


Occupied Spatiality: Non-Peace in Self-Affirmation

A Ricœurian Approach

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Paul Ricœur considered the theme of non-peace in self-affirmation to have such existential and phenomenological bearing that he devoted his intellectual capacity to explore the self that is never immediately present to oneself or at immediate peace with oneself. Not all reasons for such originating non-peace are well observed in Ricœur scholarship. This article proposes that Ricœur approaches the self by means of occupied spatiality or under the notion of “having” the self. The argument is made that self-affirmation is reliant on objectification that, subsequently, results in the self “having” or possessing itself as an object. Such necessary structure for the process of self-affirmation leads the self to grasp a notion of itself as an expropriated appropriator; this achievement leaves the self in a perpetuated state of non-peace. Here the analysis—complementary to those already presented in Ricœur scholarship—approaches religious question-setting. Making a reference to Augustine the article accords with his personal assessment considering his “unfinished state” of needing to wait and hope for “that utter peace” when the problems of human existence do not disturb him any more.

Introduction

Why is it so hard to simply just be, and not to continuously be troubled and concerned? Put differently, why does one always seem to find an element of non-peace in affirming one’s self and in one’s presence to oneself in the world? A self-critical observation

that has perhaps not so much perplexed but literally pained thinkers from Psalmists to Church Fathers (such as Augustine) and from Buddha to poets and existential philosophers concerns human restlessness. Among many others, Paul Ricœur considered this theme to be of such importance that he devoted his intellectual capacity to exploring the self that is never immediately present to oneself or at immediate peace with oneself. Ricœur’s anthropological stance can be phrased thus: a human being is “a mediator of the reality outside of himself”, thereby being “a fragile meditation himself” (Ricœur 1986, 140). When it comes to the question of human self-recognition and understanding, Ricœur maintains that the self remains an endless task for the human self. “In himself and for himself man remains torn”, Ricœur (1986, 141) summarizes. The unity of the self is maintained in reflection enabled by objects, “the signs of being human”, which mediate the idea of self in their concreteness (Ricœur 1986, 67). In other words, the self is a task in a perpetual state of restlessness.

Ricœur’s *œuvre* is by no means limited to philosophical anthropology, but such depiction admittedly describes well his

general outlook that studies the shattered ego or *cogito brisé* from a plethora of viewpoints. More specifically, Ricœur's thesis is that the self-aware subject can only be mediately present, through cultural meta-institutions such as language, value formation, and so on. This article provides a tentative exploration of an aspect of this thought that has not received the attention it deserves in Ricœur scholarship. Beyond Ricœur's emphasis on temporality and narrativity, the focus has been on the hermeneutic "space of experience" and the question of spatial or embodied experience has not figured prominently. Drawing some support from Kant's anthropology—that both applies and goes beyond his transcendental or "critical" philosophy—I will propose that Ricœur approaches the self by means of occupied spatiality or under the notion of "having" the self. The notion of the self relies on taking one's body as a concrete object. Self-affirmation is reliant on objectification that, subsequently, results in considering the self as an economic thing, that is, that the self "has" or possesses itself in extended space, thereby providing some imaginative space for the emergence of the self. Such necessary structure for self-affirmation leads the self to grasp a notion of itself only as an expropriated appropriator; this achievement leaves the self in a state of non-peace.

This article will not jump directly to the issue of the body but approaches it by way of addressing the theme of the self that becomes one by encountering otherness. This merits some clarification at the outset. In what follows, I will first model the notion of ineradicable intimate otherness by placing the self in the political, social, and legal structures of recognition.

This will provide an understanding of the dialectic of facilitation and alienation that can also be found in relation to one's own body. Such pursuit is warranted by Ricœur's own analysis. Considering the possible ontological import of his hermeneutic phenomenology of the self, Ricœur proposes in *Oneself as Another* (published in French in 1990) three related aspects of the "broken" *cogito*. The underlying thesis for all three is that "otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood" (Ricœur 1992, 317). For Ricœur (1992, 318), the constitution of the self carries with itself a "polysemy of selfhood" that is integral in the process of becoming a self. In short, *cogito brisé* is manifested in broken self-attestation that is present 1. in the experience of one's own body, 2. in the relation of intersubjectivity, and 3. in the relation of the self to itself as discussed in Heidegger's analysis of *Gewissen* that Ricœur (1992, 308–17, 341–55) interprets as attestation-injunction (or the injunctive element of self-attestation and the attesting element of self-injunction). The self, according to Ricœur, is never without some aspect of alterity or alienating passivity, be that in form of the body, of the others (represented by various institutions), or of conscience. I will, in sum, approach the issue of occupied spatiality by adopting the Ricœurian model of detour, that is, through the other or the structural.

An unoccupied space for recognition?

