Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self

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abstract: This paper sets out to reappraise Ricoeur's theory of the self, offering a critical commentary on three important theses regarding *Oneself as Another*: those of Domenico Jervolino, Johann Michel and Jean Greisch. It challenges the commonly held assumption that the "hermeneutics of the self," which Ricoeur introduces in that work, is continuous with his earlier works on a "reform" of subjectivity. It discusses three considerations which indicate that, from the mid to late 1980's onwards, Ricoeur did not view "the subject" and "the self" as one and the same. It argues that the "guiding thread" in Ricoeur's work is in fact a critical engagement with Descartes' Second *Meditation*. This sustained but evolving critique of the Second *Meditation* is almost always the occasion for innovation. However, when it occurs in *Oneself as Another* it gives rise to a revolution: a break with the "philosophies of the subject" and a rapprochement with Heidegger.

keywords: Attestation, hermeneutics of the self, philosophies of the subject, psychoanalytic critique of the cogito, wounded cogito.

Paul Ricoeur's perspective on his own work was somewhat different from the perspective shared by many of his supporters. Take, for example, the following response that Ricoeur gave to John B. Thompson's "substantial introduction" to *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*:

> The perspective which he proposes [on my work from 1947 to 1979] corrects the inverse impression, to which I have a tendency to succumb: that of a certain lack of continuity in my writings. For each work responds to a determinate challenge, and what connects it to its predecessors seems to me to be less the steady development of a unique project than the acknowledgement of a residue left over by the previous work, a residue which gives rise in turn to a new project. (Ricoeur 1981: 32)

Ricoeur appears to welcome the interplay of two perspectives here: his original impression of his own work and Thompson's corrective. The two contrary impressions are apparently well–founded with each one revealing what we might call, an element of truth. Ricoeur is certainly not prepared

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to concede that his own assessment was mistaken. As he points out, each of his works responds to a determinate challenge and appears, to its author at least, to be connected to its predecessors, but only to the extent that it acknowledges that those works have left certain questions unanswered, which it now plans to take up and form into "a new project." Twenty years later Ricoeur was still describing the relationships among his many works in precisely those terms. Consider the following statement made in *Lectio magistralis*, which was first published as the appendix to Domenico Jervolino's *Paul Ricoeur: Une herméneutique de la condition humaine*: "Like all my earlier works, [*Memory, History, Forgetting*] has its origin in the discovery and consideration of residual questions, i.e., those left unanswered in an earlier work." (Jervolino 2005: 87, my translation) On that occasion, it was Jervolino who would assume the role of respondent, suggesting that Ricoeur's account of the way his work had evolved should be counterbalanced by a demonstration of "the unity and coherence of his philosophical itinerary." (Jervolino 2005: 5)

There is one work, however, that does not appear to fit the usual pattern. *Oneself as Another* is distinctive in that a first draft of that work appeared to be a straightforward attempt to *synthesize* several decades of research in areas as diverse as: (1) the philosophy of language; (2) the philosophy of action; (3) narrative theory; and (4) moral philosophy. In short, its sole focus was ostensibly the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's work. Further, this sense of consolidating diverse aspects of a single project appeared to carry over into the final draft. But all was not as it seemed. Ricoeur's strategy for synthesizing the work, at least first time around, was to take all the questions he had dealt with in the past and divide them into four categories: (1) "Who speaks?"; (2) "Who acts?"; (3) "Who recounts?"; and (4) "Who takes responsibility for their actions?" And crucially, he then commented that those four groups of questions could be arranged around the central question, "Who?". (Jervolino 2005: 81) Unlike the others he had listed, this was not a question he had dealt with in the past. It was, rather, the "residual" question that he would try to answer next. The task facing Ricoeur, in *Oneself as Another*, was not, then, just a matter of showing how various works contributed to a unified scheme. Like all of the works that preceded it, it had a question to answer; one that had already been raised in an earlier text.

However, it would seem that the uncharacteristic emphasis that Ricoeur placed on the unity and continuity of his works, in *Oneself as Another*, has had the effect of obscuring the originality of the central theme of that work: *the self*. "The self" is, as Ricoeur points out, the answer to the question "Who?". (Ricoeur 1992: 16) Coupling that statement with the evidence that the book provides of a plan to synthesize decades of research in disparate

fields, many commentators assume that the "guiding thread," weaving its way across Ricoeur's earlier works and into *Oneself as Another*, is a questioning, even a profound questioning of "the subject." This is not an unreasonable assumption to make but, as I hope to show, it is mistaken nonetheless. The assumption is not unreasonable because Ricoeur spent best part of four decades first developing and then defending his own very distinctive philosophy of the subject; and there was no clear indication that he was about to change course. However, it would be a mistake to view the "hermeneutics of the self," which he introduces in *Oneself as Another*, as a hermeneutics of *the subject*. To equate the two is to disregard at least three of the considerations that Ricoeur includes in the Introduction to that work: (1) a plan to use a nominalized *omnipersonal* reflexive pronoun in place of the singular subjective pronoun or "I;" (2) a declaration of his intention to *break with*, or *part ways* with the "philosophies of the subject;" and (3) an important indication that the "hermeneutics of the self" will have a different *status* to that of the "philosophies of the subject." In this instance, "status" means both epistemic quality and ontological commitments.

In the first part of this paper, I discuss Ricoeur's plans to break with the "philosophies of the subject," underscoring the revolutionary character of those plans by showing how Ricoeur's established philosophical interests and past allegiances position all of his preceding works firmly within the category that he now wants to leave behind. I then note the way he uses the complex functioning of language as a guide when introducing his new topic.

