

Chapter 9

Ricoeur's contribution to a notion of political responsibility for a globalised world

Having in the two previous Chapters first sharpened the contours of the implications of Levinas' notion of responsibility and its political deployment and then outlined the four basic tasks for the further elaboration of a general theory of political responsibility in Levinas' wake, it is important in a third movement to consider the possible implications of such a fourfold progression in the reflection on post-Levinasian responsibility. The interlocutor chosen to aid me in magnifying the implications of the task of further developing the notion of political responsibility is Paul Ricoeur. He is used here not in order to hold him up as the bearer of the ultimate solution to this task – not least because the theme of responsibility is left in a somewhat undecided state in his work. Rather, the complex manner in which he integrates aspects of both Weber and Levinas' notions of responsibility makes him suitable to help explore the potential of the subsequent restructuring of Levinas' responsibility for our current purposes. The aim is thus not to present a comparison of Ricoeur and Levinas, but to inquire into the magnifying potential that we can obtain from Ricoeur's ethico-political thought for our project of a political responsibility for a globalised world. At the same time, this exercise would already suggest a number of ways by which my concerns, born of a critical examination of Levinas, can be pursued by different means. I shall therefore not attempt an exhaustive presentation of Ricoeur's ethico-political thought, but only elaborate on possible contributions that his work could make to a fuller understanding of the requirements that crystallised from my Levinas-Weber-Apel reading.

If Ricoeur is well suited for this task, it is not only because of the inherent merit of his work, but also because it is fairly natural to place him in the line of my Weberian exploration. Although it would obviously not be correct to reduce his political thought to his Weberian heritage, it can be argued that an examination of the way in which Ricoeur received Weber and the place accorded to that reception in his own thought, would give a valid and fruitful entry to Ricoeur's ethico-political thought. Consequently, Ricoeur's contribution to the project of a post-Levinasian theory of political responsibility will have to start with a clarification of his orientation in political philosophy and his appropriation of Weber (§ 1). This can be done best through an examination of a selection of his texts from the late 1950s. However, the accent in this study is on Ricoeur's "Little ethics" and the elaborations on it in the 1990s (to which the discussion will go over in § 2). A brief overview of the "Little ethics" is needed to map the terrain in which the subsequent reflection on political responsibility will be placed (§ 3). Having thus prepared the exploration, Ricoeur's contribution to the four requirements for a theory of political responsibility – as developed in Chapter 8 – will be proposed (§ 4).

1 RICOEUR'S POLITICAL PARADOX AND APPROPRIATION OF WEBER

It is well known that the essay "The political paradox" (1957) marks an important moment in the formation of Ricoeur's political philosophy. While he wrote texts of political philosophy before that, and even texts in which themes from the 1957 essay were anticipated, Ricoeur himself explains retrospectively that

"[i]t is true that my subsequent reflections in political philosophy have stemmed from this initial text."¹

The figure of the political paradox is a recurrent theme that structures Ricoeur's political thought over many decades, and it is clear that when in the late 1980s and 1990s he develops his "Little ethics" (*petite éthique*), he is still concerned with an examination and deepening of the idea of the political paradox.²

The repeated use of the expression "the political paradox" might mislead one to think that an unequivocal definition can be given for it. Yet, it

1 C&C 95 / CC 147.

2 Cf. RF 80.

would be more exact to refer to the expression “the political paradox” as a pattern of interpretation of which the interpretational potential is gradually discovered and explored, as Ricoeur develops his reflection on the political. A definition of “paradox” from one of Ricoeur’s later texts might be helpful to come to a first approximation of the figure of the political paradox. A paradox is

“a situation in which two contrary theses equally oppose being refuted and, as a result, require being preserved or abandoned together”³

and in contradistinction to an antinomy, where two theses do not belong to the same discursive universe, in the paradox they do. Of course, I do not maintain that this is the exact definition that Ricoeur had in mind when he drafted the 1957 essay, but rather that this definition suffices to clarify this dominant pattern of research in Ricoeur’s political philosophy.

This research pattern, this situation of thought stuck between two opposing theses, concerns the specificity of the political or of political power.⁴ The difference and relation between the two theses could be profiled in a number of ways: the paradox concerns the political and politics, the form and force of politics,⁵ the power of willing to live together and the legitimate recourse to violence by the power of domination,⁶ the horizontal and the vertical political dimensions,⁷ the legislative and the executive powers,⁸ the rationality particular to the political and the foundational violence thereof,⁹ the encompassing nature of the political with respect to the different spheres of society and the encompassed nature of politics as one amongst the spheres of society (*englobant – englobé*).¹⁰

In order to make my way towards a more detailed presentation of this paradox and to align this presentation with my general strategy for this Part of the book – namely to reflect on political responsibility with Max Weber’s essay on *Politics as a vocation* as stimulus – another important characteristic

3 RTJ 19, 73 / JII 27, 86.

4 C&C 96 / CC 148, 149.

5 OAA 257 / SA 299.

6 C&C 99 / CC 153.

7 C&C 99 / CC 152.

8 C&C 105 / CC 161.

9 C&C 96, 98 / CC 149, 151.

10 C&C 103, 104 / CC 159, 160. See also Bernard Dauenhauer’s recapitulation of the dimensions of the political paradox in *Paul Ricoeur. The promise and the risk of politics*. Lanham, et al.: Rowman and Littlefield publishers, 1998, pp. 211–212, which draws on Ricoeur’s “Fragilité et responsabilité”, in *Eros and Eris. Contributions to a hermeneutical phenomenology*. Paul van Togerem et. al. (eds.). Dordrecht, et al.: Kluwer, 1992, pp. 295–304.

of its development by Ricoeur needs to be mentioned: next to a series of other authors, Weber is assigned an important role in the elaboration of the political paradox. The very first time that the notion of the political paradox appears (at the beginning of the essay “The political paradox”) it is presented in terms that could be said to reflect a Weberian agenda:

“Techniques change, human relationships evolve depending upon things, and yet power unveils the same paradox, that of a twofold progress in rationality and in possibilities for perversion.”¹¹

Since Weber’s work on the Protestant work ethics, the adjective “Weberian” may be applied to any idea of a history of increasing rationality and its dark flip side, emblematically referred to as the “iron cage”. Even if Weber is not referred to by name, and no facile identification of Ricoeurian and Weberian terms is intended, the resonance of the Weberian theme in Ricoeur is undeniable. Yet, the importance of Weber for Ricoeur’s political paradox is not so much in the development of the form of the paradox, than in the particular place designated for Weber in the paradox. Ricoeur repeatedly uses Weber’s definition of political power as the monopoly on the ultimate recourse to legitimate violence, as the precise formulation of the vertical power of politics, of the executive power of domination. Not only does this serve (in 1957) to explore the particular nature of political evil, but consequently, it serves implicitly to launch the question concerning the nature and constitution of *legitimacy* and the question concerning the limitation of that power. Let’s then see how Ricoeur presents his political thought in this key text.

When we turn to “The political paradox”, it is clear that Ricoeur is concerned with arguing for the irreducible particularity of political rationality and political harm or evil (*mal*). The paradox resides in the fact that these two particularities oppose each other, but can be reflected on only together:

“This paradox must be retained: that the greatest evil adheres to the greatest rationality, that there is political alienation *because* the political is relatively autonomous.”¹²

This paradox is theoretically indissoluble, but can be responded to by a practical solution. What then is the autonomous rationality of politics? What is the nature of the particular alienation or evil of politics? And how could this practical solution be clarified?

The Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, taught us the meaning and significance of the fact that human beings are essentially, and not accidentally, political beings. The rationality of the political is derived from this: a politi-

11 HT 248 / HV 295.

12 HT 249 / HV 296, translation modified.

cal being, that strives to live well, aims at the good through life in the State. Political rationality is a teleological rationality that aims at “contributing to the humanity of people”,¹³ by living together in a State, as citizens, and by practising virtues of participation in power. One acquires these virtues by living in the State and they not only define the individual as citizen, but make the individual into a human being. The rules and means of other spheres of social interaction (e.g., economy) are deemed subservient to, or at least neatly distinct from, the teleology of politics.¹⁴ The tyrant is a secondary phenomenon of the political and can be understood and judged only in the light of the inherent rationality and autonomy of the political.

Ricoeur finds a second essential component of the particularity of the political in Rousseau’s social contract:

“The great, invincible idea of the Social Contract is that the body politic is born of a virtual act, of a consent which is not an historical event, but one which only comes out in reflection.”¹⁵

Unlike the case with Hobbes’ notion thereof, this consent to the social contract is not an exercise by which freedom is exchanged for security, but the entry of individuals into a civil existence by an act whereby all consent to the law¹⁶ and thus constitute – again, retrospectively and in reflection – the State, and through the State constitute the citizens as free and equal.¹⁷ Whatever the subsequent abuses of the law by powerful interest groups in the State may be, the contract is the truth of politics and the reality of the State.¹⁸ For Ricoeur, Rousseau essentially continues the teleology of Aristotle:

“In the two cases, with the *Telos* of the State and the generating *pact* of the general will, it is a matter of manifesting the coincidence of an individual and passional will with the objective and political will, in short, of making man’s humanity pass through legality and civil restraint.”¹⁹

Hegel’s notion of the State as reasonable organisation of individual freedom would be an extension of the same idea.²⁰

But even if this is so, the political (*le politique*) never appears in history detached from politics (*la politique*); the political may show itself retrospectively in reflection as reasonable organisation, but politics has to cope with

13 HT 250 / HV 297, translation modified.

14 HT 265 / HV 315.

15 HT 251 / HV 299.

16 HT 252 / HV 299.

17 HT 252 / HV 300.

18 HT 252 / HV 300.

19 HT 253 / HV 301.

20 HT 254 / HV 302.

uncertainty and has to make decisions in anticipation of an uncertain future, moreover, it has to do so by using political power and the means particular to politics.²¹ These means are characterised by “the monopoly over legitimised physical constraint [*le monopole de la contrainte physique légitimé*]”.²² Whereas this “legitimacy” refers the force of political power back to the end and form of the political, the relation between the monopoly on violence and its legitimacy differs in intensity from case to case. Politics, in contradistinction to the political,²³ is defined by power and by the means of its exercise and it is here that the possibility of political evil takes root. This finding occasions a new formulation of the political paradox: however the means, the power, of politics may be used, it remains the instrument of the “historical rationality of the State”,²⁴ that is to say that the political, detached from the power of politics, remains powerless, without effect; yet, the quest for the good life through the State can be realised only by the means of the State that carry in themselves the potential of evil use of the monopoly on the use of violence. Or, formulated negatively,

“on the one hand, the meaning of power resides in the desire of a plurality of people to live together; on the other hand, power dispossesses, *nevertheless*, all those that do not exercise power from the capacity to decide.”²⁵

The political can realise itself only through politics, yet politics has shown itself often to be an unreliable partner: the power and even violence that is needed to constitute the political can spend itself on the undermining of the political – this is the political paradox. At the same time, the denunciation

21 HT 255 / HV 303. “From the political to politics [*Du politique à la politique*], we move from advent to events, from sovereignty to the sovereign, from the State to government, from historical Reason to Power.” (HT 255 / HV 303, translation modified).

22 HT 255 / HV 303, translation modified; no explicit reference made to Weber by Ricoeur.

23 Here Ricoeur refers explicitly to *Politics as a vocation* when he defines politics as “the sum total of activities which have for their object the exercise of power, therefore also the conquest and preservation of power. Step by step, politics will encompass every activity whose goal or effect will be to influence the division of power.” (HT 255 / HV 304). Cf. Also “The State is that reality that down to the present has always included murder as condition for its existence, its survival and first its institution.” (HV 288, my translation).

Note that here Ricoeur does not adopt the categorisation of Arendt where the political as the desire to live together is itself the source of political power and politics is defined in Weberian terms as the recourse to certain forms of the exercise of power (C&C 99 / CC 152f).

24 HT 256 / HV 304.

25 Marc Crépon, “Du ‘paradoxe politique’ à la question des appartenances”, in *Paul Ricoeur* (Cahiers de L’Herne), Myriam Revault d’Allonnes and François Azouvi (eds.). Paris: L’Herne, pp. 307–314, citation p. 309.

of political evil becomes unintelligible if the human quest for the good through political being is not presupposed in that critique.

