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# PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS OF THE SUBJECT, PRACTICAL ONTOLOGY AND ACTION

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## ABSTRACT

The core question of Ricoeur's theory of action is "who?": Who speaks? Who acts? Who narrates? Who is the moral subject of imputation or responsible subject of action? The reiteration of the query "who?" compensates for this dispersion of the inquiry. Here, Ricoeur explores the phenomenological examination on the categories of the utterance and the speaker. This hermeneutic tenor was assured by the dialectic of construal and elucidation. This is ensued by the capability to act and the agent, then those of narration and the narrator and finally that of the imputation of acts and that of a subject responsible for its acts.

To speak, do, reckoned, and impute are the first analogon of the chains of figures of acting. The philosophy of action is an exploration of ways of speaking of oneself as an agent; ways of designating oneself verbally as the author of one's own acts.

For Ricoeur, narration is speaking par excellence, discourse and text... Moral imputation is a special kind of ascription; an attribution merging imputed action to the accountable agent. Reckoning is doing through the coherence of a narrative cohesion of life. Reckoning could be designated as the first analogon also. Ricoeur attempted to re-appropriate the Aristotelian context of being as act and possibility.

Hence, the "who?" question becomes the model through which Ricoeur unfolds gradually his perspective concerning the self or human identity. The human self is not an immediate self-possession. The non-transparent self or self-construing becomes available only piecemeal through arduous endeavor of mediation.

The explanatory mediation of the self is deduced from the theory of action in its diverse fields of application. Ricoeur's accentuation on the "what?" of action by way of the "why?" is conceived as the indispensable detour or mediation to attain the identity of the agent (the "who?").

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, ontology, action, language, testimony.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Paul Ricoeur<sup>1</sup> is one of the most original and provocative philosophers today. He is a philosopher of conversation and mediation. He is in dialogue with every discourse of our contemporary culture. Paul Ricoeur is located today among Philosophers, Theologians, Biblical Scholars, Scientists, Psychologists, Anthropologist, Linguists etc.



Paul Ricoeur was born in Valence, France on February 27, 1913. He was educated in the 1930's in a general climate of existential and phenomenological tradition. He graduated with the *Agregation de Philosophie* from the Sorbonne in 1935 and participated in seminars conducted by Marcel. In the Second World War, from 1940 to 1945, he was interned in a German POW camp. His access to German Philosophy eventually persuaded him to review the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Schleiermacher, Hegel and Jaspers. In 1950, his authoritative commentary and translation of Husserl's "*Ideen*" established him as a leading specialist on phenomenology. His work possesses relevance throughout the human sciences: epistemology, the problem of the subject, the philosophy of language and in all spheres of interpretation theory. He has also original contributions in hermeneutics, historiography, literary criticism, phenomenology, political theory, semiotics, structuralism and theology.

In 1948 to 1957, he was awarded the Chair of Philosophy at Strassbourg. In 1956 to 1967, he occupied the chair of Metaphysics in Sorbonne. Then, he joined the faculty of the University of Paris and became Dean from 1969 to 1980. He continues as *John Nuveen Professor Emeritus* at the Divinity School, University of Chicago. He is a member of the Committee on social thought in Chicago and is an Associate Fellow at the University of Warwick.

*Paul Ricoeur's Honorary Degrees* are as follows:

Basel, 1960; University of Chicago, 1967; Hijmegen (The Netherlands), 1968; Universite de Montreal (Canada), 1968; De Paul University (Chicago) 1971; Ohio State University, 1972; Zurich, 1973; Boston College, 1975; Universite de Louvain, 1976; Toronto, 1977; Northwestern (Illinois), 1977; West Seabury Seminary (Fl), 1977; Duquesne (Pittsburgh), 1978; Copenhagen, 1979; Columbia (NY), 1981; Tilburg (The Netherlands), 1982; Buenos Aires 1983; Ottawa, 1983; The New School for Social Research (NY), 1986; Neuchatel (Switzerland), 1986; Goettingen (Germany), 1987; Westminster College, 1987; Bologna (Italy), 1989; McGill (Canada), 1992; Universidad Complutense, Madrid (Spain), 1993; University of Stellenbosch (South Africa), 1993; Universite di Terrano (Italy), 1993; University Mohyla, Kier (Ukraine), 1993.<sup>2</sup>

*Paul Ricoeur's Awards* are as follows:

The Gordon Laing Prize (University of Chicago Press), 1985; Hegel Preis Stuttgart (Germany), 1985; Prix Nietzsche, Palermo (Italy), 1987; Prix Dante, Florence, 1988; Karl Jaspers Preis, Heidelberg (Germany), 1989; Leopold Lucas Preis, Tübingen (Germany), 1990; Grand Prix de L'Academie Francais pour La Philosophie, 1991; Premium Caroli (Charles IV), Prague, 1. Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 1986.<sup>3</sup>

*Paul Ricoeur belong to the following Learned Societies:*

Academie Royale des Lettres, des Sciences, et des Arts de Belgique; American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Boston); Academie Royale Neerlandaise des Sciences; Academie des Sciences de Finlande; Academie Bresillienne de Philosophie; Academie Nationale Dei Lincei (Italie); Academy of Letters and Sciences of Austria.

## 2. RICOEUR'S PRACTICAL ONTOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS OF ACTION

The starting point in the study of Paul Ricoeur is somewhat tentatively to construct an ontological framework of the self which is not metaphysical, that is, not substantive. The ontology of the self, which can encompass the amplitude of the question "who?" is constructed by threefold dialectic. The first dialectic is a reflexive mediation on the self or subject. The self is mediated by dialectic of explanation and understanding. The self is only mediately available. He insists that access to the self demands an exertion of endeavor through the analytical interpretations of the self, which is extrapolated from ordinary language philosophy, pragmatics and narratology. There is no interpretation of the self without employing explanatory procedures. It is both epistemological and ontological. The self is not intuitively established through introspection, but only via the long detour of traces of the self.

