. Under such circumstances, the enormity of the context overrides the authority of the principles and the responsibility has to be elevated to a principle.[27] Such situations cannot be avoided, but the dilemma that they bring to light should not be generalised either, according to Apel. Now, this poses a challenge to my criticism of Levinas' politics, since (as shown in my commentary on the fatal "for instance" from the Kearney interview in Chapter 6, § 2.2.) "sometimes" a Levinasian politics can find recourse to very extreme means and might (as I have shown above in comparing his responsibility to Weber's ethic of principle) even develop into an eschatological violence. And here, in the current discussion of Apel's appropriation of Weber, Levinas seems to have found an un-expected ally: from one of the most serious representatives of a contem-porary re-actualisation of deontological ethics, comes the recognition of exceptional states in which *a priori*, universal principles have to cede to considerations of the circumstances and a communicative ethics makes way for an ethics of extreme situations.

# 3   FOUR OBJECTIVES FOR A THEORY OF POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

A number of important impetuses for further reflection concerning the de-ployment of a Levinasian responsibility, and responsibility in general, in its political dimension could be derived from Apel's project, as it has been shown to fit with Levinas and Weber at the same time. Apel's appropriation of Weber's ethics of responsibility, or rather, his recognition that there is something indispensable in a consequentialist responsibility to complete his principled ethical re-appropriation of a Kantian deontology could show what the challenges are that one faces when reflecting "after Levinas" on political responsibility in a globalised world. Both the positive elements of Apel's evaluation of Weber's ethics of responsibility and the negative criticism thereof, present us with important categories for asking what a theory of responsibility should be able to do and what it should look like. I have argued above (Chapters 6 and 7) that Levinas cannot but recognise

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27  As I have explained above, and as explained by Apel with reference to Weber's remark about the connection between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of principle (in "Ética del discurso y globalización." *op. cit*. p. 101.)

that the consequences of ethical conduct have ethical meaning, namely that considerations regarding the consequences belong to the essence of the moment of decision making in the face of the plurality of others. Practically all of the traits that Levinas' theory of responsibility shares with that of Weber follow from this finding. Now, just as I have magnified the implications of Levinas' notion of responsibility for the domain of the political by looking at it through the lens of Weber, we can now amplify a number of requirements for re-conceiving responsibility after Levinas, by looking at it through the lens of Apel.

*First*, if the consequences of ethical action participate in the very meaning of the ethical, then it is impossible to avoid thinking about ethics not exclusively in terms of the meaning of the face of the other (or in terms of transcendental pragmatics, in the case of Apel), but also to think *strategically*. All of this seems to me in line with Levinas' recognition that, in the face of the plurality of others, one should compare the incomparable and act accordingly. Not thinking strategically would amount to clinging in a principled ethical manner to a cosmic-ethical realism that has centuries ago already been problematised convincingly by the world religions.[28] In other words, since there is in Levinas no such necessary correlation between action that is done in response to the appeal of the others and the beneficial outcomes of those responses, the subject has to think strategically. Strategic thinking necessarily means not obeying all of the others completely, but having to prioritise and ultimately to make *sacrifices* in the name of the maximisation of justice.

*Second*, if an ethics of responsibility is then an ethics of consequences and therefore of strategy, then Weber's description of responsibility is too simple. Or more precisely, whereas Weber devotes a lot of attention to describing at least the contemporary social conditions under which one will have to take up responsibility if one has the vocation for politics, his *Politics as a vocation* is insufficient to unpack the different forms of responsibility that one could assume or be made to take up in different spheres of social and political reality. Reflection on these different *forms and dimensions of responsibility*[29] is,

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28  Cf. PaV 123 / PaB 444.

29  By "forms and dimensions of responsibility" I shall henceforth refer to the typical distinguishable configurations through which responsibility is socially integrated. These types might be more or less stable roles and more or less distinguishable, depending on historical circumstances; the forms and dimensions also involve the roles and competences of the subject of responsibility in society, which in turn impacts on the sphere of influence, the circle of people, things and events that are influenced, the scales of competence, the nature of activities, relationships between people, etc. Usually the forms and dimensions of responsibility refer to the

however, indispensable for a general theory of responsibility – of which Levinas aspired at least to uncover the justification (and even if this general theory implies a generalisation of the political to the entire social reality[30]). Taking the forms and dimensions of responsibility seriously, means thus to engage with the inevitable strategic nature of responsibility and the embeddedness thereof in a historical context and a network of possible means, and can therefore not simply be assimilated to an enthusiasm for technocratic solutions (see also point three, below). Whoever has to think strategically about responsibility, necessarily has to think of the different conditions under which one has to be responsible and the forms of responsibility that one should carry. Even if, from a Levinasian point of view, all such roles remain forever open to critical intervention from the side of ethics, from whence they would always seem like a limitation of infinite responsibility and an alibi to shake off or shift over

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distinguishable aspects of temporality (prospective, retrospective), subjectivity (individual- or co-responsibility), conditionality (formal, informal, legal, contractual), modality (responsibility for action, for failing to act or preventing someone from acting), and so forth. The point here is not to work out these forms and dimensions, but to integrate thought on them in a project of reflection on responsibility in its political nature after Levinas. Expositions regarding the forms and dimensions of responsibility can be found in most introductions to the philosophy of responsibility; see particularly Hans Lenk's detailed presentation "Typen und Dimensionen der Verantwortlichkeit", in *Konkrete Humanität. Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit, op. cit.* pp. 261–284.

