



Paul Ricoeur's Analysis of the "One and Another"

Abstract

Paul Ricoeur's philosophical inquiry into selfhood offers a profound ethical and hermeneutical account of the relationship between the "one" and the "another." Situated within his broader project of narrative identity and moral philosophy, Ricoeur challenges atomistic and purely subject-centered conceptions of the self by emphasizing relationality and alterity as constitutive of human identity. The problem addressed in this study is the persistent neglect of the ethical depth of this relational framework, particularly its implications for responsibility, recognition, and coexistence in contemporary societies marked by fragmentation and exclusion. The objective of the study is to critically analyze Ricoeur's notion of the "one and another" in order to clarify its conceptual foundations and ethical significance. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in hermeneutical textual analysis of Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another*, supplemented by relevant secondary literature. The analysis focuses on key concepts such as ipseity, alterity, narrative identity, solicitude, and justice. The findings reveal that for Ricoeur, the self is not an isolated entity but is always mediated through the other; selfhood is realized through mutual recognition and ethical responsibility. The notion of solicitude emerges as a mediating ethical category that balances self-esteem with respect for the Other, thereby grounding moral action and social relations. The study concludes that Ricoeur's analysis provides a coherent and compelling ethical vision in which identity and responsibility are inseparably linked. It recommends further application of this framework to contemporary ethical, social, and political challenges, particularly in pluralistic and multicultural contexts.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur; selfhood; alterity; narrative identity; ethical responsibility; solicitude

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Date Received: 18th January,
2026

Date Accepted: 25th January,
2026

Introduction

It is obvious, that social institutions originate from the demands of justice by 'the third'. Thus in order to be just to the other and the third, there is

need to confront and judge, to weigh and consider, to clarify and make distinction, to determine priority and urgency. All these are aimed at performing one's responsibility very well and administering justice to all in

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seeing the other person as the self. However, it is very sad today that people, social economic and political institutions have lost primordial aim.

Put differently, for Ricoeur the other is a unique entity that should not be reduced to a concept or a phantom rather it brings the self into being by calling it to responsibility and service. He holds that the face of the other reveals to me the injustice as well as the impossibility of my claim to sovereign freedom and egoistic enjoyment. Ricoeur says the presence of the other calls me to service not only to that particular self but to all. Looking at this understanding, it is therefore paramount to employ the teaching of Ricoeur to think of possible answers to the needs of the other today as to reduce crimes against humanity.

Ricoeur provides us with a strong phenomenological- grounded ethics of responsibility given through the presence of another. He attempts to give us a unique grounding for Ethics which does not rely on theism, universal principles, a theory of equality of men nor religion. His ethics of the other is grounded in the concrete phenomenal experience of encounter with another. Ricoeur says human beings are distinct from other beings in the sense that they use language, they make meanings, they interpret meanings; in other words, they live their life by the meanings that language creates for them (Ricoeur, 2005).

Is there still an atom of hope for us today looking at the present situation of man's inhumanity to man? Can one still see the 'Other' today and say this is a human being regardless of where the person comes from and renders help to him or her? Where is the place of

morality or ethics of responsibility for the 'Other' in the present day? Do men still remember or think they have responsibility towards another? Man fights against the 'Other' due to his selfish interest which takes different forms. It can take the form of a desire for fame, a desire for wealth, a desire for money, a desire for praise and so on which puts aside the interest of the others thereby making him to forget his responsibility towards the 'Other'. An action motivated by altruism is done not out of a desire for any personal benefit to be derived from it, but entirely for the sake of other or for the benefit of another person other than oneself. *Oneself as Another* has been increasingly interpreted not merely as a work of hermeneutical anthropology but as a foundational text for relational ethics and intersubjective philosophy (Pellauer, 2016; Kearney, 2018). Ricoeur's insistence that the self can only be understood through its relation to the other challenges modern conceptions of autonomous subjectivity and provides a conceptual framework for rethinking moral agency in pluralistic societies (Taylor, 2017; Dierckxsens, 2020). Human beings are distinct from other beings in the sense that they use language, they make meanings, they interpret meanings; in other words they live their life by the meanings that language creates for them. Thus, they must not be treated as mere object or be objectified by either science, government or by another individual (Ricoeur, 1986)

This work is a clarion call over the apparent forgetfulness of the dignity of the human person and the Ethics of responsibility towards the 'Other'. It is a clear call to take serious note of the

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acute danger of slaughtering one another daily because of socio-politico-religious issues.

