The Globalization of Responsibility: Marginal Notes on Ethics and Religion

by
Michael Sievernich

Owing to the 20th century's risk production, the ambivalence of the project of Modernity, which the proponents of Critical Theory in the Frankfurt School described as a "dialectic of enlightenment," has become highly visible. Among the dangerous consequences of modernity on the political level are the monstrosities and catastrophic after-effects of totalitarian systems based on race and class, which make the past century appear as a particularly dark one. On the social level, the uneven distribution of goods leads to an increasing segregation between rich and poor countries, with the struggle for natural resources often entailing military conflicts. Processes of globalization exacerbate the situation, as does, on the ecological level, the enduring strain to which pollutants subject the earth and its atmosphere. On the scientific level, the dangers include the incalculable consequences of a technology tampering with life's genetic make-up without being able to foretell the effects. The averred motives of agricultural yield increase or medical therapy are posited against unknown and therefore incalculable long-term corollaries. One may therefore wonder whether all this will lead, on the cultural level, to the "clash of civilizations" prognosticated in 1996 by Huntington, a clash in the course of which the role of religion in the globalized world would have to be re-negotiated.

In its negative variant, the role religion currently plays emerged on occasion of the terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001 when the Twin Towers in New York, understood as emblems of globalized modernity, were destroyed by Islamist offenders. This "apocalyptic" event prompted the philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his famous speech in Frankfurt's St. Paul's Church to evoke the risks of a "derailing modernism" (Habermas 2001: 12). In the course of the same epoch-making address, Habermas also attempted to turn the hereditary controversy between faith and knowledge, religion and philosophy toward a newly positive relationship and to postulate the critical translation of religious contents. This turn

toward a new rapport between religion and modernity also shaped the conversation that took place in Munich in the year 2004 between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, today's Pope Benedict XVI (Habermas / Ratzinger 2005). In its course, the two protagonists discussed the "dialectic of secularization." As Gerhold K. Becker shows in a lucid exposition of the dialogue between the German philosopher and the German theologian (Becker 2006), the two men reached a consensus regarding the pre-political conditions of the modern state, the peaceful yet critical cooperation between faith and reason, as well as the risks of modernity.

In light of the risks of modernity and a derailing secularization it seems hardly surprising that the category of "responsibility" should advance to become the key concept in a future-oriented ethic. The career of that notion began at the outset of the 20th century, when the number of victims claimed by the First World War had become apparent and Max Weber had coined the programmatic term "Verantwortungsethik" (ethic of responsibility). After the catastrophe of the Second World War, the founding fathers of the Federal Republic of Germany wrote into the preamble of the Constitution (Grundgesetz) that the German people had given itself this constitution "in the awareness of a responsibility before God and mankind." Later, under the impact of growing ecological awareness, an article about the protection of the natural conditions of life was added, specifying the "responsibility for future generations" (*Grundgesetz*, art. 20a; cf. Birnbacher 1988).

If one looks for empirical proof of the role played by the ethical category "responsibility" in the present, one will find a surprising answer in the *European Values Study Survey*. The aim of this study was to assess the importance Europeans attach to different values and to determine which they encourage in others and teach their children at home. People could select five qualities out of a list of eleven that included traditional values such as good manners, hard work, good faith and obedience, but also modern qualities like imagination, tolerance, independence, as well as the classical and modern quality of responsibility. The most popular value in Europe according to this study is "responsibility" (chosen by more than 70% of respondents) followed by "good manners," "tolerance and respect for other people," and "hard work," whereas the values of "religious faith," "unselfishness," and "imagination" only achieved a low consent of about 20% (Halman 2005).

In what follows I will discuss, as marginalia of the debate characterizing this century, the historical and contemporary contexts within which concepts of ethical responsibility were developed. This will in turn lead me to the question of the possible contours of a globalized responsibility.

I Contexts of Responsibility

The term responsibility (French *responsabilité*, Spanish *responsabilidad*, German *Verantwortung*) does not feature as a relevant concept in classical ethics. In eighteenth-century moral philosophy, David Hume and Immanuel Kant employ it, albeit only occasionally and rather marginally. Not until the nineteenth century does the term gradually gain importance through the works of John Stuart Mill and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. With the writings of Max Weber in the early 20th century, it begins to occupy a central position. Hans Jonas defines it as one of the key categories of ethic, as a "principle" (cf. Bayertz 1995).

