

Chapter 7

Levinas and Max Weber on being called for politics

It is well known that Max Weber's later work, in particular the essay *Politics as a vocation*, plays a major role in the historical development of reflection on responsibility and notably of a prospective political notion of responsibility. The choice of Weber as the privileged interlocutor of Levinas on political responsibility is not justified by an idea that he would in one way or another bring the desired correctives to the defects of Levinas' ethics. Rather, it seems that Weber's theory of responsibility could serve as a magnifying glass through which the implications of Levinas' ethical notion of responsibility and its implications for political action could be perceived with far greater clarity. Furthermore, Weber's theory will serve to support our reflection on the socio-historical context in which such a responsibility is to have effect and in this way, the comparison of Weber and Levinas will prepare the way for the subsequent explorations of this Part. It is not my ambition to develop a full comparison of Weber and Levinas, but to clarify the issue of responsibility and its social setting by looking at Levinas through the lens of the twin essays *Politics as a vocation* (*Politik als Beruf*) and *Science as a vocation* (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*).

1 AN INHOSPITABLE WORLD: DISENCHANTMENT AND POLYTHEISM IN WEBER AND LEVINAS

These two texts should of course be read together, since it is not possible to appreciate Weber's exposition on responsibility in the first without the socio-historical background provided in the second. The most important

aspect of the socio-historical background is a twofold diagnosis of contemporary social reality. On the one hand, the complex history of *rationalisation* that has left (Western) humanity in a disenchanted world governed by calculative and goal-aiming rationality, the execution of which undermines human experience of meaning and the technical implementation of which reduces human freedom like an iron cage. On the other hand, claims to direction giving values grow to a conflicting multitude – to which he refers as a *polytheism*. Weber takes it as a

“fundamental fact, that so long as life remains immanent and is interpreted in its own terms, it knows only of an unceasing struggle of these gods with one another. Or speaking directly [*unbildlich*], the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion.”¹

It would evidently make no sense to attribute the detail of Weber’s theory of rationalisation to Levinas.² However, it could be pointed out that Levinas shared a number of convictions with Weber and that these are crucial for his understanding of responsibility. The exposition of secu-

1 SaV 152 / WaB 550. On this twofold diagnosis, see Danilo Martuccelli, *Sociologies de la modernité*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999, pp. 203–216 and Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. Band 1. Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp [1981] 1995, pp. 332–345.

It is probably not inadmissible to clarify a major concern of these two texts of Weber, using a citation from a much earlier intervention, where he exclaimed: “The reason why I react so extremely sharply on every occasion, with a certain pedantry as far as I am concerned, against the amalgamation of ‘ought-to-be’ with ‘what-is’ [*die Verquickung des Seinsollens mit dem Seienden*] is not that I underestimate the question concerning “ought”, but exactly the opposite: because I cannot bear it when problems of world-shattering importance, of greatest ideal range, in a certain sense the highest problems, that can move a human heart, are changed here into an issue of technico-economic ‘productivity’ and made to a subject of specialist discipline [*Fachdisziplin*], as national economy is.” (*Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Soziologie und Sozialpolitik von Max Weber*, p. 421, pointed out by Willi Oelmüller in “Gibt es überzeugende Orientierungssysteme für unser politisches Handeln?”, *Diskurs: Politik*. W. Oelmüller, et al. (eds.). Paderborn, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1980, p. 15).

This question of world-shattering importance that fills Weber with so much passion, his concern for “ought-to-be”, for how one is supposed to act, for ethics, is identified here by a refusal of the temptation to answer it by the means of scientific disciplines. The reason for this is because of Weber’s well-known conviction that the sciences can and should ultimately be neutral with regard to value (*wertfrei*). This conviction stands in close connection with the theory of the kind of world in which the scientific disciplines as forms of reason have come to being.

2 In the works of Levinas there is not explicit reference to Weber.

larisation that Levinas developed³ has little in common with Weber's reconstruction of the rationalisation of religions,⁴ but it does correspond with Weber in that it is about a description of the contemporary world as disenchanted and rejects a unilaterally positive appraisal of reason and the development of technology⁵ and with it refuses to believe in a certain Enlightenment faith in progress.⁶ That this process leads to a disenchanted world is common to Levinas' ideas of secularisation and Weber's on rationalisation, whatever the different accents of this notion might be for each of them. Although there is no theory of the modern State and bureaucracy in Levinas, he apparently shares Weber's disillusionment in both of them, as is clear when he states:

"For me, the negative element, the element of violence in the State, in the hierarchy, appears even when the hierarchy functions perfectly, when everyone submits to universal ideas. There are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable Order. There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see: the tears of the Other".⁷

Likewise, although there is no comparable social theory of science in Levinas, he apparently shares Weber's conviction that in the modern disenchanted world the sciences are not capable of giving decisive direction to our choices of actions since, for Levinas, they remain "gnoseologically" oriented (as does Western philosophy) and place the question of ethics second.⁸

The fact that practically all of Levinas' efforts are devoted to the affirmation of one particular direction-giving meaning should not obscure the fact that he was convinced that he lived in a polytheistic world. This should be evident from his elaborations on the "crisis of monotheism" as presented in Merleau-Pontian terms in *Humanism of the other* (see Chapter 5, above). Even if it is Levinas' contention that there is a unifying point of reconciliation

3 In "Sécularisation et faim", (*Emmanuel Lévinas*. Cahier de l'Herne. Catherine Chalié and Miguel Abensour (eds.). Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 1991, pp. 19–28) and in "Transcendance, idolatry and secularization" (GDT, 163–166 / DMT 190–194).

4 Cf. Wolfgang Schluchter's excellent synthesis in "Die Paradoxie der Rationalisierung. Zum Verhältnis von 'Ethik' und 'Welt' bei Max Weber", in *Rationalismus und Weltbeherrschung. Studien zu Max Weber*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980, pp. 9–40.

5 Making place for an incomplete dialectic between the gains and losses of technological development DF 231 / DL 323, IH 142, commented on in *De l'éthique à la justice* 145–147.

6 Cf. Danilo Martuccelli, *Sociologies de la modernité*, *op. cit.* p. 204.

7 BPW 23 / LC 97.

8 OB 64 / AE 104.

of all meaningful action, the manner in which he develops this idea shows some affinities with Weber's theoretical writings on religion. For Weber the diverse religious traditions of theodicy point to the impossibility of harmonising the religious attitude of salvation religions and the factual causality of this world – there is no necessary connection between good action and good consequences;⁹ for Levinas, if the “old-fashioned Judaism is dying off, or is already dead”,¹⁰ if the simple religious adoration of God in Judaism has become impossible in the aftermath of the genocide, it is because there is no argument that could put an omnipotent God in the right for these happenings and in this sense, as Levinas said: God “committed suicide at Auschwitz”.¹¹ Therefore, there is in his philosophical thinking no pre-conceived expectation of a guarantee that well-intended action will lead to good results. In other words, the recognition of the crisis of monotheism amounts to the acceptance of *polytheism as a socio-descriptive category*. It is in answer to this “polytheism” that Levinas proposes the unique sense (*sense unique*) that is ethnicity.