***The second dialectic involves the identity of the self.*** The conceptual framework of Ricoeur's analysis rests on the fundamental distinction on the identity of the self between identity as sameness (Latin "*idem*"; English "self"; German "*Gleichheit*"; French "*memete*") and identity as selfhood (Latin "*ipse*"; English "self"; French "*ipseite*"; German "*selbsheit*"). Selfhood is not sameness. This concerns more on the constitutive criteria, not specifically of personhood, but of "sameness." The emphasis of the term ***Idem-Identity*** is on trans-temporal sameness while the term ***Iipse-Identity*** (himself or itself) is on "selfhood" or "nature."



The operation of this dialectic can best be demonstrated in the narrative. Narrative unfigures human actions. But they also configure temporality. In the narrative development of the personages, narratives account for human existence in a temporal mode. Human identity is exhibited to be a temporal process. Ricoeur deduces a theory of the interior dialectic of the human self from what he calls “the development of a narrative in characterology.” In the narrative there is an interaction of a self that, on the one hand, maintains an identity of constancy (a self that remains the same, hence “sameness”), with a self that, on the other hand, projects itself into the future and commits itself to change and transformation (a self that is not yet, but becomes in the pondered word, which Ricoeur calls “*ipseity*.” The human self is constituted precisely in this dialectic of sameness and *ipseity*. The self unfolds in a process. On one aspect, of actions that have “sedimented” themselves in what Ricoeur calls the human character. Here, the self gives an account of a consistency, constancy, and a substantive identity, which upholds as something that can be identified again and again as being the same. On the other aspect, one also assumes ethical and moral actions, which are innovative, or initiatives. The human person is not only an abiding self. At the level of *ipseity* the self’s authenticity comprises in preserving to sojourn truthfully to the self by preserving and valuing a pondered word. The self gives impetus and is resolved by actions, which are *commissives or promissives*. In projected actions the identity is not substantive, but as brittle as the premise given to another. It is fragile, weak and is easily snapped. Narratives configure this dialectic through the concordance-discordance plot. The dialectical identity of the self of the narrative personage is exhibited and represented at the instance of the “change of fortune.” This is the moment in which the sedimented self stands “tête-à-tête” and “vis-à-vis” with a new beneficial and profitable circumstances or a confrontation of a turning point. In the capability and competence of the personage to yield with a new initiative, committing him or her to new possibilities, the self is presented as being more than flexible constancy. It becomes other without forfeiting personal identity, that is, it becomes itself without in some aspect remaining the same. Hence, Ricoeur identifies the self as dialectic of “sameness” and “*ipseity*.” Such dialectic pits “sameness” for it can be recognized again and again, visibly as something substantive, as an entity with “*ipseity*” which is projective and grounded on the “pondered work.”

The third dialectic comprising human identity or the self is between the self and the other. This dialectic is by far the most encompassing. It readdresses the perennial philosophical theme of the same and the other. Here, the adverse and antagonistic dialectic of the self is not the temporal sameness or constancy of the human character, but the other in its several external appearances and pretenses. The other, or alterity, to which Ricoeur alludes, is the diverse experience of passivity, intertwined in multiple ways in human action. This allusion to the other and passivity persuades and conveys into play a trait of action that assumes a role in the dialectical relationship with the other. The dimension of action is once again best explored and exemplified in narratives. Narrative action encloses not only interactions or actions in common but also encompasses passions, that is, action which are undergone or suffered. Every power to act is simultaneously a power “over.” This power over possessions, baggage’s, conditions and circumstances or, in political communities, over people is grafted upon the initial dissymmetry between that which one does and that which is doing to the other. Whether this power “over” assumes the form of gentle urging, persuading and convincing or the barbarity of torture, it is clear that every power to act, even the power to act “with,” must assume the account of the power “over.” Human agency influences the other. Every action has its agents and its patients.

The narrative action expands the personal identity of the agent beyond the inner dialectic of the self. Narrative action presents that the human identity or the self does not compose even more efficaciously the eclipse of the other in the narrative. Action is, interaction, and simultaneously undertakes action. Action and passion, that is, actions undertaken or suffered are not disengageable, for every action is at the same time an efficacy “over.” Human agency influences the other, so that the efficacy to act is “grafted upon the initial dissymmetry between that which one does and that which is done to the other. Ricoeur comments, “Every action has its agents and its patients.” An adjunct of the dimension of the other with its passive constitution for both self and the other with its pervasive constitution for both self and the other must be observed in the twofold ontology of the self delineated above. Ricoeur’s scheme of this passivity is a threefold experience: the experience of one’s body which mediates between the self and the world, the experience of the intersubjective other for which I experience an ethical accountability, and the experience of conscience as an engagement of our evocation of our debt to the dead.



### 3. RICOEUR'S ONTOLOGICAL, MORAL AND ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE OTHER

#### 3.1 The Threefold experience of passivity or alterity

##### 3.1.1. The First other of the self: the experience of one's body

In every engagement of the other this action assumes a role. This has repercussions both ethically and ontologically. It is inconceivable of agency as a power without considering the other. Ontologically, Ricoeur collates to persuade and convey the self and the other together into the fragile structure of a self, which is neither a ground nor an illusion. This fragile ontological structure of the self is rooted upon a threefold experience of passivity or alterity. The passivity at the nucleus of otherness is manifested in three ways: First, the first other of the self is located in the experience of one's body. The body is "my body" or "own most body," that is, a non-objectifiable thing, which mediates between the self and the world. One's own body is puzzling. Persons are also bodies. Every person is for himself his own body. This enigmatic body participates both in the self and in the world. Persons are bodies but bodies also belong to the domain of things. In this context selfhood involves an alterity in the very fact that the self is both flesh (for me) and a body (for others). The "flesh is the location of the experience of passivity. Selfhood implies a "lived" otherness, of which the flesh is the ground. Then, we discover the passivity implied by the engagement of the self to the alien, in the precise meaning of the other (than) self. Lastly, the component of the most profound concealed passivity, that of the engagement of the self to itself, which is conscience or "*gewissen*." All of the above manifestations represent the intricacy and the density of the standpoint of otherness. The term "I" or self is a being capable of asserting "I." He alludes to the term person. He intends to disclose essential characteristics. "I" also alludes no to his own individual self but to all 'I's all selves, all persons as such.