A long procession of political thinkers throughout human history may have denounced events in which the sovereign parades as sovereignty itself, but even so, a perfect harmony between the political and politics is unattainable.²⁶ However, it would be too simple to merely classify political power as evil, because the means of political action belong radically to the human being as a political being. The evil of political power, is the evil of the human being as political being.²⁷ Human beings can no more rid themselves of the dilemma of the use of political power, than from their essence as political beings.²⁸ Although Ricoeur doesn't do so in this text, he subsequently regularly mentioned the fact, when referring to Weber's presentation of politics and the unavoidable constitution of power by violent means, that Weber presented this picture of politics in an address made to naive pacifist students.²⁹ Ricoeur too rejects this political naivety as can be derived from his insistence in the essay "The political paradox" on the fact that his exposition of the evil of politics is motivated by a quest for lucidity and an attempt to remain politically vigilant.³⁰

This lucidity and vigilance are of considerable importance in making the transition from the theoretical to a practical reflection on the political paradox, since whereas there is no theoretical (dis-)solution of the political paradox – the two theses can be maintained only together – there is a practical solution to it. This practical solution of the paradox consists of allowing the State enough power to do its beneficial work, but setting limits to that power, or practising an "*ethic of limited violence* [*éthique de la violence limitée*]"³¹ In more concrete terms:

"the great problem of democracy concerns the *control* of the State by the people", which means

"to devise institutional techniques especially designed to render possible the exercise of power and render its abuse impossible."³²

26 Cf. HT 259 / HV 308.

27 HT 261 / HV 310.

28 Cf. HT 261 / HV 311.

29 E.g., LI 235.

30 HT 261 / HV 310, 311, respectively.

31 HT 262 / HV 312, my emphasis. This is a crucial expression, since it is in practically the same terms that Ricoeur, two years later, suggests the coordination of the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility be interpreted in Weber (see discussion below). It also corresponds with the terms in which the nature of the political paradox was posed in its first use (see above).

32 HT 261f / HV 311 and see HT 264 / HV 314.

How then does Ricoeur see the question of a political ethics of limited violence – this thoroughly Weberian question of realism with regard to the means of politics? If the paradox of the political is a universal structure, in other words if it is independent of historical contingencies of particular political forms, then it follows that there would always be at least the possibility of institutional dispositions of the State that would surpass the interest of a power group within the State. One example is of particular importance here: the universal intention of liberal politics since the 18th century surpasses the contingent form of what socialists would call the bourgeois State.³³ The “universal” aspects of liberalism would be: (1) the independence of judges with regard to the State, (2) the possibility of access for citizens to sources of information and science that are generated independently from the State, and this includes the freedom to form a public opinion, which in turn depends on the freedom of the press, (3) the settlement of differences in interests between the State and the work force, even if it means recourse to strikes, and (4) the control exercised by a democratically organised citizenry to negotiate the tension between long-term planning and continual discussion. Hence Ricoeur’s conclusion that if the term “liberalism” is to retain any credit it stands for a formulation of the political paradox from the perspective of liberty:

“either that the State *founds* freedom by means of its rationality, or that freedom *limits* the passions of power through its resistance.”³⁴

The final considerations of Ricoeur’s exposition of the political paradox clearly battles with the question of the inevitable use of the violent means that define the State,³⁵ and thus attempts to accompany reflectively the Weberian issue of a political ethic of responsibility. Although Ricoeur draws the terms describing this issue from Weber (amongst others) and *Politics as a vocation* in particular, in the essay on “The political paradox” he doesn’t make mention of the notion of an ethic of responsibility and thus the question of how he would articulate the different concerns recorded by Weber in the opposition between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of principle remains in suspense.

33 HT 267 / HV 317–318.

34 HT 270 / HV 321.

35 As he does in a text of the same year in “State and violence” (HT 234ff / HV 287ff). Although Weber is never mentioned in this essay, he is even more present by implicit illusions to the most important aspects of his political thought.

For a response to this question one could perhaps turn to the curious little essay “Ethics and politics” (1959),³⁶ written shortly after “The political paradox” as commentary on the then recently published French translation of *Politik als Beruf*.³⁷ My choice of the word “curious” is deliberate. One could safely say that the six pages of simple exposition are successful as introduction to the paper of Weber, but that it is otherwise uneventful. One notes that the question of legitimate violence is central in this exposition, as it is in “The political paradox” and “State and violence” (also of 1957) and that this violence is the means of the State and its defining characteristic. That violence is organically fused with the political suffices to evoke the question concerning an ethics of politics – which Weber does with his distinction between an ethic of principle and an ethic of responsibility. These derive their meaning not only from the historical conditions in and for which Weber wrote, but also from the more general characteristics of politics in the modern era. Weber’s question, then, is to understand what a person is to be like, who lives under these conditions *for* politics (and not merely *of* politics). Such a person has to have a passionate devotion for the cause, a cool reflective vision of the state of affairs and then also responsibility (as we have also seen in Chapter 7). And it is here that Ricoeur’s fairly uneventful commentary becomes interesting. Without commenting on the detail of the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility, Ricoeur first insists that Weber shows a lot of respect for the ethic of principle of the Gospel and for the imperative of responsibly taking on the consequences of action by oneself – this twofold respect prohibits Weber from taking pleasure in the thorny conflicts associated with political decision-making. Then, having posed this twin respect of Weber for the two political ethics, Ricoeur claims that Weber doesn’t call for a rejection of the ethic of principle, since it is exactly because of the fact that the ethic of principle is “impregnable” (*inexpugnable*)³⁸ that there is a problem (supposedly of the ethical orientation of political decision making). Furthermore, Ricoeur reads Weber to mean that

“for souls that are not dead, there is always a moment that can neither be planned, nor stipulated, when the ethic of principle blocks the person that acts according to the rule of responsibility and suggests, as Socrates’ demon that said always *no*: ‘Up to here, but no further [*Jusqu’ici, mais pas plus loin*].’ It is not said either that this contradiction is without solution; it is rather a test [*épreuve*] in all the meanings of the word – and this test makes a choice inevitable.”³⁹

36 LI 235–240.

37 This is as far as I know, the only lengthy commentary of Ricoeur on this paper of Weber.

38 LI 240.

39 LI 240.

This citation in which we find Ricoeur's reading of the coordination between the two ethics of politics of Weber is curious for a number of reasons.

- (1) First, instead of declaring the ethic of principle a possible, but inappropriate ethic for contemporary politics (as Weber does), Ricoeur sees it playing an equal but different role from the ethic of responsibility in political decision making.
- (2) Second, instead of elevating the ethic of responsibility to a level of principle (as I have shown Weber does), responsibility is bound in a tension with the ethic of principle that has its own independent role to play.
- (3) Third, this role of the ethic of principle does not consist of shying away from or refusing to contemplate and assume the consequences of action (as Weber defines the ethic of principle), instead, the ethic of principle is redeployed as setting limits to the ethic of responsibility, that means in fact that the ethic of principle now consists of embracing the ethic of responsibility that contemplates and assumes the consequences of action within the limits set to it by the ethic of principle, in order to set those limits to it. This new role assigned to the ethic of principle is enforced by two further improvisations. On the one hand Ricoeur equates it with the Socratic "no"; one could perhaps see it as the negation that is the root of deontological thinking (see discussion below). On the other hand Ricoeur renders the words, attributed legendarily to Luther, in a very odd manner: "Jusqu'ici, mais pas plus loin" – not only does he not follow Julien Freund's translation (even though his paper was written to celebrate the new translation!), but also, although in meaning Ricoeur's translation corresponds with the Freund translation, it is an incorrect rendering of "ich kann nicht anders, hier stehe ich" (by which Weber cites Luther, but inverts the two halves of the phrase, PaB 448). Gerth and Mills translate: "Here I stand; I can do no other" (PaV 127); I translate it somewhat freely as "This is my position and it is impossible for me not to hold it" or "This is what I think is to be done and I shall not budge on it", but Freund translates it as: "Je ne puis faire autrement. Je m'arrête là!"⁴⁰ ("I can do no other. I stop here!") and Ricoeur then: "Jusqu'ici, mais pas plus loin" ("Up to here, but not further"). This translation clearly serves the purpose of assigning an independent role to the "no" of principled

40 Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique*. Julien Freund (transl.). Raymond Aron (intro.), Paris: Plon, 1959, p. 199. The more recent translation by Catherine Colliot-Thélène reads very similarly: "Je ne peux faire autrement, je m'arrête ici." in Max Weber, *Le savant et le politique. Une nouvelle traduction*. Paris: La Découverte, 2003, p. 204.

ethics.⁴¹ This “no” is presented in Ricoeur’s reading of *Politics as a vocation* as the pronouncement of a practitioner of the ethic of responsibility that has equally internalised the ethic of principle, understood as the setting of limits to the range of actions responsibly assumable. However, the words of Luther, in the mouth of Weber, seem rather to speak of assuming or the consequences and undesired side-effects of one’s action.

- (4) Fourth, while affirming that there is no theoretical solution to this conflict of ethical orientations (as Weber also does), Ricoeur claims that there is a practical solution possible (just as he claimed for the response to the political paradox). Since this solution is practical, cannot be dictated before-hand and thus constitutes a test (*épreuve*), it would be in order to call this an exercise of *phronésis* between the “excess” of political power and the “deficiency” of the moral prohibition. The phronetic choice is the moment of the exercise of power within certain limits; it is the practical manifestation of an “ethic of limited violence” as Ricoeur says in 1957. It is also this that Ricoeur identifies as the heart of the vocation of politics in the last sentence of his 1959 essay. In other words, if the vocation of politics consists of practising the ethic of limited violence, then it also consists of practically responding to the political paradox, notably by effecting control over the exercise of State power.

41 On reflecting about how to interpret the relation between the two kinds of political ethic, identified by Weber, Raymond Aron, in the introduction to the first French translation, concedes that there exists a veritable “antinomy” between the two forms of ethic. However, he thinks it nonetheless reasonable to expect that “in the majority of cases, prudence would suggest a reasonable compromise” (“Introduction” in *Le savant et le politique*, *op. cit.* p. 46). Compromise is of course necessitated by the conflicting nature of political interaction. Whereas the adherents of an ethic of principle refuse to engage with this conflict, the responsible political agent does engage with the conflict, yet, not without sometimes being forced to pronounce the principled ethical “no”: “There is no responsible person who will not, one day or another, be forced to say ‘no’, whatever the price of it might be, *weil er nicht anders kann*, because he can not do otherwise.” (p. 46).

Like Ricoeur, Aron identifies the voice of the ethic of principle with saying “no”. Although Aron is not very clear on the coordination of the two ethics, he seems to believe that under extreme circumstances the ethic of responsibility transforms into an ethic of principle where the responsible agent is forced to say: “No, I don’t budge, whatever the price”. In this Aron is closer to Weber than Ricoeur. Ricoeur’s “no” rather says: “here I yield, in order not to sacrifice what is of absolute value, to gain what is merely of great value”. For this reason it seems implausible to identify Aron as the inspiration behind Ricoeur’s peculiar reading of this point in Weber.

In expounding his reading of the coordination between the ethic of principle and the ethic of responsibility, Ricoeur is manifestly quite far from the text of Weber, in fact, one learns in it much more about the thought of Ricoeur than of the thought of Weber.⁴² For the purposes of my argument this is a very valuable discovery: Ricoeur appropriated Weber's thought on politics and responsibility in such a manner that he could, as it were, read his own philosophical project from the text of Weber. And it is striking that the schema of realistic use of political power and violence, challenged by a deontological prohibition and thus requiring the arbitration of practical wisdom, as derived here from a reading of *Politics as a vocation*, will be the basic framework for reflecting on the normativity of political action in Ricoeur's "Little ethics" of the 1990s.

