Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self: Living in the Truth

Fergus James Laughland

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PAUL RICOEUR’S HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF:

LIVING IN THE TRUTH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Fergus James Laughland

August 2017
PAUL RICOEUR’S HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF:
LIVING IN THE TRUTH

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ABSTRACT

PAUL RICOEUR’S HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF:
LIVING IN THE TRUTH

By
Fergus James Laughland
August 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. James Swindal, PhD.

This dissertation focuses on the relationship of selfhood and ethics from the competing philosophical frameworks developed by Paul Ricoeur and Alain Badiou. Seeking “nothing short of a full victory” on the “battlefield” of history, Badiou argues that Ricoeur deceives his readers by hiding the relationship of the self to history. The purpose of this deception is to defend a definition of history that allows for a Providential sense of history whereby the past could be actively forgotten whereby crimes could be forgiven. In this work I examine Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self as developed in *Oneself as Another (Soi-même comme un autre*, 1990) as well as its relationship to his positions regarding memory, history, forgetting, and forgiveness developed in *Memory, History, Forgetting (La Mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*, 2002). Thematically, I focus on the experience of forgiveness for three reasons. First, it is a non-physical experience within a
reflective consciousness that connects to our experience of freedom. Secondly, forgiveness is a sufficiently rich experience of ethical evil. Third, forgiveness has a temporal dimension (like that of promising) that informs our understanding of memory as well as human self-identity. Ricoeur’s conceptions of selfhood, history, evil, ethics, and truth will be examined from the critical perspective offered by Badiou. Over the course of this dissertation I demonstrate that Ricoeur provides conceptions of selfhood and history that disarm Badiou’s criticism of Ricoeur by means of a critical analysis of his theory of subjectivity, as well as his conception of ethics.
DEDICATION

To my parents Jim and Sally Laughland,

and my loving wife Rose,

thank you for your patient support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This dissertation was only possible through the diligent, patient, and expert direction of Professor James Swindal. I am grateful as well to Professor Charles Don Keyes and Professor John Conley (Loyola University Maryland) for their critical reading of this dissertation. Special thanks to Professor Ron Polansky (Chair), Joan Thompson (Secretary) and to the rest of the Duquesne University philosophy department. I am grateful for the support of Professor Gary Owens with whom I have had the pleasure of teaching with at Harford Community College. Thanks as well to the Loyola University Maryland philosophy department for their collegiality and support.

Thanks Rose for listening to me all those evenings in the kitchen talk about things that even I hardly understood at the time.
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NOTE ON TEXTS

Ricoeur wrote almost exclusively in French although most of his works have been translated into English. Generally there exists only one translation of each of his major works. The same holds true for Alain Badiou. Much of the secondary literature on Ricoeur is in English and French. The majority of my references are from three works: Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another (OaA)* translated by Kathleen Blamey; *Memory, History, Forgetting (MHF)* translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer; and Alain Badiou’s *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil (Ethics)* translated by Peter Hallward.
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### Works by Ricoeur:

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>FM</td>
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<td>FN</td>
<td><em>Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary</em></td>
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<td>MHF</td>
<td><em>Memory, History, Forgetting</em></td>
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<td>OaA</td>
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<td>BE</td>
<td><em>Being and Event</em></td>
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<td>Ethics</td>
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<td>LW</td>
<td><em>Logics of Worlds</em></td>
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<td>Paul</td>
<td><em>St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism</em></td>
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<td>PE</td>
<td><em>Philosophy and the Event</em></td>
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<td>Subject</td>
<td>“The Subject Presumed to be Christian”</td>
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<td>Écrits</td>
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<td>Jacques Lacan</td>
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<td>EE</td>
<td><em>Elements for an Ethics</em>,</td>
<td>Jean Nabert</td>
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Introduction

This dissertation is a sustained examination of Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology as developed through his hermeneutical treatment of human agency. The guiding theme throughout this dissertation is the experience of forgiveness within the reflective consciousness of individuals who can forgive and be forgiven. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self contains four major elements with make up what he calls “our capable being”: I can act, I can speak, I can narrate, and I can be morally responsible. In order to fully develop Ricoeur’s theory of selfhood it will be necessary to examine how the self relates to memory, history, and forgetting. This examination of human agency involves a close reading of Ricoeur’s Oneself as Another as well as his Memory, History, Forgetting. The experience of forgiveness will be utilized as a theme to help navigate the many aspects of Ricoeur’s philosophy. Forgiveness will act as a guiding thread to facilitate this investigation of selfhood at the level of the reflective agent who can know themselves through an inner experience of conscience.

Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology is not without its distractors and chief among them is fellow French philosopher Alain Badiou. This dissertation will examine Badiou’s theory of subjectivity as a critical alternative to Ricoeur’s theory of selfhood. Badiou directly attacks Ricoeur at the point where the human agent is understood to be a subject who can be predicated as a bearer of memories. Ricoeur and Badiou strongly disagree on the question of “who?” is it who remembers and who writes history. In order to investigate this question it is necessary to investigate these philosopher’s competing notions of truth. As the subtitle of this dissertation suggests to “live in” the truth provides the best underpinning for an understanding of truth. Badiou, by contrast, understands
truth in terms of “truth-events” which exist outside of human agents. These truth-events in fact are constitutive of subjectivity according to Badiou even though they exist in a word of ideas and not an inner world of a reflective consciousness.

Three problems are therefore involved in this dissertation: agency, ethics, and truth. These three problems are perhaps the greatest problems for contemporary philosophy and are developed within this dissertation beginning with human agency, then ethics, and finishing with the question of truth; however, these three questions are so inter-dependent that we are in fact dealing with one central issue: how do we understand our subjective nature?

The experience of forgiveness will act as a North-star by which we can stay our course through the many facets of Ricoeur and Badiou’s competing theories without getting lost. What follows below is not to be a thorough development of the theological, psychological, sociological, political, economic, or even ethical treatment of forgiveness. Forgiveness will act throughout as a horizon of memory, history, and subjectivity with oneself and with others.

The first three chapters contain a sustained examination of Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* which contains his clearest development of his hermeneutics of the self. The term “hermeneutics” has its etymological roots in the Greek ἑρμηνεύω (*hermeneuō*) which means “to translate” or “to interpret”. Hermeneutics as a discipline grew out of theological interpretations of Holy Scripture, but generally means any interpretation of written or other symbolic expressions where a significant distance exists (in either space or time) between the author(s) and the reader(s). Philosophically hermeneutics includes a
core phenomenological commitment: a distinction between first-person consciousness and any representation of that consciousness in signs (especially language). An illustration of this core commitment is the distinction between perceiving a pen on a desk, versus the thought “the pen is on the desk.” Hermeneutics involves a type of wager regarding the existence of symbolic meaning in a given text. To test this wager we read a text in order to bring about any latent meaning, that is, we verify it. The typical result is that we must enter into what Ricoeur calls a “long detour” where competing interpretations conflict with the ultimate aim of finding a coherent interpretation of what is given.

What is a text? Within the discipline of hermeneutics a “text” can include a person’s life. For illustration let us briefly reflect on Socrates. His good friend Chaerephon once visited the oracle of Delphi and asked the priest there: “is any man wiser than Socrates.” The Pythia replied: “no man is wiser.” It was well known to every Greek that the Pythia’s reply must be carefully interpreted and that the surface meaning might not be the true meaning. Socrates cannot believe that he is the wiser of all men since he admittedly knows little worthwhile claiming to only have “human wisdom.” Thus, Socrates spends his life occupied with finding a solution to the oracle’s riddle. In essence, Socrates spends his life working through an interpretation of his life. In short, we can see that Socrates read his life as a text and the key to his interpretation was the riddle: no man is wiser.

Hermeneutics further includes an eye-witnessing and an attesting to what one has experienced within the world as well as within one’s conscious life. The four parts of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self includes that fact that one can act, one can speak, one
can narrate, and one can find themselves morally imputable (innocent or guilty). He begins by focusing on our use of natural language when speaking of our actions and narrating our stories. The anchor for the subject is the “I”. I find that I am always here, and always now. The deictic term “I” demands that everyone who uses this term always uses it at the exclusion of everyone else. “I” am writing this sentence right now, but “you” are reading it now thinking “I am reading this now.” And everyone who reads this sentence always reads it as an “I who reads” at the exclusion of everyone else. This anchored “I” constitutes “the limit to the world, and not one of its contents” (Oneself as Another 51). When we each speak and tell our story we begin to interpret ourselves, make sense of ourselves, and then recognize ourselves such that we construct our own identity. This is called “attestation”.

The fourth part of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of the self involves what he calls “our ethical intention” which is “to live a good life, with and for others, in just institutions.” The three parts of this intention includes a teleological aiming at the good (life), tempered and tested by a deontological duty to others, followed by the moral injunction to seek justice. These three parts relate to the self in terms of self-esteem built upon one’s capabilities, self-respect founded on one’s capacity to morally legislate, and third, to solicitude which involves our relations with others (friendship, family, as well as social and political life).

A major problem for any theory of human agency is how to account for the unity of the subject. Ricoeur makes a critical distinction between what he calls our idem-identity (sameness) versus what he calls our ipse-identity or Ipseity (selfhood). Our sameness over time must be understood as existential facets of our selfhood. What this
means is multifold, but two aspects can be mentioned here. If we distinguish between the involuntary versus voluntary aspects of our lives we will discover that much in our lives was decided before we learned to make decisions. The name on my birth certificate is mine, that was me, but that’s not “me” in many ways. There are fundamental facts of my life that cannot be changed and I did not voluntarily decide upon such as when, where, to whom, and under what circumstances I was born. One the other hand with regard to my voluntary choices in life if I make a promise I am saying that “I will be the same person who made that promise.” I am saying that I will remain the same over time. Forgiveness presents the case that I am not the same person who acted so badly in the past, so please forgive my past actions.

What is important in the idem- / ipse-identity split is that the human agent has the capacity to inaugurate anew in the world. What Ricoeur calls “our capable being” is understood as equivalent to Martin Heidegger’s conception of care (Sorge) in Being and Time. Our capable being presupposes the world as a horizon for our acting, speaking, narrating, and feeling of innocence or guilt. Ricoeur develops the distinction between how we have actually lived in the world (voluntarily and involuntarily) against our potential to inaugurate anew in the world. This is one theme which is developed in chapter three below.

Our attesting to our actions through speech, stories, and moral claims crosses with a call from with the conscience of being-enjoined to act in certain ways. “Being-enjoined” is a legal term when a court of law calls upon someone to do a specific action, cease activities, or in some manner to be prohibited from certain actions. To be enjoined is in other words to hear a call from within conscience of a moral injunction to act in
specific ways. The voice of moral injunction constitutes a moment of “otherness” within selfhood because it calls us in the second-person. Moral injunctions say “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not” act in these prescribed manner. It commands us to act. This voice calling in the second-person leads to a reinterpretation of otherness. For Ricoeur, the conflict of interpretations means that I am called to live with other; I am called to live for others; I am called to live with others in just institutions. This call of the conscience is the origin of our ethical intention.

Ricoeur recognizes two other injunctions in addition to our moral injunctions: to love one another, and to hold convictions regarding fairness, justice, and goodness. At the heart of selfhood is the call of our ethical intention, the call to love others, and the conviction to hold on to our ethical intention. It possesses the grammar of the optative mood of “if only” and “what can be” because there is no guaranteed outcome in life. Attestation and moral injunction cross-over, yet remain separate. Attestation requires the moral voice of injunction and injunction in turn needs attestation in order to be heard. Morality does not spring from others, but from “on high” as it were from within conscience. This structure of selfhood is crucial to understanding Ricoeur. We will find that forgiveness is an adequate experience to help us navigate this structure of selfhood.

Philosophy is a competitive discipline and Ricoeur is not without his detractors. Chief among Ricoeur’s opponents is Alain Badiou who takes direct aim at Ricoeur’s later work Memory, History, Forgetting right at the point where memory and history are attributed to a subject. How that subject is defined is fundamental to how one is to understand the nature of history-itself and the historiographic sciences (the historian’s task). Badiou has developed a theory of human subjectivity based upon what he calls
“truth-events” from one of four areas of human knowledge: the arts, the sciences, politic, and love (including the religious per se). Badiou begins from the perspective that most members of the homo sapiens species are what he calls “human animals” and only a very few individuals are true Subjects (capital S).

This principal distinction between human animals and Subjects is whether they are self-interested in their own preservation of life and property, or whether they are possessed by a disinterested interest. Once again, we can reflect on Socrates for an illustration of what Badiou might mean by disinterested interest. In Plato’s Crito we find Socrates discussing a proposal by his dear friend Crito to escape jail and sail away from Athens, thus saving his life. Socrates says to Crito “that the most important thing in not life, but the just life” (48b). Socrates values living a good and just life higher than merely living a few more years of mere biological life. Circumstances wherein an individual loses the self-interest to live in favor a remaining faithful to some event of truth constitutes the creation of true subjectivity for Badiou. A rupture in one’s biological drive for self-preservation is the price of being a witness to a truth-event. Badiou’s theory of truth-events established not only his theory of subjectivity, but also his ethical theory. These two theories will be developed in chapters 4 and 5.

Badiou’s most pointed claim about Ricoeur is that he deceives his readers by bringing his notion of selfhood into Memory, History, Forgetting very late in the text. Badiou claims that Ricoeur’s endeavor involves the attribution of memory and history as predicates that can belong to individuals, close others (neighbors), and distant strangers. Ricoeur’s tactic then is to subordinate memory to forgiveness by means of a technique of forgetting. Badiou pointedly asks: Isn’t a memory, that is in some manner asserted,
precisely the kind that makes *reserving* attribution of memories to a subject impossible?" (Subject 27.4).

Ricoeur’s abstention of attribution of memories to individual agents is aimed at finding a way to attribute memories to others: both close relations and distance strangers. Badiou’s fear is that Ricoeur’s conception of the self allows for a conception of memory and history that is at odds with his own theory of subjectivity. The problem of the attributions of memory is developed in chapter 6 with the result that Ricoeur seeks to extend memories to collectives without necessitating a Hegelian style *Sittlichkeit* (ethical order) at the level of memory.

If memories can be attributed to both self and others as a collective other then we can learn to recollect the past in such a way to avoid cycles of violence. Forgiveness unbinds agents from their past and allow agents to inaugurate anew in the world. Ricoeur’s conception of selfhood comes under what he calls the “shattered cogito” in the sense that there exists a fault between our inner-most desires to act and our actual effects within the world. Bridging this gap or “fault” is what forgiveness promises to do for the agent. The discrepancy between our “primordial destination and [our] historical manifestation” is where evil starts forth from.

The seventh and final chapter of this dissertation addresses the structure of selfhood at the very point where we find forgiveness. Primordially we can at least imagine human innocence even if no one is ever actually innocent in this world. He says: “Innocence would be fallibility without fault, and this fallibility would be only fragility, only weakness, but by no means downfall” (Fallible Man 144). The image of innocence
means that we have “fallen” from a primordial state and that we do not coincide with ourselves. We are other to ourselves in the fact that we desire a good life, but fall short of that aim. When we recall what we have done the memory of our actions do not necessarily come along with an avowal of guilt or innocence. Ricoeur claims that attributing fault to ourselves an agent can avowal that this or that actions is in fact “mine”. To ask for forgiveness or to receive forgiveness means that the human being desires wholeness; a wholeness lost in the world of inadequation between our desires and actions.

We can hope to understand the call for justice, and at an extreme the call for vengeance, only by first coming to a clearer understanding of the structure of our subjectivity. Forgiveness, Ricoeur maintains, is a spiritual gift much like joy, love, hope, and peace. To live in the truth then means to live with the hope that we can inaugurate anew in the world and not be bound to our past. For this to work we need a conception of memory and history that can be attributed not only to individual agents, but to the many collectives in this world which history has made enemies. Ricoeur’s aims are ultimately practical in political terms through various “incognitos” of forgiveness: debt forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative actions, criminal pardons, and other means of dialogue.

What is most primordial for Ricoeur is the human propensity for desiring the good. We are not adequate to our desires, but we have a voice of conscience that helps temper our teleological aiming at the good life. We desire also to live with and for others. We desire and hope for just institutions. We wish to love and be loved. We have ethical conviction to which we hold. We aim at the good, but fall short. Forgiveness is found
within human subjectivity and has the capacity to release our potential to begin again after our failures.

In summary, Ricoeur offers by way of his hermeneutical approach to selfhood a richer and more realistic picture of the human agent than is designated by Badiou’s “Subject” who is dependent upon truth-events. Ricoeur’s conception of selfhood is an embodied agent who lives and suffers in a real world within which they act, speak, and narrate their live, and find themselves to be moral agents capable of being innocent or guilty. On the other hand, Badiou awaits the third figuration of Marxist communism as an event which might be taken up by some human animal, so that at least one Subject is inaugurated. My preference is always for a philosophy that is concrete, intuitive both bodily and emotionally, but above all, one that includes those human beings who do not have the privilege of knowing some profound “science”. Ricoeur, unlike Badiou, does not exclude almost all of humanity from the benefits of subjective Immortality presented by some un-namable truth-event.
Prelude to Chapters 1-3

“…the sort of philosophy I prefer, one that is not too quick to unify the field of human experience from on high….”

Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 312.

Textual Analysis of Ricoeur’s Oneself as Another

The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur has been described as “a sustained attention to the meaning and task of being human” (Schweiker 89). His attention has been focused since his early work Freedom and Nature (1950) on the voluntary nature of the agent who understands him- or herself through their interactions with other persons and objects. He works within a metaphysical model governed by the subject-object dualism where the human agent is “conscious of that object and representing this object to itself as subject” (Pellauer 6). In these first three chapters we will explore Ricoeur’s much vaunted hermeneutics of the self as it is developed in Oneself as Another (1990). Oneself as Another (OaA) consists of eleven “studies” that grew out of a series of Gifford lectures presented at the University of Edinburgh in 1986. The English translation of Oneself as Another contains only the first ten studied, because the eleventh study consisted of a
biblical hermeneutics. Ricoeur says that the primary reason he did not include this study in the English translation is that he wanted to pursue “an autonomous, philosophical discourse,” that does “not assume any commitment from the reader to reject, accept, or suspend anything with regard to biblical faith” (OaA 24).

What then does Oneself as Another pertain to philosophically? This work pertains to what Ricoeur calls “the shattered cogito.” Before addressing the nature of this shattered cogito Ricoeur explains the three philosophical intentions that motivate these studies of the self. First, he wants to “indicate the primacy of reflective meditation over the immediate positing of the subject” (OaA 1). The first guide here is natural language and specifically the reflective language of the ego – “I am,” “I exist,” “I think,” and so forth. Additionally, there are reflexive aspects of language such as when one speaks of “presenting myself” or “I think about myself.”

The second intention that guides these studies concerns the two complementary notions of identity. For this task Ricoeur utilizes the Latin “idem” and “ipse” to distinguish sameness (la même, idem) from selfhood (l’ipséité, ipse). To be clear, “idem” simply means “the same as”, whereas “ipse” means “self-constancy.” Both forms of identity have a degree of equivocity and “an entire hierarchy of significations” such as, for instance, if my pen runs dry I can use another pen that is “idem-identical” to that one (it is the same make of pen). By contrast, ipse-identity uses the language of self where one has an “emphatic form” of self-identity when it indicates “that it is precisely a matter of the being, or the thing in question” (OaA 3). Speaking of a pen in this sense one would say “this particular pen – is ‘my’ pen; not another ‘like’ it.” Ricoeur places the question
of identity at the center of his investigations on selfhood and this line of thought will likewise facilitate the overall course of this dissertation.

The third philosophical intention that guides these studies concerns the dialectic between being oneself versus being another – hence the title of his text. The dialectical pairing proposed by Ricoeur is not between “sameness” versus an “other” but instead a pairing of “otherness” with “selfhood” in such a way that the self is related to itself as other-than-itself. What is crucial here is that in natural language “same” (sameness) can be opposed to “other” (otherness) while “self” (selfhood) cannot, since they are not natural antonyms. It must be re-stated at this point that this is indeed a hermeneutics of selfhood in the very real sense that language and interpretation is the starting point for this study of selfhood. Natural language is a guide for his hermeneutics, however our working hypothesis throughout our investigations is that we are not mastered by language in the sense that Nietzsche and Heidegger claim.

This present textual analysis undertaken in chapters 1-3 focuses on whether or not Ricoeur successfully develops a conception of self that is capable, not only of addressing traditional philosophies of self, but whether or not it can address Alain Badiou’s criticisms of Ricoeur’s theory of selfhood. The tradition that Ricoeur works within is the modern philosophical tradition that begins with Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1640) where he posits the self as a “thinking thing” capable of founding

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1Regarding man’s mastery by language in Nietzsche and Heidegger see *The Genealogy of Morals* section five where he addresses “our problem” namely “a subjective transformation” of language over time, and for instance *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* where Heidegger says, “Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man.”
itself and being epistemologically transparent to itself. Contrary to the Cartesian cogito there are those who are hyperbolically suspicious of the cogito arguing instead in favor of an anti-cogito. The main purveyors of the anti-cogito, according to Ricoeur, are Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud – his so-called “masters of suspicion” regarding any claim that the self is master of itself. In Oneself as Another Ricoeur does not explicitly address these figures, instead taking a long detour through more current theories of the self. For these investigations he refers to a “shattered cogito” as descriptive of the contemporary situation regarding the philosophy of human subjectivity. With regard to two schools of thought (modern, and postmodern), each with their distinct conceptions of the human subject, Ricoeur develops an approach that addresses the concerns of each side in a creative dialogue. He argues that the reflective “I” is the best way to address the problematics concerning the nature of the self. Specifically, he aims to confirm the virtue of beginning his investigation from the first-person through a “hermeneutics of the self is placed at an equal distance from the apology of the cogito and from its overthrow” (OaA 4). He continues saying that,

The style specific to the hermeneutics of the self is best understood if one has first had a chance to take stock of the amazing oscillations that the philosophies of the subject appear to present, as though the cogito out of which they arise were unavoidably caught up in an alternating sequence of overevaluation and underevaluation (OaA 4).

2 Ricoeur introduces the phrase “masters of suspicion” on page 32 of Freud and Philosophy during his discussion of the hermeneutics of suspicion which maintains that the human subject is mastered by his economic and material conditions, or by language, or in the case of Freud by our sexual drives.
The over-evaluations Ricoeur speaks of belong to the Cartesian cogito as a fully transparent self-founding consciousness capable of establishing the epistemological ground for knowing the self, nature, and God. On the other hand, the under-evaluations, under the sign of the anti-cogito, represent a ‘shattering’ of the self’s ability to either know itself or to master its capacities to freely act in the world. For this dissertation the philosophical position defended by Badiou represents one such under-evaluation which is divided into the “human animal” and the (capital S) “Subject”. Properly speaking a “Subject” for Badiou is the result of truth-processes in art, science, politics, or religion (love) which are capable of elevating the “human animal” above its subjectivity by means of participation with truth-events. This will be developed in chapters 5 and 6 of this dissertation.

The first task is to examine Ricoeur’s conception of selfhood seen from within the tension between the philosophies of the cogito and the anti-cogito. Three stages are involved in Oneself as Another and these stages will be treated in three separate chapters. Chapter 1 will begin with theories of selfhood based on personhood, natural language (performative versus constative speech acts), narrative theory of self, action theory, pragmatics of language, and competing notions of “character.” Chapter 2 will explore the second major stage which involves the study of the self as it passes through Ricoeur’s so-called “little ethics”³ where he studies the ethical dimensions of the self. Studies seven

³ Ricoeur’s little ethics is encapsulated in one sentence: “to aim at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions.” He breaks this down into its three sub-components: (1) the teleologicalaiming at the good life, (2) living with and for others, and (3) in just institutions.
through nine of *Oneself as Another* compose this “little ethics” which contribute to his
philosophical anthropology by helping answer the question: “what does it mean to be
morally responsible?” Ricoeur’s response in *Oneself as Another* is to remain within the
centuries-old philosophical quarrel over the *cogito* by focusing on first-person “who” as
in “who?” in each case can answer this very question. At the beginning of his “little
ethics” he repeats his overall methodology, that is, to focus on four central questions
regarding the self: a human being is capable of answering: “who is speaking? Who is
acting? Who is telling his or her story? Who is the moral subject of imputation?”

By the end of the ninth study (out of ten) Ricoeur has surveyed each of these
questions by means of a long detour through competing theories of self – language,
action theory, narrative theory (chapter 1), and ethics (chapter 2). The tenth study is
perhaps the most important study for it examines Ricoeur’s conception of “attestation”
which is “the assurance – the credence and the trust – of existing in the mode of
selfhood” (OaA 302). Epistemologically, attestation involves a conception of truth
founded on judgments, testimony, as well as rhetorical forms of persuasion including
fiction and metaphor.4 Building on the distinction between *idem*-identity (sameness) and
*ipse*-identity (selfhood) the notion of attestation concerns the epistemological nature of
selfhood notably through memory and history. Consider for instance the two basic
possibilities of how the self can be conceived as remaining identical over time: as a
substantial corporeal animal, or as a psychological self who is grounded upon memory.
The substantialist argument fails if we recall Locke’s metaphor of a ship at sea which has

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4 See the first section of the Tenth Study of *Oneself as Another*, pages 299-302.
each of its parts replaced one at a time – the *same* ship remains even though no single one of its original parts remains. The same holds true for a person from birth through adulthood as most of our “parts” are replaced (or at least added to); therefore we can say that we are the *same* person who is named on our birth certificate, while not being substantially the same. Facing similar problems as the substantialist position, the psychological view of selfhood is founded on imagination, belief, and memory, all of which change over time. One may imagine, remember, or otherwise believe that they are the same person named on their birth certificate while openly acknowledging their many bodily and psychological changes. Both positions have difficulty accounting for change in a subject while attempting to maintain a stable subject. Ricoeur’s thesis is that we need the distinction between *idem*- and *ipse*-identity in order to avoid the many paradoxes and problems of the question of selfhood. His answer to these many problems is that we must not rely on an epistemology that is founded either on a scientific *epistēmē*, or on a doxic belief, that is, on a physicalism of sameness, or a psychology of memory respectively. Instead, Ricoeur develops in the tenth study his notion of attestation which is characterized by a sense of “believing-in” versus a “believing-that” whether one refers to scientific observation or memory-based imagination. This epistemological position is reflected in the sub-title of this dissertation: “living in the truth.” In short, chapter 3 aims to explicate this sense of truth-as-attestation in order to lay the groundwork for clarifying Ricoeur’s conception of selfhood before we can judge his conception of selfhood in light of the criticisms of Badiou.
CHAPTER ONE

Competing Theories: Personhood, Character, & Identity

1.1 “Long Detours” through Language, Action and Narrative

Readers of Ricoeur are familiar with his method of what he calls “long detours” through theories, ideas, and the works of others, from both inside and outside philosophy, which have been under-utilized in terms of the fruitfulness of application to difficult questions, paradoxes, and aporia. The “chief merit” of Ricoeur’s long detours has been identified as his ability to make many new and insightful connections between continental and analytic

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5 Cf. Don Ihde’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, where he states on page 7 of the Introduction that, “For Ricoeur it is impossible that man may know himself directly or introspectively. It is only by a series of detours that he learns about the fullness and complexity of his own being and of his relationship to Being. This emphasis upon indirectness pervades the whole of Ricoeur’s methodology from the early structural phenomenology to the more recent hermeneutic phenomenology.”
traditions of philosophy. Most often these long detours work through areas where Ricoeur thinks others have taken unsupported leaps, or miss important distinctions. *Oneself as Another* includes numerous detours through several theories of self-identity which are incapable of escaping their own difficulties in explaining selfhood. The three theoretical areas identified by Ricoeur involve natural language, action theory, and narrative theory – the latter includes his own work on narrative theory. The examination of these detours is necessary to understand his overall effort in *Oneself as Another* as they constitute the first three (of four) ways human beings are “capable beings.” The fourth way, developed in chapter 2, concerns how we are capable of morally imputing actions to our own personhood. We now will address each of these first three theoretical areas in this first chapter.

In the first study of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur is working in the area between the “I” and the “you” of natural language with the goal of discovering how we move from the concept “person” to the ascription of psyche to persons-as-other-selves (from self to other selves). For this first study Ricoeur draws heavily on the work of Sir Peter Strawson and specifically his work *Individuals* (1959).

Ricoeur says that we use language to identify things in the world by ascribing to individuals an identity using “varying degrees of specification” (OaA 27). Identifying is the inverse of categorization and “is a type that is neither repeatable nor divisible without alternation” (OaA 27). Language does not limit us to conceptualization and predication

alone since “we individualize with a view to describing more” (OaA 28). Language, Ricoeur says “in a way repairs,” what conceptualization has done for us” (OaA 28). What Ricoeur means is that conceptualization primarily involves categorizing and predicating our self and others as “things” broadly construed. Language also has resources he calls “individualization operators” that move language beyond a mere object-predication such as “the cat is on the mat.” Therefore, one could say that, “my cat, Phoenix, is on the mat.” 

Ricoeur states that there are three main ways we can identify a thing: A) descriptions (inventor of, first person to, etc.), B) proper names (Socrates, Paris, etc.), and C) indicators (deictic terms: I, you, here, now, here, there, etc.) (OaA 28).

Regarding how language “repairs” conceptualization he makes three conclusions. The first is the fact that language has its own “designation procedures” that aim at an individual specimen. The second conclusion is that these various procedures, “have no unity apart from this aim,” that is, the aim at designating individuals (OaA 30). The third conclusion is that “I” and “you,” just like all deictic terms, retain their focus on the utterances of language as things (or verbal events) in the world. Thus, in a very real sense, when I say, “you are here,” the focus is on the utterance itself as an operation of identifying an individual as a thing.

Next, Ricoeur moves to the concept “person” which he says is a “basic particular thing” borrowing a phrase from Strawson’s Individuals. Strawson’s strategy, according to Ricoeur, “consists in isolating, among all the particulars to which we may refer in order
to identify them (in the sense of individualizing given above), privileged particulars belonging to a certain type, which he classes ‘basic particulars’” (OaA 31). Similar to Kant in his transcendental deduction, Ricoeur says we begin with how the primitive concept “person” acts as a schema upon which discourse is made possible. From this primitive concept we then move to the “basic particulars” of individual persons. In other words, Ricoeur’s investigation begins by taking a person as if they are just another thing in the world similar to how we take our body to be already given.

Our question here is: What particular predicates belong to the concept “person”?

Much like the Cartesian meditator in Descartes’ Meditations, Strawson mentions personhood briefly when he says that we begin from “the fact that individuals belong to a single spatiotemporal schema,” a schema that, “contains us, in which we ourselves take our place” (italics in original, OaA 32). Ricoeur says that in Strawson’s Individuals we find a “what” in our spatiotemporal schema, and not yet a “who” who can self-designate (OaA 32).

The concept “person,” according to Strawson, is “a single referent possessing two series of predicates: physical predicates and mental predicates” (italics in original, OaA 33). The benefit of Strawson’s conception of the person with its emphasis on the predication of bodily presence is that it is a public and not a private (i.e., mental) entity. Maintaining the primacy of a body within the conception of “person” has the added benefit that all mental events (cognitions, affections, emotions, and volitions) are to be

That is descriptors, proper names, and indicators.
attributed to a bodily person in the sense of “someone”. Strawson notes that all philosophers have noted the unique role the body plays in the metaphysics of the “I” and that the body plays a certain causal role for all conscious matters. The body’s role helps explain my “particular attachment” to “my” body, but it does “not explain why the experiences should be ascribed to any subject at all”.

He avoids the problem of Cartesian dualism which deliberately institutes a distinction between the mind and the body; however, Strawson’s rejection of mental states as “basic particulars” is not without its problems.

Despite Strawson’s linking the body to the self through the concept of “person”, Ricoeur is aware that there is still the problem of the “third person” consciousness because he asks, “for can we ascribe mental events to a third person without assuming what this third party feels? Now feeling does indeed seem to characterize a first-person experience” (OaA, 35). In other words, I can say and feel that “I” feel, but what sense does it make to say, “this person Fergus – he feels too,” talking about myself in the third person? We will return to this experience of feeling in our final chapter when we examine the feeling of fault during our examination of forgiveness. What we can say at this point is that self-designation is manifest at the level of feelings and utterances and not as only a body located in a spatiotemporal schema.

On the way to explicating Ricoeur’s philosophy of the self as psychic agent tied to a body in a world surrounded by other bodies, this first study lays-out his primitive

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concept of “person”. With regards to this early concept, the self is “still hidden,” because a “person” at this early stage is not much different from a chair, a tree, or the moon. We are able to attach predicates to persons, to make ascriptions to them, and using language, identify them as individuals, but we are in a strange position where we cannot explain how we are capable of saying that, “one ascribes predicates to oneself”.

Noting the “strangeness” of this notion of personhood, Ricoeur says that there are “physical predicates which the person shares with bodies, and mental predicates which distinguish it from bodies” (OaA 36). The advantage of beginning with this concept of person is that the sameness of the body with the mental is retained. We can predicate to the concept “person” both that this “is a body” and that this “is a mind.” Ricoeur adds that: “Sameness and selfhood, one is tempted to say, are two kinds of problems that mutually conceal one another” (OaA 36). This is the “strange problem” with “mineness”. My body is “mine” and your body is “yours.” However, “mine” is a property predicated to my person, and properties, like predicates, ought to be transferable. I can say “red car,” “red house,” or “red sunset,” because the property of redness is transferable. “Mineness” however is a non-transferable property and predicate – strange indeed!

On the topic of mental states generally Ricoeur argues that psychic predicates (cognitions, affections, emotions, and volitions) too are “the same” for one person as they are for another person. For instance if one considers mathematical definitions, or a claim that today’s weather is pleasant these predicates ought to be the same for other minds. Ricoeur says that “the logical force of the same eclipses that of the self,” therefore sameness (that is, the generality of predication) still dominates this basic concept of the human agent (OaA 37). Echoing the title of this book he says that, “oneself as another
can be taken as *someone as anyone else*” (OaA 38). What is important to observe at this point is that the ascription of consciousness to others is based upon our observations of others, while self-ascription of consciousness is based on how it is *felt* by each person. This division between observation and feeling will be with us through to the very end of our investigations – through memory, history, ethics, forgetting, forgiveness, fault, and finally repentance.

What is clear here is that by beginning with the concept of person we do not have the problematic complexities of selfhood which Ricoeur addresses at length later and which Badiou will criticize as we will investigate in chapters 5 and 6. Natural language repairs what conceptualization and predication do for our thinking, although that repair-work remains hidden behind concepts, predicates, and categories. To use Platonic language, we understand conceptual language to refer to *universals*, whereas natural language indicates *particulars*, such as proper names, descriptions, and indications. Furthermore, natural language expresses feelings, something predication and conceptualization cannot. Thus, for instance, when I say that “I have a state of consciousness,” I can feel this to be true; however, for others I can observe only what I take to be their own state of consciousness. When we observe the species of the animal kingdom we can only make observations and wonder if they are conscious in any way like us – for the simple reason that they lack predicative language, albeit animals most certainly communicate.

Observing other persons and ascribing consciousness to them gets stuck on the horns of the Kantian dilemma of freedom versus determinism: we can never prove that freedom exists in the world, only that the self has a will that is capable of looking
backwards, believing we could have acted differently, and wishing we had indeed acted
differently. Acts of will utilize the grammar of the optative mood (willing; “if only”) which we will examine at the very end of this dissertation under the sign of a happy memory. Throughout this dissertation we are taking long-detours on our road to the experience of forgiveness. It is an experience that is spoken in the willful grammatical mood of the optative that wishes “if only…” as in “if only I could have acted differently.” Ricoeur thus commences his investigation of selfhood from the perspective of viewing persons as things in the world who are interacting with other bodies and persons, as well as to their own psychic self-ascriptions. We will therefore move from self-ascription to the ascription of other persons as likewise being capable of self-ascription. “In other words,” Ricoeur says, “we have to acquire simultaneously the idea of reflexivity and the idea of otherness, in order to pass from a weak correlation between someone and anyone else, which is too easily assumable, to a strong correlation between belonging to the self, in the sense of mine, and belonging to another, in the sense of yours” (OaA 39). With our primitive concept of person in hand we now turn to the second study on speaking subjects on our road to understanding the self as agent.

1.2 The “I” as a Performative Utterance

Are all our utterances just facts in the world? To help answer this Ricoeur moves from the semantics of language to a pragmatics of language focused on the nature of
interlocution between the “I” and the “you”. Ricoeur identifies an important convergence\(^9\) of the semantics of identifying references\(^{10}\) (using a transcendental method to identify the conditions for the possibility of language by way of concepts and predicates) and the theory of speech-acts (utterances) as the two main methods of analysis of the self though language. In the second study he does not abandon the transcendental method, rather he seeks the common ground it has with utterances, and therefore we are looking at the utterances of “I” and “you” as the very utterances which you and I utter in our natural language speech acts regarding self and other.

Utterances within language addressed to my personhood, or other persons, renders the “person” in the third person – as an object-like thing. For reflexive theories of the self the person who speaks is rendered a “you.” Thus, we say “I see you talk, and you see me talk.” The “I” is something seen as a self-referential thing that uses the “I”, but for others it is always a “you”. On the other hand, utterances are signs that stand for other things and therefore are opaque to the extent that they both point beyond themselves.

\(^9\) A ready at hand example of the convergence of these two theories of language can be seen in a birth certificate. A birth certificate has three important pieces of information: a proper name, a time, and a location in public space – all inscribed in public records. Each of these is a deictic reference, and each is found where phenomenological aspect meets cosmological counterpart in naming, time and space. The “I” is given its proper name by its parents at its birth and as we will see the “I” forms a limit to “the world.” Furthermore, regarding the proper name of the “I” Ricoeur says that “[t]he relation between the personal pronoun “I,” taken as the subject of attribution, and the proper nouns, as the designation of the token of a basic particular, is a relation of inscription in the institutional sense of the term. “I” is literally inscribed by virtue of the illocutionary force of a particular speech act – naming – onto the public list of proper names in accordance with the conventional rules that govern the attribution of family names and first names” (OaA 54).

\(^{10}\) An identifying reference as used in natural language (as opposed to identifying descriptions) and according to David Pallauer in Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed, an identifying reference “designates individuals rather than classifying them in terms of a concept or predicating a property to them although it also presupposes both these other uses of language” (92).
Furthermore, they are also things themselves and will never lose their thing-like nature. Ricoeur says that a sign becomes opaque and, “it attests once more to the fact of being a thing and reveals its eminently paradoxical structure of an entity at once present and absent” (OaA 41). Further, he says that when an utterance, “comes to influence the referential intention itself,” it reveals the sign’s opacity (OaA 41). The specific sign we are interested in this study is that of the utterance of the “I”.

Outlining a theory of speech acts Ricoeur distinguishes between performative and constative speech acts – a distinction barrowed from J. L. Austin. Performative acts play a significant role in Ricoeur’s own ethical theory, and will be important in our final analysis of forgiving. Performative acts include acts such as, “I promise that,” “I guarantee that,” or “I forgive that.” Constative speech acts are declarations such as “the cat is on the mat,” as well as those which relate to a correspondence of utterances to states of affairs. These two types of speech acts “intersect” with other types of action and are thus to be included in the “very plane of action” (OaA 43). The example Ricoeur gives is the difference between saying “the cat is on the mat,” versus “I affirm that the cat is on the mat.” The former is a constative, and locutionary – it is an utterance qua act, yet is opaque due to its nature as a sign. The latter (“I affirm that…”) is also constative, but illocutionary (performative) hence it is not an act or a sign that refers back to itself, rather the prefix “I affirm that…” has, according to Ricoeur, “the transparence of a statement that is wholly traversed by its referential intention” (OaA 43). This forms Ricoeur’s model for, “the linguistic expression of the illocutionary force of all statements” (OaA 43). When we say “I” it is not a locutionary speech act, or a sign in the world, rather it is to be thought of as a performative utterance. An example of this performative utterance is
seen by the adding to the phrase “I promise that,” the additional phrase, “to you,” so that we are really always saying, “I promise to you that.” The “I” then is always a part of interlocution. Looking forward to the other studies, Ricoeur tells us that, “every advance made in the direction of the selfhood of the speaker or the agent has as its counterpart a comparable advance in the otherness of the partner” (OaA 44). This advancement is the theoretical heart of Ricoeur’s overall semantic project directed by his ontological hermeneutic methodology.

Performative illocutionary utterances compliment the “I” such that “this” refers to anything nearby; “here” refers to every place nearby; “now” refers to any event “contemporaneous with the utterance made by the utterer” (OaA 45). Without going into exhaustive detail, we are confronted here by several paradoxes and aporias regarding reference, sign, and utterance – each one is related to the “I”. Beyond the question of “who?” and the possible substitution of “I” for “a person who thus designates themselves,” Ricoeur says he is passing from pragmatics (studying language with reference to contexts) to the “syntagmatic” viewpoint. By this I take it that Ricoeur is understands “syntagmatic” as the general rules governing the combination of linguistic elements. Therefore the deictic term “I” demands that it is “in each case only one person to the exclusion of any other, the one who is speaking here and now” (OaA 49). The expression “I” is called an “anchoring” and is, “a non-substitutable position, to a unique center of perspective on the world” (OaA 49). This anchored “I” constitutes “the limit of the world, and not one of its contents” (OaA 51). Essentially, Ricoeur has demonstrated here in Oneself as Another the aporia that the “I” as a world-limit (“horizon”) is not coincidental with a person’s proper name, because one’s proper name (e.g., Paul)
indicates a real person, whereas the “I” can shift from one speaker to another. In other words, there is a distinction between the ego who speaks versus the speech act of the “I”.

In the third section of this second study Ricoeur brings together the theory of identifying reference with the reflexivity of the utterance. Are we really able to extract “I” from action verbs such as “I affirm that”? And how can we bring together this “I” who is the subject of utterance with the concept of “person” who is supposed to be an “irreducible basic particular” (52)? His starting points are the “now” and the “here”. The “now” and the “here” arise out of the “limit-of-the-world character” of the “ego of the utterance” (OaA 53). He states that the term “now” comes about by “the conjunction between the living present of the phenomenological experience of time and the indifferent instant of cosmological experience” (OaA 53). In other words we “inscribe” into a calendar, that is cosmological time (heavenly movements), our phenomenological experience of the living present to achieve a “dated now”. It works in a similar fashion to the “here” because my bodily-self forms the center of my perspective on the world from which all things spring out of my own “zero point.”

Commencing from the “dated-now” and the “bodily-here” our next step is into the sphere of the lived body on the road to getting to the heart of “the irreplaceable center of perspective in the world,” that makes up the human agent (OaA 55). The topographical zero point of the “here” and “now” sheds light on the personal pronoun “I”. Robert Sweeney notes that “the isolated ‘I’ is literally inscribed by virtue of the illocutionary

\[\text{In a sense it is as if we are Descartes of the } Meditations \text{ sitting at the zero point of Cartesian coordinates: “here” is the source-point and “a localized here” (OaA, page 53).}\]
force\textsuperscript{12} of a particular speech act, i.e., naming, into the list of proper names in accordance with the conventional rules that govern the attribution of family names and first names…”\textsuperscript{13} Thus proper names act in a similar way to the agent’s locutionary acts of saying “I am now here,” or “I am here now,” that is, one’s proper name sets up a zero point just like “here” is opposed to “there”.

1.3 Beyond Action-Theory’s Agentlessness

The third study of \textit{Oneself as Another} consists in an analysis of the philosophy of action (action-theory) developed in analytic philosophy chiefly through the work of G. E. M. Anscombe and Donald Davidson. Ricoeur focuses his criticism of analytic action-theory on the ontology of events wherein the actions of persons are understood to constitute observable events in the world much like other physical causes of change or movement. The role of David Hume’s philosophical characterization of causation, as a concept inductively constructed by the mind, is the target of this criticism as understood through its narrow sense of “intentionality” attributed to the agent by analytic philosophers. This narrow sense of agent-intentionality is founded on the causality of the agent as being

\textsuperscript{12} “Illocutionary force” is a term developed by J. L. Austin in \textit{How to Do Things with Words} (1962). Illocutionary is distinguished from locutionary and perlocutionary speech acts according to the “force” or intention of a given speech act. For instance if my wife asks “how’s the dissertation coming along?” she is not asking about just the progress, but intentionally asking me to “get it finished now!” Illocutionary force can take on many forms such as commands, promises, assertions, warning, and other forms of exclamations. When an agent says “I” they are making a speech act with the illocutionary force asserting a presence here and now.

subject to external causes. In essence “intentionality” is understood by these action-theorists in the very concrete sense that if some person reaches for food or drink, then they must reasonably be hungry or thirsty. Likewise all other seemingly intentional behavior is to be understood in this broad sense of “intentional” action caused by an agent’s will governed by given circumstances. As Hume says, “experience is our only teacher” (Enquiry, section IV, paragraph 24).

Ricoeur begins by demarking the two key limitations inherent in the philosophy of action: first it has produced “sparse results,” and second it has failed to recognize “the processes of hierarchization among practices,” which are needed if we are to “speak of the narrative unity of a life” (OaA 57). The most pressing problem involved with these limitations is that “we are led in turn to disregard the ethical predicates belonging to the family of the good14 and the just15” (OaA, page 57). The good, as we will see in the “little ethics”, belongs to the teleological directedness of choices and actions towards “the good life” or “happiness” borrowing from the Aristotelian sense of a fully-active and actualized human life. The just belongs to a Kantian inspired deontology that is generative of laws which can “correct” one’s life-plan as one strives towards the good

14 With regard to Ricoeur’s conception of “the good” my own reading of this notion has been shaped by William Schweiker who argues that Ricoeur does not provide either a very clear conception of the good-life, or the ethical-good. Schweiker argues that we have to be content with the very loose notion of the ethical good as a life-plan whereby one is worthy of being happy. Also see Schweiker’s Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought.
15 Ricoeur’s conception of the just developed only in his later philosophical essays and according to David Pellauer – who is a prolific translator of Ricoeur’s works – the notion of the just enters Oneself as Another at the level of institutions and not intersubjectivity. See Pellauer’s essay on Ricoeur, “Looking for the Just” as well as a collection of essays appropriately entitled, The Just.
life. In short, analytic philosophy’s action theory is incapable of delivering an ethical agent of action. We now turn in an examination of this specific limitation.

- **Actions and Events versus Motives and Causes**

Action theory seeks to solve the questions of “what?” and “why?” in terms of “what is being done?” and “why is an agent doing an action?” Ricoeur changes these two questions into the singular question of “who?” as in “who is this agent of action?” Actions and agents he says are part of a network of “circumstances, intentions, motives, deliberations, voluntary and involuntary motions, passiveness, constraints, intended and unintended results, and so on” (OaA 57). According to Ricoeur the “who?” in this network is the Heideggerian *selbst* (selbstheit) and he says that action calls for narration in order that we can answer this question of the “who?” One answer to the “who?” question is to give a proper name: for instance “Socrates” answers the question: “who defended himself at trial?” However, with action theory the question of “who?” has been “occulted” by analytic action theory’s approach which is almost exclusively related to the “what?” and to the “why?” – “Why has this action been done?” Or, for “what purpose has an action been done?” The problem with the kinds of answers one gives to these questions is that they refer only to actions within the world in terms of causal events and thereby exclude a more meaningful sense of intentionality.

In order to distinguish between actions and events, Ricoeur poses another distinction, this time between motives and causes. In the first case we may say that once an action is executed it has become an event in the world. Our goal is to know the (true) motives behind an agent’s actions, and motives are not to be understood as per a Humean
notion of causation, that is, as merely causal reactions due to external circumstances, and stimuli resulting through the force of habit. What I understand Ricoeur to mean by “Humean causation” is the classic formulation of Hume which holds that all ideas owe their origin to sense-impressions. The combinations of sense-impressions into thoughts (ideas) are either natural or philosophical; however, all ideas are made based on a) the resemblance of sense-impressions to one another, or b) those impressions can be contiguous in time and space, or c) impressions can be judged to be causally linked. It is this third type of connection (i.e., causality) which is important for us here, and we can put it in a simple formula, “whenever I experience X, then Y seems to follow.” The implication is that human agency as understood by the semantics of action-theory is that an agent’s actions are to be attributed to an event, or chain of events, in general, and not to an agent who possesses motives, a will, and future-directed intentions.

When agents act they do something (cause an event), and that event can be observed as an event in the world. Ricoeur states that there is a distinction between saying, “events simply happen,” versus saying that “actions are what make things happen” (OaA 61). Ricoeur discerns a logical gulf between these two terms -- action and event -- as used in analytic philosophy since, he says, “what happens is the object of an observation, hence of a constative utterance (declarative statements) which can be true or false” (OaA 61). The problem with this distinction between action and event involves the description of what is happening within the individual agent. If one claims that an agent

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16 The classic formulation of causation by David Hume is found in both his *A Treatise of Human Nature* as well as his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* wherein he develops his “copy” principle. This principle holds that all thoughts are copies of original sense-impressions.
“makes events happen” through his actions, then one ignores the “who?” On the other hand, “what?” an agent has done can be observed just as with any material phenomenon, and the “why?” can be determined by looking at their intentions (asking about those intentions too); yet the question remains: “who is making these very events happen?” External observations are available without any internal observation – of either our own self or others – being necessary. Ricoeur explains that when I make a gesture I do not observe myself making it happen, rather, “knowledge of the gesture is in the gesture” (OaA 62). Ricoeur calls this “practical knowledge”; I do not need to think about how to sit, stand, or move, although I do usually know that I know these actions are being done by me. In any case, the problem with the distinction between events-in-general and an agent’s actions-as-cause only answers the question “what?” and not “who?”

Similar problems are involved with the question of “why?” that is, why agents act as they do; this question involves motives and causes. “Describing,” Ricoeur says, “is beginning to explain, and explaining more is describing more” (italics added, OaA 63). If agents explain what they are doing, then we can ask whether or not they are explaining why they are doing it? If I explain to you what I’m doing: going to the store, does this not imply that I have explained the “why?” of my actions. To ask, what the chicken did: it crossed the road, does not the answer as to the “why?” “A motive,” Ricoeur says, “is already a motive for acting” (OaA 63). Therefore, we can say that the chicken is motived to cross the road to get to the other side, and in turn we may say that the “other side” is one of the causes of the chicken’s actions. Motives drive actions in a parallel fashion to the way causes impel events, but this semantics of action is insufficient to get us to the agent who desires, and wills. What is possible within the confines of analytic action
theory is limited to the ability to observe actions and interpret them as to what motivated the agent: “why did they act so?” The “who?” is left unaddressed.

Analytic action-theory likens human motives to causes; but it must be rejected because it reduces every “willful” action to an external motivating object and not an action prompted by a human agent. Many human actions can be reduced to reactions to external events leading one to conclude prematurely that human agents are very much the same as any other kind of causal interaction. Ricoeur provides one particular example asking: “what made you jump?” with an answer, “a dog frightened me” (OaA 65). The cause of action is certainly grounded in some external object that explains and helps interpret the action of an agent as if they are merely another material object in the world. The result of this example is that the question “why is an agent motivated to act this way?” is superimposed on a notion of agency that is no different than saying, “what caused this particular physical event?”

The so-called “agentless semantics of action” found within analytic action-theory thus suffers from a “deliberate” ignoring of intentionality in the Husserlian tradition understood as the investigation of a consciousness who aims at doing something. Anscombe’s book Intention is the foil by which Ricoeur explains that even though the language of “intention” is used in analytic philosophy’s conceptual analyses of action, its use does not deal with the future-directed “intending to” found within existential phenomenology.

Ricoeur outlines three uses of the language of intention: 1) “intention” as having done, or doing something with intent, 2) “acting with a certain intention,” and 3)
“intending to” (OaA 68). Note that these three uses correspond to the three temporal tenses: past, present, and future. Ricoeur argues that Anscombe is close to Aristotle’s analysis of *proairesis* (preferential choice), and that in his estimation, “the entire problematic of causality is in a state of total confusion; we must therefore confine ourselves to saying that in certain acceptable answers to the question ‘why?’ we employ the term ‘cause’ in a meaningful way” (OaA 69). This leads to the frequent merger of “acting” with “cause” in cases of a backward-looking intentionality of the form, “having done something intentionally.” This position is still operating with an understanding of agency as a cause/effect relationship. The way forward will be through the third form of intention: “intending to.”

The second form of intention is what Aristotle calls a practical syllogism since it is a development of an action based upon either an earlier state of affairs, or current conditions. Much of our actions in life, in our daily lives, are done “in view of” current circumstances. Practical reasoning operates from the “what?” of current situations and “in view of” the “why?” Thus for instance, why do I do not lie? I want to retain other’s trust, and why do I eat healthy foods? To maintain my health (one could install any Kantian duty here). Importantly, the “I” is not the focus of this form of intentionality in the sense of the conscious “who” that looks intentionally to the past, present, or future. Anscombe’s analysis, according to Ricoeur, “has merely eliminated what I shall call the intention of the intention, namely the specific leap toward the future, where the thing that is to be done is to be done by me, the same one (ipse) as he who says that he will do it” (OaA 73). We are seeking this *ipse*-self, that is, one who is capable of “intending towards intention” or more concretely someone who is capable of making plans, promises, or
commitments, and of recognizing oneself as the same self that made the plan, promise, or commitment.

It is very clear that Ricoeur is claiming that action-theory is unable to deal with the full breadth of intentionality and especially the intention which comes under the heading of “attestation” in the sense that the agent “believes-in” what they have done, are doing, or plans to do. For Ricoeur the term “attestation” relates to the “intention to” as it applies to something such as promising, or some other temporal-directed dedication of the self to a future commitment or a release from a prior act – what the agent “had intended to do.” It is here with attestation that both the self as agent and ethics begin to come together for Ricoeur. Attestation stands against knowledge (epistēmē) in the strictly scientific sense, and “presents itself first as a kind a belief” (OaA 21). However, this belief is not like the belief of an opinion (doxa) which belongs to a grammar of “I believe-that”. Rather attestation belongs to a grammar of “I believe-in” (OaA 21). Intentionality as the “intention to” leads us to attestation which in turn will lead us to the self in terms of ascription of actions to the self.