Given the specific task the article aims to pursue, it is justified to admit that terms such as "occupied spatiality" may, quite understandably, lead us to consider political

unrest and armed conflicts such as the ones going on in Ukraine and Gaza. The failing aspect of both ethico-political formation and the mediated means of recognition are by no means foreign to Ricœur's thought. In this article I will not, however, place my emphasis on the observable current aspects of non-ethicality, rejection, or intolerance, even when this could well be done by applying Ricœur's elaborations penned in the midst of the imperfect peace of the Balkans war in 1995.¹ The first crucial clarification leads us therefore to pay attention to the multiplicity that the question of self-recognition has in Ricœur's work. Even though the issue ultimately concerns the processes of individual and communal self-recognition, this does not permit the reduction of the issue to one of existential self-recognition. In spite of its existential importance, the question has been approached relatively independently in various fields of philosophical thought that span linguistics and hermeneutics to social and political philosophy. As we will soon see, however, there is nevertheless a considerable overlap that cuts across the seemingly distinct areas of exploration—just as Ricœur intimates in *Oneself as Another*.

At the same time it can also be shown that in spite of always admitting the human reality to be internally torn and disarrayed—and even addressing various forms of external and internal violence in many of his works—Ricœur's specific interest (1984, 72–73) was in the theme of “concordant discordance”, or in the question of how to

achieve and maintain *some* sense of worth and restfulness in spite of the undeniable instability and volatility at all levels of existence. As but one example of this, Ricœur explicitly states that the central thesis of *The Course of Recognition* (published in French in 2004) concerns “the idea of symbolic mutual recognition” (Ricœur 2005, 233). He could not be much clearer that the symbolic—meaning the deep semantic—aspect of the practice of gift-giving is for him more important than the gestural one:

The thesis I want to argue for can be summed up as follows: the alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange. (Ricœur 2005, 219)

What I wish the reader to pay attention to here is Ricœur's use of the words “peaceful” and “alternative”. Even though we will set aside the specific focus on struggling for some notion or sense of peace and restfulness, Ricœur ultimately theorizes that such a state will only emerge when set in contrast to its alternative, that is, to the imaginable and, even more, experienced “other” that recasts the whole of human experience.

Here the detour to the issue of the body opens up for us. In *The Course of Recognition* Ricœur extends his project of *Oneself as Another* by searching for the hermeneutic and ethico-affective peace or “clarity” of human relations—mutuality beyond inter-subjective reciprocity. The second, reciprocity, may well be needed in terms of justice that ensures that all subjects are

1 See Ricœur's 1995 essay “Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe” in which he lists practical examples of ruthless violence and laments that “the history of Europe is cruel”.

recognized and that each will have what is allowed or granted by the societal systems of having, power, or worth. But in distinction to “mere” justice, mutuality is an opening up of a field of encountering another person or entity beyond what is demanded; being recognized as a legal person by the judicial system, for example, is not yet full mutual recognition. Ricœur argues that mutuality surpasses reciprocity in that the other is met as another me in spite of the original dissymmetry that always remains between two subjects (whether of individual or collective kind) and even in the self; this is what Ricœur explored more in detail in *Oneself as Another*.

Here a more refined clarification offers itself. In the case of recognition processes between a number of parties, Ricœur’s insistent point is that some—even surprising—sense of having seen, acknowledged, and accepted the presence of the other parties is indeed possible as experience tells us, against the all too common experience of some form of exclusion. To reiterate the same point in Ricœurian language, the symbolic mediations—such as the one in play in the practice of symbolic gift-giving—evinced the “sunny breaks” (*l’éclaircies*) of peaceful co-existence or the experience of mutuality. Analysing the “paradox of the gift and the gift in return” provides a kind of un- or dis-occupied space to notice that *agape*, or overwhelming generosity, transcends the “autonomous circularity” attached to reciprocity. “In this way”, Ricœur (2005, 219–20) explains, “the ground will be clearer for an interpretation of the mutuality of the gift founded on the idea of symbolic recognition”. The “symbolic character of recognition” is, therefore, the key in the Kantian thought of Ricœur

(2005, 234, 244) as it provides the opportunity to creatively bind together the structural in the field of social and political life (such as the judicial system of courts) and the dynamic in the field of linguistic and hermeneutic life (such as communicative practices that rely on a kind of constant “translation” at the personal and ultimately at the existential level).

Ricœur’s misrecognition

Ricœur’s description of the possibility of accepting encounter, that is, the reality of inter-personal or inter-entity good will, is a worthy attempt, considering the pervasive gloomy mindset of everyday news and experiences. Placing the emphasis on the elevating, inspiring, and touching aspects of encounters not only gives hope but is a sign of hope that emerges as evident. At this point the given account of Ricœur’s notion of recognition has to be balanced, however; Ricœur is not merely discussing the aspect of concordance in spite of his clear attempts at bracketing discordance from sight.

