

## Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self

Paul Ricoeur

### Abstract

"Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" deals with the connection between the hermeneutics of the self, as constituted in the ethical-anthropological framework of *Oneself as Another* (1990), and Ricoeur's conception of a metaphysics of human agency as developed within this period of his work. It relates to his inquiries in the fields of ontology and metaphysics, from the lectures entitled *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote* (1953-1954) – translated as *Being, Essence and Substance in Plato and Aristotle* (2013) –, up to "De la métaphysique à la morale" (1993) published in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* – translated into English as "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy" (1996) –, via the article "Ontologie" (1972) for *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, the last chapter of *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975), and the first section of the conclusions to the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (1985). Ricoeur aims at determining a specific kind of philosophical discourse as a common ground for the perspectives stemming from a hermeneutic phenomenology and from a more speculative ontological-metaphysical research.

*Keywords:* anthropology; discourse; ethics; hermeneutics of the self; metaphysics; ontology; phenomenology

### Résumé

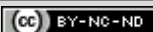
« Discours, métaphysique et herméneutique du soi » revient sur les liens entre l'herméneutique du soi, telle qu'elle est déployée dans le cadre éthique-anthropologique de *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), et la conception ricœurienne d'une métaphysique de l'agir humain, telle que revendiquée au cours de la même période. Synthétisant des recherches dans les champs de l'ontologie et de la métaphysique – depuis les cours de 1953-1954 intitulés *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote* jusqu'à l'article « De la métaphysique à la morale » (1993) publié dans la *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, en passant par l'article « Ontologie » (1972) pour *Encyclopædia Universalis*, la dernière étude de *La métaphore vive* (1975) ou la première section des conclusions de *Temps et récit* (1985) –, Ricoeur vise à déterminer un discours philosophique en tant que sol commun à ces perspectives issues d'une phénoménologie herméneutique et d'une recherche ontologique-métaphysique plus spéculative.

*Mots-clés :* anthropologie ; discours ; éthique ; herméneutique du soi ; métaphysique ; ontologie ; phénoménologie

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 15, No 2 (2024), pp. 193-206

ISSN 2156-7808 (online) 10.5195/errs.2024.679

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# Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self

Paul Ricoeur

## I

I first would like to express my warmest thanks to Professor Baliñas for cordially inviting me to deliver the opening plenary address to this Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle conference.<sup>1</sup>

In titling this lecture “Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics,” I gave myself two assignments. The first one was to consider the question of metaphysics from the side of *discourse*. So my contribution fits the conference section dedicated to *philosophical discourse*. What I asked myself looking at the conference topics was what characterizes philosophical discourse as a *metaphysical* discourse. My second assignment was to demonstrate how metaphysics understood as a form of discourse confers a speculative structure on the hermeneutics of the self to which my own philosophical work is devoted. Hence my twofold title: discourse, metaphysics *and* hermeneutics.

I believed that I could respond to this double inquiry by choosing to focus my analysis on the prefix “meta-” in “metaphysics.” There are two benefits in proceeding this way. First, it is the *discursive* feature of metaphysics that is emphasized, in contrast to contemporary discussions about metaphysics as ontotheology. Even if the critique of ontotheology were justified – this point is not

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: this edited version of this text corrects typographical and spelling errors within the 1998 text. Some of Ricoeur’s phrasing has been changed. Punctuation and the use of single quotation marks have been corrected and harmonized as much as possible. Regular quotation marks are used for quotations referring to bibliographical references and for terms considered in a specific way. Both usages existed in the original text. However, sometimes single quotation marks were present but with no obvious connection to what was said although sometimes they have been left to agree with the original text – though, in cases of quotation, it was not always possible to find and include references to the texts used by Ricoeur. *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies’* referencing rules have been implemented; references to books used by Ricoeur have been kept as far as possible. “Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self” is the product of an oral presentation based almost entirely on a previously published text: Paul Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, vol. 98, n° 4 (1993), 455-477, translated into English by David Pellauer as “From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 40 (1996), 443-458. This revision of the version published in proceedings of the *Horizontes de la Hermenéutica* conference in Santiago de Compostela, while retaining the content and formatting of the 1998 version – particularly its use of italics – is based on the article from the *Revue de métaphysique et morale*. However, the introductory and concluding sections of these two texts differ, and the fourth section of “De la métaphysique à la morale”, which is decisive in the development of this article, is not reproduced in “Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self.” Ricoeur also reshaped most of the paragraphs of the lecture text and some passages from the earlier text were moved to the second text’s footnotes. For this edition, the page numbers in French and English of excerpts from “De la métaphysique à la morale” used in “Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self” will be noted in the footnotes. We are deeply grateful to David Pellauer (DePaul University) for his in-depth revision of this English translation of Ricoeur’s text as well as for his editorial suggestions.

discussed here –, an investigation of the “meta-” function of speculative thinking is not implied in this critique; so we do not need to locate ourselves in a post-metaphysical age to account for the discursive feature of metaphysics.