What Ricoeur is working us toward is, “a being in the making, possessing de jure the problematic of selfhood, just as the problematic of sameness belongs de jure to the ontology of events” (OaA, 86).
1.4 Ascription of Actions to an Agent: Freedom and Determinism

Ricoeur’s long detour through competing theories of agency continues in the fourth study with a return to where he left off in the first study with Strawson. He draws three conclusions all under the designation of “ascription”. First, “persons” can be attributed predicates some of which are attributable only to persons, and not mere bodies. Second, we attribute both physical and psychological predicates “to the same things.” Third, mental predicates are attributable to both oneself and to others. Ricoeur examines pragmatics in this study as possibly a better theory than the semantics of actions for helping us understand this three-fold notion of “ascription”. This section consists of a short study of the problem in Aristotle, then an examination of three aporias related to the ascription of actions to an agent.

Ricoeur notes that although Aristotle did not have a unified concept of the will in his *Nicomachean Ethics* he was remarkably able to presage the difficulties facing modern conceptions of the ethical self. At the very least the virtuous person for Aristotle is one who expresses “a preferential choice” (*proairesis*) and one who acts upon prior deliberation (*bouleusis*). Aristotle identifies some of the principal causes of human action – some external, others internal, some voluntary and some involuntary. What Ricoeur is looking for is “a principle that is a self, a self that is a principle” (OaA 91).

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17 Pragmatics is the study of language from the direction of the intent and context of language which gives meaning to words, phrases, and in general, all utterances. An example of the importance of context can be seen with the various meaning that can be ascribed to a simple phrase such as, “here you go” where depending on the context one might mean to hand someone something, or as one holds open a door with the intent of ushering someone through a threshold.
Ricoeur notes a subtle shift in Aristotle’s uses the prefixes “en-” (in) and “epi-” (on) when describing physical and ethical actions. When one acts involuntarily (slavishly) then they act according to a principle “in” themselves. However, when one has deliberated and acts according to a preferential choice they act “on” their own. The principle of action (arkhē) and the self (autos) who acts become one and the same without the distinction found in other causal relations. In short, persons (agents) act according to their own deliberation and on their preferences in the sense that they are the source and origin (arkhē) of their actions. Ricoeur says,

“This is the essential point: the sort of short circuit established between arkhē and autos results in each of these terms being interpreted in relation to the other. The entire enigma which the moderns have placed under the heading of ascription resides in this mutual interpretation” (OaA 92).

In the analysis of ascription advanced by Ricoeur what matters most is, “the deliberation that precedes choice: the pre-ferred” (OaA 92). This detour into Aristotle contributes to the analysis of language carried out by pragmatics to the extent that it shows the problem of attribution of action to an agent necessarily involves the reasoned deliberation inherent to ethical deliberation. The involvement of the ethical in our conception of the human person as an authentic “self” will carry us through to the very end of our dialogue between Ricoeur and Badiou.

Pragmatics is the study of language from the direction of the intent and context of language which gives meaning to words, phrases, and in general, to linguistic utterances. The most important utterances for us are those that belong to persons: own, my/mine,
you/yours, her/hers, their/theirs and so forth. The task is to move from the questions “what?” and “why?” of action-theory to the question of “who?” Ricoeur’s position is that these types of expressions can “be classified as transcendentals on the same order as those we assigned to the semantic field of action” (OaA 95). Ascription is the means by which an agent attributes action to herself and who understands herself as the principal source of her actions.

**Three Difficulties of Ascription**

The first aporia concerns the transition from action-theory’s ascription of predicates to a subject *qua* physical object to pragmatics which takes motivations and intentions into account. Ricoeur says that what is difficult to understand here is that ascription is split between the “self-ascribable and the other-ascribable” yet both refer to the “same thing” (OaA 96). When mental attributes such as cognitions, affections, emotions, and volitions are ascribed to others, or when I ascribe them to myself Ricoeur notes that there is no difference according to whom they are ascribed. Ricoeur points out that even fictional characters can be attributed mental predicates such as anger, joy, and so forth. Included in “the mental” is the language of “one,” “someone,” and “each one,” thus we say “one feels joy,” “someone feels joy,” and “each one feels joy.” The predication of the mental attribute is independent of *whom* it is applied to in every case. What is needed, Ricoeur says, is that, “an agent must be able to designate himself or herself in such a way that there is a genuine other to whom the same attribution is made in a relevant manner” (OaA 98). In essence, mental affections and actions are predicates that can be attributed to *oneself*, to any *one*, and to every *one*. The result is that “what?” *one* is thinking and
“why?” one is thinking something or feeling something (affections) has been kept separate from “who” is thinking.

The second aporia involves the presumed leap from ascription of actions to an ascription of actors. Included with this leap from actions to actors are any descriptions (and eventual prescriptions) regarding actions themselves. Someone may be observed doing something, yet how can we say that we are capable of accurately describing those actions as to the voluntary or involuntary nature of the actor? It is certainly true that we can observe ourselves and others, and from those observations make declarative statements that ascribe to those agents which actions have been performed and also ascribe a reasonable “why” as well. Likewise, we can say that, “she said this” or “he took that”, but are we thereby justified in properly describing the intentional course of actions we have witnessed? Defending our judgment as properly descriptive is the crux of the problem at this point. We can explain, but do we understand the agent’s actions?

This aporia (i.e., the leap from actions to actors) involves the transitions from mere descriptions of actions to a proper ascription of those actors who carried out the actions. Proper description, and ascription, are the prerequisites for ethical prescription as well as moral and judicial imputation (such as in a court of law). Imputation of action to an agent means that an act can be deemed to be praiseworthy, or blameworthy, based on identifiable rules, and furthermore the agent can be held responsible for its actions. Ricoeur relies on H. L. A. Hart’s interpretation of phrases such as “he did that,” as akin to judicial decisions where an ascription of action to an agent comes as the result of a verdict as to why he “did that” (OaA 99).
Ricoeur provides three reasons as to why we cannot simply leap from the language of “ascription” to that of the more judicial language of “imputation.” First, ascription deals with simple actions, whereas imputation concerns more complex chains of causes and effects than are suitable for action-sentences which include the matter of intention within pragmatics. Second, there are so-called “verdictives” in the sense of verdicts concerning how an agent has acted within the world. If an actor is found to be either innocent or guilty, then that requires a verdict; that is an altogether different speech-act than an ascription of an action to an agent. Third, with a reference to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* Ricoeur says that one must show that the agent has made a “preferential choice” (*proairesis*) as a key link in the causal chain from agent to action. All this is leading us to the question of a person’s power to act – what Ricoeur will call the “capable human being.”

The third aporia regarding ascription is the “most intractable” (OaA 112), and it concerns the status of efficient causation\(^\text{18}\) as a primitive datum which Ricoeur refers to simply as *initiative*. This difficulty of any ascription of an action to an agent results from the fact of the agent’s power to act (the so-called “I can” borrowed from Merleau-Ponty). Ricoeur turns to the epistemological plane where he references Arthur Danto’s so-called

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\(^\text{18}\) Efficient causation is the third of Aristotle’s four causes and it explains movement, change, alternation and rest within things. The efficient cause is the primary source of a thing’s motion, change, and coming to rest. For instance for a chicken egg to become a chicken it requires some thing to change (bodily mass and form) and we call that change within a living organism “growth”. An important caveat to calling the efficient cause in living things “growth” is that Aristotle is very clear that “it takes a man to generate a man” (*Physics* 194 b 13) in the sense that the form “man” is the formal cause for the new born. A seed will grow into an adult according to the form within that seed by taking in nutrients as it grows into a fully formed adult. For an artificial object such as a wooden chair the efficient cause is external since chairs neither grow on trees nor do chairs reproduce, hence their efficient cause is a furniture maker.
“basic actions” with regards to how we speak of an agent’s actions. For Danto, the primitive datum of declarative sentences includes “actions which require no other intermediary action one would have had to perform in order to do this or that” (OaA 103). Primitive datum, Ricoeur says, “should be recognizable only at the end of a labor of thinking, of a dialectic – that is, of a conflict of arguments, which has been developed rigorously” (OaA 102).

This dialectic passes through two phases according to Ricoeur: from the disjunctive to the conjunctive. We begin with the disjunctive logical form of A v B (A or B) within the context of Kant’s third antinomy of freedom and determinism such that we say that an action by an agent is either freely chosen or causally determined. Understanding this antinomy demands that we recognize Kant’s first antinomy – the cosmos either had a beginning in time, or it is eternal and therefore without a beginning. This first beginning (for our contemporary science it is the Big Bang) in either case of the antinomy leads to the complete series of causally related events. In order for freedom to exist, in any meaningful sense, there must be an other (or “new”) beginning and this would be one that takes place within a free agent. Ricoeur asks, how then can we speak of a new beginning or an inauguration? His answer is that with regard to “an absolute beginning with respect to a particular series of events, liberty is only a relative beginning with respect to the entire course of the world” (OaA 105). What we are seeking then is a means to delineate a relative beginning separate from an absolute (cosmological; physical) beginning.

This dialectic from the disjunctive (A v B) to the conjunctive (A & B) also demands that the causal chain inaugurated by an agent’s actions, the so-called primitive
datum, be subject to a logical conjunctive phase (A & B). Conclusions regarding the causal chain within an agent’s actions are true if and only if both A & B are true. What this means for causality is that at the end of this dialectic, “we recognize the necessity to coordinate in a synergistic way the original causality of the agent with the other forms of causality” (OaA 102). At the center of this third aporia is the problem: how are we to delimit the causal chains regarding an agent? Where do we begin and where do we cease to attribute to an agent his or her actions as being deliberate voluntary choices? To reach our final goal of understanding the phenomenon of forgiveness we will need to figure out how an agent as an authentic self can attest to their past, and for this we will examine Ricoeur’s ontology of selfhood in chapter 3 below.

Where is this leading us? If the agent can inaugurate a new causal beginning, then we must seek its proper starting point. Within any judicial hearing the judge and jury must faithfully retrace the causal chain of events that led up to a supposed crime in order to determine guilt or innocence. It is not difficult to find convicted criminals who claim, “the knife found its way” into their victim – with no mention of their own hand in the crime. The disjunctive logic of freedom versus determinism does not allow us to avoid this aporia regarding the ascription of responsibility to an agent regarding their actions. We need to find a means to say conjunctively that both A (“the knife founds its way”) and (“I stabbed the victim”) can both be true.

Ricoeur closes this fourth study with a reflection on initiative as “an intervention which effectively causes changes in the world” (OaA 109). The aim of Ricoeur’s investigation into selfhood is to understand how a person is capable, through an agent’s causality, of making things happen that coincide with the broader causality of the world.
We are on our way to investigating attestation on the epistemological plane opened by the theories of action and of language that will bring together the causality of both the psychological and physical predicates of the self into a single ontology. The end result will be a conception of self that is capable of not only acting, but also of suffering (*pathos*). At the end of this dissertation we aim to show that Ricoeur’s hermeneutical ontology of the self also accounts for an agent who can forgive, and can be forgiven, because they are human persons who are capable of narrating and recounting their own actions.

### 1.5 Narrative and the Problems of Personal Identity

The theories thus far examined, taken from analytic philosophy, all fail to account for how a person *qua* actor can self-designate their own actions as causes within the world of effects. Ricoeur’s proposal is to examine personal identity from within the framework of narrative theory as a means to bridge the gap dividing descriptions of action from moral prescriptions of actions. Narrative theory constitutes the study of the elements, structures, and utilization of narratives in all their various forms found everywhere in human endeavors. Narrative theory seeks to delineate how narrative structures differ from other forms of discourse, whether fiction or non-fiction writing – including lyrical writing, logical categorization, scientific descriptions of the laws of nature, as well as the descriptive language used by action theory. Narrative makes a contribution, Ricoeur says, “to the constitution of the self” (*OaA* 114). Narrative is the third part of Ricoeur’s four-
fold hermeneutics of the self as it is developed in *Oneself as Another*: we are capable of acting, speaking, narrating, and being morally responsible.

Before we move forward with our discussion of narrative theory let us first define “narrative” as we see it utilized by Ricoeur. “To narrate” according to Jean Bessière “is basically nothing more than bringing together, by means of refiguration, discordant moments in time, and presenting the figure of their agreement.”\(^19\) The language Bessière employs reflects Ricoeur’s own language especially as found in *Time and Narrative* (1983). For example, Ricoeur says in *Time and Narrative* that with regard to narrative “[w]e are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refigured time through the meditation of a configured time” (54). Ricoeur is refereeing to a three-fold mimesis or “mimetic process” whereby the past is composed into a plot (*emplotment*, French *mise en intrigue*). Narratives plot discordant events into a concord, and “agreement” can be understood in two manners. First, “time can be represented as one” or secondarily “narrative presupposes the representation of an action” and hence its agent.\(^20\) It is this second perspective which is developed in *Oneself as Another* with the aim of answering how one can “posit such a human agent whose identity remains constant, when many narratives… are at pains to undo the notions of action and the constant identity of the agent.”\(^21\) This problem in particular will be addressed with a dialogue with Derek Parfit five subsections below on Parfit’s “My Division.”


\(^{20}\) Bessière, page 49.

\(^{21}\) Bessière, page 49.
The problems of personal identity that are considered at this stage concern the division mentioned before regarding an *idem*-identity versus an *ipse*-identity (i.e., likeness versus selfhood). Where these two notions of identity overlap is with the ability to remain the same over time. These two distinct types of identity include numerical (a thing being one and the same) and qualitative (“Rose and Sophia were wearing the same dress”). Maintaining certain claims of sameness over significant periods of time suffers from a problem that we will revisit with the possibilities of forgiveness where we will consider whether or not the crime can be separated from the criminal (separation of agent from act). It is generally assumed that people can change over time and this sits at the heart of our difficulties throughout these investigations.

The problems of personal identity addressed here leads Ricoeur to suggest that instead of focusing on sameness that there is a *structure* that exhibits permanence over time, thus this question of “a structure” constitutes our next step. What is needed is a “principle of permanence in time” and Ricoeur argues that this “idea of structure, opposed to that of event, replies to this criterion of identity, the strongest one that can be applied” (OaA 117). Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self develops around this “search for a relational invariant” (OaA 118). This “relational invariant” is the very “self” within subjectivity, but this self is not itself an object of intuition. David Pellauer argues that the self “is reachable only through reflection, but reflection that is now itself a process of interpretation, a process of interpretation that begins from the object, and not from the
subject.” What beginning “from the object” means is that for Ricoeur modern philosophy begins from Descartes’ cogito as an object of thought, that is, the very question of the self, and not (as most presume) from the position that the cogito is a subject who thinks. Those who make this claim approach the cogito as the subject who thinks, and not as Ricoeur stresses – the cogito represents the very question of the self which is the object of our enquiry. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics must be seen against philosophical efforts that claim that the self is merely a myth, or some form of epiphenomenon.

Some Problems of Personal Identity

The problems of personal identity related to narrative theory are easy to find within contemporary culture – especially in literary science fiction. Examples abound in literary science fiction where a Cartesian subject – typically located in the physical presence of the brain – is housed in a jar, a computer, or in an avatar (i.e., a robot). From Frankenstein to Darth Vader there are many examples of the paradoxes involved with personal identity when the brain (i.e., the entire central nervous system) is taken to be the essence of personhood. Frankenstein, for instance, has an identity, yet all of his parts are replaceable in the same sense as the ship of Theseus. Parallel to science fiction there is

23 The three “masters of suspicion” with regard to the cogito are, for Ricoeur, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.
24 Plutarch, Parallel Lives, Life of Theseus, XXIII. “Now the thirty-oared ship, in which Theseus sailed with the youths, and came back safe, was kept by the Athenians up to the time of Demetrius Phalereus. They constantly removed the decayed part of her timbers, and renewed them with sound wood, so that the ship became an illustration to philosophers of the doctrine of growth and change, as some argued that it remained the same, and others, that it did not remain the same.” Translated by Aubrey Stewart and George Long, Trinity College, 1894.
extensive research in the fields of both cognitive and computer science into the so-called “Singularity.” This represents the point when technology will (inevitably!) allow a person to up-load the contents of their consciousness onto a computer and effectively live forever as a virtual avatar. These efforts are based on the premise that one could live forever beyond their own physical body via the construction of an avatar. Our question throughout this first chapter has been focused on the “who?” of action and in this section we are investigating the related question: “Who is this ‘some-one’ who (supposedly) lives-on?” Answering this question will provide the necessary groundwork for understanding Ricoeur’s conception of human identity.

Ricoeur says that “a triad has thus imposed itself on my analysis: describe, narrate, prescribe” (OaA 114). In other words, we are moving from descriptions of humans as agents causing events in the world, to an agent that needs to be narrated, because they are historical. Essentially, selfhood is the referent to whom effects are prescribed; the self thus acts similar to any other physical or bodily thing in the world. However, the self deserves to be narrated, because the self is essentially moral in character. Here it is helpful to recall Kant’s third antinomy which holds the thesis that, “Causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom in order to explain them,” against the antithesis that: “There is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature.”25 This will be an important distinction once we get to the study of forgiveness where we

will ask whether or not there can be another beginning (freedom within an agent) within the causal network that determines the world.

In the first six studies of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur is attempting to answer the question as to how events in the world can be attributed to agents. For that to be answered we need to answer the question of sameness, that is to say whether or not this agent is the same as he who made that event happen in the world. To move from sameness (*idem*-identity) to selfhood (*ipseity*) we must recognize that humans are temporal and create narratives utilizing both memorial and historical elements to create an autobiographically unified life-story. To achieve this move into temporality we will focus on the dialectic between selfhood and sameness. Our distinction at this point is between a similitude (e.g., seeing an old colleague versus my memory of him or her), on the one hand, and on the other hand a sense of an “uninterrupted continuity” (OaA 117) in the sense noted already of the ship of Theseus (a vessel whose every part has been replaced). We see this problematic clearly in the case of criminals who are tried many years after their crimes where their defense is rooted in their “changed” character. Narratives do indeed create coherent stories; however, we are still threatened by the possible obliteration of selfhood (*ipseity*) over time.
Heraclitus of Ephesus has left for posterity the enigmatic phrase *ethos anthropos daimon* – usually translated as “Character is fate.” 26 The Greek word “*daimon*” is typically translated as “character” yet it forms the root of “demon” and can be translated as “spirit”. The result is a richness of Heraclitus’ phrase regarding the nature of human character as developed overtime by our actions and habits. Ricoeur says that character is, “the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification [sic] of a human individual as the same” (OaA 119). Ricoeur then recalls his early effort in his *Freedom and Nature* (1950) where he placed character under the heading of an “absolute involuntary,” with the result that he still maintains that character is “a finite, unchosen perspective through which we accede to values and to the use of our powers” (OaA 119). In the context of *Oneself as Another* “character” is to be understood as those “lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized” (OaA 121). Through habits, and other forms of identifications, character is the “what happens as events” with regard to the “who” who causes those events. Character is an overlapping of the *idem*- and *ipse*-identity. Character entails the adoption and sedimentation of preferences, values, rules, conclusions, and other forms of evaluative choices within a self who believes that these constitute their own self understanding. When people act “out of character” we know that they are acting

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26 More specifically *ethos* means habits, *anthropos* means man and *daimon* means spirit, therefore this seemingly simple fragment can be various translated according to one’s emphasis on either habit, being human, or spirit (character). This fragment has been translated this as “A person’s character is his divinity (guardian spirit)” [trans. By Richard D. McKirahan], “man’s character is his fate” [trans. By Jonathan Barnes], or in my own facile translation, “you are what you do in life.”
against those values with which they identify, and by which we are capable of identifying that person.

Contrary to the model of character, marked by its sedimentation of choices (actions, values, and so forth) over time, there is also the model of making promises, which includes its related phenomenon: asking for forgiveness. (Note that both represent a disparity between a past and present self-consistency.) However, such permanence over time based on the model of loyalty to one’s work, or one’s past, involves possible conflict with one’s character, especially since one’s character can change over time with the adoption of new habits; albeit usually only in minor degrees. When I make a promise I am saying that regardless of my future desires I will keep my word, and I maintain that it was the “same” I who made the promise, although now I today have a different desire; regardless this I now identifies itself as the ipse-author of the earlier promise. The conflict here is a perseverance of character over time versus the perseverance of one’s word. Character maintains an idem-identity (sameness) at odds with an ipseity (selfhood) of promise keeping where one remains faithful to their word, even if they no longer desire to keep an old promise.

- Some Paradoxes of Personal Identity

The first paradox relates to the early-modern link made by John Locke and David Hume between personal identity and memory. According to Craig Bean, Ricoeur argues that “Hume equated identity with sameness but found only diverse experiences within, while
narrative enables us to employ diversity, variability, and discontinuity into an integrated and continuous story”

We will explore the differences between narratives versus the scenarios favored by analytic philosophers. The latter like to ask, as for instance in Locke’s famous scenario: what happens when the memory of a prince is transplanted into the body of a cobbler? (Essay, book II, ch. 27, ¶15) Who will this new transplanted person be? The prince or the cobbler? Locke’s answer according to Ricoeur seems to be in essence that we must rely upon instantaneous reflection on our memories, thus a prince in a cobbler’s body. In Locke’s own words: “So that whatever has the consciousness of present and past Actions, is the same Person to whom they both belong” (Essay, book II, ch. 27, ¶16).

Related questions and difficulties are also involved with lapses of memory when asleep or in cases of amnesia, psychopathologies, and other loss or alterations of memories. Further aporias arise out of Hume’s skepticism of human identity and anything resembling a soul. Is the human being merely a constant conjunction of memories and mental acts that merely resemble each other or are found always in mental contiguity with one another? In an interesting turn of phrase Ricoeur asks the Humean philosopher whether or not it is belief alone that creates the “fiction” of the self. If when one enquires into one’s own selfhood one cannot find attached to any impression, memory, or experience an invariable “self”, then for Hume this means the self is a mere illusion. Hume acts like someone who cannot find himself – a self who is free of some other particular impression gained from the senses. The question then becomes: what are

the “criteria” of belief in our memories, versus belief in the self? The paradoxical problem here with Hume is that we have a self who cannot find itself within the spacious caverns of her memory filled like a gallery of one’s sense-impression. All art, no artists.

Some paradoxes involved when identity is founded upon memory are found in St. Augustine’s *Confessions* where, for instance, he says “I myself do not remember this (infancy)” and that “I do not remember such (infant) acts of my own” therefore we must assume from observations of infants that that is how we each were at that young age (*Confessions*, book 1, chapter 6). Likewise, there are many paradoxes involved with amnesia as well as false or repressed memories. When we narrow our reflective focus on our present mind and ask ourselves “where is the foundation of my selfhood?” there seems to be no “self” who solidly sits by me while my mind considers this idea, this attribute of my body, or that memory. This is the so-called “school of inwardness” which we find in Augustine’s *Confessions* where he says, “I come into the fields and spacious palaces of my memory, where are treasures of countless images of things of every manner, brought there from objects perceived by sense” (*Confessions*, book 10, chapter 8). The Humean account finds no self, but only ideas that have come into the mind, a mind that was born a blank slate and has formed by the sedimentation of sense-impressions by the force of habit alone. In other words for Hume there is no self “down there” anywhere – only the constant conjunction of thoughts born by habit.

The concept of “character” implies that there is some stable sameness. Philosophers since Descartes have sought certain criteria within the mind sufficient for the establishment of selfhood. Ricoeur’s critique of this search for criteria springs from a rejection of any verification of selfhood. Rather, the self is something that “I believe-in”
and not something that “I believe-that” exists. This is called “attestation” by Ricoeur and involves a kind of truth test which only becomes clear after the distinction between sameness and selfhood is completed.

Ricoeur and Parfit: A Dialogue on “My Division”

According to Derek Parfit there is no such thing as a stable permanent subject which would constitute an identity, rather the human person’s existence is very much limited to a body and brain that interacts with other physical events in the world.28 Furthermore, any moral sentiment is understood as merely a fiction – albeit a fact at the neural level of brain activity – yet still a fiction therefore morality has no meaning, unless it is also rational to act according to a moral sentiment.29

Regarding Ricoeur’s reading and critique of Parfit’s “important work”30 Reasons and Persons (1986) our first task consists here of an interpretation of Parfit’s major claims prior to Ricoeur’s own critique of his reductionist position. “Ricoeur takes Derek Parfit’s reductionist conclusion that ‘personal identity is not what matters (Parfit 255)’” according to Pamela S. Anderson, “to be the strongest and most cogent statement of a view directly opposed to his position”31. The main distinction made by Ricoeur is

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28 See Derek Parfit’s Reasons and Persons (1984) for his central work discussing various theories of self from within the Empiricist tradition. Parfit expends considerable energy dismissing various theories of self that are based on the same brain, the same body, the same memories as well as the same soul. Reasons and Persons Parfit says, “discusses some of the differences between theories, but does not try to decide between them.” His project is also heavily grounded in science fiction themes of tele-transportation, brains-in-a-vat scenarios, and other paradoxes of selfhood.
29 See Reasons and Persons, page 452 on moral skepticism.
between the science fiction literature so widely utilized by Parfit versus the nature of identity as it is found in literary fiction. Science fiction provides many scenarios where an individual human being experiences a loss of identity through some combination of a displacement or replacement of their body, a division of their brain, or even more fantastic scenarios due to tele-transportation paradoxes. The most forceful thought experiment regarding the problems of identity is, according to Simon Beck, Parfit’s scenario entitled *My Division* which Beck utilizes to defend Parfit against Ricoeur’s criticisms. Beck says that “Parfit’s case is set up to embarrass someone who claims (like Ricoeur) that this body and psychology are irreducibly mine.” The scenario of *My Division* goes as follows:

My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two [twin] brothers. My brain is divided, and each half is successfully transplanted into the body of one of my brothers. Each of the resulting people believes he is me, seems to remember living my life, has my character, and is in every other way psychologically continuous with me. And each has a body that is very like mine. (Parfit, 1984: 254)

To be clear this scenario involves identical triplets, two of whom have suffered total brain damage, while their bodies remain healthy, whereas the third sibling suffers grave bodily damage while maintaining full brain functioning. The healthy brain is removed, divided

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32 The chief distinction Ricoeur maintains between “science fiction literature” and “literary fiction” is the presence of a subject in all literary fiction even up to the point where that subject loses all sense of self. The subject who loses all sense of self still remains some one who can ask the question of identity. This distinction will be made clearer in this present discussion of Parfit’s scenario entitled *My Division.*

into its natural hemispherical halves, and transplanted into the two healthy bodies. For the sake of argument we assume that there is nothing technologically infeasible regarding such a procedure.

After the above fictional operating (assuming it is successful) Parfit argues that only four possibilities with regard to identity could exist: “I am dead”, “I am one of two survivors”, “I am the other survivor”, or “I am both brothers” (Parfit, 1984: 254). Beck’s own analysis of these possibilities is that none is satisfactory and that what must be rejected is the notion of identity itself. Beck says that Parfit’s conclusion “is that it cannot ultimately be identity that matters for survival. Personal identity is what we have when we have all that fundamentally matters in survival and only one instance of that relation” (italics in original).  

My initial reaction to Beck’s defense of Parfit is that there must be someone for whom his or her survival is meaningful. Meditating on My Division I can imagine myself, with my other “half” going to our own funeral witnessing “our” corpse lowered into a grave with “my” name on the gravestone. Talking with my other brother, who embodies half my brain, it is impossible to imagine that from the moment we woke from our operation that our experiences would any longer coincide. I would see “myself” “over there,” across the room capable of acting, speaking, narrating, and morally imputable independent of me. “Our” memories might indeed be identical, but our present and future states (attention and anticipation respectively) are non-identical from this point onwards.

34 Beck, page 331.
We can easily add to this scenario another which occurs after the operation where one brother asks the other how he feels – at this point forward their actions and experiences will diverge into two unique identities.

Ricoeur contrasts Parfit’s numerous science fiction scenarios with literary fiction most notably with Robert Musil’s novel *The Man without Qualities (Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, 1943)*. Ricoeur’s concern with the role of identity in various kinds of fiction grows out of his interest in integrating historical and fictional narrative. In an attempt to integrate these two stories Ricoeur argues, in a short article *Narrative Identity*, the following hypothesis: “that the constitution of narrative identity, whether of an individual or a historical community, was the place to search for this fusion between history and fiction”.

The thesis he puts forth involves his now famous distinction of identity between *idem*-identity (sameness) and *ipse*-identity (selfhood). This split between *idem* and *ipse* is described by Ricoeur using Heidegger’s language of *Dasein* versus *Vorhalten/Zuhalten* (present-at-hand and ready-at-hand) in the sense that the former, *Dasein*, is characterized by “mineness” whereas the latter is characteristic of being-in-the-world. Both kinds of identity intersect with regards “to permanence over time”.

The logic of this division forces Ricoeur to present a “double” thesis: “the first is that most of the difficulties which afflict the contemporary discussion of personal identity result from confusion between two interpretations of permanence over time; the second is

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36 Ricoeur, page 75.
that the notion of narrative identity offers a solution to the aporias concerning personal identity”.37

Ricoeur’s response to Parfit’s numerous, largely brain-centered, scenarios involving a loss of identity is to say that, “[w]e equate life to the story or stories we tell about it”.38 Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Ricoeur says life is really a matter of a “fundamental narrative unity”.39 The center piece of any narrative is the formation of a plot. Without a plot there is no story, and without a story there is “life” to speak of in a unified sense. This is where Musil’s novel The Man without Qualities comes to bear of the question of identity for Musil’s novel involves a man named Ulrich who experiences a total disintegration of his character. This loss of character is paralleled, according to Ricoeur, with a loss of narrative, “and draws the literary work toward the vicinity of the essay”40 – a literary style generally always lacking any form of narrative.

Ulrich, in Musil’s novel, can now be paralleled to Parfit’s My Division. According to Parfit there is no possible way that “my” former brain, transplanted into “my” two brother’s bodies, could then identify with his new status, because either “I” would be dead, or “I” would be looking at “my” brothers. The principal move made by Ricoeur here, which Parfit and his defenders such as Beck, apparently fail to recognize, is that the “non-subject is not nothing”.41 Ricoeur identifies two major distinctions between the puzzling scenarios of science fiction and literary fiction: first, there is an invariant within
any narrative fiction, namely, a subject who acts, suffers, even dies; however, the second characteristic exclusive to science fiction treats the subject “without any relation to another [person]”. Consider for instance the character Frankenstein: his body is not invariant, but an ensemble of parts, and he has no family, friends, or acquaintances of any kind, even “his” proper name does not belong to him, but his maker’s name: Victor Frankenstein.

The principal difference though between science fiction scenarios and literary fiction for Ricoeur is that literary fiction intensifies the question of the “who?”.

Regarding Musil’s character Ulrich in *The Man without Qualities*, I agree here with Ricoeur, “that to the degree the narrative approaches the annulment of the character in terms of identity-as-sameness, the novel loses its properly narrative qualities”. Therefore what we have learned from the detour through literary fiction is that without *idem*-identity (forgetting for the moment *ipse*-identity) we exit the realm of narrative altogether.

Simon Beck’s defense of Parfit clearly misses this important point. He refers to *My Division* scenario as a “story” while insisting that the crucial aspect is the embodiment of a person. Beck claims that the central problem with Ricoeur’s acceptance of thought experiments like Parfit’s involves the status of a subject’s embodiment – claiming that Ricoeur illicitly assumes existential embodiment. “Parfit’s case,” Beck claims, “is set up to embarrass someone who claims (like Ricoeur) that this body and

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42 Ricoeur, page 79.
43 Ricoeur, page 78.
psychology are irreducibly mine, just as much as someone who claims (like Descartes) that the self is something over and above the relevant mental and physical facts”. If we assume Beck and Parfit are correct, that after the division (of the brain) that Parfit is either dead, or one of his two brother’s new agents, then identity must be rejected as an unnecessary “further fact”; all that exists are brains with their memories, sense-data, and psychological states. Unfortunately Beck and Parfit miss Ricoeur’s central argument: any life that could be called “mine” involves an actor who has suffered the involuntary necessities of this world, who can narrate these events into a plot, and can call them “mine”.

The central weakness of Parfit’s reductionist effort and his rejection of identity is the failure to recognize a distinction between idem-identity (sameness over time, character), versus ipse-identity (mineness, selfhood). The “narrative condition of self-identity” significantly contributes, according to Anderson, “to resolving the difficulties related to personal identity as it is debated by Anglo-American analytic philosophers such as Parfit”. Ipseity is not a “further fact” falsely added to the other facts of cerebral or psychological activity. Instead we have a relationship with our actions as an agent who can assess those actions by plotting them autobiographically. Anderson states this

concisely when she says: “And it is this important feature of our sense of identity (i.e. of *l’ipséité*) that Parfit’s account leaves out”.

By maintaining the human being as a naturalistic event in the world, Parfit manages to reduce the human existence down to his or her body, further localizing that existent “person” down to the brain. One may readily see the Cartesian moves here with regards to where Descartes in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* locates the connection of mind to body in the brain’s pineal gland. Parfit, though, wholly rejects any stable *cogito*, or “soul,” staying well within his Empiricist roots by maintaining that we can rely only on rationality and mathematics. Parfit’s principal philosophical endeavor concerns what can we mean when we say a human being’s identity remains the “same” over time.

From his theoretical point of view we can readily see the many strange consequences of Parfit’s position regarding sameness over space and time. In science fiction many stories are based on the location of the human person within the brain alone. In the recent remake of the movie *Robocop* (2014) the main character detective Alex Murphy has his body mostly replaced by a robotic body. Within the robotic frame we see briefly that all that remains of Murphy is his brain, face, and some internal muscles and organs only down to his lungs. The status of his heart is ambiguous in the film. All his skin besides his face is gone as well as all his limbs and guts. We must ask: Is this the *same* detective Alex Murphy? The movie addresses the questions at several levels – with his friend/partner, with his wife and child, with his own superiors, as well as the

46 Anderson, page 62.
investigation of his own “homicide”. However, the most direct interference with Murphy’s personal identity takes place at the level of the brain. His doctor, and savior of sorts from natural death, is capable of directly manipulating Murphy’s brain by means of various brain implants. This and many other examples from science fiction reflect our contemporary struggle to understand the nature of human agency, personal identity, and selfhood through the cultural imaginary.

The crux of the matter revolves around sameness versus mineness with regard to the status of the body. It is mineness and not sameness which matters to human identity and to selfhood. If my brain were transplanted into a new body, then that new body would be mine, albeit not the same. Parfit’s attack on personal identity includes an attack on “what matters to us.” If my soul were to be reincarnated several times over, or if the contents of my consciousness (memories, intentions, and so forth) were up-loaded onto a machine, Parfit is arguing that what matters is that it is the same thoughts. However, “what matters” must “matter” to some one and this leads to the question, crucial to Ricoeur at this point, which is: “for whom does this matter?” If I were told that all my thoughts and memories were teleported into a robotic avatar, then should I be relieved that I, left in my dying body, will not perish? The Cartesian cogito returns to us here: I think, I fear death, I hope to live on. Questions of remaining the same matter only for an agent who is troubled with death, that is, for an agent with self-concern.

What is the result of this long detour into analytic philosophy and the fictions of techno-science? According to Don Ihde, what is at work here are two competing visions of not only technology, but of human embodiment. The two competing visions of technology diverge into what Ihde calls technomyths with the analytic tradition favoring
a utopian vision, while the continental tradition stressing the dystopian vision of technology’s hazards. Ihde says that, “Ricoeur does not explicitly take a distinctly antitechnological stance,” however a version of “continental Romanticism” appears. He calls it “a ‘slide’ from the phenomenologically established ontological relation between an embodied self and the environing world”.\textsuperscript{47} Thus we can say that Ricoeur embodies the self – loosely following Heidegger who situates the human being on “Earth” (i.e. our embodied terrestrial condition). With regards to technology this is a dystopian position and a marked contrast to analytic philosophy’s utopian view of technologies such as brain transplants, and tele-transportation. The other major contrast Ihde identifies between Ricoeur and Parfit is their philosophical approach to the body. Parfit essentially presents a neo-Cartesian body/mind dualism in the form of a “brain = body” equation. Ricoeur for his part maintains the distinction between body and flesh. “Flesh, phenomenological body” Ihde concisely states, “is mineness, experiencable [sic]”.\textsuperscript{48}

1.6 From Disjunctive Events, to an Ethical Destination

We are working our way towards Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of selfhood by way of a theory of narrative identity which will guide us through his “little ethics” in the next chapter. Narrative identity involves a dialectic between the sameness of an agent as a cause of events in the world (disjunctive) and selfhood (conjunctive). Recall that “disjunctive” can


\textsuperscript{48} Don Ihde, 101.
be stated as “Either A or B is true” (A v B) while on the other hand “conjunctive” can be stated “A is true if and only if B is true” (A & B). Selfhood is tentatively understood at this point as the mineness of my body, my thoughts and my actions. But this still needs to be elaborated. The self attests that “this is mine” and the self “believes-in” its free agency within a world otherwise fully determined by laws of nature. The focus of selfhood has led us to the notion of “character” as witnessed in literature, fiction, and other narrative forms including those related to memory and history. Character as we will see can be possessed by non-human things such as the HMS Titanic, or the Mediterranean sea. Ricoeur utilizes the term “emplotment” (mise en intrigue) to refer to, “the competition between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances which, up to the close of the story, threaten this identity” (OaA 141). Within any narrative there is the mediation between a character who somehow is the same throughout while also undergoing or performing a wide variety of discordance actions. Thus for instance the HMS Titanic is the same ship throughout her journey, yet she undergoes various discordances (i.e., sinking). Ricoeur relies heavily on Aristotle’s own analysis of tragedy which revolves around the notion of acting (poiesis) such as the poor decision-making of King Creon in Sophocles’ Antigone, or the formation of a character as seen in Plato’s Symposium where Diotima praises love (Eros) as the soul’s way of fostering knowledge and virtue by way of its striving for the Good. The narrative theory of identity thus treats events not merely as links in a causal chain, but as occurrences that did not necessarily have to happen. Therefore for instance, when, where, and by whom I was born was not due to some necessary causes, but since these events cannot be undone they assume a place in my own necessary history. I could not have been born otherwise, for then I
would not be my own self. In order for me to be me it was necessary that these events occurred as they did, while at the time they happened there were many other possibilities. To help clarify the structure of narrative Ricoeur utilizes a triad of mimesis: pre-figuration, configuration, and refiguration such that chance events take-on a sense of necessary after the fact. Thus, once a character is subjected to some discordant event, then that event then assumes the sense of necessity.

Ricoeur articulates how plot and character are co-established through the narrative. At an extreme, a plot that loses its concordance will lose its characters. “Telling a story,” he says, “is saying who did what and how, by spreading out in time the connection between these various viewpoints” (OaA 146). Those “viewpoints” are the linguistic elements of the narrative itself, the words that reflect the events and occurrences that have taken place. Throughout this investigation of selfhood Ricoeur repeatedly reminds us of Kant’s third antinomy regarding determinism and freedom. Narrative, he says, resolves Kant’s antinomy by “granting to the character an initiative” or a power to begin, while also, “assigning to the narrative as such the power of determining the beginning, the middle, and the end of an action” (OaA 147). Eventually we will investigate how the phenomenology of forgiveness forms an eschatological horizon that is capable of bringing the most troublesome narratives to a peaceful close – in what we call “happiness”.

49 This is the principle which Aristotle states in the Poetics where he says that every “tragedy is an imitation of a whole and complete action that has some greatness. A whole has a beginning, middle, and ending” (Poetics 1450b 24-26).
A person, or an object like the HMS *Titanic*, treated as a character in a narrative, “shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted” (OaA 147). In other words the character is not something distinct from the events and occurrences undergone. But how can we bring together the dialectic of concord and discord with the dialectic of sameness and selfhood? There are two “poles of permanence in time” according to Ricoeur. The first is that of the sameness of a character within a plot, and the second is the *ipseity* of selfhood which is the sense of identity that belongs to a self – some one who can say “mine”. Ricoeur examines some limit-cases of science fiction where the brain of a person is treated as something that fully contains the sameness of the person by way of the contents of consciousness (especially memories). If a plot can reduce a character to something incorporeal, something that can be up-loaded onto a machine as one finds in science fiction, then what happens to the ontology of the body? Taken a step further, if a story is written such that it loses its plot as for instance in a stream-of-consciousness novel, then what happens to the sameness of the characters? It is left unsettled at this point for Ricoeur, but we will see that the ontology of the corporeal body and that of the world as our dwelling place needs to be secured in order to secure selfhood.

Ricoeur reminds us of the triad of “describe, narrate, prescribe,” (OaA 114) and at this point we are at the stage of narration. How do we move from saying an agent has the capacity to act to saying that an agent has an obligation to act?
The move from action to obligation takes us through the language of “practices” and “relations”. Practices include “professions, the arts and games” (OaA 153) and each is done in order to achieve some goal as in “we do X in order to achieve goal Y.” In Kantian terms these are rationally guided by hypothetical imperatives (if you want X, then do Y) with an ulterior motive behind the initial action. What is important for Ricoeur here is that an agent acts through chains of actions towards a goal and hence there is a projected teleology inherent in our practices. A “practice” can form a chain of actions that can then be placed within what Ricoeur calls “nesting relations” where a simple gesture follows a rule whereby that gesture is “nested” within a broader scheme that gives it meaning. An example he gives is a gesture (move) one makes when playing chess. The gesture by itself can be seen as an event, however within the broader rule-based relations it takes on meaning within the broader goal of winning the game.

In addition to basic actions, and simple gestures, there are illocutionary acts (performative linguistic acts) which include “promising, ordering, warning, and noting” (OaA 155). These performative acts, “are distinguished from one another by their ‘force,’ which is itself constituted by the rule that says, for example, that promising is placing oneself under the obligation to do tomorrow what today I say I shall do” (OaA 155). The notion of practices, with varying degrees of being nested into broader relations of practices, also applies to the level of a human life taken as a whole. The highest level of practice an individual can accomplish is at the level of life plans. Individuals have, to various degrees of clarity, a sense of a life plan and our daily lives generally are seen within the broader scope of our life plans. Our life plans include educational, career, family, relationship, social, economic, political, and all other goals within a hierarchy
aiming at the good life. We tend to view our lives as a unity which means that our practices appear, “to be subjected to a twofold principle of determination,” meaning that our individual practices are interpreted by means of the whole of life, as well as the individual gestures (OaA 158).

We can see the nature of broad scope of life plans in the adage that *one must not count a man happy until he is dead*. The life of Job is a case in point, for in his twilight years the happy and materially successful Job, with his large family, suffered the greatest loss of family and estate. Up to that point one would have certainly counted Job as happy, but we must wait until *that end* which others must narrate for us – our death. Perhaps the most famous case of this is found in the final pages of the Torah at Deuteronomy 34:5-7 where it says “So Moses the servant of the Lord dies there in the land of Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab facing Bethpeor, and no one to this day knows where his grave is. Moses was 120 years old when he died.” The paradox of these lines rests in the fact that all of the Torah is said to have been written by Moses, but obviously he could not have written these final lines. Such is the case so that every human narrative remains incomplete even after death. The experience of death marks a limit experience which is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will not be further developed. Ricoeur adopts from Alasdair MacIntyre what he calls the “narrative unity of a life,” as it aims at the “good life”. Ricoeur calls this aim the “cornerstone of his ethics” (OaA 158). Ricoeur’s conclusion to this inquiry into narrative identity is both that “narrative recounts care,” and that, “far from being mutually exclusive, (literary narratives and life histories) are complementary despite, or even because of, their contrast” (OaA 163).
Ethics and Narrative

Narratives possess a “double gaze” which involves a “looking backward in the direction of the practical field and ahead in the direction of the ethical field” (OaA 115). Steven H. Clark explains it this way: “If I am the story of myself, this narrative is not limited to what has been, but extends to what may be.” In the third section of the sixth study Ricoeur says that, “the issue here is the ethical primacy of the other-than-the-self over the self” (hyphens added for emphasis, OaA 168). We must emphasize the phrase “other-than-the-self” in order to recognize that the way out of the cogito/anti-cogito discourse is not be achieved by way of the concepts of person, agent, or self alone. We need the experience of otherness – in other persons or in our self-as-other – to irrupt into our consciousness. The first six studies of Oneself as Another examine various theories from action theory, to pragmatics, as well as to other theories of identity. What is needed beyond, and certainly in addition to, those theories is an ethical theory that brings the other into a relationship with the person who, thus far, is understood best through the narrative theory of identity. The short-fall of narrative theory was seen with the dependency upon the narrative for a stable character on one hand, and self-constancy on the other. This brief transitional section aims to explain why an ethical theory is necessary for a theory of the self. Questions of agency will likewise rest upon our understanding of selfhood, for when agents act – they claim their actions as their own? Therefore we need to know “to whom” this “mineness” of actions belongs.

50 Steven H. Clark, “Narrative Identity in Ricoeur’s Oneself as Another” Ethics and the Subject, 1997, page 93.
Philosophically what we have is a confrontation between a narrative theory of identity and an ethical theory of identity. Telling stories is the exchanging of experiences. This exchanging of experiences is not the Kantian (i.e., theoretical) sense of judgments of experience, but something closer to Aristotle’s notion of *phronēsis* (i.e., practical wisdom). For Kant an experience is a judgment *a priori* whereby the intellect synthesizes sense data subsumed under a category of the Understanding. His famous example from his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* is “the sun shines, the rock is warm,” (judgment of perception) versus, “the sun shines, causing the rock to warm” (judgment of experience). Here we see the addition of the category “causation” to the sense perceptions of sun, rock, and warmth. For us, “the art of storytelling is the art of exchanging *experiences*” and actions “are always subject to approval or disapproval and agents to praise or blame” (OaA 164).

Narratives span a broad variety of forms including epics, mythology, and fiction through to the historical sciences. Historians, and history as a science in a general technical sense of getting the facts straight, stand at one end of the spectrum with regards to the moral judgments of characters. Any historian who aims to write without moral judgment is still subject, Ricoeur contends and I concur, to the demand to preserve the past faithfully. We are indebted to the past and that sense of duty to preserve the record *sine ira et studio* – without anger and fondness. Yet, however much one might try to be without passion, Ricoeur notes that the historian still feels “the duty never to forget” (OaA 164). The role of history for our notion of ethics, agency, and selfhood will occupy us throughout this and subsequent chapters all the way up to the examination of forgiveness.
Again, the theories of agency examined above do not resolve the problem of human identity sufficiently enough to say that we have reached a durable notion of selfhood. Ricoeur draws out a spectrum of notions of identity from character on the one pole and self-constancy on the other pole. Characters must be identifiable over time albeit they may be human or non-human. Thus for instance a historian, or story teller, may focus his or her attention not on a person, but on an inanimate object such as the HMS Titanic, Mesopotamia, or the computer. On the other end we may speak of self-constancy that is linked to a sense of ipse-identity marked by responsibility, or more generally speaking, the ability to answer to others “here I am.” Any character in a narrative, as in real life, can falter, even disappear; however, so long as I am here then I have self-constancy and can claim “here I am.” It is at this point where we can depart from narrative theory’s claim that persons are characters since what is needed in addition is a voice which can make a claim to “I am here.” The Nile River might be the main “character” in a historian’s text, but it cannot voice such a claim to self-constancy.

Within Descartes’s cogito we always have the foundational principle that “I am here thinking.” Against this we have Nietzsche’s anti-cogito based on the total suspicion of the self as nothing other than the tropes of language – in other words the self can be likened to a metaphor or worse – a fiction. (If it is a fiction then do we believe in an unbelief about the self?) Action theory and narrative theory do not rely on the “I” (ego) and therefore fail to deliver the self from the threat of non-existence. Self-constancy though is still not enough to get us to a philosophically sound notion of selfhood. What it does is to point the way towards ethics.
At this point we have narrative theory presenting a range of possible identities from the notion of character to the self-constancy of a self who can answer the question “who are you?” with a “Here I am!” answer. The full range of identities, promised by narrative theory remain naked, for behind the “I” it is as least thinkable, Ricoeur says, that there is nothing behind the thinking identifiable person. “What is practicable,” he goes on to say, “lies perhaps in acknowledging that all the attempts at identification, which form the substance of those narratives of interpretive value with respect to the retreat of the self, are doomed to failure” (OaA 167). In other words, narrative interpretations cannot silence the suspicion that the self is nothing beneath the sedimented identification. This suspicion is the view of David Hume which still haunts analytic philosophy and nourishes the suspicion that the self does not exist.

In the sixth study of Oneself as Another Ricoeur makes the crucial turn from theories of personal identity to selfhood. He remarks that there is a “fruitful tension” between the “who am I?” and the “Here I am!” such that a person recognizes themselves as a subject of imputation, that is, actions can indeed be ascribed to an individual. This tension leads to a restatement of the “who am I?” / “Here I am!” couple into a new question / response couple. Ricoeur says that, “between the imagination that says, ‘I can try anything’ and the voice that says, ‘everything is possible but not everything is beneficial (understanding here, to others and to yourself),’ a muted discord is sounded” (OaA 167). This in turn transforms into “I can try anything,” (to be sure, but also) “here is where I stand!” Here we are at a key transition: other persons rely on us, they count on us to fulfill our promises, or that we are there when they need us. The problem of course is that we are so inconstant and change over time. Ricoeur is saying in essence that there
is a gap between the question asked by the narrative imagination: “who am I?” as developed through fiction and history (as well as our own memory and life story), and on the other hand, the self as understood as being self-constant for others (e.g., capable of keeping promises). This gap exposes a “secret break” at the very heart of commitment to others.

The many cases of the loss of personal identity in literature and real-world historical cases, including whole societies who have lost their identity, Ricoeur suggests that there is to be found “a dialectic of ownership and of dispossession, of care and of carefreeness, of self-affirmation and of self-effacement” (OaA 168). Given such a fractured, strange, and fragile self-identity it should not surprise us that Ricoeur, and others including Jean Nabert and Emmanuel Lévinas, have turned to “the other than the self” for a solution to the crisis of selfhood. We now turn to Ricoeur’s “little ethics” in order to examine this “other than the self.”

The aim of this first chapter has been to develop how Ricoeur address the problems of agency in light of the rejection of Descartes’s stable, transparent ego as developed in his Meditations, i.e., the cogito. The empiricist tradition of Locke and Hume agree that self-identity is formed by sameness (idem-identity), yet both rejected the notion of a stable ego in addition to such sameness. “Narrative,” on the other hand, “enables us to employ diversity, variability, and discontinuity into an integrated and
continuous story” forming what Ricoeur labels “ipseity” or selfhood. Narrative is capable of bringing concord to discordant actions and events as they relate to an agent in such a manner that an agent can claim “Here I am!” amidst inconstant memories, actions, and circumstances over time. We witnessed this above in the extreme case of Parfit’s scenario “My Division” where a brain is transplanted into another body. Regardless of such transplants there is still a self who could say “here I am at my own [corpse’s] funeral.”

CHAPTER TWO

Our Capable Being: Moral Imputability

2.1 Ricoeur’s “Little Ethics”

My goal in this chapter is to examine three studies (seven, eight, and nine) within Oneself as Another where Ricoeur develops what he calls “our ethical intention” which is to “aim at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions.” The ethical intention contains three moments: a teleological aim at “the good life,” guided by a deontological moment of duty towards others, and third, a moment of social life wherein we determine the justice of our institutions regarding all members of society. Several polarities are developed by Ricoeur along the lines of Aristotle contra Kant, Lévinas contra Husserl, Heidegger contra Hegel, Rousseau contra Rawls – all within the larger context of the deep suspicion that there is no stable ego as posited by Descartes. We will move through
the three moments of the ethical intention, which is the fourth stage of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of selfhood, beginning with the ethical moment which has primacy over morality, and justice. The terms “ethical” and “moral” are often conflated within the field of ethics or uniquely defined by an author for a specific purpose. Ricoeur defines “ethics” as the teleological aiming at “an accomplished life,” while reserving “morality” for “the articulation of this aim in norms characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint” (OaA 170). This chapter will proceed through these three moments with the aim of demonstrating how Ricoeur’s “little ethics” contributes to his hermeneutics of the self which involves a dialectic of the self with the other than self (OaA 296). In this chapter we examine how Ricoeur develops three categories to correspond to the three moments of the ethical intention: imputability, responsibility, and recognition. Regarding the latter Ricoeur says that, “[r]ecognition is a structure of the self reflecting on the movement that carries self-esteem toward solicitude and solicitude toward justice” (OaA 296). We now begin our examination beginning with phronēsis, then moving to moral duty, and ending with a discussion of justice.

Ricoeur’s Oneself as Another is his most concise statement on the nature of selfhood constituting his clearest presentation of his hermeneutics of the self and contains his most systematic treatment of ethics. Oneself as Another has been described as “a dense,

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52 The four stags of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self are “I can act,” “I can speak,” “I can narrate my story,” and fourth, “I can be held morally imputable.”
53 Bernard Williams, for instance, in Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy defines “ethics” as the broader subject matter with “morality” reserved for a more narrow meaning pertaining to modern ethical theories that stress obligation. While teaching ethics I have personally run into numerous cases of often contradictory definitions of “ethics” versus “morality”.
layered, complicated, and nuanced text”. The methodology throughout this work is founded on describing the four parts of his hermeneutics of the self: speaking, acting, narrating, and moral imputation. The methodological goal is to answer, in each case, the question of “who?”: “Who is speaking?” “Who is acting?” “Who is narrating?” and “Who is innocent or guilty?” Central to Ricoeur’s method is a rejection of the dichotomy made famous by Hume between the descriptive “is” of circumstances and the prescriptive “ought” of moral imputation. Ricoeur argues elsewhere that, “to explain more is to understand better” (MHF 182). In other words, the more we can explain and describe circumstances then the more we can understand and ultimately prescribe praise or blame to actions. Explanatory descriptions enable us to answer the question “why?” through the use of “because” in a way that helps us move from the descriptive “is” of states of affairs to the prescriptive “ought” of moral and ethical claims. Ricoeur’s “little ethics” aims to bridge this logical gap denoted by “Hume’s razor” by demonstrating that, “the deontological viewpoint is subordinate to the teleological perspective” (OaA 171). With the analysis of his “little ethics” which follows here, I aim to demonstrate the following points: first Ricoeur’s “little ethics” is less about ethical theory and much more about the capacity of the self to describe itself as a responsible moral subject. And second, in order for us to answer the question “who?” we must work-through the agent’s capacity to prescribe to both itself and to others the ethical good.