In the context of *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur’s analysis is placed between the “Hobbesian challenge” to the notion of recognition as the violent state of nature—by which the theme of searching for peace under the sign of fear-motivated calculation and contract becomes apparent—and Axel Honneth’s “systematic renewal” of Hegel’s argument on the struggle for recognition in terms of love, personal rights, and social esteem (Honneth 1995, 1–2, 69, 92–130). Not giving due credit to the full scope of Hegel’s notion of *Anerkennung* that Ricœur takes as constituting both a historical and conceptual link between these two thematics of recognition, Ricœur’s Hegel analysis highlights

the aspect of negativity, or the struggle, even in its muted forms such as misrecognition. This sets Ricœur's own analysis (2005, 218) in a favorable light; it thereby brings forth "our actual experience of what I [that is, Ricœur] shall call states of peace". Portraying Hegel's philosophy of recognition in a Kojevian manner as a never-ending dialectical conflict that brings in the aspect of discordance, Ricœur himself wishes to highlight "the truces, sunny breaks", that is, our experiences of peaceful recognition that are conceptualized by *agape*—properly defined as the divine form of self-giving love—and represented symbolically by mutual gift-exchange (Ricœur 2005, 218). Such an approach, however, ends up being a kind of performative misrecognition.

Ricœur both misrepresents the Hegelian account that ends up stressing the notion of a loving model of recognition and, at least for the sake of argument, casts aside the aspect of struggle that, in the end, remains ineradicable also for Ricœur. In spite of arguing for *some* sense of peacefulness to be not only possible but executable, there is no peaceful recognition or "pure" ethicality apart from the struggle. Ricœur actually maintains at the outset that there is no pure mutuality, but that recognition always remains tensional. "The experiences of peaceful recognition cannot take the place of a resolution for the perplexities raised by the very concept of a struggle, still less of a resolution of the conflicts in question", Ricœur stresses (2005, 218). The struggle is inevitable, as are the structural "orders of recognition" (Ricœur 2005, 203–04), but this does not render the peaceful experiences impossible. Ricœur argues (2005, 218), in fact, that these experiences

offer "a confirmation that the moral motivation for struggles for recognition is not illusory". When explored closely, Ricœur seemingly argues, from within the struggle there arises a detectable tone of willing the good for the self and the others.

In brief, the experiential certainty affirms mutual ethicality in the structures of reciprocity. Here, though, the celebration of concordance over discordance can easily be shown only temporary and at best fleeting. Even though the "sunny breaks" of the peaceful moments of recognition are experientially genuine, Ricœur (2005, 261) nevertheless explicitly warns his readers not to forget "the original asymmetry in the relation between the self and others, which even the experience of peaceful states does not manage to abolish". The point is well made and well-taken. Ricœur can also be read as thinking about the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict when summing up his thought in one phrase: "The struggle for recognition perhaps remains endless" (Ricœur 2005, 246). When it comes to "occupied spatiality", there is much less unconditional love and self-giving goodness than Ricœur makes there out to be. The deeply unsettling reality of discordance cannot be eradicated, even when attempting to highlight the moments of experienced concordance.

Towards the self's place

It may appear that the preceding discussion has taken us in a direction that goes well beyond the theme and the scope indicated in the opening of this article. This may well be true if one reads the preceding clarification merely as a summation of Ricœur's philosophy of politically or economically structured, societally mediated recognition.

Given the recounted instruction in *Oneself as Another*, however, if read as a struggle for self-recognition—the self’s attempt at achieving a stable notion of itself—the preceding clarification becomes instructive. The discussion serves as a description of the process of recognition the self is engaged in through its other (such as the judicial system or linguistic practices—or even my own body). Moreover, there are indications in *The Course of Recognition* pointing to the employment of the work in this manner.

In sum, the course, path, or trail of recognition (*parcours de la reconnaissance*) Ricœur investigates is a course from the state of perplexity to that of identification, self-recognition, inter-subjective reciprocity, and finally mutual recognition and gratitude. Put differently, the somewhat calm or peaceful state of recognition between self-aware subjects as the struggle for recognition has not perhaps ceased but rather been made void in light of what is achieved. Furthermore, the point about the self approaching itself in the mode of calling to be recognized figures prominently in Ricœur’s work. In *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur argues for a shift from “active” to “passive” recognition. It should be observed here that it is precisely the existentially originating triad of passivity (the body, the others, the injunction) that Ricœur problematizes in *Oneself as Another* (1992, 318). Although his analysis in *The Course of Recognition* might begin by asking about recognizing in an active sense, it will soon become clear that the need for recognition, that is, of “being recognized” prevails. (Ricœur 2005, 19).²