In the second part of the paper, I argue that it is possible, nonetheless, to identify a "guiding thread" in Ricoeur's work, which first appears in the early 1950's and is still discernible in 1990, the year he published *Oneself as Another*. That "guiding thread" is Ricoeur's sustained critical engagement with Descartes' Second *Meditation*. I try to show that it is this critical engagement with the Second *Meditation* that has given us some of Ricoeur's more memorable and inventive ideas. I then try to demonstrate that, contrary to appearances, there is no discrepancy between the first and final drafts of *Oneself as Another* when it comes to the accounts that Ricoeur offers of the way the central question — "Who?" — emerges in his work. Both accounts allude, explicitly or otherwise, to a critical engagement with the Second *Meditation*.

In the third part, I discuss three important commentaries on *Oneself as Another*, two of which do not make a distinction between "the subject" and "the self." I challenge the central theses of both commentaries by drawing on the research presented and the arguments developed in parts one and two. I then discuss the third commentary, which, as I indicate, is very much in line with that research.

1. Ricoeur's "new project" in *Oneself as Another*

If the design and layout of *Oneself as Another* point to the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's multiple works, comments made in the introduction place considerable emphasis on an impending *break with* certain outmoded philosophical interests, interests that Ricoeur once shared with Kant, Fichte, and Husserl. Ricoeur declares that "the quarrel over the cogito" has been "superseded;" and he talks about reaching a point where "our problematic will have *parted ways with* the philosophies of the subject." (Ricoeur 1992: 4, my emphasis) But what does he mean by "the philosophies of the subject?" He explains that he takes the expression to be "equivalent to 'philosophies of the cogito.'" (Ricoeur 1992: 4) Among those philosophies of the subject (or cogito) he includes works that defend "the ambition of establishing a final, ultimate foundation, primarily Descartes's *Meditations* but also works by Kant and Fichte, and Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*." (Ricoeur 1992: 4) However, his list of "philosophies of the subject" is not confined to those works; it also includes works by those who would shatter and "overthrow" the cogito, chief among them being Nietzsche. In an effort to differentiate the philosophy presented in *Oneself as Another* from those opposing "philosophies of the subject," Ricoeur says that it is "'second philosophy,' in the sense that Manfred Riedel gives to this term." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) He explains that Riedel uses the term to identify a form of philosophy that arose "following the failure of the cogito to be constituted as first philosophy and to resolve the question of determining an ultimate foundation." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) Ricoeur goes on to explain that Riedel's expression, "second philosophy" is equivalent to the expression, "practical philosophy." He does not want to claim that every aspect of *Oneself as Another* will count as "second" or "practical philosophy," but he wants to name one way in which it will. He explains that the ten studies presented in that work "have as their thematic unity *human action* and that the notion of action acquires, over the course of the studies, an ever–increasing extension and concreteness." (Ricoeur 1992: 19) It is, he says, to this extent that "the philosophy that comes out of this work deserves to be termed a practical philosophy and to be taken as 'second philosophy,' in the sense that Manfred Riedel gives to this term." (Ricoeur 1992: 19)

Viewed from the perspective of Ricoeur's introduction, there is, then, a certain lack of continuity between *Oneself as Another* and Ricoeur's earlier works, a situation which, I want to argue, coincides with the introduction of a new project. However, before venturing to offer a detailed account of what that new project entails, I would like to take a moment or two to reflect on Ricoeur's earlier association with the so–called "philosophies of the subject," because his new problematic is as far removed from his

earlier work as it is from all the other "philosophies of the subject," whether sympathetic to the idea of the cogito or emphatically anti–cogito. In an essay entitled *On Interpretation*, which is included in the collection *From Text to Action*, Ricoeur casts what Jean Greisch describes as "a retrospective glance over the problems that have occupied him for about thirty years." (Greisch 2001: 18, my translation) Ricoeur begins by offering a broad description of the "philosophical tradition" to which he belongs: "It stands in the line of a *reflexive* philosophy; it remains within the sphere of Husserlian *phenomenology*; it strives to be a hermeneutical variation of this phenomenology." (Ricoeur 2008: 12) Ricoeur knows that many of his readers will not be familiar with the term, "reflexive philosophy," so he offers a definition: "By reflexive philosophy, I mean broadly speaking the mode of thought stemming from the Cartesian cogito and handed down by way of Kant and French post–Kantian philosophy, a philosophy that is little known abroad and that, for me at least, was most strikingly represented by Jean Nabert." (Ricoeur 2008: 12) In providing that definition of the tradition of reflexive philosophy, a tradition to which he claims to belong, Ricoeur positions *all* of the works he published in the period from the 1950's to the early 1980's within the category of "the philosophies of the subject." This, of course, would explain the countless references we find, in those works, to "the subject" and even to "the cogito." But Ricoeur's cogito is distinctive. If we go back to *The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology*, an essay included in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, we come upon the curious expression, the "wounded cogito," *cogito blessé*. (Ricoeur 2007: 243) But what is it that makes this version of the cogito distinctive? Ricoeur defines the "wounded cogito" as "a *cogito* which posits but does not possess itself, a *cogito* which understands its primordial truth only in and through the avowal of inadequation, the illusion, the fakery of immediate consciousness." (Ricoeur 2007: 243) He explains that he came to think of the cogito in those terms after meditating on Freudian psychoanalysis. (Ricoeur 2007: 242) This particular conceptualization of the cogito finds an echo in Greisch's expression, "the hermeneutic cogito," *le cogito herméneutique*.[1]

There is a second essay in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, entitled *Existence and Hermeneutics*, which dramatizes Ricoeur's profound transformation of the cogito in, what for me, is an unforgettable way. There Ricoeur warns that his decision to "graft" hermeneutics onto phenomenology will change "the wild stock," (i.e., phenomenology) causing the cogito to "explode." (Ricoeur 2007: 17) He would use another interesting metaphor, in 2001, when describing the impact that Freudian psychoanalysis had on his work

