The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge Between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

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IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF PAUL RICOEUR

by

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ABSTRACT
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Ricoeur defines attestation as the "*assurance* of being oneself acting and suffering" or as the "assurance – the credence and the trust – of *existing* in the mode of selfhood." In this dissertation I discuss the concept of attestation in Ricoeur's philosophy in relation to the main dimensions of the self: Capacities, personal identity, memory and otherness. I state that attestation is the key to the three dialectics of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self: The dialectic between reflection and analysis, the dialectic between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity and the dialectic between oneself and other. In these three dialectics, attestation, as the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering, allows the self to appropriate its otherness: The otherness of its capacities, the otherness of its identity, the otherness of its body, of other people and of its conscience. In other words, the self gains the confidence of being a self through the confidence that the actions it performs and the words it says are its own actions and words; the confidence that the narratives it tells express its own identity; the confidence that the body is its own body; the confidence that the esteem of others mediates its own esteem and that the values that it embraces are its own values. This analysis is made in the first four chapters of this dissertation. In the fifth chapter I explore the relationship between attestation and recognition.

Attestation is not only necessary to understand the self at a hermeneutical level, but at the same time attestation shows a main ontological trait of the self: The self *is* attestation in the sense that the self is the confidence of existing as a self, confidence that is gained by appropriating its otherness. Thus, the concept of attestation along with providing an understanding of the self through otherness (hermeneutical level) shows us that to become a self we need to attest to our self by appropriating our otherness (ontological level). Then, as a conclusion, we can state that attestation serves as a bridge between hermeneutics and ontology in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur.

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Introduction

1.   Objective of the dissertation

The goal of this dissertation is to analyze the concept of attestation in the context

of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. Although attestation, according to Ricoeur, is the

key concept linking the essays in *Oneself as Another*, the literature on Ricoeur has not

paid enough attention to it.[1] I will analyze attestation by trying to discover the

hermeneutical and ontological implications of this concept, proposing the thesis that

attestation is the bridge between a hermeneutics and an ontology of the self. In order to

defend my thesis I will analyze the role of attestation as it relates to the four main

dimensions of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self – capacities, identity, memory,

otherness. The first four chapters of the dissertation will be devoted precisely to this task

in that very order. So, the first chapter will analyze attestation in relation with the

phenomenology of the capable being, that is, the phenomenological analysis of the main

human capacities (to speak, to act, to narrate and to be imputable). The second chapter

analyzes attestation in relation with personal identity. The third chapter discusses

attestation in relation with memory. The fourth chapter explicates the notion of attestation

as it relates to otherness. In the fifth chapter I complement the analysis of the first four

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[1] Among the few studies dedicated to this topic, we find "Testimony and Attestation" by Jean Greisch (Greisch 1996); "Ricoeur's Ethics. Another Version of Virtue Ethics? Attestation is not a Virtue" by Mark Muldoon (Muldoon 2007); "Agnosticism and Attestation: An Aporia concerning the Other in Ricoeur's 'Oneself as Another'" by Pamela Sue Anderson (Anderson 1994) and "The Concept of Attestation of Paul Ricoeur" by Josué Pérez (Pérez 2001).

chapters by analyzing the relationship between attestation and recognition. Finally, in the conclusion, I try to show how attestation serves as a bridge between a hermeneutics and an ontology of the self.

In what follows, I will situate the problem of attestation in three main contexts. The first one concerns the prevalent philosophical views about the self. In this regard, we can say that with the idea of attestation Ricoeur responds to the main challenges that we have found in the history of philosophy with respect to the self. The second context is that of the hermeneutics of testimony that will help us understand why Ricoeur uses a juridical term – attestation – to explain his idea of the self. The third context will be the hermeneutics of the self. The hermeneutics of the self grafts Ricoeur's philosophical response to the traditions of the self and the hermeneutics of testimony on to his own philosophical project: A hermeneutics of the self in which attestation is at the core. In this sense we could say that the hermeneutics of the self is not just a context but it is where attestation finds its natural space and ground.

2.   Attestation in the context of the crisis of the cogito

The idea of attestation must be understood in the context of the two main traditions that have concerned themselves with the idea of the cogito. The first is the modern tradition initiated by Descartes and followed by Kant and Fichte and continued in the 20th century, by Husserl, among others. In this tradition the cogito is evident and serves as a primary and transparent truth of thought (Ricoeur 1992, 4). To that view is opposed what Ricoeur calls the "shattered cogito," which finds its best expression in

Nietzsche (Ricoeur 1992, 11-16). In this second tradition, the self is a mere illusion or at

most a construction.[2]

Although Ricoeur agrees with this criticism directed against the Cartesian

tradition, he is not satisfied with the mere dissolution of the cogito.[3] He believes it is

possible to have some certainty about the cogito, not an absolute certainty, but a certainty

nonetheless that Ricoeur calls "attestation." This certainty is less than the unshakable

certainty Descartes wanted but is more than the skepticism of Nietzsche (Ricoeur 1992,

16-23). Thus, attestation is a kind of belief, but not a belief in the sense of *doxa* when it is

opposed to *episteme*. It is a belief that has the form of a credence, a "belief in" and a trust.

Although Ricoeur states that attestation is "placed at an equal distance from the apology

of the cogito and from its overthrow" (Ricoeur 1992, 4), Greisch reminds us that for

Ricoeur "this equal distance" is not an exact midpoint between two extremes, but it

occupies an epistemic and ontological place beyond these alternatives (Greisch 1996, 84-

85).What does it mean to go beyond these alternatives? In my understanding, Ricoeur's

claim that attestation occupies a place beyond the alternatives is meant to stress the idea

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[2] According to Van Den Hengel, Ricoeur's concern about the crisis of the cogito is linked with his diagnosis of the crisis of the contemporary human being: "His venture into practical philosophy must be seen in the light of his perception of the current crisis of Western civilization. For Ricoeur, a pivotal event marks our era, which calls for a new thrust in philosophy. He identifies this event at the level of human consciousness as the shattering of the Cartesian *cogito*" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 72). Indeed it is not hard to see how the idea of a shattered cogito constituted a major crisis for humanity. Without a consistent idea of a self, the problem of the meaning of life and the ethical dimension is shattered as well.

[3] The consequences of accepting the dissolution of the cogito are significant, as Van Den Hengel points out: "If the ego is no longer the radical origin or foundation, what role does the human self play in relation to the world or, to put it otherwise, in the ascertaining of truth?" (Van Den Hengel 1994, 470). As Hall points out, "Ricoeur was unwilling to follow the inheritors of Nietzsche's campaign against the rational faculty in reducing the self to a mere confluence of external or internal forces" (Hall 2007, 21).

that attestation is not just a kind of "soft belief" in the self that would be mid-way between Cartesian certainty and the Nietzschean overthrow of the self, but that it is a belief belonging to a realm different from that of epistemic certainty and of Nietzschean skepticism.[4]

This idea of attestation will be crucial to understanding the hermeneutics of the self that Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another*. In addition, the idea of attestation[5] can also be used as a clue to understand several important topics in his late philosophy up to his death in 2005.[6]

Attestation is mainly attestation of the self (Ricoeur 1992, 22). Through attestation the self presents itself as a being with the power to say, the power to do, the power to have an identity and to be responsible for its actions. Attestation can thus be defined as "the *assurance* of being oneself acting and suffering" (Ricoeur 1992, 22). Here we have the epistemological sense of attestation which helps to answer the question: What kind of knowledge does the self have about itself? The self is thus the being that is certain that it is an agent and a patient. However, attestation also has an ontological import and in that sense it can be defined as the "assurance – the credence and the trust –

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[4] Another way of expressing the same idea is to say that the cogito of attestation is a wounded cogito, but not a crushed cogito, as Greisch affirms: "But this wounded cogito is not a cogito *crushed* by the weight of a relentless suspicion. For the credence which characterizes attestation is also the 'trust' which copes with suspicion, thus making an 'attestation of the self' out of attestation" (Greisch 1996, 86).

[5] Attestation appears as an important philosophical concept in Ricoeur's work for the first time in *Oneself as Another* in 1990.

[6] In this sense *Oneself as Another* is linked to three of his late works: *The Just* (2000), *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004a) and *The Course of Recognition* (2005).

of *existing* in the mode of selfhood" (Ricoeur 1992, 302). In this sense attestation helps to answer the question: "Who is the self?" The self *is* the confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood.

What do these two senses have in common? In both cases it is a confidence, a trust, a credence, but in a sense other than that of a scientific certainty. As we can see, attestation possesses a very peculiar epistemological status. The status of this confidence can be understood only if we relate attestation to the hermeneutics of testimony.

3.   Attestation in the context of the hermeneutics of testimony

The word attestation has the same root as the word testimony. To attest is to give a testimony. Ricoeur himself proposes this link by stating that the kind of belief attestation implies is similar to the belief we have in the "the speech of the one giving testimony" (Ricoeur 1992, 21). Therefore, in order to understand the concept of attestation it is important to focus on the idea of testimony. Testimony, properly speaking, is given in court during a trial. By extension, we can also speak of the testimony of a historian who attests to a historical fact on the basis of some evidence. The object of a testimony is, in general, to ascertain facts, when they are not evident. The witness is supposed to have a privileged access to the facts, as we can imagine in the case of travelers who came back from a distant trip with fresh news about the places they had visited. Here the traveler has a privileged access to those facts and we have to rely on his testimony. However, the attestation of the self is a very particular type of testimony. It is not a testimony that is given in a court of law. It is not the report of historical facts by a

historian. Rather, it is a very peculiar kind of testimony that can be understood only in the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony. In this regard, Greisch proposes a connection between the hermeneutics of the self and the hermeneutics of testimony through the idea of attestation: "[We find] on the hand the *hermeneutics of testimony*, and on the other *the hermeneutics of the self*, whose hidden core is, in my opinion, attestation" (Greisch 1996, 81). For Greisch it is in attestation that the hermeneutics of the self and the hermeneutics of testimony come together. The key to the hermeneutics of the self is attestation in the sense that the self becomes a self only through the attestation of its own self. Attestation, in its turn, can be the key of the hermeneutics of testimony insofar as the attestation of the self can be well explained in the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony.

Ricoeur develops his hermeneutics of testimony in dialogue with Jean Nabert. The main essay where Ricoeur discusses this hermeneutics is the "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," a presentation he made at the Castelli symposium on testimony in Rome in 1972. In this essay Ricoeur starts by asking what "sort of philosophy makes a problem of testimony?" It is, he answers, a philosophy for "which the question of the absolute is a proper question, a philosophy which seeks to join an *experience* of the absolute to the *idea* of the absolute" (Ricoeur 1980, 119). Thus, the problem of testimony is related to a philosophy of religion where the absolute and its manifestations to a consciousness are relevant. Can we, then, apply this philosophy of testimony to the problem of attestation? Despite the fact that this philosophy arises in the context of a philosophy of religion, we find in this notion of testimony many elements that can be applied to the problem of

testimony in general (especially in what Ricoeur calls a "semantics of testimony") and to the problem of attestation in particular.

One of Ricoeur main contributions to the philosophy of testimony is the amplification of the idea of testimony beyond its legal or historical boundaries. Testimony, traditionally understood, is the report that somebody gives before a court of law about what she has seen or is the report given in a narration in order to establish the veracity of historical facts. Ricoeur, following Jean Nabert, amplifies this traditional idea of testimony in several ways:

> Testimony should be a philosophical problem and not limited to legal or historical contexts where it refers to the account of a witness who reports what he has seen. The term testimony should be applied to words, works, actions, and to lives which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience and history which nonetheless transcend experience and history. (Ricoeur 1980, 119-120)

Here we observe first that, not only can a person give a testimony, but also some words, some actions or some lives give a testimony. Secondly, the object of a testimony is not only facts, but the witness can attest to ideas, intentions and inspirations. What we have, then, is an amplification of the idea of testimony, beyond facts and into words, works, actions and lives. The content of those testimonies can be an idea, an inspiration or an intention. To understand fully the paragraph quoted above we would have to delve into Nabert's philosophy of religion, but this exceeds the purpose of this introduction. However, we can take this idea of testimony and see to what kinds of phenomena it can be applied. Ricoeur explains that the object of attestation is an intention, an inspiration or an idea that is at the heart of experience and history but transcends them. In my opinion, Ricoeur refers to phenomena that are crucial to human experience but whose meaning

goes beyond what is lived in a given moment. At the same time, they are phenomena that need to be attested to, because their existence cannot be empirically proven. I think that we can apply this idea of testimony to issues such as forgiveness or the meaning of life. These types of things can be said to be at the core of human experience, but their reality can only be attested to. I can never be completely sure if forgiveness happens. However, some people attest to the existence of forgiveness. Moreover, some words (as "I forgive you") and actions (like the act of forgiveness) attest to the existence of forgiveness. The same is the case with the idea of the meaning of life. Can I prove that life has a meaning? I cannot prove it. However, the lives of some people attest to the existence of a meaning in life, as the life of people completely devoted to a cause (I am thinking of people like Mother Teresa). It seems that the idea of the self is also a phenomenon of this kind: It is at the heart of human experience but transcends the experience and can only be attested to. The self is the kind of thing whose existence cannot be empirically proven; rather, we can only attest to its existence. I cannot demonstrate that there is a self, but the life, actions, and words of people attest to the existence of the self. The self is at the core of experience (indeed, without the idea of a self it would be hard to speak of an experience) and history, but at the same time it transcends experience and history in the sense that the self can project itself beyond the present experience and time (for example in promises). Thus, it makes sense to say that the self can only be attested to.

That the idea of the self fits well in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of testimony can be confirmed when we link the idea of the attestation of the self with what Ricoeur calls the

semantics of testimony. In what follows I will present some basic traits of the semantics

of testimony and I will link them to the idea of the attestation of the self.

The hermeneutics of testimony is precisely a hermeneutics, that is, to say, a

philosophy of interpretation, as Ricoeur points out: "I would like to try to show that such

a philosophy can only be a hermeneutics, that is, a philosophy of *interpretation*..."

(Ricoeur 1980, 143). Although testimonies are based on facts, those facts must always be

interpreted. Within the problem of the interpretation of testimonies we find what Ricoeur

calls the dialectic between meaning and event:

> Testimony demands to be interpreted because of the dialectic of meaning and
> event that traverses it… It signifies that interpretation cannot be applied to
> testimony from without as a violence which would be done to it. Interpretation,
> however, is intended to be the taking up again, in a different discourse, of an
> internal dialectic of testimony. (Ricoeur 1980, 144-145)

The events that must be interpreted are not independent of the interpretation that the

witness makes of them. Interpretation cannot be applied to testimony from outside.

Interpretation belongs to testimony in the sense that interpretation is part of the very

nature of a testimony. It is not the case that we first have a testimony and then the

testimony is interpreted. Rather, the event is appropriated with a meaning. We see the

same phenomenon in attestation. In attestation the self attests to itself with an

interpretation of its actions, narrations, words and other manifestations of itself that

cannot be separated from those actions, narrations and words. The latter are appropriated

by the self under a given interpretation.

This helps us move to the second main trait of testimony: The idea of suspicion. A

testimony can always be challenged and one of its main traits is precisely the possibility

of its being contested. The image of a trial expresses this idea very aptly. A testimony is given before a judge who decides whether it is credible or not:

> This juridical coloration of judgment is important to qualify testimony. The testimony which constitutes it has as its aim an act which decides in favor of…, which condemns or acquits, which confers or recognizes a right, which decides between two claims. (Ricoeur 1980, 125)

A testimony can be believed or suspected. It is not possible to give a testimony that is completely immune to suspicion. The idea of a testimony is associated with the idea of a trial in which the testimony will be accepted or rejected. The same holds for attestation. The attestation that the self gives of itself is always under suspicion and can always be accepted or rejected, even by the self itself, although not as Cartesian doubt, but rather as a lack of confidence in its own actions, narrations and words or as a crisis of identity. Trust in the witness plays a crucial role in the decision to accept or reject a testimony. Thus, it is not in vain that Ricoeur uses a juridical term to represent the certitude that we have about the self.

The third feature of the hermeneutics of testimony that connects it with attestation is the relationship between testimony and witness. There is a strong and necessary relationship between witness and testimony. In order to believe in a testimony, the witness must be reliable. This is true of any kind of testimony and trial. In the following passage Ricoeur expresses well the relationship between witness and testimony, referring particularly to the case of the devoted disciple of God:

> [T]he witness seals his bond to the cause that he defends by a public profession of his conviction, by the zeal of a propagator, by a personal devotion which can extend even to the sacrifice of his life. (Ricoeur 1980, 129)

In the witness' profession of faith (particularly in the case of religion) we find a "total engagement not only of words but of acts and, in the extreme, in the sacrifice of a life" (Ricoeur 1980, 131). Here, the idea of witness gains its strongest expression: "…the witness does not testify about isolated and contingent facts but about the radical, global meaning of human experience" (Ricoeur 1980, 131). We find the same close relationship between the witness and testimony in the idea of attestation. Attestation, by definition, supposes a total and complete engagement of the self. In the belief that I am a self my whole existence as a self is at stake.

The last service that a hermeneutics of testimony can render us is to help us understand the epistemological status of attestation. We have seen that a testimony can always be contested. Are testimony and attestation then a lower kind of knowledge, a kind of *doxa*? Ricoeur explicitly states that attestation is not *doxa* and thus not at a lower level with respect to science:

> Attestation presents itself first, in fact, as a kind of belief. But it is not a doxic belief, in the sense in which *doxa* (belief) has less standing than *epistēmē* (science, or better, knowledge). (Ricoeur 1992, 21)

Then, what is the epistemological status of attestation? The key is that attestation is not a theoretical knowledge, but rather a practical knowledge about the self. The categories of *episteme* and *doxa*, traditionally understood, belong to theoretical knowledge, whereas the categories of attestation belong to a practical level that is more closely related to personal commitment than to states of affairs of things. To judge testimony by the standards we use to judge scientific truths would be to misunderstand the epistemological

status of testimony and attestation, which belong to a different epistemic realm, as

Ricoeur points out:

> In terms of the modality of judgment, the interpretation of testimony is only probable, but it only appears as such when compared to a scientific ideal which governs only one of the different requirements of thought, which reigns in only one of the centers of reflection, namely knowledge of objects. (Ricoeur 1980, 150)

However, it would be a mistake to think that the truth of testimony (and consequently of

attestation) is not subject to criticism. Testimony and attestation must be criticized and

analyzed, but not with the criteria that we use to measure empirical truths.

4.   Attestation in the context of the hermeneutics of the self

The last context in which I want to place attestation is the context of Ricoeur's

hermeneutics of the self. In a way we can say that Ricoeur's whole project is a

"hermeneutics of the self" in the sense that his philosophy is a hermeneutical effort to

make sense of human existence. However, the philosophical scope of what Ricoeur calls

a hermeneutics of the self is more specific. Indeed in Ricoeur we find many works that

touch on an enormous diversity of topics that in a way are related to the self but that are

not specifically about the self (as his work on narrative, metaphor, legal research, etc.).

Ricoeur proposes a specific hermeneutics of the self in *Oneself as Another*, where he

develops the idea of attestation more thoroughly. The main questions of the hermeneutics

of the self are "who is speaking?," "who is acting?," "who is telling his or her story?" and

"who is the moral subject of imputation?" (Ricoeur 1992, 169).[7] However, the general question – and the most important one – is "who is the self?" Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is developed through three main kinds of dialectics, the dialectic of reflection and analysis, the dialectic of *ipse*/*idem* and the dialectic of sameness and otherness.[8]

In what follows I will present briefly the three main dialectics that Ricoeur develops in his hermeneutics of the self and I will explain summarily how each chapter of this dissertation concerns these dialectics and what the role of attestation is in each dialectic. Although the chapters are not completely structured around these dialectics, each chapter (particularly the first four) is an effort to unveil the role of attestation in the dialectics of the self. My hope is that by the end of the dissertation it will become clear to the reader what Ricoeur means when he states in *Oneself as Another* that attestation is the password for his hermeneutics of the self. In addition to this, I will show how attestation can serve as a bridge to an ontology of the self. I will now proceed to present each dialectic.

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[7] Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is closely linked with the problem of practical philosophy, as Van Den Hengel points out: "…the concern of a practical philosophy has become the question of selfhood in all its obviousness, as in the question 'Who am I?' or in all its opaqueness, as in the question 'What is the 'I'?' or 'What is the self?'" (Van Den Hengel 1994, 458-459). We could say that the hermeneutics of the self is contained in practical philosophy, whose main topics are the human self and human action.

[8] The fact that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is developed through three main dialectics is a direct consequence of the fact that hermeneutics is a philosophy of detours, as Van den Hengel points out: "Hermeneutics is a philosophy of detours, seemingly endless detours, unraveling the question 'who,' that is, 'Who is the self?'" (Van den Hengel 2002, 73).

a) The dialectic of reflection and analysis[9]

Ricoeur states that the first philosophical intention of *Oneself as Another* "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'" (Ricoeur 1992, 1). This first dialectic is the immediate consequence of Ricoeur's idea of the self. Since the self is not self-transparent, we cannot pretend to have an immediate access to the self. The main analytical tools are provided by analytic philosophy, mainly the philosophy of action and language developed in the Anglo-Saxon world. Through analysis we can have an indirect access to the self. For Ricoeur, the "*recourse to analysis… is the price to pay for a hermeneutics characterized by the indirect manner of positing the self*" (Ricoeur 1992, 17, Ricoeur's emphasis). Hermeneutics is a philosophy of detours. There is not a specific reason to choose analytic philosophy. Ricoeur chooses it simply because he considers that it is the richest in promise and result (Ricoeur 1992, 17).[10] This detour of analysis can be explained as the detour through the *what* of experience in order to access the *who* of the self. Analysis in general and analytic philosophy in particular, allow us to take the

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[9] Van den Hengel summarizes this dialectic in the following way: "According to Ricoeur, the self is mediated by a dialectic of explanation and understanding. The self is only mediately available. Hence he insists that access to the self demands the effort of working through the analytical explanations of the self… Ricoeur's explanation of the self is derived from Ordinary Language Philosophy, pragmatics, and narratology. There is no understanding of the self without using explanatory procedures" (Van den Hengel 1994, 466).

[10] The tools of analysis are applied mainly to human actions. Here Van den Hengel emphasizes some of the dimensions of Ricoeur's philosophy of action: "The theory of human action, underpinning practical philosophy as part of its analytical detours, is constituted out of fragments from the analysis of action in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of action, narrative theory, and ethical, moral, and political determinations of action" (Van den Hengel 2002, 73).

detour of the *what* of the action in order to have access to the *who* of the agent. The self cannot be immediately posited. We have to take the detour of the objectifications of the self.[11] The detour chosen in *Oneself As Another* is the detour of analysis.

This dialectic appears mainly in Ricoeur's analysis of the capacities of the self. The indirect approach to the self is seen in the analysis of the different capacities of the self. The analysis of the capacities of the self will be presented in the three first chapters of this dissertation. In the first chapter, I will analyze the capacity to speak, to act, to narrate and to be imputable. In the second chapter (within the topic of personal identity) I will analyze the capacity to make promises. In the third chapter, I will analyze the capacity to remember. These analyses will make explicit the dialectic between analysis and reflection. The analysis of these capacities will help us reflect on their meaning.

The purpose of this analysis of the capacities of the self is to discover the role of attestation in them. We will find that without the idea of attestation, namely, the belief that I am myself acting and suffering, the capacities of the self would remain external to the self. Through attestation we make it possible to connect fruitfully the self to its capacities. Attestation as a belief in being a self, allows the self to appropriate its own capacities, to claim and reclaim them in the form, for example, of "it is *me*, speaking, acting, narrating." Thus, at the level of this first dialectic of analysis and reflection, attestation allows the self to *appropriate* its own capacities. In this way, attestation

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[11] It is important to note that it is only a "detour" in the sense that at some point we need to "return" to the self by an act of appropriation, as Van Den Hengel states: "The human self is appropriated by way of an analysis of the "What?" and the "Why?" of action" (Van Den Hengel 1994, 466).

completes the dialectic of analysis and reflection.[12] While the use of analytical tools helps us analyze the capacities, attestation works as the reflective moment when we try to make full sense of what it means to be capable. Attestation helps us realize that to be capable is mainly to believe, to trust in our own capacities. Without attestation, the dialectic between analysis and reflection would not be complete in the sense that we would lack the link connecting the self to its capacities.

b) The dialectic of *ipse/idem*

The second dialectic of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is the dialectic between *ipse/idem* (Ricoeur 1992, 2). *Ipse* and *idem* are two forms of identity. Each identity corresponds to a different model of permanence in time. The identity characterized by *idem* is what we in general assign to things and it is based on the permanence of some qualities or in the uninterrupted continuity over time, among other criteria. Human identity is more aptly depicted by what Ricoeur calls *ipse* identity. *Ipse* identity is based on the capacity of the self to affirm its identity despite changes, as it is evidenced, for example, in promises, where the self affirms that it will be the same ("I will be there") despite any change in its character.

What is interesting to note here is that *ipse* identity is built into a dialectical relationship with *idem* identity. This means that the affirmation of our identity over time

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[12] It is important to note that when we speak of the dialectic between reflection and analysis we are not stating that the self needs to analyze and to reflect on their capacities. The dialectic of reflection and analysis is a requirement of the hermeneutical analysis of the self. We need analysis because the self is not self-transparent and we need reflection to make full sense of the meaning of the self.

needs to find "support" in some permanence of traits over time, in some uninterrupted

continuity or in the identification with some values, ideals, etc. This dialectic, as we will

see, is well evidenced in narrative identity, where the self constructs its identity (as *ipse*

identity) by affirming that a given narrative configuration, that is, a specific way of

narrating a life, expresses its identity. That act of narrative configuration is made in a

dialectical relationship to *idem* identity, insofar as many of the elements that we take into

consideration when we give a narrative account of our life are based in some of the

criteria of the *idem* identity, such as the permanence of some traits of character or in the

uninterrupted continuity of our life. Attestation, here, appears as the trust and the

confidence that a given narrative configuration expresses who I am. Without this

confidence the self would not be able to *affirm* that a given narrative configuration

expresses its identity better than another one. Thus, attestation is the belief/trust that a

given narrative configuration expresses the self's personal identity. This dialectic

between *ipse*/*idem* identity and the role of attestation in it will be analyzed in the second

chapter of the dissertation.

c) The dialectic of sameness/otherness

Ricoeur states that the "third philosophical intention [of *Oneself as Another*] – this

one explicitly included in the title – is related to the preceding one, in the sense that *ipse*-

identity involves a dialectic complementary to that of selfhood and sameness, namely the

dialectic of *self* and the *other than self*" (Ricoeur 1992, 3). Thus, the third dialectic is the

dialectic of self and the other or the dialectic between sameness and otherness. This dialectic is the most important of the three.[13] The self is constituted in a dialectical relationship to what is other than self. At the core of the self there is a threefold otherness: The otherness of the body, the otherness of other people and the otherness of conscience. How is it possible for the self to be constituted by an otherness? This can only happen because the otherness of the self is in a dialectical relationship to the self. It is an otherness that is assumed as part of the self. It is an otherness that expresses the self. It is not something alien to the self. The otherness of the self can be assumed as part of the self thanks to attestation. The self attests to its own self by attesting to its otherness. The self believes in being a self (attestation) by assuming the otherness of its own body *as* expressing its own self, by assuming the otherness of other people *as* expressing its own esteem (in the figure of self esteem) and by assuming the otherness of conscience *as* expressing its own values in the phenomenon of conviction. Thus, through attestation the self *assumes* its otherness as expressing its self.

In the first four chapters I will explore the hermeneutical role of attestation where we will see that attestation works as a hermeneutical key insofar it has the three main functions aforementioned: Appropriation, affirmation and assumption (in the sense of

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[13] Van Den Hengel reminds us that this dialectic is the most important of the three: "For Ricoeur this dialectic is by far the most encompassing. It was important enough for it to give rise to the title of the book. It readdresses the perennial philosophical theme of the Same and the Other. Here the dialectical opposite of the self is not the temporal sameness or constancy of the human character, but the other in its various guises" (Van Den Hengel 1994, 467). Ricoeur, along the same lines, states: "[T]he dialectic of the same and the other crowns the first two dialectics" (Ricoeur 1992, 18).

assuming what is other for the self). These three functions will be complemented by the idea of recognition that will be developed in the fifth chapter. In this last chapter, we will see that the self can attest to its own self only if it is recognized by others in its capacities. Without the experience of recognition (that is indeed an experience of mutual recognition), self-attestation is not possible. Indeed, what we can call the hermeneutical role of attestation – summarized as appropriation, affirmation, assumption – is only possible through the mediation of others in the form of mutual recognition.

In the conclusion to the dissertation, I will present how these hermeneutical roles of attestation help us make the transition from a hermeneutics of the self to an ontology of the self. Indeed, the three hermeneutical functions of appropriation, affirmation and assumption (in addition to the issue of recognition that makes these hermeneutical functions possible) place us at the threshold of an ontology of the self. The ontology of the self that I will present is in many ways along the lines of the ontological remarks on the self that Ricoeur himself makes in *Oneself as Another*. My contribution, in this respect, is to show how this ontology can be derived from Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self through the idea of attestation in its three main hermeneutical functions: Appropriation, affirmation and assumption. I will propose that attestation in its hermeneutical function shows us that the self is constructed in a dialectical relationship with otherness: The otherness of the capacities of the self, the otherness of the identity as sameness, the otherness of its body, of other people and conscience. In this sense, the self is its own otherness. At the same time I will propose, as an ontological trait, that the self constructs its selfhood by appropriating its own otherness. This will be in line with the idea of the self as *dynamis* that Ricoeur proposes. After analyzing the ontological

implications of attestation I hope that we will be able to make complete sense of the main

thesis of Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*: We are a self constructed in relation with

otherness in a process of becoming ourselves through otherness.

Chapter One

Attestation and the Phenomenology of Capable Being

1.1. Introduction

Ricoeur introduces the notion of attestation as an alternative to the idea of the self as certitude (as it is proposed in the Cartesian tradition) and the dissolution of the self (as it is suggested in the Nietzschean tradition). Attestation appears as a kind of *middle ground*. The self is not self-evident nor is it a mere illusion. Rather, the self must be attested to in the form of belief and trust. Who is the one that attests to the self? The self is attested to by the very self in an act of trusting in its own existence. Thus, attestation is mainly self-attestation.

The attestation of the self finds a privileged expression in the attestation of its capacities. The self attests to its own self by recognizing itself in the capacities it has. This is consistent with Ricoeur's claim that it is not possible to have a direct access to the self. There is a fundamental opacity at the heart of the self that makes necessary the detour through what he calls "the 'object' side of experience" which is expressed precisely through the capacities of the self (Ricoeur 2005a, 93). Because the self is not transparent to itself, the self must be grasped *in action*, that is, in its main expression: Its

capacities.[14] However, the self is not only attested to in the actions of the self. The self is

also attested to in the "passions" of the self.[15] In the fourth chapter I will discuss

attestation in relationship to the passivity of the self expressed by the body, other people

and conscience.

In this chapter, I analyze attestation in relation to each of the main capacities that

Ricoeur examines: The capacity to say, the capacity to act, the capacity to narrate and the

capacity to be imputable (Ricoeur 2002, 280). In a conference given in 1999 – a few

years before he died – Ricoeur ventured to offer a kind of summary of his main concern

as a philosopher and mentioned the topic of human capabilities, specifically the four main

capacities mentioned above, as what bestows a unity to his whole philosophy:

> When I try to cast a retrospective glance to my work, I agree that it is – for the
> sake of a discourse of the second order – a personal reinterpretation offered to my
> readers. And I must say that it is only recently that I felt allowed to give a name to
> this overarching problematics. I mean the problem of human capability, capability
> as the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology, or, to put it in more simple
> terms belonging to ordinary language, the realm of the theme expressed by the
> verb *I can*… It can be read in terms of four verbs, which the "*I can*" modifies: *I
> can speak*, *I can do things*, *I can tell a story*, and *I can be imputed*, an action can
> be imputed to me as its true author. (Ricoeur 2002, 280)

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[14] Hall makes explicit the link between attestation and capacities, stating that selfhood is
evidenced in action: "Ricoeur claimed that selfhood is attested to in the capacity to act and in the abilities
of the will to leave its traces on the course of events in the world" (Hall 2007, 21). Later, Halls adds an
ontological consequence to the link between selfhood and capacities. Because the self is attested in its
capacities we can affirm that "the *I* is, first and foremost, an agent" (Hall 2007, 21).

[15] The articulation between the active and passive side of our experience is nicely explained by
Ricoeur in his book *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Ricoeur 1966). For more on
this topic, see David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative. The Creative Tension between Love and
Justice*, pp. 22-25 (Hall 2007).

In fact, the notion of human capabilities in Paul Ricoeur's philosophy seems to cover a whole range of topics. *I can speak* is related to his investigations in the philosophy of language and hermeneutics; *I can do things*, to his research on philosophy of action; *I can tell a story*, to narrative; and *I can be imputed* to ethics. Thus, in analyzing Ricoeur's phenomenology of *the capable being* we will at the same time be gaining a good perspective on some of the main topics of his philosophy, and this will be helpful to understand the concept of attestation.

Why does Ricoeur choose these capacities and not others? To answer this question, it must be noted, first, that Ricoeur does not choose the same capacities in all the texts where he addresses this issue. At least in *Oneself as Another*, in *The Just* and in the article *Ethics and Human Capability*, he selects the four capacities of speaking, acting, narrating and being imputable. However, in *The Course of Recognition* he adds the capacity of remembering and promising. Thus, it does not seem that there is any fundamental reason to select the capacities to speak, to act, to narrate and to be imputable. All Ricoeur wants is to give a good account of the structure of the capable being, without denying that there are other very important capacities that can be included in a broad understanding of the capacity to act. However, these four capacities are not chosen randomly, either. Actually, they have unity and coherence. According to Ricoeur the four capacities mentioned have a cumulative function, that is, the more complex capacities suppose the basic ones. Thus, language is not a capability among others, but the condition for the possibility of all other meaningful capacities (Ricoeur 2002, 280). The capacity to act is built upon the capacity to speak, insofar as action is linguistically mediated. The capacity to narrate has a linguistic structure and presupposes our capacity to act (we tell

stories about what we do). Finally, as we will see later in this chapter, the capacity to be imputed presupposes a being that has language and that is able to act and narrate. In order to recognize our responsibility in our actions, we have to be able to act and to make sense of our actions by giving an account of them (telling a story).

The main problem that we will have to solve in this *phenomenology of the capable being* (Ricoeur 2005a, 89-134)[16] is the relationship between the self and its capacities. It is not enough to just present some capacities. We also need to show the link between these capacities and the self. The main thesis I present in this chapter is that attestation establishes the connection between the self and its capacities. If we look at the human capacities from the perspective of an observer, we find several actions: Speaking, doing, narrating, and being imputed. How can we assume that these actions are the manifestations of a being *capable* of performing them? To answer this question the concept of attestation is crucial. We can affirm that an action belongs to an agent only thanks to a kind of credence or of confidence in its capacity to act. However, this confidence does not work at the level of the certainty proper to the sciences, because there is no way to provide an empirical verification of the capacity to act. This knowledge works as a belief in our capacities, which Ricoeur calls attestation. Of course, this confidence can always be challenged. "Are you sure that you meant what you said? Can you really claim ownership of your own words? Are you really committed to what you

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[16] Ricoeur calls this phenomenology a "phenomenology of the capable being." However, when he describes the different capabilities, he uses, in general, the word capacities (*capacités*) rather capabilities (*capabilités*). I do not think that in Ricoeur there is a conceptual difference between capacities and capabilities. For that reason, I will use the term capacities to refer to both capabilities and capacities.

said?" The answer can only be given by the agent in the form of a reassurance, not in the form of a demonstration. "Yes, believe me, I mean that." Thus, at all levels of capacities we have to show how the relationship between the agent and the action is forged. As I said, this relationship has the form of attestation.

Attestation is not the only conceptual device available to show the relationship between the agent and the action. This relationship can be shown using another important concept: Recognition. Indeed, the agent can recognize his actions as belonging to him and the agent can recognize *himself* in his actions. The path of recognition as a way of connecting the action to the agent is indeed not very different from the idea of attestation. A close semantic kinship exists between the two concepts. The connection is so strong that I will devote a complete chapter (chapter five) to examine the relationship between attestation and recognition.

In the following pages I will present each of the four main capacities mentioned above (to speak, to do things, to narrate and to be imputable) and show how in each of these capacities the concept of attestation makes possible the connection between the agent and the action.

1.2.   To be able to speak

It is no coincidence that the analysis of capacities starts with the capacity to speak. This capacity has a privileged place among the other capacities. First of all, the capacity to speak is the main tool through which persons recognize themselves as capable beings. Ricoeur gives us the example of the Greek Heroes. The characters of Homer and the

tragic heroes always speak of their actions and recognize themselves as the "cause" and the principle of what they do (Ricoeur 2005a, 94). At the same time, we can say that the capacity to speak is the foundation for all the other capacities. Language is not just a capacity among others, but, according to Ricoeur, it is the condition for the possibility of all other meaningful capacities (Ricoeur 2002, 280).

The two studies where Ricoeur discusses the issue of language and the capacity to speak in *Oneself as Another* are *Person and Identifying Reference. A Semantic Approach* and *Utterance and the Speaking Subject. A Pragmatic Approach*. It is important to note that in these studies the concept of attestation is not mentioned except in a note.[17] However, as I will try to demonstrate here, the idea of attestation is present in the capacity to speak.

1.2.1. The semantic and the pragmatic approach

Ricoeur's analysis of the capacity to speak in *Oneself as Another* uses the tools of semantics and pragmatics. The semantic approach allows us to analyze the capacity to speak from the manner in which the speaking subject appears in language. The main claim is that persons (as speaking subjects) are entities about whom we speak (Ricoeur 1992, 40). We can speak about persons because we can identify them with an operation

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[17] This leads Greisch to say: "…at first sight, the first two studies… do not refer to attestation at all" (Greisch 1996, 86).

that Ricoeur, following Strawson, calls "identifying reference" (Ricoeur 1992, 27).[18]

Ricoeur mentions as the main tools to identify individuals, definite descriptors, proper

names and indicators (Ricoeur 1992, 28).

From the semantic approach, again following Strawson, we learn that persons are

basic particulars (Ricoeur 1992, 31). Basic particulars are primitive concepts that cannot

be defined but have to be simply presupposed (Ricoeur 1992, 31). Strawson mentions

two main basic particulars: Persons and physical bodies (Ricoeur 1992, 31). The fact that

persons are designated as basic particulars gives them the possibility of being identified

and re-identified in language (Ricoeur 1992, 32), thanks mainly to physical predicates

(Ricoeur 1992, 36). In addition to the physical predicates, persons have mental

predicates.[19] Ricoeur notes that mental predicates have the quality of keeping the same

meaning, independently of the person to whom they belong (Ricoeur 1992, 38). This kind

of indeterminacy is what allows these predicates to be ascribed to "oneself" and to

"someone else" (Ricoeur 1992, 39).[20]

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[18] As Meech says, this semantics "brackets the speaker and situation. At this level the person is not yet a self (i.e., is not self-designating) but is something referred to in sentences" (Meech 2006, 75).

[19] The problem of attestation, according to Ricoeur, emerges precisely in the "discussion of the relation of imputation of mental predicates to the entity of the person" (Ricoeur 1992, 45, note 6). Indeed, the problem of ascribing psychic predicates to a subject seems to be about the confidence (attestation) that the self has in the fact that those predicates belong to itself.

[20] Meech offers a good summary of the semantic approach: "First, a person is at the same time a body; second, the physical and the mental properties of a person are attributed to one and the same entity; third, the mental predicates maintain the same meaning as they circulate among the personal pronouns (I hurt, you hurt, she hurts, etc.). There is thus double attribution (physical and mental predicates to a person) without double reference (as in the Cartesian body and soul)" (Meech 2006, 76).

This semantic approach, which we can call the "path of referentiality," gives us only a limited idea of the person. The main problem is that the semantic approach only refers to a person as someone whom we can identify in our discourse (with some mental and physical predicates) but without a fundamental trait of personhood: Without the capacity of self-designation, understood as the capacity of the person to refer to herself as the true author of her speech. Thus, if we want to have a complete idea of person, we have to follow a new path that we can call the "path of reflexivity," which is developed in pragmatics (Ricoeur 1992, 32).

The reflexivity of statements is particularly well evidenced in what, following John Searle's speech acts theory, is called the illocutionary act that is implied in a statement. The illocutionary act "consists in what the speaker *does in* speaking" (Ricoeur 1992, 43). For Ricoeur this element of speech acts shows the reflexive aspect of a statement. It is always someone who is doing something through speech. Thus, thanks to pragmatics, the reflexivity of the utterance is evidenced, although it is not always transparent in the statements. In some acts, the commitment of the self to the utterance is clear, like when somebody says "I promise." In those cases it is evident that it is that person who promises. In other speech acts, the self is not as apparent. For example, in phrases like "it is raining." In these cases, in order to show the commitment of the utterer we have to rephrase it in the form "*I* affirm that it is raining" (Ricoeur 1992, 43).

In the pragmatic level of speech, we could find attestation easily since in each utterance the subject is present, as Ricoeur shows following the speech acts theory. However, Ricoeur claims that in these cases we are dealing with a "reflexivity without

selfhood: A 'self' without 'oneself'" (Ricoeur 1992, 47). This reflexivity without

selfhood seems to be due to the fact that pragmatics concentrates on the "factualness of

the utterance" more than on the speaking subject.[21] The "one" speaking can be

"everyone;" the commitment proper to attestation does not appear.

1.2.2. Attestation and the capacity to speak

So far, we have analyzed two approaches to the capacity to speak, the semantic

and the pragmatic. The referential approach (semantics) focuses on the person as

somebody about whom we speak. The reflexive approach emphasizes the first person as a

subject who designates himself in speech and for whom a world is opened. We could say

that in one case we have a first person perspective and in the other a third person

perspective. These two perspectives seem to collapse into each other. If we take the third

person point of view, that is, the point of view of an observer, the speaking subject is a

content of the world. If we take the perspective of the speaker, we find that the person

talks *about* the world but *she*, as speaking subject, is not part of the world. It is true that

she can speak about herself, but in that case she becomes part of the discourse in a

reflexive way, not in a direct manner. We cannot *at the same time* be the content and the

subject of a discourse. Ricoeur calls this problem of the world unfolding from a

perspective that never becomes directly part of the world of the speaker the "aporia of

anchoring." He summarizes the problem in these words: "The privileged point of

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[21] Greisch expresses the same idea in a very succinct manner: "[Pragmatics] puts the main stress on the *factualness* of the utterance, which in its turns creates new aporias that Ricoeur analyzes at length…" (Greisch 1996, 87).

perspective on the world which each speaking subject is, is the limit of the world and not one of its contents" (Ricoeur 1992, 51). We could say the ego of the speaking subject is in some respect *not in the world* because it is the point of view from which a complete world is unfolded, but at the same time *it is in the world* insofar as it can be identified and addressed by others.

The solution to the seeming conflict between the two perspectives can be found in combining these two approaches, semantic and pragmatic. Ricoeur thinks that the convergence between the idea of a subject as the world-limit and the idea of a person as the object of identifying reference is possible thanks to a process of the same nature as the process of inscription of our names in public records (Ricoeur 1992, 53). When a name was given to me at birth, this name was inscribed in records. I received a location in a family, a place and a time. Thus, I became simultaneously a subject from whose perspective a world is unfolded and an entity identifiable in discourse by a community, or, as Meech states, the "social institution of naming inscribes the I within a social map of persons in the world" (Meech 2006, 76). Greisch sees in this inscription a place where the phenomenon of attestation can be grounded:

> This inscription itself presupposes a special act of utterance, *appellation*… As a hypothesis, I propose to say that this new phenomenon, appellation, also contains the place of attestation engraved within itself. (Greisch 1996, 88)

Although Greisch does not explain in greater detail why appellation contains the place of attestation engraved within itself, his claim makes sense. As we will see in the fifth chapter, attestation is very much related to recognition by others. So, the appellation of others can very well be one of the grounds of attestation at the linguistic level.

However, Ricoeur claims that the phenomenon of inscription does not solve the aporia between semantics and pragmatics. He goes beyond this process to refer to a more fundamental reality that can be the ground for the conjunction of these two paths. For him, the foundation of this conjunction can only be discovered by stepping outside the philosophy of language and inquiring into what kind of being we are, that allows us to identify ourselves as an objective person and as a reflective subject (Ricoeur 1992, 54).

This strange constitution of the human being is related to the fact that we possess a lived body which "belongs" to two dimensions. Our body, as a basic particular, can be identified and re-identified in discourse and at the same time our body refers to an "I" that is an irreplaceable center of perspective on the world and in that sense not a content of the world (Ricoeur 1992, 55). For Ricoeur, this problematic of one's body is related to the ontological status of a being (us) that comes into the world in its own incarnation (Ricoeur 1992, 55).

Since we are incarnated beings we have a dual nature: We are one of the objects of the world at the same time that we are a point from which a world is unfolded. However, incarnation is not enough to explain how despite this dual nature we live with the certainty that we are one and the same self. From a semantic point of view, we are objects of discourse. From the pragmatic point of view we are subjects of discourse. The fact that these two apparently opposite perspectives are united in the core of the self is made possible by the certainty we have that the individual who appears in public and the individual who is a pole of reference – from whom a whole world unfolds – is actually the same. This certitude works as an act of attestation of the self. Thus, thanks to

attestation I can believe that the one that appears in the public sphere as a speaking subject is the same as the one from whom a world is unfolded. Thus, in attestation the semantic and the pragmatic come together.

Along the same lines, Josué Pérez, explains that the lived body offers a way of solving the paradox of the dual status of the person whereby it is both part of an identifying reference and reflexive. With the phenomenon of the lived body, we are, he writes, "at the threshold of attestation" (Pérez 2001, 96). However, Pérez does not explain how the phenomenon of attestation arises from the phenomenon of the lived body.

1.3. To be able to do things[22]

The capacity to do things summarizes all the other capacities discussed in this chapter. In fact, the capacity to speak, to narrate and to be imputable, are expressed in actions that can be understood as part of the general capacity to *do* things. Ricoeur explicitly reminds us of the famous phrase of Austin that to speak is to do things with words (Ricoeur 2006, 18). In addition, the analysis of the capacity to do things shows that for Ricoeur the idea of human capacity is not restricted to the capacities he focuses on but includes every kind of capacity.