There is a second, double, way in which Levinas' ethics itself is bound to the idea of polytheism, and this should crystallise from the critical reading of his ethics that I have presented in Chapter 6. On the one hand, the third introduces a contradiction with respect to the ethical appeal of the singular other which means that, on “entering” the political, responsibility equals deciding who should come first – which one of the competing and, in principle, equally valid “gods” should be given priority. The word “god” is appropriate here, since it is the affirmation of the ethical alterity of the other that constitutes Levinas' response to the “crisis of monotheism”. The plurality of mutually contradictory, infinite appeals to the responsibility of the subject, could thus be said to represent an *ethical polytheism*. On the other hand, every ethical subject, once he/she has established what the appropriate way is to cope with the plurality of contradicting claims of the others, has to put through this idea of what justice entails in a social reality of competing claims to what justice entails. And since nobody can claim to directly present the unified appeal of the other, and everybody presents always only ideas of what the compromise between different claims to responsibility entails, it is not realistic to count on a consensus based on the “appeal of the other”. Furthermore, it should be noted that one is at a loss for finding any guidance in Levinas' philosophy

9 PaV 122f / PaB 443f; cf. ENT 188 / EN 194.

10 DF 271 / DL 377.

11 Visage et violence première”, interview in *La différence comme non-indifférence. Ethique et altérité chez Emmanuel Lévinas*. Paris: Kimé, 1995, pp. 129–143, citation p. 135. See also the discussion of “atheism” in Levinas' Judaism, in Chapter 4.

on either of these two forms of plurality. In this way, the plurality of ethical subjects that compete for the realisation of what they hold justice to entail, amounts to an *ethico-political polytheism* or a *polytheism of justice*.

It should be highlighted once again that the picture that one forms of Levinas' ethics – in this case especially in relation to the question of polytheism – depends on the distinction between two levels of his thought: that of ethics and that of politics. If I argue for a polytheism in Levinas' politics, I do not deny his (in my mind, failed) attempt to defend a monotheism in his ethics that is partially based on a critique of social processes through the deployment of the metaphor of a plurality of sacred deities (see Chapter 2).

Whatever the differences might be that distinguish these two authors (despite the indicated similarities), both consider responsibility as the appropriate response for people to this inhospitable world.

2 LEVINAS: A *GESINNUNGSETHIKER* OR A *VERANTWORTUNGSETHIKER*?

It would be imprudent to equate Weber's and Levinas' notions of "responsibility" simply on the basis of their use of the same (translated) word. In fact, if one considers Weber's presentation of the "two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims [*zwei voneinander grundverschiedenen, unausragbar gegensätzlichen Maximen*]" under which "all ethically oriented conduct [*alles ethisch orientierte Handeln*]"¹² may be classified – the *ethic of (ultimate) principle(s)* [*Gesinnungsethik*], that insists on the right intention or principle as determining the ethical goodness of an action, and the *ethic of responsibility* [*Verantwortungsethik*], that determines ethically desired courses of action by weighing the likely consequences and adopting the appropriate means by which to attain the desired outcome¹³ – it would

12 PaV 120 / PaB 441.

13 It is not easy to find the appropriate terms by which to translate these Weberian notions in English. Of the uncertainty of the precise meaning of the two notions, Hans Lenk, one of the foremost German specialists of the philosophy of responsibility, writes in *Konkrete Humanität. Vorlesungen über Verantwortung und Menschlichkeit*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998, p. 138): he suggests that *Verantwortungsethik* be considered in the case of Weber as equivalent to *Folgenethik* (ethics of consequences) or *Konsequenzethik* (consequentialism) and gives *Prinzipienethik* (ethics of principles) as equivalent to *Gesinnungsethik*. In what follows, I shall simply translate *Verantwortungsethik* as ethic of responsibility and follow Lenk's suggestion to translate *Gesinnungsethik* as ethic of (ultimate) principle(s). The use of "ethic of ultimate ends" for *Gesinnungsethik* in the translation of *Politics as a vocation*, seems completely misleading if "ends" refer

seem at first sight, that Levinas' notion of responsibility stands much closer to Weber's notion of an ethics of principle.

2.1 The *prima facie* case for Levinas as "ethicist of principle"

How strong this *prima facie* case is, could be indicated with reference to Weber's famous *Zwischenbrachtung*.¹⁴ Here the sociologist argues that an ethics of principle is the culmination of a certain history of religious evolution and equates it to an ethic of brotherliness. He devotes a good number of pages to motivate and illustrate his point that

"[t]he religion of brotherliness [*religiöse Brüderlichkeit*] has always clashed with the orders and values of this world [...]."¹⁵

Now, although Levinas' ethics should not be misconstrued as a "religion of brotherliness" or "religious brotherliness", it could be argued that his notion of responsibility corresponds point by point with such a "brotherly ethic"¹⁶ or ethic of principle, at least as far as it is negatively situated in relation to the widely accepted values of different life spheres.

to the consideration of outcomes of action; another possible translation for *Gesinnungsethik*, namely "ethic of conviction" is better and has the advantage of expressing the idea of attitude in *Gesinnungsethik*, but should perhaps rather be avoided since the ethicist of responsibility also acts out of conviction – this time not convictions regarding context-independent principles, but convictions regarding means and consequences. Furthermore, the option of the translation of "ethic of principle" avoids confusion later when Ricoeur's notion of conviction will have to be distinguished from his interpretation of *Gesinnungsethik*, even if he translates the latter notion with "éthique de conviction".

Since the aim of examining these notions of Weber (in this entire Part) is to come to a better understanding of what the practical implications of political responsibility are, it is not important to distinguish between a Weberian theory of *ethic* (with the accent of the description of a habitual way of acting) and, say, a Levinasian theory of *ethics* (with its accent on the imperative and meta-ethical import); evaluating an ethic of responsibility (as Weber undertakes) simply overlaps with reflection on a justifiable ethics of responsibility (as Levinas attempts), at least in as far as the implications of their insertion in practical contexts is concerned. For this reason I make use of (a theory of the evaluation of) *ethic* and (a theory of the justification of) *ethics* as interchangeable notions.

14 Although this text is slightly earlier than PaB (1919) and WaB (1917) there are numerous points of correspondence in the text that show the closeness with *Politics as a vocation*.

15 RRW 330 / ZB 544.

16 Cf. "It is my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign [...] that constitutes the original fact of fraternity." (T&I 214 / TI 235).

