

ONE

Personal Identity

Charles E. Reagan

During the decade of the 1980s, Paul Ricoeur published five major works: three volumes of *Time and Narrative*;¹ *From Text to Action*,² an edited version of many of his articles published in English during the late 1970s and early 1980s; and, most recently, *Oneself as Another*.³ In 1980, at the beginning of this prolific period, Ricoeur had already retired from the University of Paris-Nanterre and was thinking of reducing his teaching at the University of Chicago. Several years later, he was named the John Nuveen Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago and limited his teaching there to one quarter per year. He was then sixty-seven years old, and, after an extraordinary intellectual career, was widely known and highly regarded both in France and in the United States. He had clearly earned his retirement.

But retirement is not his style. Rather, he began a new intellectual journey, which expanded beyond the hermeneutics he practiced in the 1970s to an understanding of the philosophical power of narratives. His three-volume work, *Time and Narrative*, excited a renewed interest in his philosophy after a ten-year, self-imposed exile from the French university scene. During this period Ricoeur lived, worked, lectured, and published primarily *outside* of France. Thus, in the mid-1980s, his French readers needed to “catch up” with the work he had been doing since the last major work he had published in France, *La métaphore vive*.⁴ The articles, which are in edited and abridged form in the collection *Du texte à l'action*, were, with a few exceptions, either written and published in English, or they were written in French but published outside of France.

After finishing the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur began work on the Gifford Lectures, which he gave in Edinburgh in the winter of 1986. The lectures were written in French and an abridged English version

was actually read. Ricoeur then revised the first version by expanding several chapters. The second edition follows closely the order and topics of the first edition. This version was first given as lectures at the University of Munich in the same year. Yet Ricoeur was not satisfied with his text and continued for two more years to work and rework it. This was time well spent: *Oneself as Another* is, in my opinion, Ricoeur's most elegantly written, clearly organized, and closely argued work. This is high praise for an author whose work as a whole exemplifies these traits.

What I intend to do here is to give a synopsis of the book in order to show what the question of personal identity is and how Ricoeur progressively argues for a concept of personal identity that is inextricably bound up with a concept of the other and the relation between the self and the other. Then, I will give a more detailed account of the three chapters on ethics. These chapters are interesting in their own right, and they come as close as anything Ricoeur has written to being a clear account of his "philosophical ethics." He has written many articles on individual moral or political concepts and concerns, but he has never written a theoretical work on ethics. These chapters serve as his "groundwork for a metaphysics of morals."

My second goal in this essay is to point out some of the things we, his students, learned about philosophy from Paul Ricoeur, as well as to comment on some of the constant features in his philosophical style. Above all, Paul Ricoeur is a *teacher* of philosophy. He taught us to do a careful reading of philosophical texts, to always give the most generous interpretation to ambiguous or obscure texts, and to give full credit to those we have read and from whom we have learned. His fundamental thesis as a philosopher is that virtually every philosopher, ancient, modern, or contemporary, has seen a piece of the truth. Now our task is to adjudicate among competing interpretations, each of which claims to be absolute.

The title itself of this book, *Oneself as Another*, indicates the three converging themes that make up this work: a reflexive meditation on the self or subject; a dialectic on the meaning of the word *même* or "same" in the sense of identical (*idem*) or in the sense of "one and the same" (*ipse*), or selfhood; a dialectic between the self and the "other." Ricoeur's meditation takes place within the context of the history of the philosophy of the subject and, in particular, of the philosophy of Descartes and Nietzsche. For Descartes, the *cogito* is both indubitable and the ultimate foundation of all that can be known. For Nietzsche, on the contrary, the *cogito* is the name of an illusion. Ricoeur, in his typically dialectic mode, says, "the hermeneutics of the self is placed at an equal distance from the apology of the *cogito* and from its overthrow" (4).

One of the most important dialectics in Ricoeur's philosophy is between the auto-foundational claims of idealistic philosophies of the self, such as Descartes's and Husserl's, and the skeptical philosophies of the "masters of suspicion," Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. The reflective and hermeneutic philosophy Ricoeur practices is the contrary of a philosophy of the immediate. This is why Ricoeur, the French translator of Husserl's *Ideen I*, rejected from the beginning both the transcendental *epoché* and the idealist version of Husserl's phenomenology. Ricoeur says, "The first truth—I am, I think—remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be 'mediated' by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it."⁵ Thus, Ricoeur rejects the classical picture of consciousness as a veridical "mirror of nature" and says we gain self-knowledge through the long route of the interpretations of texts, monuments, and cultural forms.

Ricoeur's goal is to develop a hermeneutic of the self that bridges the gap between the *cogito* and the anti-*cogito*. He asks, "To what extent can one say that the hermeneutics of the self developed here occupies an epistemological (and ontological, as I shall state in the tenth study) place, situated beyond the alternative of the *cogito* and the anti-*cogito*?" (16).

In his preface, Ricoeur sets forth three conceptual themes that guide his study of the self: the use of "self" in natural languages, "same" in the sense of *idem* and *ipse*, and the correlation between the self and the other-than-self. "To these three grammatical features correspond the three major features of the hermeneutics of the self, namely, the detour of reflection by way of analysis, the dialectic of selfhood and sameness, and finally the dialectic of selfhood and otherness" (16). The whole hermeneutic is led by the question, who: who speaks? who acts? who tells a story? and who is the subject of moral imputation?