Ricoeur devotes several articles and chapters of books to the analysis of the capacity to do. These texts, mostly written in the 1980s and 1990s, constitute what we

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[22] For a complete analysis of the idea of action in Ricoeur see John Van Den Hengel "Can There be a Science of Action?" (Van Den Hengel, 2002).

can call Ricoeur's theory of human action.[23] In the following paragraphs I will present the main components of his view on human action. In addition, I will show how the concept of attestation helps us to gain a more complete idea of the capacity to act.

1.3.1. Ricoeur's concept of action

Ricoeur's reflection on human action is consistent with his methodology of going through the objective side of human experience in order to complement reflection with analysis. Here we see how the resources of semantics and pragmatics are helpful in achieving a good understanding of human action but also why they are at the same time not enough for a complete grasping of this topic.

According to Ricoeur, the capacity to act can be defined as the ability "to make events happen" (Ricoeur 2006, 19) or the "capacity to generate changes at the physical, interpersonal and social level" (Ricoeur 2006, 19). We will see that despite the simplicity of these definitions, to try to define and understand human actions is a very complex task. From these definitions, we realize that there are two elements in human actions that need to be articulated and understood simultaneously. On the one hand we have what we can call the "external side" of actions, i.e., the changes in the world that are produced as a result of an action. On the other hand, the "internal side" of action, i.e., the fact that an action is the result of a human will that is exteriorized. Ricoeur calls the articulation of these two aspects of action the problem of ascription, and it is one of his main concerns in

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[23] Let me mention, among others, *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1992), *Initiative* (Ricoeur 1991c), *Explanation and Understanding* (Ricoeur 1991a) and *Practical Reason* (1991b).

his theory of action. He holds that the idea of ascription is contained in the very meaning of an action:

> [The] ascription of action to an agent is part of the meaning of action as a capacity. It characterizes as "agency" this tight link between action and agent. We may then say that the action belongs to the agent who appropriates it and calls it his own. (Ricoeur 2006, 19)

Ascription is a problem because the two dimensions of action mentioned above (the external and the internal) seem to belong to two different realms. Action as an event in the world appears as part of what Kant calls the world of appearances, the realm of causality. Action, as an initiative of the agent belongs to the realm of freedom, as a free intervention in the world. Can these two realms be reconciled? Ricoeur offers an interesting way of reconciling them. Before discussing his attempt at a solution, I will present the position of Anscombe and Davidson, as discussed in *Oneself as Another*. I will thus rely on Ricoeur's exposition and focus on what Ricoeur sees relevant. Anscombe and Davidson represent a valid and complete attempt to show the link between the agent and the action. Nonetheless, for Ricoeur both positions fall short of offering a solution. His criticism of these two theories will lay the ground for an understanding of his own views.

1.3.2. Intention as the link between the agent and the action

Anscombe chooses the notion of intention as what distinguishes an action from other events in the world. She distinguishes three possible uses of the word intention: Having done or doing something intentionally, acting with a certain intention, intending to (Ricoeur 1992, 68). She chooses the first use, i.e., the intention in the adverbial form

(to do something intentionally) to explain actions. This use of the word intention allows her to analyze the action from a descriptive point of view independently of any consideration of the relation of possession between the action and the agent (Ricoeur 1992, 68).[24] This method has the advantage of providing us an idea of action that can be analyzed in terms of its grammatical structure.

For Anscombe an intentional action is an action about which I can answer successfully the question "why?" In answering the question concerning the "why" of an action we cannot distinguish clearly between causes and reasons-for. In some cases, our justifications for actions take the form of a cause (why did you march? Military music excites me). This is particularly the case when we refer to backward looking motives (like in cases of vengeance) (Ricoeur 1992, 69). However in forward-looking motives intention acts more as a "reason for."

Another aspect of Anscombe's theory of action that is important for Ricoeur is her notion of knowledge without observation. For her, intentional action constitutes a subclass of things known without observation (Ricoeur 1992, 70). How can I know that I am doing something? I do not know it by observing it, but I know it by doing it. It is what she calls practical knowledge.

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[24] A common trait in the analytical approach to action is that it focuses more in the action that in the agent, as Van den Hengel points out: "The analytic philosophers of action have trained their eyes to look for action among the events in the world. In order to determine what counts as an action, analytic philosophy looks for an explanation for the action taken as what happens" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 76).

These elements could lead us to think that in Anscombe's framework the relation between the action and the agent could find a good articulation. However, Anscombe, in focusing on the question "why?" and the acceptable answers to that question, privileges the objective side of action, and this, according to Ricoeur, obliterates the agent (Ricoeur 1992, 70). Thus, the excessive concern with the truth of the description (the objective side of action) diminishes any interest in ascribing the action to the agent (Ricoeur 1992, 72).

For Davidson, as for Anscombe, what distinguishes an action from other events in the world is intention. He also chooses the adverbial form of intention (to do something intentionally), because with intention taken in the adverbial form, actions can be more easily explained (Ricoeur 1992, 75). The explanation of an action has the form of a rationalization. Someone has a reason to do something if she has a certain "pro-attitude" (a favorable attitude, an inclination for the specific action) and a kind of belief that the action belongs to the category of action that the agent wants to perform (Ricoeur 1992, 76). An intentional action is an action done "for a reason." For Davidson, to know the reason for an action is equivalent to knowing the intention with which the action was done. Finally, according to Davidson explanation by reasons is a subset of causal explanation (Ricoeur 1992, 76), and this is confirmed by the fact that we usually ask someone what led or caused him to do it.

The main objection Ricoeur has to both Davidson's and Anscombe's idea of action is that in choosing the adverbial form of "intention" they overlook three main phenomenological characteristics of action (Ricoeur 1992, 81):[25]

a) *The orientation to the future*: The idea of "doing something intentionally" usually accounts for a past action, but most actions, indeed, are oriented toward the future, particularly when we plan them.

b) *The delay in accomplishing*: In action there is a logical sequence where the intention precedes the action. This "delay in accomplishing" is lost in the adverbial form of intention.

c) *The implication of the agent:* With the adverbial form the agent does not appear clearly, because it leads us to focus our attention on the "what-why" of the action more than on the "who."

For Ricoeur in order to explain the nature of action, we have to focus on the third sense of the concept of intention that Anscombe describes, that is, the "intention to…" (Ricoeur 1992, 79-87). In the idea of intention as "intention to" there clearly appears the idea of a future, for example, when we are discussing our plans (I have the "intention to" take a vacation). In the "intention to," the delay in accomplishing also becomes clear. I

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[25] Ricoeur's criticism here is specifically directed at Davidson. However, since Anscombe chooses the same type of intention as Davidson, we can apply the criticism to her as well.

have an intention and then I perform an action. Finally, in this use of intention the agent

is manifest, because it is always *somebody* who has the "intention to" do something.[26]

In giving preference to this use of the concept of intention the problem of action is

no longer about the truth of a description but about the veracity of an action, i.e., a

problem about the implication of the agent in the action and about the fact that the agent

is the true author of the action (see Ricoeur 1992, 72-73).[27] The problem of veracity

pushes us away from analytic philosophy toward the realm of phenomenology and

particularly toward the problem of attestation. However, before entering that terrain, I

will show how Ricoeur tries to sort out an idea of action that can do justice to both the

agent and the action.[28]

1.3.3. Ricoeur's theory of action

As it is the case with other topics in Ricoeur, it is hard to speak of a unified theory

of action. However, through an analysis of several texts in which he reflects on human

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[26] For Ricoeur analytic philosophy when it deals with actions as what we "intend–to" misses its essence by treating them as mere events, as Van den Hengel points out: "According to Ricoeur, analytic philosophy seems constantly tempted to let these actions be dealt with in the same manner as past actions. Actions intended to be done, however, are not events. They are not "something" that I can describe. If we seek an explanation of such projected actions, we must look for it in the motivation, the expression of intention, and the ability of the agent" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 77). According to Reagan, "only a phenomenology of attestation can account for 'intending-to'" (Reagan 2002, 11).

[27] Van den Hengel points out that the priority of the agent in Ricoeur's account of action does not undermine the importance of taken the detour of the objective side of the experience: "The priority of the agent is not such that it can bypass the analysis of the "what" of actions by way of their "why" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 79).

[28] In Ricoeur there is a shift to the primacy of the agent: "This shift of emphasis toward the agent does not mean that action is some sort of internal (contemplative) event, modeled after external observation, which can then be called volition, desire, or wanting" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 77).

actions we can conclude that there is a unity: An attempt to reconcile what I have called the external with the internal side of action.

An interesting exposition of his theory of action is found in an article called *Explanation and Understanding*. Here Ricoeur emphasizes the need for understanding the two aforementioned dimensions of action in a dialectical way. Motives (which can be understood as the "inner dimension of action") and causes (which can be interpreted more as the "external dimension of action") are not logically independent and do not belong to two different language games (Ricoeur 1991a, 134). We can find actions that can be explained from an almost purely causal model in cases where a kind of external force makes the agent react (for example in cases of "unconscious motives") and we can find cases where there is a pure rational motivation, for example in cases of intellectual games, like chess (Ricoeur 1991a, 134).[29] However, for Ricoeur human actions lie mostly "in between" these two models. Motives are also motions and justifications, especially when we give an account of a past action. Causes, in order to be taken into consideration as an explanation for a human action must be considered as motives. Ricoeur concludes that "human being is as it is precisely because it belongs both to the domain of causation and motivation" (Ricoeur 1991a, 135) or, as Reagan explains, human beings "are susceptible of explanation in terms of both force and meaning" (Reagan 1995, 339).

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[29] Reagan describes in this regard, the extremes across which human actions range: "…we have a spectrum which ranges from causality without motivation – all the experiences of constrain or force – to motivation without causality – best exemplified by intellectual games or strategies" (Reagan 1995, 339).

A second approach to the same problem can be made through the analysis that Ricoeur offers of Aristotle's idea of action and of rational desire. He emphasizes the fact that in Aristotle there is no break between desire and reason (Ricoeur 1991b, 191). Desire can be seen as close to the language of causes, insofar as desire appears as an "irrational force." However, in Aristotle desire must be rational as well. The origin of the virtuous action is a rational desire. Thus, action belongs to that intermediate level between reason and desire.

A third way of presenting the same phenomenon is by appealing to the idea of wanting. According to Ricoeur the category of wanting offers a "mixed category" (Ricoeur 1992, 65). The idea of wanting to act involves a certain passivity that is well expressed in our affects and passions. This passivity can be seen in the type of answers that we give to some classical questions that describe prototypical situations. For example to the question "What prompted you to do this or that?" (Ricoeur 1992, 65), we usually answer by appealing to an incidental impulse or drive. To the question "what usually makes you act this way?" (Ricoeur 1992, 65) we respond by referring to a disposition or a tendency. Finally, to questions like "what made you jump?" we usually respond by mentioning a physical element like a "dog frightened me" (Ricoeur 1992, 65). All these examples show that, in the realm of actions, the motivations for our actions are intertwined with causes, so that it is very hard to separate one from the other. Thus, to *want* to do something cannot be reduced to a pure rational motive. That would be "an action without any element of desire!" (Ricoeur 1992, 66). The *rational* motivations that are present in the act of *wanting* are at the same time *causes*. Ricoeur synthesizes this

idea as follows: "[M]otives would not be motives for action if they were not also its causes" (Ricoeur 1992, 66).

1.3.4. Attestation and to be able to do things

Despite the theoretical efforts to combine the two dimensions of human actions (the external and internal) it is impossible to give a complete account of action without appealing to a reality that serves as its phenomenological support.

Human actions are ultimately founded in a "primitive datum," which is the "assurance that the agent has the power to do things, that is to produce changes in the world" (Ricoeur 1992, 112). This assurance that can always be challenged cannot be demonstrated with empirical evidence.[30] Only at the level of this assurance it is possible to pass from what Ricoeur called the disjunctive to the conjunctive stage. In the disjunctive stage we observe the "necessarily antagonistic character of the original causality of the agent in relation to the other modes of causality" (Ricoeur 1992, 102). In other words, here we have the Kantian antinomy between causality and freedom. The conjunctive stage refers to the need to coordinate in "a synergistic way the original causality of the agent with the other forms of causality" (Ricoeur 1992, 102).

The word "assurance" clearly refers to the main topic of this dissertation: The concept of attestation. Our being able to act can be wholly understood at the level of

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[30] Hall points out that the attestation of my own initiative implies the attestation of my power to act: "To attest to my power of initiative is, at the same time, to testify to a power that precedes me and makes my power possible" (Hall 2007, 63).

attestation, as a belief in our power to do things in the world, to "make things happen."

As we know, this belief or confidence can be challenged and this is more than clear in the

world of actions. The capacity to do things as free agents has been challenged not only at

the theoretical level, but also at the experiential level, where sometimes, following

Ricoeur's language, we can experience that our actions are more the product of causality

and necessity that the product of "motivations" and "reasons for acting."

For Ricoeur this "power to do" has an ontological foundation, as he explains in

this passage:

> What would make this discourse based on the "I can" a different discourse is, in
> the last analysis, its reference to an ontology of *one's own body*, that is of *a* body
> which is also *my* body and which, by its double allegiance to the order of physical
> bodies and to that of persons, therefore lies at the point of articulation of the
> power to act which is ours and of the course of things which belongs to the world
> order. It is only in this phenomenology of the "I can" and in the related ontology
> of the body as one's own that the status of primitive datum accorded to the power
> to act would be established definitively. (Ricoeur 1992, 111)[31]

This crucial passage shows how our own ontological constitution is the fundamental

cause of the tension that we find in the theory of action. As incarnate beings we

experience the duality of having a body that is, on the one hand, part of the world and as

such subject to the causal laws and on the other hand, we experience our body as

referring to a core, which is our self and is a center of decisions and initiatives. Thus, the

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[31] This ontology of the "I can" is borrowed from Merleau-Ponty as Pellauer points out: "…Ricoeur adopts the French's philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's argument that our most basic lived experience is that of a lived conviction that 'I can.' This way of speaking not only expresses this capability; it links it to something more basic than itself. Even at this most basic level, though, Ricoeur notes that there is a reflexive aspect to every decision: I make up my own mind to do something. This is not something I observe, but something I do…" (Pellauer 2007, 15).

duality of action is the expression of the dual nature of our body. How can we account for this duality at the center of the unity of human experience? Again it seems that only through attestation can we conceive of ourselves as beings belonging to the sphere of causes and sphere of motives without contradiction or separation between the two.[32]

An alternative to this interpretation of the role of attestation in the idea of action is given by Van Den Hengel's article *Can There Be a Science of Action?* (Van Den Hengel 2002). Van Den Hengel links the problem of attestation with the epistemological status of the action. He situates Ricoeur's analysis of action in the context of *episteme* and *doxa*. For Van Den Hengel, Ricoeur's idea of action as attestation, that is, as the confidence of being an agent, shows an intermediate path between the idea of epistemic certitude proper to the sciences and the idea of *doxa*. As he explains here:

> Where does this leave us with the question of a science of action? For Ricoeur, the dialectic between *epistémé* and *doxa* will never be completed. What he seeks therefore is a space between "mere" opinion and science. That is the space of Aristotle's *doxazein*, that is, the space of the dialectic. (Van Den Hengel 2002, 88)

Although Van Den Hengel's interpretation is appealing, he misses one important point. For Ricoeur attestation does not lie just between the alternatives of *doxa* and *episteme* but rather lies beyond these alternatives, as he implies: "Whereas doxic belief is implied in

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[32] Meech refers to the same idea by showing that through attestation Ricoeur addresses the third Kantian antinomy: "Any attempt to give conceptual clarity to this power runs into Kant's third antinomy: first, that agents have to be able to initiate their own actions to be held responsible and, second, that for the agent to remain free the search for causes has to remain open. Such a power to act is thus a primitive datum – something attested" (Meech 2006, 77). Bourgeois offers a good account of Ricoeur's reinterpretation of Kant's solution to the third antinomy: "Ricoeur's adjustment in the Kantian doctrine means first that sensibility must be capable of a relation to willing as a motive for decision which *inclines without compelling*; and second, a rational principle must be capable of touching me in a manner analogous to that of sensible goods" (Bourgeois 1995, 553). For more on Ricoeur's reception of Kant see Anderson 1993 and Piercey 2007.

the grammar of "I believe-that," attestation belongs to the grammar of 'I believe-in'" (Ricoeur 1992, 21). Here Ricoeur suggests that the kind of belief that is constitutive of attestation belongs to a different realm than doxa. Attestation is not just a more certain belief, but it belongs to a different epistemic realm, that is, the realm of practical certitude.

Greisch sees the role of attestation in Ricoeur's theory of action in "[t]he confidence which characterizes the initiatives of the agents" (Greisch 1996, 89). He places the idea of attestation in the context of the relationship between the action and the agent and grounds it in the power of the agent to act. Although I do not disagree with Greisch's interpretation, its shortcoming lies in the fact that he is not able to show how attestation responds to the aporias of action. As I stated above, attestation is necessary because of the dual nature of our actions: A principle and an external manifestation. Without addressing the problem of the dual nature of our actions, an account of attestation in the context of Ricoeur's theory of action is incomplete.

1.4.   To be able to tell a story

The human capacity to tell a story or to narrate, which is the third capacity that Ricoeur mentions in *Oneself as Another*, is related to Ricoeur's work on narrative theory. A complete account of this large project exceeds the purpose of this dissertation. However some basic aspects of Ricoeur's narrative theory must be addressed here. In this section, I will concentrate mostly on our capacity to narrate in order to articulate and understand the problem of human agency, especially in relation to the ascription of the action to the agent. In the next chapter I will describe the problem of the threefold mimesis that needs to be addressed in order to grasp the problem of narrative identity.

The capacity to narrate can be understood from many perspectives: We create fictional stories (fiction), we retell actions and narrate the events of the past (history) and we can narrate our own life. Among these three possible perspectives, I will focus on our capacity to narrate our own life. The choice of this particular kind of narrative is based on Ricoeur's claim that it is through the narration of our life that we reach a very particular and rich understanding of our actions.

1.4.1. The narrative unity of life

The link between action and narrative is well explained in *Oneself as Another*. In this book Ricoeur shows this link by appealing to what he calls the narrative unity of life, that is, the fact that we understand our own life as a narrative. The understanding of life as a narrative unity constitutes the broadest possible understanding of action. It attempts to see our whole life as part of a single narrative that bestows it with sense and meaning. However, this understanding of action presupposes the understanding of lower units that in some respect support and anticipate the narrative unity of life. What is interesting to note here, is that for Ricoeur action is not an atom, but it is rather a kind of complex net. This net can be seen from its basic components (single specific actions, like to sing) or from broader units like life practices, life plans or the narrative unity of life. In what follows I will present first the idea of practices, then the idea of life plans and finally the idea of narrative unity of life. Practices and life plans help to understand the narrative unity of life insofar as they show an increasingly complex and broader understanding of actions.

a) *Practices:* The notion of practice goes beyond a basic understanding of action insofar as it encompasses several actions in a basic unity. The unity is based on a criterion that allows us to understand a manifold of actions as being part of a single "practice." A practice can be a profession (the practice of medicine, the practice of law, the practice of philosophy), an art (painting, sculpture) or even a game (soccer, football, baseball). The notion of practice supposes a criterion that allows us to identify several actions as being part of a single unity. The criterion is based upon a particular relation of meaning expressed by the notion of constitutive rule (Ricoeur 1992, 154). A constitutive rule is a precept that defines what can be "counted as" something. In the case of practices, a constitutive rule defines what can be counted as being part of, for example, the profession of medicine. The notion of constitutive rule helps to stress the social dimension of practices, since a constitutive rule is not the invention of a particular performer, but is always built in a community that recognizes the validity of a rule (Ricoeur 1992, 155).[33] Can we say that with the notion of practice we are already in a narrative? According to Ricoeur, practices are not ready-made narrative scenarios, but their organization has a pre-narrative quality (Ricoeur 1992, 157).

b) *Life Plans:* The notion of "life plans" is the second unit of praxis that Ricoeur presents as the basis for the narrative unity of life. "Life plans" are the practical units that make up a professional life, family life, leisure time, etc. (Ricoeur 1992, 157). As we can see, it is

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[33] As Van Den Hengel formulates it, these "practices are meaningful and comprehensible only in a pragmatic social context, which means in interaction with others even when they are solitary practices" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 80). For more on the notion of practice, see *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative. The Creative Tension between Love and Justice*, 58 (Hall 2007).

a unity of action that is bigger than practices. In "life plans," we have a kind of division of the life of an individual in several areas, each one possessing its own unity. Even if we can find some overlapping between practices and life plans, life plans are more oriented toward the manner in which a person segments his life. At the base of life plans we find basic actions and practices. Actions and practices make sense in the context of a set of ideals and projects (Ricoeur 1992, 158) and, in turn, ideals and projects are built on several practices and actions.[34] According to Ricoeur, this notion is very close to that of narrative. In fact this dialectical structure of life plans resembles very much the hermeneutical comprehension of a text through the exchange between the whole and the part (Ricoeur 1992, 158).

c) *The Narrative Unity of Life:* The two notions mentioned above (practices and life plans) find their culmination in a more complex and complete concept: The narrative unity of life. Ricoeur borrows this expression from MacIntyre (Ricoeur 1992, 158) and endorses the same thesis that MacIntyre wants to propose through this idea: Our life is understood and evaluated through an understanding that has the form of a narrative. We have a narrative pre-comprehension of our life that takes the actual form of a narrative when we tell it.

It is important to note that these three units (practices, life plans and the narrative units of life) cannot be understood separately. Life plans are specifications of the

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[34] Hall stresses the mediating role of life plans: "A life plan serves to mediate between a lower limit of action considered in terms of practices and an upper limit of a projected unity of a life which serves as both horizon of possibility and limit idea for discreet actions" (Hall 2007, 59).

narrative unity of life and practices are specifications of the idea of life plans. Among the three aforementioned units, the most important for the purpose of this investigation is the idea of the "narrative unity of life."[35] Thanks to this notion, we can enrich the idea of action as it is given in the analysis of the capacity to act, and we can have a more complete understanding of the relationship between the agent and the action. However, in order to apply this third unit of action to the problem of agency, we have first to present one important criticism Ricoeur addresses to MacIntyre.

According to Ricoeur, MacIntyre overlooks the difference that exists between narrative in fiction and in life (Ricoeur 1992, 158-159). By overlooking this difference, MacIntyre misses some of the crucial elements of life stories, particularly, the active role of the subject in making sense of her own story. The "author" of a life story, that is, the one that leads a life, is not equivalent to the author of a fictional story. This point affects the idea of authorship, the problem of the beginning and end of a story, the relationship with other stories and the projection of the story into the future, making us, at a first glance, to doubt whether in life stories we can properly speak of a narrative. However, we will see that the four elements that are transformed in life stories indeed do not suppose a departure from narrative but rather a flexible use of the categories of authorship, beginning and end, unity of the story and temporality. This will make the problem of

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[35] Narratives enrich actions, among others, by making more clear and explicit their goals, as Van Den Hengel explains: "…narrative… plays the role of gathering together into a whole the real beginnings that constitute our initiatives with an anticipation of an ending of the course of our action" (Van Den Hengel 2002, 81).

attestation come to the fore. According to Ricoeur, the main differences between life stories and fictional stories are the following:

a) *Authorship*: In a fictional story, usually we can distinguish with some precision the author, the narrator and the character. In life stories I can distinguish a narrator (that usually is oneself), characters, but I cannot distinguish precisely an author. I cannot claim that I am the author of my life story in the form that a writer can claim that he is the author of his novel. With respect to my life I can claim at most that I am the co-author (Ricoeur 1992, 160).

b) *Beginning and End*: A second difference between fictional stories and our life in a narrative unity is the notion of beginning and end. In fiction, the beginning and the end are those given by the narrative (for example, in the form of a present, a past or a mythical beginning). In the narrative account of our life, we lack both a beginning and an end (Ricoeur 1992, 160). My birth, my early childhood belongs more to the story of my parents that to my own story and my death will be recounted through the stories of others.

c) *Entangled in stories*: Ricoeur uses the title of Wilhelm Schapp's book *In Geschichten verstrickt* ("caught up or entangled in stories") to express the idea that our stories are entangled with the stories of others. Our life story is part of the story of the life of others and the life stories of others are part of my life story (Ricoeur 1992, 161). In fictional narratives we can find some references between different narratives, however in most cases each one keeps some independence and their plots are rather incommensurable with one another.

d) While fictional stories cover mainly past actions, life stories are always projected in the form of an existential project (Ricoeur 1992, 161).

In spite of these important differences between life stories and fictional stories, for Ricoeur these distinctions do not prevent us from assigning to our life a narrative unity, particularly because each of these differences is compensated by some similitude with a fictional narration. With respect to the problem of the authorship, although it is true that I am not the author of my own life, Ricoeur contends that "by narrating a life of which I am not the author as to existence, I make myself its coauthor as to its meaning" (Ricoeur 1992, 162). In other words, the lack of control that I have over my life as the author is compensated with the active role that I have over it in the production of its meaning. In fact, although we do not have a complete control over many facts of our life, finally we have to give the definite interpretations of our own life. In relation to the problem of the lack of beginning and end of our life stories, our life story can, with the help of fictional stories, achieve to some extent a sense of a beginning and of an end (Ricoeur 1992, 162). Borrowing models from literature we can give to our life a provisional beginning (for example using some important moments of my life that mark a "new beginning"). Literature can help us represent outlines of our own end as well. Ricoeur designates this with a beautiful word: Literature as the "apprenticeship of dying" (Ricoeur 1992, 162). With respect to our being entangled in stories, if we look closely at fictional narratives, we find that they provide models for making sense of our entanglement with the stories of others (Ricoeur 1992, 162). Thus, through literature I can understand the relationship of my own story to the story of others. Finally, against the claim that a narrative lacks the projection into the future that a life has, Ricoeur explains

that literary narrative is retrospective only in the eyes of the narrator (Ricoeur 1992, 163). Indeed, among the facts recounted we find projects, expectations and anticipations by which the characters are oriented toward the future.

What can we conclude from these parallels between fictional narratives and life stories? First, we can conclude that at first glance life stories have specific features that make them different from fictional stories. Life does not have an identifiable author; in life stories there is not a definitive beginning and end; life stories are entangled with the life stories of others and life stories have a projection to the future that fictional narrations lack.

Secondly, we can conclude that if we look at both narratives and life stories in more detail we find that these differences are not as deep as to prevent us from assigning to life a narrative structure. The fact that life does not have an identifiable author is compensated by our active role in being the true author of the *meaning* of our life. The fact that our life does not have a definitive beginning and end is compensated by our capacity – with the help of literature – to find models that give our life story a kind of beginning and end. The fact that our life is entangled with other life stories is compensated by the models of entanglement that fictional stories give us. Finally, the projective nature of life stories is also found in fictional narrations in characters who anticipate the future just as each of us does. Thus, we can say that life stories have enough similarity with narrative stories to assign to them a narrative structure.

There is a third conclusion that we can derive from this parallel between fictional and life stories. It is my contention that the specific features of life stories that Ricoeur

describes endows them with a particular quality that reveals to us the relationship between the narrative unity of life and attestation. I will devote the following section to explain how this is the case.

1.4.2. The narrative unity of life and attestation

The fact that we are active in the production of the meaning of our life, that the beginning and the end of our life story are never completely given, that we are entangled with other stories and that our life story is not only about the past but projected into the future, gives to a life story a very important feature that we can call the *indeterminacy* of life stories.

Ricoeur does not refer specifically to this feature. However, he implicitly mentions it when he says that "learning to narrate oneself is also learning how to narrate oneself in other ways" (Ricoeur 2005a, 101).[36] In other words, there is some freedom in our capacity to narrate ourselves. There is not just *one* possible story that we can tell about ourselves. We can always give a new *meaning* to our life, we can find new

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[36] The idea that we use the possible narratives to make sense of our life is grounded in an important philosophical point that Ricoeur makes: We do not create meaning out of nothing, but we appeal to the meanings that are already available. We mix them, we interpret them and we appropriate them. The different narrative possibilities are in a way the meanings available for us in order to configure our own life. Hall expresses this idea very well: "In advancing the claim that human understanding is grounded in receptivity, I simply claim that humans do not make up meaning *ex nihilo*…Humans come to understand their existence within the realm of meaning to which they are receptive; however… human receptivity to the realm of meaning is not absolute passivity. This receptivity is an *active receptivity*. In other words, humans *actively understand* on the basis of the meanings they receive: they *create* new meaning out of received meaning" (Hall 2007, 38).

beginnings and possible *ends* to our life,[37] we can find new ways of understanding our

life in relation to others and finally we can always project our life story in different ways.

The indeterminacy of our life story makes it possible for us to find several

competing narratives about ourselves. How, then, is it possible to arbitrate between them?

Which life story will we prefer? Is it possible to be completely indifferent to *all* possible

life stories? At a certain point I can find the need to *commit* to some interpretation of my

own story and to believe that a particular interpretation of my life is better than another.

This commitment, this belief in, in my opinion, corresponds to what Ricoeur calls

attestation. The self that understands itself through the stories about itself, needs to

commit to some life story.[38]

This *attestation through narrative* is important for the identity of the self (as we

will see in the next chapter), but it also helps to solve one of the problems in this chapter:

The problem of ascription, i.e., of the relation of the self to its actions. In the introduction

to the chapter, I mentioned that one of the main challenges that the phenomenology of

capable being has to face is the relationship between the agent and the action. People

speak, do things, tell stories and recognize responsibility. However, at the same time,

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[37] Hall links the idea of the narrative unity of life with the idea of a project in life: "This narrative, however, remains a project, a task. The narrative unity of a life is a *unity* to the extent that it is a unified *totality*; but, the unified totality of *my* life remains a task so long as I am in the midst of it" (Hall 2007, 61). A narrative acts as a kind of bridge between the past and the future, through which the self projects its ownmost possibilities.

[38] Hall makes explicit the relationship between narrative understanding and self-understanding in this way: "Thus, narrative understanding crosses over into self-understanding: I gain perspective on myself by gaining perspective on the narrative. In this sense, narrative understanding is practical understanding" (Hall 2007, 55).

people say that they do not mean what they said; people sometimes argue that they do not recognize themselves in what they do or in the stories that they tell and finally people deny their responsibility in some acts. In my opinion, narrative is one of the main tools that human beings have in order to recognize or to reject their authorship and involvement in actions. When we tell a story of ourselves, we are giving an interpretation about our own involvement in the actions. To say, "after a while I decided to leave" is not the same as to say, "the circumstances forced me to leave." Through the stories we tell, we recognize or we deny our involvement in some actions. In addition, through the stories we tell we ascribe responsibility to others. It is analogous to the work of a judge. In reconstructing the facts, we are implicitly or explicitly asserting who did what. If this is true in the ascription of responsibilities to others through narrations, it is especially true in the recognition of our own responsibility through stories.

Thus, we can say that through the narrative of our own life we *attest* to our own self as being capable of several actions, those actions that are recounted in our stories. To narrate our own life and to attest to our own self are parallel notions. The capacity to narrate oneself is a specific way of attesting to oneself, ascribing to oneself several actions as one's own or, on the contrary, denying one's involvement in some. To choose one instead of the other is a matter of commitment, an act of our freedom, a problem of attestation. The attestation of our own self through narrative leads us to the last capacity that Ricoeur discusses in detail in *Oneself as Another*, i.e., the capacity of being imputable. In the following paragraphs I will analyze it.

1.5.   To be imputable

With the capacity of being imputable, we reach the last of the four capacities that
are mentioned in *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur works with a specific and narrow concept
of imputability, equivalent to moral imputation. For him moral imputation consists in "a
kind of judgment saying that humans are responsible for the proximate consequences of
their deeds and for that reason may be praised or blamed" (Ricoeur 1989, 97-98).[39] Then,
imputation is not just the attribution of an action to an agent, but in addition involves the
idea of praise or blame in a moral sense. In moral imputation we are not just assigning an
action to an agent, but we are *judging* the agent as good or bad in relation to the action.

Imputability is built into the other capacities analyzed here. In order to have an
imputable being, we need the subject to be able to designate himself in discourse
(Ricoeur 1989, 98). To recognize myself as responsible for an action I need to be able to
designate myself in language. The capacity to act and to recognize ourselves as the true
authors of our actions is also required here in order to impute an action. How could we
judge an action as good or bad if we were not able, *in the first place*, to ascribe an action
to an agent as the true author? For that reason, the same aporia that we found in the
capacity to act is found in imputability, that is, the problem of conceiving a free agent in
the midst of a world dominated by causalities. Imputability supposes a favorable

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[39] In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur gives the following definition: "the ascription of action to its
agent, *under the condition of ethical and moral predicates* which characterize the action as good, just,
conforming to duty, done out of duty, and, finally, as being the wisest in the case of conflictual situations"
(Ricoeur 1992, 292).

resolution of this aporia, since only an agent capable of acting in the world can be held responsible for his actions.

Finally, the capacity of being imputable is built into the capacity to narrate. Here the link is not as evident as in the other two capacities mentioned above. However, for Ricoeur it is clear that only through the enrichment of action articulated in narrative, can we ascribe moral qualities to action. First of all, through the narrative unity of life I assign to actions a goal and a purpose. This purpose gives to action a moral quality through the idea of a good life (see Ricoeur 1989, 98). Secondly, the practices and life plans (that are at the basis of the narrative unity of life) are ruled by precepts (technical, aesthetic, moral and political) that allow these actions to be evaluated by a "standard of excellence" (Ricoeur 1989, 99). These "standards of excellence," i.e., patterns that determine whether an action is good or bad, are the basis for the moral evaluation of an action and, consequently, for imputation.

1.5.1. Imputability and reflexivity

In the concept of imputation, the idea of reflexivity that is present in the concept of the self reaches its highest intensity:

> Thus, with imputability the notion of a capable subject reaches its highest meaning, and the form of self-designation it implies includes and in a way recapitulates the preceding forms of self-reference. (Ricoeur 2005a, 106)[40]

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[40] Ricoeur, in his analysis, does not distinguish expressly between imputability and self-imputability. Although that there is a difference between the two, for Ricoeur it seems that one suppose the

The idea of reflexivity has been present in the analysis of all capacities. We find it already in the pragmatic approach to the capacity to speak that shows a subject able to designate himself in discourse. Then, we find it in the idea of action, through the ascription of an action to the agent and the capacity of the agent to recognize herself as its true author. In the capacity to narrate our own life, we find the idea of reflexivity as well when we are able to recognize ourselves in our own narrations. The capacity to impute an action supposes the previous levels of reflexivity. In order to be imputable I need to be able to apply to myself the moral predicates of my actions, which is a reflexive act. For that reason, Ricoeur asserts that in this capacity the idea of reflexivity is present in its highest intensity.

This reflexivity can be evidenced through an analysis of the meaning of a concept that is closely related to imputability, i.e., the idea of being accountable. This concept involves the idea of an account, a balance, a report, a dossier, a summary of our merits and faults (Ricoeur 2000b, 14). In other words, our actions become so attached to us that they are registered in our self in an almost material form. Thus, the analysis of this related concept (to be accountable) confirms the reflexivity of the idea of imputation. In order to be accountable I need to be able to take responsibility for my actions, what implies an act of self-designation similar to the one presents in imputability.

The notion of self-esteem also confirms the reflexivity of the idea of imputation. According to Ricoeur, self-esteem is the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the

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other. I am imputable because I have the capacity of recognize the authorship of some actions. I can recognize the authorship of some actions because others recognize me as the responsible of actions.

ethical evaluation of our actions (Ricoeur 1989, 99). So, we do not only attribute to ourselves the moral predicates of our actions, but even more we *understand* ourselves in and through the ethical evaluation of our actions that we and others do. In some respect, we could say that *we are what we do*. We value ourselves in relationship to the value of our actions.

1.5.2. Imputation and attestation

After this exposition, we can ask about the relationship between imputation and attestation. Since the idea of imputation supposes a moral judgment over a subject, we have to find the relationship between imputation and attestation in the moral capacity of the subject. To attest, to believe in my capacity of being imputable supposes first of all a belief, a trust in my capacity to make moral judgment, because when we impute an action to a subject, praising or blaming, we assume his capacity of moral judgment (indeed in the criminal system the incapacity of a moral judgment usually makes somebody unable of being imputed). Thus, the attestation of imputability must be found indirectly through the attestation of our moral capacity, as Ricoeur suggests in the following paragraph:

> This experiential evidence is the new figure in which *attestation* appears, when the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well (Ricoeur 1992, 180).

We can conclude that the attestation of imputability is the attestation of our moral capacity, which includes the capacity to make a moral judgment *and* the capacity to have a right idea of the good life. Indeed, is the conviction of judging and acting much different from the idea of a good life? I think that these two elements cannot be separated.

In my act of judging and acting, there is always explicitly or implicitly involved an idea of the good life. Then, if these two elements are part of a unity, attestation is not only the conviction of acting and judging well but the conviction of having the right idea of the good life. Thus, attestation is found at the core of ethics.[41]

1.6.   Conclusion

After this exposition of the main capacities in relation to the problem of attestation, we can ask about the role of attestation in the phenomenology of the capable being. My thesis is that this role is twofold: Attestation is the link between the external and the internal side of experience and attestation works along with the affirmation of the self in each capacity, i.e., to attest to a capacity is to attest to my own self.

The problem of the relation between the external and the internal side of experience is related with the dialectic between reflection and analysis that Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another*. As I stated in the introduction, since for Ricoeur it is not possible to have a direct access to the self, we have to follow the detour of the manifestations of the self. This detour is made mainly by using the tools of analysis.

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[41] There is a strong relationship between ipseity and moral responsibility, as Hall sees it: "Establishing the structure of agency is important for many reasons, but most especially for ethical reflection. Ethics depends upon an account of the agent for two reasons. First, the topic of agency allows an approach to the subject to whom one can ascribe moral predicates. There must be a subject who is an agent in order to be able to engage in ethical reflection at all. For this reason, Ricoeur's philosophical project was most profoundly a philosophical *anthropology*. His was a project that sought to address the nature and character of acting selves. In a second way, agency designates the subject of ethics to the extent that ethics is a discipline concerned with the question of morally responsible agency" (Hall 2007, 21-22). Along the same lines, Hall establishes the link between ipseity and moral responsibility: "[T]o locate an agent is to locate one who is responsible and, therefore, subject to moral injunctions" (Hall 2007, 22).

Analysis bears on the external side of experience, with what is observable. In the capacity to speak, the external side of experience is mainly the capacity of being able to identify a subject in discourse. In the capacity to act, the external side of experience is given by our understanding of actions as a cause as well as an event in the world. In the capacity to narrate, the external side of experience seems to be constituted by the stories we tell about ourselves. In imputability, the external side of experience is the set of norms that constitute the moral realm. At the same time that we discover all these external manifestations, we realize that there is another dimension that can be called the internal side of experience. In the case of the capacity to speak this internal side is constituted by our capacity for self-designation; in the case of the capacity to act it is constituted by actions understood as the reasons and the motives of the actions; in the capacity to narrate it is constituted by the narrative unity of life, i.e., our effort to give unity to our life through narrative; and in the capacity to be imputable, it is constituted by our capacity to apply reflexively the moral qualifications of the action to the self.

Thus the problem is how to join the two sides of experience, the external and the internal. My thesis is that attestation is for Ricoeur the link between these two aspects. In the case of the capacity to speak, attestation is the conviction of being oneself the same subject able to be identified in discourse as well as the subject with the capacity of self designation. In the case of the capacity to act, attestation is the conviction of the power to act, i.e., the power to intervene with my actions that are reasons and motives in the world of causes. In the case of the capacity to narrate (ourselves), attestation is the conviction that a given narrative expresses the meaning and the interpretation of my own life as a

unity. Finally, in the case of imputability, attestation is the conviction of judging and acting well by applying moral norms to my actions and to me.

In other words, attestation works as a kind of appropriation of what is "already there" for the self. This phenomenon can be explained with the idea of inscription and ascription. The self is "inscribed" in different expressions that in some respect precede it. The self is inscribed in a language, in some social patterns that constitute actions, in some narrations that possess a specific semiotics and norms. All these manifestations of the self in which it is inscribed, corresponds to what I am calling here the external side of experience. If we remain in that dimension, we will end up with an incomplete idea of the self. We do not just speak, but we designate ourselves in speech; we do not just act, but we assume some actions as ours; we do not just tell a story about ourselves, but we think that these narratives account for who we are; we do not just follow some norms but we think that we are good or bad insofar as we engage in good or bad actions. In other words, there is a degree of reflexivity in our actions. So, once our actions are inscribed in a kind of "grammar" that we have not created, how can we claim that these manifestations belong to us? Here we find the problem of ascription that is somehow the reverse of inscription. We have to ascribe actions to ourselves, assuming that it is *I* who am speaking, acting, narrating and being imputable. How can we be sure of that? We can never reach the certainty of a science in this respect. At most, we are *confident* that we are the true author of our words, of our actions, of our narrations and morally responsible for them. This confidence is at the core of the ascription of the words, actions, narrations and norms to the self and it has the form of attestation, i.e., of a trust, a certainty that can always be challenged.

What is the object of attestation? When I trust in my capacity of being the true author of my words, my actions, my narration and when I assume the moral responsibility for my actions, I am attesting to my very self, I am *affirming* that I am a self, that "behind" my words, my actions, my narrations it is I who am speaking, acting, giving unity to my life and assuming the moral responsibility of my actions. This "I" is the self. Thus, the object of attestation is mainly the self. Attestation is attestation to the self. It is a self that exists *in* and *through* its capacities and a self that cannot be evidenced directly, because it is a self with a radical opacity. Thus, when I act and when I recognize myself as capable, I am affirming my own self through an act that has the form of attestation.

This idea of a self that is present in actions opens up a new range of very important questions. What is the identity of the self? Is it *the same self* in each action? What happens with the temporal element? Does time threaten the identity of the self? What is the basis for that identity? All these important questions in relation to the problem of attestation will be addressed in the next chapter, through the discussion of the problem of the identity of the self.

Chapter Two

Attestation and Personal Identity

2.1. Introduction

In first chapter we discussed the main capacities of the self and the role of

attestation in each of these capacities. In describing the main capacities of the self, we

encountered the problem of identity several times. In the analysis of each capacity, we

can ask who speaks, who acts, who narrates and who is imputable. As we saw, these are,

for Ricoeur, the most important questions regarding the self. Now it is time to turn our

attention to the problem of identity in relation to attestation.

When referring to the self, Ricoeur distinguishes two main kinds of identity:

Identity characterized by *idem* and identity characterized as *ipse*.[42] These two kinds of

identities refer to two models of permanence in time. *Idem*-identity, the identity proper of

things, refers to the mode of permanence in time that is based on the permanence of

certain features. *Ipse*-identity, the identity proper of the self, is based on self-maintenance,

that is, on the capacity of the self to stay the same despite changes. These two models of

identity of the self will be at the core of the analyses of this chapter. The analysis of

personal identity will be performed in several steps. First, I will start with the notion of

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[42] We refer to them as *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, for short. Ricoeur also refers to *idem*-identity as *sameness* and *ipse*-identity as *ipseity* and *selfhood*.

identity as sameness. Next, I will analyze the notion of character. For Ricoeur, character

is the "set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (Ricoeur 1992, 121).

Character is first associated with identity as sameness, because it expresses the

permanence of certain features in a person. However, at the same time we will see that

character expresses the ipseity of a person, insofar as the permanent traits of a person

express not only the "what" of somebody but also the "who." Thus the notion of

character will serve as a transition in order to explain in detail the idea of ipseity, which is

for Ricoeur a form of identity that goes beyond the permanence of some traits in a person.

Ipseity will be fully developed by the analysis of its privileged manifestation: Promises.[43]

The analysis of the idea of sameness, character and ipseity will prepare the ground

for understanding of Ricoeur's main contributions to the problem of personal identity:

The concept of narrative identity, which, according to Ricoeur, is the kind of identity that

best defines the identity of the self. In narrative identity we find identity as sameness and

identity as ipseity in a dialectical relation. In narrative identity, there are elements of the

person that remain the same through time (sameness) and there are elements that are

changed. Despite those changes, the self keeps a unity (selfhood) thanks specifically to

the operation of narrative configuration.

The concept of narrative identity will show the role of attestation in personal

identity. Narrative identity is a fragile identity that can always be configured differently.

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[43] The dialectic between sameness and ipseity is a development of the two modes of being that Heidegger distinguishes: *Vorhandenheit* and *Dasein* (Ricoeur 1992, 309). To compare the notion of the self in Ricoeur and Heidegger would exceed the goal of this dissertation. For more on this issue, see the brief remarks that Dauenhauer makes on this point (Dauenhauer 1997, 130).

Attestation, as a kind of credence and belief in the self, permits the arbitration between different possible plots of our own life through an act of commitment to a specific self-interpretation. Narrative identity presupposes the commitment that attestation provides. Otherwise, the self would be fragmented by the different plots about itself, without having any specific identity.

2.2.   Identity as sameness

The first of the two main senses of the concept of identity is "identity as *sameness*" or identity in the sense of *idem* (Ricoeur 1991d, 73). In order to explain this concept, Ricoeur presents four different way of understanding sameness: *Numerical identity*, *qualitative identity*, *uninterrupted continuity* and *permanence in time*. Although each of these ways of understanding sameness is different, they are connected and refer to the same phenomenon: The idea of a basic feature that remains constant in a thing.

Numerical identity is the kind of identity that we have in mind when we say that two items actually constitute "one and the same thing" (Ricoeur 1991d, 74). It is the notion of identity that is present when we recognize a person: "I already met you, you are Mr. Smith." It is the same person. The idea of numerical identity encompasses the idea of uniqueness, plurality being its contrary. To ascribe *numerical identity* is to affirm that something is unique.

Qualitative identity refers to the identity that is present in two different things that have an extreme resemblance (Ricoeur 1992, 116). For example, if we say that two ladies are wearing "the same dress," we are implying that the dresses are extraordinarily similar

(Ricoeur 1991d, 74). Thus, the opposite of this idea of identity is difference. This criterion of identity can help us sort out cases where the criterion of numerical identity is not clear. It is possible that I am not sure that two appearances correspond to "one and the same thing" (numerical identity). Afterwards, to be sure, I can appeal to qualitative identity and see whether there is a resemblance between the two appearances (Ricoeur 1991d, 74).

