# Introduction to "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" by Paul Ricoeur

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## Abstract

When examining the relationship of Ricoeur's philosophy to the field of ontology and metaphysics, a text entitled "Discourse, metaphysics and the hermeneutics of the self" may attract attention as it provides useful and meaningful insights. This text is a reworking of a better-known text, "De la métaphysique à la morale" (1993), but remains different by focusing on analyses relating to an ontology and metaphysics of human action and agency, and considers the speculative structure of a hermeneutics of the self constituted since *Oneself as Another* (1990). Originating from a conference held at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in 1993 and 1995, this text was first published in 1998 in the proceedings of that conference; the present version aims at making it accessible again and improving its editorial form.

*Keywords: hermeneutics of the self; metaphysics; moral philosophy and ethics; ontology; philosophical discourse; Ricoeur*
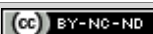
## Résumé

Quand on examine le rapport de la philosophie ricoeurienne au champ de l'ontologie et de la métaphysique, un texte intitulé « Discours, métaphysique, et herméneutique du soi » peut retenir l'attention et apporter des éclairages utiles et significatifs. Ce texte est une refondation d'un autre texte, mieux connu : « De la métaphysique à la morale » (1993) ; mais il s'en différencie en se concentrant sur les analyses relatives à une ontologie et une métaphysique de l'agir humain et en considérant la structure spéculative d'une herméneutique du soi constituée depuis *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). Issu d'un colloque qui s'est déroulé à l'Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Espagne) en 1993 et 1995, ce texte a d'abord été publié en 1998 dans les actes de ce colloque ; il est réédité afin de le rendre de nouveau accessible et de le remettre en forme.

*Mots-clés : discours philosophique ; herméneutique du soi ; métaphysique ; ontologie ; philosophie morale et éthique ; Ricœur*

# Introduction to "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" by Paul Ricoeur

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"Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" is an article originally published in French in the appendix ("apéndice") to the proceedings of the conference ("Encontros Internacionais de Filosofia no Camino de Santiago") that took place at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain) in 1993 and 1995. These proceedings were published in Spanish in 1998.[2] This text is based almost entirely on another better-known text, "De la métaphysique à la morale," which retains some significance in the development of Ricoeur's philosophy.[3] "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," however, has its own identity and a different purpose. The context in which it was published – in the Spanish-language proceedings of a conference held three decades ago – also restricted its accessibility. Furthermore, this version contained typographical, spelling, and editing errors that were likely to affect the attention and efforts of a public interested in its subject-matter. It was therefore necessary to edit again a scientific edition

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[2] Paul Ricoeur, "Discours, métaphysique, et herméneutique du soi," in *Horizontes de la hermenéutica. Actas. Encuentras de Filosofia en el Camina de Santiago (1993, 1995)*, ed. Marcelino Agis Villaverde (ed.), n°112, 1998, 749-762. The lecture on which this text is based was given at the opening of the symposium in 1993. Edited by Marcelino Agis Villaverde, a professor of philosophy at that university, the conference proceedings include a Spanish version of Ricoeur's text, "Discurso, metafísica y hermenéutica del sí-mismo" (*ibid.*, 19–32), as well as another text, "Justici y Verdad" (*ibid.*, 33-44), the French version of which ("Justice et verité") is added to the appendix (*ibid.*, 763-774). Among the forty or so contributions to these proceedings are, in addition to those by Ricoeur, texts by Domenico Jervolino and Mario J. Valdès. Ricoeur was sponsored by the Sociedad Interuniversitaria de Filosofia, which organized this conference, to receive the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela in 1996.

[3] Paul Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, vol. 98, n° 4 (1993), 455-477. In English translation, the text appears as Paul Ricoeur, "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 40, n° 4 (1996), 443-458. The French text was published as part of the journal's centenary celebrations, and it was also included in the first edition of Paul Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite. Autobiographie intellectuelle* (Paris: Esprit, 1995), 83-115, which would attest to its significance for Ricoeur. Those earlier versions have been used to support the revision and correction of "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self;" the English version is based on this revised and corrected French version.

(in French and English) of "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" to provide access to it in a more standard form and make it easier to read. In introducing this text, we will first consider the way in which the fields of ontology and metaphysics are generally approached in Ricoeur's philosophy. Then we will describe its content in a more analytical manner.