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1. J. GREISCH, *Le Cogito herméneutique: l'herméneutique philosophique et l'héritage cartésien*, Paris, Vrin, 2000.

in the 1960's, a decade in which he wrote all the essays that comprise *The Conflict of Interpretations* as well as *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. That metaphor would depict psychoanalysis as a player in a game of chess that had *put in check* "the philosophies of consciousness stemming from Descartes, including the Husserlian phenomenology that I myself had practiced in my early works." (Jervolino 2005: 77–78) Ricoeur would then explain that he had to look to "the complex functioning of language" for guidance when planning his defensive move. (Jervolino 2005: 78)

When reading the opening paragraphs of the introduction to *Oneself as Another* it is important to remember that Ricoeur spent many decades defending his own distinctive version of the cogito before making the announcement that there would be a point where "our [new] problematic" parts ways with the philosophies of the subject. He may list Descartes, Kant, Fichte, Husserl, and even Nietzsche as philosophers who developed various "philosophies of the subject," but his philosophy of the "wounded cogito" earns him a place on that list too. However, that is not to say that there will be nothing to connect *Oneself as Another* to Ricoeur's earlier works. It is notable, for example, that when he introduces his new project he draws support from the way "the grammars of natural languages" function, a strategy that clearly recalls his earlier response to the threat posed to the cogito by psychoanalysis. (Ricoeur 1992: 1) However, in this later work, he is no longer looking to move the philosophies of consciousness out of check. He wants, rather, to set up an opposition between the "I" of the "I think" and "the self." Here is how he describes what he was trying to achieve:

> The first intention [that influenced the preparation of the book] was to indicate the primacy of reflective meditation over the immediate positing of the subject, as this is expressed in the first person singular: "I think," "I am." This initial intention draws support from the grammars of natural languages inasmuch as they allow the opposition between "self" and "I." This support takes different forms following the peculiarities of each language. (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

Ricoeur is clearly encouraged by the fact that the grammars of natural languages, like French, German, English, etc., "allow the opposition between 'self' and 'I.'" However, he wants to do far more than claim that it would be a mistake to confuse the two. Demonstrating an on–going commitment to phenomenological analysis, he goes in search of what he terms, "the essential meaning" of "self." (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

As Ricoeur notes, "self" is a *reflexive* pronoun. There are, in English, eight reflexive pronouns: *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, and themselves*; and it is clear from the text, that if Ricoeur had been writing in English, he would have used the term "self" to cover *all* of them. But

he goes even further than that. He writes: "I shall frequently refer in the course of these investigations" to "the impersonal pronouns, such as 'each,' 'anyone,' 'one,'" and he signals that they too will be covered by the term "self." (Ricoeur 1992: 1) He concedes that "the philosophical use of the term throughout these studies violates a restriction that has been stressed by grammarians, namely that *soi* is a third–person reflexive pronoun (himself, herself, itself)." He then endeavours to lift that restriction by comparing *soi* and *se* (as in *se présenter* and *se nommer*). Drawing on the work of the linguist G. Guillaume, he is able to show that because "*se*" relates to verbs in the form of the infinitive, i.e., verbs that are not "distributed among the tenses and the grammatical persons," there is no restriction on the pronouns it can designate. Then, comparing *se* and *soi*, he notes that "the reflexive pronoun *soi* also attains the same timeless range [*la même amplitude omnitemporelle*] when it is added to the *se* in the infinitive mode: *se décider soi–même*." (Ricoeur 1992: 1)

It seems to me that when Ricoeur seizes the opportunity to oppose "I" and "self," afforded him by the grammars of a number of European languages, he takes an important first step in demarcating his new research topic. No longer prepared to use the singular subject pronoun, "I," he has reached what we might consider a first staging post: "an omnipersonal reflexive pronoun." (Ricoeur 1992: 2) But Ricoeur quickly moves on to nominalize that pronoun, so that his topic becomes "the self" (*le soi*). As he explains: "The shift from one expression to the other is permitted by the grammatical capacity for nominalizing any element of language: do we not say 'the drink,' 'the beautiful,' 'the bright day?.'" (Ricoeur 1992: 2) He also points out that "the self" can function as the *indirect object* of another noun, and to illustrate the point he borrows "Michel Foucault's magnificent title: *le souci de soi* (care of the self)." (Ricoeur 1992: 2) It is interesting that he should align what he is attempting to do, in *Oneself as Another*, with the work of Foucault, someone whose name is so often associated with the thesis of "the death of the subject."

The more obvious connection, however, is with Martin Heidegger and Hans–Georg Gadamer, two hermeneutic philosophers who reject the subject–object conceptuality favoured by Husserl. In an essay entitled *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, which is included in the collection *From Text to Action*, Ricoeur offers a brief sketch of the main problem associated with this type of conceptuality. He notes that Husserl employs the subject–object conceptuality, in the epilogue to *Ideas*, whilst articulating his idealist thesis on the "ultimate justification" of phenomenology. Ricoeur objects that Husserl's idealist version of phenomenological justification is evidentially weak, that it is nothing more than self–assertion, a style of justification that "is associated with" the subject–object conceptuality. He draws attention

to the fact that hermeneutics, by which he means his own philosophy but also the philosophies of Heidegger and Gadamer, *opposes* the subject–object conceptuality by giving priority to the ontological "concept of belonging." (Ricoeur 2008: 27)[2] Although he does not claim that he has framed "the self" in that same hermeneutic conceptuality of belonging, in *Oneself as Another*, there may be some justification for claiming that the sense of belonging to someone (or to some group), suggested by the very construction of reflexive pronouns like *my*self or *your*self or *our*selves, was not lost in the process of nominalizing those pronouns. However, one thing is certain, Ricoeur admired Foucault's sub–title, *Care of the Self*, and what this shows is that he believed it was possible to say something intelligible about "the self" without having to carve the world up into discrete subjects and objects.

