



PAUL RICOEUR & NARRATIVE ETHICS

a middle ground between rigid rationality and aimless indifference

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Summary

Paul Ricoeur's conception of ethics and morality, is determined by narrativity being their precondition, necessarily giving rise to the ethical experience. Narrativity is essential to an encompassing understanding of personal identity. Through narrative self-interpretation we have access to our 'selves' and undeniably engender the ethical. David Hume's 'is'- 'ought' distinction, a commonly discussed metaethical theme, is bridged by Ricoeur's narrative ethics. Ricoeur's bridge between facts and values answers to ultimately undermining possibilities of epistemological and ethical suspicion, offering a middle ground between indubitable certainty and complete uncertainty. Narrative ethics' solution to Hume's infamous distinction, and its epistemological account of morality, contain a fruitful and original metaethical position, which deserves to be incorporated within the metaethical debate.

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Paul Ricoeur & Narrative Ethics:

a middle ground between rigid rationality and aimless indifference

[...] narrative theory finds one of its major justifications in the role it plays as a middle ground between the descriptive viewpoint on action, to which we have confined ourselves until now, and the prescriptive viewpoint [...].¹

Introduction

Paul Ricoeur's conception of the ethical dimension of the 'self', in *Soi-même comme un autre*, is determined by the assumption of a necessary narrative framework. Our narrative (self-) understanding gives rise to 'the aim for a good life' and 'the norms' that follow from its pursuit. Narrativity, as epistemological and ontological precondition for ethics and morality, secures a 'logic,' a structure at the basis of our unmistakable urge to interpret our actions and their motives in ethical terms of 'good' and 'worthwhile' and in moral terms of 'just' and 'obligatory.'

David Hume's strict distinction between *moral sense* and *reason and ideas* is a frequently discussed theme within the metaethical field of moral epistemology. Ricoeur's narrative conception of morality bridges the Humean gap between 'is' and 'ought', through a new understanding of what the human self 'is.' By showing a place for the self, as far away from the Cartesian exalted cogito, as from the Nietzschean humiliated cogito, Ricoeur, in the last four studies of *Soi-même comme un autre*, implicates a similar situation for morality: neither banished to a world of fiction, nor immutably self-foundational.

'Narrative ethics,' a term only used once by Ricoeur to signify an understanding of 'the ethical' as a sphere of human experience to which narrativity provides models for prescriptives², offers an important position within the metaethical debate, enabling a middle ground between surrender to indubitable moral dogma and denial of veritable moral value.

This paper argues that Ricoeur's narrative ethics offers an indefeasible account of ethical and moral reality. Ricoeur's account of the necessary structure of our ethical experiences, thoughts and feelings and of the formation of our constitution as ethical and moral beings, offers a highly original metaethical position, with respect to its resilience against empirical reductionism and moral skepticism. Regardless of ethical content or the moralities we might arrive at, which are characterized by an intrinsic defeasibility, narrative ethics points out how we acquire such content, answering to the metaethical

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 114.

² Ricoeur uses this term once in an interview given in Chicago the 17th of May 1990, in which *Soi-même comme un autre*, his then latest book, is discussed. Explaining how his view on narration gradually changed, he remarks that the reason for adding the ethical section (studies 7, 8 and 9) is related to the vital role of narrativity, regarding 'prescriptives'. Narrative does not only 'provide paradigms for action,' it also 'provides models for prescriptives.' 'I will speak of narrative ethics in this sense,' Ricoeur states.

Charles Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 119.

challenges of moral epistemology with a hermeneutical middle ground, which enables a rich response in the face of metaethical relativism and implies a careful diligence towards possible moral settling.

In order to partially indicate the wide problematics to which Ricoeur's narrative ethics relates, the first part of this paper conceptualizes two types of radical suspicion. The credibility of a rational moral foundation, as well as the trust-worthiness of the concept of personal identity, are being questioned from the perspectives of epistemological based doubt and ethical suspicion. Doubt towards the concept of the self is relevant here, because Ricoeur's account of the self as narrative identity is crucial to the bridge between description and prescription and to the restoration of a sense of personal and moral reality, where narrative ethics stands for.