Our Ethical Intention

Ricoeur’s first step is to identify what he calls the “ethical intention” which brings together his own definition of the “ethics” and “morality”. The ethical intention is stated as aiming, “at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions” (OaA 172). Ethics is thus defined as the teleological aiming at the good, while morality makes corrections by means of its law-like commands that prescribe what is obligatory.

Ricoeur identifies the aim of ethics as the production of a “good” life by means of the corrective constraints of moral norms, i.e., “obligations”. His aim, though, is to raise the terms “good” and “obligation” up from the level of “predicates applied to action” (OaA 171) to the “level of self-designation: to the ethical aim will correspond what we shall henceforth call self-esteem and to the deontological moment, self-respect” (OaA 171). The move he is making involves using these two ethical predicates of “good” and “obligation” at the level of the dialogical with others. Furthermore, this dialogic structure requires “reference to just institutions” in order to give meaning to both self-respect and self-esteem (OaA 172). Self-respect (following one’s obligations) will therefore be subordinate to self-esteem (aiming at good life). These two stages of ethical growth – self-esteem and self-respect – are “rooted not in accomplishments but in capacities, and in self-evaluation.”

We will examine the full philosophical meaning of “capacities” as

55 Note on the term “life”: Ricoeur makes clear that the term “life” does not designate just the bios of the human biological life, but “the person as a whole, in opposition to fragmented practices.” (OaA, 177)

Ricoeur elaborates it against the Aristotelian notion of potential in the first section of chapter 3 under the sub-section entitled “Selfhood and Ontology: Between Act and Power.”

An illustration of how an individual agent seeks the good life is provided by the figure of the doctor who, by definition, aims to produce health over and above any external personal gain during the course of helping others. The move here is from the practices (praxis) of (for instance) in the medical arts to the sense of practical wisdom (phronēsis) according to Aristotle which represents the deliberation an individual makes concerning life decisions. The point is that whatever we do in life, and whatever practice we take up, we ought to do it well. Ricoeur borrows Alasdair MacIntyre’s notion of “standards of excellence” in order to bridge the gap from individual practices to an intersubjective “standard” that acts as a set of rules for best practices. Ricoeur’s working hypothesis is that an agent’s life plan, teleological aiming at happiness, is superior to the deontological rules that govern practices, yet any life plan must be governed by moral laws if one is to avoid self-centered notions of “a good life”.

Ricoeur’s next task in his “little ethics” is to seek some limiting ideas (a horizon) with regards to the notion of a “good life”. To achieve this he considers the problems involved with Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics where the notion of practices (praxis) comes into conflict with the notion of practical wisdom (phronēsis). This conflict concerns the internalization of what MacIntyre calls “standards of excellence” and involves the internalization of a practice whereby one seeks the good inherent to the practice itself, rather than to external goods. For instance, a good doctor is a one who practices medicine with the aim to bringing about health and not because it is a lucrative
line of work. MacIntyre gives an example of a child paying chess who does so merely with her focus on winning a prize of candy, rather than playing with an eye on the mental exercise and strategic thinking it involves.57

Within a world of practices there are those who we consider experts within every field for whom Aristotle coined the word *phronimos*58 – the person of practical wisdom. The problem with Aristotle’s ethics, according to Ricoeur, concerns the hierarchy of goods and ends within an agent’s life. How are we to understand an agent’s choices regarding the ends and practices that lead to a good life, including which end-goal can be said to be the “higher finality” (OaA 179)?

It is with this question that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self comes to the forefront. To begin with, we can treat an agent’s aiming at the good-life as a hermeneutical circle where the parts of one’s life – one’s particular choices with regard to love, career, and so forth – inform the whole narrative of one’s life. This is similar to a text59 and involves interpretation. From the “idea of interpretation” Ricoeur points out that meaning is always meaning for someone; meaning is not something separate or separable from agents in any way. An agent who interprets her own actions as a narrative


58 “The agent they would call [the *phronimos*] is the one who studies well each question about his own good, and he is the one to whom they would entrust such questions” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI 7, 1141a23-28, trans. Irwin).

59 In an article entitled “Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics”, re-published in *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism to Postmodernism*, Blackwell publishing, 2001, Ricoeur says that a text “is any discourse fixed by writing.” From this obvious and deliberately narrow definition Ricoeur asks the more important question regarding the relationship between speech and writing. When writing replaces speech what he have with the text, “is the very place where the author appears”(341). The human being is not text, although a human life can be narrated and thereby treated to some extent, by an author, as a text.
engages in a self-interpretation and on the ethical plane this is what Ricoeur calls “self-esteem”. What follows from this sort of interpretation? Ricoeur rightly says that interpretation “provokes controversy, dispute, rivalry,” and in short a “conflict of interpretations” (OaA 179-180). As a result, when an agent seeks an adequation of their actions in the world with their ideals there is no recourse to scientific observation, rather they must make a judgment regarding if they are at “fault”. The term “fault” is intentionally used by Ricoeur because it invokes the image of a geological gap or inadequation whereby what I think about myself is measured against how I have acted. In chapter 7 of this dissertation we will examine the feeling of fault as it relates to the disparity between an agent’s capacity as a causal agent and the efficacy of causal intentions in the world of action. This disparity, experienced as the feeling of fault, does not yet include the further experience of “failure” which is contrary to success.60 In the long epilogue to Memory, History, Forgetting, in the section entitled The Forgiveness Equation, Ricoeur defines fault in the following manner:

On its objective side, fault consists in transgressing a rule, whatever it may be, a duty, including its recognizable consequences, that is, fundamentally, a harm done to others. It is acting badly and, as such, is blameworthy, receiving an evaluation in negative terms. In the vocabulary of the Kantian essay on negative magnitudes61, fault is a negative magnitude of practice. In this first sense, fault is

60 See Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, pages 459-466, notably page 463, where he describes fault, failure, and solitude in light of his anthropology of our capable being.

61 Immanuel Kant, “Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy” [1763], Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770, trans. David Walford, with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203-41.)
as limited as the rule it infringes, even if the consequences are through their repercussions themselves indefinite in nature in terms of the suffering inflicted. (MHF 461).

For the agent though there is a gap (fault) between the action (acting badly) and the pathetic (“being affected by one’s own actions”) which invokes reflective thought by the individual on its own causal nature in the world. It is at this point that Ricoeur introduces his notion of “attestation” which is the sense in which an actor “believes-in” what they have done, how their story is told and hence “who” they are. He says that: “This experiential evidence is the new figure in which attestation appears, when the certainty of being the author of one’s own discourse and of one’s own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well” (OaA 180). If we are going to be worthy of our happiness (self-esteem with self-respect) then our aiming at the good-life must be corrected by the regulatory notions given by the normative moral law. Recall that the deontology moment of moral obligation is subordinate to the ethical teleological aiming at the good life. Morality acts as a corrective to the ethical intention. This is the essence of the first two elements of the ethical intention – the teleological and deontological.

- With and for Others: Solitude

The reflective agent of self-esteem is threatened by solipsism by virtue of its reflexive narrative of its actions. To counter any turn towards solipsism Ricoeur addresses how any good life must be “with and for others” which he develops according to the assumption that an agent's capacities can be realized only when mediated by others. To detail this
Ricoeur again turns to Aristotle and his discussion of friendship (*philia*) in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 8-9. Aristotle identifies friendship as something an agent *needs*. The agent possesses the potential for friendship, yet others are required in order to make it actual, therefore the individual is dependent upon others at least in this case. In other words, the self lacks what it needs for friendship and finds it only in others – this is what he is calling “solicitude”. Ricoeur adopts this term “solicitude” from Martin Heidegger’s term “Fürsorge” – meaning “concern for people.” Solicitude involves a fundamental equivalency between self-esteem and esteem for others.

Ricoeur needs to demonstrate that we can move from “oneself” who aims at a “good-life” to living that life “with and for others.” To accomplish this he recalls how Aristotle distinguishes three types of friendship: those for pleasure, those for utility, and those friends who improve us. This third type is true friendship and it exhibits *reciprocity of self to others* since a friend is someone who wants their friends to remain as they are – as excellent persons in the Aristotelian sense of *enáretos* (*ενάρετος*), that is, being a virtuous person. Ricoeur moves beyond the discussion of the three types of friendship towards what is an equally important question: does one *need* friends?

The short answer is “yes” – we need friends in order to be conscious of our life and activity. We love our friends *as ourselves* since it is through them that we are conscious of the worth of our lives which comports to Aristotle’s claim that the contemplative life is the most excellent life. “Friendship,” Ricoeur says, “therefore, works toward establishing the conditions for the realization of life, considered in its intrinsic goodness and its basic pleasure” (OaA 186). What Ricoeur takes from Aristotle’s treatise on friendship is that there is reciprocity between agents who esteem
themselves, in the sense of being the most excellent persons they can be, and others who likewise esteem themselves thus providing one another mutual support. At this point Ricoeur moves away from Aristotle’s discussion of *philia* with its special concern for the contemplative life and turns instead towards giving and receiving. For Aristotle, giving and receiving amongst perfect friends involves the fact that, “each partner receives in all matters what he give the other, in the same or in a similar form” (1156b 33-34). In perfect friendship things that are held to be good without qualification are objects of choice or affection, and are sought not for themselves but as characteristics of the good person.

“Thus,” Aristotle says, “each partner both loves his own good and makes an equal return in the good he wished for his partner and in the pleasure he gives him” (1157b 34-36).

Recalling that for Ricoeur moral obligation (deontological moment) is subordinate to the ethical good (teleological moment), the giving and receiving between agents is to be understood through solicitude and not deontological obligation (duty). Looking ahead, we can now say that there is no duty to forgive. Ricoeur identifies giving and receiving as the extremes in terms of how an agent is summoned to responsibility. The pair “giving and receiving” manifests its own extremes as well in the form of – “radical imbalance[s],” “whereby all is received and nothing is given,” thereby presenting new difficulties. It is precisely here that Ricoeur brings Emmanuel Lévinas into his discussion (Cohen 130). Contrary to Lévinas, the self is not subject to an infinite

62 Patrick L. Bourgeois argues “Ricoeur’s critique of Lévinas is indeed a bit too severe” yet Ricoeur does succeed in demonstrating that Lévinas’s account of the demands of the encounter with other faces is “incapable of establishing the relation required for such a response” to the demands made by the other. (“Ricoeur and Lévinas”, Ricoeur as Another, page 110).
demand made by the face of the other. Instead, some semblance to a balance is to be maintained of giving and receiving. If the figure of the suffering Other who makes an infinite demand upon us is one end of the spectrum, then the other end of this spectrum of giving and receiving is that of our suffering. Suffering for Ricoeur is not just physical or mental pain, but a “violation of self-integrity” and “the reduction … of the capacity for acting, of being-able-to-act” (OaA 190). True sympathy for others – suffering with others – is “perhaps the supreme test of solictude,” Ricoeur says, “when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands” (OaA 191). Ricoeur’s critique of Lévinas is predicated on the view that Lévinas’s position exceeds all possible relationality when he gives total priority to the Other. This priority of the Other over the Same is a priority of the moral (social relations) over the ethical (character). Ricoeur calls Lévinas’s relation of Other to Self an “irrelation” [sic] (OaA 189).

The examination of living a good life “with and for others” exposes for us a new spectrum that ranges from giving to receiving with friendship as an equilibrium given its balance of giving and receiving. Solicitude involves the establishment of reciprocity in terms of giving and receiving between agents, therefore fulfilling self-esteem’s desire for the good-life. It does so through need – we need others as friends in order at the very

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63 See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969: “To approach the other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity” (page 51).
least to be conscious of our being-one-among-others who are also fragile and mortal beings. It is on this topic of mortality that Ricoeur introduces the notion of “similitude” which he says, “is the fruit of the exchange between esteem for oneself and solicitude for others” (OaA 193). Similitude means that I can consider others capable of acting freely in the world, setting a hierarchy of goals, and establishing priorities. What he means at this is that there is no self-esteem “unless I esteem others as myself” in the sense that others hold themselves in esteem as acting, speaking, narrating and generally being responsible moral agents. With similitude I can take another as a “oneself” and I can take myself as an “other”.

The Task of Publicness: Immortality

The third part of the “ethical intention” involves living “in just institutions.” By “institutions” Ricoeur means how historical communities structure interpersonal relations; however, he also includes the life of institutions themselves. Communities range along a wide spectrum from the authoritarian to the many purely voluntary manners in which we live together. What all institutions seem to share is a desire to conquer time and the mortality of life through the creation of enduring habits of human behavior. “Just” institutions are those that provide a fair distribution of the goods they are capable of providing (OaA 194). As we will see this notion of an “institutional immortality” is central to Badiou’s claim that the only way the “human animal” partakes in the “immortal” is through a fidelity to institutional knowledges (with an ‘s’). The move Ricoeur makes at this point is from the I/you relationship to the third-party relationships which entitle “each” member with justice, rights, and equality. Involved here is what Ricoeur calls a “plea for the anonymous” – institutions are not only authorities (relating
to a past), but more importantly institutions have an ambition to outlast their living members (OaA 195). We will engage this notion of “staying” and of “continuing!” when we examine Alain Badiou’s notion of Truth in chapters 4 and 5.

**Power and Justice**

The desire “to live and act together” takes form through a plurality of agents working together in a public sphere by means of acting in concert with one another. If “power” is understood as the desire “to live and act together,” then it leads us directly to the question of justice. Recalling that Ricoeur’s “little ethics” maintains an ethical teleology over any moral deontology than any sense of justice is to be understood as an end-goal.

Ricoeur again involves Aristotle in his discussion. This time it involves Aristotle’s emphasis on distributive justice within political communities. Ricoeur cautions that we must “maintain the greatest flexibility for the term ‘distributive’” (OaA 200). Institutions grow out of the desire to “live and act together”; however, within a living institution the question then becomes, “how are goods and honors to be apportioned?” (OaA 200). The transition from the interpersonal stage to the societal stage is helped by the interjection of the notion of “distribution” of goods, because it avoids for Ricoeur a troublesome false debate. That false debate is between Durkheimian sociologists who argue that society is more than its members on the one hand, and those who stake their position on the atomistic individual. Ricoeur claims here that this false dilemma can be avoided since the distribution of goods is determined from within a society by individuals, while that very distribution makes society. Distribution of goods is complementary to belonging to a group. Ricoeur makes it clear that, “the relation is not
reduced to the terms of the relation” (OaA 200), because there is no “system” of distribution. Individuals distribute the goods of society and this is lost on some sociologists, much as distributive justice, which is lost by those who maintain atomistic individualism. For an example of atomistic individual par excellence I would refer anyone to the life and work of John Forbes Nash Jr. – the so-called “beautiful mind” from MIT. Nash helped develop game theory which assumes that all individuals will always act out of self-interest.

Ricoeur makes it clear that the principal goal of his discussion of the relationship of individuals with institutions is to confirm that, “the institution is part of the ethical aim taken in its full scope” (OaA 201). Legal institutions focus their attention on restorative justice where a plaintiff receives a restoration of goods (broadly speaking) from those convicted of harming another’s person or property. On the other hand, distributive justice concerns a “fair” distribution of goods, honors, and so forth. Aristotle identifies two forms of distribution justice: numerical, and proportional. What this means is that equal

64 Game theory is the scientific study of conflicting interests among individuals and groups, both human and other biological species. Game theory has its roots in John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern’s 1944 work Theory of Games and Economic Behavior. The central premise of game theory is that for every competitive circumstance there are mathematically identifiable equilibria (or only one equilibrium) that is best for all the actors. According to Avinash Dixit “Game theory studies interactive decision-making where the outcome for each participant or “player” depends on the actions of all. If you are a player in such a game, when choosing your course of action or “strategy” you must take into account the choices of others. But in thinking about their choices, you must recognize that they are thinking about yours, and in turn trying to take into account your thinking about their thinking, and so on” (Benoit Chevalier-Roignant, Lenos Trigeorgis, Avinash K. Dixit (Foreword). Competitive Strategy: Options and Games. MIT Press, 2011.). A famous example of game theory is practice was the Cold War doctrine of M.A.D. (Mutually Assured Destruction) which predicted that any nuclear exchange between the USA and the USSR would be against both party’s desired outcomes.
shares can be distributed to unequal recipients, or as the case may be, unequal shares can be distributed to unequal recipients based on merit or need (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1130b-1132b). Consider the following illustration: professional athletes are paid unequal shares according to their performance, while in children’s sports everyone receives equal awards in the form of a “participation” trophy. Both are just, while not equal.

The third moment of the ethical intention is to live “in just institutions,” and our institutions are the vehicles by which society’s goods and responsibilities are to be distributed. As in friendship each individual gives and receives from the other – each needs the other. At the level of institutions things appear rather similar:

*Equality, however it is modulated, is to life in institutions what solicitude is to interpersonal relations.* Solicitude provides to the self another who is a face, in the strong sense that Emmanuel Lévinas has taught us to recognize. Equality provides to the self another who is an *each*. In this, the distributive character of “each” passes from the grammatical plane, where we encountered it in the Introduction, to the ethical plane. Because of this, the sense of justice takes nothing away from solicitude; the sense of justice presupposes it, to the extent that it holds persons to be irreplaceable. Justice in turn adds to solicitude, to the extent that the field of application of equality is all of humanity (OaA 202).

In solicitude we saw the need to balance giving and receiving first from within the context of friendship. What distribution (distributive justice) provides for us comes in addition to solicitude, yet at the societal level – the goods and responsibilities of living
together must be distributed if we are to achieve truly just institutions. With this we have a preliminary case for why ethics must pass through the level of institutions, and furthermore, why a hermeneutics of the self must pass through the level of institutions. We need to understand very carefully how equality is similar to the solicitude which transforms the face of others into an “each” in the difficult sense that each person is like me.

2.2 Duty’s Norms: from the Good-life to Respect

Ricoeur’s “little ethics” consists of three studies each aimed at demonstrating that the ethical (the good life) has primacy over moral duty. In what amounts to a tripartite structure these three studies (7, 8 & 9) seek to demonstrate that the term “good” applies first to the actions of an agent (self-esteem), second that any notion of the “good life” must be subjected to the crucible of norms, and finally a return to an ethics that has been enriched in the rigor of just institutions. In what follows we will examine how the self is subjected to moral norms leading to what Ricoeur calls “self-respect.” Specifically we will focus on whether Ricoeur is successful in demonstrating that respect for norms translates into respect for others and in return a respect for oneself. What this will mean is that if justice is understood as the proper distribution of goods within institutions, then each human agent must be understood to have earned the respectful place of being an equal. In the final chapter of this dissertation we will examine the experience of forgiveness which is situated at the horizon of our obligation for others.
Ricoeur’s task is the examination of the possible move from the deontological *demand* to follow a universalizable duty to the agent who *desires* to be in-line with those normative duties. The first image of the universalization of moral duty is seen, according to Ricoeur, in Aristotle’s “golden mean” in the sense that it opens the person to the capacity to act according to a virtuous middle term. However, Ricoeur does not go directly through Aristotle, instead he draws on Immanuel Kant’s deontological moral theory which begins from the “good will”.

For this move he employs Kant’s famous claim at the opening of his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* that the only thing that can be said to be good without any qualification is a good will. Ricoeur claims that the good will takes the place occupied in by rational desire (*boulesis*) in Aristotle’s ethics. Desire aims at the good; the grammatical form of desire is the optative mood which we will return to again once we address forgiveness in the last chapter. On the other hand, the will also has the grammatical form of the assertoric as is clear in Kant’s work – his famous categorical imperatives.

According to Kant, the author and foundation of categorical imperatives (i.e., duties to self and others) is the agent’s own power to act as the legislator of the moral law. This self-legislation means that the source of the moral law is the rational agent’s own autonomous reason. How does the autonomy of the rational agent relate then to the desiring part of the human will? At first Kant answers that duty is universal therefore one must put aside one’s personal desires, inclinations, and circumstances. However, this is
not enough to motivate action by an agent. Kantian deontology is anchored in the
teleological as well -- in the sense that it aims at the good life through autonomous
legislation. For Kant, it is the will that is “good” taking the place of rational desire in
Aristotle with the chief distinction being that will is related to the moral law as witnessed
in the grammar of imperatives. Thus, Ricoeur reads Kant’s *Groundwork for the
Metaphysics of Morals* in terms of a teleological drive towards the good as guided by the
rational will. This rational will is autonomous in the sense that it legislates the moral law
in terms of a universalism whereby the will is able to claim that *any* rational will would
act according to the same maxim *cum* law. Ricoeur claims that what Kant develops is
indeed a unique test of the teleological by means of the demand to follow a universalized
imperative.

What is good? A good will is the only thing that is – without qualification – good.
It aims at that which is good for every rational agent. Linked to the universal good will is
the notion of a “constraint” – in other words, a “duty” before the moral law. This marks
the *test* by which the ethical, with its teleological planning for a good life, is to be
examined. Ricoeur is claiming then that: “The style of a morality of obligation can then
be characterized by the progressive strategy of placing at a distance, of purifying, of
excluding, at the end of which the will that is good without qualification will equal the
self-legislated will, in accordance with the supreme principle of autonomy” (OaA 207).
Several stages to this process are identified which we will now examine.

Stage one concerns the problematics of finite constraint (duty) and the universal
good will (autonomy). Ricoeur claims that we can “at least conceive of a mode of
subjective determination,” that would not be marked by, “the antagonism between reason
and desire” (OaA 207). In Kant we find this possibility formalized in his first of three
formal categorical imperatives: “Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action
could be elevated to the level of a universal law” (Kant, *Groundwork*, 402).

Ricoeur never fails to impress me with subtle philosophical reasoning and here we
find one particularly insightful link he makes between autonomy and the moral law’s
command form. Ricoeur sees a link between the speech acts of reason and of desire.
“Ethics,” according to Ricoeur’s “ethical intention,” involves the rational desire “to live
the good life” which is corrected by the constraints of morality in the deontological
meaning of the word “moral”. Desire for a good life is expressed in the optative (willing)
grammatical mood, whereas moral duty is expressed, as noted one page above, in the
imperative grammatical mood. Kant’s universalism is rooted in the *constraint* on our
actions made by morality, even to the point of being directly against our personal desire
to live.65 The Kantian *will* takes the place of the Aristotelian *rational desire* while
retaining the stamp of the “good”. Ricoeur points out that, “the imperative poses a
specific problem: in addition to the conditions of success… speech acts are also subject to
conditions on their satisfaction…” (OaA 208). Thus, in between the law commanding,
and the agent obeying we see the “difference between the moral norm and the ethical
aim” (OaA 208). We therefore have in Kant a single agent who both commands and
obeys those commands leading Kant to define “inclination” by means of the power to
disobey – what Kant calls the “pathological” (OaA 209).

65 For an example of an agent willing to die rather than live an unjust life see Plato’s *Crito*. 

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**A Split within the Agent**

One of the clearest distinctions within Kant’s *Groundwork* is between hypothetical versus categorical imperatives. One can easily grasp the distinguishing characteristics of these two forms of imperatives: hypothetical follows an “if, then” grammar, while the categorical imperative has a command form as for instance: “Just do it!” or “do not lie.” This distinction among imperatives gives us the Kantian distinction between autonomy (freedom) with its universal character and heteronomy (inclinations) on the other.

Ricoeur refers to this split between the autonomous and heteronomous will as the “most radial expression” of the split between reason and desire. The result is that, “when autonomy substitutes for obedience to another [an] obedience to oneself, [then] obedience has lost all character of dependence and submission. True obedience, one could say, is autonomy” (OaA 210). This can be a difficult point to explain given common-sense conceptions of “freedom” confused with “license”: that true freedom is not the license to do whatever one desires, rather true freedom (at least for Kant) is when one obeys the commands one has determined for *all* rational agents.

At the end of this first of three stages concerning Kantian deontology it is important to note, as Ricoeur does, that it is not an egological thesis. The legislating self is the groundwork for moral selfhood. It is important to note that the moral agent’s consciousness is as Kant said a “Factum der Vernunft” or a “fact of reason” that does not allow being the subject of hyperbolic doubt. If the rational will is a “fact of reason,” then the other side of affectivity, once it is split into two (reason and desire), presents an
additional problem. The three stages of Kant’s deontology, which correspond to his three formulations of the categorical imperative, follow the logical category of quantity:\textsuperscript{66} beginning with the \textit{unity} of the agent, next to the \textit{plurality} of others, and third to the \textit{totality} of all rational agents. Ricoeur raises the difficult question of whether an agent who follows the moral law’s commands has self-respect. According to Ricoeur’s reading of Kant it is respect which makes it possible for the rational agent to turn his or her own maxims into universal laws. \textit{Prima facie}, if I am willing to turn my maxims into universal moral commands, then I must have some degree of respect for my agency. We will see that respect develops from here into respect for treating others as ends-in-themselves, and finally to respectfully treating our own self and others within the so-called kingdom of ends.

The third stage concerns Kant’s essay on radical evil entitled, \textit{Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone}, which concerns an “inadequation of inclination… to meet the test of the rule of universalization” (OaA 216). “Evil” then, according to Ricoeur, is “a reversal of the order that requires respect for the law to be placed above inclination” (OaA 216). The “true problem for us” Ricoeur suggests, is that regarding evil as the propensity to follow maxims that produce evil outcomes, “puts into question the exercise, the realization of freedom” (OaA 216). There are innumerable possible maxims which can be either categorical or hypothetical beginning for instance with this maxim: “if you are hungry, then eat something.” We will return again and again to the problem of evil –

\textsuperscript{66} See Kant’s \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, Doctrine of Elements. Pt. II. Div. I. Bk. I, Ch. I A80/B1-6 where he provides the Table of Categories. The first set is “Of Quantity” and it includes the concepts of Unity, Plurality and Totality.
its definition, source and nature – when we confront Badiou’s notion of evil later in chapter 5. Evil in Ricoeur’s reckoning is that it affects our ability freely to choose to follow the commands of moral duty. In other words, if we are to follow Ricoeur’s “ethical intention” that claims that the aim of ethics is to “aim at the good-life, with and for other, in just institutions,” then we must confront the propensity of agents to follow affective desires that go against moral norms.

■ Solicitude and the Norm

Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative is, “[a]ct in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means”.67 This second formulation moves us from the universal rational agent to the plurality of other persons including the respect we owe to others as rational agents. Ricoeur sees a direct parallel between the relationship of autonomy and other persons with the relationship between self-respect and solicitude. Recall that “self-respect” is defined as the deontological moment when an agent has a sense of adequation between his or her

sense of duty and their actions. Recall as well that solicitude stands for the fulfillment of a lack found within an agent that is filled by others – especially by our friends.

The transition Ricoeur is seeking to achieve is from the self-respect of the autonomous individual agent to respect for others when we recognize the necessity of treating others as ends-in-themselves. Linking these and making the parallel with the transition from self-esteem to self-respect will allow us to finish the move from the teleological moment of ethics into the deontological moment. Self-esteem and self-respect both entail the self-designation of the terms “good” and “obligation” instead of a mere designation of ordinary actions by actors; esteem belongs to the ethical good, while respect belongs to moral obligation. How this is possible can be conceived by meditating on the Golden Rule: “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12). We will allow for Kant’s formalized Golden Rule from this *Groundwork* where he notes that Matthew 7:12 does not include “the ground of duties to oneself” (*Groundwork* Ak 4:430); regardless, moral obligation (self-respect) will be *subordinate* the ethical (self-esteem). Especially helpful as a corollary in this regard is Matthew 22:39 “Love your neighbor as yourself,” because according to Ricoeur it clearly connects solicitude (neighborliness) with the moral law (norms) and the love for

68 We may understand by the term “lack” either a privation of some element or in the stronger sense of a non-being within the experience of the self. In Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation Four, he says that there is, “as it were, a certain negative idea of nothingness... and that I have been so constituted as a kind of middle ground between God and nothingness, or between the supreme being and non-being.” This sense of a privation in Descartes, of a non-being exists for him in terms of knowledge, whereas in Ricoeur a similar non-being exists within the agent as the need for friends. Friendship is necessary if we are to have esteem and respect for ourselves.
one’s neighbor acts as a corrective to overly ego-centric self-love that would neglect others.

For Kant the principal problem with classical formulations of the Golden Rule is that they are subjective, whereas he goes to great efforts to develop the categorical imperative which is universal and objective. The Golden Rule allows an agent to follow his or her personal inclinations with regard to how he or she treats neighbors. This subjectivity can be compared to the manner in which children buy gifts for others, namely they will buy a gift that they want regardless of the recipient. However, Ricoeur’s stance regarding the Golden Rule does not concern its subjectivity alone, but more importantly its dialogical grammatical formulation: who is saying, or doing, what to whom? And how are they saying, or doing it? There is reciprocity within the formulation of the Golden Rule that makes a universal demand that all persons treat others as they wish to be treated. Yet, against this reciprocity there exists an agent/patient relationship as well. Ricoeur comments on these two competing relationships, saying that,

This absence of symmetry has its grammatical projection in the opposition between the active form of doing and the passive form of being done, hence of suffering or submission. The passage from solicitude to the norm is of a piece

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It has been argued that the Golden Rule is near universal having been formulated by several traditions. Some evidence of this claim includes the following quotes and references. Socrates says, "For it has been made clear to us that in no case is it just to harm anyone" (Republic 335e); In the Talmud we read where Hillel converts a non-Jew when he says, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the entire Torah, the rest is just commentary, now go and study" (Shabbat 31a, F2). And with St. Paul we read: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Galatians, 5:14). Also see Henry Epps’ book The Universal Golden Rule, A Philosopher Perspective, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.
with this basic dissymmetry, to the extent that it is upon this dissymmetry that all the maleficent offshoots of interaction, beginning with influence and culminating in murder, will be grafted (OaA 219).

Therefore the difficulty is that on the one hand Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative demands that all rational agents treat all other rational agents as ends-in-themselves, however on the other hand, solicitude (friendship, neighborliness, and so forth) involves this asymmetric agent/patient distinction.

- **“Power Over” Others**

Evil is defined by Ricoeur as the power one has over another to the extent that one can do violence to another (OaA 220). Regarding “power” itself Ricoeur distinguishes both power-to-do (individual action) and power-in-common (communal action) against the violence of power-over others which diminishes both power-to-do and power-in-common. Violence is therefore defined by Ricoeur as the power to reduce or eliminate the power-to-do (to act) exercisable by others thereby negatively impacting upon one’s own self-respect in the sense that one cannot follow moral duty. The elimination of individual agent’s power-to-do likewise makes power-in-common impossible since it is reliant upon a body of persons acting freely in concert. Ricoeur notes the wide spectrum of actions that can come under the rubric of “violence” from micro-aggressive threats, through all forms of arresting actions, and further descending into torture, and the brutality of murder. Power-over others includes innumerable forms of humiliation with the common trait that an agent’s self-esteem and self-respect are destroyed. This definition of evil shall illuminate our discussion of both promising and forgiving, and in
chapter 6 and 7 it will be supplemented with an additional sense of evil as fault. With a promise one binds one’s future self to the constraints of a promise, while on the other hand forgiving is capable of unbinding an agent from past transgressions that hold the agent’s powers-to-act hostage.

What of the commands of morality as witnessed from the Ten Commandments of Moses up through Kant? Ricoeur says that, “if the commandment cannot do otherwise than to take the form of a prohibition, this is precisely because of evil: to all the figures of evil responds the no of morality” (italics original with the emphasis on the “no” in the sense of “Thy shall not…” (OaA 221). The Golden Rule in other words reaffirms that through our solicitude with and for others the diminution of other’s powers-to-act is understood in terms of “indignity”. The Golden Rule, as already discussed above, exhibits a symmetry in the sense that I ought to treat others as my neighbors, and equally you ought to treat me as your neighbor. The experience of solicitude maintains that other agents’ powers-to-act are essential to them – as essential as my own capacities.

Given that evil is defined as the reduction, or even destruction, of an agent’s power-to-act within the world, then the next question becomes: how are we to understand other humans and “humanity” in general? Kant’s move is from the first to the second formulation of the categorical imperative, that is, from action according to universal laws,  

70 This point is of the greatest import in our later discussion with Badiou who we will see maintains a notion of evil as a failure to remain faithful to a change in an area of human knowledge. The principal distinction is whether or not morality springs from a capacity for good, versus a turning away from an evil. We will maintain in chapter 7 that the first moral act is to stop one’s own desire to act. We see this principle in Plato at those times when Socrates’ inner voice (daimonia, literally “little-spirit”) orders him to cease a course of action.
to treating all other agents as ends-in-themselves. Parallel to the Kantian move Ricoeur substitutes self-esteem (aiming at good life) for solicitude (living with others). The Golden Rule, albeit reformulated, remains in the center of both Kant’s and Ricoeur’s project. Kant’s formalization of the Golden Rule seeks to remove all pathological affections (inclinations, circumstances, desires, personal ends, and so forth) from the Golden Rule’s subjective form: “treat others as you desire to be treated.” And Ricoeur aim is to transition from the individual’s aiming at the good life to the mutual affirmation of self-esteem among individuals as well as groups.

The problem Ricoeur identifies with the Kantian conception of humanity is that once we make the transition to the second formulization of the categorical imperative (treat others as ends-in-themselves), then retroactively the first formalization (act according to moral law) places the agent into the plurality of humanity. The effect of making the rational agent part of the plurality of humanity is that it takes away the self-respect gained via the ethical intention to aim at the good-life. In other words, the rational agent of Kant’s first formalization does not have any distinction of personhood from the pluralism of humanity. This problem is solved by Kant with the introduction of the term “person” within the formalization: treat other persons either in oneself or others never as a mere means to a utilitarian end. What does this mean in Ricoeur’s reading of Kant? It means that “the deepest intention” of both imperatives “now emerges clarified and purified” (OaA 225). Ricoeur asks,

What indeed is it to treat humanity in my person and in the person of others as a means if not to exert upon the will of others that power which, full of restraint in
the case of influence, is unleashed in all the forms that violence takes, culminating in torture? (italics in original, OaA 225).

By extending the plurality of humanity by means of personhood Kant has turned the fact of reason (Factum der Vernunft) into the fact of morality, since every person is consciously capable of the autonomy that generates the moral law. In other words, the end goal of the individual’s conscious reasoning is the generation of the *test* of the rational will against the demand to treat others out of respect for themselves as self-legislating agents by means of a reciprocity with others. An agent’s rational will concerns itself with a heterogeneous mass of interests which Kant separates into three kinds of imperatives: rules of art (skill), dictates of prudence, and the laws of morality (*Groundwork* Ak 4:415-416). The rule of art and dictates of prudence have a hypothetical imperative structure and do not need to pass a test of morality. These include common-sense “know-how” as well as the means to achieve happiness. However, morality has a categorical imperative structure and must pass the test of the moral law as commanded by pure reason. The central lesson here is that there is a recognizable distinction between “things” and “person”. Things can be obtained very effectively using the resources of rationality (“if I want X, then I must do Y.”), whereas persons are not commodities open to exchange, but in fact have an inherent worth (dignity). The movement from Kant’s first to second categorical imperative makes clear the move from an agent’s own self-esteem to that of the self-esteem of all other human agents, because they too have the test of the moral law within their own faculty of reason. This “test” is the whole point.
The third formalization of the categorical imperative moves from the plurality of humanity understood according to personhood to what Kant calls the “Kingdom of Ends”\textsuperscript{71}. Recalling that justice has already been treated as distributive within institutions whereby we seek to live with others, Ricoeur turns towards examining how we can move from a deontological conception of justice to a teleological conception, “under the aegis of the idea of equality” (OaA 227). Distributive justice is problematic given the fact that certain ambiguities exist with regards to the notion of the “equal” person as well as the “equal” share.

Justice, Ricoeur points out, aims at the promotion of the “good”, yet the “good” itself within just institutions aims at both the “good-life” (ethical teleology) as well as the “legal” (morality’s corrective testing of the will). Ricoeur develops his conception of justice by means of what he calls “the fiction” of the social contract, which he says takes the place on the level of institutions what autonomy took on the “fundamental” level of morality. How does the social contract work? It works because it establishes, “a freedom sufficiently disengaged from the gangue [i.e., waste material] of inclinations [and] provides a law for itself which is the very law of freedom” (OaA 229).

Although fictional and enigmatic, the demands that every subject must abide by the dictates of the general will governed according to legitimate democratic decisions. What any social contract theory needs to address is the relationship between the

\textsuperscript{71}“See Kant’s \textit{Groundwork}, chapter 2 where he develops this notion. He says, "By 'kingdom' (\textit{Reich}) I understand the systematic union of different rational beings through shared laws" (32).
autonomous moral agent (equipped with his or her capacity for moral imputation) and the demands made by the social contract. For Socrates in Plato’s *Crito*, the state is likened to our parents who gave us birth, raised and educated us, as well as protected us throughout our lives. Parental relationships however belong to solicitude and not the level of just institutions. For Rousseau the fiction of the republic is founded on what he calls the “first convention” where agents unanimously agree to “be a people.” Likewise, John Rawls claims at the start of his *A Theory of Justice* that, “[j]ustice is the first virtue of social institutions,” implying that there is a teleological character to justice in the sense that it aims at the good-life. The teleological character is specifically the fact that Rawls claims justice is a virtue – all virtues are, by Aristotle’s definition, habits that dispose us always to aim at some good.

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**On John Rawls’ Circular Order of Justice**

Rawls’ theory of justice is a form of contractualism based upon the notion of “fairness” among all the members of an institution with special considerations made for those who are the least well-off. His theory of justice is a reaction against act utilitarianism which aims at creating the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers of persons. What is problematic with all forms of utilitarianism are the provisions they make for scapegoating, that is “making an example” of others and, in a word, “sacrifices” for the greater good (within reason). Ricoeur claims that regarding the potential use of others as a mere

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73 This is Jeremy Bentham’s “greatest happiness principle” from his *A Fragment on Government*. London, Preface 2nd paragraph, (1776).
means to a greater good that Rawls follows Kant insofar as it is a “conviction” – while on the other hand Rawls argues for something much different.

Ricoeur identifies three questions concerning Rawls’ theoretical position. The first concerns the thought experiment of a veil of ignorance representing an original moral position. This thought experiment has the effect that Rawls must constrain the essence of individuals who could possibility attend to such a veil. The result is that this, “initial situation must annihilate,… the effects of contingency, due to nature as much as to social circumstances, so-called merit being placed by Rawls among these effects of contingency” (OaA 232). Ricoeur’s criticism is essentially that Rawls’s veil of ignorance excludes the possibility of self-esteem, and self-respect since both would be effects of contingency in an agent’s life.

The second question Ricoeur poses to a Rawlsian theory is, “which principles will be chosen from behind the veil of ignorance?” (OaA 233). It seems Rawls accepts and enlarges the principle that persons within institutions are “social partners” under the notion of distributive justice. In other words social “goods” are to be divided up according to fair-shares in the face of the “scandal of inequality” (inequalities spring from natural life circumstances, but also those based on socio-economic circumstances). The result is that Rawls struggles between a notion of justice as “equal freedom of citizenship” and a notion of justice as corrective of life’s many inequalities. The former cannot be limited in order to solve the latter or else the theory slides into utilitarianism, even Marxism. If social transfers are counterproductive to social growth, then this is where the “difference principle” makes its entrance. This principle, Ricoeur says, “selects the most equal situation compatible with the rule of unanimity” (OaA 235). This “rule of
unanimity” is the very foundation of Rawls’ and Rousseau’s contractualism. The rule of unanimity (and the equality is helps ensure) is primary over the difference principle, albeit this latter principle remains essential to Rawls’ notion of justice as fairness. One significant result is that there exists a tension within Rawls’ theory between freedom and distribution, and between contracts and individual welfare that cannot be solved. This tension is reflected in the “difference principle” which states that real inequalities that remain in a society should always favor the least well off. Rawls states in Political Liberalism (1993) that the difference principle requires “continuous corrections of particular distributions” (283). Rawls further clarifies distributive justice by stating that “even if an equal distribution of natural assets seemed more in keeping with the equality of free persons, the question of redistributing these assets (were this conceivable) does not arise, since it is incompatible with the integrity of the person” (283). The question here is whether or not, within rights-orientated liberalism, it is ever possible to override the individual’s rights in the name of equality and fair distribution. Regarding contracts Rawls states in Political Liberalism that, “we must find some point of view, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached” (23). Here we can see why Rawls develops a sense of justice as fairness distinct from either prior theories of contractualism or utilitarianism.

74 Jean-Pierre Dupuy supports this view when he states that “the lexicographic subordination of the principle of difference, which is a principle of economic justice — equality of liberty and equality of opportunity — is an essential trait of A Theory of Justice” Jean-Pierre Dupuy “Les paradoxes de ‘Théorie de la justice’: Introduction à l’oeuvre de John Rawls,” Esprit 134 (January 1988): 72-84.
The third question for Rawls is why should anyone ascribe to his form of contractualism versus utilitarianism? From behind the veil of ignorance we can speculate that it would be a unanimous decision within the constitution of any social contract that slavery, for instance, would be abolished since it institutionalizes the least-well-off. The problem here is how to decide between an ahistorical ideal condition (the unanimous contract) and the contingent conditions of a historical people? Recall that institutions are by nature ahistorical because they seek to escape the mortality of persons by propagating their habits or customs across time. We must once again remind ourselves of the position held by Badiou regarding institutions: the truth-event of political institutions favors a contractualism within which individual rational decision-making (so central to Aristotle’s, Kant’s, and Ricoeur’s ethics) can be sacrificed to the maximizing of social goods.

Ricoeur’s conclusion regarding Kant’s and Rawls’ attempts to free deontological morality from the teleological aiming at the good (“good life”) is that they both run afoul of a circularity while attempting to move away from the universal and free agent towards the plurality of institutions whereby persons would be treated as ends-in-themselves. The problem is that there is a crisis of confidence as to whether or not their conceptions of a procedural justice do not in fact rely upon a “pre-understanding of what is meant by the unjust and the just” (OaA 237). In other words, Rawls wants to begin his contractualist position from the veil of ignorance, yet the very persons who would be making such fictional decisions are not yet persons aware of their actual interests. Justice thus is asked to precede the authors of justice.
These limitations that Ricoeur finds within these ethical theories leads him to conclude that it is not possible to separate deontology from teleology – meaning that Kant’s and Rawls’ theories must remain tied to the ethical (i.e., the teleological) aiming at the good. Kant sought to move from reason’s command that one act according to the good-will to the plurality of persons by means of the principle that persons are not things to be bought and sold. The formalism of Kant and Rawls is incapable of an empirical grounding, because they both depend on a “progressive rationalization” of autonomy and justice respectively. Rawls argues that we have a moral duty to act according to a sense of justice, but is not able to account for why we should have this sense of justice while still under the veil of ignorance. For Kantian deontology it is autonomy that cannot be empirically demonstrated, therefore in both cases we have attempts to free deontology from teleology. Regarding Kant’s claim that the moral law is a Factum der Vernunft Ricoeur says that,

If we admit… that this fact of reason means simply that morality exists, that it enjoys the same authority in the practical order as experience [does] in the theoretical order, then one would have to say that this existence can only be attested to, that this attestation\textsuperscript{75} refers back to the opening declaration of the Groundwork, namely: ‘It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good

\textsuperscript{75} “Attestation” is an epistemological concept on the level of an “I believe-in something” and not a scientific sense of facticity such as “I believe-that something is the case.” If one believes that other persons are ends-in-themselves and not reified commodities there is no ultimate test as per Hume’s argument that we cannot logically conjoin what “is” to what “ought” to be the case.
will’ (4.393, p. 61). Now this statement roots the deontological viewpoint once more in the teleological perspective (OaA 238-9).

This is why Kant’s claim that we ought to treat other persons as ends-in-themselves since it is also a fact of reason [that persons are not things to be bought or sold]. The concluding contrast here between Kant and Rawls concerns the status of autonomy and the social contract. Autonomy is a fact of reason much as experience is a fact of reason on the plane of theoretical reason. By contrast, the contract is a fiction because no political body is capable of attesting to itself. For this reason we will see that Ricoeur does not make the Hegelian leap to Sittlichkeit (social ethical life) which we will now turn to in the next section.

In this chapter we have been discussing the fourth manner in which we are capable beings: we can act, speak, narrate, and we are morally imputable. We have therefore moved closer to Ricoeur’s conception of selfhood which includes moral imputation as a crucial aspect when attesting to one’s selfhood. Ricoeur concludes with a question regarding the status of the autonomous moral agent: “If now, by moving backward, we carry this doubt affecting the fiction of the contract back to the principle of autonomy, does not the latter also risk finding itself a fiction intended to compensate for forgetting the foundation of deontology in the desire to live well with and for others in just institutions?” (OaA 239).
Regarding the general status of institutions I follow a position outlined by George Taylor in his article “Ricoeur and Just Institutions”\(^76\) that Ricoeur’s position is that institutions “objectify” human values, that is, make them manifest. This position is opposed to figures such as Georg Lukács have argued that labor becomes reified and therefore, by extension, human institutions become reified. Our modern age is threatened by the objectification\(^77\) of our entire cosmos as mere things for us to utilize. Against this position Taylor effectively argues that Ricoeur proposes that institutions outwardly objectify human desires and values. According to Taylor this “positive externalization” becomes manifest in our “words, deeds, structures, and institutions.”\(^78\)

### 2.3 Just Institutions and Society

The third part of Ricoeur’s “little ethics” completes his examination of the ethical dimension of selfhood with the aim of solving the ethical conflicts that arise within “the framework of ethical situations” (OaA 240). In his opinion the transition from the autonomous agent’s moral duty to situational and circumstantial moral judgments demands “the reawakening of the resources of singularity inherent in the aim of the true life” (OaA 240). This “true life” that is developed in Ricoeur will be the anvil upon which we will test Badiou’s conception of ethics as the fidelitous continuation of truth-

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76 George H. Taylor, Ricoeur and Just Institutions”, *Philosophy Today*, vol. 58, Issue 4 (Fall 2014), page 572.
77 See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, page 220, where he addresses social coercion: “A dynamic approach to the constituting of the social bond will then surmount the contingent opposition between institutional regularity and social inventiveness, if we speak of institutionalization rather than of institutions.” Furthermore this “dynamic point of view” will help us explain “the production of nascent meaning” against the power of “established constraints.”
78 Taylor, page 571.
events. It is important to remain clear that the ethical aim at the true life maintains the priority of practical reason over moral law, yet without ever abandoning its rigorous testing of our personal life-plans. We live with and for others and therefore our individual pursuit of happiness must be tempered by the fires that are the commands of moral duty. Ricoeur holds practical reason as the font of conviction that informs one that one’s life is indeed good, and practical reason in the sense of “convictions” governs at the level of institutions. David Rasmussen makes this important link between Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self and his theory of justice when he states that “the model of narrative identity as a model for interpretation can be effectively used as a model for political understanding.”79 In other words, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self must be read onto contemporary problems of global diversity, discord, the search for concord, and all forms of intersubjectivity up through the level of “just institutions.”

### The Places of Moral Conflict

Ricoeur examines three areas of moral conflict: a) within institutions, b) with regard to the respect we gain when we follow moral commands, and c) within our own experience of our autonomy when we aim at the good and true life. Before examining these Ricoeur makes an interlude called “Tragic Action: for Olivier again” in which he moves away from philosophy into one of philosophy’s “others”: tragedy. Ricoeur’s son Olivier struggled with drug addiction and took his own life at age 39. Charles Reagan was a long-time friend of the Ricoeur family who visited and stayed at their house in Paris

many times. Reagan spoke on Ricoeur several years ago at St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore where he provided some insight, not only into Ricoeur’s philosophy, but also the family’s personal life. Reagan remarked about how during one particular visit he had to go upstairs and ask Olivier to stop getting high because “the fumes” were wafting down into his chamber (his drug of choice was ether). Reagan says in *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work* that he found Olivier to be “very friendly, personable, and handsome”80 (Reagan 64). Olivier committed suicide in April 1986 and this interlude on tragedy was written for the 1986 Gifford lectures.

Ricoeur chose to focus on Sophocles’ *Antigone* in order to examine how tragic events have a way of irrupting not only, “our illusions of the heart but also to the illusions of the hubris of practical reason itself” (OaA 241). Sophocles’ play concerns the two discordant responses to the character’s obligations to the laws of the city conflict with obligations to family custom. Do we follow the laws of the city at the expense to our friends and our family? The object of this interlude investigating tragedy is to expose how “practical determination cannot be reduced to a simple modality of choice and deliberation, along the lines described by Aristotle and by Kant (OaA 243). The choice present for Antigone is to follow the city’s command to leave the body of her brother unburied, or to disobey the city’s command and properly bury her dead brother. The power to deliberate our actions under competing laws or customs has direct bearing on our passions and desires – especially with regard to what we see as the good-life. Ricoeur says Antigone is caught between pity for her dead brother – lying unburied – and her fear

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in the face of the threat of violence by the king who has ruled that his body remain unburied. Ricoeur sees this conflict as, “the condition for all properly ethical instruction” (OaA 243). Ethical choice then involves a conflict of fate and choice, as well as community and family.

King Creon represents a narrow view of the law and the polis with his simplistic claim that what is good for the polis is just; the corollary is that the gods honor those who have died in defense of the city. Sophocles’ other protagonist is likewise very narrow in her view of philos and ekkhros (friend and enemy). The two sides of the conflict are clear with Creon claiming that what the city demands is just, against Antigone’s claim that her duty to her brother Polynices takes precedence over the polis. She is in essence outside of the city and its laws pointing to the very limits of all human institutions.

Tragedy is in many ways a rich resource for philosophy, but Ricoeur warns us that the philosopher risks making practical determinations based upon the inherent over-determinations within the tragedy. Those over-determinations include the distinction between friend and enemy, as well as state-law versus people’s customs.

Sophocles’ Antigone ultimately shows us the limits to all human institutions leading Ricoeur to note that the final lesson comes in the form of an appeal to to phronein (wisdom). Sophocles’ Antigone makes many appeals to “deliberating well,” yet the tragic play creates a gap between the tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. This gap involves the cathartic ending of the play with Antigone’s death on the one hand and her ethical conviction on the other. Catharsis does not provide us with any useful ethical prescription, but does open path “to the moment of conviction,” according to Ricoeur (OaA 249). What he means by this is that we learn that ethical conflict is an inevitable
part of moral life. We will see in Badiou a radically different idea of the role of conflict
in life, although not in moral life, but in every field of human knowledge.

The tragic play does not provide “genuine reconciliation” because the tragedy is
properly speaking not a morality play. Ricoeur says that, “the genuine reconciliation
occurs only at the very end of this itinerary, at the outcome of the conflict between
judging consciousness and acting man; this reconciliation rests on an actual renunciation
by each party of his partiality and has the value of a pardon in which each is truly
recognized by the other.” Sophocles’ Antigone cannot create a sense of reconciliation;
rather we read at the end of the play how Antigone hangs herself in Polynices’ sepulcher.

Ricoeur uses this tragic interlude to re-introduce moral conflict into his
phenomenological hermeneutics of the self which has taken us through this long detour
via his “little ethics.” The two agencies we have examined thus far form the first and
second moments of Ricoeur’s statement on our “ethical intention.” The first moment is
marked by self-esteem (living a good-life), the second is marked by self-respect
(following one’s obligations) and the re-introduction of moral conflict will take us into
the third moment when these first two are integrated into “just institutions.” These first
two moments form what Ricoeur calls the “dialectic of ethics (aim) and morality (law).”
Regarding this dialectic he states that: “My wager is that the dialectic of ethics and
morality, in the sense defined in the preceding studies, develops and resolves itself in
moral judgment in situation, without the addition, as a third agency, of Sittlichkeit, the
flower of a philosophy of Geist in the practical dimension” (OaA 249). Ricoeur says that he does not harbor a mistrust of *Sittlichkeit*; rather there is no need for it.

Ricoeur ends this interlude on tragedy by noting that, “[e]thical conflicts are inevitable… only a recourse to the ethical ground against which morality stands out can give rise to the wisdom of judgment in situation” (OaA 249). This is Ricoeur’s post-critical *phronēsis* which is capable of weighing the demands of the universal moral commands of deontology. In other words, the teleological aiming at the good and true life acts as both a foundation for and background against which to silhouette moral laws. There is no escaping the reality of life’s discrete and circumstantial situations where those clear-cut moral duties that regulate our lives must yield to our pursuit of happiness.

- **The Inevitability of Moral Conflicts**

Ricoeur’s position with regard to institutions does not begin with the assumption that all institutions abuse power, but from the position that, “at least theoretically [they have] capacities to offer justice.”\(^8{2}\) Within the realm of institutions, and Ricoeur’s confrontation with Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, moral conflict resolves itself within the problematic of the equivocity of fair distribution. The formalism of Kant and Rawls are problematic because they “cover over” (OaA 250) the gap between rational agents maximizing goods (utilitarianism) and the abstract *veil of ignorance* which aims to relieve the circumstances of the least-well-off (contractualism). The Golden Rule and Kant’s formalization of it do

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81 *Sittlichkeit*: ethical community, ethical social sense. *Sitten* means “custom” in German. So the emphasis with *Sittlichkeit* is on a community’s customs and specifically its institutions if one wants to determine a person’s central constitution.

not solve the problem of reciprocity, because there is an “initial dissymmetry related to
the power an agent exercises over the patient of his action, a dissymmetry that violence
transforms into exploitation” (OaA 251). The nature of moral conflicts within institutions
(up to the level of states, even international relations) concerns the proper distribution of
goods which in turn leads to the problem of various universally recognized “goods” as
well as the contextualist problem regarding how various “goods” are estimated. Ricoeur
labels these the “universalist” claim to equality and the “contextualist” claim of
equality.83

First, Ricoeur problematizes the universalist claims by pointing out that every
political body has its own “spheres of justice” (a phrase he borrows from Michael
Walzer) such as legal rights of citizens, property rights, as well as basic civil protections.
Ricoeur says that with regard to these “spheres” his concern is with “the arbitration
required by the competition among these spheres of justice and by the threat of one being
trampled by another, which gives the notion of social conflict its real meaning” (OaA
252). Determining the nature of moral conflict is crucial for me, not only at the level of
ethics, but also in our later discussion of Badiou’s central philosophical claim that
conflict are inevitable – even going so far as to strive to enable social conflict as the
principal means of social progress. Badiou’s “truth-events” are by their very nature
conflictual ruptures within an epistemological fabric – rupturing one’s love-life,
aesthetics, scientific outlook, or political commitments. Badiou shows his Hegelian roots

83 Aristotle recognizes two major forms of distributive justice in terms of equal shares for each member,
or unequal shares for unequal members. Recall our simple illustration of these two different forms in the
figure of youth football where every player receives a “participation” award, versus professional football
where superior athletes earn significantly more than mediocre athletes.
when he claims that truth-events drive political movements to break with a conservative political consensus – this is the very essence of his revolutionary political philosophy.

