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Paul Ricoeur Human, Antihuman, Posthuman

Edited by Paolo Furia and Alberto Martinengo



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La via lunga del soggetto

ALBERTO MARTINENGO*

La riflessione di Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) ha una posizione perfettamente riconoscibile tra gli autori–chiave dell’ermeneutica filosofica novecentesca. È una collocazione che Ricoeur guadagna fin dagli anni Sessanta: l’uscita di *Finitudine e colpa*, che nel 1960 inaugura il capitolo dell’ermeneutica filosofica francese, lo apre infatti a un confronto produttivo, molto al di là dei confini del pensiero continentale — *in primis* verso le scienze dell’uomo ma, più in generale, nella direzione di modi e metodologie differenti da quelli delle stesse *humanities*. Nel mezzo secolo che ci separa dal dibattito di quegli anni, lo si è detto molte volte: se (una parte del)l’ermeneutica filosofica tedesca, soprattutto per mano di Hans–Georg Gadamer, individua il proprio specifico sulla scia di autori come Wilhelm Dilthey, enfatizzando la rottura epistemologica tra i metodi dello spiegare e del comprendere, di contro Ricoeur ne riarticola la profonda complementarità — di più, la loro imprescindibile cooperazione per il lavoro filosofico.

Da qui, l’immagine ancora viva che l’ermeneutica filosofica di Ricoeur ci restituisce oggi: un’ermeneutica che, dal punto di vista storico, nasce dall’innesto tra la filosofia riflessiva e la fenomenologia; ma che, sotto il profilo programmatico, si proietta altrove, in un’altra serie di innesti, di alternative che sono ricomposte, di coppie concettuali che si ingranano l’una nell’altra, di ricostruzioni che prevalgono sulle rotture. La composizione tra la spiegazione e la comprensione è la prima di queste ricostruzioni. Lo è anzitutto in senso cronologico, perché vede la luce fin da quando Ricoeur mette a tema la ricchezza del mito: una sovrabbondanza di sensi, che la filosofia è chiamata a *comprendere* sulle ceneri del mito inteso come verità oggettiva, che le *spiegazioni* antropologiche e etnografiche hanno demistificato. Ma si tratta anche della scommessa teorica più fortunata per Ricoeur e per il riscontro internazionale che inizia a ottenere, perché apre i suoi lavori e la sua vita accademica al pubblico anglofono, che vi vede un autore più attento a sensibilità filosofiche estranee al continente europeo.

Da allora, il contesto di problemi è profondamente mutato. Ma non è irriconoscibile. In prima istanza, non è irriconoscibile perché oggi la pre-

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senza delle scienze umane — per tacere delle scienze naturali (su tutte, la biologia) — è ancora più intrecciata con la discussione filosofica e per noi sarebbe ingenuo pensare di fare filosofia senza essere consapevoli dei risultati che provengono da discipline dotate di oggetti, procedure, metodi opposti rispetto a ciò che l'ermeneutica chiamava appunto "comprensione". In seconda istanza, di quell'insieme di problemi rimane la struttura, sebbene i contenuti abbiano subito una sorta di risemantizzazione. La composizione della frattura tra la spiegazione e la comprensione nasce infatti nell'ottica di integrare le "discipline dell'uomo": è anzitutto l'uomo a essere il tema dell'uno o dell'altro metodo; è l'uomo a sparire o riapparire nelle diverse discipline che si occupano del mito, del simbolo, del linguaggio, del romanzo — dalla psicoanalisi all'esperienza religiosa, dallo strutturalismo all'antropologia, dalla letteratura alla stessa filosofia. I risultati sono noti. Ma è altresì noto il significato militante di questo programma: per Ricoeur, riproporre l'umano — seppur come problema — significa muoversi in radicale controtendenza rispetto al lessico della "morte dell'uomo", che attraversa le discipline di cui si è detto. Un lessico che, negli anni Sessanta, ha nella nozione di antiumanismo la sua categoria filosofica più significativa e che, nella stessa ermeneutica filosofica traccia sentieri di grande rilievo.

Ecco il tratto mutevole ma particolarmente attuale del pensiero di Ricoeur. Parlavamo di un contesto modificato, perché la coppia concettuale umanismo / antiumanismo ha completamente fatto il suo tempo, ma il tema non si è dissolto: si pensi alla portata del dibattito sul postumano che, di nuovo, esce da canali disciplinari specifici e si fa lessico comune — moda culturale, talvolta — per chi si occupa di filosofia sociale o di diritto, di *gender studies* o di *science fiction*, di cultura popolare o di rivoluzione digitale, per citare i terreni di studio più interessanti.