2. Linking *Oneself as Another* to Ricoeur's earlier works

I should now like to switch perspective and devote some time to considering the case for viewing *Oneself as Another* as being continuous with Ricoeur's earlier works at least in certain respects. The first piece of evidence that we need to consider is one provided by Ricoeur himself in the above mentioned *Lectio magistralis*. There Ricoeur reports that, after he had completed the third and final volume of *Time and Narrative*, he turned his attention to preparing a series of lectures, which he would revise, expand and rework several times before publishing them, in 1990, under the title, *Soi–même comme un autre*. The English translation, *Oneself as Another*, would appear two years later. Ricoeur explains that the motivation for preparing the original material was an invitation he had received to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the winter of 1986. However, that invitation came with a special request, which left him feeling that the whole thing was a bit "awkward." The organizing committee wanted him to "offer a synthesis of my works," but to do so would be to go "against the tide of my known preferences." (Jervolino 2005: 80–81) Ricoeur's handling of this awkward situation was skilful. He found a way of providing his audience with a single "set of tools" for understanding his various works while still managing to introduce a new project. (Jervolino 2005: 81) As he recalls, it occurred to him that all the questions he had dealt with in the past could be divided into four groups, corresponding to the four uses that he made of the modal verb "I can." He notes that he used the modal verb "I can" in the

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2. Ricoeur's position on the primacy of the concept of belonging is complicated due to a decision he takes to follow "the long route" to ontology via a series of studies and engagements that remain on the epistemological level. See *Existence and Hermeneutics*, in Ricoeur 2007: 19–24.

following ways: "I can speak, I can act, I can recount, [and] I can hold myself responsible for my actions, letting them be attributed to me as their true author." (Jervolino 2005: 81) So, the four groups of questions were to be given the question headings: (1) "Who speaks?"; (2) "Who acts?"; (3) "Who recounts?"; and (4) "Who takes responsibility for their actions?" Newly grouped and re–labelled in that way, Ricoeur hoped that those questions could then be seen to be linked to one another in certain respects. Of course, by establishing links among the various questions he effectively demonstrated the unity and continuity of works that were spread across the following areas: (1) the philosophy of language; (2) the philosophy of action; (3) narrative theory; and (4) moral philosophy. However, he was not content with merely synthesizing his earlier works; as always, he also wanted to introduce a *new project*. But how was he going to do that? He recalls that it occurred to him that "the multiple questions that I dealt with in the past could be grouped together around *a central question* that rises to the surface in our discourse on the uses that we make of the modal verb 'I can.'" (Jervolino 2005: 81, my emphasis) That central question was the question, "Who?" It was a question that he was keen to take up and form into his "new project."

The Gifford Lectures were clearly written with a view to highlighting the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's philosophical itinerary. However, four years of substantial revisions and expansions separate those lectures from the work that would be translated as, *Oneself as Another*. Charles E. Reagan considers this to be "time well spent: *Oneself as Another* is in my opinion Ricoeur's most elegantly written, clearly organized, and closely argued work." (Cohen and Marsh 2002: 4) But my question is: How much of the original highlighting of unity and continuity survived the changes made? As discussed in part one, *Oneself as Another* is designed to part ways with the philosophies of the subject, switching attention onto "the self;" and to facilitate that transition Ricoeur plans to stop using the singular subjective pronoun "I," replacing it with a *nominalized* "omnipersonal reflexive pronoun." Of course, that means he is no longer in a position to use the modal verb "I can" to establish links among the questions posed in the four areas of his work that were mentioned above. So how is the central question — "Who?" — meant to arise? And what survives, if anything, of his original list of four peripheral questions? Both answers are to be found in the introduction. There we see that Ricoeur manages to introduce his central question by turning to Descartes' Second *Meditation*, where he finds an original question that he will be able *to repeat and make his own*. Commenting on the meaning of Descartes' original question, he writes: "The question 'who?', related to the question 'who doubts?', takes on a new twist when it is connected to the question 'who thinks?' and, more radically, 'who

exists?'" (Ricoeur 1992: 6–7) Ricoeur's repetition of Descartes' "Who?" will be related, or connected, to a different set of questions: (1) "Who speaks?"; (2) "Who acts?"; (3) "Who recounts?"; and (4) "Who takes responsibility for their actions?"

Notwithstanding the evidence of continuity between the Gifford lectures and *Oneself as Another*, one could be troubled by the fact that Ricoeur appears to offer two very different accounts of how the central question "Who?" arose for him: (1) it emerged out of Ricoeur's uses of the modal verb "I can" (the story Ricoeur tells in his reflections on the Gifford lectures); and (2) it is a question that Descartes raised in the Second *Meditation* and which Ricoeur intends to raise anew (the story Ricoeur tells in the introduction to *Oneself as Another*). But there is no need to be troubled in that regard. Ricoeur took a critical stance on Descartes' Second *Meditation* as far back as 1950, if not before, and there is some evidence to suggest that that critique took on a number of different forms down through the years, Ricoeur's use of the modal verb "I can" being one of them. So, let me say something about that now, starting with a few comments on Ricoeur's early exposure to a rather unusual critique of Descartes.