The second advantage of this approach is that it makes possible a reflection on the ability of the “meta-” function to articulate a hermeneutics of the self at its highest speculative and discursive level. The hermeneutics that I propose also constitutes a kind of philosophical discourse that must be placed in relation to the discourse of metaphysics.

Having said that, I will outline, by way of introduction,<sup>2</sup> the “meta-” function as it relates to two distinct, complementary strategies, one of the *hierarchizing* and the other of the *pluralizing* of the principles presumed or assumed by thinkers dealing with metaphysics in diverse ways.

I start with the first strategy, that of hierarchization, because it determines the level from which the second strategy, that of pluralization, is implemented. Any philosophical discourse aiming at coherence, it seems to me, must include principles, some of which are held to be derived and others of which are held to be basic or foundational, at least in the specific discourse under consideration. These “first” principles apply only in that sort of philosophy.

The model for this strategy is to be found in Plato’s so-called metaphysical *dialogues*,<sup>3</sup> which are also Plato’s dialectical dialogues. Plato is not only the author of the theory of Forms or Ideas, and as such the instigator of the Platonic vulgate based on the all-too-familiar disjunctive pairs of the intelligible *vs.* the sensible, the immutable *vs.* the changeable, the eternal *vs.* the temporal. He also and more fundamentally stands as a critic for that kind of platonism. The criticism exemplified in the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Philebus*<sup>4</sup> produces a second-degree ontology, one that deals with the ideas of being and non-being and, as I will say in a moment, with several other of the “great kinds” that are equally involved in the operations having to do with the distinction of and participation among the first-degree kinds.<sup>5</sup>

For our purposes, it is not irrelevant that *Parmenides* begins by setting out a series of aporias about the possibility of thinking the relationship between the Ideas and things as well as between the Ideas themselves, and that the dialogue goes on to examine a series of hypotheses in which the second strategy of the “meta-” function is combined with the first strategy: indeed, we are present at a rule-governed game in which the Ideas of being, of the one, and of the other are put to the test using a series of conjunctive and disjunctive procedures in which the very fate of predication understood as participation is at stake.<sup>6</sup> The *Sophist* further emphasizes, if that is possible, not only this reduplication of discourse levels but the hierarchization at work in the chain-like

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<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: the content of Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 457, is replicated from this point on. Since this 1993 article is the primary source of two texts by Ricoeur (in French and English), similar references to be mentioned hereafter will be limited to this source.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 457-458, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 458).

<sup>6</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 458, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 458).

determination of the “greatest kinds.” Being thus “mingles” as a “triton ti”<sup>7</sup> with movement and rest, and it dominates this opposition in that sense. The polarity of the same and the other is then built on the trilogy of being-movement-rest. The last two kinds within the *Sophist’s* “five great kinds” are given a prominent place insofar as the being of anything must always be defined as being “related to itself” and “related to something else.” Here, the other has an advantage over being in the same way being previously had an advantage over movement and rest – for example, if I say that movement is other than rest or other than being: this meta-category, Plato writes, “pervades all of them since each of them is different from the others, not because of its own nature but because of sharing in the type of the different.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, being is the highest notion of philosophy, in contrast to change and permanence, only if it allows itself to be supplemented by the most ungraspable category. Being is “third” only because there is a “fifth.”<sup>9</sup>

This places us well beyond the naive essentialism of the “friends of the Forms,” which has too often served as the paradigm of a so-called platonism and all its successors through centuries.

What is the point of this game? It is the high price that must be paid for thinking what the sophist gives us to think about by the very fact of his existence among us – namely, the truth of falsity, in that falsity, which is not, somehow exists. What might be called a phenomenology of truth and falsity thus finds the conditions for its own discourse in the sharpest of dialectic operating at the level of the greatest kinds. At a later stage of this analysis, I shall devote myself to a similar detour but by using my own register, that is the register of a hermeneutics of action.

But first, a few words about the second strategy relating to the “meta-” function, the strategy of differentiating among various accepted meanings for being. It was anticipated by Plato’s dialectic of the “greatest kinds.” In return, it presupposes the strategy of hierarchization of principles illustrated by the “second” platonism. Aristotle, who is now to be called to the stand, agrees with this when, in book Gamma of *Metaphysics*, he first sets out his conception of the many meanings for being as being: “There is,” he says in the first lines of this book, “a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature...”<sup>10</sup>

As in Plato’s case, resorting to these “highest” principles is required in order to solve a subordinate problem, namely, in this case, the semantic domain that makes “saying” and “meaning” equivalent, a semantic that is required for the dismissal of sophistry.