The first grouping (chapters 1 and 2) is based on a *philosophy of language* both as semantics and as pragmatics. This analytic stage is made necessary by the indirect status of the self. Hermeneutics is always a philosophy of detour; the hermeneutics of the self must take a detour through the analysis of the language in which we talk about the self.

The second group (chapters 3 and 4) is based on a *philosophy of action* in the sense this has taken in analytic philosophy. The interest here is in language about action and in speech acts where the agent of an action designates himself as the one who acts. "The questions 'Who is speaking?' and 'Who is acting?' appear in this way to be closely interconnected" (17). Ricoeur reminds us that these long analytic forays are "characteristic of the indirect style of a hermeneutics of self, in stark contrast to the demand for immediacy belonging to the *cogito*" (17).

The third grouping (chapters 5 and 6) is centered on the question of *personal identity*. This is the place of the dialectic between identity (*idem*) and identity (*ipse*) which arises from the second grammatical trait of *soi-même* (oneself) and the ambiguity of the word *même* (same). Here Ricoeur links narrative identity with the philosophy of action, since narrative is the “imitation of action” (*mimesis*). “At the same time, and correlatively, the subject of the action recounted will begin to correspond to the broader concept of the *acting and suffering* individual, which our analytic-hermeneutical procedure is capable of eliciting” (18).

The fourth group (chapters 7, 8, and 9) makes a final detour through the ethical and moral determinations of action. “It is in the three ethical studies that the dialectic of the *same* and the *other* will find its appropriate philosophical development” (18). Ricoeur admits that his studies appear to be fragmentary and lack a unity. He says, “The fragmentary character of these studies results from the analytic-reflective structure that imposes arduous detours on our hermeneutics, beginning as early as the first study” (19). The thematic unity is found in *human action*. But human action does not serve as an ultimate foundation of some set of derived disciplines. Rather, there is an analogical unity because of the polysemy of “action” and because of “the variety and contingency of the questions that activate the analyses leading back to the reflection on the self” (19–20).

The thread that unifies Ricoeur’s analyses is *description, narration, prescription*. Narrative identity serves “a transitional and relational function between the description that prevails in the analytical philosophies of action and the prescription that designates all the determinations of action by means of a generic term on the basis of the predicates ‘good’ and ‘obligatory’” (20).

The final study (chapter 10) explores the ontological consequences of the hermeneutics of the self. Ricoeur claims that the dialectic between the “same” and the “other” will prevent an ontology of act and power from becoming encased in a tautology. “The polysemy of otherness, which I shall propose in the tenth study, will imprint upon the entire ontology of acting the seal of the diversity of sense that foils the ambition of arriving at an ultimate foundation, characteristic of the cogito philosophies” (21).

Another characteristic that distinguishes Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of the self from the philosophies of the *cogito* is the type of certainty appropriate to the hermeneutics, in contradistinction to the claims of self-evidence and self-foundation of the philosophies of the *cogito*. Ricoeur uses the word *attestation* to describe the level of certitude appropriate to his hermeneutics. With respect to the “epistemological exaltation” of Descartes’s *cogito* and its destruction by Nietzsche and his followers, Ricoeur claims, “Attestation may appear

to require less than the one and more than the other" (21). It is opposed to the kind of certainty claims of *épistémé*, of science, "taken in the sense of ultimate and self—founding knowledge" (21). Attestation is a kind of *belief*, not in the doxic sense of "I believe that . . .," but in the sense of "I believe in. . . ." Since attestation is a much weaker claim than the foundational claims of the *cogito*, it is always vulnerable. "This vulnerability will be expressed in the permanent threat of suspicion, if we allow that suspicion is the specific contrary of attestation. The kinship between attestation and testimony is verified here: there is no 'true' testimony without 'false' testimony. But there is no recourse against false testimony than another that is more credible; and there is no recourse against suspicion but a more reliable attestation" (22). Another way Ricoeur defines attestation is as "the *assurance of being oneself acting and suffering*. This assurance remains the ultimate recourse against all suspicion" (22). He finishes laying out his thesis and his plan of study by saying, "As credence without any guarantee, but also as trust greater than any suspicion, the hermeneutics of the self can claim to hold itself at an equal distance from the *cogito* exalted by Descartes and from the *cogito* that Nietzsche proclaimed forfeit. The reader will judge whether the investigations that follow live up to this claim" (23).

The notion of "attestation" is a middle ground between apodictic certainty—which is only rarely attainable—and perpetual suspicion, and it is, he says, the level of certainty appropriate to hermeneutics. In his influential article "The Model of the Text,"⁶ Ricoeur uses the analogy with judicial reasoning and discourse to show the kind of certainty appropriate to hermeneutical interpretations in literary criticism and in the social sciences. The key is the polemical character of validation. Ricoeur says,

In front of the court, the plurivocity common to texts and to actions is exhibited in the form of a conflict of interpretations, and the final interpretation appears as a verdict to which it is possible to make appeal. Like legal utterances, all interpretations in the field of literary criticism and in the social sciences may be challenged, and the question "what can defeat a claim" is common to all argumentative situations. Only in the tribunal is there a moment when the procedures of appeal are exhausted. But it is because the decision of the judge is implemented by the force of public power. Neither in literary criticism, nor in the social sciences, is there such a last word. Or if there is any, we call that violence.⁷

In juridical arguments, we recognize levels of certainty appropriate to different situations, such as "probably cause," "preponderance of the evidence,"

“beyond a reasonable doubt.” For Ricoeur, the task of philosophy is to avoid the skepticism that doubts everything while at the same time abandoning the ideal of total certainty.