Let us, in conclusion, develop this point: what do we learn about Ricoeur's political thought from the emergence of the notion of the political paradox and the Weberian appropriation accompanying it? The political can be understood only under the figure of a paradox. Human beings striving for their fullest accomplishment through political existence need political force and even violence to constitute and realise this political existence; at the same time it is the means of political life that carries the possibility of evil abuse of that power. One could refer to the two dimensions of this paradox

42 In as far as a later text can be called to witness for an earlier one, the essay "Tasks of the political educator" (1965) (in *Political and social essays*. David Steward and Joseph Bien (eds.). Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974, pp. 271–293 / LI 241–257) confirms this rendering of Ricoeur's appropriation of Weber. Speaking of the difficult connections between politics and ethics, and thinking now more on an institutional level than an individual level, Ricoeur clearly states: "I want to say at once that I adopt as a working hypothesis, and I add as a personal guideline, a most fruitful distinction which I borrow from the great German sociologist of the beginning of this century, Max Weber." He is equally clear about what it is that he derives from Weber: "I am convinced, in fact that the health of a collectivity rests ultimately on the justness of the relation between these two ethics. On the one hand the ethic of principle is supported by cultural and intellectual groups and by confessing communities, including the churches, which find here – and not at all in politics proper – their true point of insertion. On the other hand, the ethic of responsibility is also the morality of force, of methodological violence, of calculated culpability." (*Political and social essays*, op. cit. pp. 287–288 / LI 253, translation modified). What social health needs, then, is to maintain these two ethics in "a lively tension [...]. For if we reduce the ethic of principle to the ethic of responsibility, we will sink to political realism and Machiavellism, which results from the constant confusion of means and ends. But on the other hand if the ethic of principle pretends to a kind of direct action, we will sink to all the illusions of moralism and clericalism. The ethic of principle can only operate indirectly by the constant pressure which it exerts on the ethic of responsibility and power." (*Political and social essays*, op. cit. pp. 287–288 / LI 253–254).

as the horizontal and the vertical aspects of the political. Whereas the horizontal aspect is presented in 1957 especially with the aid of Aristotle, Ricoeur will do so in the 1990s with the aid of Arendt⁴³ – political power is seen as constituted by the will or desire to live together (*vouloir vivre ensemble*) that represents the teleological aspect of human social action. The deontological force of the contract theory, presented by Ricoeur in 1957 with reference to Rousseau, will in the 1990s be developed through a series of studies on Rawls. But the deontological moment of reflection on the political is provoked in particular by the drifts in the use of means of political action, that is, the means associated with domination, which is the vertical aspect of the political. Ricoeur still presents this vertical aspect in the 1990s with recourse to Weber's definition of politics as the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence.⁴⁴ Even though the political will to live together and the eventual use of violent means by politics are fatally joined, Ricoeur will still insist on and elaborate his conviction that the political stretches beyond the sphere of politics and encompasses the other spheres of social action.⁴⁵ The practical negotiation between the teleological and the deontological moment of ethics is a central concern for Ricoeur in the 1990s. Accordingly, the practice and limitation of politics through discussion⁴⁶ takes an important place, amongst others, in Ricoeur's debate with discourse ethics. Also the reflections on the just extends the thought about the settlement of disputes, of conflicting claims. All of these points could serve to support Ricoeur's (implicit) claim that in his "Little ethics" and the elaborations on it, he was providing "a sufficient anchorage" for his previous and contemporary work on the paradoxes of political power (RF 80). And inversely, as will follow from the ensuing discussion, accepting the political paradox is a condition for the intelligibility of responsibility in its political dimension.

In order to make the transition from the 1950s to the 1990s and to enforce the legitimacy of the claim that Ricoeur is (amongst others) occupied with the Weberian concerns that I have formulated earlier, I shall find my point of entry to the "Little ethics" from a marginal essay of 1991.

43 On this, see Ricoeur's reading of Arendt, with the telling title: "Power and violence" of 1989 in LI 20–42.

44 OAA 194 / SA 227.

45 LI 288, TJ 92 / JI 141, C&C 101 / CC 156.

46 OAA 257–262 / SA 300–305. It should be noted that his exposition of discussion follows directly from a reference to the political paradox and Weber's concern about politics' defining recourse to legitimate violence in *Politics as a vocation* – see OAA 257 / SA 299.

2 FROM THE POLITICAL PARADOX TO ITS INTEGRATION IN THE “LITTLE ETHICS”

The “Postface au *Temps de la responsabilité*”⁴⁷ could be considered a minor text in Ricoeur’s work of the 1990s, not least because it is written as an overview and interpretation of a collection of essays by other authors. Consequently, in this text Ricoeur’s concern is first with presenting the opinion of the authors of the book. However, at certain places his own voice comes through very clearly. In categorising the contributions to the book in two kinds, with regard to the way in which the notion of responsibility is treated in them, Ricoeur discusses first the opposition between a logic of responsibility and a logic of obedience,⁴⁸ before turning to the opposition between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of principle.⁴⁹ The reason why I would like to comment on these latter few pages is that they neatly take up the question of the Weberian opposition between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of principle where we left it at the end of the 1950s. However a number of terms that are crucial for Ricoeur’s political and normative thought in the 1990s are attached to this pair – in such a way that I may claim that we find here, through a few remarks on the Weberian ethical categories, a small entrance to Ricoeur’s later political thought.

First Ricoeur insists on the problematic nature of the distinction: does the categorisation of an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of principle mean that responsibility goes without principle or conviction? Likewise does it deny that principle or conviction⁵⁰ invests people with responsibility? Having questioned the absoluteness of this opposition, Ricoeur advances by maintaining the close relationship between these opposed ethico-political approaches and reflection on the political. The close tie is due to the fact that the domain of the exercise of political power is a scene of conflict – between pragmatic political engagement and idealistic moral conviction. It is important to note that Ricoeur claims that this is a commonly acknowledged insight at least since Sophocles’ *Antigone*, because it is exactly by means of a commentary on *Antigone* that Ricoeur introduces the notion of the tragic nature of action in *Oneself as another*, where it will be explored under the three dimensions of conflict (institution, autonomy, respect) in the ninth study (entitled “The self and practical wisdom: conviction”).

47 LI 271–294.

48 LI 284ff.

49 LI 286ff.

50 For the sake of clarity, it needs to be recalled here that I consistently render Weber’s *Gesinnungsethik* by ethic of principle, and thus also when commenting on Ricoeur’s use of the term in the French translation as “éthique de conviction”.

It should, however, immediately be pointed out that the notion of principle (Ricoeur uses “conviction”) as Ricoeur comments on it in the “Postface” and where “principle” denotes, in accordance with Weber’s initial usage “an ‘idealistic’ invocation of moral values, without consideration for the consequences”,⁵¹ differs markedly (1) from its use in 1959 and 1965 where, without a clear definition it denotes a positive contribution of non-political intellectual, cultural and religious discourses to the health of a collective by remaining in constant tension with the political morality of force and violence⁵² and (2) from its use in *Oneself as another* where conviction, together with argumentation, keeps the difficult balance between teleology and deontology. But as in 1965, Ricoeur here agrees with Weber that an idealist ethics of principle – that is not willing to face up to what defines the exercise of political power, namely the ultimate recourse to violence – is not worthy of our human reality. Rather, whoever wants to engage with the reality of political action and decision making is, according to Ricoeur, immediately caught up in the *paradox of the political*⁵³ and thus he makes the link with his earlier political philosophy explicit. It is only when one enters this paradox of the “fragile conjunction” between the form (constitution and State of law in so far as they express the will to live together) and the force (origin and use of violence) of political action⁵⁴ that one is confronted with the “tragedy of action” and hence, one might add, with the need for a practical solution of the paradox.

In fact, this paradox manifests itself also beyond the political sphere in all matters pertaining to the use of power in action and where the choices about the use of power are in effect political.⁵⁵ To be quite clear, Ricoeur specifies that

“After all, the political is not a separate or additional sphere, but the place where decisions are made on the scale of those historical communities that are the nation States. The same problems will arise on the level of supra-state, European or global authorities.”⁵⁶

This declaration is evidently of great concern for the current project, first because it states the terms of a general notion of the political dimension of action beyond the social sphere of politics, and secondly, because it already affirms the global reach of this principle.

51 LI 288.

52 LI 253.

53 LI 287.

54 Cf. OAA 257 / SA 299.

55 LI 288.

56 LI 288.

Closely tied to this is the affirmation of the need for a restriction of responsibility by something – for which the name ethics of principle is at least a suitable place-holder – that would prevent the reflection on the use of means in responsibility slipping into a brutally one-sided calculation of efficiency. In fact, responsibility should be rooted in a “conviction” (or principle), of which Ricoeur now gives his own circumscription, namely “the obligation to help the fragile [*périssable*]”.⁵⁷ This re-definition of conviction is remarkable, not only because it clearly rejects the ethic of principle (or ethic of conviction) understood as “an ‘idealistic’ invocation of moral values, without consideration for the consequences” (as he did just before), but also as its new content embraces two ideas that are very relevant for the current project. *First*, the idea of “obligation” that is the key notion for the morality, for deontology, as part of Ricoeur’s “Little ethics” between teleology and practical wisdom. In fact, if he here says that responsibility has to be moderated by conviction that has the form of obligation, he refers (and I guard against a too facile identification of the structures of the argument in the different *loci* of Ricoeur’s work) to the coordination of the teleological and the deontological for which the conflict of practical ethical conduct calls. *Second*, this reading is reinforced when one considers that a few pages earlier, Ricoeur carefully appropriates Jonas’s notion of responsibility, but particularly that part in which the Jonasian categorical imperative of responsibility is foregrounded as the appropriate way to respond to the new dimensions of human fragility:

“if the human being has become the fragile *par excellence*, the main moral maxim becomes the exercise of moderation, restraint and even of refraining from action.”⁵⁸

Again the idea of limiting the scope of adoptable courses of action by a rule of conduct (*maxime*) is clear (even though it is done here, following Jonas, under the name of “responsibility” and not “conviction”!). One might at this point recall that in Ricoeur’s 1959 essay the value of the ethics of principle was exactly said to be its force of saying “no!” in the face of the exigencies of political efficiency.⁵⁹ The character of negativity, or rather the force of interdiction, we shall see, is the beginning of the moral order of obligation, since morality responds primordially with a “no!” to the violence committed by some against (the fragility of) others; but the interdiction implies already the ethical from which the “no!” of moral indignation draws its strength.⁶⁰

57 LI 289.

58 LI 284.

59 LI 240.

60 OAA 221 / SA 258. A simple illustration of how this “no!” impregnates the power of the State can be found in “La justice, vertu et institution” (in *La sagesse*

The specificity of the political is then this conflict between responsibility (as the effort to give form to the political by the means of politics) and conviction (or principle) of controlling the spontaneity of political action by the demand to help the fragile. Subsequently, if one wants to understand human action in its political dimension, beyond the sphere of politics, by taking into account ethical considerations (in as far as they can be shown to be philosophically credible) and the very nature of political action in whatever form, this short passage from Ricoeur's "Postface" makes a series of important suggestions. As normative should hold, not only considerations about obligation and interdiction, but equally reflection on where obligation and interdiction draw their strengths from; this should be done in full realisation of the tragic nature of human action. It is to these questions that we shall turn now.

3 POLITICAL ACTION BETWEEN CAPACITIES AND CONFLICT

From the earlier Ricoeur, we have seen that the central figure of thought of his political philosophy – the political paradox – is formulated, amongst others, by an appropriation of Weber's definition of the State as having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and of the idea of responsibility consisting in the sober use of the (ultimately, violent) means associated with political power. From the later Ricoeur, we have seen that this Weberian distinction and coordination is appropriated, albeit through a reinterpretation thereof, to set out the need for the limitation of or the control over the use of these political means. From this perspective one could consider Ricoeur's central notion of the political paradox as a manner in which he positions himself in the extension of a Weberian thought on political power and responsibility, more precisely, with respect to the half of the paradox which has to do with the inevitable recourse to the means of political power and for the question of its control, which is the question of the practical solution to the paradox.

pratique. Autour de l'oeuvre de Paul Ricoeur. Jeffrey Barash and Mireille Delbraccio (eds.). Amiens: Centre régional de documentation pédagogique de l'académie d'Amiens, 1998, pp. 11–28) where Ricoeur explicitly recognises the Weberian definition of the State by its monopoly on public violence (p. 12), but when it comes to the question of the death penalty, he insists: "But one thing is sure and that is that the State may not behave like the executioner and that there should be a kind of restraint, namely that State should prohibited itself [*s'interdit*] to act like a murderer." (p. 16).

