

ETIENNE DE VILLIERS

Revisiting Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility

Perspektiven der Ethik



Mohr Siebeck

Perspektiven der Ethik

herausgegeben von
Reiner Anselm, Thomas Gutmann
und Corinna Mieth

12



Etienne de Villiers

Revisiting Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility

Mohr Siebeck

Etienne de Villiers (born in 1945) is Emeritus Professor of the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria. He studied Theology and Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch and was awarded a doctorate in Christian Ethics at the Free University of Amsterdam. After a stint as lecturer at the Huguenot College in Wellington (South Africa), he was appointed as professor at the University of Pretoria, where he taught Christian Ethics and Engineering Ethics. He also served as the director of two centres of the University: the Centre for Business and Professional Ethics and the Centre for Public Theology, and served as chairperson of the Theological Society of Southern Africa for a number of years. After his retirement he returned to the University of Pretoria to act as head of the Department of Philosophy. He published widely on Christian ethical and public theological issues. In recent years his main research interest has been the prospects of a contemporary ethic of responsibility.

ISBN 978-3-16-155816-0 eISBN 978-3-16-155825-2

ISSN 2198-3933 (Perspektiven der Ethik)

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2018 Mohr Siebeck Tübingen, Germany. www.mohr.de

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, in any form (beyond that permitted by copyright law) without the publisher's written permission. This applies particularly to reproduction, translations, microfilms and storage and processing in electronic systems.

The book was typeset by epline in Böblingen, printed by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen on non-aging paper and bound by Großbuchbinderei Spinner in Ottersweier.

Printed in Germany

For Joan

Preface

It is difficult not to be drawn into greater engagement with Max Weber's thought once you have become acquainted with it. At least this is what I have experienced. I first ventured into the territory he had opened up when early in the new millennium I began writing a number of articles on proponents of a Christian ethics of responsibility. It was only in the course of conducting this research that I learned that Weber had been the first to propose an ethic of responsibility in his famous speech 'Politics as a vocation'. The speech, when I read it for the first time, fascinated me, and in my effort to get a grip on Weber's understanding of the ethic of responsibility, I was drawn into ever more intensive engagement with his thought. The present work developed from a growing conviction, on account of this engagement, that even today we have much to learn from Weber's conceptualisation of this ethic, in spite of its shortcomings.

I am grateful for the encouragement and support of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife Joan for acting as an important soundboard and enduring many hours of my musings on Weber's thought as a consequence. She was not only a patient listener, but also an active interlocutor who asked critical questions and made enlightening remarks. It is only due to her firm belief in the meaningfulness of my project that I was able to persevere and complete the monograph. I would also like to thank our son, Dawid de Villiers, a lecturer in English at Stellenbosch University, for the excellent job he did in editing the manuscript.

There are quite a number of academic colleagues who provided valuable input. A special word of thanks must go to professor Ernst Wolff, who was a member of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria when I acted as head of the Department. I had long and fruitful discussions with him on Weber and the interpretation of his ethic of responsibility. Another colleague in the Department of Philosophy with whom I discussed my research is professor Marinus Schoeman. My close friend, professor Dirkie Smit, who has been appointed at Princeton Theological Seminary since his recent retirement from Stellenbosch University, is another treasured discussion partner.

Professor Wolfgang Huber, previously professor of Social Ethics at the University of Heidelberg, and more recently chairperson of the board of the 'Evangelische Kirche Deutschland' (EKD) and honorary professor of the Humboldt University Berlin, on several occasions formally hosted me during research stays

in Germany as an Alexander von Humboldt stipend holder. It was through engagement with his work that I became interested in the ethic of responsibility. He also gave excellent advice after reading parts of the manuscript for the present work, which he consistently encouraged me to complete. During a research stay in 2005 at the Maximilian University in Munich, professor Friedrich Wilhelm Graf acted as my host professor and helped me, at that initial stage, to get my research on track. I have been privileged, also, in getting input in personal interviews from distinguished Weber scholars such as professors Wolfgang Schluchter and Hans Joas.

Over the years I have gained much from the opportunity to lecture on aspects of my research project: at the University of Leiden, the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Free University in Amsterdam, the University of Pretoria and the University of Gothenburg. The feedback I received from academic colleagues on these occasions proved to be inestimable in fine-tuning my views. I especially want to acknowledge the written feedback that professor Paul van Tongeren, now emeritus professor in philosophy at Radboud University, presented to me after attending one of my lectures.

I want to give recognition for financial support for research stays in Berlin, Munich, Utrecht and Princeton I received from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany and the National Research Foundation in South Africa.

Lastly I want to thank the editors of the 'Perspectives on ethics' series, as well as the personnel of Mohr Siebeck. I am delighted that the editors decided to publish my monograph as the first volume in English in their series after subjecting it to peer review. The personnel of Mohr Siebeck handled the publication of my monograph in the most professional and efficient manner. A special word of thanks is due to dr. Stephanie Warnke-De Nobili, the chief editor for history, philosophy, and the social sciences at the time when I first contacted the publisher, dr. Rolf Geiger, who has since then taken over from her, ms. Susanne Mang, who was responsible for seeing the publication through the press, and ms. Kendra Maeschke, who is responsible for the marketing of the monograph.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Situating Weber's ethic of responsibility	13
1. Introduction	13
2. Situating the ethic of responsibility historically	14
3. Situating the ethic of responsibility textually	19
3.1 Science as a vocation	19
3.2. Politics as a vocation	23
3.3. Brief comparison of the two speeches	29
3.4. How should 'Politics as a vocation' be categorised academically?	31
4. Situating the ethic of responsibility biographically	38
5. Conclusion	45
Chapter 2: Major interpretations	47
1. Introduction	47
2. Interpretations in terms of responsibility for consequences	49
2.1 One of the main existing ethical approaches in Western politics (Lothar Waas)	49
2.2. One leg of the appropriate ethical approach in politics (Nicholas Gane, Hans-Peter Müller)	52
2.3. A situated consequentialist ethics attuned to charismatic political leadership (Peter Breiner)	56
2.4. A variant of utilitarian ethics suitable not only for political ethics, but also for applied ethics in general (Wolfgang Wieland)	60
3. Interpretations in terms of responsibility for both conviction and consequences	65
3.1 The responsible ethic of conviction as the appropriate ethics of the political sphere (H. H. Bruun)	65
3.2. An alternative for Kant's formal ethical theory in late modernity (Wolfgang Schluchter)	70
4. Conclusion	77