There never was a time when Ricoeur did not want to move beyond some features of Descartes' philosophy of the cogito. Roland Dalbiez, the man who taught him philosophy in his final year at secondary school, was a huge influence in that regard, as Ricoeur's contribution to Marguerite Léna's *Honneur aux maîtres* will confirm. Dalbiez was a neo–Scholastic, and as such, vehemently opposed to philosophical idealism. He was, for Ricoeur, "an unforgettable teacher," who taught him about the importance of conceptual rigour and intellectual courage. (Jervolino 2005: 75) However, as Ricoeur notes in *Honneur aux maîtres*, Dalbiez was no ordinary neo–Aristotelian realist; he had devised a radically new way of critiquing idealist conceptions of consciousness, based on his own reconstruction of psychoanalysis. Most unusually, for the time, Dalbiez viewed psychoanalysis as much more than a therapy; he saw huge potential in the *theories* of the unconscious, of the libido, and of neurosis that Freud had developed. Ricoeur and his classmates were not directly acquainted with that research, but they did encounter it in the form of Dalbiez's judgement on the idealists' decision to prioritize "a knowledge that is conscious of itself" over "the real." Dalbiez described this "derealisation" as "a mental illness of the psychotic variety." Ricoeur says that it was only ten or fifteen years after he left school that he began to appreciate the extent of his debt to Dalbiez. Commenting specifically on the impact of Dalbiez's legacy on *Freedom and Nature*, he remarks that whilst certain elements of the book constitute a type of parricide, others pay tribute, albeit unintentionally, to "Dalbiez's Freud." However, he says, it is probably his own idea of the "absolute involuntary" that is most harmonious

with Dalbiez's "critique of the 'idealism' of the Cartesian cogito, which still resonates in the walls of the (boys'!) Lycée of Rennes."[3]

There is no suggestion that Dalbiez encouraged Ricoeur to focus on Descartes' Second *Meditation*. So it is likely that Ricoeur did not come to critically reflect on aspects of that *Meditation* until he took on the arduous task of translating Husserl's *Ideen* into French. At that stage he would have seen that Husserl made no distinction between "consciousness" and Descartes' "I think," understood in a broad sense:

> As starting–point we take consciousness in a pregnant sense which suggests itself at once, most simply indicated through the Cartesian *cogito*, 'I think.' As is known Descartes understood this in a sense so wide as to include every case of 'I perceive, I remember, I fancy, I judge, feel, desire, will,' and all experiences of the Ego that in any way resemble the foregoing, in all the countless fluctuations of their special patterns. (Husserl 1962: 104)

It was, of course, in the Second *Meditation* that Descartes listed the various modes of the "I think." Many years later, in the Introduction to *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur would quote the relevant line, noting that it formed the answer to a very particular question: "What is [a think that thinks?] A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagines and senses." (quoted in Ricoeur 1992: 7) He would then comment that there is "a 'phenomenologizing' tendency, expressed in the enumeration that preserves the real internal variety of the act of thinking." (Ricoeur 1992: 7) On Ricoeur's reading, Descartes was not simply an inspiration for Husserl; he was in fact a proto–phenomenologist.

Michael Sohn, in *The Good of Recognition: Phenomenology, Ethics and Religion in the Thought of Lévinas and Ricoeur*, offers a very insightful account of the distinctive way in which phenomenologists like Husserl and Levinas understand Descartes' cogito. He makes the observation that they share a "broadened interpretation of the ego cogito," recognizing multiple modalities, including will, perception, memory, imagination, judgement, and sensation; and he notes that Levinas is distinctive in that he "highlights the [important] place of sensation." Sohn also suggests that Ricoeur had a preference for "the modality of the will." (Sohn 2014: 35) I think that this is a very interesting way of looking at a work like *Freedom and Nature*, and in a moment I will offer some suggestions of my own as to why Ricoeur might have chosen that modality of the cogito over all the others. However, those suggestions will inevitably point to some sharp differences between Ricoeur and Levinas, the latter who, if Sohn is right, was not interested in moving beyond Descartes. (Sohn 2014: 35)

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3. *Mon premier maître en philosophie*, http://www.fondsricoeur.fr/uploads/medias/articles_pr/mon-premier-maitre.pdf (accessed September 29, 2015, my translation).

As an aspiring phenomenologist in the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology, Ricoeur would have had no option but to take the Cartesian cogito, or "I think," as his starting point for a work like *Freedom and Nature*. However, because that tradition favoured a broad conception of the ego cogito he was free to choose the modality of the "I think." However, there was no requirement that his *motivation* for choosing one modality over another had to be the same as a philosopher like Levinas. As Sohn notes, Levinas highlighted the modality of sensation because he considered it to be, "the most primordial and fundamental." (Sohn 2014: 35) Choosing the "I will" because it served to dramatize problems inherent in Descartes' conception of the cogito was also an option. There is an intriguing footnote in John Wall's *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility*, which provides an insight into the standard that Ricoeur would have applied to Descartes' latent philosophy of the will. Wall notes: "Interestingly, the body is so central to willing for Ricoeur that he goes so far as to make the rather strange claim in *Freedom and Nature* that 'the acid test of a philosophy of the will is indisputably the problem of *muscular effort*' (308)." (Wall 2005: 197–198) Ricoeur would have seen that because Descartes deliberately supposed throughout the Second *Meditation* that no bodies exist, including his own, he was not in a position to do justice to the idea that the will entails "mastery over a body." This meant that the only defensible appropriation of Descartes' "I will" was in fact a *critical* one. Of course, being more or less obliged to effect a critical appropriation of the cogito would have suited Ricoeur perfectly. It allowed him to position himself within the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology whilst employing the psychoanalysis–inspired critique of the cogito that he had inherited from Dalbiez. The record shows that Ricoeur embraced that opportunity, transforming the Cartesian cogito, in *Freedom and Nature*, into a fragile synthesis of the voluntary and the involuntary (which included the body, character, and the unconscious). And within a decade he had begun to use the term, "the wounded cogito" to refer to this subject that posits but does not possess itself.