However suitable Weber's thought might be in the development of these key aspects of Ricoeur's political philosophy, it always has to be situated within a broader development of his political thought. The simplest way to show this is to point out that the first half of the political paradox hardly comes into view when one focuses only on the Weberian side of the paradox. This first half of the paradox is represented by the political, the essence of which is elaborated on in the larger ethico-political theory by the teleological formula: "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions".⁶¹ This formula encapsulates what Ricoeur calls ethics or the ethical (*l'éthique*) and it is only in the confrontation between ethics and what he calls morality or the moral (*la morale*) (that, without being identical to it, takes the place of Weber's ethic of principle), that a context-sensitive ethics of prudence can be deployed. With some reservations, that will be formulated later, it is the latter that gives us the best picture of what a Ricoeurian notion of political responsibility would look like.

The core of his ethico-political theory, first expounded in *Oneself as another* (published in 1990, and then further developed in essays during the decade that followed and of which most have found their way into the two volumes of *Le juste*),⁶² takes form by a reflection on action in which Ricoeur, not completely unlike Levinas,⁶³ confronts this question of action by redirecting it to the question of the agent: Who is it that aims at the good life with and for others in just institutions? Therefore, in order to

61 OAA 172 / SA202.

62 An exposition of the philosophy of these books that cover the same terrain as the present subsection is Olivier Abel's *Paul Ricoeur. La promesse et la règle*. Paris: Editions Michalon, 1996. See also the presentation and appraisal of Ricoeur's "Little ethics" in Fred Dallmayr's "Ethics and public life. A critical tribute to Paul Ricoeur" in *Paul Ricoeur and contemporary moral thought*. John Wall, Willam Schweiker and W. David Hall (eds.). New York and London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 213–232.

63 Despite this similarity it is clear from the outset that Ricoeur's philosophical anthropological approach to the agent of ethico-political action differs considerably from Levinas' metaphysical or ontological approach. The most significant aspect of this difference is probably the importance attributed to pure passivity by Levinas and the accent in Ricoeur on capacities and self-esteem. Ricoeur captured this difference in a letter to Levinas (25 June 1990) by saying: "If there is between you and I some disagreement, it is to be situated exactly at the point where I maintain that the face of the other could be recognised as source of questioning [*interpellation*] and of injunction only if it turns out possible to arouse or to awake a self-esteem [understood in terms of 'solicitude for others and justice for everybody' – EW] (published as "L'unicité humaine du pronom je", in *Ethique et responsabilité: Paul Ricoeur*. Jean-Christophe Aeschlimann (ed.). Neufchâtel: Editions La Baconnière, 1994, p. 37.). However a detailed comparison of the two theories of subjectivity is not the issue here.

provide us with the orientation needed for our current exploration, a number of remarks are in order concerning the agent, the capable human being (*l'homme capable*), both in his/her capacities and in his/her constitution. This consideration of (and for) the capabilities of the agent will form the background to what I want to draw from Ricoeur in the project for a theory of responsibility “after Levinas”. The competence of political agents to determine and execute responsible action in sensitivity for the normative restriction of efficiency, but also in cognisance of the complexity of praxis seem already to be major components of this theory (whereas, as argued before, they are neglected by Levinas). But in order to show how Ricoeur could be useful in this regard, the entry of the ethical and the moral on the scene of the agent’s existence has to be presented as well. These two issues – the capable agent and the ethical – represent the two axes of the chart on which Ricoeur’s ethico-political reflection can be mapped out:⁶⁴ the *horizontal axis* being the dialogical constitution of the self and the *vertical axis* representing the hierarchy of predicates applicable to action and to agents – “ethical”, “moral” and “prudent”. Let’s recall the main traits of these two axes in turn, before exploring their intersection in more detail.⁶⁵

Saying that one could represent the constitution of the self on a *horizontal axis* entails that the self, in isolation and in the singular, is for Ricoeur only an abstraction of the person that is continually constituted by others. These are the nearby others, the “you”, but also the anonymous others, “he or she” or “everyone”. This triad of first, second and third person should thus be seen as a relation of dialectical constitution of the self.⁶⁶ Furthermore the constitution by an interpersonal alterity of the second person and an institutional alterity of the third person⁶⁷ should be considered equally original. At the same time the agent requires the mediation of the others in order to develop and actualise his or her capacities into powers, which in turn find their realisation or deployment in similar relations to the others.⁶⁸ The capacities in question here are those of speaking, acting and suffering, narrating about oneself, and presenting oneself as a subject of ethical imputation. It is only

64 Cf. TJ xii / JI 13.

65 There are a number of core aspects of Ricoeur’s approach that I shall not look at here: the “epistemological status” of claims about the ethical agent (the entire issue of attestation), the language pragmatics in which Ricoeur’s argument is embedded, the problematisation of the is/ought-dilemma by Ricoeur and the justification of discourse on the ethical, the detail of the dialogical constitution of the self. It is only the limits of the current use of Ricoeur that could justify such a thematic restriction.

66 RTJ 60 / JII 72.

67 TJ 5 / JI 34.

68 TJ 5 / JI 33–34.

by the deployment of these four kinds of capacities that someone can identify himself or herself (each time as a “self”, rather than a direct introspective and free standing “I”) and show esteem for himself or herself. In fact by deploying its capacities the self shows its care⁶⁹ for its life, and for that of others, and is situated in the force field of desire and lacking that stretches towards the accomplished or good life.⁷⁰ This teleological directedness of the self is not so much a description of the normal human inclination to the good (but does at least not exclude such inclinations), but rather an optative through which it is affirmed that a life would indeed be good in which the self would care for himself/herself with and for the others in just institutions.⁷¹ It should already be added here that while the *telos* of teleology is the good, what this good entails is a matter of uncertainty⁷² and thus the issue of uncertainty will infiltrate the “Little ethics” from the beginning.

Let’s look at the essence of the activation of self-esteem through the four capacities. This always happens through relationships and interactions of reciprocity or of recognition with the nearby others, that is, in solicitude⁷³ and/or through institutions with everybody, that is, in justice.⁷⁴ It is, furthermore, important to emphasise that Ricoeur is especially concerned with the distributive mode of justice, which allows him to visualise the institutions (that are responsible for just distributions) in a very broad way:

“every institution as a schema of distribution, of which the portions that have to be distributed are not only goods and merchandise, but rights and duties, obligations and tasks, advantages and disadvantages, responsibilities and honours.”⁷⁵

Distribution as a function of institutions includes sharing, participation and distinction.⁷⁶ If the deployment of capacities always involves self-esteem, solicitude of others and just institutions, it could be shown to be the case in all four of these capacities.

Through the first capacity, that of *speech*, a person identifies himself or herself by engaging in speech acts in exchange with interlocutors and by adopting the institution of language (that is sharing and participating in

69 LI 259, LII 208.

70 TJ xi / JI 16.

71 Cf. LI 259.

72 LI 178.

73 LII 205.

74 LII 206.

75 LII 206.

76 OAA 200 / SA 233; *prendre part* as Ricoeur says in LI 180, presenting a vision of social participation not unlike that of Norbert Elias.

its existence) that belongs to nobody in particular, but of which a distinct use is made at that moment. Or: someone says something about something to somebody⁷⁷ in a certain language. The same pattern marks the deployment of the second capacity, that of *acting*. By acting, the self identifies himself/herself in interaction with other people and these actions take shape under the social institutions of the “rules of the game” or different kinds of measures of excellence with which all actions comply to a greater or lesser degree and that help us to identify them as ways of participating in the myriad of social practices and playing certain roles,⁷⁸ Or: someone does something (or undergoes something) in interaction with somebody, according to standards of excellence that constitute practices.

The capacity of *narration*, as third in the series of four, foregrounds the temporal development of the agent of speech and action. By narrating his or her existence, the agent establishes his or her identity. This happens once again in a dialectical implication of the others with whom one’s life-narrative is shared or entangled and through which the constitutional triad unfolds. These other narratives include those of the institutions with whom one interacts and even fictive narrations. Furthermore, through narration a dialectic of identity as sameness (*idem*, immutability) and identity as selfness (*ipse*, selfhood) is worked out.

In all three of these capacities of the agent, care (for the self, the nearby others and the just institutions) gave a distinct teleological directness to the parallel threefold realisation thereof. This is only partially true for the fourth capacity, that of self-assignment of *imputability*. In order to get the full picture of this capacity, one has to return for a moment to the capacity of action. Whenever one considers the interaction of people, there are often not only active agents, but also those that passively undergo action. Action often entails the power of some over others and thus the possibility and reality of the infliction of harm.⁷⁹ Here the “no” of prohibition and its imperative expression, the obligation, are called for,⁸⁰ since the infliction of harm is an attack on the very capacities of the other and it is these that are truly worthy of respect in a person⁸¹ and that one has to recognise to have self-respect. The ethics of teleo-

77 LII 212.

78 LII 215–216.

79 LII 216.

80 OAA 218 / SA 254. As Ricoeur explains in RTJ 235 / JII 271, the moral plane of reflection is needed because of the potential for conflict for which ethics, by the sole resources of teleology, cannot provide the necessary arbitration.

81 LI 163.

logical valuation of action in self-esteem has to be doubled by a deontological valuation in self-respect. In other words, the capable agent has to identify himself or herself through the considered application of the predicates “good” and “obligatory” on actions and retrospectively on their agents and himself or herself as the person that makes the judgement.⁸² The fourth capacity is, then, special in the sense that it includes the other capacities: it is as capable of self-identification as the person that utters speech, as the actor of action and as the protagonist-narrator of narrations that one could be considered worthy of self-esteem and self-respect.⁸³ Therefore, this capability of ethics in the true sense of the word, is also deployed in the interpersonal dimension (e.g., in agreements and promises) and with others in just institutions, the latter including especially all the institutions of law, up to the international level.

With this last capability, we have also started to present the *vertical axis* of Ricoeur’s ethico-political theory, which concerns the attribution of evaluative predicates on three levels. The *first level* of ethical judgement is the teleological and is encapsulated in the formula: the desire for the good life, with and for the others, in just institutions. If it is accepted that the discussion of the teleological dimension of ethics as given above suffices for our present purposes, the *second level* can be presented in more detail.

For Ricoeur the deontology is the moral aspect of the attribution of evaluative predicates and concerns the aspiring of the teleological towards the good under the regime of the moral law, that is, the formalisation of obligation by which the optative essence of teleological directedness is submitted to restriction.⁸⁴ Detached from teleological concerns, the moral refers to the universalistic ambition of obligation.⁸⁵ Hence Ricoeur’s predilection for the Golden rule as formulation of morality as prohibition against the infringement on the dignity of the other: “do not do unto others what you would not have them do to you”.⁸⁶ The indignation with which this imperative or rather prohibition responds to violence is rooted in the reciprocal recognition of self-esteem in solicitude (and *mutatis mutandis* in just institutions).⁸⁷ Here, on the moral level, one can see again the relatedness of the self to the others. This relatedness is not merely a supplement to the self-respect for the autonomy of the moral self; rather the respect for the others as

82 TJ 4 / JI 32.

83 TJ 4 / JI 33.

84 OAA 204 / SA 238.

85 OAA 238 / SA 276.

86 Cf. elaboration OAA 219 / SA 255.

87 Cf. OAA 222 / SA 258.

an end goal in itself is co-constitutive of self-respect. Just as self-esteem is complemented by solicitude and justice, so personal autonomy (and self-respect) is complemented by communitarian and cosmopolitan autonomy.⁸⁸ Or, one could equally say that the moral obligation is complemented by the formal norm and by legality. The latter represents the institutional incorporation of deontology as nourished by the contractualist tradition of political theory and where justice refers to procedural formalism.⁸⁹

However, when considering the question: “what then shall we do in this situation?” one is immediately confronted with the tragedy of action: the tension between the singularity of particular cases and the generality of obligation, the conflict between obligations and the complexity of life in society.⁹⁰ Thus one is forced to the *third level* of ethical judgement of action, that of prudence or practical wisdom. This is not a third independent source of evaluative reflection, but emerges from redirecting the formalism of morality back to ethics under the conflicting circumstances of the situation of ethical praxis.⁹¹ If practical wisdom requires the relativisation of the universality of the moral imperative, because of the historically particular circumstances of action or because of the particular claims of certain people, then this does not mean abandoning the moral imperative in order to embrace a flat arbitrariness,⁹² but to keep the tension between the ethical and the moral. Or in a later reformulation of the relation:

“On the one hand, we can take morality as the *plane of reference* in relation to which a fundamental ethic that is anterior to it and an applied ethics that is posterior to it are defined. On the other hand, we can say that moral philosophy in its unfolding of private, juridical, and political norms constitutes the *transition structure* that guides the movement from the fundamental ethics to applied ethics, which gives moral philosophy visibility and readability on the plane of *praxis*.”⁹³

88 RTJ 237 / JII 273, similarly OAA 238 / SA 277.

89 But here, the correct coordination of contractual thinking – the inspiration of Arendt or Rousseau on the one hand and Rawls on the other – is important. See Abel, *Paul Ricoeur. La promesse et la règle. op. cit.*: “Before being this procedure of reciprocal regulation that will play an important role in the second approach to justice, the contract is thus the act through which a common will is instituted. In this sense, just as in Rousseau the social contract is an implicit and retrospective pact that has not taken place but that is the presupposition of all political existence, the real contract has to be rediscovered incessantly together like a forgotten project that precedes all our rules. The political is nothing other than the rootedness of institutions in this fictitious pact.” (p. 53).