If we compare something in a given year and the same thing ten years later, it could very well be impossible to recognize it as the same thing. The third criterion of identity (*uninterrupted continuity*), that is, identity as "the uninterrupted continuity in the development of a being between the first and last stage of its evolution" (Ricoeur 1991d, 74), addresses this problem. In spite of the fact that some things change, we can still say that they are the same thanks to an uninterrupted continuity that can be traced back from the present moment to the beginning of the thing (Ricoeur 1992, 117). It is the case of an acorn that becomes a tree. In the tree there is nothing that resembles the acorn, but we can still say that it is the same thing because there is a temporal continuity between the acorn and the tree. The opposite of this criterion of identity is discontinuity. This criterion of uninterrupted continuity through time has the advantage of allowing changes through time. However, relying only on continuity through time is usually not enough to ascribe identity. It is hard to ascribe identity to a thing in which I do not recognize the permanence of any characteristic.

The fourth sense of identity as sameness, that is, identity as *permanence in time* is similar to identity as uninterrupted continuity, but it adds the idea of a principle that remains (Ricoeur 1992, 117). Ricoeur gives the following example:

> This will be, for example, the invariable structure of a tool, all of whose parts will gradually have been replaced. This is also the case, of supreme interest to us, of the permanence of the genetic code of a biologic individual; what remains here is the organization of a combinatory system. (Ricoeur 1992, 117)

Identity as permanence in time is the most complete idea of sameness. The first two senses of identity (numerical identity and qualitative identity) do not take into consideration the threat of time. The idea of uninterrupted continuity is linked to the problem of time, but it gives a very fragile idea of identity, because it is not always easy to follow the trajectory of a thing through time. The advantage of identity as *permanence in time* is that it adds to the temporal aspect of identity, a principle that stays constant through time, for example a structure.

According to Ricoeur, the idea of a person possessing a character expresses well the kind of *sameness* that is present in personal identity. The character, as the set of permanent dispositions, gives to personal identity the stability proper to identity as sameness. At the same time, the idea of character will serve as a transition to the notion of identity as *ipseity*, insofar as the self through the traits that are present in its character, answers to the question "who are you?" The self, through the identification with its own trait of character, finds its own identity, its own selfhood. For this reason, Ricoeur holds that the idea of character exhibits an overlap between sameness and ipseity. Character is sameness, because it contains the sedimentation of habits, traits and customs. However

character is also ipseity because the self affirms its own selfhood through its character insofar as the self identifies itself with those character traits.

2.3.   Character and the dialectic between sameness and ipseity

For Ricoeur, all the senses of identity as sameness are present in the notion of character. He does not explain exactly how each of the ideas of sameness is contained in the idea of character. Here I attempt an explanation. Numerical identity is contained in the fact that our character can be identified and re-identified as "one and the same thing." This idea of numerical identity allows us to tell an acquaintance, "I think you are the same person I saw at the convocation three years ago " or, on the contrary, to note changes in a person. The qualitative identity can be seen in the characteristics that make it possible to compare one character to another and to classify them. Thus, thanks to qualitative identity we can say to a friend from a long time ago, "After all these years you are the same dreamy chap I once knew." The uninterrupted continuity across time is evidenced in the character's history that makes it a unity that develops through time. Without the idea of an uninterrupted continuity we could not assert that a friend is the same person despite the many changes in his character. Finally, the idea of identity as permanence in time is contained in the character as the "set of distinctive marks" (Ricoeur 1992, 119) that are stable through time.

"Character" can be defined as "the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized" (Ricoeur 1992, 121). These dispositions either come from acquired habits or identifications. Habits are the sedimentation of practices that form in the person a kind of "second nature." Identifications are those values, norms, ideals, models and heroes

(Ricoeur 1992, 121) that the character assumes as proper. Through identification, what is alien becomes part of the self. These dispositions and identifications constitute the sameness of a character that allows us to identify and re-identify it. However, the idea of character does not only express sameness. The habits that are part of the character are not just a set of characteristics; they are characteristics that express the *who* of the self. There is a "certain adherence of the 'what?' to the 'who?'" (Ricoeur 1992, 122). Ricoeur claims that "precisely as second nature, my character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself as *idem*" (Ricoeur 1992,121). The *who* of the character (ipseity) is revealed through the *what* of the character (sameness) or, as Ricoeur puts it: "Character is truly the 'what' of the 'who'" (Ricoeur 1993, 106). We can note here that in character we find the overlapping of these two forms of identity: sameness and ipseity. However, some commentators claim that character is rather the expression of sameness. For example Dauenhauer, after enumerating the constituents of character states that "[b]y contrast with this idem-identity, identity of self (*ipse*-identity) consists in the permanent capacity to make and keep promises regardless of whether they support or undercut permanence of character," (Dauenhauer 1997, 130) implying by this sharp contrast between character and promise, that character is equivalent to *idem*-identity. However, in my opinion, Ricoeur is clear about the ipse-*idem* dialectic in character when he states that in character "*ipse* announces itself as *idem*." If character were just sameness, the person could not feel that her character expresses her own self. We could not even speak of *her* character. The character is the expression of *ipseity*, what can be noted in statements as "do not ask me to change at this point of my life, *this* [this character] is the person that I am." For that reason, in this respect I agree with Hall who states:

Character represents not the *absence* of *ipse*-identity, but the "over-lapping" of *idem* and *ipse* to the point where the latter becomes indiscernible from the former. In a metaphorical sense, selfhood remains hidden behind sameness as the principle around which dispositions and identifications cluster. But, selfhood is also the potential for initiative, which can spring forth from character. (Hall 2007, 27)

It is hard to give a straightforward definition of ipseity. Summarily, we can say

that *ipseity* is the very self that remains despite the changes in life. Thus, ipseity is a

principle of permanence in time different from sameness. While sameness is based in

features that do not change, ipseity is based in the capacity of being oneself *despite* the

changes. Thus, ipseity is the identity of the self that is manifested in its self-maintenance,

that is, in the act of the self to affirm its own identity thorough its life. Venema points to

Ricoeur's insistence that "selfhood has a meaning beyond 'its contrast with sameness'"

(Venema 2000a, 143), that is, selfhood is not just characterized negatively as a principle

that goes beyond sameness, but it has a positive definition. According to McCarthy "ipse

identity finds its fullest expression in the notion of *self-constancy*" (McCarthy 2007, 126).

McCarthy stresses that for Ricoeur these two senses of identity are distinguishable

"logically, epistemologically, and ontologically," giving as evidence the following

passage from *Oneself as Another*:

The ontological status of selfhood is therefore solidly based upon the distinction between two modes of being, Dasein and Vorhandenheit. In this regard, the correlation between category of sameness in my own analyses and the notion of Vorhandenheit in Heidegger is the same as that between selfhood and the mode of being of Dasein. (Ricoeur 1992, 309)[44]

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[44] Cited by McCarthy 2007, 129.

As we can observe in this passage, there is an ontological difference between sameness and selfhood. Sameness has the mode of being of things, while selfhood points to the mode of being of *Dasein*, that is, of human beings. Things and human beings have two different modes of permanence in time. While the identity of things is based on sameness, that is, on the permanence in time of some traits, the identity of human beings is not based in the continuity of some traits but in an act of assurance of the self that guarantees that it is itself the same through time despite the changes. With respect to the epistemological differences between sameness and selfhood, McCarthy has the following to say:

> *Idem*-identity can be verified by Cartesian certainty or objective criteria (for example, taking fingerprints), while *ipse*-identity is verified by what he calls "attestation." (McCarthy 2007, 130)

While *idem*-identity is verified through observation, measurement and empirical evidence, ipse-identity is verified through the act of assurance that the self provides of itself, guarantying that despite the changes, she is the same person. It is an act of self-assurance that has the form of attestation.

McCarthy' emphasis on the ontological and epistemological differences between sameness and selfhood are accurate and useful. However, they can be misleading if we simply assume that sameness is the identity proper to things and ipseity the identity proper to human beings, because, by doing so we would be forgetting that the identity of the self is based on the *dialectic* between sameness and ipseity. Thus, in order to understand the role of sameness and ipseity in human identity, rather than simply take sameness to be the identity of things and ipseity the identity of human beings, we should

make it clear that both sameness and ipseity are modes of being that apply to the self. As Hall states it:

> The principal question to ask here is the manner in which the identity of the agent perseveres in time and how agency is configured within time. Posing the identity of the self in terms of sameness and selfhood, therefore, is Ricoeur's attempt to account for the *permanence in time* of the self both as a body and as an agent. (Hall 2007, 26)

Hall's approach to the dialectic between sameness and selfhood has two main advantages. First, like McCarthy, he recognizes the ontological and the epistemological difference between sameness and selfhood, by acknowledging that sameness accounts for the permanence in time of the self as a body and selfhood accounts for the permanence in time of the self as agent. However, while McCarthy emphasizes that sameness accounts for the identity of things, Hall stresses that sameness accounts for the identity of the *self* as a body. Indeed, sameness is not the identity of things in contraposition to the identity of the self, but sameness accounts for a mode of identity that is present in the self as well. For that reason, the identity of the self is a dialectic between identity as sameness and identity as selfhood, insofar as the self is also a body, that is, a thing among things.

The problem of the *who* of the self or ipseity is also present in the identifications that are part of its character. The different things with which a character identifies itself form part of the sameness of that character, insofar as they are traits that can be identified and re-identified. However, these things with which the character can identify itself need to be accepted and integrated by the self. Through this act of acceptance, the notion of identity as ipseity appears, as Ricoeur explains in the following passage:

> [W]e may relate to the notion of disposition the set of *acquired identifications* by which the other enters into the composition of the same. To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, *in* which the person or the community recognizes itself. Recognizing oneself *in* contributes to recognizing oneself *by*. (Ricoeur 1992, 121)

Thus, when we refer to persons, there is no ipseity without sameness because the self needs to affirm its own self through the different traits of its character.[45] At the same time, there is no sameness without ipseity.[46] Just to have a set of characteristics without a self that assumes them as its own does not constitute self-identity at all. For this reason, Ricoeur claims that the "permanence of character expresses the almost complete mutual overlapping of the problematic of *idem* and of *ipse*" (Ricoeur 1992, 118). This dialectical relationship between sameness and ipseity, however, is not kept with the same intensity at all the levels of personal identity. There are situations when ipseity seems to rule over sameness. For example, this could happen when we want to enact changes in our lives that will affect our character and start something radically new in our life. In these situations, for a moment, ipseity seems to become uncoupled from sameness, as it happens in the capacity of "keeping one's word" (Ricoeur 1992, 118). A promise can be related to our past, but it can inaugurate something completely new in our life.

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[45] We will see later that there are particular cases in which there seems to appear a "naked self" without the support of sameness. However, here I am speaking at the level of character. At this level, the ipseity that is present needs the support of sameness.

[46] Ricoeur is very explicit on this point: "This proves that one cannot think the *idem* of the person through without considering the *ipse*, even when one entirely covers over the other" (Ricoeur 1992, 121).

2.4.   Promises and ipseity

Usually ipseity and sameness are found together. If we are asked who we are, we answer by telling about some features of ourselves. "I am a person who likes to…; in my life I have taken these options, etc." We answer the "who of ourselves" by appealing to the "what of ourselves." However, we are aware that the "what of ourselves" (our characteristics, our history, our traits) does not express completely the "who of ourselves". We know that there is a difference between the two. One of the moments where this difference is particularly experienced is in promises. When I promise I affirm that despite the changes in my life (disruptions in sameness) I will stay firm. What element of me will stay firm? My very self, my ipseity. In promises, ipseity appears very pristine and for that reason promise is for Ricoeur the "paradigmatic example of ipseity" (Ricoeur 2005a, 127).

The capacity to make promises is built upon and presupposes all the other capacities (Ricoeur 2005a, 128). In fact, to be able to make promises presupposes the ability to speak; to be able to make a commitment; to be able to give a narrative unity to one's life through time and to be able to be responsible for one's acts (imputation). Thus, promises express the highest manifestation of selfhood, and this is evidenced in some languages, like French, in which a promise can be made by saying: "*Je m'engage à*" (Ricoeur 2005a, 129): "I commit myself to…"

While in character the identity of self finds its support in habits and identifications, in promising the self is affirmed without the need for a principle of permanence based on dispositions of character. Even more, the strength of promises is built into the capacity to

remain firm through changes, as Ricoeur states "keeping one's promise… does indeed appear to stand as a challenge to time, a denial of change: Even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, 'I will hold firm'" (Ricoeur 1992, 124). Does this mean that in promising there is no principle of permanence in time? No, promises are founded upon a principle of permanence in time, but a principle that is not grounded in sameness, but in ipseity. It is a principle of self-constancy (Ricoeur 1992, 103).[47]

When we emphasize this principle of self-maintenance that is not grounded in sameness, we can ask ourselves what happens to the dialectic between ipseity and sameness, which as I have mentioned before, is crucial to Ricoeur's philosophy of the self. At first glance, it seems that in promises we find ipseity without sameness. The very idea of a promise suggests a challenge to sameness. While sameness refers to the sedimentations of the self, to habits, attitudes that are already a part of us, promises can break with the past and affirm an identity that is grounded in what has been constructed during a life. Many promises imply a break with the past, particularly promises that imply a deep conversion in the person's attitudes and habits. At the same time, promises imply a challenge to the future. The promise maker affirms that despite the disruptions in sameness, "I will hold my word." Thus, we could think of promises as a paradigmatic example of ipseity without the support of sameness (sameness being a principle of

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[47] Ipseity is not only relevant for promises, but it is also relevant for any ethics. Without a principle that stands despite the changes in the self, it is hard to maintain the idea of responsibility. For more on this see Van den Beld 2002, 51.

constancy). Indeed, Ricoeur seems to support the idea that in a promise sameness is not relevant when he, for example, argues that promise is the "paradigmatic example of ipseity." However, as I will explain in what follows, Ricoeur does understand and even emphasizes the importance of sameness in promises.

First, sameness matters at the moment of making a promise. A promise is not made out of the blue. Generally it reflects some dispositions of character, which motivate a person to make a commitment. Promises often express the desire of giving a continuation to some traits of character that are already present. Thus, friends through promises make explicit a favorable disposition to each other that is already present in each of them. When somebody tells a friend "I promise that whatever happens I will stand by you," she is just making explicit a favorable disposition that is in her character. Thus, here we find that promises are anchored in sameness in the sense that promises give a continuation to some traits that are already present in the character of a person. Ricoeur seems to agree with the idea that promises are a kind of projection of sameness to the future by agreeing with Hannah Arendt's claim that promises supplement the weakness of human action. For Arendt, by its binding power, "the promise offers a response to the unpredictability that threatens confidence in some expected course of action, in grounding itself in the reliability of human actions" (Ricoeur 2005a, 132). Using Ricoeur's concepts, we could rephrase Arendt's by stating that promises supplement the weakness of the habits and dispositions, i.e., of the sameness of character. The choice of the verb "supplements" indicates that the possibility that promises can be built without the initial support of sameness is ruled out.

Secondly, in my opinion, sameness seems to matter *after* a promise is made as well. Once the act of promising is made, the person can make decisions that will transform his character in such a way that he will end up breaking the promise. How is it possible to faithfully live a promise if the character is not in a way "attuned" to what a promise requires? A promise is not something that is made once and for ever. A promise, in order to remain such, needs a continued renewal. That renewal is made in a dialectical way with sameness. If I promised to serve my country, I have to try to develop a character that helps me to serve it.[48] This can be found in the remarks Ricoeur makes on the fragility of promises.[49] Promises are fragile in part because ipseity needs the support of sameness.[50] Maybe for this reason Ricoeur warns us "not to presume" too much about the power of promises, not to "promise too much" (Ricoeur 2005a, 133). Since to promise is a risky act where the self goes beyond the safety of mere sameness (Ricoeur 2005a, 103), we have to find ways by which the sameness could help the self to keep its word. One of the ways in which the self can gain the support of sameness is by appealing

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[48] Here I use the idea of character in two senses: what underlies someone's actions and behaviors and what actions and behaviors mold. These two complement one another. My actions are shaped by my character and my character is shaped by my action.

[49] Ricoeur refers to this fragility by stating that the "power not to keep one's word is an integral part of the ability to make promises" (Ricoeur 2005a, 127).

[50] Hall links the idea that there is no promise without sameness with the relationship between the voluntary and the involuntary: "Nevertheless, human freedom is not pure volition; human action is not pure act. Human capability is embodied, incarnate, and as such one's action is limited by the obstacles both within and outside of the body. Actions arise within the interconnected systems of cause and effect. Thus, initiative is not an *absolute beginning*, but the initiation of a series of events within a larger series. Even at the level of keeping one's promises, where the capability of the self announces itself at its most profound, individual initiative is a limited one. Therefore, one cannot reasonably promise to do something that is beyond his/her capability. Selfhood finds its structural support within sameness, even if selfhood lays claim to itself beyond structures of sameness" (Hall 2007, 27-28).

to memory. We find a powerful example of this in the history of the biblical Israel, where the people need to remember the deeds of God in order for them to renew their own commitment. When the people of Israel became unfaithful to God (when they broke their promises), the prophets reminded them of what God had done in their favor. Those memories produced a reactivation of the commitment of the people of Israel. Through those memories, the prophets reminded them that their close relationship with God was part of their own "character" (sameness).

Finally, we can find the dialectic between ipseity and promises by appealing to a different dialectic: The dialectic between the self and the other. Even if we have a hard time finding the support of sameness for ipseity, otherness can support the act of promising and in so doing confers another kind of sameness, the sameness that is built upon the recognition of the other. Indeed, for Ricoeur promises have a very important dialogical dimension, as is seen in this sentence: "The relation to the other is so strong in the case of promises that this feature can serve to mark the transition between the present chapter and the one that will follow, on mutual recognition" (Ricoeur 2005a, 127-128). According to Ricoeur, the ethical dimension of promises arises in this dialogical dimension. Promises consist in a "commitment to 'do' or 'give' something held to be good for him or her" (Ricoeur 2005, 129). Promises not only have a receiver but a beneficiary as well. Here Ricoeur links the idea of promises with Gabriel Marcel's concept of creative fidelity (Ricoeur 2005, 133-134). Marcel emphasizes that fidelity to someone else is not static, but supposes an openness to change in order to be faithful. The otherness that is present in promises comes to strengthen the pole of sameness in the dialectic between ipseity and sameness. How can this happen? As we will see in the

fourth chapter, otherness becomes part of the self in a dialectical way. My thesis is that in becoming part of the self, otherness comes to be part of the sameness of its character as disposition to fulfill one's word, to honor a promise. When I promise something I develop a favorable disposition to fulfill that promise. Otherwise the promise is not sincere. That disposition is a disposition towards the *other*. Through the disposition towards the other, the other becomes part of the self as a beneficiary even with the right to complain if I do not fulfill my word. In the fourth chapter this idea will be expanded in the thesis that for Ricoeur the self can be sustained as a meaningful entity only in a dialectical relationship with otherness. As we will see, there is no self without the other. We can apply the same formula to promise: There is no promise without the recognition of the other who becomes part of the self's commitment. Thus, in a promise the other becomes part of the self in the sense that to promise is a particular way of being affected by otherness.

To conclude this section, we can say that even if it is true that in promises there is an undeniable gap between ipseity and sameness, this gap is not equivalent to an abyss. The dialectic between ipseity and sameness is also maintained in promises, as we can see in the role of sameness in the making of a promise, in the keeping of one's word and in recognizing the other as the beneficiary of a promise. However, promises still manifest the crucial distance between sameness and ipseity, while character manifests the overlap of sameness and ipseity. An adequate understanding of personal identity must be built upon a more fruitful and balanced articulation of sameness and ipseity. This is what narrative identity provides.

2.5.   Identity and narrative

Idem and *ipse* are two ways of responding to the challenges that time presents to human identity. They are two models of permanence in time that belong to the self, sameness being an identity built on the idea of stability and ipseity being a dynamic identity. According to Ricoeur, the challenges that the articulation of change and permanence in time introduces can only be successfully approached with the idea of narrative identity:

> My thesis from this point on is a double one: the first is that most of the difficulties which afflict the contemporary discussion of personal identity result from the confusion between two interpretations of permanence over time; the second is that the notion of narrative identity offers a solution to the aporias concerning personal identity. (Ricoeur 1991d, 76)

It is not a coincidence that it is precisely in narrative that we can find an adequate articulation of the problem of identity. Our existence is temporal and therefore only a concept of identity essentially temporal, as narrative identity is, can give a good account of the problem of identity.[51]

Let us therefore introduce this idea of narrative identity laying out the main assumptions it involves. To speak with Ricoeur:

> It is therefore plausible to affirm the following assertions: a) knowledge of the self is an interpretation; b) the interpretation of the self, in turn, finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privileged mediation; c) this mediation

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[51] Meech expresses the same idea: "Narrative identity articulates what cannot be said in a purely descriptive discourse, namely, the dialectical relationship between *ipse* and *idem*, selfhood and sameness" (Meech 2006, 89). See also McCarthy 2007, 168.

> borrows from history as much as fiction making the life story a fictive history or, if you prefer, an historical fiction, comparable to those biographies of great men where both history and fiction are found blended together. (Ricoeur 1991d, 73)

The most important of these assumptions is that life is a self-interpretation mediated by narrative.[52] Ricoeur goes even further when he claims that his notion of narrative can result in a significant reformulation of Socrates's well known dictum, the "unexamined life is not worth living" (Apology 38a), as "a life *examined*… is a life *narrated*" (Ricoeur 1986, 130). Although Ricoeur recognizes that narrative is not the only mediation for self-understanding, he holds that narrative is an essential mediation without which we could not make sense of our life: "[D]o not human lives become more readable [*lisibles*] when they are interpreted in function of the stories people tell about themselves?" (Ricoeur 1991d, 73).[53]

This thesis supposes that between narrative and life there is an essential relationship. Narratives are fulfilled through their reception by the reader and life is

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[52] Hall explains this rather well: "Narrative, Ricoeur argued, is a fundamental structure of self-understanding. It casts both a retrospective glance and a prospective glance over one's existence, and in so doing, erects a configuration around what are otherwise random events" (Hall 2007, 52). In another text, Ricoeur amplifies the mediating role of narrative in three fundamental senses: "From an hermeneutic point of view, that is, from the point of view of the interpretation of a literary experience, a text has an entirely different significance from that which a structural analysis, deriving from linguistics, accords to it; it is a mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself. Mediation between man and the world is called *reference*; mediation between man and man is *communication*; mediation between man and himself is *self-understanding*. A literary works brings together these three dimensions of reference, communication, and self-understanding" (Ricoeur 1986, 126-127).

[53] We have stated in the introduction of this dissertation that Ricoeur's idea of the self is not a self that occupies the foundational places as in the philosophies of the cogito. The importance of narrative in Ricoeur's work is a direct consequence of his idea of a mediated self: "Allow me to conclude by saying that the *subject* is never given at the beginning. Or, if it were so given it would run the risk of reducing itself to a narcissistic ego, self-centered and avaricious – and it is just this from which literature can liberate us. Our loss on the side of narcissism is our gain on the side of narrative identity. In the place of an ego enchanted by itself a *self* is born, taught by cultural symbols, first among which are the stories received in the literary tradition. These stories give unity – not unity of substance but narrative wholeness" (Ricoeur 1986, 132).

understood narratively. Ricoeur recognizes the objections that such thesis can invite, since it seems to go against the intuitive idea that "stories are told, life is lived" (Ricoeur 1986, 126).[54] In order to analyze the possibility and lay down the foundation of this thesis that supports narrative identity, I will start with Ricoeur's theory of the threefold mimesis. The choice of this theory is governed by its central position in Ricoeur narrative theory. Indeed, this theory is formulated in *Time and Narrative*, a three volume work. The threefold mimesis, in its turn, is the core of this monumental work.

2.5.1. The threefold mimesis

The main goal of the theory of threefold mimesis is to demonstrate the essential relationship between time and narrative in the sense that time becomes human through the narrative function and the narrative function is structured and articulated through time:

> *[T]ime becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.* (Ricoeur 1984, 52, Ricoeur's emphasis)

Lived time can only be understood through narration. Narratives, in other words, are an essential mediation of temporal experience. At the same time, narratives are essentially temporal. Thus, there is no experience of time that is not mediated in narratives and there is no narrative that is not temporal. By demonstrating this thesis Ricoeur wants to face

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[54] As expected, the issue of the relationship between life and narrative is controversial in the secondary literature. Some scholars go further than Ricoeur claiming that life more than having just a pre-narrative quality is narrative itself. Others, on the contrary, deny that life has a narrative or pre-narrative quality at all. For more on this discussion see Carr et al. 1991, Kemp 1989, 73–77 and Pellauer 1991.

down the inscrutable aporias of time that so bothered Augustine and other philosophers after him. Ricoeur is not looking for a theoretical solution to the aporias but for a "poetic solution," by showing how this aporia can be reconciled through narrative. Although the main aim of Ricoeur with the threefold mimesis is to show the relationship between time and narrative, he does that by showing how human actions are prefigured, configured and refigured through narrative. Thus, the broad thesis of the articulation of time through narrative is demonstrated by a more specific topic: The articulation of action through narrative. However, through the demonstration of this specific issue, a larger issue is at stake: The relationship between life and narrative, where Ricoeur holds that life is understood through narrative[55] and narrative reaches its fulfillment in life. Thus, from the outset, we can realize that this theory is crucial for a good understanding of Ricoeur's idea of narrative identity.

Ricoeur borrows the idea of mimesis from Aristotle. In Aristotle, story ("mythos") is defined as an "imitation of action, *mimesis praxeos*" (Ricoeur 1986, 127). Analogously, Ricoeur focuses on the process of imitation of action through the narrative configuration. Thus, the threefold mimesis shows the activity of narrative composition in three stages. Mimesis$_2$ is the central stage where we find the core of narrative

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[55] As Vandevelde rightly points out "Ricoeur's challenge is thus to show, among other things, that the level of life and experience, of action and suffering, is already in some sense a narrative order" (Vandevelde 2008, 147).

composition. Mimesis$_1$ is what narrative composition supposes (the world of action) and mimesis$_3$ is the reception by the reader of the narrative composition.[56]

Mimesis$_1$

Mimesis$_1$ is the world of actions that is presupposed in every narrative composition. We can compose, understand and follow a narrative because we have a pre-understanding of the practical field that narration makes explicit. Without such understanding, it would be impossible to understand a narrative.[57] Here we find two main claims: Narrations are built on a preunderstanding of the world of actions (epistemological claim) and the world of action has a narrative quality (ontological claim), as Vandevelde explains:

> Narratives are thus not mere descriptions of something that would be otherwise available independently of description, but are ontological layers, part and parcel of the paste of actions and experiences. (Vandevelde 2008, 141)

Thus, it is not only that narrations are built on a preunderstanding of action (which would be quite obvious) but that the world of actions is essentially narrative. This last thesis is more controversial. We will return to this point later by analyzing some of the critical remarks that commentators have made on this theory.

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[56] Hattingh and Van Veuren summarize the model of mimesis stating that it "gives rise to three corresponding moments of understanding, namely prefiguration (world of action), configuration (emplotment), and refiguration (appropriation)" (Hattingh and Van Veuren 1995, 63).

[57] See Venema 2000a, 98. Jervolino offers us a good summary of this idea: "Hence, the ultimate meaning of Mimesis$_1$ is that in order to imitate or represent action, it is necessary to pre-understand human acting in its semantic, symbolic and temporality. Literature would be incomprehensible if its role were not that of configuring that which already has its figure in human action" (Jervolino 1990, 129).

For Ricoeur our understanding of narratives presupposes the mastering of the basic structure of actions in its semantic, symbolic and temporal structures. Without that understanding, it would not be possible to narrate actions and to understand those narratives. The semantic structure of action refers to the basic components that constitute an action and allows us to distinguish it from physical motion (Ricoeur 1984, 54-55).[58] Thus, in every action we find some basic elements such as "project, goal, means, circumstances, and so on" (Ricoeur 1986, 128). Thanks to the understanding of the semantic structure of action we can act meaningfully. Every action follows this kind of grammar. Otherwise, it could not be considered an action. In every action the agent is inspired by a project (the agent wants to achieve something), has a goal (there is a direct purpose in what is done), some means are chosen, and there are some circumstances that surround the action (other agents, a time, a place). As we cannot meaningfully speak a language without knowing its grammar, we cannot act if we do not follow this basic structure. Ricoeur summarizes these ideas in this way:

> Actions imply goals, the anticipation of which is not confused with some foreseen or predicted result, but which commit the one on whom the action depends. Actions, moreover, refer to motives, which explain why someone does or did something, in a way that we clearly distinguish from the way one physical event leads to another. Actions also have agents, who do and can do things which are taken as *their* word, or *their* deed. (Ricoeur 1984, 55)

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[58] Ricoeur stresses the idea that actions and passions are meaningful because they belong to a net of meaning that we master: "We understand what action and passion are in virtue of our ability to utilize in a meaningful way the entire network of expressions and concepts which the natural languages supply us with in order to distinguish "action" from simple physical "movement" and from psycho-physiological 'behavior'" (Ricoeur 1986, 128).

It must be noted that the knowledge of the semantics of action that we need to have in order to act meaningfully is not a theoretical knowledge, but a practical one. We do not need an awareness of a theory of action in order to act. Secondly, it is important to note that these components of action constitute a network in the sense that the mastering of one of these concepts supposes and requires the mastering of the others (Ricoeur 1984, 55).

The second anchorage that the narrative composition finds in the world of actions is the "symbolic mediation of action" (Ricoeur 1984, 54). Human actions are articulated by signs, rules, and norms (Ricoeur 1984, 57). While the semantics of action allows us to understand the basic components of human actions (goals, motives, agents), the symbolics of action confer an initial "*readability* on action" (Ricoeur 1984, 58), that is, it provides the rules that permit us to interpret the meaning of an action or behavior. Thus, when an agent does something, what he is doing must be interpreted in the context of the meaning of the symbols that are present in his action. Thus, for example, certain gestures are interpreted differently in different cultures depending upon the symbolic net available in that culture. Ricoeur gives the example of the gesture of raising a hand which can be interpreted as greeting, voting or hailing a taxi depending on the symbolic rules and norms of a culture and the context (Ricoeur 1984, 58).[59] While the semantic structure of an action allows us to distinguish what is and what is not an action, the symbolic

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[59] As Ricoeur states, the meaning cannot be dissociated from the context: "In other words, it is 'as a function of' such a symbolic convention that we can interpret this gesture as meaning this or that. The same gesture of raising one's arm, depending on the context, may be understood as a way of greeting someone, of hailing a taxi, or of voting" (Ricoeur 1984, 58).

structure of an action is related to the meaning of an action.[60] For example, if somebody

draws a swastika on a wall in a Jewish community, the meaning of his action cannot be

dissociated from the strong symbolism that is present in that sign. Thus, the symbolism of

an action is related to the complete set of symbols available in a culture, as Ricoeur

explains:

> To understand a ritual act is to situate it within a ritual, set within a cultic system, and by degrees within the whole set of conventions, beliefs, and institutions that make up the symbolic framework of a culture. (Ricoeur 1985, 58)

Ricoeur here holds that the symbols that are present in a specific kind of act must be

understood in the context of the whole set of symbols available in a society. While the

semantics of an action refers to the minimum elements that constitute an action, the

symbolics of an action refers to the meaning of the symbols that are present in it. Those

symbols, as Ricoeur explains, are given in the context of the symbolic net of a culture. In

the symbolic structure of actions we find ethical evaluation of actions as well. Actions are

already evaluated within a symbolic net of values. Since a narrative is grafted onto this

symbolic structure, there are no ethically neutral narratives.[61]

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[60] This aspect of action is related to the public dimension of an action, to a meaning that is publically available, as Jervolino points out: "It is a structured symbolic system, a public one, which furnishes single actions with a context and makes them, in a certain sense, readable" (Jervolino 1990, 128).

[61] Ricoeur emphasizes here that the moral evaluation of the action can be transferred to the agent: "As a function of the norms immanent in a culture, actions can be estimated or evaluated, that is, judged according to a scale of moral preferences. They thereby receive a relative value, which says that this action is more valuable than that one. These degrees of value, first attributed to actions, can be extended to the agents themselves, who are held to be good or bad, better or worse" (Ricoeur 1984, 58). See also Ricoeur 1992, 115.

Finally, we have the third element by which narrative is anchored in life. Ricoeur calls it the "*pre-narrative quality of human experience*" (Ricoeur 1986, 129, Ricoeur's emphasis). In our understanding of actions, there is a comprehension of their temporal structures in a way that we can speak of "life as an incipient story" (Ricoeur 1986, 129). This "pre-narrative quality of human experience" is evidenced in the need that we have to narrate our stories. Action possesses "temporal structures that call for narration" (Ricoeur 1984, 59). Ricoeur provides two examples to show that our actions need to be narrated and, therefore, posses a "narrative pre-quality." The first one is the patient who turns to a psychoanalyst in order to make his story "more intelligible and more bearable" (Ricoeur 1986, 129). The patient makes sense of her own story by telling it to the analyst. This fact would demonstrate that our experience has a narrative component that is made explicit when we narrate it. The second case that would demonstrate the "narrative pre-quality" of life is the case of a trial where "a judge tries to understand a suspect by unraveling the knot of complications in which the suspect is caught" (Ricoeur 1986, 129). The fact that we need different narratives about an incident in which the suspect was involved in order to make sense of it demonstrates that our actions have a narrative quality before they are told. Ricoeur here is claiming that some events in our life can only make sense when we narrate them. Thus, a demand for meaning makes our life worthy of being narrated. We could say that our life possesses an inchoate meaning that can only be made explicit through narration. Finally, Ricoeur offers an additional reason why our life should be narrated:

> We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save

the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative. (Ricoeur 1984, 75)

By narrating the story of the vanquished we do justice to those whose history has not been narrated or whose point of view has not been taken into consideration. However, in addition, by narrating the history of the losers, we do justice to history itself, recounting the past "such as it was."[62] Thus, through narrative we do fulfill a moral duty to the truth and to others. Not any narrative satisfies this demand. Usually history is made by the victors and does not take into consideration the point of view of the lost.

Mimesis$_2$

Mimesis$_2$ is found between mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_3$ and it possesses a mediating function. It mediates between the world of action (which precedes the narrative configuration or mimesis$_1$) and the reception of the narration by the reader (what follows the narrative configuration, mimesis$_3$) (Ricoeur 1984, 65). Mimesis$_2$ corresponds to the configuration of action accomplished by narratives. The configuration of an action is what Ricoeur calls "emplotment."[63] The notion of emplotment is borrowed by Ricoeur from Aristotle's concept of "composition," *mythos* in Greek, "which means both 'fable' (in the sense of imaginary story) and 'plot' (in the sense of 'well-constructed history')"

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[62] See Vandevelde 2008.

[63] The word "emplotment" is given by Ricoeur as the translation of the concept *"mise en intrigue*." This concept is also found in Hayden White: "…by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures…" (White, 2001). Ricoeur was well aware of White's works and he relates the notion of *mise en intrigue* with emplotment precisely while he engages in a discussion with White (see Ricoeur 1983, 231).

(Ricoeur 1986, 122). Ricoeur's notion of emplotment follows the second idea of mythos (a "well constructed history"). Emplotment is mainly an operation that consists in the synthesis of the heterogeneous elements that are found in a story, such as agents, actions, accidental confrontations or expected ones, interactions, means, results and so on (Ricoeur 1986, 122). This synthesis of the heterogeneous happens mainly through three functions of the narrative. First, the narrative produces a synthesis of heterogeneous elements in giving the story a unity. It is this synthesis that gives the story the quality of being a singular, complete and intelligible whole (Ricoeur 1986, 122).[64] As a consequence, a story has a theme. Secondly, through narratives the story gains a greater coherence (Ricoeur 1986, 123). In most narratives the different characters, actions, times can give the idea that there is no coherence in a narration. The events appear disconnected and contradictory to one another. The reader could ask "what is the connection between these events?" However, even in those cases, there is a primacy of concord over discord. Otherwise, we could not call it "a story" but just a series of disconnected facts. Thus, narrative configuration confers a coherence to facts. Finally, emplotment is a synthesis of the heterogeneous by deriving configuration from a succession. In a story we always find an undefined succession of incidents. This succession of incidents that are present in a story reaches a unity once the story is completed and acquires a kind of necessity. What was just a mere succession of events

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[64] Or, in more simple words, borrowed from Kearney: "By narrative configuration he [Ricoeur] means the temporal synthesis of heterogeneous elements – or to put it more simply, the ability to create a plot which transforms a sequence of events into a story" (Kearney 1989, 18).

becomes a necessary configuration. Thus, emplotment configures succession by providing integration, culmination and an ending (Ricoeur 1986, 123).[65]

What is the relationship of mimesis$_2$ (emplotment) to mimesis$_1$? According to Ricoeur it is a relationship of presupposition and transformation (Ricoeur 1984, 55). As I stated above, mimesis$_2$ presupposes mimesis$_1$ in the sense that it works on the same practical understanding of action that is described in mimesis$_1$. In other words, mimesis$_2$ is built on the semantic, the symbolic and the temporal elements of action described in mimesis$_1$. However, mimesis$_2$ at the same time transforms these elements: Mimesis$_2$ is not a mere repetition of the world of action or a redundancy of mimesis$_1$ (Ricoeur 1984, 73). But, how is mimesis$_1$ transformed in mimesis$_2$?

In relation to the semantics of action proper to mimesis$_1$, Ricoeur asserts that while mimesis$_1$ offers the paradigmatic level of action, mimesis$_2$ offers the syntagmatic level. The paradigmatic level of action refers to the basic semantic structure of action that, we find the in mimesis$_1$ such as an agent, a goal, other agents or patients, and circumstances. However, at the level of mimesis$_1$, those elements do not have a specific order. These elements reach a specific order only in mimesis$_2$, which, according to Ricoeur, is the syntagmatic level. Thus, the organization of those elements in the process of emplotment is the "passage from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic" and "constitutes the transition from mimesis$_1$ to mimesis$_2$" (Ricoeur 1984, 66).

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[65] Ricoeur summarizes these three elements: "…we may retain three traits: the mediation between multiple incidents and the singular story accomplished in the plot; the primacy of concord over discord; finally, the struggle between succession and configuration" (Ricoeur 1986, 123).

This transformation has very important ontological consequences. The world of actions configured by the emplotment possesses the ontological status of "being-as" (Ricoeur 1984, 80) in the sense that the understanding of the world through narrative is more that an exact copy of the world of actions, but a world that is understood narratively with its own ontological status. The idea of "being-as" could make us think that the world narrated is not the "real" world but a world that is "as it were real," a representation of the world. However, this is not what Ricoeur has in mind. The world narrated is how the world is given to us or in Husserl's terms, it is the "noema" of what is the case.[66] For that reason, Ricoeur says with confidence that literature shapes our understanding of the world. However, this ontological status of a "being as" is only fully reached when the texts are "received" by the reader, and this only happens in mimesis$_3$.

Mimesis$_3$

Ricoeur describes the transition from mimesis$_2$ to mimesis$_3$ with the analogy of sensation:

> And if emplotment can be described as an act of judgment and of the productive imagination, it is so insofar as this act is the joint work of the text and the reader, just as Aristotle said that sensation is the common work of sensing and what is sensed. (Ricoeur 1984, 76)

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[66] Hohler expresses the same idea: "[A]s the time of the plot holds together the dialectic of the chronological and the achronological, the configurational act produces a figure; it is mimetic. The narration is a "telling *as*"; for it is not an experienced immediacy nor a Xerox-like reproduction. The plot, whether applied to literature or history, breaks from a living experience and produces a 'telling as'" (Hohler 1987, 295).

The analogy of sensation is very illustrative. Sensation supposes what is sensed (a color, smell, etc.) but only happens when the color or smell is perceived. Likewise, the narrative intelligibility that is produced as the result of the configuration only happens through the act of reading, through the reception of the work.[67] Thus, mimesis$_3$ refers to the moment when the narrative is heard or read. In other words, it refers to the reception of the work. According to Ricoeur, this level is equivalent to what Gadamer calls the "application" of the narrative. Narratives achieve their full development only in the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader (Ricoeur 1986, 126). This can be seen from the perspective of the text and from the perspective of the reader. From the perspective of the text, it means that the text can only unfold its world through the mediation of the world of the reader. The reader "fulfills" the meaning of the text by "dwelling" in the world of the text (Ricoeur 1986, 126).[68] At the same time the reader is enriched by the text by finding in it a world of possibilities: "[W]hat is interpreted in a text is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers" (Ricoeur 1984, 81). As Venema mentions, reading "transforms our imagination,

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[67] Venema explains how narrative configuration transforms experience and personal identity: "Narrative configuration is completed through an act of reading that produces a possibility for experience which, when taken up through decision and action, refigures experience and therein personal identity" (Venema 2000a, 103). Muldoon stresses how the operation of emplotment is completed in the reader: "…the effect of emplotment does not end with the text but with the reader. The significance of a story finds its springboard of change in what the reader brings to it" (Muldoon 1997, 41).

[68] The full meaning of a narrative can only be reached in the reader, as Fodor explains: "the reception of a work is an integral part of the constitution of its meaning. Meaning is always the joint product of the text and its reader or recipient; the two emerge together synergetically" (Fodor 1997, 156). Fodor stresses the idea that narrative disrupt our world-view and by doing that open up new possibilities for us: "Indeed, any encounter with the text's imaginary world disrupts in some sense the reader's everyday moral actions; but in so doing it challenges the reader to find ever new and interesting ways of ordering the actual world, thereby enhancing her powers of moral discernment and extending her ethical vision over a greater portion of the practical domain" (Fodor 1997, 157).

refigures our world of experience, and contributes to the narrative texture of our identity, our sense of self" (Venema 2000b, 238).Thus, for Ricoeur, narrative is the "privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience" (Ricoeur 1984, xi).[69] In this mutual exchange between the reader and the text a "fusion of horizons" is produced between the world of the reader and the world of the text. The reception of a work is not just the passive reading of it, but it is an essential moment of its meaning. For this reason, it is called a mimetic moment, that is, a essential moment in the production of the work.

To summarize, in mimesis$_1$ we find the world of actions that is structured in a semantic, symbolic and temporal dimension. In mimesis$_2$, we find that the narrative configuration is grafted onto the practical knowledge of mimesis$_1$ at the same time that the world of actions is transformed. Finally, in mimesis$_3$ our experience is transformed through the encounter with the world of the text. Thus, a prefigured experience (mimesis$_1$) is configured in mimesis$_2$ and refigured in mimesis$_3$ in a circular manner. The world that is configured in the reception of the work (mimesis$_3$) transforms our practical world (mimesis$_1$) in which the narrative configuration (mimesis$_2$) is anchored. Ricoeur is insistent that what we have here is not a vicious circle but a spiral. The experience that comes from action that is already mediated by narrative is configured in narration, which

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[69] Venema stresses the idea that through narrative we bridge the gap between language and life: "Narrative identity tries to bridge the gap between language and life by completing the world of the text in and through the world of the reader. Understanding is incomplete, wooden, bereft of life, without the transfiguration of the world of the one who tries to understand" (Venema 2000b, 242).

in turn refigures the world of experience. In this process there is a continuous enrichment of the world of action.

After this presentation of the threefold mimesis we are ready to discuss the idea of narrative identity. As we will see narrative identity presupposes and needs the theoretical assumptions that are provided by the theory of the threefold mimesis: Our experience is narrated, mediated, and configured through the notion of emplotment and refigured through the reception of narratives.

2.5.2. Narrative identity

Narrative identity successfully articulates permanence and change thanks to the notion of emplotment (composition), already explained in mimesis$_2$. What must be added here is that for Ricoeur emplotment is not only applied to the actions of a narration, but the character (the person) "is him- or herself emplotted" (Ricoeur 2005a, 100). Thanks to the emplotment of the characters, the diverse elements that are commonly present in a story of a life, such as the interactions with other characters, the actions in which one is involved, the physical and psychological characteristics, find a unity as belonging to one single character. Without that unity, it would be impossible to identify the character as such. We can speak of a character, because all the different moments in which someone appears in a narrative are united by the configuring operation of emplotment. The notion of emplotment, in combining elements as diverse as actions, circumstances, and traits of personality, helps us articulate the dialectic between sameness and ipseity. Thus, thanks to narrative identity we can give a unity to the different experiences we have in our life.

Narrative identity helps us to articulate sameness and ipseity by presenting us with different models for combining these two concepts, as Ricoeur explains:

> [T]he imaginative variations generated by the *topos* "narrative identity" and supported by the thought-experiments enhanced by literature makes it possible to display a whole range of combinations between sameness and selfhood: at one end of the spectrum, we find the characters of fairy tales and of folklore with their stiffness and stability through time; in between, we have the complex balance of stability and change of characters in the nineteenth-century novel; at the other extremity, we encounter the character of some contemporary novels, influenced by Kafka, Joyce, and Proust, whose identity seems threatened to such an extent that we are inclined to say that it has been lost. (Ricoeur 1993, 115-116)

Narratives offer us models for articulating our identity. These models offer us different alternatives for articulating sameness and ipseity. Formed by narratives we can find better possible articulations of our own identity. It is important to note that even in the most extreme cases of authors like Kafka, Joyce, and Proust whose writing seem to render sameness extinct, we can still find a dialectic between ipseity and sameness; otherwise there would be no narrative identity. Indeed, where ipseity does not find the support of sameness, usually we do not have a narrative anymore, because to the loss of the identity of the character corresponds the loss of the narrative configuration (Ricoeur 1992, 149).[70] This happens, according to Ricoeur, in some novels such as Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities*:

> Thus, in the case of Robert Musil, the decomposition of the narrative form paralleling the loss of identity of the character breaks out of the confines of the narrative and draws the literary work into the sphere of the essay (Ricoeur 1992, 149).

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[70] See Hattingh and Van Veuren 1995, 67.

Thus, narrative provides models that help us to configure and understand better our own identity. Ricoeur writes:

> [We have a] capacity to appropriate in the application to ourselves the intrigues we received from our culture, and our capacity of thus experimenting with the various roles that the favorite *personae* assume in the stories we love best. And so we try to gain by means of *imaginative variation* of our *ego* a narrative understanding of ourselves, the only kind of understanding that escapes the pseudo-alternative of pure change and absolute identity. (Ricoeur 1986, 131-132)

As stated above, in narrative identity the dialectic between sameness and ipseity achieves its fullest development. This is possible due to the notion of emplotment and to the different models of articulation that different narrations offer us. Now, we have to go one step further and ask ourselves how the notion of ipseity and sameness is present in the articulation that narratives make possible.