In a special section at the end of the preface, Ricoeur explains to his readers why he omitted from this book two chapters that were originally part of the Gifford Lectures. They were called “The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures” and “The Mandated Self.” The first of these dealt with the naming of God through the Old and New Testaments. In the symbolic network of the Scriptures, we find the kerygmatic dimension distinguished from the argumentative mode of philosophy. The second lecture dealt with the narratives of “vocation,” of the calling of the prophets and disciples, and the understanding of the self contained in the response to the call. “The relation between call and response was therefore the strong connection between these two lectures” (23).

Ricoeur omitted the lectures from his work for two reasons: (1) He wanted this book to be an autonomous philosophical discourse by putting into parentheses the convictions that tied him to his biblical faith. This has been a guiding principle in all of his philosophical work. (2) If Ricoeur has defended his work from becoming a “crypto-theology,” he also defends biblical faith from becoming a “crypto-philosophy.” In particular, he does not want biblical faith to replace the *cogito* as a form of foundation against which his hermeneutics has fought continually.

PERSONAL IDENTITY

Ricoeur begins his studies of the self by looking at the linguistic means at our disposal to identify anything, to refer to individual things and pick them out of a group of similar things. He claims that a person is, at the lowest level possible, “one of the things that we distinguish by means of identifying reference” (27). He will begin with a linguistic study of the operations of individualization found in natural languages. Definite descriptions create a class with a single member (e.g., the first man to walk on the moon), while proper names refer to a single individual without, however, giving any information about the individual (e.g., Socrates). The third category of individualizing operators is made up of pronouns (e.g., you, he) and deictics such as demonstratives (e.g., this one, that one), adverbs of time and place (e.g., now, then, here, there), and the tenses of verbs. These operators individualize with reference to the speaker. “Here” means in the proximity of the speaker, in relation to which “there”

makes sense. “Now” refers to events contemporaneous with the speaking itself. At this point, none of these individualizing operations privileges the person.

In moving from the identification of any kind of particular to the identification of persons, Ricoeur follows P. F. Strawson, who in his book *Individuals*⁸ claims that there are only two kinds of basic particulars, things (physical objects) and persons. Every identification refers ultimately to one of these two classes of individuals. At this point, what is important are the sets of predicates appropriate to each basic particular.

Strawson’s second main thesis is that the first basic particular is the body, or physical object, because it satisfies the criterion of having a unique spatiotemporal location. Persons are also bodies, but they, unlike bodies, are a referent for two series of predicates, physical and psychological. The importance of this claim is that souls (à la Descartes), ideas, percepts, etc., are not fundamental or basic particulars. This cuts off any temptation to relapse into subjectivism or idealism. It also means that the person cannot be considered as a pure consciousness to which is added a body, as is the case in classical mind/body dualisms. The importance of this double attribution of predicates to *the same thing* is that we eliminate any double reference to body and soul by two series of predicates.

The first study follows one of the two linguistic approaches to the problem of the self, that of identifying reference. In the second chapter, Ricoeur takes up the other approach, enunciation, or speech-acts. Speech-acts immediately involve the “I” and the “you” of interlocution, whereas referential identification is centered on the “he.” “The question will be finally to determine how the ‘I-you’ of interlocution can be externalized in a ‘him’ or a ‘her’ without losing its capacity to designate itself, and how the ‘he/she’ of identifying reference can be internalized in a speaking subject who designates himself or herself as an I” (41).

The theory of speech-acts, begun by Austin and perfected by Searle, is well known. A fundamental element of the theory is the distinction between performatives and constatives. The latter describe a state of affairs; the former are speech-actions, where the saying is the doing itself. Their paradigm illustration is a promise, where saying “I promise you” is to make a promise and not to describe a promise. Other examples would be rendering a verdict, making a proclamation, naming a child, etc. The importance of this is that it is a principal intersection between the theory of language and the theory of action. Secondly, reflexive speech implies both an “I” who speaks and a “you” to whom the speech is addressed. “In short, utterance equals interlocution” (44).

ACTION AND AGENT

The next two chapters link up the linguistic analysis of identifying reference and speech-acts with the philosophy of action. In chapter 3, Ricoeur deals with the concepts in the philosophy of action, devoid of reference to a particular agent. The following chapter introduces the imputation of agency. "What does action, we shall ask, teach about its agent? And to what extent can what is learned in this way contribute to clarifying the difference between *ipse* and *idem*?" (56).

At the level of identifying reference, the network of concepts with which we describe action refers to an agent as *being spoken about*. But this is far different from an explicit self-imputation of an action to an agent. Only at the end of Ricoeur's next chapter will we see the interrelationship between identifying reference and self-designation of an "acting subject."

For the purposes of this study, Ricoeur puts "in parentheses" the unifying principle of chains of actions, that is, the "practical unities of a higher order." These include techniques, skilled crafts, arts, games, all of which order chains of actions so that some actions are understood as parts of higher-order actions. This means that at this point he will set aside ethical predicates that evaluate actions, or chains of actions, as good, just, etc.

