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Introduction

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Guest Editors

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Introduction

We are pleased to present the seventh issue of *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* devoted to the topic "The Crisis of the Self: Fragility, Vulnerability, and Suffering." This special issue draws its initial inspiration from the 4th *International Conference on Ricœur Studies*, which was held in Lecce (Italy) in September 2012 and was dedicated to thinking about crisis and conflict with Paul Ricœur. Yet, this publication highlights only one of the three main topics covered at the conference and only two articles here stem from the Lecce conference. Therefore, we are not dealing here with what are ordinarily referred to as conference proceedings.

It is not an easy task to identify a dominant theme and a common thread in Ricoeur's prolific work. Throughout his intellectual life, the French philosopher studied very diverse fields: the anthropological philosophy and the analysis of the problem of evil at the time of his *Philosophy of the Will*; the reflection on the unconscious in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*; the problem of language and its ontological implications as examined in his twin works, *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*; the discovery of the self in *Oneself as Another*; the concepts of memory and recognition, as explored in his later works. However, as conclusively shown by Domenico Jervolino in *Il cogito e l'ermeneutica* (1993), the question of the self allows us to trace a line of continuity through work of such breadth. Ricoeur's starting point is the critique of the Cartesian *cogito*. In brief, Ricoeur envisages a subject that is hetero-positing, insofar as it is constituted through the experiences of vulnerability, fragility and suffering. In this respect, it can be that the "crisis of the self" represents one of the common threads of his thought.

Ricoeur himself states, in introducing Jervolino's book, that "I am grateful to the author for perceiving the continuity of the critique of the Cogito, its claim to immediate certainty and self-transparency, ever since the time I substituted 'I want to' for 'I think' [...]." At that time, in fact, instead of reducing the subjectivity to pure reason - but without sacrificing its rational component - Ricoeur talks about a full cogito, where body and soul are inseparably united. Ricoeur overrules the conventional distinction between soul and body with that between voluntary and involuntary: "there is no phenomenology of the pure involuntary, but only of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary; I understand the involuntary as the other pole of my life, as affecting my will."

Ricoeur's subsequent reflections may be viewed as the deepening of this reflection on the the involuntary, whether relative or absolute. This is particularly evident when Ricoeur approaches the "masters of suspicion", Marx and Freud, inasmuch as the former shows the limits of the subject in relation to the social forces by which it is determined and the latter denounces the primacy of conscience in relation to the influence of the unconscious. The passage through the masters of suspicion as well as the questioning of any immediate self-positing of consciousness justify the long detour through the mediations of sense (symbols, metaphors, narrative, and institutions). The reasons behind the hermeneutic turn of Ricoeur's thought are to be found partly in the admission of the subject's inability to know itself immediately and partly in the belief that language is the bridge between the self and being. As already stated by Ricoeur at the end of *Fallible Man*: "the symbol gives rise to the thought that the Cogito is within being and not the converse [...]."

And yet, in his introduction to Jervolino's book, Ricoeur points out the following: "I am especially grateful to him of having understood that this critique was not the liquidation of the question of the subject itself." In other words, taking into account vulnerability, fragility, and suffering does not coincide for Ricoeur with the outright dissolution of the subject, in contrast with some postmodern thinkers. This is clear when analyzing his thoroughly original approach to Marxism and Freudianism. With regard to the former, Ricoeur rejects Althusser's interpretation whereby the mature Marx would escape from any anthropological perspective. Instead, the problem for him remains alienated consciousness: "The core of Ricoeurian Marxism," says Johann Michel in *Paul Ricoeur. Une philosophie de l'agir humain* (2006), "is woven around the possibility for individuals to act in circumstances that they themselves have not produced." With regard to Freudianism, Michel likewise notes that Ricoeur does not attempt to reduce the work of psychoanalysis to a deconstruction of the subject: "Freud's entire effort is directed toward a liberation from the forces that prevent the subject from coinciding with itself." The crisis of the self finds a limit in the (at least) partial capacity of the subject to become aware of what determines it. Instead of representing itself in terms of self-position, the subject constitutes itself through narration, enabling it to coexist with the dissonances of its experiences. This perspective presupposes a well-defined anthropological vision: that of the *homo capax*, who is able to speak, to tell stories, to act, and to be responsible for his or her actions. In *Oneself as Another* the argument is structured around these different roles of the ego. They all form the connection -without confusing them- between the issues in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of action, narrative and, finally, moral philosophy. The self must be understood therefore as "the fruit of an examined life," consisting of activity and passivity, responsible for its actions and constitutively open to otherness. It is characterized by commitment, that is, by the task of keeping promises and of being responsible for itself.