2.5.3. The articulation of sameness and ipseity in narrative

The operation of emplotment puts together elements as different as actions, circumstances, traits of personality, agents, interactions, and influences into a single unity. In my opinion, the pole of sameness is made up of all these elements that must be put together in emplotment. We could say that sameness corresponds to the objective side of the story of the self, to what is given to the self. Once something is given, it becomes an element that we have to integrate into our personal identity. We could use the image of a mosaic. What are given are the pieces of the mosaic and what must be done is to put together those pieces in an act equivalent to the operation of emplotment. As in a mosaic, the self has to work with the "pieces" that are already there, available. These "pieces" correspond in our discussion to the pole of sameness, to what is given to the self (a story,

temporal and spatial coordinates, a culture). Then, the self must make sense of all these elements that are given, as one has to make sense of the pieces of a mosaic. With what is given to the self, the self can construct many different possible identities. Thus, sameness is the source of different possible identities. However, sameness at the same time places restrictions on the possible identities that can be generated. I cannot construct any kind of personal identity. The elements that are given to the self (sameness) act as constraint in the sense that I cannot come up with just any kind of identity. The pole of sameness of personal identity places some limits on the possibilities of identity. I can change the meaning of my past and of my circumstances, but I cannot come up with whatever past and circumstances I want, unless I have lost my mind.

This notion of sameness is obviously broader than the idea of sameness present in character, where sameness is equivalent to invariability. Sameness in narrative identity is that with which the self can identify itself. Thus, a single event during a life could be significant enough to permanently affect one's identity, thereby becoming a source of sameness. In the idea of character, only what remains stable can be source of identity, because character encompasses a static view of the self. However, if we see the self in its history, everything that happens to the self could become part of it thanks to memory. This element can be clearly seen in the identity of countries, where some founding events are part of the national identity. This broader idea of sameness is also consistent with Ricoeur's idea that the self is mediated through stories, traditions, symbols and even through its own interpretation. All these mediations, in my opinion, correspond to a narrative kind of sameness. Yet, where does the idea of ipseity enter in narrative identity? Ipseity appears in narrative identity mainly in the operation of emplotment by which the

self puts together the manifold of sameness into a coherent and intelligible unity. The operation of emplotment is an expression of ipseity, because narrative identity is that intelligible unity that results from the act of configuration.

This interpretation of narrative identity as an articulation of sameness and ipseity is consistent with Ricoeur's understanding of identity, where he always emphasizes that identity is the result of the articulation of sameness and ipseity. However, in *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III, Ricoeur states that narrative identity *is* ipseity, dismissing, in a way, the importance of sameness.[71] He makes a sharp contrast between sameness and ipseity, implying that sameness belongs to the identity of things and ipseity to the identity of the self, ipseity being the narrative identity: "The difference between *idem* and *ipse* is nothing more than the difference between a substantial or formal identity and a narrative identity" (Ricoeur 1988, 246). Narrative identity, in this text, instead of articulating sameness and ipseity, articulates sameness and otherness, change and permanence: "Unlike the abstract identity of the Same, this narrative identity, constitutive of self-constancy, can include change, mutability, within the cohesion of one lifetime" (Ricoeur 1988, 246). Is this idea of ipseity different from the idea of ipseity presented in *Oneself as Another* and in the *Course of Recognition* where Ricoeur insists that ipseity is in a dialectical relationship with sameness? Not necessarily, since narrative identity by

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[71] Some commentators emphasize the same fact. For example for Stevens the "narrative identity of a person or a community answers the question: Who performed these actions? Who is the hero of the story? The answer is not the definition of an *idem*: a permanent substantial and formal support that can only prove to be an illusion proper to the metaphysics of subjectivity. The answer rather comes from a description of the *ipse*: the account of the various narrative configurations that determine a subject as being the one who acted in such and such a way" (Stevens 1995, 503).

combining different elements in a narrative unity is not negating the model of

permanence in time based on sameness. There is nothing in a narration that is allergic to

the notion of the presence of some sameness in the self that can be expressed through the

permanence of physical or psychological traits in a narration. So, then, why does Ricoeur

say in *Time and Narrative* that narrative identity is in contrast to identity as sameness? In

my opinion, the difference, which we found in *Time and Narrative*, more than being the

result of his notion of ipseity, is based on a different understanding of the notion of

sameness. While in *Oneself as Another* and in *The Course of Recognition* the idea of

sameness is the idea of a model of permanence in time that is found in the self, in *Time

and Narrative* sameness appears just as a the "substantialist illusion" that philosophers

like Hume and Nietzsche have criticized (Ricoeur 1988, 246). However, this dismissal of

sameness is corrected in Ricoeur's later texts. For example, in a conference given in 1992,

Ricoeur states explicitly that narrative identity articulates sameness and ipseity: "The

notion of narrative identity provides the appropriate occasion for an explicit dialectic

between the *idem* and the *ipse* poles of personal identity" (Ricoeur 1993, 114). Later, in

the same text, he goes even further by claiming that narrative identity is found in between

ipseity and sameness:

> Narrative identity may be seen as an intermediary stage between the stability of a
> character (in the psychological sense of the word) and the kind of self-
> maintenance exemplified by the promise. (Ricoeur 1993, 115)

However, the fact that he does not recognize fully the importance of sameness in

Time and Narrative, may show that in his narrative theory, at least as formulated in *Time

and Narrative*, the self has a fragile status, as I will show in what follows.

2.5.4. Fragile identity

For Ricoeur personal identity is a fragile identity. Ricoeur stresses the idea that a narrative opens multiple possible narrative configurations in order for, in Venema's words, "being other-wise in the stories of others" (Venema 2000b, 238), that is, through others' stories we can explore new possible identities for us. This dialectic between the possible "imaginative variations" of the self and some given elements can be seen in the dialectic between fiction and history, as Ricoeur points out in this text:

> [N]arrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity. Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents (which, thus, should not really be called the same events), so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives. In this regard, we might say that, in the exchange of roles between history and fiction, the historical component of a narrative about oneself draws this narrative toward the side of a chronicle submitted to the same documentary verifications as any other historical narration, while the fictional component draws it toward those imaginative variations that destabilize narrative identity… A systematic investigation of autobiography and self-portraiture would no doubt verify this instability in principle of narrative identity. (Ricoeur 1988, 248-249)

As Ricoeur states it, it is always possible to weave different plots about our lives. This element gives to narrative identity a very fragile and unstable nature.[72] As in fiction, we can make multiple variations of our own life. However, our life is not just a pure

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[72] The fragility of narrative identity can be seen as a consequence of the partial nature of the narratives involved in the constitution of identity. Dauenhauer describes three main ways in which narratives are partial: "They are partial (*a*) because they exclude some items that they could include, (*b*) because they make contestable distributions of emphasis among the items they do include, and (*c*) because there are always alternatives with different inclusions and emphasis that could be told. Hence the convictions they can yield can never be exhaustively considered. However well–considered they may be, they always remain subject to reform in the light of further reflection" (Dauenhauer 1997, 131).

collection of possible narratives. Those variations always have an underlying principle of invariability. There are thus some constrains on the way we can configure our identity. First of all, we are determined by a place and a time. Secondly, although we can change and "negotiate" the meaning of our past, we cannot change what has happened. Our body and the material conditions of our existence also work as givens. This pole of invariability is analogous to the "documentary verifications" with which a historian works in so far as our attempt to find some "evidence" to ground our life-events helps us to configure our identity. We can appeal here to the dramatic cases of Argentinean children who were taken away from their parents at a very early age (usually while their parents were held as political prisoners) in order to be given away to military families that could not conceive children. Some of these children found themselves later on trying to find out who their real parents were. As a consequence, their identities experienced traumatic transformations. The same can happen to adopted children once they find out the truth. Our past, our origin does matter in order to configure our identity and in a way provides an element of invariability and stability for the construction of our identity. However, Ricoeur seems unwilling to concede enough strength to the restrictions that a person must encounter when it comes to articulating her own past in order to construct her own identity. As the historian does not have many restrictions in his interpretation of the past in Ricoeur's model (as we will see in what follows), the self does not have many restrictions in the way that it configures its own identity. The reason for this instability can be traced back to the relationship between $mimesis_1$ and $mimesis_2$. To approach this complex problem I will present some of the criticisms that have been recently made by

Pol Vandevelde to Ricoeur's theory of the threefold mimesis in an article called *The Challenge of the 'such as it was": Ricoeur's Theory of Narratives* (Vandevelde 2008).

Vandevelde focuses on Ricoeur's claim that in our narratives of historical events we have a kind of "debt" to the past (Vandevelde 2008, 143). Let us remember that for Ricoeur narratives can be fictional or historical and that the theory of the threefold mimesis applies to both. The debt of the historian is expressed in the demand that she tells the event "such as it was". Vandevelde points out that while Ricoeur recognizes the importance of paying out that debt to the past, the relationship between $mimesis_2$ and $mimesis_1$ has some ambiguities that in a way make our repayment of the debt impossible. The ambiguities are found mainly in the fact that while $mimesis_1$ provides the paradigmatic level of action, $mimesis_2$ provides the syntagmatic level. In other words, in $mimesis_1$ we have the level at which actions are yet inchoate and lacking shape. Through the act of narrative configuration, we pass from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic level, where we provide actions with a shape and form in our recounting of it. As a consequence, "only when told can the action in actuality be an action, clearly identifiable and meaningful" (Vandevelde 2008. 154). Vandevelde claims that Ricoeur gives too much leeway to the readers and interpreters of actions (Vandevelde 2008, 155).

Basically I agree with Vandevelde's criticism. Indeed, if we draw all the consequences of Ricoeur's claim that in the level of $mimesis_1$ actions do not possess a syntagmatic order, but only a paradigmatic one, we have to conclude that the interpreter,

by the act of narrative configuration can provide almost any kind of order to the action.[73]

However, it is hard to think that Ricoeur would accept that. Even though Ricoeur claims

that the syntagmatic level is provided by the narrator, I do not think that for Ricoeur

"any" order would do justice to the past. The problem is that Ricoeur does not provide an

account of the kinds of constraints that the narrator has in her narration. Is this lack of

constraint missing in narrative identity as well? According to Vandevelde, we have to

recognize a fundamental difference between the account that a historian gives of the past

and the account that the self gives of itself through the rendering of its identity. While the

historian should be concerned about doing justice to the meaning of the events (what it

was the case?), when we speak of the self it seems that it is more a question of the

meaningfulness of the events (what were the consequences or the significance of the

action?), as Vandevelde points out:

> As previously mentioned about the narratives applied to selfhood, we are dealing
> more with the meaningfulness of facts, deeds, and events than with their meaning.
> (Vandevelde 2008, 152)

For that reason, the problem of the lack of constraint that we find in mimesis$_2$ is a

problem that is relevant particularly in the case of history, according to Vandevelde.

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[73] To illustrate this point, Vandevelde gives the example of Caesar's murder by Brutus, explaining
that at the symbolics of action (mimesis$_1$) there are not enough constrain to distinguish a murder from an
accident: "Let us imagine our Brutus free from bloody intent just briskly walking and passing by the Senate
consumed in his contemplation of a knife he just bought at the Mausoleum flea market, a knife he was told
belonged to General Nicias; Brutus proudly and firmly holds the knife in his right hand in front of him.
And the next thing Brutus hears is, "*Tu qouque, Brute*" ("You too, Brutus") and Julius Cesar falling on
him, apparently having impaled himself on the knife Brutus held when Caesar embraced him. Of this
scenario it is still true that "Brutus killed Caesar on March 14, 44 BC." But, as we say, it would have been
an accident, not a murder. While it is true that we would have to tell a story to discriminate an accident and
a murder precisely by appealing to the symbolics of action, still the choice of the narrative – accident or
murder – is not constrained by the symbolics of action itself [mimesis$_1$]" (Vandevelde 2008, 159).

However, in my opinion, the problem of the self is not only related to the meaningfulness of events. There are some facts that build our identity and act as a kind of constraint for it. Historical facts have a say in what we are. Are those elements only a problem of meaningfulness or significance? I do not think so. The identity of the self is not only related with the consequences of some events or the significance of some events (meaningfulness), but self-identity is also based in what it was the case (meaning). The self cannot ascribe just any kind of meaning to those facts. There are some restrictions to such an ascription. Thus, while I agree in the main with Vandevelde's criticism of the lack of restrictions that we find in Ricoeur's mimesis$_2$, I think that the lack of restrictions is a problem not only when we are given an account of what was the case in historical narratives; it is also a problem when we try to understand the constitution of narrative identity. We cannot expect a complete correspondence between the narrative configuration of the self and the facts that lie at the basis of our identity, but we cannot make identity entirely dependent on the configuration of its identity by the self. Maybe it is the all too powerful idea of configuration that is rightly criticized by Vandevelde, and which causes Ricoeur not to give enough importance to sameness in the construction of narrative identity. As I explained above, we can see this in *Time and Narrative*, where the role of sameness in the identity of the self is suppressed.

If in the configuration of our identity there are not many restrictions, what is the criterion for producing such a configuration? What is the nature of the act that makes us choose to configure our identity in one way over another? In my opinion we can only tackle this problem successfully by appealing to the notion of attestation.

2.5.5. Narrative identity and attestation

The difficulty in deciding what possible emplotment we resort to in order to configure our identity shows the fragility of personal identity and the fragility of the self. The main fragility of the self is that there is no definitive criterion to arbitrate between the competing plots. I can tell many stories about myself and I can assign different relevance and interpretation to the stories that others tell about myself. I can read my own story from different points of view. These possibilities might give us the impression that there is no self at all, but just a bundle of influences that can hardly be seen in a unity.

Ricoeur acknowledges the fragility of the self, as I have stated, though he does not accept the dissolution of it (although the lack of restrictions in his account of narrative identity puts the self at risk). He believes in the capacity of the self to promise, to commit and to affirm proudly that "it is me, here." How, then, can the self reach unity while being enmeshed in the different stories that constitute it? Here the notion of attestation is crucial. The self can prefer one narrative account over other based in its confidence that some interpretations and configurations express better than others its own identity. Thus, narrative identity is an attested identity, an identity that is built on the confidence of the self in a specific narrative configuration that for it expresses its self.

Pamela Anderson sees in Ricoeur's narrative identity a dialectic between self-affirmation and self-effacement, between attestation and suspicion. According to her, narrative identity is situated between an idea of the self as self-evidence and the dissolution of the self (Anderson 1992, 65). Indeed, we can claim that the narrative

configuration that the self gives to itself is an expression of ipseity and an act of

attestation, as Ricoeur suggests in this text:

> [R]eading also includes a moment of impetus. This is when reading becomes a
> provocation to be and to act differently. However this impetus is transformed into
> action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand! So narrative
> identity is not equivalent to true self-constancy except through this decisive
> moment, which makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy.
> (Ricoeur 1988, 249)

For Ricoeur the moment of reading, which he also calls "refiguration," is a moment in

which the reader appropriates what is foreign.[74] This moment corresponds exactly to

attestation. This would be an attestation of the self that happens to be the attestation of

otherness:

> Language is for itself the order of the Same. The world is its Other. The
> attestation of this otherness arises from language's reflexivity with regard to itself,
> whereby it knows itself as being *in* being in order to bear *on* being. (Ricoeur 1984,
> 78)

Thus, in narrative identity, what comes from the "outside" needs to be assented to by an

act of decision in which the self says "Here I stand!" This is an act of decision, of

affirmation, and is an act of attestation. Just as in the case of an act of attestation,

narrative identity can always be challenged. There is no way to provide a definitive

configuration of the self that could not be questioned. Attestation as a belief in, a

commitment, a confidence in, faces the permanent threat of suspicion.

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[74] Hattingh and Van Veuren emphasize the appropriation of meaning by the reader in the
following way: "To describe the relationship between text and reader, Ricoeur employs a dialectic which
states that 'the objectification is a necessary mediation between the writer and the reader.' But at the same
time, this objectification as mediation, 'calls for a complementary act of a more existential character which
I shall call the appropriation of meaning' (Ricoeur 1981, 185). Appropriation means to make one's own
what was initially alien" (Hattingh and Van Veuren 1995, 64).

The fragility of narrative identity is expressed in its transitory nature. Narrative configuration is always a work in progress. We never reach a definitive self-interpretation.[75] New events challenge our existing configuration and shed new light over our past. Our identity is in constant negotiation in part because we do not remember things the same way at different times. We visit and revisit our past trying to make sense of it. As I mentioned above, one of the problems with Ricoeur's account of narrative is the lack of a definite answer to the question of how to give an account of the past. Thus, the problem of the attestation of identity announces another related problem: The problem of the attestation of the past. This will be our topic in the next chapter.

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[75] Along these lines, Dauenhauer stresses the idea that the formation of narrative identity is an endless process: "…the constitution of one's personal identity, though it is already underway and has already received a character of some sort, is a task that should have no *determinate* terminus. Rather, it is a task that should continue until death cuts it off" (Dauenhauer 1997, 131–132).

Chapter Three

Attestation of the Past: Memory

3.1.   Introduction

In the previous chapter we have found that memories play an important role in the constitution of personal identity. Our identity is shaped, in part, by our past. Now it is time to analyze the problem of memory in relation to attestation. There are at least two instances where attestation and memory come together. The first instance, which will be explained in the first part of this chapter, is what we could call the ontological status of the past. In order to explain this idea, firstly, I will show the ambiguity of memory, that is, the fact that memory is something that belongs to the present as well as to the past. Memories exist as images. These images are present images that represent past events. Secondly, I will explore the fragility of memory. We will see that memories are threatened by their confusion with fiction, by the shadow of forgetfulness and by the possibility of manipulation. These two main aspects of memory, its ambiguity and its fragility, will help us articulate the first thesis of this chapter: The past is attested. Indeed, memories rely on testimonies, either on the testimony of the self or on other testimonies. There is no access to memories that are not mediated by testimonies. As a consequence, the past is something that I believe in. That belief has the form of credence, of trust, of attestation.

In the second part of this chapter I will show how, as a direct consequence of the first thesis, through the attestation of memory the self attests to its own self. The main assumption here is that although the past cannot be changed, the meaning of the past can be changed. The self ascribes and provides a meaning to the past. This meaning is mainly a matter of attestation to the extent that this meaning cannot be empirically proven but it is given as a conviction that the interpretation that I give to the past does justice to it. Through the attestation of the past, I attest to my own self as well. The confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood (attestation) is gained in part by ascribing a specific meaning to the past. I will show this by appealing to two paradigmatic examples where we can see how the self attests to its own self by giving a specific meaning to its own past. The first example will be mourning. We will see that through mourning the self ascribes a specific meaning to its own past in an effort to try to face the reality and the truth of the past. Mourning, in this sense, is the contrary of the repression of the past. The second example will be forgiveness. Forgiveness will be interpreted as an act through which the self gives a specific meaning to the past that in a way separates the offender from its fault. We will see, as a conclusion, that both mourning and forgiving are ways by which the self attests to its own self insofar as they can help the self free itself from the haunting power of the past.

3.2.   The ambiguity of memory

Ricoeur presents the problem of what is the ontological status of memory by pointing out an important aporia: Memories appear to us as present images that represent the past. Thus, memory has a twofold dimension: It is constituted by *present* images but

the present images are of the past.[76] As Ricoeur explains, memory is a "present representation of an absent thing" (Ricoeur 2004a, 494). In Reagan's words: "[The] object of the representation no longer exists, but the representation is in the present" (Reagan 2005, 310).

Ricoeur notes that this distinction is already present in Aristotle in the difference between *mnēmē-memoria* (the images that represent the past) and *anamnēsis*, the active moment of memory, the process of seeking, of discovering and of rediscovering. Thanks to this active moment, the images are recognized as belonging to the past, as Ricoeur explains in this passage:

> The past is "contemporaneous" with the present that it *has been*. Hence, we do not perceive this survival, but we presuppose it and believe in it. This is the latent and unconscious aspect of memories preserved from the past. It is also the profound truth of the Greek *anamnēsis*. To seek is to discover, and to rediscover is to recognize what one once – previously – learned. As Aristotle puts it well in speaking of *anamnēsis*, "memory is of the past." (Ricoeur 2005a, 126)[77]

The phenomenon of memory shows us the ambiguous ontological status of the past. On one side, the past is what is "no longer," a past that has been "elapsed, abolished, superseded" (Ricoeur 2004a, 498). On the other side, the past *is* there, in the sense that it

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[76] Greisch emphasizes the temporal aspect of the traces that constitute memory, which also make memory a sign: "The basic difficulty is in understanding the specifically temporalizing function of memory, which is reflected in Aristotle's statement: 'memory is *of* time.' This formulation, which Ricoeur takes as the guiding star of the whole of his investigation, reminds us that mnesic traces refer us immediately to a temporal horizon. So we avoid the temptation of making memory a mere province in the vast empire of the imagination and, we might add, of making the trace a mere province in the vast empire of signs" (Greisch 2004, 85).

[77] See also Ricoeur 2004a, 4.

is available, present to the subject that remembers. Memory attests to this ambiguous character of the past in the idea of a "present" image of the "past."

The ambiguous character of the past is a key to understanding Ricoeur's reflections on memory and serves as a theoretical framework for this chapter. This ambiguity explains in part what I call here the "fragility of memory." This fragility is manifested in at least three aspects that I will explain in detail. Firstly, this fragility can be seen in the difficulty that we have in distinguishing between memory and fiction. Since both memory and fiction appear as images it is sometimes hard to decide whether an image corresponds to something that indeed happened or is just a fantasy. Secondly, the fragility of memory is manifested in the shadow of forgetfulness. We remember, but we also forget. Memory is always at risk of being lost. All the monumental efforts of keeping archives and records are efforts to fight against the threat of forgetfulness. The third manifestation of the fragility of memory is seen in the risk of manipulation that memory faces.

3.3.   The fragility of memory

In this section I analyze the problem of the fragility of memory by appealing to three phenomena: The possible confusion between memory and fiction, the fact that memory is always threaten by forgetfulness and the constant risk of manipulation that memory faces. In these analyses, we will find examples taken from individual memories and from collective memories. The recourse to these two kinds of memories could raise the objection that we are ascribing memory to collective entities that do not properly

remember. For this reason, before entering into this discussion, we have to analyze who is the subject of memory and whether the examples given at the collective level can be applied to the personal level.

Ricoeur shows two main traditions with respect to the subject of memory. The first tradition is what Ricoeur calls, borrowing from Taylor, the "tradition of inwardness" (see Ricoeur 2004a, 96-132). For this tradition, well represented in Augustine, memory is basically a personal act. On the opposite side, we find some sociologists who deny the existence of personal memory, like Halbwachs who claims that all memories are collective (Ricoeur 2004, 120).

Against Halbwachs Ricoeur sides with the tradition of inwardness and defends the view that the subject of the act of remembering is the individual: "[The] act of recollection is in each case ours. To believe this, to attest to it, cannot be denounced as a radical illusion" (Ricoeur 2004a, 123). However, Ricoeur sides with Halbwachs when attributing memory to collective entities, such as groups or societies (Ricoeur 2004a, 120). We can attribute memories to collective entities because our memories, from the outset, are social: "Starting with the role of the testimony of others in recalling memories, we then move step-by-step to memories that we have as members of a group; they require a shift in our viewpoint, which we are well able to perform" (Ricoeur 2004, 121). The social nature of memory appears clearly in events like 9/11, where the memories that we have are mediated by what the media told us, how the authorities reacted and by the testimonies given by the witnesses.

Thus, when I state in this section, following Ricoeur, that a society represses, forgets or manipulate memories, I am not using a figurative speech, but I am trying to do justice to the strong role that society has in the articulation of memory. It is true that in a strict sense the act of remembering, forgetting or repressing belong to the individual. However, since our memories are by nature collective (in the sense that others play a central role in the genesis of our memories) we do not fall in a fallacy of equivocation when we attribute memories to a society.

At the same time, answering the possible objection that what can be said at the collective level cannot be applied to the personal level, I argue that personal and collective memories influence each other. For example, a decree of amnesty, social by nature, affects personal memories. By the same token, individual memories, like the memory of the victims of bloody regimes, shape collective memories. Of course, we find differences between the two, but those differences do not prevent their interconnection. Ricoeur supports this thesis, stating that our close relations with others mediate between personal and collective memories:

> Does there not exist and intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual persons and the public memory of the communities to which we belong? This is the level of our close relations, to whom we have a right to attribute a memory of a distinct kind. These close relations, those people who count for us and for whom we count, are situated along a range of varying distances in the relation between self and others. (Ricoeur 2004, 131)

3.3.1. Memory and fiction

We can only have access to our past through an image of it. The problem is that these images can be easily confused with mere fictions or imaginings (Ricoeur 2004a, 6). How can I be sure that the images that come to my mind really correspond to what has taken place? The images that refer to the realm of the "unreal, the possible, the utopian" (Ricoeur 2004a, 6) and the images that refer to the realm of "memory, directed toward prior reality" (Ricoeur 2004a, 6) cannot always be sharply distinguished in our mind.[78] One of the main difficulties in distinguishing real images of the past from fictions is that what happened is always at some distance from what is happening. The older a memory, the greater the distance that separates it from us. Thus, we experience a constant "danger of confusing remembering and imagining" (Ricoeur 2004a, 7). This danger affects the reliability of memory (Ricoeur 2004a, 414).[79]

Nonetheless, we have "nothing better than memory to guarantee that something has taken place" (Ricoeur 2004a, 7). If we do not rely on ourselves as true witnesses of the past, we have to appeal to other witnesses. Those witnesses or documents must be believed. Thus, there is no way to be absolutely certain about the reality of the past.[80] As

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[78] The idea that memory cannot be completely distinguished from fiction is one that appears many times in Ricoeur's work. Indeed, one of the main theses of *Time and Narrative* is that history and fiction are closely connected (see Ricoeur 1984, 81–82).

[79] As Hannoum rightly points out: "The claim of memory to truth is thus a crucial trait to keep in mind" (Hannoum 2005, 125).

[80] Belvedresi explicitly relates the problem of the reality of the past to the problem of the Cartesian doubt: "After all, memory is a victim of the same Cartesian doubt that affects sensible knowledge. Does it

a consequence, the belief in the pastness of our images is a matter of trust, of credence, of attestation. The proud declaration of a witness who affirms and asks to be believed: "Believe me, I was there" supposes that the person trusts his memories. If I do not trust that some images correspond to the past, then I cannot ask *in good faith* to be trusted and believed.

The possibility of confusing the true with the fake image of the past is not the only threat and risk that memory faces. There is also the possibility of forgetting what happened. Not only to think that something happened when indeed it did not, but also not to have an image at all of what happened. The effacement of traces, that is, forgetfulness, is the second element that shows the fragility of memory.

3.3.2. Memory and forgetfulness

There is an essential relationship between memory and forgetfulness since to remember means precisely that we have not forgotten. To remember is not to forget. For that reason, the main threat to memory is forgetfulness. As betrayal is the enemy of promise, forgetfulness is the enemy of memory as Ricoeur says: "[F]orgetting is indeed the enemy of memory, and memory is a sometimes desperate attempt to pull some flotsam from the great shipwreck of forgetting" (Ricoeur 2005a, 112). In order not to forget, we keep archives and documents. We want to have a memory of our own life and

not happen sometimes that a very distinct dream, as time passes, cannot be distinguished from the fact that really happened? Do we not sometimes experience what happens to others so intensely that we cannot distinguish those events from our own experiences?" (My translation) (Belvedresi 2004, 365).

a collective memory. As Hannoum states, "[f]orgetfulness is seen as a betrayal of memory, for after all memory is an effort against forgetfulness, and forgetfulness is the challenge to memory" (Hannoum 2005, 130).[81]

Ricoeur distinguishes two kinds of forgetfulness: A passive and an active forgetfulness. The passive forgetfulness is associated with a deficit in our memory and with the difficulty to remember. The active forgetfulness is characterized as a strategy of avoidance, that is, as a will to forget. If forgetfulness is deliberate, the self is equally responsible for the active and for the passive forgetfulness.[82] We can be blamed for not making an effort to remember or for trying to forget. In what follows, I will focus on active forgetfulness, since its analysis is more relevant for the purposes of this investigation, especially with regard to attestation.

Active forgetfulness is related to the problem of a blocked memory, which is the phenomenon that in some circumstances the subject simply does not want to remember. Ricoeur analyzes the phenomenon of blocked memory using the tools that psychoanalysis provides, particularly the concepts of compulsion to repetition and melancholia. The compulsion to repetition is the consequence of a memory that does not remember. The

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[81] Forgetfulness can have extraordinarily dramatic implications for the human self, as Greisch points out in the following text: "But what the phenomenologist can apprehend is the terrible anguish that takes hold of people deprived by a brain trauma of the ability to access their short-term memories, or the upsetting signs of senile amnesia suffered by people with Alzheimer's disease, showing just how much certain forms of forgetting are synonymous with the destruction of the self" (Greisch 2004, 81).

[82] Ricoeur emphasizes the idea that we can be as responsible for not remembering as we can be for forgetting: "Being active, forgetfulness of this kind involves the same degree of responsibility as that ascribed to acts of negligence or omission, in any situation where action has not been taken, and it appears after the event to any supposedly 'right' conscience that one should have known, and could have known, or tried to find out" (Ricoeur 1996a, 22).

patient "repeats instead of remembering" (Ricoeur 2004a, 445).[83] The lack of

remembering makes us "repeat" the repressed events that are covered by a blocked

memory. Here we find that the past cannot just be neglected, as Ricoeur states:

> [I]n particular circumstances, entire sections of the reputedly forgotten past can
> return. For the philosopher, psychoanalysis is therefore the most trustworthy ally
> in support of the thesis of the unforgettable. This was even one of Freud's
> strongest convictions, that the past once experienced is indestructible. (Ricoeur
> 2004a, 445)

The past, in some respect, demands that it be honored and remembered. Freud

analyzes this aspect in relation to the loss of objects that we love. In many cases, we

repress the memory of our losses in order to deny the loss of them. This is not only

related to traumatic events where someone loses a loved one. Also in cases where the

person has been the culprit of an act against another, we can find in the offender a will to

repress the memories in order to avoid the pain of the loss of self-esteem, as has been

observed in many places where interested parties benefiting from political persecution or

racial injustices choose not to remember their association with criminal regimes.[84] As a

consequence of that repression, there is a compulsion to "repeat" the past, i.e., to act out

and to redo in a symbolic manner the events that have been repressed. This repetition can

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[83] Although here we are using the language of psychoanalysis that refers to a "patient," these
concepts can be easily applied to a society or to a group. When a society has not done the work of
remembering, we can see how it tends to repeat some phenomena, for example, in the form of violence, as
Ricoeur explains: "Too much memory recalls especially the compulsion to repeat, which, Freud said, leads
us to substitute acting out for the true recollection by which the present would be reconciled with the past:
how much violence in the world stands as acting out "in place of" remembering!" (Ricoeur 2004, 79).

[84] We can mention, among many, the case of Chile during the Pinochet regime and the case of
South Africa during the Apartheid.

have the form of a violence that happens over and over in societies that have not found

reconciliation with their violent origins.[85]

The second symptom of a repressed memory is the mood of melancholia, that,

according to Ricoeur, can be described as a situation where the ego "finds itself in

desolation: It succumbs to the blows of its own devaluation, its own accusation, its own

condemnation, its own abasement" (Ricoeur 2004a, 73).[86] These two symptoms –

repetition and melancholia – usually are found together. A blocked memory tends to

repeat the past in the compulsion to repetition in some cases and it tends to produce the

feeling of melancholia in other cases. Melancholia is very similar to grief. It is a "sadness

that has not completed the work of mourning" (Ricoeur 2004a, 77).

Thus, there is a price to pay for forgetfulness: Compulsion to repetition as well as

melancholia. Compulsion to repetition is a way in which the past is manifest in the

actions of the subject despite what the subject wants. Melancholia is the price to be paid

for a past with which there is no reconciliation at all. In melancholia the destructive

power of memories is directed against the subject. We could say that in compulsion to

repetition the past remains present in an active way, reappearing again and again, and in

melancholia the past remains present in a passive way, destroying the self. Thus, the

psychological problems of compulsion to repetition and of melancholia remind us that we

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[85] The difficulty we have had in the United States of recognizing the atrocities committed against blacks can be one of the reasons why the deprivation of civil rights has been perpetuated in renewed forms of discrimination and social marginalization.

[86] For more on melancholia see Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (Kristeva 1989).

should not forget.[87] However, our duty not to forget can in some cases be understood from the standpoint of a debt to our ancestors, especially with regard to traumatic events, such as the holocaust, as Ricoeur states:

> [E]vents like the Holocaust and the great crimes of the twentieth century, situated at the limits of representation, stand in the name of all the events that have left their traumatic imprint on hearts and bodies: they protest that they were and as such they demand being said, recounted, understood. (Ricoeur 2004a, 498)

With this idea Ricoeur introduces us to the moral dimension of memory. We should tell, recount the history of our ancestors, especially the history of the victims.[88] However, this debt is not felt by all the members of society. On the contrary, there are groups that insist on denying some events, for example, some groups deny the Holocaust. So, then, if it is not evident to everyone that we *should* remember, how then can we justify this duty? In what follows I attempt an explanation.

Ricoeur relates the duty to remember to traumatic events where people have suffered. Starting from this point, we can learn that this duty is mainly a duty to those who have suffered. We can explain this by appealing to the idea of recognition. The injustice that an individual suffers implies in a sense a refusal to recognize her dignity and her rights. By remembering the horrors of the past, such as crimes and injustices, we are at the same time recognizing the injustices committed against the victims. We can

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[87] Here we see an interesting intersection between ethics and psychology. The denial of the past, as an ethical problem, is manifested in psychological phenomena: compulsion to repetition and melancholia.

[88] For more on this see *The Challenge of the "such as it was"* (Vandevelde 2008) and *A Return on the Repressed. The debt of history in Paul Ricoeur's Time and Narrative* (Gerhardt 2004).

appeal here to the example of the Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation in Chile and South Africa.[89] These commissions, by establishing a shared truth about the past, in the name of the whole society recognized that what happened to those victims was unjust and it should never happen again. The idea that the truth about the past grants some justice to the victims can be confirmed by the fact that for many of the victims and their families the mere social recognition of what happened is a big relief and, at the same time, part of their main struggle, which is still today a struggle against oblivion.[90]

But to be faithful to the past is not just a matter of doing justice to the victims. The past demands to be told as it was. There is a truth claim in the past that we cannot overlook:

> There could be no *good* use of memory if there were no aspect of truth. So, in a sense, what "really happened" must keep concerning us… In a sense we are summoned by what was… Here we confront problems of historical representation and reference to the past, but we must never eliminate the truth claim of what has been. This is for ethical as well as epistemological reasons. (Ricoeur 2004c, 49)[91]

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[89] For more on Truth and Reconciliation see Nico Schreurs' *Truth and Reconciliation. Is Radical Openness a Condition for Reconciliation?* (Schreurs 2001, 131). In this article the reader can find, in addition to a good general discussion on the issue of Truth and Reconciliation, some specific remarks on the South African case.

[90] It is important to remember, also, as a way of preventing the crimes from happening again, As Kemp points out: "It follows that the horror attached to these events [like Auschwitz], which we must *never forget*, in order to ensure that they will never happen again…" (Kemp 1995, 381).

[91] It is important to be faithful to the past in part because memory is a form of knowledge. We do not just remember, but we want to remember what was the case, as Anderson points out: "Memory is a form of knowledge. Even when we vaguely remember what has been, memory is at work cognitively" (Anderson 2003, 109).

There is an ontological reason to be faithful to the past (the past has some reality that we must respect) that could be the ground for ethics. We must represent the past in an effort to be faithful to our ancestors:

> Everything takes place as though historians knew themselves to be bound by a debt to people from earlier times, to the dead. It is the task of philosophical reflection to bring to light the presupposition underlying this tacit "realism"… (Ricoeur 1988, 100)

Our representations of the past are an effort of "standing -for" (or "taking the place of") the past, which, as the natural consequence of time, is no longer (Ricoeur 1988, 100). To dismiss the truth claim of memory and the past "would be to announce the suicide of history" (Ricoeur 1988, 118).

We must remember. However, it is impossible to remember everything. We need to find a right balance between memory and forgetfulness (Ricoeur 2004a, 413), as Ricoeur points out in the following text:

> Speaking about memory necessarily means speaking about forgetfulness, because one cannot remember everything. A memory with no gaps would be an unbearable burden; it is a cliché to say that memory is selective. (Ricoeur 1996a, 21)[92]

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[92] Ricoeur relates the idea of a memory that is not able to forget with Borges' short story *Funes el Memorioso* that shows the burden of a memory that does not forget anything (Ricoeur 2004a, 413). In relation to this story, Greisch makes this interesting comment: "Responding to the story *Funes el memorioso* by Jorge Luis Borges, I wonder if what threatens us nowadays is not a 'merciless memory,' that is in a sense insomniac, unable to forget anything whatsoever. Far from being the most splendid palace, a memory like that, which is reluctant to let go of anything at all, is just a waste-bin as vast as the world" (Greisch 2004, 86).

The complex balance between memory and forgetfulness opens us to another phenomenon similar to blocked memory: The manipulated memory, which can take the form of either an excess of memory or an excess of forgetfulness.

3.3.3. Memory and manipulation

Those who have power in a society can easily manipulate memories. This problem seems to be one of the main motivations that inspire Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*:

> I continue to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetfulness elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting. The idea of a policy of the just allotment of memory is in this respect one of my avowed civic themes. (Ricoeur 2004a, xv)[93]

How do the ideologies of power manipulate memory? Ideology provides a symbolic net that structures action, giving a meaning and a justification to the agents. In this sense, ideology is inevitable.[94] All action is ideologically mediated in the sense that it is mediated by a symbolic net.[95] The problem arises when this basic and necessary articulation of action becomes an instrument of justification of power or of distortion of

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[93] The problem of the manipulation of memories either by an excess or by a defect is a very complicated equation. To remember in the right way at the right time seems to require a practical wisdom not very different from Aristotle's idea of prudence.

[94] Ideology has three main functions: "distortions of reality, the legitimation of the system of power, and the integration of the common world by means of symbolic systems immanent in action" (Ricoeur 2004a, 82).

[95] Ricoeur develops this in detail in *Time and Narrative* I (see Ricoeur 1984, 57–59), as I explained in Chapter II.

reality. Ideologies through the manipulation of memory try to impose a particular identity on a group. This is possible because identities are in part based on memories, which is particularly true in the case of collective identities. Persons and societies respond to the question "who are you?" by appealing to their own story as they interpret and remember it.[96] As we discussed in the second chapter, it is always possible to tell a story differently and to configure and synthesize in a different way the same heterogeneous elements in a narrative. Ideologies take advantage of this possibility by giving more importance to some events that support better the identities they want to impose on a group:

> It is, more precisely, the selective function of the narrative that opens to manipulation the opportunity and the means of a clever strategy, consisting from the outset in a strategy of forgetfulness as much as in a strategy of remembering. (Ricoeur 2004a, 85)

The manipulation of memory can be made either by an excess of memory or by an obligated forgetfulness. Ricoeur points to the phenomenon of forced memory (excess of memory) mentioning the abuse of acts of commemoration and memorialization (Ricoeur 2004a, 85). Some societies force onto their members the memorialization of founding events, of hymns, and of the story of some characters. These abuses of commemorations and memorializations are used as a way of imposing what Ricoeur calls "a history taught, a history learned" that becomes a "history celebrated" as well (Ricoeur 2004a, 85).[97] Hannoum gives a good example of this, appealing to the story of France

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[96] The connections between memory and narrative are very strong, as Anderson explains: "Story telling is a significant form of memory; it shapes remembering" (Anderson 2003, 110).

[97] Kearney explains well how memory can be manipulated: "Narrative memory is never innocent. It is an ongoing conflict of interpretations: a battlefield of competing narratives. Every history is told from

where by stressing the importance of the French revolution, the colonial story has been silenced, making the French Revolution the founding event of France:

> To define itself, France has chosen to eradicate (or rather to forget) over three centuries from its memory and to recognize as a founding event of its identity not its expansion in the world, but its bourgeois revolution. (Hannoum 2005, 135)

This particular interpretation of French identity is obviously beneficial to some groups that want to present France to the French and to the world as the society of the values of the revolution: *Liberté*, *Egalité*, *Fraternité*. By doing that, France does not have to think about its duty to provide reparation to its colonies that were exploited for centuries. Hannoum turns this abuse of memory against Ricoeur himself wondering why he omits this distortion in the French self-identity from his analysis on memory given the fact that *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000) was read by an audience "in the midst of a debate on colonial memory, whose author lived the colonial experience and declares, from the outset, that he has written the book to fulfill a civic theme" (Hannoum 2005, 135).

Ideology can also manipulate identity by imposing forgetfulness. Sometimes the leaders of society do not want to remember acts that could erode their power. For that reason, they try to impose silence and to force forgetfulness. Amnesty, although it is a political tool for reconciliation, certainly can be used as a way of forbidding memory. Ricoeur realizes that the boundaries between amnesty as a way to reconcile a society and

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a certain perspective and in the light of specific prejudice (at least in Gadamer's sense). Memory… is not always on the side of angels" (Kearney 2008, 81-82).

amnesty as a kind of imposed oblivion (amnesia) are diffuse (Ricoeur 2004a, 456). An

example provided by Ricoeur presents this ambiguity very well:

> The most ancient [example], recalled by Aristotle in *The Athenian Constitution*, is
> taken from the famous decree promulgated in Athens in 403 B.C. after the victory
> of the democracy over the oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants. The formula is worth
> recalling. In fact, it is twofold. On the one hand, the decree [of amnesty] properly
> speaking; on the other, the oath taken one by one by the citizens. On one hand, "it
> is forbidden to recall the evils (the misfortunes)"; the Greek has a single syntagma
> (*mnēsikakein*) to express this, which indicates recalling-against; on the other, "I
> shall not recall the evils (misfortunes)" under the pain of maledictions unleashed
> by this perjury. The negative formulations are striking: not to recall. For the recall
> would negate something, namely, forgetting. (Ricoeur 2004a, 453–454)

This Athenian decree is an effort to keep the peace and achieve reconciliation.

However, by imposing this oblivion by force, a distortion in the Athenian identity is

deliberatively performed: "A civic imaginary is established in which friendship and even

the tie between brothers are promoted to the rank of foundation, despite the murders

within families" (Ricoeur 2004a, 454). It is hard not to see in an act like this an abuse of

forgetfulness that has a deliberate political purpose. A contemporary example is the case

of the Amnesty Decree given in Chile in 1978 by the Pinochet Government.[98] This

amnesty favored mainly the agents who violated human rights after the coup d'état

against the former president, Salvador Allende. Although the "official purpose" of this

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[98] In order to understand correctly what amnesty means, it is useful to distinguish it from a pardon
given by a president or a parliament. While a pardon is a relief from punishment, amnesty consists in
changing the qualification of the event. When an amnesty is granted, the events covered by the amnesty are
not considered crimes any more. In this sense, amnesty is a paradigmatic example of an effort to change the
meaning of the past and by doing that, to "erase the past." Indeed, since the "materiality" of some events
cannot just be erased from the collective memory, an imposed change of the meaning of those events is a
clever strategy of doing something analogous to erasing the past. Then, it is not hard to see that amnesty
can be easily used as a way to abuse memory by an abuse of oblivion.

amnesty was to achieve political peace and reconciliation, there was an effort to manipulate memory and to perform a distortion of the image the citizens had of the government. Amnesty did not only grant immunity, but by "erasing the crime," the country was deprived of the historical truth of the events and of the knowledge of what happened to the victims. Thus, the Pinochet government used amnesty as a way of consolidating its power. The government wanted to convince Chilean citizens that it was the "savior" from communism and not a bloody regime that committed many abuses.[99]

3.4.   Attestation and memory

The three topics analyzed above (fiction, forgetfulness and manipulation) show that memory is a task to be accomplished. If memory is a task to be accomplished, we can ask ourselves what the aim of this task is. The main task of memory is to be faithful to the past, that is, to give a correct account of what happened. In that sense, memory has a claim to truth, as Ricoeur explains:

> The constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from becoming images in this way, affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory. (Ricoeur 2004a, 7)

The main difficulty that memory faces is that it is always possible to configure it differently. As it is always possible to narrate otherwise, it is always possible *to*

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[99] Today, this decree is challenged in courts. One of the ways by which lawyers have tried to challenge this decree is by claiming that amnesty can only be given by a judge after the facts have been established. By doing that, they tried to rescue memory from the deliberate effort of oblivion performed by the dictatorship.

remember otherwise. Then, what is the criterion to know whether one account of the past

is better than another? Could we say that it does not matter what account of the past we

give? Clearly for Ricoeur, as I mentioned above, the task of memory is to be faithful to

the past.[100] So, not any account of the past is equally valid, but only the one that is

faithful to the past. However, for Ricoeur, this goal of faithfulness is more a horizon and

a wish than an accomplishment, as we can see from this passage:

> I can say after the fact that the lodestar of the entire phenomenology of memory
> has been the idea of happy memory. It was concealed in the definition of the
> cognitive intention of memory as faithful. Faithfulness to the past is not a given,
> but a wish. Like all wishes, it can be disappointed, even betrayed. (Ricoeur 2004a,
> 494)

The words that Ricoeur uses here, like "faithfulness," "wish," "disappointment"

and "betrayal" help us realize that the problem of the "happy memory" does not belong to

the certainties proper to the sciences, but to the field of attestation. I cannot be sure that I

am being faithful to the past. Rather, I hope to be faithful, I hope that my memories

correspond to what indeed happened.[101] It is a confidence, not an empirical certainty.

Other accounts can help me. I can corroborate my account with documents or other

accounts, but memory cannot escape the problem of trust: I have to give credence to

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[100] Here we find the pragmatic and the epistemic dimensions of memory related to one another.
Memory is an act (pragmatic dimension) and an action with an epistemic aim: the truth. Hannoum points
out: "[M]emory refers to the past and it is in this same reference, or rather, it is its very claim to the truth of
the past that constitutes the epistemic dimension of the issue of memory. For, after all, if memory is not a
thing, it is not an object, it is an act and an action, its epistemic dimension is blended with its pragmatic
dimension, which makes it an exercise. For memory exerts itself" (Hannoum 2005, 125).