Action and agent belong to the same conceptual schema; this includes concepts such as motive, circumstance, intention, deliberation, voluntary, constraint, intended consequences, and so forth. The important thing is, they form a coherent network such that one must understand how all of them function and what they mean, in order to understand any one of them. The network as a whole determines what will "count as" an action. One way of seeing this network is that it constitutes the list of questions that can be asked of an agent about an action: when, under what circumstances, with what intention, why (what motive), what influences, and so forth.

Within the framework of identifying reference, the question "who?" can be answered with a proper name, a demonstrative, or a definite description. Ricoeur believes that analytic philosophy of action has created problems for itself by focusing its discussion on the question of what will count as an action among the *events that happen in the world*. This has led it to couple the question "what?" with the question "why?" such that distinguishing between an action and an event depends on the mode of explanation of the action (the "why?"). "The use of 'why?' in the explanation of action thus becomes the arbiter of the description of what counts as actions" (61).⁹

Ricoeur now looks at the analytic philosophy of action as it interprets the meaning of "intention." The fundamental and guiding question of this view

is “what distinguishes intentional actions from unintentional ones?” Anscombe’s answer is that actions are intentional if a certain sense of “because” applies to them. This sense is that the *because* gives a “reason for acting” (69). This opens a whole range of answers to “why?” that are mixed or even counterexamples. Aristotle reminds us that in some cases the question “why?” doesn’t have any sense: cases where the action was the result of ignorance or of constraint. Ricoeur claims that the main victim of this kind of analysis is the dichotomy between reason for acting and cause. He says that there is a whole spectrum of answers to “why?” and only at the far extremes of the spectrum do you find a pure opposition between reason and cause. In the case of “backward-looking” motives such as vengeance, the line between cause and reason is completely erased. He concludes, “But one can see how fluid the border is between reason-for-acting, forward-looking motive, mental cause, and cause as such (a grimacing face made me jump). The criterion of the question ‘why?’ is therefore firm; its application surprisingly flexible” (69).

According to Ricoeur, the analytic philosophy of action has been preoccupied with the question “what-why?” to the exclusion of the question “who?”. He says, “In my opinion, it is the exclusive concern with the truth of the description that tends to overshadow any interest in assigning the action to its agent” (72). This is the same reason that analytic philosophy has neglected the sense of intention as “intending-to”; the present intention to do something in the future. The dilemma is that the truth of such an intention claim rests on the nonverifiable declaration of the agent, or leads to a theory of internal mental events. For Ricoeur, only a phenomenology of attestation can account for “intending-to.” The criterion of truth is not the verifiability of a description, but the confidence in a testimony. Even a declared intention belongs to the category of a shared confession and not to the category of a public description. In conclusion, the “intention-to,” relegated to the third rank by conceptual analysis of the type done by Anscombe, finds itself in the first rank from the phenomenological perspective. This is because this sense of intention is very close to the act of promising.

In Ricoeur’s first three chapters, the question “who?” was eclipsed by semantic considerations of the pair “what/why?”. In chapter 4, he returns to the central focus of “who?”, or the relation between the agent and the action. Earlier studies concentrated on distinguishing actions from events and on the relationship between intentional explanations and causal explanations. In returning to the role of the agent, Ricoeur recalls the theses of Strawson, discussed in his first chapter, and the linguistic act of *ascription*. Strawson’s principal theses are that persons are “basic particulars” and all

attribution of predicates is of persons or bodies; certain predicates are attributable only to persons and they are not reducible to any one or any set of predicates attributable to bodies. Secondly, we attribute both body predicates and person predicates to the *same* thing, that is, persons. Finally, mental predicates are attributable to ourselves and others without having a different meaning.

Turning his attention to contemporary theory of action, Ricoeur wants to show that ascription has a different meaning than attribution. Each term in the network of action (*what? why?*), refers back to the *who?*. When we speak of the action, we ask who did it. When we ask for the motive, we refer directly to the agent. Ricoeur notes that these inquiries are not symmetrical: the question “who?” is answered when we name or otherwise indicate the agent; the search for motives is interminable.

Ricoeur asks why contemporary philosophy of action has resisted any kind of profound analysis of the relation between the action and the agent. He gives two reasons: Much of the discussion is dominated by an ontology of events (Davidson) and other analyses are dominated by an ontology of “things in general” (Strawson).

Ricoeur rejects, however, the claim that moral or judicial imputation of an action to an agent is merely a strong form of ascription. The first reason is that moral imputation makes no sense in cases of banal actions or simple acts disconnected from a practice or a complex human action. Secondly, imputation properly applies only in cases of actions that are praiseworthy or blamable. But to condemn an action is to submit it to an accusatory process of the “verdictive” type. The third reason is that imputation is on a different level from the self-designation of a speaker because it implies the *power to act*, including the causal efficacy—however explained—of this power.

But what does “power to act” mean? The *third problem* arises from the fact that “to say that an action depends on its agent is to say in an equivalent fashion that it is in the agent’s power” (101). With an analysis of the “power to act,” efficient causality, ejected from physics by Galileo, rediscovers its native land: the experience we all have of the power to act. Ricoeur claims that this experience is a “primitive fact.” This does not mean it is a given or a starting point, but that it will be seen as such at the *end* of a dialectic. The dialectic will have a disjunctive phase, where efficient causality implied in the power to act is seen as different and disconnected from other forms of causality. It will have also a conjunctive phase where the primitive causality of the agent is shown to be connected with other forms of causality.