The articles published in this special issue of *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* have the merit not only of being scrupulous surveys of the concepts of vulnerability, fragility and suffering in Ricoeur, but also, and especially, of being reflections stemming from Ricoeur's perspective on the limits of the human power to act.

The issue opens with the contribution from Cyndie Sautereau, "*Subjectivité et vulnérabilité chez Ricoeur et Levinas*", which in the first part deftly identifies the three levels of vulnerability in the thought of the French philosopher: the reflective level, the level of capabilities, and the ontological level. This essay then compares Ricoeur's notion of vulnerability with that more radical notion, in the author's opinion, of Levinas. Whereas Levinas is especially concerned with the vulnerability of *autrui*, for Ricoeur the issue is primarily related to the self.

The second article, "*Les limites du récit*", by Jérôme Porée, effectively demonstrates that Ricoeur recognized the limitations of narrative and of the narrative identity that is based on it, in contrast with certain dogmatism about narration. In particular, the author is interested in what he calls the limits of the story "towards the bottom," which are "*those that have a role in the constitution of time and of personal identity*." These limits reach their paroxysm in suffering, where the narrative genre is exceeded: the power of language is limited by its own radical experience of the unspeakable.

In "*Mémoires et conflits. Conflit des mémoires, collision des durées*", Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron not only compares Bergson and Ricoeur on the issues of duration and memory, but also identifies three levels of analysis: metaphysical foundations, the aesthetic dimension, as well as forgetting and forgiving as forms of collision of different durations. In this regard, the author shows the numerous 'family resemblances' between the conceptions of time in the two

thinkers, especially concerning the abandonment of the *a priori* of the time (a true patricide of Kant), the predilection for durations (plural) over duration (singular), and the idea of degrees of the past. An essential contribution of Vieillard-Baron is his critique of the Ricoeurian interpretation of the problem of time in Augustine. According to the author, any specifically phenomenological perspective in which the soul is self-sufficient, as is the case with Ricoeur, neglects the moral and religious nature of the problem of time in Augustine, conceived as *distentio animi*.

The originality of Ernst Wolff's article, "Competences de l'homme capable à la lumière de l'incapacité", is in its thesis that Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the capable man requires a development of its technical dimension, that is, a reflection on the skills and the tools of the "I can." Thus, the author investigates the correlation between ability and inability in humans, leading to the claim that: '*dire que l'incapacité et la capacité [...] sont constitutives l'une de l'autre signifie que l'incapacité, malgré son caractère "négatif", contribue à rendre l'agent capable de faire des choses [...].*' If human nature is made up not only of capacities but also of incapacities, then the technical nature of the human, primary and secondary, should be at the center of anthropological philosophy. While, from an individual point of view, technique tends to compensate for certain failures, from a collective perspective it risks to compromise what is best for agents. This is what Wolff refers to as the technical paradox at the conclusion of his essay.

The article by Roger Savage, "Fragile Identities and Capable Selves", focuses on what one might call the "vulnerability of vulnerability," that is, a form of vulnerability which affects individuals and social groups who are in disadvantaged positions compared to others. The perversion of this kind of vulnerability is its two-fold effectiveness, so to speak. To an objective uncertainty, it adds a "subjective" phenomenon of internalization through which marginalized individuals and groups repeat the contemptuous image conveyed by dominant individuals and groups. Ricoeur's reflections on the inability to tell one's own story or on the lack of self-recognition as a form of violence and a source of conflict correspond with those of Martha Nussbaum, when she reflects on the inability of some individuals, as is the case of numerous women in a developing countries like India, to understand themselves as "capable of ...". Though not proposing definitive solutions to this problem, Savage finds a plausible initial response in Ricoeur's consideration of hope and states of peace.

Finally, we would like to thank all the colleagues and friends -too many to be mentioned individually- who, in various ways, contributed to the success of the 2012 conference in Lecce and to the publication of this issue of *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*. We wish to acknowledge the University of Salento, the University of Verona and the University of Rome "La Sapienza" for having made the symposium in Lecce possible. Very special thanks to Johann Michel, Eileen Brennan, and Scott Davidson, who invited us to be guest editors for this issue.

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