How Can I Become a Responsible Subject? Towards a Practice-Based Ethics of Responsiveness

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ABSTRACT. Approaches to business ethics can be roughly divided into two streams: 'codes of behavior' and 'forms of subjectification', with code-oriented approaches clearly dominating the field. Through an elaboration of poststructuralist approaches to moral philosophy, this paper questions the emphasis on codes of behaviour and, thus, the conceptions of the moral and responsible subject that are inherent in rule-based approaches. As a consequence of this critique, the concept of a practice-based 'ethics of responsiveness' in which ethics is never final but rather always 'to come', is investigated. In such an approach the ethical self is understood as being continuously constituted within power/knowledge relations. Following this line, we ask how one can become a responsible subject while also acknowledging certain limits of full responsibility. We thereby explore responsibility as a considered but unconditional openness in response to the other.

KEY WORDS: ethics of practice, giving account, limits of responsibility, responsiveness, subjectification

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all … what is philosophy – philosophical activity, I mean – in what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (Foucault, 1984, p. 8)

Introduction

A growing interest in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (see, for example, Branco and Rodrigues, 2006; Carroll, 1999; Cochran and Wood, 1984; Freeman and Velamuri, 2006; Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Smith, 2004) has drawn much attention to the concept of responsibility within the field of business ethics. The discussions on responsibility are however dominated by a focus on moral codes of conduct, which organizations and organizational members have to apply in order to be perceived and judged as morally good. In this study, we develop the notion of an 'ethics of responsiveness' in an attempt to elaborate a perspective on responsibility and the responsible subject that tries to go beyond code and rule orientation.

We will begin here with a look at the two main streams that business ethics approaches fall into: those approaches that centre on '*moral codes*' and those that are based on '*forms of subjectification*' (Johnson, 1996 in Cummings, 2000, p. 212). Importantly, however, our intent is not to review the business ethics literature as several authors have already done this (see, for example, Crane and Matten, 2007; Hartman, 2005; Jones et al., 2005; Parker, 1998; Shaw, 1998; Valesquez, 1998; Wines, 2008). Instead, what we attempt is an elaboration of the underdeveloped subjectification-oriented concepts. Therefore, we consider how the individual can constitute itself as a subject of moral conduct. This sees us relying primarily on the work of Michel Foucault. We then move on to the question of how the *formation of the subject* could elicit a frame for understanding ethical response (Butler, 2005, p. 135). By means of Judith Butler's ideas on 'giving account' we show how the self is constituted in relation to 'the other'. In acknowledging a certain lack of self-knowledge we argue, with reference to Butler, that full responsibility is impossible. Finally

then, we reflect upon the possibility of becoming responsible subjects despite the aforementioned *limitations of responsibility*. This line of thinking is thereby predominantly informed by our understanding of Emmanuel Levinas' and Jacques Derrida's take on responsibility. Given this paper's overall focus on the constitution of the ethical self and of ethical relations in spite of full responsibility limits, we see it as conceptual in nature and as attempting to highlight the issue of responsible conduct in practice-based and subjectification-oriented approaches within the field of business ethics.

Code- and subjectification-oriented business ethics approaches

The distinction between 'moral codes' and 'forms of subjectification' has already been mentioned above (Cummings, 2000, p. 212; Johnson, 1996). Of the two streams, the former is by far the most used, popularized to a large degree by the impact of CSR. In this section, we will discuss what we see to be the constraints of code-oriented approaches and explain why we think that approaches based on forms of subjectification are equally important considerations with regard to questions of morality in business (ethics).

The determination of responsible conduct through moral codes

Code- and rule-based approaches to business ethics generally codify 'what is ethical' (Cummings, 2000, p. 212). Thus, such approaches try to determine responsible behaviour by way of universally defined rules, instructions and obligations on how to behave and act in a 'proper and right way' (Jackson, 2000; Stevens, 1994; Trevino and Weaver, 2006; Warren, 1993; Weaver, 2006). Approaches that are code-oriented usually advance the idea that definition of collective moral rules can produce and deliver responsible conduct. Moreover, these concepts are based on the assumption that codes can ensure the rational 'solution' of ethical issues, discontinuities and ambiguous or precarious organizational demands (Cummings, 2000, p. 217f). Code-oriented ethical concepts therefore often recommend the involvement of external 'moral experts' in the constitution

of organizational moral guidelines. These experts are attributed with 'external' experiences and knowledge that are considered to be essential in the objective, appropriate elaboration of ethical rules.