Ricoeur proposes an ontology of the *lived body* (*corps propre*), “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" (111). So, the power of acting is rooted in a phenomenology of the "I can" and the ontology of the "lived body."

NARRATIVE IDENTITY

Up to this point, Ricoeur limited his discussion to semantic and pragmatic considerations of the theory of language and theory of action with respect to the constitution of the self as self-designation and as agent of an action. At the end of his analyses, he reintroduced the phenomenological concept of a "lived body" as the intermediary between action and agent. All of this served as a "propadeutic to the question of selfhood [*ipséité*]" (113). In addition, the whole problematic of *personal identity* has been omitted.

To tie these two themes together, considering the contemporary debates in Anglo-American philosophy about personal identity, Ricoeur will introduce the dialectic between *sameness* (*mêmeté*) and *selfhood* (*ipséité*) and the central idea of narrative identity. Once he has been able to show the advantages of this narrative identity in resolving the paradoxes of the problem of personal identity, he can finally turn to the thesis stated in his introduction, "namely that narrative theory finds one of its major justifications in the role it plays as a middle ground between the descriptive viewpoint on action, to which we have confined ourselves until now, and the prescriptive viewpoint which will prevail in the studies that follow. A triad has thus imposed itself on my analysis: describe, narrate, prescribe—each moment of the triad implying a specific relation between the constitution of action and the constitution of the self" (114–115). Narrative already contains, even in its most descriptive mode, evaluations, estimations, and value judgments. In this sense, it serves as a preparation for ethics proper.

It is here that Ricoeur clearly lays out the two meanings of identity and begins to show their dialectical relationship. In one sense, identity means *sameness*; its other sense is *selfhood*. The context for this discussion of identity is permanence through time. What does it mean to say that someone or something is identical at two different times? On the most basic level, identity means numerical identity—there is one and the same thing, rather than two or more different things. Another sense of identity is qualitative, or the substitutability of one thing for another. Determining identity in cases separated by time, as in cases of law where we claim that the defendant is *the same person* as the person who committed the crime, can be very difficult.

This leads to a third sense of identity, that of uninterrupted continuity between two stages of development of what we take to be the same individual. This kind of identity overcomes the problem of a lack of sameness or similarity required in the qualitative sense of identity. Another sense is permanence in time represented by, say, a genetic code, or a structure, or the organization of a combinatory system. All of these meanings of identity are tied in some way to the idea of *sameness*.

The question now is whether selfhood implies a form of permanence in time that does not depend on a substratum of sameness. What we are looking for, says Ricoeur, is “a form of permanence in time that is a reply to the question ‘Who am I?’” (118). His proposal is that there are two models for this kind of identity, *character* and *keeping a promise*. In the first case, identity in the sense of one’s character is very close to identity in the sense of sameness, an enduring and reidentifiable substratum. In the second case, the selfhood implied in keeping promises is antithetical to sameness. For example, I say that even though I have different opinions, values, desires, inclinations, I will keep my word.

But what does “character” mean? “By ‘character’ I understand the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same” (119). This will include all of the descriptive traits of “sameness” such as “qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time” (119). Ricoeur reminds us that he has dealt at length with the concept of character in two of his previous works. In *Freedom and Nature*, character was seen as an absolutely permanent and involuntary aspect of our experience (along with our birth and our unconscious) to which we could, at most, consent.¹⁰ It was the nonchosen perspective on our values and our capabilities. In *Fallible Man*, character represented a finite restriction on my openness to the world of things, ideas, values, and persons.¹¹ In the present work, Ricoeur wants to modify his view of character by situating it within the dialectic of identity. What is at issue is the immutability of character, which he took as a given in his previous works. “Character, I would say today, designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized” (121). Here, sameness is constitutive of selfhood.

But if identity in terms of sameness and identity in terms of selfhood find convergence in the idea of character, they are seen as divergent in the analysis of a promise kept. To keep a promise is not to remain the same through time but to defy the changes wrought by time. “Even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or my inclination, ‘I will hold firm’” (124). So the dialectic of sameness and selfhood has two poles: character, where sameness and permanence of dispositions constitute

selfhood; and promising, where selfhood is maintained in spite of change, or in the absence of sameness. Ricoeur thinks that narrative identity is the mediating concept.

His thesis is that the true nature of narrative identity is found only in the dialectic of sameness and selfhood, and the dialectic itself is the main contribution of the narrative theory to the constitution of the self. His arguments are in two steps: First, in an analysis of emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) along the same lines as we found in *Time and Narrative*, the construction of a narrative plot integrates diversity, variability, and discontinuity into the permanence in time. In short, it unifies elements that appear to be totally disparate. Secondly, this same emplotment, transferred from action to characters—characters in a narrative as distinct from “character” as a fundamental element of the existing individual—creates a dialectic of sameness and selfhood.

After giving a brief description of *configuration*, one of the principal concepts in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur undertakes to compare narrative configuration with impersonal description. He claims that narration occupies a middle place between description and prescription. He must now show its relation to both end-terms.

One touchstone of the difference between narrative and description is the role of *event*. On the one hand, an event appears to be totally contingent, and thus from the narrative point of view, a discordance. On the other hand, it advances the narrative and is seen as necessary to it. Thus, it is a concordance. The paradox of narration is that it transforms contingent events into necessary episodes by providing a context or link with other events.