The five different life spheres with which such a brotherly ethic is explained by Weber to be in conflict are: economics, politics, aesthetics, erotics and the intellectual sphere. Now consider a number of specifications concerning ethics in the work of Levinas. In each case, something is said of the tension between ethicity and the normal logic of the particular life sphere.

(1) Economy:

“The commercial value of services and human labour gives credence to the strong idea of *being* as totalised and one and (when integrated to the economy and the arithmetic of money) as the order or system that hides or conceals the disorder of the merciless struggles of profit-sharing [*intéressement*]”,

to which Levinas opposes the “axiology of *dis-interestedness* [*dés-inter-essement*] [...] which is the kindness of giving”.¹⁷

(2) Politics:

Whereas the “necessities peculiar to the State” constitute

“a determinism as rigorous as that of nature indifferent to man, even though justice [...] may have, at the start, served as an end or pretext for the political necessities”,

Levinas defends the prophetic constitution of ethics as an instance outside of the State that is characterised by

“a vigilance totally different from political intelligence, a lucidity not limited to yielding before the formalism of universality, but upholding justice itself in its limitations”.¹⁸

Likewise, if we consider that Weber discusses the “depersonalisation” [*Sachlichkeit*] of the bureaucratic State also under this heading,¹⁹ Levinas’ conviction should be again evoked that

“[t]here are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable Order. There are, if you like, the tears that a civil servant cannot see: the tears of the Other.”²⁰

(3) Aesthetics:

“before Culture and Aesthetics, meaning is situated in the Ethical, presupposed by all Culture and all meaning.”²¹

17 “Socialité et argent”, in *Emmanuel Lévinas*. Cahier de l’Herne. Catherine Chaliel and Miguel Abensour (eds.). Paris: Editions de l’Herne, 1991, pp. 106–112, citations pp. 109 and 110 respectively.

18 OS 123 / HS 167.

19 RWW334 / ZB 546.

20 BPW 23 / LC 97.

It can be conceded that art is a “renewal of the interest for the other”, only if it has been recognised first that

“the look of the artist aims at finding novelty, the first contact with. It is not on the level of the relation to the Other that this process is situated, but on the level of the discovery of the world.”²²

(4) Erotics:

“The referral to the other is an awakening to nearness, which is responsibility for the neighbour to the point of substitution, which is the enucleation of the transcendental subject. Here we find the notion of a love without eros.”²³

And this notion is clarified elsewhere as

“love without Eros, charity, love in which the ethical aspect dominates the passionate aspect, love without concupiscence”.²⁴

(5) Intellectual sphere:

Levinas critiques Western philosophy that

“has never doubted the gnoseological, and consequently ontological, structure of signification”

by calling for the recognition of “a sense somewhere else than in ontology” and by implication, somewhat different from the gnoseological.²⁵

Likewise,

“this way of grappling with the perfection of the infinite is not a theoretical consideration in turn in which liberty would spontaneously re-assume its rights. It is a *shame* that liberty has of itself, when it discovers its very exercise to be murder and usurpation.”²⁶

These references, isolated from their context, certainly do not represent Levinas’ often complex (and developing) vision of these aspects of social reality, and I don’t ignore the fact that one could therefore evoke a number of passages that would contradict some of those cited here²⁷ – in fact, my presentation of Levinas’ philosophy on two plains, that of ethics and that

21 HO 36 / HH 58, translation modified.

22 “Deux dialogues avec Emmanuel Lévinas”, in Augusto Ponzio. *Sujet et altérité. Sur Emmanuel Lévinas*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996, pp. 143–151, citations p. 149.

23 GDT 233 / DMT 257.

24 ENT 103 / EN 114.

25 OB 64 / AE 104.

26 DEHH 176.

27 See for instance my discussion of Levinas’ thought on the economy in *De l’éthique à la justice* 166–171.

of politics, could contribute to an explanation of why that is the case. But that is not the issue here. The citations do suffice to make the *prima facie* case for associating him rather with an ethic of brotherly love and thus with Weber's ethic of principle and to justify my call for vigilance in comparing Levinas' "responsabilité" with Weber's "Verantwortungsethik".

Without identifying Levinas' ethics with Weber's ethic of principle, Dorando Michelini²⁸ has argued that

"the interest of the Levinasian reflection on responsibility lies in a perspective that is diametrically opposed to that of Weber – given that Levinas is not that much interested in drawing up an ethical system to consider ethical actions and decisions, but rather to reflect on the radical origin of all responsibility as answer to the appeal of the other."²⁹

Since this articulation, at least of the formal characteristics of Levinas' intention, is perfectly correct, it would be interesting to show how Michelini construes the opposition between the Weberian and the Levinasian perspectives on responsibility.

Whereas direct and indirect consequences of actions are central for Weber, according to Michelini's observation they play only a secondary role in Levinas (meaning probably both secondary in volume discussed and secondary to ethical alterity). In fact,

"unlike Weber and Jonas, Levinas understands ethics and responsibility not from the consequences of human action but from the relation to the other."³⁰

It is, according to Michelini, probably due to the French philosopher's insistence on the radical alterity of the other and this lack of regard for the consequences of action that it is not simple to formulate a social ethic from a Levinasian perspective. Four weaknesses of Levinas' notion of responsibility could be derived from this general remark. In all of them the absence of a truly Weberian attention to the consequences of action leads to defects in the application of Levinas' ethics.³¹

28 Dorando Michelini, "Ética de la responsabilidad. Modelos de fundamentación y aplicación" in *Concordia* 41, 2002, pp. 83–103 (henceforth = EdIR). Despite the fact that the Weber-Levinas comparison forms only a limited part of Michelini's larger project, namely to trace the similarities and divergences between the approaches of Weber, Jonas, Levinas and Apel, I was not able to find any more significant – and no sustained – comparison of Weber and Levinas on the question of responsibility.

29 EdIR 84–85.

30 EdIR 92.

31 EdIR 94.

- (1) The root of Levinasian responsibility is not in the “I” but in the other, which entails a serious undermining of autonomy.
- (2) It is an individual responsibility of the I for the other, which provides no significant contribution to social ethics and is thus not capable of contributing towards

“a realistic and minimally objective consideration of the problems of power and the systems of autoaffirmation, like the economy, law or politics”.³²
- (3) The notion of a face-to-face responsibility is a-historical, since it doesn’t take into account the complex and multiple mediations between the I and the other in everyday life.
- (4) Following Habermas, Michelini claims that in situations where multiple ethical options are constituted by complex ideological or cultural differences, rational decision-making depends on inclusive, critical discourse that aims at consensus seeking and that is an indispensable requisite for a justifiable inter-subjective practice. Yet, these are not developed or taken into account by Levinas.