90 RF 81.

91 OAA 250 / SA 291.

92 OAA 241 / SA 280.

93 RTJ 56–57 / JII 68.

However it is then formulated, the power with which this dialectic between the ethical and the moral is played out in practice, is carried by conviction that effects the mediation in coordination with argumentation.⁹⁴

But the insistence on the conflicting and tragic nature that this mediation can take on, doesn't mean that all situations are of the nature of distress, but that prudence exactly creates space for reflection on it and that the possibility of tragedy in ethical decision making always has to be taken into account. For the conflict that arises then in the situation of practical application, a practical solution has to be found (like in "The political paradox"), and this not only in self-reflection, but in consultation with others and in engagement in public debate.⁹⁵ Furthermore, since "the principles of justification of a moral or legal rule leave the problems of application intact"⁹⁶ and "application" is a notion of interpretation, the tradition that mediates the application of universal norms to particular situations should constantly be submitted to interpretation in prudent reflection.⁹⁷

This synopsis suffices to map out the terrain in which Ricoeur works out his ethico-political theory. A self that can identify himself or herself as the capable agent of speech, action, narration and imputation, is constituted by the other – those close by, but also by everybody – and in interaction with the others these capacities can be deployed. This is the horizontal axis. Driven by the desire for a flourishing or good life, but already under the impression of the problem of conflict and violence, the self seeks the realisation of the good life under examination of the universal and formal obligation, but also in full cognisance of the complexity of the situations of application. This is the vertical axis. The ideas interpreted in this synopsis represent the indispensable orientation for the subsequent detailed exploration of a number of aspects of this theory, within the framework of my own project.

4 RESPONSIBILITY, PRUDENCE, COLLABORATION, EQUITY

Having presented the broad schema of Ricoeur's ethico-political thought, we can now enter some of the detail thereof, equipped with my own project as agenda for this exploration. This will be done in three movements: *first*, a number of clarifications with regard to the situation of Levinas' ethics in re-

94 OAA 287 / SA 334.

95 OAA 257–262 / SA 300–305.

96 RTJ 243 / JII 279.

97 RTJ 243f / JII 280.

lation to Ricoeur's framework will be presented; *second*, the uncertainty concerning the exact place and function of the notion of responsibility in Ricoeur's "Little ethics" needs to be focused on in order to highlight that there is no short-cut for adopting Ricoeur's insight for this project and; *third*, it will be argued how this theory of Ricoeur's can be expected to contribute to the elaboration of my project and provide pointers in the development of a political notion of responsibility for a globalised world.

4.1 Remarks on the resources: Levinas and Ricoeur

As declared earlier, the intention of introducing Ricoeur in this study about Levinas and responsibility is not to work towards a comparison of the two authors.⁹⁸ Instead, the question is how Ricoeur can help to give an improved grasp on my project of a political responsibility after Levinas. This doesn't mean that the value that such a confrontation between Ricoeur and Levinas could have for the current theme is denied, but simply that it falls outside of the current thematic and strategic delimitation.

However, although I shall thus not enter into the detail of the profound philosophical arguments concerning, especially ontology, alterity and the constitution of the subject, my strategy of using Ricoeur to enhance my post-Levinasian project necessarily involves at least an implicit confrontation between the "resources" or most fundamental thought of these two philosophers. For that reason, I consider it desirable to at least give an account of the structural differences between the two philosophies. I shall do this

98 The comparison between the two philosophers has naturally been the subject of exploration and dispute. The contributions of Patrick Bourgeois and of Richard Cohen in *Ricoeur as another. The ethics of subjectivity*. (Richard Cohen and James Marsh (eds.). Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) are worthy to be highlighted as valuable, since they represent two strong, opposing answers to the question concerning the correctness of Ricoeur's interpretation of Levinas and with it the relation between Levinas and Ricoeur. It should be clear that my reading of Levinas and Ricoeur is much closer to that of Bourgeois than to that of Cohen: the formidable scope of enterprise and the strength of the sovereignty of the Levinasian political subject (as I interpret it) seems to me to be the consequence of the strong emphasis on exteriority of the other as regards the ethical (emphasised in Bourgeois' mostly approving reading of Ricoeur's interpretation of Levinas). And if in "accepting the role of solicitude in human existence, Ricoeur has developed a place within interiority that really allows a response to the face of the other." ("Ricoeur and Levinas: Solicitude in reciprocity and solicitude in existence", in *Ricoeur as another, op. cit.* pp. 109–126, here 122) then he also allows for taking the opinion of the other about matters ethical seriously and thus taking the other as agent of ethics seriously – to a point I doubt possible in Levinas.

by highlighting a number of significant divergences of Levinas with respect to the framework of Ricoeur that has been presented above.

- (1) In Ricoeur's development from the first person to the second and third person, the self is doubly constituted by the other and this on the plane of reciprocity. In Levinas the priority of the second person other is indisputable in the absolute asymmetry between the self and the other; this asymmetry is so radical that, on the level of ethics the other overwhelmingly defines the self. Furthermore, not only is the place of the third person other underdeveloped in Levinas, but there is no clear indication of the relation between the other and the thirds, or their irrelation is simply expressed as contradiction.⁹⁹ However, on the level of politics this contradiction is the resource of a fraternity of eternally asymmetrical relations.
- (2) Ricoeur presents the triangular unfolding of the identity of the self in relation to the other as the expression of the different dimensions of self-esteem and thus of esteem for the life of the self and of the others with whom it is directly and institutionally linked. This teleological moment of the self would, for Levinas, be equal to the *conatus*, the perseverance in the ontological identity and as long as the alterity of the other is not sufficiently recognised, the affirmation regarding the constitution of the self by the other risks sliding into the identitary or indifferent force of participation with all of the potential violence lurking within it, as discussed in Chapter 2.
- (3) There is in Ricoeur a dramatisation of the coordination between teleological ethics and deontological morality – both find their realisation in the dialectical relation to each other that is expressed in practical wisdom. Levinas fuses the teleological (that is condemned as inevitably conspiring with the dark side of ontology) and the deontological (in the sense of the unconditional imperative emanating from the other and the negativity of that imperative in the “thou shalt not kill!”) in the double, ontological-ethical, constitution of the subject, and of which the ambiguity of ageing (discussed in Chapter 1, § 2.1. and Chapter 5, § 3) is the easiest manifestation.¹⁰⁰

99 Didier Frank convincingly argues that Levinas reduces the complex relationship (the political) to the simpler one (the face-to-face) and tries to derive the complex from the simple. This should be regarded a considerable weakness in his approach to the political. Cf. Didier Frank (*L'un-pour-l'autre. Levinas et la signification*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008) p. 237.

100 I am fully aware that these are not Levinas' terms and that I present him with the tools borrowed from another artisan. This could be allowed at least for the strategic purposes outlined in this Chapter.

- (4) Even though there is no development of practical wisdom in Levinas, his description of the constitution of the quest for justice (cf. Chapter 7, §2.2) sufficiently marks the place in his philosophy where that should be situated. For Ricoeur reflection on ethics culminates in a reflection on practical wisdom.
- (5) Whereas in Ricoeur, situations of tragedy necessitate a recourse to the ethical despite the validity of the moral, in Levinas the law is to be challenged by what is even more moral than the law, namely that for which the unspeakable imperative “thou shalt not kill!” holds the place.
- (6) Whereas the question of the capacity of the self is central for Ricoeur and finds its culmination in imputation, the self in Levinas is always elected, independent of whatever capacity; this election is simply imposed or assumed passively. But this difference on the level of the constitution of the subject has implications for the political situation of the subject. Strictly speaking, every Levinasian subject is isolated in his or her responsibility for the others, in the sense that nobody can be responsible in the subject’s stead. Furthermore, this responsibility draws all of its resources from a constitution independent of that of the life in a State. For Ricoeur, on the other hand, the question of the form of the State and the respect due to the others are ultimately rooted in the capacities of the citizens.¹⁰¹
- (7) Since, for Ricoeur, ethical agency is constituted in relationships of reciprocity and recognition and mediated institutionally, ethical action can be coordinated between different agents or executed alone. For Levinas nobody can take my place and any collaboration can only be understood as and accepted in as far as it is an extension of my irreplaceable obedience to the other. Any reciprocity or recognition is already an expression of the attempt to answer in responsibility the appeal of the others. Consequently, all initiatives at institutionalising and mediation of ethical conduct would, for Levinas, merit at least a healthy dose of suspicion.

101 “On the contrary, an anthropology that makes a place for the notions of the capability to act, dispositions, development, realisation, can give account of the fact that the capabilities that we quite rightly consider as immediately worthy of respect can flourish only in societies of a certain form, and thus their development is not possible in simply any political society. And yet, if the individual becomes human only under the condition of certain institutions, then the obligation to serve those institutions is itself a condition for the continued development of a human agent.” (LI 163). And one should add that this central position accorded to capacities and institutions in turn implies the significance of the technologies associated with the capacities and institutions (which is not the same as adopting a technocratic approach to politics).

- (8) For Ricoeur the force behind the improvement of justice is the force of the political, of the will to live together. By contrast, for Levinas, the force for the improvement of justice resides in the individual agent's orientation by the ethical imperative and the plurality of these imperatives, which result in the strength to override or call to greater justice the legal system that is in force at a certain place and time.

In these points the most salient differences in the ethico-political profile of Levinas and Ricoeur are sketched. This should suffice to contrast them with respect to their deepest philosophical orientations in matters ethical and the political thought that is nourished by these orientations, which lead to the divergent contributions they would make to a debate about political responsibility. In accordance with the demarcation of the present study, I remain as far as possible agnostic regarding the ultimate philosophical issues presupposed by the work of Levinas and Ricoeur, in order to devote my attention to matters that ensue from it. For this reason it is important to insist that the point at which Ricoeur enters this project is not on the level of the debate of the ultimate philosophical concerns, but limited to the level of the elaboration of the four requirements for a political notion of responsibility (see Chapter 8), that were already a step away from Levinas' own thought.

Now, whereas the notion of responsibility is evidently a key notion in his thought, thus far nothing has been said about Ricoeur's contribution to the question of responsibility (accept, of course his commentary on Weber's notion thereof). The reason for this temporary exclusion needs to be explained. It is necessary to give a review of the complicated attitude of Ricoeur with regard to the notion of responsibility, since it is only by doing so that I can complete the justification for the stated manner in which I shall attempt to make his thought useful for the current project.

4.2 Ambiguity concerning Ricoeur's use of the notion of responsibility

It would certainly be too simplistic to understand the thrust of my argument as replacing a defective Levinas with a correct Ricoeur. This cannot be the case, not only because of the manner in which I inscribe my reflection in the continuation of central aspects of Levinas' thought (see end of Chapter 6), but also because Ricoeur, in the development of his ethico-philosophical theory, attempted to incorporate important aspects of Levinas' thought into his own and therefore it seems incorrect to schematise the re-

relationship between the two philosophers as that of two mutually exclusive alternatives.¹⁰² There is a further significant reason why one could not simply open Ricoeur's work and draw from it a theory of responsibility in its political dimension and this is the uncertainty concerning the status of the notion of responsibility in Ricoeur's later thought.