2 Axel Honneth also discusses Hegel’s

A parallel shift from epistemological recognition to the ethical relates to the previous shift from active to passive recognition. Clearly, being merely capable of identifying entities does not exhaust the meaning of the word “recognition”. According to Ricœur, recognition guided by gratitude must also be distinguished from the normative and structural reciprocal recognition. Still, in a manner already argued for in this article, there is no way to altogether bypass or set aside these structural or passive means. Ricœur (2005, 203–04) insists that socioeconomic, sociopolitical (including judicial), and institutionalized sociocultural complexes can well be understood as “orders of recognition”. According to Ricœur’s explication of Axel Honneth’s three patterns of intersubjective recognition (*die Muster der Anerkennung*) each of these various “organized mediations” indirectly recognizes a subject by granting it a status or standing as a social agent.

The self is granted a place as a self indirectly by applying the societal structures that assume the existence of societal beings, as both individuals (consider, e.g., a defendant in a court of law) and social entities (consider, e.g., groups such as athletic clubs, religious congregations, or nation states). Such placing, however, is not personal as it merely “indexes” the self and does not really individualize in any existentially pertinent sense. For example, for the legal proceedings the notion of defendant is what counts, not the existence of the specific individual. The self is therefore not “at peace” as there really has not yet been a resolution to the question of being a self in the structures of

conception of “being recognized”. See Honneth 1995, 49–52, 80, 86.

societal existence. “I” may be recognized as a defendant, but this outward recognition does not yet reveal the specific meaning of my life to myself as it does not account for the sought for existential level of (self-)recognition. Here, however, we start to provide some space for the self to enter into the picture.

The phenomenology of human quests

Ricœur’s philosophy is decidedly phenomenological. In spite of hermeneutics later taking on the leading role, the phenomenological undertone never disappears. When it comes to Ricœur’s very late insistence that his “bottom line is a phenomenology of being able” (Ricœur and Kearney 2004, 167), this not only confirms such scholarly observation but also Ricœur’s mindset concerning the intentional ground of human action. The structure of consciousness is intentional, that is, Ricœur follows the Husserlian formula of “*ego-cogito-cogitatum*” (Husserl 1982, 50). From the phenomenological point of view, any object of consciousness is an intentional “pole of identity” that is not distinct from the consciousness but rather an objectifiable “index” that resides in consciousness in each and every one of its moments—a kind of thought-node that stands for, and is, an object but always in relation to consciousness not merely having but intending it. The objects for consciousness therefore point to a “noetic intentionality” that is the basic structure of any consciousness (Husserl 1982, 46). Distinguishing himself from Husserl, however, Ricœur insisted on the same point as Gabriel Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty: embodiment or incarnation is elementary for the human intentional consciousness.

In his early work Ricœur argues for practical action, or transforming my environment by altering my relation to objects in the world, to be done in a corporeal world, that is, in the world of physical objects and the objects of intentional actions irrespective of whether they are peaceful or hostile. Acting, therefore, “is a way in which a subject relates himself to objects”, by bringing a change to these relations in using the personal body (Ricœur 1966, 208). Ricœur maintains that the personal body, “my own body”, is already an indication of the fact that subjectivity cannot dismiss this phenomenal dimension of being human, that is, of taking or occupying space. For there to be a practically acting self—or a self practically acted upon as in our everyday dealings—it is a necessity that a subject’s personal body is “an original relation of subjectivity to the world” (Ricœur 1966, 208). Being a subject in the world rests not only on structurally extended recognition but also on the notion of having my own body (*mon corps propre*). As Stephanie Arel (2020, 62) summarizes, Ricœur views the body “as the ‘absolute place’ in the world occupied by the self”. The self has a place as a subject that occupies space; I am in it in action, be it welcoming and approving or hostile and violent.

We will have to make a pause here and—because it is a key to the subjective relating to worldly objects—study the question of having the personal body as a marker for occupied spatiality that allows for intentionality in practical terms. To do so, some explanatory remarks are in order to clarify Ricœur’s approach. I will try to open the discussion from a distinct angle if compared to the hermeneutics of place or the temporal “space of experience” that are already noted

in Ricoeur scholarship. For example, Savage (2021, 22) addresses the question of “my own body” as a spatial marker, but links this almost immediately to the hermeneutical aspect of “transforming the physical topography of a place into an array of sites where memories, stories, and legends endure”. Ferret (2021, 52) continues from this by focusing on the reconfigured space of games and playing: “Playing refigures the spatial inscription of one’s own body”.³ For her part, Costanzo (2021, 81–82) redoubles the narrative account in stressing “the construction of a lived space” or the narratively accentuating and formed architectural space.