The Differentiation of Meaning

In the German language, the lexical field "(sich) verantworten"—literally: to be answerable (for oneself)—can be accounted for since the late Middle Ages. It is established primarily in legal contexts, where it was presumably derived from terms common in Roman legal thinking such as "respondere" or "responsum." In this forensic sense the word signified the requirement to answer an accusation in court, and more generally, to justify or defend one's behavior (Grimm 1956: 79-82). The word was later taken over into the religious domain, where it came to mean, in Christian parlance, to justify oneself before a divine power like the "heavenly father." This usage is obvious when Martin Luther, in a sermon preached on 30 June 1532, the fifth Sunday after Trinity, remarks in an interpretation of the expression "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8): "Denn es kömpt doch dahin, das sich das gewissen als fur gott verantworten mus, das, wer alda bestehet, der bestehet auch am jüngsten Gericht." (For it amounts to a situation in which conscience must be answerable to God, that who passes there will also pass in the Last Judgment; Luther 1909: 444). The notion of a responsibility before God (*coram Deo*) has no doubt contributed to a subjective sense of responsibility. Soon the term also entered the political field, as in the eighteenth-century question of the responsibility of French ministers or the responsibility of ministers before the British parliament.

The classical meaning of responsibility thus had a history in legal, political, and religious contexts before it entered the vernacular and became a fundamental category in the ethical sphere. In the fields of everyday language and ethical discourse it is necessary to discriminate between two kinds of responsibility (Kaufmann 1992). There is the responsibility for particular functions linked to a position or role. Such a function-related

responsibility or accountability demands the dutiful and correct performance of a task within a predefined organizational frame. This is to be distinguished from individuals' responsibility as a self-imposed commitment, an ethical disposition ready to master conflict situations both cognitively and ethically. The latter kind of responsibility is indispensable for any leadership positions. Finally, there is the responsibility of corporate actors, i.e., of organizations that have the status of a legal person. Complex organizations based on a division of labor have a heightened capability of responsibility. They induce trust, as is the case with particular brands of cars, insurances, media, or political parties. The case is similar for corporate actors on the national or state level (government) or on the international level (United Nations).

Whenever one relates responsibility to the micro-, meso-, or macro-area, it should be easy enough to define the respective responsibility within the immediate field of personal livelihood, family connections, or circles of friends where the context as well as the results of one's actions are relatively unmistakable. Things are somewhat different in the professional and social areas, where ever more complex chains of actions cause the results of actions to appear diffuse. The greatest divergences from foreseeable sequences are found in areas involving great distances, as is the case with political decision making; one only has to think of the danger of a nuclear war or the risks caused by the anthropogenic factors of climate change.

Modern Contexts

In the context of the modern life-world one can pinpoint a number of tendencies that define contemporary societies. One of them is ever-growing complexity. The increasing differentiation within modern societies into diverging sub-systems like economy, politics, culture, religion, and the private sphere entails processes such as the individualization of life styles and the pluralization of options. The result is a constant need to choose, whether in the supermarket or with regard to the TV program, but even on the marketplace of religions and world views. There is a distinct tendency toward a multiple-choice society that discourages unified or lifelong behavioral patterns. The growing complexity of the circumstances defining human lives creates ever wider margins for actions. Individuals are no longer asked to act according to a principle of order and obedience; instead, what is demanded of them is intelligent problem solving, communicative capability, innovative thinking, and the readiness to take on independent responsibility.

All this is compounded by the growing speed with which the circumstances of our life change. This speed makes it difficult to stake one's actions on a stable repertoire of tried and trusted patterns, i.e., to continue applying an ethos that has been adopted at a certain point without constantly and responsibly developing it. In the course of time, modernization also means mobilization, an enhancement of the developmental tempo, of transport, of communication. Work is carried out in the rhythm of the appointment book, time turns into the most expensive, non-producible good. The norm of the Olympian escalation, "citius, altius, fortius" (faster, higher, stronger) becomes ubiquitous. Last but not least, the acceleration of our life circumstances brings the problem of the finite allotment of lifetime into focus, a problem many people—more than 20 percent of Europeans—seek to solve by taking recourse to Oriental notions of reincarnation. Finally, modern information and transport technology increase the scope of individual actions. Scientific progress poses new challenges: it confronts biologists and medical researchers with the possibilities of gene technology, information scientists with the possibilities of artificial intelligence, business people with the possibilities of the globalized world market, the military with the possibilities of high-tech wars. Knowledge of the cumulated results of individual actions cause areas to emerge into the field of responsibility for which people in earlier epochs would never have been required to feel accountable, such as the preservation of biodiversity in the Amazon basin or the conservation of the Antarctic ice shield.