The fundamental dimensions which constitute the person integrally participate in the human person's imaging God. The human person is an *historical subject* in corporeality who stands in relation to the world, to other persons, to social structures, and to God, and who is unique originality within the context of being fundamentally equal with all other persons. To be a human person is to be essentially directed toward others. We are communal at our core. Personal existence is not an "I" in isolation, but always as "I" and "You" in relationship. As relational, social beings, human persons need to live in social groups with expedient structures, which sustain human dignity and the common good. The relational dimension of being human reaches its peak in our engagement to God in faith, hope, and love. Hence, each person has eternal significance and worth. To speak of the human person as a subject is to say that the person is in charge of his or her conscience, in freedom, and with knowledge. The human person as an embodied subject entails a more unitive articulation than the Greek version of being human "body and soul." *Embodied subject* implies that our bodies are not accessories. Our bodies are symbols of interiority; bodily articulations of love in an engagement ought to be proportionate to the nature of the commitment between persons. Our body is subject to the laws of the material world but we can restrict the potential of the biological order. We can also accede our genetic endowment, which sets the baseline for certain possibilities and limitations to our physical, intellectual, and psychological capacities. Being part of the material world demands moral agents to consider the negative consequences necessarily entailed in the affirmative discoveries of technology and to weigh their moral importance.

As *embodied spirit* is necessarily an *historical subject*. To be an historical subject means to be relentlessly temporal. Paul Ricoeur has capitalized in this characteristic of the person by employing metaphors of life as a journey and of each person as a pilgrim made to rest only in God. Narrativity cogitates on the temporality of human existence when it talks about the "*narrative quality of experience*." In the personal historical process, one's accountability is proportionate to his or her capacity at each stage of development. As *historical subjects*, reflection must be as dynamic as the human life. We acquire new potentials and elaborate new values; discover appropriate ways to integrate them into our uniquely individual but commonly shared lives. The dimensions of being human are sufficiently diverse that we must also take into account the originality, uniqueness and fundamental equality among human persons.

##### 3.1.2. The Second other or passivity: the inter- subjective other

The second category of the experience of the passivity of the self is in the "otherness" of other people. Such other or passivity is the inter-subjective other. In the dialectic of the self as sameness and *ipseity*. Ricoeur has discovered a



context of uneven equilibrium of disposition in Husserl and Levinas's diametrically adverse and antagonistic approximations to the other. The other as another "flesh," another "I" (Husserl), or as a radical exteriority (Levinas) is transformed in Ricoeur's philosophy into a self of reciprocity or dialogue. I know the other to be another self into a self of reciprocity or dialogue. I know the other to be another self in the ethical response that the other enjoins on me. In this sense the self is responsibility to and by the other.

Here, Ricoeur brings in the standpoint of a dialectic between self-esteem and friendship. He envisions that justice is generally regarded in the meaning of distributive justice in exchanges, but it could be reavered in terms of a dialectic of action and affection. In the dialectic between the self and the other, it is the face of the other that is evident to me and utters, "Thou shall not kill." It is the other who composes me as accountable, that is, composition of capability and efficacy to respond. In this sense, the word of the other is to be located at the derivability of my acts: self-designation, which imputes moral accountability for my acts to me, has its point of reference outside of the self. Ricoeur's anticipatory question: If another were not counting on me, would I be capable of keeping my word, and of maintaining myself?

The self comprises a passive constitution. Ricoeur's scheme of this passivity is a threefold experience: the experience of one's body which mediates between the self and the world; the experience of the intersubjective other for whom I experience an ethical accountability; and the experience of conscience as an engagement of our evocation of our debt to the dead.

### 3.1.3. *The Third other: the other within (Gewissen)*

The third other is the other within, a passivity unconcealed in the relation of indebtedness to oneself recognize as conscience "*Gewissen*." Among the most suspect perspective are those of the "bad" or "good" *gewissen*. Ricoeur's thesis: "*attestation of selfhood is inextricably linked from an exercise of suspicion.*" Hence, *gewissen* proffers a perfect opportunity for his argumentation. Overcoming the contrast between "good" or "bad" *gewissen* is only the first step to deal with phenomena of injunction and debt, which are ingrained, in the viewpoint of *gewissen*. To deliver the context of *gewissen* from Nietzsche's assault, Ricoeur suggested three disputations to overcome: First, the *gewissen* is the location where illusions about oneself are merged with the truth of attestation. After an expanded argumentations of Nietzsche exposition of the context of *gewissen*, Ricoeur depicts the efficacy of Nietzsche's method of suspicion that *all gewissen* is "*bad gewissen*" and revert to a sort of non-moral suspicion which is the other face of attestation. Second, What happens when we "de-moralize the *gewissen*?" "How do we keep from falling back into the sense of "good" and "bad" *gewissen*?" An averation concerning the metaphor of the context places us on the right route. Ricoeur stated succinctly that it is not because the realm of morality has been disengaged from the triad ethics-morality-conviction. The first incorporation is a call to live well with and for others in just institutions. Violence can plunder all of our interpersonal associations that we have the law or interdiction "thou shall not kill." Violence, for Ricoeur, causes a short circuit and the voice of *Gewissen* becomes the verdict of a court. We must take the inverse route, from interdiction-verdict to the injunction to live well. Third, the otherness of the *gewissen* is located in the Freudian super ego, the interiorization of the ancestral voice. The otherness in the core of the conscience is a sort of the passivity of the self. In the engagement to the world the body is not the radically other, because it is "my" body, a personal body, and not as an object.

Even Levinas's radically exterior other, the stranger who enjoins me not to kill, nestle with the self as accountability, that is, as a capability, even an exigency, to reply. The same applies to the "voice" of *gewissen*. In all these instances the self stands in dialectic engagement to the other, which an ontology of the self will discover to ponder in fragile balance. The query is, if there is a trace of the other in *gewissen*, is that other ancestral, or God, or a devoid location? Ricoeur's ontological conclusive discretion: With this aporia of the other, philosophical discourse comes to an end. Actually it does not end. It is simply the threshold. It is time to respond, and advance our philosophical construal of "Oneself as Another."