In this way, codes apparently legalize and justify the behaviour of organizations, while giving certainty and protection of rights and duties for organizational members. Further, such rules are supposed to both contribute to the clarification of – as well as the identification with – organizational values and to provide a routinized means of responsible conduct that will dissolve individual or collective biases and homogenize conflicting interests (e.g. Lunau and Wettstein, 2004).

Moreover, code-oriented approaches tend to share a utilitarian focus (Bauman, 2007; Clegg et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2005). Thus, the practice of 'social (and) responsible' conduct seems to stem from strategic considerations and *a priori* defined expectations or organizational interests. In this regard, Jones et al. (2005, p. 122) argue that many business ethics approaches advise ''care about the other because the other is useful for us'', that is care about the other because it pays (Francis and Amstrong, 2003).

With this, the normative orientation of many code-based business ethics approaches becomes evident. The primary interest here seems to be the detection and capturing of ethical issues. Thus, these approaches attempt to ensure full accountability through the elaboration of abstract rules that identify and normalize 'what is morally good'. According to Cummings, behavioural code-oriented ethics focus on seeking guidance from external invocations and obligations and therefore from others rather than from '*within*' (see Cummings, 2000, p. 213f). In defining the purpose and the function of ethics, such approaches risk becoming 'restrictive' rather than 'empowering' (Kjonstad and Willmott, 1995). Rule-based concepts try to circumvent uncertainties and ambivalences as well as 'irrational' and aesthetic aspects that guide the moral conduct of individuals and also influence the ethical practices of organizations, as we will show in our further analysis (see, for example, the contributions in Linstead and Höpfl, 2000).

We perceive any attempt to fully determine *responsibility* as problematic because it usually neglects the demand to respond that evolves *in situ*

(see, for example, Derrida, 1995). However, this is not to be understood in the sense of generally neglecting the existence of organizational rules as, for example, Bauman (1993) tends to argue. The argument that the question of responsibility can not be reduced to an abstract, technical and functionalistic codified system does not mean that we are advocating ethical relativism (see also Muhr, 2008b). Our call for continuous questioning of rules and codes and for discussion of potentially precarious, often also non-intended, effects of fixing and defining (responsible) behaviour, must therefore not be seen as a plead for 'the rule-free organization'. Such an attitude is itself determining and seems to produce anti-positions and anti-rules (Ortmann, 2003; Weiskopf, 2004). We therefore emphasize that rules are important in order to contextualize ethical issues. They offer a crucial frame of orientation that allows consideration of the particular against the background of the general. From this perspective, responsible decisions are made in relation to rules *and* the singular ethical demand (Derrida, 1995, p. 51).

Critiques of the rule-based perspective are not unusual. However, many of these (for example, Trevino and Weaver, 2006; Weaver, 2006) do not consider the *limits* of responsibility individuals are confronted with. We, on the other hand, perceive these limitations to be of special importance if we reflect on how to constitute ourselves as moral subjects in relation to discursively constituted norms. In this study, we have chosen to draw on poststructuralist philosophies as these ideas follow an 'ontology of becoming' (see, for example, Chia, 1995, 2003). In the context of organization theory, this implies a stress on the processual 'nature' of organizations rather than on established orders and formal structures. In following such a view, we aim to re-think various dualistic assumptions and differentiations, e.g. between organization and individual, inside and outside, responsible and irresponsible behaviour. Hence, we consider language, power/knowledge discourses and discursive practices as constitutive for the way we 'make up the world' and thus analyse, categorize and make (ethical) sense of it (see, for example, Clegg and Hardy, 1999; Linstead, 2002; Rose, 1992).

In relation to our poststructuralist choices, we will below elaborate our argument by discussing the practice-based conception of ethics that is oriented on 'forms of subjectification'. This idea primarily concerns processes of self-formation and is therefore centered on how ethical relations to the self and others are created.

The formation of ethical practices and ethical self-relations

In the perspective we follow, morality is, as mentioned, more than an attempt to calculate ethical risks and struggles. In our view responsibility and 'good ethics' is not a matter of prescribing fixed rules or universal principles of behaviour, nor is it a matter of justifying or legitimizing certain principles or forms of life. In the following, we mainly reference the work of Foucault to explain why, for us, ethics is a question of 'personal choice' (in contrast to 'free choice') and lies in specific acts of responding to norms and rules according to singular demands (see also Jones et al., 2005, p. 122f).

The argument of a practice-based approach is that ethics is not given a priori and cannot be concluded or enclosed. Such an approach views ethics as dynamic and continuously developing within the heterogeneous practices of everyday (organizational) life. An understanding of ethics that is based on practices (of the self) is therefore concerned with concrete situational answers to codes and normative, often inconsistent, expectations. Therefore, we consider how individuals try to constitute themselves as moral subjects through specific use and enactment of rules.