In the era of globalization, the term responsibility thus evolves to new dimensions. In our days, the intensification and acceleration of border-crossing interactions in the areas of economy, finance, technology, and telecommunication is described with the ambivalent term globalization, a contentious term that suffers from both *overuse* and *under-definition*. This diffuse term shapes current discourses and emotions as no other buzzword does. Some people expect worldwide collaboration and global prosperity on all continents, while others fear a social segregation on the planet along with a unified civilization destructive of local cultures. As we step into the third millennium, an increase and intensification of social relations is beyond dispute, turning the earth into Marshall MacLuhan's proverbial "global village." Presupposing a broad meaning of the term one could describe globalization as complex interdependence or as the "compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson 1992: 8).

Many people associate globalization with economic changes as a locomotive for worldwide development, counting among its corollaries the dynamic increase of world trade through the opening and deregulation of markets, the actions of the international financial markets, or the decisions of multinational businesses regarding investments or location. Globalization has many faces indeed. It does not only concern economic processes but also new forms of telecommunication and above all the internet, which facilitates an exchange of information and knowledge of an intensity and quality previously unknown. In the process, what is being spread is not only technology but also the model of Western civilization with its notions and values (human rights, democracy, pluralism, freedom of conscience and religion). At the same time, the internet serves to proliferate racism, pornography, and terrorism. The processes of globalization thus have their dark side. These include the forced mobility of refugees as well as enormous migrations for economic or political reasons. While the mobility of goods, services, and capital is desirable, the same does not apply to the mobility of human labor, against which the affluent countries attempt to protect themselves through administrative means or with the help of literal walls and fences.

The Tübingen-based philosopher Otfried Höffe draws attention to the fact that the human community of fate is not only a "community of cooperation" but also a "community of violence" and a "community of need and sorrow." The two world wars in the twentieth century as well as the many regional wars, many of them fought with global contributions, have shown how violence becomes global. The community of need and sorrow manifests itself in famine and poverty as well as in economic, political, and cultural underdevelopment exacerbated by the disconnection of economic and communicative circuits. These and other phenomena draw attention to the need for a globalization of responsibility. For violence requires a global rule of right and peace-keeping, cooperation requires framing conditions such as democracy, minimum standards of social support, and human rights, and the situation of poverty and famine raises questions of global justice and solidarity (Höffe 1999: 15-20). Poverty must be considered as global if one in every five persons lives under circumstances that limit his resources for survival to the equivalent to one US dollar a day. These people—more than a billion—do not command the necessary resources (such as sufficient income for the acquisition of goods and access to health care and the educational system) to fill their basic needs and lead a dignified life.

In response, when in the year 2000 the United Nation's Millenium Assembly defined its Millenium Development Goals, it decreed that its priority would be the fight against extreme poverty and famine, with the intention of reducing to half by the year 2015 the number of people suffering from these scourges. The sustainable fight against poverty inevitably turns into a question of fate also for the prosperous countries and thus chimes with their well-considered self-interest. This insight, however, is not really all that new. In his inaugural address of 1961, the American president John F. Kennedy famously declared: "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich" (*The Presidents speak*, 1961: 270).

II Concepts of Responsibility

The awareness of responsibility grew primarily out of reflections in the social sciences, the natural sciences, and in philosophy. Exemplary for these fields are three great thinkers of the twentieth century: Max Weber, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Hans Jonas.

Max Weber (1864-1920)

In the wake of the catastrophe of World War One, the German social thinker and historian, Max Weber, in search of a sustainable new approach to a politic ethic, developed the term "Verantwortungsethik" (ethic of responsibility), contrasting it with the term "Gesinnungsethik" (ethic of intention).[1] To this day, the fields of politics, economics, and public life are characterized by a mixture of the two terms when it comes to describing individual moral standpoints. The discussion among specialists, by contrast, treats the typification implied in the two terms under the rubric of deontological versus teleological ethic (Spaemann 2001: 218-237).