Narrative identity has as its challenge to create a dynamic identity out of Locke’s incompatible categories of identity and diversity. Ricoeur’s thesis here is, “that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots” (143). But what is the relation between character and narrated action? The personage has a unity and an identity correlative to those of the narrative itself. This is captured in the concept of a *role*. Our understanding of a narrative is that it is about agents and victims (*patients*). Ricoeur says, “For my part, I never forget to speak of humans as acting and suffering” (144–145). This shows, I think, the close relation between narration and ethics.

What is the relation between narrative identity and ethics, between narrating and prescribing? In the first case, narration always deals with actions that are “subject to approval or disapproval and agents that are subject to praise or blame” (164). Ricoeur also says that literature is a grand laboratory

of the imagination where experiments are conducted in the realm of good and evil.

In the narrative dialectic of the character, one pole is the character, a constant set of dispositions that remains the same across time. The other pole is the self-constancy represented by commitment made and kept. In the ethical version of the dialectic of identity, character is in the role of sameness: this is what is identifiable and reidentifiable in me, through time and across all of my experiences and actions. The pole of selfhood, or identity in spite of diversity, is responsibility, or acting in such a manner that others can *count* on me and thus make me *accountable* for my actions. Narrative identity is between the poles of sameness as character and selfhood as responsibility.

ETHICS AND MORALS

At this point, Ricoeur begins his extensive discussion of the moral and ethical dimension of selfhood, which is added to the linguistic, practical, and narrative aspects discussed previously. The guiding questions for these four groups of inquiries are: “Who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is telling his or her story? Who is the moral subject of imputation?” (169). The key predicates here will be “good” and “obligatory.” Ricoeur says, “The ethical and moral determinations of action will be treated here as predicates of a new kind, and their relation to the subject of action as a new mediation along the return path to the self” (169).

But what is the difference between the terms *ethical* and *moral* for Ricoeur? He wants to distinguish between what is “considered to be good” and what “imposes itself as obligatory.” “It is, therefore, by convention that I reserve the term ‘ethics’ for the *aim* of an accomplished life and the term ‘morality’ for the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and an effect of constraint (later I shall say what links these two features together)” (170). From a historical point of view, we see the ethical concern of Aristotle in the *teleological* interest in the “good life.” The moral point of view is found in Kant’s *deontology*. In this chapter, Ricoeur seeks to establish the primacy of ethics over morals, the necessity for the goal of ethics to pass through the screen of norms (moral rules), and the recourse of such norms to the ethical goal. “In other words, according to the working hypothesis I am proposing, morality is held to constitute only a limited, although legitimate and even indispensable, actualization of the ethical aim, and ethics in this sense would then encompass morality” (170). But what is the relation between these terms and selfhood? Ricoeur answers, “To the

ethical aim will correspond what we shall henceforth call self-esteem, and to the deontological moment, self-respect" (171).

Ricoeur argues at length for the primacy of ethics over morals. But what is the goal of ethics (*visée éthique*)? "Let us define 'ethical intention' as *aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions*" (172). The "good life" is the aim of ethics. If we distinguish between practices and a "life-plan," the former are lower on the scale than the latter and their integration is found in the narrative unity of a life. In this discussion, which is well centered on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, there is a hierarchy in which practices, including professions, games, and art, are subordinate to the idea of "the good life." The linkage with self-esteem is the following: Our practices are defined by constructive rules and standards of excellence. In appreciating the excellence or success in our actions, we begin to appreciate ourselves as the author of those actions. Ricoeur points out that "life" in the expression "good life" does not have a biological meaning as much as a social meaning that was familiar to the Greeks. They spoke of a "life of pleasure," a "political life," a "contemplative life," etc. For Ricoeur, "life" has this sense as well as the notion of the rootedness of our lives in the biological sense of "to live." Finally, it is in the narrative unity of a life that the estimations applied to particular actions and the evaluation of persons themselves are joined together. In fact, Ricoeur claims that there is a sort of "hermeneutical circle" between our lives as a whole under the idea of the "good life," and our most important particular choices, such as career, spouse, leisure pursuits, etc. But this is not the only hermeneutical connection. "For the agent, interpreting the text of an action is interpreting himself or herself" (179). A bit further, Ricoeur says, "On the ethical plane, self-interpretation becomes self-esteem. In return, self-esteem follows the fate of interpretation" (179).

If the "good life" is the goal of ethics, it is lived with and for others. This becomes the basis for the second part of Ricoeur's reflection on ethics. He designates this concern for the other as *solicitude*. It is not something added to self-esteem from the outside but is an internal, dialogical dimension "such that self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected upon one without the other" (180). Self-esteem is not founded on accomplishment, but on capacity; the ability to judge (to esteem) is based on the ability to act (*le pouvoir-faire*). "The question is then whether the mediation of the other is not required along the route from capacity to realization" (181). The importance of this question is found in certain political theories in which individuals have rights independently of any social connections and the role of the state is relegated to protecting antecedently existing rights. According to Ricoeur, this view rests on a misunderstanding of the role of the other as

a mediator between capacity and effectuation. For Aristotle, friendship (*aminé*) plays a mediating role between the goal of the good life found in self-esteem, a solitary virtue, and justice, a political virtue. Friendship introduces the notion of “mutuality.” “Friendship, however, is not justice, to the extent that the latter governs institutions and the former interpersonal relations” (184). Equality is presupposed in our relations of friendship, while it is a goal to be achieved in our political institutions. Ricoeur thus takes from Aristotle “the ethics of reciprocity, of sharing, of living together” (187). Self-esteem is the reflexive moment of the goal of the good life, while the relation between the self and the other is characterized by solicitude, which is based on the exchange of giving and receiving. For Ricoeur, this shows the primacy of the ethical goal of the good life, including solicitude for the other, over the moral claims of obligation. As he says, friendship involves reciprocity, while the moral injunction is asymmetrical.