Therefore, despite his effort to find a more radical justification of responsibility, Levinas’ version of responsibility is, in Michelini’s judgement, not able to help in the solution of contemporary moral problems;³³ the anarchical and non-reciprocal construal of responsibility

“diametrically contradicts a conception of responsibility conceived as awareness and capacity to moral judgement that is socially and historically formed.”³⁴

Although Michelini doesn’t attribute these incapacitating defects of Levinas’ philosophy to its religious roots,³⁵ his whole presentation of responsibility in Levinas is subtended by the conviction that its religious foundation³⁶ is contrasted to Weber’s monological, narrowly strategically- and instrumentally-based conception of responsibility.³⁷ If one considers that the relation to the

32 EdIR 94.

33 This is a criticism often directed at Levinas. Although my own critique of his ethics goes in the same direction, it needs to be stressed that if Levinas was able to provide as little as only a justification for the claim to the tenability of the ethical, he would have rendered an enormous service, not only to the philosophical contemplation of ethics, but also to the quite practical question of how to start speaking about the ethical in a domain of the everyday world, namely philosophy, where the conviction of the death of God reigns. The latter could be considered the most important and difficult of all meta-ethical problems.

34 EdIR 101.

35 EdIR 91.

36 Thus Michelini, EdIR 101.

37 EdIR 101.

other (the brother, as Levinas says) is central to Levinas' ethics, and connects with it Michelini's interpretation of the religiosity of Levinas' work, then it seems permissible to conclude that Michelini would tend to link Levinas' ethics rather to Weber's ethic of principle or ethic of brotherliness (although he doesn't do so explicitly). Be that as it may, what is important is that Michelini argues for a marked distinction or even conflict between the notion of responsibility in Levinas and in Weber.

Having now shown that a *prima facie* case could be made for pairing Levinas' notion of responsibility with Weber's notion of an ethic of principle and having presented Michelini's case for a patent distinction between the notion of responsibility in Levinas and Weber, I would like to make the opposite case. I shall not at all attempt to show that Levinas was a Weberian; rather, in accord with the aims set out for this comparison, I shall use Weber's notions of responsibility as a lens through which to magnify certain aspects of Levinas' thought on responsibility.

I have argued above that Levinas shares with Weber significant aspects of the diagnosis of contemporary society (or *Gegenwartsdiagnose*) of disenchantment and polytheism, with their concomitant experiences of loss of freedom and loss of meaning. Again, in figuring out how to situate Levinas with respect to Weber's notion of responsibility, it will be of utmost importance to distinguish whether one considers the ethical plain of Levinas' thought or the plain of the political implications thereof. I shall argue that if, for the purposes of this examination, we were to accept Weber's categorisation, Levinas would seem to a considerable extent to be an ethicist of ultimate principles (*Gesinnungsethiker*) on the plane of his ethics. Yet, as argued since Chapter 1, a purely ethical subject never exists – a consequent Levinasian reading would have to concede that the subject is always political – and in his reflection on the political plain and the implications thereof pointed out in Chapter 6, Levinas then seems more an ethicist of responsibility (*Verantwortungsethiker*) in the Weberian sense.

2.2 Levinas as political “ethicist of responsibility”

However, before one could undertake such a comparison between Levinas and Weber, it would be necessary to gain clarity on the exact nature of the categorisation of the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility, since this has implications for the manner in which this comparison can be plausibly undertaken. A number of features of Weber's presentation of the two ethical categories in *Politics as a vocation* would suggest that they are

categories specifically for political action. The distinction fits into the overall theme of the essay on the nature of the vocation of politics.³⁸ The first place in the essay where the question of responsibility is raised consists of a distinction between the responsibility of a bureaucrat or civil servant and the responsibility of a political leader.³⁹ Then, after lengthy sociological analyses of the modern State and the different manners in which one could live *off* or *for* politics in the State,⁴⁰ Weber reintroduces the question of responsibility by a question that he typifies as “ethical”:

“What kind of a person must one be to dare to put his hand on/in the wheel of history?”⁴¹

Responsibility, passion and a sense of proportion are the characteristics of such a person – clearly those of a political leader and not of every human being. Besides, from the entire essay it is clear that “responsibility” is the attitude that Weber sees as necessary for someone who operates with the means particular to politics, namely “power backed up by *violence*”.⁴² Even then, when the issue of the inevitable means of politics provokes the question concerning the relationship between ethics and politics⁴³ and an ethic that is conscious of the means to be used (responsibility) is opposed to an ethic that insists on the right intention of action (ethic of principle), the theme is clearly still that of a political ethic. Yet, when the distinction between the two kinds of ethics is introduced explicitly for the first time in the essay, Weber unmistakably states

“the fact that *all ethically oriented conduct* may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an ‘ethic of ultimate principles’ or to an ‘ethic of responsibility’.”⁴⁴

And at the climax of the essay where Weber sings the praises of a truly mature person’s responsibility, assumed to the point of saying figuratively “I can do no other; here I stand”, he implores his readers:

38 See also the valuable commentaries of Bradley E. Starr, “The structure of Max Weber’s ethic of responsibility”, in *The journal of religious ethics*, 27/3 1999, pp. 407–434 and Wolfgang Schluchter, *Wertfreiheit und Verantwortungsethik. Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Politik bei Max Weber*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1971.

39 PaV 95 / PaB 414f.

40 PaV 77–115 / PaB 396–435.

41 PaV 115 / PaB 435, translation modified.

42 PaV 119 / PaB 439.

43 PaV 118 / PaB 439.

44 PaV 120 / PaB 441, translation modified, my italics.

“every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realise the possibility of finding himself at some time in that position.”⁴⁵

Conceded, this is not always everybody’s situation, but it could happen to everybody, whereas evidently it could not realistically be expected that the vocation of politics (in Weber’s sense) will fall on everybody.

These two uses of Weber’s categorisation can’t be easily or obviously reconciled. But since the current objective is not to solve a difficulty in Weber’s text, but rather to use his text as a lens through which to gaze at Levinas’ text, I suggest the following coordination of the two uses. What Weber says about the ethic of responsibility and about the ethic of ultimate principles is intended as insight into the nature of action for the modern world of advanced rationalisation and disenchantment, as he understands it. Even if Weber focuses on the question of politics in the essay under discussion, it should follow that the socio-historical conditions under which any political ethic is to gain its plausibility, are the same as the conditions under which any ethic is to demonstrate its appropriateness. Now, not all fields of ethics have to do with the adoption of the means of the State, the means particular to politics, but in all ethics the question of the preference for principle-guidedness or consequence-guidedness is important in that it confronts pre-established principles with the means appropriate to that field of action. Moreover, if the question about Levinas’ stance in relation to these two ethical orientations is posed, it should be borne in mind that all action is for Levinas political (as previously argued). This doesn’t mean that it has directly to do with the violent means at the disposal of a State – Levinas’ definition of politics is formed by the ethical obligation to the others and the consequent quest for justice – but that it might ultimately lead to an impact on those means.