## I.     Ontology and metaphysics in Ricoeur's philosophy

This text can be associated with Ricoeur's course in the fields of ontology and metaphysics, from a perspective that includes research in the history of philosophy (to support Ricoeur's teaching) and research in Ricoeur's personal philosophy (for the publication of his works).[4] More specifically, this text focuses on the connection between metaphysics as a philosophical discourse and the hermeneutics of the self, as defined since *Soi-même comme un autre*, whereas "De la métaphysique à la morale" aimed to take up, by renewing it on the basis of specific contributions of Ricoeur's philosophy, the movement of the "transition from metaphysics to morality" introduced by Félix Ravaisson in an article in the very first issue of the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*.[5] "De la métaphysique à la morale" actually begins with a reference to this journal's initial project in relation to contemporary conceptions of a "moral philosophy worthy of the name," which would mean being able to respond to criticisms of Comte's positivism and its successors

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[4] Along with monographs that, from *Philosophie de la volonté I et II* (Paris: Aubier, 1950 and 1960) to *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Stock, 2004), constitute the main corpus of Ricoeur's philosophy dealing, in one way or another, with the issues of ontology and metaphysics – generally in the last part of a work – the following texts may be mentioned: Paul Ricoeur and Mikel Dufrenne, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence* (Paris: Seuil, 1947); Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophie et Ontologie I. Retour à Hegel," *Esprit*, vol. 23, n° 8 (1955), 1378-1391; *id.*, "H. Heimsoeth, Les six grands thèmes de la métaphysique occidentale," *Les études philosophiques*, vol. 12, n° 4 (1957), 408-409; *id.*, "Le Traité de métaphysique de Jean Wahl," *Esprit*, vol. 25, n° 3 (1957), 529-540, reprinted in *id.*, *Lectures 2. La contrée des philosophes* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 79-91; *id.*, "Renouveau de l'ontologie," in *Encyclopédie française. XIX. Philosophie et religion* (Paris: Larousse, 1957), 19.16.15–19.18.3; *id.*, "Ontologie," in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. XII (Paris: Encyclopædia Universalis France, 1972), 94-102; *id.*, "Rozhovor s Paulem Ricoeurem. O reci, zjeveni a ontologii," in *Byti a subjektivita. Ricoeurovake eseje* (Praha: Expedice, 1986), 114-149; *id.*, "L'attestation: entre phénoménologie et ontologie," in *Paul Ricœur. Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique. Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, 1988*, ed. Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney (Paris: Cerf, 1991), 381-403; *id.*, "Entre éthique et ontologie: la disponibilité," in *Gabriel Marcel*, ed. Michèle Sacquin (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1989), 157-165, reprinted in *id.*, *Lectures 2. La contrée des philosophes*, 68-78; *id.*, "De la métaphysique à la morale ;" *id.*, *Autrement. Une lecture de Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris: PUF, 1997); *id.*, *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote* (Paris: Seuil, 2011). This list is not exhaustive for it does not take into account numerous texts that indirectly deal with the issues of ontology and metaphysics, various texts in the field of theology, religion or at the junction between philosophy, theology and religion, and some forewords to books related to these different fields and themes. The framework of the present text, it should be pointed out, does not allow us to mention or discuss works studying these issues in Ricoeur's philosophy.

[5] Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 456 (our translation) ; Félix Ravaisson, "Métaphysique et morale," *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, vol. 1, n° 1 (1893), 6-25. Ravaisson's article was republished in 1993 by the *Revue de métaphysique et morale*, just before Ricoeur's contribution, which was followed by those of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alan Gewirth, Karl-Otto Apel, and Jean-François Marquet.

towards the "metaphysical age" but also to take a stand against a certain "mysticism."[6] This latter stand remains compatible with French spiritualism, of which Ravaisson is one of the prominent figures, but the fact remains that the identification between "being" and "acting" and the ontology of act and potentiality is introduced by reference to Ravaisson's work on Aristotelian metaphysics.[7] The principle of a metaphysics of human agency, promoted since *Soi-même comme un autre*, begins to take shape from there on, in the sense of a metaphysics linked to a morality embodied in action.[8] However, Ricoeur sets himself the task of making this perspective more complex, not only because of his differences with Ravaisson's thought, but also to engage himself in a process of "linking" and "unlinking" metaphysics and morality based on his anthropology of the "acting and enduring man" and articulated connections between "ethics" and "morality," "idem-identity" and "ipse-identity," or "premoral forms of imputation" and "moral imputation."[9] "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" leaves aside those developments on morality so it can focus on the "speculative structure" of the hermeneutics of the self, significantly emphasizing the metaphysical aim of this investigation.[10]

When checking Ricoeur's bibliography, one can see that the term "ontology" occurs more often than the term "metaphysics."[11] This might first reinforce the attention and interest granted to "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" to deepen the metaphysical aim of Ricoeur's philosophy. But one might then be led to consider that the distinction between ontology and metaphysics is not that obvious to grasp, for it was not fully clarified by Ricoeur. If he addresses this distinction in an article entitled "Ontology," it is precisely by focusing on the question of ontology and by limiting the conception of ontology as metaphysics to the section of this article that deals with Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.[12] The current distinction between general metaphysics, represented by ontology after Aristotle, and special metaphysics, including cosmology, psychology and theology, would be what encourages us to superimpose ontology and metaphysics when we aim to place ourselves at the level of a discourse on being that is as broad and open as possible.[13] Ricoeur refers precisely to this heritage and to Kant's choice for taking a critical stance towards traditional metaphysics and what he calls ontotheology.[14] We understand that the metaphysical level, which was related to the theme of human agency when *Soi-même comme*

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[6] Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 455-456 (our translation).