Chapter 3: Weber's views on ethics and politics: The bigger picture	79
1. Introduction	79
2. Views on ethics	80
2.1. External consequences of rationalisation	82
2.2. Internal consequences of rationalisation	85
2.3. Inappropriate and appropriate responses to modernisation	90
3. Views on politics	98
3.1. Sociological views on politics	99
3.2. Personal political views	104
3.3. The solution for the problems of political leadership	111
4. Conclusion	117
 Chapter 4: Towards an adequate interpretation	 119
1. Introduction	119
2. A critical assessment of the major interpretations	120
2.1. Lothar Waas	120
2.2. Nicholas Gane and Hans-Peter Müller	122
2.3. Peter Breiner	124
2.4. Wolfgang Wieland	127
2.5. H. H. Bruun	130
2.6. Wolfgang Schluchter	134
3. An interpretation in terms of responsibility	138
3.1. The emergence of the concept of responsibility	139
3.2. An ethical approach fundamentally qualified by responsibility	143
3.3. Weber and the philosophers of the 'via media'.	152
4. Conclusion	154
 Chapter 5: The impact of modernisation on ethics: An appraisal of Weber's views	 156
1. Introduction	156
2. The secularisation thesis	157
3. The differentiation thesis	165
4. The 'iron cage' thesis	173
5. Conclusion	183
 Chapter 6: Going beyond Weber's ethic of responsibility	 186
1. Introduction	186
2. Critical assessment of Weber's ethic of responsibility	186
2.1. Commendable aspects	186
2.2. Problematic aspects	197

3. A proposal for a contemporary ethic of responsibility	207
3.1. Terminological clarification	207
3.2. Presuppositions	210
3.3. Features	214
4. Conclusion	228
Bibliography	229
Name index	237
Subject index	241

Introduction

If the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has to be recognised as the herald of the decline of traditional Christian and humanist ethics, the sociologist Max Weber deserves recognition for being the first to venture a sociological explanation for this decline.¹ Weber argued that the main cause for the decline of traditional Western ethics could be found in the distinctive manner in which modernisation processes played themselves out in the Western world.

According to Weber the irony of it all is that Protestant ethics, especially in the Reformed version, contributed to the very modernisation that eventually came to undermine Christian ethics. More particularly, it was the distinctive ‘value-rationalisation’ processes taking place in Reformed ethics that eventually led to a new appreciation and enhancement of ‘this-worldly’ activities and to the prominence of what he called ‘purposive rationality’ (‘instrumental rationality’ in current parlance), which became one of the most distinctive features of Western modernity. What he claimed was that the form value-rationalisation took in Reformed religion – the fact that it resulted in the distinctive ‘inner-worldly asceticism’ of Reformed ethics – was instrumental in providing a spiritual climate (*Geist*) that enhanced capitalistic entrepreneurship and contributed to the establishment of capitalism in the Western world. More generally, Reformed ethics, on account of its emphasis on hard and effective work as an important means of serving God, also had as side effect the increase in status of activities taking instrumental rationalisation as its cue. In due time, however, such processes of rationalisation in the economy, politics, science, and technology ended up turning against the hand that had fed them, impacting negatively upon religion and ethics. This impact manifested in primarily two ways: it significantly contributed to the increasing ‘disenchantment’ (German: *Entzauberung*) of the world, the origins of which Weber traced back to the Old Testament prophets and Greek philosophy, and it led to an increasing restriction of the freedom of individuals to realise their personal ethical ideals.

What Weber indicated by ‘the disenchantment of the world’ was the undermining of the belief that there were magical forces operating in the world. He was of the opinion that processes of instrumental rationalisation led to the increasing

¹ In this book no technical distinction between ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’, ‘ethical’ and ‘moral’ is made.

spread of the belief in the West that, in principle, there are no mysterious and incalculable powers exerting an influence on what is happening in this world, and that, in principle, human beings should be able to control everything by calculation (Weber 1968b: 594). The spread of this belief inevitably undermined the dominant position of the Christian religion and the church, resulting in widespread secularisation. It also had far-reaching consequences for the ethical domain. The general acceptance of one set of common Christian ethical values grounded in the authority of the Triune God was lost. This in turn led to the emergence of a plurality of divergent and competing ethical value systems, both religious and secular, none of which could attain the general acceptance Christian ethical values had before the dawn of modernity. The belief that prevailed in Europe even after the Reformation, that God and his commands have the highest authority, not only in religion, but also in other spheres of life, almost completely lost its legitimacy in the process. The result was the emergence of pluralism, that is, the increasing differentiation of autonomous and secularised social orders, with distinctive value systems, which – according to Weber – are also in conflict with one another (Weber 2004: 238, 244). This does not only force individuals to choose their own ultimate values from among the conflicting values available to them, but also makes it difficult for them to find common ethical ground with other individuals (Weber 1949: 18; 1968b: 508–509). For Weber it is even more difficult for those who act within the context of a specific social order – politicians, for example – to find acceptance of their ultimate values among other role-players.