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<sup>7</sup> Editor’s note: a “third term.” See also Paul Ricoeur, *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote* (Paris: Seuil, 2011) or Paul Ricoeur, *Being, Essence and Substance in Plato and Aristotle*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 255e. [Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 458, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 458).]

<sup>9</sup> Editor’s note: this sentence is taken from Ricoeur, *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote*, 138.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), □, 1003a. [Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 458-459, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 460).]

The science in question certainly remains a science “to be sought.”<sup>11</sup> We know at least that “there is” such a science and that its superior rank is not questionable. So, the polysemy in the diction of what being is unfolds at this level of highest principles and causes, halfway between homonymy and synonymy.

In this respect, *Metaphysics* E, 2 is Aristotle’s text that guided this enquiry about ontological presuppositions within my own hermeneutics of the self. I quote here one translation from the *Metaphysics*: “But since the unqualified term ‘being’ has several meanings, of which one was seen to be accidental, and another the true (non-being being the false); which besides these there are the figures of predication, e.g. the ‘what,’ quality, quantity, place, time, and any similar meanings which ‘being’ may have; and again besides all these is that which is potentially or actually.”<sup>12</sup>

Based on this text, I have wagered that it should be possible to give preference, among the meanings of being as being, to those designated by the *energeia-dunamis* pair, the same way that others have privileged the categorical sequence opened by *ousia* or by the determination of being as true.<sup>13</sup>

If the title “Metaphysics” could be honored by the attempt to correlate the major meanings of a hermeneutics of the self with the Aristotelian *energeia-dunamis* pair, as pertaining to an inspection of the primary meanings of being as being, this attempt could be held, along with many others, to illustrate in its own way what I have previously called the “meta-” function.<sup>14</sup> The following remarks will be primarily placed under the aegis of the notion of being in act, which actually combines, as previously stated, the two strategies of the hierarchization and differentiation of principles, and then the dialectic of the same and the other.<sup>15</sup>

## II

The problematic of the self that I propose in *Oneself as Another* unfolds on several levels of understanding of the verb “to act.” At the first level, that of a hermeneutic phenomenology, the investigation is driven by a network of questions close to ordinary language: *who* is the subject of the discourse? *who* is the subject of the doing? *who* is the subject of the narrative? *who* is the subject of moral imputation? The unity of this inquiry is affected by the relative autonomy of the

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<sup>11</sup> Editor’s note: Ricoeur constantly recalls this point in his work and in his texts dealing more directly with ontology and metaphysics; see for instance Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1977), 265.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E, 2, 1026a33-b2.

<sup>13</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 460, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 460). Being as “energeia-dunamis” (or as “dunamis-energeia” – potentiality and activity) is one of the distinctions that is made when approaching being as “ousia” (substance or “beingness”), that is being qua being or being considered in concrete terms. See also Paul Ricoeur, “Ontologie”, in *Encyclopædia Universalis*, T. XII (Paris: Encyclopædia Universalis France, 1972), 96.

<sup>14</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 460-461, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 461).

<sup>15</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 461, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 461).

phenomenological fields dealt with – language, action, narrative, and responsibility. But the repetition of the “who” question compensates for this scattering through the insistence on an all-encompassing question that allows the assertion of the self to be taken as the answer to the “who” question. We ask about the *self* insofar as we undertake to answer a question in terms of “who” rather than in terms of “what” or “why.” This is how the categories of enunciation and a locutor, then those of power to act and an agent, then those of narration and a narrator, and then eventually those of the imputation of acts and of a subject who is accountable for them, are successively scrutinized by a phenomenological investigation.<sup>16</sup>

The “meta-” function is not arbitrarily superimposed on this fourfold enquiry.<sup>17</sup> It finds its first expression in the gathering function assigned to the “who” question as well as to the “self” answer and, therefore, in the very correlation between the “who” in the question and the “self” in the answer.

The “meta-” function finds a second expression in the higher-level operation assigned to the encompassing category of action. In different but related meanings, “speaking,” “doing,” “recounting,” and “submitting to an imputation” can be taken as distinct modes of fundamental acting. Nowhere is this more apparent than in speech acts, practical initiatives and interventions, the emplotting of narrated actions and of protagonists for these actions, and in the act of imputing the responsibility for the speech act, the action, or the narrative to someone. This is the reason why I venture to speak of action as being related to these multiple phenomenological expressions only under the auspices of the analogy of agency (*agir*). I am aware of the risks that any recourse to analogy may run, as was already the case with scholastic interpretations of a *pros hen*<sup>18</sup> with regard to the series of categories. But I do not claim any *pros hen* for my series of categories for acting. All I retain from the analogy is the place held between homonymy and univocity in what Wittgenstein called a “family resemblance.”<sup>19</sup>