[7] *Ibid.* (our translation).

[8] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 32–33 ; *id.*, "De la volonté à l'acte. Entretien de Paul Ricoeur avec Carlos Oliveira," in *« Temps et récit » de Paul Ricœur en débat*, ed. Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 22.

[9] Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 457, 472-474, and 476 (our translation).

[10] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 15, nº 2 (2024), 193 (our translation).

[11] See Frans D. Vansina (with Pieter Vandecasteele), *Paul Ricœur. Bibliographie primaire et secondaire/Paul Ricoeur Primary and Secondary Bibliography 1935-2008* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).

[12] Ricoeur, "Ontologie," 94-96. Since this article sums up Ricoeur's main ideas, there is no need here for returning to earlier publications directly or indirectly dealing with ontology.

[13] See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 2019) and Christian Wolff, *Philosophia prima siva ontologia* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1962).

[14] Emmanuel Kant, *Critique de la raison pure* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006); Ricoeur, "Ontologie," 94.

*un autre* was conceived and published, corresponds, according to the logic of Ricoeur's analyses and the common definitions of this field, to a specific stage of development of a more general ontological research dealing with the issue of being qua being and the issue of being in the diversity of its meanings. If we follow the terms of a more recent debate, asking the question of "what *is*" then belongs to the connected yet distinct fields of ontology and metaphysics, for the first field refers to a greater level of generality and systematicity and the second field refers to a focus on actuality.[15] Reconceiving Ricoeur's problem within this framework would lead to consideration of whether action can only be grasped and explained by crossing the practical field and facing up to the polysemy of being. This problem can then be related to a self only thanks to a system of interpretation or a hermeneutic justifying the fact that we have to rely on an ontology of act and potentiality; and it is finally only through its actualization in action, which is anthropologically universal and irreducible to an epistemic aim, that it displays a fuller meaning akin to something like a philosophical truth.

Despite this proposal of reformulation, shouldn't we see Ricoeur's approach as being still indebted to Heidegger's approach focused on the concept of ontology? Without denying this connection, a renewal of research on this subject-matter requires us to clarify things in relation to Ricoeur's work, to take into account the complexity through which the terms of the problem are posed, and to recall the differences between Ricoeur and Heidegger. The goal aimed here, and what "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" quite concisely recalls, is the sort of culmination represented by *Soi-même comme un autre* and various texts from the same period: a metaphysical position built upon the concepts of "attestation," "ipseity," and "alterity."[16] Referring to the "ontology of historicity" in *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Frédéric Nef speaks of a "classically Heideggerian analysis."[17] A similar interpretation could apply not only to *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, which Nef probably sees as recapitulating Ricoeur's thought, but to certain developments in other texts and books by Ricoeur. Indeed, that sort of interpretation relies more on what would be mechanically expected from a hermeneutical phenomenology than anything else.[18] it is not appropriate to qualify Ricoeur's approach to ontology or his ontology as a whole; it just simplifies things unnecessarily; we therefore need to look at this question in greater depth. Such task may have become all the more necessary given that Heidegger has also used the term "metaphysics" for a while; he actually favored it right after the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (from 1927-1931) before radicalizing his approach further and searching for a way of thinking that would exist outside of all metaphysics, establishing a conception of ontology through a rather esoteric expression of

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[15] Frédéric Nef and Yann Schmitt, "Introduction," in *Ontologie. Identité, structure et métaontologie* (Paris: Vrin, 2017), 8. The terms of this debate also include Roman Ingarden's contribution in the path of phenomenology but through a critique of Husserl; see Roman Ingarden, *Husserl. La controverse Idéalisme-Réalisme* (Paris: Vrin, 2001).

[16] Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 347-410 (our translation).