There were to be further critical engagements with the Second *Meditation*. As I mentioned in part one above, from the mid–1960s onward, Ricoeur tried to defend the cogito against a threat posed by Freudian psychoanalysis. However, when he spoke of psychoanalysis *putting in check* the philosophies of the cogito, he did not mean that the former offered a potentially more compelling account of the structure of the subject: id, ego, and super–ego *vs* a subject that is fully transparent to itself. After all, his earliest account of the cogito had managed to reconcile the Cartesian "I will" with the "absolute involuntary," which was meant to include the unconscious. The threat that psychoanalysis posed for the philosophies of the cogito, including his own, came in the form of an all–encompassing and seemingly never–

ending *suspicion* regarding the reliability of the subject's claims about itself. In an effort to defend the cogito from that threat, whilst conceding some ground to Freud, Ricoeur turned to the complex functioning of language for guidance. Remarkably, the operations of language led him to broaden the conception of the cogito beyond the list of modalities found in Descartes' Second *Meditation*, and subsequently employed by Husserl, in *Ideas*, when he wanted to indicate what he understood by the term, "consciousness." The modalities of Ricoeur's cogito included: "I can speak," "I can act," "I can recount," "I can hold myself responsible for my actions," and ultimately "I can promise" and "I can remember." Straightaway we see that there are differences in the grammatical forms employed by Descartes and Ricoeur, a situation that points to a critical appropriation of some aspect of the Second *Meditation*.

Descartes' "I think" constitutes a complete thought. The verb conveys a sense of *action* but, for Descartes at least, there is also information to be gleaned about the *state* of the subject: "I am a thing that thinks." Ricoeur's "I can" bears some resemblance to Descartes' "I think," but his two–word claim does not form a complete thought. Further, the modal verb "I can" conveys a sense of *ability or capacity* as opposed to a sense of action. Ricoeur offers an explanation, in *Oneself as Another*, as to why he is no longer prepared to use the two–word statement, "I think." He says that Descartes' enumeration of mental acts, in the Second *Meditation* "poses the question of the identity of the subject, but in a sense entirely different from the narrative identity of a concrete person." (Ricoeur 1992: 7) He feels that however welcome the diversity of the operations of Descartes' subject may be, it "can involve nothing but a pointlike ahistorical identity... since the cogito is instantaneous." (Ricoeur 1992: 7) Of course, Husserl's phenomenological description of the "I think," which as we have seen stays close to the Second *Meditation*, does not restrict the sense of the identity of consciousness in quite the same way. What seems to be missing in Ricoeur's explanation, then, is a clear statement on his dissatisfaction with Descartes' inattention to abilities or capacities. However, we will have to look elsewhere if we are to appreciate the extent to which Ricoeur's use of the modal verb "I can" represents a critique of Descartes' "I think."

It seems to me that a fuller explanation for Ricoeur's decision to jettison Descartes' "I think," (and Husserl's concomitant acts of consciousness) initially in favour of the modal verb "I can," can be constructed on the basis of the critique of Husserlian idealism that Ricoeur proposes in *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*. Let us take just one idealist thesis by way of example: *the ultimately self–responsible thesis*. According to Ricoeur, that thesis holds that the subject is "sovereign," that it is "*master* of itself;" the only responsibility it has is to itself. (Ricoeur 2008: 35) But hermeneutics is deeply suspicious

of this "Cartesian" claim of ultimate self–responsibility; and to expose the pretensions of the idealist cogito, it makes the counter–claim that the genuine subject is the one that "responds to the matter of the text, and hence to the proposals of meaning the text unfolds." (Ricoeur 2008: 34) As Ricoeur remarks, "Hermeneutics proposes to make subjectivity the final, and not the first, category of a theory of understanding. Subjectivity must be lost as radical origin if it is to be recovered in a more modest role." (Ricoeur 2008: 34) To this, we can add that once it is recovered in a more modest role, the subject will be seen to have a more modest tone. It will no longer triumphantly assert "I think," but will adopt a tone of conviction and earnestness: "I believe I can."[4]

To return briefly to what Ricoeur says about his relationship to Descartes in the introduction to *Oneself as Another*, it is worth noting that having signalled that he plans to take up Descartes' question — "Who?" — and make it his own, he makes it clear that the answer he intends to give to that question is "the speaker, agent, character of narration, subject of moral imputation, and so forth." (Ricoeur 1992: 7) However, he insists that this speaker or agent, etc. will not have the same *status* as the "meditating subject" at "the end of [Descartes'] Second *Meditation*." (Ricoeur 1992: 7) As already noted, at that point in the *Meditations* the "meditating subject" is described as follows: "A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagines and senses." (quoted in Ricoeur 1992: 7) This important statement on a difference in status between Ricoeur's notion of "the self" and Descartes notion of the "I" of the "I think" underscores a feature of Ricoeur's long–standing critical engagement with the Second *Meditation*: this guiding thread is, in every instance, the occasion for innovation on Ricoeur's part. From it emerged: the fragile synthesis of the voluntary and involuntary; the "wounded cogito;" and a cogito that expresses itself using the modal verb "I can." However, the upshot of the most recent critical engagement with Descartes is more revolution than innovation. It is the occasion for introducing something that "appears to have nothing in common with" Descartes' "meditating subject," namely, "the self." (Ricoeur 1992: 7)

3. Conflicting interpretations of *Oneself as Another*

Domenico Jervolino in *Paul Ricoeur: Une herméneutique de la condition humaine* focuses attention on some of the statements from the introduction to *Oneself as Another* that I discussed in part one above, including Ricoeur's reference to the opposition between "self" and "I." But, on his reading, it is

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4. The latter is the formula that Ricoeur uses in *The Course of Recognition* (Abel and Porée 2007: 35).

not the introduction of a new topic that separates *Oneself as Another* from the works that precede it, but the search for *a form of language* that is better adapted to talking about "the subject." Jervolino suggests that Ricoeur's earlier works may have used a type of language that led his readers to view the subject in a "subjectivist way," and acutely conscious of that danger, in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur went in search of a more appropriate form of expression for talking about beings like us. Jervolino writes: "The question of the subject, one of the guiding threads for all of Ricoeur's research, appeared in *Oneself as Another* in all its complexity as a radical re–examination of the subject and the exploration of various, non–subjectivist conventions for speaking about this being oneself (*cet être soi–même*) that we are, through what the author calls 'a hermeneutic phenomenology of the self.'" (Jervolino 2005: 39, my translation) The first thing to note is that Jervolino does not give equal consideration here to (1) the unity and continuity of Ricoeur's works and (2) the emergence of a new project in *Oneself as Another*. His thought is that Ricoeur's entire work is focused on the same question: the question of the subject. For him, *Oneself as Another* is just the most radical form of that questioning to date in that it raises concerns about the unintended consequences of Ricoeur's use of the language of modern epistemology: encouraging a subjectivist view of the subject, that is one where the mind generates knowledge without reference to reality.