Ricoeur claims for himself that he is “simply interested in determining whether political praxis calls upon the resources of a concrete morality that can be exercised only in the framework of a self-knowledge that the state as such would contain. This is precisely what Hegel teaches in the *Philosophy of Right*” (OaA 253). Hegel, for his part, develops this third kind of morality that is found within the social and political body (*Sittlichkeit*). What is so threatening about *Sittlichkeit* is that it results in a contraction of justice, because there is no organic relationship between individuals within institutions and states. The individual’s relationship to the state is likewise determined by an abstract right predicated on the separation of what is “mine” from what is “yours”. Therefore, instead of an organic (human) relationship Right is defined by means of the fiction of the social contract – this same criticism holds against Rawls, according to Ricoeur. Contractualism and Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* both suffer from their atomizing the human subject. Consider again Rawls’ *veil of ignorance*: when I enter into this fiction I do not consider the interests of any actual person, instead I attempt to think universally for all persons – as an atomized person.

**Becoming Human: Beyond Justice?**

Our concern throughout all these deliberations regarding ethics centers on how an agent becomes human and at this point we are enquiring into how an agent operates within institutions. The problem for Ricoeur concerns whether or not societal goods resist being only abstract universals, without concrete meanings, within both Rawls’ contractual theory of justice and Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. Ricoeur asks: “is the obligation to serve the
institutions of a constitutional state of another, even of a higher, nature than moral obligation?” (OaA255). More specifically he asks whether the state has “a ground other than the idea of justice?” (OaA 255). Again, the fear is that the state represented as Hegelian Geist would destroy any possibility of morality in the Kantian sense of Moralität. In other words, does the state “think”? For Badiou we will see that the politics is one of four sources of truth which human subjects strive to continue! through the political process. Events-of-truth for Badiou represent for his materialism a sense in which the politics can “think” according to his ontological theory set out in his Logics of Worlds (LW). Badiou says “[t]here are only bodies and language, except that there are truths” (LW 4). In the Preface to Logics of Worlds Badiou gives an insightful explanation of the distinction between Stalin and Mao paralleled against the ancient Chinese distinction between Legalism and Confucianism. He states that the truth embodied in Legalist and Maoist political theory involves “a truly political administration of the state subordinates all economic laws to voluntary representations, fights for equality, and combines, where the people are concerned, confidence and terror” (LW 21). This means that political decisions are not to be fettered by the state economy (LW 23). Badiou presents four major conclusions regarding the truths of politics that “aims at an emancipation of humanity as a whole” (LW 27). Badiou’s materialism (“only bodies and language”) is supplemented by an ontology (of truths) that allows for truths to reappear over great historical distances. The truth he focuses on in this section of the Preface is a “confidence in the masses” which the Legalists and Mao embodied. The state cannot think, but most certainly, for Badiou, politics thinks and it thinks this “generic kernel of a political truth” (LW 27). That truth includes: a will against economic necessity, equality
in the fact of circumstances, confidence in the masses, and authority against the harms of competition (LW 27).

For Hegel, Rawls, and Badiou the state possesses some characteristics of self-consciousness; even if Badiou seeks to “replant” that consciousness back into the “human animals” that compose the members of the state. The totalitarian regimes of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century lend credence to the opposite conjecture. Ricoeur pointedly addresses the dangers of Sittlichkeit warning that: “When the spirit of a people is perverted to the point of feeding a deadly Sittlichkeit, it is finally in the moral consciousness of a small number of individuals, inaccessible to fear and to corruption, that the spirit takes refuge, once it has fled the now-criminal institutions” (OaA 256). The real battle described in this dissertation orbits around the nature of those very agents-of-change within our world – are they human animals possessed by some external “truth” or are human beings capable of inaugurating change from within their own experience of selfhood?

Ricoeur turns his attention to the distinction between power and domination in an effort to critique political practice and its presumption of a state-based origin of justice. Ricoeur’s own notion of power is borrowed from Hannah Arendt’s definition\textsuperscript{84} as the cooperative operation of voluntary institutions where individuals choose to work in concert. Domination on the other hand struggles through the dialectic of form and force. The form of any state is in essence its constitution, so long as it maintains a mutual respect and recognition of its parts, powers, and members. Force is the violence required —

\textsuperscript{84} Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, page 204, “Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearances, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate raison d’être.”
at times to maintain the political body over time. By definition, powers do not wrestle with this dialectic since force of violence is not necessary to maintain a cooperative institution (a power).85 Domination by definition does unfortunately require the use of violence to maintain the political body (i.e., form) even if it is solely at the level of criminal courts. The dialectic Ricoeur identifies evolves into what is called the political paradox where the form and the force conflict. This is seen, for instance, in Antigone in which the necessity of acting according to the letter of the law resulted in a tragic conclusion.

Conflicts within institutions are identified along three “levels” according to Ricoeur each of which is concrete and refreshingly commonsensical. The first concerns the everyday conflicts between spheres of power within any state and the priority any particular choice demands over alternate choices. In concrete terms we can witness these conflicting choices in contemporary society’s exhibition of greater and greater diversity, plurality, and polysemy of voices and interests. Free and open public debate is necessary in order to make proper deliberations on various interests. The expression of opinions is likewise paramount since “the public good cannot be decided in a scientific or dogmatic manner” (OaA 258).

The second level concerns the sphere of what is generally called “good governance”. Ricoeur says that this “is an integral part of the political mediation through which we aspire to a full life, to the ‘good life’” (OaA 258). “Political ideology” and “political philosophy” are at this level tasked with determining the meaning of the chief

85 An example of a “power” could be any sort of organization or club, thus for instance a chess club will not have to resort to violence in order to maintain its form.
political terms such as security, prosperity, liberty, equality, and solidarity among other terms one could identify. Given the polysemy of such political terms, Ricoeur says that Hegelian Sittlichkeit should bend “to the side of Aristotelian phronēsis (practical wisdom)” (OaA 259). What governs each connotation of these political terms is a particular conviction held by the various voices within the political body. Again, we cannot fall back upon a universal voice as embodied within a self-conscious “state” since no universal voice exists that could make determinations regarding concrete distinctions and the application of such ideals.

The third level takes us to the so-called “legitimation problem” at the very foundation of any political economy. Badiou for his part does not seem to have any answer to this problem other than how a “truth-event” draws individual “human animals” into line with a particular political formation. Ricoeur recognizes a “void” at the heart of Hegelian Sittlichkeit which is also to be found in Rawls and I would add is present in Badiou. This void is an absence of the self’s attestation of its own capacity for moral imputation. Ricoeur comments:

If power is the forgotten source of domination, how is domination to be derived visibly from the desire to live together? It is here that the fiction of the social contract, carried to a higher level of refinement by the Rawlsian fable of an original position characterized by fairness, is revealed to fill a void, namely, as suggested above, the absence for the social contract of the sort of attestation by virtue of which autonomy is, for the individual, a ‘fact of reason’ and the respect of persons, the implication of their ‘rational nature.’ There is an obvious absence of any parallel between moral autonomy and the self-legislation of a people,
whom domination would simply awaken out of their forgetfulness to the desire to live together and to act together as a people (OaA 260).

Ricoeur’s contrast here between the “fact of reason” and the “fable of the social contract” highlights to gap between morality per se, grounded in the autonomous agent, and the wider self-legislation founded on Rousseau’s notion of a “first convention” whereby a people agree to be “a people”. Badiou claims something oddly similar, but from the point of view of a materialism whereby the consensus “knowledge” that holds any political body together will always undergo an irruptive event of truth. For now though, our concern is domination and how it can be legitimized from within Hegel’s Sittlichkeit. Ricoeur’s position is again refreshing – his view of the legitimation problem recognizes human memory as well as historical customs. He says,

There is nothing better to offer, in reply to the legitimation crisis (which, in my opinion, affects the idea of domination more than that of power, as a people’s desire to live and act together), than the memory and the intersection in the public space of the appearance of the traditions that make room for tolerance and pluralism, not out of concessions to external pressures, but out of inner conviction, even if this is late in coming (OaA 261).

The public sphere is grounded in a common history (traditions and institutions) and the living memories in real persons which once again highlights the fact that institutions and states do not possess a self-consciousness since institutions do not possess memories – people do. States owe their domination to an abuse of power brought about by forgetfulness of the origins of power within individual’s ethical desire to live and act in concert.
This claim that power springs from the individual’s desire to live a good life with others in just institutions is a central claim of Ricoeur’s which is instrumental in attacking Badiou’s claim that individual agents are merely “human animals” until a truth-event transforms them into proper Subjects engaged in something greater than their biological selves. This is a kind of “bio-power” conceptually supported by the claim that agents act principally according to their desire to live simply without violence. Badiou is claiming that at the level of “bio-power” (self-preservation) that no true human subject has yet manifested itself. We find a broadly similar claim with Arendt’s distinction between work, labor, and activity. For Arendt labor (animal laborans) involves efforts that leave no durable product – cleaning, cooking, and the general practice of living. Work (homo faber) involves efforts that “work upon” materials and leave some durable artifice – carpentry, smithing, and every sort of fabrication. Animals too labor, and some also produce “works” such as nests, dens, webs, and other durable fabrications. Humans though are also capable of activity, that is, of being an inauguration (beginning) in the world. Arendt describes this as a kind of “second birth” in The Human Condition (Arendt 177). The broad similarity to Badiou to which I am referring is the distinction between human-animals and their definitions as full human-beings.

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86 See Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition where she develops a three-fold distinction between humanity as an Animal Laborans (biological labors), Homo Faber is humanity as a worker and fabricator of artificial products, and finally at the level of political action there is Zoon Politikon. Badiou develops a very similar philosophy but reduces the first two into what he simply calls the “human animal.”
Respect and Conflict

Stepping back from the level of institutions and the conflicts found within situations of domination, Ricoeur turns to self-respect which is a product of the agent’s willingness to attend upon the moral law. Central to the concept of “respect” is the Enlightenment notion of “humanity” as a universal claim best embodied in the Golden Rule as re-worked by Kant into his second formalization of the categorical imperative: treat others as ends and never as mere means for one’s own ends.

What do we respect? We ought to respect both the moral law and other persons. Kant gives four examples of moral duties in his *Groundwork*: two perfect and two imperfect (meaning that these allow for reasonable limitations). The two examples of perfect duties Kant provides are to keep your promises and do not commit suicide while the two imperfect duties Kant provides are to help others and to develop your talents. The first of each pair applies to others, whereas the second in each pair applies to oneself. There are many other maxims of behavior that exist as candidates for being raised to the level of a moral law. Moreover, we are not lacking for concrete behaviors to examine as to whether they enter the conflict between respect for the law versus respect for others.

Two paths are identified by Ricoeur within Kant’s moral duty: the first asks whether any particular maxim can be made a universal moral law and the second is the application of a maxim to a concrete situation. It is within this second path that Ricoeur identifies the very real possibility of conflicts. He begins with the duty to keep our promises.
Ricoeur identifies a *caesura* or tear within the Kantian formulations of respect for the moral law and respect for persons (OaA 268). He claims that this tear becomes “gaping” once we look at concrete instances of the conflicts within the moral agent and how she acts towards others.

Promising, as a speech act, is not distinguishable from the rule of justice (e.g., in a law court) according to Ricoeur since in either case there is a dialogic structure of agent and patient. Thus any court of law has its own dyadic structure of defense and prosecution. When I make a promise to another person, who am I ultimately respecting? Is it my own self-constancy over time (*ipse*-identity, i.e., self-constancy) or my respect for the other? Ricoeur borrows the name *disponibilité* from Gabriel Marcel to characterize the proper relationship of myself to others when I make a promise. Translated as *availability* he claims that it “is the key that opens self-constancy to the dialogic structure established by the Golden Rule” (OaA 268). The idea is that I wish to make myself *available* for the other out of respect for the other. At the heart of availability is a “double intention: the intention not to change my intention” (OaA 268). However, one problem with Marcel’s formulation is that it is too close to legal norms such as oaths and legal contracts.

Ricoeur focuses instead is where self-constancy connects with “the principle of reciprocity founded in solicitude” (OaA 268). Self-constancy sits at the heart of Ricoeur’s

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87 The nature of this “tear” is easy to see even for my ethics students who ask about the application of Kant’s deontology to concrete instances. In my courses I must always strongly emphasize the first path which hinges on the self-destructiveness of not following duties – especially in the case of lying whereby one will no longer be able to lie, since no one will trust the word of a liar. Nevertheless, any concrete application is difficult.
notion of selfhood as determined by one’s ability to attest to one’s own actions over time including promises and other speech acts including forgiveness. Solicitude is the friendship, fraternalism, and kinship one feels with others including the fact that others come to count on another.

Ricoeur finishes his move from a naïve solicitude to a critical solicitude by a reflection on two major sources of ethical questions: those of the end of life and beginning of life. He settles on three features of these bioethical questions: it is prudent that “adverse positions call upon the same principles of respect” although they may differ in their “amplitude” of application. Second, the “just mean” or “golden mean” of Aristotle ought to be sought wherever possible in moral deliberations. The third feature of all these ethical conflicts is the call for all decision makers to take into consideration the view of the “most competent and the wisest” (OaA 273). Ricoeur concludes saying, “that it is to solicitude, concerned with the otherness of persons, including ‘potential persons,’ that respect refers, in those cases where it is itself the source of conflicts, in particular in novel situations produced by the powers that technology gives humans over the phenomena of life” (OaA 273).

Ricoeur’s position on the very contentious issue of abortion is not, unsurprisingly, as clear-cut as either side of the debate might want. Charles Reagan notes that Ricoeur pays close attention to the “phenomena of thresholds and stages” of the unborn, and that he rejects any “all-or-nothing” view which “does not admit degrees or stages of [fetal] development” (Reagan 93-94). Regarding the difficult ontological questions of whether a fetus is a person or a thing Ricoeur lends support to both the biological argument that life begins at conception, as well as the opposing view that humans are determined according to their capabilities. Clearly for Ricoeur, the stages of life are scientific questions with scientific answers, yet beginning (and end) of life questions belong to practical reason, and each stage might entail new rights. The fears held by strong “right-to-lifers” to the killing and manipulation of human fetuses qua things does not belong to defenders of the unborn alone, but extend to every stage of human life. Ricoeur says that this issue “is part of that practical wisdom required by conflictual situations resulting from respect itself in an area in which the dichotomy between persons and things is in akimbo” (OaA 272).
In this third part of the topic of conflict Ricoeur seeks to return to the center of the ethical intention which is found within the individual’s autonomy. The confrontation here lies between the universalist claim and our historical and communitarian contexts. The universalist claim belongs to the rules inherent in Kant’s deontology, which acts as a test for the teleological aiming at the good life, while the historical and communitarian contexts represents the concrete conditions that determine how those rules ought to be applied according to situations and circumstances. Ricoeur’s aim is to situate morality as the means by which the conflicts which inevitably arise within circumstances and choices can be resolved. He is seeking to critique Kant’s universalist claim inherent within the formalism that aims to make the Golden Rule objective and not inclusive of personal inclinations and desires. This universalist claim forms the heart of the first formalization of the categorical imperative to always act by those maxims which could become universal laws without logical contradiction. He says that its “revision” is to be made in three stages; the first of which is to analyze the primacy of autonomy over the plurality of other human beings in institutions including the state. The course he pursues begins from the principle of justice, through the principle of respect for other persons especially the least well-off, through the most disadvantaged individuals, ending finally with a reckoning of how we can respect others similar to how we respect ourselves (OaA 274). In other words, this is how we move from a sense of universal justice to respect for the autonomy of others even if they are not yet born, or otherwise unable to speak for themselves because of sickness, weakness, or domination by others.
At the end of this detour from justice through institutions back to autonomy Ricoeur aims at the pronouncement of a non-self-sufficient sense of autonomy – a true living “with and for others” by treating others as oneself. It is important to keep in mind that this return to the self’s autonomy will not fall back into the Cartesian problem of an egological selfhood in which others are wholly and completely “other” to oneself. Any morality founded on the logical coherence within the mind of one autonomous agent is profoundly unable to cope with the conflicts which arise within the heteronomy of concrete historical circumstances and cultures. And it is for this reason that Ricoeur begins the return trek to autonomy beginning from judicial reasoning with all its balances and compromises as one could find in a proper court of law. Ricoeur makes an important presupposition regarding the functioning of judicial reasoning by contrast to Kant’s universalist claim to follow the moral law without exception. His presupposition is that, “every conception of justice requires a coherence that is not merely to be preserved but to be constructed” (OaA 277). This requirement to “construct” a rule, and not just to preserve a prior incarnation of a law, brings the necessary flexibility into any application of morality to the ethical life (the good-life).

A Fragile Coherence

Judicial systems have a coherence given the fact that they are concerned with cases that are subject to legal review and proper compensation. Morality, on the other hand, concerns every sort of crime including those difficult cases where a fair settlement appears to be impossible (e.g., radical crimes against humanity). On the issue of the fragility of moral coherence, Ricoeur says that moral reasoning can produce heterogeneous duties, however these ought not be subservient to one another (e.g., lying
for philanthropic reasons). Furthermore, any departures from a moral rule may still fall under a superior moral rule.

The fragility of morality’s rational coherence is well known. Kant produced a short essay entitled “On the Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns”. The essence of the supposed right to lie involves a scenario in which a murderer knocks on your door seeking to kill a friend whom you are secretly protecting in your house: do you follow your moral duty to never lie or the conflicting duty to protect others? When the murderer comes to the door there appears a conflict between the duty to not lie and the duty to protect others thereby threatening the coherence of moral reasoning. Not only must moral reasoning construct its own rules, “moral philosophy has to incorporate a sharp critique of prejudices and ideological residues in its enterprise of reconstructing the specificatory premises capable of assuring the fragile coherence of the moral system” (OaA, 280).

The answer to this moral quandary rests on the “specificatory premises” that determine the logic of such a choice. Ricoeur borrows this phrase from Alan Donagan,89 who comes to a similar conclusion as Roger Sullivan,90 that we must not tell the murderer the full truth nor should we lie to him. What we should do is misdirect him with a truthful statement. One could say, without lying: “I saw him in the market this morning” while leaving out “and I knew you were after him, so I’m hiding him in my attic.” The “specificatory premises” here function to determine the proper application of conflicting duties under the imperative to always treat others with respect as a rational being.

90 Robert Sullivan, An Introduction to Kant’s Ethics, chapter 3.
Another reinterpretation of Kantian morality is taken up in terms of the discourse ethics as developed by Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas which merges the three formalizations of the categorical imperative. Based on Kant’s logic of quantity it judges the concept of unity added to the concept plurality to result in totality. Autonomy is the unity principle, respect for others follows the concept of plurality and these meet in the concept of totality in the kingdom of ends. Ricoeur says that the morality of communication thereby founds the self “in a single stroke” as a universal source of law that is both dialogical with others and founded within institutions. Kant himself moves from the normative law that issues forth from the agent first to others as ends-in-themselves deserving of respect onwards to the community of persons within the kingdom of ends. Likewise the morality of communication begins from the normative maxims of behavior, which both Habermas and Ricoeur agree cannot be justified by philosophy, into very real discourse among heterogeneous agents concerning conflicts between rules. The final step involves justification for following this rule versus that rule of behavior and the conflict is ultimately solved by argumentation among agents. Echoing Habermas, Ricoeur states that “practical discourse is a real discourse,” (OaA, 282) with the result that ethical discourse is grounded in human reason which is capable of universal claims of moral duty.

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Again, see Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Doctrine of Elements. Pt. II. Div. I. Bk. I, Ch. I A80/B1-6 where he provides the Table of Categories. The first set is “Of Quantity” and it includes the concepts of Unity, Plurality and Totality.
It is important to keep in mind that the theory of selfhood which Ricoeur is
developing throughout *Oneself as Another* and *Memory, History, Forgetting* comes under
withering polemic attack by Badiou according to the accusation that Ricoeur’s
conception of the human subject is nothing more than an over-determined Christian
subject. For a Marxist and Maoist such as Badiou, this charge of “Christian over-
determination” is clear grounds for a dismissal of Ricoeur’s entire project. I ask my
reader to pay close attention to the concreteness of Ricoeur’s theory of the self.

**The Conflict between Universalism and Contextualism**

Contextualism stands at the opposite end of the spectrum of moral theory from theories
predicated on a universal foundation as for example in Kant’s deontology. The great
multitudes of cultural, political, economic, and historical contexts are indeed another way
to formulate a theory of justice. In short, one begins to theorize from circumstances
causd by actions already accomplished, and then seeks to formulate a theory of justice
based upon those actions. Kant by contrast, begins from an autonomous agent who is
capable of rationally raising the maxims of his action to the level of universal laws prior
to any sense of institutional or contextual justice.

Let us briefly focus our attention on the nature of real-world problems of today,
whether they are economic, political, social, or interpersonal. In any real-world problem
the contextualist theorist (e.g., Rawls) aims to develop a theory of justice from within a
historical milieu of social goods to be distributed fairly. Within his examination of the
conflict between universalism and contextualism Ricoeur draws on examples taken from
bioethics: end of life, and beginning of life issues. This focus on these two areas of
bioethics highlights the problem of universalism, because these are individuals who by
their very biological and medical nature are not – in a literal sense – fully actualized rational agents capable of moral reasoning. For the contextualist, historical conditions could permit the wonton destruction of human life at these extremes stages as for instance with abortion, forced sterilization, and the (seemingly) growing trend of euthanasia. Rawls’ *veil of ignorance* would seem to make abortion impermissible, unless of course the fiction of the veil is lifted *only at the contextualized time of one’s first breath*, thus escaping the problem of abortion. The historical and contextual search for just solutions runs afoul of this and other problems where respect for the moral law clashes with respect for other persons.

### 2.4 Towards an Ethics of Argumentation

At the point where the universalist claims of a moral law come into conflict with specific situational circumstances of historical people we find a space for an ethico-moral discourse. If we can maintain both respect for the moral law and respect for real persons, then the solution is for persons to discuss moral conflicts in open, civil discourse. It is helpful to recount Ricoeur’s tri-part “ethical intention” namely: “to live a good-life, with and for others, in just institutions.” The first part refers to the teleology that aims at happiness; however, happiness must pass through the moral as a means to “test” as to whether one *can esteem oneself worthy of being* happy, and has not achieved his

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92 Is happiness something one must earn, or in others words, something one deserves? For Ricoeur one must pass through the three stages examined in this chapter: self-esteem, self-respect, and respect for the moral norm. Self-respect, on the moral plane “answers to” self-esteem on the ethical plane in the sense that one’s aiming at the good life must “answer to” one’s self-respect with regards to moral duty.
happiness on the backs of others. Third, justice is to be understood as the fair distribution of goods available within a community including one’s own life, liberty, honors, wealth, health, and pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, an ethics of argumentation suffers, according to Ricoeur, an impasse regarding how debate ought to be conducted. For Kant all heterogeneous passions, inclinations, and affections must be carefully excised in order to keep moral reasoning pure in the sense that motives ought to usher from the commands of Reason alone. Theorists, such as Habermas, Ricoeur points out, suffer the very modern affliction that they seek to exclude all cultural conventions in an effort to maintain a similar homogeneous (i.e., pure) moral reasoning. Further, today we witness radical forms of multiculturalism that hold that every culture is entitled to its own moral determinations – all argument excluded.

Ricoeur seeks to reconcile the universalist position à la Kant, Rawls, and others with the diversity of personal and cultural narratives without falling prey to abject relativism that is akin to dismissing all argumentation. Badiou is cleverer, arguing that all ethics today is nothing more than a communication of opinion. His savior is not argumentation, but that someone will witness an event that ruptures the consensus and steadfastly remains faithful to that truth-event. In any case, there does not appear that there is room in Badiou for (genuine) argumentation concerning moral conflicts. An ethics of argumentation is founded on what Ricoeur simply calls “conviction”. The

However, the full meaning of self-respect is achieved only at the third plane of “just institutions” where one’s respect for the moral norm grows into a respect for others (including “oneself as another”). Ricoeur says that only once respect for the moral norm has been thus extended to others does one therefore have “the right to expect his or her just share in an equitable distribution” (OaA 203-204). In this way we can say that one must earn his or her happiness (i.e., good life).
conviction at the heart of the universalist voice of rigorous reason, which can cross-

examine the various narratives, personal histories, and institutional histories of peoples,

that by themselves too often lack rational support, is parallel to deontology’s testing of

the human will in its search for the good-life. Ricoeur thus says:

At the end of this long journey, I should like to suggest a reformulation of the

ethics of argumentation that will allow it to integrate the objections of

contextualism, while allowing the latter, at the same time, to take seriously the

requirement of universalization in order to focus on the conditions for placing this

requirement in context (it is for this last reason that I prefer to use the term

“contextualism” rather than “historicism” or “communitarianism”) (OaA 287).

This reformulation involves a dialogue between argumentation and convention. By itself,

rational argumentation is detached from real-life conventions as is apparent either

through the conflicts between moral duties or from behind Rawls’ veil of ignorance. The

discursive material requisite for meaningful rational discourse comes from the memories,
histories, conventions, and traditions (narratives, life-stories, archives, traces, and so

forth) of real people, with real-life concerns. When argumentation cross-examines these

discourses we can then say that we have a “conviction”. The conviction which these

discursive materials represent form “an inescapable party” for his ethics because of the

fact that,

it expresses the positions from which result the meanings, interpretations, and

evaluations relating to the multiple goods that occupy the scale of praxis, from

practices and their immanent goods, passing by way of life plans, life histories,

and including the conceptions human have, alone or together, of what a complete
human life would be. For, finally, what do we discuss, even on the level of political practice, where the goods concerned transcend the goods immanent in various practices – for example, in the debate over the ends of good government or the legitimacy of democracy – yes, what do we discuss, if not the best way for each party in the great debate to aim, beyond institutional mediations, at a complete life with and for others in just institutions? (OaA 288)

The position here is almost pedestrian: we must talk through our problems if we seek to avoid violent conflict. It must be remembered, though, that Ricoeur’s “little ethics” is part of a sustained hermeneutics of the self and forms the fourth element of the capable human being. Those four parts are worth repeating here at the end of this long investigation: we are capable of acting in the world; we are capable of speaking what is on our mind, telling other our deepest desires, dreams and fears; we are capable of narrating our lives, and the lives of those who have come before us; finally we are capable of morally imputing ourselves. We can act, speak, tell stories, and find ourselves morally imputable.

Within this seemingly pedestrian conflict between the universalist’s aim and the contextualist’s discursive materials a paradox lurks: “on the one hand, one must maintain the universalist claim attached to a few values where the universal and the historical intersect, and on the other hand, one must submit this claim to discussion, not on a formal level, but on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life” (OaA

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93 This is what I tell my ethics students repeatedly through the semester in order to drive-home the point that what ethics ultimately aims to achieve is a better life for all humanity.
The notion of “conviction” emerges from a theory of a self who is capable of believing-in him- or herself.

How does this the joining of the universalist and contextualist positions into an ethics of argumentation look in action? A central distinction which structures an ethics based on argumentation is between declarative statements such as found in the “Declaration of Universal Rights” and the actual legislation within nation-states. There are certain declared rights for all persons recognized across political, social, religious, racial and cultural boundaries under the aegis of “freedom,” yet actual legislation greatly differs (to the point of open warfare). Globally recognized “universal human rights” are an area, Ricoeur says, where the universalist approach to morality overlaps with the contextualist position since Western values have become universal (i.e., globalized) since the time of the Enlightenment.

2.5 Recapitulation

At the completion of our survey of Ricoeur’s “little ethics” we come to the end of his most concise statement of ethical theory to be found in his whole corpus. Moral imputation forms the fourth stage of his hermeneutics of the self which has involved a “search for a relational invariant” at the heart of human agency and identity. The starting point is this invariant owes it spirit to Descartes’s cogito, but it is an approach that takes into account the masters of suspicion (especially Nietzsche) who have cast deep doubt on any valve of ontological analysis of the human being. We have also seen how Ricoeur’s hermeneutics follows a dialectic of sameness (idem) and selfhood (ipse) aimed at clarifying selfhood from otherness, as witnessed in the title of work we have been
examining: *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur’s “little ethics” is most obviously a dialogue between Aristotelian teleology (aiming at good life) and Kantian deontology (with and for others), but also provides an answer to the Hegelian Sittlichkeit at the level of institutions. Our solicitude for others takes precedence over moral norms (duties) because solicitude (ideally at least) leads one to esteem *others as oneself*, and to acknowledge *oneself as an other*. 
CHAPTER THREE

Attestation as Truth: Ricoeur’s Ontology of Selfhood

Prelude

Ricoeur seeks a means to account for how the actions of human agents actually happen in the world and unfortunately analytic methods, used in the first six studies of *Oneself as Another*, suffer from a “closed semanticism” which Ricoeur describes it as a “jumping from one language game to another” (OaA 301). The guiding categories of *Oneself as Another* are those of “self” and “other” and in the tenth study *ipseity* takes on a meaning as we will see in this chapter that is close to Aristotle’s notion of *phronēsis* as well as Spinoza’s notion of *conatus*. Attestation, the epistemological claim that “I believe-in my own actions and selfhood,” is developed through an investigation of conscience in the sense of an amoral voice *à la* Heidegger. Attestation (Bezeugung in Heidegger) can consist of various testimony one gives of actions and events witnessed within the world involving interpretation of experiences. Attestation brings necessary consistency to
behavior and habits which form the conditions for living respectful lives of exchange with others by means of a “critical solicitude” (OaA 273). This chapter investigates Ricoeur’s “exploratory” (OaA 297) study of the ontological implications of attestation, the idem/ipse distinction, and the “specific dialectical structure of the relation between selfhood and otherness” (OaA 298). Our primary goal therefore is to explore Ricoeur’s, significant, claim that selfhood is primordially structured by the optative mood (willing; “if only….”), and is not, as Heidegger claims in Being and Time, a call of conscience without a voice. The voice of conscience is for Ricoeur the attestation-injunction to live good, just, lives with others, solidified by conviction regarding how we ought to live. On this point he says,

If this is so, the passivity of being-enjoined consists in the situation of listening in which the ethical subject is placed in relation to the voice addressed to it in the second person. To find oneself called upon in the second person at the very core of the optative of living well, then of the prohibition to kill, then of the search for the choice appropriate to the situation, is to recognize oneself as being enjoined to live well with and for others in just institutions and to esteem oneself as the bearer of this wish. (OaA 352).

« S’il en est ainsi, la passivité de l’être-enjoint consiste dans la situation d’écoute dans laquelle le sujet éthique se trouve placé par rapport à la voix qui lui est adressée à la seconde personne. Se trouver interpellé à la seconde personne, au cœur même de l’optatif du bien-vivre, puis de l’interdiction de tuer, puis de la recherche du choix approprié à la situation, c’est se reconnaître enjoint de vivre-
This chapter explores the philosophical arguments made by Ricoeur to explain the ontological implications of his hermeneutics of the self as developed in the first two chapters below.

### 3.1 What kind of being is the Self?

Ricoeur sees an “exact equivalence” between our capacity for self-interpretation and the “unfolding” of three problematics which determine his analysis of selfhood. Ricoeur employs his method of the “long detour” through an analysis of reflective subjectivity. This analysis of reflection will be countenanced with the sense of selfhood examined earlier as an *idem*-identity or “sameness” over time (*idem*-identity, e.g., this pen is the “same” as this other pen). This sense of the self as an *idem*-identity will in turn be countenanced by means of a dialectic with otherness.

This last study concentrates on the ontological status of the self, and consists of three inter-related questions regarding Ricoeur’s notion of attestation which is central to his notion of selfhood. The self’s attestation is the capacity of the self to be confident in its own selfhood over time. Attestation ultimately is the self’s capacity to understand itself as morally imputable for its actions, or in other words, the self is capable of believing-in its capacity to be morally imputable for both its actions as well as any failure to have acted properly. This question of attesting to oneself has direct bearing on the
problematic distinction, so central to Ricoeur’s notion of the self, between *idem*- and *ipse*-identity. The third and final question “concerns the specific dialectical structure of the relation between selfhood and otherness” (OaA 298).

These three questions on 1) the ontological *commitment* of attestation, 2) the ontological *import* of the distinction between *ipse* and *idem*, and 3) the dialectic structure between *ipse* and *idem* intertwine through the third major dialectic in *Oneself as Another*. The first dialectic was between persons and things, the second dialectic was between selfhood with sameness, and the third is a dialectic of selfhood with otherness. This third dialectic exposes the distinction between the second-order discourse of Same and Other from the manifestly phenomenological aspects of selfhood found at the first-order discourse of things and persons (i.e., things that can be categorized, predicated, analyzed, and described). What follows is an effort to reinterpret, to reappropriate, to reawaken, in an innovative fashion, the ontological possibilities that are latent in the philosophical tradition from Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and others. Ricoeur’s goal of this third dialectic is to explore the multiplicity of meanings which “being” contains.

### Innovating on the Tradition: the Polysemy of Truth

What are the ontological implications of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self? The investigation of that ontology begins with the Aristotelian distinction between being-true and being-false, yet now under the innovative guise of attestation and suspicion. On the plane of testimony true testimony is always “haunted” by false testimony – likewise when one ascribes an action to oneself one can be suspicious of one’s own memories or
motives as we read in St. Augustine’s *Confessions* where he questions his youthful motives. For instance, when I reflect on my own past actions, affections, and life-story, I am apt to be suspicious as to whether or not I recall my past truthfully – “am I being true to myself?” From within the reflective space of moral conflicts one might suspect ulterior motives for having judged in this way, rather than the alternatives present at the time.

This *alethetic* (*veritative*) *ontology* is formulated at the chiasm of *reflection and analysis* where the self who can ascribe actions to oneself, and who can morally impute responsibility to oneself, then cross-examines himself in an analytic fashion. Regarding this chiasm Ricoeur confirms what he calls the “ontological vehemence” of ordinary language to express being even when in the form of tropes, metaphor, or fiction.

How does this work?

Let us begin from the material and physical position that the human animal is a thing which is the same thing over the course of its life as recognized by a birth certificate which has the proper name of an individual. When I see a photograph of myself as a child I can say, “Yes, that is me as a child – I am that same person.” Likewise, I can ascribe many actions – both physical acts and speech acts – to myself. Another instance, if one long ago committed a crime, yet only now is before a court the defense can argue (attorneys do so argue) that the person being charged “is not the same person” who long ago committed the crime. We use natural language to describe ourselves by means of making reference to “self,” “myself,” “ourselves,” and so forth.

On the epistemological level what is involved here is analysis of reflective meditation which results in a realist position regarding a correspondence of ideas to states of affairs. We have seen the contrast to this is Ricoeur’s development of narrative identity which
sometimes involves fictions or false memories (e.g., autobiographical flourish, embroidered histories, and repressed memory). In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur begins with natural language with its reflective character as a starting point to explore the open ground between the *cogito* and the anti-*cogito*. Descartes’ *cogito* in the *Meditations* is firmly grounded in transparent deductive logic where the self is in total mastery of language seen first with the *cogito* who can affirm “I am, I exist.” Against the *cogito* we have the specter advanced by Nietzsche of the anti-*cogito* which is the result of his own hyperbolic suspicion that language masters man, and not the other way around as with Descartes.

These two pairs: reflection and analysis, and attestation and suspicion, overlap in such a manner that the initial confidence that conscious reflection has with its attestation of having acted or having thought is tested by a suspicious analysis of those reflections. In the previous chapter we saw that at the level of the ethical intentions, and our detour through morality, that it is compliance with the moral law that acts as the analytic test of the self’s aiming at the good life. In a similar way, the reflective agent is called to analyze in an epistemic way the veracity of its own reflective consciousness.

For the Cartesian *cogito* there is no reason to suspect that the *cogito* does not exist given the apodictic certainty of deductive thinking itself. Since we are working in between the *cogito* and the anti-*cogito*, then we must understand how reflection and suspicion work in concert to constitute our selfhood. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self begins therefore from the ontological notion of being-true as founded on the self’s own attestation of itself – that is the confidence, trust, and credence that we have in ourselves. Let us be very clear: we are at the epistemological level of believing-in and not of
apodictic reasoning as per Descartes. With attestation we are saying that “we believe-in ourselves” rather than that “we believe-that we exist.”

Selfhood and Ontology: Between Act and Power

Ricoeur’s first path towards an ontology of selfhood opened by attestation as a “credence and truth – of existing in the mode of selfhood” (OaA 302) takes as its starting point Aristotle’s distinction of action (energeia) from power (dunamis) in book five of his *Metaphysics*. Ricoeur is claiming that at its heart the human being is marked as something which both acts (energeia) in the world and has the potential (dunamis) to act. In human terms the notion of action includes physical acts, speech acts, narration of one’s life story, and moral imputation of deeds; these we examined in chapters 1 and 2. Ricoeur aims to unify act and potency into a conception of the human being that goes beyond simply working from within the Aristotelian tradition. He does this by adding his own innovations into these two notions, and goes beyond Aristotle’s analysis of habit in the Nicomachean Ethics as well.

In an article by Richard Kearney entitled, “Capable Man, Capable God” the innovative reading of Aristotle’s *energeia* and *dunamis* is explained as an effort to overcome the dualism of these two terms. This overcoming of the dualism begins for Ricoeur by taking aim at Aristotle’s elevation of *act over potency* as in the case of an builder (architect) who is only a builder while she is building and therefore not strictly-speaking a builder while asleep, but only a potential builder. According to Kearney it is through the notion of work (*ergon*) that one can think of the builder as on-the-road-to-being-a-builder, prior to an actual building project. Ricoeur’s notion of attestation offers a
sense of potency that is not knowable, or subjected, to some prior notion of action. Therefore we read in Kearney that for the builder “their” capacity remains “their” right and expressive of “their” appetitus and conatus,

Their “capacity” or “potency,” no matter how ignored, retains the status of a task, a promise, a solicitation to which one can attest by responding to their “right” to liberty and recognition, their appetitus for expression, their conatus towards a good life. (Kearney 52)

Our human potential includes the contents of our consciousness (epistemic), our moral recognition of self and others, as well as the wider fields of human actions. We are capable of developing motivations, plans, tasks, and pre-figuring these actions in narratives that take life as a project to be accomplished. Potentiality and possibility are thus characteristic of the human being and not something that exists only when it is actualized.

In this tenth study of Oneself as Another Ricoeur examines other difficulties with Aristotle’s notion of potentiality and actuality (his focus is on Metaphysics 5 and 9.1-10). The polysemy of meanings with the two terms “potentiality” and “actuality” will parallel the difficulties with the ontological status of selfhood. Ricoeur’s first move is to explicate the aporia of being qua potentiality given that “potentiality” is defined in concert (and by contrast) with actuality. Two other difficulties (besides this circularity) are discussed, but since they fall outside our present discussion I only state them here without further comment: “the cosmotheology of rest, and the ‘thought of thought’” (OaA 306). At this
point – where Aristotle subordinates *dunamis* to *energeia* -- we see Ricoeur’s effort to innovate on the Aristotelian tradition:

To these three sources of difficulty … is now added a specific difficulty concerning the relation between this primitive acceptation of [the terms] being and human action. It is at this point that our entire undertaking is directly concerned. In a sense, one can in fact say that the examples drawn from human operations – seeing, understanding, living well, making things, acting (praxis) – have a paradigmatic value (OaA 306).

Kearney is, once again, very helpful with regard to making sense of Ricoeur’s effort to re-think Aristotle’s conception of potentiality and specifically the potentiality of the human agent under the rubric of selfhood. This sends us on our trajectory towards this dissertation’s final goal: the power of forgiveness to re-establish human potential and allow one to inaugurate anew. The ground for human action is this *energeia-dunamis* pair, which it is important to note is not limited to praxis (action), rather agents are both actors and potential actors. There is a paradox here, according to Ricoeur: if the ground of being is the *energeia-dunamis* pair, then activity constitutes a de-centering away from that ground with the result that “if an ontology of selfhood is possible – this is in conjunction with a ground starting from which the self can be said to be *acting*” (OaA 308). In other words, human potential (paired with action) first required a pure actor.

The second step, after the above examination of the difficulties within Aristotle, is an examination of Heidegger’s notion of *Gewissen* as developed from the period of *Being and Time*. Heidegger re-worked the *energeia-dunamis* couple and it is this innovative
interpretation that Ricoeur is following by means of the theme of *Gewissen* (moral conscience). We see here the roots of Ricoeur’s notion of attestation where in Heidegger it shows itself as a sort of “consciousness as attestation;” what Heidegger terms *Bezeugung*. This term is translatable into various English verbs: “to express”, “to witness”, “to identify”, and all together in the sense that we can say *Bezeugung* is “an expression of a witness that identifies.” Throughout *Oneself as Another* one of Ricoeur’s main hypotheses is that *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity (sameness and selfhood) involve two modes of being in addition to these two modes of meaning.94 Ricoeur says that,

Heidegger inaugurates this ontology by establishing a relation of immediate dependence between selfhood – *Selbstheit* – and the mode of being that we are in each case, as that being whose being is an issue for it, namely Dasein. It is by reason of this dependence between a modality of self-apprehension and a mode of being in the world that selfhood can figure among the existentials (OaA 309).

Ricoeur adopts from Heidegger the distinction between the two modes of being marked by the names *Dasein* and *Vorhandenheit* (ready-at-handness) for his own ontology of the self. The result of this adoption of terms that his notion of *idem*-identity (sameness) is the correlate to *Vorhandenheit*, and *ipse*-identity (selfhood) is the correlate of *Dasein* in Heidegger.

Throughout the first nine studies of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur develops what he says is a fractured sense of selfhood which begins to come into focus only in the tenth

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94 In other words this is the “ontological vehemence” of ordinary language. See Oneself as Another pages 301, and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pages 462-3.
study as something that must be unified. Ricoeur proposes that the Heideggerian notion of *Sorge* (care) both as *Besorge* (care for things) and *Fürsorge* (solicitude, care for persons) can act (at least as a preliminary model) as a unifying principle for what, up to now, he has simply termed “action”. Human action includes praxis, language, narration as well as ethico-moral determinations, yet these four areas lack an over-arching unity. In order for Ricoeur to account for the unity of the self as active and capable the sameness of the agent over time are understood as existential facets of the *ipse*-self. Selfhood is therefore marked by the potential to inaugurate new courses of action across the entire horizon of concern in the world. Ricoeur says that: “The being of the self presupposes the totality of a world that is the horizon of its thinking, acting, feeling – in short, of its *care*” (OaA 310), with the result that ontologically Heidegger’s notion of *Sorge* (care) is equivalent to Ricoeur’s notion of our capable being.

In what Ricoeur admits is a “convoluted path,” that is, “fraught with pitfalls” he aims to re-appropriate Aristotle’s ontology through Heidegger in order to perform an ontological reading of his own hermeneutics of the self (OaA 311). Regarding this difficult task he says that,

In any event, the kind of plurality that Aristotle preserves by leaving theoria, praxis, and poiesis side-by-side seems to me to agree better with the sort of philosophy I prefer, one that is not too quick to unify the field of human

95 “Action”, as we have seen, took the four forms in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self as speech acts, actions, narrative acts, and moral actions of imputation and responsibility.
experience from on high, as is the case of the philosophies from which I distanced myself in the Introduction (OaA 312).

Principal to this endeavor is to formulate an account of selfhood that is founded upon both the actuality of being in the world as well as the potentiality to inaugurate new forms of being in the world.

**Essentia Actuosa: A Note on Spinoza**

I want to repeat an insightful comment by Spinoza which Ricoeur quotes:

> We should not, however, forget that the passage from inadequate ideas, which we form about ourselves and about things, to adequate ideas signifies for us the possibility of being truly active. In this sense, the power to act can be said to be increased by the retreat of passivity tied to inadequate ideas (*Ethics*, bk. 3, prop. 1, proof and corollary). (316).

Ricoeur says that this conquest of inactivity by adequate ideas makes Spinoza’s *Ethics*, as a whole, an ethics; this means that there is a strong connection between thought and action. Thus there is a close connection between the internal dynamism, worthy of the name of life and the power of the intelligence, which governs the passage from inadequate to adequate ideas. In this sense, we are powerful when we understand adequately our horizontal and external dependence with respect to all things, and our vertical and immanent dependence with respect to the primordial power that Spinoza continues to name “God” (OaA 316).
3.2 Selfhood and Otherness

It is helpful to recall the three dialectics developed throughout *Oneself as Another*. The first dialectic (discussed below in Chapter 1) concerned reflection and analysis on *persons and things* as seen for instance in our discussion of Parfit’s “My Division”. The second dialectic (discussed below in Chapter 2) concerned the two forms of identity: sameness (*idem*) versus selfhood (*ipse*). This third dialectic concerning sameness and otherness is “primary” and “more fundamental” than the first two (OaA 317). Otherness is not something to be reduced to the otherness of other persons alone, but instead otherness is found *within* selfhood itself. The Other, as we shall see, is not to be “reduced… to the otherness of another Person” (OaA 317). Otherness, as the title of his work suggests, also inhabits oneself. We have seen in our analysis of the “little ethics” that the self is divisible into the senses of sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*) according to their temporal natures. Ricoeur’s goal is to explicate how otherness is at work within selfhood by means of a dual vocabulary taken from phenomenological discourse and ontological discourse. On this point Ricoeur suggests,

In order to determine our vocabulary here, let us posit that the *phenomenological* respondent [sic] to the metacategory of otherness is the variety of experiences of passivity, intertwined in multiple ways in human action. The term “otherness” is then reserved for speculative discourse, while passivity becomes *the* attestation of otherness (318).

This quote – like so much of Ricoeur – is dense in its eloquence and subtle in its reasoning. The latent meaning of the dialectic of the self *qua* other (oneself as another) is
that selfhood is fractured. The fracture is between a passivity before otherness and an assurance that one is a self. The language of “vocabulary” and “discourse” tells us that the fracturing of the self is – at least here – on the plane of language. The speculative discourse of philosophy, as for instance with Descartes’s cogito, is the very otherness to which the self passively attests. If we characterize the Cartesian cogito’s claim of apodictic certainty that “I am, I exist,” then the passivity of attestation to the otherness of this voice of speculative discourse is the credible, trusting, assurance that “yes, indeed I exist… in the mode of selfhood. Speculative reason, the voice of the cogito, is an other to our own selfhood. Our own personhood is an other to our selfhood which is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Since the Introduction of Oneself as Another, and in keeping with his overall philosophical endeavors, Ricoeur seeks to work within the atopos between an “exalted” cogito and a “humiliated” anti-cogito. Badiou, as we will see, plays close to the position of the humiliated anti-cogito – a sense of Subjectivity (capital S) that owes its origins to external events of truth. “Truth” is to be understood in the sense of a course that is traced by the event through a given historical and epistemic situation in an irruptive sense akin to a scientific revolution. Ricoeur’s working hypothesis for this investigation of the otherness inherent in the self’s attestation of its own actions and sufferings within the world is what he calls a “triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness” (OaA 318). This triad includes what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh of the body and its passivity in the face of the other planes are body-as-flesh, and the “foreign” (étranger) found in other physical persons and things.

96 The other planes are body-as-flesh, and the “foreign” (étranger) found in other physical persons and things.
of otherness; it includes the self in the face of the utterly foreign; third, it includes the relation of the self to itself in what Heidegger calls Gewissen and what we more generally call the conscience. The conscience is itself attestation in the very real sense that it is the self at the point where it confronts its own passivity.

The Gravity of the Body

Ricoeur finally begins in earnest his ontological treatment of the self through the dimension of suffering when he states that, “[u]ndergoing and enduring are, in a sense, revealed in their complete passive dimension when they become suffering” (OaA 320). The figure of the suffering individual first surfaces within narratives where disparate events are emplotted (mise en intrigue) with one another. On the moral plane this was seen with Kant’s adaptation of the Golden Rule where the agent aims to treat others as they reasonably think all rational agents should be treated, viz., according to universal moral laws. However, suffering does not fully manifest itself until we grasp the decrease in one’s capacity to retell one’s stories which directly limits one’s power-to-act. Thus, a decrease in our acting is a corresponding decrease in our very existence. In the language of Spinoza this would be a decrease in our conatus: "each thing, as far as it lies in itself, strives to persevere in its being" (Ethics, part 3, prop. 6). “Victimization appears,”

97 We examined this notion of “emplotment” (mise en intrigue) when we discussed narrative in chapter 1. The basic idea with any narrative is that disparate events are made consonant by means of putting-things-into-intriguing relations with one another.

98 Regarding Spinoza’s notion of conatus Ricoeur would later say in a 2003 interview: “And in one sense what I find intriguing about Spinoza’s notion of conatus is that it refuses the alternative between act and potency, between energeia and dunamis. For Spinoza each concrete thing or event is always a mélange of act and possibility.” From an interview with Richard Kearney, Anne B. Kearney, and Fabrizio Turoldo, republished under the title “On Life Stories” in On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva, Ashgate, Burlington VT, USA, 2004, Page 168
according to Ricoeur, “as passivity’s underside, casting a gloom over the ‘glory’ of action” (OaA 320). Victimization sits then at the very center of the notion of “evil” as developed not only by Ricoeur, but is also characteristic of medieval Scholastic notions of evil as a privation of a good. We will see that for Badiou this notion of evil is to be resisted since it is rooted only in the human animal therefore lacking a relationship with truth as he understands it. This and other traditional ethical notions of evil do not apply for Badiou down to the level of the mere human animal who seeks its own happiness.

The passivity of the body is understood in terms of the fact that the other which impinges on my own self. Following Maine de Biran, Ricoeur argues that the Cartesian inspired “I am” of the ego is displaced by a phenomenological conception of the self which departs from the equating of existence with substance. In its place de Biran maintains that it is potency and act which are essential to the human agent in the sense that “I can act, I can desire, I can move, I can tell my story, and so forth” (OaA 221). What this “potency” means is that the body has “gravity” in more ways than one. The body has what we could variously call inertia, mass, weight and pressure within the world – it is a physical thing.

Another problematic concern with the body is its phenomenological distinction from the “flesh.” This distinction of “body” and “flesh”, Ricoeur reminds us, comes from the “Fifth Meditation” of Husserl’s Cartesian Meditations (CM) under the concept of “pairing” (Paarung), or the “forming of a plurality” (Husserl, CM 112). In the course of developing his ontology of the body Husserl says that “[p]airing is a primal form of that passive synthesis which we designate as ‘association’, in contrast to passive synthesis of ‘identification’” (Husserl, CM 112). The characteristic trait of an “associative”, as
opposed to an “identifying”, passive synthesis, is we have two (or more) data points intuited, whether they are consciously perceived or not, and in their “mutual distinctness they found phenomenologically a unity of similarity” as a “pair”. Identification on the other hand is “the fundamental form of synthesis” experience as the “continuous consciousness of internal time” (Husserl, CM 41).

“Body”, according to Husserl, is “my animate organism as uniquely singled out” to which “I ascribe fields of sensation” as the only “Object ‘in’ which I ‘rule and govern’ immediately” (Husserl, CM 97). The kinesthesias of the body “are subject to my ‘I can’” such that I find that my body is not only related to Nature, but also “is reflexively related to itself also in practice” (Husserl, CM 97). The body is reflexively related to all other bodies in that it always finds itself “here” whilst all other bodies are given as “there” (Husserl, CM 116). Of course, I can move my body from this “here” over to “there” by utilizing my legs to walk “over there”. In working out how an ego is paired with an alter-ego Husserl describes how my body “here” pairs another [human] body in its “There” through “assimilative apperception”:

“But, since the other body there enters into a pairing association with my body here and, being given perceptually, becomes the core of an appresentation, the core of my experience of a coexisting ego, that ego, according to the whole sense-giving course of the association, must be appresented as an ego now coexisting in the mode There, ‘such as I should be if I were there’” (Husserl, CM119).

This means that there is an ego that is appresented as other than my own ego, an alter-ego. The pairing of these two primitive sense data (ego and alter-ego) means that the
“body” of the other is not a “body among other bodies” (Körper) but is akin to “my own flesh” (Leib). Pairing is therefore fundamentally intersubjective.

“Flesh” Ricoeur says is the “mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness” (OaA 318). Bodies are things within the world with relations to other corporeal things found in space. By contrast, flesh is not located within space and time as “here and now” as opposed to “there and then.” Instead, flesh is non-spatial although “here and now” is where the flesh always remains because it remains bodily. Flesh is essentially the seat of our “mineness” or of my own-most self. For instance, our perception of the world is located within the flesh as it is capable of moving to change its particular perceptions – such as when I turn my head round and cast by gaze on what is behind me.

Flesh and Pathos

Perhaps the most crucial dimension of Ricoeur’s conception of flesh which separates it from body is how it relates to pathos: human emotions, passions, and sufferings. The most common academic approach to pathos usually begins with Aristotle’s treatment of logos, ethos, and pathos is his Rhetoric. For Aristotle “it is not enough to know what we ought to say; we must also say it as we ought” (1403b 23-25). Naturally his primary concern in the Rhetoric is for a speaker to create pathopoeia, that is, rhetoric that is emotionally moving. Pathos however has a much broader meaning and in Ricoeur’s early work Fallible Man he explores our fallible nature under the heading of our pathétique. Each of us experiences suffering in the form of the gap or fault between how we desire to act against the reality of how we have actually acted in the world.
Commenting on Ricoeur’s conception of the *pathétique* in human experience Rebecca Huskey says, “My first experience of this aspect of myself comes not in the form of rational thought, but in *pathos*, a feeling of searching, perplexity, and misery”.