The inverse of the moral injunction is *suffering*. “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” (190). Ricoeur sees this as laid out on a spectrum ranging from the injunction coming from the other (“Thou shalt not...”) to the opposite end, where sympathy for the suffering other comes from the self. Friendship lies in the middle of this spectrum where the self and the other share an equality and a common wish to live together. The mutuality of friendship means that the roles are reversible, while the persons who play these roles are not substitutable. Ricoeur puts it this way: “The agents and patients of an action are caught up in relationships of exchange which, like language, join together the reversibility of roles and nonsubstitutability of persons. Solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is *irreplaceable* in our affection and our esteem” (193).

The ideas of irreplaceability and nonsubstitutability lead to the notion of *similitude*, as the result of the exchange between self-esteem and solicitude for the other. This means that, finally, I understand the other as a self, an agent and author of his actions, who has reasons for his actions, who can rank his preferences, etc. All of our ethical feelings, says Ricoeur, refer back to this phenomenology of the “you, too” and “like me.” “Fundamentally equivalent are the esteem of the *other as oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*” (194).

But Ricoeur wants to extend his analysis of the ethical goal of the good life from interpersonal relations to institutions, and he extends the virtue of solicitude for the other to the virtue of justice. By “institution,” Ricoeur means those structures of *living together* found in historical communities,

structures that extend beyond simple interpersonal relations but are bound up with the latter through their function of the distribution of roles, responsibilities, privileges, goods, and rewards. Ricoeur asks if justice is found on the level of ethics and teleology or, as Rawls and Kant would have it, only on the deontological level of morals. Ricoeur's own answer is that justice has two sides: the side of the *good* which is an extension of interpersonal relations, and the *legal* side where it implies a judicial system of coherent laws. He is concerned in this chapter with the first sense or aspect of justice.

But what is the relation between the institution, as an abstract organization of distribution of goods and burdens, and the individuals who make up social institutions? Ricoeur says, "The conception of society as a system of distribution transcends the terms of the opposition. The institution as regulation of the distribution of roles, hence as a system, is indeed something more and something other than the individuals who play those roles. . . . An institution considered as a rule of distribution exists only to the extent that individuals take part in it" (200). Distributive justice is not a matter of mere arithmetical equality among individuals but a *proportional* equality which relates merit to each individual. In conclusion, Ricoeur says that justice adds equality to solicitude and its range is all humanity rather than interpersonal relations. This is why he adds "in just institutions" to our ethical pursuit of the "good life" lived "with and for others."

Let us sum up the argument so far. At the beginning, Ricoeur announced three theses that he would treat in successive studies: "(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm, and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice" (170). We have just dealt with the primacy of ethics over morality. Let us now consider how Ricoeur deals with the question of the relation between the goal of ethics (teleology) and moral norms (deontology).

The criterion of universality is the hallmark of Kant's formalism. It is anticipated in Aristotle by the "golden mean," which characterizes all virtues. Aristotle's "good life" is approached by Kant's "good will, good without reservation." But the teleological character of "good" is lost when Kant adds "without reservation." What is more, for Kant it is the *will* that receives the predicate "good." As Ricoeur says, "the will, however, takes the place in Kantian morality that rational desire occupied in Aristotelian ethics; desire is recognized through its aim, will through its relation to law" (206).

Universality is the "royal road" to Kant's view of moral obligation. It is closely linked with "restraint" and through the latter with the idea of *duty*. Kant's genius was to place in the same person the power to command and

the power to obey or disobey the command. The moral law is “autonomous,” a universal law of reason that the autonomous subject gives himself. At the same time, his autonomy means that he can choose to obey or disobey this law. But this freedom, this autonomy, is affected by the propensity to evil. What effect does this propensity have on the status of the autonomy of the will? Ricoeur says that there are two important ideas here: (1) that evil, taken back to the origin of the maxims, should be thought of in terms of a real opposition; (2) that in radicalizing evil, Kant radicalized the idea of free will. Ricoeur concludes, “Because there is evil, the aim of the ‘good life’ has to be submitted to the test of moral obligation” (218).

Ricoeur has already shown how solicitude for the other was implicitly contained in the idea of self-esteem; he wants to show now that respect for others is implicit in the idea of obligation, rule, or law. His argument is that respect owed to others is tied to solicitude on the level of ethics; and, that on the level of morality, it is in the same relation to autonomy that solicitude is to the goal of the good life on the ethical level. In fact, Ricoeur claims that this relation will help us see the relation between the first formulation of the categorical imperative, in terms of obligation, and the second formulation, which tells us to respect others as ends-in-themselves. He has previously distinguished between the *power to act*, which is the capacity for an agent to be the author of his actions, and *power-in-common*, which is the capacity of the members of a community to will to live together. This latter capacity is to be distinguished from the relation of domination, which is the source of political violence. Political violence can take many forms, from constraint to torture and even to murder. In torture, it is the self-respect of the victim that is broken. Ricoeur says that all of these figures of evil are answered by the “no” of morality. This is why so many moral norms are expressed in the negative, “Thou shalt not....”