## 3.2 Selfhood as alterity

The vortex of discussion is "self" (*soi*), which designates more what we view in Plato's "care for the self" (*allos or heteros autos*). Ricoeur, envisions that alterity depicts the following primal features: First, the other stands in variance to the self, not to the same; the other is "another self, not simply another entity." Second, the ontological meta-category of alterity, located on the Platonic aspect of "major sorts" without lessening itself to a simple copy of heteron, and



discover its phenomenological counterpart in passivity. This tells us that we experience and meet alterity in the type of suffering and endurance that either restricts or precedes our initiative. [Husserl, 1,13-14, 37, 128. 346, 368]

Third, like passivity, alterity configures three different types as the alterity of one's own life, of the other and of *Gewissen*. An Aristotelian sort of reinvigoration is conspicuous in Ricoeur's orientation towards polysemic, which exhibits a plurality of uttering without viewing for a sole architectonic sense. The unconcealed type of the dialectic that consequences can be designated as a mediation without a middle. The middle is not subdued, but simply neglected. The alterity of the other is a vortex issue in three of Ricoeur's argumentations: in his study of ethics (7<sup>th</sup> study), moral (8<sup>th</sup> study) and ontology (10<sup>th</sup> study). The intention of his ethical project, which constitutes an Aristotelian structure, is to intend for the "good life," with and for the other, with in "just institutions."

In this sense self-valuation and advancement as well as self-love, without which the good life is no longer my life, incorporate both with friendship in which I corroborate my life with certain others, and with justice, which is institutionally extrapolated from the presupposition of a third. The same threefold division is discovered in a Kantian morality. Commencing from self-respect, which is submissive to the moral law, a regard for others unfolds that is bearable by theory of justice that constrains me as well as all subjects. In both realms, we are justified in uttering of an "exploration for equipoise through inequality."

Lastly, Ricoeur uncovers in the end the ontological implications of phenomenological hermeneutic studies of the self, the otherness of the other locates itself between the alterity of one's own body and the alterity of one's *Gewissen*, such as the triad of self-other-universality is left preserved throughout. This perspective bridges the Aristotelian instances of self-love, friendship and rectifying justice both with the Kantian motives of suspect and unconditional duty and with the Heideggerian concoctions of concerns and the summons of *Dasein*. It discovers its critical counterpart in all attempts which intends to deduce either alterity from selfhood or selfhood from alterity, and which thus vex the equilibrium between acting and suffering and between giving and receiving. This entails that Ricoeur's critique guides itself from one angle contrary to Husserl's egological approximation and from another angle contrary to Levinas's approximation, which we can designate as heterological since it arises not from the ego, but in inverse sense from the other.

Ricoeur structured a context of the self. Action can indeed be regarded in two planes: as past and therefore, noticeable action, which engenders actions to become like entities, likened to events, and as future, not yet existing, speculated actions which are not like entities. Who or what is this self mediated of human action? The self, for Ricoeur, is not synonymous with the "I." Ricoeur construed *the self as a mediated self*. This dialectic of explication and construing is perfected by dialectic, on one plane, of the self as *idem* (human identity as being the same) and the self as *ipse* (human identity as not-yet, as *ipseity* or the "pondered word"), and, on another plane, of the self and the other. The dialectic of sameness and *ipseity* enables Ricoeur to represent the same division of the self-happening in action.

The identity of the self is composed between "*sameness*" (*idem*) and "*ipseity*" (*ipse*). Ricoeur envisages this dialectic through narratives. He construed this dialectic as an imitation of action and the Aristotelian context of generative reality. This is *the main thesis of Ricoeur: Narratives configures temporality not only of actions but also of the characters, the agents inscribed in the text. In the unfolding of the characters, narratives reckon for existence as temporal. Self-Identity is a temporal course. The temporal course attributed in narratives exhibits this self-identity as a dialectic course. In the narrative, there is an interaction of a self that sustains an identity of permanency (a self remains the same, hence "sameness"), with a self that, on another plane, projects itself into the future and commits itself to conversion and transformation (a self that is not yet but becomes an "ipseity").*

The human self comprised this dialectic of sameness and *ipseity*. The self unfolds in a course, on one side, of actions that have "sedimented" themselves in human character. Here the self exhibits a logical coherence and a permanency. The self is evident to have a substantive identity, which bears what can be recognized again and again as being the same. On another plane, the human person is not solely an impenetrable self. He undergoes initiatives and recreates something to occur which encloses itself as strangeness. He projects into the future through promises and commitments. This phase is what Ricoeur calls *ipseity*. The self is determined to remain committed, faithful and truthful to a proffered word. The firmness of the self is a forestalled action. In such projected actions, the identity is not substantive but a course of becoming. In narratives, this identity is constituted by the plot. In peripeteia i.e., change of fortune, the self as *idem* meets expedient occasions or turning point. The character's position to reply with new innovations committing him to new potentialities, the self is exhibited as being more than unflinching steadfastness. It becomes other without defeating personal identity, that is, it becomes itself without in some way remaining the same. The self is a dialectic "of sameness" and "*ipseity*." Such dialectic pits "sameness" for it can be recognized again and again; visibly as something substantive, as an entity with "*ipseity*" which is projective and grounded on the "pondered work."



Concerning the ontology of action, Ricoeur structured a context of the self. Action can indeed be regarded in two planes: as past and therefore, noticeable action, which engenders actions to become like entities, likened to events, and as future, not yet existing, speculated actions which are not like entities. Who or what is this self mediated of human action? The self, for Ricoeur, is not synonymous with the "I." Ricoeur construed *the self as a mediated self*. This dialectic of explication and construing is perfected by dialectic, on one plane, of the self as *idem* (human identity as being the same) and the self as *ipse* (human identity as not-yet, as *ipseity* or the "pondered word"), and, on another plane, of the self and the other. The dialectic of sameness and *ipseity* enables Ricoeur to represent the same division of the self-happening in action.