Foucault developed his conception of ethics in his later works (1984, 1985); primarily through his analysis of the moral prescriptions *and* the moral behaviour of the ancient Greeks. In doing this, he tried to understand and explore the ethics and ethical self-relations that individuals and groups of individuals develop *in practice* (see also O'Leary, 2002; Schmid, 2002; Weiskopf and Loacker, 2006). Foucault saw ethics and ethical self-relations as emerging while relating to discursively constituted norms. In this way, Foucault argues that ''freedom is the ontological condition of ethics'' (Foucault, 1997, p. 284) and continues that ''ethics is the considered practice that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection'' (Foucault, 1997, p. 284). For Foucault,

ethics is immanent and expressed by the way people use their 'freedom'.

The Foucauldian concept of 'ethics' thereby implies two interrelated dimensions. It requires on the one hand the identification of normative codes that define what is morally correct. These codes are inscribed in organizational power/knowledge structures, culture and language and they regulate and govern specific forms of conduct. On the other hand, and more central, a Foucauldian approach requires looking at the context-specific 'practices of the self', through which subjects relate codes to themselves and try to constitute themselves as agents of moral conduct. Thus the specific attitude, which individuals take towards socially constituted truths, is of particular significance (Foucault, 1984, p. 25f).

If we want to understand the ethics of an organization in a Foucauldian light, we should therefore try "to understand how its members use categorization devices and how such discursive formulations frame judgments" (Clegg et al., 2007, p. 114). This also implies that "it is not the free subject that simply chooses whether to behave ethically, but the practice of ethics that constitutes the subject. It is not a universal, a-contextual code of conduct that forms subjectivity; rather it is embedded in day-to-day practices and discourses" (Clegg et al., 2007, p. 115ff).

However, even if there is no 'free subject', ethics is, following Foucault, a personal choice. This, again, must not be understood as an isolated activity. Relationships to and with others affect how one develops the ethical self. Hence, to focus on oneself also means to focus on one's community and tradition (Cummings, 2000, p. 222). Drawing from Foucault, the 'care for the self' is always intertwined with the 'care for the other' (Foucault, 1985) and it can be understood as an attempt to elaborate a personal ethics in relation to others. Even though Foucault sees the care for the self as a precondition for the care for the other, it seems important to note that the care for the self, as long as it is seen as a purely individualized exercise, is likely to reproduce power-relations and simply bind individuals closer to the hegemonic regime (Weiskopf and Loacker, 2006, p. 20). The care for the self demands and implies heterogeneous relationships, engagements and communications with others (Foucault, 1997, p. 287). It is a practice of intensifying social relations;

and in this sense subjectification is also "about creating ways of existing, what Nietzsche called inventing new possibilities of life" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 118).

Following Foucault, the assumption that the ethical self is not a given implies just one option or consequence: "we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (Rabinow, 1986, p. 350). Since subjectification always takes place within a social formation, we therefore want to stress that this inventing of oneself as an 'art work' asks for the other and thereby for the investigation of new modes of solidarity (Weiskopf and Loacker, 2006, p. 20). According to Foucault 'Heterotopias' as unfolded 'spaces of difference' (Foucault, 2005, p. 11) can, in contrast to utopias, create such new modes of community and solidarity. Within heterotopias there are no attempts to dominate, subject or assimilate the other, rather there persists the right to 'think and be different' (Foucault, 1984, p. 9) that is respected in the engagement with the other and moreover, considered as a condition for the development of mutual ethical self relations.

To recap then, it seems that in code-oriented approaches, ethics and the ethical subject are constituted according to certain predefined and general assumptions with the attempt to deliver and determine 'good' behaviour. According to Cummings "codes of behavior refer to collective rules of conduct that exist over and above individual bodies in the world. They can be used to legitimate, or prove right or wrong, independent actions" (Cummings, 2000, p. 212). In this way approaches that focus on forms of subjectification are in opposition to rule-based understandings of ethics. They refer to "individuals constituting themselves as subjects of moral conduct through the development of relationships with the self: relationships for self-reflection, self-examination or self-aesthetics, relationships for the decipherment of the self by oneself" (Cummings, 2000, p. 212).