The processes of instrumental rationalisation, in Weber's view, had an additional negative impact on the ethical domain, in that it severely curtailed the freedom of the individual to realise personal ethical ideals. He was especially concerned that the on-going bureaucratisation of politics was diminishing the room for political leaders to achieve their ultimate values. He regarded the fact that specialised bureaucrats had virtually taken charge of government decisions in Germany during the reign of Wilhelm II as a particularly negative development, since this put them in a position to effectively prevent political leaders from governing in accordance with their own ultimate values (Weber 1984: 450–524; Weber 1994a: 324–330). As for ordinary citizens, Weber had little faith that democratic society enabled them to promote and achieve particular ultimate values in politics and other social spheres; in his opinion they were even more severely ensnared in bureaucratic networks and the routine of everyday life.

It is conspicuous that all of these phenomena identified by Weber as part and parcel of Western modernisation – the decline of traditional ethics, secularisation, the plurality of ethical values, pluralism of the value systems of differentiated social orders and the loss of freedom to live out one's ethical beliefs – are still intensively discussed today, in philosophy, theology, sociology, and the media. This begs the important question: To what extent might Weber's analysis of these

phenomena, his explanation of their origins and his prediction of future developments regarding them, be deemed still valid today?

In this book I will necessarily devote some attention to this question, yet it should be pointed out that Weber's interest for us is not limited to the mere sociological description and analysis of the negative impact of modernisation processes on the ethical dimension of life; he also severely criticised inadequate contemporary responses to the threat these processes held for the ethical dimension. Among the *bourgeoisie* in Germany there were those who welcomed the fact that the dominance of Christian ethical values was undermined, seeing in it the opportunity to finally cast off its stifling hold and revert to a naturalistic life-style.² This validation of instinct and desire was particularly marked with regard to sexuality, and resulted in a milieu of erotic experimentation. Conversely, personal expression also found an outlet in the form of aestheticism, which encouraged people to give creative expression to their own lives as works of art. Weber severely chastised the fashionable eroticism and aestheticism in the social circles in which he moved (Weber 2004: 231). In his view those who experimented with a naturalistic or aesthetic lifestyle in an irresponsible manner undertook a flight into subjectivism and refused to face the real and serious problems in the German society of his time.

He also took to task those who thought that one could completely ignore the drastic societal changes brought about by modernisation processes, consoled by the belief that those traditional ethical values they personally adhered to could continue to be invoked indiscriminately, in all spheres of life. Their solution to the growing threat to the ethical dimension of life was a simple one: simply increase the intensity of your resolve to apply personal ethical values unconditionally across the board and strongly believe that eventually things will turn out for the best, despite any indications to the contrary. Weber called this approach to ethics the 'ethic of conviction' (German: *Gesinnungsethik*). Although in earlier publications and in personal correspondence he had already made brief critical remarks regarding this approach, he launched a decisive attack against it in his famous speech of 1919, 'Politics as a vocation' (German: '*Politik als Beruf*') (Weber 1994a). In taking for granted that personal ethical values could be applied in politics in exactly the same manner as in personal relationships, adherents of the ethic of conviction turned a blind eye to the obvious fact that, given the differentiation of politics as an autonomous social order, personal ethical values are for the most part not applicable. There are other values, namely social-order-specific and cultural values, that come into play when it is a matter of making political decisions. The ethic of conviction seemed to Weber to tempt decision-makers in pursuit of

² According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary one of the meanings of the term 'naturalism' is: 'action, inclination, or thought based on only natural desires and instincts'.

their political goals into a careless application of personal ethical convictions and a disregard for the potential consequences of their actions.

Again, one may ask to what extent these responses to the threat that modernisation holds for the ethical dimension of life Weber identified and analysed in his time can still be found and are still influential in present-day societies. Just as important is the question: Should we subscribe to Weber's negative evaluation of these responses? It is also not the purpose of this book to address these questions. Attention will only be given to Weber's analysis and assessment of the ethic of conviction insofar as it is relevant for his conceptualisation of the ethic of responsibility and our contemporary assessment of this ethic.

Quite significant, in my opinion, is that Weber did not only provide an analysis of the negative impact of modernisation processes on the ethical dimension of life; neither did he rest with criticising those who, in his opinion, inadequately responded to these threats. He also felt himself obliged to venture beyond the familiar sphere of sociological analysis and explanation into the normative field of ethics, by proposing, in 'Politics as a vocation', an ethical approach in the political order that was more in tune with developments in modernity and the resultant threat to ethics than the ethic of conviction and other inadequate responses. For Weber, the ethical approach best suited to the vocation of the politician was what he called the 'ethic of responsibility' (Weber 1994a).

Weber was the first to use the expression 'ethic of responsibility' (German: *Verantwortungsethik*). One can say without exaggeration that the speech 'Politics as a vocation', among others, has become famous on account of its introduction of this ethical orientation, which he contrasted with the 'ethic of conviction'. In spite of its brevity, his proposal regarding the ethic of responsibility has since then found strong resonance in politics, philosophy, and theology. Politicians sometimes made polemical use of the depiction 'ethic of conviction' to characterise and criticise the political views and actions of their political opponents, while commending their own political views and actions as the outcome of an ethic of responsibility – a former chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt, presenting a clear example.³ This approach has also increasingly become an important topic of discussion in philosophy. Theodor Adorno,⁴ Karl-Otto Apel⁵ and Paul Ricoeur⁶ are examples of philosophers who constructively engaged with Weber's ethic of responsibility and incorporated aspects of this ethic in their own philosophies. Some researchers aver that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own theological ethic of responsibility was to some extent influenced by Weber, despite the lack of

³ Cf. Schmidt (2011: 197–215) and Roth (1984: 491–511) for Helmut Schmidt.