[17] Frédéric Nef, *Traité d'ontologie pour les non-philosophes (et les philosophes)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 27 (our translation); Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

[18] As a remark from a book in ontology, one would be justified in judging that something is missing out here, given the scope of Ricoeur's work and Nef's rather light evaluation in historical and analytical terms.

philosophical discourse.[19] Traces of Heidegger's philosophy within Ricoeur's philosophy cannot be ignored or denied; however, a number of factors would lead to consideration of Ricoeur's research and conceptions for themselves, in irreducible difference with those of Heidegger. First, it should be remembered that the path followed by the author of *Sein und Zeit* on ontology and metaphysics cannot be transposed to the analyses of those issues by the author of *Temps et récit*. If connections exist and can be recognized between the two approaches, it is mainly because they result from a comparable effort to integrate, within a phenomenology necessarily dedicated to the description and analysis of phenomenal appearance, an initial confrontation with the diversity of being and, consequently, with a form of combination between being and appearing. In other words, a confrontation with ontological issues becomes inevitable even when we stick to the methodological framework of phenomenological research.[20] In Heidegger's perspective, hermeneutics, which must be strongly distinguished from the Schleiermacher's and Dilthey's conceptions of this field, is then used as a means of transforming phenomenology. However, the kind of connection that Ricoeur builds up between phenomenology and hermeneutics is not comparable to Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics. According to Dominique Janicaud's analysis, Ricoeur's approach is related to "two methodological phases with clearly delineated and ultimately complementary roles."[21] It must also be recalled that Ricoeur's philosophy distanced itself from Heidegger's philosophy, albeit gradually, and at different stages of his career he was able to assert a marked opposition to it, especially with regard to the question of metaphysics.[22] Finally, when looking more closely at this issue, one sees that it is decisively linked to the aims of Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology.[23]

What is relevant and valuable in "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" could therefore be considered in relation to a philosophical position that still has to be analyzed and investigated further. At first, it might reinforce the idea that this text cannot be assimilated to a narrow transposition of "De la métaphysique à la morale," even though it was necessarily used to communicate, in a conference, theses reported in that article after being established, for the sake

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[19] Martin Heidegger, *Être et temps* [*Sein und Zeit*] (Paris: Authentica, 1985) et *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989).

[20] From Paul Ricoeur, "Méthode et tâches d'une philosophie de la volonté," in *À l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), 80-86, to Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, including Ingarden's critique of the "metaphysical decision" implicit in Husserl's phenomenology – see in particular Paul Ricoeur, "Kant et Husserl," in *À l'école de la phénoménologie*, 241, the notions of "ontological phenomenology," "hermeneutic phenomenology," and the principle of an ontology based on phenomenology remind us of the inevitability of this confrontation.

[21] Dominique Janicaud, *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 231 (our translation).

[22] Regardless of the details related to this point and of texts distancing themselves from Heidegger's ontology, the following references can be mentioned: Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 356-362 and 392-399, and *id.*, *Temps et récit III. Le temps raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 110-187. It should also be remembered that a difference with Heidegger is made in the introduction to "De la métaphysique à la morale" and by referring to Ravaisson (Ricoeur, "De la métaphysique à la morale," 456).

[23] Samuel Lelièvre, "Herméneutique et horizon anthropologique de la phénoménologie dans la philosophie ricœurienne," *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, vol. 14, nᵒ 1 (2023), 78-112.

of a philosophical work, in *Soi-même comme un autre*. One could then remark that the title of this text itself would refer to a continuity in Ricoeur's investigation, namely from the lectures on *Être, essence, et substance chez Platon et Aristote* in the 1950s to *Soi-même comme un autre* via the work on hermeneutics, symbol and language, of which *La métaphore vive* is one of the main outcomes. It could also help us to understand a period during which the philosopher mentions more explicitly the metaphysical aim of his philosophy, while relying on the style and methods of a hermeneutic phenomenology. "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" would summarize this effort in a characteristic way: it results from a development at the end of which we would join a kind of common ground that would combine the general conception of a philosophical investigation and its ethical-anthropological aim with a metaphysics of human agency that expands an ontological research from a hermeneutic phenomenology. After having correctly identified Ricoeur's methodological clarity in assembling phenomenology and hermeneutics – when compared to Heidegger's approach – Janicaud typically interprets Ricoeur's metaphysical aim as an "undertaking to restore metaphysics," opening the way for an irregular overflowing of the constraining framework of the phenomenological method.[24] It remains hard to understand how Ricoeur would consequently shift from the status of the only author who firmly avoids a certain theological, post-Levinasian drift observed with most figures of French phenomenology, to the status of an author redistributing the terms of the ontology-theology pair respectively to phenomenology and hermeneutics via his use of the "meta-" function of speculative thought. A contradiction appears here at the end of an analytic development that remains remarkable for its relevance and effectiveness. Indeed, if Janicaud refers to analyses that can be read in "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," he misses the way in which the strategy of "hierarchization" and "diversification" associated with the "'meta-' function" does not seek to unify the significations of beings so that it would achieve something claiming to be the ultimate "sense" of the being, but, in a way that is both simpler and more decisive, to set them in order by preserving the principles of ontological plurality and polysemy.[25]