The second part summarizes Hume's argument against personal identity and morality's foundation of reason. Hume's sharp distinction between *the succession of related objects* and *perfect identity* and his logical separation of *moral values* from *facts and reason*, clearly conveys what is at stake, within an empirical reductionism that shows 'moral knowledge' to be dubitable.

The third part of this paper demonstrates narrative ethics' answer to epistemologically and ethically based doubt. The reconciliation between facts and values by way of a narrative relation, is firstly addressed on the plane of our mediated self-interpretation/understanding. Ricoeur's account of the epistemological status of the 'self' as attestation situates the ethical between objective description and fiction. Finally, the subordination of the deontological to the teleological, links morality's 'ought' to narrative identity in a modest and vulnerable manner.

The fourth part draws up a conclusion, reflecting on the mediative character of Ricoeur's narrative ethics. The distinction between the narrative structure of the ethical and the specific ethical and moral content, is stressed in view of the importance of the dynamical character of the ethical, as opposed to the character of fixed truth. Narrative ethics, recognizing that and explaining how our ethical aiming and our moral arrangements can oppose each other, in cases of interpretative conflict, emphasizes the importance of '*the optative mood of living well*'³, from which moralities originate.

Thus, forms of utmost fundamental suspicion towards ethics and morality, are shown to fit in with and contribute to Ricoeur's narrative ethics. I will argue that this quality of Ricoeur's narrative ethics is sufficient reason for it to be deserving of being included within the metaethical debate. Ricoeur's notion of violence, is used to demonstrate in what way the middle ground of narrative ethics, is crucial to authentic responsibility.

³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 352.

1. Ethical Relativism: an onset

Insinuation and Denial

In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Hume occurs together with Friedrich Nietzsche, concerning suspicion towards the ontological status of ‘the self.’ Ricoeur takes Hume as a starting point; to whom ‘the self’ becomes a useful but unreal imaginary construct, and Nietzsche as the grand finale; in which the unity of a personality suggested by this construct, is denied. ‘*With him, the violence of denial will replace the subtlety of insinuation.*’⁴

One might suggest a similar relation between the two thinkers, on the subject of morality. Both Hume and Nietzsche have had a fierce influence on the way in which we might conceive of the connection between knowledge, certainty and morality. In order to illustrate the ultimate philosophical suspicion, concerning the trustworthiness of our ethical experience, to which narrative ethics responds, we will briefly sketch both Hume and Nietzsche’s epistemological and ethical doubt, regarding personal identity and morality.

Personal Multiplicity

Ricoeur adequately characterizes Hume’s take on personal identity as an account of sameness-identity⁵, meaning that Hume’s criterion of sameness, regarding ‘the self’, excludes personal identity from observation, sending it to the realm of fiction.

Let us read his [Hume’s] main argument: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception."⁶

Hume’s critique of the notion of personal identity, is based on an epistemological suspicion about the impossibility of any access, let alone “a continuous and intimate consciousness”⁷, to an uninterrupted and invariable entity called ‘self.’

Ethically, Hume appreciates the fiction of personal identity, with respect to its usefulness. It enables us to speak of our ‘selves’ and to make sense of the many concerns the ‘self’ has. Our imagination groups a lot of related, but diverse objects, together in ‘*the unity of personality*’⁸, helping us to come to grips with the flux of actions, emotions, desires etc., through a useful but fictitious imaginative construct.

Nietzsche also starts out from an epistemological perspective, asserting the deception of so called immediate reflection.⁹ With Hume, imagination is producing a useful fiction. But with Nietzsche,

⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 128.

⁵ Ibid, 127-128.

⁶ Ibid, 128.

⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: a critical edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164.

⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 128.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

we are confronted by ‘*the paradox of language that is figural through and through and thus reputed to be deceitful.*’¹⁰ The ‘inner world’ could be fundamentally altered, before reaching consciousness, by ‘*the process of inner ‘perception’’*¹¹. The seduction of words, makes us believe in direct certainty, while in fact, the expression ‘I think’ holds ‘*a whole set of bold claims that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish.*’¹² The terms we use for the conscious moments could be disguising a (possibly conflicting) multiplicity as a unity.