⁴ Cf. Adorno (1997: 200–201; 217–232).

⁵ Cf. Apel (1997: 270–305) and Wolff (2011: 206–219) for Karl-Otto Apel.

⁶ Cf. Ricoeur (1965: 308–312; 1991: 235–240; 1994: 240–296) and Wolff (2011: 221–266) for Paul Ricoeur.

acknowledgement of this on the part of the theologian.⁷ Philosophers like Hans Jonas⁸ and Emmanuel Levinas⁹ redeployed the term ‘ethic of responsibility’ to depict the ‘new’ approaches to ethics they proposed. The same can be said of the American theologians H. Richard Niebuhr¹⁰ and William Schweiker,¹¹ as well as the German theologians Ulrich Körtner¹² and Wolfgang Huber,¹³ who developed their own theological versions of the ethic. Due to the influence of these proponents the ethic of responsibility remains an important topic in contemporary ethical research in the fields of philosophy and theology, while Max Weber remains an important interlocutor in publications engaging with the approach.

In this study I do not so much want to trace the influence of Weber’s proposal on these proponents of an ethic of responsibility, although I fully recognise that a research gap exists in this regard. I would rather like to explore the validity and relevancy of Weber’s own ethic of responsibility proposal from a present-day perspective. Or to formulate the research question in a different way: To what extent might we today, at this stage of modernisation, subscribe to Weber’s proposal of an ethic of responsibility as an adequate approach to ethics?

What interest do we who are living in the twenty-first century have in getting an answer to this question? After all, almost hundred years passed since Weber gave his speech ‘Politics as a vocation’. In my opinion we have to acknowledge that he was not only the first social scientist who provided an incisive analysis of modernisation and its effects – an analysis that is still influential today – but also the first to propose a new ethical approach in tune with his analysis of modernisation – albeit that he restricted himself to the ethical approach appropriate to modern politics. Although we live in the twenty-first century we are still inextricably entangled in on-going processes of modernisation and its offshoot, globalisation, and in my view this makes it worthwhile to explore whether Weber’s proposal on the ethic of responsibility as the appropriate ethical approach in his time could in any way still serve us as model. Such an exploration is also prompted by the oft-repeated laments in contemporary publications regarding the threat modernisation poses to the ethical dimension of life, and calls for a new approach to ethics that is required to deal with the challenges of contemporary modernity.

Of course, the only way to properly address this question – To what extent can Weber’s proposal on the ethic of responsibility serve as a model to us? – is to proceed from an adequate interpretation of this ethic itself. In this book, therefore, I start out by endeavouring to provide such an interpretation. If the pursuit

⁷ Cf. Bonhoeffer (2005: 52; 220; 255; 418; 432).

⁸ Cf. Jonas (1984).

⁹ Cf. Levinas (1969).

¹⁰ Cf. Niebuhr (1978).

¹¹ Cf. Schweiker (1995).

¹² Cf. Körtner (1996).

¹³ Cf. Huber (1990).

of an ‘adequate interpretation’ makes up the bulk of this book it is because Weber himself provided only a brief exposition of his ethic in ‘Politics as a vocation’ and did not have the opportunity to expound upon it in later publications, partly because of his death in 1920, a little more than a year and a half after giving this speech. This has left his views on the ethic of responsibility particularly open to different interpretations. There are sociologists who claim that in discussing the ethic of responsibility and contrasting it to the ethic of conviction, Weber did not in any way intend to propose a new approach to political ethics, but merely provided two ideal types of the two prevalent approaches to ethics in politics in his time, without registering any preference for either. Others recognise a preference for the ethic of responsibility as the most appropriate ethical approach in politics, but take it to mean that a utilitarian approach is for Weber more appropriate in politics than a deontological one. As for those who agree that Weber intended to formulate a new ethical approach more attuned to modernity, they nonetheless differ on whether this new ethical approach is applicable only to politics, or has a wider scope.

In interpreting Weber’s ethic of responsibility I hope to avoid the shortcuts taken by some of his earlier interpreters, who rely solely on an exegesis of ‘Politics as a vocation’ in spite of the brevity of the exposition, or who, despite realising that an adequate interpretation requires also taking into account relevant extra-textual factors – e. g., historical circumstances, biographical information, the perspectives of Weber’s contemporaries, as well as views expressed in his other publications – nevertheless rely solely on one or two of these factors as decisive for the interpretation.¹⁴ In my opinion, a responsible and adequate interpretation should be as holistic as possible, drawing on the full range of relevant textual and extra-textual factors. Furthermore, such an interpretation necessarily requires that one takes note of and critically engages with the major interpretations of Weber’s ethic of responsibility already out there. It came as something of a surprise to discover that among the many interpretations in existence, almost none meaningfully engages with earlier readings. In addressing this omission I hope that the present study will also prove to be of use to those who primarily wish to gain a better sense of the reception of Weber’s ethic.

The focus of Chapters 1 to 4 will be the interpretation of Weber’s ethic of responsibility.

¹⁴ In his comprehensive recent biography on Max Weber, Dirk Kaesler complains that distinctions in ‘Politics as a vocation’ like living ‘for’ or ‘from’ politics and conviction and responsibility ethics have become “ [...] set pieces in trivial talk about politics and politicians, without adequately relating them to the whole oeuvre of Max Weber and its context, often even without mentioning the original author [...] In present social scientific research the speech ‘Politics as a vocation’ of Max Weber, this passionately political person, held in the concrete political situation of the revolutionary free state Bayern, is often stripped from its historical connections and stylized to the status of ‘key text’ of the Weberian sociology in general” (Kaesler 2014: 876, tr. from the German).