Limitations that could be attributed to Ricoeur's analyses are to be found elsewhere, that is, in more internal elements of his work. Reference could especially be made to certain consequences of Ricoeur's critical evaluation of the tenth study of *Soi-même comme un autre* and to another approach building a link between hermeneutic phenomenology and metaphysics that is still constitutive of Ricoeur's philosophy. Regarding the first problem, the philosopher wrote in *Réflexion faite*: "I am not sure that Aristotle's distinction between potentiality and act is open enough to contemporary reinterpretations (mainly post-Heideggerian) so it can introduce to the ontology to be looked for."[26] If this remark may indirectly attest to a critical stance towards Heidegger's ontology and its consequences, it points above all to problems resulting from attempts to continue some of the crucial contributions in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The synthetic feature of "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" could, however, make it possible to overlook these difficulties inherent in reviving the ontology of act and potentiality even if it proceeds from a break with the substantialism inherited from the scholastic tradition (including the onto-theological

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[24] Dominique Janicaud, *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*, 245 (our translation).

[25] Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of Self," 195; Janicaud, *La phénoménologie dans tous ses états*, 245-246 (our translation).

[26] Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*, 117 (our translation).

perspective) and proposes, in addition to the reference to a "post-Heideggerian Aristotle" still in dispute, a reconnection with the "conatus" in Spinoza's sense.[27] But insofar as it aims to recall the main topics of the ontological level of the hermeneutics of the self, this text still relies on analyses from *Soi-même comme un autre's* last study and so on its "exploratory character" and remains somewhat indefinite.[28] Regarding the second problem, we have to put forward the hypothesis that "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" may have been an opportunity to return to some of the points made in *La métaphore vive's* last study, namely the issue of imagination as a mode of mediation between the level of a phenomenological investigation and the metaphysical level targeted by the hermeneutics of the self – which is itself determined or carried forward by a philosophical anthropology.[29] This eighth study of *La métaphore vive* displays a twofold movement: a first critical (or "polemical") movement which, by concentrating on exposing the difference between philosophical discourse and poetic discourse, discreetly and indirectly gives a role to imagination;[30] a second movement, conceived in "positive terms," relates more directly to the issue of the imagination.[31] The interesting point here appears in the second movement. Thus, alongside developments on the "creative" or productive imagination as a way for "thinking more" that is able to induce "conceptual thought" and therefore philosophical discourse out of their comfort zone, *La métaphore vive*, against Heidegger, points to a dialectic between the metaphorical and the speculative, using the imagination as a mode of mediation.[32]

But if the relationship to Kant via the issue of schematism does not appear within the perspective of a metaphysics of action, it remains prominent via two other levels that engage a conception of philosophical discourse: on the one hand, the consequences of Kant's criticism as a reconfiguration of various fields of philosophy and a kind of new valorization of practical and moral philosophy; on the other hand, the limitations of Kant's criticism with regard to a philosophy of knowledge linked to the concepts of ontology and metaphysics irreducible to ontotheology alone

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[27] Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 365-367; Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*, 117 (our translation); Baruch Spinoza, *Œuvres IV. Ethica. Éthique* (Paris: PUF, 2020).

[28] Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 345 (our translation).

[29] This limitation also has to do with the more restricted framework that the philosopher gives himself for a text supporting an oral presentation. More extensive in its analyses, "De la métaphysique à la morale" includes a fourth section in which this question of imagination is taken into account, essentially by recalling the links between "ethics and morality" and the "thought experiments" permitted by "fiction" and the "imaginary" – see *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 98, nº 4 (1993), 475 or Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*, 112-113. However, we find traces of these developments through two occurrences of the notion of fiction (Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 201-202).

[30] Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, 374 (our translation).

[31] *Id.*

[32] *Ibid.*, 384 (our translation). Ricoeur notably writes that "the doubling of reference and the re-description of reality, subject to the imaginative variations of fiction, appear as specific figures of distanciation, when these figures are reflected and re-articulated by speculative discourse" (*ibid.*, 399, our translation). See also Paul Ricoeur, *L'imagination* (Paris: Seuil, 2024) along with Jean-Luc Amalric, *Ricœur, Derrida. L'enjeu de la métaphore* (Paris: PUF, 2006), which underlines the importance of Ricoeur's criticism towards Heidegger in *La métaphore vive's* eighth study.