The ethical side of Nietzsche’s suspicion comes down to the risks innate to the concealing notion of a ‘thinking’ [a fictitious unity of a multiplicity of instincts] ‘subject’ [the imagined origin of thought].¹³ If we assert an “I” as the free source of thought and action, we might be inverting causality,¹⁴ and doing so we might contribute to the reversal of moral values, which is turning life against itself.

It is just as absurd to ask strength not to express itself as strength, not to be a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, to be a thirst for enemies, resistance and triumphs, as it is to ask weakness to express itself as strength. A quantum of force is just such a quantum of drive, will, action, in fact it is nothing but this driving, willing and acting, and only the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified within it), which construes and misconstrues all actions as conditional upon an agency, a ‘subject’, can make it appear otherwise.¹⁵

One might be exposed to irresolvable inner-conflict and guilt, because of this strong concept of a ‘free subject.’

Nietzsche’s ethical accusations of the deception of personal identity, warrant Ricoeur to attribute him with the culmination of the tradition of the shattered cogito¹⁶ and to seek for an expression of personal identity beyond an indubitable and a denied cogito. In Ricoeur’s own words, his account of narrative identity; ‘*challenges the hypothesis of reflective simplicity without thereby giving in to the vertigo of the disintegration of the self pursued mercilessly by Nietzschean deconstruction.*’¹⁷

(Im)Moral Sense

Hume’s ‘is’-‘ought’ distinction, insinuates the difference between moral taste and other kinds of preferences to be merely gradual. The absence of any thinkable relation between immutable matters of fact and moral distinctions, regarding human action, inspires Hume to shift the epistemological status of ethics, from logical ideation of knowledge to vivid perception of pain and pleasure.

Hume’s ethical suspicion of a rational foundation of morality points him in the same direction. Given that reason is incapable of influencing our actions, the proper domain of morality must be sought

¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 12.

¹¹ Ibid, 13.

¹² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a philosophy of the future*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 16-17.

¹³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid, 19.

elsewhere, because morality ought to move us and make us pursue what we feel is right. Ideas about what is true and false, concerning reality, are incapable of such influence. To state that morality is not concerned with what is reasonable and what is unreasonable, but with what is laudable and what is despicable, is one thing. But stating that morality could have a despicable origin, which would render any moral thought inherently contradictory, seems to inspire an entirely different suspicion.

What if the opposite were true? What if a regressive trait lurked in ‘the good man’, likewise a danger, an enticement, a poison, a narcotic, so that the present lived at the expense of the future? [...] So that morality itself was the danger of dangers? . . .¹⁸

Nietzsche’s narrative of an alternative genesis of morality, featuring a resentful saying ‘no’ and the deceptive working of language previously discussed, suggests that our moral sense might not have evolved from a healthy way of valuing, but from a less life-promoting origin.

Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself, slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed. This reversal of the evaluating glance - this essential orientation to the outside instead of back onto itself - is a feature of *ressentiment* [...].¹⁹

The uncertainty about the origin of our moral sense, inspires an epistemological doubt. Whether ‘slave morality’ (or ‘noble morality’) is an actual enticement at the expense of the future or not, Nietzsche points out that we are uncertain about the source of our sense of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and that there might be many separately evolved systems of morality, exposing moralities to be given nor evident, regarding their content.

Nietzsche’s ethical suspicion concerns morality’s potential origin of self-deception and self-sacrifice, demonstrating our moral sense to be inherently conflicting and suspicious, pending between a toxic tradition and an aspiration to be powerful and lively. In a certain sense, Nietzsche concretizes the undermining of morality, [which Hume merely made possible by focusing on our natural human sense, which he thought to be more or less static], denying morality any univocity, nor general validity.

Atopos

Denying morality any structure of reason, we run the risk of aimless wandering, for once we interpret our moral sentiments to be variable and vulnerable to unhealthy influences, the fact that we cannot *know* what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ might lead us to doubt any morality *ethically*.

To a certain degree the personal and the ethical share the same fate. The “I” of ‘*the philosophies of the subject*’²⁰ is characterized by Ricoeur, as lacking an assigned place in ‘*the world about which he or she speaks*’.²¹ This would explain both its foundational ambition in René Descartes’ philosophy and its

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 8.

¹⁹ Ibid, 20.

²⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 16.

²¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Philosophical anthropology: Writing and Lectures*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 219.

crisis and shattering, because ‘the subject’ is constituting the perspective of the described world, rather than being one of its contents.

The ‘self’ of the hermeneutics of the self, in contrast to this non-situation of exaltation and humiliation,²² tries to move beyond the opposition between cogito and anti-cogito. The exclusive accessibility through the mediations of analysis and reflection admits to, and accounts for, the vulnerable status of personal identity.

Ricoeur’s narrative ethics faces the challenges of metaethical skepticism in a similar fashion. Understood from the perspective of self-interpretation and the search for direction, morality’s law-like formal structure is posited out of nowhere²³, seemingly forcing us to choose between believing in a fixed moral law or denying morality altogether.

The mediated self, finds in self-attestation a way of being expressed and examined, which enables the articulation of intentions and promises. If morality is grounded on the way human beings are interpreting themselves and their lives, it might be open to reason, in a modest manner.

In a reflection on his narrative ethics, nine years after the publication of *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur highlights the grounding function of ethics.²⁴ Imputability arises where intentions and actions are ascribed to the self, through narrative self-attestation. The ethical as grounding/basic phenomenon of a willing person is implied in this moment of attestation/self-interpretation.²⁵ Originating from this ethical dimension of the self, ‘morality should appear as only an intermediary level, the level of testing programs’²⁶. The objective side, the norm, the measuring tool, which is morality, follows from the subjective side of the ethical: commitment.

[...] we know of no human experience that would ignore the relation to some norm, some evaluation and prescription concerning human action, the allowed and forbidden, connected with a subject capable of putting itself under the rule of this norm, [...].²⁷

Before we turn to the exact manner in which narrative ethics conceives of the ethical and moral dimension of the self, we will first dive deeper in Hume’s theory of moral sense, so as to clarify in more detail, what is at stake, regarding the hermeneutic complementation of the analytic discourse.

²² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 16.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Het Probleem van de Grondslagen van de Moraal*, trans. Henk Opdebeeck (Kampen: Kok Agora, 1995), 28-29.

²⁴ John Wall, William Schweiker and W. David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 285-289.

²⁵ Wall, *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral thought*, 288.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 285.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 286.

2. Hume's Division

Morality parting from Reason: is, ought and the will

With Hume opened the era of doubt and suspicion.²⁸

For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.²⁹

How do we observe moral relations and how do we justify such affirmations? Hume's negative answer is as clear as it is persuasive; not merely by describing an objective state of affairs.

Hume understands anything our minds are concerned with as perception of some sort. He even names judging and loving as actions of the mind to be understood as perception.³⁰ Perception, then, splits into ideas and impressions. Hume explains how many thinkers classify morality as a matter of ideas; reasonable, rational beings discovering changeless criteria regarding right and wrong, like one perceives of truth. He nullifies this point of view by stating that, morally, our actions are: '*original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions*'.³¹

Since reason discovers '*real relations of ideas*' or '*real existence*'³² of things either to be true or false with respect to their reality, according to Hume, actions avoid the grasp of reason. Our urging, willing and acting cannot be evaluated morally solely with respect to their bare reality, their truth or falsehood. As facts, they are complete in themselves and on closer inspection we can analyze their causal structures, or the linguistic structures we use to express them, but that will not bring us closer to their moral value. We need more than mere reason to conceive of morality.

Hume explains how reason plays a role in our action and desire, exclusively by informing us of the existence of a proper object of desire and by informing us about cause and effect '*so as to afford us means of exerting any passion*'.³³ These are the only 'is's' that can inform our 'oughts', but we cannot derive these 'oughts' solely from such 'is's.' 'Ought' signifies a totally new relation, one, not on the level of ideas, but on the level of impression or sentiment.

Hume's argument is mostly seen as an epistemological stance on the limits of reason and morality's proper domain being sense. The '*double advantage*'³⁴, by which Hume characterizes his argument, however, hints on some ethical aspects of his 'is'- 'ought'-distinction too. Hume claims that human action cannot be caused or prevented by reason. Reason is not only unable to conceive of moral distinctions and thus of determining what is meritorious or blameful, reason is also incapable of

²⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 127.

²⁹ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 302.

³⁰ Ibid, 293.