Questo fascicolo di « Trópos », che esce nel decennale della scomparsa di Paul Ricoeur, interroga la sua filosofia a partire dal perimetro semantico dell'umano, dell'antiumano e del postumano. Si chiede insomma come evolva il problema dell'uomo, nell'arco di sensibilità che vanno dall'antiumanismo della metà del Novecento, al postumano degli anni Novanta e Duemila. Ma si chiede, soprattutto, in che misura il modello di Ricoeur possa corrispondere a esigenze nuove — se non altro, per cronologia — da quelle che lo animavano. Un modello, quello di Ricoeur, che è a sua volta in movimento, come ci ricordano i contributi nelle pagine che seguono: l'uomo fallibile degli anni Sessanta, l'identità narrativa di *Tempo e racconto* (1983-'85), l'ipseità di *Sé come un altro* (1990), i percorsi del riconoscimento nel libro omonimo del 2004.

Così, Eileen Brennan (*Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self*) ricostruisce l'ermeneutica del sé partendo dal volume nel quale essa è tematizzata: *Sé come un altro*, appunto. Lo fa usando questo testo come lente attraverso la

quale studiare l'evoluzione stessa del discorso di Ricoeur: posto che il tema dell'umano sia un filo conduttore potente della sua ermeneutica, come se ne rintraccia la presenza da parte a parte della riflessione ricoeuriana? Si tratta di una vera continuità, oppure è un mutamento che introduce via via nuovi modelli, anche in risposta alla diversa condizione delle discussioni che Ricoeur incrocia? Per rispondere, Brennan chiama in causa un pezzo significativo della ricezione di Ricoeur, in tre interpreti diversi per area geografica, interessi e riferimenti cronologici: Domenico Jervolino, Jean Greisch e Johann Michel. Il contributo di Gabriel Aranzueque, *Heterogeneidades sin síntesis. Del hombre falible al doliente*, parte invece dalle origini dell'interesse di Ricoeur per il tema, muovendo proprio dall'uomo fallibile. Qui la lente d'ingrandimento è la fragilità dell'umano — vero punto di rottura con la fenomenologia. Una lente che, nella ricostruzione di Aranzueque, non guida soltanto le riflessioni degli anni Sessanta, ma ritorna anche nelle analisi degli anni Ottanta sulla narratività: il racconto, come dispositivo di integrazione dell'esperienza dentro un quadro di riferimento unitario, è caricato di un compito quasi taumaturgico nei confronti del soggetto fragile; ma resta da capire se davvero il “dinamismo integratore” della trama narrativa sia in grado di fare i conti con la rottura singolarizzante dell'identità, rappresentata dalla sofferenza. Per Aranzueque la risposta non è positiva e con ciò si fotografa uno dei limiti connessi all'ermeneutica ricoeuriana del sé. I saggi di Johann Michel (*Of Testimony and Confession: Two Paradigms of the Subject*) e di Oreste Aime (*L'animale autobiografico e l'identità narrativa nell'epoca della tecnoscienza*) aprono il confronto tra Ricoeur e i suoi contemporanei. Michel mette in luce i due modelli della soggettività che fanno capo, rispettivamente, a Ricoeur e a Michel Foucault: il tema è la relazione tra il soggetto e la sua verità, in una chiave che, in entrambi, prende la forma di una contestazione del paradigma cartesiano. Sono due diverse uscite dal cartesianesimo che Michel riconduce allo schema della testimonianza e della confessione. Aime analizza invece il rapporto tra Ricoeur e Jacques Derrida: un confronto che — a dispetto delle apparenze — si snoda tacito per molti decenni, per concretizzarsi attorno ad alcuni temi-cardine del pensiero ricoeuriano, dalla metafora alla narratività, fino alle discussioni attorno al dono e al perdono. Si tratta di un vero e proprio “capitolo non scritto” del dibattito francese contemporaneo, di cui Aime fornisce una prima tavola di problemi. Paolo Furia (*Identità e narrazione. La posizione ricoeuriana alla prova dei social network*) e Alberto Romele (*Digital Traceability and the Right to be Forgotten: Ricoeurian Perspectives*) aprono infine la discussione attorno all'identità digitale, mettendo alla prova gli strumenti e i limiti della narrativizzazione di Ricoeur. Furia introduce il discorso enfatizzando le continuità tra il modello ricoeuriano e i fenomeni di digitalizzazione e socializzazione identitaria. Il suo scopo è reperire nel paradigma dell'ipseità strumenti di lettura critica