and its critique.[33] On those two levels, Ricoeur's position must be understood in all its complexity – something that "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self" shows tightly and clearly enough. Ricoeur takes up Kant's critique of metaphysics and the reformulation of a moral philosophy – in particular from the problem of freedom –, but he distances himself from Kant's conception of "practical reason" in some kind of negative anticipation of any future post-metaphysical discourse.[34] One consequence of this difference is the fresh development of the debate between philosophy and theology, in an implicit divergence from the idea of a "transcendental theology" and a circumvention of the problem of ontotheology and the circularity of the reasoning structuring this last section of the "transcendental dialectic."[35] Ricoeur also takes up Kant's criticism of metaphysics and the reformulation of a philosophy of knowledge – in particular through the problem of judgment – but he points to the impasse constituted by the hiatus between "physics" and "ethics" within the system of criticism.[36] This latter problem is what would expose us to a restrained yet induced idealism or, through the extension of the principle of a Copernican revolution and a subjectivization of epistemology, to an absolutization of this metaphysical orientation. It is thus comprehensible how Ricoeur maintains an exchange with the ontological-metaphysical tradition since Plato and Aristotle and affirms the necessity "to awaken, to liberate those resources that great systems of the past tend to stifle and mask" in order to make "innovation" really possible in this fundamental field of philosophical investigation.[37] This approach is not taken in addition to or simultaneously with the reference to the contributions and consequences of Kant's criticism but by avoiding a conception of the history of philosophy that opposes the metaphysical tradition to post-metaphysical modernity.[38]

We might finally be asking ourselves whether Ricoeur's appropriation of ideas from English-speaking contemporary philosophy, and more specifically from analytic philosophy, provides useful or decisive support to make his approach more accessible, that is less subject to the limitations prompted by a constant reminder of possible convergence and divergence with Kant's heritage. The principle of a metaphysics that cannot be destroyed or toppled, since it remains attached to an ontology as a science of being and a philosophy of knowledge or to an epistemic goal entrenched in philosophical discourse – a principle introduced by Peirce and continued by various conceptions of realism up to the present day – implies moving away from a speculative conception of metaphysics and heading toward a scientific conception of this field, far from the

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[33] Analytic philosophy of knowledge specialized in recalling such difference.

[34] Paul Ricoeur, "La raison pratique," in *Du texte à l'action. Herméneutique II* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 263-288.

[35] Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, 553. To limit ourselves to one bibliographical reference among the most decisive ones, see Paul Ricoeur, *Le mal, un défi à la philosophie et à la théologie* (Genève: Fides, 1988). On Kantian criticism, see also *id.*, "Kant, Emmanuel (1724-1804)" in *Encyclopédie du protestantisme* (Paris-Genève: Cerf-Labor et Fides, 1995), 816-821.

[36] Paul Ricoeur, "La tâche de l'herméneutique: en venant de Schleiermacher et de Dilthey" (1975), in *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II.* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 87.

[37] Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 347 (our translation).

[38] The difference in the conception of philosophical discourse is recurrent in many misunderstandings that can be found in Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz ed., *"Temps et récit" de Paul Ricœur en débat* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

anti-metaphysical stances of logical empiricism and other sources of analytical philosophy.[39] Ricoeur recalls the importance of the debate he sought to engage in with the analytic trend in his research about an ontology of the self and a metaphysics of action, specifically by considering the issue of "attestation" and the work of Peter Strawson, Donald Davidson and Derek Parfit.[40] In this context, he highlights the plain "realist" orientation in those works and their role as a "counterweight for two tendencies, respectively idealist and phenomenist, stemming from Descartes and Hume."[41] Having in mind Ricoeur's self-association with reflective philosophy, hermeneutics and phenomenology, this last point provides quite a strong idea of his commitment to defend metaphysics as responding to the epistemic and veritative values of philosophy. However, other problems arise, in particular the following two points. Ricoeur precisely does not reduce his approach to this "epistemic determination"; he aims at making "attestation" something that would work as some sort of ontological re-anchoring for the "linguistic analysis" borrowed from English-speaking philosophers.[42] These perspectives are a reminder that Ricoeur's adaptation of inputs from analytic philosophy remains subject to a conception received from a reflexive philosophy inclined to link metaphysics to a moral philosophy and from a hermeneutic phenomenology leaning to neutralize the concept of metaphysics by using mainly the concept of ontology. If there are some points that can possibly be discussed in this debate between Ricoeur and analytic philosophy, we cannot avoid mentioning the following limitations. First, Ricoeur continues to situate ontology and metaphysics within a speculative horizon of philosophical discourse. Second, the field of metaphysics is not the one that dominates his reading of (analytic or non-analytic) contemporary English-speaking philosophy. References to the latter are indeed numerous and related to a wide variety of fields.[43] philosophy of action, philosophy of language, ethics, philosophy of law, social and political philosophy, and philosophy of the social sciences – in particular, as follows *Temps et récit*, the philosophy of history. Even though the philosophy of action and the philosophy of language are placed, in those contexts, in the fields of metaphysics and epistemology, the references called upon here by Ricoeur are not decisive when compared with the development of *Soi-même comme un autre's* tenth study as a whole, especially regarding the other notions put forward, namely the notions of ipseity and alterity. In "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," references to analytic philosophy are limited to John L. Austin's approach to speech acts and the philosophy of ordinary language in Ludwig Wittgenstein's last approach, backing then a framed use of the "analogy of agency" with language

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[39] Charles S. Peirce, *Le raisonnement et la logique des choses* (Paris: Cerf, 1995). David M. Armstrong's philosophy is one of the most significant expressions of scientific realism in contemporary metaphysics.