Max Weber developed this pair of terms when, following the disenchantment of traditional values and striving for a rationalization, he tried to find a new ethical principle that was to bracket religious preconceptions and moral convictions of good and evil. In his famous lecture of 1919, "Politics as a Vocation," he describes the basic difference as follows:

[1] In this contribution, the term "Gesinnungsethik" is translated as "ethic of intention" instead of the usual "ethic of ultimate ends." This choice was made in order to provide a coherent translation of "Gesinnung" (intention) and "Gesinnungsethik" (ethic of intention).

> We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an "ethic of intention" (Gesinnungsethik) or to an "ethic of responsibility" (Verantwortungsethik). This is not to say that an ethic of intention is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethic of responsibility is identical with unprincipled opportunism. Naturally nobody says that. However, there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of intention—that is, in religious terms, "The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord" *or* conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the (foreseeable) results of one's action." (Weber 1992: 237).

The position of an "ethic of responsibility," which Weber developed using as an example the profession of the politician, is distinguished by its consideration of the (foreseeable) consequences of an action. A politician must orient his (or her) actions and weigh the options according to the consequences for the community's concerns and interests. He will only be considered to act responsibly if he agrees to be held accountable for the foreseeable consequences and does not shift the blame to others. He will impute these results to his action.

Conversely, Weber defines an "ethic of intention" as the attitude of a person who, in the pursuit of his or her interests, does not take possible consequences into consideration and thereby shows a deficiency in moral realism.

> Who holds an ethic of intention feels responsible only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quenched, for example the flame of protesting against the injustice of social order. To rekindle the flame ever anew is the purpose of his quite irrational deeds, judged in view of their possible success.

For Weber, this means that the consequences are shifted to others.

> If an action of pure intention leads to bad results, then, in the actor's eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men or God's will who made them thus, is responsible (Weber 1992: 238 and 237).

With this distinction, Weber counters the utopianism of political enthusiasts rampant in his life-time, but also the notion of traditional ethics according to which moral values can determine reality. Since the condition of a "disenchanted world" is no longer valid, Weber postulates, the morality

of an action is determined by its consequences. For all intents and purposes he is reformulating here a biblical maxim (Sirach 7:36) also expressed in a Latin proverb from the late-medieval collection *Gesta Romanorum* c. 103): "Quidquid agis, prudenter agas et respice finem." (Whatever you do, do it thoughtfully, and consider the consequences.)

This invites the critical question whether responsibility and intention are really alternatives and abysmally separate spheres, as Weber imputes. Do they not rather belong together like the two faces of a coin? (Starr 1999) Accountability for the consequences of one's actions is certainly indispensable, yet responsibility implies more than that. An individual's intentions entail his or her good will and a basic attitude that is constitutive for ethically relevant actions. Those who from right intentions seek to do what is good will necessarily wish to do what is right, and will thus want to be answerable for the consequences of their actions. To act responsibly also means to avouch for and own up to past guilt and morally failed actions. Weber categorically denies such a responsibility for guilt, and in that sense does not orient the consequences of actions along the distinction of good and evil. Since Weber's concept of an ethic of responsibility is incompatible with intention, it leads to a paradox that one could, quoting Niklas Luhmann, define as follows:

> If objectionable actions can have positive consequences, as the economists of the 17th and 18th centuries assure us, and if conversely the best intentions can degenerate to bad outcomes, as one can see in politics, then moral motivation will block itself. Should ethics then advise good or bad actions? (Luhmann 1990: 28)

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)

As a biologist and paleontologist, the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin spent his life working toward an evolutional "world view" in which science, philosophy, and religion would converge like the meridians at a pole. Within the frame of this world view, Teilhard interprets the emergence of human beings gifted with reflection and freedom as evolution turning into history, a process he calls "auto-evolution." With this he means to indicate that evolution no longer simply unfolds naturally, but is co-determined by human willpower. In the same context Teilhard also considers the question of responsibility.