In contrast to these scholarly observations, I aim to focus on the notion of spatial extension and occupation that is of a physical and embodied kind. As Vendra and Furia (2021, 3) rightfully note, here Ricoeur’s temporally “biased” hermeneutic phenomenology calls for a clarification. The following will, however, propose a complementary reading to Vendra and Furia (2021, 3) according to whom “Ricoeur does not explicitly bring out the question of space in his early phenomenological works”. I will nevertheless adhere to their observation that “the problem of space is linked here to Ricoeur’s conception of the lived body seen as the center of orientation of all perceptions”. And as it comes to the issue of the body, Halsema (2020, 9) merits notice for the summation that “we do not understand the body as our situation, as thrown into the world, apart from a reflection on the perception of a thing”. These notions lead us in the right direction,

3 “Le jeu refigure l’inscription spatiale du corps propre”.

but there is more that can be said about the role of the body in the becoming of the self.

In his long quest of exploring philosophical anthropology, Ricoeur early on presented a triad to which he returned in his last published work that we have explored above. The question of being a self and the relating question of (self-)recognition is worked through this particular triad—having, power, and esteem—that will also guide our search in this article for the originating non-peace in self-affirmation. More specifically, in its general progression from consciousness to ideal self-consciousness, and furthermore to mutual recognition in cultural objectivity, *Fallible Man* (published in French in 1960) prefigures the line of Ricoeur’s much later argument in *The Course of Recognition*. This earlier triad that grounds and explains the later “orders of recognition” is the focus of our interest in what follows.

There is, however, yet another triad that will also have to be recounted. According to Ricoeur, a subject becomes recognized and gains an understanding of being a human being only in the light of objectivity that the named triad explores. As also Savage (2021, 18–19) indicates, this analysis has a heavy Kantian background from productive imagination to schematism (viz. Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*) and furthermore to its application in terms of figuration that also results in ethico-political being (viz. Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*). In spite of Ricoeur’s professedly unorthodox reading of Kant, his early work *Fallible Man* is saturated with Kant’s philosophy beyond the critical works: it turns against Kant’s critical works with the help of his *Anthropology*. Ricoeur’s engagement with Kant’s philosophy not only amounts to a

phenomenological anthropology of a capable/fallible human being—a concretization of “being able”—but also to a corresponding philosophy that concretizes the notion of object in *Fallible Man*.

Here a brief explanation of the subsequent triadic constellations is needed. Ricœur’s triadic analysis is based on Kant’s concept of the three passions or “manias” (*die Leidenschaften*) as laid out in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (§80–§86). Given that the manias for possession (*Habsucht*), domination (*Herrschaftsucht*), and honour (*Ehrensucht*) are discussed in relation to propensity, inclination, desire, and freedom, Kant has certainly laid out a triadic constellation that, in turn, has a strong thematic resemblance to Augustine’s threefold exposition of concupiscence that viscerally addresses human embodiment (Augustine 1997, X.31.40–41.66). Moreover, Kant’s analysis of the perverted manias for possession, domination, and honor focuses on these desires, which hinder or distort the use of reason. Passions as hidden human dispositions, or desires, are always in affiliation with those purposes that reason sets, but as perverted inclinations they are, according to Kant (2006, A267), “without exception evil”. Kant’s understanding is that passion, as a weakness leading to servile submission, collides with the concept of freedom, which is established by reason alone: “*Mania for honor* is the weakness of human beings which enables a person to have influence on them through their opinion; *mania for domination*, through their fear; and *mania for possession*, through their own interest” (Kant 2006, A272). These three acquired passions are in Kant’s view possible only for human beings and, while being descriptions at the

level of persons, they also concern inter-human relations.

Here we come again to the notion of alienation. Ricœur’s application of these Kantian passions makes evident the necessity of objectivity in a search for the human constitution. *Fallible Man* argues that the three perverted inclinations or quests (*-sucht*) indicate an authentic *Suchen*, that is, a fundamental human quest that takes the threefold form of a search for having (*avoir*), power (*pouvoir*), and esteem (*valoir*). Put differently, Ricœur maintains that the specifically human quests for having, power, and esteem connect to a primordial personal search for an authentic mode of being, that is, for a self that is content in and of itself as a self—a state and status that is empirically rarely achievable if at all. The primordial search, which Ricœur (1986, 112, 144) calls an “imagination of the essential”, indicates therefore an assumption concerning an unperverted primordial condition, or “an innocent kingdom”, that precedes the empirical state of “having fallen”. The self, insofar as it is available to itself, is then in this analysis always already “fallen” or alienated from its “pure” condition—just as experience tells us at the level of each empirical personal self. Consequently, the most concrete notion of the human self in its current standing is achievable within the same context of analysis, that is, in the realm of passions that indicate this “fall” or alienation. We are at the brink of turbulent self-affirmation.