³¹ Ibid, 295.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

immediately preventing or producing actions. This last point has an ethical side to it. Reason; the discovery of truth or falsehood, cannot discern right from wrong, it does not make us 'judge' or 'love'.

The inactive character of Hume's conception of reason is an argument against morality being a matter of discovering an '*abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil [...] being eternal and immutable*'³⁵, because Hume assumes that: morality ought to inspire action.³⁶ Morality *ought* to exclusively be learned about by experience of particular beings and the particular influence and connection between them, so as not to be closed off by mere abstract knowledge of rational relations, incapable of inspiring the will.³⁷ For if morality was learned about by theoretically considering the abstract rational differences between right and wrong; and if morality, consequently, could not inspire the will; there would be no necessary connection between morality and human action. This argument is only a valid ad absurdum if the connection between morality and human action is indeed essential, which is not an entirely epistemological point but reveals Hume's ethical intention. This intention, nonetheless, is very much about what is real to us.

Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue, and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour. [...] since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them.³⁸

Self-concern parting from Perception: the personal, identity and fiction

Hume presents an exhaustive list of all relations that are demonstrable ('*resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality and proportion in quantity and number*'³⁹), insinuating that morality is not open to reason, demonstration or certainty. Given that these relations are applicable to lifeless matter, it would be absurd that they would be applicable to morality too. Hume does, however, raise the possibility of a fifth and new relation, in addition to his enumeration, in which the sense of morality might reside. To this possibility, Hume states, '*Tis impossible to refute a system, which has never yet been explain'd.*'⁴⁰

We might think of the narrative relation (which enables the involvement of our 'selves' regarding our actions) as a fifth and new relation, not between inanimate objects, but between '*our actions, passions, and volitions*'⁴¹ and their 'who?', referred to by the word: 'our'. Narration can be seen as constituting a teleological relation between characters, actions and intentions. In order to explain this 'new relation' we will first discuss Hume's account of personal identity so we can properly grasp how Ricoeur's account of narrative identity complements and broadens it.

³⁵ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 299.

³⁶ Ibid, 294.

³⁷ Ibid, 300.

³⁸ Ibid, 302.

³⁹ Ibid, 298.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 299.

⁴¹ Ibid, 298.

Hume sees our 'selves' as imaginative constructs of which we can have no impression or idea and against which the fact that any impressions we do have are inconstant and variable, attests.⁴² He distinguishes '*personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination*' from personal identity '*as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves*'.⁴³ On the former Hume states:

We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness. We have also a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession, and connected together by a close relation [...] yet 'tis certain, that in our common way of thinking they are generally confounded with each other. That action of the imagination, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling [...].⁴⁴

The resemblance of identity and the succession of closely related objects causes a confusion between the *interrupted and variable* and *perfect identity* on the plane of feeling, according to Hume.

Depending on our attitude, this insurmountable '*biass from the imagination*'⁴⁵ either causes a fiction of a filled in 'self' or a fiction of an empty 'self':

Thus the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words. [...] our mistake is not confin'd to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions.⁴⁶

Hume, furthermore, asserts that the deluding of our feeling with the fiction of personal identity, regarding our thoughts and imagination, is dependent on the attribution of a common end and a sympathy to this common aim, to the succession of distinct (though neighboring) perceptions.⁴⁷

On personal identity, regarding our passions and the concern we take in ourselves, Hume states that it affirms the '*fictitious one*', '*which we ascribe to the mind of man*',⁴⁸ by capacitating the influence of perceptions upon each other, thus '*giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures*'.⁴⁹ Hume likens this causal influence between our perceptions, the constant chase of impressions and ideas, which inclines us to imagine a personal identity, to;

a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts.⁵⁰

Ricoeur interprets Hume's shift away from consciousness of personal identity to a believe occasioning fictions as a prelude to '*the time when belief will have become unbelievable*'.⁵¹

⁴² Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 164.

⁴³ Ibid, 165

⁴⁴ Ibid, 165-166.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 166.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 166.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 167-168.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 169.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 170.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 128.