What, then, is the most appropriate response to our current world and in the face of the other? What is the most fitting ethical orientation in this inhospitable world? Levinas adamantly affirms that the answer is to be sought in a particular understanding of the ethical: the other impacts on the subject as an appeal to limitless responsibility. And it is this originary orientation of all action that exerts its authority without apparent regard for the situation or the mediations of actions, that prompts someone like Michelini to characterise Levinas’ thought as *a-social and a-historical*.⁴⁶ It is thus not only the remarks in which Levinas negatively demarcates his ethics with regard to the inherent rationality proper to the independent life spheres that suggest a

45 PaV 127 / PaB 448f.

46 This aspect of Levinas’ thought on ethics has been exposed in Chapter 6 with reference to his use of the famous passage from *The brothers Karamazov*.

proximity between his ethical notion of responsibility and Weber's ethic of principle (as indicated above), but the fact that all actions apparently draw their ultimate and decisive meaning from unconditional obedience to the imperative of the other also points in the same direction. However, this holds only so long as the comparison is limited to the plain of Levinas' ethics that considers only the relation between the ethical subject and the *other in the singular*. But following the repeatedly cited theme of the present book:

“there are always at least three people. [...] As soon as there are three people, the ethical relation to the other becomes political and enters into the totalizing discourse of ontology.”⁴⁷

A subject that is “always” obsessed by more than one other will always be political and as such is submerged in the discourse of ontology, in other words, will always have to weigh, calculate, interpret and reflect on the efficiency of actions involving others. From this perspective, from the plain of Levinas' politics, the relationship between his thoughts and an ethic of principle is markedly different. Weber will help us to articulate this difference between Levinas' political thought and the ethic of principle, before we turn in a similar way to an articulation of the resemblance of Levinas' notion of responsibility and Weber's, on the political level.

According to Weber's classification, the calculation of the consequences of action doesn't play an important role in the ethic of principle.⁴⁸ It doesn't have to, since the ethic of principle is fed by a rejection of the irrationality of the world: it assumes that good actions lead to good consequences (even if appearances contradict this assumption) and that there could be no conflict between different duties.⁴⁹ Besides, reflection on the consequences might compromise the fidelity with which one adheres to the intrinsic worth of certain general values or principles of actions. Furthermore, an ethic of principle ignores the fact that sometimes forceful or even violent means have to be adopted to see through what is considered a desirable decision and course of action. Only in extreme cases does principled ethical deliberation embrace the use of evil's means against itself and that is when, from a chiliastic-eschatological perspective, violent means are adopted to commit the

“*last violent deed, which would then lead to a state of affairs in which all violence is annihilated*”.⁵⁰

47 “Ethics of the infinite”, *op. cit.* pp. 57–58 / “De la phénoménologie à l'éthique”, *op. cit.* p. 129 (translation modified).

48 PaV 120–122 / PaB 441–443.

49 Cf. Starr, “The structure of Max Weber's ethic of responsibility” *op. cit.* p. 415.

50 PaV 122 / PaB 443.

Levinas' *political* thought (following the interpretation that I have given thereof in Chapters 1 and 6) stands in stark contrast to this context-blind attitude. Although it is true that, as I have pointed out, the subject of politics is obsessed by the appeal of the other (albeit in the plural) to which, in each case, absolute, unconditional obedience is due, it would not be correct to equate this to an attitude of absolute fidelity to a set of values. The appeal of the other is a void imperative to responsibility and, as pointed out (Chapter 6, § 2.1.), the imperative emanating from one other contradicts that of other others, because of its equally and contemporaneously valid, unconditional and all-embracing nature. Levinas is thus very conscious of the fact of contradiction between one's duties. It is exactly for this reason, or from this condition, that the subject as political subject is constituted. And since the political subject is constituted by contradicting equally valid claims to his/her responsibility, means should be devised to compare the incomparable; political subjectivity is born from the fact that there is no set of actions by which to serve all of the interests of all of the others at the same time; something, or someone, inevitably has to be sacrificed – preferably the ethical agent himself/herself in the first place, but calculation will have to determine this. It is here that the socio-historical context of action becomes important. It seems to me that this political condition could lead to “comparing the incomparable” equally possibly by means of hierarchies of values and by calculation of consequences.

However, in the places where Levinas gives an idea of what politics entails, he uses words like comparing, gathering, thinking, equalising,⁵¹ judging, deciding,⁵² weighing, calculating, and measuring – notions that seem to indicate deliberation on consequences rather than the establishment of values. This is clarified further when Levinas explains that this entails the quest for justice, by means of laws, courts, States,⁵³ propositions and communication,⁵⁴ work and technology,⁵⁵ science and commerce,⁵⁶ and philosophy that is charged with introducing a measure in the comparison.⁵⁷ Given these spheres of the realisation of deliberation concerning the just ways of arbitrating the contradicting claims of responsibility, it seems unlikely that a true Levinasian would leave deliberations concerning the consequences of actions out of consideration. In fact, it seems probable that the notion of re-

51 OB 16 / AE 33, GCM 82 / DVI 132.

52 AS 61.

53 ENT 165 / EN 171, GDT 183 / DMT 214.

54 OS 142 / HS 192, OB 134 / AE 211.

55 OB 159 / AE 248.

56 OB 161 / AE 251.

57 OB 161 / AE 251. On these routes from the ethical appeal to responsibility to domains of the realisation of justice in the sphere of ontology, see *De l'éthique à la justice* 271–274.

sponsibility, on the plain of politics, would mean that one would have to stand accountable for the means chosen by which to respond to the appeal of the others. This would be affirmed by the fact that all actions stand forever open to revision and improvement – one would have to evaluate the *outcomes* of action for their fidelity to respond to the others. That Levinas would count on a happy outcome for whatever is undertaken in the name of the others is excluded. For this, he is too disillusioned with the world.⁵⁸

Now, if it is true that the quest for appropriate ways to respond to the contradicting appeals of the others leads to the adoption of the means of the different life spheres, and if we take into consideration Levinas' suspicion of the inevitable violent inclination of means on the plain of ontology, then it seems unavoidable to conclude that he would have agreed that the "good" could be realised by "evil" means. This becomes evident when we consider his refusal of "non-resistance to evil".⁵⁹ And it is here that an unexpected similarity with the ethic of principle crops up on the level of politics. My discussion in Chapter 6 of possible drifts of political radicalism in the frame of a Levinasian ethics, should suffice to support the claim that the radical eschatologically minded seizure of violent means in order to make an end to violence for ever, could not be excluded as a possible outcome of the Levinasian styled calculations of how best to serve the contradicting demands of the others. At least, if it is correct that Weber's presentation of the ethic of principle could be divided into three categories⁶⁰ – religious-acosmic, pacifistic-political and radical-revolutionary – then the Levinasian seeker of justice will never be religious-acosmic, but might perhaps under certain circumstances share traits with the pacifistic-political (however, Levinas' explicit rejection of non resistance to injustice and violence would tend to exclude this) and it could not be excluded that the radical-revolutionary stance be adopted.⁶¹ It seems then that *in Levinas' political thought, he is quite far from an ethic of ultimate principles*, and comes closer to the attitude of an ethic of principles, only to the degree that the ethic of principle itself cedes to the temptation of interfering in the conse-

58 However, one might detect a principled ethical trait in Levinas' fallacious conclusion that the different infinite responsibilities limit each other – this boils down to a form of thinking that good actions will have good consequences (see Chapter 6, § 2.2.). But for Levinas, the limitation of responsibility is not necessarily something good. Furthermore, when Levinas expresses his belief that the individualist and somewhat anarchic ethics of Jerusalem will hold the Athenian doctrine of hierarchy in balance (BPW 24 / LC 99, as was explained and disputed in Chapter 6, § 2.3.), he falls in the ethico-cosmic realist trap.