dei *social networks*, in dialogo con alcuni esiti della semiologia francese dei *new media*. Romele porta l'attenzione sui temi filosofico-giuridici del diritto all'oblio: le pratiche di archiviazione delle nostre attività digitali, da parte dei motori di ricerca, pongono sotto una nuova luce la riflessione di Ricoeur attorno alla costruzione del passato. Gli incroci tra la fenomenologia e l'ermeneutica, che *La memoria, la storia, l'oblio* (2000) articola a partire da questi temi, diventano un punto di osservazione privilegiato a partire dal quale leggere il *web* come luogo di pratiche identitarie, di azioni, di *performances* del ricordo e dell'oblio.

Quello che emerge è dunque un quadro vasto e frastagliato, forse eccentrico rispetto alle linee che per alcuni decenni la ricezione italiana di Ricoeur ha tracciato. Ma ci muove la convinzione che la "storia degli effetti" dell'ermeneutica ricoeuriana sia stata tanto più fruttuosa quanto più ha rispecchiato l'ampiezza di interessi (e anche di curiosità) che *in primis* Paul Ricoeur praticava.

Paul Ricoeur
Human, Antihuman, Posthuman

Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self

EILEEN BRENNAN*

ABSTRACT: This paper sets out to reappraise Ricoeur's theory of the self, offering a critical commentary on three important theses regarding *Oneself as Another*: those of Domenico Jervolino, Johann Michel and Jean Greisch. It challenges the commonly held assumption that the "hermeneutics of the self," which Ricoeur introduces in that work, is continuous with his earlier works on a "reform" of subjectivity. It discusses three considerations which indicate that, from the mid to late 1980's onwards, Ricoeur did not view "the subject" and "the self" as one and the same. It argues that the "guiding thread" in Ricoeur's work is in fact a critical engagement with Descartes' *Second Meditation*. This sustained but evolving critique of the *Second Meditation* is almost always the occasion for innovation. However, when it occurs in *Oneself as Another* it gives rise to a revolution: a break with the "philosophies of the subject" and a rapprochement with Heidegger.

KEYWORDS: Attestation, hermeneutics of the self, philosophies of the subject, psychoanalytic critique of the cogito, wounded cogito.

Paul Ricoeur's perspective on his own work was somewhat different from the perspective shared by many of his supporters. Take, for example, the following response that Ricoeur gave to John B. Thompson's "substantial introduction" to *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*:

The perspective which he proposes [on my work from 1947 to 1979] corrects the inverse impression, to which I have a tendency to succumb: that of a certain lack of continuity in my writings. For each work responds to a determinate challenge, and what connects it to its predecessors seems to me to be less the steady development of a unique project than the acknowledgement of a residue left over by the previous work, a residue which gives rise in turn to a new project. (Ricoeur 1981: 32)

Ricoeur appears to welcome the interplay of two perspectives here: his original impression of his own work and Thompson's corrective. The two contrary impressions are apparently well-founded with each one revealing what we might call, an element of truth. Ricoeur is certainly not prepared

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to concede that his own assessment was mistaken. As he points out, each of his works responds to a determinate challenge and appears, to its author at least, to be connected to its predecessors, but only to the extent that it acknowledges that those works have left certain questions unanswered, which it now plans to take up and form into “a new project.” Twenty years later Ricoeur was still describing the relationships among his many works in precisely those terms. Consider the following statement made in *Lectio magistralis*, which was first published as the appendix to Domenico Jervolino’s *Paul Ricoeur: Une herméneutique de la condition humaine*: “Like all my earlier works, [*Memory, History, Forgetting*] has its origin in the discovery and consideration of residual questions, i.e., those left unanswered in an earlier work.” (Jervolino 2005: 87, my translation) On that occasion, it was Jervolino who would assume the role of respondent, suggesting that Ricoeur’s account of the way his work had evolved should be counterbalanced by a demonstration of “the unity and coherence of his philosophical itinerary.” (Jervolino 2005: 5)