Rather than venture myself upon that boundless ocean

Hume's distinction between personal identity regarding thought and personal identity regarding passions can be compared to the phenomenologically inspired, hermeneutical distinction between identity and ipseity. According to Ricoeur, what is overlooked by the philosophies of personal identity is the distinction between selfhood (ipseity) and sameness (identity). This distinction contains an intricate interplay, generating several modes in which the self appears and will be discussed hereafter in more detail. Hume's notion of personal identity regarding the passions and self-concern, can be said to match Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity in an incomplete manner.

The fiction of the self, fueled by the passions with causality between the successive perceptions, is, in part, being generated through the false attribution of *a common sympathy towards a common end* to our perceptions, like a republic. This causality of our sentiments; giving us a concern for our past and future, free from the criterion of perfect identity, aspires to match Ricoeur's notion of 'self-maintenance,' which is the kind of permanence of the self, when viewed from the ipse-perspective.

Narrative identity aims to do justice to both aspects of personal identity, whereas Hume's personal identity concerning passions and self-concern is merely endorsing a fiction, due to the lack of the sameness of the narrative notion of character.

the polarity I am going to examine suggests an intervention of narrative identity in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character, where idem and ipse tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness.⁵²

We could say that narration both explores the correct characterization of our inner commonwealth, [preliminarily understanding the notion of 'character' as the permanence we identify our 'selves' with] as well as the possible changes and decisions the respective representatives of said republic might consider, regarding their common end.

To Ricoeur it is no problem that narrativity involves fiction. It is Hume who falls short of recognizing that narrativity, even when fictional, might be quite telling, with respect to human reality. Ironically, right after the passages we discussed, Hume narrates about his own personal struggle with suspicion and personal identity. He attests to himself through the story of a journey, in a fashion phenomenally illustrative of narrative identity.

I find myself inclin'd to stop a moment in my present station, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken, and which undoubtedly requires the utmost art and industry to be brought to a happy conclusion. Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap'd shipwreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances. My memory of past errors and perplexities, makes me diffident for the future. The wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, [...] reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present, rather than venture myself upon that

⁵² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 118-119.

boundless ocean, which runs out into immensity. [...] fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate. Fain wou'd I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. I call upon others to join me, in order to make a company apart; but no one will hearken to me. Every one keeps at a distance, and dreads that storm, which beats upon me from every side. [...] Can I be sure, that in leaving all establish'd opinions I am following truth; and by what criterion shall I distinguish her, even if fortune shou'd at last guide me on her foot-steps?⁵³

According to Ricoeur, narration enables us to attest to the personal, showing how the practical field can be expanded and how actions have ethical features.

[...] the practical field covered by narrative theory is greater than that covered by the semantics and pragmatics of action sentences [...] the actions organized into a narrative present features that can be developed thematically only within the framework of ethics.⁵⁴

⁵³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 171-172.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 115.

3. Narrative Ethics: Attesting to Aiming-for and Duty

Self-concern and Perceptions as part of Personal Identity

The introduction of the concept of ‘narrative identity’ allows Ricoeur to indicate the epistemological status of attestation; the level of certainty available with respect to the ascription (and imputation) of actions (and responsibility). What is mainly at stake in the narrative relation between the self, character and action, is the previously touched upon dialectic between *sameness* and *selfhood*; *the demonstrable permanence of character*, on the one hand, and *the attestable ‘own-ness’, of the ascription (and dissociation) of characteristics*, on the other hand. This certainty enables an observation and explanation of the new relation that ‘ought’ expresses with respect to the ‘is’-realm (so very different from it), and at the same time offers a reason for this relation, called for by Hume.⁵⁵

We have seen that for Hume, personal identity is nowhere to be found. His introspection observed nothing but perception. Ricoeur interprets the ‘*someone*’ who finds nothing but particular changing impressions, as a ‘self’ of whom we can only know through attestation, not through any criterion.⁵⁶ When we reflect upon our ‘self’ from the viewpoint of sameness, we find that we cannot observe our personal identity. ‘*With the question Who? — who is seeking, stumbling, and not finding, and who perceives? — the self returns just when the same slips away.*’⁵⁷ In other words, Ricoeur agrees with Hume that ascription of action and experience to a ‘self’, cannot pass any truth ‘*test of verification or falsification*’⁵⁸, and adds that the viewpoint of idem-identity can be broadened by narrativity so as for the attestation of ascription to fit with ‘*a truth test of another order*’⁵⁹.