[40] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 348-349 (our translation). Peter Frederick Strawson, *Les individus* (Paris: Seuil, 1973); Donald Davidson, *Actions et événements* (Paris: PUF, 1993); Derek Parfit, *Les raisons et les personnes* (Paris: Agone, 2024).

[41] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 348 (our translation).

[42] *Ibid.*, 347 and 349 (our translation).

[43] Limiting ourselves to the authors most frequently cited, the following could be mentioned: Elizabeth Anscombe, John L. Austin, Arthur Danto, Donald Davidson, Alan Donagan, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Derek Parfit, John Rawls, John Searle, Peter Frederick Strawson, Charles Taylor, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

as one of the modes of action and with a philosophy of action as the condition of a relationship to being.[44]

## II.        Analytical description of "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self"

Ricoeur's text revolves around three sections, the last two of which are most directly related to the title of the text. The second section is thus devoted to an account of metaphysics in relation to various levels of "philosophical discourse;" the third section deals with the issue of a "hermeneutics of the self" as receiving its "speculative structure" from metaphysics.[45] In the first section of the text, Ricoeur's analysis focuses on the "prefix 'meta-' of 'metaphysics'":[46] what is at play here is the "*discursive* feature of metaphysics."[47] Moreover, this allows him to avoid entering into the framework of a "critique of ontotheology" – such as introduced by Kant and then radicalized by Heidegger – or taking the stance of a "post-metaphysical age"[48] – such as promoted by a post-Hegelian line notably represented by the Frankfurt School's critical theory.[49] Ricoeur then mentions "two distinct [and] complementary strategies,"[50] which will sustain the way to deal with key issues of his text. The first strategy involves what he calls a "hierarchization"[51] of philosophical discourse; in a reminder of the links that exist between the tenth study of *Soi-même comme un autre* and the lectures on Plato and Aristotle in the 1950s, Ricoeur relates this strategy to his reference to Plato's great kinds and to the dialogues (the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Philebus*) that take on a critical dimension in front of traditional Platonism represented by the "theory of Forms or Ideas."[52] The other strategy is about what is considered to be a "pluralization"[53] of philosophical discourse, that is a "the strategy of differentiating among various accepted meanings for being"[54] but which more generally results from a reference to Aristotle's conception of a

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[44] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 197 and sq.

[45] *Ibid.*, 193.

[46] *Id.*

[47] *Id.*

[48] *Ibid.*, 194.

[49] Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*; Heidegger, *Être et temps*; *id.*, *Kant et le problème de la métaphysique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981); *id.*, "Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique ?," in *Question I et II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 23-84; *id.*, *La "Phénoménologie de l'esprit" de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984) ; Jürgen Habermas, *La pensée post-métaphysique* (Paris: Colin, 1997). The notion of ontotheology would appear in Heidegger's work especially from "Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?" (1929) and the *Cours sur Hegel* (1930-1931), while *Kant et le problème de la métaphysique* (1929) would address a kind of Kantian unveiling of the notion of being (via the limits of reason), as opposed to the Neo-Kantianism focus on the philosophy of knowledge. See also Ernst Cassirer et Martin Heidegger, *Débat sur le kantisme et la philosophie et autres textes de 1929-1931* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972).

[50] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 194.

[51] *Id.*

[52] *Id.*; Platon, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).

[53] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 194.

[54] *Ibid.*, 195.

plurality of meanings of being or for a being that is said in multiple ways. We are therefore referred to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in addition to Plato's ontology;[55] however, these developments, as inseparable as they are from Platonism while introducing a relationship to the concreteness of being, establish, like all Ricoeur's texts on the subject, a decisive support for the analysis.[56] He then indicates that he chose to develop his "hermeneutics of the self" on the basis of the "energeia-dunamis pair,"[57] or being as act and potentiality, already posited in the last study of *Soi-même comme un autre*, and which continues to be discussed in relation to Spinoza's, Heidegger's and Nabert's ontological conceptions.

From this point on, the hermeneutics of the self is first related to an ontology of action that includes the strategies of hierarchization and differentiation set out before. It is about answering the "'who' question,"[58] according to which an imputability of action is concerned. Ricoeur also mentions the necessity of cautiously using an "analogy of agency"[59] to include a variety of expressions of this action or of this relationship to action where the identity and the alterity of a subject in the second and third person are apprehended and integrated into an interpretative framework. "'Talking,' 'doing,' 'recounting,' 'imputing,'" he writes, "are, in turns, the first analogon in the series of figures of acting, based on what Kant would have called an interest of reason that is different in each case."[60] The analogy of agency, also related to an analogical unity of agency in *Soi-même comme un autre*, would be how we can effectively account for the multiple meanings of being and in a sense maintain ourselves within the metaphysical horizon supporting a philosophical relationship to reason. The reference to Aristotle's principle of "being as act and potentiality," which Ricoeur admits could be confined to a "reappropriation [that remains] difficult,"[61] is then justified by two arguments:[62] on the one hand, it is considered that the hermeneutics of the self can be seen as "an *a posteriori* justification"[63] for this ontology of act and potentiality; on the other hand, the same ontology "authenticates *a priori* the primacy given to agency at the level of hermeneutic phenomenology."[64] In this section of the text, Ricoeur's philosophy of action is thus linked to a metaphysical position concentrated on the notion of "attestation," which must be defined as "the affirmation of the self as an acting (and suffering)