There is one work, however, that does not appear to fit the usual pattern. *Oneself as Another* is distinctive in that a first draft of that work appeared to be a straightforward attempt to *synthesize* several decades of research in areas as diverse as: (1) the philosophy of language; (2) the philosophy of action; (3) narrative theory; and (4) moral philosophy. In short, its sole focus was ostensibly the unity and continuity of Ricoeur’s work. Further, this sense of consolidating diverse aspects of a single project appeared to carry over into the final draft. But all was not as it seemed. Ricoeur’s strategy for synthesizing the work, at least first time around, was to take all the questions he had dealt with in the past and divide them into four categories: (1) “Who speaks?”; (2) “Who acts?”; (3) “Who recounts?”; and (4) “Who takes responsibility for their actions?” And crucially, he then commented that those four groups of questions could be arranged around the central question, “Who?”. (Jervolino 2005: 81) Unlike the others he had listed, this was not a question he had dealt with in the past. It was, rather, the “residual” question that he would try to answer next. The task facing Ricoeur, in *Oneself as Another*, was not, then, just a matter of showing how various works contributed to a unified scheme. Like all of the works that preceded it, it had a question to answer; one that had already been raised in an earlier text.

However, it would seem that the uncharacteristic emphasis that Ricoeur placed on the unity and continuity of his works, in *Oneself as Another*, has had the effect of obscuring the originality of the central theme of that work: *the self*. “The self” is, as Ricoeur points out, the answer to the question “Who?”. (Ricoeur 1992: 16) Coupling that statement with the evidence that the book provides of a plan to synthesize decades of research in disparate

fields, many commentators assume that the “guiding thread,” weaving its way across Ricoeur’s earlier works and into *Oneself as Another*, is a questioning, even a profound questioning of “the subject.” This is not an unreasonable assumption to make but, as I hope to show, it is mistaken nonetheless. The assumption is not unreasonable because Ricoeur spent best part of four decades first developing and then defending his own very distinctive philosophy of the subject; and there was no clear indication that he was about to change course. However, it would be a mistake to view the “hermeneutics of the self,” which he introduces in *Oneself as Another*, as a hermeneutics of *the subject*. To equate the two is to disregard at least three of the considerations that Ricoeur includes in the Introduction to that work: (1) a plan to use a nominalized *omnipersonal* reflexive pronoun in place of the singular subjective pronoun or “I;” (2) a declaration of his intention to *break with*, or *part ways* with the “philosophies of the subject;” and (3) an important indication that the “hermeneutics of the self” will have a different *status* to that of the “philosophies of the subject.” In this instance, “status” means both epistemic quality and ontological commitments.

In the first part of this paper, I discuss Ricoeur’s plans to break with the “philosophies of the subject,” underscoring the revolutionary character of those plans by showing how Ricoeur’s established philosophical interests and past allegiances position all of his preceding works firmly within the category that he now wants to leave behind. I then note the way he uses the complex functioning of language as a guide when introducing his new topic.

In the second part of the paper, I argue that it is possible, nonetheless, to identify a “guiding thread” in Ricoeur’s work, which first appears in the early 1950’s and is still discernible in 1990, the year he published *Oneself as Another*. That “guiding thread” is Ricoeur’s sustained critical engagement with Descartes’ *Second Meditation*. I try to show that it is this critical engagement with the *Second Meditation* that has given us some of Ricoeur’s more memorable and inventive ideas. I then try to demonstrate that, contrary to appearances, there is no discrepancy between the first and final drafts of *Oneself as Another* when it comes to the accounts that Ricoeur offers of the way the central question — “Who?” — emerges in his work. Both accounts allude, explicitly or otherwise, to a critical engagement with the *Second Meditation*.

In the third part, I discuss three important commentaries on *Oneself as Another*, two of which do not make a distinction between “the subject” and “the self.” I challenge the central theses of both commentaries by drawing on the research presented and the arguments developed in parts one and two. I then discuss the third commentary, which, as I indicate, is very much in line with that research.