Definitions of term

The self

The self is divisible into the senses of sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*) according to their temporal natures. In speculative reason, the voice of the cogito, is another to our own selfhood. Our own personhood is another to our selfhood.

Otherness

Otherness is not something to be reduced to the otherness of other persons alone, but instead otherness is found within selfhood itself. The Other, is not to be reduced to the otherness of another Person. Otherness, as the title of his work suggests, also inhabits oneself (Ricoeur, 1992).

An Exposition of Ricoeur Idea of the Self

Human person and Language

Human beings are distinct from other beings in the sense that they use language, they make meanings, they interpret meanings; in other words, they live their life by the meanings that language creates for them. The nature of language has become the most significant issue in the interpretation of human life. In fact, it is not the text that is weaved in language, but the human life that weaves and is viewed in language. To be human means to be linguistic. In the later part of the twentieth century the thinkers of language have made radical

understandings of the nature of language (Ricoeur, 1965).

One of the ways to understand the nature of language is that it is metaphorical in every sense of the term. According to Nietzsche, all words are dead metaphors. Language is metaphorical because it relates itself to the objects that it describes only as an image, or the relationship of language with its objects is not synthetically but imaginary. As the metaphor cannot relate itself in synthetically manner with the objects that it describes. If we assign some concrete meaning to the metaphor, such an attempt is rooted in the ideological thinking of the views of metaphor.

Time in relation to Metaphor is the context that creates the possibilities of stable meaning. Language being one of the fictional entities always seeks the support of time to generate stable meaning. However, time itself is slippery and unstable, and difficult to hold as the future is yet to come, which will remain forever in future. Language that makes meanings in relation to such temporalities is doomed to create unstable meaning.

Contemporary interpretations emphasize that for Ricoeur, language opens the human person to alterity, since speaking and understanding always involve dialogue with another whether a concrete other or the "otherness" embedded in texts and traditions (Kearney, 2018; Muldoon, 2017). Through narrative language in particular, the person integrates action, memory, and responsibility into a coherent yet revisable identity, what Ricoeur terms narrative selfhood (Gregory, 2019). This narrative mediation underscores the ethical

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dimension of language, as selfhood is shaped in responsiveness to others and accountability within shared meanings (Venema, 2021). There, in the *Rule of Metaphor*, he argues that language belongs to, and is expressive of extra-linguistic reality. Despite this apparent concession to realism, Ricoeur insists that the objective cannot be known as such, but merely grasped indirectly and analytically. Thus, Ricoeur's philosophy presents the human person as a linguistic and interpretive being, whose identity is neither fixed nor arbitrary but continuously formed through language, dialogue, and ethical engagement with others (Dierckxsens, 2020).

The self

There are two closely related questions that animate all of Ricoeur's work, and which he considers to be fundamental to philosophy: Who am I? and How should I live? The first question has been neglected by much of contemporary analytical and post-modern philosophy. Consequently, those philosophies lack the means to address the second question. Postmodernism self-consciously rejects traditional processes of identity formation, depicting them as familial and political power relations premised upon dubious metaphysical assumptions about gender, race and mind. At the same time, contemporary philosophy of mind reduces questions of who to questions of what? and in doing so, closes down considerations of self while rendering the moral question one of mere instrumentality or utility. In relation to the question who am I? Ricoeur acknowledges a long-standing debt to Marcel and Heidegger, and to a lesser extent to Merleau-Ponty. To the

moral question, the debt is to Aristotle and Kant. In addressing the question who am I? Ricoeur sets out first to understand the nature of selfhood to understand the being whose nature it is to enquire into itself (Ricoeur, 1992).

In this endeavor, Ricoeur's philosophy is driven by the desire to provide an account that will do justice to the tensions and ambiguities which make us human, and which underpin our fallibility. Ricoeur's interest here can be noted as early as *The Voluntary and The Involuntary*, drafted during his years as a prisoner of war. There he explores the involuntary constraints to which we are necessarily subject in virtue of our being bodily mortal creatures, and the voluntariness necessary to the idea of ourselves as the agents of our actions. We have, as he later describes it, a double allegiance, an allegiance to the material world of cause and effect, and to the phenomenal world of the freedom of the will by which we tear ourselves away from the laws of nature through action. This conception of the double nature of the self lies at the core of Ricoeur's philosophical thought. Ricoeur rejects the idea that a self is a metaphysical entity; there is no entity, the self, there is only selfhood. Selfhood is an intersubjectivity constituted capacity for agency and self-ascription that can be had by individual human beings. Selfhood proper is neither simply an abstract nor an animal self-awareness, but both. It essentially involves an active grasp of oneself as a who—that is, as a person who is the subject of a concrete situation, a situation characterized by material and phenomenal qualities. This entails understanding oneself as a named person with a time and place of birth,

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linked to other similarly named persons and to certain ethnic and cultural traditions, living in a dated and named place.