Throughout Ricoeur’s career *pathos* informs his philosophical anthropology developing through his conception of flesh to what is perhaps his most important philosophical concern: our capable being. Ricoeur explains that “I have adopted in my works on philosophical anthropology a condensed expression that serves as a heading for detailed analyses, the expression *capable man*. Under this expression I gather all the figures of power and impotence, as indicated by linguistic constructions using the auxiliary verb “can”. Power is the whole of what I can do; impotence, the sum of what I cannot. In the broad sense of the word, it is about an approach to the human phenomenon in terms of acting and suffering, of *praxis* and *pathos*.”

Commenting on the link between flesh and pathos Richard Kearney says that “Flesh is the place where we *exist* in the world as both suffering and acting, pathos and praxis, resistance and effort.”

Throughout this dissertation we are exploring how *pathos* and *praxis* are interpreted by agents who can speak about, narrate, and impute actions to themselves. The poetics of narrative’s “mimetic displacement,” according to Robert Savage, “opens

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the way to exploring the pathos of the human condition”102. Pathos as experienced by our flesh is contextualized by narrative in relation to our causal limitations, and “our historical condition” Savage adds that “[a]ctions’ mimetic transposition to the fictive world of narrative in turn augments the practical field of our everyday experiences when, through seeing how the actions of the story’s protagonists affect others’ lives as well as their own, we reevaluate our own convictions, beliefs, and modes of conduct.” He continues by pointing out that in tragedy “[t]he depth of pathos -- the suffering -- that in tragedy accompanies action attests to the violence, injustice, and overwhelming circumstances that afflict human affairs.”103 If we can say that Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology is focused on our capable being then we must include in our investigation our capacity to suffer. His hermeneutics as outlined in Oneself as Another has four parts: we can act, we can speak, we can narrate, and we can be morally imputable; however, we have to include our capacity to suffer. The experience of forgiveness is one important manner in which we can relieve the pathologies our flesh experiences in life.

Another manner to help understand the relationship of flesh to body can be demonstrated in the ways in which phenomenological time and space are inscribed within cosmological time and space: calendars and maps. A calendar locates the phenomenon of the flesh within the cycles of the heavens just as a map locates the flesh qua body within spatial coordinates. Inscription of this nature is important to this dissertation when we deal with the criticism leveled by Badiou that the self is intentionally concealed by

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103 Robert Savage, page 3.
Ricoeur, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, who aims to examine the inscription of memory and history within the human agent. To understand properly the self’s relation to memory, history, and forgetting we need to understand Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self. Badiou fails to take this rather complicated hermeneutics into account. The flesh appears on one’s birth certificate which records the time and place of birth. Ricoeur explains:

> For my flesh appears as a body among bodies only to the extent that I am myself an *other* among all the others, in the apprehension of a common nature, woven, as Husserl says, out of the network of intersubjectivity – itself, unlike Husserl’s conception, founding selfhood in its own way (OaA 326).

How am I capable of understanding myself-as-another? It is because my flesh is distinct from my body. There is however another side to this ontology of the flesh/body dialectic and it is formulated by Heidegger as thrownness (*geworfenheit*). Flesh is also marked by an “opening” to the world wherein it becomes a task for itself. The strangeness (alienation) of the self with itself can be identified according to how the agent situates the task for itself in terms of having-to-be. According to Ricoeur, Heidegger does not develop this conception of the self’s thrownness due to his emphasis on the fear instilled by Dasein’s anticipatory resoluteness towards death (Cf. OaA 326). Authenticity for Heidegger includes the spatiality of the body as one body among other bodies in the world, but his phenomenology holds that these relations with things are merely “ready-at-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*), and not “present-at-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*) in the authentic sense. The inauthentic sense of Dasein is where the self is concerned not with itself, but with objects it can manipulate.
At this point we are finished our examination of the selfhood as determined by otherness through a description of an ontology of the body supported by the contribution of Biran, Husserl, and Heidegger. We now move on to the second of three ways in which the self is related to metacategory of otherness: the otherness of other persons.

- **“The Otherness of Other People”**

The background to this discussion is the difference between an egology such as found in Descartes’ *cogito* and a hermeneutics of selfhood which views the self as recognizing only itself through the affections produced by otherness in oneself and other agents.

The first instance of the exchange between the self and others can be seen at the level of linguistic exchanges of designating or accusation where the other makes claims about the self’s actions as an agent. I can speak about what I have done, yet the other can speak about what I have done as well. Further, I am affected by what others say with regards to my own agency. The same exchange between self and other occurs at the narrative levels of memory and history, as well as at the ethico-moral level when others find me responsible as an agent.

As we have seen, Ricoeur’s philosophy of selfhood is founded on the *ipseity* of the agent as capable of identifying itself over time. The dialectic between the self and other, he claims, “is impossible to construct… in a unilateral manner” (OaA 331). Instead, he develops a two-prong conception “that is homogeneous with the fundamental distinction between two ideas of the same,” namely the *ipse*- and *idem*-identity we have been examining (OaA 331).
What is at issue here with this distinction between *ipse-* and *idem-*identity is the nature of our “ownness”. Even in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* Descartes discourses with his readers even though they are not present with him at his desk while writing his meditations. Solicitude with others is present throughout the *Meditations* despite the rhetoric of *methodical doubt* culminating in the fiction of an “evil genius”. Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and Lévinas’ philosophy of the Other are marked by the same philosophical reasoning regarding their treatment of the other as if we were capable of doubting the existence of other persons – or positing them in so extreme a manner.

“The only path then left open to us,” Ricoeur claims, “is that of constituting the senses of the other ‘in’ (German, *in*) and ‘on the basis of’ (*aus*) the sense of the I” (OaA 332). This constituting in the sense of the ego though must confront the “vertible rebellion” against any philosophical project that aims to posit the “otherness of other people” through any sense of “ownness” (OaA 332). Our first focus here is an examination of Husserl’s *epoché* (i.e., the “suspension” or “bracketing of all external existence,”).

- **Others and Appresentation**

Husserl uses the term “appresentation” (*Appräsentation*) to express how language, symbols, and signs function with regard to the presence of things that posit something else which is not present. For Husserl, appresentation is the foundational mode by which the intuitions (intentions, thoughts and memories) of others are “received” by the phenomenological self. An unbridgeable gap seems to exist between originary intuitions and their appresentation. It is impossible for the self to re-present the thoughts of another to itself, because the intentionality of the other is given as something that exceeds a self’s ability to live the experiences of others. The body and mind of the other is “over there”
through an analogical transfer of my own flesh (affectivity) onto the other body *as if* by analogy. Ricoeur clarifies what this means by stating that, “apprehending a body over there as flesh *is* appresentation itself as such” (italics original, OaA 332).

What Ricoeur argues is that there is an analogical transfer of the ego to an alter-ego through appresentation and the pairing of flesh to flesh. In other words the ego confers upon its alter-ego a likeness to itself such that the ego can say, “she thinks like me” (OaA 334). The gap which Husserl recognized and called appresentation cannot be bridged for sure, but it is the gap which gives meaning to the analogical language of “likeness,” as we so often claim in life that these other persons think “like” we do in the sense that they too say, “I”. Ricoeur says that the “marvel” of the analogical transfer from the self to the other, from flesh to flesh is found in natural language such as when I say, “she thinks” what I mean is that “she says in her heart: I think” (OaA 335).

- **Husserl contra Lévinas and vice versa**

Ricoeur places Husserl in a philosophical confrontation with Lévinas at the point where each of the latter two develops his own “strategic” hyperbolic ontological distinction between the Same and the Other within their phenomenology. The aim of this confrontation is “to challenge the modern philosophical conception of selfhood determined as posited ego” (Cohen 128) versus the anti-cogito of Nietzsche. Ricoeur therefore takes up two points of view in this confrontation: the analytical position and the hermeneutical position. For the latter his focus is on Edmund Husserl where the movement is from the Sameness of the phenomenological subject outwards to the Other. Lévinas, representative of the former position, focuses his attention of the movement
from the Other to the Sameness that marks the place of the individual ego. Ricoeur claims that these two opposing movements are “dialectically complementary” for the one unfolds the “gnoseological\textsuperscript{104} dimension of sense,” while the other unfolds the “ethical dimension of injunction” (OaA 340-341).

At the heart of both of these theoretical and methodological movements is an analogical transfer between the Same and the Other – either in one direction or the other. Ricoeur says that his own work, specifically *Oneself as Another*, is “directed against a conception of the identity of the Same, to which the otherness of the Other is diametrically opposed, but at a level of radicality where the distinction I propose between two sorts of identity that of *ipse* and *idem*, cannot be taken into account” (OaA 335). What is missing in both Husserl and Lévinas is this distinction of identity where self-designation issues forth as witnessed in natural language – especially with personal pronouns. In essence, the sharp dichotomy between Same and Other ignores the sense of speaking of self in terms of my being a subject of discourse, of action, of narration and of moral imputation.

The result of the hyperbolic ontological distinction between the Same and the Other within Husserl’s phenomenology results in a conception of the self that is both idealist and solipsistic. On the other hand, for Lévinas, this hyperbolic ontological distinction of Same and Other results in an openness towards radical otherness which results in a total substitution of the self (sameness) for the Other (Cf. OaA 338). In each

\textsuperscript{104}Gnoseological is the study of knowledge generally speaking; however, for Husserl it is the phenomenological study of the contents of our consciousness.
case there is a hoped for “break” from the interior to the exterior or vice versa as the case might be. The necessity of a break arises, according to Ricoeur, from a great pretension at the heart of these two philosophies which is precisely this assumption of an absolute state of separation premised on the categories of Same and Other.

The way forward at this point is through a dialectic of Same and Other which, “attests that here the Other is not only the counterpart of the Same but belongs to the intimate constitution of its sense” (OaA 329). An example of how the Other belongs to the constitution of the Same is found with Ricoeur’s analysis of the promise. Eventually we will investigate in this dissertation the temporal opposite to the future-orientation of promising in the past-oriented experience of forgiving. In both cases of promising and forgiving I would not be capable of making a promise or acting on forgiveness if there were no one on the other end who was counting on me, or otherwise accountable to me.

3.3 Phronēsis, Gewissen, Moral Conscience

It is best that we begin with clear definitions for our two key terms here: phronēsis and Gewissen. We hear first from Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics when describes the phronetic person (phronemos): “Now, the capacity of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself is regarded as typical of a man of practical wisdom – not deliberating well about what is good and advantageous in a partial sense, for example, what contributes to health or strength, but what sort of thing contributes to the good life in general” (1140a 25-28). Further defining the term phronēsis he says it “is a truthful characteristic of acting rationally in matters good and bad for a person” (1140b 5). The
chief complaint by Heidegger and others\textsuperscript{105} is that Aristotle’s notion of \textit{phronēsis} lacks a universalism being characteristically parochial since the agent must be situated within a particular community. Second, we read Heidegger’s confrontation with \textit{phronēsis} in the course of his fundamental ontology of \textit{Being and Time}. For his part \textit{phronēsis} is re-worked under the term \textit{Gewissen} which he defines as, “nothing other than conscience set into motion, making an action transparent. Conscience cannot be forgotten.”\textsuperscript{106} As with so much of Ricoeur’s work that takes the reader through long detours he warns us that, “To hold conscience – in the sense of the German \textit{Gewissen} – to be the place of an original form of the dialectic between selfhood and otherness is an enterprise fraught with difficulties” (OaA 341).

Ricoeur identifies three challenges to this ontological investigation. First, the “metaphor of the voice” means that notions such as “good” or “bad” conscience are suspect. This he says will, “provide the opportunity to put to the test the claim that the attestation of selfhood is inseparable from an exercise of suspicion” (OaA 341). Second, even if this suspicion could be lifted, “does not conscience itself denote a phenomenon distinct from the attestation of our power-to-be?” (OaA 341). Here the aim is to investigate whether we can make the notions of \textit{injunction} and \textit{debt} more precise within


\textsuperscript{106} Cf. Martin Heidegger, \textit{Plato’s Sophist}, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1997, page 39: “Certainly the explication which Aristotle gives here (NE 1140b28ff) is very meager. But it is nevertheless clear from the context that we would not be going too far in our interpretation by saying that Aristotle has here come across the phenomenon of conscience. \textit{Phronēsis} is nothing other than conscience set into motion, making an action transparent. Conscience cannot be forgotten. But it is quite possible that what is disclosed by conscience can be distorted and allowed to be ineffective through \textit{hedone} [pleasure] and \textit{lupe} [pain], through the passions. Conscience always announces itself.”
the presence of the, “nonmoral [sic] version of conscience” (OaA 341). Third, if the phenomena of injunction and debt are prerequisites of conscience, then is the otherness of injunction and debt any different from the otherness of the other? We investigated the “test” of the moral injunction in chapter 2 during our examination of the deontological moment of the “ethical intention.” The latter phenomena of “debt” we have not touched upon thus far, but it moves us closer to the experience of forgiveness in the sense that there is an experience of indebtedness to the past – our ancestors especially. Both injunction and debt though point to a sense of otherness as an authority or superior which speaks to us.

The metaphor of the voice serves as a clue in this investigation given the fact that major ethical concepts engender a sort of voice from on high that tells us to seek the good life, to follow the moral law, and to treat others as ends-in-themselves. It is within conscience itself that fictions about the self are mixed with the veracity of attestation with the result that we are suspicious of moral injunctions and indebtedness. The moral voice and the voice of conscience possess a vertical structure whereby the self feels “called-upon” for instance by the Heideggerian “the They” of Being and Time, as well as Kant’s moral law. The self is passive in other words before the voice of the other – and we could even draw Lévinas back into this point about the passivity of the self before the other. Ricoeur says here that: “It is the vertical nature of the call, equal to its interiority that creates the enigma of the phenomenon of conscience” (OaA 342). A similar vertical structure will be found in our examination of forgiveness in the seventh and final chapter as a counter-part to the “depths of fault.”
Does Moral Conscience equate to Bad Conscience?

Let us begin by stating that the notion of “bad conscience” involves an agent’s reaction which always comes too late in the form of a remorse, repentance, regret – sometimes with a corresponding optative wish for forgiveness. “Good conscience”, for the sake of clarity, is for individuals who are mad enough to proclaim, “I am good” – for Heidegger this is the reserve of “the They” (Das Man). Thus, our question: is the moral conscience a bad conscience?

For Ricoeur attestation mingles being-true with being-false through a process of emplotment (mise en intrigue) whereby disparate events in one’s life are put into a coherent narrative. Some of our life events are truthfully recounted, while others are either excluded (forgotten) or are invented (falsified). If for instance I were to recall my academic career the overall narrative to which I would likely attest to would be incomplete and not “the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” This overlapping of the true and the false is the very nature of attestation. “Conscience is,” Ricoeur says, “in truth, that place par excellence in which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with the veracity of attestation” (OaA 341). As with so much that Ricoeur says, this is a highly reasonable and accurate assessment of the human agent’s self-characterization of the events in its own life. The human being truly is all too human.

In Kant’s moral philosophy we find the commanding voice of reason which produces the good-will. The metaphor of a voice suggests that conscience exhibits passivity before a voice which is both within (our faculty of reason) and without as a voice that commands us regardless of our personal heterogeneous desires and
inclinations. In *Being and Time* Heidegger places this voice under the name of “the They” who speaks to the conscience (*Gewissen*) as an otherness outside of the self. How can conscience separate itself from the They? Heidegger suggests a “call” (German, *Ruf*) of conscience by which the self is called upon by its own agency. Ricoeur characterizes the relationship of the They with the conscience (*Gewissen*) as the vertical relationship mentioned in the section above. It is worth emphasizing that, “it is the vertical nature of the call, equal to its interiority, which creates the enigma of the phenomena of the conscience” (342). It is “equal to its interiority” in the sense that we have within conscience the voice of an agent who is appealing to itself. This sets up a dissymmetry of the self with this voice from on high as it were; however, the difficulty here is that the moralizing of this voice conceals our philosophical investigation of it.

Heideggerian *Gewissen* (conscience) does not belong to a moral vision of the world, rather it belongs to another dialectic – that of the acting consciousness and the judging consciousness, according to Ricoeur. He says that in their confrontation with each other, “the ‘pardon’ resulting from the mutual recognition of the two antagonists who admit the limits of their viewpoints and renounce their partiality denotes the authentic phenomenon of conscience” (OaA 343). This confrontation begins in Hegel’s criticism of Kant based on three postulates: i) the moral commands of reason demand that they be done in the real world (in nature) regardless of our desires (our nature); ii) the

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108 Hegel and Nietzsche understood at least this much about the nature of the relationship of the conscience with the voice of morality – especially as it was developed by Kant. It is for this reason that they were suspicious of the moral consciousness.
moral voice is out of harmony with nature – what is is out of harmony with what ought to be; iii) the result of these two postulates according to Hegel is that the moral consciousness is held by suspicion as being external the natural world. Ricoeur remarks, “that Hegel misrepresents Kant … in constructing his postulates” (OaA 343). This misrepresentation of Kant by Hegel is instructive because it makes clear the lack of resemblance (dissemblance) of the self with itself; dissemblance of moral conscience with the desiring self. The self who morally judges is out of harmony with the self who acts within the world. We shall see this gap between an inner moral conscience and the self’s causal impacts in the world again in our last chapter when we investigate the gap between inner intentional causality and the external results of action. The gap will be addressed as the self’s experience of “fault”.

Ricoeur moves from Hegel to Nietzsche, specifically to the second essay of The Genealogy of Morals where Nietzsche develops a genealogy of bad conscience of moral guilt, in order to examine the prospect of an innocent will to power. Nietzsche argues that punishment has the darkest of primordial origins – it is not in response to the constitution of the human being, that is of being-guilty, and not because people are responsible agents. Rather, Nietzsche points out that guilt (Shuld) springs from a concrete sense of debt (Schulden) and he says that “for every damage there could somehow be found an equivalent, by which that damage might be compensated – if necessary in the pain of the doer.”109 The implication here is that if the origin of guilt is merely concrete debts, then every regime of punishment is a manifestation of a will to power. Further, whenever one

109 Nietzsche, Frederick, The Genealogy of Morals, second essay, section IV.
feels “justified” in meting out punishment this feeling of justification itself is a manifestation of a bad conscience. Ricoeur’s cross-examination of Nietzsche here is only three pages in length, but he makes it clear that: “All that matters to me here is the force of the suspicion, implicit in Hegel, explicit in Nietzsche, that conscience is equated with ‘bad conscience’” (OaA 347). The “force of the suspicion” found in Hegel and Nietzsche runs counter to attestation (credence in selfhood), yet there is no possibility here of simply reversing suspicion with attestation. We must seek another way out of the circle of “good” versus “bad” conscience.

Ricoeur’s analysis of the metaphor of the moral voice as it was critiqued by Hegel and Nietzsche culminates in the position that even though they both equate “moral conscience” with “bad conscience” we cannot simply reverse this position and claim that “moral conscience” is “good conscience.” Further, this analysis suggests that we cannot simply remove “moral conscience” from conscience in order to avoid this difficulty opened by Hegel’s phenomenology.

- From the De-Moralized Conscience to Conviction

Our goal now is to investigate whether moral conscience can be saved from the good conscience of the They (Das Man) and the bad conscience of remorse. For Heidegger the call of conscience is towards Dasein’s authenticity which involves a removal from everydayness and the They (Das Man). We will now see how Ricoeur proposes a close association of attestation (Bezeugung) with [moral] injunction.
The second challenge regarding any understanding of conscience stems from Ricoeur’s analysis of being-in-debt found in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* which forms the basis for moral guilt. Morality in other words cannot be primary since it is dependent upon Dasein’s existential indebtedness. The origin of this being-in-debt is the voice of conscience which is a call, but a silent call without any commands, unlike what we see in Kant’s moral voice of reason. This particular voice identified by Heidegger calls us in our own-most potentiality-to-be as a conscience for which existence is its concern. “I am guilty” does not mean for Heidegger that “I am guilty – therefore I am indebted to another,” rather it is our fundamental mode of being.

At the center of this conception of conscience is a nullity – Dasein does not master itself either in terms of the fallenness of *geworfenheit* (thrownness) or its affections – we do not chose to be born, we do not chose to be the beings that we are for whom being *is* the foremost issue of our concern (*Sorge*). What conscience cares for is its own existence – its ownmost possibilities which can be properly viewed as a contribution to Nietzsche’s will to power.

What about a “good” or a “bad” conscience? For Heidegger the “good” conscience belongs to the inauthenticity of the “They,” and the “bad” conscience is a later, and hence secondary, reaction too late to constitute an aspect of care (*Sorge*). “Bad” conscience in the common-sense meaning of feeling guilty and having remorse belongs

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110 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Part I, Division 2, ¶58, H. 281. Regarding the “call of conscience” Heidegger asks whether “the call either addresses Dasein as ‘Guilty!’, or, as in the case when the conscience gives warning, refers to a possible ‘Guilty!’, or affirms, as a ‘good’ conscience, that one is ‘conscious of guilt’?”
to the everydayness of Dasein. (We see a similar view of moral consciousness in Badiou where the ethical impulse to reduce violence is viewed as coming after the fact and therefore not belonging to a more fundamental truth-event.) Again, the central concern (Sorge) for Dasein is its potentiality-for-being and moral conscience is rejected by Heidegger as a form of conscience that remains subject to the everydayness of the “They” – therefore it is inauthentic. However, “Being guilty” is an existentiell (not existential) possibility that belongs to the Being of Dasein and, “must be conceived as a potentiality-for-Being-guilty” (BT, H306). Regarding the actualization of Dasein’s potentiality Heidegger adds: “Only when it ‘qualifies’ itself as Being-towards-death does resoluteness understand the ‘can’ of its potentiality-for-Being-guilty” (“Das ‘kann’ des Schuldigseinkönnens versteht die Entscholssenheit erst, wenn sie sich als Sein zum Tode “qualifiziert””) (BT H307).

Heidegger’s rejection of the moral conscience means that the critical function of conscience is completely remote from the self’s concern for its ownmost being – Dasein is a being for whom being is at issue. What remains, according to Ricoeur, after the de-moralization of conscience is a notion of attestation (Bezeugung) in Heidegger that “is truly a kind of understanding, but one that cannot be reduced to knowing something. The meaning of attestation is now sealed: ‘calling forth and summoning us to Being-guilty (Schuldigsein) [being-in-debt]’ (p. 341 [H.295])” (OaA 350). Heidegger adds to the summoning to our potentiality-for-being what he calls our anticipatory resoluteness

111 “One would completely misunderstand the phenomenon of resoluteness if one should want to suppose that this consists simply in taking up possibilities which have been proposed and recommended,
towards death. For Heidegger being-guilty (*Schuldigsein*) means that Dasein in resolute with regards to being-a-whole ultimately characterized by being-towards-death.

Responding to an impoverishment of the ethical in Heidegger’s close association of attestation to resoluteness (towards-death) Ricoeur suggests that debt (*Schuld*) is hastily ontologized, with the result that indebtedness (*Schuldenheit*) is eclipsed thus de-moralizing Dasein. Ricoeur opposes Heidegger’s de-moralized conscience by closely associating *injunction* with *attestation* (OaA 351). To address the de-moralized ontology of Dasein Ricoeur suggests returning to the metaphor of the court, such as a court of law. The court’s dictates (its voice) have the form of injunction (“enjoining” verdicts) that is similar to the second and third parts of the ethical intention: “to live with and for others, in just institutions.” Moral injunction constitutes “the moment of otherness” within conscience because being-enjoined reflects a relation of the self with the other. Ricoeur illuminates his philosophical position regarding attestation by means of the quite deliberate use of the legal phrase “being-enjoined”. It means *to be called* [by a court] to do a specific action, cease conduct, or otherwise be prohibited from certain actions. He says that the voice of injunction (being-enjoined) is a “moment of otherness proper to the phenomenon of conscience” (OaA 351). Returning here is the first ethico-moral injunction examined under the sign of our “ethical intention” in the “little ethics”. This injunction leads to a reinterpretation of otherness: I am called to live *with* others; I am called to live *for* others; I am called to live with others in just institutions. Added to our

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ethical intention is a second injunction to love one another; Ricoeur specifically identifies
the injunction in the Song of Songs: “Thou, love me!” There is an “upward slope” here
from the prohibition to kill others (commit violence) back up to the injunction to live well
with others. Ricoeur says that we must “continue to follow its course all the way to moral
choices in situation” (OaA 351-352). These first two injunctions meet with a third
injunction in the form of convictions. Conviction marks “a recourse to the as yet
unexplored resources of ethics” (OaA 352). With this Ricoeur turns away from
Heidegger’s claim that the voice of conscience says nothing when it calls:

If this is so, the passivity of being-enjoined consists in the situation of listening in
which the ethical subject is placed in relation to the voice addressed to it in the
second person. To find oneself called upon in the second person at the very core
of the optative113 of living well, then of the prohibition to kill, then of the search
for the choice appropriate to the situation, is to recognize oneself as being
enjoined to live well with and for others in just institutions and to esteem oneself
as the bearer of this wish (italics original, OaA 352).

« la passivité de l’être-enjoint consiste dans la situations d’écoute dans laquelle le
sujet éthique se trouve placé par rapport à la voix qui lui est adressée à la seconde
personne. Se trouver interpellé à la seconde personne au coeur de l’optatif du
bien vivre, puis de l’interdiction de tuer, puis de la recherche du choix approprié
à la situation, c’est se reconnaître enjoint de vivre bien avec et par les autres

113 “Optative” refers to the grammatical mood of desire or wishing such as “I wish that things had turned-
out differently.” We will see this optative mood again when we examine forgiveness in chapter 7.
The call of conscience is thus this triad of being-enjoined, in the second-person, from an voice of otherness within selfhood. It calls us to live well with others, to not commit violence against others, and to hold the convictions of our ethical intention. It is a “wish” because the language of the ethical intention is in the optative mood of desiring and aiming towards a good life and not a certain outcome.

Conscience and the Chiasmus of Attestation and Injunction

The final difficulty confronts the temptation to say that the otherness of the Other is embodied in other persons. Ricoeur begins with a short criticism of Hegel claiming that he leaves us “puzzled with the identity of the other,” and in between an anthropological and theological interpretation of otherness (OaA 353). Ricoeur next confronts Freud’s psychoanalytic reading of moral conscience as the superego which instills voices from our ancestors to whom we are most certainly indebted, yet this does not “exhaust the phenomenon of injunction” (OaA 353).

Ricoeur opposes both Heidegger’s “reduction of being-in-the-world to the strange(r)ness tied to the facticity of being-in-the-world,” and Lévinas’s “symmetrical reduction of the otherness of conscience to the externality of the other manifested in his face” (OaA 354). Ricoeur argues for another modality of otherness in the form of an injunction to act: “namely being enjoined as the structure of selfhood” (OaA 354).

Attestation and injunction must be held separate. If injunction comes from attestation and not the other, then it is no longer properly speaking an injunction. If attestation is devoid of injunction, then conscience loses all moral character. If injunction is not a part of attestation then the injunction risks not being heard. Ricoeur stresses the chiasmus of attestation and injunction stating that,

The profound unity of self-attestation and of the injunction coming from the other justifies the acknowledgement, in its irreducible specificity, of the modality of otherness corresponding, on the plane of the ‘great kinds,’ [i.e., Same and Other] to the passivity of conscience on the phenomenological plane (OaA 355).

In other words, as the title of *Oneself as Another* suggests, the moral injunctions to live with others, to love, and the convictions of moral duty do not spring from an other person external to selfhood. Rather there is a vertical calling from on high, as it were, from within the conscience which forms the structure of selfhood. Ricoeur ends his ontological investigation of selfhood on the equivocalness of the very notion of the “other.” The source of injunction it seems, to quote Socrates closing statement in Plato’s *Apology*, is known to no one, but the god.
CHAPTER FOUR

Badiou’s Theory of the Subject

4.1 The Foundations of Badiou’s philosophical position

“Ne pas cédes sur son désir.”

– Jacques Lacan

This chapter examines the three major influences upon Badiou’s philosophical outlook: Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxism, and mathematics. These three influences each lend support for his materialism as a guide for his development of what he calls the “human animal” into a human “Subject.” The main task of this chapter is show that Badiou’s philosophy of the subject falls on the side of what Ricoeur terms the anti-cogito suspicion which means that selfhood is structured by external forces fully beyond the control of a reflective consciousness. By contrast, Ricoeur develops his conception of selfhood from a
reflective consciousness bearing a likeness to the cogito. The starting point with regards to founding the self is in natural language as we explored in chapters 1, 2 and 3 below. The order of presentation in this chapter begins first with Lacan’s theory of the subject; second, we will examine his Marxist roots with a special focus on his Maoism; third, we will finish with the mathematical framework of his materialism.

- **Lacan: The Purloined Gaze**

In order to explicate the Lacanian roots to Badiou’s philosophy I will focus my attention on two works from Lacan’s Écrits: “The Freudian Thing”, and his “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”. In the former, Lacan explicates what he sees as Freud’s major discovery – namely that the consciousness is not master of itself, but is in fact mastered by unconscious instincts and drives. “Instinct” is also at times referred to as the “death drive” or the body’s whole network of erotic desires including sexual instincts, while also including anything which produces bodily pleasure. The famous chain of these “sexual” desires were developed by Freud out of his infant psychology of the libidinal instincts of the oral, anal, phallic, latent, and genital stages. These stages will not be examined individually; instead, it will be enough for my purposes to focus on the death drive as a whole and show how this informs Badiou’s own notion of the “human animal.” This drive is called the “death drive” because it is – as its name suggests – aimed at the self-destruction of the bodily organism back to its inorganic origins.

What I examine first is how the death drive (Thanatos) informs Badiou’s critique of the ethical tradition which in his view is aimed at the preservation of mere biological life to the detriment of what he calls “Truth.” Ricoeur’s ethics is singled-out by Badiou as
part of what he calls the “democratic consensus” which allows for late twentieth, and now, twenty-first century “humanitarian wars” predicated on the defense of human rights. The foundation of these so-called “universal human rights” is the Enlightenment notion of “humanity” which is itself founded on a conception of the human being as a transparent, conscious and autonomous agent – “selfhood” in a word.

Lacan understood Freud’s greatest discovery to be that, “the very center of the human being was no longer to be found at the place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition” (Écrits 114). Freud’s discovery that the human being is not grounded in the ego – in consciousness – “puts truth into question,” because the self is by nature a dynamic conflict. Distinguishing the unconscious from the consciousness is like separating the face from the mask, because the unconscious will defend itself by means of conscious acts – especially speech acts.

Lacan forces us to think of desire as a part of the human being that remains forever unknowable. Likewise for Badiou, desire is conceived of as a seizing of the truth-process to which the human subject remains faithful to its very fidelity to the eventing of a truth. The human animal is “broken,” so to speak, at the point where it is seized by the truth-process and as a result it becomes what Badiou calls a “Subject.” The transformative process from a mere human animal who is attentive to his or her biological needs into a Subject who continues! to remain faithful to a truth is founded on the Lacanian structure of subject to object, or what he calls the “petit objet a.” The phrase “petit objet a” translates to the “little object ‘a’” and represents a non-representative, and wholly indeterminate “object of desire” that is an object always held beyond the grasp of consciousness. Lacan utilizes the language of “drive” adopted from Freudian
psychoanalysis with its attendant framework of sexual desires, which places the drives outside of the ego/superego consciousness. The id is the primordial place of desire (of the drives) which according to Freud acts in a deterministic fashion upon the consciousness. One of the chief motivators of the drives is self-preservation including psychological self-defense. Lacan develops this notion of defense to the point that the very defensive mechanisms erected by the consciousness are like masks deceitfully covering the true face of the self. In his 1955 essay “The Freudian Thing” he asks,

Have we not overstepped the limit when we admit that the drive itself may be led to consciousness by the defence [sic] in order to prevent the subject from recognizing it? (Écrits 118).

According to Lacan the symbolic order of the psyche is marked by the repetitions of foreclosure, denial, repression as well as the more infamous “Freudian slips” and the interpretation of dreams. He calls these “repetition automatism” (Wiederholungswang) and these effects, “follow so faithfully the displacement (Entstellung) of the signifier that imaginary factors, despite their inertia, figure only as shadows and reflections in the process” (Écrits, 40). The repeated theft of the letter in Edgar Allen Poe’s short story, The Purloined Letter, according to Lacan’s structuralist account, gives the human subjects in Poe’s fictional story their subjectivity. In Lacan’s own words “it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject” (Écrits 40).

The symbolic order of the psyche is, according to Lacan, structured like a language following the structuralist linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. One model for this structured psychic economy is based on Lacan’s reading of
The Purloined Letter which is in many respects the fore-runner to modern detective movies such as director John Huston’s 1941 The Maltese Falcon based on the novel by Dashiell Hammett. In both stories there is an object (*petit objet a*) that remains mysterious in its full contents (an unread letter), yet all the action revolves around this *petit object a*. Lacan interprets the purloined letter in terms of the object of desire as an object that is never real in any meaningful sense other than that which human agents act around. The psychic economy of the self is such that the unconscious operates according to desires and drives that are never specific and thus the self is always hidden from itself at the conscious level. In The Purloined Letter the mysterious, unread, letter stolen from the Queen is repeatedly stolen throughout Poe’s short story. These repetitions represent for Lacan, according to his essay on this short story, a repetition of desire outwardly towards objects – none of which ever fulfill the agent’s desire.

The letter, repeatedly stolen, also represents for Lacan what he calls the “gaze of the other.” The letter was written by the Queen and it exposes the King in terms of a symbolic castration, yet it is stolen by Minister D--- (this is Poe’s name for this character), before it is eventually discovered by Investigator Dupin. Lacan reads Poe’s work as a psychoanalytic drama that plays on our gaze upon others, as well as the other’s gaze back upon us. The formula in Lacan’s analysis is that “the unconsciousness is the discourse of the Other” (Écrits 43). Accordingly he concludes that the sender of the letter (*i.e.*, the gaze) “receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form” (Écrits 72). My interpretation of this is that the conscience receives from the unconscious a gaze which discourses with our conscience self *qua* an *other* to itself. The import of this Lacanian discourse, with regard to its influence upon Badiou, is that his philosophy of the
human agent is founded on this Lacanian formula which argues that all conscious subjectivity (“Subject” for Badiou; “selfhood” for Ricoeur) consists of defense mechanisms springing from the death drive as it reacts to the unconsciousness.

Lacan’s theory of the subject is the central pre-occupation throughout his work and the first thing to recognize when studying his conception of the subject is to realize that it is a divided subject which is not identical to a singular individual. A subject can be an individual, but more often than not it is a defused subject across numerous individual human agents. In his seminar on Poe’s *The Purloined Letter* the letter-itself (the letter’s contents are unknown to both the characters of this short story as well as for the readers) occupies the place of what Lacan calls the petit objet a. Since all the action revolves around this petit objet a, then the letter-itself becomes the symbolic order according to which the characters take-on their respective rôles. The symbolic order is therefore a pattern within the multiple subjects act. In other words the symbolic order is constitutive of the subject(s).

The climax of Lacan’s analysis is found on page 32 of *Écrits* where he expounds on the “glances” each character makes towards the other characters. Lacan identifies three “moments” structured by three glances, which we will discuss in some detail; however, for the sake of clarity, a brief outline of Poe’s short story will help to clarify these three moments.

- *E. A. Poe’s The Purloined Letter.*

Seen as the progenitor of the modern detective novel, Poe’s short story involves a letter to the Queen regarding, we are led to believe, some secret about the King. A government
Minister D--- is present with the King and Queen as the letter sits upon a table in plain view although the King is not aware of its significance. The Minister D--- purloins the letter. The Queen asks the Perfect of the police to search his residence and office for the letter. They turn-over the whole place, but cannot find the letter. The Queen then hires detective Dupin hoping he will have more luck. Dupin visits Minister D--- and notices that the letter is “hiding” in plain sight. Dupin, through manoeuvre and distraction, switches out the letter for a false one – thereby retrieving (via another purloining) the stolen letter. Lacan identifies the three moments of Poe’s story this way:

Thus three moments, structuring three glances, borne by three subjects, incarnated each time by different characters. The first is a glance that sees nothing: the King and the police. The second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides: the Queen, then the Minister. The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it: the Minister, and finally Dupin (Écrits 32).

What is operating with these three intersubjective glances is what Freud calls the “repetition automatism” of the death drive. This means that the conscious subject is like an ostrich which hides his head in the sand pretending that they are not seen. It is the repetition automatism which circles about the petit objet a without ever fulfilling the drive to obtain its object of desire. My thesis is that Badiou ultimately replaces the figure of the petit object a, and its symbolic relationship to subjects, with his own conception of truth-events. In both cases we have a deep suspicion of any conception of the human being that would attempt to maintain a strong sense of consciousness and autonomy.
Badiou says of this deep suspicion regarding consciousness that, “[Lacan] demonstrated how it was essential to distinguish the Ego, a figure of only imaginary unity, from the Subject” (*Ethics* 6) He goes on to say that the subject has no substance, no nature, and is merely a function of the language and history of desire. Just as there is no ego, there is no God, no spirit, no big Other, not even the visage of the other as we see in Lévinas. The same holds for selfhood according to Badiou, hence I understand him to be a part of the anti-*cogito* tradition lead by the three “masters of suspicion” identified by Ricoeur as Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche.

**The Divided Animal: Ego and Subject**

The term “subject” has a very broad meaning, and is certainly a loaded term, yet we will aim at first to use it in as neutral a sense as possible in order to understand the transition from “human animal” to “Subject.” We begin again with Lacan who uses the term *sujet* (“subject” in French) and determines a split in the human being between the Ego (*moi*) and the subject (*sujet*).

For Freudian psychoanalysis the faculty of the will is divided between the “life drive” (*eros*), and the “Death Drive” (*thanatos*). Badiou’s claim is that ethical inquiry in contemporary philosophy (what he calls “Ethical Ideology”) is really the Death Drive masked by various calls for “human rights,” utilitarian, normative ethics, and the search for security from all suffering. Given the close attention to the complexities of subjectivity in Badiou’s frontal assault on normative ethics, it is plausible to critique his arguments from the same approach, namely, the nature of the human agent. What we will investigate in the last chapter is the experience of fault as the dissonance between the self
which reaches into the world to act, and the effects of our actions in the world when they do not match the agent’s intentions (desires). The self seeks fulfillment, finds itself lacking in its own concreteness, thereby giving rise to a sense of finitude. The human being has a radical non-identity to itself both in Lacan and in Ricoeur (idem- and ipse-identity). For Lacan the human agent is divided into Ego and Subject, with the Ego as an object that is formed by a mirroring of the world, and the Subject as always driven by desire about “little object a” (objet petit a), hence never finding any repose. For Ricoeur a similar structure is at work: the self seeks fulfillment (totalization), yet always finds that it is unfulfilled. For instance, we want to know the “why?” about evil; we want to overcome evil. In an important parallel, Lacan’s split between the agent as an Ego qua object, and a Subject (sujet), that is always seeking, yet never finding, a fulfillment of the drives, shares important similarities to Ricoeur’s remarks on our divided selfhood.

- **Badiou and Marxism**

The second major influence upon Badiou’s philosophy is Marxism which – like psychoanalysis – is characterized by a strong suspicion of individual autonomy and consciousness through an analysis of economic-political identity of the self.

In the first of six interviews published as *Philosophy and the Event* (PE) Badiou defines his communism as “a third configuration” of the idea of modern communism, “that we are at the very beginning of the third and don’t, therefore, know very much about it yet!” (PE 16). The “first configuration” of communism had its birth in the French Revolution and is marked by the core concept of liberty. It was stabilized (historically speaking) as the foundations for political equality and private property so familiar to us
today. The “second configuration” is found in an idea of equality that is not subordinated to individual liberty and private property. This second configuration he says, “has not as yet stabilized,” (PE 15), and it “has a history” (PE, page 16). Further, this second configuration of Marxism eventually comes to be under the proper name of Stalin – and “state” communism (PE, 19). It is to the name “Stalin” which Badiou links the idea of the state as the sole representation of the proletariat and its struggle for a kind of equality that is not subordinate to private property. In order to understand the transition from the second to the third “configuration” of modern communism we have to investigate Badiou’s Maoist roots.

**Badiou’s Maoism**

Maoism, Badiou maintains, “is something completely different. To identify him with Stalin is a serious error. Mao perfectly understood that the Party-state was inappropriate because it had shown itself powerless to organize true equality” (PE 19). Badiou argues that it was Mao’s (disastrous) Cultural Revolution which distinguishes Maoism from Lenin-Stalinism, because the former returns communism back to the people. For communism he says can only ever be a movement and never a state. Badiou recognizes the abject failure (1.5 million died in China during the Cultural Revolution) and says it marks the end of the second configuration of modern communism known through Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao and other dictatorial regimes.

If the end of the Cultural Revolution in China marks for Badiou the end of the second configuration of modern communism, then what is to be done? He claims that a third configuration of communism is upon us, yet it is too early to say what the nature of
this newest configuration is. “I don’t see how it is possible,” Badiou declares, “to say that the communist Idea has to be abandoned without finding oneself fully within the consensus” (PE 22). This so-called “consensus” is our parliamentary democracy, and as we will see, Ricoeur squarely belongs to this “conservative consensus” according to Badiou. The origin of this notion of consensus springs-out of Mao’s observation that the true communist movement cannot take place within the state, but must always be found within the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat.

A principal element of this of Mao’s insight is identified by Jason Barker in his work Alain Badiou: A Critical Introduction where he posits that it is Mao’s recovery of Lenin’s axiom regarding dialectical thought: it is contradiction itself that is primary over synthesis. The Hegelian synthesis of thesis with anti-thesis is therefore not the proper focus of the communist Idea, rather it is the fact that since “one divides itself into two” that “synthesis is possible” (Barker 21). What is absolute in the world is conflict and process itself. Furthermore, every process is to be understood as a set of contractions for Badiou. In order for us to understand the nature of process we now turn to Badiou’s theory of truth-events. These events arise in a three-fold manner, but first we must take a detour through Badiou’s mathematical ontology concerning the “multitude.”

- **Axiomatic Set Theory: a Primer**

By far the most radical and important contribution by Badiou is his conception of what he calls “events.” In *Being and Event* he begins by explaining the metaphysical problem of the one and the many arguing in favor of a (mathematical) ontology of multiplicity. Badiou’s philosophy of the event is supported by his mathematical ontology which is
founded on set theory. I will therefore briefly outline some basic elements of set theory in order to ascertain better Badiou’s conception of events.

Set theory involves *collections of objects*. Well-known mathematical sets include “all natural numbers,” “integers,” “prime numbers,” “rational numbers,” “fractions,” “real numbers” and so forth. Set theory can be either “naïve” or “axiomatic.” Naïve set theory may use axioms, but it does so using ordinary language when speaking of “most,” “some,” “all,” and so forth. In other words naïve set theory is the manner in which we most often think logically even when thinking is formalized by Venn diagrams. Axiomatic set theory is structured by rules based on relations among mathematical objects. The main task within mathematical set theory involves the proper logical relationship between various axioms.

#### Russell’s Paradox

A set of all sets cannot exist. Let me suggest at the outset here that Russell’s paradox is similar in nature to Aristotle’s criticism of Platonic *eidos* as found in the so-called “Third Man” problem in Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*. Aristotle’s criticism of Plato is that if there is a man we must first have the form (*eidos*) “man.” If we have a material man, then we have both an *idea* of “man” and material man (flesh and bones). If then we think this pair (idea of man and physical man) then we have the following new idea: “the idea of man’ and the material man together” thus forming a “third man.” From here we could follow the logic *ad infinitum* to get an infinite number of “men.” In a similar manner Russell’s paradox suggests that if we attempt to think a “set that contains all sets” then
that set is either an element within itself, or it is not – whereby it would be a new set paradoxically not included in “all sets.”

Badiou’s mathematical ontology supports, and in many ways undergirds, his philosophical endeavors yet it this “proof” which is most important. If his mathematical ontology is the basis of his philosophy, then the question is what kind of ontology does mathematical set theory represent? Badiou understands being as a kind of multiplicity that is a-substantial and essentially equivalent to what he calls the “void.” Badiou describes the multiple against the traditional ontological framework inherited from Parmenides of a One which includes everything without leaving any reminder outside of all being. Contra this notion of being as One, he suggests that we must distinguish between how the philosopher or mathematician presents what is present within any representation. In Being and Event he says that, “In sum: the multiple is the regime of presentation; the one, in respect to presentation, is an operational result; being is what presents (itself)” (BE 26). This “operational result” of “oneness” needs to be rejected from any conception of being qua being because it is part of the operations of thought and not something that is ever presented to us as knowing agents.

The One is part of, and inside, “the regime of structured presentation” as well as the “regime of the possible presentation itself” (BE 55). In axiomatic set theory it is

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115 The (human) Subject is not a substance according to Badiou when we mean by “substance” being qua being. Rather Badiou puts forth a “materialist, non-representational, but schematic, ontology: an ontology that does not claim to re-present or express being as an external substantiality or chaos, but rather to unfold being as it inscribes it: being as inconsistent multiplicity, a-substantial, equivalent to ‘nothing’” (Being and Event, translator’s Preface, page xxiv). The phrase “to unfold being as it inscribes it” suggests a conception of an ontology which “unfolds” according to how it manifests itself.
impossible to achieve an ultimate closure of mathematical sets$^{116}$. For instance, if one were to have a set of all natural numbers we would have to say that there is an infinite number of natural numbers (taking the notion of “infinite” here to mean that which could conceivable, although not actually, be counted). However, the notion of infinity which could possibly be counted implies that these infinite sets are some manner “defined”.

Consider how we can speak of infinite sets even without ever demonstrating that they are in fact infinite. The problem with the traditional notion of “the infinite” inherited from Aristotle became apparent only after the advent of modern axiomatic set theory (Zermelo-Fraenkel [ZF] set theory)$^{117}$. An example will suffice to expose the problem: if we have two sets both containing an infinite series such as “all prime numbers,” and “all rational numbers,” what we find is that no matter how much they coincide they will nonetheless have an infinite difference$^{118}$. Naïve set theory would maintain that there they are virtually infinite; whereas axiomatic set theory holds them to be infinite since in principle (as even a child knows) they are actually infinite, and not virtually infinite. The result is that the two infinite sets just mentioned above can be infinitely different. This distinction is attributed to Paul J. Cohen’s demonstration that the continuum hypothesis

$^{116}$This is the result of Russell’s paradox concerning the theoretical possibility of a “set of all sets.”

$^{117}$Axiomatic set theory was developed early in the twentieth century in order to solve paradoxes involved with set theory. Ernst Zermelo proposed the first theory which was revised by Abraham Fraenkel and Thoralf Skolem, hence Zermelo-Fraenkel. Axiomatic set theory studies collections of “elements” into various “sets”. Axiomatic set theory helps define the foundations of mathematics, especially with regards to “infinity” in mathematics.

$^{118}$Regarding Badiou’s notion of “infinite difference” Oliver Feltham says: “A generic truth procedure is thus a praxis which slowly transforms and supplements a historical situation by means of separating out those of its elements which are connected to the name of the event from those which are not. This is an infinite process, and it has no assignable overall function or goal save the transformation of the situation according to immanent imperatives derived from the operator of fidelity and the actual enquiries.” (Being and Event, Translator’s Preface, page xxxi.)
(CH) is independent of axiomatic set theory. What this means is that given our two sets above (“all prime numbers” and “all rational numbers”) the continuum hypothesis maintains that in both sets the number of numbers in each set would remain equal to infinity. However, since Cohen demonstrated that this CH is independent of ZF set theory, “As strange as it may seem, for Cohen it is consistent with the axioms of set theory to regard an infinite set as indiscernible, or ‘generic’, in the precise sense of wholly lacking definable qualities” (Barker 10). Badiou relies heavily on Cohen’s conception of genetic truth procedures going so far as to claim that Cohen’s notions are “an intellectual *topos* at least as fundamental as Godel’s famous theorems were in their time” (BE 16). It is these “generic sets” which provide insight into Badiou’s ontological groundwork for his conception of events, for if we analogously regard a consensus opinion as a set then there will always be the possibility of a new set that includes that set. Badiou finds within set theory a model for radical political resistance and revolt against any established knowledge. The eventuality of a new set means that a new set will always irrupt into consensus opinion as an “event” of truth. Such disruption of established – even consensus – opinion and knowledges forms the core of both Badiou’s philosophical conception of truths and his political theory.

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**The Void, or the Inexistent**

Armed with a basic picture of axiomatic set theory we can now examine the first of three essential philosophical components to Badiou’s theory of events. I will now give a brief explanation of the “void” which Badiou says in Meditation Four of *Being and Event* is the “proper name of being.”
The ancient problem of the “One and the Many” finds its first systematic treatment in Parmenides’ poem wherein he distinguishes the way of truth (aletheia) from the way of opinion (doxa). The truth for Parmenides is that being is one, and all the multitudes of things are merely the result of illusory human opinion that splits the truth, which is one, into many. Badiou seeks a solution to this problem and his simple answer is that “the one is not” (BE 26). When one names a category of beings (human beings, furniture, animals, and so forth) these names refer to sets of beings and not any sort of “being”. The same is truth for the set of all sets, the set of all beings. Each member or “element” of a set may be called an individual “being” however “being qua being” does not belong to any set. The label for a multitude “being” or “humanity” is not an element. Being, or God, or Nature, or any grand cosmological archē properly belongs to the void set and thus does not exist. This is the fundamental premise of Badiou’s ontology.

The void is not “nothing” for Badiou for he says that “nothing” belongs to a structural notion of the universe as a whole. The “void” on the other hand stands for what he terms the “inexistent.” The inexistent is the first of three aspects of events. In Being and Event Badiou claims that from a structured position (i.e., counting-as-one) standpoint the “nothing” in a multiple (counted-as-one) is “unpresented” as a “non-one which is merely the subtractive face of the count” (BE 59). Axiomatic set theory maintains that for any set (collection of things) there is always the possibility of adding to an infinite set in such a manner that that added element is not missing from the substance of the set; or in the case of being qua being an element missing from the universe of facts. Badiou’s notion of event is demonstrated by set theory stemming from the theoretical addition of a non-one. “The event,” he says, “will be this ultra-one of a hazard, on the basis of which
the void of a situation\textsuperscript{119} is retroactively discernible” (BE 59). Discerning this ultra-one is impossible from within any historical situation (“what there is”), therefore for Badiou the “third configuration” of communism may be taking place today; however we are not yet able to discern the inexistent of this event (this so-called “third configuration”).

The three parts of the event for Badiou begins with the inexistent\textsuperscript{120}, which marks the contingency of existence, creates a revolutionary irruption within intelligible frameworks (\textit{epoche}) before a process of intervention takes place in the character of a “truth”. Badiou’s ontology is based on the above posits of axiomatic set theory from the point of view that the very nature of the multitude and the inability to have recourse to the “One” necessitates axiomatic theorization. The metaphysical question is the ancient puzzle of the “one and the many,” to which he answers that there is no oneness to the multitude since the multitude is always marked by the possible addition of another additional element. Calling the whole of all being “one” in the Parmenidean sense of “all is what-is” is therefore impossible.

\textsuperscript{119} Badiou defines a “Situation” as “any presented multiplicity. Granted the effectiveness of the presentation, a situation is the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question. Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one. This is the most general definition of a structure; it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of count-as-one.” (\textit{Being and Event}, page 27).

\textsuperscript{120} Cf. Badiou begins \textit{Being and Event} with Parmenides of Elea who first attempted to understand all beings under the singular term “Being”. See also, \textit{Logic of World}, II.i.1 and II.i.3 where Badiou makes it clear that it is “intrinsically contradictory” to affirm of set of all sets. Furthermore in \textit{Logic of Worlds} IV.3.4 he states that the inexistent of the multiple “Is the mark, within objectivity, of the contingency of existence.”

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“The multiple as multiple of multiples”

What Badiou has in mind is that for any set we can have another set that is “the same” as the first. However, the axiom of extensionality causes problems for the traditional understanding of what “the same” would mean for two infinite sets. For instance, let us consider the set of all “rational” numbers and the set of all “real” numbers. One intuitively knows that these two sets contain an infinite series of numbers which could never be comprehensively counted. Cohen’s insight was to treat the infinite as real and not as virtual, which leads to the logical conclusion that if we have two sets of numbers, each with an infinite number of elements, then we must treat the elements as multiple and in no way one. What this means is that if we were to think of all that exists, all being qua being, the impulse is to say that “all is one.” However, given the nature of axiomatic set theory any and every set can always (and this is Godel’s theorem) be made part of another set – that is another multitude. The One is always beyond reach and unspeakable because it is undefinable from within the set of known things at hand. Badiou is implying that set theory proves his materialist ontology that all there is is the multitude. An event is like the addition of a new set in the intellectual life of historical subjects.

From the Inexistent Void to the Real

Neither the inexistent nor the void are the “nothing.” In Badiou’s The Logic of Worlds (LW) he claims that Russell’s paradox, (a set of all sets cannot exist), means that, “one

\[ \text{121 In The Logic of Worlds Badiou employs the symbolic language of set theory which I am neither fluent in, nor wish to tax my reader with these symbolic argument. Therefore I render his technical proposals in natural language.} \]
cannot pass directly from a predicate to the multiple of the beings that fall under this predicate” (LW 154). Thus if we wanted to claim that “all things belong under the predicate ‘existence’” then we would be claiming that we have made a “set of all sets,” but this is impossible. Badiou is arguing in *The Logic of Worlds* that we cannot predicate “the real of all being,” and the consequence is that the *Whole* must be understood as an inexistent.