It seems that in the later work of Ricoeur there are at least three somewhat divergent uses of the notion of responsibility.

- (1) It is, first of all, used as synonymous for "imputability". The fourth question by which to enquire about the identity of the capable agent "who is the moral subject of imputation?"¹⁰³ is sometimes simply formulated as "who designates herself as the morally responsible author of her acts?"¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Ricoeur would claim that without a subject that could have self-esteem through being capable of acting intentionally and of initiating action, there would be no "responsible subject".¹⁰⁵ And with a different emphasis and some reservations, Ricoeur explains that only in so far as a subject is capable of situating his or her action under the obligation to conform to rules and to assume the consequences of action, can that subject be called responsible.¹⁰⁶
- (2) In spite of Ricoeur having equated responsibility and imputability, he immediately then opens a gap between the two notions. If responsibility is to be taken as a synonym for imputability and if imputation means first of all the capacity to assume on one's account an action, then responsibility means first of all *Zurechnungsfähigkeit*, the capacity to have an action placed on one's account as it were, that is, not "to respond to" in the first place, but giving an account of one's actions or admitting to having authored them.¹⁰⁷ But this means that there is also another meaning of responsibility, in which the "responding to" is dominant and in this sense is not the same as imputation. In "The concept of responsibility. An essay in semantic analysis"¹⁰⁸ this difference despite the similarity between imputability and responsibility is worked out by tracing the historical development by which "responsibility" as a notion branched off from "imputability". "Responsibility" changed from simple

102 See again Bourgeois, "Ricoeur and Levinas: Solitude in reciprocity and solicitude in existence", *op. cit.* pp. 122f.

103 OAA 169 / SA 199.

104 TJ 23 / JI 55.

105 LII 205.

106 RTJ 82 / JII 96.

107 RTJ 82–83 / JII 97.

108 TJ 11–35 / JI 41–70.

attribution (that is, imputation) to obligation (especially in law), and from there the explosion of its use filled it with ambiguity in law (withdrawal of the meaning of imputation and inability in the tendencies of attribution of penalty and culpability for those that commit mistakes). A proliferation of meanings also developed in moral philosophy. The latter entails a shift in the object of responsibility (e.g., from responsibility for one's actions to responsibility for the other, in Levinas) or the unlimited extension of the scope of responsibility (e.g., for future generations, as in Jonas) and in both of these cases there is increased emphasis on prospective responsibility, rather than on retrospective responsibility (of which imputability is a species) and a consequent undermining of the component of the identifiability of the subject of responsibility (due to the lapse of time between consequence and initial action, or due to the complexity of the causal network that makes the calculation of what responsibility is taken for very hazy). When Ricoeur then concludes that the subject of responsibility becomes ungraspable (*insaisissable*) and diluted (*dilué*)¹⁰⁹ we have arrived very close to the opposite of the initial idea (in point 1.) of responsibility as the capacity of imputation. In fact, the prudence that Ricoeur proposes as corrective to the (legitimate) issues expressed in the new moral philosophies of responsibility, depends on a stronger emphasis and valuation of the capacity of imputation. In this sense this course of examination presented by Ricoeur doesn't amount to a plea for the abolition of the moral theories of responsibility, but for a considerable rethinking of them, starting by anchoring them anew in the agent that is capable of imputation.

- (3) Between these two extremes of convergence (synonymy) and divergence (or firm distinction), is a third, positive place accorded to the notion of responsibility in Ricoeur's ethics. In the conclusion to the "Little ethics" and, in fact, to the first nine studies of *Oneself as another*.¹¹⁰ Ricoeur recapitulates the contribution of the three ethical studies not only to the reflexive identification of the self by ethical judgement, but to the entire set of capacities of the capable human. If Ricoeur explains the title of the book right from its first pages by the threefold question concerning the identity of the "who?", then the conclusion following the ninth study provides a comprehensive answer that can be given only once the entire course of the exploration of the capacities of speech, action, narration and ethico-moral judgement has been followed through. Let it be recal-

109 TJ 34 / JI 69.

110 OAA 291–296 / SA 337–344.

led that the threefold question concerning the “who?” consists of (1) the question concerning the reflexive identity of the self (*soi*) through mediation by speech and action, (2) the question about the dialectical identity of sameness (identity-*idem*) and selfness (identity-*ipse*) and (3) the question regarding the dialectical identity of selfness through alterity.¹¹¹ The exploration of ethics provides answers to these three questions while at the same time drawing on the three other capacities (speech, action, narration) and in this sense recapitulates the entire movement of the response to these three questions concerning oneself as another.¹¹² For each of these three answers a name could be given to encapsulate the response that is only possible to give once the fourth, the ethical, capacity has been reached. The encapsulating term for reflexive self-identification is *imputation*, the term for the dialectical identity of sameness and selfness is *responsibility*, and the term for the identity emerging dialectically from the self and the other is *recognition*. Imputation designates the self as capable of attributing statements or actions to himself/herself through the mediation of the ethico-moral predicates (good, obedient, just, prudent, etc.).¹¹³ Recognition

“is a structure of the self reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice. Recognition introduces the dyad and plurality in the very constitution of the self.”¹¹⁴

Between the two, responsibility refers to the continued self-identification or “self-constancy” [*maintien de soi-même*]¹¹⁵ that remains in dialectical tension with the mere duration of empirical sameness of the ethical agent through the vicissitudes of time and the adventures of ethics that it entails. Ricoeur elaborates on this by examining the temporal aspects of responsibility. The prospective or future aspect of responsibility refers to assuming the future consequences (intended or not) of actions; the retrospective or past aspect of responsibility refers to the assumption of actions (committed by oneself or not) or the recognition of debt. But “[h]olding oneself responsible now, is

111 Cf. OAA 1–4 / SA 11–15.

112 We have seen a similar movement at work in one of the texts used to introduce the question of the identity of the ethical agent and his/her capacities: “Approches de la personne” (LII 203–221) and “Who is the subject of rights” (TJ 1–10 / JI 2–40).

113 OAA 291, 293 / SA 338, 340.

114 OAA 296 / SA 344.

115 OAA 295 / SA 343.

[...] accepting to be held to be the same today as the one who acted yesterday and who will act tomorrow”.¹¹⁶ Furthermore,

“this responsibility in the present assumes that the responsibility of the consequences to come and that of a past with respect to which the self recognises its debt are integrated in this non-pointlike [*non ponctuel*] present and in a sense recapitulated in it.”¹¹⁷

Even if the notion of responsibility proposed here by Ricoeur includes imputation (described previously), it is certainly non-synonymous with it, in fact it rather represents a further development the idea of imputation. Likewise, one could consider recognition as an extension or further development of the notion of responsibility.

Instead of attempting a superficial conflation or harmonisation of these three uses of “responsibility” by Ricoeur, or even worse, making a choice between them, I shall take a step back in order to situate the issue at stake in each of them within the broader framework of Ricoeur’s ethico-political theory, that I approach from the point of view of the political paradox. Since such an approach is justified by nothing more than the aims of the current project, my point is obviously not to propose a “rectification” of Ricoeur’s use of “responsibility”, but just to examine the ways in which he could be said to contribute to the construction of my own development on “responsibility”.

Three things are sure about this “practical solution” to the uncertain position of the notion of responsibility in Ricoeur, and with them I shall proceed on my alternative approach to finding Ricoeur’s contribution on responsibility. First, accepting the first sense of responsibility as imputability is the condition for thinking with Ricoeur about matters ethical; second, the third sense should be considered as an expansion of the meaning of the first and with this statement the question of the further expansion of the use of the term in a Ricoeurian frame is opened; third, it could be accepted that the second sense is concerned with theoretical problems in contemporary theories of responsibility¹¹⁸ and could thus be considered a negative contribution to considerations on the use of the term. All three of these statements affirm that Ricoeur’s ethical theory remains the major stake of the use of the term “responsibility” and hence for current purposes it could be acceptable to refer the issue of the polysemy in Ricoeur’s use of it back to the frame of his ethics sketched earlier.

As stated, in what follows certain aspects of Ricoeur’s ethics will be discussed in greater detail, notably from the perspective of the political paradox.

116 OAA 295 / SA 242, translation modified.

117 OAA 295 / SA 243.

118 Cf. also RTJ 159 / JII 185.

The reader will recall that I have shown that the political paradox could be presented as a reformulation of Weber's concerns in the paper in which he developed his theory of political responsibility. This is the perspective in which I want to bind all considerations about responsibility, since it is the perspective from which I have tried to develop a project for political responsibility out of Levinas.

Let us now consider some of the aspects of Ricoeur's contribution to the developed fourfold project of political responsibility.¹¹⁹

4.3 Towards a political responsibility for a globalised world

For the sake of clarity, let it be recalled that the notion of "political", as it is used here, concerns something broader than one of the spheres of social reality. In fact, it includes all human relationships, with the possible exceptions of (aspects of) close interpersonal relationships. The political refers to the broad power of the will to live together (Arendt) and is the furthest implications of the teleological aim of human life. But the power of the political is necessarily bound up with the political paradox: in order for political power to realise itself, it has to adopt means appropriate to that realisation (see Weber on the means of the political), but those means carry at the same time in them the possibility of their violent use and misuse. The political paradox is thus a form of the tragedy of human action. Since this is the case, the question concerning the limitation or control of these means has to be asked, and in Ricoeur's reinterpretation of the ethics of principle this entails the affirmation of the obligation of restraint. The assumption of the use of political means and the consequences thereof, that Weber designated as an ethic of responsibility, has to be placed under control by the force of obligation – Ricoeur's reformulation of the relationship between Weber's ethic of responsibility and ethic of principle turns out to be the tension between the teleological and deontological sides of his "Little ethics". But this tension doesn't resolve the political paradox, instead it continually calls for a practical response to it, which is reflected on by Ricoeur under the term of practical wisdom or prudence. If the summit of responsibility is for Weber the coordination of responsibility and principle by elevating responsibility to a principle, then for Ricoeur the summit of ethical

119 For an exposition of political responsibility on Ricoeur's own terms, see Bernard Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The promise and the risk of politics, op. cit.* Chapter 8: "Political responsibility". Although Dauenhauer gives full recognition to the fact that, in Ricoeur, the political extends beyond the sphere of politics, his presentation thematises mainly responsibility for or in connection with the political sphere.

action is the practical solution of the eternal tension between the ethical and the moral in practical wisdom. The way in which Ricoeur opts to think through this complex issue that leads up to prudence situates the “who?” of this practical wisdom in the centre. He also refers to this being as a person or the subject of law or again the capable human. With my Weberian perspective on Ricoeur, it may be permissible to call it the *agent of political responsibility*.

Central to the motivation for seeking in the Ricoeurian agent of political responsibility an ally in reflection on political responsibility after Levinas, is the fact that Ricoeur engages with the *capability* of the agent and consequently also facilitates reflection on the *means* of agency (whatever the status of the capability and the nature of the means might be). Let it be recalled here that a number of problematic issues with the ethical subject in Levinas seemed to necessitate this continued reflection on responsibility that I undertake in this Chapter: behind all of the insufficiencies concerning reflection on co-responsibility, the complexity of application to a practical context and the mediatedness of action, is the blind-spot concerning the nature and dimensions of the competence of ethical agents. One could be perfectly ethically constituted as Levinas has it, but fatally clumsy in subsequently translating that ethical constitution into appropriate action. This is of course not to say that an acquisition of certain skills and knowledge programmes an agent to more ethically acceptable conduct, but simply to recognise that the practise of ethics is not at all without relevance for the meaning of the ethical. If Ricoeur, then, draws our attention to the capacities of ethical agents, it will neither be to ignore the role of the other in the constitution of that agent, nor to establish a set of requirements for effective ethico-political agency, but to open the discussion of ethics to a reflection on who the agent is or how the capacity to act ethically is constituted. By referring the question about ethics to a philosophical anthropology of human capabilities (to Ricoeur’s *homme capable*), an approach is adopted in which the competence of the ethico-political agent is taken seriously, since capacity immediately implies the distinction between degrees of capability, and thus of excellence or the lack of it or of sufficiency in it. This means that if we are from the outset concerned about the capacity of ethical agency that it will facilitate reflection on: (1) strategy, calculation and sacrifice; (2) the distribution of roles, the dimensions of responsibility and co-responsibility; (3) the context of action and its institutional and instrumental dimensions in particular and (4) the dilemma of the exception and equity – in short, the four objectives for reflection on a notion of political responsibility “after Levinas”, as outlined in Chapter 8. This insistence on the capability and excellence of the ethical subject doesn’t mean that the meaning of “for the other” is interfered with or compromised, but simply that we cannot merely

be concerned about the “that” of ethical agency, without this implying the importance of the question of “how?” or “what?” of excellence. Ethical action is not an all-or-nothing matter; excellence doesn’t exclude the possibility of the fairly good sufficing in certain circumstances. This conviction is of course Aristotelian. But this shouldn’t surprise us, since the entire discussion concerning Ricoeur headed for a re-appropriation of *phronésis*.