Consequently, in our view, neither ethics, responsibility nor the moral subject are given categories. Rather they are produced within specific historic, cultural and social "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1977, also see Butler, 2005). Following this line of thinking, we perceive subjectivity to be continuously emerging through a 'process of becoming' (see, for example, Alvesson and Willmott,

2002; Pullen and Linstead, 2005), and, as we shall see in the following section, to be constituted and invented within heterogeneous practices. We therefore look to Butler's treatment of "how the formation of the subject implies a framework for understanding ethical response" (Butler, 2005, p. 135). This will finally allow us to think of a fragmented *but* responsible subject.

From 'being' to 'becoming': how to understand and constitute the ethical subject?

Taking a poststructuralist viewpoint, subjectivities are not seen as sovereign but as specifically shaped within a field of power/knowledge relations (see, for example, Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Butler, 1999; Clegg, 1994; Knights, 1990; Rose, 1992). As a consequence, subjectivity is not seen as a stable substance, a fixed entity or a core element of personality, which is to be discovered or uncovered. Instead, it is a *narrative* that emerges, develops and changes over time in the 'performing' of identity (Butler, 1999, 2005, p. 66).

Power, knowledge and the self

In a Foucauldian sense, the subject emerges in the interstices of power, truth and the self and is thereby discursively produced through power/knowledge technologies and regimes of truth. However, the subject is not considered timeless or without history. Rather it is a historical form, which has both a past and a future. This also suggests that subjectivity cannot be fully calculated and regulated. Following Foucault, subjectivity arises in the process of subjectification where the subject is produced in two senses. First, in the sense of being "subjected to someone else by control and dependence" (Foucault, 1983, p. 81) and second, in the sense of being "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1983, p. 81). This means – for example in relation to rule-based instruments like CSR – that individuals have to subscribe to – or at least confront themselves with – a specific set of

norms, truths and practices if they want to be constituted as moral subjects.

The primary object of Foucault's analyses (see, for example, Foucault, 1973, 1970, 1977) was the creation of a "history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects" (Foucault, 1983, p. 208). In his early works, Foucault studied the relationships between the subject, regimes of truth and power/knowledge relations either in terms of repressing or subjecting practices and tended to equate 'subjectification' with 'subjection'. However, in his later works, Foucault (1984, 1985, 1997) developed a concept of subjectification that allowed for possibilities of both subjugation *and* of self-creation (Rabinow and Rose, 2003, p. xxi). Such a distinction offers a view that considers "subjectification as created by folding" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 104) the 'outside' into the 'inside'. Subjectification consequently involves an active process of forming the self via 'technologies of the self' (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 94–123), where according to Foucault, technologies of the self are practices which are not "invented by the individual himself" (Foucault, 1984, p. 291). Rather "they are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group" (Foucault, 1984, p. 291). However, this understanding of self-creation is not a substitute for the former process of subjection and thus should not be understood in the sense of an autonomous individual that fully constitutes oneself. The production of the individual is actually to be appreciated as an interplay between technologies of power, which normalize and objectify the individual and its behaviour, and technologies of the self, which include the attempt to distance oneself from established power relations. Even if the "subject can recognize itself, and others, only within a specific regime of truth" (Butler, 2005, p. 116), the use of technologies of the self presents an active form of 'identity work' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) that allows the individual to create and transform itself as a moral subject (see Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Following these ideas, subjectivity, in spite of multiple regulating power technologies and programmes, can never be fully determined as "there will always be a relation to oneself, which resists codes and powers" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 103).

As with Foucault, Butler's work on subjectivity is focused on problematizing and questioning subjectivity as a stable and uniform entity. In analysing modes of gender construction, Butler shows that subjectivity does not arise from an autonomous, self-determined self, but is rather constituted within power/knowledge structures. Some of the central questions she poses in this regard are: If one *becomes* identity, what was it before? Who is the one, who does the becoming? And in relation to gender constructions, Butler asks whether there are humans who are not always already engendered: Is there anything non-gendered that can qualify us as humans? Thus, can there be non-identity? (Butler, 1999, p. 141f).

According to Butler, gender identity has traditionally been understood through the category of sex. However, a disagreement has arisen about what sex as a category actually determines (Butler, 1999, p. 4). In this regard, Butler refers to the argument of Simone de Beauvoir, that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (Butler, 1999, p. 3). In other words, gender is not a fixed category into which we are born, instead gender is "the cultural meaning the sexed body assumes" (Butler, 1999, p. 11). In fact, the existence of any category itself inevitably generates not only acceptance, but also multiple refusals to accept that category. Juridical systems of power, for example, produce the types of subjectivity they *subsequently* come to represent. The gendered subject, thus, "turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation" (Butler, 1999, p. 22). Moreover, subjectivities in general cannot be presumed to be self-identical in different environments, assemblages and relations, durable, unified and internally coherent. This aspect seems to be of significant relevance in relation to the demands of 'full responsibility', as we will illustrate below.