#### 4. THE ONTOLOGY OF ACTION

Concerning narrative discourse, In Ricoeur's view, all narrative form collaborates in this temporal belonging and cognitioning articulates the experience of our historicity. Ricoeur repudiate Husserl's vortex of an unmediated awareness manifest to itself. Ricoeur accented on the exigency for mediations via language, symbol, culture and history. We always proceed by interpretation. Narrative discourse forces us with a thick interpretive matrix mediating and elucidating. On the realm of procedures, history emerges as inquiry out of the particular use it makes of elucidation. How is this matrix itself to approached and expressed?

The narrative action expands the personal identity of the agent beyond the inner dialectic of the self. Narrative action presents that the human identity or the self does not composed even more efficaciously the eclipse of the other in the narrative. Action is, interaction, and simultaneously undertakes action. Action and passion that is actions undertaken or suffered are not disengageable, for every action is at the same time an efficacy "over." Human agency influences the other. Thus, Every action has its agents and its patients.

Ontology was indispensable to permit practical philosophy to incorporate together into an analogous integration the diverse discourses on human action. What sort of ontology undergirds the parts of discourse that Ricoeur has incorporated concerning human identity? If the ontology of the self is configured out of these diverse discourses on action, traditional metaphysics is out of the question, which is too firmly grounded in Being as substance or presence. It demands a context of being that is, in fragment, non-substantialist. Solely the self as sameness is evidently substantial. Where does Ricoeur discover such ontology?

Amazingly, in an intensified Aristotelian practical philosophy, Ricoeur discovered unresolved aporias that perhaps be exploited for a non-substantialist action of Being. He clarifies this in Aristotle's manner of action and potency as modes of Being. In Aristotle, these notions are left vague, for action is elucidated through potency. Here, Ricoeur argues on the evident temporality of action and passion. Heidegger's rereading of Aristotle achieved in tying temporality to ontology. Heidegger's *selbst* has become an existential, *Dasein*, a temporal unconcealedness to the world. In the self's projection into the future through initiative the self becomes a particular place for harmonious action with the transitions of the world. This is the rationality behind this ontology discovering its grounds not in substantial being but in being as act and potency.

Hence the task of Ricoeur is to discover how is the self of attestation grounded? He incorporated this to a self in an expedient ontology of action and passion. If the self in dialectical existence is not to be shattered into an irremediable devoidness, it must be grounded ontologically. Traditional metaphysics fall short of rooting the self for it is too solidly grounded in being as substance or presence. The self in its dialectical configuration of sameness and *ipseity* is only a fragment, at the phase of sameness, a something. Solely as sameness is the self grounded in substantialist being. As *ipseity* the self is not a something but a projection. Hence Ricoeur opt to a non-substantialist context of Being. In his earliest endeavors he has sustained that Being must not be permitted to be use up repletely by substance and form. Here, he represented being as act, the "living averment, the efficacy of existing and of making exist." Ricoeur justified such ontology.

The core question of Ricoeur's theory of action is "who?": Who speaks? Who acts? Who narrates? Who is the moral subject of imputation or responsible subject of action? The reiteration of the query "who?" compensates for this dispersion of the inquiry. Here, Ricoeur explores the phenomenological examination on the categories of the utterance and the speaker. This hermeneutic tenor was assured by the dialectic of construal and elucidation. This is ensued by the capability to act and the agent, then those of narration and the narrator and finally that of the imputation of acts and that of a subject responsible for its acts.

To speak, do, reckoned, and impute are the first analogon of the chains of figures of acting. The philosophy of action is an exploration of ways of speaking of oneself as an agent and ways of designating oneself verbally as the author of one's own acts. For Ricoeur, narration is speaking par excellence, discourse and text. Moral imputation is a special kind of ascription; an attribution merging imputed action to the accountable agent. Reckoning is doing through the



coherence of a narrative cohesion of life. Reckoning could be designated as the first analogon also. In the analogy of acting, Ricoeur attempted to re-appropriate the Aristotelian context of being as act and possibility. Hence, the “who?” question becomes the model through which Ricoeur unfolds gradually his perspective concerning the self or human identity. The human self is not an immediate self-possession. The non-transparent self or self-construing becomes available only piecemeal through arduous endeavor of mediation. The explanatory mediation of the self is deduced from the theory of action in its diverse fields of application. Ricoeur’s accentuation on the “what?” of action by way of the “why?” is conceived as the indispensable detour or mediation to attain the identity of the agent (the “who?”). The analysis of action through intentionality (action as an event) discloses the path for an indirect or mediated understanding of the agent of action. In the context the precedence in the theory of action is furnished to the agent (the “who?”) is fulfilled only after an exploratory approximation to action. The human self is appropriated through an analysis of the “what?” and the “why?” of action. It is on this context that Ricoeur adopts a practical philosophy whose primary regard is the identity and constitution of the human self. For Ricoeur, there are two universe of discourse: action versus event, and motive versus cause. He characterized this in two major arguments: First, the “what?” of action in its specificity; second, the relation between the “what?” and the “why?” On the first context, the principle of action preserved the particularity of human action. This was actualized in order to oppose action to event. Event simply occurs. Actions are what make things occur. (How do you know that you are doing what you are doing? You know it by doing it. “It is a practical knowledge”). This opposition leads us to the “logical efficacy of an action.” On the second context, the “what?” of action is particularized in a decisive manner by its engaging to the “why?” (To say what an action is, is to say why it is done). The relation simply describes the genesis to explain and explaining more is describing better. Here, there is a transition subsequent to logical series of entanglement, a shift from wanting to trying to do it and, finally, to doing.

#### 4.1. The Language game of action

The most influential manner of founding the reciprocal determination of the context belonging to this network of action is to identify the series of questions asked on the subject of action: Who did or is doing what design, how or what circumstances, with what means and what results? The key context of the network of action is deduced from their meaning from the particular character of the responses given to particular queries, which are themselves cross-signifying: Who? What? Why? How? Where? When?