It would be misguided to reduce the formal aspect of responsibility to that of the contractual obligations of the stereotypical bureaucrat (as is all too often done). The person that is unexpectedly confronted with someone in need and the liberation fighter can equally be shown to be informed by certain pre-existing forms of responsibility as they play out their responsibility outside of an institutional framework and it would not be correct to consider their attempts at responsible action (supererogatory or transgressing) as simply formless. What is at issue in the discussion of forms of responsibility is not to predetermine responsible action independently of the situation of action (it cannot be done), nor to eliminate conflict between the multiple roles that every person holds (it cannot be done) – the issue is that responsibility action cannot exist without it.

I am not ignorant of the fact that such considerations about the forms and dimensions of responsibility would, in Levinas' mind, largely be considered derivatives of originary responsibility and for this reason not only secondary, but also mere translations and therefore already treasons against originary responsibility. My point is that even if this is accepted, the practical execution (translation) of originary responsibility on the level of politics (that is, in principle, all action) participates in the meaning of the originary imperative and that one therefore must consider the whole when reflecting on political responsibility.

30 Let it be repeated here that I share, with Levinas, Ricoeur's conviction that the political is not merely one amongst different spheres of social life, but a unifying aspect of them. However, this does not mean that the entire social existence could be reduced to or exhaustively explained in political terms.

responsibility, these roles of responsibility should be considered indispensable in the execution of responsibility, also in the execution of a truly Levinasian responsibility. The person that exposes or denounces all the sacrifices made in respect to the legitimate appeals of the others and all the limitations or compromises made to infinite responsibility by remaining true to the rules of specific roles of responsibility, might well be ethically in the right, but also risks undermining the strategy necessary for effective service to the others. Furthermore, such reflection on the strategy, conditions and roles of responsibility would necessarily entail reflection on *co-responsibility*[31] – a notion that is completely absent from Levinas, since if nobody can respond in my place to the appeals of the others, the sharing of responsibility could, at best, be a secondary derivative of my own responsibility, at worst, another alibi to shirk my duty towards the others. The consequence of my arguments concerning possible fanaticism derived from a Levinasian ethics (Chapter 6, § 2.2.) should show that a defect in reflecting on co-responsibility thoroughly could equally do violence to the interest of the others. Furthermore, it seems to me under the current conditions of the disenchanted polytheistic world impossible to conceive of co-responsibility between different ethical agents – for a context that demands strategic thinking, acting and sacrifice – without *negotiation* between the relevant partners concerning strategy and sacrifice, in fact concerning everything entailed in ethical conduct. Negotiation between ethical partners would not have a foundational pretence here, but it does seem an indispensable component in the execution of ethical conduct – at least when ethics in a context larger than just the very narrowest of interpersonal relations is concerned. That such negotiation could take different forms conjugating different degrees of participation, engagement, consultation with specialists, concessions, reason and pressure seems undeniable. However it does seem that there are limits to such negotiations that could not be transgressed without putting the collaborative ethical endeavour at risk.[32]

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31  It is probably more prudent to understand co-responsibility (*Mitverantwortung*) as "shared responsibility", rather than "collective responsibility", as distinguished by Iris Young (in "Responsibility, Social connection, and Global labor justice", in *Global challenges. War, self-determination, and responsibility for justice*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2007, pp. 159–186). She defines shared responsibility as "a personal responsibility for outcomes or the risks of harmful outcomes, produced by a group of persons. Each is personally responsible for outcomes in a partial way, since he or she alone does not produce the outcomes; the specific part that each plays in producing the outcome cannot be isolated and identified, however, and thus the responsibility is essentially shared." (p. 179).

32  The passage from Levinas to different forms of dialogical or discourse ethics is opened in this way and will have to be elaborated on in future reflection.