The economics of “having”

At this point we come to the overlap between the intersubjective economic system and the subjective economics of the body that both—as problematized in the conclud-

ing study of *Oneself as Another*—result in encountering otherness. As Ricœur (1992, 318) rather surprisingly puts it, “the main virtue of such a dialectic is that it keeps the self from occupying the place of foundation [*d’occuper la place du fondement*]”. At the same time, however, he admits not to have failed to observe that “if persons are also bodies, it is to the extent that each person is for himself his own body” (Ricœur 1992, 319). The question now is how does one come to such an understanding—and all the more to have that occupied spatiality in the form of one’s own body?

I have indicated that in its phenomenological analysis of the threefold human quests *Fallible Man* brings fundamentally forth this widely recognized element of originating turbulence in self-affirmation and self-recognition, that is, the conditioning reasons for the non-coincidence of the self. In brief, human existence and its self-recognition are fragile as they rely on a need for alienation or at least for a heavy distancing. Ricœur (1986, 113, 116) insists that both distinguishing an individual self and articulating the relationship between individual selves requires the support of “objectivity that is built on the themes of having, power, and esteem”; this is why he also calls these aspects of human experience “roots of self-affirmation”. Unlike for Descartes, the self is not directly present to itself. Ricœur is supportive of the post-Kantian reflexive argument, according to which there is no immediate intuition of one’s own being whereas the self and its understanding of itself are always mediated. The concepts of having, power, and esteem speak of the fundamentally indirect character of achieving a notion of the self. As we will already see in reference to “having”, the moment of

objectification precedes that of reflection or any self-aware consciousness of the self. The search for the constitution of the self, therefore, begins by acknowledging that before being able to discuss human alienation—alienation as in Hegel and later, in a different sense, in Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—one would have to presuppose a self “having” itself. Such having, however, is at the same time the beginning of its alienating fall.

The primal self-identity is formed in positive self-objectification. In a thematization that in some ways recalls John Stuart Mill’s concept of *homo oeconomicus* or the “economic human” (Mill 1874, 137–38), Ricœur (1986, 113) argues that the self is first of all concerned with owning itself.⁴ The self makes itself a primordial economic object, that is, it “has” itself by claiming identity in an economic manner: “the ‘I’ constitutes itself by founding itself on a ‘mine’”. This grounding notion of an economic object, or an object of economic interest, differentiates the properly human needs from the animal “simple needs” (*le simple besoin*), which are directed towards natural objects, and for which the correlative feeling is an “oriented lack”, as Ricœur (1986, 113–14) defines the shortage of sustenance indicated by instincts. In contrast to natural objects which are merely there, an economic object is “an available good”

4 The term “*homo oeconomicus*” that Ricœur uses in *Freedom and Nature* is commonly associated with the critical reception of John Stuart Mill’s 1836 essay “On the Definition of Political Economy, and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It”. Defining “political economy” as a narrower science than “social economy”, Mill “brackets” all the aspects of human nature except that of desiring wealth (Ricœur 1966, 116).

that according to Ricœur is characterized by its generic availability “for me”:

This specific relation to the economic object carries a significance that neither the concupiscible nor even the irascible had when taken as animal tendencies linking the individual to a natural environment. The economic object is not merely a source of pleasure or an obstacle to be overcome; it is an *available good* (*un bien disponible*). (Ricœur 1986, 114)

The key here is to comprehend the distinction between natural objects and objects that are considered possessions and are, thereby, possibly acquired or appropriated. The shift between animal and human environment is based on the layer of meaning brought into play; the economic relation is a new, no-longer-merely-animal kind of relation to things. The affective interiorization of the external relation between the “I” and the economic object is a correlate of this mode of relating.

Some cautiousness is warranted here. We could easily slip into Ricœur’s subsequent analysis on power or capability (*pouvoir*) and his correlating—but not fully approving—thesis that “through work, human existence takes on the character of a rationally organized battle against nature that makes nature appear as a reservoir of forces to be conquered” (Ricœur 1986, 116). The realm of having (*avoir*) has, however, much more to offer—also about work or labour—that will explain the subsequently felt and executed human need for organization, hierarchization, subordination, and domination, that is, the entry into power-relations as also in the battle against

natural and human forces. For the purposes of this analysis it is noteworthy that such subsequent power-relations are not only directed to things that reside in the nature “outside” but also subsume the notion of the self under the same mode of approach or consciousness. The self gains power over itself, organizes itself, and commands its nature “inside” not unlike it aims at subordinating that which appears to be conquerable in the external world. The grasp that allows such mode of consciousness to appear, however, is nothing other than first taking the self as “an available good”—the self has to first “have” itself for it to be commanded and thereby found to be capable of different achievements such as occupying or conquering land and sea.

