

PART 3

Political Responsibility for a Globalised World

There is a famous passage in which Derrida describes Levinas' style of argumentation with a lyrical image: it

“proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.”¹

From the position of a less gifted reader that nonetheless makes every effort to engage in a thoroughly critical examination of the validity of Levinas' ethics, as I hope should be evident from the preceding Chapters, I often feel more inclined to compare his work with a swarm of bees from which one might succeed in swatting a few, but not without constantly getting stung by others from behind. Emmanuel Levinas developed a particularly innovative and forcefully argued philosophy of ethics. Of the thought provoking and challenging potential of this philosophy the enormous international and interdisciplinary reception that his work enjoys today, could serve as ample proof. Providing adequate responses to whatever objections one might have to a theory of such standing will always be a daunting task. I shall not be so rash as to propose a “solution” to the criticism formulated against Levinas in the previous Chapter. Instead, in cognisance of the magnitude of such an enterprise, I shall use this Part to prepare the ambitious project of enforcing the positive aspects of Levinas' ethics and to explore ways of weakening what have been indicated as undesirable side effects thereof.

1 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference*. Alan Bass (transl.). London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 398n7 / *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 124n1 – Derrida refers here particularly to TI.

The theme of this preliminary discussion will be the question of an ethico-political notion of responsibility for the contemporary globalised world. It has been prepared by all of the preceding discussions. Chapter 1 was devoted to defending the eminently *political* nature of Levinas' philosophical enterprise in which the *responsibility* of the self for the other is the centrepiece. In Chapters 2 and 3 an attempt was made to exploit as far as possible some of the means of Levinas' own work to argue for the *global* horizon for such political reflection. Finally in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, Levinas' own presentation and justification of his thought on the self and the other, as an attempt at uncovering the ultimate nature and sense of such a global political *responsibility* has been examined under the title of a "humanism of the other human" and the failure of Levinas' ethico-political thought to reflect on the mediations, context, means and consequences of practical obedience to the plurality of others as part of the very meaning of ethnicity has been exposed. All of these conclusions should be considered as the *essential background to and necessary point of departure for everything written in the current Part*. Max Weber, particularly in his capacity as theoretician of responsibility, has been chosen as the appropriate interlocutor through which to augment the explorative power of this Part. A similar role is assigned to two contemporary philosophers that have appropriated significant aspects of Weber's thought on responsibility, namely Karl-Otto Apel and Paul Ricoeur. What these three authors have in common and what opposes the Weberian heritage of thought on responsibility to Levinas, is their conviction that the practical complications of responsible action in a world of uncertainty belongs to the core meaning of ethics. For this reason, confronting Levinas with Weber and his two heirs will help to advance our understanding of the political implications of Levinas' notion of responsibility and to further our own post-Levinasian reflection on responsibility for the contemporary context.

In the three Chapters that follow, a framework for the development of an ethico-political notion of responsibility for a globalised world will be proposed through a three-stage argument. In the first stage, Chapter 7, I shall resume reflection on Levinas' notion of responsibility as it enters the political, where it was left in Chapter 6. *Instead of resolving the difficulties created by the contradiction between the plurality of others, the results from my critical reading of Levinas will simply be assumed and submitted to further examination*. By means of a detailed comparison between Max Weber's distinction of two ethical-political orientations – the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility – Levinas' notion of political responsibility, or responsibility that seeks justice, will be magni-

fied in order to show in more detail what the profile thereof is. On the basis of this profile, I will then attempt, in the second stage of this Part, Chapter 8, to identify the minimum objectives or requirements for the development of this profile into a theory of political responsibility for a globalised world. Apel's appropriation of Weber's notion of responsibility will serve here as a suggestive parallel. Finally, in the third stage, Chapter 9, the four requirements identified in Chapter 8 will themselves be explored and expanded. Using Ricoeur's practical philosophy, which will be shown to be true to Weber's reflection on political responsibility in pertinent ways, the potential of working on these requirements, in view of a theory of ethico-political responsibility for a globalised world, will be demonstrated and the contours of these requirements will be better mapped out.