1. Ricoeur's "new project" in *Oneself as Another*

If the design and layout of *Oneself as Another* point to the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's multiple works, comments made in the introduction place considerable emphasis on an impending *break with* certain outmoded philosophical interests, interests that Ricoeur once shared with Kant, Fichte, and Husserl. Ricoeur declares that "the quarrel over the cogito" has been "superseded;" and he talks about reaching a point where "our problematic will have *parted ways with* the philosophies of the subject." (Ricoeur 1992: 4, my emphasis) But what does he mean by "the philosophies of the subject?" He explains that he takes the expression to be "equivalent to 'philosophies of the cogito.'" (Ricoeur 1992: 4) Among those philosophies of the subject (or cogito) he includes works that defend "the ambition of establishing a final, ultimate foundation, primarily Descartes's *Meditations* but also works by Kant and Fichte, and Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*." (Ricoeur 1992: 4) However, his list of "philosophies of the subject" is not confined to those works; it also includes works by those who would shatter and "overthrow" the cogito, chief among them being Nietzsche. In an effort to differentiate the philosophy presented in *Oneself as Another* from those opposing "philosophies of the subject," Ricoeur says that it is "'second philosophy,' in the sense that Manfred Riedel gives to this term." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) He explains that Riedel uses the term to identify a form of philosophy that arose "following the failure of the cogito to be constituted as first philosophy and to resolve the question of determining an ultimate foundation." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) Ricoeur goes on to explain that Riedel's expression, "second philosophy" is equivalent to the expression, "practical philosophy." He does not want to claim that every aspect of *Oneself as Another* will count as "second" or "practical philosophy," but he wants to name one way in which it will. He explains that the ten studies presented in that work "have as their thematic unity *human action* and that the notion of action acquires, over the course of the studies, an ever-increasing extension and concreteness." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) It is, he says, to this extent that "the philosophy that comes out of this work deserves to be termed a practical philosophy and to be taken as 'second philosophy,' in the sense that Manfred Riedel gives to this term." (Ricoeur 1992: 19)

Viewed from the perspective of Ricoeur's introduction, there is, then, a certain lack of continuity between *Oneself as Another* and Ricoeur's earlier works, a situation which, I want to argue, coincides with the introduction of a new project. However, before venturing to offer a detailed account of what that new project entails, I would like to take a moment or two to reflect on Ricoeur's earlier association with the so-called "philosophies of the subject," because his new problematic is as far removed from his

earlier work as it is from all the other “philosophies of the subject,” whether sympathetic to the idea of the cogito or emphatically anti-cogito. In an essay entitled *On Interpretation*, which is included in the collection *From Text to Action*, Ricoeur casts what Jean Greisch describes as “a retrospective glance over the problems that have occupied him for about thirty years.” (Greisch 2001: 18, my translation) Ricoeur begins by offering a broad description of the “philosophical tradition” to which he belongs: “It stands in the line of a *reflexive* philosophy; it remains within the sphere of Husserlian *phenomenology*; it strives to be a hermeneutical variation of this phenomenology.” (Ricoeur 2008: 12) Ricoeur knows that many of his readers will not be familiar with the term, “reflexive philosophy,” so he offers a definition: “By reflexive philosophy, I mean broadly speaking the mode of thought stemming from the Cartesian cogito and handed down by way of Kant and French post-Kantian philosophy, a philosophy that is little known abroad and that, for me at least, was most strikingly represented by Jean Nabert.” (Ricoeur 2008: 12) In providing that definition of the tradition of reflexive philosophy, a tradition to which he claims to belong, Ricoeur positions *all* of the works he published in the period from the 1950’s to the early 1980’s within the category of “the philosophies of the subject.” This, of course, would explain the countless references we find, in those works, to “the subject” and even to “the cogito.” But Ricoeur’s cogito is distinctive. If we go back to *The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology*, an essay included in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, we come upon the curious expression, the “wounded cogito,” *cogito blessé*. (Ricoeur 2007: 243) But what is it that makes this version of the cogito distinctive? Ricoeur defines the “wounded cogito” as “a *cogito* which posits but does not possess itself, a *cogito* which understands its primordial truth only in and through the avowal of inadequation, the illusion, the fakery of immediate consciousness.” (Ricoeur 2007: 243) He explains that he came to think of the cogito in those terms after meditating on Freudian psychoanalysis. (Ricoeur 2007: 242) This particular conceptualization of the cogito finds an echo in Greisch’s expression, “the hermeneutic cogito,” *le cogito herméneutique*.¹