If it is true that in the process of this auto-evolution human unity grows and leads to greater freedom, then there must follow a rise of human respon-

sibility to heretofore unknown dimensions. Responsibility will grow, as Teilhard explains in a 1950 article about "the evolution of responsibility in the world," because the radius of individual action has increased in scope, depth, and volume. This is a situation in which each one of us "can, *with a single gesture*—for benefit or doom—entrain ever larger 'packets' of other human beings. [...] We may think of the commander of a large modern ship or the pilot of a huge airplane—or of the gesture of dropping a nuclear bomb [...]" (Teilhard de Chardin 1963: 218)

The notion of the increasing range of responsibility has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of morally good and evil deeds since it heads for a kind of "ultra-responsibility" and thus concerns the entire gamut of virtues and vices. It also has far-reaching consequences for morality as a whole, which focuses on developing the wealth of the earth and contributing with all one's might to the fulfilment of the human project. Therefore Teilhard rejects a morality of intention that only looks for good aims and purposes. Instead he emphasizes a morality in which the result of an action (*opus*) matters as much as the action itself (*operatio*), in other words: in which the positive outcome is a measuring rod. In contradistinction to Max Weber, Teilhard de Chardin underscores the interrelationship between intention and the consequences of actions.

Hans Jonas (1903-1993)

In the late 1970s, the German-born philosopher and historian of Jewish descent and American nationality, Hans Jonas, developed an ethic for the technological civilization, which he placed under the anti-utopian "principle of responsibility"—thus reads the German title of his book (Jonas 1979). Impressed by the possibilities of modern technology he pleads for a new ethic of a self-limitation of human power, while at the same time criticizing the Marxist utopianism that found its poetico-philosophical expression in Ernst Bloch's three-volume work of 1954-59, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1986).

Jonas was originally moved by the "apocalyptic possibilities" opened up by modern technology. These involve situations in which humans become the objects of technology, as when progresses in the biomedical sciences move the extension of the human life span, the control of behavior, or changes in the genetic make-up into the sphere of feasibility. If it were true that the world needs to be protected and the invulnerability of the human essence to be preserved, then what is required according to Jonas is a "far-away ethic" that takes into account the remote consequences of actions.

A new, future-oriented ethic would be required, he argued, because the hitherto existing ethic was a "near ethic," concerned exclusively with the immediate and contemporary surroundings of a life, without taking the global conditions of human life, the remote future, or the existence of the species into account. All commandments and maxims of traditional ethics are confined to the immediate ambit of an action, as is the case with the ethical imperative of the Bible: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mt 22:39). The same is true for Kant's "categorical imperative" as formulated in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (Kant 1911: 429). Moreover, the persons acting and acted upon in this ethic are invariably contemporaries, i.e., participants in a shared present. Any morality was concerned with this near sphere of action without taking the consequences for later generations and times into account. "In our age of technology, ethics is concerned with actions whose causal impact on the future is unprecedented in its range, accompanied by a preknowledge that also, even if incompletely, far outstrips anything that was once familiar. [...] All this shifts responsibility into the center of ethics, with temporal and spatial horizons corresponding to the actions." (Jonas 1979: 8-9) The imperative with which Jonas includes the future therefore reads as follows: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life." (Jonas 1984: 11) For Jonas, this is a matter of the concern for nature in the historically new situation, a concern recognized as a duty since the vulnerability of nature through technological intervention has become apparent and thereby gained moral status.

The concern for the vulnerability of beings emerges particularly with regard to humans. Therefore, the archetype of responsibility is that felt by humans for humans, which Jonas exemplifies with reference to parental responsibility for a child. This is a complete and continual responsibility for the child's protection and education, and thus entirely geared toward the future. All of us started out as objects of parental responsibility before becoming bearers of responsibility for others. The possibility to experience responsibility reveals the commonality of humans with all living creatures; the freedom to exercise responsibility shows their accountability as moral beings (Jonas 1984: 98-99). Responsibility thus cannot be measured solely by its consequences, as it ultimately entails the content-determined responsibility for the human existence, the future, and the entire biosphere.