In Chapter 1 Weber's ethic of responsibility is situated in a number of ways. The first aim of this chapter is to orientate readers, especially those unfamiliar with Weber's views. The second aim is to define more clearly the parameters within which our attempt to interpret his proposal for an ethic of responsibility should take place. For one thing, the proposal is situated *historically* by describing the circumstances immediately preceding the presentation of 'Politics as a vocation'; both the factors that led to the invitation to Weber to give the speech and the prevailing political situation in Germany – and, more specifically, in Munich, where the speech was given – are discussed. Furthermore, the speech is also *textually* situated in relation to 'Science as a vocation', its companion piece in the series on 'Intellectual labour as a vocation', by means of brief summaries and a comparison of the content of the two speeches. It also takes the form of an attempt to categorise his discussion of the two ethics and, more specifically, his proposal on an ethic of responsibility, in terms of academic discipline. A provisional answer is provided to the question: Did Weber have in mind a purely sociological discussion of existing ethical approaches in politics, or did he have a more philosophical, even normative ethical purpose? Finally, the proposal is also situated *biographically*. Attention is given to relevant biographical factors, including personal characteristics and formative relationships and experiences, which shaped Weber as a person and might be considered to have indirectly influenced his views on the distinction between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility.

Chapter 2 provides a brief exposition of the major interpretations of Weber's ethic of responsibility, the focus being not on an exhaustive overview of all the different readings generated over time, but rather on interpretations that might be deemed representative and influential. A significant distinction that emerges here is between those who interpret Weber's ethic of responsibility exclusively in terms of teleological or consequentialist ethics, thus only in terms of responsibility for consequences, and those interpretations in terms of responsibility for both conviction and consequences. Among the former there are four interpretations I highlight for consideration. Lothar Waas interprets the ethic of responsibility as Weber's depiction of one of the basic and existing ethical approaches in Western politics, which stands in opposition to the ethic of conviction as the other basic ethical approach. There is, in his opinion, no difference between Weber's distinction of the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility and the more contemporary distinction of deontological and teleological ethics, while he also remains convinced that Weber did not express any preference for the ethic of responsibility. Where Waas emphasises the contrast between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility, Nicholas Gane and Peter Müller stress the complementarity of the two ethics in Weber's exposition in 'Politics as a vocation'. According to them, Weber regarded the ethic of responsibility as only one leg of the appropriate ethical approach in politics, the other indispensable

leg being the ethic of conviction. Peter Breiner provides yet another perspective, arguing that Weber clearly regarded the ethic of conviction approach as unsuitable for politics and preferred the ethic of responsibility approach. He interprets the ethic of responsibility as a situated, consequentialist ethics closely attuned to charismatic political leadership. An emphatic attempt to interpret Weber's ethic of responsibility in purely teleological terms is undertaken by Wolfgang Wieland, who presents it as a variant of utilitarian ethics, suitable not only for politics, but also for applied ethics in other social orders.

Under the second rubric I first turn to the work of H. H. Bruun, who is of the opinion that Weber regarded the ethic of responsibility as the ethical approach typical of the political sphere. In a first round of interpretation he portrays the ethic of responsibility purely in teleological terms, but in a second round concludes that Weber in the last part of 'Politics as a vocation' introduces a responsible ethic of conviction, which also allows value axioms from other social orders than the political one to play a role in political decision making. Wolfgang Schluchter's interpretation is also executed in two rounds. First, he provides an interpretation of the professional ethical virtues of the political leader who acts in accordance with the ethic of responsibility. He then proceeds to substantiate his claim that Weber proposes this ethic as a new type of normative ethics that can serve as an alternative for Kant's formal ethical theory in late modernity.

Chapter 3 sketches the bigger picture regarding Weber's views on ethics and politics, incorporating views developed by him in works preceding 'Politics as a vocation'. The primary aim of this sketch is to demonstrate that the formulation of the ethic of responsibility in this speech was the outcome of the development of his thoughts on ethics and politics over a long period of time. My own point of departure here is that the key for understanding his sociological work is to be found in his desire to fathom the impact of rationalisation processes in the Western World not only on the external institutional dimension of social life, but also on the inner dimension of social life and the life and conduct of the individual. While the emphasis in his work was on accurate sociological description he occasionally also allowed himself normative reflection on his sociological findings. Accordingly, I first pay attention to Weber's views on the external, institutional consequences of rationalisation in the Western world, before going on to consider, not only the internal meaning of this rationalisation for the experience of life and the ethical orientation of people in modernity, but also his evaluation of different responses to the ambivalences of modernity. The discussion of Weber's views on politics starts off by establishing that his interest in politics was not only academic, but also intensely personal – particularly in the case of German politics – and that he had no reservations about regularly expressing his personal views in speeches and articles for the popular press. This inevitably raises the question: What, indeed, is the relation between Weber's sociological and personal views on politics? In pursuing an answer to this question, I elucidate

what I take to be two distinct perspectives on politics to be found in Weber, the first rigorously sociological and the other personal, and proceed to show how these perspectives variously contributed to his proposed solutions to problems regarding political leadership.