“Talking,” “doing,” “recounting,” “imputing” are, in turns, the first *analogon*<sup>20</sup> in the series of figures of acting, based on what Kant would have called an interest of reason that is different in each case. Speaking is the first *analogon*, insofar as it is in a symbolic and therefore verbal milieu that all the other modalities of acting are determined: the philosophy of action is, in its analytical phase, a semantics of action sentences and, in its reflexive phase, an investigation of our ways of

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<sup>16</sup> The properly hermeneutical content of this first-level investigation is ensured by the dialectic of understanding and explanation which, for all those different four stages, gives the opportunity to a confrontation between phenomenological philosophy and analytic philosophy, the latter offering each time the great diversions of objectification, which makes it possible to dissociate the reflexive turn of the enquiry on the self from the alleged immediacy of the old philosophies of the self. [Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 461 ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 461).]

<sup>17</sup> Editor’s note: Ricoeur previously summarized the different steps of *Oneself as Another* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1992) up to the ninth study; he also takes back the breakdown provided in the preface to this book (*ibid.*, 16-18).

<sup>18</sup> Editor’s note: the notion of “pros hen” refers to the principle of a meaning unity.

<sup>19</sup> Editor’s note: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953).

<sup>20</sup> Editor’s note: The term “analogon” designates an element of analogy, not a formally constituted analogy.



calling ourselves an agent, of verbally recognizing ourselves as the author of our own acts; narration is par excellence “speech,” “discourse,” and “text;” moral imputation is said through taking the form of a special attribution, an “ascription”<sup>21</sup> joining the imputed action to the responsible agent.

But “doing” is no less entitled to the role of first *analogon*: “when saying is doing,” according to the well-known French translation of Austin’s great book title, *How To Do Things With Words*;<sup>22</sup> “when narrating is doing,” we should add, in that it confers the cohesion of narrative on the cohesion of a life; as for this “narrating,” it stands in turn as the first *analogon* when the question of the permanency of the self within time is highlighted in the fields of both saying and doing as well as in the ascribing of acts to their agent. Moral imputation too can be considered as the first *analogon* in the series of accepted meanings for acting: what would the self-designation of the speaker mean if the sincerity of his utterance were not presumed by interlocutors? Could an agent be considered the author of his actions if he did not say that she or he was prepared to be held accountable for these actions before an evaluating or approving authority, as in the case of a moral judgement?

It is by using this analogy of agency that an attempt can finally be made to *reappropriate* the Aristotelian understanding of being as act and potentiality.<sup>23</sup> I do not want to conceal the difficulty in carrying out this re-appropriation, driven as it is, to some extent, by the intention of holding this understanding of being to be the first principle of a discourse about agency, which finds, at the level of a philosophical anthropology, articulations that fit the style of a hermeneutic phenomenology.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Editor’s note: see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Editor’s note: See John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>23</sup> Editor’s note: from this point onwards, Ricoeur takes up more directly analyses from the tenth study of *Oneself as Another*, which aimed at an ontological-metaphysical level, while being of an “exploratory nature” (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 287).

<sup>24</sup> My actual re-appropriation attempt is difficult for two reasons. It is so firstly because of perplexities arising from any archaeological reading of the *dunamis-energeia* pair in Aristotle’s work itself, whether in direct commentaries of *Metaphysics*  $\Gamma$ , 12 and mostly of *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$  – I was especially intrigued by fragment  $\Theta$ , 6, 1048b18-35 as were the best commentators of these texts before me, including Remi Brague in *Aristote et la question du monde* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988) [Editor’s note: see also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 307, note 10] – , or in attempted reconstructions of the link between the ontology of potentiality and act, and the concept of praxis, such as developed in *Nicomachean Ethics*. The reappropriation of the ontology of potentiality and act is made even more difficult in the indirect route – attempted before me by Franco Volpi in *Heidegger e Aristotele* (Padova: Daphne, 1984) and in Jacques Taminiaux’s, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) – onto Heidegger’s concept of care. Indeed, this detour gives rise to a problematic shift that results from the transfer from an ontology favoring the being as true to an ontology that gives priority to the being as act and potentiality among multiple acceptations of what is being as something being. [Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 461-463) ends here; this content is taken up again in the following footnote whereas it is placed within the text for “De la métaphysique à la morale” (*ibid.*, 463).]