In *Oneself As Another* Ricoeur describes how the complexity of the question of who opens directly onto a certain way of articulating the question of personal identity: how the self can be at one and the same time a person of whom we speak and a subject who designates herself in the first person while addressing a second person. The difficulty will understand how the third person is designated in discourse as someone who designates himself as a first person (Ricoeur, 1992).

Drawing on Heidegger's notion of Dasein, Ricoeur goes on to write that to say self is not to say myself . . . the passage from selfhood to mineness is marked by the clause in each case . . . The self . . . is in each case mine (Ricoeur, 1992). What he means by this is that each person has to take one's selfhood as one's own; each must take oneself as who one is; one must attest to oneself. Subjectivity, or selfhood, is for Ricoeur, a dialectic of activity and passivity because we are beings with a double nature, structured along the fault lines of the voluntary and the involuntary, beings given to ourselves as something to be known. Ricoeur shares Marcel's view that the answer to the question who am I? can never be fully explicated. This is because, in asking who am I? I who pose the question necessarily fall within the domain of enquiry; I am both seeker and what is sought. This peculiar circularity gives a questing and dialectical character to selfhood, which now requires a hermeneutic approach. This

circularity has its origins in the nature of embodied subjectivity.

Ricoeur's account is built upon Marcel's conception of embodied subjectivity as a fundamental predicament. The predicament lies in the anti-dualist realization that "I" and my body are not metaphysically distinct entities. My body cannot be abstracted from its being mine. Whatever states I may attribute to my body as its states, I do so only insofar as they are attributes of mine. My body is both something that I am and something that I have: it is my body that imagines, perceives and experiences. The unity of my body is a unity *sui generis* (Ricoeur, 1965). Yet my body is also that over which I exercise a certain instrumentality through my agency.

This example is supposed to demonstrate two points: first, that the ambiguity of my body prevents the complete objectification of myself, and second, that ambiguity extends to all perception. Perception is not simply passive, but rather, involves an active reception (a concept that Ricoeur takes up and develops in his account of the ontology of the self and one's own body in *Oneself As Another*. In other words, my body has an active role in structuring my perceptions, and so, the meaning of my perceptions needs to be interpreted in the context of my bodily situation. The non-coincidence of myself and my body constitutes a fault line within the structure of subjectivity. The result is that knowledge of myself and the world is not constituted by more or less accurate facts, but rather, is a composite discourse—a discourse which charts the intersection of the objective, intersubjectivity and subjective aspects of lived experience. On this view, all

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knowledge, including my knowledge of my own existence, is mediate and so calls for interpretation. This also means that self-understanding can never be grasped by the kind of introspective immediacy celebrated by Descartes. Instead, as human beings we are never quite at one with ourselves; we are fallible creatures. Thus, who I am is not an objective fact to be discovered, but rather something that I must achieve or create, and to which I must attest. On Ricoeur's view, the question Who am I? is a question specific to a certain kind of being, namely, being a subject of a temporal, material, linguistic and social unity. The ability to grasp oneself as a concrete subject of such a world requires a complex mode of understanding capable of integrating discourses of quite heterogeneous kinds, including, importantly, different orders of time. It is to the temporal dimension of selfhood that Ricoeur has most directly addressed his hermeneutic philosophy and narrative model of understanding.

A central feature of Ricoeur's account of the self is the distinction between *idem*-identity (sameness) and *ipse*-identity (selfhood), which allows for continuity without rigidity and change without loss of moral responsibility (Dierckxsens, 2019; Venema, 2021). Recent scholarship emphasizes that *ipseity* grounds ethical agency, especially in practices such as promise-keeping, accountability, and fidelity to oneself in relation to others (Kearney, 2018; Gregory, 2020). The self, therefore, is not defined by static characteristics but by its capacity to respond and remain answerable. Moreover, Ricoeur situates the self within a fundamentally ethical horizon, where selfhood is inseparable from solicitude for the other

and participation in just institutions (Pellauer, 2016; Kaplan, 2018). Contemporary interpreters highlight how this ethical self resists both radical individualism and totalizing collectivism by affirming a relational self-grounded in mutual recognition (Dierckxsens, 2020; Venema, 2023). In this way, Ricoeur's philosophy presents the self as a narrative, ethical, and dialogical being, whose identity is continuously formed through interpretation and responsibility toward the other.