The “having” of *cogito brisé*

Having reached this point in the argument, it is perhaps helpful to summarize that already the self appears as distinct to itself, owing to the very process of trying to achieve a notion of itself. The beginning of the process of self-affirmation already casts some shadow over the potentially gained notions of the self. In short, the aspect of “having” results in the shattered consciousness or, in Ricœur’s terms, the *cogito brisé*. The point, however, can be made even more evident. Even though not yet entering the realm of “power”, Ricœur nevertheless restates the distinction between a brute animal environment and the human world in terms of *work*. A human being is distinguished from other animals because the essence of his or her needs is different, and the difference between these needs is itself brought about by human production in form of establishing an economic relation to things, that is, treating objects as

possessions: “whereas the animal merely preserves itself, a human being subsists and establishes himself among things in treating them as possessions” (Ricœur 1986, 114). Consequently, Ricœur (1986, 48) defines human being as the Working Human in a manner that in some way echoes Henri Bergson’s (1975, 153–54, 172–78) concept of *homo faber*: “The [life]world of persons expresses itself through the world of things by filling it with new things that are human works”. Moreover, “a human being, because she produces her subsistence, is a being who works” (Ricœur 1986, 114). In Ricœur’s analysis, the working human establishes this economic relation to things; establishing such new kind of relation to them is the fundamental “work” not very much unlike how Bergson (1975, 151–55) theorized about “intellectual tools”.

Here we reach the crux of “having”. By way of economic objectification, objects at disposal become possessions and symbols which connote control and dependence, and which therefore also imply certain “otherness” not only in the sense of there being economic meaning, but also in the very form of the object “on which I make myself dependent” (Ricœur 1986, 114). This otherness of an economic object introduces the idea of shattered consciousness or *cogito brisé*; the “I” is dependent on a “non-I”—a new kind of element facilitates my subsistence and the establishing of myself to myself. In the concept of having this kind of objectification is literally fleshed out in terms of *mon propre corps*, my personal body. The economic relation or objectification is established in a very fundamental sense to one’s body as one’s own.⁵

5 In Ricœur’s analysis having also defines

The possibility of self-affirmation begins by noticing the having of the body. This is the point I want to emphasize, as already indicated at the outset of this article. As for John Locke and for Merleau-Ponty, also for Ricœur *one’s body is therefore an occupied spatiality* by which one enters into the world of “mine” that is much more fundamental than the world of external things and all kinds of social structures subsequently apprehended from such grounding point of view.⁶

Such having of the body, however, is also the origin of phenomenologico-existential tumult, disturbance, or unrest—as Ricœur (1992, 319) later also intimates in *Oneself as Another* when referring to one’s own body as the “first figure of passivity-otherness”. While I am my body in my engagement in being, this is not to state that I have not made myself dependent on my body-object; this is the enigmatic reality of living in the *Leib/Körper* polarity.⁷ For me to have the possibility to consider my embodied being in extended space, occupying a place in it, I will first have to consider myself as “having” my body, that is, making it an “available good” or an economic object. Moreover, the possibility thus opened of no-longer-having

interpersonal relations. Possessing distinguishes the “I” from another “I”, since excluding “mine” from “yours” differentiates the “I” and the “you” in relation to their respective “spheres of belonging”, or contexts of having.

6 Ricœur’s emphasis on the body as “mine” can be seen through the lens of Lockean liberalism. See Locke 1995, 287, 298.

7 See Ricœur’s discussion of Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations in Oneself as Another* (1992, 322–326) and Cristina Vendra’s highly illuminating evaluation of Ricœur’s position on the issue; Vendra 2020.

(*ne-plus-avoir*) forms a breach in the constitution of the economic “I” who works to have and to gain a solid standing: the body that is under the mortifying conditions of temporality and decay is not the body object that is always to be preserved. For his part, Ricœur stresses the inevitability and thoroughness of expropriation in the very act of appropriation:

Mutual exclusion, begun by the body insofar as it is a separate and occupied spatiality (*le corps en tant que spatialité découpée et occupée*), is continued by mutual expropriation; the attachment to the body changes character through the interference of the attachment to the “mine”. If I hold to my house because of my body, the relation to my body becomes, in turn, dependent on the economic relation to things that nourish it, clothe it, and protect it. Being established and settled completes incarnation and transforms it through and through. Moreover, the relation of appropriation invades the region of the mind step by step: I can be in a relation of appropriation with my thoughts (I have my ideas about that, I say). Straightway the mutual expropriation moves from the body to the mind and carries to completion even into their very inwardness the breach between the I and the you. (Ricœur 1986, 115)

In other words, Ricœur maintains that goods and commodities of all kind pertain to the fundamental good of “bien disponible” or to me *in and with my body* that is not only the nexus of my spatial occupation but rather the occupied space I consider having

due to my body—that I consider as one due to having worked out a notion of “having” and having applied it to the body as a body-object. This chiasmic “relating to the relation”, as Kierkegaard would phrase it, therefore responds critically to Descartes. Due to such “having” *res extensa is res cogitans*. At the same time, however, the very same argument also affirms the Cartesian stance to the extent that the self “has” appropriated itself only as expropriated.