There is a second essay in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, entitled *Existence and Hermeneutics*, which dramatizes Ricoeur’s profound transformation of the cogito in, what for me, is an unforgettable way. There Ricoeur warns that his decision to “graft” hermeneutics onto phenomenology will change “the wild stock,” (i.e., phenomenology) causing the cogito to “explode.” (Ricoeur 2007: 17) He would use another interesting metaphor, in 2001, when describing the impact that Freudian psychoanalysis had on his work

1. J. GREISCH, *Le Cogito herméneutique: l’herméneutique philosophique et l’héritage cartésien*, Paris, Vrin, 2000.

in the 1960's, a decade in which he wrote all the essays that comprise *The Conflict of Interpretations* as well as *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. That metaphor would depict psychoanalysis as a player in a game of chess that had *put in check* "the philosophies of consciousness stemming from Descartes, including the Husserlian phenomenology that I myself had practiced in my early works." (Jervolino 2005: 77–78) Ricoeur would then explain that he had to look to "the complex functioning of language" for guidance when planning his defensive move. (Jervolino 2005: 78)

When reading the opening paragraphs of the introduction to *Oneself as Another* it is important to remember that Ricoeur spent many decades defending his own distinctive version of the cogito before making the announcement that there would be a point where "our [new] problematic" parts ways with the philosophies of the subject. He may list Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Husserl, and even Nietzsche as philosophers who developed various "philosophies of the subject," but his philosophy of the "wounded cogito" earns him a place on that list too. However, that is not to say that there will be nothing to connect *Oneself as Another* to Ricoeur's earlier works. It is notable, for example, that when he introduces his new project he draws support from the way "the grammars of natural languages" function, a strategy that clearly recalls his earlier response to the threat posed to the cogito by psychoanalysis. (Ricoeur 1992: 1) However, in this later work, he is no longer looking to move the philosophies of consciousness out of check. He wants, rather, to set up an opposition between the "I" of the "I think" and "the self." Here is how he describes what he was trying to achieve:

The first intention [that influenced the preparation of the book] was to indicate the primacy of reflective meditation over the immediate positing of the subject, as this is expressed in the first person singular: "I think," "I am." This initial intention draws support from the grammars of natural languages inasmuch as they allow the opposition between "self" and "I." This support takes different forms following the peculiarities of each language. (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

Ricoeur is clearly encouraged by the fact that the grammars of natural languages, like French, German, English, etc., "allow the opposition between 'self' and 'I.'" However, he wants to do far more than claim that it would be a mistake to confuse the two. Demonstrating an on-going commitment to phenomenological analysis, he goes in search of what he terms, "the essential meaning" of "self." (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

As Ricoeur notes, "self" is a *reflexive* pronoun. There are, in English, eight reflexive pronouns: *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, and themselves*; and it is clear from the text, that if Ricoeur had been writing in English, he would have used the term "self" to cover *all* of them. But

he goes even further than that. He writes: "I shall frequently refer in the course of these investigations" to "the impersonal pronouns, such as 'each,' 'anyone,' 'one,'" and he signals that they too will be covered by the term "self" (Ricoeur 1992: 1) He concedes that "the philosophical use of the term throughout these studies violates a restriction that has been stressed by grammarians, namely that *soi* is a third-person reflexive pronoun (himself, herself, itself)." He then endeavours to lift that restriction by comparing *soi* and *se* (as in *se présenter* and *se nommer*). Drawing on the work of the linguist G. Guillaume, he is able to show that because "*se*" relates to verbs in the form of the infinitive, i.e., verbs that are not "distributed among the tenses and the grammatical persons," there is no restriction on the pronouns it can designate. Then, comparing *se* and *soi*, he notes that "the reflexive pronoun *soi* also attains the same timeless range [*la même amplitude omnitemporelle*] when it is added to the *se* in the infinitive mode: *se décider soi-même*." (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

It seems to me that when Ricoeur seizes the opportunity to oppose "I" and "self," afforded him by the grammars of a number of European languages, he takes an important first step in demarcating his new research topic. No longer prepared to use the singular subject pronoun, "I," he has reached what we might consider a first staging post: "an omnipersonal reflexive pronoun." (Ricoeur 1992: 2) But Ricoeur quickly moves on to nominalize that pronoun, so that his topic becomes "the self" (*le soi*). As he explains: "The shift from one expression to the other is permitted by the grammatical capacity for nominalizing any element of language: do we not say 'the drink,' 'the beautiful,' 'the bright day?'" (Ricoeur 1992: 2) He also points out that "the self" can function as the *indirect object* of another noun, and to illustrate the point he borrows "Michel Foucault's magnificent title: *le souci de soi* (care of the self)." (Ricoeur 1992: 2) It is interesting that he should align what he is attempting to do, in *Oneself as Another*, with the work of Foucault, someone whose name is so often associated with the thesis of "the death of the subject."