There is no denying that Jervolino's interpretation can accommodate most of the statements made in the introduction. However, it has to sidestep one or two of the more dramatic claims underscored in part one above, for example, Ricoeur's stated ambition to reach a point where "our problematic will have parted ways with the philosophies of the subject." (Ricoeur 1992: 4) Further, Jervolino's suggestion that, prior to the mid–1980s, Ricoeur's use of language risked promoting a subjectivist conception of the subject is not borne out by the research presented in parts one and two above. As I have already noted, Ricoeur's appropriation of the cogito or "I think" was always critical, and indeed always linguistically inventive. He spoke about an *exploding* cogito and a "wounded cogito." Further, it was always a cogito that was embodied, had its own character, and involved an unconscious, which meant it was capable of positing itself but was *not in possession of itself*. As such, Ricoeur's description of the cogito was possibly the furthest one could get from a subjectivist interpretation without having to jettison the subject altogether.

Johann Michel, in *Paul Ricoeur: une philosophie de l'agir humain*, is similar to Jervolino in that he reads Ricoeur's text closely, notes the various statements on a planned break with the use of terms like "I," yet still maintains that the topic discussed in *Oneself as Another* is nothing new; it is still "the subject." He concedes that the work represents some kind of break with the

works that preceded it, but he warns against lending too much importance to "a break that is excessively abrupt and unfamiliar in Ricoeur's teaching style." (Michel 2006: 73, my translation) Of course, those claims regarding a dramatic break with the philosophies of the subject are claims that Ricoeur himself makes in the Introduction. What Michel appears to be saying is that those claims are not sufficiently "Ricoeurian," that Ricoeur is not being true to his own pedagogy, which is known to be much more dialectical. Encouraged not only by the use of the term "other" in the title of the work but also by the third intention that, according to Ricoeur, influenced the preparation of the book, Michel focuses attention on what he terms, the "intersubjective system of reference" that Ricoeur introduces in *Oneself as Another*. He claims that up until the publication of that work Ricoeur's anthropology was one that related to "a subject," without being either ego-centric or solipsistic; yet it was problematical in that it accorded priority to the "care of the self," that is, it was very much a case of a self in search of itself. (Michel 2006: 73–74) Michel suggests that *Oneself as Another* represents "a major event" in Ricoeur's "anthropological itinerary" (Michel 2006: 73) because it provides a new and very different path to understanding the self: the "detour through the philosophy of intersubjectivity." (Michel 2006: 74)

The term "intersubjectivity" is associated with, among other things, the type of epistemology that we find in Husserl's works. However, Michel suggests that there is a significant "bifurcation" in the way Husserl and Ricoeur — two proponents of *Husserlian* phenomenology — employ, or allude to, the notion of intersubjectivity. (Michel 2006: 73) As is well known, intersubjectivity is one of the *problems* that Husserl addresses in his phe-nomenological epistemology, but, on Michel's reading, the "turning point of intersubjectivity," in Ricoeur, is really a turn towards the realm of "the interhuman." (Michel 2006: 119) Michel is, of course, perfectly right to asso-ciate Ricoeur with Husserl. As I noted in part one above, Ricoeur claimed to belong to the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology. However, as I also mentioned in a footnote to part one, Ricoeur made an early statement, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, regarding his intention to journey towards a phenomenological ontology that would link his work to that of Heidegger and Gadamer. The problem with Michel's talk of the "turning point of intersubjectivity," as I see it, is that it does not capture the sense that we have, in reading *Oneself as Another*, that Ricoeur is finally taking up a posi-tion that will allow him to give the long anticipated answer to the question *What Ontology in View?* (the title of the tenth study). It is simply impossible to get from the epistemological conceptuality of intersubjectivity to the ontological conceptuality of belonging in one small step.

In contrast, Jean Greisch, in *Paul Ricoeur: L'itinérance du sens*, takes Ri-coeur at his word and accepts that he is trying to work out "a hermeneutics

of the self," in *Oneself as Another*, which would represent something very different from the well–known philosophies of the subject. Focusing attention on a statement that Ricoeur makes about *the position* that his hermeneutics of the self is to occupy (or to use Ricoeur's term, the *status* it is to have) relative to the philosophies of the subject, Greisch notes: "Conscious of the amazing variations that these philosophies present, torn between the Cartesian cogito with its foundational ambition (the 'exalted subject') and the Nietzschean anti–cogito (the 'humiliated subject'), Ricoeur's hermeneutics 'is placed at an equal distance from the apology of the cogito and from its overthrow' [Ricoeur 1992: 4]." (Greisch 2001: 380) As Greisch understands it, Ricoeur's phrase, "equal distance" is not meant to signify some pusillanimous compromise between extremes. Rather, it is meant to signify a position that lies beyond, or surpasses, the alternatives: Cartesian cogito or Nietzschean anti–cogito.