59 ENT 105 / EN 115.

60 According to the exposition in Hans Henrik Bruun's *Science, Values, and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology* – referred to by Bradley Starr in "The structure of Max Weber's ethic of responsibility" *op. cit.* p. 416.

61 Cf. discussion of "for instance", in Chapter 6, § 2.2.).

quences of its action, that is, to have considerations concerning means override (temporarily or by *ad hoc* justifications and modifications) the ultimate principles. Hence the need to have a look, with Levinas, at the ethics of means and consequences – the ethics of responsibility.

At first glance one could point out a clash between the spirit of Levinas' philosophy and the first three-fold qualifications of responsibility in Weber's essay.⁶² (1) For Levinas the subject of politics is always obsessed by the imperatives of the others; Weber's politician's passion has the meaning of objectiveness (*Sachlichkeit*). (2) Levinas' is inspired by the other; Weber's is devoted to a cause. (3) Levinas' is forever infinitely responsible; for Weber's the sense of proportion is a decisive quality. However, it can be demonstrated that a categorical opposition between a Levinasian responsibility of "peace and proximity" and a Weberian responsibility of "recourse to violent means and objective distance" would simply be a misrepresentation of the implications of their thought.

To begin with, on the political plain the Levinasian political subject cannot but calculate the consequences of his or her action and therefore also the means necessary to act in particular spheres of life: justice, States, communication, work, technology, science, commerce and philosophy. This has already been argued above. For this reason the drive to gain power, typical for the Weberian politician, may not at all be excluded from the effort of the practical realisation of a Levinasian politics. The reconstruction of Levinas' politics that I have presented (Chapters 1 and 6) seems to be in perfect correspondence with Weber's affirmation that

"[n]o ethics in the world can dodge the fact that in numerous instances the attainment of 'good' ends is bound to the fact that one must be willing to pay the price of using morally dubious means or at least dangerous ones – and facing the possibility or even the probability of evil ramifications. From no ethics in the world can it be concluded when and to what extent the ethically good purpose 'justifies' [*heiligt*] the ethically dangerous means and ramifications."⁶³

It therefore certainly holds for the political implications of Levinas' politics that

"he who lets himself in for politics, that is for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers and for his action it is *not* true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true."⁶⁴

62 PaV 115–116 / PaB 435–436.

63 PaV 121 / PaB 442.

64 PaV 123 / PaB 444. Cf. my argument concerning a Levinasian justification to kill under certain circumstances, in Chapter 6, §2.1. The characterisation of powers as "diabolical" in the citation from Weber stems from the fact that he attributes this insight (amongst others) to the early Christians; in a secularised form Weber ascribes to this view (cf. PaV 125 / PaB 447).

This is true also of a Levinasian that, for the sake of the effective realisation of justice, needs associates – the *collaborators* or followers will have to be incorporated into the desired project, whatever their motivations for collaboration might be – be it as manifestation of what they consider the appropriate response to the appeals of the other, or some or other material, social or psychological gain.⁶⁵ In addition, it would hold to a greater or lesser degree also for any Levinasian political project that

“one of the conditions for success is the depersonalisation and routinisation, in short the psychic proletarianisation, in the interest of discipline”.⁶⁶

This would certainly not exclude that a Levinasian project team would always consist of people that contribute to each other’s mutual sensitisation to the ethical.⁶⁷ However, it is unrealistic to think that the narrow common motivation – responding to the appeal of the others – would spontaneously lead to a broad consensus on political action. And if there is no guarantee of consensus, then somebody will have to put through his or her idea of what best justice entails *at the price of* some collaborator’s ideas on the same issue and *with* their collaboration none the less (which does not exclude that the others will simply abandon the project). Yet, reflection on co-responsibility is very far from Levinas’ domain of interest.

These are some of the paradoxes to which Levinas’ notion of responsibility inevitably leads in the domain of the political; however, it seems unlikely that Levinas would have had the courage to acknowledge with Weber (as I think he should have) that

“[w]hoever wants to engage in politics at all [...] must know that he is responsible for what may become of himself under the impact of these paradoxes”⁶⁸

that may endanger the “salvation of the soul”⁶⁹ in that sense. Furthermore, although the Levinasian political subject, then, takes the meaning of human action seriously, I am not convinced that Levinas shows sufficiently intimate

“knowledge of tragedy with which all action, but especially political action, is truly interwoven”.⁷⁰

But even then, Levinas never uses ethics as a means of justifying action or events, “of being in the right”,⁷¹ and always as a manner of pursuing a

65 PaV 125 / PaB 446.

66 PaV 125 / PaB 447.

67 Cf. Levinas on “awakening” (*éveil*) and “sobering-up” (*dégrisement*) – *De l'éthique à la justice* Chapter 8, § 2.1 “Le dédire et la poursuite de l’authenticité” and § 2.2 “La communauté des philosophes et les livres”.

68 PaV 125 / PaB 447.

69 PaV 126 / PaB 447.

70 PaV 117 / PaB 437; cf. PaV 121 / PaB 442.

cause⁷² in full cognisance of the means associated with a domain of action⁷³ and with the non rational nature of the world⁷⁴ – all of which are typical of the Weberian ethic of responsibility.

If it is correct then to attribute to the political Levinas at least the implicit recognition that the use of forceful means and reflection on the consequences thereof are indispensable for the quest for justice, it is patent that we do not have to do here with a politics of turning the other cheek. Self-sacrifice, that is, considering oneself as the ultimate means to a specific end, can however never be excluded as political strategy. Turning the other cheek is an attitude of unconditional surrender to the other – but in Levinas’ politics the subject’s giving to the other is not unconditional, it is conditioned by the calculation of which of the others comes first and of the most effective use the subject can make of himself or herself in that justice. If that consists of self-sacrifice, then the infinite responsibility to the others calls for it, but this would not always be the case. Equally possible is that the political subject accords to himself or herself an important role, for the sake of an efficient response to the others. As pointed out previously, Levinas does not support non-resistance to evil and would therefore certainly agree with Weber’s politician that

“thou *shalt* resist evil [and, if need be – EW] by force, or else you are responsible for the evil winning out.”⁷⁵

Hence I find it very unlikely that a Levinasian on the political plain would practise *truthfulness* at all costs, as a principled ethicist would⁷⁶ – at least if he or she does, it is not for the truthfulness as such, but for the others. Rather, in the name of the other one might have to lie, obscure, or misrepresent information, exactly because the question of consequences of action is in harmony with the responsible quest for justice.