Instead of creating a multi-categorical definition of identity, Butler claims identity to be performative. In this way, it is also always *doing*. In drawing on Nietzsche, she distinguishes between 'the doer' and 'the deed'; that is the doing by a subject pre-exists the deed (Butler, 1999, p. 33), and the doer is constructed in and through the deed (Butler, 1999, p. 181). Following this argument, Butler makes an important distinction between performance and *performativity*. In contrast to many notions of performance she does not presuppose a definable actor who is developing, calculating and/or doing a performance, instead, Butler claims that there is a mutual relation between the one who performs and the performance itself (Loacker, 2008, p. 107ff). This is thus the way performance is said to pre-exist the performer (Salih, 2002, p. 10). Performativity does therefore not refer to a repetitive act of the same; in fact repetition offers the production of difference as no two acts are the same (Borgerson, 2005). In this sense, performativity implies repetition *and* difference (see also Deleuze, 1992), which constitutes the social temporality of the subject. It is through performative iterations formed over time where the 'actors' themselves, according to Butler (1999, p. 179), come to believe in these identities and thereby principally perform on the strength of this belief.

Butler's notion of subjectivity therefore stresses an unstable structure that is continuously in formation within modulating power/knowledge relations. It also refers to an ethical dimension. Butler argues, referring to Levinas, that the constitution of subjectivity occurs, in a large part, in the encounter with the other and will as such always include ethical questions. In the following we will therefore briefly explain how the ethical subject is understood in Levinas' philosophy.

The ethical encounter with the other

Levinas is introduced in this paper to highlight the role of 'the other' within the process of identity constitution and the importance of the singular element that is inherent in every ethical demand. From a Levinasian perspective an encounter with the other, which is understood as an ethical relation, constitutes a central frame of reference for the formation of the self. Thus, the self is considered to be constantly constructed, disturbed and reconstructed within the (ethical) relations with the other. In contrast to Foucault, Levinas does not see identity formed by an outside authority. Hence, the identity of an individual cannot be defined "from the outside by the finger that points to it" (Levinas, 1969, p. 289). By saying this, Levinas does not defend the idea of an autonomous subject. Rather he

emphasizes that subjectivity is primarily produced on the basis of endless encounters with the other, not on the basis of determining or totalizing norms (Levinas, 1969, p. 23). However, self-identification is not a copy of the categorical consciousness that the 'I' has of the other, rather it is shaped in the interplay between the interiority of the self and the other's exteriority.

As the self, for Levinas, is continuously being developed in relation to the other, it diverges from itself without letting go of itself. Subjectivity is, therefore, "not in phase with itself", rather it is always "about to come" (Levinas, 1981, p. 32) and never final. The self is, thus, not something, which lies latently in the individual and awaits awakening (Levinas, 1969, p. 219), rather it constantly unfolds in its *response* to the other. Therefore, in Levinas' understanding, the self cannot recognize itself by solely focusing on itself. The self is transformed *and* continuously recognized in its (ethical) response to the other.

In Levinas' philosophy the (ethical) response to the other is inevitable. The self can neither avoid encounters with the other nor neglect ethical demands. Levinas' ethical self is affected by the other and its difference. By the call of the other's 'face' the self is demanded to care for the other instead of passing the other by. Thus, according to Levinas, the relationship with the other always includes responsibility of the self to the other. Following Levinas' thinking again; "no one can stay in himself; the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for others" (Levinas, 2003, p. 67). Hence, the constitution of subjectivity is seen as an ongoing dynamic process of "unfolding one's own being without at any point losing contact with the other" (Levinas, 1969, p. 61). The acknowledgement of the other's difference, therefore separates the self from this other at the same time as it connects the self to it (Levinas, 1969, p. 299).

According to Levinas, subjectivity arises in what he calls an ethical "offering of oneself" (Levinas, 1981, p. 54). This means that the encounter with the other also must be thought as an 'exposure of oneself'. Thus, the other's call demonstrates a risk of critique and a questioning of one's own beliefs and common sense (Levinas, 1969, p. 43). At the same time, the call of the other allows for self-transformation and development as it changes the way the self sees both the other and the self (Muhr, 2008a, see also Werhane, 1995).