Oneself as Another

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur describes how the complexity of the "Who" opens directly on to a certain way of articulating the question of personal identity as: How the self can be at one and the same time a person of whom we speak and a subject who designates herself in the first person while addressing a second person. The difficulty of will understand how the third person is designated in discourse as someone who designates himself as a first person. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of 'dasein,' Ricoeur goes on to write that to say self is not to say myself, what he means by this is that each person has to take oneself as one's own; each must take Oneself as who one is; one must attest to one-self, furthermore he adds: The first task is to carry to a higher level the dialectic of sameness and selfhood implicitly contained in the notion of narrative identity. The second is to complete this investigation of the narrated self by exploring the mediations that narrative theory can perform between action theory and moral theory (Ricoeur, 1992). This second task will itself have two

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sides to it. Returning to our triad describing, narrating, and prescribing we shall ask first what extension of the practical field is called for by the narrative function, if the action described is to match the action narrated. The reciprocal constitution of action and of the self will be pursued on both sides of narrative theory, in the practical as well as the ethical sphere.

In *Oneself as Another*, Paul Ricoeur offers a profound reconfiguration of the concept of selfhood by situating the self within a dynamic relationship with otherness. Rejecting the classical notion of the self as an autonomous and self-transparent substance, Ricoeur argues that self-understanding is always mediated through language, action, and interpretation (Ricoeur, 2016; Pellauer, 2016). The self is thus constituted hermeneutically, coming to itself through symbols, narratives, and social practices that both disclose and transform personal identity (Muldoon, 2017; Gregory, 2019). A central theoretical contribution of *Oneself as Another* is Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* (sameness) and *ipse* (selfhood), which allows for the preservation of identity across change without reducing the self to static traits (Dierckxsens, 2019; Venema, 2021). Recent scholarship emphasizes that *ipseity* grounds moral agency by anchoring responsibility, promise-keeping, and fidelity within a temporal narrative of the self (Kearney, 2018; Gregory, 2020). Through this framework, Ricoeur demonstrates that ethical identity is inseparable from responsiveness to the other.

Moreover, Ricoeur situates selfhood within an explicitly ethical horizon summarized in his formulation of aiming at the good life, with and for

others, in just institutions. Contemporary interpreters underline how this ethical aim integrates personal identity, interpersonal relations, and social justice into a coherent philosophical vision (Kaplan, 2018; Venema, 2023). By foregrounding solicitude, mutual recognition, and practical wisdom (*phronesis*), Ricoeur's analysis offers a mediating position between individual autonomy and communal responsibility (Dierckxsens, 2020). Thus, *Oneself as Another* remains a foundational text for contemporary debates on identity, ethics, and alterity, presenting a relational and narrative conception of the self that is both ethically grounded and socially responsive (Muldoon, 2017; Kearney, 2021).

Ricoeur's Ethics

Ricoeur's ethics is teleological. He argues that human life has an ethical aim, and that aim is self-esteem: the interpretation of ourselves mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions. Self-esteem is itself an evaluation process indirectly applied to ourselves as selves. In short, self-esteem means being able to attest to oneself as being the worthy subject of a good life, where good is an evaluation informed not simply by one's own subjective criteria, but rather by intersubjectivity criteria to which one attests (Ricoeur, 1992). This entails another moral concept: that of imputation. As the subject of my actions, I am responsible for what I do; I am the subject to whom my actions can be imputed and whose character is to be interpreted in the light of those actions. Ricoeur describes the ethical perspective that arises from this view of the subject as aiming at the good life with and for

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others, in just institutions. Such a perspective merely spells out the premise of this practical and material conception of selfhood, with its presupposition of the world of action, lived with others. For Ricoeur, a life can have an aim because the teleological structure of action extends over a whole life, understood within the narrative framework. The ethical life is achieved by aiming to live well with others in just institutions.