The philosophical consequences of his meta-analysis of set theory can be seen more clearly when we turn towards his political commitments. In *Theory of the Subject* (TS) we see a particular application the proof from *The Logic of Worlds* where he demonstrated that the Whole is inexistent. Take for instance the whole of a political body – a whole people (later we will look at a whole subject). We may think of a people as a whole, but a whole with its own internal contradiction whereby *the One becomes multiple*. Contradiction is a scission within the whole and in terms of political bodies the scission is for Badiou between the Bourgeois and the Proletariat. By the way, this notion of a scission within the whole is the key insight Badiou takes away from Mao’s political philosophy of conflict. In order to explain this more I now turn briefly to Badiou’s examination of Christianity in *The Theory of the Subject*.

Regarding the historicization of the scission of the whole into parts, or the one into the multitude Badiou applies this to how the infinite *ex-sists* in the finite within Christianity. Consider this following passage regarding the Christian God as a preview of his philosophy of the human subject:
God (A) is indexed (A_p) as specific out-place of the splace of the finite: this is the principle of the Incarnation. God becomes man. God divides into himself (the Father) and himself-placed-in-the-finite (the Son). A is the Father, and A_p the Son, that historic son by whom God ex-sists. God thus occurs as scission of the outplace, A = AA_p, God = Father/Son, a scission that the Council of Nicea, … will designate as sole existence – as unity of opposites – in the well-known dialectical axiom: ‘The Son is consubstantial with the Father’ (TS 15).

What this example helps us to understand is how Badiou applies his set theory-based ontology to the dialectical of the multitude. The out-place (hor-lieu) is a contraction of “being-out-of-place” in the sense that God is not localizable within a space, but gives rise to a Son who is the splace (site of a place) who acts as a “structure” or in the language of The Logic of Worlds a “world.” The one (God) splits, in order to ex-sist as the multitude of the Trinity. In other words when we posit a thing to exist we are positing an existent as both (a) existent and (b) existing-in-a-place. God is the existent that is posited, yet that existent must be posited as being-in-a-place (i.e., “splaced”; neologism from “espace de placement”) and this is the Son of God Jesus Christ. This “Christian paradox” involving the dialectical encounter of the eternal (God) within time (Jesus) seems to involve for Badiou only two parts of the Trinity for he does not mention the Holy Spirit within the context of this paradox.122

122 Regarding the doctrine of the Holy Trinity I have yet to find any direct reference in Badiou’s works.
An event according to Badiou thus begins within the wholeness of a historical epoch but as an inexistent that cannot yet be named. A concrete instance of this can be found in scientific revolutions where the whole body of knowledge forms a whole set or “paradigm” that from within itself cannot account for that which will rupture the scientific consensus. This formula of an inexistent rupturing One into a multitude is the beginning point for understanding events.

The scission occurs in the out-place which Badiou calls the “real.” The result is to be found within a splace (i.e., world) in the form of a total disruption of a subject’s epistemological grasp. Badiou identifies four areas (truth-processes) of epistemic disruption: art, science, politics and love. Consider another example: the lover. When one falls in love there is (let us say for the sake of argument “typically”) a total shift of the subject’s feeling towards the beloved. Falling in love also has a totalizing shift of one’s perspective on every other aspect of one’s life. The adjustment to this new splace (world) opened by the event forms the third part of a truth-event. A simple illustration of this is witnessed when a lover calls “my possessions” (house, furniture, money etc.) “our house,” “our sofa,” “our pets,” and “our budget.” All things are re-labeled.

- **The Event’s Tri-part Structure**

The circumstances required for the human animal to become “convoked” (*requis*) or figuratively “called together” to become a Subject involves what Badiou calls “truth-events.” These events of truth have a three-part structure which can be described without the aid of the more technical language of axiomatic set theory. Given his ontology of multiples it is clear that the circumstances for a truth-event do not exist within *what there*
is [ce qu’il y a] because truth-events begin with an inexistent. We now turn our focus to Badiou’s ethical thought as developed in *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Ethics).

Every human animal occupied with its individual preservation within the given situation according to *what there is*. What is super-added to *what there is* Badiou calls the “event” (Ethics 41). He gives several examples of historical events: Galileo’s new physics (one might assume any major scientific revolution); Joseph Haydn’s (1732-1809), as well as Arnold Schoenberg’s (1874-1951), novel musical styles; the French Revolution; Mao’s Cultural Revolution and one might add Saul’s conversion into Paul, the American Revolution, Copernicus’ revolution, and so forth. There do not seem to be clearly defined guidelines as to what might be considered an event so far as I have found in both my readings and discussion with others regarding legitimate “events.” Badiou is selective of his choices of legitimate events.

The second of three stages of any truth-event is the advent of a decision on the part of a human agent which shifts them away from the own self-interest towards an interest in the event. A decision is made by the proto-Subject to remain faithful to the “perspective of this eventual supplement” (Ethics 41). One clue as to what constitutes a legitimate event is that the decision to remain faithful to the event is characterized by a supplement which the old rule-set (paradigm) could not account for – and maybe even more importantly – it could not foresee.

This leads us to his language of “truth” or *a* truth for each case. “Essentially, a truth is,” Badiou says, “the material course traced, within the situation, by the eventual
supplementation” (Ethics 42). This truth proceeds with a situation, however it is characteristic of a rupture, or whole, punched through the rule-set (paradigm) that was already present. The truth was immanent within the situation, not coming from a “heaven of truths,” because as an inexistent it could not be identified from within that old rule-set. Here we come upon the Subject for the first time as that individual who faithfully carries-forth this new truth. Thus, a “Subject” strictly speaking is a carrier who bears upon him or herself a truth.

Let us quickly retrace our steps so far: There are innumerable inexistent, any of which are possible or potential events, but these events only ever rise to the level of a truth if and only if a human animal takes them upon themselves as a Subject qua carrier of that truth. The event “convokes” (requis) the human animal to name, announce, and carry the newly recognized truth. Further, an intervention is necessary to support and bear this new truth. Badiou says: “I call ‘subject’ the bearer [le support] of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth” (Ethics 43). The bearer who is faithful to a truth-process is a “Subject”, but not in the sense of a reflective agent in the tradition from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Kant. What Badiou means by “a Subject” can be either an individual or a group of human agents; however, what is more important is that those who are subject to truth are more than themselves as individual agents. Subjects are “militants” to the truth and for Badiou this links them to what he variously calls the “eternal” or “immortality.” A truth exceeds any individual agent; therefore the excess inherent in any truth means that the truth is not to be localized within any one bodily person.
The third part of any truth-event has been mentioned already, but only by indirect inference: discontinuity with current knowledge. One can find a similar break in Heidegger’s notion of event as Ereignis which is generally translated as “en-owning.”\textsuperscript{123} Enowning is the translation by Parvis Eman and Kenneth Maly in their translation of Heidegger’s Contribution to Philosophy which in German has the secondary “essential” title “Vom Ereignis”. This choice of translating Ereignis as “enowning” instead of “event”, which some have suggested\textsuperscript{124} conveys the dynamic up-welling of the prefix “en-“ such as with “en-able,” or “en-joy”. Regardless of these difficulties of translation we must ask: are there any real similarities to be drawn between Heideggerian Ereignis and Badiouian Events? I think there are fruitful similarities which we will now explore.

What is notable when one links Heideggerian Ereignis with Badiou’s events is that there is an included exclusion of truth as a “swaying of being” that is marked by the two terms “ground” and the “away-ground” (Ab-grund). Heidegger states in his Contributions to Philosophy (CP) that it is in this Abgrund where “Be-ing holds sway as enowning the grounding of the t/here [Da], put briefly: as enowning” (CP 174). What Heidegger contributes here is the notion that being qua being requires a “needing and belonging” (CP 176) on the part of Dasein. When being is disclosed it also, at the same time, closes being in the sense of truth as aletheia – that is, as an un-forgetting or “recollection” of being. The essential sway of being changes the being of beings (Sein of Seiendes) and it is with that change that errancy of thought comes to the forefront. I

\textsuperscript{123} Heidegger, Martin, Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning), translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Indiana University Press, 1989
\textsuperscript{124} Purcell, Lynn, 2011.
follow Lynn Purcell’s description of a “ghostly form of presence” that haunts Dasein’s enowning of the essential sway of being. Purcell characterizes Badiou’s truth-events as capable of giving errancy “its full sway” which I understand to mean the truth-event’s potential to radically, even totally, disrupt the given spacle (world) or symbolic order of thought. In order to explicate what is said here in a rather terse form we will investigate Badiou’s case of Saul of Tarsus to illustrate how a Subject’s symbolic order of thought is radically disrupted by an event of truth.

4.2 St. Paul and the Foundation of Universalism

Before moving on to Badiou’s conception of ethics we will examine the particular case of the transformation of Saul of Tarsus into St. Paul to provide more depth and detail on how the human, all too human, animal becomes a proper – and immortal – Subject.

In the Prologue to Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism (St. Paul) Badiou makes his position regarding St. Paul clear when he declares that: “For me, truth be told, Paul is not an apostle or a saint. I care nothing for the Good News he declares” (St. Paul 1). Rather, for Badiou, “Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure” (St. Paul 2). Badiou seeks in St. Paul a model for the new figure of militancy who will lead the so-called “third configuration” of communism which he believes is at play in contemporary thought – this unnamed configuration that is coming after Lenin’s statist approach failed and pre-figured by Mao’s Revolution.
In the conclusion to *St. Paul* Badiou states that “exclusive credit” is due him for establishing that “fidelity to such an event exists only through the termination of communitarian particularisms and the determination of a subject-of-truth who *indistinguishes* [sic] the One and the ‘for all’” (St. Paul 108). Paul represents for Badiou “an antiphilosophical theoretician of universality” with the result that he teaches the philosopher that the conditions for the possibility of universals are not to be found in the conceptual. Instead the universal message of Paul is a subjective production where all otherness of Jew versus Gentile are rejected for universal equality and sameness. Paul’s universalism reduces all worldly material differences to a null-point where it makes no difference as to one’s heritage, wealth, fortune and so forth.

Paul is an exemplar of the Subject who holds to the truth-event of love – one of the four kinds of truth-events according the Badiou – because his thought *is* his power. His thought can be his chief power because, Badiou says, “… the necessary condition of thought as power (viz. love) consists in he who is a militant of the truth identifying himself, as well as everyone else, on the basis of the universal” (St. Paul 109). Thus it is the universalism of Paul that give power to his message of love. What Paul, as a militant of truth, remains faithful to is the injunction that he identifies himself as a Subject upon the foundation of the truth that *all persons are equal*. Further, he identifies all other persons as well on the basis of that same universal: to love your neighbor as yourself.

We now return to the chapter 1 of *St. Paul* to see how Badiou argues for a theory of the subject who is subordinate to the randomness of any event and the “pure contingency of multiple-being without sacrificing the theme of freedom” (St. Paul 4). Badiou reduces Pauline Christianity to what he calls the “fabulous element” or “fable” of
the resurrection of Christ. Further, he says that, “it is rigorously impossible to believe in the resurrection of the crucified” whereby we are thrust into the very question of faith and belief (*pistis*) (St. Paul 5). If this is Badiou’s position, then why focus on St. Paul at all? The reason is that he views Paul as the inventor of, “the connection that establishes a passage between a proposition concerning the subject and an interrogation concerning the law” (St. Paul 5). In other words, for Badiou, truth is subtracted from any communitarian situation, because it is to be found within the Subject who believes. The resurrection of Christ is based solely on three eye-witness accounts and nothing which one could call “objective” or a matter of fact, so we are clearly in the area of faith.

If the “truth” of Pauline Christianity is a “fable” what then does Badiou mean by “truth”? His concern is that in modern and contemporary philosophy, truth has been progressively reduced to “a linguistic form, [namely] judgment” which “ends up in a cultural and historical relativism” (St. Paul 6). The result is apparent to any observant and thoughtful person today that all universals, even mathematics, fall prey to the dominator/victim dynamic whereby “Western” values have been imperialistically foisted on the world’s victims. Badiou refers to a “victimist (*victimaire*) conception of man” (St. Paul 6). The chief vehicle of this “*victimaire*” conception is “monetary abstraction” or in a word: capitalism. According to Badiou: “This is why Paul, himself the contemporary of a monumental figure of the destruction of all politics…, interests us in the highest degree” (St. Paul 7).

Predictably, Badiou’s criticism of all modern simulacrum of truth procedures is that they are motivated by capitalism and these simulacrum result in nothing but untruths hidden under the “uniform dictatorship of what they take to be ‘modernity’” (St. Paul 11).
The problem which Paul sheds great light upon is the problem with all forms of communitarian identity politics – these are what Paul rejected and these are precisely what Badiou says the truth-event ruptures. The truth-event is like a new set that contains all the old sets without possibly being named before-hand. Badiou names “Nazism” as one particular group-identity; one wonders if all group-identities are similarly lacking any truth-process. These same kinds of communitarian identities existed in Paul’s world and his aim was to lift the Gospels from any particular statist identity – Jewish or Roman, or even Greek philosophy for that matter. According to Badiou, this is the birth of universalism.

A truth process operates in just this manner whereby it ruptures all present circumstances and symbolic economies. The Subject is one who takes a truth upon their shoulders at the expense of everything he or she had previously believed to be true. What happens when at some moment in time an event takes place, next, it is then declared a “truth” and finally some-one remains faithful to that truth-event? Two things happen according to Badiou. First, he notes that the event possesses a singular being and it is “neither structural, nor axiomatic, nor legal” (St. Paul 14). Second, the subjective declaration of truth means that, “no preconstituted subset can support it; nothing communitarian or historically established can lend its substance to the process of truth” (St. Paul 14).

- **Paul’s Antiphilosophy**

Badiou breezes over Paul’s biographical and historical background in chapter 2 of *St. Paul* in order to focus on his antiphilosophy which he compares to Rousseau of the
Confessions, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Each of these modern philosophers can be properly understood he argues only from their unique autobiographies. The antiphilosopher’s position is always enunciated with an eye to answer the question “Who speaks?” (St. Paul 17). Paul became the subject who speaks on the road to Damascus. Quoting Corinthians I 15.10 “By the grace of God I am what I am,” Badiou suggests that Paul’s conversion was not a dialectical reversal, but instead a sudden break with his previous self-identity. That moment on the road to Damascus was the “event” that changed Saul into Paul, and not a conversion effected by other Christians. “It happened,” and it happened without identifiable preconditions (St. Paul 17).

What happened next is that Paul does not seek any institutional approval for his conversion, instead, Badiou says, he turns, “away from all authority other than that of the Voice that personally summoned him to his becoming-subject” (St. Paul 18). Further, Paul’s fourteen years of voyages demonstrates for Badiou that Paul represents a “de-centered dimension,” which is the “practical substructure of his thought, which posits that all true universality is devoid of a center” (St. Paul 19). And for this reason Paul resists St. Peter’s entreaties to consult with Jewish authorities.

Instead of working with authorities Paul builds small “bands of brothers,” comrades or simply “brothers and sisters” who constitute for Badiou “militants.” These few militants represent for Badiou those who are commensurable with a truth – “anonymous individuals are always transformed into vectors of humanity as a whole” (St. Paul 20). Badiou cannot resist comparisons of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to France’s Resistance Fighters of 1940!
Badiou stresses Paul’s urbane character and up-bringing especially noting that Antioch was the Roman empire’s third largest city. The stress on his urban nature allows Badiou easily to suggest that Paul was a politician at heart who must disseminate his letters and doctrine the world over. Perhaps the most famous schism in Paul’s early church regarded whether new converts to Christianity must be circumcised. To be glib we could say that either you’re all in, or you’re not in at all. Badiou remarks that: “A truth procedure is only universal insofar as it is supported, at that point through which it indexes the real, by an immediate subjective recognition of its singularity” (St. Paul 22). What he means is that circumcision is still attached to the community of Jews and not strictly to the singularity of Christ’s resurrection of the cross. Militants of truth-processes erase communitarian founded identities as a matter of process.

Badiou’s own reconstruction of this debate focuses on three aspects which are to be found with any event of truth: interruption, fidelity, and marking. Christ’s resurrection is the interrupting event of all time; Paul is a subject because he is faithful to this event; circumcision does not become a mark of a Christian. These three aspects (interruption, fidelity, marking) form the central philosophical framework for Badiou’s theory of the subject and we will examine them again once we turn to his Ethics in the next chapter.

The result of Paul’s conflicts at Antioch with Peter regarding the schism between Judeo- versus Gentile-Christians is that the ancient imperatives of the Law, “is no longer, tenable, even for those who claim (like Peter) to follow it” (St. Paul 27). Badiou claims that for Paul the “Law has become a figure of death” (St. Paul 27). The figure of whose
death? The death of truth, and “the eventual declaration (of Christ’s resurrection), which is its principle of life” (St. Paul 27).

A Subject Divided: Flesh and Spirit

Flesh and spirit do not denote body and soul. For the Subject, according to Badiou, the flesh and the spirit characterize the new “real” of Pauline Christianity. Both flesh and spirit are thoughts, “each identifying its real through an opposed name” (St. Paul 56). The Christ-event reveals to Paul that the two paths of subjectivity (flesh and spirit) are the thought of death and the thought of life. This is the truth which Christ’s resurrection reveals, and for Badiou it reveals to us that the Subject is always a divided subject. Contrary to this divided subject we find the figure of the unified individual agent in the Greek tradition. There is a sense of cosmic totality in Greek thought which we can see in Book Lambda of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* through the figure of the Prime Mover. The Greek philosopher’s cosmic totality allows for places to be occupied by the divine mind (*nous*), hence giving us the language of body and soul. Not so for Paul who identifies his own Subject as a “refuse of the world,” as something thrown-away and out-of-place. In essence, the event of truth in Christ’s resurrection “can not be reconciled… with the natural Whole, nor with the imperative of the letter” (of Jewish law) (St. Paul 57). Flesh and spirit therefore expose for Paul the nature of this “new real.”

What does Badiou mean here by the “real”? I will be as brief as possible here. For Paul the “real” is strictly speaking *not real*, but the “fable” of Christ’s resurrection. For the Greek philosopher the “real” is the opening of a place for the individual to think.
Aristotle, that holistic philosopher *par excellence*, centers all his philosophical endeavors around thinking, whether in his ethics, politics, or metaphysics, and besides all the fields of inquiry are tightly linked. For the Jew the “real” is the opening in the world made possible by the Lord’s commandments whereby one can live a true life by living according to God’s Law. The “real” for Paul is the truth-event of the Crucifixion. Badiou claims that what is “real” for the Greek and the Jew are not universals at all, but most distinctly communitarian (*ethnê*) in their nature. Regarding how these discourses draw distinctions among people he says,

> More generally, the moment the real is identified as event, making way for the division of the subject, the figures of distinction in discourse are terminated, because the position of the real instituted by them is revealed, through the retroaction of the event, to be illusory. (St. Paul 57).

The divided subject opposes itself to the “perpetuation of a full or undivided subject,” who is found within a particularized cultural, communitarian, and historical milieu or “*ethnê*” to use Paul’s word for “nations.” And thus for Paul there are no communitarian distinctions, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Badiou remarks at this point that: “There is no doubt that universalism, and hence the existence of any truth whatsoever, requires the destitution of established differences and the initiation of a subject divided in itself by the challenge of having nothing but the vanished event to face up to” (St. Paul 58). This “destitution of established differences” is produced according to Badiou in our present circumstances by market capitalism manifested by identity politics which do not participate in any truth-process. On the other hand, the Pauline truth-event
establishes, according to Badiou, a Subject who is divided between flesh and spirit. However, instead of the language of “flesh and spirit” Badiou has in mind the division, which conforms to Freud’s theory of drives, between the “human animal” and the “subject”. The “human animal” and the “subject” correspond to the two drives are the death-drive and the life-drive respectively.

One concrete illustration ought to provide some sense of how the broader themes within Badiou may be conceived. Consider the great pyramids of Giza, the Acropolis, grand medieval cathedrals and other considerable architectural legacy-creations. These works are not practical constructions in any conventional sense; rather they represent the human animal’s attempt to reach beyond death into eternal life. Therefore we can imagine that the ancient Egyptian farmer was merely a human animal, until he was ordered by the Pharaoh to work constructing a great pyramid. At that point the man’s labor is now re-ordered into something that is essentially “immortal” whereby we can claim that that man a genuine Subject. For Badiou, capitalism and the so-called “democratic consensus” is the manifestation of the death drive with its emphasis on simple preservation of biological life. Taking a cursory look around us in the early twentieth century there are no obvious attempts to build grand temples to “house” the eternal and according to Badiou the eternal transforms the human animal into a proper Subject. Before leaving Badiou’s discussion of Paul we will examine one more short section of his text on St. Paul’s universalism as a means to segue into Badiou’s Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil.

- Lord and Servants
Universalism brings with it equality. Badiou argues that for Paul in our earthly life we live as God’s co-workers and it is this working-together for God’s kingdom which makes us all equals. Jesus was not our master such that we are slaves, rather we are co-workers with Jesus and the project is the event of truth: Christ’s resurrection. As noted with the illustration of temple-building above the human animal becomes a subject as a co-worker for the eternal.

Badiou examines Paul’s contribution to universalism against Nietzsche’s three ages of man saying that, for Nietzsche, Paul is not an opponent, but a rival. This rivalry concerns three contributions by Paul: first there is a “self-legitimating subjective declaration,” then a “breaking of history into two,” and third “the new man as the end of guilty slavery and affirmation of life” (St. Paul 61). These correspond respectively to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, his grand politics, and the overman (Übermensch). Badiou seeks a reaffirmation of this tri-part move by means of a declaration of Marxist truth, out of the slavery of capitalism into an eternal life of the immortal spirit of the truth-process. What is our contemporary truth? This has been stated above as the so-called “third configuration” of communism that remains undeclared – hence unknowable, because we are the contemporaries of this event of truth. The “crucial formula” of the event, according to Badiou, is found in Roman 6.14: “for you are not under law, but under grace” (emphasis added). The subject is divided between the law of the communitarian (the death drive’s bio-power), and the grace that is the givenness of Christ’s resurrection. Regarding the event he says:

The event is at once the suspension of the path of the flesh through a problematic “not,” and the affirmation of the path of the spirit through a “but” of
exception. Law and grace are for the subject the name of the constituting weave through which he is related to the situation as it is and to the effects of the event as they have to become. (St. Paul 63)

In conclusion, the subject according to Badiou is constituted when the human animal is divided by an event such that they now witness the division of their self into a flesh and a spirit. Capitalism and parliamentary democracy do not partake of truth because they are motivated by the flesh and the death drive to preserve biological life. The third configuration of communism is our contemporary event awaiting a clear declaration whereby this event will become a truth. Our work is to continue this truth which calls for universal equality at the expense of all those more practical elements of our globalized community: human rights, private property, and wage-labor. We now turn to Badiou’s essay on *Ethics* in order to examine how Pauline universalism informs Badiou’s own philosophical ethics.
CHAPTER FIVE

Badiou’s Ethics

5.1 Our Contemporary “Ethical Ideology”

Both the possibility of a non-subjective “view from nowhere” ethical fiction as well an ethics of otherness have been challenged by Alain Badiou in his Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil. Badiou attacks, in a very polemical fashion, what he calls the “ethical ideology.” This ideology maintains, according to Badiou's analysis, that the differences between individuals and cultures, ethnic groups, or communities must be respected under the signs of tolerance, human rights, and multiculturalism. For Badiou, the problem with the “ethical ideology” is the determination as to what constitutes “evil” and how those “evil-doers” are to be punished. Therefore the problem with multiculturalism, for Badiou, is the very real intolerance towards other isolated intolerant cultures or ways of living that are out of step with the prevailing ethical ideology. This problem may strike one as absurd on a first reading; however, Badiou offers an original
defense of his claim that twentieth and twenty-first century political violence predicated upon communitarianism and otherness. He makes his argument by means of his conception of “truths” (Ethics 44). A “truth” is indifferent to differences, because it brings diverse subjects together under a new truth that is to be “continued!” Badiou states that, “If there is no ethics ‘in general’, that is because there is no abstract subject, who would adopt it as his shield” (Ethics 40). Consequently there is no such thing as “ethics as such.” The “ethical ideology” is tied to the political will to power, the death drive, and tied as well to what he calls the “human animal.” The problem thus seems to be a “conservatism” he says that is focused only on the material progress of the “human animal” instead of any immortal “truth”. This means that society is guided by a drive to avoid ills and evils, hence holding to a negative notion of good as right to non-evil, and not focused on the human being’s capacity to do good, and to take part in “the immortal.”

Such a capacity to do good, and to be in touch with the so-called immortal is the ultimate source of human plasticity, capacity and what Badiou terms our resilient (résistant) character. Similar lines of thought on the connections between the “immortal” and the human being’s plastic powers are found in other thinkers including

125 “Human Animal” refers to homo sapiens as devoid of any truths, and simply opining in its communications.
126 An example given by Badiou of a Truth that expresses “the immortal” is in the life of Jesus, as well as Haydn’s music, Einstein’s new physics, and the communist Cultural Revolution. Each truth is constructed “bit by bit,” by a fidelity to events, and “it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces” (Ethics, page 68). What is important here is that truths stand as positive events that shape actions of agents because those truths are believed to be good. We will ask the question, “who believes?”
127 Badiou, Alain, Ethics, page 16.
Nietzsche and Arendt\textsuperscript{128}. In the seventh chapter, forgiveness will be examined in light of the plastic powers of the human being to begin anew, to say, “I can; I can be different than I have been.”

In more practical terms this “ethical ideology,” Badiou contends, also leads to evils such as the various “humanitarian bombings” of the former Yugoslavia, or NATO’s 2011 bombing of Libya. The classic example of “evil” is of course the Nazis state-sponsored genocide predicated on a consensus regarding who the “true” German peoples were against those who merely resided in German lands. This same economy of “we opine that we are good, and they are evil” determines much of contemporary ethical ideology as well. What Badiou calls “ethics” is not an otherness at all, but rather a sameness (a “truth”) that brings people together \textit{despite} their communitarian differences. Recall that for St. Paul we are neither Jews nor gentiles, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. Truth is what we “\textit{continue}!” and it comes in four kinds of experiences: love, art, religion, and politics. Badiou's criticism of all of contemporary ethics therefore cuts across both the continental and analytic traditions, but its venom seems most aimed at his fellow French thinkers. Ricoeur is targeted in this critique of ethical ideology based on Badiou’s interpretation of the presentation of the self in \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting}. Therefore I will examine Badiou’s ethics on the way to defending Ricoeur's approach to

\textsuperscript{128} What Badiou calls the ‘immortal’ is taken in this context in a similar manner to Hannah Arendt’s \textit{The Human Condition} where she distinguishes between the ‘immortal’ and the ‘eternal’ with the ‘immortal’ achievable through human action, while Plato introduces the ‘eternal’ (Arendt claims) by way of the \textit{Forms (eidos)} through a \textit{vita contemplativa} apart from human action (\textit{praxis}) of any kind. Arendt argues that the \textit{vita activa} (labor, work, action) at its highest level, the level of ‘action’ leads to human \textit{freedom} through the human community. In many philosophers I detect the very same directedness towards the immortal, and the sacred, as for example in Aristotle it is ultimately our intellectual activity which leads us back to God.
selfhood throughout his philosophical thought. For this dissertation the choice of focus was first on *Oneself as Another* in order to understand Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self and the second focus is on the relationship of the self to forgiveness as developed in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

### Contemporary Ethics

For several years I have completed my Ethics courses with a short article by Alasdair MacIntyre entitled, “The Nature of the Virtues: From Homer to Benjamin Franklin”\(^{129}\) in order to leave my students with a sense of ethical discourse in our time. MacIntyre examines several virtue-ethic traditions starting his survey with Homeric virtues before coursing-through Aristotelian, Christian and the more particularized sets of virtues according to Jane Austin and Benjamin Franklin. Throughout his career MacIntyre lamented the fact that every tradition of virtue ethics suffers from a distinct disconnect with contemporary discourse. We have lost the ability to speak in ethico-moral terms as a society in general.\(^{130}\) MacIntyre for his part identifies within every tradition of virtues a distinction between an internal and an external good. He emphasizes that “external goods genuinely are goods,” however he finishes by noting that,

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\(^{130}\) I witness this lack of knowledge of the virtues in my classes every semester when I ask my students “what does ‘virtue’ mean?” Invariably students are unable to make contact with even the most elementary notion of what “virtue” might mean.
…if in a particular society the pursuit of external goods were to become dominant, the concept of the virtues might suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement, although simulacra might abound (34).

The distinction between internal and external goods is illustrated by MacIntyre by means of a thought experiment involving playing a game of chess with a child. A child might be taught the game of chess by means of an external reward (e.g., candy) when he plays well. They may not necessarily win the game, but if they demonstrate patience, restraint, concentration and a general sense of strategic thinking they receive an external reward. The aim, the hope really, of these external rewards is that with some practice the child will learn to value the internal rewards of playing chess. Failure to distinguish between internal and external goods leads MacIntyre to warn that, “in any society which recognized only external goods competitiveness would be the dominant and even exclusive feature. We have a brilliant portrait of such a society in Hobbes’s account of the State of Nature” (Virtues 34). Hobbes’s State of Nature is described in chapter XIII of his Leviathan under the headings of “From Equality Proceeds Diffidence” and “The Incommodities of Such a War” where he famously said the life of persons in a State of Nature would prove to be, “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Leviathan 89).

Ethical thinkers today are sharply at odds on both the meta-ethical as well as the practical levels. Given the state of ethics it seems best that any approach to contemporary ethics begins from the clearest conflicts of interpretations regarding the true nature of ethics. Ricoeur and Badiou represent a clear dividing-line between two of the most prominent positions defended by theorists today: the existential-phenomenological-hermeneutic approach founded on a reflective subject, and the Marxist-materialist
approach which is hyperbolically suspicious of the conscious individual self. What I have
chosen to keep out of this dissertation are the various Utilitarian approaches which seem
to guide so much of our contemporary political, social and economic decision-making.

- **Badiou’s Rejection of Otherness**

In the introduction to his *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* Badiou identifies
two purposes for his essay. The first is an examination of contemporary ethical theory
that, he says, amounts to “a genuine nihilism” because it takes as its foundation the
communitarian focus on threats to life and property. Ethics today is often thoughtlessly
divided by professions such that we have bioethics, business ethics, techno-scientific
ethics, various social, racial, religious and other identity-based ethics, as well as
institutional authorities of morality. All of these represent the capitalist “democratic
consensus” that Badiou so often attacks. The second purpose of his essay is the
advancement of a positive theory of ethics based upon his theory of the Subject as a
subject always of a truth-event. These two purposes parallel Badiou’s adaptation of
Freud’s two drives. The “ethical ideology” represents the death-drive, while the Subject
of a truth represents the life-drive.

    Badiou implores us to reject any dialectic of the Same and the Other which is
predicated upon the recognition of other agents as strictly speaking “other.” The “real
question” given our contemporary truth (i.e., the third configuration of communism qua
universal equality), “is much more that of recognizing the Same” (italics original, Ethics
25). Badiou’s axiomatic thinking comes to the fore with this demand to recognize the
Same. He restates his metaphysical principles developed in his early work in his two-
volume *Being and Event (The Logic of Worlds)*. First, there is no God – meaning that the One does not exist. Everything, including human beings, are multiples, “only stopping at the void” (Ethics 25). “Infinity” is therefore not a predicate attributable to a subject such as one finds in Descartes’ *Meditations* (third meditation). Infinity belongs to every situation and every human being, therefore to inquire how two agents are “Other to each other” proves impossible since they are infinitely Other.

We should draw-back from such abstractions for a brief recollection of Badiou’s philosophy given that it is founded upon his understanding of axiomatic set theory. Given two sets, for instance, the set of “all rational numbers” and the set of “all prime numbers” in both cases we have infinite sets. These sets are said to be infinite in the sense that if for each number in each set we accorded (all the numbers were themselves numbered) each one with a number there would be two infinities that are infinitely different. It is this “infinite difference” which is important, because it means that these sets are *real* infinities and not mere *virtual* infinities. When this sense of infinity is applied to human beings it means that despite any and all similarities there exists an infinite difference. To say that other persons are Other is meaningless given their infinite difference. Badiou therefore is seeking what is *the Same* in every human subject and the answer he provides is that subjects share in truth-events. “Infinite alterity,” Badiou claims, “is quite simply *what there is*” (italics original, Ethics 25). Furthermore Badiou says: “Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences” (Ethics 25).
The Same

According to Badiou, sameness is characterized by becoming and not by what is, and the advent of the Same is what occurs with a truth. Only a truth is “indifferent to indifferences,” (Ethics 27), therefore we must turn to the four “fundamental subjective ‘types’” Badiou identities in order to explain what he means by these truths which produce subjects out of human animals. The four areas of truth-processes are found in art, science, politics and as we saw above with St. Paul – love. There exist as many truths as there are areas of knowledge (albeit within Badiou’s four categories of truth) and any human agent can be a multiple of subjects according to how many truths he or she remains faithful to. A “Subject” (capital ‘S’) can also refer to multiple human agents as we also saw with our discussion above regarding how for St. Paul we are coworkers with Christ in the sense that all the members of the Church form a single universal Subject. However, for Badiou there is no single truth, and therefore there are no singular subjects, culminating in his further claim that “it is impossible to speak of a one Ethics” (italics original, Ethics 28).

Our Apathetic Consensus

As everyone knows (and those who don’t prove the rule) the public is an apathetic body. Many people around the world are willfully ignorant and driven by little other than life’s necessities, punctuated with entertainment and leisurely vacations. The logic of contemporary politics is capitalism and its presumed science of economics – according to Badiou. He laments that nowhere in our nihilistic globalism do people work towards a Good. What is this capital G “good”? One would be correct to infer that our
contemporary subjectivity is concerned only with external goods. However, the Good to which Badiou refers is “the Good as the superhumanity of humanity towards the Immortal as the master of time” (Ethics 32). Against this Good, Badiou is claiming, is the view that some “evil” is necessary in terms of military action against perceived “aggressors”. This is the all-consuming endeavor of parliamentary politics today. The hand-maiden of modern capitalism is identified by Badiou as none other than ethics, that bellwether of public opinion. And it is Ethics which stands in the way of emancipatory politics and “any genuinely collective cause” (Ethics 31).

Consensus itself is hostage to economic necessities and forced to repeat the same exercises over and over again using military force here, then there, and then there again. Domestic politics (Badiou repeatedly references Vichy France) is likewise characterized by hostility to foreigners to stave-off high unemployment, terrorism, and the threat to France’s national identity. Ethics is the voice of this resignation to necessities, but worse all this is marked by a failure to will a Good – a superhuman and immortal Good. Referencing Nietzsche he says that, “every non-willing (every impotence) is shaped by a will to nothingness whose other name is: death drive” (Ethics 34). Capitalism is flesh, without spirit. According to the “Ethical Ideology” the worst thing that can happen to anyone is death.  

131 While in prison awaiting his execution Socrates says to his dear old friend Crito, “that the most important thing is not life, but the good life” (Plato, Crito 48b).
5.2 Badiou’s Ethic of Truths

Badiou’s first task is to save the term “ethics” from various “prostitutions” of the language. It is worth repeating here his claim that: “If there is no ethics ‘in general’, that is because there is no abstract Subject, who would adopt it as his shield” (Ethics 40). Badiou’s opening statement on his own “ethic of truths” clearly reflects his theory of the divided subject that is (as we saw in chapter 4 above) proven by his mathematical materialism concerning multiplicity. A human Subject (not the mere human animal) is inaugurated at the moment he or she takes upon themselves a Truth. That is the point when a human animal takes upon himself the mantel of immortality. The conditions for the possibility of a mere human animal to become a Subject are through a truth-event. We now turn to Badiou’s explication of this theory of “an ethic of truths.”

- Two Initial Problems with Badiou’s Truth-Events

The first major problem with Badiou’s truth-events is how can we distinguish between a real truth-event and other types of mere events? For instance, when the HMS Titanic sank in 1913 many naval engineers were struck by the swiftness of its sinking, thus ushering in years of investigations into why the ship failed so catastrophically. Was this an event of truth? It may seem to qualify since after the sinking of the Titanic many improvements to ship design and safety were made and the industry has been faithful to those new standards. What about the 9/11 terror attacks? It was certainly an “event” but was it a “truth-event”? It seems to perfectly qualify as a political event and millions (billions!) of persons have adjusted, faithfully we may add, to this new reality. Badiou seems very cautious regarding which “events” he chooses as examples of proper events. This raises
suspicions since he seems to choose either glorious communist events or uncontroversial events such as Newton’s or Einstein’s new physics.

The second major problem with Badiou’s conception of truth-events concerns his constant attack on all things “conservative.” Badiou uses the term “conservative” frequently, yet always in the most derogatory and partisan manner when describing what takes part in un-truth by unthinking human animals concerned – it seems – only with their personal consumption of material goods. If a Subject is one who maintains a serious faithfulness to an event, then why would a “conservative” position not qualify as “fidelity to a truth”? The answer must lie in that since there are innumerable truths only those events which irrupt knowledges (with an “s”) that maintain the human animal qualify. A proper truth according to Badiou produces a Subject who thereby makes some sort of “contact” with immortality. Yet, how does Badiou explain how Einstein’s new physics – now a century old – connects Subjects with some semblance of immortality? Likewise, when one falls in love it often happens that his whole world – to a reasonable extent – changes. The love-struck person’s thinking-about her own situation prior to falling in love is now defined by a real break from their former disposition. If “love” is understood in the Pauline sense, then it seems reasonable to assume that falling in love represents an event that links one up with immortality (in Christ). However, if by “falling in love” we mean a youthful infatuation with a beloved, then how does that qualify as a linking-up of the human animal with some semblance of immortality? The objections made above challenge any simple understanding of truth-events as developed by Badiou.
With his formula of an *ethic of a truth* Badiou aims to prepare the ground for his phenomenology of ethics through an examination of two forms of “interests.” The primary interest of the human animal is what we could label “self-centered interests” as these concern what every animal, including those of the human species, are concerned, namely self-preservation. The second kind of interests Badiou calls “disinterested interests” and these arise when some-one makes an immanent (not “imminent”) break with his own self-preservation as a spectator to an event of truth. Badiou provides some eloquent illustrations of these “spectators” in the form of artists, scientists, lovers and political militants who attest to a particular truth-process. Consider as an instance of a truth-event the famous exclamation of “eureka!” by Archimedes when he discerned how to determine whether King Hiero’s crown was pure gold or an alloy. According to legend, Archimedes leapt from his bathtub and ran through the streets of Syracuse naked. This event of the truth about the specific gravity of displaced liquids illustrates how Archimedes was a Subject who was capable of an *immanent* (again, not imminent, but from within) break from excepted knowledges. His act of running naked through the streets of Syracuse illustrates how as a spectator to this discovery his thinking was set into motion. He ran through the streets naked without any self-interest regarding his reputation (basic dignity!) because he was motivated by a “disinterested interest.” His fidelity to the event and his declaration of this truth makes his a perfect candidate for what Badiou calls “a Subject.”

Archimedes is strictly speaking “some-one” of the human species (a human animal) who became a Subject by belonging to a truth-process. Badiou provides the
following formula for his ethic of a truth, he says it is: “that which lends consistency to the presence of some-one in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth” (Ethics 44). The principal term in this formulation is “consistency” which is characterized by a “not knowing” what she will become if she remains faithful to her new-found truth. Remaining true to an artistic, scientific, political, or amorous event has it hazards from the point of view of mere biological life (self-preservation). Badiou speaks of a “some-one” who experiences a puncturing of her knowledge as a human animal by the thorn of a truth that takes hold of her – even at the ultimate expense of her own life.

Archimedes’ life provides us with one more excellent illustration of what Badiou means when he speaks of a Subject’s “consistency.” Archimedes died in 212 B.C. during the Second Punic war supposedly by a Roman soldier who was tasked with capturing him. When the soldiers found him he was working on a mathematical problem and asked that he not be disturbed. Angered, the soldier tasked with his arrest struck and killed Archimedes. His life illustrates that even up to death he continued to be faithful to mathematical truths, even ignoring armed soldiers’ orders. Badiou calls this “subjective consistency” which he says is a “superimposition” of perseverance upon self-preservation.

Beginning from the baseline of the human animal we may say that all human agents belong to that situation (“what there is”) within which they strive for self-preservation in the same manner as any animal occupies itself with securing life’s necessities. Truth, Badiou assures us, does not exist under this “law” of consistency qua preservation and conservation of mere biological life. Yet, it is this very law of
preservation and conservation which – according to Badiou – dictates our contemporary communitarian situation of capitalism and parliamentary democracy. Accordingly, our “ethical ideology” today is founded on this law of the preservation of the lives of every human animal under the aegis of human rights and humanitarianism. In Freudian terms the ethical ideology represents the death drive, while Badiou seeks to make a place for the life drive by means of truth processes.

Badiou speaks of a “some-one” as a human agent who attests to the event of truth as a bearer (le support) of a fidelity to a truth and that this courses-through the whole person like a puncturing of his animal occupation with mere self-preservation. Consider the situation of Socrates in prison awaiting his execution in 399 B.C. as illustrated in Plato’s Crito dialogue. Socrates asks Crito to, “[e]xamine the following statement in turn as to whether it stays the same or not, that the most important thing is not life, but the good life” (48b). The consideration of this notion that there is something more valuable than mere biological life is consistent with Badiou’s claim that the follower of a truth-event experiences a rupture of their biological instinct for survival by the willingness to die rather than to turn their back on a truth. For Socrates the truth-event is justice in the form of the contractual commitment132 the political subject makes with his or her city and its laws. Every-one is a some-one who is divided by their biological life on the one hand and their fidelity to some truth on the other. This is essentially the claim that Badiou makes regarding his notion of the divided human agent. In every case for Badiou when

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132 The “contractual commitment” for Socrates in the Crito stems from one’s choice to live within the polis and so long as one lives there they agree to obey the laws of the city.
some-one holds to a truth-event at the expense of their biological life\textsuperscript{133} he will claim that they are a proper Subject.

Before leaving Socrates we will briefly attempt to understand Socrates as a “self-subjectivizing” ‘some-one’. Badiou says that, “the ‘some-one’ was not in a position to know that he was capable of this co-belonging to a situation and to the hazardous course of a truth, this becoming-subject” (Ethics 46). Now, we must understand Socrates as co-belonging to a situation of Athenian political life in 399 B.C. which he did not fully understand since he was contemporary with this event. It certainly was a “hazardous course of a truth,” and historically from Plato’s point of view, Socrates’ execution ushered by his unwillingness to surrender his truth led to his “becoming-a-subject” (Ethics 46).

What I am attempting to do in these pages is to reconstruct and practically understand Badiou’s theory of subjectivity as founded on his notion of truth-events. It appears very easy to reconstruct many instances where mere human animals have been willing militants for innumerable truth-events. Further, one could ascent to his suspicion (which is borrowed from Nietzsche, Cf. \textit{Untimely Meditations: Second Meditation on the Use and Abuse of History for Life}) that no one is ever fully capable of being a reliable witness to his or her contemporary situation. We should also recall Hegel’s observation in the Preface to \textit{Philosophy of Right} that “every individual is a child of his time,” and the

\textsuperscript{133} Holding to the truth-event at all costs, especially at the cost of one’s life, is not a necessary condition. One does not have to be a martyr, but one must value the truthing event as more important than one’s biological life. One may forgo a more pleasant or honored life in order to hold more closely to the truth-event.
same holds for philosophy that it cannot “transcend its contemporary world” (PR 11). Thus for Badiou there is the “law of the not-known (de l’insu)” which means that “someone” (Plato’s Socrates, Archimedes, artists, revolutions of every stripe) cannot fully comprehend their subjectivity.

In summary Badiou’s ethics is built upon his philosophical attempt to think beyond the metaphysics of presence which equates being with thinking. We find his clearest statement on this philosophical effort in the preface to Logic of Worlds: Being and Event II where he (rather famously now) says, “There are only bodies and language, except that there are truths” (LW 12/4). Any philosophy that maintains that the only things that exist are “bodies and language” (or being and thinking) assumes that there is a singular universe in the sense of a “whole” that could possibly be thought. Badiou distinguishes between “what-is” from “beings” in terms of inconsistent multiplicity and consistent multiplicity. We will see in the next chapter Badiou’s claim that Ricoeur defends selfhood as a consistent multiplicity which is incapable of satisfying Badiou’s notion that the subject arises only when its finite consciousness is shattered by an event. The Subject is the carrier of an event who elevates this event to the status of a truth by nominating it and then carrying this truth forward. What is at stake for me is not his

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134 The distinction between inconsistent and consistent multiples is a distinction between “presentation” and “counting” which I interpret to mean presentation of situations, person, and things versus mathematical operations in general. This distinction concerns is developed by Badiou in Being and Event Meditation 1 and concerns the ancient problem of the one and the many. In principle Badiou maintains that “there is Oneness” at least symbolically and not actually located somewhere “over there”. The “one” is also an operation such as when we group elements of a set or category claiming that “all species of cats are felines” (one genus). Now, what occurs is that we are first presented with a multiplicity which can then be said “to be one”; this is called a “situation” by Badiou. When we refer to a multiplicity as “one” this operation acts as an effect which then presents the multiple as a oneness. The presentation of a multiple is an “inconsistent” multiplicity, whereas the counting (one by one) of a multiple is “consistent”.
contention that there are truths; rather it is his theory of the subject as a mere bearer of something from outside itself. Who is this “who?” who carries a truth? If an artist, scientist, militant or lover is a bearer of some truth, then “who?” is this person? What happens when a subject discovers that it has erred and that its supposed truth is a chimera? When we attempt to apply Badiou’s ethics of truths we quickly realize that it applies to very few of these human animals for whom he shows so much contempt. The solitary artist, scientist, militant and lover leaves most human animals – concerned about potable water, sufficient food, shelter and life’s necessities – cast aside as non-subjects pushed by the death-drive in the darkness of un-truth. One must rely very heavily on Freudian and Lacanian principles all the while hoping that set-theory does not suffer an irruption that would threaten Badiou’s mathematical ontology of multiplicities.

What comes of old truths? The event irrupts into settled knowledge which demonstrates for Badiou that what is is always incomplete and capable of revolutionizing the world of beings. Concretely he talks of artistic, scientific, and political revolutions as well as the world-altering effects of love. These events become truths when human animals announce them and continue to be faithful to these events. However, what happens over the course of time? Truths seem to be short-lived and all truths will – overtime – become part of a settled knowledge (consensus) only to experience rupture from some new truth. Truths, in other words, have expiration dates. Badiou, no doubt, is motivated by his commitment to communism and has found a means of claiming that everything in our world today is part of a stale consensus founded on capitalism and in good Marxist fashion he sees the inevitability of a communist revolution that will disrupt
ethical ideology. I will turn now to his concept of evil in order to examine how the consensus view and the “ethical ideology” are driven, in his view, by the death-drive.

5.3 An Understanding of Evil

Badiou admits that truth-events are rare, and more often than not truths are quickly retooled by human animals in the interest of their preservation. Every human life, like every other animal, he says is not “beyond good and evil,” but instead “beneath Good and Evil” (Ethics 59). At the heart of knowledges is a void or a supplement that remains unnamed and unnamable. Badiou provides two examples: Haydn’s music and Marx’s proletariat. The style of Baroque music was the knowledge at the heart of the contemporary “situation” just prior to Haydn which suffered an “absence … of a genuine conception of musical architectonics” (Ethics 68). Haydn brought this absence out into the open by means of his new musical architectonics. In a similar fashion, within the situation of early modern bourgeois societies was the unnamed supplement of the proletariat which made those economies possible. The event in both these cases was the naming of the void at the heart of these situations. This “evental (événementiel) supplement” forms the first of three dimensions of the process of truths. The mistake made by ethical ideology is the maintenance of evil that determines the destruction of life and property as the greatest of all possible evils.

According to Badiou’s ethics of truths evil has three names: terror, betrayal and disaster. Each of these three names are directly related to some-one’s relation with an event that has punched a hole in some knowledge situation. Badiou invokes Plato’s allegory of the cave in order to explain the relation between knowledges and truth, thus I
will turn to this allegory to explain the three names of evil developed in his ethics of truths.

The opening situation in Plato’s allegory of the cave involves prisoners who are allegorically chained to their opinions. One prisoner is released and turns one-hundred-eighty degrees around only to experience a total rupture of all opinions while being blindingly disoriented by the light of a fire which represents “scientific” knowledge. “Reluctantly dragged up a rugged and steep ascent,” the prisoner continues an upward ascent until he can see the sun – which represents the Good and the source of all truth – in His proper place up in the heavens. One can read into these first moves Badiou’s understanding of the event and the process of truth, namely that the chained prisoner is the human animal and the event is the release from those chains. The second half of the allegory follows the enlightened former prisoner as he returns down into the darkness of the cave. Returning to his fellow prisoners he will attempt to persuade them to break their chains and take the arduous journey up and out of the cave. Unfortunately for our enlightened prisoner they will put him to death if any one were to attempt to break their chains.

At the heart of the cave there is an unnamable void at the heart of the knowledges. The prisoner’s release is the event par excellence. The prisoner’s journey represents the process of truth which the prisoner takes even at the very threat of his own life. With this simple outline of Plato’s allegory we can read into it the three names of evil according to Badiou’s ethic of truths. Terror is the false belief that the event (the prisoner’s release) summons the “plenitude” of the given situation (the cave’s darkness), when in fact the release is the summoning of the void within the situation. Betrayal would in this case be a
failure on the part of the released prisoner to turn around upon his release, or to ascend or to fail to return. Disaster is the third name for evil and this is the point where truth forces knowledges. Within Plato’s allegory we have the disaster that is a veiled apology for Socrates who suffered the real-life disaster of his execution in 399 B.C. Disaster can be characterized by the returning prisoner (now enlightened by the truth) who attempts to “force” the knowledges of the shadows on the cave walls. Happy to guess at shadows and honor one another for who can guess which shadow will come next, they are aghast at the thought of being disabused of their errors. Badiou calls this “reorganization of opinions the power (puissance) of truths” (Ethics 80).

The logic of any world, what Badiou calls “living,” is the multiplicity of opinions that can be communicated among all the persons of that world. In the world of the cave the situation was one founded upon shadows, thus the members of that world communicated their opinions about those shadows. The event, along with the truth-process, involves a sort of return to the world of opinions and a confrontation with those opinions. The Subject of is some-one who has, like Plato’s released prisoner, two kinds of interests, first the original self-interest like the other prisoners, but now a second “disinterested-interest” in the Good as represented allegorically by the sun which has enlightened him. This some-one forces upon the opinions of the cave dwellers his newly found truth in such a way that his language can reinterpret all the language of the cave dwellers. The power of a truth to reorganize all the language and opinion of a world is called “total power.” The Subject is thus a carrier of a “subject-language” which if it has total power can rename all opinions and therefore it can result in “the wholesale negation of the human animal that bears him (i.e., the Subject)” (Ethics 84). Evil qua disaster
results in the denial of the divided “some-one” who has both personal (lower-case ‘s’) self-interests “pure and simple” as well as the disinterested-interest (as a Subject) in a truth.

Truth it seems can be too much for any Subject to bear. Truth can crush an individual when it so absolutizes the language of the world-situation of the human animal who is the bodily vehicle for the Subject. Commenting on the general nature of “interest” Badiou says: “Even ethical ‘consistency’… is only the disinterested engagement, in fidelity, of a perseverance whose origin is interest” (Ethics 84). In other words, ethical consistency *qua* fidelity to a truth retains the divided agent since the ethical consistency is founded on the interests of self-preservation. When any truth forces upon opinions (knowledges) to an absolute extent, then it can destroy the very interests of self-preservation which support the some-one who carries that truth. For Badiou the principal forcing agent is the “ethical ideology” which allows states to bomb other states in the name of human rights.\(^\text{135}\)

These three names for Evil (terror, betrayal, disaster) lead to the obvious question: What then is the Good? “The Good is Good” Badiou says, “only to the extent that it does not aspire to render the world good. Its sole being lies in the situated advent of a singular truth” (Ethics 85). Today’s politics attempts to “render the world good,” by the imposition of a politics that remains tied to the nation-state and capitalistic economics. Additionally, Badiou claims that for the ethical ideology the good is determined by the

\(^{135}\) We can witness this in the cases of Algeria in the 1950s, Bosnia in the 1990s and today we see it throughout the civil war in Syria where every side claims to be fighting against terrorism.
death-drive and mere self-preservation with its characteristic lack of any truth that would elevate the human animal via some subjective-consistency by means of a truth-process. Capitalism and democratic parliamentarianism is our world’s communitarian consensus and it is devoid of any truth-process. The truth-process is always the irruption within any knowledge of what is as of yet unnamed. Ethical ideology thus embodies for Badiou the hegemony of untruth found within any world of opinions. Those who defend “humanism,” “humanitarianism,” and “human rights” are like Plato’s prisoners always guessing at shadows and presenting each other with “peace” prizes as it were. Chief among the apologists for the ethical ideology is Paul Ricoeur who defends a sense of selfhood that is – according to Badiou – devoid of any truth-process.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, we always begin with a world, a consensus, a community, knowledges – or whatever words we choose to label the oneness of our world. Within the logic of any world is a supplement that cannot be named or known by those who “live” within that knowledge. Knowledges can be artistic, scientific, political, or amorous. For Badiou the chief world of today is that of capitalism and the voice of this world is ethics. This ethical ideology is for Badiou a manifestation of the death-drive because it is chiefly concerned with bio-ethics at every stage of our lives. The absence of any truth-process within our contemporary situation is neither unique nor is it something we can consciously “fix.” Any “fix” would be just another manifestation of the death-drive. Instead, based on his mathematical ontology our “one-world,” our contemporary situation, is in fact a multiplicity which has at the heart of it an unnamable center which corresponds in essence with the Lacanian subject who orbits around “un petit objet ‘a’”. Lacan’s maxim:
“Ne pas cèdes sur son désir” can now be restated as “do not cede your truth.” Much like desire at the heart of the subject, truth is at the heart of any knowledge waiting to be named. Once some-one nominates that supplement it ruptures a world of opinion like Plato’s released and enlightened prisoner returning to the enchained cave dwellers.