Due to its transformational nature, the Levinasian exposure of the self and one's vulnerabilities demands more than simply displaying a few weaknesses. It is more radical in nature, offering as it does the self in all its "uniqueness, stripped of all protection that would multiply it" (Levinas, 1981, p. 56). To constitute the self as an ethical subject then, an attempt to let go of unifying judgments and the willingness to leave all categories (such as white, male, rich, married) behind which can potentially 'protect' the self is required. It requires an unconditional openness to the other and its difference. As we ask how to constitute the ethical self in relation to others, the ideas of singularity, proximity, exposure and openness that characterize Levinas' conceptions of ethics and responsible conduct are, thus, of particular significance.

Generally speaking, this section saw us address why we think of the subject as a "a contingent mode of organization" (O'Leary, 2002, p. 117) which is continuously developed within socially constituted power/knowledge relations (Butler, 2005, p. 113). As we saw above, Levinas argued that the self cannot stand unaffected by the other. In a similar vein, following Foucault's and Butler's work, we assume that "there is no 'I' that can stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms" (Butler, 2005, p. 7). Since the process of subjectification is never fully determined, there are both limitations to the constitution of the (ethical) self, but there are also possibilities to transcend these limitations and to give alternative meaning and responses to established beliefs and truths. This also implies that we have not lost the 'subjective ground' for ethics. On the contrary, this disposition may well be an essential condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which ethics itself emerges (Butler, 2005, p. 8). In our view, subjectivity is therefore constituted through social norms *and* it arises within 'the act of giving an account' (Butler, 2005), where the self encounters and responds to the other. The act of giving an account is thereby not just an act where the self tries to describe itself, it is at the same time, as we learned from Levinas, a narrative enacting *and* transforming of the self (see Butler, 2005, p. 66). In the following section, we will investigate further into the act of giving an account since, on the

one hand, it is an example of the narrative performing of the self, and on the other hand, it illustrates the idea of a "subject formation that acknowledges limits of self-knowledge" (Butler, 2005, p. 19).

The act of giving account

Ethics, for us, is about 'telling the truth' in the form of an open response to the other; it is about what *has to be said*, not about justifying what *has been said* (see also Muhr, 2007). In contrast to code- and rule-oriented approaches, we argue that an enclosing of ethics and the ethical subject prohibits the important continuous questioning of norms and the reflection on what has been taken for granted until now. Thus, code-oriented concepts of business ethics tend to be ideological and 'totalizing' (Levinas, 1969, p. 22). In excluding what is doubtful, precarious, unknown and 'not yet', they proffer the possibility of full responsibility. Judith Butler calls this illusion of full responsibility an 'act of ethical violence' (Butler, 2005, p. 42). Drawing primarily on Levinas and Foucault in a recent text, she develops the scene of 'giving an account of oneself': a conception of ethics, and indeed of responsibility, that appreciates the lack of self-transparency (Butler, 2005, p. 19).

The act of giving account is an act of speech, in which the subject "gives himself in words and engages in an extended act of self verbalization" (Butler, 2005, pp. 112–113) as a way of making the self and one's world appear for the other (Wild, 1969, p. 14). This act expresses for Butler a crucial tension that is inherent in the idea of responsibility: the demand to give account and take responsibility always emerges from a specific situation and is bound to a certain social context. This embeddedness restricts the possibilities to give a true, full and responsible account of the self, as Butler notes

> [W]hat I find so hard to narrate are the norms – social in character – that brings me into being. They are, as it were, the condition of my speech, but I cannot fully thematize these conditions within the terms of my speech (Butler, 2005, p. 82).

Since the subject is affectively and emotionally *involved* in the act of giving account, he or she is thus not able, even if willing, to *distance* him- or herself

from *normative expectations* and rules that always produce a specific way of seeing, listening and responding. The involvement within the act of giving account makes it impossible to simultaneously question dominant norms under which the self is subordinated. However, the ability to reflect seems to constitute a fundamental precondition for responsible acting. Here, we consider this paradox that forms part of the idea of responsibility as a limitation of full responsibility.

Following Butler's argument, the accountable self is not entirely able to account *for* itself. This implies that being ethical consists not only in asking the question 'who am I and who are you?', but also – and maybe more importantly – in asking this question without the expectation to obtain a full and final answer (Butler, 2005, p. 43). In referring to Levinas, Butler thus identifies an 'otherness' within oneself. On this view, she argues that if

> the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us and marks immediately an excess and opacity that falls outside the categories of identity, then any effort to give an account of oneself will have to fail in order to approach being true (Butler, 2005, p. 42).

Consequently, it is also the 'opaque side' of the self that makes full accountability impossible. This opaque side of the self is caused by *limits of self-knowledge* and self-awareness. Although the otherness, or blindness, within the self modulates in different scenes of address, it can, however, never be completely recognized and perceived by the self.