Chapter 4 endeavours to provide an adequate interpretation of Weber's ethic of responsibility. First, the major interpretations of this ethic are assessed in the light of the discussion in previous chapters of factors that influenced Weber's view. One of the weaknesses of these interpretations, in my opinion, is that they ignore the fact that Weber used the term 'responsibility' to designate his preferred ethic, instead regarding it as purely coincidental that he did so, or denying responsibility any central role in his ethic. The second part of the chapter, which proffers an interpretation in terms of responsibility, therefore commences with a discussion of the emergence of responsibility as a central concept in modern Western culture, the recognition of its centrality, also in politics and philosophy, and the expansion of its meaning since the nineteenth century. This discussion indicates how Weber's discourse on responsibility in 'Politics as a vocation' and in earlier works resonates with this emergence of the concept of responsibility, a concept that, I go on to demonstrate, does indeed take centre stage in his exposition of the ethic of responsibility. In my opinion Weber pertinently called his ethic the 'ethic of *responsibility*': first of all, to emphasise the special responsibility of the charismatic political leader to uphold ethics in the political order and to set the ethical course of the nation; secondly, to stress the need for a new and more appropriate ethical approach in politics that is 'responsible' in the comprehensive sense of the word. The ethic of responsibility in the first instance entails a *professional ethics*, which singles out comprehensive political responsibility – both retrospectively and prospectively – as the most important professional virtue the political leader should exhibit. In the second instance, it also entails a *formal ethics of political action*, in that the political leader is expected both to select the ultimate values that form the basis of his political decisions responsibly and to take political decisions responsibly by, inter alia, estimating the foreseeable consequences of the available options for action before deciding. As such, Weber's ethic of responsibility should not be regarded as yet another normative ethical theory addressed to the identification and justification of first-level moral principles but, rather, as a proposal for a second-level normative approach in politics, dealing with the responsible choice of ultimate values from what in late modernity becomes a plurality of moral and social-order-specific values vying with one another for recognition, as well as with the prerequisites for responsible decision-making. The third and last part of the chapter briefly highlights the remarkable correspondences between Weber's proposal and ethical proposals of the so-called *via media* by philosophers who preceded him or were his contemporaries.

This leaves us with the question regarding the relevancy and applicability of Weber's ethic of responsibility today. Should we regard it as an out-dated ethical

proposal that does not have any validity in the changed circumstances of contemporary modern societies? Or should we acknowledge that in at least certain respects it provides a model for us in our own search for an appropriate contemporary approach to ethics? These questions are addressed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Given the close correlation of Weber's proposed ethic to his views on the distinctive character of Western modernisation, the processes of rationalisation that contributed to it, and the negative impact these processes had on the ethical dimension of life, especially in the context of the different social orders, Chapter 5 starts out by addressing the question: To what extent do these views of Weber still apply today? Attention is given to three theses that form the core of Weber's views on modernisation and its impact on ethical living. The first thesis can be called the *secularisation thesis* or, more precisely, the thesis that disenchantment inevitably leads to secularisation, that is, the gradual decline of the influence of religious faith and ethics. The second thesis can be called the *differentiation thesis*, to the effect that modernisation resulted in the differentiation of autonomous social orders, each with its own distinctive set of values. Of special relevancy is Weber's view that the traditional moral values of the Western world have no place in these social orders. The third thesis can be called the *iron cage thesis*, referring to the ethical meaninglessness of work life and the lack of freedom to act ethically in the modern workplace due to, among other things, the stifling grip of bureaucratisation. The conclusion drawn with regard to the first thesis is that although it is still true that a particular religious ethics cannot be dominant in modern societies, it is not true that religions are destined for extinction and that religious ethical values do not provide any guidance in social orders. Although modern societies today are indeed differentiated in social orders, each with its own distinctive set of values, it does not mean that moral values are excluded from these orders, including the political order. They can form part of the normative framework within which activities in a particular social order are channelled. Contrary to what Weber anticipated, the last century did not see a drastic intensification of bureaucratisation in modern societies, but, for the most part, a movement away from hierarchical organisational structures. Added to that, ethical codes agreed upon within contemporary organisations can to a large extent assure that employers are not forced to act contrary to their own moral values.

In the light of the critical assessment of Weber's views of modernisation and its impact on the scope for living ethically, I undertake an appraisal of his proposal regarding the ethic of responsibility from a contemporary perspective in the first part of Chapter 6. Attention is given, first of all, to the commendable aspects of his proposal. It is conceded that, whatever else needs to be said, one has to appreciate Weber's recognition of the need in late modernity – given the negative impact of modernisation on traditional Western ethics – first of all, to take responsibility for salvaging the ethical dimension of life, second, to design a new approach to ethics

Name index

- Adorno, Theodor 4
Alexander, Jeffrey 166, 170
Ammerman, Nancy T. 164
Apel, Karl-Otto 4
Aristotle 99, 201
- Bain, Alexander 140
Bauman, Zygmunt 189, 191n, 207
Barker, James 177–178
Bismarck, Otto 105
Bradley, F.H. 140
Baumgarten, Hermann 104n
Baumgarten, Ida 39, 41n
Baumgarten, Otto 38n
Bayertz, Kurt 127–128, 205–206, 210
Beck, Ulrich 173
Bentham, Jeremy 51, 145, 153, 194
Berger, Peter 158, 161–164
Berlin, Isaiah 200
Bernasconi, Robert 139–141
Beyer, Peter 203
Birnbaum, Immanuel 19
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 4, 222
Breiner, Peter 8, 56–60, 99, 100–102, 114, 124–127, 130, 203
Broad, C. D. 50
Brubaker, Roger 53, 65n
Brümmer, Vincent 201
Brugger, Winfried 65n
Bruun, H. H. 8, 32, 65–70, 130–134, 138
Burckhardt, Jacob 106
- Casanova, J. 157
Castells, Manuel 174–175
Channing, William 41
Clegg, Stewart 174–177
Coady, C. A. J. 189n, 191n
Constant, Benjamin 141
Crusius, Otto 15
- Dahlmann, D. 44–45
De Villiers, D. Etienne 194, 212, 214, 222
Dewey, John 152–154
Diederichs, Eugen 44
Dilthey, Wilhelm 152–154
Donskis, Leonidas 189
Dostojewski, Fiodor 51
Dreijmanis, J. 40
Du Gay, Paul 178–180
- Ebert, Friedrich 16
Eichmann, Adolf 199
Eisenstadt, Shmuel 158
Eisner, Kurt 17–19, 44, 110, 115
- Factor, Regis 54
Feraud, Jean-Francois 140
Fitzi, Gregor 38, 81n
Foerster, Friedrich Wilhelm 16, 21, 28, 32, 36, 157
Fouillée, Alfred 152
Frankena, William K. 50
Franz, Erich 143
Fuller, Lon 191
- Gane, Nicholas 7, 45–46, 52–54, 122–124
Gladstone, William 24, 104
Goldman, Harvey 83, 94–96
Goodin, Robert 58
Goodman, Lenn E. 165
Green, Thomas Hill 152
- Habermas, Jürgen 138, 164, 166, 170, 222
Hare, R. M. 203
Harris, Charles 183
Harris, M. 175, 177