Responsibility on the political plain probably entails for Levinas, as for Weber, that the results of actions are imputed by the subject to his or her own agency,⁷⁷ whether they were intended or not, adequate for or contradicting of the initial intention.⁷⁸ This could be done only when

71 PaV 118 / PaB 439.

72 PaV 117 / PaB 438.

73 Although I have argued in Chapter 6 that Levinas didn’t always realise what this implies.

74 PaV 123 / PaB 444.

75 PaV 119–120 / PaB 440.

76 PaV 120 / PaB 441.

77 PaV 121 / PaB 442.

78 PaV 117 / PaB 437.

such an agent is convinced of the desirability of the cause that he or she pursues. Although it is certainly correct to state that Levinas' politics is driven by the plurality of ethical appeals of the others, this does, through the mediating process of calculating what justice entails, mean pursuing a cause, namely the quest for the realisation of that justice (that is of course always in principle open to revision under the appeal of the others). Even here is found a correspondence with Weber's responsibility, since when Weber asserts:

"Exactly what the cause, in the service of which the politician strives for power and uses power, looks like is a matter of faith [*Glaubenssache*]",⁷⁹

he means that the idea of the end that is to be pursued cannot be given by scientific means, since no form of science can provide that kind of guidance.⁸⁰ And likewise, what Weber calls faith, Levinas develops in the greatest detail in his rendering of one's non-ontological affectedness by the alterity of the other, of which ultimately no phenomenology can give account (i.e., just like faith, the affectedness by the other is a source of motivation that does not draw its resources from knowledge or science). But even if the Levinasian political subject is obsessed by the alterity of the other, he or she is not intoxicated by power as vain politicians are.⁸¹ This Levinasian subject is rather bound to the cause, not in the sense of being neutral, but in "distance towards one's self", i.e., against vanity⁸² and even – as indicated – to the point of self-sacrifice, if needed. His cause is the others and justice for them. And nobody can replace the bearer of this responsibility in the task of obeying it, just like the Weberian politician cannot reject or transfer his or her responsibility.⁸³

Considering the arguments above, it should be clear that the Levinasian political subject shares a number of important characteristics with Weber's responsible politician. *On the plain of the political, of the quest for justice, Levinas' philosophy implies something quite similar to Weber's ethic of responsibility.*

However, even while affirming this conclusion, the differences should not be obliterated. For Weber, ethics is a serious matter in an era of disenchantment, since it is not possible to give any justification for ethics – for choosing one form of ethics rather than another, and for remaining true to a chosen ethic rather than not. Levinas agrees with this

79 PaV 117 / PaB 437.

80 SaV 143 / WaB 540.

81 PaV 116 / PaB 436f.

82 PaV 116 / PaB 436.

83 PaV 95 / PaB 415.

social critique of ethics, but only provided that one suspends consideration of the face of the other, which for him settles the question of the realness or validity of the ethical. The other of whom the subject is always already a hostage, in the ethical sense that Levinas develops, is not exactly the justification of any particular ethic, but is rather that with reference to which something like justification has meaning at all. At the least, the Levinasian subject is elected to act in response to the others. That is why Levinas could go along with Weber in describing the world as irrational, but ultimately claims, and spends the largest part of his philosophical energy to render credible that “we are not duped by morality”.⁸⁴ Since there is no ultimate justification of action for Weber, his subject of responsibility is to be self-responsible (*eigenverantwortlich*). As a subject of ethics, the Levinasian subject is exactly the opposite of self-responsible: being a subject means exactly being constituted originally as responsive-responsible to the others that invest the subject’s action with the decisive ethical meaning. However, it should be noted that matters are very ambiguous for the Levinasian political subject: this subject always acts by responding to the contradicting appeals of the others, and since nobody can replace that subject in the task of determining what justice entails in this or that context and since nobody can replace that subject in the realisation of that justice, one could get the impression that he or she is *de facto* responsible to himself or herself for justice. However much this might correspond in form to a political self-responsibility, for a Levinasian political agent no action is possible that cannot be argued to be done out of responsibility for the other. The fact that the other’s opinion of what justice might entail in this or that context is only one amongst many factors to take into account in the decision concerning the demands of justice, doesn’t take away from the fact that the subject, in making this decision about justice, remains responsible for the others. In fact, the subject has to act out of responsibility *for* the other, even if the course of action adopted in the name of justice is executed *despite* that other’s opinion concerning the demands of justice.

The importance of this distinction between Levinas and Weber is accentuated by the fact that there is in Levinas’ philosophy no limitation of responsibility for *social roles*. In contrast, Weber gives at least the distinction between the responsibility of a civil servant and that of the political leader.⁸⁵ But in Levinas’ idea of responsibility there can be no limitation

84 T&I 21 / TI 5.

85 If Weber’s indication that his discussion in *Politics as a vocation* is about ethics in politics is taken seriously, one could add that responsibility is attributed to the role

by role, since any such limitation would amount to an illegitimate restriction of the infinite ethical obligation. Or more accurately, whatever limitation one might assume for oneself or demand of others in the name of justice, can be accepted only as long as these roles are considered the best means to serve the end of justice. Besides, these roles would remain forever open to review. That is why, for Levinas, the political responsibility of the bureaucrat is exactly as demanding as that of the political leader (and of whatever other citizen). Social roles are no limit to responsibility, they are only elements in the calculation and execution of justice.

2.3 Responsibility elevated to principle or principle elevated to responsibility?

The distinction between Weber's and Levinas' ethics of responsibility becomes even clearer when a final idea of Weber's concerning responsibility is considered: this entails the *combination of the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of principle* as it is made by "the mature person" [*ein reifer Mensch*].⁸⁶ Such a person becomes so conscious of the consequences of a course of action, that in the execution of that responsibility he/she

"reaches a point where he [or she] says: 'I can do no other, here I stand.' [*ich kann nicht anders, hier stehe ich*]]."⁸⁷

This is explicitly a position in which any person – not just political leaders – can find himself or herself.⁸⁸ At this point, Weber relativises his rigid distinction between the "two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims",⁸⁹ by claiming that in the face of the overwhelming possible consequences of one's actions

"an ethic of principle and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine person – one who *can* have the 'calling for politics'".⁹⁰

The combination of the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility is thus the summit of human action, and is what is required from those

of political leaders in a sense that cannot be said of other citizens. However, when seen from Weber's remark that the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility are general categories of all ethics, this distinction is cancelled.