The more obvious connection, however, is with Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, two hermeneutic philosophers who reject the subject-object conceptuality favoured by Husserl. In an essay entitled *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, which is included in the collection *From Text to Action*, Ricoeur offers a brief sketch of the main problem associated with this type of conceptuality. He notes that Husserl employs the subject-object conceptuality, in the epilogue to *Ideas*, whilst articulating his idealist thesis on the "ultimate justification" of phenomenology. Ricoeur objects that Husserl's idealist version of phenomenological justification is evidentially weak, that it is nothing more than self-assertion, a style of justification that "is associated with" the subject-object conceptuality. He draws attention

to the fact that hermeneutics, by which he means his own philosophy but also the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer, *opposes* the subject–object conceptuality by giving priority to the ontological “concept of belonging.” (Ricoeur 2008: 27)² Although he does not claim that he has framed “the self” in that same hermeneutic conceptuality of belonging, in *Oneself as Another*, there may be some justification for claiming that the sense of belonging to someone (or to some group), suggested by the very construction of reflexive pronouns like *myself* or *yourself* or *ourselves*, was not lost in the process of nominalizing those pronouns. However, one thing is certain, Ricoeur admired Foucault’s sub–title, *Care of the Self*, and what this shows is that he believed it was possible to say something intelligible about “the self” without having to carve the world up into discrete subjects and objects.

2. Linking *Oneself as Another* to Ricoeur’s earlier works

I should now like to switch perspective and devote some time to considering the case for viewing *Oneself as Another* as being continuous with Ricoeur’s earlier works at least in certain respects. The first piece of evidence that we need to consider is one provided by Ricoeur himself in the above mentioned *Lectio magistralis*. There Ricoeur reports that, after he had completed the third and final volume of *Time and Narrative*, he turned his attention to preparing a series of lectures, which he would revise, expand and rework several times before publishing them, in 1990, under the title, *Soi-même comme un autre*. The English translation, *Oneself as Another*, would appear two years later. Ricoeur explains that the motivation for preparing the original material was an invitation he had received to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the winter of 1986. However, that invitation came with a special request, which left him feeling that the whole thing was a bit “awkward.” The organizing committee wanted him to “offer a synthesis of my works,” but to do so would be to go “against the tide of my known preferences.” (Jervolino 2005: 80–81) Ricoeur’s handling of this awkward situation was skilful. He found a way of providing his audience with a single “set of tools” for understanding his various works while still managing to introduce a new project. (Jervolino 2005: 81) As he recalls, it occurred to him that all the questions he had dealt with in the past could be divided into four groups, corresponding to the four uses that he made of the modal verb “I can.” He notes that he used the modal verb “I can” in the

2. Ricoeur’s position on the primacy of the concept of belonging is complicated due to a decision he takes to follow “the long route” to ontology via a series of studies and engagements that remain on the epistemological level. See *Existence and Hermeneutics*, in Ricoeur 2007: 19–24.

following ways: "I can speak, I can act, I can recount, [and] I can hold myself responsible for my actions, letting them be attributed to me as their true author." (Jervolino 2005: 81) So, the four groups of questions were to be given the question headings: (1) "Who speaks?"; (2) "Who acts?"; (3) "Who recounts?"; and (4) "Who takes responsibility for their actions?" Newly grouped and re-labelled in that way, Ricoeur hoped that those questions could then be seen to be linked to one another in certain respects. Of course, by establishing links among the various questions he effectively demonstrated the unity and continuity of works that were spread across the following areas: (1) the philosophy of language; (2) the philosophy of action; (3) narrative theory; and (4) moral philosophy. However, he was not content with merely synthesizing his earlier works; as always, he also wanted to introduce a *new project*. But how was he going to do that? He recalls that it occurred to him that "the multiple questions that I dealt with in the past could be grouped together around a *central question* that rises to the surface in our discourse on the uses that we make of the modal verb 'I can.'" (Jervolino 2005: 81, my emphasis) That central question was the question, "Who?" It was a question that he was keen to take up and form into his "new project."