- Hayek, Friedrich 187
Hennis, Wilhelm 31–32, 35, 38, 104, 106
Hensel, Paul 50, 121
Heydrich, Reinhard 199
Hitler, Adolf 199
Höpfel, H. 175, 177
Honigsheim, P. 44n
Hopkins, N. S. 16–19, 40
Huber, Wolfgang 5
- Jaffé, Else 18
James, William 152–154
Jaspers, Karl 41, 49
Joas, Hans 157–159, 167, 170n
Jonas, Hans 5, 222
- Kaesler, Dirk 6n, 38n, 39n, 40n, 41n, 42, 104, 107n, 114n, 116n, 158n, 159n
Kant, Immanuel 8, 50–51, 70, 74–77, 134–137, 145, 153, 194
Kim, Sung Ho 52n
Kloppenbergh, James T. 152–154
Körtner, Ulrich 5
Korczynski, Marek 183
Krug, Wilhelm Traugott 140
- Lassman, Peter 23n, 200
Legge, Karen 176, 180–182
Lenin, Vladimir 17
Levinas, Emmanuel 5
Levy-Bruhl, Lucien 140
Liebknecht, Karl 16–17
Livingstone, J. 189
Löwith, Karl 42, 52
Luhmann, Niklas 166–171, 184, 188
Luther, Martin 28
Luxemburg, Rosa 16–17
- Macchiavelli, Niccolo 38, 51, 100
MacIntyre, Alisdair 174
Mandela, Nelson 226
Maturana, H. R. 167
McKeon, Richard 139–140
Michels, Robert 18, 42–43, 93, 106, 131
Mill, John Stuart 22, 51, 140, 145, 153, 194
Mirabeau, Honoré 141
- Mommsen, Wolfgang 19n, 42–43, 44n, 52, 98–99, 104, 106–109, 111–112
Monsma, S. V. 160
Mullhall, Stephen 206n
Müller, Hans-Peter 7, 30, 45–46, 52, 54–55, 80–81, 122–124
Münch, Richard 166, 170–171
- Niebuhr, H. Richard 5
Nietzsche, Friedrich 1, 50, 88, 106
- Palonen, Kari 34–35
Parker, Theologe 41
Parsons, Talcott 166–167
Peters, Tom 174
Picht, Georg 140, 143n, 222
Plato 21, 201
Preyer, G. 84
Prince Max of Baden 16
Pritchard, Michael 183
Putman, Hilary 205
- Rabins, Michael 183
Radkau, Joachim 39, 41–42
Rasch, William 168–169
Rawls, John 164–165, 181, 196
Reed, Michael 175–177
Rickert, Heinrich 50, 121
Ricoeur, Paul 4
Rossouw, Deon 181
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 38, 99
Roth, Guenther 4n, 33, 70n, 108–109, 111
- Sandel, Michael 188
Scaff, L. A. 88, 91
Schluchter, Wolfgang 8, 14–16, 18, 19n, 37, 70–77, 84–85, 105, 108, 111, 134–138, 212n
Schmidt, Helmut 4
Schulze-Gävernitz, Gerhard von 109
Schwab, Franz Xaver 14, 34
Schwartländer, Johannes 139
Schweiker, William 5, 208
Schwinn, T. 167, 169–171
Sennett, Richard 175–176, 182
Sewell, Graham 177–178
Sidgwick, Henry 152–154

- Simmel, Georg 25
 Somary, Felix 40, 44n
 Soper, J. V. 160
 Speirs, R. 23n
 Starr, Bradley E. 65n
 Stierle, K. 141
 Stout, Jeffrey 163–165, 220
 Suzuki, Masahito 17, 45
 Swammerdam, Jan 21
 Swift, Adam 206n

 Taylor, Charles 157, 159–162, 164, 219
 Tobler, Mina 98
 Tocqueville, Alexis de 38
 Tödt, Eduard 12, 222–225
 Tönnies, Ferdinand 40
 Toller, Ernst 42–44
 Tolstoy, Leo 21, 51, 72, 93, 117
 Tomlinson, John 172
 Turner, Charles 95n
 Turner, Stephen 54
 Tutu, Desmond 226

 Van Huyssteen, J. Wentzel 194, 213–214
 Varela, F.J. 167
 Volf, Miroslav 204

 Waas, Lothar 7, 49–52, 120–122, 138
 Walzer, Michael 11n, 201, 212, 227n
 Warnock, G. J. 204
 Weber, Alfred 14
 Weber, Helene 38–39
 Weber, Marianne 15, 38–39, 109–110, 138, 145
 Weber, Max sr. 38–41
 Wieland, Wolfgang 8, 60–64, 127–130
 Wilhelm II 2, 93–94, 115, 122
 Williams, Bernard 204n
 Wilson, Woodrow 17
 Wolff, Ernst 4n
 Wolterstorff, Nicholas 164