The non-peace of incarnated self

On the basis of the preceding discussion it may be summarized that the “economic human” is primordially passionate about having as it is a necessary condition for the possibility of the self. “I cannot imagine the I without the mine, or human being without having”, Ricœur (1986, 115) concludes. But as “expropriation” and “the breach between the I and the you” will lead us to understand, such state of having has never been peace-building whereas it is burdened with an originating non-peace, even at the level of being a self that needs to rely on objectifying the self—as in having the body—in order to gain a thereby tainted working notion of itself:

We may say, then, that human being becomes self-consciousness insofar as he experiences this economic objectivity as a new modality of his subjectivity and thus attains specifically human “feelings” relative to the availability of things as things that have been worked upon and appropriated, while at the same time he becomes an expropriated appropriator. (Ricœur 1970, 508–09)

Put differently, in spite of all conditioning, a human subject is not a subject-like object, but a willing subject engaged in living being. And still, the same subject will never have become unless by way of producing a working notion of itself in form of an object that can be considered as the self the subject is; this *incurvatus in se* is perhaps why Ricœur (2005, 69) in his later work discusses the “living, acting, and suffering subject”. As it comes to self-affirmation, the subject is in unceasing labour pains.

The phenomenology of being able therefore extends to and includes the notion of *not* being able, and of the experienced reciprocity between *puissance et impuissance*—between potency and impotence. In spite of maintaining that willingly moving my body affirms the continuity and co-presence of the free will and the restrictions of human nature, this reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary therefore remains a paradox-like challenge for Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology. He readily admits (1966, 348) that “the involuntary [which presents itself naturally as an objective reality among the objects of the world] seems in principle to demand an objective treatment and there seems to be no common standard between *object* and *subject*”. In addition to the threat of conceiving an embodied subject as a mere object in the world, Ricœur points out that an objective analysis of a subject engenders this same dilemma. But the dilemma is not good enough; we do not only suffer but live and act.

Even though it is in the end impossible to overcome the all-pervasive subject-object dichotomy, Ricœur (1966, 14) nevertheless insists that there is a need “to pass from objectivity to existence”. For a subject engaged in living being this means “that I

participate actively in *my incarnation as a mystery*” (Ricœur 1966, 14). The possibility of making a voluntary choice—which also is an objective, fundamental human condition—should, according to Ricœur, be accurately described in non-subjectivizing terms. The Marcelian mystery of “*my own body*” (*mon corps propre*) resists all attempts to reduce my subjective-bodily experience to mere objective explanation: “Total objectification of human being is an invitation to betray the responsibility I have for my body itself” (Ricœur 1966, 348).⁸ And yet this is analogous to the productively alienating acts of the self that as if betray the self in the very act of aiming to achieve the self itself. Becoming capable of being alienated is the paradoxical mode of becoming self-conscious. Self-affirmation has “fallen”, it is in the bounds of the expropriating structures of appropriation—just as “the orders of recognition” imply at the societal level:

I can imagine an innocent relation of man to having in a utopia of personal and communal appropriation: the myth of paradise in which man possesses only what he cultivates, has only what he creates, a future utopia exemplifying the primordial relation of man to having, which in fact is always shown in history as an already fallen relation. (Ricœur 1986, 115–16)

Allowed by such descriptive reference to the “already fallen relation”, we are then

8 See Marcel 1991, 19, 21, 23; Gallagher 1962, 21, 31, 36, 38–39. For a scholarly discussion on the issue of ontological mystery in Ricœur’s work, see Gregor 2019.

lastly able to consider approaching religion. As indicated in passing, what could be said here in terms of Augustine's depiction of the ineradicable struggle under *concupiscentia carnis*—or about the fact that the “flesh” itself poses insurmountable problems especially when it sets itself in contrast with the will?

We seem to have arrived at the notion that having a body—occupying space—is a necessity for becoming a human self, but the sheer fact of forming a notion of this “having” results in impassable problems. Through figuration—the schematizing application of the productive imagination—the body is failed and cast aside as a lived body just as the self is in the very making of it. If the concupiscence of the flesh was already a cause for Augustine to argue on religious grounds for the non-coincidence of the self with itself, how much greater is such non-coincidence that both necessitates and through equally necessary figuration rejects *mon corps propre*? Leaving such discussion open for now, we may nevertheless accord with Augustine's personal assessment (1997, X.30.42) when lamenting his “unfinished state” of needing to wait and hope for “that utter peace” when the problems of human existence do not disturb him anymore. Until that novel experience, human existence finds itself in the state of restlessness. Reliant on the occupied spatiality of the body, there remains “non-peace” in the process of self-affirmation. ■

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