So why did Jonas criticize the Marxist utopia of his intellectual opponent Ernst Bloch, which explicitly takes the future into account? For Jonas, the utopian ideal connected with the new possibilities of technology is the most dangerous temptation humankind ever faced, since the revolutionary utopia with its link to technology multiplies the hazards to which world and humanity are exposed anyway. The alternative to this utopia is for Jonas an "ethic of responsibility" that, after centuries of Promethean euphoria, must put the reins on this galloping forward-motion. Jonas therefore considers it indispensable "to unhook the demands of justice, charity, and reason from the bait of utopia" (Jonas 1984: 201) in order to protect the world and the human race in the future, out of a fear of threatening dangers and out of respect and awe for humans.

III Contours of Responsibility

As divergent as the above-mentioned three thinkers may appear in their positions, they do concur in their conviction that an ethical responsibility for the temporally and spatially remote consequence our actions may have for the earth and the future of humankind on it needs to be taken into account. Another thinker to stress this position was the German economist and theologian, Oswald von Nell-Breuning, the Nestor of Catholic social theory: "That with regard to which and for what we are held responsible today encompasses no less than humanity and the history of humankind as a whole" (Nell-Breuning 1987: 9). In this sense, a globalization of responsibility is under way. Were one to describe the contours of an ethics of responsibility, one could mention a number of typical moments.

Intention and Success

Every perception of responsibility is characterized by its emphasis on right intention and beneficent attitude, since these are constitutive for every moral act, although this does not mean that every good intention brings about right actions. Socrates spoke about the internal "demon" (Plato, *Apology*), and the ethics of antiquity knew about conscience in the terms of *syneidesis* and *conscientia* respectively. The biblical tradition emphasizes the "heart," i.e., the inner attitude and ethos as a source for good and evil: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander [...]" (Mt 15: 19). Immanuel Kant spoke of the "good will" that guides actions. Without good disposition we would

resemble Mephistopheles who characterizes himself in Goethe's *Faust* as one who is "part of that power which would do evil, and constantly does good" (*Faust*, Part I, lines 1335-6). Nonetheless, just as art does not rely on the creative will alone but needs skills, so a good disposition alone does not yet create an ethics.

Part and parcel of an ethic of responsibility is a well-understood concept of success. Success is here not used in the sense employed by Macchiavelli in his 1532 *Il principe* (The Prince), which describes a man striving for the technique of achieving and maintaining power in the course of social upward mobility and which allows for not only luck (*fortuna*) and competence (*virtù*) but also immoral means. Decisive for political success is not the moral value but the effect of an action. At issue is the kind of success known also in the ethic of Jesus when he talks about "good fruit" (Mt 7:17). The New Testament Sermon of the Mount thus in no way represents an "acosmic ethic of love" that advocates withdrawal from the world, as Weber imputes (Weber 1992: 235). Success is by no means unethical but part of bringing about the good. It is ethically desirable that a business be profitable since it would otherwise cease to operate or survive only on the basis of subsidies. Yet gain is not the only criterium. What is more, success is to be achieved exclusively with morally acceptable means. Wealth generated through ethically objectionable means may seem to signal "successful" behavior, but this success will neither hide nor legitimate the morally evil quality of the action.

Normative and Responsorial Orientation

A further aspect of responsibility is the question whether an action is geared to moral norms that are indispensable with regard to their ordering function. The anthropological value of moral norms and legal institutions becomes apparent, to give one example, in the history of the influence of the decalogue, the biblical ten commandments (Ex 20:1-21, Dt 5:1-22), which formulate universal moral insights and link ethics with faith in the one God. The commandments have shaped the cultural memory of the Western world and present basic rules for freedom that one can literally count on one's ten fingers. The term "responsibility" thus integrates intention, success, and (moral) norms. What matters today, particularly with regard to a view of the future, is to generate norms, i.e., not to remain locked in a mere ethic of intention or success, but to use social consensus in order to develop and legally secure new norms, for instance in the area of the biological sciences.

Here, a legal, ethical, and theological discourse about the possibilities and limits of what is feasible is very much needed.

Another aspect regards the responsorial character of responsibility that is implied in the word's etymology. This quality derives from the challenge posed by an existing authority to which the one who is about to act answers, thus entering into a relationship of respons-ibility. The challenge can come from a value claim or a world order, but also from the encounter with an Other or with God (*coram Deo*). A well-considered ethic of responsibility can thus absorb all the above-mentioned aspects without taking on the respective deficits of a pure ethic of intention or a pure ethic of success. "Responsibility" as a fundamental moral attitude seeks to interpret the unconditional claim of morality as it is experienced in human conscience with regard to moral norms and in view of concrete situations and to provide a guide for good and right action. The concept of "responsibility" thus emphasizes the responsible subject who is in charge of somebody or something and under the obligation to justify his or her actions before an authority according to certain criteria.