Facing these perplexities, someone could legitimately ask what is gained from this reappropriation of the *energeia-dunamis* dimension. In my opinion, the payoff is twofold and reciprocal. On the one hand, the preference for the understanding of being as act and potentiality finds in the hermeneutics of the self an *a posteriori* justification, through its ability to articulate, at the highest level of the research's guiding ideas, the penultimate presuppositions (for that sort of discourse) of the concept of the analogy of agency, which provides the transition between the four phenomenological registers of acting ("speaking," "doing," "narrating," "ascribing") and the highest principles of philosophical speculation.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the greatest kind of being as act and potentiality, taken in the multiplicity of its re-appropriations, authenticates *a priori* the primacy given to agency at the level

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<sup>25</sup> In this respect, my attempt to dissociate as far as possible from all the other acceptations of being the one that Aristotle himself situates, as we have seen, "outside all (other) meanings of being," by investing it, as it were, in a hermeneutics of human action, is not without precedent: Spinoza, *Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) proposes a remarkable hierarchy which subordinates the *conatus* of all peculiar, determinate entities to the *potentia* of the first substance; for his part, Leibniz, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and in the *Monadology* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1992), sets out to hierarchize the spheres of expression for *appetition* (correlative to those of perception), depending on the reference the most elementary entity called a monad because of its simplicity (Leibniz, *Monadology*, § 15) or to souls, to the limited sense that our experience of ourselves cuts out within what Leibniz calls the "general sense" of "internal action" (*ibid.*, § 18). From the same perspective, we should examine Schelling's philosophy of the *Potenzen* and, why not, the *will to power* according to Nietzsche and the *libido* according to Freud. But I would like to insist on the mediating role played, for my advantage, by Jean Nabert's notion of the *desire to be* and the *effort to exist*, which he himself subordinates to Fichte's notion of *primary affirmation* [Editor's note: Jean Nabert, *Elements for an Ethics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969)]. These precedents, all very different from one another, seemed to me as allowing my own attempt to articulate on one of the privileged meanings of being as being the second-degree discourse of a hermeneutic of the self, itself heir to a very particular tradition, that of French reflective philosophy – hence the seminal role played by Nabert's thought – enriched in turn by Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and by Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics. [Editor's note: the following replicates Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 464, note n° 1.] There obviously is no question of reducing differences between philosophical systems. In this respect, I accept Martial Guérault's thesis about the singularity of philosophical systems, and I feel more concerned and more embarrassed by the problem of communication posed by their irreducible differences than by the alleged durability of "the" metaphysics [Editor's note: see Martial Guérault, *Philosophie de l'histoire de la philosophie* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1979)]. It only is at the price of a reappropriation which is renewed each time that we can risk setting philosophies, which have just been mentioned, into a series. The trajectory that we have thus drawn is a virtual line that joins peculiar points, each of which consists only of the punctual trace left each time by a risky appropriation operation. The only way to provide this virtual trajectory with a more contemporary unity is the feeling of a debt accrued by this discrete series of appropriation acts, in which the violence of interpretation is counterbalanced by the receptivity inherent to a focused reading. [Editor's note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 463, ends here; this content is taken up again in the following footnote whereas it is placed within the text for "De la métaphysique à la morale" (*ibid.*, 463-464).]



of hermeneutic phenomenology. A kind of shared election occurs here, between an ontology of action and a phenomenology of agency.<sup>26</sup>

I would like to clarify what has just been called “authentication” and “confirmation.” What is thus *allowed* by the metaphysical gesture just outlined? It is what I have termed “attestation” at the level of hermeneutic phenomenology. With this term, I hint at the kind of belief and trust related to the affirmation of the self as an acting (and suffering) being. As I insist, this credence, this trust, cannot be reduced to opinion on a scale of objective knowledge, where *doxa* would be less important than *episteme*. Attestation is understood in contrast to its opposite, suspicion, whose legitimacy is in no way denied. But it is “despite...,” despite suspicion that I believe in my power to do things. Attestation on the hermeneutic level so receives speculative reinforcement by relying on the notion of the higher rank of being as act-potentiality. From the perspective of this act of credence and trust, I ventured to reinterpret the notion of being as act as the horizon for attestation.<sup>27</sup>

### III

Now I would like to give an idea of how I see the combination between the dialectic of the *same* and the *other* and the hermeneutics of the self. It will be recalled that it is in relation to such a dialectic, perfectly orchestrated by Plato, that the function of hierarchization, but also that of differentiation, both at work at the highest discursive level, were first highlighted in this study.

Examination of this question has been postponed up to this stage, however, despite an anteriority which is not merely chronological, because there is<sup>28</sup> a fundamental reason that will justify the order of comparison to be followed: in that the privilege given to the notion of being as act/potentiality has a certain *analogy* to the phenomenological answer regarding the manifestations of human agency – I spoke of the analogy of agency in this respect –, so too the meta-category of the other is expressed, at the level of phenomenological hermeneutics, by operations of a *disjunctive* nature whose paradigm is Plato’s paradoxes culminating in the necessity and the impossibility of attributing sameness to the one and the other, their both being the same and different. I directly address the major expressions of these paradoxes within the hermeneutics of the self, stimulated in my investigation by the fact that, in Plato, such a dialectic already represented a long detour, ultimately leading back to the initial question of the nature of the sophist and the consistency of his discourse, allegedly identified as fallacious but actually existing as being precisely fallacious. It

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<sup>26</sup> We may well suspect a variant of the hermeneutic circle here; but all the great philosophies of the past are like this; neither Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which combines the power of substance according to Book I and beatitude according to Book V, nor Leibniz’s *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics* escape this circularity. [Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 464, ends here; this content is taken up again in the following footnote whereas it is placed within the text for “De la métaphysique à la morale” (*ibid.*, 464-465).]