The Gifford Lectures were clearly written with a view to highlighting the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's philosophical itinerary. However, four years of substantial revisions and expansions separate those lectures from the work that would be translated as, *Oneself as Another*. Charles E. Reagan considers this to be "time well spent: *Oneself as Another* is in my opinion Ricoeur's most elegantly written, clearly organized, and closely argued work." (Cohen and Marsh 2002: 4) But my question is: How much of the original highlighting of unity and continuity survived the changes made? As discussed in part one, *Oneself as Another* is designed to part ways with the philosophies of the subject, switching attention onto "the self;" and to facilitate that transition Ricoeur plans to stop using the singular subjective pronoun "I," replacing it with a *nominalized* "omnipersonal reflexive pronoun." Of course, that means he is no longer in a position to use the modal verb "I can" to establish links among the questions posed in the four areas of his work that were mentioned above. So how is the central question — "Who?" — meant to arise? And what survives, if anything, of his original list of four peripheral questions? Both answers are to be found in the introduction. There we see that Ricoeur manages to introduce his central question by turning to Descartes' *Second Meditation*, where he finds an original question that he will be able to *repeat and make his own*. Commenting on the meaning of Descartes' original question, he writes: "The question 'who?', related to the question 'who doubts?', takes on a new twist when it is connected to the question 'who thinks?' and, more radically, 'who

exists?” (Ricoeur 1992: 6–7) Ricoeur’s repetition of Descartes’ “Who?” will be related, or connected, to a different set of questions: (1) “Who speaks?”; (2) “Who acts?”; (3) “Who recounts?”; and (4) “Who takes responsibility for their actions?”

Notwithstanding the evidence of continuity between the Gifford lectures and *Oneself as Another*, one could be troubled by the fact that Ricoeur appears to offer two very different accounts of how the central question “Who?” arose for him: (1) it emerged out of Ricoeur’s uses of the modal verb “I can” (the story Ricoeur tells in his reflections on the Gifford lectures); and (2) it is a question that Descartes raised in the *Second Meditation* and which Ricoeur intends to raise anew (the story Ricoeur tells in the introduction to *Oneself as Another*). But there is no need to be troubled in that regard. Ricoeur took a critical stance on Descartes’ *Second Meditation* as far back as 1950, if not before, and there is some evidence to suggest that that critique took on a number of different forms down through the years, Ricoeur’s use of the modal verb “I can” being one of them. So, let me say something about that now, starting with a few comments on Ricoeur’s early exposure to a rather unusual critique of Descartes.

There never was a time when Ricoeur did not want to move beyond some features of Descartes’ philosophy of the cogito. Roland Dalbiez, the man who taught him philosophy in his final year at secondary school, was a huge influence in that regard, as Ricoeur’s contribution to Marguerite Léna’s *Honneur aux maîtres* will confirm. Dalbiez was a neo-Scholastic, and as such, vehemently opposed to philosophical idealism. He was, for Ricoeur, “an unforgettable teacher,” who taught him about the importance of conceptual rigour and intellectual courage. (Jervolino 2005: 75) However, as Ricoeur notes in *Honneur aux maîtres*, Dalbiez was no ordinary neo-Aristotelian realist; he had devised a radically new way of critiquing idealist conceptions of consciousness, based on his own reconstruction of psychoanalysis. Most unusually, for the time, Dalbiez viewed psychoanalysis as much more than a therapy; he saw huge potential in the *theories* of the unconscious, of the libido, and of neurosis that Freud had developed. Ricoeur and his classmates were not directly acquainted with that research, but they did encounter it in the form of Dalbiez’s judgement on the idealists’ decision to prioritize “a knowledge that is conscious of itself” over “the real.” Dalbiez described this “derealisation” as “a mental illness of the psychotic variety.” Ricoeur says that it was only ten or fifteen years after he left school that he began to appreciate the extent of his debt to Dalbiez. Commenting specifically on the impact of Dalbiez’s legacy on *Freedom and Nature*, he remarks that whilst certain elements of the book constitute a type of parricide, others pay tribute, albeit unintentionally, to “Dalbiez’s Freud.” However, he says, it is probably his own idea of the “absolute involuntary” that is most harmonious