86 PaV 127 / PaB 448, translation modified.

87 PaV 127 / PaB 448, translation corrected.

88 PaV 127 / PaB 448.

89 PaV 120 / PaB 441.

90 PaV 127 / PaB 449, translation modified.

that want to live for politics. According to Weber, *responsibility can and should ideally be elevated to the level of principle*⁹¹ – and this is what he ultimately asks for: the willingness to assume the consequences for the use of the power (of the State, in some people’s case), an assumption to the point of “here I stand”, i.e., elevating this responsibility to a principle in order to prevent the social order collapsing into “anarchy”.⁹²

This elevation of responsibility to a level of principle follows both from Weber’s rejection of cosmic-ethical realism and his definition of the State with reference to the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. The argument seems to work as follows. The responsible person stands accountable for the foreseen and calculated consequences of his/her action. But since responsibility is acted out in a cosmos where one cannot assume good consequences for good actions, the responsible person will have to also be accountable for unforeseen consequences. Whatever the unforeseen consequences that will accompany the foreseen ones, and independently of (in the sense of ignorant of) the context that is to come, the responsible person will assume those consequences associated with his/her use of powerful means. This has to be accepted in order to guarantee the unified seat of legitimate use of violence in the State and thus to prevent anarchy.

How is Levinas to be situated with respect to this culmination point in Weber’s presentation of responsibility? Just as Weber does, Levinas gives a radical thrust to responsibility by linking it to a context-independtleness or by ascribing to responsibility a principled weight. Whereas this “principled weight” is in Weber the unconditional accountability for one’s decisions regarding the use of power, in other words the principledness of responsibility is effective in the present with a view to the future in order to avoid anarchy, in Levinas this principled weight comes from behind, as it were, by the context-independent validity of the imperative of absolute obligation to the other. But here a significant difference should be noted: whereas Weber’s principled responsibility aims at avoiding the fragmentation of the legitimate use of violence, the appeal of the “principle” of the imperative is anarchical. It is anarchical not only in the sense that Levinas explicitly gives to it,

91 It is true that Weber presents the two ethics as supplements *of each other*, but in the same phrase (cited above) his concern is still clearly with an ethics that is appropriate for the vocation of politics, and for this reason it would amount to a simple contradiction of everything that Weber had said previously of ethics in politics if one were to insist on the flip side of this conjunction, namely that the ethics of responsibility supplements the ethics of principle. That is why I opt for calling this conjunction “elevating responsibility to a principle”.

92 PaV 78 / PaB 397.

namely that in the face of the others (in the plural) whatever solution is found to instate justice in society is submitted to eternal correction, revision and questioning in the name of the imperative of the other (and that ultimately ethnicity doesn't operate with a foundational logic), it is also anarchical in the sense that I have explained in Chapter 6: the plurality of different requirements of the others explodes this apparent universal rule of obedience to the other into a myriad of conflicting claims. The plurality of ethical appeals that constitute the Levinasian subject as an ethical and responsible subject, each of which holds unconditionally as in the ethic of principle, constitute by their contradiction a political subject that continues to be responsible, has to answer for the others. However, because of the plurality of the others, the political subject has to take responsibility for the consequences of justice even if it may unfortunately contradict the needs or claims of certain individual others. And in the frame of Levinas' thought no limit is set to this responsibility and no reflection accompanies it on the means appropriate for the assumption of this responsibility. The effect of this is (as argued previously) that no justification can be given for keeping Jerusalem and Athens in balance, or in Weberian terms, no justification can be given for protecting the State against the fragmentation of the valid use of violence. Quite the contrary: in final analysis, the Levinasian State has as many instances of the legitimate use of violence as there are ethico-political subjects.

However wide the scope of possible actions a politician can consider as justified by Weber's theory of responsibility, the sociologist's concern about the integrity of the State makes it impossible for the subject of responsibility to put at stake or sacrifice the integrity of the State. This is true, first, in the case of responsibility as the ethic of the broader public and political officials, since no role is assigned to them that would place them in a position from which it would be possible to put the State at risk; second, in the case of the highest holders of political power, sacrificing the State is excluded since their responsibility is the responsibility for the monopoly on the use of violence that constitutes the State and thus the role of political leaders. But this much could not be said of Levinas' subjects of responsibility. Levinas does not take into consideration the entire complex issue of the competence of the ethical agent in matters political and its relation to the use of the array of means deployable in the name of justice. Therefore, the Levinasian political responsibility cannot protect itself against the temptation of attempting to radically undermine a state of affairs judged to be unjust, that is to embrace eschatological or chiliastic violence in order to radically re-found society. In other words (as indicated above), just like an ethic of principles that tempo-

rarily appropriates for itself the means proper to the exercise of the ethic of responsibility, the fanatical Levinasian subject could place anything and everything at risk, in the name of the calculation of justice, a function for which no expertise or competence is required. Since the competence in responsible calculation of consequences is negligible in importance to the sensitivity to the appeals of the others (which, alas, is a cacophony of mutually contradictory claims), the Levinasian version of the combination of an ethic of principle and an ethic of responsibility resembles less an elevation of the assumption of consequences of responsible action to a principle (as in Weber), and more the elevation of a principled ethics to the assumption of the means of an ethic of responsibility.

In conclusion, it could be derived that there is in Levinas no casuistry or system of ethical rules because of the fact that he shares Weber's conviction that there is no universal rationality that would allow for programming action towards the good, and it might be for this reason that he leaves or abandons the question concerning the calculation of the consequences of action to each particular ethical agent in every particular situation. Levinas implicitly places all of his hope on the spontaneous, unschooled capacity of every ethical agent to obey the imperative from the other and to measure his or her attempts to realise that obedience in sophisticated ways.

That this is a philosophical stance of radical responsibility, cannot be questioned. It deals with a radical plurality of values and doesn't count on the rationality of reality for help; it is backed up by no history of philosophy that would guarantee the ultimate success of ethical conduct. But the political responsibility, the real quest for just action, is constantly held hostage or terrorised by the mercilessly infinite and unconditional imperative of the others.

The gains of this exploration of Levinas through the lens of Weber's notion of political responsibility can be summarised in two essential points: first, it magnifies the political implications of Levinas' theory of responsibility, the contours thereof are mapped more sharply and the potential and limits thereof are thus clearer; second, by indicating the numerous correspondences on essential points between a consequent Levinasian political practice of responsibility and the Weberian politician's responsibility, the way has been opened up to gain more for a reflection on responsibility after Levinas from the tradition of thought on Weber's notion of responsibility. The work of two representatives of the critical appropriation of Weber – Apel and Ricoeur – will be at the centre of the next two Chapters.