Greisch discovers a great deal about the relative position of "the hermeneutics of the self" by following a clue that Ricoeur provides in a footnote to the ninth study: "attestation" is "the password for this entire book." (Ricoeur 1992: 289) Again, taking Ricoeur at his word and putting that "password" to use (Greisch 2001: 375) he learns that this new hermeneutic space has *a particular epistemic quality* and involves *certain ontological commitments*. With regard its epistemic quality, Greisch notes that Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of the self" does not have the apodictic certainty that Descartes and Husserl were looking for, but it has a degree of certainty nonetheless: "alethic" certainty. (Greisch 2001: 381) As Greisch explains, it calls on a notion that the classic opposition *doxa/episteme* simply does not capture: "believing in" (*croyance*). "Believing in" means "credence" (*créance*); it is a matter of having "confidence" (*confiance*) and facing up to (Freudian and indeed Nietzschean) "suspicion." (Greisch 2001: 381) Greisch quotes a line from the introduction to *Oneself as Another*: "'As credence without any guarantee, but also as trust greater than any suspicion,' [Ricoeur 1992: 23] the hermeneutics of the self stands at an equal distance from Descartes' exalted cogito and the cogito that is declaimed deposed by Nietzsche." (Greisch 2001: 381) However, epistemic quality is not the only thing that separates the "hermeneutics of the self" from "the philosophies of the subject." The two philosophies also have very different ontological commitments.

Greisch points out that, taken together, the first nine studies of *Oneself as Another* offer a comprehensive exploration of the epistemic quality of attestation. However, it is only in the Tenth Study that Ricoeur turns to consider the ontological commitments of attestation. Even then, he notes, Ricoeur's ontology is, as it always has been, more a "promised land" than a land that he has conquered. (Greisch 2001: 390) As Greisch understands them, the ontological commitments of Ricoeurian attestation are not truth

conditions in the sense of entities and properties of entities that we might list. Rather, they "send us back to a very complex ontological inquiry," which includes the reinterpretation of Aristotle through Heidegger, but also an appropriation of Spinoza's *conatus* and a critical engagement with Levinas. (Greisch 2001: 390) Greisch notes that Ricoeur borrows the idea of ontological commitments from W.V.O. Quine, but he does not discuss the original meaning of the expression "ontological commitments," presumably because Ricoeur does not strictly adhere to Quine's definition. Yet, it can be instructive to observe the way that expression undergoes some kind of transformation in Ricoeur's discussion on attestation.

According to Quine, ontological commitments are the truth conditions for a theory or discourse. That is to say, they are the entities or kinds of entities that must exist in order for the theory to be true.[5] So, to take Descartes' philosophy of the subject as an example, its ontological commitments are that an *immaterial substance* exists, which has properties that include the following: "thinking about Vienna" and "being free from pain." (Van Inwagen 2001: 48) But what entities need to exist in order for the "hermeneutics of the self" to be true? In the tenth study, Ricoeur explains that he stands opposed to the "substantialism of the tradition (to which Kant continues to belong from the perspective of the first analogy of experience)," though not to the "Aristotelian *ousia*, which cannot be reduced to the former." (Ricoeur 1992: 305) He talks about reinterpreting the whole of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, with a particular emphasis on the notions of *dunamis* (potentiality) and *energeia* (actuality), the objective being to articulate the ontological commitments of the attestation of "*existing* in the mode of selfhood." (Ricoeur 1992: 302) He readily accepts that a comparison can be made between his "effort of reconstruction and the efforts of those who claim to follow the Heidegger of the gestation period of *Being and Time*" and he proposes to indicate "the slight difference that remains between my attempt at reconstructing *energeia–dunamis* and the reconstruction inspired by Heidegger." (Ricoeur 1992: 308) But this vast project of appropriating Aristotle's ontology through Heidegger will surely see truth conditions re–cast as *human actions* where before they were entities. The demands that Ricoeurian attestation places on the world are not that certain entities or kinds of entities exist (as in Quine), but that certain actions or kinds of actions can be performed.

Greisch's very helpful account of the position of the "hermeneutics of the self" relative to the two opposing strands of the philosophies of the cogito provides an insight into, what I referred to in part two above, as the revolution in Ricoeur's thought that occurred in his most recent critical

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5. *Ontological Commitment*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-commitment/ (accessed September 29, 2015).

engagement with Descartes' Second *Meditation*. We can now say that that revolution took Ricoeur's reflections from the plane of epistemological inquiry, with its search for apodictic certainty and its substance ontology, to a new vantage point — the space of attestation — where the only certainty is alethic certainty and the ontological commitments are close to, but not identical with those of Heidegger. As I noted in part one above, this moment of rapprochement with Heidegger was one that Ricoeur had been anticipating for very many years.

4. Concluding remarks

I mentioned at the outset that the introduction to *Oneself as Another* includes three considerations that challenge the commonly held assumption that, for Ricoeur, "the self" and "the subject" are one and the same: (1) a plan to use a nominalized omnipersonal reflexive pronoun in place of the singular subjective pronoun or "I;" (2) a declaration of Ricoeur's intention to break with, or part ways with the "philosophies of the subject;" and (3) an important indication that the "hermeneutics of the self" will have a different *status* to that of the "philosophies of the subject." Having discussed all three considerations in some detail, I believe that it is Ricoeur's reflection on attestation that presents the strongest challenge to any attempt to equate "the subject" and "the self." It obliges us to move beyond the comfortable terrain of a discourse on the subject to the unfamiliar space of attestation where "selfhood" no longer means the quality that constitutes one's individuality, but a *mode of existing* (Ricoeur 1992: 302) which is reminiscent of Heidegger's Being–in–the–world. As Ricoeur remarks: "It remains that the concept — if we can still speak in these terms — of being–in–the–world is expressed in numerous ways, and that it is together that oneself, care, and being–in–the–world are to be determined." (Ricoeur 1992: 311)

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