 Zijderveld, A. 161

Subject index

- absolute validity of moral values 213–214
- aestheticism 3, 91–92
- bureaucratisation 101–102, 173–175
 - impact on personal ethical freedom
 - according to Weber 88–89, 173–174
 - appraisal of Weber’s views 178–180
 - bureaucratisation in contemporary organisations 174–183
 - post-bureaucratic organisations 175–176
 - neo-bureaucratic organisations 176–178
 - role and place of ethics in contemporary organisations 180–183
- capitalism
 - spirit of 1, 83
 - neoliberal capitalism 187–188
- charisma
 - charismatic (political) leadership 23–25, 112–116, 146–147, 198–199
 - charismatic domination or rule 23, 101–103
- commodification of practices in public life 188
- contextual appropriateness 211
- democratic participation 211
- disenchantment 20–23, 84–85, 94–95, 197–198
- differentiation (thesis) 30, 85, 116–117, 144, 165–173
- effectiveness 211
- eroticism 3, 92
- ethical and professional codes 190–191, 216–217
- ethical approach
 - need for a new second-level normative 189–197
- ethical decision-making 150–151, 222–224
- ethical ideals 1–2, 55, 72, 94–95, 109–111, 145, 191, 209, 221
- ethical living 208–210
- ethic of conviction 3–4, 27–29, 50–51, 53, 55–57, 66, 71, 147–148
- ethic of responsibility 4–6, 148–152, 207–209
 - Weber’s view in ‘Politics as a vocation’ 27–29
 - interpretation problems 47–48
 - major interpretations 49–77
 - assessment of major interpretations 120–138
 - interpretation as ethic fundamentally qualified by responsibility 143–152
 - assessment of Weber’s view 186–207
 - proposal on a contemporary ethic of responsibility 207–228
- ethics
 - consequential or teleological 7–8, 48, 50, 58, 61–62, 65–70, 125, 133
 - deontological 7–8, 48, 50, 60, 65, 74–75, 145, 153, 194–195
 - Kantian 74–75, 84, 153, 194–195
 - non-technical use in book 1n
 - professional 9, 36–37, 54, 122, 181, 195
 - Protestant (Reformed) 1, 28, 31, 85, 88, 95, 173
 - religious 10, 74, 81, 83–84, 160–165, 187, 189, 192, 198, 206, 219, 221–222
 - understanding in terms of flourishing 204

- utilitarian 6, 8, 45, 50–51, 58, 60–64, 194–195
 - Weber's ethics of political action 26–29, 96–98
 - Weber's formal understanding 116–117, 146
 - criticism of Weber's formal understanding 203–207
 - Weber's negative view of traditional ethics in politics 109–111
 - Weber's professional virtue ethics 25, 94–96
- failure of technical systems 215
- globalisation and its consequences 171–173
- historical circumstances in Germany and Munich January 1919 16–19
- inappropriate responses to modern culture 90–94
 - objectivist 90–91
 - subjectivist 91–92
 - absolutist 92–93
 - adaptionist 93–94
- inner-worldly asceticism 1, 83–84, 86, 92–93
- 'iron cage' (thesis) 10, 88–89, 157, 173–183
- legitimate domination: forms Weber distinguishes 101–103
 - traditional 101
 - rational-legal 101–102
 - charismatic 102–103
- minimal morality 205–206
- modernisation
 - negative impact on ethics 3–4, 86–89, 187–189
 - appraisal of Weber's view on its negative impact on ethics 156–185
- moral blindness 189
- moralism 189n
- morality 188, 189n, 192n, 203–207, 212
 - non-technical use in book 1n
 - Luhmann on 168–169
 - Weber's negative view of traditional morality in politics 109–111
- Munich Free Student Association 14–16
- nationalism
 - Weber's 107–111
- naturalism 3
- normative ethical theories 145, 194–195
- peaceful coexistence and cooperation 211
- political leadership
 - Weber's criticism of leadership role of government officials 24
 - Weber on 'power-politicians' 25–26, 147
 - Weber on solution of leadership problems in German politics 111–116
 - criticism of Weber's views 197–200
- political liberalism
 - Weber's ambiguous stance 104–106
- political realism 187
- politics
 - 'Politics as a vocation' 23–29
 - comparison with 'Science as a vocation' 29–31
 - academic categorisation 31–38
 - Weber's sociological views on politics as social order 99–104
 - Weber's personal political views 104–111
- postfoundationalism 213–214
- power and domination 100
- prophetic witness or social criticism 227–228
- rationalisation 20–21, 82–85
 - Weber's distinction between value- and instrumental (purposive) 82–83
 - Weber's view on the impact of rationalisation on (Christian) ethics 85–89
- relevant biographical information on Weber
 - personal relationships 38–40, 42–45
 - personal characteristics 40–42, 45
- responsibility
 - emergence of concept 139–143

- retrospective and prospective 132, 141–142, 148–149, 196–197, 208
- science
 - ‘Science as a vocation’ 19–23
 - comparison with ‘Politics as a vocation’ 29–31, 37
 - science and ethics 20–23
- second-level normative ethical approach
 - Weber’s ethic of responsibility as 151–152
 - contemporary ethic of responsibility as 209–210
- secularisation (thesis) 1–2, 157–165
 - Weber’s views on 157–158, 159n
 - assessment of Weber’s views 158–165
 - fragilising effect 161–162
 - pluralising effect 160–161
- state monopoly of legitimate use of physical violence 100
- technicism 188
 - ‘the good’ 205
 - ‘the just’ 205
- values
 - ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ moral values 11n, 206–207, 212, 215–222
 - social-order-specific (or social-context-specific) 211–212
 - ultimate values 2, 9, 11, 26, 46, 56–57, 88, 96–98, 100–101, 117–118, 121, 123, 125, 129, 133–134, 137, 144–152, 166, 179, 197–198
- value pluralism 200–203
 - ‘via media’ 152–154