*Third*, if the consequences, strategy and roles of responsibility are essential elements of an ethics of responsibility, then the socio-historical and cultural *context* of the ethical decision making becomes extremely important, since consequences, strategy and roles are all equally constituted by historically contingent processes. Consequently, this means that responsibility cannot be contemplated without considerations to the historically contingent means by which that responsibility is to be realised; strategy and roles are determined by the means that are available for responsible action and reflection on consequences is necessarily reflection on means. Therefore means – whether conceived in terms of technology, systems or institutions – are a constituting factor of responsibility. Furthermore, in the era in which we live, the *global* extent and influence of means of action as well as of the context of action, should be considered the ultimate horizon, as Apel correctly pointed out and as I have shown the implications of Levinas' reflections on totalitarianism and the post-colonial order to be.[33] Also, the question of the means at one's disposal for action, would necessarily lead to considerations concerning the sustainability of their use and thus about ecology.[34] At the same time, none of these reflections about means and the consequences of their use could be imagined without the recourse to expertise. These include not only the sciences and law (including the law-enforcement systems), but also insight into the nature of action, means and consequences so as to avoid the moralism engendered by context-ignorance.[35]

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33  See Chapter 3. This is also an essential aspect of Bernasconi's conclusion concerning the re-conception of ethics for the current globalised world: "If globalisation means to live in a world in which the notions far and near, foreigner and neighbour, do not have the same meaning for us as before, since they can be seen to belong to the same sphere, then the hunger of those that are pushed to the remotest periphery, represent the fundamental point of reference" in "Globalisierung und Hunger", in *Im Angesicht der Anderen. Levinas' Philosophie des Politischen*. Pascal Delhom and Alfred Hirsch (eds.). Zürich and Berlin: Diaphanes, 2005, pp. 115–129, citation p. 125.

34  I state this as a very minimum entrance to the question of an ethics of ecology. Other, non-anthropocentric approaches would of course award a much more prominent place to the responsibility to non-human forms of existence. Although I do not ignore the importance of these kinds of considerations, they are not my concern here.

35  That this introduces at the same time the risks involved in technocracy and expertocracy has been forcefully argued by such authors as Habermas and Slama. But my point is that responsibility asks for engagement with these problems. Similarly an engagement with the complexities of agency (as in the thought of Ricoeur, which will be focused on in the next Chapter) should enforce one's vigilance against moralism.

*Fourth*, (linking with the first point) the fact of being responsible for different others at the same time necessitates strategic thinking about ethical action and hence about sacrifice. One cannot merely do the right thing – one has to decide what the best course of action is. One has to weigh, or as Levinas says, compare the incomparable. But this means that, in certain historical circumstances, ethical agents might consider radical means of answering the appeal of the others to be the appropriate thing to do – they might consider the appeal of the others, as they hear it, to override the institutionalised organisation of matters as it is in place in their field of action. They would, in other words, feel themselves ethically obliged to obey the appeal of the others, rather than the laws or rules in force – not, perhaps, out of a lack of respect for the law, but out of a conviction that the urgency of the appeal of the other requires an exception. Responsibility is an ethics of uncertainty; as an ethics of consequences it keeps itself open to unforeseen or unforeseeable realisations of itself, even if it is driven by context-independent imperatives. In fact, responsibility is an ethics of *equity*, in the sense that it always has to consider the possible conflict between the "letter" and the "spirit" of its obligation. As shown in Apel's concession, it is not possible to avoid limit situations, and under these extreme situations the normal response makes way for exceptional responses. This could entail abandoning one's reflection on the circumstances and simply executing the rule; it could equally be to follow one's interpretation of the circumstances to the detriment of the rule. But one thing is clear – one has to decide: not only on what one is going to do, but on whether and to what degree the context of action constitutes an exception. The pair *decision-exception* thus makes an integral part of a proper theory of responsibility. And it makes a significant difference if one reflects on responsibility by starting from the question of the exception, or if one interprets the exception as the last outgrowth of the common everyday practice of responsibility. Ultimately, reflection on the exception joins a meditation on evil.[36]

In these four points I hope to capture the task of a theory of responsibility "after Levinas". The requirements for such a theory of responsibility might not be entirely new – my use of Weber and Apel to make this point should be ample recognition of this fact.[37] However, what is new, as far as I can

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36  Of which I find Levinas' presentation very unsatisfactory – cf. *De l'éthique à la justice* 60ff. A much more convincing reflection on evil (in which a chapter is also devoted to Levinas) is Richard Bernstein's *Radical evil. A philosophical interrogation*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002.

37  From the vast literature on politics and responsibility, the following deserve to be singled out: Kurt Bayerz (ed.), *Verantwortung: Prinzip oder Problem?*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995 and Ludger Heidbrink and Alfred

see, is the double claim that (1) all of these are necessary consequences of reflecting on the implications of Levinas' responsibility as it takes effect on the level of the political and (2) that they are not secondary derivatives of the primary meaning of ethics, but part of the very meaning of ethics, if one thinks the implications of a Levinasian responsibility through. Yet, most of this is largely, if not completely, absent from his thought.

These requirements, this task, are what our study of Levinas leaves us with. It would simply be foolhardy to attempt to work that out in the current context. Instead, these four requirements will be developed in Chapter 9 with the help of our last interlocutor, Paul Ricoeur.

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Hirsch (eds.). *Staat ohne Verantwortung? Zum Wandel der Aufgaben von Staat und Politik.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2007.