Ricoeur's view of selfhood has it that we are utterly reliant upon each other. While Ricoeur emphasizes the importance of the first person perspective and the notion of personal responsibility, his is no philosophy of the radical individual. He emphasizes that we are "mutually vulnerable", and so the fate (self-esteem) of each of us is tied up with the fate of others. This situation has a normative dimension: we have indebtedness to each other, a duty to care for each other and to engender self-respect and justice, all of which are necessary to the creation and preservation of self-esteem. While duty runs deep, Ricoeur argues that it is nevertheless preceded by certain reciprocity. In order to feel commanded by duty, one must first have the capacity to hear and respond to the demand of the Other. That is, there must be some fundamental, primordial openness and orientation to others for the power of duty to be felt. Prior to duty there must be a basic reciprocity, which underlies our mutual vulnerability and from which duty, as well as the possibility of friendship and justice, arises.

Here, Ricoeur emphasizes the ethical primacy of acting and suffering. Ricoeur calls this phenomenon solicitude or benevolent spontaneity. It

makes the relation of self and Other (and thus, ethics) primordial, or ontological – hence the title of Ricoeur's book on ethics, *Oneself As Another*. Self-esteem is said to arise from a primitive reciprocity of spontaneous, benevolent feelings, feelings which one is also capable of directing toward oneself, but only through the benevolence of others. This fundamental reciprocity is prior to the activity of giving. This can be demonstrated in the situation of sympathy, where it is the Other's suffering (not acting) that one shares. Here, Ricoeur argues that from the suffering Other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing, but precisely from weakness itself.

In this case, the suffering Other is unable to act, and yet gives. What the suffering Other gives to he or she who shares this suffering is precisely the knowledge of their shared vulnerability and the experience of the spontaneous benevolence required to bear that knowledge. As might be supposed from Ricoeur's view of embodied subjectivity, one is always already an Other to oneself. So, love and understanding for others, and love and understanding for oneself, are two sides of the same sheet of paper, so to speak. One becomes who one is through relations with the Other, whether in the instance of one's own body or another's. Reciprocity forms the basis of those productive and self-affirming relations central to so much of ethics, namely friendship and justice. Its corruption leads to self-loathing and the destruction of self-esteem, which goes hand-in-hand with harm to others and injustice. For Ricoeur, friendship and justice become the chief virtues because of their crucial role in the well-being of

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selfhood, and thus, in maintaining the conditions of possibility of selfhood. Friends and just institutions not only protect against the suffering of self-destruction to which one is always vulnerable, they provide the means for reconstructing and redeeming damaged lives. The theme of redemption runs right through Ricoeur's work, and no doubt it has a religious origin. However, the notion of redemption can be viewed in secular terms as the counterpart to the constructive nature of one's identity, and the temporal complexity of the human situation which calls for interpretation.

Conclusion

The being to whom one attests and who is attesting to oneself assumes a ground starting from which the self can be said to be acting. The ontological ground of the self and action must at once be actuality and potentiality, according to Ricoeur. This fundamentally dynamical aspect of the self, in which potentiality is actual, relates to Ricoeur's hermeneutical/meditative epistemology, regarding its direction and coordination. The self, as ontological 'opening onto the world' that is connection to the world is characterized as a relation of total concern: everything concerns me, finds direction for one's initiatives, in mediated reflection. In this respect, Ricoeur compares the epistemological trilogy of description, narration and prescription to acting and suffering, elevating the latter to second order concepts.

Our examination of Ricoeur's hermeneutic of selfhood has been carried forward by the promise to exchange the ego, master of itself, for

the self, disciple of the text. This prospect of discovering selfhood through a mediation of signs, symbols, and text, not only gives hope for understanding selfhood in dialogue with others, but gives Ricoeur's philosophical inquiries timely importance. In contrast to the philosophies of the cogito and anti cogito, Ricoeur's affirmation of a linguistic, practical, narrative and ethical self-points to a solution that might embrace the multiplicity of experience without the control and domination of a world-constituting ego. By formulating selfhood as dialectic of sedimentation and innovation, the unity of self is like a story told that remains open not just to different readings, but open to the reconstruction of the plot itself.

Selfhood, Ricoeur insists, must be an affirmation of the unity of sameness and difference that is beyond the alternative of the modern exalted subject or the postmodern humiliated subject. Ricoeur's work is to be admired for facing the difficult challenge of developing a philosophy of selfhood that does not accept this simplistic alternative of the present state of debate. According to Ricoeur the ontology that can be achieved is in no way separable from interpretation; it is caught inside the circle formed by the conjunction of the work of interpretation and the interpreted being. It is an ontology that can be reached only from a particular interpretation of the manifestations of the self in the world of culture. It is a mediated ontology, mediated by language and culture, a far cry from any strong ontological effort; and, as a result, it is not a triumphant ontology at all; it

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is not even a science, since it is unable to avoid the risk of interpretation.

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