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[55] Aristote, *Métaphysique* (Paris: Vrin, 1964).

[56] Among other occurrences, see Paul Ricoeur, "Ontologie," 96 ; *id.*, *La métaphore vive*, 388-392 ; *id.*, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 352-358 and 360-366.

[57] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 196.

[58] *Ibid.*, 197-198.

[59] *Id.*

[60] *Ibid.*, 197.

[61] *Ibid.*, 198.

[62] Ricoeur dwells on this difficulty in a long note (*id.*). What would be "laborious" in this approach would then be made even more complex by the "adventurous" attempts of "re-actualization," (*id.*, *Soi-même comme un autre*, 352), or "attempted reconstructions," (Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 198) of Aristotelian ontology via its Heideggerian re-reading (our translation).

[63] *Ibid.*, 199.

[64] *Id.*

being" and as opposed to "suspicion."[65] The principle of suspicion is not rejected in itself – Ricoeur used it to confront philosophical conceptions rooted in such a principle, whether in Marx's, Nietzsche's, Freud's or Heidegger-Derrida's terms. It is simply not described here as a privileged path to attestation, as it might be the case in *Soi-même comme un autre.*[66]

But the hermeneutics of the self will also be eventually reported to the "dialectic of the *same* and the *other*,"[67] which in fact precedes the hierarchization and differentiation of discourses. Following the model built in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur distinguishes, in his conception of a hermeneutics of the self, two levels of what he calls the "meta-category of the other:"[68] on the one hand, we must distinguish "*sameness*" – *i.e.* what does not change in personal identity – and "*ipseity*"[69] – *i.e.* what evolves while still linked to this "personal core."[70] The concept of narrative identity, elaborated in *Temps et récit* and fully studied in *Soi-même comme un autre*, encompasses "these two modes of identity;"[71] furthermore, as Ricoeur points out, it allows some sort of valorization of relations to "fiction," but also to "history" and "introspection."[72] He shows, still in connection with his earlier work, that this should not, however, lead us to disregard the importance of language at a "pre-narrative structure of discourse and action," in Dilthey's sense of the "cohesion of a life" or in the sense of "moral imputation" exemplified by the "promise" we make to others and to ourselves.[73] On the other hand, we must deal more directly with the "figures of otherness," according to which the identity of the same is played out in the "other than itself."[74] The integration of Levinas's perspective of alterity, necessarily set outside any ontology, is reaffirmed in Ricoeur's distinction between his reference to an ontology of act and potentiality and his conception of a "meta-category of the other," which can only refer to the phenomenological level of the "experiences of passivity."[75] Unlike Levinas, however, the metaphysical level aimed at by Ricoeur, namely the human agency necessarily linked to an ethical-anthropological aim, keeps connections with an ontological level that deepens various issues and themes of a phenomenological investigation.[76] The articulated connection between "passivity" and "exteriority," which results from this difference, can thus be the object of an "exploration" through

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[65] *Ibid.*, 200. On that topic, see also Paul Ricoeur, "L'attestation : entre phénoménologie et ontologie," in *Paul Ricoeur. Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*.

[66] In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur thus writes that "suspicion is also the path *to* and crossing *of* attestation," 350-351 (our translation).

[67] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 200.

[68] *Id.*

[69] *Ibid.*, 201.

[70] *Id.*

[71] *Id.*

[72] *Id.*

[73] *Ibid.*, 202.

[74] *Id.*

[75] *Ibid.*, 203.

[76] In addition to *Soi-même comme un autre* (387-393), see Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (La Haye: Nijhoff, 1974) and Paul Ricoeur, *Autrement. Lecture d'*Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'*Emmanuel Levinas*.

the themes of the "flesh," the "stranger" or the "inner self."[77] If those themes, taken separately, constitute the different analytical levels of a hermeneutic phenomenology determining the relationship to the self and to intersubjectivity, a metaphysics of human action constitutes the general and current framework in which they coexist before being sent back to the cycle of an experience *in* and *of* the world.

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[77] Paul Ricoeur, "Discourse, Metaphysics, and Hermeneutics of the Self," 203.

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