<sup>27</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 465, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 465).

<sup>28</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 465, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 466).

is to this same kind of discursive justification that the detour through the dialectic of the same and the other contributes in the field of the hermeneutic phenomenology of the self.

Actually, the hermeneutics of the self deals with two different intrusions of the meta-category of the other.<sup>29</sup>

1. The first one concerns the distinction internal to the same through the figure of personal identity, namely, the distinction between *sameness* and *ipseity*.<sup>30</sup> This distinction is constitutive of the very notion of the self. The phenomenological basis for this distinction is easy to describe. It has to do with the two different ways in which personal identity relates to time – more exactly, to the two ways for persevering and manifesting the permanence in time of a personal core: according to sameness or according to ipseity. Several criteria of identity fall under the banner of sameness: the numerical identity of the same thing through its multiple appearances, which is established on the basis of tests of identification and re-identification of the same; qualitative identity, in other words, the extreme resemblance of things that can be exchanged for each other without semantic loss, *salva veritate*<sup>31</sup>; genetic identity, attested to by the uninterrupted continuity between the first and last stages of development of what can be considered to be the same individual (from acorn to oak); the immutable structure of an individual recognizable through the existence of a relational invariant, a stable organization (a genetic or other such code). Personal identity does not exclude this kind of sameness in the form of *character*, made up of distinctive marks and assumed identities by which an individual is recognized as being the same.<sup>32</sup>

But the identity of character is only one of the two poles for the *idem/ipse* pair. The perseverance of character stands opposed to the maintenance of a self despite the changes that affect desires and beliefs, and therefore, in a way, the perseverance of character.

These two modes of identity, it seems to me, are joined together in narrative identity, be it the identity of a character in a novel, or a historical figure, or any of us reflecting on ourselves in our relationship to time. That narrative is pertinent to every level related to the “who” question, that it is the appropriate level for investigating the dialectic between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, this privilege is due to the fact that narrative apprehends discourse and its speaker, actions and their agent, *sub specie temporis*.<sup>33</sup> The dynamic unity of the plot provides the told story with the purely narrative identity actions are capable of, while this narrative identity also communicates itself through the story told to the characters, who can be said to be emplotted along with the story in which they take part.

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<sup>29</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 466, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 466).

<sup>30</sup> Editor’s note: upstream of *Oneself as Another*, an investigation of such distinction (and its derivative terms) can be found as early as the eighth and final study of *The Rule of Metaphor* and in the first section of *Time and Narrative’s* conclusions in Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative III.*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 242-249.

<sup>31</sup> Editor’s note: “without altering the truth value of statements” – and not only the meaning value.

<sup>32</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 466-467 ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 467).

<sup>33</sup> Editor’s note: “under the aspect of time” – as opposed to “from all eternity”.

The choice of the narrative level as the place where the dialectic of identity is challenged is further justified by the fact that mainly fiction but also history and, to a lesser degree, introspection make it possible to explore the range of variations in the link between the two modes of identity, from the extreme case of a near-total overlap between character and ipseity, as in fairy tales and legends, to the other extreme, that of a near-total dissociation between *idem* and *ipse*, like in novels where what is improperly called the dissolution of personal identity lays bare the “who?” question,<sup>34</sup> which becomes the only witness to ipseity, once the support of the sameness of a character has been lost. These thought experiments make fiction an extraordinary laboratory for testing the solidity of the pairing that the two modes of personal identity forms in everyday life – to the point of becoming indistinguishable.

But the polarity of the two modes to identity is not confined to the narrative level of the investigation of the self. It already appears at the linguistic level, insofar as the identity of the speaker in a series of utterances is itself a matter of a narrative identity, even when it is not reflexively thematized in the form of a narrative. The same can be said about the identity of an agent designating himself as the sole author of multiple actions (and passions) taking place over time. In that sense, we may speak about a pre-narrative structure of discourse and action applicable to what Dilthey called “the coherence of a life.”<sup>35</sup> The most difficult level to tackle with accuracy, however, remains that of moral imputation: it could even be argued that the step from metaphysics to morality is tacitly accomplished here. Does the *promise* not provide *ipse-identity* with the paradigm that has not been mentioned so far, in contrast to the role played by the paradigm of character within the dimension of *idem-identity*? This is true: keeping one’s promise despite intermittencies of the heart constitutes the model par excellence of self-maintenance that is not the perseverance of character. But would it be going into too much subtlety to distinguish between the description of promise-making as a performative act of discourse and the moral obligation to keep one’s word? As an act of discourse, promising is saying that we will do tomorrow what we say today we will be doing, and thus to bind ourselves by this very speech-act.<sup>36</sup>

The imputation sealed by the promise thus makes the person accountable for his actions. But the mediation of moral predicates – good and obligatory – is required to raise imputation to the level of morality. Ordinary language, in its everyday use, may not make such a distinction; conceptual analysis cannot avoid such fine distinctions.