How would reflection on the phronetic capacity of ethical agency contribute to the four objectives set out above? In answering this question I do not only confront the four objectives that crystallised from my Levinas-Weber-Apel reading with the insights gained in this Chapter from Ricoeur, but simultaneously formulate my view – in as far as it can be developed in the present book – on the development of a theory of political responsibility for a globalised world.

The *first* point on the agenda is that of strategy. If the question regarding strategy arises from the affirmation of the importance of competence and means for ethics, then it is rooted deeper still in the rejection of cosmic-ethical realism. The positive formulation of this rejection is in the affirmation of tragedy, of “the unavoidable nature of conflict in moral life”.¹²⁰ Ricoeur’s entire effort in moral theory could be considered as an attempt to show how this crucial recognition of tragedy in human action calls for ethical reflection that is appropriate for practice, while avoiding both arbitrariness and univocity.¹²¹ Only a practical wisdom that engages with the situation or context of its realisation, while remaining informed about consideration that transcends the mere factual particularity of the situation, can accomplish this task. Therefore, responsibility, in order to be responsible, has to be more than the name for ethnicity, but has to anticipate the consequences of its practice, which in turn implies the question of the optimisation of those consequences in terms of obedience to the meaning of the ethical. That is why applied ethics (*les éthiques*) cannot be understood as mechanical application of context-independent principles to situations, as a blind casuistry.¹²² Instead applied ethics is ethics as it applies itself through phronetic engagement with the situation. That is why applied ethics cannot be considered as separate from ethical reflection; its distinction from ethics resides in the specialist insight that it generates concerning specific contexts or cases in which the ethico-moral dialectic has to realise itself, just like the political that strives to realise itself through politics.

120 OAA 243 / SA 283.

121 OAA 249 / SA 290.

122 “We can say that moral philosophy in its unfolding of private, juridical, and political norms constitutes the *transition structure* that guides the movement from the fundamental ethics to applied ethics, which gives moral philosophy visibility and readability on the plane of *praxis*.” (RTJ 57 / JII 68).

Responsibility thus benefits equally from reflection on ethicality and by reflection on its practical realisation. But this reflection is always done in the face of practical conflict and not as a programming of action towards inevitable success. Responsibility is practice in the face of moral conflict – the incomparable has to be submitted to comparison as Levinas so aptly says, which implies the need for prioritisation and even sacrifice. The practical solution of ethical situations of conflict, through responsible action, affirms and, in this sense, maintains the conflict associated with the situation, while attempting to show itself as prudent response to it. That prudent responsibility is sacrificing responsibility should be considered an inevitable concession.¹²³ However, while affirming the inevitable role of calculation in the assumption of responsibility and the tragic dimensions it can assume in certain cases, we must avoid regarding the conflict involved in responsibility as evenly spread over all situations of responsibility, lest we risk contaminating the entire notion of responsibility with an unremitting pathos of the sole agent agonising in every act of decision making. Because responsibility is serious, it strives to realise itself strategically, which may allow for division, formalisation and variation in complexity and collective assumption (all, evidently, in varying degrees, depending on the context).

Responsibility is not one. The demands of strategy naturally differentiate responsibility out into different *forms and dimensions* of responsibility which are in turn inevitably bound up with institutions, means and other dimensions of the *context* of action. These have been indicated to be the *second* and *third* points on the agenda for an alternative notion of responsibility. One could perhaps say that responsibility doesn't simply concern a "here I am, responsible for others", but that it has the form of someone being responsible for other people (for the consequences of what is done or not done to them), in ways determined by different social roles, within certain institutional frameworks, where the competent use of certain means will be required and where the specifics of each of these elements may be submitted to revision according to the circumstances of its application.

That responsible people are responsible as members of societies seems to be the primary lesson to be derived from Ricoeur's extension of the aim of the good life to political existence – and to this should be added that one should at least count with the other members of society as probable agents of responsi-

123 But Martha Nussbaum is correct, at least in principle, to call for the claim that loses out in the phronetic decision to be kept in play; the fact of its being cancelled as the decisive claim through a practical decision doesn't take away from its initial validity in the tragic conflict between competing claims. See her "Ricoeur on tragedy: teleology, deontology and *phronesis*", in *Paul Ricoeur and contemporary moral thought*, *op. cit.* pp. 264–276.

ble action in interaction with others, entail on a social theoretical level. Since the agent of responsibility is always constituted by participation in institutions, he/she always has to take these forms of mediation into account in interaction with the third: not only to know one's own capacity of action, but also to gain insight into the network of social interactions that distributes the consequences of one's action. As true as it might be that injustice lurks in all forms of institution, so it is true that it is not possible to do away with all aspects of institution at the same time – one needs the benefits of institutionalised interaction and one's institutional constitution in order to counter, for instance, systemic injustice. As such, institutions are not only a major aspect of the socio-historical context on which one has to act, but an aspect that mediates the context to agents of action and interaction.

If one is then constituted by institutions that impose a certain form and coordination on action as interaction with other agents of responsibility, it seems inevitable to give serious consideration to the question of co-responsibility. In a situation where interaction is regulated by the institutional distribution of roles and everything that is associated with it, one could, first, identify the respective forms of excellence involved in the practice of certain roles and, second, differentiate different forms and dimensions of responsibility that fit with these roles and their capable execution.¹³⁰ Again, this doesn't suppose that all institutions are just, or that the capacities acquired by playing all roles are good. But when all competence is condemned as conspiracy with injustice, one leaves the bearer of responsibility without any means. Under normal circumstances (I shall question this term in the Conclusion) some practices can be considered acceptable means of supporting other people.

The roles and dimensions of responsibility, then, stand for the acceptance of certain limits, qualifications or specialisations of responsibility, when considered under the perspective of interaction and co-responsibility. Often roles are the incarnation of certain principles laid down for the bearers of office. This is the original sense in which the term responsibility was used as an ethico-political term. In this sense role-associated responsibility has a deontological character. However, even this deontology can be confronted with conflicting demands in particular situations that would necessitate a hermeneutics

130 More of the detail concerning competence, excellence and the constitution of practices and their interrelation can be read in OAA 175f/ SA 206f and LI 163. This reflection, which evidently engages with such neo-Aristotelian philosophies of virtue as that of Alasdair MacIntyre, clearly has important implications for the consideration of the relationship between ethics and means, which will be turned to shortly.

of prudence – as Ricoeur’s numerous studies on medical ethics sufficiently illustrate.

Whether in the form of restricted roles of responsibility or a certain prudent adaptation to the demands of practical dilemmas, responsibility has to reckon with the demands of compromise.¹³¹ But the recognition of co-responsibility makes it possible to introduce expertise and negotiation into the process of compromise. Expertise has the potential to prevent responsible agents rushing into decisions in domains where they have no competence. But expertise is only one of the forms in which consultation, discussion or exchange of views forms part of negotiation or dispute. This conflict of opinions regarding what should be done crosses the entire field laid bare by the political paradox, by the tension between the will to live together in just institutions and the means by which this is to be realised. There is no reason to adopt an overly irenic image of what this entails. Discussion is a form of conflict by which decisions are made that cannot be settled by scientific or dogmatic means.¹³² And these decisions are in principle forever open to revision. On a more radical level, even the aims and form of discussion and the legitimisation of power could be submitted to revision.¹³³ In extreme cases the very nature of dominant practices can be challenged, that is, justice could be questioned in the name of equity – to this I shall turn in a while.

But before doing so, I need to stress a last aspect of Ricoeur’s contribution to the issues of the roles of responsibility and the context of its application. This concerns the ultimate extent of the context of action and thus the ultimate horizon for deliberation about responsibility. It seems that Ricoeur would agree that this ultimate horizon is the *entire humanity*. He insists on the fact that

“human action takes on its first meaning only when it is crowned by the activities relating to the quest for a good government, whether it be that of the city, the nation of humanity as a whole.”¹³⁴

Elsewhere he refers to the extension of justice over the entire humanity as ideal,¹³⁵ which takes form in reflection on the international order.¹³⁶ The de-

131 Of the particular character of compromise in Ricoeur, Abel gives a valuable articulation in *Paul Ricoeur. La promesse et la règle. op. cit. pp.* 104–106.

132 OAA 258 / SA 300.

133 OAA 258–261 / SA 301–304.

134 LI 162.

135 LI 182, and I see no reason why this should not be taken literally, since Ricoeur also says: “The citizen that results from this institutional mediation can only wish that all humans would enjoy in the same manner this political mediation, which, apart from being one of the *necessary* conditions noted by a philosophi-

velopment of reflection on justice to this scale is in any case made inevitable by the emergence of an increasing number of post-national or supra-state institutions, amongst which are those that have legislative powers.¹³⁷ The conditions of this global extent of ethico-political reflection are referred to in his “Postface au *Temps de la responsabilité*”¹³⁸ where Ricoeur evokes development, technology, geopolitics, and the threat to the environment or the economy – that can be taken as indications of the will and need to transcend the national boundaries in political reflection.¹³⁹ This implies that the teleological optative aiming at the good life in just institutions, as well as the imperative against injustice and their dialectic in prudent decisions of justice should all be considered, ultimately, in their *global* dimension. This is implied in the very definition of the ethical, since justice

“adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity”.¹⁴⁰

If the universal claim of the moral imperative through human rights cannot rid itself of its particular formulations, then this is an indication that the dispute (referred to above) concerning these “universals” has to be conducted on a global scale, since

“only a discussion on the concrete level of cultures could say – after a long history that is still to come – which claimed universals will become the recognised universals”.¹⁴¹

The *fourth* point on the agenda for a reflection on political responsibility after Levinas concerns equity. Responsibility seems to me an appropriate term

cal anthropology for the transition of the capable human being to a real citizen, also becomes a *sufficient* condition thereof.” (LI 40).

136 LI 193. The passage in question is devoted to the idea of a “just distance”.

137 TJ 93 / JI 142.

138 LI 272f, 275f, 277, 286, 288.

139 See also Fred Dallmayr’s reflections on the global relevance of Ricoeur’s ethico-political thought in “Ethics and public life.” *op. cit.* pp. 214, 228–229.

140 OAA 202 / SA 236. One could also consider who the everybody (*chacun*) is that constitutes the political dimension of the ethical teleology. Could this “everybody” be limited by membership of political institutions (in the narrow sense of “political”), like citizenship? Would it not be more coherent to consider the “everybody” with whom one would live in just institutions as all those with whom one has or could have an institutionally mediated relation (in the large sense)? This would mean that “everybody” is incorporated into the ethical teleology by all *de facto* exchanges, whatever the nature thereof might be. Whatever Ricoeur’s opinion on this matter might be, this conclusion leads immediately to the dimension of globalisation and the texture of social ties as they are mediated technologically.

141 LI 268.

through which to approach the question of equity, since responsibility is an ethics of uncertainty,¹⁴² compromise and sacrifice. By acknowledging this, the idea is not to celebrate tragedy, but to do justice to ethics. Equity concerns exactly justice, its credibility and its desirability or commendability, ever since the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Keeping justice just, in other words keeping the socio-historically contingent institutionalised expression of justice true to the originary signification of the ethical, is Levinas' concern in his attempt to coordinate ethics and justice. In this sense Levinas could be said to contribute to a theory of equity. But it was also the interference of the ethical in the domain of justice that posed problems in Levinas' philosophy (see Chapter 6).

