The concept of responsibility plays a pivotal role in the philosophy of Hans Jonas as well as in the thought of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. One may wonder, however, if this is not just a superficial parallel. The relationship between Buber and Levinas is undoubtedly closer than that between the two and Hans Jonas.1 Unlike Jonas, Buber and Levinas did not try to reestablish the notion of *scala naturae* as a basis of normative ethics; and unlike Buber and Levinas, Jonas did not take part in the project of establishing a philosophy of dialogue. But concerning the basic account of moral responsibility, there are nevertheless some non-trivial analogies and complementary problems in the interpretations of all three philosophers, or so I will argue. Each of them criticizes the solipsistic limitations of Edmund Husserl’s philosophy and the egocentrism of Heidegger’s concept of “solicitude” or “self-care.” Each of them tries to overcome the Kantian subject-object dichotomy. Each of them construes responsibility as a bipolar relation only. And each of them deals with new forms of dichotomies and with problems concerning the exclusion of “thirdness” which emerge from their own conceptual decisions.

1. Competing Intuitions Concerning the Instance of Moral Responsibility

Let us begin with some general considerations on moral responsibility. Responsibility, as a relational term, has to be understood as a relation between a subject or a bearer of responsibility, an object or something for which the subject is responsible, and an instance of responsibility or someone to whom the subject is responsible. Whereas some philosophers prefer to add more relations, we may for now be content with the three already mentioned. Each of the three relations has its own problems: With regard to the subject of responsibility, one may try to define the properties which are necessary conditions for ascribing responsibility to it. This is where the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists takes place. Regarding the object of responsibility, one may ask about the range and the distribution of responsibility. This is the context of numerous discussions, inter alia the debate between consequentialists and Kantians on acting and omitting; and this is also the context of Hans Jonas’s admonition that the range of our moral responsibility has tremendously expanded on par with our rising power. But the third dimension of responsibility has its problems too, and this holds true particularly with respect to moral responsibility. While it is easy to state the instance of legal responsibility or other forms of role-specific responsibilities, the task of specifying the instance of moral responsibility is, indeed, a sophisticated one, at least if undertaken within the limits of secular moral philosophy. In his important book, *The Imperative of Responsibility,* Hans Jonas does not explicitly discuss the problem, but he addresses it in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen und metaphysische Vermutungen*:

> I am responsible for my act as such (as well as for its omission), regardless of there being someone who—now or later—holds me to my responsibility or not. Responsibility exists with or without God, and, of course, without any mundane court. It is, however, . . . the responsibility to something—an obliging instance, to whom we are responsible. This obliging instance is—so people say once they no longer believe in God—the conscience. But this just turns the question to the next, from where the conscience has its criteria, from which source its rulings are justified.

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