According to Levinas we cannot live without addressing the other or without being addressed by the other. The 'scene of address' is, thus, also constituted through the 'call' of the other and is, therefore, not to calculate beforehand or fully to control through the self. Even if this *incalculable demand of the other* is another reason why full accountability is not possible, it establishes the scene of giving account at the same time as a primary ethical relation (Butler, 2005, p. 21); as an ethical relation that prompts the self to act by a responsibility not known nor defined in advance. In short, the "response to the demand to give an account of oneself is a matter of fathoming at once the formation of the subject and its relation to responsibility" (Butler, 2005, p. 135). Butler's attempt, therefore,

represents a rethink of the cultural terms of ethics "to remember that not all ethical relations are reducible to acts of judgment, and that the very capacity to judge presupposes a prior relation between those who judge and those who are judged" (Butler, 2005, p. 45). In extending Levinas' philosophy she thereby asks for *mutual* responsibilities, which apply both to the self and the other. Such an ethics – which Butler calls 'an ethics of responsiveness' – is, thus, based on our shared, invariable and partial blindness about ourselves. Butler, therefore, sees the otherness within the self as a potential "source of my ethical connection with others" (Butler, 2005, p. 84). Hence, even if it seems to be "really true that we are divided, ungrounded or incoherent from the start" (Butler, 2005, p. 19), it would not be impossible "to ground a notion of personal or social responsibility" (Butler, 2005, p. 19). Moreover, the acceptance that self-knowledge and responsibility are always limited allows us to reframe the notion of the moral agent. In the last section then, we want to summarize our arguments by showing how the self, facing limits of responsibility, can be constituted as an ethical subject.

Acknowledging limits of responsibility

In referring to Butler's work we tried to explore the ways in which responsibility is bounded, and we soon noted three significant *limitations*: the first is the lack of *self-transparency* and self knowledge that relates to a certain form of opacity to oneself. Secondly, *social norms* (under which the self and the other act) always structure, to some extent, the 'scene of giving account'. This implies that we are not able to completely distance ourselves from the specific 're-gime of truth', in which we are embedded. The third limitation lies in the act of giving account itself. Since this act is never a pure individual performance, the self cannot autonomously determine, independently from the other, how to behave and act in the scene of address. To give account of oneself also means to *expose to the other*. The modes of interactions that are (re)created within this scene are, thus, never fully foreseeable.

However, even if the 'otherness' within the self can not be eliminated, it seems to be of significance to ask "who am I, how am I different from others,

and why do I do what I do?" (Cummings, 2000, p. 224). Despite the limits of giving account, these questions are still essential to the constitution of ourselves as subjects of moral conduct.

Foucault (1984) claimed that the *attempt* to 'know myself' is a constitutive part of the development of ethical self-relations and thus, of responsibility to the other. The figure of the '*parrhesia*', which Foucault elaborates in 'Fearless Speech' (2001), refers to this attempt. Parrhesia is, according to Foucault, a 'practice of critique'; it means 'to tell the truth' to myself and to others, even if the self is always embedded in and thus restricted by one's own 'regime of truth'. Parrhesia is a practice based on mutual relations, where the target is not to "persuade the assembly, but to convince someone that he must take care of himself and of others; and this means that he must change his life" (Foucault, 2001, p. 106). The 'parrhesiastes' as a 'critical friend' feels bound to use his freedom and to tell his truth without considering costs, potential personal consequences and without reflecting on one's own strategic position, and therefore the 'truth teller' is willing to take a risk in becoming responsible (Butler, 2005; Foucault, 2001). Thus, parrhesia refers to a certain ethical form of living with the other *and* with the self; one that includes a willingness to question ourselves and the ways in which we relate to others and to the world more generally. Furthermore, it implies that even if there are certain limits of responsibility in relation to oneself and to others, this does not mean that one can neglect or reject the taking of responsibility. Bauman contends that to take responsibility means "being bound to make choices under conditions of acute and painful uncertainty" (Bauman and Tester, 2001, p. 46). From such a perspective, decisions have to be made in the light of ambiguity and 'undecidability', in the space in-between general rules and a singular context-specific ethical demand. Moreover, we are precisely asked to decide responsibly under conditions of uncertainty and 'undecidability', between knowledge and non-knowledge, between calculability and incalculability (Derrida, 1993). Derrida (especially 1993, 1997) emphasizes that an action which is considered 'right' and 'true' in one context can just as well be judged 'wrong' and imply precarious effects in another context. This implies that each decision produces a 'supplement' in the sense

that to decide for someone and something involves a decision against something else (see e.g. Weiskopf, 2004, p. 242f). In an 'ethics of responsiveness' the ethical subject is not understood as a 'rule follower'. Hence, in this approach the attempt is not to identify what is 'right and wrong' or 'moral and immoral', but to focus on the 'aporetic space' (Derrida, 1993) in-between rules which requires one's own considered response. Responsibility becomes, thus, "a matter of reflection and choice amongst undecidable alternatives" (Clegg et al., 2007, p. 118).