2. The second remarkable intrusion of the meta-category of the other into the phenomenological field also has to do with the figures of otherness which concern the same, no longer as the same – like in the sharing between *idem* and *ipse* – but the same precisely as *other than itself*. It can be shown here in what sense the meta-category of the other presides over a heterogeneous *dispersion* of its own phenomenological presentations. While the meta-category of act and potentiality presides over the *analogy* of agency, bringing together multiple modes of

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<sup>34</sup> Editor’s note: Ricoeur develop further this topic in the sixth study of *Oneself as Another* by notably referring to Robert Musil’s, *The Man Without Qualities*.

<sup>35</sup> Editor’s note: Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 467-468, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 468).

appearance of this unique action, the meta-category of the other – which itself belongs to a type of discursive speculation that is *other* than that about doing something – presides over a dispersion of these phenomenological expressions. These expressions can be placed under the common heading of *experiences of passivity*. In this regard, I propose saying that passivity corresponds, on the level of a hermeneutic phenomenology, to what the other is on the level of the “greatest kinds.”<sup>37</sup>

We could add a second opposition to this first opposition between the gathering function related to the meta-category of act and potentiality and the dispersing function related to the meta-category of the other, an opposition between an enhancing function related to the *internalizing* of the human sense of agency and an expansive function related to the *externalization* brought about by the experiences of passivity placed under the meta-categorical heading of the other. The experiences of passivity to be considered here are therefore also experiences of exteriority.

Why do I insist so strongly on the polysemous character of otherness? Essentially to prevent an uncriticized reduction of the meta-category of the other to the otherness of the other. This is why it is necessary to preserve, on the phenomenological level itself, the variety of experiences of passivity and exteriority intertwined in multiple ways in the intimacy of human action. In my last work, I proposed pursuing the exploration of the diverse field of passivity-exteriority in three directions: toward the *flesh*, as mediating between the self and a world itself taken according to the varying degrees of practicability and, thus, of strangeness; toward the *stranger* insofar as he is my equivalent yet external to me; finally, towards this other represented by the *inner being* (“*for intérieur*” in French) figured by the voice of conscience addressed to me from the depths of myself.<sup>38</sup>

I will not dwell here, despite the breadth of the field to be covered, on the first figure of passivity-exteriority, the *flesh*. This emblematic term itself covers a wide variety of vivid experiences that stem from every register considered in a phenomenology of agency. Undergoing and suffering literally have the same amplitude as acting. Forbidden words from the unconscious, the wounds inflicted by the unequal distribution of power between interacting protagonists, our inability to speak about something that defeats our narrative grasping of the presumed coherence of a life; scorn, even self-loathing, which seriously undermines the power of the agent to assume responsibility for his actions and to hold himself accountable for them.

This brief reminder regarding the scattered figures of the otherness of the flesh suggests that the very term “flesh” must be taken in a sense that is broader than that of one’s own body. But above all, these figures suggest that the scope of suffering exceeds by far that of physical pain.<sup>39</sup> If we accept the equation between the power to act and the effort to exist, as suggested by Nabert but also by Spinoza before him, we can also acknowledge the inverse equation between suffering and any reduction of the power to act. This is the reason why it is no longer possible to simply speak of the agent without designating, in the same breath, the one who suffers. It would still be necessary

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<sup>37</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 468-469, ends here; this content is taken up again later but at a different point (*ibid.*, 469).

<sup>38</sup> Editor’s note: see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 317-356.

<sup>39</sup> Editor’s note: on this topic, see also Paul Ricoeur, “La souffrance n’est pas la douleur,” *Revue de psychiatrie française*, vol. XXIII (1992), 9-18. A version of this article is available via the digital archives of the Fonds Ricoeur: <https://bibnum.explore.psl.eu/s/psl/ark:/18469/3tcmb>

to show how the strangeness of the world itself, as a major figure of something irreducible to any enterprise of constitution, is in one way or another always mediated by the strangeness of the flesh. This problem cannot be addressed here.

The otherness of the *other* is a theme that is too well established in contemporary debates today that we need not dwell on it. The one originality that might be proposed would be to combine, on a phenomenological level, the otherness of the other with all the figures of the otherness of the flesh, that I have just mentioned, taking them in their broadest sense: the otherness of the speaker addressing me, the otherness of the agent with whom I struggle and cooperate, the otherness of the other stories in which mine is entangled, the otherness of the intersecting responsibilities at the core of responsible imputation.