[101] This attitude of hoping that my memories are accurate and give a good account of what was the
case is not different from the attitude toward truth that Ricoeur describes in his fine article called *The
History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth*: "I hope I am within the bounds of truth" (Ricoeur 1965, 55)

some accounts over others. For that reason, faithfulness to the past is mainly a matter of attestation.

At first glance, it could seem counterintuitive to say that we can have different configurations of the past. We could claim that "the past is the past" regardless of our account of it. However, what it is at stake in our accounts of the past is not only the reality of the events that happened, but also the meaning of those events. As Ricoeur points out, "memory establishes the meaning of the past" (Ricoeur 1996a, 14). As we saw in our analysis of the threefold mimesis (Chapter 2) for Ricoeur we ascribe meaning to the events by a narrative configuration (mimesis$_2$) of the events, that is, by putting together (in the operation of emplotment) the diverse elements that constitute human actions (agents, means, goals, circumstances). In our accounts of the past we have to decide what emplotment we will give to our memories. In those narratives, what is at stake is the meaning of the past. Since I can provide different accounts of the past and confer different meanings to it, the meaning that I finally choose by a specific articulation of the memories is a matter of attesting that my narration does justice to the past.

The statement that memory is a form of attestation is confirmed by the kinship between memory and testimony. This kinship is first of all observed in the fact that a witness has to recall events. To give credence to a witness is equivalent to giving credence to her memory. In addition, when a witness asks to be believed, she usually appeals to her memory in the form, "believe me, I remember." Even more, we can say that we are witnesses to our own past. How can I know that some events really happened? "I was there" is the answer that we give ourselves and to others. We are our

own witnesses and we bear witness to our own past. Our testimony is supported and

confronted with the testimony of others, which sometimes helps us remember better, like

when we are checking memories with others: "She was there, do you not remember that

she sat right there?" "Oh yes, now I remember."

The possibility of helping our memory through the intertwining of different

testimonies helps us link the work of remembering to the work of a judge in a trial. Just

as in our attempt to remember we have, sometimes, to confront several testimonies, a

judge in a trial must do the same. Ricoeur makes a very similar analogy, but not between

memory and a trial, but between the work of a historian and the work of a judge.[102] Both

have to give credence to different testimonies and to give a verdict. Both have a "concern

with proof and the critical examination of the credibility of witnesses" (Ricoeur 2004a,

316). The work that the self does in trying to remember, in my opinion, can be easily

added to this analogy: The self, like the historian and the judge, has to give a kind of

verdict that expresses its own account of its memories. This analogy has the advantage of

showing us the critical moment in the configuration of our past. Just as the judge and the

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[102] This analogy has some limitations. As Pellauer points out, the responsibility of a judge is not the same as the responsibility of a historian: "[T]he analogy between the judge and the historian begins to break down in that the trial process is determined by more specific rules and even by a more specific setting than the historian's research. Furthermore, the judge's verdict is more definite in that the judge has to decide, whereas historians can prevaricate or introduce qualifying terms, or even call for and expect further research, because they recognize that 'the writing of history is a perpetual rewriting' (Ricoeur 2004a, 320)" (Pellauer 2007, 121). For more of this parallel, see Reagan 2005, 313.

historian have to critically vet the witnesses and the sources, in the configuration of our own past we have to critically assess the sources we use in configuring our own past.[103]

Attesting to our past by giving credence to the images of our past and by making sense of it, works as a process of recognizing the past. To claim that an image is "of the past" is equivalent to recognizing such an image as "belonging" to the past. Actually, for Ricoeur, a happy memory is a memory that accomplishes what he calls the "small miracle of recognition":

> We come closer to what I like to call the small miracle of recognition if we discern in it the solution of the oldest enigma of the problematic of memory – that is, the present representation of something absent. Recognition is the effective resolution of this enigma of the presence of an absence, thanks to the certitude that accompanies it: "It's the one – yet, it is!" (Ricoeur 2005a, 124-125)

Recognition and attestation are two closely related terms. The effort of remembering is crowned with the certitude of recognizing what I was looking for. This moment, that Ricoeur calls the "small miracle of recognition," is the equivalent of a happy memory. It is a moment of attestation of the past, a moment of certitude of having found what I was looking for.[104] The analysis of the following passage from Ricoeur can help to expand on the kinship between the recognition and the attestation of memories:

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[103] A fine example of this effort of trying to establish the meaning of the past is found in some people who having reached adulthood want to try to make peace with their own past and start (sometimes at the recommendation of their therapist) to ask their parents to tell them about their childhood.

[104] Here we can recall the beautiful parable that appears in Luke's Gospel of the women that finds the lost coin: "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15: 8-10). As we can

> [T]he reflexive moment of memory culminates in the recognition of oneself in the form a wish. We resisted the fascination with the appearance of immediacy, certainty, and security likely to be found in the reflexive moment. This too is a vow, a claim, a demand. (Ricoeur 2004a, 496)

Here we find three main claims. Firstly, to remember is to recognize, as I have stated above. Secondly, to recognize a memory is to recognize oneself, that is, the act of recognition is an act of self-recognition. I not only recognize a memory, but I recognize *myself* in my memories, because ultimately those are *my* memories. We will analyze the relationship between recognition and self-recognition in the fifth chapter. For now, it is important to note that remembering (recognizing an image as belonging to the past) is an act where the self recognizes itself. The attestation of memories implies an act of self-attestation, because attestation is ultimately attestation of the self. Thirdly (and as a consequence of the previous statements), this act of recognition is not given immediately, but as belief in, that is, as an act of attestation.

The problem of attestation shows us that memory is not just a passive phenomenon but also an elaboration that involves a commitment to some interpretations over others. However, not all memories require the same amount of work. We can distinguish different levels of elaboration of the past. Some memories are almost automatically imposed on the self, as happens with recent memories (I do not need a great effort to remember what I had this morning for breakfast). Other memories require more work, for example, when I try to recall memories of my childhood. Finally, there

observe here, the finding of the coin is an experience of recognition that is similar to the experience of remembering.

are some memories that require an enormous amount of work, as in the case of repressed memories. This whole range of possibilities, from memories that are almost imposed on the self to memories that can be elaborated only after great effort, shows an arc that begins with memory as *mnēmē* (passive memory) and ends in memory as *anamnesis* (active memory). In every act of remembrance, both terms are implied. In all memories there is an image (passive memory) and an act of recognition of the image as representing the past (active memory). Attestation is found mainly in the active dimension of memory, where the self recognizes an image as belonging to the past. In the following section I will analyze a very particular act of remembering, that, following psychoanalytical terminology, Ricoeur calls the work of mourning. This analysis will help us to understand better the relationship between memory and attestation. My thesis is that mourning is a particular expression of memory where attestation is found eminently.

3.4.1. Mourning

For Ricoeur, as I have mentioned, the main task of memory is to be faithful to the past. A memory that accomplishes that task can be called a "happy memory." However, we can wonder if there are other forms of "happy memory." It seems that a happy memory has other tasks in addition to being faithful to the past. One of these tasks is to achieve a "reconciled memory," which supposes faithfulness, but involves other elements. In order to understand what is meant by a "reconciled memory," it is fruitful to discuss the problem of mourning, as a way to achieve such reconciliation.

As I explained above, compulsion to repetition and melancholia are the consequences of a blocked memory, that is, a memory that has not done the work of remembrance. What is the alternative? The alternative is to remember. The work of remembering rescues the memory from being trapped. In other ways, remembrance gives a future to memory, in the sense that frees the past for its haunting power.

However, to remember traumatic events is not easy. We block memories because it is hard to remember. As a consequence, we experience repetition and melancholia. When we remember, we overcome those consequences, but we pay another price: Mourning. Why does the remembrance of a painful memory give rise to mourning? Because painful memories are usually associated with losses. Thus, mourning, to quote Freud, "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved one or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (Freud, 1958, 243).[105] There is a resistance in us to accept the losses as Ricoeur notes, quoting Freud again:

> Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition. (Freud, 1958, 244) [106]

The subject tries to accept the loss of the object by doing the work of mourning. This process requires a great expense of time and psychic energy (Freud 1958, 245, quoted in Ricoeur 2004a, 72). Once the loss is accepted, there is a reward: "[W]hen the

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[105] Quoted in Ricoeur 2004a, 71.

[106] Quoted in Ricoeur 2004a, 72.

work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 1958, 245, quoted in Ricoeur 2004a, 72). The energy that was directed towards the lost object can be redirected towards other objects. Thus, the self that remembers experiences the pain of the memories, but once the work is done it is free from the past, being able to redirect its energies towards other objects:

> [I]t is as a work of remembering that the work of mourning proves to be liberating, although at a certain cost, and that this relation is reciprocal. The work of mourning is the cost of the work of remembering, but the work of remembering is the benefit of the work of mourning. (Ricoeur 2004a, 72)

Mourning is certainly a form of memory. We could say that mourning is the expression of memory when it is dealing with lost objects. It is a painful memory but at the same time a liberating one. Mourning, as a particular exercise of memory, is also guided by a desire to be faithful to the past, with the added goal of being *reconciled* with the past. How does mourning give us reconciliation? Mourning can reconcile us with the past in the sense that a memory that mourns is a memory that faces reality, that is, a memory that accepts the lost of the loved object, as Freud points out:

> [I]n mourning [,] time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object. (Freud, 1958, 252)[107]

Thus, what the self in the case of mourning attests to is not substantially different from what is attested to in memory in general: The self attests to the reality of the past, a past where the self finds the loss of a loved object. The acceptance of the loss reconciles

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[107] Quoted in Ricoeur 2004a, 74.

the self in the sense that it is no longer struggling "against" reality, but is facing it. This

"reality facing" can free the self by allowing it to redirect its energy towards other objects.

This analysis of the problem of mourning in relation to memory reinforces the main

thesis that we have analyzed so far: The past must be attested. In the case of mourning,

the attestation of the past takes the form of an acceptance of loss.

Now, we can ask whether the relationship of the self to the past can take a

different form than the attestation of the past as memory and mourning. Indeed, Ricoeur

mentions another form of relating to the past: Forgiveness. The goal of forgiveness is also

the reconciliation with the past (Ricoeur 2004a, 412). In what follows, I will present

Ricoeur's idea of forgiving in order to explore the role of attestation in this concept.

3.4.2. Forgiveness

The first question we should ask here is whether it is possible to forgive. Ricoeur

expresses an initial difficulty: There is a radical disproportion between the fault and

forgiveness. The fault, in principle, is by definition unforgivable otherwise it would not

be a fault, if we understand forgiving as the act of not considering an act a fault anymore

Fault is unforgivable not only in fact but by right (Ricoeur 2004a, 466).[108] However, the

fact that the fault is by right unforgivable does not prevent us from believing in the power

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[108] As we can observe, Ricoeur does not overlook the seriousness of the fault. In this sense, his position is different from what Papastephanou calls forgiveness without punishment, where the fault is not taken as seriously and forgiveness only implies "some change of orientation… as a reforming effect of the act of forgiveness as such." (Papastephanou 2003, 506). Contrary to this position, Ricoeur stresses the seriousness of some faults. Herein lays the origin of the paradox of forgiveness: How can serious faults be forgiven without undermining their seriousness?

of forgiveness. Following Derrida, Ricoeur asserts that "forgiveness is directed to the unforgivable or it does not exist" (Ricoeur 2004a, 468). If forgiveness is about forgiving a trivial fault, then it is not forgiveness. But, is there not a contradiction in the notion of forgiveness? To forgive in a way is to say, what you did is not as serious, do not worry any more. But if what the person did is not serious, then there is no need for forgiveness! Despite this paradox, we find that there is forgiveness: The proclamation "summed up in the simple phrase: 'There is forgiveness' resonates like an opposing challenge" (Ricoeur 2004a, 466).

How is forgiveness then possible? We have to relate forgiving to the problem of imputability. In the first chapter, we found that imputability is "a kind of judgment saying that humans are responsible for the proximate consequences of their deeds and for that reason may be praised or blamed" (Ricoeur 1989, 98). Thus, in imputability the agent completely recognizes himself in the action, assuming the consequences of it. The link between the agent and the action is so strong in imputability that the moral characteristics of the action are, in some respect, "transferred" to the agent. We judge the agent to be good or bad to the extent that her actions are good or bad. One of the expressions of this transference of the moral dimension of the action to the self is guilt. According to Ricoeur, "[t]he link between *guilt* and *selfhood* is so tight that it is not seen as possible to tear out guilt without destroying selfhood" (Ricoeur 2004b, 8). Guilt is an assault upon self-esteem that paralyzes the self, rendering the continuation of human action

difficult.[109] However, guilt is not the only manner in which evil affects human actions.

Evil has also adverse effects on our actions in their social dimension, as Ricoeur explains:

> Something basic was missing in our analysis heretofore of *guilt*, the fact that it is not merely a blow to our own credit, a wound at the core of self-esteem, but an injury inflicted to our bonds with others – to togetherness as such. (Ricoeur 2004b, 8)[110]

How can actions continue after they have been infected by evil? Forgiving makes possible the continuation of action. It removes the impairment of actions and thus makes action possible again. Thus, forgiving works within the sphere of the capable being. The fault, insofar as it causes guilt, is an impediment to action and forgiving removes that impediment.

The capacity to forgive is in some respect the opposite of imputation. While imputation is related to the capacity of putting together the agent and the action, forgiving performs the reverse operation: Uncoupling the agent from the action. When we impute an action to the agent, we accord the moral worth of the action also to the agent. When we forgive, we open a hiatus between the agent and the action. Ricoeur explicitly relates forgiveness with this kind of un-imputing:

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[109] Ricoeur refers here to the guilt that the perpetrator feels as a consequence of her action.

[110] Ricoeur's position on forgiving is clearly intersubjective. It can be distinguished from what Papastephanou calls the "monological account" of forgiveness. The monological account by focusing only on the relationship with God does not give enough importance to the fact that the fault affects our relationship with others (Papastephanou 2003, 510). In the following text Ricoeur makes even more explicit the intersubjective nature of forgiveness: "Moreover, unlike escape forgetfulness, forgiveness does not remain enclosed in the narcissistic relationship of the self to itself: it assumes mediation by another consciousness (or conscience), the victim's, which alone is entitled to forgive" (Ricoeur 1996, 23).

> [I]n imputation you have the idea of giving an account, of holding someone as accountable. Forgiving, in this ideal sense, would mean no longer counting, reckoning. (Ricoeur 2004b, 15)

This hiatus is what makes it possible for the agent to become again capable of action: "The guilty person [perpetrator], rendered capable of beginning again: this would be the figure of unbinding that commands all the others" (Ricoeur 2004a, 490). However, is it really possible to uncouple the agent from his actions? If we believe in the capacity of the agent to commit to what he does and to assume responsibility for his actions, are we not contradicting those premises by affirming the possibility of separating the agent and her action? These questions show the shocking and in some respects counterintuitive nature of forgiving. Ricoeur recalls Derrida's statement that "separating the guilty person from his act, in other words forgiving the guilty person while condemning his action, would be to forgive a subject other than the one who committed the act" (Ricoeur 2004a, 490). Herein resides the greatest difficulty of giving a proper account of forgiveness. We have to reconcile three statements. (1) The fault is serious, we cannot minimize it. (2) There is an intrinsic relationship between the wrongdoer and the fault that cannot be denied. (3)There is forgiveness.[111] So, how is it possible to uncouple the fault from the wrongdoer without denying his agency and the seriousness of his actions?

The separation of the agent and the action does not have the form of a negation of the participation of the agent in the action, as it were possible to effect a kind of erasing

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[111] Junker-Kenny expresses the same difficulty: "The paradox is between the imputability of the agent who has committed unpardonable acts, and impunity arising from forgiveness that would not do justice to his freedom as an agent" (Junker-Kenny 2004, 37).

of what the person has done. The act of forgiving, on the contrary, supposes that we take seriously the participation of the agent in the action. Otherwise, there will be nothing to forgive. In this sense, forgiving is not only contrary to imputation, but also presupposes imputation. Forgiveness, then, could be defined, in the context of Ricoeur's thought, as the act by which one person (the offended) separates the other from his act, by affirming and trusting in her capacity to act in a better manner than she did. Then, in what sense does forgiveness uncouple the agent from the action? Such uncoupling does not happen in the sense of a negation of the authorship of the action or in the sense of a negation of the moral responsibility of the agent. This uncoupling happens in a much deeper and more complex sense. Forgiveness makes possible a separation of the agent from the moral evil of the action. In forgiving, the culprit is disentangled from the radical evil of the action.[112] If this disentanglement is possible, it is because actions in some respect go beyond the agent. Our entanglement in evil actions does not suppress some original goodness in us:

> This intimate dissociation signifies that the capacity of commitment belonging to the moral subject is not exhausted by its various inscriptions in the affairs of the world. The dissociation expresses an act of faith, a credit addressed to the resources of self-regeneration. (Ricoeur 2005a, 490)

This belief in human natural goodness, we will see later, is quite controversial as a philosophical assumption.

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[112] Harvey offers a similar account of forgiving: "Once an act is done, it cannot be literally undone. Nor can a wrongdoer simply decide to forget the act. But there is something which she can do which may be appropriate: she can decide to no longer calculate this or that wrong into an account of her present moral status. And there are various locutions which suggest something along these lines, e.g., 'making a fresh start,' 'moving on,' 'putting it behind you,' 'beginning again'" (Harvey 1993, 215).

Ricoeur sees in Arendt's idea of forgiveness a similar framework. For Arendt forgiving, as promising, is a kind of remedy for the weakness of human actions. Two obstacles are set by time to the continuation of human actions: "[I]rreversibility on the one hand, unpredictability on the other" (Ricoeur 2004b, 14). The weakness of human action appears in relation to the lack of reliability of future actions. The weakness of actions appears in relation to the past in the fact that we cannot change it. What is done is done. Promises help to strengthen actions in relation to the future giving predictability to them, binding the agent to the future. Forgiveness helps to alleviate the burden of the past, untying the agent from the action. Arendt is not denying the responsibility of the agent. Forgiving, rather, gives to the agent the possibility of continuing to act. This continuation is well expressed by Arendt appeals to the symbolism of binding/unbinding, as Ricoeur explains:

> Her argument rests on reestablishing a very ancient symbolism, that of *unbinding/binding*, then on pairing forgiving and promising under this dialectic, one of which would unbind and the other bind us. (Ricoeur 2004a, 486)

Ricoeur follows a similar framework. He sees the fault as an impediment, as an incapacity. However, while Arendt sees the fault as a weakness of the action, Ricoeur sees the fault as incapacity of the agent. This subtle distinction has important consequences. By focusing more on the action than on the agent, Arendt, does not have to deal with some of the paradoxes and problems that Ricoeur's account on forgiveness has to consider. In Ricoeur, the main difficulty is how to separate the agent from the action without undermining agency and the fault. Arendt avoids this difficulty by focusing on a remedy for the action more than on a remedy for the agent. This is a consequence of the

different goals of each philosopher. Ricoeur is trying to offer a hermeneutics of the self

whereas Arendt is doing a phenomenology of the public sphere. Although Ricoeur's

account has to face more paradoxes and difficulties, in my opinion, it is deeper than

Arendt's account. Consequently I agree with Ricoeur's assessment of Arendt's work on

forgiveness: "Hannah Arendt remained at the threshold of the enigma by situating the

gesture of forgiveness at the point of intersection of the act and its consequences and not

of the agent and the act" (Ricoeur 2004a, 489). In particular, I believe that Ricoeur takes

more seriously the reality of evil and the involvement of the selfhood in the act of

forgiveness. While for Arendt the fault makes the action irreversible and forgiveness

makes human action possible again, for Ricoeur, on the contrary, the fault incapacitates

the agent because of the "adherence" of evil to the agent.[113] Still we have to recognize

that there are strong similarities between Arendt's and Ricoeur's account, particularly the

idea that forgiveness makes action possible again.[114] It is hard not to see the influence of

Arendt on Ricoeur's thought, an influence that, in any case, Ricoeur seems to have no

problem acknowledging.

Ricoeur's idea of forgiveness has some ontological presuppositions that we need

to make explicit. In the act of forgiveness there is an affirmation of the goodness of the

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[113] Forgiveness unbinds the agent from the evil: "…the enigma of a fault held to paralyze the power to act of the 'capable being' that we are; and it is, in reply, the enigma of the possible lifting of this existential incapacity, designated by the term 'forgiveness'" (Ricoeur 2004a, 457).

[114] Anderson sees the similarity between Ricoeur's and Arendt's account of forgiveness in the idea of natality: "I understand this act [forgiveness] in Arendt's sense of natality, roughly, as a new beginning. The acts of both forgiving and promising initiate natality. Arendt and Ricoeur each came to account for natality" (Anderson 2003, 111).

agent, a kind of trust in the original goodness of the person. These ideas are beautifully

expressed in the following paragraph:

> Under the sign of forgiveness, the guilty person is to be considered capable of
> something other than his offenses and his faults. He is held to be restored to his
> capacity for acting, and action restored to its capacity for continuing. This
> capacity is signaled in the small acts of consideration in which we recognized the
> *incognito* of forgiveness played out on the public stage. And, finally, this restored
> capacity is enlisted by promising as it projects action toward the future. The
> formula for this liberating word, reduced to the bareness of its utterance, would
> be: you are better than your actions. (Ricoeur 2004a, 493)[115]

Is Ricoeur not too optimistic here? It is hard not see in this the idea of an almost

ontological regeneration through forgiveness or, indeed, the Christian idea of

redemption through forgiveness. Is it possible to understand this power of

regeneration in a merely philosophical context? To tackle this difficulty we can

contrast Ricoeur's account to Margalit's account of forgiveness that in a way is

very similar to Ricoeur's:

> Remorse offers us a nonmagical way of undoing the past . . . it is possible to
> change our interpretation of the past. By expressing remorse, the offender
> presents himself in a new light . . . that can be projected into the past. His ability
> to feel remorse attests that he is not basically evil, even if the act that he
> performed was abominable . . . his very assumption of responsibility for the deed
> is supposed to create a rift between the act and the doer. Thus, an offender can be
> forgiven even if the offense cannot be forgotten. (Margalit 2002, 199)[116]

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[115] The same idea is well explained by Junker-Kenny: "Yet for Ricoeur, there are two incapacities that have to be reversed. The agent can only be delivered of the first incapacity, to have acted wrongly, by having sources of goodness re-opened and turned back into the original capability that manifests itself in the fundamental benevolence which was expressed in the wish to live well with and for others. This is what the 'great religions' do" (Junker-Kenny 2004, 37).

[116] Cited by Junker-Kenny 2004, 33-34.

At this point, Margalit's and Ricoeur's account are very similar, except for two differences. First, Margalit places the affirmation "you are better than your action" on the side of the person that feels remorse, while Ricoeur places that affirmation on the side of the one who forgives. Secondly, Margalit introduces an additional element to the equation of forgiveness: The power of regeneration that has forgiveness come from "elsewhere" (in the sense of from a transcendent source) (Junker-Kenny 2004, 34). Although he recognizes that the idea of forgiveness has a religious origin, Ricoeur tries to keep his analysis of forgiveness within the confines of philosophical terms in *Memory, History, Forgetting*[117] However, in other texts, Ricoeur makes an explicit connection between the idea of capacity (as a power of regeneration) and religion:

> …I see a strong connection between a philosophical anthropology based on the idea of capability and the purpose of any religious thinking… all religions are different attempts in different language games to recover the ground of goodness, to liberate, so to say, the enslaved capability. (Ricoeur 2002, 284)

Could we say that the hesitation between a rational justification of the idea of the original goodness of human beings and their capacity of regeneration on the one hand and a religious justification of these issues on the other hand seriously weaken Ricoeur's account of forgiveness? If Ricoeur's idea of forgiveness would have relied merely on the ontological assumption of the original goodness of human life, then the lack of justification for this assumption would be a mortal wound to his account of forgiveness. However, in my opinion, beyond the ontology that can be at the basis of the idea of

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[117] For more on the relationship between human and divine forgiveness see Todd Pokrifka–Joe's *Probing the Relationship between Divine and Human Forgiveness in Matthew. Hearing a Neglected Voice in the Canon* (Pokrifka–Joe, 2001).

forgiveness, we can find some phenomenological evidence that indeed there is in the victim who forgives a trust in the goodness of the agent. We can attest to this fact if we take a look at what we can call the "grammar of repentance."

Human interactions work over on the basis of some normative expectations. The agents expect from one another some kind of behavior. There are implicit or explicit rules that shape this expectation. When an action breaks these expectations, there is a need for justification. This justification can be made by showing that the action is not indeed an exception to the rules that are at the basis of the relationship. Something similar happens with the emergence of the fault. The fault produces a disruption in a relationship since the common rules are broken. Thus, there emerges the need for justification by the wrongdoer. The wrongdoer justifies his actions by explaining that those actions do not reflect his deep intentions or feelings. Some of the ways that he can justify himself is by stating that the action was the result of a moment of weakness or that he was confused or that he did not take into account all the possible consequences or that he now has a completely different understanding. In any case, in all these justifications there is an effort to establish a distance between the action and the self. This distance can be established by appealing to a lack of knowledge, to a situation of overwhelming circumstances or to a deep change in the self that happened after the fault was committed. When the victim forgives, she accepts the uncoupling of the agent from his act and assumes that the agent is "better than her action." Is this trust the same than an ontological optimism in human nature? Probably no, but at the very least it works as a practical certitude that is enough to justify Ricoeur's account of forgiveness.

Who makes the affirmation, "you are better than your actions"? In my opinion, this affirmation comes mainly from the offended, that is, from the one who forgives. However, this operation must be completed in the offender. The offender makes possible the unbinding of the agent by trusting again in her own goodness and in her own capacity to act otherwise. In this sense the act of repentance is fundamental. However, does not the need for repentance go against Ricoeur's idea, following Derrida, that forgiveness is unconditional? Forgiveness is an unconditional gift, but as any kind of gift, it needs the acceptance of the receiver in order to be a gift. Thus, the lack of repentance does not make forgiveness impossible, but it limits its main fruit and consequence: The restoration of the capacity to act.

How is it possible to affirm that the agent is "better than his actions" and in that sense to unbind him? Here the idea of attestation is crucial. The trust in the original goodness of someone cannot be empirically proved, but can only be attested. Human action, in order to continue, requires that the agent regains her social acceptance and trust. For that reason, the unbinding of the agent from the evil of the action needs sometimes the forgiveness that comes from the offended. In some cases only the offended can unbind the offender, particularly in cases of violent and destructive acts. The offended, by forgiving, attests to the distance between the agent and his act and believes and trusts in his capacity of "being better than his actions." However, as it was said above, forgiveness, in order to bear all its fruits, needs the act of repentance from the offender. In this act of repentance there is an attestation that is analogous to the attestation that we find in the act of forgiveness. The offender in her act of repentance manifests her belief, her trust in her

capacity for acting otherwise. In this act the agent is implicitly saying, "I regret my

actions, if I had the opportunity I would act otherwise." If this desire to have acted in a

different manner is absent, then the act of repentance is not sincere.

The fact that in Ricoeur's account of forgiveness there is a strong relationship

between the self and its action, makes it hard for him to find a public institution of

forgiving. Societies punish actions. Public institutions try to apply justice and to put the

offender at an adequate distance from the victim. To forgive in the public sphere could be

equivalent to not considering that an action is evil, which could be a great injustice, as

Ricoeur explains:

> If punishment is required by the violation of the law in order to restore the law, of
> satisfying the complaint of the victim and protecting public order, then forgiving
> should appear as a kind of injustice. Justice, it seems, forbids the act of forgiving.
> The prohibition of forgiveness in the name of justice looks still more indisputable
> if you consider that the claim of forgiveness would be to reach beyond the wrong
> deed and the wrongful agent, once more to destroy evil at its source, that is the
> capacity of the agent to be accused, be held as a culprit. All claim to self-
> justification is barred by a strict sense of justice (Ricoeur 2004b, 9)

In the public sphere we can find some institutions that in a way remind us of forgiveness,

like the notion of prescription of indictment[118] or the institution of amnesty. However, the

prescription of indictment is rather an exception "to the rigor of justice" (Ricoeur 2004b,

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[118] The idea of "prescription of indictment" in the French legal system is equivalent to the "Statute
of Limitation" in the Anglo Saxon legal system. It means that there are some temporal constraints in the
prosecution of a crime.

12) than a case of forgiveness.[119] The purpose of amnesty, in turn, is to "cure the wounds of the social body" (Ricoeur 2004b, 12) more than to forgive. Thus, these institutions, as Ricoeur calls them, contain "traces of forgiveness," (Ricoeur 2004b, 11) but not a full expression of it.

What is the relationship between forgiveness, forgetfulness and memory? Is forgiving a form of forgetfulness? Forgetfulness and forgiving change our relation with the past. However, while forgetfulness as an abuse of memory (under the form of blocked memory) makes us a victim of the haunting power of the past, forgiving lightens the burden of the past.[120] According to Ricoeur forgiveness is equivalent to what can be called a "good oblivion," an idea that is magnificently explained in this paragraph:

> [W]hat kind of forgetting would deserve to be held as a trace of forgiving? I would suggest to speak of a *good oblivion* in the same way as we speak of a *good memory*… It would mean breaking free from the trading logic of adding and subtracting, from the poor vocabulary of deleting the debt, of drawing a line on the blackboard of our sins as though pardon could compete with the work of time, or, worse, to contribute to this frightening destructive work. Good oblivion should be on the side of this other figure of forgetting, the preservation of the traces, but delivered from their mischievousness, their haunting power. Lifting the burden of the debt is recovering the lightness of existence, the divine freedom from worry. (Ricoeur 2004b, 14-15)

As we can observe in this paragraph, Ricoeur avoids any superficial interpretation of forgiving as a simple "erasing of the past," pointing out that the *good oblivion* (which

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[119] Reagan emphasizes that for Ricoeur amnesty is not a real forgiveness: "Ricoeur claims that amnesty is a "caricature" of forgiveness because it is conditional and it defies justice for utilitarian ends" (Reagan 2008, 244).

[120] See Kearney 2008, 81.

is equivalent to forgiveness) does suppose the "preservation of the traces." Thus, the past is recognized in forgiveness, but the "grace" of forgiveness is that the past loses its "mischievousness," its "haunting power." Then, forgiveness is equivalent to forgetfulness in the sense that in both cases the past loses some of its burden. However, while in the *bad oblivion* the past is neglected (and thus it never stops to haunt us), in the *good oblivion* the past is there but without its haunting power.

Forgiveness, at the same time, is a form of memory and mourning, as Ricoeur shows here:

> I would suggest that the work of forgiving consists in connecting together memory work and mourning work. Mourning, at the core of memory, would mean that we must deal with the idea of loss, loss of the claim to construct a story of our life without lacks nor gaps. There is something inextricable in human things. Loss at the level of our claim to repair all wounds. There is something irreparable in human affairs. This is why the work of rememoration cannot go without that of mourning. Should we then speak of forgiving as a further kind of work? I would suggest that forgiveness, when and where it is available, wants to add to these former kinds of work an amount of cheerfulness, of gaiety, in the sense of Nietzsche's *gay science*. This playful note is that of grace in the midst of human actions – and passions. (Ricoeur 2004b, 15-16)

In this important passage, Ricoeur connects the idea of forgiving with the idea of memory and mourning. There is a close link between some kind of memories and mourning. Memory can be a form of mourning insofar as dealing with our past sometimes supposes that we accept the necessary losses that life brings, first and foremost the loss of time, that is, the fact that the past is no longer there: It has *passed*. In addition, we may have to deal with the fact that not all our expectations are fulfilled in the past. There are losses and frustrations that we have to admit when we remember some events. The idea of

forgiving establishes a relationship with difficult memories past that is slightly different

from the relationship that we find in mourning. Ricoeur states that through forgiving our

relationship with the past becomes a little bit easier and happier. Ricoeur appeals to an

unmistakable religious language, when he affirms that forgiving brings a note of grace.

From a philosophical point of view, we could take the word grace in the sense that

forgiving is a gift. Here is how Ricoeur develops this idea:

> This should not be taken to imply that forgiveness is solely connected with the
> religious dimension of life. Admittedly, in the Judaeo-Christian culture of the
> West, forgiveness is synonymous with grace, and grace is the prerogative of the
> One who, since He can read our hearts, can forgive to the extent that He can also
> punish. But the warm glow of forgiveness can extend outside the religious sphere,
> in the form of an *economy of giving*, where the logic of superabundance
> outweighs that of just equivalence: this economy of giving has considerable
> juridical and political implications. (Ricoeur 1996a, 24)

If forgiveness is a gift that we receive, then it is not something that completely depends

on us. We can connect this assertion with the claim that forgiving is offered without

asking anything in return: Forgiving is unconditional (Ricoeur 2004a, 481).

What does forgiving achieve? Ricoeur explains the goal of forgiving in the

following terms:

> A new relationship with the past would then proceed from this triangular
> connection between memory, mourning and forgiveness, namely that the past
> would be set at the right distance from the present: the past as no longer there but
> as having been (Ricoeur 2004b, 16)

This paragraph can be easily connected to one of the goals of the work of mourning: To

achieve a peaceful relationship with the past. In a blocked memory, that is, in a memory

that has not made the work of mourning, the past haunts the subject in the form of

compulsion to repetition and melancholia. Forgiving, as a kind of memory that

remembers and mourns, can accomplish a *just* relationship to the past, a past that is "set

at the right distance from the present: The past as no longer there but as having been"

(Ricoeur 2004b, 16). When the past is not set at a right distance, the past persists "there"

preventing the self from projecting itself into the future. Sometimes the lack of forgiving

("I will never forget what you did") or the lack of mourning ("I do not accept the loss of

my youth") can give the past too much weight, keeping the past "too close." At the same

time the lack of mourning or forgiveness, insofar as it is expressed in the "repression" of

some events ("that never happened to me"; "for me, that person does not exist"), gives to

the past too little weight, keeping the past "too far," but at the same time too close

inasmuch as the repression of the past can be expressed in compulsion to repetition and in

melancholia. In both cases, the past haunts the self and prevents it from projecting itself

into the future. The "right place" for the past is just that: The past, that is, something that

has been and is no longer. When the self recognizes the right ontological status of the

past, the past is kept at the right distance without making difficult the projection into the

future. Forgiveness joins mourning in the task of freeing the present from the weight of

the past:

> Forgiveness is a sort of healing of memory, the completion of its mourning period.
> Delivered from the weight of debt, memory is liberated for great projects.
> Forgiveness gives memory a future. (Ricoeur 1996a, 24)

In addition to finding a complicated balance that "does justice" to the past,

forgiving adds the possibility of a happier and graceful relationship to the past, which can

bring us reconciliation: "If it were possible, we could then be allowed to speak of

reconciliation with ourselves. But that cannot occur without a certain amount of folly" (Ricoeur 2004b, 16). What does Ricoeur mean by "reconciliation with ourselves"? Reconciliation is a word that implies the end of a situation of confrontation. It is relatively easy to think of reconciliation as the fruit of forgiving in the context of the social relations. In fact, a society that can forgive can arrive at a significant level of reconciliation. However, Ricoeur here speaks of "reconciliation with ourselves." If he uses this language, it is because the lack of forgiving could be equivalent to a situation of distress or violence within the self, as expressed in the feeling of anger. We do not forgive; we usually retain anger in us against the persons or situations that have hurt us. Forgiveness can bring reconciliation in the sense that allows us to "let go" of resentment and to accept the past.[121] As Ricoeur correctly points out, "it is impossible in the long run for a society to remain endlessly angry against itself" (Ricoeur 2004b, 12). Ricoeur realizes that the use of the word "reconciliation" is only analogical and not completely proper (it is probably for this reason that we cannot speak of reconciliation "without a certain amount of folly").[122] However, we need to appeal to this analogy in order to express the possibility of finding peace in ourselves.

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[121] The idea of forgiveness as an overcoming of an emotional feeling is popular. For example, for Hughes forgiveness "typically involves the overcoming of *moral anger* toward another…" (Hughes 1997, 33).

[122] The word folly can refer to the fact that when we speak of forgiveness and reconciliation we are expecting in human affairs something that goes well beyond the logic of reciprocity that usually rules human affairs. Forgiveness introduces a different logic that is not based on equivalence but in what Ricoeur calls "the economy of the gift," which will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

How is it possible to just "let go" of the offenses that we have suffered? It seems that it is not enough to mourn, to accept the past. Mourning helps us accept certain losses. However, when losses are the consequence of deliberate acts of an offender, mourning cannot be enough. In such cases, in order to stop the anger that we feel, we have to uncouple the evil that we have experienced from the agent. We have to attest to the idea that despite everything, the offender is still better than his acts.

3.5.   Conclusion

We started the discussion in this chapter by presenting the ambiguous status of memory: Memory is a present image of something that belongs to the past. We continued the discussion by pointing to the fragility of memory, always at risk of being confused with fiction, of being erased and of being manipulated. The main consequences of the status of memory (a present image of the past) and of the fragility of memory are that we can access the past in its reality only through an act of trust, of credence. Thus, the first thesis of this chapter is that we need to attest to the past.

However the past must not only be attested to in its reality, but the meaning of the past is not fixed either; it is a matter of interpretation. A given interpretation of the past is also a matter of attestation, of credence, of belief that such an interpretation does justice to the past. This attestation can have, as one of its main motivations, the idea that we have a debt to the past, a debt to our ancestors who must be honored. Thus, the attestation of the meaning of the past takes on an ethical dimension through the idea that we have to do justice to what was the case. Part of this duty is to come up with an adequate balance

between memory and forgetfulness. To know when to remember and when to forget

requires a practical understanding that is part of the attestation of the past. Ricoeur

explains well what is at stake by resorting to a spatial metaphor. We have to keep the past

at an adequate distance. To keep the past too far is an excess of forgetting. To keep the

past too close would be an excess of remembrance.

Why is it so important to find an adequate relationship to the past? Is not the past,

in the ultimate instance, something of the *past*? The answer to this challenge introduces

the main thesis of this chapter: The past *matters* because our relationship to the past

mediates our relationship to ourselves. In the language that we have been using, we can

say that through the attestation of the past and through the attestation of its meaning, the

self attests to its own self. In other words, the confidence of being a self is mediated

through the attestation of the past. It is not only that the self becomes a self through

awareness of its own past,[123] but what Ricoeur seems to have in mind is that our

relationship to our past determines who we are. The self attests to its own self by giving a

specific meaning to its own past. Paradoxically, what is at stake in our negotiation with

the past is our future.

Mourning and forgiveness prove the thesis that through a negotiation with the past

the self attests to its own self. First, mourning and forgiveness are specific ways of

dealing with the past. In mourning the self turns to its own losses and in forgiveness the

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[123] Dramatic cases, as Alzheimer disease, attest to the fact that the dissolution of memories usually brings the dissolution of the self.

self turns to the offenses received. What is at stake in mourning and forgiveness is the meaning of the past. Mourning is about accepting the reality of the losses; forgiveness is about unbinding the culprit from his fault. By "negotiating" with the past, the self attests to its own self. However, even though what is at stake in mourning and forgiveness is the meaning of the past, both determine and affect the future of the self.[124] In the case of mourning, it allows us to liberate the energies that are invested in the lost object. In the case of forgiveness, it regenerates in the self its capacity to act, allowing the self to attest to its own self as capable. Although mourning and forgiveness are paradigmatic cases of how the self attests to its own self attesting to the meaning of the past, these two cases are not the only examples. In general, each time that we visit our past we are implicitly attesting to our self.

In the idea of the attestation of the self through the attestation of the past, we find, once more, that attestation is a *mediated* attestation, in this case, mediated by memory. The problem of mediation that we find in attestation is related to the idea of otherness that we find at the core of the self. In the next chapter, I will give a full account of this problem through the discussion of the passivity of the self.

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[124] It is for this reason that the work of the commissions of Truth and Reconciliation in countries that have experienced political violence is so important. In negotiating an acceptable shared truth of the past the whole future of the country is at stake. The accepted truth about the past that emerges from this commission sets, in many cases, the ethical standards that will be expected in a society. It is what is present in the motto "never again."

Chapter Four

Attestation and Injunction

4.1. Introduction

In the first three chapters, I have presented attestation in relation to the capacities of the self and in relation to personal identity. Attestation, in this context, has appeared as the credence, the assurance of being oneself *acting*. However, the attestation of the self does not always happen through the active dimensions of the self or through the assurance of its own identity. The self also gains its confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood by experiencing different levels of passivity that will be explained in what follows. These passivities are often experienced as injunctions, that is, as a moral call for the self.

The problem of injunction appears in the context of the dialectic between the self and otherness. The main thesis that Ricoeur presents by way of this dialectic is that the self is constituted by otherness. Otherness is not something external to the self but is something at its very core.[125] Ricoeur distinguishes three kinds of otherness: The

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[125] As stated in the introduction, for Ricoeur the self does not occupy the place of foundation such as one finds in Descartes' philosophy of the cogito. However, Ricoeur at the same time disagrees with those philosophies that proclaim the dissolution of the self. It is not a self that is self-founded nor is it a "dissolved self." The presence of otherness at the core of the self can be seen as an intermediate position between these two extreme ideas of the self. A self that is constituted by otherness is a self that is not transparent to itself, since otherness introduces some opacity into it. Otherness dislocates the self from its

otherness of one's own body, the otherness of other people and the otherness of one's

own conscience. The category of otherness is a logical category. In order to analyze it, we

need to find phenomenological evidence for this category. Such evidence is found in the

category of passivity. To each kind of otherness, there corresponds an experience of

passivity, as Ricoeur explains:

> In this regard, I suggest as a working hypothesis what could be called the *triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness*. First, there is the passivity represented by the experience of one's own body – or better, as we shall say later, of the *flesh* – as a mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness. Next, we find the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the *foreign*, in the precise sense of the other (than) itself, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity. Finally, we have the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is *conscience* in the sense of *Gewissen* rather than of *Bewusstsein*. (Ricoeur 1992, 318)

In what follows I will analyze the three passivities that Ricoeur distinguishes. The

purpose of this analysis is to understand the role of attestation in the dialectic between the

self and otherness. In this regard, Ricoeur makes a very general statement: "The term

'otherness' is then reserved for speculative discourse, while passivity becomes *the

attestation of otherness*" (Ricoeur 1992, 318).[126] By stating that passivity is the attestation

of otherness, Ricoeur shows us another important dimension of attestation that

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place of self-foundation. At the same time, a self constituted by otherness is not a dissolved self, because otherness gives content, substance and stability to the self, as we will see in this chapter.

[126] Ricoeur does not give us a definition of passivity. Waldenfels offers a sort of definition in the context of the dialectic between the self and the other: "It is true that Ricoeur does not limit passivity and passion to the simple incurring (*pâtir*) of something, but brings them to the abyss of a suffering (*souffrir*), in which the suffering of myself, grasped as the 'intimate passivity' of my own body, binds the suffering with the suffering of the other" (Waldenfels 1996, 120). Thus, we can say that passivity is what "happens" to the self in the sense of what "affects" the self.

complements the analysis that has been made so far. Passivity can be defined as the attestation of the self through otherness: By experiencing otherness in passivity, the self attests to its own self. In order to make the attestation of the self through otherness more explicit, we need to find a phenomenon in each experience of passivity where the attestation of the self appears clearly. In the experience of the passivity of the body, this phenomenon is one "intimate passivity." In the experience of the passivity of others (other people) self-esteem shows the attestation of the self through otherness. Finally, the phenomenon of conviction makes evident the attestation of the self through the otherness of conscience.

After analyzing the three experiences of passivity I will propose an interpretation of the role of attestation in the dialectic of self and otherness. My thesis is that attestation makes possible such a dialectic. Thanks to attestation otherness is integrated as part of the self; otherwise, it would remain external to the self

4.2.   The passivity of the body

In this section, I present the dialectic of the self and otherness at the level of the passivity of the body. I present this dialectic in three phases. First, I show the otherness of the body by explaining the three degrees of passivity of the body that Maine de Biran distinguishes. Secondly, I present the receptivity of the body by discussing Ricoeur's engagement with Husserl and Heidegger. Finally, I present attestation as what allows the dialectic between the body as otherness and the body as intimate passivity. My thesis is that through the experience of the body the self attests to its self, that is, gains the trust of

being a self. At the same time, attestation makes possible the dialectic between the body

as otherness and the body as intimacy.

4.2.1. The body as otherness

The body is the first passivity and a kind of "primordial passivity" that makes

possible every other passivity. We have a body, we are incarnated beings, and from that

condition we experience the otherness of other people and the otherness of conscience.

The otherness of the body can be explained following Ricoeur's analysis of Maine de

Biran's three degrees of passivity. On the first level we find that "the body denotes

resistance that gives way to effort" (Ricoeur 1992, 321).[127] Effort and resistance form a

unity.[128] On this level I receive the "indelible significance of being my body" (Ricoeur

1992, 321). Here, there is a basic apprehension of the body in the daily experience of

feeling the resistance of it. A second degree of passivity "is represented by the coming

and going of capricious humors" (Ricoeur 1992, 321). Passivity becomes here something

foreign and hostile. While the first passivity refers to a kind of physical resistance of the

body, we can speak here of a psychological experience of resistance. Indeed, many times

in our life a bad humor acts as a resistance to our activities, particularly in experiences

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[127] This experience of "resistance" is doubtless associated with the phenomenon of suffering, as Meech points out: "The category of flesh (a translation of Husserl's *Leib* – sometimes translated as "living body") expresses ontologically the self's experience of its own body as its most intimate other. This experience is attested most profoundly in a phenomenology of suffering" (Meech 2006, 105).

[128] Another way of expressing that effort and resistance go hand to hand is to say, quoting Gedney, that "I am fundamentally to be understood by my capacity to act but that equally this capacity to act testifies to the self's power to act in relation to the passivity that is the body-affected" (Gedney 2004, 334).

such as depression. Although we can do something about our humors, for the most part they are "there" despite ourselves. The third degree of passivity of the body for Maine de Biran is marked "by the resistance of external things; it is through active touch, in which our effort is extended, that things attest to their existence as indubitably as our own" (Ricoeur 1992, 321-322). The experience of external things is an experience of the passivity of the body insofar as the body mediates our experience with the world.

What is common to these three degrees of passivity is the experience of resistance, either the resistance of one's own body that gives way to effort, the resistance of the capricious humors or the resistance of external things. In these three aspects, our own body is revealed to us as an otherness that sometimes becomes a burden, particularly when that resistance is accompanied by the experience of physical or psychological pain.