In conclusion we can make the following observations concerning Badiou’s ethics and any possible relation it may have with the so-called “ethical ideology” and Ricoeur’s own philosophy of selfhood which passes through the ethical as we examined in chapter 2. The first observation is that gone are all references to justice, virtue, duty, phronēsis, Reason’s commands as well as other traditional ethical terms concerning practical behaviors. This is intentional of course for the only virtue (in the most general sense) for Badiou is the strength “some-one” has to continue! to bear an event through its truth-process at the expense of their animal interests. Again, using traditional language we may say that this is a Subject’s only duty, yet for Badiou the Subject is a result of subjective-continuity, not in any way a foundational consciousness. Our second observation is that Badiou’s primary intellectual concern is political through and through: the ascent of what he calls the “third configuration” of communism. The whole globalized community is the domain of democratic-capitalism and Marx’s “inevitable” manifestation of communism is simply awaiting some still unnamable, unknown, event. The bearers of this event-to-come are guaranteed by nothing other than Badiou’s confidence in his own theory of truth-events supported by axiomatic set-theory. Third observation: Badiou’s ethics applies to very little of human activity, in fact, it applies to only those exceptional “events” that make the history of ideas so exciting: namely revolutions. However, it is a mark of the modern mind to place the highest esteem upon revolutions ever since
Nicholas Copernicus coined our present use of the term in his *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*. One must wonder if Badiou is still *too* modern given the centrality of revolution within his system of ontology as well as his ethics. My own personal contention (although not a rigid conviction) is that *the revolutions are over*. Although our age is age of constant *technological* revolution, essentially we have our work as a civilization before us in terms of finding sustained ways of growing and flourishing. While I am sympathetic to Badiou’s overall project and often find his works insightfully thought-provoking my overall conclusion is that he provides a novel view-from-above that is woefully inadequate for all those of us whose biological and rational lives matter.
CHAPTER SIX

Today’s “Battlefield” – The Subject’s Relation to History

6.1 Badiou: From the Human Animal to the Subject of Truth

Badiou’s most direct criticism takes aim at Ricoeur’s Memory, History, Forgetting (MHF) specifically focusing on the chapter entitled The Historian’s Representation concerning the role of the subject culminating in a suspicion that Ricoeur leaves the subject out of his general discussion of memory and history. In a short article entitled “The Subject Supposed to be Christian: On Paul Ricoeur’s Memory, History, Forgetting”136 he states that he will, “argue that Ricoeur’s great book (MHF), in all its subtlety and erudition, is no less than a muffled expression of a sort of abstract war which involves, via control over the practice of historians, the spiritual direction of the

‘democratic’ camp” (Subject 2). Suspecting that Ricoeur is hiding, like Descartes, behind a mask of false neutrality much as Descartes’ hid himself behind a false mask of outward piety, Badiou seeks to unmask the Christian subject in Memory, History, Forgetting. Such an unmasking of a Christian subjectivity will suffice for many137 as a valid and sufficient critique of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self and the “democratic camp” in general. This so-called “democratic camp” should be understood in the concrete sense as the post-Cold War consensus that free-market capitalism and representative republican democracy (i.e., constitutional democracy) is the current as well as the future state of politics.138 To be a member of what Badiou calls the “democratic consensus” invalidates one’s philosophy. In chapters 4 and 5 below we laid the groundwork necessary to understand how this is so according to Badiou’s mathematics-based ontology and his ethical theory. Anyone who supposedly supports the consensus view of politics is akin to the enchained prisoners guessing at shadows in Plato’s cave. Badiou views Ricoeur as a member of such a consensus; a consensus that represents one side of the principal choice facing our age. The choice, according to Badiou, is between either “a subject of the Law, who confronts a tradition of persecution” or “the subject of faith, for whom a sacrificial event opens the path of salvation” (Subject 27.2). Badiou views himself as a militant

137 The claim that Ricoeur is a secret Christian apologist is sufficient criticism for many readers today given the wide adherence to the three masters of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. All three of these thinkers were very vocal in their denunciations of religion and Christianity in particular. Marx called religion the “opiate of the masses”; Nietzsche’s arch-enemies was Socrates and his pre-figuration of Jesus Christ; Freud understood religion to be an illusory coping-mechanism. Given these widely prevalent attitudes towards all religious faith the accusation of hidden apologetics for any religion is viewed as sufficient grounds for exclusion from the academy. The irony is not lost on me that the very founder of the Academy is predicated upon the events surrounding Socrates execution for the thought-crime of not believing in the gods of the polis. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose!
confronting a “tradition of persecution” which is embodied in thinkers such as Ricoeur. Therefore, the situation of the contemporary discipline and general activity of history and the wider cultural imaginary is the central “battlefield” where nothing less than “the spiritual direction of the ‘democratic’ camp,” is defending by Ricoeur.

Badiou’s main attack against Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting* rests on the premise that he hides his philosophical conception of the subject until the very end – brought to bear on the issues of memory, history, and forgetting only in the text’s long Epilogue. Badiou even claims that the literary device of an epilogue offers further proof that Ricoeur has something nefarious to hide. A proper and creative philosophical attitude will always approach philosophers as if they are direct, open, honest, and not as deceiving geniuses. For instance, when one reads Descartes one does not need to employ a suspicion that he was actually an atheist who demonstrates God’s existence (twice!) in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* merely as a means to trick religious authorities into believing in his piety139. Likewise in our present case, the contention that Ricoeur must be held with deep suspicion as to his motives for the “return of the self” (return of the subject – in Badiou’s terms) in an epilogue no less is, I argue, unfounded. The extraordinary claim made by Badiou that Ricoeur is deceiving his readers requires evidence. Such evidence I will show in the next two chapters is lacking, thereby refuting Badiou’s criticism. Furthermore, I will show in these final two chapters that Ricoeur provides a conception of selfhood that exceeds Badiou’s theory of the subject in term of

139 Descartes left Paris with only his Bible and some writings of St. Aquinas – not the baggage of an atheist.
the psychological, existential, phenomenological depth of selfhood as well as at the concrete level of common-sense experience.

Badiou's criticism cuts across both the continental and analytic traditions, but its venom is most clearly aimed at his fellow continental thinkers. In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou identifies Ricoeur as “[t]he greatest French representative of the connection between phenomenology and religion,” going on to say the Ricoeur’s “intellectual strategy presupposes the indestructible latency of a Christian subject at the very heart of the text [i.e., *Memory, History, Forgetting*]” (LW 516). Badiou’s criticism begins from the claim that Ricoeur has a positivist conception of historical representation akin to Descartes’ correspondence theory of truth as outlined in meditation four of his *Meditations*. Invoking Lacan, Badiou argues that positivism requires a subject for any representation of states of affairs – in our case here – historical representations. Badiou is claiming that Ricoeur “reserves attribution” of historical representations until the very end of *Memory, History, Forgetting* in order to secure an “over-determined” Christian subject, hence putting Ricoeur squarely into the “democratic consensus.” Badiou’s critique makes sense only given what we have examined in chapter 4 regarding his political commitments to what he calls the “third configuration” of communism. In essence, Badiou needs to undermine Ricoeur’s position in order to support his claim that ethics today is nothing more than a *dispostif* that comes to the defense of modern capitalism and judicial legalism. These latter forces are viewed by his as the principal cause of political violence for much of the past one hundred years.
Today’s “battlefield” – History, Evil and Juridical Humanism

Badiou identifies history (the discipline thereof) as the “battlefield” for contemporary philosophy because those in the consensual camp, led by Ricoeur, seek to separate the imprescriptible and unforgiveable evil of events such as the Holocaust from history-itself. Central to this effort is to preserve the duty to remember evils while at the same time allowing for a forgetting in order that we may “learn to recount otherwise” (MHF 477). This effort argues in favor a moral norm that is trans-historical in much the same way as the Christian doctrine of Providence acts as a trans-historical norm capable of redeeming all evils within human history. (The figure of Christ is the trans-historical figure par excellence in the very sense that his birth bisects all historical time into B.C. and A.D.) What is this trans-historical norm? It is the “duty to remember” radical evils. With such a duty, forgetting is forbidden yet, according to Badiou, the “dialectical correlate” of forgetting is forgiveness. This problematizes the experience of forgiving. If all of history falls under the duty to remember, then forgetting is forbidden, leading to the conclusion that forgiveness is likewise impossible. This problem is what Badiou is claiming that Ricoeur must fix by means of retaining a Christian subject who can somehow still be separated as a subject from memory and history.

We can now summarize Badiou’s critique of Ricoeur in the following terms. The “ethical ideology” is founded on an understanding of evil as the violent destruction of life

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140 “History-itself” refers to the idea that history has a spirit or life of its own within which human beings are mere actors. Georg Hegel is a strong advocate of this notion of a “history-itself” that is independent of any interpretation by the historian. The question of “history-itself” is not to be taken up here. For more on this see R. G. Collingwood’s The Idea of History, Oxford University Press, 1994.
which allows “those who opine” to impose an “ethical constraint” upon history-itself. The underlying theme here is one of redemptive history whereby all the evils of the world are ultimately part of God’s Providence. The duty to remember instances of so-called “radical evil” means that forgetting is forbidden, hence the need for the correlative concept of forgiving which can unbind an agent from his or her act without forgetfulness of that action. Badiou’s thesis is that the discussion of the self must therefore enter Ricoeur’s text only at the point where we have a self who is capable of forgiving, thereby saving the duty to remember. All of these maneuvers are in service to a conception of evil as the privation of life and property, hence maintaining the consensus’ juridical humanism with its powers to punish whomever it “opines” to be evil. The ethical ideology always remains at the level of the death drive and the all too human concerns shared by other animals for self-preservation – whether individual or collective by race, religion, nation, language or some other tradition or social construct. Truth-events are not found at this level.

Central to Badiou’s criticism is his conviction that evil is not something “down here” in the world of mere human animals fighting for survival. For Badiou good and evil are “above” the world of opining human animals (Ethics 66). The figure used to illustrate the world of human animals versus the world of Subjects-of-a-truth was Plato’s cave. In Plato’s allegory of the cave the sun represents the Good and it is not to be found in the world of shadowy opinions. Events occur when the Oneness of the logic of a world is seen and understood (by a Subject) as a multiple. Evil for Badiou is the failure to continue to faithfully follow an event once denominated as a new truth by a Subject.
We now turn to Badiou’s description of how Ricoeur deceptively endeavors to keep the subject separate from memory, history, and forgiving until the Christian subject capable of forgiving returns to his text.

6.2 Ricoeur’s Endeavor – Reserving Attribution

In this first of two sections in this chapter we will examine what Ricoeur endeavors to do with regard to the presence and absence of the self throughout his treatment of memory and history in Memory, History, Forgetting. It is Badiou’s contention that Ricoeur seeks to keep the human subject separate from both memory and history until the point where he can usher in a subject who remains essentially Christian.

Central to Badiou’s argument is that in Part One of Memory, History, Forgetting Ricoeur develops a phenomenology of memory that allows memories to have a core intelligibility absent a subject. This is not surprising given that phenomenology examines the contents of consciousness with all other forms of knowledge bracketed or suspended while one examines those contents. Memories are then attributed to three types of subjects: oneself, close others, and distant strangers. According to Badiou, this attribution betrays the Christian over-determination of the subject in Ricoeur because it is a transparent adaptation of St. Paul’s own command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (i.e., “distant strangers”). For Ricoeur, memory is characterized by the enigma of the presence of an absent thing divided between the “what?” that is remembered and the “who?” who recalls it. In other words, the act is the noesis of remembering while the intention to remember is the noema. Ricoeur’s project there is to begin with mneme, i.e.,
memory\textsuperscript{141} ("the what?") and anamnesis, i.e., objective recollection\textsuperscript{142} ("the how?") in order to arrive at "the who?" that is, the subject. He says he will move, "from memory to reflective memory, passing by way of recollection" (MHF 8). Ricoeur begins his investigation with Plato and Aristotle in order to develop a dialogue between Plato’s notion of memory as an \textit{eikōn} versus Aristotle’s claim that, "memory is of the past" (MHF 11-15). The entire problematic of memory for Ricoeur is the conjunction between external stimulation and internal resemblance (MHF 17).

Ricoeur’s first result of describing the spectrum of memories (from pathological to objective) is that the phenomenologist can distinguish between “knowing \textit{that} X happened,” and “remembering \textit{how to do} X.” What he means is that there is habitual memory as in animals, but also there are memories that can imagine and can reconfigure (i.e., anamnesis). Memory in this latter sense is reflective and Ricoeur defines a polarity between reflexivity and worldliness when he says:

One does not simply remember oneself, seeing, experiencing, learning; rather one recalls the situations in the world in which one has seen, experienced, learned. These situations imply one’s own body and the bodies of others, lived space, and, finally, the horizon of the world and worlds, within which something has occurred (MHF 36).

\textsuperscript{141} Ricoeur’s principal objective in \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting} is to investigate traumatic memories and the possibility of healing wounds and scars. Pathological memories are “sick” memories which involve great suffering that can lead to repetitions or cycles of violence within families, communities, religions, as well as within and between nations.

\textsuperscript{142} "Objective recollection" is the task of historians whose discipline it is to recall the past without passions, pathos, and anger.
We say, “in our heart” that I was there, I saw this, and I did that. This belongs to our interior subjectivity and any “interpretive surplus of subjectivist idealism” that would restrict this dialectical relation should be rejected (MHF 36). Husserl’s “epoché” involves a [bracketing] of the phenomenological immediacy of all knowledge in the sense that its positivistic validity is suspended in order to investigate the contents of consciousness in terms of “intentionality.” According to Ricoeur, this is a direct rejection of an unfortunate drawback within Husserl’s conception of the “epoché” that was only partially corrected by his notion of Lebenswelt (MHF 37).

In chapter 2 of Part One of Memory, History, Forgetting Ricoeur examines the exercise of memory: its uses and abuses. Remembering involves both cognitive and pragmatic problematics which fall under anamnesis and recollection respectively. A favorite expression of Ricoeur’s is borrowed from Merleau-Ponty that “I can remember” (MHF 57). Memory involves a desire for faithfulness to the past and involves an “effort” to recall faithfully. He passes through a detour of experimental psychology and the biology of memory under the sign of ars memoriae – the art of memory. The founding myth of ars memoriae is the tragic episode at a banquet-hall in 500 B.C. which suffered a total collapse due to an earthquake. Simonides of Ceos was outside the hall and was tasked with recalling all the guests whose bodies were crushed beyond recognition. He was able to recall all those in attendance by recollecting the physical seating arrangement, that is, by attaching mental images of persons to their places at the banquet. In a similar way I remember my students according to where they are seated. Ricoeur examines three masters of ars memoriae: St. Augustine, Dante Alighieri, and Giordano Bruno. The
tradition of *ars memoriae* is figured in the rotund character Sancho Panza in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* who represents in his rotund form the accumulation of knowledge.

Ricoeur asks whether or not we require a “methodical forgetting” in order to overcome cycles of political violence witnessed in our globalized world. This particular thesis is further developed by Maria Duffy in her text *Paul Ricoeur’s Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*.143 This thesis of a possible “methodical forgetting” is a principal element of Badiou’s criticism. The many uses of memory are so obvious they need not be stated for all of our science and our knowledge of our lives is founded on the proper use and retention of memory. The modern notion of “genius” is likewise predicated on the mastery of memory and finds itself in the many cultural imaginaries of the evil intelligence who has mastery of every detail.144

If we are clear on the *uses* of memory, then what of the *abuses*? Memories can be blocked, manipulated or forced. In Plato we can find several instances of the abuses of memory. One instance is in Plato’s *Apology* where we find Socrates breaking the legal injunction to never mention the reign of the Thirty Tyrants on penalty of death (Cf. *Apology* 32 c-e). This is an instance of forced forgetting: “you will not recall the time of the Thirty Tyrants!” Another instance is found in Plato’s *Menexenus* dialogue where Socrates discusses with Menexenus the emotional power of fine eulogies for those who

143 Duffy’s work represents an early direction of my study of Ricoeur which was abandoned only after reading Badiou’s critique of Ricoeur which guides this dissertation.

144 For a thorough treatment of memory and the character of the genius see Harald Weinrich’s insightful text *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, Cornell University Press, 2004. I am indebted to this text for insight into the modern notion of genius as the accumulation of knowledge by means of the art of memory.
have died in battle. Socrates exclaims: “O Menexenus! Death in battle is certainly in
many respects a noble thing… an elaborate speech is made over him by a wise man who
has long ago prepared what he has to say, although he who is praised may not have been
good for much” (234b-c). Further, Socrates says that he feels “quite elevated by their
laudations,” he is “enchanted” by their words and “I imagine myself to have become a
grater and nobler and finer man than I was before” (235a-b). This is an instance of forced
memory – “you will remember them all as fine heroes!” Ricoeur’s question regarding
repressed, manipulated and forced memory concerns how the pathos of memory fits into
the techne of memorials.

Badiou’s claim that Ricoeur hides the self until the very end of Memory, History,
Forgetting does not seem to hold up to scrutiny given the survey of the first two chapters
of Ricoeur’s phenomenology of memory. Manipulated memories (pathological, practical
and ethico-political) all concern the subject who is remembering. When memory is
blocked the self turns to pathological repetitions of behavior and when mourning is
blocked the self turns melancholic, but in either case the ego’s libidinal drives are bound
to the past. The melancholic mind is seen in the figure of the genius, the mad scientist
and ultimately in the mental condition of acedia – apathy. Ricoeur asks whether we can
transpose Freud’s psychoanalytic categories such as repression, melancholia, and the
repetitions so common to trauma victims upon collective memory. Collectives, like
individuals, do endure the loss of “objects” in the form of fellow citizens, land, property,

145 This is certainly true with Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome as well as when a person is not allowed to
mourn a loss.
wealth and sense of cultural identity. At the heart of this question of transposing psychoanalytic, or broadly “subjective” categories, upon collectives is the more pointed question of, “[h]ow much violence in the world stands as acting out ‘in place of’ remembering?” (MHF 79). What I find difficult to understand is how Badiou does not see that Ricoeur’s project is not deceptively to keep the self out of the consideration of memory, but how can we extend the phenomenon of memory beyond the self. Ricoeur’s primary concern is how can we answer the question “Who am I?” based on the “what?” of memory beginning with the idem- sense of identity on the way to an ipse-identity. This is the problem of the self’s difficult relation to time, and it is through narrative that memory is incorporated, i.e., “emplotted” (mis en intrigue), into identity. We will see the full sense of the self who acts, speaks, narrates and passes the test of the “ethical intention” in chapter 7 below. For now my only concern is to continue my examination of Badiou’s claim that the self is not identified by Ricoeur until the Epilogue.

Badiou’s critique of Ricoeur is driven by a two-fold concern: the lack of awareness of the abyss of forgetfulness and the challenge Ricoeur poses to his interdependent theories of truth-events, Subjectivity and Evil. These latter three are facets of the same concern, and the former is the weapon he uses against Ricoeur. For Ricoeur “memory is the womb of history,” and justice turns memory into a project along two parallel lines. First we use memory in order to search for the truth (veracity) of the past, and second memory can be used (and abused) for practical purposes. When these converge successfully we can say that we have fulfilled our “duty to memory” (MHF 88). Reflect briefly on our various calendars – they help us commemorate each and every year the victories, catastrophes and founding persons or events in our lives. This constitutes a
use of memory certainly, but political powers can turn annual celebrations into abusive memorials. Ricoeur admits that any phenomenology of memory must confront the questions of the supposed duty to remember. Badiou is claiming that this duty to remember represents the imposition upon history of a trans-historical norm. This is anathema to Badiou’s philosophy since *History as such* is always only what “those who opine” – Plato’s cave-dwellers – say it is. Badiou’s point is that the principal mistake made by any supposed “consensus view” of history is the claim that there is only one narrative of history. For Badiou on the other hand, history is always something to be disrupted, punctured, by new events of truth. For Ricoeur, it is not a question of one history-itself, or of revolutionary “truths,” but rather of how the human being comes to live in the truth. To live in the truth means that our memory has passed a test of recollection (the *techne* of memory) and its discordant aspects are worked into a coherent narrative that a subject finds believable. This means that one can have both the belief-that events unfolded as they are recounted, and that one can believe-in the role and efficacy of human agents within the world. Memories and histories rely on the existence of material evidence, documentary traces, eye-witness accounts, and other physical phenomena. The justice of such a process of memory is largely negative in the sense that memories and histories are not suppressed or abusively repeated. Further, with all the evidence at hand descriptions of the past must do justice to the role of human agency if it is to be believable.

In chapter 3 of Part One of *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur opens by noting that the question of the actual subject of the operations of memory is an “unwieldy debate” (MHF 93). This question involves the “two estranged universes of discourse,”
namely collective memory and individual memory. The impasse between these two owes it origin to St. Augustine’s theory of memory in Book 10 of his Confessions. Memory here is the way we pass through memory like walking in interior fields and palaces of memory, only to “collect” and “assemble” (cogito) those individual and disparate memories. Augustine also remarks in Book 10 chapter 8 that forgetfulness can swallow up and bury my memories, yet I can recall that I cannot recall something. Badiou names forgetfulness one of the three figures of Evil in his Ethics – “betrayal” of a truth (71).

We have the work of Husserl which Ricoeur calls the “apex of inwardness” (MHF 109). Ricoeur studies this “school of inwardness” in order to explain phenomenology’s retreat from the objective sphere into the egological sphere. Badiou argues that Ricoeur thinks only within this phenomenological framework because he apparently does not understand how Ricoeur moves beyond the sense of immanent time experienced as the flow of consciousness. Ricoeur’s egological approach – through the flow of consciousness – rejects the existence of a foreign “I” – as an other than the self within the self. As noted above Ricoeur’s task in Part One of Memory, History, Forgetting is to detour through mneme, i.e., memory (“the what?”), and anamnesis, i.e., objective recollection (“the how?”) in order to arrive at “the who?” as the subject. Anamnesis is the

146 A further sequence of this school of memory as inward thought is John Locke’s invention of the sequence of a) identity, b) consciousness, c) self. Key to this sequence is the concept of “person” as a name for the ”self” who is responsible for his actions according to how one identify with oneself as an agent.
objective memory we have as such, but it holds memories of the past “at a distance” (MHF 116).

As we saw in our examination of Oneself as Another in the first three chapters of this dissertation Ricoeur understands the self as constituted out of its relations with its own otherness and the otherness of others. Beginning with “ownness,” the ego experiences other persons as foreign. Next there is a “pairing” (Paarung) whereby the “not-me” and the “in-me” achieve an equilibrium or an “appresentation”. This forms an irreversible chain from 1) the idea of ownness to 2) the experience of the other to 3) a communalization of subjective experience. Hegel made a leap from the “I” to the “We” under the sign of Sittlichkeit. However, as we discussed in chapter 2 above Ricoeur rejects Hegel here:

My wager is that the dialectic of ethics and morality, in the sense defined in the preceding studies, develops and resolves itself in moral judgment in situation, without the addition, as a third agency, of Sittlichkeit, the flower of a philosophy of Geist in the practical dimension (OaA 249).

The communalization of subjective experience is not therefore to be found in some third agency such as a collective consciousness. There are, “only two principles of connection: that of the ‘facts and material phenomena’ and that of collective memory” (MHF 123). The former is always marked by presence and the representations in consciousness.

147 For St. Augustine in Book 11 of his Confessions time has three parts: the presence of the past, the presence of the present and the present of the future – also known as memory, attention and anticipation.
Collective memory is the only way he says that we can “account for the logics of coherence presiding over the perception of the world” (MHF 123). The coherence of memory is therefore founded not just on the pathological memories formed by worldly facts and material interactions, but it also requires a collective sense of anamnesis as a recollection that answers “How?” the facts occurred. The coherence of memory is therefore not grounded simply in a subject as Badiou demands, rather the self must emplot those facts into a narrative which brings those disparate facts together. This is in marked contrast with Badiou’s understanding of “life” outlined in his Logics of Worlds as the multiplicity of opinions that can be communicated among all the persons of that world. For Badiou the logic of a world is to be understood (and “proven”) by his mathematical ontology that holds that any “oneness” (i.e., community) will invariable show itself as a multitude. The hidden element of knowledge that irrupts that community (i.e., a “consistent” multiplicity) is the so-called “event” that shows that “what is” is not the entire known collection of “beings”. According to Badiou’s use of axiomatic set theory every collective is a multiple which is a non-one in the sense that any set can always become part of a larger set. This is essentially Godel’s theorem that there is always another set of all sets, and this allows Badiou to claim that every collective (i.e., set) contains its own rupture.

Only now can we understand Badiou’s central critique of Ricoeur and what is at stake for him in this “battlefield” of history. For Ricoeur it is in the very personal act of recollection that “the social was sought and found” (MHF 123). Now, we can see how diametrically opposed these two thinkers are. Badiou presents a philosophy imposed from above by means of a mathematically demonstrated ontology of multitudes which involves
“worlds” whose “logics” present themselves to their contemporaries as one and whole. However, within every logic there exist “supplements” that remain unknown and unnamed until they eventfully disrupt the consensus opinion. (I find that recalling the figure of Plato’s released prisoner returning to “those who opine” on the shadows on the cave wall to be very helpful.) Events such as Socrates’ trial, Christ’s resurrection, Copernicus’ De Revolutionibus, Newton, Einstein, Marx’s Proletariat, and other events—artistic, scientific, political and amorous all disrupted the logic of some world. Ricoeur on the other hand presents a philosophy, not imposed from on high, but one that begins from one’s own reflective and personal acts of recollection.

Badiou claims that Ricoeur’s endeavor in Memory, History, Forgetting involves the “attribution” of memory as predicates that can be predicated to three types of subjects: self, collectives and neighbors. Badiou claims that Ricoeur’s tactic here is to subordinate memory to forgiveness under the sign of a technique of forgetting. Furthermore, the attribution of memories as predicates leads Badiou to ask: “Isn’t a memory, that is in some manner averred, precisely the kind that makes reserving attribution [of memories to a subject] impossible?” (Subject 27.4). Memories for Badiou are truths, not just subjective meanings, and “unlike meaning, a truth cannot be predicated in identical fashion about two distinct subjects” (Subject, 27.4). What Badiou missed is that Ricoeur states that his own “phenomenological investigation, concerning the relations between remembering, memorizing, and commemorating, was conducted in line with this abstention from attribution [to a subject]” (MHF 126). Memory is both a particular and a singular case as, for instance, when we speak in first, second or third person, or when fictional characters speak in literature. Further, Ricoeur notes how the
pronominal verbal form (*je se souvenir*) illustrates that when “remembering something [we] remember ourselves” (*se souvenir de quelque chose se souvenir de soi*).

My conclusion here is that when Badiou “entertains the hypothesis that attribution is an *ad hoc* operator which aims at granting memory only a predicative status,” that his suspicion that there is an over-determined Christian subject hidden in the heart of Ricoeur’s project. My judgment is that Ricoeur reserves attribution of memory and history to selfhood throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting* in order to argue that memory and history are not merely predicative of the self, but constitutive of selfhood through the alethetic process of finding truth within one’s lived experiences. Selfhood is not merely something to predicate this or that memory, but something for whom a memory, or historical event, has meaning. The “attributive hypothesis: that of which the operations of memory and of historical propositions could be said.” 27.3 The “could” of this statement means that we “could” describe memory, history and forgetting without recourse to a subject who remembers, narratives and forgets. This is likened to a Husserlian epoché which Ricoeur calls “reserving attribution.” Badiou’s claim then is that the consensual camp is attempting to subtract history from the duty to remember. Some evils are “too radical” and thus defy any attempt to compose a rational narrative about them, whereby they leave an “essential wound in the fabric of history”. (Subject 27.1) The duty to remember the “radical evil” that renders the fabric of history imposes an ethical “trans-historical norm” across history in the form of a call for forgetting. According to Badiou, since for Ricoeur the dialectical correlate to forgetting is forgiveness, therefore Ricoeur must hide the true nature of his theory of selfhood until it is safely positioned after memory and history. The effect of this would be to allow a
sense of self that could be released from all the crimes of the past through Christian-style redemption. This is the reason, according to Badiou, why Ricoeur must separate his theory of the self from memory and history by “reserving attribution.” Again, Ricoeur’s reasons for attributing memory to self, close others, and distant strangers (neighbors) is not to separate the self from memory, but to extend memory to collectives without necessitating a Hegelian-style Sittlichkeit at the level of memory.

6.3 Ricoeur’s Methodology: The Proposition

Badiou’s criticism is that Ricoeur stealthily maintains a theory of the human subject which retains what he calls an “overdetermination” of Christian subjectivity. The central aspect of this over-determination is the separation of the subject from memory as well as history. History, more so than memory, can be treated positivistically in terms of how any event in history can be separated from an agent who recalls that event or otherwise recognizes some trace of the historical (e.g., archeology). Badiou’s main concern with regards to the separation of the subject from history is that it also separates history from politics. We have sufficiently discussed his theory of truth-events as well as how they inform his notion of ethics in chapter 5 below. Now we will examine whether or not Ricoeur does in fact separate the human agent from history and by extension separate the agent from politics. For Badiou’s philosophical position to succeed he must demonstrate that history requires a subject who will remain faithful to the past. Ricoeur, by contrast, he must demonstrate that the subject is capable of forgetting and finally of forgiving without violating his own notion of truth.
In the first section of this chapter we examined how Badiou critiques Ricoeur’s use of the attribution of memory with regards to the self, collectives, and neighbors. The attribution of memories to self and neighbors demonstrates for Badiou the Christian overdetermination of the subject in Ricoeur through the adoption of the commands by St. Paul to love thy neighbors as yourself. Ricoeur’s phenomenology of memory allows, according to Badiou, memories to be attributed to others as mere predicates in an effort to reserve, “subjective singularity for the economy of salvation” (Subject 27.4). It is this very question of salvation which will follow us to the end of this dissertation’s investigation in the form of (difficult) forgiveness.

Before we can enter into the investigation of forgiveness we must examine Badiou’s critique of Ricoeur’s epistemological method regarding the discipline of history in Part Two of Memory, History, Forgetting. It is in Part Two where, according to Badiou, Ricoeur attempts to develop a middle path between historical fact and a “remembered real event” (Subject 27.5). Badiou identifies Ricoeur’s proposition regarding the foundations of historical representation in general, quoting Ricoeur: “The fact is not the event, itself brought back to the life of a witnessing consciousness, but the content of a statement seeking to represent it [i.e., the fact]” (Ricoeur 2004: 178-9). This statement is central to Badiou’s criticism of Ricoeur’s philosophical treatment of history, and it is not without it difficulties. Ricoeur makes it clear that “we need to leave undetermined the question of the actual relation between fact and event” and recognize that good historians often use these terms interchangeably. Ricoeur is clearly arguing that when we speak of the past – the world of human life “as it happened” – we ought to include phrases such as “the fact that this event occurred” (MHF 179). Furthermore,
Ricoeur says: “It is this propositional character of the historical fact (in the sense of “fact that…”) that governs the mode of truth or falsity attached to the fact” (MHF179). The principal phrase here is “propositional character” because it emphasizes the problem Badiou has with Ricoeur’s supposed separation of the human subject from the facts of historical events. According to Ricoeur, instead of opining that “X happened” the historian is really saying, “I propose that it is a fact that X happened.” Badiou seems to find the use of the terms “events” and “truths” in this statement to be the greatest threat to his own Marxist project which he preferentially calls “emancipatory politics.” Badiou is intolerant of any clear separation of the events of the world from their impact on those human animals who carry those events through the process of truth on the road to being Subjects.

If history is understood as propositions on “the fact that…X” happened in the past then the question is “who?” holds those propositions. Badiou is arguing that there needs to be a subject who makes those propositions: “the genesis and destiny of these propositions are subordinated to the present multiplicity of political subjects” (italics original, Subject 27.6). This subordination of the historian’s propositions (representations) to those political subjects who are present runs contrary to Ricoeur’s supposed agenda, according to Badiou, which is to maintain, “the univocal existence of some historical representations” (Subject 27.6). These historical representations make up the elements for the supposed “duty to remember” the “radically evil” crimes against humanity. For Badiou what is at stake is that propositional statements such as “gas chambers were used at Auschwitz” can be positively “verified” in scientific sense à la Karl Popper that all scientific propositions must be stated in such a way that their claims
can be falsified. As we explored above in the first section of this chapter on Badiou’s endeavor, the “duty to remember” imposes a historical norm in the figure of radical evils which leaves a “wound in the fabric of history” (Subject 27.1). Because this is contrary to Christian redemption Ricoeur must employ a “third term” as manifested in the title to *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and the dialectical correlate to forgetting is forgiveness which allows us to separate the agent from his act. The duty to remember, the attribution of memories to self, collectives and neighbors, and the claim that some historical representations are equivocal are for Badiou all necessary according to Ricoeur’s notion of evil as a reduction in human capabilities. To win the war against Ricoeur he must show that Ricoeur’s turn towards forgiveness is indeed a non-philosophical encroachment of religious faith. Badiou will not tolerate any separation of history from the subject who follows the supplementary and irruptive events of truth beyond the consensus opinions held by human animals.

- **The Historian’s Representation**

The historian’s representation is the third phase of what Ricoeur calls the “historiographic operation.” The three phases of this operation begins with documentary proof from eye-witness testimony, records, chronicles as well as other forms of historical traces of the past. The second phase brings together the dichotomy of “explanation” versus “understanding” in the sense that “to explain more is to understand better” (MHF 182). The historian must then narrate those elements of the past which best reconstruct the actions of the past – this is the “historian’s representation” of the past in the form of history texts.
Badiou asks, “can a proposition represent without implying in the representation a subjective adherence to the proposition as such?” (Subject 27.5). Is it only for a subject, in a subject, that any historical representation has any content at all? Badiou claims that “Ricoeur ends up throwing in the towel” when he calls the refiguration of the past an “enigma”. This enigma could be lifted if we “suppose that the historical proposition only exists as such once it has to configure the fact for a subject in the present” (italics original, Subject 27.5). There would thus not be one historical representation, but a partition originally distributed among many immediately active subjective perspectives. This does not mean that there would be no historical real, far from it. Badiou claims that, “this real would be averred (i.e., asserted) as representation only in a field where all becoming-represented (any lieutenancy or place-holding, if you like) confronts a multiple” (Subject 27.5). This means that historical representations are subordinate to a multitude of political subjects and not, as Ricoeur seems to suggest, that historical representations can be fully separated from subjects. Remember that for Badiou a “Subject” is not necessarily an individual human being, but can be multiple persons so long as they maintain faithfulness to the event that disrupted a presumed oneness. The independence of history from subjects, and subjects from history, is central to Badiou’s critique of Ricoeur. We now turn to Part Two, chapter 3 of Memory, History, Forgetting in order to examine the legitimacy of Badiou’s argument and his critique of Ricoeur.

- **Representation and Narrative**

In Memory, History, Forgetting Ricoeur claims that historical representation “constitutes a fully legitimate operation that has the privilege of bringing to light the intended reference of historical discourse” (MHF 236). Historical writing is not literature, in other
words, but has its own intentional aims. History and historical representations involve a narrative structure where events and persons are emplotted (*mis en intrigue*) into a narrative. Disparate events and persons are drawn-together in such a way that their great distance and dissimilarities are bridge when emplotted – literally “put into a plot” – by means of narratives. What is an “event” in history? Ricoeur suggests that “the Renaissance” was an event, and as such it could form part of more than one narrative. Narratives must be both intelligible and teleological. The story of a great leader will include for instance a cohesive biography of the person, but also an explanatory connectedness towards some end purpose or matrix of other events.

Ricoeur identifies three moments found within narrative – structure, conjuncture, and event – which he illustrates with two examples. The first example deals with “scales” of history from micro- to macro-history. For instance a historian can shift his focus from “the American Revolution” down the “scale” to examine how an individual was affected by those political events. The other example concerns events as they are explained by the historian taking into consideration the various scales involved with any historical event. Scales and events are distanced from traditional chronology of first, next, and last. Instead of straight-forward chronologies, narrative events are grasped against a horizon of structures at different scales and the conjuncture of those structures. So for instance, when did Renaissance humanist architecture begin? Narratives explain how historical structures are to be understood according to the particular events that form those structures. He says that, “narrative becomes the condition for the possibility of the event” (MHF 246). Further, Ricoeur says that, “We can speak here of structure in eventu whose
significance is only grasped post eventum” (MHF 246). One does not have to struggle to
think of major historical events which went unnoticed when they happened.

Two lessons should be taken from the examples of historical scales and event: “on
the one hand, they show how the written forms of this operation get articulated in terms
of the explanatory forms. On the other hand, they show how the intentional aim of
narrative beyond its closure runs across such explanation in the direction of the reality
attested to” (MHF 247). Thus, historical narratives are explanatory, and the intentional
aim is towards a “reality attested to.”

The nature of representation and narrative in history leads us to questions
regarding the role of rhetoric in history. Let us repeat that Badiou’s claim is that Ricoeur
seeks to separate the subject from history. Besides the problems which Ricoeur
investigates regarding “what is history?” or “what is history-itself?” we are still left with
the accuracy of Badiou’s criticism of Part Two, chapter 2: “The Historian’s
Representation” in Memory, History, Forgetting. Ricoeur identifies a “three-fold frame”
which he says forms the “secret of historical knowledge” (MHF 249). This three-fold
frame begins first with documentary proof, next the historian proposes a
causal/explanatory explanation which is then framed in a literary emplotment (mise en
intrigue). Various plot types can be employed using rhetorical motifs that are inaugural,
transitional or terminal. These typologies do not concern us here, but what we must note
is that there is no direct route for the historian through an accepted “common sense”, but
only through an explanatory matrix that facilitates our understanding of the
circumstances of the past – including those rhetorical “scales” of history that make events
“happen” and also makes them “visible” as a kind of inflection-point in history. The
historian relies on documentary proof to construct the presumed truth (i.e., accurate history) and that documentary proof often takes the form of eye-witness accounts (i.e., memories).

Ricoeur’s task is to “probe the limits of representations” (MHF 254) focusing on the Shoah (Holocaust) as an “event at the limits” (MHF 255). At issue here is whether eye-witness attestations about the Shoah can be integrated with postmodern protests against naïve realism in history, “in the name of the polysemy en abîme [into the abyss] of discourse, of the self-referentiality of linguistic constructions,” because there are those who argue that beyond language there is “no stable reality” (MHF 255). Badiou is also countering (albeit as a rival to Ricoeur) this postmodern claim regarding naïve realism in history when he says that, “There are only bodies and language, except there are also events.” Badiou’s events as we examined in chapter 5 of this dissertation are the irruption of the as-of-yet unstated knowledge within any community of knowledge. At stake in this chapter is how events (of any sort) are to be transmitted in the broadest sense of “historically represented.” By focusing on representations of the Shoah, Ricoeur is seeking a way to explain without excusing; to understand without pardoning.\textsuperscript{148} To this point he says: “The moral judgment interwoven with historical judgment stems from another layer of historical meaning than that of description and explanation. Therefore it

\textsuperscript{148} Attempts to explain the Shoah have often been claimed to commit the unpardonable sin of somehow excusing those involved with genocide. Many accounts of the problems involved with historical attempts to understand the Shoah recount Theodore Adorno’s claim that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (After Auschwitz 34). See also Berel Lang’s \textit{Holocaust Representation}, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
must not intimidate the historian to the point of leading him to censor himself” (MHF 258).

Badiou’s criticism that Ricoeur attempts to separate the subject from history is one that I have taken very seriously, yet it is a criticism that I find puzzling given the nature of Ricoeur’s work. Let us examine another passage with our attention on the supposed division of subjects from history. It begins with a question asked by Theodore Adorno in an article entitled: “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?”149 The key word in this title is the German *Aufarbeitung*150 which means “coming to terms with”. The writing of history can and at times must be a therapeutic work of memory that helps us work-through the traumas and repetitions of violence in those situations by means of a “…stubborn will to understand those others whom history has made our enemies…” (MHF 477). The constant thesis of Ricoeur’s book has been that, “the characters in a narrative are emplotted along with the events that, taken together, make up the story” (MHF 262). For Badiou, the human animal is “below” truth as well as below “Good and Evil,” therefore the human animal does not partake of any truth-in-history. It does not appear that Ricoeur has attempted to separate the human subject (construed as an agent, a self or a Badiouian Subject) from history at all. Rather, that Ricoeur is arguing for a discipline of historical sciences that takes into account the characteristics of narrative


150 The German term *Aufarbeitung* contains the German verb “arbeit” which means “to work” and brings the question closer to the psychoanalytic language of “working-through” traumas. See Sigmund Freud’s essay, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through” where he says that, “working through the resistances may in practice become an arduous task for the patient and a considerable test of the physician’s patience.”
emplotment (*mise en intrigue*). If history is to be persuasive as a representation of the truth of the past then persuasiveness as such must be understood. It is for this reason that Ricoeur turns to narrative’s readability and visibility when discussing the historical discourses of (political) power. Discourses on power is central to both the historian and to the Marxist philosopher such as Badiou. Discourses on power, once it is “made explicit on the plane of the historian’s representation, simultaneously assumes the two forms of narrative (evocative of some absence) and icon (the bearer of some real presence)” (MHF 265-6). In totalitarian states one will always be surrounded by the presence of portraits of the Dear Leader, all the while that leader is absent from his subjects physically. In a similar fashion, our memories are present to us like those portraits to remind us of a past that is absent to us. This “presence of the absent thing” is the central enigma throughout Ricoeur’s investigation leading from memory, through history to “our historical condition” on the road to his characterization of the human agent as a self who is confronted with this very enigma throughout its life in its own sense of selfhood.

Badiou claims that this enigma leads Ricoeur to maintain an ontology of time that is very close to Heidegger’s. Ricoeur says, “At this point the epistemology of history borders on the ontology of being-in-the-world. I will call our ‘historical condition’ this real of existence placed under the sign of a past as being no longer (*n’est plus*) and having been (*avoir été*)” (MHF 280). However, this is the limit of the epistemology of historical representation, and it is consistent with Ricoeur’s ontology of our historical being.
Our Historical Condition

According to Badiou the attribution problem in Ricoeur exposes the presence of an over-determined Christian subject such that we attribute memories to ourselves, others, and neighbors. Badiou is arguing that the separation of the subject from memory and history revolves around the problem of the “presence of absence” that involves an “ontology of time of Heideggerian style” (Subject 27.3). What Badiou supposes is that Ricoeur has a hermeneutic philosophy that is founded on Heidegger’s ontology of time. We now turn to Ricoeur’s hermeneutics in order to investigate this claim of a Heideggerian notion of time in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics according to Ricoeur involves “examining modes of understanding in forms of knowledges whose aim is objectivity” (MHF 283). Interpretation limits the totalization of knowledge therefore Ricoeur investigates the ontological status of selfhood in order to explore the “existential” presuppositions within his hermeneutics. This ontological investigation allows him to elucidate the structure of time as a manner of existing. He says that instead of using Heidegger’s term “historicity” he will rely on a sense of “our historical condition” (MHF 284). Ricoeur rightfully points out that we make history and histories in the sense that we give meaning to historical events. The passage we will examine here moves from historical knowledge through Ricoeur’s critical hermeneutics on the way to understanding his ontological hermeneutics.

The key thesis here is “that there also exists a reserve of forgetting, which can be a resource for memory and for history” (MHF 284). Badiou views forgetting as one side of the dialectic with forgiveness required for Ricoeur’s deceptive project of defending the
Christian subject against his own notion of the Subject of a truth. It is important to keep in mind that the Subject for Badiou is determined by a *faithful* continuation of some truth-event whereby any forgetting is to be construed as one of his three forms of evil. Ricoeur goes so far as to suggest that there is the possibility of a “happy forgetting” (MHF 285). Forgiveness is the name for this happy forgetting and it forms an “eschatological horizon” for the problems of memory, history, and forgetting.

The theme of an *excess* of historical knowledge is nothing new. It can be found in Nietzsche’s *Second Untimely Meditation: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Ricoeur *gently* parallels Nietzsche’s critique of historical culture with Plato’s *Phaedrus* and specifically with the myth of the *pharmakon* discussed therein. He notes that it is not a perfect parallel, but that we can examine how *anamnesis* confounds *grammata* in a similar way as “life-force” in Nietzsche confounds historical culture. What is set-up here is that we can contrast an ahistorical forgetting with the artistic and religious supra-historical as “antidotes to history” (MHF 291-2). For Badiou it is centrally important that the artistic and the religious are neither ahistorical nor supra-historical, because as a Marxist philosophy the central science is history-itself. For Badiou history is marked by the irruptions of truth-events against the background of the consensus view which forms the knowledges at any historical point in time. To suggest that art and religion can act as “antidotes” to history cannot be allowed if Badiou’s philosophical position is to be

151 “Grammata” is understood in this context in terms of the Greek sense of “letters” or “written language” as a cure for the “disease” of forgetting. The origin of this so-called “pharmakon” (cure, or elixir) is found towards the end of Plato’s Phaedrus (274b-277a) with the story of the Egyptian god Theuth giving pharaoh Thamus the gift of written language. Ricoeur’s own interpretation of grammata stems from his “playful” (MHF 288) reading of Nietzsche’s Second Untimely Meditation where history stands on the side of grammata opposed to living memory.
maintains. This is one of the key reasons why Badiou so vehemently attacks Ricoeur’s work – equipped as it is with a theory of selfhood that allows for “happy forgetting.”

The main metacategory within the historical disciplines is that of “history-itself” in the sense of a singular, authentic, and un-contaminated record of the events and persons of the past. The possibility of a total recollection and absolute knowledge of the past was articulated by Georg Hegel as the phenomenal manifestation of spirit (Geist) into the world stage as a sort of history that was self-productive – an unfolding of Reason. Against this notion of “history-itself” we know of major ruptures within history, for instance with the birth of Christ, the French Revolution, and other examples that fissured historical “progress”. Ricoeur lays-out a spectrum of possibilities for us with Hegel’s constitutive history on one pole and Kant’s sense of history as a regulative notion at the other pole (MHF 302) This spectrum of possibilities informs what comes next for Ricoeur. Regulative ideas in Kant are transcendental in the sense that no amount of sense data can fulfill the idea of history. Instead the idea of history remains a perpetual possibility that is always on the route to becoming universal. On the other hand the Hegelian notion is of history as determinant: it is global and universal as its continues to actually unfold.

The metacategory of history-itself can be understood in another way. We can speak of history as the totality of events which have happened, yet we can also speak of history in terms of traces, chronologies, and reports on those past events. This will go a long way in solving the criticisms of Badiou regarding Ricoeur’s supposed desire to maintain a sense of history that preserves the Christian sense of historical redemption. Another trap related to the notion of “history-itself” is that of relativism and the question
“whence does the history speak?” My contention is that Badiou’s sense of history, tied as it is to his supporting work on axiomatic set-theory, is beholden to a sense of history-itself: total and absolute. The innovation by Badiou is to bring art, religion, and love within the purview of a sense of history that is total in the sense of bodies and words “except there are also truths.” Those truths are within these four situations and the problem from Badiou’s perspective is our current consensus hides within its multiplicity a truth that will irrupt and disrupt today’s complacent capitalist paradigm. Badiou’s concern is very much at the level of how the Subject relates to conventional truth, and every set of conventional establishes the conditions for the possibility of a new event of truth. Badiou’s philosophy is a strange mixture of novelty and cyclical thinking from truth to situation back to truth.

One area of history where Badiou’s theory of truth-events makes sense is in terms of chronosophies where historical periods are made into “epochs” such as “Renaissance,” “Roman times,” “American century” and so forth. Badiou’s position seems most applicable to cases such as scientific epochs where knowledge of a given content begins to have significant anomalies to cause a paradigm shift such as between “Renaissance” and “early Modern.” Badiou’s philosophy is not without merit; however, his political ambition for the third figuration of communism seems to have led to a hasty attack on Ricoeur’s ontological hermeneutics which grounds his theory of selfhood. The “historical condition” within which each person finds him- or herself includes the collective memories of those in our families, communities as well as other testimony of the past. Ricoeur’s aim throughout Memory, History, Forgetting is to demonstrate that there are objective historical truths that are neither part of an absolute movement of history, nor
positivistic points of fact that can scientifically be settled. Badiou strait-forwardly accuses Ricoeur of maintaining a positivistic sense of historical truth. Determining how we can achieve objective historical knowledge leads us to the figure of the historian as judge over the traces of the past.

**Historian as Judge**

“Our historical condition” means that we are born into a discourse founded on the testimony of those who were witnesses to the past. Coupled with this is the testimony of others which has been preserved in various forms of historical records. Additionally the historian will seek to collect physical traces of the past in concert with the eye-witness testimony of those who claim to have “been there.” This “documentary phase” necessitates a degree of interpretation by the historian while they sift through archival materials; therefore the “facts” within any archive are not strictly speaking “positivistic facts” as Badiou contends. The historian must then judge these facts with an eye towards both understanding the motives of those who are described in the archive as well as to explain those actions from within the given archival records. Ricoeur’s motto here is: “To explain more is to understand better” and the verb “to explain” here means to answer the question: “Why?” (MHF 182).

Ricoeur’s deliberate decision to link the historian with the figure of the judge is partially driven by the notion that the historian and the judge ideally vow to be impartial with the evidence. It is critical that the historian examines the credibility of the testimony from witnesses, including the archeologist’s records from an excavation site. These two figures are “masters of the manipulation of suspicion” (MHF 317). However, there is a
most significant sense in which the historian and the judge differ: the judge must render a
decision of guilt or innocence. The judge does not purge the memory about those who are
guilty, but delivers them over to incarceration and punishment.

All this, historians do not do, cannot do, do not want to do; and if they were to
attempt it, at the risk of setting themselves up as the sole tribunal of history, this
would be at the cost of acknowledging the precariousness of a judgement whose
partiality, even militancy, is recognized. But then this bold judgment is submitted
to the critique of the corporation of historians and to the critique of the
enlightened public, and the work subjected to an unending process of revision,
which makes the writing of history a perpetual rewriting (MHF 320).

The criticisms of Ricoeur leveled by Badiou are founded on the notion that Ricoeur
follows to a consensus view, yet we find in Ricoeur a philosophy that is deeply
committed to the claim not memorial and historical claims do not reach a level of mere
group consensus. Notice as well that Ricoeur judges that the historian does not seek to be
a “militant” for some presumed “truth.” Badiou is most certainly seeking such militants
for his presumed truths. It is in passages such as these that we find the greatest distinction
in the philosophical attitudes of Ricoeur and Badiou.

- No Truth without Friendship

The recognition on Ricoeur’s part of the role of interpretation throughout all three phases
of the historiographic operation underscores the impossibility of a total reflection by the
historian (MHF 334). Ricoeur works to avoid the subjective/objective dichotomy which
is vulnerable to psychologism and claims of social bias. Rather, the historian is some-one
who has “social and institutional commitments,” who attempts to understand the others of the historical past as people – despite them being foreign in a very real sense. Ricoeur’s ontological hermeneutics is visible in the study of the historian as some-one who works to appropriate testimony and eye-witness accounts. Ricoeur says that, “The understanding of the other becomes the historian’s loadstar, at the cost of an epoché of the self in a true self-forgetting” (MHF 335). History as an art form or science (techne) “is born as hermeneutics” (MHF 335). The subjective “implications” of the role of the historian includes therefore both, “the condition and the limit of historical knowledge” (MHF 336). Ricoeur is making a strong argument in favor of a sense of subjectivity where we can distinguish a good and a bad subjectivity which Badiou does not take into consideration in his claim that Ricoeur holds to a Heideggerian sense of historicity (Geschichtlichkeit). Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach distinguishes between a sense of self qua researcher against the sense of self as determined by pathos. In other words, the historian attempts to “be-friend” those of the past in order to come closer to the truth. Truth here means that we come as close as we can to the reasons why those actors acted as they did. Finally, Ricoeur claims: “This implication of interpretation at every phase of historiographic operation finally commands the status of truth in history” (MHF 340).

Badiou’s criticism of Ricoeur is worth repeating: “history is well represented in propositions. But the genesis and destiny of these propositions are subordinated to the present multiplicity of political subjects” (italics original, (Subject 27.6). Badiou’s claim

152 For a full statement on the nature and role of pathos in Ricoeur see chapter 3, section 3.2 “Selfhood and Others”, subsection “Flesh and Pathos.”
is that Ricoeur attempts to maintain historical representations (i.e., propositions) totally separate from the political subjects who make those propositions, as well as those citizens who receive those propositions. At the very end of the section entitled “The Historian and the Judge” in chapter1 of Part III, Ricoeur makes it clear that, “[t] is the citizen who militantly carries the ‘liberal’ values of constitutional democracy. In the final analysis, the conviction of the citizen alone justifies the fairness of the penal procedure in the courts and the intellectual honesty of the historian in the archives” (MHF 333). There is no sense in Ricoeur that the historian’s representations are subordinated to political citizens. Badiou continues his criticism saying that

Ricoeur cannot accept this subordination, because he wishes to preserve, to his own (political?) ends, the univocal existence of some historical representations. Moreover, he is also not willing to accept that the subjective adherence to representations is a constitutive phenomenon, because he wishes to engineer the entrance on stage of the subject only when the identity of this subject will be practically constrained (Subject 27.6).

Ricoeur rules-out the “univocal existence of some historical propositions” through his hermeneutical treatment the three stages of the historiographical operation which are at every stage characterized by a second-order interpretation. The first level is the interpretation of documents and other traces of the past, the second level is interpretation with the goal of explaining past actions so that we come to better understand them, and the third level of interpretation is the historian’s representations (proclamations) embodied in publications (i.e., written history).
Concluding Remarks

Badiou made two major claims regarding Ricoeur’s project which we have examined throughout this chapter in two sections. Those claims revolve around his contention that Ricoeur deceives his readers by hiding the fact that he works to keep the human agent *qua* subject separate from both memory and history. As we saw in the first half of this chapter with regards to the question of the attribution of memory to self, others, and neighbors Ricoeur does indeed allow for the attribution of memory to others in the sense that we can share memories. Badiou’s contention is that Ricoeur’s memories are attributable only as predicates that operate on an *ad hoc* basis, rather than holding to any sense of truth-in-history. Badiou’s own theory of the subject demands that truths first be nominated as such in their evental (*événementiel*) rupturing of some consensus opinion. We compared this to the return of the released prisoner back into Plato’s cave. The problem for Badiou’s reading of Ricoeur is that for Ricoeur the phenomena of memories are not mere predicates, but they must pass-through a hermeneutics of interpretation as we examined with the historiographic operation. The historian relies on memories, attributes them to others; however, this is not done without interpretation with an aim at finding the truth as to why historical actors acted in the manner in which (the archives suggest) they did.