Becoming a responsible subject despite limitations

For those poststructuralist of persuasion, the question of responsibility can never be solved, controlled or closed. On this viewpoint, Levinas emphasizes that morality lies not in establishing rules to which the self and the other have to apply and ethics has, therefore, nothing to do with expectations from or demands for the other. Rather, for Levinas, the ethical demand constituted in the encounter with the other affects and disposes the self to take responsibility. However, the self that tries to give an openhearted response can never be responsible enough because it can never fully cope with the 'call' of the other, because the ethical demand is always 'to come' (Levinas, 1981, p. 12). According to both Levinas and Derrida the 'problem' of responsibility is infinite. There are no 'right' decisions insofar as every decision inevitably produces its inclusions and exclusions (Derrida, 1995, p. 27). Derrida argues that "if responsibility would not be infinite there would be no ethical and political problems" (Derrida, 1999, p. 192). But responsibility is infinite since undecidability, lack of guarantees, non-knowledge, uncalculated events – the 'not yet' – are immanent in it, or even constitute the ethical question. Within an "ethics of modesty, responsiveness and patience to the other's difference" (Butler, 2005, p. 42) every singular decision, therefore, includes a new responsible moment where the ethical effort lies in problematizing familiarities and certainties (Levinas, 1969, p. 43) as well as in considering the unique request within the broader social context (Weiskopf, 2004, p. 243).

From this perspective the ethical response to the other also includes a risk since it demands an opening up to critique and self-questioning (see Foucault, 1992; Levinas, 1969). To take responsibility, therefore, also demands 'courage' from the ethical self. In this regard Butler mentions that

> we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human (Butler, 2005, p. 136).

Consequently the ethical relation with the other is simultaneously a chance and a risk (Levinas, 1969). In the encounter with the other "one discloses oneself by neglecting one's defenses, leaving a shelter, exposing oneself to outrage, to insults and wounding" (Levinas, 1981, p. 49). Hence, the recognition that one is not always similar to how one presents oneself requires not only the willingness to accept the irreducible limits of responsibility; rather, it requires a certain *patience* with others and oneself (Butler, 2005, p. 42). Following Butler it is exactly this 'patience', the careful listening and responding to the other's demands, that could avoid acts of 'ethical violence'.

In conclusion, Butler's assumption that "I am my *relation* to you" (Butler, 2005, p. 81) implies that the self is created and transformed in the encounter with the other *and* thereby incited to reflect upon itself (Butler, 2005, p. 125). Thus, the moral subject is keen "to become critical of norms under which we are asked to act" (Butler, 2005, p. 24). This means that the moral agent strives to distance him- or herself from established 'regimes of truth', including his or her own (Foucault, 2001). Thus, if we are to act in a responsible way, reflection on how to use our scopes in response to the other and in relation to the respectively singular is indispensable. To be ethical therefore means to question the self at the moment of uncertainty and to try to act responsibly in spite of limitations. If we do that, we are, according to Butler, not being irresponsible – or if we are after all, "we will surely be forgiven" (Butler, 2005, p. 136).

Due to its open, context-related and subject-oriented focus there are obviously difficulties to substantiate the practical application of a practice-based ethics (see Mansell, 2008, 2009). However, in our view it is not possible to put an 'ideal ethics' into practice. Instead, we have argued in this paper that an 'ethics of humility and responsiveness' seeks to

acknowledge and bring about awareness of the significance of the always-present limitations of responsibility. An ethics which is 'to come' must therefore include a certain empty space – a space for critique and for the unknown (Derrida, 1997). Being responsible does not mean to know fully in advance how to respond and to whom to respond but rather, responsibility is seen as a *considered but unconditional openness* in response to the other, where the goal lies in nothing else than the *response* itself (see also Jones et al., 2005, p. 123).

Assuming that full responsibility is never to be realized, the purpose of this conceptual paper was to ask how an incoherent subject can become responsible 'despite'. In addressing this question, we see our elaborations as a contribution to subjectification-oriented business ethics approaches in which the problem of responsibility and responsible conduct remains little explored.

Acknowledgments

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