Albeit he accented so hard on the above intersignification of all these queries, it is expedient to note that the above argumentation’s centrality are focused on three queries: “Who?” “What?” and “Why?” that is, on the notion of action, its purpose and motivations, and the agent. His persistence on the precedence of “who” in the exposition of action, Ricoeur varies from the conventional approximation to action.

Ricoeur’s contention on the present action principle is expedient to the “what-why” correlation at the expense of the agent. Action principle regards actions from the presupposition of “something that happens.” He discovers to correct this imbalance by divulging a logical inconsistency and bias in the present principle.

The bias rests in the incapacity of action principle to allude the compulsion to regard actions as events. (OAA, 59-61). The analytic philosophers of action became vigilant viewing for action among the events in the world. To determine what counts as an action, analytic philosophy explore for an elucidation for the action considered as what occurs. These accentuations on the “what” of action cause almost automatically to regard the “why” of action.

Among events, actions are intentional activities. Ricoeur, however, discards the volitional principle or the principle of the mind that overcomes the problem in action theory in attempting to contrast between actions and occurrences. Meaningful actions, such as promising, greeting someone, or offering are distinctive from involuntary bodily transitions or occurrences for they are such intentional doings. But the very language of “intentional” deceives the articulated preclusion of the agent who makes it all occur.

The philosophy of language exhibits its role as the organon for the principle of action of analytic philosophy. This principle depends on its exposition on the linguistic representations of action, classical exposition of identifying reference and of speech-acts i.e., utterances in which individuals state their actions.

The intricacy of the affinity between the principle of language and the principle of action is explored in the context of philosophical semantics within the context of the pragmatics of language. Hence, it shares to the lucid distinction between *ipse and idem*.

Without the Language Games of Action, we fall short in regarding the course of hierarchization among practices, which permits us to speak and exhibit the narrative integration of life. Hence, we must regard series of actions that engages with the exposition of practical reasoning. For Ricoeur, meaningful action as “that action which an agent





can reckon for – *logon didonai* – to someone else or to himself in such a way that the one who receives this reckoning accedes it as intelligible.” Among events, actions are intentional activities. Meaningful actions, such as promising, greeting someone, or offering are distinctive from involuntary bodily transitions or occurrences for they are such intentional doings. But the very language of “intentional” deceives the articulated preclusion of the agent who makes it all occur. Meaningful means that the account meets the conditions of acceptability established within a community of language and of values. In the context of such performance, accessibility is realized. Language represents the rules and norms of such action. Hence, a coherent language game is governed by rules and norms of such action. The above option is formulated to allude to the compulsion existing between actions and noticeable or foreseeable events. Analytic philosophy accented throughout that actions are not events or occurrences. Actions do not occur. Actions are what make things occur. Meaningful actions are not noticeable and are likely bewildered with an event. The above network of action operates and interacts with one another. Such network comprises the line of demarcation contrasting actions from occurring on events.

**The Language Game of Action** encompasses such context as circumstance, intention, goals, deliberations, voluntary or involuntary motives, passiveness, constraints, intended or unintended results, agent, doing, initiative and so on whereas events occur and are noticeable psychic or physiological transitions. When these contexts of language action are employed, the others are implied as well. For example, intention comprises motive, and together motive and intention encompasses the context of agent.

The most influential manner of founding the reciprocal determination of the context belonging to this network of action is to identify the series of questions asked on the subject of action: Who did or is doing what design, how or what circumstances, with what means and what results? The key context of the network of action is deduced from their meaning from the particular character of the responses given to particular queries, which are themselves cross-signifying: Who? What? Why? How? Where? When?

Albeit he accented so hard on the above intersignification of all these queries, it is expedient to note that the above argumentation’s centrality are focused on three queries: “Who?” “What?” and “Why?” that is, on the notion of action, its purpose and motivations, and the agent. His persistence on the precedence of “who” in the exposition of action, Ricoeur varies from the conventional approximation to action.

## 4.2. The Analytic of action

The thread, which integrates Ricoeur’s exposition, is description, narration and prescription. **Narrative identity** is a transitional and a relational function between the description that predominates in the analytical philosophies of action and the prescription that designates all the determinations of action through a generic terminology grounded on the predicates of the good and obligatory. In the **Description of Action**, actions intended to be done are not events. They are not a something that can be described. Expounding such projected actions is to investigate the motivation, the articulation of intent and the capacity of the agent.

Such intentional actions are not the same interior event but disclose themselves in the doing. They don’t need a descriptive knowledge but a practical knowledge: a knowing-how rather than a knowing-that. Practical knowledge, evidently, poses the problem of veracity not because of abounding description but because of truth, that is, disposition of honesty or attitude. Ricoeur alludes to such attitude towards practical authentic attestation. This is the sphere of “being-authentic” or “being-inauthentic.” The sphere of authenticity or of lies, deceptions, and illusions (OAA, 72). To describe an intentional action is to expound it by articulating the logical reasons for the action. Actions are that which makes things occur. “Intentional actions are some sort of efficient causality: they make things occur. The explicatory form of such intentional action is described as “teleological elucidations” where actions are expounded by the very circumstances that generate them. (OAA, 78). Teleological elucidation describes the goal and expounds such a perspective of which is something is done. The “who” of action is implied but not expressed.

**The Prescription of action** applies simultaneously to agents and to actions. It is to someone that is prescribed to act in concurrence with this or that rule of action. It is determined simultaneously what is allowed and what is not with consideration to actions and what is blameworthy and praiseworthy with consideration to agents. Hence, actions are



governed by rules and agents are held accountable for their actions. Concerning the Narration of Action, the scheme of action is advanced explicitly in the discourse of action. Ricoeur exhibited a conceptual framework within which the contributions of Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy and those of phenomenology can enrich one another. For Ricoeur, it is the circumstances of the human being as “being-in-time” that intensifies all narrative constructs. There always exists a temporal aporia emerging from the discordant experience of our inscription of lived – phenomenological time in cosmological time, an aporia that discovers some resolution in our endeavor to “humanize our experience of time in narrative activity.