4.2.2. The body as intimacy

Along with the experience of resistance that reveals the otherness of the body, there is a radical receptivity of the self to the body. This radical receptivity can be evidenced in the experience of the body as "intimate passivity." Again Ricoeur's reception of Maine de Biran's work can help us articulate this point. In Maine de Biran we find the idea that the knowledge of the body belongs to the region of a "nonrepresentative certainty" (Ricoeur 1992, 321). We become acquainted with our body thanks to an act of apprehension, which is different from all objectivizing representation and includes "within the same certainty the acting self and its contrary, which is also its

complement, corporeal passivity" (Ricoeur 1992, 321). Thus, we have a certainty of our body that is present in both our actions and passions.

The idea of intimate passivity and "nonrepresentative certainty" shows the receptivity of the self to the body. This receptivity is so strong that is hard to distinguish between the self and the body. The body appears to the self as an intimate experience. Ricoeur develops the idea of the body as intimate passivity by appealing to Husserl's notion of the flesh. "Flesh" is the translation of *Leib*. Husserl distinguishes between the body as lived body, the body insofar as it is experienced by the self – *Leib* – as opposed to the body as a public entity that appears as one body among others – *Körper*. Through the idea of the flesh we can have access to the experience of having a body, which is crucial to the understanding of the idea of intimate passivity.

The flesh, Husserl tells us, is what "is most originally mine and of all things that which is closest" (Ricoeur 1992, 324) and has an aptitude for feeling that is mainly revealed in the sense of touch, becoming "the organ of desire, the support of free movement" (Ricoeur 1992, 324). The radical passivity of the flesh is evidenced in the fact that the flesh is not an object of choice or desire, but is prior to any initiative. It is the basis and foundation of any wanting and in that sense precedes the "distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary" (Ricoeur 1992, 324).

The experience of the body as an intimate passivity not only shows the radical receptivity of the self to the body, but it also shows the radical openness of the body to others and to the world. The body as an openness mediates the experience of the self with the world. Here Ricoeur touches the core of his hermeneutics of the self, in which he

states that the self is constituted by otherness. In his thesis of the radical openness of the body he discusses the position of Husserl, who in the *Cartesian Meditations* proposes a philosophical exercise: To reduce the ego to what he calls the sphere of ownness. Husserl wants to give a phenomenological description of the constitution of the ego and its world. In order to account for what comes from the ego, he strips the ego of anything that comes from "outside" in order to see what is left. The result is a "sphere of ownness" in which we find a flesh that becomes a body constituting in the process other bodies, other selves and a world. In this phenomenology the radical passivity of the body appears in a fashion similar to Maine de Biran's idea of body as nonrepresentative apprehension. Where Ricoeur disagrees is in the possibility of constituting the flesh prior to the constitution of other selves. The very hypothesis of a sphere of ownness prior to the idea of otherness is doomed to failure because others are required even for the constitution of the intimacy of the flesh:

> ...the presupposition of the other is... contained in the formation of the very sense of the sphere of ownness. In the hypothesis that I am alone, this experience could never be totalized without the help of the other who helps me to gather myself together, strengthen myself, and maintain myself in my identity. (Ricoeur 1992, 332)

Johnstone's article "Oneself as Oneself and Not as Another" issues a strong criticism to Ricoeur's position. What is interesting to note is that Johnstone, following Husserl, presents a position that is completely opposed to Ricoeur's views. This opposition can be noted in the very title of his article, where he criticizes the main thesis of Ricoeur's ontology of the flesh. According to Johnstone, oneself is *oneself* and not another, as Ricoeur claims. With respect to the problem of the flesh, Johnstone criticizes

the fact that Ricoeur "deems the presence of another to be necessary for the constitution of the concept of one's own tactile-kinesthetic body" (Johnstone 1996, 7). Johnstone's attempt at a refutation is based primarily on the evidence of our daily experience where we have a coherent perception of the body without the need of the mediation of others:

> One need only consult one's own experience to find one's own tactile-kinesthetic body continually present and, with a mere shift of attention, on display center stage available for scrutiny. As may be verified by closing one's eyes to short circuit visual expectations somewhat, and by turning the focus of one's attention inward, various regions of the flesh are located contiguously, hands near wrists, mouth near tongue, eyes near brow, chest near abdomen, while others are separated by intervening regions. (Johnstone 1996, 7)

Johnstone also criticizes Ricoeur's claim that, without otherness, the flesh has a "natural disposition toward fragmentation" (Johnstone 1996, 7). For Johnstone the "various inclinations and motivating feelings infusing the tactile-kinesthetic body are holistic rather than pluralistic in nature" (Johnstone 1996, 7). In other words, the physiological structure of the body gives harmony to the experience of our own body, which is attested in an "infant's body muscles" that "work in concert, and are rarely (if ever) incoherent in the sense of two appendages moving in unrelated fashion" (Johnstone 1996, 7). Thus, the cases of fragmentation of the body that some people can experience are more a "pathological symptom within a global psychotic disorder" (Johnstone 1996, 8) than a proof of the needs of otherness to constitute the flesh.

Johnstone does not criticize Ricoeur's interpretation of Husserl. Rather, he disagrees with Ricoeur's idea that we need others to constitute our own flesh. In my opinion, this point is hard to settle. We are dealing here with a matter of philosophical assumption that cannot be demonstrated. The main problem is that we do not know

whether it would be possible to constitute our flesh at an early age without the presence of other children or adults. Since we "always already" find the self in the midst of other selves, it is very hard to trace back the constitution of a notion as basic as the notion of the flesh. Beyond this dispute, it is relevant to ask ourselves how important Ricoeur's assumption that we need others to constitute our own flesh is. For Ricoeur, it matters because it would otherwise be hard to prove his main thesis: That the self is constituted by otherness. Ricoeur's argument seems to be as follows: -The self is constituted by otherness. -In order to have a self mediated by otherness, we need a self that is radically open to others. -The body is a fundamental mediation in our experience with others. -Then, to have a self radically opened to others, we need a body that is opened as well. -Only a body that is constituted in its own flesh (as lived body) by others can be completely opened to others.

Given the central role that others play in his hermeneutics of the self, Ricoeur departs from Husserl and enters into a dialogue with Heidegger in order to show the radical openness of the body to others and to the world. For Ricoeur, Heidegger frees "the problematic of one's own body from the trial of a reduction to ownness" (Ricoeur 1992, 326). Ricoeur finds in *Dasein*'s structure of "being in the world" an indication of the openness of the body. The fact of "being in the world" means that the world precedes the self. It is not that, first, we find a self and, then, a world, but in the very structure of the self we find the fact that we are opened to a world. Heidegger's notions of *facticity* and *throwness* show that we are "always already" in a world and in a situation that we have not chosen. From the experience of *facticity* we can see that the body has two

dimensions: It is a space of intimacy and it is an openness to the foreign and to others.

We are "thrown" in the midst of the world with a body that is a source of intimacy for us.

At the same time, because we have found ourselves in the middle of a world, we are an

openness, that is, we are constituted beforehand by the world in which we find ourselves.

Using Heidegger's notions of *facticity* and *throwness*, Ricoeur reformulates the

dialectic of the self and the body. As a body we find ourselves in the world with the

burden of existence. This burden is felt in the experience of passivity, as Maine de Biran

shows. The resistance of one's own body that gives way to effort, the passivity of

capricious humors and the resistance of external objects show that existence involves

shouldering a daily weight. We, thus, have to face the otherness of our own existence in

an effort of appropriation and overcoming.[129] Ricoeur summarizes these ideas in the

following way:

> One could even say that the link, in the same existentiale of state-of-mind, of the
> burdensome character of existence and of the task of having-to-be, expresses what
> is most crucial in the paradox of an otherness constitutive of the self and in this
> way reveals for the first time the full force of the expression "oneself as another."
> (Ricoeur 1992, 327)

Thus, we find that Ricoeur formulates the dialectic between oneself and another

(same and otherness) at a level as basic as our experience of our own body. However, it

seems that Ricoeur grants too much to others in the constitution of the body. We can still

say that the self is another, as Ricoeur tries to state, without saying that the sense of our

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[129] Ricoeur uses Heidegger's notion of *throwness* and *facticity* to show the dialectic of the body
and otherness noting that Heidegger does not give enough consideration to the problem of the body.

body as flesh is already constituted by others. The self could be open to others even if the constitution of the sense of the body did not require the mediation of others.

Since Ricoeur grants too much to others in the constitution of the own body, the role of attestation seems crucial in order to recapture some sense of ownness in the body, as I will explain in what follows.

4.2.3. The attestation of the self by the experience of the passivity of the body

According to Ricoeur, our self in its basic constitution as a body is in part constituted by the otherness of the body, which in turn, is constituted by the otherness of other people. This strangeness of the body would hardly do justice to our experience, if it would not be compensated with the fact that I feel this body as *my* body.[130] By approaching the certainty that this body is *my* body we are entering into the realm of attestation. Indeed, the assurance that the body is *mine* and an intimate part of me is an act of attestation. I attest to the fact that this is *my* body. This attestation seems to be located in the different experiences of "intimate passivity" described above in dialogue with Maine de Biran and Husserl. At the same time, through the attestation of the body as mine, I attest to my own self in the sense that I gain the confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood through the confidence of having a body. We could say that the

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[130] Here we can refer to the fine phenomenological analysis done by Gabriel Marcel. For Marcel our experience of incarnate beings is well expressed in the statement "I am and I am not my body." Indeed, I am a body in the sense that there is a complete identification between myself and my body and I am not my body in the sense that I can speak of the body as an entity different of the self: I can "give up" my body, I should take good care of "the body", etc. For more on this topic, see Marcel 1976.

certainty (attestation) of having a body is transferred to the certainty (attestation) of being a self. In other words, the statement "it is me here" can be supported by appealing to the reality of the body in the form "it is me here, here is my body," as we see in the Gospel's scene of the apparition of Jesus to the disciples, where Jesus invites Thomas to put his fingers in his wounds as a proof of his resurrection.[131] In that passage we can see how the existence of the self (in the case of Jesus, the resurrected self) is associated with the existence of the body. By appealing to his own body as the "proof" of the resurrection of his self, Jesus is implying that the body "attests" to the existence of the self.[132]

The attestation of the self through the attestation of the body as any act of attestation is not free of suspicion. In some cases, traumatic experiences of the body can produce a challenge to the experience of the self. For example, drastic changes in physical appearance can produce a great uncertainty in the self about its own existence. This possibility, instead of weakening the thesis that the body is a source of attestation for the self, reinforces this idea, since, as Ricoeur insists, attestation is always threatened by suspicion and doubt.

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[131] This scene is found in John's Gospel (Chapter 20: 26-27): "A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe'."

[132] Gedney, along the same lines, states that the body is a "place" where attestation occurs: "The lived body represents the place in which my attestation receives both an initial confirmation in the reality of my actions, but it also opens up the possibility of encountering the other as the other person who also acts in their lived bodies; who are, as it were, 'there in the flesh'" (Gedney 2004, 334).

4.3.   The passivity of others

In this section I analyze the passivity with regard to other people. As in the previous section, I show the dialectic between the self and the other – this time at the level of other people – and the role of attestation in this dialectic. In order to articulate this dialectic, first I show the otherness of other people. This otherness will be evidenced by explaining Ricoeur's appropriation of Husserl's concept of the appresentation of others. Secondly, I show the receptivity of the self to other people. This crucial aspect is explained by discussing Ricoeur's critical reception of Lévinas. Finally, I show how attestation makes possible the dialectic between the self and the other in the experience of self-esteem.

4.3.1. The otherness of other people

To explain the passivity with regard to others, Ricoeur borrows from Husserl, essentially assenting to his conception of the other. The other, in Husserl, has what we can call a double status. On the one hand, it is possible to have an authentic experience of the other. On the other hand, there is no intuition of the other. In this sense, the other is always "beyond me." Ricoeur summarizes these ideas:

> Husserl gave the name "appresentation" to this givenness in order to express, on the one hand, that unlike representations in signs or images, the givenness of the other is an authentic givenness and, on the other hand, that unlike the originary, immediate givenness of the flesh to itself, the givenness of the other never allows me to live the experience of others and, in this sense, can never be converted into originary presentation. (Ricoeur 1992, 333)

"Appresentation" represents the two facts I mentioned above. Appresentation is an authentic givenness of something. In this sense, the other is really given. However, appresentation is not intuition. Rather, what is appresented is co-given: Something is given with something else. In this case, another ego is given along with a body. The other's self is really given, but not as an originary presentation. The other in some sense remains beyond the self. Thus, Husserl presents the experience of the other as a dialectic of immanence-transcendence that is consistent with Ricoeur's dialectic of the self and another. However, for Ricoeur it is also important to show that the self possesses a receptivity to otherness. This receptivity is articulated by entering into a critical dialogue with Lévinas.

4.3.2. The receptivity of the self to otherness

The experience of the passivity of the others requires a self that is capable of receiving the injunction of others.[133] Ricoeur shows the basic receptivity of the self by criticizing Lévinas' position on the relationship between the self and the other. Lévinas gives precedence to the other over the self, holding an idea of the same that is marked by the notion of separation. The self is separated from others and tends to form a circle with itself. According to Ricoeur, Lévinas sees in the self a "will to closure, more precisely a state of separation, that makes otherness the equivalent of radical exteriority" (Ricoeur

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[133] As Wallace puts it, only "a self – insofar as it esteems itself *as* a self capable of reason, agency, and good will – can exercise solicitude for others." (Wallace 2002, 86) Meech explains this capacity of receiving the other by appealing to the Heideggerian idea that we are always already in a world-with-others: "…I am permitted to posit a predialogical self (or other) as long as I acknowledge that I always do so from within an already existing world-with-others" (Meech 2007, 107).

1992, 335-336). Thus, it is not possible to establish a fruitful relationship between the self and the other:

> If interiority were indeed determined solely by the desire for retreat and closure, how could it ever hear a word addressed to it, which would seem so foreign to it that this word would be as nothing for an isolated existence? (Ricoeur 1992, 339)[134]

Lévinas answers this challenge by arguing that the other enters into the sphere of the self under the form of an ethical injunction. The irruption of the other is explained by the image of the face:

> For an ego such as this, incapable of the Other, the epiphany of the face (still a phenomenological theme) signifies an absolute exteriority, that is, a nonrelative exteriority... (Ricoeur 1992, 337)

For Lévinas it is possible to establish an ethical relation between the self and the other in the context of the separation of the self and the exteriority of the other because responsibility has its origin in the other who constitutes me as responsible, not in the self that accepts it:

> It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, as capable of responding. In this way,

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[134] Waldenfels summarizes Ricoeur's criticism of Lévinas well: "The principal reproach against Lévinas is thus that he abruptly opposes the 'otherness of the other' to the 'identity of the self' such that he blocks the pathway from the ego (*Ich*) to the self, enclosing the ego in an ontological totality and separating it from the other, who thus becomes exiled in an absolute exteriority" (Waldenfels 1996, 120). Along the same lines, Foster summarizes Ricoeur's objection to Lévinas as follows: "He [Ricoeur] sees Lévinas' injunction coming from the Other to the closed up ego as overemphasized to the point of creating an impossible situation for reception. He sees Lévinas' emphasis on the separation between the 'same' and the 'other' in term of the stubborn, closedness of the ego, as a characteristic which makes it impossible for the ego to respond to the call from the other…" (Foster 2004, 25).

the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts. (Ricoeur 1992, 336)

However, contrary to Lévinas, Ricoeur considers that in order to have a self that is responsible for its acts, we need first to grant it a capacity of reception. Thus, while in Lévinas the relation between the self and the other is marked by the idea of separation and exteriority, in Ricoeur the relationship between the self and the other is marked by the notion of receptivity.

The idea of separation not only makes impossible the ethical relation but it adds an additional problem. Without receptivity it is not possible to distinguish between the other that instructs me about justice and the other that just wants to do violence to me:

…must we not join to this capacity of reception a capacity of discernment and recognition, taking into account the fact that the otherness of the Other cannot be summed up in what seems to be just one of the figures of the Other, that of the master who teaches, once we have to consider as well the figure of the offender in *Otherwise than Being*? And what are we to say of the Other when he is the executioner? And who will be able to distinguish the master from the executioner, the master who calls for a disciple from the master who requires a slave? (Ricoeur 1992, 339)

Cohen holds that the separation Lévinas establishes between the self and the other is necessary to avoid a philosophy of totality where the ethical relationship is not possible. Lévinas' idea of separation does not entail the absence of relation, as Ricoeur assumes. Far from that, the uniqueness of the ethical relation "is precisely that its terms, self and other, are both out of relation and in relation" (Cohen, 2002, 131). Recognizing that in Lévinas the other appears at some distance from the self, Cohen thinks that Ricoeur is

mistaken in his claim that in Lévinas the self has no capacity to receive the other.[135] In

this respect, Ricoeur is "tilting at a straw man" (Cohen 2002, 138) and he "nowhere

touches upon Lévinas's very fine analyses of the self's capacity of reception found in Part

Four of *Totality and Infinity*" (Cohen 2002, 138). Particularly, Cohen refers to Lévinas's

idea of the self as a created being. According to Lévinas the self is the product of

"familial relations," conditioned "by birth, filiality (paternity, maternity), and fraternity"

(Cohen 2002, 138).

In my opinion, there are two different issues in this discussion. The first issue is

about the fairness of Ricoeur's interpretation of Lévinas, but this exceeds the purpose of

this dissertation. The second issue concerns the nature of the ethical injunction of the

other. It seems that for Ricoeur the ethical injunction needs to be received by the self in

order to be an ethical injunction, while for Lévinas the ethical injunction is received

"despite" the self. Both philosophers grant transcendence to the ethical injunction, but

while for Ricoeur that transcendence must become an immanence in order to be effective,

in Lévinas the force of the ethical injunction resides in its exteriority. In this sense, I

agree with Ricoeur that without a capacity of reception in the self we do not have an

injunction from the other. The radical transcendence of the other's injunction that is

present in Lévinas (at least in Ricoeur's reading) seems to make an ethical injunction

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[135] Along the same lines, according to Kemp, Ricoeur misses important aspects of Lévinas' philosophy that account for the capacity of the self to receive the other: "In *Totality and Infinity* there are three levels of description of existence: that of enjoyment and habitation (called 'Interiority and Economy'); that of the face (called 'Exteriority and the Face'); and that of life and fecundity (called 'Beyond the Face'). None of these levels excludes the others" (Kemp 1996, 56). He adds that "Lévinas's description of separation does not have the negative and even masochistic accent which Ricoeur ascribes to it…" (Kemp 1996, 57).

impossible. How can we listen to the voice of the other if we do not receive it? However, I insist, this criticism is only fair if Ricoeur's interpretation of Lévinas is correct. Beyond the discussion between Ricoeur and Lévinas, it is important to understand more precisely what Ricoeur means by the dialectic between the self and others and the role of attestation in it. The analysis of the notion of self-esteem will help tackle both issues.

4.3.3. The attestation of the self through self-esteem

The dialectic between the self and the other happens mainly at the ethical level. Ricoeur tries to articulate the dialectic between the self and other in such a way that the otherness of the self is preserved (as it happens in Husserl's idea of the appresentation of the other) and, at the same time, the self has a capacity for the reception of the injunction of the other, avoiding the excesses of Lévinas's ethical injunction

The core of the dialectic between the self and other people is found in the notion of self-esteem. This notion needs to be stripped from its common psychological connotations in order to be fully understood in the context of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. Self-esteem is not just the appreciation that the self has for itself, but it is what constitutes the self. By estimating myself I become a self, as Ricoeur points out:

> In this way, self-esteem and self-respect together will represent the most advanced stages of the growth of selfhood, which is at the same time its unfolding. (Ricoeur 1992, 171)

If self-esteem is so intrinsically related to the construction of selfhood, it is worthwhile to discuss this concept in order to come to a better understanding of the dialectic between the self and the other.

Ricoeur's analysis of self-esteem is rich and deep and can be described as a phenomenological account of the ethical unfolding of the self in the midst of its relations with others. It could be surprising that a notion that in principle is based on a reflexive act (*self*-esteem) can account for ethical relations. However, the originality of Ricoeur's notion of self-esteem is precisely its essentially ethical sense in which self-esteem is constructed through the mediations of others:

> For the agent, interpreting the text of an action is interpreting himself or herself… [O]ur concept of the self is greatly enriched by this relation between interpretation of the text of action and self-interpretation. On the ethical plane, self-interpretation becomes self-esteem. In return, self-esteem follows the fate of interpretation. (Ricoeur 1992, 179)

Self-esteem is based on the evaluations that the self makes of its own actions. At the same time, the evaluations of the actions are socially mediated. Thus, in the last instance, self-esteem is constructed, in part, through the evaluations that others perform of our actions.[136]

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[136] Before the self evaluates its own actions, the self finds that actions are "already" socially morally evaluated, as we can realize if we appeal to the notion of "standards of excellence": "These standards of excellence are rules of comparison applied to different accomplishments, in relation to ideals of perfection shared by a given community of practitioners and internalized by the masters and virtuosi of the practice considered" (Ricoeur 1992, 176). The idea of "standards of excellence," which is borrowed from MacIntyre, shows that in each action there are certain standards that determine whether an action is well performed or not. Another important notion related to the valuation of actions, also from MacIntyre, is the idea of "internal goods" of an action. According to this notion, each action possesses its own good that determines if an action is well or poorly performed. The notion of internal good is applied reflexively to the agent: "This concept of internal good, dear to MacIntyre, thus provides an initial support for the reflexive moment of self-esteem, to the extent that it is in appraising our actions that we appraise ourselves as being their author" (Ricoeur 1992, 177).

For Ricoeur the main ethical intention is "to live well with and for others in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992, 351). Self-esteem is the reflexive moment of this ethical aim and unfolds mainly by the idea of solicitude:

> [M]y thesis is that solicitude is not something added on to self-esteem from outside but that it unfolds the dialogic dimension of self-esteem, which up to now has been passed over in silence. (Ricoeur 1992, 180)

Solicitude expresses the dialogical dimension of self-esteem. Self-esteem and solicitude cannot be understood separately: "…self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected upon one without the other" (Ricoeur 1992, 180). The idea of solicitude shows that the "good life" must be accomplished with others and needs the mediation of others. Because we are not self sufficient, we need others to accomplish our own good. There is a lack in each of us that makes us need others:

> To self-esteem, understood as a reflexive moment of the wish for the "good life," solicitude adds essentially the dimension of *lack*, the fact that we *need* friends; as a reaction to the effect of solicitude on self-esteem, the self perceives itself as another among others. (Ricoeur 1992, 192)

The lack is not only on the side of the one who receives solicitude, but even the one that shows solicitude needs others. So, from the idea of lack there unfolds an important element of solicitude: Reciprocity. These two elements, lack and reciprocity appear in the different "figures" by which, according to Ricoeur, solicitude is expressed: Friendship, benevolent spontaneity, and sympathy. This will be the object of the following paragraphs.

In his analysis of friendship, Ricoeur basically reminds us of the basic points of Aristotle's analysis of friendship in the *Nichomachean Ethics* in order to stress the idea

that the good life is constructed with others in reciprocal relations. Indeed, friendship

shows that we are not self sufficient, that we *lack* many things and that we need others to

realize our own good, as Ricoeur points out here:

> It is in connection with the notions of capacity and realization – that is, finally of *power* and *act* – that a place is made for *lack* and, through the mediation of lack, for *others*. (Ricoeur 1992, 182)

Friendship is an essential component of the realization of the good life. Even the happy

man needs friends. We need friends not only because life is not self-sufficient but also

because, in order to enjoy its own good, the self needs the mediation of others:

> This need has to do not only with what is active and incomplete in living together but also with the sort of shortage or lack belonging to the very relation of the self to its own existence. (Ricoeur 1992, 186)

The second figure where we observe the unfolding of self-esteem is in benevolent

spontaneity. Ricoeur offers the notion of "benevolent spontaneity" as a response to

Lévinas idea of the master of justice who is the person who instructs others in justice and

shows the injunction of others over the self. In the injunction of the master of justice the

reciprocity proper to friendship disappears. Lévinas intentionally wants to establish the

precedence of the initiative of the other in order to break with any idea of totality where

the other could be subsumed in an attempt of domination from the self, as Ricoeur

explains here:

> E. Lévinas's entire philosophy rests on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relation. In reality, this initiative establishes no relation at all, to the extent that the other represents absolute exteriority with respect to an ego defined by the condition of separation. (Ricoeur 1992, 188-189)

Ricoeur, as was stated above, disagrees with this idea of injunction in that it does not suppose a capacity of reception in the self. The injunction of others needs to be heard and received in order to be a real injunction. Without a capacity for receiving the injunction, the injunction would remain external and, as a consequence, could not appeal to the self:

> Taken literally, a dissymmetry left uncompensated would break off the exchange of giving and receiving and would exclude any instruction by the face within the field of solicitude. (Ricoeur 1992, 189)

In order to compensate for this dissymmetry Ricoeur proposes the idea of benevolent spontaneity. The idea of benevolent spontaneity refers to the reception of the injunction of the other thanks to the capacity of the self to recognize the superiority of the authority the master of justice has:

> On the basis of this benevolent spontaneity, receiving is on an equal footing with the summons to responsibility, in the guise of the self's recognition of the superiority of the authority enjoining it to act in accordance with justice. (Ricoeur 1992, 190)

This idea is similar to Gadamer's idea of authority.[137] In both cases, we see that authority is not seen as something imposed from "outside" but as the source of a truth that is freely recognized by the self. The initiative of the other that instructs justice is compensated by the capacity of the self to accept others' initiative.[138]

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[137] See Gadamer 1986.

[138] Wallace expresses the same idea stating that "Ricoeur stubbornly insists on preserving self-love and other-regard in a correlative tension that he argues is snapped by Lévinas's one-sided emphasis on self-emptying obedience in the face of the summons of the other" (Wallace 2002, 86).

The capacity of the self to accept the injunction of the other is grounded, according to Ricoeur, in the goodness of the self:

> Now what resources might these be if not the resources of *goodness* which could spring forth only from a being who does not detest itself to the point of being unable to hear the injunction coming from the other? (Ricoeur 1992, 189)

Cohen, from a Lévinasian perspective, strongly criticizes this idea of benevolent spontaneity, because it supposes that there is in the self a morally inclined solicitude. Responding to Ricoeur, Cohen asks rhetorically "from whence is selfhood inclined to benevolence?" (Cohen 2002, 132) and then adds, "[n]o evidence supports his optimism, or, rather, equal evidence opposes it" (Cohen 2002, 132).[139] Cohen's objection is interesting. To expect that the self will recognize its responsibility from its source of goodness could be non-realistic. In this sense Lévinas seems to be more grounded in stating that the source of responsibility is not the self but the other who summons to responsibility. However, in Ricoeur's defense, it must be noted that responsibility needs to be accepted by the self. For that reason, Ricoeur insists that there is no injunction without attestation. The act of acceptance of responsibility is well expressed in Ricoeur's

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[139] Kemp, on the contrary, claims that Lévinas does recognize the goodness of the self and a positive capacity to receive the other: "Enjoyment indeed is experienced in a habitation where the other, although not yet being 'face', nevertheless is not absent, but, on the contrary, present in intimacy and sweetness, in familiarity and femininity… it is impossible to understand this analysis otherwise than as praise of the goodness of life in the sense in which this goodness is given by the creation of human existence… habitation is not total passivity in relation to the foreigner – it is in principle a home of hospitality" (Kemp 1996, 56). The main difference from Ricoeur is that while Ricoeur builds his ethics upon this capacity of benevolent spontaneity, it seems that Lévinasian ethics cannot be built upon this level, as Kemp claims: "But the hand is fallible, it *may* be a manipulator, and one *may* close one's house instead of opening it to the poor and the stranger. In these cases, the Same at all levels of praxis, including philosophical or metaphysical praxis, closes in on itself, so that interiority and the economy of the home cannot constitute an ethics. Indeed, it is only the face entering from the exteriority which assigns us to responsibility" (Kemp 1996, 56-57).

idea of solicitude in general and benevolent spontaneity in particular. Thus, by recognizing the role of the self in the act of taking responsibility, Ricoeur offers a good complement to Lévinas' idea of injunction, as Bourgeois points out:

> In accepting the role of solicitude in human existence, Ricoeur has developed a place within interiority that really allows a response to the face of the other. And in doing so, he has accounted for a central, indeed, the central point of Lévinas, that a breakthrough – a break out – out of the "totality" of traditional philosophy is necessary for there to be a face to face encounter. (Bourgeois 2002, 122)[140]

The last figure of solicitude that Ricoeur presents is the relationship with the dying person. The dying person works as the paradigm of the suffering person. Ricoeur's idea of suffering goes beyond the notion of physical or mental pain and is related to the diminishing or the destruction of the capacity of acting:

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[140] For Bourgeois, Ricoeur's project is compatible with a "break out" of a philosophy of totality. By giving a role to the self in the act of acceptance of responsibility, expressed in the idea of benevolent spontaneity, Ricoeur would not place the other under the dominion of the self. However, for Cohen, Ricoeur's project does fall into a philosophy of totality: "Ricoeur can never come across this totality precisely because all his investigations operate within it, unwittingly conforming to its contours. Lévinas's thought, in contrast, articulates this totality by exceeding and rupturing it – from a moral angle, a height" (Cohen 2002, 147). Wallace offers an interesting interpretation of the difference between the role of others in relation to the self in Lévinas and Ricoeur. According to Wallace this difference could be based in a different hermeneutic tradition. Lévinas belongs to the Jewish tradition where biblical revelation "centers on prescriptive teaching – regarding matters of behavior, morality, ritual, and law – to the degree that even in seemingly unlegal genres, such as the Psalms and sapiential literature, Lévinas argues that are prescriptive upheavals where God's commanding voice to the reader breaks through the literary surface of these texts" (Wallace, 86). By contrast, Ricoeur belongs to a Christian tradition where God is named through the different biblical genres. In the Christian tradition there is no primacy of the legal texts over the others. Thus, God's revelation is not experienced primarily as a legal injunction (as it happens in the Jewish tradition), but in many different manners, and this gives to the self a more active role in the articulation of God's will and revelation. Thus, Lévinas' formation in the Jewish biblical tradition would incline him to stress the idea of the injunction of the voice of the other manifested in the genre of prescriptions, while Ricoeur belonging to the Christian tradition would stress the reception of the word through the diverse biblical genres without giving priority to any of them. These two hermeneutical traditions can be translated into two philosophical attitudes. One – well expressed in Lévinas – gives importance to a voice that is manifested as an injunction, and the other – present in Ricoeur – stresses the importance of the appropriation and interpretation of that voice from the one that receives the injunction.

> Suffering is not defined solely by physical pain, nor even by mental pain, but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity. (Ricoeur 1992, 190)

The relationship between the suffering person, particularly the dying person, and the one that assists her seems to be asymmetrical. The one comforting and taking care seems to be only one that is giving:

> Here initiative, precisely in terms of being-able-to-act, seems to belong exclusively to the self who *gives* his sympathy, his compassion, these terms being taken in the strong sense of the wish to share someone else's pain. (Ricoeur 1992, 190)

On the contrary, the one that is being comforted seems "to be reduced to the sole condition of *receiving*" (Ricoeur 1992, 190). Thus, reciprocity apparently is broken. However, if we take a closer look, we see that in true sympathy "the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return" (Ricoeur 1992, 191). Thus, reciprocity is reestablished. One person offers comfort, consolation and sympathy and the other gives something that does not come from her power of acting, but from her own weakness. Thus, the dying person offers to the one comforting a reminder of one's condition of mortality and vulnerability (Ricoeur 1992, 191). Ricoeur summarizes the exchange in this beautiful text:

> This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands. (Ricoeur 1992, 191)

As it has been stated, self-esteem is at the core of the dialectic between self and other people. The three figures of solicitude (friendship, benevolent spontaneity and

sympathy) show that the good life cannot be accomplished alone. Others are an essential mediation to the ethical life. Ricoeur tries to keep a delicate balance between the self and others.[141] Following Husserl, he tries to preserve the otherness of other people and against Lévinas, he grants to the self a capacity to receive the injunction of others.

Still, it is hard to understand how the good life is mediated by others. It is easy to accept that we need others to accomplish our goals since we are not self-sufficient. However, we find a stronger claim in the three figures of self-esteem: The self assumes as its own good the good of others. In friendship, the good of the friend becomes the good of the self; in benevolent spontaneity the injunction of others becomes the self's own moral response and in sympathy the self assumes the fragility and mortality of the other as a reminder of its own mortality and fragility. How is it possible for the self to assume the good of the other as its own good? Attestation seems to be the explanation for this phenomenon. Through attestation, in the form of self-esteem, the self is able to gain the confidence of being a self through the assumption of the good of others[142] and by doing that, the self integrates the good of others as its own good. Thus, we can say that self-

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[141] This effort of keeping a balance between the self and the other is observed in the three figures of solicitude, although with different emphasis: "Let us attempt, in conclusion, to take an overview of the entire range of attitudes deployed between the two extremes of the summons to responsibility, where the initiative comes from the other, and of sympathy for the suffering other, where the initiative comes from the loving self, friendship appearing as a midpoint where the self and the other share equally the same wish to live together. While equality is presupposed in friendship, in the case of the injunction coming from the other, equality is reestablished only through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other's authority; in the case of sympathy that comes from the self and extends to the other, equality is reestablished only through the shared admission of fragility and, finally, of mortality" (Ricoeur 1992, 192).

[142] Wallace also connects the idea of self-esteem to attestation: "Self-attestation – the capacity for self-esteem – has its origin in my self-reflexive openness to being enjoined to give myself to meet the other's needs even as my hearing and understanding the voice of the other have their origin in my regard for myself as a moral subject" (Wallace 2002, 86).

esteem is the phenomenological place where the attestation of the self through the other happens.

This view is doubtless appealing. However, we wonder what happens where the self denies other selves or does not assume the good of others as its own good. If we are true to what we have been holding we should state that in those cases the self is not attesting to its own self. However, we see that sociopaths (an extreme case of the denial of the good of others) do attest to their own self, in the sense that they have the confidence in being capable of acting, of remembering and even promising. Ricoeur does not consider this challenge. However, by making a strong association between selfhood, self-esteem and the ethical aim, he is proposing an ethics rooted in an ontology that could be formulated in the following terms: To be a self means to pursue the ethical aim. Then, if somebody, like a sociopath, does not pursue the ethical aim, that person indeed is diminishing his selfhood. If this interpretation is faithful to Ricoeur, we have to say then that his account is coherent, but controversial, to say the least. The next section, focused on the analysis of conscience, can shed some light on this problem.

4.4. The passivity of conscience

The third type of passivity that Ricoeur explains is the passivity with regard to conscience. As I did with the other two passivities (body and other people), I discuss this passivity by showing how the dialectic between the self and the other is present even here. The first step in the unfolding of this dialectic is explicated in the otherness of conscience which is evidenced in the fact that conscience is a call. The second step of this dialectic is the self's receptivity to the call of conscience that will be shown in the structure of

"being-enjoined." Then, I will show how attestation makes possible this dialectic by analyzing the idea of conviction. In conviction, what is other (the call of conscience) is assumed as the expression of the dearest values of the self. Finally, I will discuss some critical considerations that commentators have made about Ricoeur's idea of conscience that are relevant to the relationship between conscience and attestation.

4.4.1. Conscience as a call

Ricoeur finds in Heidegger's analysis of conscience[143] a good framework from within which he articulates his own position. Ricoeur agrees with Heidegger's idea of conscience as an ontological phenomenon and not a mere religious or moral one[144] and praises him for recognizing the otherness of conscience:

> In the chapter of *Being and Time* entitled "Gewissen," … Heidegger described perfectly this moment of otherness that distinguishes conscience. (Ricoeur 1992, 342)

The otherness of conscience in Heidegger's phenomenological description is described mainly through the metaphor of the "voice of conscience" and introduces an important element for Ricoeur's account, the idea of a non self-mastery of the self:

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[143] For more on Heidegger's idea of conscience see Mariana Ortega's article *When Conscience Calls, Will Dasein Answer? Heideggerian Authenticity and the Possibility of Ethical Life* (Ortega 2005).

[144] Ricoeur praises Heidegger for giving conscience a character that is not merely religious or moral: "In this sense, we can note the neutral character of the phenomenon of conscience as regards its religious interpretation. It is the self that calls the self and bears witness to its ownmost power of being… If a theological interpretation of conscience is to be possible, it will precisely presuppose this intimacy of self and conscience" (Ricoeur 1995d, 271). Along the same lines, Gedney states: "Ricoeur… attempts to distinguish the general character of conscience from its particular manifestations as good or bad. The standard of conscience calls me to act, to be resolved, that is, to be or become myself, and this is also a call to be faithful" (Gedney 2004, 336).

> Unlike the dialogue of the soul with itself, of which Plato speaks, this affection by another voice presents a remarkable dissymmetry, one that can be called vertical, between the agency that calls and the self called upon. It is the vertical nature of the call, equal to its interiority, that creates the enigma of the phenomenon of conscience. (Ricoeur 1992, 342)

Heidegger shows that in the self there is a kind of asymmetry in the sense that the self is affected with an element that is in the self and in some sense beyond the self. However, in Heidegger the otherness of conscience remains within the immediacy of conscience. As a consequence, for Ricoeur, in Heidegger's account there is no transcendence in the voice of conscience.[145]

Conscience in Heidegger is a call to authenticity. Dasein finds itself in inauthenticity, lost in the they. Conscience is precisely what calls Dasein to get away from inauthenticity and to find its ownmost possibilities. Dasein can run away from the they by facing its own nothingness through the mood of angst. This interpretation of conscience, according to Ricoeur, falls short mainly for two reasons. First, conscience does not appear as an injunction from others[146] and secondly, conscience is deprived of any ethical content.[147] Ricoeur counters this idea of conscience by affirming that it is

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[145] Along the same lines, Hall points out that there is no exteriority in Dasein's call, and this makes Heidegger's notion of consciousness peculiar: "This peculiar nature of conscience becomes particularly apparent in Heidegger's explanation of the "whence" of the appeal; if Dasein is appealed to, who calls? Paradoxically, it is Dasein that calls *itself* out of its lostness. And yet, the call is not something that the self voluntarily chooses; rather, the call comes to Dasein, though Dasein is nonetheless the source of the call…" (Hall 2007, 119).

[146] Ricoeur states that there is some strangeness in Heidegger's account of conscience, but there is a "*strangeness without a stranger*" (Ricoeur 1995a, 111, Ricoeur's emphasis).

[147] According to Ricoeur, in Heidegger's account "Conscience says nothing, there is no uproar, no message, just a silent call" (Ricoeur 1995a, 110). Meech summarizes Ricoeur's criticism of Heidegger amoral idea of conscience: "Ricoeur concludes that all Heidegger can provide in terms of a return from

basically an injunction to live well with and for others in just institutions. However, it is important to note that although Ricoeur criticizes Heidegger for depriving conscience of any moral content, in Ricoeur conscience is not a moral phenomenon either: "Conscience is fundamentally a principle of individuation rather an instance of accusation and judgment" (Ricoeur 1995b, 273).[148]

Conscience is an injunction of otherness. However, the status of otherness is itself ambiguous. First, otherness can be identified with the presence of other people in the form of social values. Secondly, the otherness of conscience can be identified with the idea of the ancestors. In the self we find the sedimentation of generations whose traces are found in myths and cults. Finally, the otherness of conscience can be identified with God as well. These three possibilities, for Ricoeur, more than exhaust the idea of conscience and show its basic ambiguity:

> Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end. (Ricoeur 1992, 355)

ontological to ethical conscience is a kind of moral situationism – conscience as a silent summons attests only to the brute fact of Dasein's thrownness. Conscience cannot orient action; instead, it calls the self out of the domination of the They to assume responsibility for its own thrownness" (Meech 2007, 109).

[148] In this respect Ricoeur states that "it would not be excessive to attempt to isolate the pre-ethical features of conscience [*for intérieur*] as the *forum* of the colloquy of the self with itself. (This is why I prefer to use the term *for intérieur* to *conscience morale* in French to translate the German *Gewissen* and the English *conscience*)" (Ricoeur 1996b, 454). See also Kemp 1996, 46.

In the end the philosopher cannot know for sure about the specific nature of conscience. This difficulty and ambiguity seems to be consubstantial with the nature of conscience. If conscience is an otherness, then the analysis of this phenomenon must respect such otherness. For that reason, Ricoeur claims that the "ultimate equivocalness with respect to the status of the Other in the phenomenon of conscience is perhaps what needs to be preserved in the final analysis" (Ricoeur 1992, 353).

4.4.2. Being enjoined: The capacity to listen to the voice of conscience

Conscience is not just a call, but there is in the self a basic capacity to receive that call. This fact is evidenced in the phenomenon of being enjoined. Being enjoined supposes the injunction of others in conscience and the capacity to receive that injunction through the notion of "listening to the voice of conscience":

> Being-enjoined would then constitute the moment of otherness proper to the phenomenon of conscience, in accordance with the metaphor of the voice. Listening to the voice of conscience would signify being-enjoined by the Other. (Ricoeur 1992, 351)[149]

The structure of being enjoined combines the idea of injunction with the idea of receptivity. In the capacity of the self to receive the injunction of conscience the phenomenon of attestation appears for the first time in the passivity of conscience. The injunction of others needs a self that can be receptive to that injunction and such

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[149] Gedney summarizes this notion of being-enjoined very nicely: "The self is constituted in a fundamental way in conscience but not simply as the power to decide over the abyss. The self is called to a decision as a response to the other who has called and challenged me, and it is thus first and foremost a 'being-enjoined'" (Gedney 2004, 337).

receptivity to otherness is attestation, in the sense that the self achieves its own

conviction of existing in the mode of the self insofar as it experiences the injunction of

conscience.[150] At the same time, attestation at the level of conscience needs injunction,

because the attestation of the self is mediated by the otherness of conscience. Without

injunction it would be an empty attestation.

Ricoeur recognizes in Lévinas's approach a solid idea of injunction. Otherness in

Lévinas, as I have discussed above, appears as an injunction to the self. However,

Ricoeur criticizes Lévinas for not including in the idea of the openness of the self the

capacity to "hear the voice of conscience." It is Heidegger who best articulates the

receptivity of the self, the idea that at the core of the self we find the otherness of

conscience. However, in Heidegger conscience is not an injunction, but an empty call to

authenticity.[151] Thus, Ricoeur's position occupies a middle ground between the two

approaches:

> To Heidegger, I objected that attestation is primordially injunction, or attestation
> risks losing all ethical or moral significance. To Lévinas, I shall object that the

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[150] Wallace summarizes this injunction as follows: "In the depths of one's interiority, the subject is enjoined to live well with oneself and for others. The colloquy of the self with itself – the phenomenon of being enjoined – occurs in the place where the self appropriates for itself the demand of the other upon it. Conscience, then, is the forum for the summoning of the self to its obligations" (Wallace 2002, 84).

[151] Here is how Kemp summarizes Ricoeur's criticism of Heidegger: "[A]s a criticism of his analytic of the human world, for giving no room for *the other* at the border of or outside the world which is mine. There is no place for the other – whether it is my body as the other I am in an ambiguous way (to be body is indeed to take care of oneself as another), or the other here and now, absent in the past or in the future to which I must ascribe his or her own world…" (Kemp 1996, 49). Further Kemp adds his own criticism of Heidegger for not giving a room for the other in the analytic of Dasein stating that according to "Heidegger, ultimately the other can give me nothing of real importance. Likewise, in my ownness, I am fundamentally unable to give something to others except – if this can be more than a *flatus vocis* in the Heideggerian universe – to 'let them be'" (Kemp 1996, 53).

injunction is primordially attestation, or the injunction risks not being heard and the self not being affected in the mode of being-enjoined. (Ricoeur 1992, 355)

This intermediate position between Lévinas and Heidegger[152] can be expressed in the ontological structure of being-enjoined by others, which is equivalent to conscience in Ricoeur. Being-enjoined supposes and summarizes the moment of receiving an injunction from others (in opposition to Heidegger) and the moment of recognizing the injunction in the form of attestation (in opposition to Lévinas):

> To these alternatives – either Heidegger's strange(r)ness or Lévinas's externality – I shall stubbornly oppose the original and originary character of what appears to me to constitute the third modality of otherness, namely *being enjoined as the structure of selfhood*. (Ricoeur 1992, 354)

Is it possible to understand the injunction of others as a call and conscience (as attestation) as the response to the call? Such an interpretation would have several problems. For Ricoeur it is not possible to have an injunction without attestation. These two terms come together (Ricoeur 1992, 352).[153] If attestation were just an answer, it would be possible to have injunction without attestation. Contrary to that possibility,

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[152] Hall explains this intermediate idea of conscience between Lévinas and Heidegger: "Conscience is neither completely anxiety/authenticity nor complete alterity. The injunction can be reduced neither to the voice of Dasein to itself nor to the other commanding the self to moral concern" (Hall 2007, 122). In another article, Hall offers another complementary interpretation of Ricoeur intermediate position between Lévinas and Heidegger: "In the concluding section of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur attempts to negotiate a path between Heidegger's "demoralized" account of conscience, which risks evacuating self-attestation of any ethical and moral concern, and Lévinas's "deontologized" account, which risks reducing the phenomenon of conscience to the otherness of other persons" (Hall 2002, 161).

[153] Ricoeur responds to Heidegger's demoralization of conscience with an idea of conscience intimately associated with the idea of injunction: "To this demoralization of conscience, I would oppose a conception that closely associates the phenomenon of *injunction* to that of *attestation*" (Ricoeur 1992, 351).

Ricoeur situates the phenomenon of being-enjoined, injunction-attestation and passivity

as the capacity of finding oneself called upon, as he explains in this paragraph:

> [T]he passivity of being-enjoined consists in the situation of listening in which the ethical subject is placed in relation to the voice addressed to it in the second person. To find oneself called upon in the second person at the very core of the optative of living well, then of the prohibition to kill, then of the search for the choice appropriate to the situation, is to recognize oneself as being enjoined to *live well with and for others in just institutions and to esteem oneself as the bearer of this wish.* (Ricoeur 1992, 352, Ricoeur's emphasis)

Although, as was said above, conscience is not a mere moral phenomenon, the

injunction of others in conscience is an ethical injunction, as we can observe in the

paragraph just quoted. Then, to understand better the attestation of the self through the

otherness of conscience we have to focus on a phenomenon where the fact of being-

enjoined by otherness as an ethical injunction is evidenced. This phenomenon in

Ricoeur's thought seems to be conviction, where the attestation of the self in conscience

appears most clearly.