This differentiated phenomenology of the other as another would allow the recurring discussion of the theme of intersubjectivity to escape the alternative between the simply perceptual criterion of the apprehension of the other, as in Husserl, and the immediately moral criterion of the injunction inherent in the appeal to one's own responsibility, as with Levinas. It is not possible to develop this suggestion further, which itself relies on the concern to differentiate as far as possible the experiences of passivity to be found under the meta-category of the other.

The case of the *inner self* is undoubtedly the most difficult one, for it is tied to the problem of what is moral. However, nothing prevents us from trying to spot the pre-ethical features of this inner self as a *forum* for the colloquy of the self with itself – that is why I prefer the term “inner self” to that of a moral conscience when translating the German *Gewissen* and the English *conscience*. I believe that the idea of an unparalleled passivity, both internal and superior to me, must be held onto along with the metaphor of the voice. There is certainly no question of entirely dissociating the phenomenon of the voice from the capacity to distinguish good from evil in a singular situation. In this way, conscience, considered as the inner self, is barely distinguishable from conviction (“Überzeugung” in German) as the ultimate instance of practical wisdom. It nevertheless remains close to conscience in that attestation (“Bezeugung” in German) is the instance of judgment that confronts suspicion in all those circumstances where the self designates itself, either as the author of what is said, the agent of action, a narrator of a story, or as a subject held accountable for its actions. In this sense, our inner being is nothing other than the *attestation* by which the self affects itself.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> In this regard, we can invoke both Hegel and Heidegger, to disengage without excess of abstraction a “metaphysics” of the interior from an “ethics” of moral consciousness. With the Hegel of chapter VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), we affirm the primacy of the “spirit sure (*gewiss*) of itself” over any moral vision of the world, at this stage where the acting consciousness and the judging consciousness, confessing the limits of their respective points of view, and renouncing their own partiality, recognize and mutually absolve each other. From Heidegger we retain the idea of a tearing away of the self from the anonymity of the “One” and the idea of a call that the *Dasein* addresses to itself from the depths of itself, but from higher up than itself [Editor's note: the text of this footnote is taken up again content of Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 471, before taking it back within the text but at another point (*ibid.*, 471)].

This inner self thus appears as the intimate confidence that, in a specific circumstance, sweeps away doubts, hesitations, suspicions of inauthenticity, hypocrisy, self-indulgence, and self-deception, and allows the acting and suffering human being to say: “*Here I stand.*”<sup>41</sup>

My point is: human being is not the master of the intimate certainty of existing in the mode of selfhood; this selfhood comes to human being, happens to the human being, in the manner of a gift, a grace, which is not at the self’s disposal. This lack of mastery over a voice that is more heard than pronounced leaves intact the question of its origin – and in this respect, saying with Heidegger that “in consciousness, the Dasein calls itself”<sup>42</sup> is too quickly to resolve an indetermination constitutive of the phenomenon of the voice. The strangeness of the voice is not less than the strangeness of the flesh and that of the other.<sup>43</sup>

This, to conclude, is the way that, on the one hand, a *metaphysical discourse* resulting from the reappropriation of Plato’s “great kinds” and Aristotle’s distinction between the multiple meanings of being, and, on the other hand, the *discourse of a hermeneutics of the self*, where the emphasis is placed in turns on the analogy of human agency and the dispersion of figures of otherness, can be brought together.

As I suggested at the start of my remarks, this conjunction amounts to a mutual choice for both the speculative level and the phenomenological level of philosophical discourse. My wish is that the circle that is thus drawn is not a vicious circle but a healthy one!

Translation from French by Samuel Lelievre for Fonds Paul Ricoeur.  
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<sup>41</sup> Certainly, it is difficult, if we want to give an exact account of the phenomenon of attestation, not to join the meta-category of true being to that of being as act and potentiality. The consciousness-attestation seems to fit well into the problem of truth, as a belief and a trust. But can we not say that the inner being is the true being of being as an act in the finite conditions of human action? Whatever this speculative refinement, it is the phenomenological response to this presumed dialectic – where the “meta-” function exceeds itself! – which matters to us here [Editor’s note: the text of this footnote is taken up again content of Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 471-472, before that it is taken back within the text but at another point (*ibid.*, 472). The formula: “Here I stand [*Hier stehe ich*]” was Luther’s reply to the Diet of Worms (1521) which was about to expel him from the Church.]

<sup>42</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984), 275.

<sup>43</sup> Editor’s note: the replication of content from Ricoeur, “De la métaphysique à la morale,” 469-472, ends here; the following content is specific to this text and does not include the part IV of “De la métaphysique à la morale” (*ibid.*, 472-477).



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