Selfhood, I have repeatedly affirmed, is not sameness. Because the major distinction between them is not recognized [...] solutions offered to the problem of personal identity which do not consider the narrative dimension fail.⁶⁰

The addition of ipseity to the concept of identity gives Ricoeur’s account of the ‘self’ a nuanced balance, having attention for epistemological concern without succumbing to the alleged impossibility of locating the ‘self’, ‘without the same slipping away’. In this respect, the problem of ascription/‘own-ness’ is elucidative.

According to Ricoeur, the real difference between a reductionism which limits itself to ‘*the vocabulary of events, of facts, described in an impersonal manner*’⁶¹, and non-reductionism is not that non-reductionism adds a ‘*further fact*’⁶²; a Cartesian dualism. Instead it is ‘own-ness’ that is reduced in favor of the factual character of neutral, impersonal and observable events.

⁵⁵ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 302.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 128.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 116.

⁶¹ Ibid, 131.

⁶² Ibid.

[...] what the reductionist thesis reduces is not only, nor even primarily, the mineness of experience but, more fundamentally, that of my own body. The impersonal character of the event marks above all the neutralization of one's own body. Thereafter, the true difference between the nonreductionist thesis and the reductionist thesis in no way coincides with the so-called dualism between spiritual substance and corporeal substance, but between my own possession and impersonal description. [...] the body as mine, and the body as one body among others. The reductionist thesis in this sense marks the reduction of one's own body to the body as impersonal body.⁶³

The identity of a body is perfectly demonstrable, even with respect to Hume's standards. But in demonstrating a body to be my body, what criterion should I use? Ricoeur puts it as follows:

Is my body's belonging to myself on the order of a criteriology? Does it not come instead within the province of attestation?⁶⁴

The same can be said about the ascription of action. In an article on the epistemological status of action in Ricoeur, John van den Hengel defines the notion of 'meaningful actions', which he borrows from Carlos Moya, as '*actions that do not require bodily movements*.'⁶⁵ In fact, Moya describes 'meaningful actions' as actions that '*do not consist merely of bodily movements*'⁶⁶. The exaggeration is telling of van den Hengel's intention to strongly distinguish a cold description of events from his inquiry into the knowledge of real human action.

According to H. L. A. Hart, imputation and ascription share the same working and are opposed to description. The character of defeasibility of the ruling of a judge is seen, by him, as paradigmatic for the ascription of action.⁶⁷ Ricoeur moderates Hart's point, but he agrees with the underlying idea of assimilating ascription and moral imputation.⁶⁸ In this way, Hengel, Moya, Hart and Ricoeur all underscore that essential aspects of human experience are lost in a focus confined to description and try in different ways to spare the ethical and moral dimension.

Only Ricoeur, however, pursues further and considers literary narratives, which problematize personal identity. The need for ascription to the self of; the body and of actions, experiences, and all the more complex phenomena described by Ricoeur as '*the power-to-do*'⁶⁹, calls for '*a new alliance between the analytic tradition and the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition*'.⁷⁰

The analytic tradition accounts for the difficulties of tracing the self, from an objective and scientific viewpoint. In the fourth study of *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur explains how our tendency to separate the "what?" of our future actions and the "why?" of these actions from our 'selves'; the "who?" of the actions, when we analyze the content of our intentions and their motivations, is caused

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 132.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 129.

⁶⁵ Richard Cohen and James Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 2002), *Ricoeur as Another*, 75.

⁶⁶ Carlos Moya, *The Philosophy of Action: an introduction* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990), 40.

⁶⁷ H. L. A. Hart, "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 49 (1948): 187-188.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 99.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 113.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

by the linguistic features of mental phenomena and the attraction to focus on causality. When we analyze our intentions, we ask after the effects of certain future actions and at the same time we suspend ascription so we can, from a certain distance, make up our minds. All mental phenomena share the linguistic ability to be suspended from ascription in order to be understandable and analyzable, paused from personal execution. These structural aspects give way to *'the point of least resistance'*⁷¹, regarding the logical analysis of action sentences, leading to the preference of an epistemology of causality.