4.4.3. Conviction: The attestation of the self through conscience

The dialectic between the self and otherness at the level of conscience is

completed in conviction. Conviction allows what is other (the "call of conscience") to be

integrated as part of the self. In conviction, the voice of conscience becomes my own

without losing its otherness.

The idea of conviction emerges in the context of the problem of conscience. As I

have stated above, the ethical injunction consists in a call "to live well with and for others

in just institutions" (Ricoeur 1992, 351). The emergence of evil and violence in societies

makes it necessary to create norms. Ricoeur calls the realm of norms morality (Ricoeur

1992, 170). Conscience usually is associated with norms. However, in order to discover

the reality of conscience we have to go beyond the realm of norms in order to reveal the

ethical injunction. The ethical injunction is experienced in conscience in the phenomenon

of conviction, as Ricoeur explains here:

> We must not stop moving up the slope leading from this injunction-prohibition back to the injunction to live well. This is not all: we must not stop the trajectory of ethics at the point of imperative-injunction but continue to follow its course all the way to moral choices in situation. The injunction then meets up with the phenomenon of *conviction*… (Ricoeur 1992, 351-352)

The phenomenon of conviction is related to the moral choices that we have to make in

each situation. We can distinguish in the phenomenon of conviction different levels. In

one extreme, we find weak convictions when we have to take decisions that are not very

important. In the other extreme, we find strong convictions when important things are at

stake. When we make decisions where our most firm values are tested, the phenomenon

of conviction appears more clearly.

In conviction we experience the otherness of conscience as an injunction.

However, injunction does not appear just as an otherness. The voice that may initially

appear as foreign can become my own voice. Ricoeur illustrates this point appealing to

the commandment "thou shalt not kill":

> ....must not the voice of the Other who says to me: "Thou shalt not kill," become my own, to the point of becoming my conviction, a conviction to equal the accusative of "It's me here!" with the nominative of "Here I stand"? (Ricoeur 1992, 339)

This ambiguity of the voice of conscience clearly shows that in conviction we find an intersection of injunction and attestation. Conviction is injunction in the sense that conviction is experienced as a call to do something, as a decision that is not up to the self. However, conviction expresses at the same time the most inner and authentic belief of the self. Conviction is equivalent to saying "it's me here" which is the same expression that Ricoeur uses to illustrate the definition of attestation.[154]

Finally, we can say that in conviction attestation becomes an ethical attestation.[155] It is not the first time that the link between ethics and attestation appears. In the capacity of imputation we found that the confidence of existing in the mode of the self becomes in imputation the confidence of judging and acting well:

> This experiential evidence is the new figure in which attestation appears, when the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well (Ricoeur 1992, 180).

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[154] Here Ricoeur joins the expression "it is me here" with attestation: "...attestation is fundamentally attestation *of* self. This trust will, in turn, be a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative: "It's me here" (Ricoeur 1992, 22).

[155] It is not the first time that the link between ethics and attestation appears. In the capacity of imputation we found that the confidence of existing in the mode of the self becomes in imputation the confidence of judging and acting well: "This experiential evidence is the new figure in which *attestation* appears, when the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well" (Ricoeur 1992, 180).

4.4.4. Conscience: Critical Considerations

The dialectic between the self and the other at the level of conscience has the form of an injunction to a self that is receptive to that injunction and assumes that injunction in the form of conviction. However, if we take a closer look at Ricoeur's idea of conscience, we find some problems that hinder the dialectic. The first problem can be located at the level of the injunction. Is conscience a clear voice that allows us to discern the ethical injunction? To tackle this issue, I will discuss Wallace's objection to Ricoeur's idea of conscience. The second problem is related to the idea of conviction. Is Ricoeur's idea of conviction consistent with his idea of conscience? Some remarks of Pamela Anderson will be helpful to articulate this problem. Now let us discuss Wallace objections.

Wallace points out to at least two possible problems in Ricoeur's account of conscience: First, the fact that he does not recognize the plurality of voices that we usually find in conscience and secondly the lack of a criterion to adjudicate between the different voices:

> But what I find missing in Ricoeur's magisterial analysis of conscience is an equally powerful account of the phenomenon of the *war of the self with itself* in the interior adjudication of opposing life choices and moral options. In the colloquy of the self with itself, the character of this interior conversation is oftentimes more like an aporetic and conflicted *contest* between diverging voices than it is a careful and deliberative weighting of adjudicable options. Caught in the vicegrip of seemingly irresolvable extremes for action, the self, as it struggles with the voice of conscience within, must often run the risk of dissolving into an irredeemable jumble of broken pieces in its agonistic struggle to decide which path to pursue in responsibility to itself and others. Conscience, in this model, is

> not a hearkening to *a* voice or *the* voice within, but a confrontation with a plurality of *many different* voices – some of which are self-generated, others of which have their origin outside of the self. Conscience, from this perspective, is not a hearkening to one voice – be it the voice of the other or the voice of God or the voice of the nowhere – but a cacophonous echo chamber of many voices – many disparate and irreconcilably contested voices – all of which lay claim to the attention of the moral agent. (Wallace 2002, 88–89)

Is there any possible solution to these problems? Wallace made a first attempt in the same article where he formulates these sharps criticisms. Wallace quotes a text where Ricoeur recognizes the importance of others in the decisions that we have to make in our conscience:

> …the decision taken at the end of a debate with oneself, at the heart of what we may call our innermost forum, our heart of hearts, will be all the more worthy of being called *wise* if it issues from a council, on the model of our French national consultative council on ethics, or on the model of the small circle bringing together relatives, doctors, psychologists, and religious leaders at the bed of someone who is dying. Wisdom in judging and the pronouncement of wise judgment must always involve more than one person. Then conscience truly merits the name *conviction.* (Ricoeur 2000c, 155)[156]

However, Wallace points out that the appealing to others does not solve the cases where our conscience dictates us to go against the status quo, where there is no council to consult or where we have to make a decision in the solitude of our own convictions.

Thus, Ricoeur can leave us without many guidelines about how to make decisions and how to adjudicate between different voices in our conscience. Moreover, Ricoeur does not seem to recognize the multiplicity of voices that are present in our conscience. However, if we turn to Ricoeur's account of tragedy, we can find some indications that

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[156] Quoted in Wallace 2002, 89–90.

could solve the issue of the conflicts of conscience and of the multiplicity of voices that we sometimes find in us.

For Nussbaum, Ricoeur sees the conflictual nature of conscience by recognizing the teaching that tragedy can provide (Nussbaum 2002, 272).[157] However, Ricoeur does not expect from tragic wisdom any "solution" to the conflicts, but rather an acknowledgment of the inevitable place of conflict in moral life (Ricoeur 1992, 247).[158] Tragedy for Ricoeur, following Hegel, shows us the narrowness of the moral perspectives of the agents (as it is evidenced in the limited perspective of Antigone and Creon in the tragedy *Antigone*). These teachings instead of making us renounce the ethical life, make us move to *phronesis*:

> Tragedy, on the level our investigation has reached, is not to be sought only at the dawn of ethical life but, on the contrary, at the advanced stage of morality, in the conflicts that arise along the path leading from the rule to moral judgment in situation. (Ricoeur 1992, 249)[159]

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[157] Ricoeur, indeed, devotes many pages in *Oneself as Another* to the contributions of tragedy to moral life. See Ricoeur 1992, 241 and ff.

[158] Piercey interprets the recognition of the inevitable place of conflict as the recognition of limitations of reason in moral life: "Rather than being an instrument that reason uses to achieve other ends, tragedy brings reason face to face with its own limitations" (Piercey 2005, 12).

[159] Tragedy shows the conflicting nature of human actions and, even more, the basic conflicts of human action. This is not a small contribution. Indeed, many times ethical problems arise not because the agents are incapable of solving a moral conflict, but because they do not see the conflict. Pellauer calls this phenomenon "moral blindness": "By this notion, I mean the fact that we do not even "see" that there is a moral question, conflict, or dilemma, so the question of practical wisdom does not even arise. Hence, it is not a matter of the wrong description of some moral fact. Moral blindness is rather the failure to even recognize that there is a moral fact or state of affairs to be investigated and evaluated" (Pellauer 2002, 193).

Phronesis[160] comes to our aid in order to make the hard choices among different goods.

Nussbaum praises Ricoeur for recognizing the tragic dimension of action and

complements his account with a fine interpretation of the relevance and the importance of

recognizing the tragic character of action. Tragedy can help the moral actor look for

solutions that in the future avoid the necessity of succumbing to the doomed options:

> Tragic dilemmas may have a natural element, but they usually also have an
> element of human greed or neglect or lack of imagination. We should not treat the
> greed as given; we should exercise imagination in a free Hegelian spirit, asking
> what steps might be taken to produce a world that is free of some life-crushing
> contradictions. (Nussbaum 2002, 274)[161]

Wallace's challenge can also be addressed from Ricoeur's recognition of the

plurality of the good. This recognition, as Nussbaum rightly points out, is present in

Ricoeur's reception of Michael Walzer's idea of the different spheres of the good[162] and

can, at the same time, be the reason why Ricoeur does not provide a more specific way to

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[160] *Phronesis* or practical wisdom "consists in inventing conduct that will satisfy the exception required by solicitude, by betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible" (Ricoeur 1992, 269). For a complete analysis of Ricoeur's notion of *phronesis* see John Wall's article *Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity* (Wall 2003).

[161] This capacity of tragedy to show us that conflict is an inevitable aspect of moral life and to reorient our action (particularly in the future) to avoid, precisely, tragic conflicts (insofar it is possible to do it) is well explained by the example of the choices that women face in India. Nussbaum explains that many women have to choose between sending their children to school and sending them to work. It is a very hard choice because the cost of sending them to school could be a matter of survival for many families that need the income that the children can provide. At the same time the cost that illiteracy has for the children in particular and for the country in general is huge. Then, it is a tragic choice, where whatever choice is made, hard consequences will follow. However, authorities instructed by tragic wisdom can create the conditions for families so that they do not have to choose between education and survival.

[162] Ricoeur follows Walzer in the idea that in ethical life there is a plurality of goods that many times are incommensurable (see Ricoeur 1992, 252).

adjudicate between the conflicts of moral life.[163] Thus, Ricoeur's omission of the plurality of voices that we find in conscience can be compensated with the idea of tragic wisdom and with the recognition of the plurality of goods, answering, at least in part, some of the challenges that Wallace presents.

However, in my opinion there is a much more serious problem in Ricoeur's idea of conscience. I would like to point out to an inconsistency between his idea of conscience and his idea of conviction. While Ricoeur has an idea of conscience somewhat ambiguous (it is not very clear what kind of voice conscience is) and weak (we may find many competing voices instead of a single strong voice), he presents a very strong idea of conviction where the self assumes as its own the injunction of others and it is able to stand for his own values, even to the extreme of dying for them. Here is my objection: If the voice of conscience is ambiguous and multiple, how is it possible for the self to come up with a definite and single answer to the voice of conscience?

This difficulty seems to be implicit in Pamela Sue Anderson's article "Agnosticism and Attestation: An Aporia concerning the Other in Ricoeur's 'Oneself as Another'." Anderson sees a contradiction between Ricoeur's confessed philosophical agnosticism in *Oneself as Another* and Ricoeur's idea of attestation. Indeed at the beginning of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur expresses the need for keeping the

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[163] Still, Ricoeur recognizes that in a specific sphere, such as in the Christian faith, there are ways of discerning the injunction of conscience: "The Christian is someone who discerns 'conformity to the image of Christ' in the call of conscience. This discernment is an interpretation. And this interpretation is the outcome of a struggle for veracity and intellectual honesty. A 'synthesis' is not given and never attained between the verdict of conscience and the christomorphism of faith. Any synthesis remains a risk, a 'lovely risk' (Plato)" (Ricoeur 1995b, 274-275).

philosophical discourse free of theological or religious assumptions.[164] However, Anderson points to a certain inconsistency between this acknowledged agnosticism and Ricoeur's idea of attestation. Attestation as a trust, a confidence in existing in the mode of selfhood seems to contradict Ricoeur confessed agnosticism and, at the end of the day, attestation seems to win:

> Whatever the manner in which we now choose to distinguish Ricoeur's use of agnosticism, we have, from our assessment in the preceding pages, found that attestation will always win the day for Ricoeur. And so, I would contend that we have shown Ricoeur's belief, which ultimately remains protected from any decisive doubt, to affect profoundly the very status of his so-called autonomous philosophical discourse. Far from an autonomous discourse, philosophy gives any final priority concerning the Other to the domain of belief. (Anderson 1994, 76)

In short, as Crump nicely summarizes, "the primacy of attestation signifies [for Anderson] that Ricoeur's philosophical discourse is covertly determined by religious belief/conviction and theological discourse" (Crump 2002, 163).[165] It is interesting to note that this possible inconsistency can be evidenced in Ricoeur's notion of conscience and conviction. While Ricoeur's notion of conscience expressed his philosophical agnosticism rather well to the extent that the philosopher cannot know the nature of the

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[164] The philosophical agnosticism is presented as follows: "…I have presented to my readers arguments alone, which do not assume any commitment from the reader to reject, accept, or suspend anything with regard to biblical faith. It will be observed that this asceticism of the argument, which marks, I believe, all my philosophical works, leads to a type of philosophy from which the actual question of God is absent and in which the question of God, as a philosophical question, itself remains in a suspension that could be called agnostic…" (Ricoeur 1992, 24).

[165] Crump explains in some detail the relation between Ricoeur's philosophy and theology (Crump 2002).

otherness of conscience,[166] Ricoeur's notion of conviction, on the other hand, seems to be an expression of his notion of attestation where we could find some contamination by theological and religious assumptions. Thus, although it is true that Ricoeur is not building a notion of attestation full of religious assumptions, he is assuming in the self an attitude towards itself and towards otherness that is rich in content and commitment, but that does not seem compatible with his agnostic notion of conscience.

Anderson's criticism is illustrative of the tension that we find between Ricoeur's notion of otherness and Ricoeur's idea of attestation. However, Anderson is confusing two spheres. Ricoeur's "agnosticism" refers to the status of the philosophical discourse. The philosopher, as such, should keep her philosophy uncontaminated by religious assumptions. However, the idea of attestation is first of all a phenomenological description of the agent. Attestation, as a kind of conviction, of trust of being oneself acting and suffering, is the conviction of the self, not the conviction of the philosopher. In the idea of attestation, in principle, there is no claim about the ontological nature of the self, but a phenomenological description of how the self experiences its selfhood. Thus, while philosophical agnosticism is a kind of theoretical asceticism, attestation is a practical certitude.

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[166] Anderson explicitly sees in Ricoeur's notion of conscience one of the expressions of his philosophical agnosticism.

4.5.   Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the philosophical idea that gives its name to Ricoeur's main work on the hermeneutics of the self: *Oneself as Another*. Here Ricoeur makes a very strong claim: At the core of the self there is an otherness that constitutes the self. There are several philosophical assumptions that need to be proved in order to make the idea of a self constituted by an otherness plausible. I have developed them throughout the chapter. It is time to summarize them.

There is a threefold otherness at the core of the self: The otherness of the body, the otherness of other people and the otherness of conscience. To each otherness there corresponds an experience of passivity (the passivity of the body, the passivity of other people and the passivity of conscience).

The self, in order to be constituted by otherness needs to have a fundamental openness to otherness. This openness has been shown by Ricoeur at the level of the lived body (the flesh) by entering into a critical dialogue with Husserl, making the claim that even the constitution of the flesh (the lived body) is not possible without the other. With this claim, Ricoeur, from the outset, wants to show that the self is radically opened to other people. This idea is emphasized by appealing to Heidegger's idea of facticity and throwness that show that the self is "always already" opened and constituted by the world. The same idea of being opened to otherness is affirmed by Ricoeur at the level of the passivity of other people, by emphasizing the reciprocal dimension of solicitude in friendship, benevolent spontaneity and sympathy. In these reciprocal relations we observe

the openness of the self to the good of the other (friendship), to the injunction of other (benevolent spontaneity) and to the instructive fragility and weakness of the other (sympathy). Finally, we discussed that conscience is openness to the injunction of otherness insofar as having a conscience means being-enjoined by otherness. Thus, openness is the first structure of the self that permits the dialectic between the self and otherness.

The second structure that we find in the dialectic between the self and the other is the structure of otherness. Indeed, without an authentic otherness there is no dialectic between the self and the other. Otherness needs to be preserved in its authentically being "beyond the self." The otherness of the self, as it was explained, appears at the level of the body in the experience of resistance of the body, in the experience of the capricious humors and in the experience of the physical limits of the things evidenced in the sense of touch. All these experiences show that the body is a real otherness and a kind of limit for the self. At the level of other people, Husserl explains well the otherness of others when he states that there is no original presentation of other selves; these are "appresented," presented along with the bodies of others. Finally, the otherness of conscience is shown in its ambiguous philosophical status. Conscience can be the sedimentation of the voice of other people, of the ancestors or even of God. This ambiguity seems to preserve for Ricoeur the otherness of conscience; otherwise, with a too delimited idea of conscience we could be tempted to represent conscience just as a projection of the self.

So far we have the openness of the self and the otherness of the other. We need a third element that makes possible the dialectic between the self and the other. In my

thesis it is attestation that makes this dialectic possible. The dialectic between the self and otherness supposes that otherness is assumed as part of the self. The idea of *Oneself as Another* is that the self recognizes itself in what is other. In other words, the self gains its own selfhood through otherness. How is it possible that what is other becomes part of the self? Otherness can become part of the self insofar as the self becomes a self through otherness and this happens through attestation, in its three main instances: The experiences of "intimate passivity," self-esteem and conviction. In the experience of "intimate passivity," the self attests to its own self through the experience of having a body that is felt as *my* body. This experience possesses the two basic elements of the attestation of the self through otherness. The body is felt as something external (as something that "resists" my own efforts) at the same time that the body is felt as being part of the core of the self. Thus, through this experience the self acquires the confidence, the trust of existing in the mode of selfhood.   This confidence is a very basic one that serves as the support for the other forms of attestation that we find in the other levels of passivity.

Self-esteem is an experience of attestation where the dialectic between the self and the others (the foreign) is fulfilled. Self-esteem is an instance of the attestation of the self that occurs with the mediation of others. This is so because self-esteem is constructed by the mediation of others. First, the esteem of the self depends on the evaluation of actions, which is done socially. Second, the esteem of the self is achieved through the different figures of solicitude, such as friendship, benevolent spontaneity and sympathy. The exchange of goods proper to friendship helps build self-esteem insofar as the good is

achieved with others. The one that is summoned to justice constructs her own self-esteem insofar as she recognizes the injunction of others in an act of benevolent spontaneity. The one that shows sympathy constructs his own self-esteem by the gift that he receives from the dying person that reminds one of one's own fragility and mortality. All these instances are driven by the idea of reciprocity and show that the unfolding of self-esteem, which is a form of attestation, needs the mediation of others. Others never lose their otherness, but they are recognized as constructing self-esteem and thus as a privileged instance of the attestation of the self. In this way, through the recognition of others as building their own self-esteems, once again, we find that the dialectic of the self and otherness achieves its full meaning.

Finally, the phenomenon of conviction, as an attestation of the self at the level of conscience, fulfills the dialectic of the self and otherness. In conviction, the injunction of otherness (either under the form of the "face of the other" or as norms) is assumed and recognized as part of one's own self. What is an injunction is assumed as one's ownmost conviction and through that conviction, the self attests to its own self.

Chapter Five

Recognition and Attestation

5.1.   Introduction

So far we have analyzed attestation in relation to human capacities, personal identity, memory and the otherness of the self. Through this analysis I have tried to shed some light on the phenomenon of attestation and how it works in the different layers of the hermeneutics of the self. However, even now a crucial question remains to be answered. What are the conditions that make attestation possible? In this chapter I attempt to answer this question. The main thesis of this chapter is that the self in order to attest to its own self needs to be recognized by others. Without recognition there is no attestation.

In order to show that attestation is mediated by recognition, I, first, present the main features of Ricoeur's philosophy of recognition. Then, I analyze the relation between recognition, capacity and attestation. Through the idea of capacity, recognition and attestation come together. The self by recognizing its capacities, attests to its capacities and to its own self. This step, while making explicit the importance of self-recognition as a way of attestation of the self, will also show the limits of self-recognition. In order to recognize my own capacities I need them to be recognized socially. The problem of the social recognition of capacities will move us to the third step: The problem of mutual recognition. We will see that the social recognition of capacities, far

from being taken for granted, always appears along with misrecognition and in the context of a struggle. The analysis of misrecognition and struggle for recognition will help us understand the complexities of social recognition paving the way for the understanding of the conditions that must be satisfied in order to recognize fully the capacities and the self. Having charted out Ricoeur's *course of recognition* I hope to make clear how attestation is only possible through mutual recognition and what the conditions for such recognition are.

5.2.   The Course of Recognition

In 2005, Ricoeur gave three lectures on the topic of recognition at the *Institut für die Wissenshaft des Menschens* in Vienna. These three lectures were edited and presented in his last main work, *The Course of Recognition*. In this work, Ricoeur contends that, despite the philosophical importance of the idea of recognition, there is no major work that develops this topic systematically. This is what he provides.

The method Ricoeur adopts is to follow the lexical meaning of the word 'recognition' as it is offered in dictionaries. Ricoeur notes that the "word *recognition* has a lexical stability that justifies its place as an entry in the dictionary" (Ricoeur 2005a, 2). In this sense we can speak of a "rule-governed polysemy of the word *recognition* in its ordinary usage" (Ricoeur 2005a, 2). However, Ricoeur also finds "a kind of discordance [that] appears during the comparison of one lexicon with another" (Ricoeur 2005a, 2). Part of the purpose of *The Course of Recognition* is to find the rule that governs the polysemy of the word recognition:

I shall follow Littré's advice about the rule that "needs to be discovered." It lies concealed behind the succession of twenty-three (yes, twenty-three!) meanings enumerated. (Ricoeur 2005a, 5)

Ricoeur consults two main dictionaries: *Dictionnaire de la langue française* and the *Grand Robert de la langue française*. After a careful analysis of the main meanings of the word 'recognition' that the dictionaries offer, Ricoeur sees a trajectory of meaning that goes from recognition as an active operation (where the subject masters and rules the meaning) to a passive operation where the subject is recognized:

> My hypothesis is that the potential philosophical uses of the verb *to recognize* can be organized along a trajectory running through its use in the active voice to its use in the passive voice. This reversal on the grammatical plane will show the traces of a reversal of the same scope on the philosophical plane. To recognize as an act expresses a pretension, a claim, to exercise an intellectual mastery over this field of meaning, of signifying assertions. At the opposite end of this trajectory, the demand for recognition expresses an expectation that can be satisfied only by mutual recognition, where this mutual recognition either remains an unfulfilled dream or requires procedures and institutions that elevate recognition to the political plane. (Ricoeur 2005a, 19)

As Ricoeur says here, these two senses of recognition mark out a trajectory of meaning, a *course* that goes from its active to its passive sense. The trajectory of meaning that we observe when we analyze the word recognition is analogous to a philosophical trajectory. Recognition, at first glance, appears as something that depends on the self that recognizes. However, this is only an appearance. Recognition, indeed, is something that is granted, as it will be shown particularly in the topic of mutual recognition. This seems to be the underlying premises in Ricoeur's philosophy of recognition. The concept of recognition is not static, but it has its own history and inner development. The self starts by mastering the meaning of what is recognized, and ends up with the conviction that

recognition comes from elsewhere. This is not an empirical description of what happens

in each of us, but it is more a logical and normative model that shows that the self

becomes a self only insofar as it is recognized. In this way, we can say that the course of

recognition is indeed the *course* of the self where we find a dialectical unfolding of the

self analogous and complementary to the one that is found in *Oneself as Another*.

The conceptual unfolding of the idea of recognition that Ricoeur undertakes s in

his semantic analysis finds a philosophical confirmation in the history of philosophy:

Recognition appears first as an active operation in Descartes and ends up as a passive

operation in Lévinas. My description of this evolution is schematic and succinct and only

aims at clarifying Ricoeur's idea of recognition. For that reason, I will focus on the

beginning and on the end of Ricoeur's description of the philosophical evolution of

recognition. I will not linger in the intermediate steps, which would distract us from the

main goal of this chapter of finding the connection between recognition and attestation.

The first sense of the word recognition that Ricoeur develops is the idea of

recognition as identification, which is found in Descartes, where there is an almost total

identification between knowing and recognizing. To recognize is to know something as

such. In that respect, Descartes represents a model of mastering meaning.[167] Ricoeur sees

in the late Husserl a major transformation of the idea of recognition. He supports his

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[167] Recognition as identification is related to the recognition of the identity of things, as Connolly points out: "Recognizing an object entails actively 'grasping' its identity…" (Connolly 2007, 134). In Descartes identification is related with judging and distinguishing, as Moratalla explains: "For Descartes to judge is to distinguish between what is true and false; to distinguish something is to identify something" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 211).

thesis by citing Lévinas' article, "The Ruin of Representation," in which Lévinas claims that, in the late Husserl, we find a major transformation in the idea of representation. According to Lévinas, what marks this transformation is the idea that the meaning of things exceeds the meaning of what is explicitly given (Lévinas 1998, 115).[168] There is a "surplus of meaning" in the sense that the representation of the thing does not exhaust its intended meaning. This marks a departure from transcendental idealism and a turn to the "things themselves" that directly affects the idea of recognition.

The problem of recognition, then, is not situated in the representation of the subject but in the things themselves, in the sense that recognition is mediated by the giveness of the object. If we narrow our focus to the different things that can be recognized, we realize that what they have in common is that they change (Ricoeur 2005a, 61-68). Because they change, the recognition of things is always threatened by the possibility of misrecognition. Recognition, from a phenomenological point of view, as it appears in Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, is guided by coherence in perception. Something is recognized as such insofar as there is some harmony in its perception. However, the harmony in perception is fragile. It is always possible that at some point the "noema," as Husserl puts it, will explode, raising the problem of misrecognition.

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[168] Cited by Ricoeur 2005a, 60.

Phenomenology thus exposes the very fragility of recognition.[169] In Descartes,

recognition appears very close to certitude, because of the identification between

knowledge and recognition. By contrast, in the context of phenomenology, recognition is

an experience that is always threatened by misrecognition, particularly because of the

problem of change. As a consequence, it is never free from the specter of suspicion. This

element of suspicion and uncertainty becomes more crucial when we are trying to

identify human beings.[170] Ricoeur shows this element of suspicion by focusing on a scene

from Proust's *Time Regained*, where the narrator is thrown into "the spectacle of a dinner

where all the guests who had earlier peopled his solitude and evening outings reappear,

struck by decrepitude under the blows dealt by old age" (Ricoeur 2005a, 66). The

narrator describes his difficulty in recognizing the characters affected by the passage of

time. Here, the problem of recognition and misrecognition appears in all its force.

These epistemological analyses of recognition are important because they set the

ground for the personal and social analysis of recognition. Recognition is primarily an

epistemological act in the sense that to recognize is to know. However, it is a form of

knowledge that, as has been explained, is *given* to the self. In appearance, to recognize is

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[169] In relation to recognition as identification, Altieri states that "this recognition is precarious, fallible and often after the fact. The risk of unrecognition – due principally to the fact that things (including ourselves) can change – goes along with this perceptual recognition" (My translation) (Altieri 2006, 382).

[170] If the identity of the thing changes, the recognition of the thing is more difficult, as Moratalla explains: "The common feature of these ways of being is "change," the effect of the elapsing of time, change that is not analyzed from the point of view of the subject, but from that of the object, and which has been greatly explored in literature" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 212).

an act of mastering meaning, but in fact, to recognize is to accept something that is given to the self. The same dynamic will be observed at the personal and social level.

5.3.   The recognition of the capacities

The analysis of the history of the idea of recognition serves as a preparation for entering into the core of Ricoeur's philosophy of recognition, which has as its horizon personal recognition. The problem of personal recognition is analyzed in the second part of the Course of Recognition. In that analysis we find that the problem of self-recognition is linked to the concept of capacities. In this section I will explore two main theses about the idea of capacity that will serve to deepen the relation between attestation and recognition: –The recognition of the capacities of the self mediates the attestation of the self. – Capacities can only be understood fully from a social perspective and, as a consequence, need to be socially recognized.

5.3.1. Self-recognition, capacities and attestation

Ricoeur relates the idea of self-recognition to the idea of capacity and attestation. The recognition of the self happens through the recognition of the capacities of the self and, at the same time, the self, by recognizing its capacities,[171] attests to its own self. For

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[171] Connolly links self-recognition to our capacity to act and accept responsibility: "Recognizing oneself involves an affirmative declaration of our capacity to act in the world and to accept responsibility for the repercussions of our actions" (Connolly 2007, 134).

this reason, Ricoeur states that there is a semantic kinship between attestation and recognition:

> My thesis on this level is that there is a close semantic kinship between attestation and self-recognition, in line with the "recognizing responsibility" attributed to the agents of action by the Greeks, from Homer and Sophocles to Aristotle. In recognizing that they have done something, these agents implicitly attest that they were capable of doing it. The great difference between the ancient thinkers and us is that we have brought to the reflexive stage the juncture between attestation and recognition in the sense of "taking as true." (Ricoeur 2005a, 91-92)

By *recognizing* what they have done, the agents attest to their being capable of acting and affirm their belief in their own capacities, in their being agents.[172]

Ricoeur notes that the main difference between the notion of recognition in ancient texts and the notion of recognition in the contemporary reflection on agency lies in the fact that we have added to the notion of responsibility the idea of being the "true agent" of our actions. Indeed, it seems that the Greeks did not develop thematically the reflexivity of actions, that is, the belief the agent possesses that she is the true author of her actions. For that reason, while it makes sense, in the Greek world, to speak of the recognition of capacities, the idea of attestation as the belief of being oneself acting and suffering is rather a modern concept, insofar as this idea of attestation requires a more

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[172] Moratalla explains the link between attestation and self-recognition as follows: "They are capacities that we hold to be true, that we recognize in us and that we confess, experience and feel. It is not anymore the recognition-identification of things but the recognition-confession of oneself. Of this self-recognition there is no proof, no certitude, only attestation. We move here in a kind of truth and in a kind of certitude proper to the practical field. For Ricoeur there is a close link between attestation and self-recognition, along the lines of the recognition of responsibility. By recognizing that we have performed an act, the agent state that they are capable" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 214).

elaborate idea of the self, an idea of the self that apparently was not present in the Greek world.[173]

5.3.2. Capacities are social

So far, I have presented the idea of the self-recognition of the capacities. However, the self-recognition of capacities is not enough because capacities are indeed social, that is, capacities are only meaningful in the context of a community and they need the recognition of others in order to be fully developed.[174] Thus, the idea of social capacity serves as a mediation between self-recognition and mutual recognition. At the same time, the idea of social capacity is important to the idea of attestation. If it is true – as I have stated here – that the attestation of the self is mediated by the attestation of the capacities, then, because capacities are social, the attestation of the self is mediated by the recognition of others.

Ricoeur states that the emphasis that he has placed on the reflexivity of the capacities, "must not overshadow the alterity implied in the exercise of each modality of the 'I can'" (Ricoeur 2005a, 252). Thus, for example, in the case of the capacity to speak, "to say something – presupposes an expectation of being heard" (Ricoeur 2005a, 253).

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[173] Moratalla relates this change with the Cartesian turn: "The arising of the 'Cartesian cogito' constitutes the most important event of thought of modernity, which forces us to think in a different way. The reflection on persons, identity, and over the self is elevated to a thematic level without precedence" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 213).

[174] Connolly emphasizes the fact that the capacities that we recognize are social: "He [Ricoeur] suggests that what we recognize in ourselves are precisely those characteristics which we share with each other…" (Connolly 2007, 137).

The capacity to act "takes place in a setting of interaction, where the other can take on over time the role of obstacle, helper, or fellow actor" (Ricoeur 2005a, 253). In the case of the capacity to narrate, we find that "[t]here is no narrative that does not mix together different life stories," and that the "plot is the configuration that weaves together events and characters" (Ricoeur 2005a, 253). In the capacity to be imputable, the alterity is particularly clear:

> [T]he idea of imputability centers on this power to act, over against some other person, who can be by turns an interrogator (who did this?), an inquisitor (admit it – you are the author responsible for this act), an accuser (get ready to bear the consequences of your act, to repair the harm you have done, and to suffer the penalty). It is before the judge, who assigns guilt more often than he offers praise, that the subject admits to being the actual author of his act. (Ricoeur 2005a, 254)

In order to explain the idea of socially recognized capacities it is helpful to appeal to Ricoeur's reading of the Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, who centers his economical analysis – particularly in his *On Ethics and Economics* and *Commodities and Capabilities* – on the importance of the notion of capacity.[175] What is interesting in Sen's view is that he adds to the idea of social capacity a normative model that shows

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[175] Connolly sees in Ricoeur's analysis of Sen's thought the transition from self-recognition to mutual recognition. I defend the same interpretation: "Sen demonstrates how the effects of shortages can be mitigated not only by redistribution, but by providing people with the right to obtain gainful employment. In this instance having the right to act can forestall famine. Ricoeur uses this example to segue from recognizing oneself to mutual recognition. This analysis acknowledges that the abstractly conceived capabilities Ricoeur attributes to individuals may well be restricted and their realization impeded by the way that societies are organized, the way the rights are conceived, and the way that goods are distributed" (Connolly 2007, 138). For more on Sen's thought on human capabilities, see David Crocker's article *Functioning and Capability: The Foundations of Sen's and Nussbaum's Development Ethic* (Crocker 1995). For the topic of capacities in general in relation with social justice, see the following studies by Martha Nussbaum: *Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism* (Nussbaum 1992) and *Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution* (Nussbaum 1998).

that capacities need to be recognized and promoted by society. This model, we will see, places us in the threshold of the idea of mutual recognition, which is the topic of the next section.

Sen criticizes traditional economics for having focused exclusively on the notion of well-being and for understanding humans as beings only motivated by the maximization of their own interest and proposes a theory that takes into consideration other motivations in human beings:

> It is difficult to believe that real people could be left out completely by the reach of the self-examination induced by the Socratic question: 'How should one live?' (Sen 1985, 2)[176]

As a consequence of this expansion of the view of human beings, Sen emphasizes the importance of agency. Here, the importance of the freedom of the individual and her capacity to choose comes to the forefront. Sen argues that the capacity to choose and to develop one's own capabilities is crucial for human beings, and that, therefore, economics should focus on creating conditions that enhance people's freedom.[177]

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[176] Cited by Ricoeur 2005a, 142.

[177] It is important to note that the freedom Sen promotes is not just the absence of interference or impediment from others. Using Isaiah Berlin's distinction between negative and positive freedom, he asserts that the mere "absences of hindrances that some individual – or principally the state – can impose on an individual" (negative freedom) (Ricoeur 2005a, 143) are not enough: "[The] protection against the abusive interference of others, which libertarians place at their pinnacle, is vain if specific measures are not taken that guarantee this minimal capacity to act" (Ricoeur 2005a, 146). The guarantee of the capacity to act is equivalent to Berlin's notion of positive liberty. Positive liberty means the capacity to exercise one's own freedom.

Capacities do not become social capacities until they are recognized by a society. This recognition of the capacities in Sen's thought appears through the notion of the *right* to capacities and through the idea of collective responsibility (Ricoeur 2005a, 143). It is the responsibility of society to ensure that individuals can exercise their capacities.

With the analysis of the idea of social capacity, we are ready to entertain in the idea of mutual recognition. Since capacities are basically social, personal recognition must be granted by others. I recognize myself through my capacities and the capacities need to be recognized by others because they are eminently social.

5.4. Mutual recognition

With the topic of mutual recognition, we enter in the core of this chapter. The analysis of the notion of capacities has shown us that there is a strong link between recognition and attestation. By recognizing their capacities, agents attest to their capacity to act and thereby to their own self. However, at the same time, as we saw in the previous section, capacities need others to be recognized, because capacities are indeed social. As a consequence, the capacities of the self can only be attested if they are recognized by others, recognition that is, indeed, part of a process of mutual recognition as I will explain in this section.

I start by presenting Ricoeur's answer to Hobbes challenge about the origin of the state. For Hobbes, the state is based in our most basic passions of competition, mistrust and glory. The drive for recognition comes from these passions. Ricoeur, against Hobbes, states that recognition must be based on a desire of recognition grounded on moral

principles. This idea of moral recognition finds its first expression in his discussion of

Honneth. In Honneth we find a phenomenological analysis of the effort of people in

society to be recognized at different levels. This analysis will at the same time show the

limits of recognition, and this will pave the way for an analysis of the conditions of

mutual recognition: Reciprocity and unconditionality. These two conditions will help us

understand how the self can attest to its own self through the mediation of others'

recognition.

5.4.1. Moral recognition

Once we have demonstrated that capacities are indeed social, it is necessary to see

the moral context of the idea of recognition. It would be easy to see recognition as just a

competition. However, through the idea of mutual recognition Ricoeur is not just

emphasizing the social dimension of each capacity, but, also, the fact that we need the

recognition of others in order to fully develop our capacities and, in that way, he wants to

restate a basic moral idea of living together. Nonetheless, it is not obvious that human

beings live together in order to recognize one another. Recognition is always threatened

by misrecognition, as illustrated by the history of human civilizations which are marked

by war, neglect or hatred. Thus, for Ricoeur a theory of recognition must, from the start,

face the challenge presented by the bitter truth of misrecognition. In this respect, Hobbes'

theory of the state of nature is paradigmatic. It is a state of "war of all against all," in

which there are three dominant passions: Competition, distrust and glory (Ricoeur 2005a,

164). Individuals agree to form a state and relinquish their power to the sovereign,

because of the fear of a violent death. Thus, the state has its origin not in a moral motive,

but in the calculation of individuals. They prefer to relinquish all their rights, because of the fear of a violent death.

Ricoeur sees a basic problem with the non-moral origin of the state as understood by Hobbes. He asks himself whether "it suffices, through the intervention of calculation, to carry the whole edifice of contracts and promises that appears to reconstitute the conditions of a common-wealth" (Ricoeur 2005a, 170). The will to live in common needs more motivation than just a calculation of convenience. For Hobbes, the only motivation to relinquish power to the sovereign is for the security that is provided by the state.

According to Ricoeur, Hegel answers Hobbes' challenge by providing a moral idea of the life in common that is expressed in the desire for recognition. For Hegel, the motivation that impels individuals to live in common is not just the fear of a violent death, but the desire to be recognized, in the sense of being respected (Ricoeur 2005a, 171-172). However, recognition is not something that is easily achieved. Hegel develops it in what he calls the "struggle for recognition."

5.4.2. Difficult recognition: Honneth's analysis

In this section, I concentrate on Ricoeur's remarks on the renewal of Hegel's notion of the "struggle for recognition," particularly by Honneth.[178] Honneth renews Hegel's notion of "struggle for recognition" by presenting three levels where the struggle

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[178] Moratalla reminds us that the idea of struggle is at the heart of social relations: "…the demand for recognition does not happen without struggle; indeed the idea of struggle for recognition is at the heart of modern social relations" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 221).

of recognition takes place: Love, the juridical plane and the level of social esteem.[179] He

offers an account of misrecognition at each level. In what follows, I attempt to grasp the

conditions for the social recognition[180] of the capacities in the context of the "struggle for

recognition" through the analysis of each of the figures of recognition-misrecognition.

The model of recognition through love encompasses "erotic relations, friendship,

and family ties" (Ricoeur 2005a, 188). It is a level of prejuridical recognition, in which

the subjects confirm each other in relation to their concrete needs (Ricoeur 2005a, 189).

Honneth relates this level to the notion of the "capacity to be alone" as developed in

psychoanalysis and understood as a goal that must be achieved in order to reach personal

maturity. Ricoeur writes:

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[179] Connolly describes Honneth's analysis as a philosophy of the self analogous to Ricoeur with more emphasis on the idea of recognition/misrecognition: "Honneth (1995) argues that our sense of selves is largely a consequence of the way we are recognized by others. He too develops a phenomenology of selfhood. Rather than identify a suite of individual capacities, however, he develops a schema in which to place the consequences of social recognition for individual identity. In ideal circumstances the forms of recognition to which we are subject will facilitate the development of self-confidence, self-respect or responsibility, and self-esteem. These characteristics of Honneth's capable agents are derived from the three forms of social recognition he discusses, namely love-based, rights-based and solidarity- or merit-based recognition. With the first, the recognition of intimates fosters the confidence to interpret and articulate our needs and desires. Second, the recipient of rights comes to understand that individual capacity has social consequences; moreover, that the capacity to act is circumscribed by social responsibilities. Third, public recognition of our achievements, which is largely mediated through employment and wages, contributes to our understanding of the esteem in which we are held and thereby how we evaluate our life-projects" (Connolly 2007, 139).

[180] Recognition, in Honneth, is always social and for the most part mediated by institutions, as Connolly explains: "Honneth… harnesses the term recognition to an investigation into the way people acknowledge each other. In his work recognition is invariably preceded by the word social and is largely mediated by institutions, like the state, which structure and regulate patterns of public recognition" (Connolly 2007, 134). Honneth's analysis is very useful for Ricoeur's account since, as Ricoeur, Honneth sees in misrecognition an obstacle for the development of our capacities: "Honneth also examines the suffering caused to individuals by misrecognition. In other words he directs the attention to how failures of recognition compromise our capacity to act" (Connolly 2007, 139).

> Just as the young child must face the test of the absence of the mother, thanks to which she regains her own capacity for independence, if for his part the child is to attain the autonomy suitable at his age, in the same way relationships in adulthood face the test of separation, whose emotionally costly benefit is the capacity to be alone. And this grows in proportion to the partner's confidence in the permanence of the invisible bond that develops in the alternation between presence and absence. (Ricoeur 2005a, 189)

The "capacity to be alone" is "[b]etween the two poles of emotional fusion and self-affirmation in solitude" (Ricoeur 2005a, 189). It implies being in a relationship in which the subjects are respected in their identity and recognize one another. We could even say that the other two alternatives, emotional fusion and self-affirmation, imply a misrecognition. Emotional fusion denies recognition because, for recognition to take place, it is necessary that the individual keeps his or her individuality. If there is a fusion, then there are no longer different individuals to be recognized. At the same time, if there is just self-affirmation in solitude, there is no recognition of others, but only self-reference.

What kind of recognition do individuals receive on this level? Ricoeur speaks here of recognition as approbation of the other's existence (Ricoeur 2005a, 191). The opposite of recognition, misrecognition, is expressed in the "[h]umiliation, experienced as the withdrawal or refusal of such approbation" (Ricoeur 2005a, 191). Misrecognition, at this level, hurts the base of one's existence, as Ricoeur states: "Deprived of approbation, the person is as if nonexistent" (Ricoeur 2005a, 191).

The second kind of recognition occurs at the juridical level. Honneth connects the juridical level with the level of love. The capacity to be alone that appeared in the sphere of love is interpreted on the juridical level as the predicate "free," in the sense of "the

rationality presumed to be equal in every person considered in his or her juridical dimension" (Ricoeur 2005a, 197). By the same token, the idea of trust – in the sense of the confidence in the permanence of the relationship despite the distance that we observed in the sphere of love – is expressed in the idea of 'respect' in the juridical sphere. As a result, the juridical level is "stamped with a claim to universality that goes beyond the proximity of ties of affection" (Ricoeur 2005a, 197).

What are recognized at the juridical level are the other person as well as the norm. Recognition in relation to the norm means "to take as valid, to assert validity" (Ricoeur 2005a, 197). As regards the person, "recognition means identifying each person as free and equal to every other person" (Ricoeur 2005a, 197). Both recognitions are intertwined. When I recognize the validity of the norm, I recognize the person that the norm protects and when I recognize the person, I recognize the validity of the norm that commands respect for that person.

Ricoeur claims that "juridical recognition adds to self-recognition in terms of capacities… new capacities stemming from the conjunction between the universal validity of the norm and the singularity of persons" (Ricoeur 2005a, 197). These new capacities can be understood in two ways:

> …on the one hand, on the plane of an enumeration of personal rights defined by their content; on the other, on the plane of the attribution of these rights to new categories of individuals or groups. (Ricoeur 2005a, 198-199)

The struggle for recognition on the juridical level consists in a struggle for new rights and in the struggle of groups to be considered as holders of those rights. We could speak here

of a horizontal and a vertical enhancement of rights. In the vertical sense, the struggle for

recognition goes deeper in the recognition of new rights. In this context, Ricoeur

mentions the incorporation of the idea of social rights (such as the right to education,

healthcare, etc.), which are added to civil and political rights (Ricoeur 2005a, 199).

Depending on the level at which a person or group feels excluded, different

feelings are experienced (Ricoeur 2005a, 201):

> In this regard, the humiliation that relates to a denial of civil rights is different
> from the frustration that relates to not being able to participate in the shaping of
> the public will, which is again different from the feeling of exclusion that results
> from the refusal of any access to the most basic goods. (Ricoeur 2005a, 200)

Thus, we find that there are three main feelings that are experienced as the result of the

non-recognition of rights in the civil, political and social sphere of rights – humiliation,

frustration and exclusion. These feelings are reflected in the struggle that some groups

undertake in order to extend the sphere of application of rights and arise particularly

when groups compare their own situation to "the types and standards of living attained

elsewhere" (Ricoeur 2005a, 201). Those negative feelings (like humiliation, frustration

and exclusion) are "important impulses in the struggle for recognition" (Ricoeur 2005a,

200).

The third model of recognition that Honneth develops is the idea of social esteem.

Rather than renewing Hegel's idea of constitution of the state, this notion, instead

emphasizes Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life). It is a concept "irreducible to

juridical ties" (Ricoeur 2005a, 201). Honneth's idea of social recognition "sum[s] up all

the modes of mutual recognition that exceed the mere recognition of the equality of rights

among free subjects" (Ricoeur 2005a, 202). Social recognition presupposes the

"existence of a horizon of values common to the subjects concerned" (Ricoeur 2005a,

202). This horizon of values depends on the cultural conception that a society has of itself

and constitutes the measure by which individuals are esteemed. Every society has a

different set of values by which to esteem individuals. For that reason we find the "very

notion of esteem varying depending on the kind of mediation that makes a person

'estimable'" (Ricoeur 2005a, 202).