We now turn to the final chapter of this dissertation in order to examine the human agent according to Ricoeur as one who is capable not only of memory and history, but also in need of a happy forgetting which can restore an agent’s freedom.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conditions for the Possibility of Forgiving

7.1 Preliminary Remarks

“Faithfulness to the past is not a given, but a wish”

Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, 494

The simplest manner in which the present discourse between Ricoeur and Badiou may be stated is in terms of a philosophy which begins within the intimacy of our own reflective experience versus a philosophy which attempts to view all human knowledge from above. Badiou’s theory of the Subject and his understanding of the logics of worlds presents the latter – a view from above which explicitly waits for the “third figuration” of Marxist communism. This waiting for “an irruptive event” is itself modeled on a conception of scientific revolutions which is supported by Badiou’s use of axiomatic set theory which we explored in chapter 4. What follows below will consist of an examination of Ricoeur’s notion of the human agent understood in terms of selfhood in
the sense of an agent’s capacity to formulate a sense of one’s life in terms of an open text. For Badiou a Subject involves a departure from the agent’s mere “human animal” existence within a consensus framework of accepted opinions. Against this dualism of “from the human animal to Subject” we will examine the question of whether or not that human animal involves a narrative framework before, within which an event of truth finds fertile ground. We examined the case of St. Paul below in Part II below where Saul of Tarsus converted to Christianity and subsequently changed his whole sense of himself as a subject. For the sake of our current discussion we are assuming that Badiou’s account of Paul is a sufficient representation of Badiou’s conception of Subjectivity. As for Paul himself, did he not already have a life-history founded on memories both his own and his communities? Yes, no one would doubt this. Did he not already emplot (mis en intrigue) the disparate events of his life into a coherent narrative? Yes, again one should have no doubt that he has a coherence conception of his self both before and after his conversion. If Saul was merely a human animal concerned with his self-preservation and the preservation of the consensus view of Jewish law, then how can we determine the veracity of those two lives? Badiou is most certainly claiming that the Subject of a truth is a more authentic sense of being human than the “masses” of the consensus-situation who subsist – like cave dwellers – according to the dictates of the death drive. Badiou’s notion of evil and ethics is founded on this sense of an authenticity of the Subject who continues! and remains faithful to the truth-event. Our examination of selfhood here will therefore involve the question of a faithfulness not to an event of truth, but to the past as best as we can conceive of what we mean by “the past-itself.” This involves the
distinction between an *idem*-identity (sameness) and *ipse*-identity (selfhood) as we examined in chapters 1-3.

In the previous chapter we examined in two separate sections two of the three operations which Ricoeur was involved with in *Memory, History, Forgetting*: his endeavor to separate the subject from memory and history, and his method by means of a hermeneutic ontology focused on the historiographical operation. The third operation at work in Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting*, again according to Badiou, and borne out by the text itself, involves the possible unbinding of an agent from their past actions and passions. The unbinding of agents may involve either a lifting of its own faults in the form of asking for forgiveness (French: *le pardon*), or the forgiving of other agents for their transgressions against us. We examined in chapter 4 that according to Badiou’s *Ethics* none of the transgressions calling for forgiveness involves a truth, and therefore no instance of forgiveness will rise to the level of Good and Evil in Badiou’s conception of these terms.

What kind of agent do we have? How does Ricoeur understand identity at the various levels of memory, history and now at the level of forgetting and forgiving? As we examined in chapters 1-3 Ricoeur maintains a two-fold understanding of identity in terms of an *idem*- and an *ipse*-identity. The *idem*-identity is the notion that I am the same person as named on my birth certificate. Other historical traces as well as the living memories of those who have known me support the notion that “I am that same person.” On the other hand, my *ipse*-identity involves my own understanding of my capacities to act, speak, narrate and to be morally imputed as an agent in the world. All four of these capacities involve, as we saw, a sense of “mineness” and a belief that “this is my act, my
word, my story, or my fault.” When Ricoeur makes the shift from memory and history to forgetting and forgiveness he brings these two notions of identity with him to support his hermeneutical and ontological understanding of selfhood.

7.2 The Elementary Ethical Gesture

What is memory without a subject, agent, or self to remember? What is history without a human being (whatever we call it) to chronicle, interpret, write, and finally read it? What is forgetting without some-one to be oblivious of the past? At each stage we need an agent of some sort who is capable of identifying with these operations. Badiou’s answer is clear: a subject is required for memory and history to the degree that for any crime there must be some agent to whom those crimes are attributable. Badiou claims that Ricoeur seeks to separate the subject’s identity from its actions – this is only partially accurate. Ricoeur is well aware that an agent who commits a crime, or more broadly “is at fault,” did indeed cause that wound; however this is only at the level of one’s idem-identity. In a court of law it is well-known that the legal defense can claim that, “yes, the accused did do the crime, but today they are a ‘different’ person.” This therefore appears to be a very reasonable claim, on the part of Ricoeur, that indeed we can separate an agent from its actions. It is not impossible, but it is difficult. Badiou specifically takes aim at the most robust type of culpability where the subject is recognized, “precisely as a subject whose entire being is either guilt or innocence” (italics original, Subject 27.6).

The difficulty with any facile attempt to understand Badiou’s criticism is that he views most (ethical) crimes as merely the sounds and furies of the human animal driven this

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way and that by the death drive’s pursuit of self-preservation. As we discussed below in chapter 4 the true ethical crimes always involves one’s relationship to truth-events. The Soviet Gulags and Nazi Holocaust were crimes committed in the name of the preservation of some consensus regarding “the revolution’s ‘new man’” or the “Über-race.” These “radically evil” crimes, moral and judicial, involve subjects who are thoroughly guilty as a matter of course. Badiou’s claim that the “entire being” of Stalin or Eichmann, for instance, is characterized by guilt accords with his notion of the human animal identified as a single faceted figure. Badiou does not make an allowance for the two types of identity (idem and ipse) found in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self.

In positivistic sense Badiou is correct: let the guilty be punished. Period. Furthermore, Badiou is certainly allowed to define “ethics” in terms of “Continuing!” – to continue to remain faithful to truth-events in the arts, the sciences, politics and amorous passions. The Badiouian Subject is equivalent (at best) to his/her/their actions and the three names of evil are: terror, betrayal and disaster. “Terror” names the error of mistaking an event for the plentitude of the world instead of the void within the logic of that world. “Betrayal” is the failure of a subject to live up to the truth and one’s

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153 The three names for “evil” according to Badiou are discussed in chapter 5 of his Ethics, page 71, and these include 1) terror, 2) betrayal, and 3) disaster. All three are directly related to the subject’s relationship to a truth.
154 Cf. Simon Wiesenthal’s semi-autobiographical account of the time he was forced to care for a dying Nazi soldier while a prisoner in Lemberg concentration camp in 1943. The book is entitled, The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness, it involves a discussion of the limits of forgiveness as well as the silent refusal to forgive another’s crimes.
155 Recall that the “subject” according to Badiou can refer to either an individual human being or to a group of “militants”. The subject is fully predicated on its fidelity to a truth, therefore it is the faithfulness which takes primacy over any human subject-as-such. In essence the subject cannot be greater than their actions; just the opposite is true: a subject can be nearly as great as their actions. Actions take precedence over subjectivity.
Immortality. “Disaster” occurs when a truth is confused with total power. In all three cases Badiou nominates “evil” in terms that suggests that ethical actions derive their meaning always from an agent actively maintaining some course of action. Illustration of these three names of evil will help expose the positively active element required by Badiou’s ethics. Taking as our example the 1917 Russian revolution the un-named and un-namable “void” within Czarist Russia was the Russian Proletariat. The nomination of this “void” constitutes the “event” of the revolution and the “truth” depends upon those militant subjects who continue! the revolution. Therefore, in this case, “terror” would be positively mistaking the void as part of the logic of the world of Czarist Russia when in fact the Czars showed too little regard (to be kind) to the Russian proletariat. Terror then is an active mistaking of the event as if it were already a part of the given contemporary situation. Betrayal is obviously the failure actively to continue to follow an event that has ruptured the logic of some world. Disaster is when the event of truth is mistaken as some form of final totality (an “end” of history). In all three cases Badiou proposes an ethics based on a positive motivating of the subject’s intentions. As Slavoj Žižek points out that, “Here, Badiou is wrong: the elementary ethical gesture is a negative one, the one of blocking one’s direct inclination” (Parallax View, 202). We see this throughout Plato’s dialogues in the figure of Socrates’ daimonion which never tells him how to act, but always only stops him on a course of action.

If we assume that the blocking of our ownmost inclinations is the elementary ethical gesture, then forgiveness involves the unbinding of the agent from his or her surrender to one’s inclinations. Ricoeur’s interest is the possible lifting of the stain of guilt of faults and failures caused by the disparity between an agent’s actions in the world
and causal forces within an agent. The disparity between the will to act and the effects of those actions give rise to a gap, or “fault” between what an agent intends and what it does. Jean Nabert investigated this disparity in his *Elements for an Ethic* – a text that influenced Ricoeur’s early work. We now turn to the “key passage,” according to Badiou, in Ricoeur’s treatment of forgiveness found in the Epilogue to *Memory, History, Forgetting* under the section entitled: “The Forgiveness Equation” which details the depth of fault and vertical heights of forgiveness.

### 7.3 The Experience of Fault

If our first assumption here is that the primary ethical gesture is negative in the sense of an agent’s resistance to her own inclinations, then our second assumption is that moral fault points back to an agent. The theme of “fault” has a long pedigree in Ricoeur’s works beginning in earnest with his treatment of it in *Fallible Man* (1960). In his Preface to Jean Nabert’s *Elements for an Ethic* (EE) (1943) Ricoeur examines three so-called “givens of experience.” These givens of experience include fault, failure, and solitude.

According to Nabert we can read the self as a text in a way similar to the reading of any historical text. We can either aim at a determinate explanation, or attempt to recapture the decision’s moral energy and the ideals that lead to events (EE 3). This reading of the self as a text strives for knowledge of our own history, while at the same time working to free itself from self-interest. What Nabert seeks to explore is experience we have once we have acted:
One of the most mysterious phenomena of moral life is the surprise that consciousness experiences after action, not only in no longer being for itself what it was before action but in no longer being able to disassociate the idea of its own causality from the memory of the particular act which it accomplished (EE 4).

Nabert’s view is that the consciousness does not offer itself up for punishment simply because of the experience of fault alone. Instead he says that, “the feeling of fault would not go beyond this relationship between an action indicted by judgment and a causality which its own actions would always leave available. It would be as though, in exercising itself, this causality did not affect itself in its foundations” (EE 6). Might this experience not just translate into a contagion of disgust which the self charges itself as an agent? Perhaps it translates into disgust for self, but this does not exhaust the experience of fault for Nabert.

The experience of fault is according to Badiou an admission that Ricoeur’s principal endeavor is an apologetics for a Christian subject. However, for Nabert the experience of fault might very well be the source for metaphysics and religion – not the other way around (EE 8). “One can discover,” Nabert says, the very experience of fault “at the origin of certain religious movements and of certain individual conversions” (EE 8). We can ask Badiou whether or not Saul of Tarsus experienced failure or fault leading up to his conversion on the road to Damascus. This question of experiencing fault is a far more philosophically interesting experience than Badiou’s explanation that a truth-event converted him, because St. Paul’s experience of fault preceded his conversion and gave life to his faithfulness.
It is from within the experience of fault, according to Nabert, that “the relationship of consciousness to its past cannot be separated from the movement of reflection which must both disclose the conditions of consciousness of self and return the self to possession of its being” (EE 9). When we reflect on our fault we experience some liberation from our causality as it has been effectuated in the world, because it advances us towards a confidence regarding our capacities. The problem for conscious reflection is that it experiences an impotence in the face of the self’s production of actions. When we are at fault (moral or non-moral) we can say, “I ought not to have acted as I did.” On this point Nabert says that, “To say that causality should not have chosen this act is only to express in another way the feeling of fault” (EE 9). In a very real sense our ownmost causality as an agent is the source of evil, and it is something which we can neither disavow as not our own, nor make perfectly transparent to ourselves. This is our inroad into the great philosophical topology between the transparent cogito of Descartes and Kant, and the anti-cogito of those masters of suspicion – Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. We are following Ricoeur in his effort to think in between these two positions with the hope that we can find some firm foundation for selfhood that avoids the false choice between the transparent cogito and the abyss of the anti-cogito.

The experience of fault is most certainly found when we fail to live up to our obligations – moral or otherwise. However, the experience of fault goes beyond these for “it relates to the experience of an ever renewed difference between what really makes up the causality of the self and what it should be capable of in order for the self to be equal to its true being [as the self understands itself]” (EE 10). Fault forces reflection – a reflection which is “the result of free initiative,” “linked to feelings which accompany the
total moral experience” of the self (EE 3). Fault moves us to reflect and to “muster the forces” of consciousness for a regeneration of consciousness which includes a relationship with the past and with the self’s faults. What kind of consciousness is conceived here? A consciousness which is constituted by two relationships, the first relationship is with its past (hence its liberty156) and the other relationship to the consciousness’ capacity to regenerate and have desire to continue. Further, Nabert claims that, “the self increasingly desires to overthrow the import of the actions which occasioned reflection. Its present now opens on possibilities for action from which it does not anticipate cancellation of its past but conversion of that past into liberty” (EE 14). In short, the experience of fault pulls us back to our past and blocks our future, but this reflection on the past holds the promise of liberation from those past actions. Finally, the experience of fault gives us knowledge of an inner necessity within the self beyond reflective rational reconstructions of our actions and “this inner necessity is capable of enlisting the past in the service of the future of the self in terms of its highest hopes” (EE 15). What we take from Nabert is the notion that fault is an existentiell “given” of consciousness that holds out the hope that the agent can be different from not only its past actions, but also different from its specific past causal agency, while the self’s capacities remain unchanged and actively open to new causal relations.

156 What I have in mind here is close to Kant’s notion of freedom (liberty) in the sense that the agent can reflect on its own past actions and say, “I ought to have acted differently.” Determinate things cannot make these kinds of judgments.
Philosophically, Ricoeur endeavors to think always between the voluntary and the involuntary, between the transparent consciousness of the *cogito* and the shattered anti-*cogito*, and between the potential to fail and actual failure. Ricoeur does not divide the human agent between the artificial lines of “the human animal” and the Subject of evental truths. Instead Ricoeur works-through from within the most subtle structures of reflective consciousness outwards to the experiences of memory, history and into the sciences – philosophy’s *others* in and outside of the academy.

The experience of fault is the final destination in *Memory, History, Forgetting*; however, in a very real sense it is the starting point for all his investigations. In his early work, *Fallible Man* (FM), Ricoeur investigates the possibility of fault as a “gap” within every human agent regarding action “between the demand for happiness and the contingency of character and of death” (FM 142). In a similar way, Ricoeur says, “Man is by destination a mediation between the demand for happiness and the contingency of character and of death” (FM 142). The task of ethics is working out a “mean” between vicious extremes of wishing and hoping on the one hand for what is best, while on the other hand always falling victim to an inadequacy of action and effect. Ricoeur concludes at the end of *Fallible Man*:

thus, ethics, taken in the broadest sense of the word, which takes in the whole realm of normativity, always presupposes man as having missed the synthesis of the object, the synthesis of humanity in itself, and its own synthesis of finitude and infinitude; that is why ethics would fain ‘educate him’ by means of a
scientific methodology, a moral pedagogy, a culture of taste: ‘to educate him.’

That is, to draw him out of the sphere where the essential has already been missed (FM 142).

Ricoeur compares the human being, as philosophy finds him, to some-one who has forgotten his own origins. Ricoeur says that we see this figure of forgotten origins in Parmenides’ character – the young man who journeyed to heaven to meet the goddess in the preface of his now fragmented poem. Ricoeur compares the young Parmenides to Plato’s released prisoner in the allegory of the cave who has become disillusioned about his origins. Further still, Ricoeur compares this human being (this person who has forgotten his or her origins) to Descartes’ mediator, in his Meditations on First Philosophy, passing through radical doubt and attempting, by means of the fiction of the evil genius, to demolish all his opinions of the world and himself.

We are fallible, and it is through this discrepancy between our “primordial destination and [our] historical manifestation” that evil starts forth from. (The language here of “through” and “starts forth from” Ricoeur says are correlates.) Our fallibility is the source of our evil, and the notion of fault leads us back to our primordial constitution through our fallibility. Ricoeur asks whether we could philosophically isolate the representation of fallibility from fault. Yes, he says by imagining innocence. He says: “Innocence would be fallibility without fault, and this fallibility would be only fragility, only weakness, but by no means downfall” (FM 144). Innocence belongs only to mythical and imaginary images, not to real persons. The language of “downfall” here refers to Ricoeur’s early work on the symbolisms of evil – while it is true that the human agent is fallible in a primordial sense, given the image that we are fallen means that our
goodness, from which we have fallen, is even more primordial. Finally, “to say that man is fallible is to say that the limitation peculiar to a being who does not coincide with himself is the primordial weakness from which evil arises” (FM 146). It bears repeating that what is primordial is our goodness which hopes for achieving the highest aims, but our experience is that of a historical destination which is always non-identical with those desires. This is the experience of fault. Even Badiou’s own philosophical commitments secretly rely upon a hoped-for continuation of some good “out there” in the logic of some world of human knowledge.

- **Fault in Memory, History, Forgetting**

In *Memory, History, Forgetting* the same theme of fault continues from Ricoeur’s early work stemming from the influence of Nabert in the in 1940s and Ricoeur’s own efforts in the 1950s and ‘60s. Fault in Ricoeur’s later works and especially in this text is characterized as having a “depth” in terms of how it is felt. Fault, as well as other experiences including failure, solitude, struggle, suffering, and death are, “implied in every contingent situation and belong to what we ourselves have designated by the phrase our ‘historical condition’ on the level of an ontological hermeneutics” (MHF 460). The experience of fault gives rise to the notion that we can be morally imputed for our actions as well as our failures to act. We discussed moral imputability in chapter 3 below, but now we can talk about the metaphorical aspect of Ricoeur’s account of fault which covers the fissure separating the agent from its actions. We also discussed this in chapter 3 with the questions of the “what?” of an action and the “who?” of the agent. This was discussed in terms of Ricoeur’s theory of selfhood under the rubric that we are capable beings – imputability being one of the ways we can be: we can be guilty (i.e., we can be at fault).
To fully answer and reject Badiou it is crucial that we see in the experience of fault the same nexus between the “what?” and the “who?” as was developed in Part One of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. As we saw in chapter 6, Badiou accuses Ricoeur of attributing memories to self, others and neighbors as a means to keep the Subject separated from memory (and later, from history-itself in Part Two of *Memory, History, Forgetting*). The specific form of attribution within the subject of fault is called “avowal” and broadly speaking it includes any form of admission that “assumes the accusation” as its own doing (MHF 461). It is through this form of attribution at the level of fault that we can then, and only then, work backwards towards how we are to attribute historical events and memories to ourselves as human agents.

Avowal is capable of bridging “the abyss between innocence and guilt” (MHF 461) which with remembering itself cannot be distinguished – the memory is there, but without an avowal of guilt or innocence. In St. Augustine’s *Confessions* he notes that when we recall sorrowful memories they can return with joy, as well joyful memories can be remembered with sadness; likewise we can recall memories of our actions and passions without their accompanying feeling of fault. Ricoeur’s task is to explain how the attribution of fault in the figure of an avowal of responsibility bridges the abyss that separates the human agent from his or her actions. Both Ricoeur and Badiou agree on this point that ethics and any understanding of evil rests on the all-important link between human agents and their actions.

When we reflectively represent our actions to ourselves it exposes our own causality as an agent to the disparity between our deepest desires to act and the actual effects in which we have indeed affected the world of action which results in “the feeling
of the loss of its [the agent’s] own wholeness” (MHF 462). That is, I see myself as other than my deepest desires, as disjointed and inadequate to those desires. “This desire,” Ricoeur says, “can hardly be expressed except in terms of the desire for wholeness; the latter is better known through failings in the effort to exist than through the approximations of its [i.e., the ego’s] ownmost being” (MHF 462). Fault therefore “provide[s] access to this pre-empirical past” (MHF 462), albeit closely tied to our own memorial histories as an agent. Again, the experience of fault issues forth from the distinction between a subject’s primordial destination (desire for the wholeness possible through an adequation of our causation and our actions) and our historical manifestation.

What we as human agents experience through fault is what Ricoeur calls “the ontological vehemence of discourse about the self” (MHF 463) and this is what was discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation in our discussion of “attestation” in Oneself as Another. Attestation as we stated there involves a notion of selfhood which is characterized by the capacity of the self to be confident in its own selfhood over time. Epistemologically, attestation appears as a “believing-in” my agency and causal efficacy in the world; it is contrasted with a scientific epistēmē of “believing-that” such-and-such is a matter of fact. Our ontological vehemence uses familiar metaphysical language of being and non-being in the sense that in our ownmost being we are concerned with our desire and effort to exist, which is “the being proper to desire itself” (MHF 462). Badiou’s whole effort is to relegate such desire to the level of the human animal, whereby he can then preserve the label of “ethics” and the naming of evil for the level of his Subject of truth-events. What we see in Ricoeur is a far more philosophically tenable position supported by our own experience as human beings. Ultimately we get real
human beings in Ricoeur, instead of the partial representation of humans, according to Badiou, in the figure of the militant “Subject”.

Ricoeur notes three benefits to the equation of fault with evil which I will only very briefly mention here before moving onto the other side of the experience of the “depth” of fault and that is the experience of the “heights” of forgiveness.

The first benefit of equating fault with evil under the metacategory of “nonbeing” is that we can then place, Ricoeur says, other experiences – some he draws from Nabert, others from Karl Jaspers – under the same sign of “nonbeing”. These other experiences include failure, solitude, social dissensus, sorrow, suffering, and, of course, death. The second benefit is that the notion of evil is its “unbearable overabundance” which comes along with it in the sense of “radical evil” and imprescriptible crimes – crimes for which no sense of judicial restoration is available. Here Ricoeur mentions, just briefly, the Shoah (Holocaust) among the many evils of totalitarianism for which those “indescribable misfortunes” defy every attempt of rational narrative. The third reason for equating fault with evil is that it invites us to investigate the wide variety of figures in the cultural imaginary regarding tragic fault. Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in his Poetics is “a person who is not superior in virtue and justice who passes into ill fortune, not because he is bad and vicious, but because he makes some error” (1453a 6-12). (For convenience I am taking the word “error” to be synonymous with “fault”.) Symbols of evil qua fault are also found in the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve, as well as in Sophocles’ play

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157 “Imprescriptible” crimes are those that are beyond prescriptive or retributive justice, and do not have a statute of limitations.
The Women of Trachis under the vocabulary of sungnômosunên (compassion) for the faults of others. The result of equating the experience of fault with evil is that it allows us to critique more clearly Badiou’s equating of the Subject’s relationship with truth-events with evil and the limitations of such an equation. Badiou unfortunately leaves most human agents out of his discussion of ethics, good and evil, in his effort to make way for the third configuration of communism. This is unfortunate indeed given the enormous benefit to be gained by equating evil with our inner-most experiences of selfhood.

Anger: Muss es sein? Es muss sein.

Before moving from the depths of fault to the vertical heights of forgiveness we would do well to remind ourselves that fault and evil are names that denote sources of pain, suffering, and anger. The whole point of ethics is to communicate our anger to others, to draw attention to injustice, to investigate evil in lieu of violently acting out our emotions. In Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics we read that, “the man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised” (1125b 32-33). We have in this statement the recognition of the reality of anger as a result of the actions of others against our person, honor, family, community, and property. By contrast, Badiou’s ethics is an ethics without anger, but it is true for Ricoeur that the depths of fault which we experience stirs anger, fear, and hateful

For more on the history of the language of forgiving see Charles L. Griswold’s Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration. I am indebted to him for his insights into the wider variety of cognates for forgiving and pardoning through a rich assortment of cultural figures from Homer to the contemporary political mea culpa.
vengeance. Badiou’s own cheerful philosophy, with its theory of the Subject and the clean axiomatic sets within his logics of worlds, is not equipped to confront evil in the form of hateful anger. Rather, for Badiou passions and emotions belong to the human animal who is concerned with nothing more than its own self-preservation. Badiou pretends with his philosophy to be above all this human behavior. Badiou takes delight in the artistic avant garde, the scientific revolutionary, the political militant, and the amorous lover. No doubt Badiou presents an attractive philosophy to some.

Contrary to Badiou’s dismissal of contemporary ethics under the sign of an “ethical ideology”159 which is tied to the Freudian death drive, Ricoeur’s efforts have been to explain and understand the human agent from within its deepest emotional experiences. In Ricoeur’s first major monograph, Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (FN), he notes that, “I do not cure myself of anger without curing myself of excessive self-esteem and of the susceptibility to injury deriving from it: these are the bad imaginations, oppressors of the will which constitute the combustible matter of emotion” (FN, 278). Ricoeur’s ontological hermeneutics seeks to address these “combustible matter of emotion,” by first understanding how we can curb the anger raging at our own fault. One of my working hypotheses throughout this dissertation is that the central task of contemporary philosophy is to come to a better understanding of how fault within our ownmost self gives rise to self-loathing. The experience of fault is the experience of the disparity of my causal agency and my deepest desires. Only by first

159 Recall that for Badiou the “ethical ideology” is a dispositif in defense of global market capitalism and constitutions republicanism (parliamentary democracy).
coming to a clear understanding of our own human agency can we hope to understand the angry desire for revenge as well as the call for justice.

The emotions of “fear and rage,” Ricoeur says, “are nourished by hate and sorrow while an excessive estimation of the self and of the goods whose lack threatens us dominates the background. This is why according to Descartes the true cure for anger is generosity” (FN 278-279). For Badiou self-esteem and the goods required to sustain our biological lives do not count in his estimating of the Subject. The philosophical positions of Badiou and Ricoeur are one of the great philosophical contrasts of our age. Ricoeur’s project, even in his early work, leads him to the conclusion that, “we need to learn about the world of passions by a method other than existential deepening of eidetics: by daily life, novel, theatre, epic” (FN 280). Learning to read the human life as a narrative is the thesis that nourishes Ricoeur’s turn to an ontological hermeneutics of selfhood. Daily life, stories, movies, novels, poetry, theatre, epics, scripture and other cultural imaginaries teach us about the raw necessities of life, and that “whatever will be, will be.” Amen. Let it be. Coming to terms with anger is precisely what forgiveness can help us understand better. Classically the human task of coming to terms with how things have been allotted to us has been the frame for conceptions of freedom from the Stoics to Kant’s formulation of moral freedom in his *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals* wherein autonomous rational agents write the moral commands which they are then constrained to follow. Whether we are to write the moral law, or we are to follow nature’s dictates does not matter. What matters for us here is that we must cope with the disparity in life between our deepest desires and our historical condition. It is here that we find forgiveness.
I would be amiss if I did not briefly consider Nietzsche’s claim in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* that (in Heideggerian terms) we *god* gods – that is, we aesthetically create the gods in reaction to life. “Life” for Nietzsche is defined in his *Second Untimely Essay: On the Use and Abuse of History for life* as a “dark, driving, insatiably self-desiring power” (22). When we couple this definition with the three *Moirai* (fates), Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos discussed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we find his masterful suspicion of the *principium individuationis*. Nietzsche’s anti-*cogito* position is that our anger at our fate is misplaced and that we must instead live joyfully – waiting for the divinities.160 This is certainly a kind a peace and release from the anger one feels for one’s actions, but are we willing to go so far as to claim that all such experiences of fault, failure, solitude, suffering, joy, love, and forgiveness are mere epiphenomena floating upon an illusion called “man”? The only difference I see between Nietzsche’s hyperbolic doubt in selfhood and Badiou’s theory of the Subject is that for Badiou, “there are also truths.” Unfortunately, those truths have too little to do with the depth and breadth of human experience, but only with the knowledges concerning art, science, politics and love affairs.

To be at peace, then, is to consent to what has been and what is present now. Forgiveness of fault is the recognition that one has acted out in the world that is – as it were – across an abyss from the agent’s deepest desires. Forgiveness is not easy. How

160 Cf. Martin Heidegger’s short essay “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” where he presents his so-called “four fold” which includes earth, sky, mortals and divinities. We mortals dwell on earth, always fearful of threats from the sky waiting for the divinities to come. In a figure we can witness this “four fold” in the story of Noah: the sky opened up, flooding all earth, and all the remaining mortals wait inside the dwelling (ark) waiting for God to send a sign.
can history forgive Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao and other tyrants? How can we forgive Dr. Mengele? A better example might be the Mongolian destruction of Baghdad in 1258 under the command of Hulagu Khan. What sense does it make to even think of forgiveness when the victims are long dead, the criminal empire long gone? Today, the consequences of the siege and destruction of Baghdad are nothing more than long dark shadows haunting Mesopotamia. If we believed forgiveness were an absolute power, then we could implore Achilles outside the walls of Troy to please forgive Hector for the killing of his beloved Patroclus. Such is the nature of the “unforgiveable” – in many cases forgiveness would come too late. However, in all cases where there is an agent who seeks forgiveness there is the possibility of forgiveness, albeit in some case it is supremely difficult for people in severe circumstances to forgive heinous crimes. The point is that we must have a keen seriousness about the very limitations of any “practical” use of forgiveness at the socio-political level.

7.4 Heights of Forgiveness

Ricoeur tells us that the term “unforgiveable” does not only apply to those who commit the most heinous acts of evil against others, but indeed it applies to each one of us. “Stripping guilt from our existence would, it seems, destroy that existence totally,” Ricoeur says, and this is what the experience of fault teaches us (MHF 466).

What is this “height” which Ricoeur refers to regarding forgiveness? Ricoeur warns that any philosophical attempt to examine forgiveness risks “the infiltration of theology,” although the link “between fault and self, guilt and selfhood seems
indissoluble” (MHF 466). This is the over-determined Christian Subject which Badiou has argued that Ricoeur is hiding throughout all of his earlier investigations on memory and history in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Ricoeur argues that forgiveness must be recognized to “be there” in some manner; “there is forgiveness” (MHF 466). Forgiveness is characterized by Ricoeur as something of a “voice from above” – a voice that is silent, yet not mute (MHF 467). The proper discourse of forgiveness is that the hymn, since it does not explicitly say who is guilty and why, but simply pronounces the guilt. He claims that, “there is forgiveness as there is joy, as there is wisdom, extravagance, love. Love precisely” (MHF 467). *Prima facie* it might indeed appear from this discussion of “hymns” and “a voice from above,” that Ricoeur has mixed theology and philosophy thus supporting Badiou’s claim that Ricoeur has been hiding an over-determined Christian subject. This is too hasty a judgment as we will see below.

Love is one of Badiou’s four “subjective types” of truth processes and interestingly for Ricoeur it is also closely related to truth. Ricoeur’s examination of forgiveness as love in the section of the Epilogue called “Height: Forgiveness” examines St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. It is in chapter 12 that Paul speaks of the spiritual gifts (charismata) leading up to his claim that “with no love, I am nothing.” This expresses for Ricoeur the path of eminence. Love is what it does, and it holds no ledger of sins, “but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:5). Love is the very height *itself* from which forgiveness and all other charismatic gifts spring forth. At this point Ricoeur has linked love with forgiveness, since love pardons all things and keeps no score of sin. All things are excused, even the unforgiveable. With this claim Ricoeur brings into his discourse a dialogue with Jacques Derrida’s claim that pure forgiveness exists only according to a
logic that forgiveness must forgive the unforgiveable; otherwise it is on the level of an economy of exchange. Against Derrida’s uncompromising claim that every act of reconciliation, redemption or other restorative action – especially at the political level – cannot count as true and “pure” forgiveness Ricoeur asks whether or not there can be some “partitive” pardon for us. What he means is that perhaps we are capable of forgiving and being forgiven at least partially – to some extent if not fully and purely as Derrida demands.\textsuperscript{161} Similarly for Ricoeur, is the height of forgiveness that it makes an infinite demand for pardon even in crimes deemed imprescriptible.

\textit{Forgiveness Today}

Ricoeur’s debate with Derrida is important because it illustrates our contemporary global situation with regards to the supposed universality of the Abrahamic language of forgiveness in political discourse; however I am going to pass over it in order to examine the return of the self in the penultimate section of \textit{Memory, History, Forgiveness}.\textsuperscript{162} Duffy recognizes the problems regarding the very possibility of the globalization of the language of forgiveness saying that, “the traditionally religious language of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation is being politicized and co-opted into a civilian framework” (PP 8). She properly notes that for Ricoeur, “forgiveness is the horizon of the future, the generous gift granted in order to write a new script for communities as well as for

\textsuperscript{161} See Jacques Derrida, \textit{On Forgiveness}, (Routledge, New York, NY, 2001) where he says that “Must one not maintain that an act of forgiveness worthy of its name, if there ever is such a thing, must forgive the unforgiveable, and without condition?” He goes on to say that such radical purity might excessive, hyperbolic, and even mad (39).

\textsuperscript{162} I am comfortable with skipping this material given that Maria Duffy’s work on Ricoeur’s entitled \textit{Pedagogy of Pardon} (PP) does an admirable job developing this theme of the globalization of the language of forgiveness.
individuals” (PP 11). Further she mentions how, “Ricoeur helps us to frame the institutional pole of forgiveness as it impacts on law, politics and social morality” (PP 11-12). Duffy goes further than I am willing to go in practical terms when she claims that, “the ‘politics of pardon’ is becoming a worldwide phenomenon, brought about to some extent by the emergence of the ‘truth commission’, e.g., in South Africa after Apartheid. Herein lies a challenge for the Churches and Christians: to bring the authentic gospel vision to bear on this development if it is not to become an exercise in pragmatism” (PP 12). These and other questions regarding the application of the language of forgiveness and pardon – either authentically or not – lie unfortunately outside the confines of this dissertation. Nonetheless these have consumed many hours of research on my part.

In contrast to Duffy’s attempt to develop a pedagogy of pardon that could teach enemies how to “recall anew,” or as Ricoeur might say, “a past which has made us enemies,” others have made clearer political divisions. For instance, Charles Griswold, in his book Forgiveness, distinguishes between forgiveness and political apology. He states that, “political apology is a form of address, seeking to convince that conflict, or the threat of retaliation, should cease, and cooperation based at least on minimal trust in the reliability of the offending party should be unimpeded by the wrong in question” (Forgiveness 188). This is a clear statement of an economy of exchange where the apology aims to fix a practical – criminal, political, moral – problem. This is the most intractable problem facing the prospect of forgiving.
7.5 The Return of the Self

According to Badiou, Ricoeur’s third major endeavor in *Memory, History, Forgetting* involves the “return of the self” under the sign of the experience of forgiving. This is the aspect most obviously exposing the “over-determined Christian subject” at work in Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting*. We discussed the first two major operations in chapter 6: the first is Ricoeur’s endeavor to separate the subject from memory and history; the second is Ricoeur’s method of attributing memory to self, close others, and neighbors. This return of the self in Ricoeur’s discussion of memory, history and forgetting comes by way of forgiveness and specifically concerns the unbinding of the agent from its past actions. This third element of subjectivity follows the first two of the phenomenology of memory and the narrative treatment of history which Badiou is claiming Ricoeur has kept independent from his theory of the subject. The register here, according to Badiou, is based on an ontology of the human being as a “capable being.” We saw with our investigation of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur’s formulation of our capable being in terms of acting, speaking, narrating, and moral imputation. Here the capacity to be investigated is that of the possible release from one’s past. Badiou regards this flexible subject who can re-figure his or her past as the return of this kind of subject where he feels closest to Ricoeur (Subject 27.6).

What is at stake here for Badiou is how politics and history are to be understood with the subject at the center as the very “point of view” from which history is to be understood. If he allows Ricoeur to found a subject using his ontological hermeneutical approach, then history can be re-configured by the experience of unbinding, redemption, and forgiveness. This, he claims, would be a threat to truth in history. Specifically, are we
for instance willing to forgive Nazi exterminators? This would involve a separation of the subjective identity of an agent from any moral or judicial qualifications regarding his actions.

Leading right up to this section on unbinding an agent from their actions, Ricoeur states that “[t]here is no politics of forgiveness,” and there are no genuinely political institutions of forgiveness as there are, on the other hand, with institutions and politics of promising which are paired with forgiveness (MHF 488). Concerning the supposed absence of political institutions of forgiveness Ricoeur notes that the Catholic Sacrament of Penance is of “an entirely different dimension” (MHF 488). This is opposed to Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor who promises “salvation of men at the price of their freedom” (MHF 488). Ricoeur is emphatic that there is no “politics of forgiveness” (MHF 488). Both promising and forgiving concern our subjective identity over time: with the promise I agree to have the same willingness in the future to fulfill agreements I have made in the past; forgiveness asks that my present identity be freed from my past actions. Hannah Arendt in her text *The Human Condition* claims that there is a symmetry between these two actions163, whereas Ricoeur argues that because there are no institutions of forgiving that forgiving is therefore not identical to promising. When we promise we can sign an oath, a contract and be taken to court for our failures to live up to our word. States also make treaties with one another to which they are legally bound. Nothing of the sort exists with regards to forgiving.

Ricoeur’s philosophical position developed according to his ontological hermeneutics based upon our *idem-* and *ipse*-identity which takes into consideration the involuntary and voluntary aspects of our lives such that agents attest and avowal that actions in the world are their own. We act, and then we can speak about, narrative, and morally impute ourselves as innocent or guilty. This is borne out by our institutions of criminal law, politics and moral guilt. Ricoeur calls these the “incognitos of forgiveness” (MHF 490). This position is what Badiou repeatedly calls the “consensus” position for which Ricoeur is the foremost defender. Ricoeur’s whole effort then, according to Badiou, is a *dispostif* for judicial humanism which seeks global ideological hegemony. Badiou makes himself abundantly clear that he stands completely outside of this consensual camp. The singular situation to which Ricoeur belongs is the market-based capitalism which is the true nature of contemporary parliamentary-democratic civilization. This is world of shadow-guessing and opinion-making in Plato’s allegory of the cave.

Ricoeur’s reply to our unforgivable fault was stated above through Derrida’s claim that forgiveness can be given only in cases where the crime is unforgivable. Yet, we also saw that Ricoeur responds to this with the possibility of a partial forgiveness and he says that, “[t]he guilty person, rendered capable of beginning again: this would be the figure of unbinding that commands all the others” (MHF 490). The “others” referred to here are those alibis of forgiveness: legal pardons, forgiveness of material debt, amnesty and reconciliations. All the various incognitos of forgiveness – pardoning in its broadest sense – are to be understood through the experience of forgiveness which comes as a gift of love. What is required to unbind the subject from its past, to separate the agent from
her actions, is “a more radical uncoupling... namely, between the effectuation and the capacity that it actualizes” (MHF 490).

For Badiou this “radical uncoupling” of the agent from its actions forms the “third separation” at the level of forgetting within a subject. Forgiving is the third major operation according to Badiou in Ricoeur’s effort to separate thoroughly the human subject from memory, history and forgetting. This uncoupling or “unbinding” of the agent from its actions contains for Badiou, “the ultimate meaning of the book (MHF) as a whole” (Subject 27.6). Badiou is certainly correct in his reading of the dialogue between Ricoeur and Derrida regarding the relationship between the “unforgiveable act” and the agent of that act when he states that Ricoeur rejects Derrida’s claim that forgiving forgives the impossible (or else it is not pure forgiving). Ricoeur’s position is based on his ontology explicated in Study 10 of Oneself as Another and further explored in Memory, History, Forgetting. That ontology is founded on a characterization of the human being as a “capable being” who believes to his own causal agency in the sense that the agent “attests” that these actions are mine. At the heart of the human agent, of subjectivity, of selfhood, is the human capacity to regenerate itself, inaugurate actions anew, and to act differently. Included in this ontology is the capacity of historical persons to learn how to recount the past anew in ways that can bring a cessation to political violence (one of the avowed goals of Memory, History, Forgetting).

In the first three chapters of this dissertation we examined Ricoeur’s hermeneutic ontology of our capable being in terms of our capacities to act, speak, narrate, and morally impute ourselves. The unbinding of actions from the agent conforms to this philosophy of action since the act of forgiving restores to the agent the very powers to act
which have been blocked by past faults, failures, sorrows, and other forms of suffering. Ricoeur utilizes Aristotle’s metaphysical language of power and act in order to understand the human agent – especially in moral terms. We examined this in chapter 2 through the examination of Ricoeur’s “little ethics” under to motto of the ethical intention: “to aim at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions.” This ethical intention includes the teleological aim at happiness; however, happiness must pass through a deontological stage whereby one is worthy of being happy. Finally, our happiness and that of others is founded by a sense of justice which is capable of both restoring fairness torn by circumstances as well as correcting for unfair distributions of life’s goods. (These goods are derided by Badiou as the shadowy opinions communicated amongst human animals and do not rise to the level of the Good according to his ethics.)

The agent can be separated, unbound, redeemed, forgiven or whatever we call it, from his actions, because no matter how radical evil may be, it is not original. Intentionally utilizing Kantian language, Ricoeur says that, “what is original is the predisposition (Anlage) to [the] good (MHF 491). For Kant, reason-itself commands that we act according to a goodwill for it is the only thing in the world that is good without qualification. For Ricoeur, the Kantian formula that our original predisposition is towards the good, yet we have propensity for falling away from the commands of reason – the goodwill – means that a restoration of our “original predisposition” is possible. The figure of that restoration is forgiveness. And forgiveness has an “irreducibly practical nature” which requires a willingness, a desire, and hope on the part of the agent who seeks to be forgiven. Of course, even if one is forgiven it does not necessarily mean that they are redeemed.
What more can philosophy say about the possible restoration of our predisposition towards the good? It seems we are at one of the horizons—limits—of philosophy. Ricoeur says, “possessing an irreducibly practical nature,” the restorative capacity, “can be uttered only in the grammar of the optative mood” (MHF 493). What this “optative mood” means is that we can only ever wish to have the original disposition towards the good be restored. Speculative reason cannot go further than this. The signs in daily life that this is possible, Ricoeur notes, are witnessed through the many incognitos of forgiveness—acts of individual forgiveness, attempts to repent, working to re-count the past differently in ways that will no longer keep us enemies, criminal pardons, economic and political “debt” relief, and so forth. These partial acts of forgiveness are not pure in the sense that Derrida demands; however, that does not make them any less difficult.

7.6 An Unconscious God

Today’s philosophical battlefield is clear then: idealism versus materialism. There are three, and only three, things that exist: God, the World (Nature), and the Soul. These are the objects of metaphysics and how one answers each of the questions, “What is God?” or “What is Nature?” or “What is the Soul?” will shape how the other two questions will be answered. Modern philosophy is shaped by Descartes’ answer that we are thinking things (cogito), whereas the classical answer we receive from Aristotle is that God is a living intellect who is actively contemplating all that He is—including all of His creation. Materialism has been with us from the very beginnings of philosophy, for example, in the form of Thales of Miletus’ claim that “All is water.” Thales’ material monism is not
fundamentally different from contemporary materialism including Badiou’s materialism. In order for Badiou to defend his materialism he must dismantle any attempt to maintain a theory of subjectivity which defies the logic of the death of man which in Badiou’s case is supported by his theory of truth-events. Subjectivity thus is predicated on whether or not a ‘generic human animal’ remains faithful to a revolutionary disruption in the knowledges that (always only temporarily) constitute the arts, sciences, politics, and amorous relations. This notion of a “generic” human subjectivity means that it is not the agent who acts, but in fact it is the action which makes the agents into a Subject – so long as they act in the interests of some truth. Most human beings are therefore nothing more than animals concerned with their self-preservation understood under the Freudian notion of the death drive. This amounts to a sophisticated formula for the death of man as an agent of action who could then be forgiven in any meaningful sense as the one responsible for his or her actions.

Badiou aims to demonstrate through his theory of the subject, within a logic of a world, that subjectivity ought to be predicated on a human animal faithfully following an event of truth. So long as that subject continues to be interested more in the truth-event than its own self-preservation, then they are properly speaking “Subjects” in addition to being merely a human animal. However, we must take careful notice that what is required is that the person can act in a certain way – artistically, scientifically, as a political militant, or as a lover. Where Badiou goes wrong in his reading of Ricoeur is that he argues that “Christ’s manoeuvre” is the forgiveness of “original sin.” The redemption of all mankind’s original sin by Christ’s infinite sacrifice on the cross means for Badiou that everyone is guilty, and since everyone is guilty then really no one is guilty: “committed
by all, will be seen as committed by none” (Subject 27.8). The mistake is with the conception of “original sin” – as if it is the most original ground of the self. As we just saw above is our brief discussion of Kant what is most primordial is our propensity towards the good. While not all teleological thinking aims at the Kantian good determined by the good will each teleological system aims at some good. It is enough to claim then that what is primordial is some good, however understood, and not some evil at the heart of human subjectivity.

For Badiou subjectivity begins from the perspective of action when a human animal becomes more interested in the event of a truth than in its own self-preservation. Action then is the principal feature of subjectivity and he criticizes Ricoeur as if he were claiming that what is original is our guilt in the form of our “original sin.” What Badiou seems to have mistaken with Ricoeur is that it is not action that is original, but the power to act which is our original disposition and that that disposition is towards the good. Badiou characterizes “the Good” as a fall, as a “disorganization in the walk of life” (Ethics 60). The human animal no longer cares for the organization of their mere animal concerns, because the rare truth-event is such that the new Subject will throw its whole life away in its effort to advance that truth. Prior to a truth-event there are only “generic human animals” who in their various ways seek to preserve themselves, procreate, and survive as long as they can. For Badiou, this death drive for mere survival is the cause (singular!) of all violence in the world. But, miracle of miracles! Some human animals respond to rare events which irrupt out of the fabric of consensus-bound knowledges, remain faithful to the truth of the event and become full-fledged Subjects. How this is
possible Badiou does not explore and this is precisely what Ricoeur spent his long philosophical career investigating. Badiou’s position is clear:

My sole ambition in this text was to clarify things. I for one believe that there only exist human animals whose generic soul has never been sublated by any sacrifice, bar those sacrifices they themselves have performed so that some truths could exist. It is permissible for those animals to become subjects, in always singular circumstances. But it is only their action, or the mode in which they persevere in the consequences of such action, that qualifies them as subjects. So that it is decidedly impossible to say, as does Ricoeur: ‘You are worth more than your acts’. It is the very opposite that must be affirmed: ‘It can happen, rarely, that your acts are worth more than you’.

Badiou finishes:

This is why the only path leading to subjective identity is that of mis-recognition\textsuperscript{164} [sic]. As Lacan said, in a point whichFrançois Regnault has commented on so well: ‘God is unconscious’. (Subject 27.9)

This final statement at the end of his polemic attack on Ricoeur is telling. First, on the one hand, he tells us that he divides people between the vast majority of “human animals” with “generic souls” who have never sacrificed anything, and know no truth. And on the other hand there are those rare, O so rare!, souls who have made the ultimate sacrifice to

\textsuperscript{164} The term “mis-recognition” is a translation of the French “méconnaissance” and it contains a hyphen in the translation.
the truths in the arts, sciences, (Marxist) politics, and of course while in love! His is a very original, very clever, and frankly a very interesting philosophy which makes the most important contribution to philosophy from the perspective of the philosopher – Badiou makes us think.

From the outset of this dissertation I have sought to explore the dueling theories of the human agent developed by Ricoeur and Badiou with my own sympathies resting firmly with Ricoeur. His approach takes us through many “long detours” through disciplines other than philosophy in order to learn from those perspectives and disabuse philosophy of its pretention of being subordinate to nothing but geometry in the classical sense of that great Pythagorean philosopher Plato. Ricoeur’s philosophy does indeed develop in close proximity to theological themes, yet he reminds mindful of the need to divide clearly his philosophical commitments from any theological assertions. In a weak and general sense, Badiou’s claim that Ricoeur’s conception of the human being contains elements of a Christian subject seems plausible. However, on our closer inspection, the very ground for Badiou’s own theory of the subject would appear to require a theory of selfhood that is developed along the lines of Ricoeur’s “capable human being.” Ricoeur’s philosophy patiently builds a portrait of selfhood from within an existential framework, rather than Badiou’s cool, almost cold, outlook from on high. Claiming that axiomatic set theory provides supporting evidence of one’s theory of selfhood as we examined in chapter 4 is certainly a claim from “on high” as it is outside of human experience.

165 According to Joannes Philoponus, above the entrance to Plato’s Academy it was written “mèdeia ageomètrētas eisitō mou tēn stegēn” which translates to “Let no one ignorant of geometry come under my roof.”
Ricoeur’s philosophy is difficult because of the constellation of human experiences which he explores without putting those experiences under a grand narrative of his own philosophical creation. Memory, history, forgetting, forgiveness, and redemption are not forced to work within a given framework provided at the outset by Ricoeur and this makes reading Ricoeur challenging.

My final conclusion then is that Ricoeur is not guilty of maintaining an “over-determined Christian Subject” at the heart of his theory of selfhood. Badiou for his part is guilty of not recognizing that in order for his Subject to act at all, then prior to that act the Subject must be a capable human being. Badiou presents an interesting theory of revolutions, but comes across as [suffering from] a fetish for revolutions such that he sees them everywhere as the root cause of all truth and the very immortality of the human being. Badiou’s God is unconscious and by his very own metric Badiou’s biological life is worth less than his truth-events.

Ricoeur confesses that the link between forgiveness and the “entire undertaking” of Memory, History, Forgetting did not consciously come to light until after re-reading his text during drafting. He mentions a distinction he found in Eugen Fink “between operative concepts, never entirely present to the mind, and thematic concepts, displayed as relevant objects of knowledge” (MHF 494) as a plausible distinction between those ideas he set-out to demonstrate versus those which emerged from his efforts. In a similar way is Ricoeur guilty of unintentionally harboring an over-determined Christian subject? I do not find any reason to believe that Ricoeur worked to deceive either himself or his readers; however, what counts as a “Christian Subject” is a difficult consideration. Badiou’s own theory of the subject means that human beings only ever – and rarely --
rise above their violent animal nature through some external adherence to some truth. His fetish with the revolutionary event is his own “over-determination,” and one that blinds him to the existential humanism found in Ricoeur’s ontological hermeneutics. Ricoeur offers by way of his hermeneutical approach to selfhood a richer and more realistic picture of the human agent than is designated by Badiou’s Subject who is dependent on truth-events. Ricoeur’s self is an embodied agent who lives and suffers in a real world within which they act, speak of and narrate their doings to other, all the while finding themselves moral agents capable of being held imputable for how they have acted. On the other hand, Badiou awaits the third figuration of Marxist communism as an event which might be taken up by some human animal, so that at least one Subject is inaugurated. My preference is always for a philosophy that is concrete, intuitive both bodily and emotionally, but above all is one that includes those human beings who do not have the privilege of knowing what we philosophers know. Ricoeur, unlike Badiou, does not exclude almost all of humanity from the benefits of subjective Immortality presented by some un-namable truth-event. “The only reality, in the end, are individuals who do things”166 (History as Narrative 216).

166 Paul Ricoeur, ‘History as narrative and practice’ (Paul Ricoeur interviewed by Peter Kemp), Philosophy Today, Fall 1985.
CONCLUSION

My years of devoted research into Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology his hermeneutics of the self has been fruitful in many ways. This dissertation has greatly advanced my understanding of Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger as well as numerous contemporary philosophers. Studying Ricoeur has been demanding because of his method of discoursing and dialoguing with so many other thinkers. Furthermore, my understanding of the field of ethics has been greatly advanced through the competing approaching developed by Ricoeur and Badiou.

My primary conclusion regarding the competing views of Ricoeur and Badiou is that philosophy today is a struggle to understand human agency against a totalizing ontology that threatens to negate human freedom. Ricoeur’s contributions to philosophy build on the work of Husserl and Heidegger most obviously; however, the hermeneutic turn that supports his philosophical anthropology is by far his greatest contribution.

The confrontation developed here between Ricoeur and Badiou has aimed to defend Ricoeur against polemic attacks by Badiou that seek what Badiou terms “a total
victory.” Such a total victory for either position does not seem possible though for the following reasons. First, each presents a conception of the human agent that do not preclude the philosophical import of the each theory. The self for Ricoeur aims to live in a truth that has meaning for the self, and it is a truth that has possibilities for all persons. On the other hand, Badiou’s sense of the Subject is characterized by the Marxist division between the human animal alienated from his life by an ideology he has not -- cannot -- extricate himself from by mere will. Rather, Badiou’s Marxism requires an external truth-event to transform the human animal into an agent of truth. The definition of truth developed by Badiou is by itself an interesting possibility, yet there are no reasons why it could not be theoretically inserted into Ricoeur’s anthropology. A second reason why we can reject the sharp dichotomy of total victory is that both philosophers seek to understand the human agent as truly free from the causality of nature. The task is in short to think beyond and around Kant’s antinomy of determinism versus freedom. The third reason why no total philosophical victory is to be expected from the confrontation between Ricoeur and Badiou because the possibility of any finality to the question of selfhood is, I am convinced, impossible.

No closure to the question of human agency, selfhood, and how we are capable of living in the truth is possible. As we live our lives we inaugurate new actions, speak to others of those actions, narrate the course of our many actions, and find ourselves morally imputable for all we have done as well as for what we have not acted upon. Badiou’s Subjects are too a creature to account to most human beings, but that is not a rejection of his insight that singular truths found outside our causal agency have so profound an impact upon an agent that they are willing to sacrifice their lives in dedication to that
truth. As for me I have dedicated much time and energy on my own personal search for truth. I recall as a child that I realized that this is my only life and that I would dedicate myself to finding out as much about this world as I could. I feel I have accomplished an important chapter in that life-long goal – to live in the truth.


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