### 4.3. The Framework of action

Ricoeur explored the permutation of the framework of action into three different units of praxis: *First, practice; second, life plans; Lastly, the narrative unity of life.* An enlarged principle of action ought to configure such realms of praxis that are classified sequentially. The first unit of praxis is known as “*practices*” wherein the network of supplementary actions is exercised by constitutional rules that are effective in professions, arts and games. These engagements are known as “nesting engagements” for they are not linear; instead they entail the intricacy of the framework of supplementary actions such as the profession of a medical doctor, a lawyer or the basketball game. These actions yield significance by the context of configured rules assevering the given action or shift comprises meaning and consequences solely in the notion of the profession or game. Such rules exercised the meaning of the specific gestures, declaring, for example, that transposing or a homerun hit in baseball comprises a movement or that a promise is in congruence and accepting such accountability to ponder one’s word. Such a broadening of action principle locates action into a social milieu. These practices are meaningful and conceivable solely in a pragmatic social context that is in engagement with others even when they are solitary practices. Simultaneously, the situating of action into these widened intricacies such as professions and games manifests that acting and enjoying can also become acting. You are undertaking action. It appears that action is proximately allied with passion or suffering.

The second unit of praxis is known as *Life plans*. Ricoeur employs this terminology when he alludes to the great extent of practical components. It offers action as proximately allied with passion or suffering. Ricoeur’s centrality on the life plans is a shift between answered ideals wherein we explore to actualize thou as our life present. Ricoeur cited Alisdair Macintyre’s perspective on the third unit of practice known as “*the narrative unity.*” Ricoeur contains a degree of difficulty because of the dissimilarities as well as similarity between a literary and real life. It offers the narrative to be a “non constant mingling of fabulation and realized experience (OAA, 162).” Narrative integration of life is the most extensive notion for a principle of action. For Ricoeur, action is transformed to be usable for exposition and explicatory procedures, not solely in the form of action sentences but also in terms of practices with their roles for construing, as well as in terms of the more illusive life plans, but specifically the intelligibility of narrative compositions. Ricoeur persisted that action is similar to a lingual text i.e., several languages. This engenders action critically investigated on a way that a literary text or narrative is examined and explored. Action is likened to “readability characters,” that is, action is transformed to an event that leaves traces or imprints such as in documents, monuments, process of events, history, institutions, great endeavors of culture, components of rules of behavior, tradition etc.

The above contention is only one side of the sphere of meaningful human action. It does not reckon the projective character of human life, which Ricoeur perceives first, for a narrative integration of a “good life.” So as at the projective impact, action as configuring human life has an ethical coloration and should be examined by ethics, politics, and the resources of practical wisdom. Similar to grammar in language, actions are rule exercised. The incentive of social action is through symbols and values that articulates public features of desirability, and is codified in the cultural network of symbolic mediations that generate models of interactive meanings. Action is transform to communicable and accessible commitment to writing, i.e., a shift into a cultural context. Actions penetrate into the public sphere and become accessible to description (e.g., ethnology) and to practical reason, construed in an adaptation of Aristotelian meaning as pondered desire.



## 5. THE ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT OF THE OTHER

### 5.1. The Epistemological status of action: Aristotle's practical philosophy

This variation between certainty (*episteme*) and *opinion (doxa)* was first articulated by Plato. Paul Ricoeur explored this *epistemic-doxis* status of the knowledge of human action. He expanded a hermeneutical approximation to a principle of action with particular accentuations on its epistemological status. His position safeguards both an ontology of human action and an epistemology.

Ricoeur characterizes ethics by anchoring in an immediate manner with the principle of action and its extension in the principle of narrative. It is in the direct evaluations and estimations applied to action that the teleological standpoint is articulated. The first configuration of the ethical aim is what Aristotle named "living well," or the "good life" or "true life." In Aristotelian ethics, it is a question of the good for us. This relativity does not hinder the reality that the good is not the component in any particular thing. The good is rather that which is deficient in all things. The ethics presupposes this nonsaturable employment of the predicate "good." Aristotle grounded this aim of the "good life" in praxis. Ricoeur then attempted to establish the teleology interior to praxis as the structuring theory for the aim of the "good life." The composition of the "good life" is the nebulous of ideals and dreams of realizations with consideration to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled. In Ricoeur, this is the realm of "time lost" and of "time regained." All the actions of "the good life" are directed and summoned to the idea of a higher finality, which would never cease to be interior to human life. Esteem and solicitude for the other. I construe the other as a self; an agent and author of his actions who possesses logical coherence for his actions and can rank his preferences, etc. All of our ethical feelings alludes back to this phenomenology of the "You, too" and "like me." Ultimately equivalent are the esteem of the other as oneself and the esteem of "oneself as another." Ricoeur extended his exposition of the ethical intention and the good life from interpersonal engagements to institutions. He exemplified the virtue of solicitude for the other to the virtue of justice. Institutions, for Ricoeur, are those structures of living together situated in historical communities and which expands beyond interpersonal engagements but which are tied with the latter through their task of the allotted roles, accountabilities, benefits, goods and merits. Ricoeur aver on justice containing two angles: the angle of the good, which is an expansion of interpersonal engagements, and the legal angle where it constitutes judicial process of coherent laws. A ruled institution of allotment exists only to the length that individuals participate on it. Distributive justice is a proportional equality, which engages merit to each individual. Hence justice appends equality to solicitude and its angles is all humanity rather than interpersonal engagements. In "just institutions," our ethical desire of the "good life" is lived "with and for others."