Are these forms of recognition sufficient? Ricoeur warns us that the struggle for

recognition can be an infinite task:

> Does not the claim for affective, juridical, and social recognition, through its
> militant, conflictual style, end up as an indefinite demand, a kind of "bad
> infinity"? This question has to do not only with the negative feelings that go with
> a lack of recognition, but also with the acquired abilities, thereby handed over to
> an insatiable quest. The temptation here is a new form of the "unhappy
> consciousness," as either an incurable sense of victimization or the indefatigable
> postulation of unattainable ideals. (Ricoeur 2005a, 218)

The conflicts involved in the struggle for recognition are never completely settled, since

there are competing parts that want to be recognized. This is particularly evident on the

juridical and social levels. Often, the recognition of one group competes with the

recognition of another group. This is the case not only because the individuals and groups

do not find the deserved recognition, but also because, many times, the desire to be

recognized is, in a way, infinite.

There is a tragic destiny in the struggle of recognition. Recognition will never be

attained because it cannot be grounded in a struggle. It is a contradiction to "force"

recognition. We can struggle for rights or for different rendering of the social contract, but the true recognition cannot come out of a struggle. We can appeal here to the cases of native groups. In many countries they have felt humiliated and segregated. They want to be recognized, they want to be respected. However, that respect and appreciation cannot be forced. For that reason, despite the good will of its members, in many societies some minorities continue to remain unrecognized.

5.4.3. Unconditional and reciprocal recognition

Ricoeur is not seeking a way to end the struggle. Conflicts are hard to settle.[181] Still, we may wonder whether the social bond must be constructed on the idea of struggle or "whether there is not also at its [the social bond's] origin a kind of goodwill linked to the similarity between one human being and another in the great human family" (Ricoeur 2005b).

In other words, the question is whether societies can be constructed on the basis of a positive desire for recognition. Ricoeur thinks that it is important to propose a kind of "horizon" of full recognition. He does this by postulating what he calls "states of peace" which serve as a moral motivation:

> Experiences of peaceful recognition cannot take the place of a resolution for the
> perplexities raised by the very concept of a struggle, still less of a resolution of the

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[181] Connolly sees in Ricoeur's approach a "healthy skepticism" about the possibilities of being fully recognized: "Ricoeur's approach to his topic is characterized by a healthy skepticism, rather than just speculation, about the success of recognition" (Connolly 2007, 134).

conflicts in question. The certitude that accompanies states of peace offers instead a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory. This I why we have to turn to days of truce, clear days, what we might call clearing, where the meaning of action emerges from the fog of doubt bearing the mark of "fitting action." (Ricoeur 2005a, 218)

The idea of "states of peace" acts as a kind of regulative ideal, in the Kantian sense of the word. It is not an ideal that can be completely realized, but it gives a motivation and a moral direction to the search for recognition.

The notion of states of peace appears in the work of several authors. Ricoeur refers to two of them: Marcel Hénaff and Luc Boltanski (Ricoeur 2005a, 219, n. 52). In general, Ricoeur understands the states of peace as "peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations" (Ricoeur 2005a, 219).[182] Ricoeur mentions three main states of peace that correspond to the three classical forms of love: *Philia*, *eros* and *agape*. Among the three, Ricoeur thinks that *agape* is the one that can provide an

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[182] Williams interprets the states of peace as an alternative to an endless conflict in the struggle for recognition: "Ricoeur affirms mutual recognition is at least possible. The end of the process is not simply mutual recognition but states of peace. These constitute an alternative to struggle and unhappy consciousness. However, he limits the expectations of what these might mean. Experiences of peaceful, non-struggle recognition, cannot take the place of *resolution* for the perplexities raised by the very concept of struggle, still less of a *resolution* of the conflicts in question. States of peace are temporary truces within the situation of universal conflict, but their significance is a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory. States of peace are mediated symbolically, and are distinct from juridical recognition and the reciprocity constitutive of the commercial order of exchange" (Williams 2008, 470). Moratalla interprets the states of peace in a more radical way, as the ground, for solidarity and hospitality: "The concept of "states of peace" is the Ricoeurian answer to Hobbes's challenge and to Hegel's response, and it offers us at the same time the elements to found solidarity and hospitality, allowing that these words stop of being only common places… to become constitutive of our humanity" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 224).

alternative to the "struggle for recognition," insofar as *agape* is the only form of love based solely on disinterest.[183]

Agape satisfies one of the essential conditions of recognition: Unconditionality. True recognition must be unconditional because what is recognized is ultimately the person's worth and dignity. If recognition is not disinterested, then it is not a true recognition. This is so, for example, in the case of adulation. An artist who is recognized only because he benefits the one who recognizes him cannot feel completely recognized.

However, the unconditionality of love is not enough for having full recognition. Authentic recognition must be reciprocal. If I am recognized by somebody that I do not recognize, then that recognition is useless, because in general one appreciates the recognition that comes from somebody for whom one feels some respect and consideration. In this sense, recognition has to come from a "competent and willing recognizer." Although Ricoeur does not state reciprocity explicitly as one of the condition for recognition, this idea is implicit in his idea that the full recognition of the self happens in mutual recognition.

5.5.   The articulation of love and justice

We saw that the basic conditions of mutual recognition are unconditionality and reciprocity. In this section I try to offer a deeper justification for this thesis by showing

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[183] See Boltanski's *L'amour et la justice comme compétences: Trois essais de sociologie de l'action* (Boltanski 1990).

the dialectic between love and justice. It is my contention that through this dialectic we can understand the conditions of mutual recognition and, what is crucial for this dissertation, namely, the conditions for the attestation of the self.

Ricoeur elaborates the dialectic between love and justice in the *Course of Recognition* through the idea of exchanges of gift. However, before discussing this idea it is important to explain what, in my opinion, serves as its theoretical foundation: The economy of the gift.

5.5.1. Economy of the gift

The expression "economy of the gift" is enigmatic. Ricoeur does not develop a systematic doctrine of this economy, but he discusses and develops the concepts involved in it in many of his writings.[184] Hall points out that it is in principle a contradiction to put together the words "economy" and "gift" since the word economy supposes a logic of exchange and self-interest while the idea of gift supposes that something is "given to another out of generosity, without an interest in return, without concern for reciprocation" (Hall 2006, 190). For Hall the idea of the "economy of the gift" makes sense in the

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[184] In this text, Ricoeur links the economy of the gift with the logic of superabundance and the logic of equivalence: "It is this commandment [to love one's enemies], not the golden rule, that seems to constitute the expression closest, on the ethical plane, to what I have called the economy of the gift. This expression approximating the economy of the gift can be placed under the title of a logic of superabundance, which is opposed as an opposite pole to the logic of equivalence that governs everyday morality" (Ricoeur 1995c, 300) In the same text, Ricoeur relates the economy of the gift to the idea of the supraethical: "Detached from the golden rule, the commandment to love one's enemies is not ethical but supraethical, as is the whole economy of the gift to which it belongs. If it is not to swerve over to the nonmoral, or even to the immoral, the commandment to love must reinterpret the golden rule and, in so doing, be itself reinterpreted by this rule" (Ricoeur 1995c, 301).

context of the "confrontation between the moral ideal of reciprocity and the *supra*moral ideal of love" (Hall 2006. 190). While the idea of economy refers to moral relations of reciprocity, expressed mainly in the idea of justice that we see in the golden rule, the idea of gift[185] is grounded in a theology of salvation, as Hall explains:

> The God who is poetically named in the narratives of creation and redemption is the God with whom humans cannot hold reciprocal relations; the gift of existence, original and redeemed, cannot be returned to the giver. (Hall 2006, 196)[186]

The idea of an existence that is given by God as a gift is the foundation for love in its extreme versions.[187] Because God loves us in a way that we cannot reciprocate, we are expected to do the same to others.

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[185] I mean that the idea of the gift in the context of an *economy* of the gift is grounded in a theology of salvation and not necessarily in other contexts.

[186] The same theology of salvation is expressed in the person of Jesus: "…we are – in the manner of Jesus – to gift others with an exuberant solicitude, without expecting something of equivalent or greater worth in return. That is, we are to give, and give generously, not in order to get, but simply because, in the fullness of time, we ourselves have been gifted in myriads ways" (Einsohn 2005, 27-28).

[187] There are a lot of textual support in Ricoeur's work for this interpretation, like the following: "In order to introduce this major theme, the economy of the gift, I would like to emphasize, following James Gustafson, the polycentrism of Judeo-Christian symbolism in relation to any moralizing reduction. In so doing, we set in the foremost place the sense of our radical dependence on a power that precedes us, envelops us, and support us. This sense is supraethical par excellence. And the symbol that articulates this experience and confers a sense on it – that is, both a meaning and a direction – is that of an original but always ongoing creation. No doubt, this symbol sets human beings in the place of honor, but within a cosmos created before them and that continues to shelter them. Each of us is not left face-to-face with another human being, as the principle of morality taken in isolation seems to imply. Rather nature is between us, around us – not just as something to exploit but as an object of solicitude, respect, and admiration. The sense of our radical dependence on a higher power thus may be reflected in a love for the creature, for every creature, in every creature – and the love of neighbor can become an expression of this supramoral love for all creatures" (Ricoeur 1995c, 297-298). In another text, Ricoeur states that the "love of neighbor, in its extreme form of love for one's enemies, thus finds its first link to the economy of the gift in this hyperethical feeling of the dependence of the human creature…" (Ricoeur 1995d, 325).

In the economy of the gift love and justice correct each other from some of its possible deformations. At the core of the idea of justice, there is a fundamental ambiguity, as Ricoeur points out:

> We saw the rule of justice oscillate between the disinterested interest of parties concerned to increase their own advantage as far as the accepted rule will allow, and a true feeling of cooperation going as far as the confession of being mutual debtors to one another. (Ricoeur 1995d, 328)[188]

Justice implies fairness in the sense that the parties must accept rules that are applied to all, leaving aside their own interests in order to comply with fair rules. In the strict Kantian sense, the parties must go beyond their own pathological interests, in order to accept only the rules that can be universalized. The foundation of that disinterestedness is the recognition of the value of others as ends in themselves. However, at the same time, the parties involved can act justly for reasons of self-interest. One can be just not because one respects others, but because it is to one's own benefit if everyone lives by the rule of reciprocity. This ambiguity appears more clearly in the golden rule. The rule 'do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you' can be interpreted on the one hand as a way of considering the intrinsic worth of the other and on the other hand, as a justification for using others to my own benefit.[189] I can restrain myself from doing to

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[188] Hall claims that Ricoeur places the golden rule and the love command in a dynamic encounter: "He argued that posing the golden rule and love command along the lines of dynamic encounter, rather than static opposition, offers a profound solution…" (Hall 2007, 152).

[189] Hall mentions a possible misinterpretation of the golden rule. One is called a "reactive reciprocity" and the other an "instrumental reciprocity": "…the golden rule might be interpreted in terms of what I have called a reactive reciprocity: do to others what they do to you. It is this orientation that links the golden rule to the "eye for an eye" of the law of retribution. Second, and perhaps more insidious, the golden rule can be interpreted in terms of a kind of instrumental reciprocity: I give so that you will give" (Hall 2007, 151). To point out the risks involved in the idea of justice expressed in the golden rule in no

others what I do not want others to do to me because I respect them as human beings with the same worth as me. But I can also restrain myself from doing to others what I do not want others to do to me as a way to ensure that others will not do anything that can harm *me*.[190] Thus, the golden rule is "in a *concrete* fashion, at the heart of an incessant conflict between self-interest and self-sacrifice" (Ricoeur 1995c, 301). We could say that the golden rule is always in between a Kantian interpretation (where the goal is to respect the other) and a utilitarian interpretation (where the goal is to maximize one's own benefit). In this context, the commandment to love our enemies corrects the tendency of exploiting the golden rule in a utilitarian fashion, as Wall states:

> Theological love is able to disorient our ordinary tendency toward utilitarianism because, according to Ricoeur, it is not good to be pursued (as is love in the ordinary meaning of the term), but a *command* to be obeyed. (Wall 2001, 246-247).[191]

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way undermines the value and importance of this rule, as Hall explains: "The Golden Rule is expressive of the ideal of reciprocity characteristics of justice in two senses. First, the Golden Rule highlights the fundamental asymmetry of action, the fact that action involves both an agent and a patient. This recognition is guaranteed by the tension between "doing unto others" and "as oneself." Opposed to a conception of the situation of action solely in terms of the confrontation between two agents, this presentation of action recognizes both an actor and another who is a potential victim. The merit of the Golden Rule is its acknowledgment, at the level of grammar, of both the one who acts and the one who is acted upon. Second, the Golden Rule sets both agent and patient on the same footing relative to the deliberation over action. An equivalence is established in the application of the Golden Rule to discrete situations; both myself and others are potential aggressors or potential victims" (Hall 2002, 152).

[190] This possible perversion of the golden rule and the idea of justice is called by Wall a new "deontological radical evil" and can take more pernicious forms degenerating into vengeance as "an 'original violence' that attempts to 'equalize' a prior violation of goods with a calculated violence to the goods of the offender" (Wall 2001, 245).

[191] Along the same lines, Wall adds: "Our fallen incapacity for respecting genuine otherness is therefore resisted and turned around, Ricoeur argues, only through a still more primordial capacity for superabundant love. Through the radical limit-experience of God's love for us, we are able to catch the glimmer of a divine economy that reverses the ordinary devolution of human relations into utilitarian exchange" (Wall 2001, 247).

However, it is not only that love corrects justice, but also the case that justice corrects love from its own possible deformations. Hall describes the risks and perils of a misunderstood idea of love:

> Equally perverse and immoral, the demand to forgo reciprocity encountered in the superabundant logic of the love command too easily inclines toward a misinterpreted self-degradation in the face of the object of love. The vulnerable in society are made to bear the brunt of a 'love' that leaves physical and emotional scars, and too often on claims of biblical precedent: a woman 'cherishes' her husband by remaining submissive in the face of beatings; children 'honour' their parents by remaining quiet in the face of physical and emotional neglect; the slave obeys his master as a show of love for God. (Hall 2006, 200)

The commandment of love, without the idea of justice can be interpreted in ways that can be very destructive for the subject that is summoned to love. Thus, the idea of justice introduces a fundamental element that should be present in relations of love: The idea of reciprocity.[192]

To summarize, the economy of the gift seems to contain two fundamental ideas: First, that love should be unconditional[193] and second, that it should be reciprocal. Through these two elements, the economy of the gift serves as a good foundation for recognition, since, as it has been stated above, recognition should be unconditional and reciprocal as well. However, the economy of the gift has the limitation of being grounded in a theology of salvation. We are supposed to love one another unconditionally because

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[192] Reciprocity is not a *condition* for love, because otherwise love would not be unconditional. However, it seems that reciprocity is needed to correct love from its possible corruptions.

[193] Gedney makes a direct connection between the idea of gift and love in Ricoeur: "We give a gift in the name of generosity, and thus love, and we receive in return in that name as well" (Gedney 2008, 69).

of God's unconditional gift of existence. How is it then possible to formulate a

philosophy of recognition based in the idea of unconditional and reciprocal recognition

without appealing to a theology of God's gift of existence?

5.5.2. Exchange of gifts

We need to find phenomenological evidence to show that it is possible to have an

experience of unconditional and reciprocal recognition (analogous to the idea of *agape*).

Ricoeur finds this phenomenological evidence in the idea of the exchange of gifts that

serves as a model of recognition, a phenomenological equivalent of the state of peace of

agape. Ricoeur focuses on the idea of an exchange of gifts as a symbolic event[194] in

which recognition happens.[195] Through the exchange of gifts, the individuals recognize

one another. As stated above, recognition supposes unconditionality and reciprocity. The

idea of a 'gift' contains the idea of unconditionality, since, in principle, a gift is

something that it is given without expecting anything in return (otherwise it would not be

a gift).[196] At the same time, in an *exchange* of gifts, there is an element of reciprocity.

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[194] The exchanges of gift is a symbolic event in the sense that the meaning of the act transcends the value of the gift, as Tatranský points out: "Even for a material gift, however, the value of the gift ideally transcends the worth of the thing I give, since it is rather an expression or a token of gratuity and generosity of my love towards the other" (Tatranský 2008, 304).

[195] Williams, along the same lines, sees the gift-exchange as a symbolic mutual recognition and as an expression of the state of peace called *agape*: "Ricoeur's thesis is that the gift exchange is a symbolic mutual recognition. This makes it necessary to sort out the 'good' reciprocity from the bad (conditional) reciprocity. Ricoeur proposes that the second gift is a response to the *call* of *Agape* coming from the first gift" (Williams 2008, 471).

[196] The idea of an unconditional gift is tied to the idea of unconditional love which is controversial when it is analyzed without giving it a theological foundation. For more on this controversy see Anderson's *Unselfing in Love: A Contradiction in Terms* (Anderson 2006).

However, the exchange of gifts can easily be transformed into a mere *do ut des*, that is, I give to you in order that you give to me. Ricoeur tries to solve this problem by appealing to an interpretation of the exchange of gifts that preserves the idea of giving without expecting anything in return. He does this by referring to another meaning of the notion of recognition: Recognition as gratitude (one of the meanings that the French word *reconnaissance* has is, precisely, 'to be grateful to'). The person who receives a gift gives in return, because she is grateful. Thus, through the idea of recognition as gratitude, Ricoeur advances the possibility of thinking of two simultaneous acts of giving, neither of which is performed because of an expectation of anything in return. The one who receives gives in return because she is grateful, but not because she feels a juridical or moral obligation to do it.[197]

For Ricoeur, the idea of exchange of gifts is a model of recognition insofar as, in the exchange the subjects recognize one another. By giving something to you, I am celebrating and recognizing your existence, your value.[198] The "risk of the first gift, the risk of its offer, preserves something of the disinterested character of *Agape*" (Williams

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[197] The giving of a gift initiates a relation that calls for a response, as Williams explains: "The generosity of the gift does not call for restitution, which would amount to annulling or canceling the first gift as a gift, but rather calls for a response to the *offer*. The first gift is re-read here as an initiation of relation, an offer that can be refused or accepted" (Williams 2008, 471).

[198] Ricoeur in his discussion goes against some interpretations that only see the practice of gift giving as a form of commercial exchange where the gifts are given as a fulfillment of an obligation. One of the interpretations that is discussed is the one by Mauss who sees in the idea of gift a force that people feel the obligation to transmit and not stop. As Williams explains, in such an interpretation the very idea of gift disappears, since a gift, by definition, implies the absence of constraint: "Mauss cites the *Hau*, as the force in the gift that obligates a gift in return. But when a gift thus obliges a gift in return (exchange), what disappears is the very idea of the gift in the first place" (Williams 2008, 470-471).

2008, 471). By giving something in return, I am showing gratitude,[199] consideration for

your act, for your person, and, thus, I am recognizing you as a person.

5.5.3. The concept of mutuality

What kind of recognition happens in the midst of the exchange gifts? Ricoeur

prefers to speak of a *mutual* recognition than a *reciprocal* recognition.[200] Mutuality

supposes reciprocity[201] but in mutuality there is additional awareness of the differences

among the members. Mutuality is a space *in between* those who are present in the

exchange of gifts:

> …the recourse made to a concept of mutual recognition amounts… to a plea in
> favor of the mutuality of relations *between* those who exchange gifts, in contrast
> with the concept of reciprocity that the theory places *above* social agents and their
> transactions. (Ricoeur 2005a, 232)

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[199] Tatranský describes rather well the feeling of gratitude that the first gift engenders: "As such, my gift awakes in the other originally not an obligation to give another gift in return, but a feeling of gratitude, which eventually moves the other – but from within, so to speak – to reciprocate, even if I have no right to *expect* the return of the gift…" (Tatranský 2008, 304).

[200] I follow here Moratalla's interpretation of Ricoeur who states that Ricoeur prefers to speak of mutuality to avoid the risks of reciprocity: "In these experiences a reciprocal recognition is produced that erases interpersonal limits, and for that reason Ricoeur prefers to speak of mutuality in order to distinguish it from the experiences that are under the logic of reciprocity" (My translation) (Moratalla 2006, 224-225).

[201] David Pellauer distinguishes between these two notions in the following way: "…these recent theories of recognition do not really get beyond the idea of reciprocal recognition, which can all too easily be limited to narrow contexts, such as commercial exchanges. In these narrow cases, the selves involved are simply those required for participating in the exchange; nothing more about them needs to be known or acknowledged. Beyond this reduction to what he sees as a diminished self, Ricoeur wants to argue that mutual recognition goes beyond every explanation in terms of a struggle for recognition present in Hegel and his successors. Mutual recognition depends more on 'states of peace' than on those of struggle and conflict" (Pellauer 2007, 131).

Reciprocity is a relationship viewed from "above," where the subjects are

interchangeable, because the position of each subject is not important. Mutuality stresses

the non-interchangeability of the subjects whereby each one occupies a position that

cannot be exchanged for that of the other. In mutuality there is reciprocity, but that

reciprocity is based on the intrinsic worth of the subjects that cannot be exchanged. The

non interchangeability of the subjects seems to be crucial because it safeguards

differences and the possible asymmetry among them. Because it tends to forget the

differences between the subjects, reciprocity may at the same time erases the alterity of

the self, which is a form of misrecognition, as Ricoeur suggests here:

> …I want to turn the objections that each phenomenologist runs into along his own
> way into a warning addressed to every concept of the primacy of reciprocity over
> the alterity of the protagonists in an exchange with each other. (Ricoeur 2005a,
> 262) [202]

Mutuality builds a "space" where dissymmetry can be preserved, and this has many

advantages, as Ricoeur explains:

> Admitting the threat that lies in forgetting this dissymmetry first calls attention to
> the irreplaceable character of each of the partners in the exchange. The one is not
> the other. We exchange gifts, but not places. The second benefit of this admission
> is that it protects mutuality against the pitfalls of a fusional union, whether in love,
> friendship, or fraternity on a communal or a cosmopolitan scale. A just distance is

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[202] Williams makes explicit the risks of reciprocity: "Ricoeur, like Hegel, defends reciprocity qualified as mutuality. However there is still a problem: if the praise of mutual recognition leads us to forget the 'originary asymmetry in the relation between self and others,' this would be the ultimate misrecognition at the heart of actual experiences of mutual recognition" (Williams 2008, 472).

maintained at the heart of mutuality, a just distance that integrates respect into intimacy. (Ricoeur 2005a, 263) [203]

Thus, full recognition can only be built upon mutuality, where the subject is granted its full value. Mutuality presupposes justice, but yet is founded on *agape*, that is, on the possibility of a love that is disinterested.[204]

By emphasizing the idea of mutuality, it seems that Ricoeur is warning us against a liberal idea of recognition where we overstress reciprocity for the sake of recognition and we overlook the differences among subjects. This liberal notion of recognition can be observed in some public policies that assume that giving equal opportunity to all the members will automatically bring recognition. However, since not all relations in a society are among equals, any politics of recognition must start recognizing the differences and the dissymmetries that are present in relations. A politics of recognition just based on equality can exert violence against groups that cannot be treated equally because they are found in an initial relation of dissymmetry.

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[203] Williams expands upon the ideas presented by Ricoeur in the paragraph cited above, pointing out the paradox that in order to preserve recognition I have to keep dissymmetry: "It may appear that to re-admit dissymmetry into mutuality is once again to raise the suspicion that dissymmetry can undermine that very mutuality and reconciliation inherent in the process of recognition. After all, that was the very inference that Ricoeur drew against both Husserl and Lévinas. At stake is the meaning of the 'between.' Even in the between I am not you; we exchange gifts but not places." (Williams 2008, 472).

[204] Jervolino connects the idea of mutuality with Ricoeur's idea of translation: "Translation as a labor of memory and the mourning it requires, being always faced with the challenge of the untranslatable, help us maintain the appropriate distance from the other, the appropriate distance that reconciles respect with intimacy" (Jervolino 2008, 233-234). Kaplan, introducing the article just quoted, summarizes rather well the parallel between recognition and translation: "…the capacity to translate reveals a new form of vulnerability that reminds us of our limitations in understanding and communicating with others. Translation is the paradigm of our relation to the other – an asymmetrical yet mutual relation between self and other, including other cultures, religions, and historical ages. Jervolino relates Ricoeur's model of translation to his notion of recognition developed in his final book, *The Course of Recognition*: both attempt to respect the other while preserving the alterity of the other" (Kaplan 2008, 11).

5.6.   Conclusion

With the idea of mutuality we reach the end of our analysis of the course of recognition. How does this course of recognition help us get a better understanding of the problem of attestation?

My main thesis is that the notion of recognition reinforces the idea that the attestation of the self is always mediated. In this case, attestation is mediated through recognition. We observed how this was the case when we related self-recognition and attestation. The recognition of our own capacities allows the attestation of those capacities and the attestation of the self. In order to attest to our self, we need to attest to our capacities. In order to attest to our capacities, we need to recognize our capacities. Thus, recognition becomes the path to attestation.

That attestation is mediated through recognition becomes even more clear when we look up the topic of mutual recognition. Ricoeur states that the capacities need to be recognized by others in order that we may attest to them. This is so, because capacities are basically social capacities. Thus, it is not enough for attestation to be mediated by a simple self-recognition of capacities, but it needs to be mediated by the recognition of the other.

That recognition is in need of social mediation by others in order to attest to one's own capacities can be easily seen by noting that capacities are mainly social capacities. However, the claim that we need the recognition of others in order to attest to our own self is controversial to say the least. To be fair, Ricoeur never makes this claim in the

Course of Recognition. However, he explicitly states that the social recognition of society is required in order to attest to our capacities and he also states, mainly in *Oneself as Another*, that the attestation of the self and the attestation of the capacities are closely connected. Thus, it seems consistent to believe that Ricoeur would accept the claim that the social recognition of the capacities is required for the attestation of the self.

However, the attestation of the self is the belief, the trust of existing in the mode of selfhood. Is the social recognition of others a necessary condition for this belief, this trust in one's own existence in the mode of selfhood? In order to answer these questions, we should make some distinctions. We need to distinguish between different levels of attestation. Firstly, we have a very basic form of attestation, an attestation required in order to have a minimal sense of selfhood. I am thinking here of the minimal awareness that is required in order to recognize oneself as a self. This attestation depends on the recognition of the people that are closest to the self. Without this basic recognition, there probably is no self at all. This basic recognition can be located at the first, i.e., the affective level of the struggle for recognition, as distinguished by Honneth. Secondly, we can identify a deeper attestation of the self, an attestation required in order to recognize one's own responsibilities, or in order to believe in our capacity to be agents of social change. For this attestation, it seems that the recognition by the social body is required. This attestation happens at the juridical and the social level of the struggle for recognition.

In addition, the role of others in the very attestation of the self appears clearly if we link recognition to the problem of social identity. Ricoeur, indeed, explicitly links the problem of attestation with the problem of identity:

> As for our third major theme, placed under the heading of mutual recognition, we can already say that with it the question of identity will reach a kind of culminating point: it is indeed our most authentic identity, the one that makes us who we are, that demands to be recognized. (Ricoeur 1992, 21)

If our identity is that of and for which we demand recognition, and if, as Ricoeur also claims, identity is what makes us who we are, then it makes perfect sense to claim that the social recognition, granted by the social body, is required to attest to one's self, as we see in the struggle that some minorities have to engage in order to keep their own identity. This struggle becomes particularly tragic when it happens in the context of a process of modernization. Traditional groups understand their own world in particular ways, but these groups suddenly find themselves threatened by processes of modernization that do not recognize their identities, or the validity of their understanding. In such a situation, the groups' struggle for recognition becomes a struggle for the very survival of their selves. In that context, the claim that attestation is a 'right to demand' gains its full sense.

By connecting attestation with the struggle for recognition, we can speak of a 'struggle for attestation.' If the social recognition of the capacities is necessary for the attestation of the capacities and the attestation of the self, then the struggle for recognition is also a struggle for attestation. The subjects, in demanding recognition, are also, thereby, demanding that they be allowed to attest to their selves. This is consistent with the following statement by Ricoeur:

> Attestation has become a demand, a right to require, under the rubric of the idea of social justice. (Ricoeur 2005a, 148)

We can examine critically the claim that attestation is mediated by recognition by appealing to Meech's reflections on attestation. Meech comes very close to the

conclusion that I have presented here – that attestation is mediated through the recognition of others – by relating the idea of attestation to the idea of community. Meech's argument is complex and is developed in several steps. First, he reminds us that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is developed through many different kinds of discourses – "Fregean semantics, speech act theory, pragmatics, studies of identity, narrative theory, and ethics" (Meech 2007, 115). At the end of all these detours we discover – with Ricoeur – that the self has only analogical unity and, therefore, – Meech adds – that the effort of moving to an ontology of the self must happen in the midst of a conversation where all these discourses come together:

> So if an ontology of the self is possible, then there is a discursive space in which participants in these diverse discourses converse about aspects of the same reality, namely, a self that is a unity, even if only analogically. That the self is an *analogical* unity respects that the self is never glimpsed as a whole but in detours. This analogical unity does not ground these discourses (it always comes too late) but is disclosed retrospectively as something presupposed and (indirectly) talked about. (Meech 2006, 115)

Then, the attestation of the self happens in the midst of a community of inquirers:

> What gives credence to an ontology of the self? On the one hand, it is the testimony that emerges at the end of an itinerary of detours. Yet a community is the condition of testimony – it opens the discursive space where self and other meet; notwithstanding, in such meetings the self and the other carry their communities into the future. The testimony that arises in a hermeneutics of the self is thus the testimony of a community of inquirers. (Meech 2006, 116)

The inquirers, by recognizing one another in the legitimacy of their claims, can attest to the self that is present in the different discourses. In this sense, attestation happens in an experience of recognition that is not as different from the experiences of recognition that are described in the *Course of Recognition*.

The effort of developing an ontology of the self in the context of a community is remarkable and original. Meech recognizes that Ricoeur does not go that far. Meech points out that the dialectic between the Same and the Other (that is at the core of Ricoeur's ontology of the self) needs the community to be completed (Meech 2006, 116). He advances this thesis by showing the role of the community in the three expressions of the dialectic of the Same and the Other: The dialectic between the self and the flesh, the dialectic between the self and the other people and the dialectic between the self and conscience. Meech tries to show how without the support of the community these dialectics cannot be fulfilled. For example, with respect to the dialectics between the self and the body, Meech states:

> …the community that provides me the resources to relate to my body as other, in a world with others, can also negatively impact my prior relation to my body: first by wounding my ability to live out that relatedness and second by wounding my ability to express my suffering when it denies me access to the community's narrative resources. (Meech 2006, 117)

In Meech's reflection we see a slight shift of attention from the idea of a community of inquirers to the idea of the actual community in which the self lives. I think that Meech is right in emphasizing the role of the community in both instances: In the inquiry about the self and in the life of the self in a community. The only shortcoming that I see in Meech in this respect is that he does not make explicit the shift from the community of inquirers to the community in which actual selves live. However, it is a minor problem in comparison to his insightful idea that attestation needs the mediation of a community. It is remarkable that Meech arrives at conclusions that are similar to the ones that Ricoeur arrives at in the *Course of Recognition* by expanding some ideas that Ricoeur develops in

Oneself as Another. In this sense we could state that the *Course of Recognition* is a continuation of *Oneself as Another*.

Through the concept of recognition, the idea of attestation undergoes important transformations. In the course of this dissertation, I have presented attestation as an act that comes from the self and is expressed mainly in the idea of capacities. The self attests to its self, through the assurance of being itself *acting*. It is true that Ricoeur also adds to this definition the idea of being itself *suffering*. However, at least in the first three chapters, we saw that attestation is more related to the idea of acting than to the idea of suffering. It is only in the fourth chapter that the dimension of passivity enters the scene by making room for the possibility that the self attest to its self by being affected by its body, other people and its conscience. However, attestation is still located in an initiative of the self. It is true that the self is constituted by several passivities. However, these passivities need to be assumed by the self.

By relating the idea of attestation to the idea of recognition, for the first time, attestation becomes something that is granted more that something that depends on the self. The self, to attest to its own self, needs to be recognized by others. This recognition, as I have stated, is granted through the recognition of the capacities. When my capacities are recognized, I can recognize myself in my capacities and, as a consequence, I can attest to my own self.

In this way, through recognition we can understand several cases where the self fails to attest to itself: People whose culture has been so attacked that they have lost any sense of self-identity; people who have been so deeply humiliated that they have lost their

capacity for acting or people whose memory has been erased as a consequence of

personal or collective trauma. Once again, through the discussion of recognition, we are

reminded of the fragility of attestation. The self is not something that is gained once and

for all, but is always a work in progress.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to show how attestation helps us move from a hermeneutics to an ontology of the self. Commentators have and Ricoeur himself has admitted that attestation has a central role in the ontology of the self. Also, in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur declares that attestation is the key for the whole book. However, it has not been clearly shown in the secondary literature what the hermeneutical role of attestation is and how that hermeneutical role of attestation helps us to move to an ontology of the self. Thus, my main contribution has been to show the hermeneutical role of attestation and how this hermeneutical role helps us to arrive at an ontology of the self. We can thus make sense of the title of this dissertation: Attestation as a bridge between hermeneutics and ontology. In what follows, I will stress some of the main theses that are present in this dissertation and I will suggest some possible further developments to the ideas presented here. First, I will emphasize the role of attestation as a hermeneutical key for Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. Second, I will show how the hermeneutical role of attestation can help us to move to an ontology of the self. Finally, I will advance some views about the role that attestation can have in Ricoeur's general hermeneutical project.

1.   Attestation as a hermeneutical key

Throughout this dissertation I have tried to make clear the meaning as well as the critical role played by attestation in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. I introduced my project by stating that attestation has a key role in the three dialectics of the self illustrated in *Oneself as Another*. The first dialectic is the dialectic between analysis and

reflection. The role of attestation in this dialectic is that of appropriation, insofar as through attestation the self appropriates its capacities. The second dialectic is the dialectic between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity. In this second dialectic, we attest to ourselves not only by understanding our self through narratives, but by affirming that a specific narrative configuration expresses our identity. The third dialectic is between sameness and otherness. It is only through attestation that we are able to assume what is other than ourselves as something that constitutes our very selves and without which we would not be who we are.

Ricoeur states that the most important of the three dialectics is the dialectic between sameness and otherness. This dialectic encompasses the other two. I have said that attestation can be described as having the role of appropriation, affirmation and assumption (in the sense of *assuming* what is other than ourselves). The idea of appropriation encompasses the idea of affirmation and assumption. We can say that attestation has the role of allowing the appropriation of our own selves through otherness. In other words, the confidence of being oneself acting and suffering (attestation) is gained through the confidence that what is other than ourselves constitutes our own selves. Thus, the self gains the confidence of being a self through the confidence that the actions it performs and the words it says are *its* own actions and words; the confidence that the narratives it tells express *its* own identity; the confidence that the body is *its* own body; the confidence that the esteem of others constitute *its* own esteem and that the values that it embraces are *its* own values.

2.   Attestation as an ontological key for the hermeneutics of the self

How does this hermeneutical role of attestation – allowing for the appropriation of the self through otherness – helps us move towards an ontology of the self? First, we have to say that attestation has both a hermeneutical and an ontological function. Hermeneutically speaking, attestation allows the self to appropriate its own otherness. Indeed the self is able to understand and interpret its own activities and passivities only by appropriating its own otherness. Ontologically speaking, the self becomes a self only by appropriating otherness. At the hermeneutical level, attestation answers to the question how can I know that I am a self? I know that I am self by appropriating otherness. At the ontological level, attestation answers the question: How I become a self? I become a self by appropriating otherness. By "appropriation" I mean basically to recognize something as my own thing, not to make mine what is not mine. For that reason, sometimes it may be better to speak of assumption or affirmation or recognition. In any case, the words that are chosen are not what matters the most, but the most important thing is to account for the phenomenon that is the self.

Now it is time to enunciate some of the ontological traits of the self that appear when we connect ontology with hermeneutics through attestation. First, the self is attestation, that is, the self *is* the confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood. This can be misleading if we interpret confidence as a theoretical certainty. This certainty, however, is a practical certainty mediated by several expressions of the self: Capacities, identity and the otherness of the self. Thus, the practical certainty of being a self is the practical certitude of, among others being capable of speaking, acting, narrating,

recognizing responsibility, promising, remembering, having an identity, having a body, responding to the injunction of the other, and having a conscience. Secondly, the self it is not something that is given once and for all, but it is constructed by the appropriation of otherness. This relates to Ricoeur's idea of human existence as an effort of existing that he borrows from Nabert, who understands existence as a desire to be and an effort to exist. This desire to be and this effort to exist are expressed, as we will later see, as the appropriation of the otherness of the self, through the appropriation of its own corporality or of its own convictions. Thirdly, the idea of the self as an act of appropriation and as an effort connects with the idea of the self as *dynamis* that Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another*. For Ricoeur the right ontology of the self cannot be built on an ontology of substance, but rather on an ontology of a act/potency, that is, on the idea that the self is an acting being: The self appropriates otherness in a dynamic way.

The role of otherness in the attestation of the self is radicalized through what was expressed in the fifth chapter: The idea of recognition. The self must be recognized in order that it may attest to its own self. This suggests two other ontological layers: The self as something that is given to the self and the self as a response. There is textual evidence for this:

> This point is that human being has no mastery over the inner, intimate certitude of existing as a self; this is something that comes to us, that comes upon us, like a gift, a grace, that is not at our disposal. (Ricoeur 1996b, 455)

Attestation as the inner certitude of existing as a self, according to this text, is not something that we master but it is rather given as a gift or as a grace. This assertion takes the idea that to be oneself is to be another – the main statement of the book "Oneself as

Another" – to its ultimate consequences: The self does not belong originally to the self, but is given. If selfhood is given to the self, we wonder what the role of the self in that giveness is. Ricoeur gives such a strong role to passivity in the constitution of the self that we could even say that the self is pure passivity in the sense that we have a body, a conscience, a tradition, a culture and a language that is given. Even our most original thoughts come in a linguistic articulation that is given to us. However, at the same time, we have to respond in an act of appropriating of what is given to us, insofar as we have to appropriate our body, the esteem that others have for us, and the values and norms that are given to us in the form of injunctions. This appropriation can be seen as a response that has the form of attestation, that is, of a confidence that this is my body, that some actions make me good, and that some norms and values express my deepest convictions.

Finally, we wonder whether there are different forms of attesting to the self. I contend that attestation may take different forms, since the self not only attests to its own self, but it attests to its own self in a particular way. This is especially clear in the idea of injunction discussed in the fourth chapter, where we saw that conscience, as an instance of attestation, is basically a response to an injunction. The self, by attesting to its self through conscience, can respond to that injunction in different ways, as is evident in the different attitudes that people take regarding moral issues. I can "listen" to the voice of conscience but not follow that voice or, worse, I can chose not to listen, not to be open to the injunction of conscience. Thus, attestation has an evident ethical dimension. Indeed, Ricoeur, as I pointed out in the fourth chapter, states that in conviction attestation becomes the "conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well" (Ricoeur 1992, 180)

3.   Attestation as an ontological key for Ricoeur's general hermeneutical project

Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy cannot be understood without relating it to

Nabert's philosophy. In the essay "Nabert on Act and Sign" Ricoeur presents the main

challenge of Nabert's philosophy:

> [To show]…the relationships between the act whereby consciousness posits and
> produces itself and the signs wherein consciousness represents to itself the
> meaning of its action. (Ricoeur 1974b, 211)

Herein lies a paradox: We want to understand what is the original motivation of our acts

but the only way to understand that is by following the signs and representations of our

original acts. However, we focus on signs and representations not simply to confine

ourselves to that level but in order to understand the original act that is expressed in those

signs and representations. This process is called by Nabert the recovery, the "move from

the representation to the act" (Ricoeur 1974b, 215). Ricoeur's philosophy takes this task

of analyzing the signs, symbols and expressions as a way to understand the self. This is

the main goal of his own philosophy, as he explains:

> …by understanding ourselves, we said, we appropriate to ourselves the meaning
> of our desire to be or of our effort to exist. Existence, we can now say, is desire
> and effort. We term it effort in order to stress its positive energy and its
> dynamism; we term it desire in order to designate its lack and its poverty: Eros is
> the son of Poros and Penia. Thus the *cogito* is no longer the pretentious act it was
> initially – I mean its pretension of positing itself; it appears as *already* posited in
> being. (Ricoeur 1974a, 21)

Ricoeur starts from Nabert's idea that existence is a desire to be and an effort to exist.[205]

What is added by him is the need to appropriate our existence by understanding the

meaning of that desire and effort. Secondly we see here the phenomenological

affirmation that we "always already" find ourselves in existence. Thus, our cogito is

already posited in being. This marks an opacity of the cogito that will be essential for

Ricoeur's philosophical project:

> The *cogito* is not only a truth as vain as it is invincible; we must add, as well, that it is like an empty place which has, from all time, been occupied by a false *cogito*. We have indeed learned, from all the exegetic disciplines and from psychoanalysis in particular, that so-called immediate consciousness is first of all "false consciousness." (Ricoeur 1974a, 18)

The cogito as a transparent truth is empty. The cogito is already posited in the midst of

human endeavors. Moreover, in that cogito we find many distortions that make illusory

any effort of grasping the cogito as the foundation of a philosophical system, à la

Descartes.

Be that as it may, it is still the task of philosophy to make sense of our existence

as the desire to be and the effort to exist. In this sense, Ricoeur's philosophy is not

different from Heidegger's ontology of Dasein. Both philosophies try to understand our

being. However, Ricoeur's stress on the opacity of the self ends up as the main difference

of method from that of Heidegger. For Ricoeur, Heidegger takes the "short route" in the

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[205] Hall summarizes this idea: "Humans are oriented in existence by desire. My striving toward selfhood is directed by an intended goal that motivates me" (Hall 2007, 64).

sense of trying to grasp human existence directly, without following any kind of

mediation, as he explains:

> The short route is the one taken by an *ontology of understanding*, after the manner
> of Heidegger. I call such an ontology of understanding the "short route" because,
> breaking with any discussion of *method*, it carries itself directly to the level of an
> ontology of finite being in order there to recover *understanding*, no longer as a
> mode of knowledge, but rather as a mode of being. (Ricoeur 1974a, 6)

Ricoeur criticizes Heidegger for breaking with "any discussion of *method*" going directly

to an ontology of finite being. Precisely, the opacity of the cogito and the fact that the

cogito is always already articulated in the manifestations of the self, such as the works of

culture and language, are evidence for Ricoeur that we cannot have direct access to it. For

that reason, we have to follow the "long route" described by Ricoeur as the "continual

exegesis of all the significations that come to light in the world of culture" (Ricoeur

1974a, 21). Because philosophy can only appropriate existence through an exegesis,

philosophy is hermeneutics. Through an act of appropriation of existence analogous to

the exegetical act of philosophy, we become a self:[206]

> Existence becomes a self – human and adult – only by appropriating this meaning,
> which first resides "outside," in works institutions, and cultural monuments in
> which the life of the spirit is objectified. (Ricoeur 1974a, 22)

Language is the principal mediation used to appropriate existence since "It is first

of all and always in language that all ontic or ontological understanding arrives at its

expressions" (Ricoeur 1974a, 11).Thus, all the disciplines that deal with language, such

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[206] Here we can see that philosophy is deeply ethical since self-understanding is a way to fulfill
our desire to be. For more about this topic, see Ricoeur's article *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral
Philosophy* (Ricoeur 2000d).

as semantics and semiology, will be privileged ways of developing this understanding of human existence. But the social sciences and humanities will also be crucial in order to make sense of human existence. Thus, Ricoeur against Heidegger and Gadamer, states that it is not possible to separate *truth* from *method*, but on the contrary we must "keep in contact with the disciplines which seek to practice interpretation in a methodical manner" (Ricoeur 1974a, 11).

According to Ricoeur the ontology that can be achieved "is in no way separable from interpretation; it is caught inside the circle formed by the conjunction of the work of interpretation and the interpreted being" (Ricoeur 1974a, 23). It is an ontology that can be reached only from a particular interpretation of the manifestations of the self in the world of culture. It is a mediated ontology, mediated by language and culture, a far cry from any "strong" ontological effort; and, as a result, it is not "a triumphant ontology at all; it is not even a science, since it is unable to avoid the *risk* of interpretation" (Ricoeur 1974a, 23). This ontology, then, is a promised land, as Ricoeur explains in this well known paragraph:

> In this way, ontology is indeed the promised land for a philosophy that begins with language and with reflection; but, like Moses, the speaking and reflecting subject can only glimpse this land before dying. (Ricoeur 1974a, 24)

The original motivation for taking the detour through the world of culture is to understand what it means to be a self. However, once we have analyzed the expressions of the self, it is not always easy to understand what it means to be a self. A gap appears between the self and its expressions. For example, when we analyze the actions of the self, we can always wonder whether those actions really show the motivations and the

nature of the self. Thus, we need to connect the self and its several expressions in the world of culture. In other words, once we have covered that road of hermeneutics, we need to find the way back to the self. It is my contention that attestation is a possible way back to the self, insofar as attestation – the confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood – is achieved by the appropriation of the several expressions of the self, such as its capacities, its narratives, its body, and its conscience. However, attestation not only allows us to return to the self after the hermeneutical detour, but attestation, at the same time, shows us that the self *is* the appropriation of its own expressions. The self, by appropriating the world of culture, a world that the very self has built, becomes a self. Thus, attestation does not only allow us to return to the self, but helps us gain a glimpse into the "promised land of ontology."

We find here that the biblical metaphor of the promised land falls short. While in the biblical image the desert that the people of Israel have to traverse in order to attain to the promised land represents a transitory stage, in the case of the self the "desert" (if we so understand the "otherness" of the self) is a permanent detour that the self has to take to reach its own selfhood. There is no self without the detour of otherness.

On the other hand, the biblical metaphor is accurate in the sense that the self is a "promised land," not a conquered one. Indeed, the self (as "the land") is never completely given ("conquered"), but it can only be glimpsed, in the sense that we never completely achieve our selfhood. There is a fundamental disparity of the self with itself. This disparity is in part a consequence of the fact that in order to gain ourselves we have to "lose" ourselves through otherness in a constant dialectical tension. Since the self can

only be gained through otherness, the self can never be completely "at home." We recognize ourselves in our capacities, in our narratives, in other people, in our body, in our conscience, but at the same time we experience a certain foreignness in those manifestations of the self. Recognition, Ricoeur reminds us, always goes along with misrecognition. Attestation shows well this tension. Since the confidence of existing in the mode of selfhood (attestation) is gained through the appropriation of otherness, that confidence is never free of doubt or suspicion.

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