According to biblical understanding, the authority demanding justification presents the condition for the possibility of responsible action, for human action "responds" to God's preceding action. Ethic is thus not the first but the second word: the response, precisely. When human beings realize their ethical responsibility, they correspond to God's word. The decalogue makes the responsorial character of respons-ibility quite obvious (Miller 2004). Why should the ten commandments be kept? The Bible does not specify God's authority as a motive but His previous action, as in the decalogue's narrative preamble, which mentions not God's commanding authority but His liberating action: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Ex 20:2, Dt 5:6). God's liberating action vis-à-vis his people is the decisive reason why the commandments should be kept. Because God acts in this way toward His people, this people can and should observe the rules of the covenant, which are rules of freedom.

The biblical roots of the responsorial character of responsibility reach deep into the early history of humankind. In the Old Testament they are found above all in the story of the Fall. The relevant questions God asks of humans are the basic questions of responsibility; the question put to Adam: "Where are you?" and the question put to Eve: "What have you done?" (Gen 3: 9-13). These questions are expanded in the story of Cain and Abel. God asks Cain after the fratricide: "Where is your brother?" And Cain's

response is: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9) This describes morality as responsibility in two ways: as a responsibility *for* someone, the brother, and as a responsibility *before* someone, God. Abel's blood cries out to God; it is the whence of responsibility. Being "my brother's keeper" or, in the language of political correctness, my brother's or my sister's keeper, is the key concept in the biblical tradition (Spaemann 1991: 113-161).

The specifically Christian responsibility in a contemporary European context entails the responsibility for an orientational knowledge that in late modernity should be of crucial importance for the future. In the current crisis of orientation, Christian responsibility requires that we enter the modern political arena just as St. Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus, i.e. that we concern ourselves with economy and science, culture and politics and there speak of the "unknown God" (cf. Acts 17: 22-23), because the responsorial dimension of responsibility appears as ethically indispensable. For the increase of human responsibility brings with it a growing awareness to exercise just this responsibility "before God" (*coram Deo*). The Second Vatican Council in its 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, formulates the *magna charta* of this task as follows:

> Thus, far from thinking that works produced by man's own talent and energy are in opposition to God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design. For the greater man's power becomes, the farther his individual and community responsibility extends. Hence it is clear that men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world, or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows, but that they are rather more stringently bound to do these very things. (*Gaudium et spes* # 34)

When guiding traditions get lost in modern societies owing to differentiation, pluralization, and individualization of life forms, this documents the current crisis of orientation. Dispositive knowledge, i.e., the knowledge about causes, means, and effects as generated by the sciences and by technology, is increasing, while orientational knowledge (Mittelstraß 1992: 123), the knowledge about goals and purposes, i.e., the moral, cultural, and religious knowledge, is waning. The crisis of orientation describes not only a deficit but a program, since modern science considers it a precondition of its operations to refrain from orientation in moral and social questions; Max Weber speaks of "value-free" sciences. In view of this crisis of orientation,

a new responsibility is needed also for essential cultural values and their religious foundations. The disastrous consequences of the decision to refrain from orientation make it clear that the sciences are required to take a stand with regard to their ethical value claims and social consequences. The construction of the nuclear bomb was the work of physicists and engineers; the decision to drop that bomb in 1945 above Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a political act. Yet whether one is permitted to drop any nuclear bomb at all is a question of ethical responsibility before humanity and God.

The responsibility for the treasure of orientational knowledge is entrusted to, among others, the world's religions; they are called to keep alive the orientational knowledge that constitutes the core of every culture. For Christianity, this task has been taken up exemplarily by the above-mentioned Second Vatican Council, which pleads a "new humanism" with responsibility as its central pledge.

> Throughout the whole world there is a mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility. This is of paramount importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race. This becomes more clear if we consider the unification of the world and the duty which is imposed upon us, that we build a better world based upon truth and justice. Thus we are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history. (*Gaudium et spes* # 55)

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