### 5.2. Moral engagement of the other

In considering **the moral determinations of action**, Ricoeur's starting point is the argument of universality. It is forestalled in Aristotle by the "golden mean" which typifies all virtues. Aristotle's good life is advanced by Kant's "good will. Thus, Desire is identified by means of its intention, Will, through it, constraints to law. The moral law is an "autonomous," a universal law of reason wherein his autonomy entails preferences to obey or disobey this law. This autonomy is influenced by the propensity to evil. Ricoeur proposes that evil, brought back to the derivability of the maxims, should be construed in terms of a real opposition. In radicalizing evil, Kant radicalized the idea of free will. For Ricoeur, because there is evil, the aim of Aristotle's practical philosophy (good life) has to be yielded to the test of moral obligation. Ricoeur insists that first; respect owed to others is tied to solicitude on the level of ethics and on the level of morality. It is implicit in its dialogic structure on the context of obligation, rules or law. Second, the golden rule in an intermediary role between solicitude and Kant's categorical imperative in terms of respect for persons. Third, distributive justice is the key intersection between the goal of ethics and the deontological viewpoint. Here, Ricoeur reiterates the commissive and promissive linguistic philosophy.

What is the distinction between the terms "ethical" and "moral" for Ricoeur? He differentiates between what is "considered to be good" and what "imposes itself as obligatory." By convention, Ricoeur reserve "ethics" for the intention of a fulfilled life and the term "morality for the expression of this intention in norms typified at once by the assertion to universality and a consequence for restriction. From an historical stance, we visualize the ethical in Aristotle's teleological interest in the "good life." The moral stance is located in Kant's deontology.



### 5.3. The Moral norm: solicitude, the golden rule and distributive justice

For Ricoeur, *solicitude for the other* was implicitly inclusive on the vision of self-esteem. *Respect for others* is implicit in the vision of accountability, rule, or law. His asseveration is that respect owed to others is bound to solicitude on the realm of ethics, and that on the realm of morality. It is in the same engagement to autonomy that solicitude is to the intention of the good life in the ethical plane. Ricoeur aver that this engagement will corroborate for us to view the engagement between the first definitive statement of the categorical imperative, in terms of accountability, and the next definitive statement, which enjoins to respect others as ends-in-themselves. Political impetuosity constitutes many forms, from constraint, to excruciating mental or physical pain, and even homicide. In torture, it is the self-respect of the victim, which is, cleaves off. For Ricoeur, morality replied “no” to these figures of evil. This is the reason why many moral norms are articulated in the negative, “thou shalt not...” The second fragment of Ricoeur’s argument concerning respect for others is to *exhibit its engagement to solicitude*. The golden rule is an intermediary role between solicitude and Kant’s second definitive statement of the categorical imperative in terms of respect for persons.

Ricoeur envisages *justice as a primal virtue of institutions*. Here, justice is a distributive justice as the function between the goal of ethics and the deontological vision. The ground of deontology, in short, for Ricoeur, establishes “the desire to live well with and for others in just institutions.” The third fragment of Ricoeur’s cogitations on ethics exhibits how a morality of deontological forms must revert to the ultimate insight of a teleological ethics to resolve the aporias emerging in the application of the universal norms to intricate practical situations. Ricoeur’s thesis highlights an ethics of obligation produces conflictual situations where practical wisdom has no recourse, in own 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 (OAA, 240).

### 5.4. The Commissive and promissive linguistic philosophy

In commissive – promissive linguistic philosophy, it is the “you can reckon on me” of the engagement to do which bounds selfhood with the mutuality for the other established in solicitude. For Ricoeur, not keeping one’s engagement is deceiving both the other’s anticipation and the institution that mediates the reciprocated confidence of uttering subjects.”

Concerning reverence for the law and reverence for persons, Ricoeur sketches the “end of life” and the “genesis of life.” He sketches the accountability to say the truth to dying persons. Such accountability is affected by a disposition of compassion for certain patients who are infirmed to attests to the truth or those for whom the truth would be a death sentence. Ricoeur also commented on the question of *abortion*. The embryo and the human fetus, are they neither things nor persons? For Ricoeur, the embryo’s right to life is a right to a “chance to live.” Hence, it is to solicitude, concerned with the otherness of persons including potential persons that respects allude. On such ground of biological criteria on pre-natal life, Ricoeur believes that the dialectic between sameness and selfhood shuns us away from any simplistic substantialist ontology operative here. Ricoeur believes an “all-or-nothing” perspective, which repudiates phases of development. He avers for a progression of qualitatively diverse rights bound to a progression of biological incipience. Ricoeur suggests “critical solicitude,” where our moral discretions are the consequence of the good counsel of wise and competent human beings. Concerning the rights of the fetus, Ricoeur accedes to the contextualist delineation but repudiates strenuously to an apology of variance. What Ricoeur declines is an ethics of elucidation (describing the requirement for universalization) and not then regard on conditions in constructing the best elucidation, but its attempt at purification. Ricoeur prefers a redefinitive statement of the ethics of elucidation, which anchors and unifies the objection of contextualism with the requirements of universalization. He explores the compulsions explication and convention and replaces a dialectic between explication and conviction. The dialectic between ethics as the teleological intention of “a good life lived with others in just institutions” and a morality of universal maxims discovers its mediation in “practical wisdom.” This wisdom is definitely the application of moral maxims and precepts to specific situations where a



compulsion of convictions is tempered by an ethics of elucidation. In his moral principle, Ricoeur substitutes the “polarity of interpretations” of his hermeneutics with a compulsion of convictions. Concerning the decisive shift in the direction of ethics and morality, it is difficult, however, to differentiate between the promises as a performative of a certain type, capable of being represented in terms of a theory of speech acts, and the moral obligation to keep one’s promises.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Ricoeur proposes an ontology of the lived body (corpse proper), 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 belong to the world order. So, the power of acting is rooted in the phenomenology of the “I can” and the ontology of the “lived body.”

Ricoeur makes a final detour through the ethical and moral determinations of action. In these the three ethical studies the dialectic of the same and the other will discover its expedient philosophical unfolding. This seems to be fragmentary and lacks a unity. The consequence of this fragmentary character is the analytic-reflective structure that imposes arduous detours on hermeneutics. The thematic unity is located in human action. But human action is not the basis at an ultimate foundation of the same set of deduced disciplines. There is an analogical unity because of the polysemy of “action” and because of the “variety and contingency of the queries that activate the analysis leading back to the reflection on the self.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. The Library of Living Philosophers*. V. ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1975.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco, Harper, 1994).

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