Ricoeur is eminently aware of the need to accompany reflection on justice with reflection on equity, and to accompany reflectively, in turn, equity as far as possible. As far as possible, since equity represents, for Ricoeur, a species of ethico-political conflict. In order to grasp the contribution that he could make to the question of equity in a notion of political responsibility, one has therefore first to recall how he understands justice. The just, says Ricoeur,

“faces in two directions: toward the *good*, with respect to which it marks the extension of interpersonal relationships to institutions; and the *legal*, the judicial system conferring upon the law coherence and the right of constraint”.¹⁴³

This is a precious schematisation, first, because it systematises the double position that Ricoeur accords to reflection on justice (namely at the same time in teleology and in deontology), second, because it underscores the inevitable recourse of justice to the means of its realisation and, third, because it links justice to the tension inherent in the political paradox between the horizontal will to live together and the inevitable vertical exercise of force. As a result, the concerns reaped from Ricoeur's reading of Weber's notion of political responsibility (notably the legitimate use of violence and the control over it) could be located here.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, through the analyses of the teleological and the deontological perspective on justice (that will not be retraced in detail here), one is inevitably guided towards the conflict be-

142 Compare this with what Ricoeur writes about practical wisdom in the preface to *The just*: “the just in the final analysis qualifies a unique decision made within a climate of conflict and incertitude.” (TJ xxi / JI 24). As such, practical wisdom is a model for responsibility.

143 OAA 197 / SA 231.

144 There is an explicit return to the notion of the political paradox as well as Weber's definition of the political in terms of the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in the subchapter concerning conflict and institutions in the ninth study of *Oneself as another* (OAA 257 / SA 299).

tween justice as the good and justice as legality and thus to the repetition of the question of justice in the sphere of prudence or practical wisdom. It is only when reflection on justice has covered this long trajectory that it can elevate itself to the status of equity.¹⁴⁵

The conflict concerning justice, to which prudent consideration has to bring arbitration, arises especially from the fact that the qualitative heterogeneity of goods to be distributed is equalised out by the legal process of distribution that imposes a quantitative homogeneity. Ricoeur sees especially two versions of this: conflict concerning the primary social goods, and the contextualist or communitarian form of claims that limit the universalism claimed for rules of justice.¹⁴⁶ Hence the intricate confrontation of Ricoeur with Walzer and Boltanski and Thévenot on the one hand,¹⁴⁷ and with Habermas and Apel on the other hand.¹⁴⁸

But instead of entering these debates, I aim directly at the core of the question of equity. Ricoeur identifies this core by his answer to the double question: why would political practice be the site of specific conflicts and in what way do these conflicts refer us to the ethical meaning (*le sens éthique*) of justice?¹⁴⁹ Ricoeur gives his response to this double question, his interpretation of the constitution of the question concerning equity, by taking recourse to the political paradox.¹⁵⁰ There is a conflict particular to the practice of politics because of the fact that the hierarchy of domination of politics (*la politique*) tends to cover and obscure the power of politics (*le politique*), yet the purely horizontal power of politics can generate no truly political action without the vertical structures of political domination.¹⁵¹ Since Ricoeur rejects the Hegelian solution of the State “erected as a superior agency endowed with self-knowledge”,¹⁵² he counts on the plural or public dimension of *phronésis*.¹⁵³ This prudent dispute by which the horizontal and vertical dimensions of political conflict are arbitrated is played out on three levels of radicality (alluded to above). The prudent way to dispute justice is to descend gradually through the discursive modes of political practice:

145 OAA 250 / SA 291.

146 OAA 251f / SA 293.

147 See especially “The plurality of instances of justice” (TJ 76–93 / JI 121–142).

148 See especially “The universal and the historical” (RTJ 232–248 / JII 267–285).

149 OAA 256 / SA 298.

150 OAA 256–257 / SA 298–299.

151 OAA 257 / SA 299.

152 OAA 256 / SA 298.

153 OAA 261 / SA 304.

“[1] from that of institutionalized political debate in pluralist democracies to [2] that of discussion about the ends of good government (security, prosperity, equality, solidarity, and so on), and finally [3] to the level of the legitimization of democracy itself”.¹⁵⁴

One can gauge the importance that this three-storey presentation of the prudent solution to conflict in matters of justice would have for reflection on political responsibility by considering how it responds to the weakness concerning equity in the implications of Levinas’ theory of justice (which was a major point of Chapter 6).¹⁵⁵ (1) One can be engaged in these different levels of dispute of justice only if the other is recognised – at the very least in the capacity of opponent – as valuable in the struggle to find what one could consider as greater justice. In this way the charge of responsible changes brought to justice as legality, in the name of justice as the good, is placed on the shoulders of many. (2) The way in which one participates in such a struggle and the way in which one thus recognises the other as responsible agent, changes from one level of radicality to another. This entails the assumption of roles and dimensions of responsibility appropriate for each of the respective levels of dispute. In other words, the very challenge of justice in the name of equity is tied up with the institutional distribution of roles of responsibility – this role-bound responsibility is shed only gradually, which means at the same time assuming other roles with other responsibilities. (3) The exposition of the levels of conflict indicates an appropriate degree of polemics determined by the degree of conflict. At the same time it is implied that certain capacities would allow for responsible participation in the dispute at each of the levels. (4) All three of these levels of dispute represent ways of calling justice to greater justice, by referring legality to the aim of the good life in just institutions. As manifestations of public *phronésis* they serve to arbitrate between the teleological and deontological dimensions of justice, but evoke already the question of the *exception*: every challenge to the generality of the law, with recourse to the particularity of specific cases, in other words every appeal to equity, calls for arbitration. Furthermore, with every level of dispute, the extent and the stakes involved are increased, but the alternative of all-or-nothing is postponed to the very last. And even if that point is reached, equity remains another name for justice and this becomes pertinent in the face of the failure of the law to do justice. That is why equity as justice refers to the very last reaches of the appeal to it, to a long trajectory of arbitration:

154 OAA 284–285 / SA 330, discussed in OAA 257–262 / SA 300–305.

155 It should also be considered that the three levels of dispute discussed here are typical of the domain of politics, but that similar structures for the institutionalisation, conducting and even generation of dispute in other domains could be explored. Ricoeur’s studies on medical and legal ethics testify to this fact.

“Equity [...] is another name for the *sense* of justice, when the latter traverses the hardships and conflicts resulting from the application of the *rule* of justice.”¹⁵⁶

Or inversely:

“there would not be a problem of equity in unique situations unless there were a general problem of justice capable of universal recognition.”¹⁵⁷

In all of this, I do not suggest that Levinas’ take on justice excludes such reflection, but only that there is no way in which his thought on ethics could enable him to introduce it and that the reflection on the practical recourse to equity is not of secondary importance to the meaning of ethics.

In this consideration about disputed justice, it stands out that the prudent arbitration of conflicts (the comparison of the incomparable as Levinas would say) remains the culminating point in the attribution of the predicate “just”. Thus the just could be called the “good” (in the teleological perspective) or the “legal” (in the deontological perspective) or “the equitable” when the just concerns the exercise of judgement in a particular situation. Equity, says Ricoeur, is

“the figure that clothes the idea of the just in situations of incertitude and of conflict, or, to put it a better way, in the ordinary – or extraordinary – realm of the tragic dimension of action”.¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, this reflection on the tragedy of action and the response of practical wisdom necessitates reflection on the conscience, as the ultimate seat of arbitration:

“It is at this stage that the moral conscience, as an inner forum, one’s heart of hearts, is summoned to make unique decisions, taken in a climate of incertitude and of serious conflict.”¹⁵⁹

This “climate of incertitude and of serious conflict” is where the reflection on the intensifying dispute of justice in the name of equity leads; these are situations where the intensity of uncertainty places particular pressure on the individual conscience:

“When the spirit of a people is perverted to the point of feeding a deadly *Sittlichkeit*, it is finally in the moral consciousness of a small number of individuals, inaccessible to fear and to corruption, that the spirit takes refuge, once it has fled the now-criminal institutions.”¹⁶⁰

156 OAA 262 / SA 305.

157 RTJ 247 / JII 284.

158 TJ xxiv / JI 27.

159 TJ xxi / JI 24.

160 OAA 256 / SA 298.

We have to examine Ricoeur's position on this problem, since it was the recourse to ultimate means by the isolated individual that has been shown to have a dark side in Levinas' ethico-political thought.

In order to examine Ricoeur's contribution to this locus of the problem one has to step outside of the "Little ethics" in *Oneself as another* to the discussion of the "great kinds" in the tenth Study, where the *conscience* is discussed under the heading of the self and the other.¹⁶¹ One should, to start with, shed all illusions concerning a supposed clarity of the conscience:

"Conscience is, in truth, that place par excellence in which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with the veracity of attestation."¹⁶²

Furthermore:

"left to its own judgment, conscience will never be rid of the tendency to confuse good and evil, and [...] this very confusion remains the fate of conscience left solely to itself."¹⁶³

Since this is the case, the exploration of the conscience should resist the temptation of a self-celebrating auto-justification of the conscience¹⁶⁴ and rather take the humbler way of dispersing the alternative of a good and bad conscience. The reinterpretation to which Ricoeur submits the triad of ethics, morality and prudence in terms of alterity, points to an understanding of the conscience as attestation-injunction. This means that what is indicated by the metaphor of the voice of the conscience is the passively undergone injunction to live well with and for the others in just institutions and to which the bearer of conscience attests through self-esteem that expresses itself in the optative: my I live well with and for the others in just institutions.¹⁶⁵ Formulated briefly, in Heideggerian parlance,

"[c]onscience, as attestation-injunction, signifies that these 'ownmost possibilities' of Dasein are primordially structured by the optative mood of living well, which mood governs in a secondary fashion the imperative of respect and links up with the conviction belonging to moral judgment in situation."¹⁶⁶

And ultimately this judgement in a particular situation and the decisions ensuing from it rest with the individual that is called by the conscience:

161 The philosophical register in which this is done, is one that I have been avoiding in this book, but that is evidently not irrelevant to the current thematic. However, it is not the present objective to enter the debate about the "great kinds".

162 OAA 341 / SA 394.

163 OAA 345 / SA 397.

164 OAA 347 / SA 400.

165 OAA 351 / SA 405.

166 OAA 352 / SA 406.

“it is always alone that, in what we called the tragic character of action, we make up our minds. In measuring up to conviction in this way, conscience attests to the passive side: ‘Here I stand! *I cannot do otherwise!*’ [*Ici je me tiens! Je ne puis autrement!*].”¹⁶⁷

In these words we have arrived at, what is for Ricoeur, the narrowest and ultimate space of conflict and arbitration. We recognise, of course, the words of Luther, cited by Weber to express the climax of his exposition on political responsibility and that has been our companion throughout this Part. One would also recall that Ricoeur had, quite early on, appropriated these words to express the need to submit the exercise of political domination to control, to set a limit to what politics may allow itself to do. By returning to these words – even if it is without an explicit reference to Weber – Ricoeur deepens the implications of their meaning within his ethico-political theory. The ultimate seat of responsible decisions concerning the political is the individual conscience. However, unlike the case in Levinas, the injunction recorded by the conscience is immediately captured by the self-esteeming self that is called to live the good life with and for the others in just institutions, which means that the recognition of the other as affected conscience is even in the extreme cases, not far away. Also, the space for reflection concerning the means and appropriateness of their use in response to the injunction, is already implied in the injunction. But at this point one enters the debate about the status of alterity on a level about which I remain, for the present study, agnostic.

Yet, it should be stated unambiguously that for Ricoeur too, the ultimate decision concerning the situation of exception, the exceptional character of such a situation and the concomitant compromises and even sacrifices that have to be made, reside with the individual capable agent as inspired by the call of the conscience. This is the conscience of which Ricoeur has acknowledged from the outset that it is

“that place par excellence in which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with the veracity of attestation”,¹⁶⁸

and that

“left to its own judgment, conscience will never be rid of the tendency to confuse good and evil, and that this very confusion remains the fate of conscience left solely to itself”.¹⁶⁹

For this reason, Ricoeur’s presentation of the conscience doesn’t amount to a self-justification of a good conscience.

167 OAA 352 / SA 405.

168 OAA 341 / SA 394.

169 OAA 345 / SA 397.