The second part of his argument concerning respect for others is to show its relation to solicitude. The Golden Rule, he says, is in an intermediary role between solicitude and Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative in terms of respect for persons. He asks, “What, indeed, is it to treat humanity in my person and in the person of others as a *means*, if not to exert *upon* the will of others that power which, full of restraint in the case of influence, is unleashed in all forms that violence takes, culminating in torture?” (225).

Ricoeur has claimed that justice is a virtue principally of institutions. He now takes justice, in the sense of distributive justice, as the key intersection between the goal of ethics and the deontological point of view. But the very term *justice* is ambiguous. One sense emphasizes separation, in the sense of

what belongs to me does not belong to you. Justice is to determine what should belong to whom. Another sense, however, puts the emphasis on cooperation and the community of interests. Related to these two senses of justice is the ambiguity between two senses of "equal": as in arithmetic, where all parts are exactly the same, and as proportional, where the parts to be distributed are proportional to some other measure such as merit, social standing, or power.

There have been many attempts to establish the principles of justice, especially on the social level. One of the most enduring is the "social contract," where justice is founded on a contract between individuals who, by this contract, create a community and establish the rules for the distribution of goods and obligations, rights and privileges, duties, and burdens. Ricoeur sees an analogy between the role of this contract on the level of institutions and the place of autonomy on the level of morality: "a freedom sufficiently disengaged from the gangue of inclinations provides a law for itself which is the very law of freedom" (229). At this point, Ricoeur turns to a long analysis of Rawls's attempt to establish the principles of justice through a theoretical and hypothetical gambit known as the "veil of ignorance." Rawls asks, what would be the principles of justice in a community if the members of the community could write those rules *not knowing what their actual lot would be*? His idea of justice as "fairness" leads, through this thought-experiment, to two general principles of justice: First, equal freedoms of citizenship, such as freedom of expression, etc.; second, a principle of difference that tells us under which circumstances inequalities are acceptable.

Ricoeur claims that what Rawls has done is to formalize a sense of justice that is already presupposed. Rawls himself agrees that he is not establishing a completely independent meaning of justice, that he relies on our precomprehension of what is just and unjust. What he does claim is that there is a "reflected equilibrium" between his theory and our "considered convictions." We do indeed have certain convictions about justice and injustice (e.g., religious intolerance, torture) that seem certain, while others such as the distribution of wealth or power seem less sure. Rawls's arguments are of the same type as those of Kant when he tries to prove the necessity for universalization of maxims. "The whole system of argumentation can therefore be seen as a progressive rationalization of these convictions, when they are affected by prejudices or weakened by doubts. This rationalization consists in a complex process of mutual adjustment between conviction and theory" (237).

At the end of his analysis of Rawls's attempt to establish a contractual basis for institutional justice, Ricoeur says that we can draw two conclusions:

(1) We can see how the attempt to give a purely procedural foundation for institutional justice takes to the maximum the ambition to free the deontological point of view of morality from the teleological perspective of ethics. (2) Yet we also see that this attempt clearly shows the limits of this ambition. In short, formalism has tried to banish inclinations from the sphere of rational will, the treatment of others as means in the interpersonal realm, and utilitarianism in the sphere of institutions. Instead, the deontological point of view insists on “autonomy in the first sphere, the person as end in himself in the second, and the social contract in the third” (238). The social contract plays the same role on the level of institutions as autonomy on the level of morality. But the social contract is a *fiction*, a “founding fiction, to be sure, but a fiction nonetheless” (239). Ricoeur criticizes social contract theories on the grounds that they are plausible only because we have forgotten our fundamental desire to live together. The foundation of deontology, in other words is, Ricoeur claims, found in “*the desire to live well with and for others in just institutions*” (239).

The third part of Ricoeur’s reflections on ethics is to show how a morality of deontological norms must return to the fundamental insight of a teleological ethics in order to resolve the aporias arising in the application of the universal norms to difficult practical cases. His guiding thesis is that an ethics of obligation “produces conflictual situations where practical wisdom has no recourse, in our opinion, other than to return to the initial intuition of ethics, in the framework of moral judgment in situation; that is, to the vision or aim of the ‘good life’ with and for others in just institutions” (240). There are two possible misinterpretations to avoid here: First, we do not need to resort to any kind of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, or superior moment, which surpasses both the morality of obligation and the ethical goal of the good life. Second, the return from a morality of obligation to ethics should not be taken as a rejection of the morality of obligation. What Ricoeur is looking for, in other words, is a “practical wisdom” that allows us to decide in difficult particular cases without falling into a kind of arbitrary situationism.

At this point, Ricoeur resorts to a very unusual variation of style, reminiscent of Nietzsche, by inserting a nine-page *Interlude* called “Tragic Action.” It is dedicated to his late son, Olivier, who died at the age of thirty-nine, only days after Ricoeur finished the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh. Ricoeur takes as a case of “the tragedy of action,” the moral conflict at the heart of Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Antigone follows the “unwritten law” to bury her brother, Polynices, who was killed in an uprising against Thebes. She disobeys the direct order of the king, Creon, who has commanded that Polynices not be buried because he was a traitor to the city. For Creon, the moral rules are