The fundamental contribution of the phenomenological and hermeneutical tradition can be gathered from the experience the existential crisis of the self. The phenomenological analysis of *'the crisis of the self'*⁷² attests to the fundamental character of 'own-ness' and a hermeneutics of *'the troubling cases of literary fiction'*⁷³ points towards the epistemological status, as well as the *'ontological vehemence'*⁷⁴ of attestation.

The extreme situation in which any ascription is problematized, not only theoretically but with respect to the practical experience of a failure of any attempt at self-identification,⁷⁵ is telling of a naked 'own-ness', stripped from any recourse to the sameness of character:

So many conversion narratives attest to such nights of personal identity. In these moments of extreme destitution, the empty response to the question "Who am I?" refers not to nullity but to the nakedness of the question itself. It is precisely the nakedness of the question "who?" that, confronted with the proud answer "Here I am!", reopens the debate.⁷⁶

The experience of *'the retreat of the self'*⁷⁷, in moments of extreme self-doubt, attests to a seemingly insurmountable imposing of the question 'who?'. In this unique situation, in which the ipse of the self has no recourse to the sameness of characteristics, traits and habits, it becomes clear that, in addition to the power to take initiative and be responsible, there is another vital aspect of ipseity. The 'own-ness' of our constant demand for ascription, belonging and identity, puts us to a halt until we attest to something, anything. When faced with the 'nothingness' of pure ipse without idem, we can only find direction, regarding our thought as well our action, through attestation.

In order for self-attestation to be a fruitful reopening of the debate/reflection around the self, we need more than the reference to the factuality of analyzable events. The loose components of a chronicle of memorized data, however detailed, cannot satisfy our thirst for support and direction. Instead we need a certain permanence which encompasses own-ness and which can be ascribed to us.

Now, the entire question is to know whether mineness belongs to the range of facts, to the epistemology of observable entities, and, finally, to the ontology of events. We are thus carried

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 98.

⁷² Ibid, 168.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 301.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 167.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 166-167.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 167.

back once again to the distinction between two problematics of identity, that of ipse and that of idem. [...] the phenomenon of mineness in relation to the factual character of the event.⁷⁸

Narratively, permanence on the plane of ipseity can be understood as the self-maintenance of promising and keeping-one's-word, whereas permanence on the plane of a complete overlap of ipse and idem can be understood as character; *'the "what?" of the "who?"'*^{79,80} What we are maintaining, through promise and being faithful to our 'selves' is the permanence of our character, whereas what we are trying to change and improve, when we try to be better versions of our 'selves' also comes down to this narrative notion of character.

The way narrative self-interpretation and self-attestation employ the emplotment of our actions and experiences, to find oneself and to find direction, stresses the aforementioned distinction between empirical description and the ascription of 'own-ness.' To further emphasize and effectively illustrate Ricoeur's leap from an ontology of events to an ontology of personhood, conditioned by epistemological mediation, van den Hengel points out the paradigmatic status of 'promissives' and 'commissives,' regarding action in Ricoeur.⁸¹ Our commitments to future actions are barely accessible, from an analytic point of view. Future events and actions cannot be observed, do not yet exist, but are an essential part of our daily experience.

Through the understanding and expression of a connection between events that is not apparent from their isolated and objective observance, narrativity relates events with respect to their temporal dimension.

[...] the specific model of the interconnection of events constituted by emplotment allows us to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability. [...] the notion of emplotment, transposed from the action to the characters in the narrative, produces a dialectic of the character which is quite clearly a dialectic of sameness and selfhood.⁸²

Narration of action involves agents who, as characters, maintain permanence while being capable of acting, suffering and effecting change. Action is automatically ascribed to identity in the narrative form of a character, through narrative configuration. To a certain degree identity coincides with that action⁸³; *'It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.'*⁸⁴

This conjunction is the true response to the aporias of ascription [...] from a syntagmatic viewpoint, the responses to these questions ["who?" "what?" "why?"] form a chain that is none other than the story chain. Telling a story is saying who did what and how, by spreading out in time the connection between these various viewpoints.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 132.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 122.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 118-119.

⁸¹ Cohen, *Ricoeur as another*, 76.

⁸² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 140-141.

⁸³ Ibid, 146-147.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 148.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 146.

The person as character forms a unity with his/her experiences and shares with the plot the discordant concordance and the search for permanence in time.⁸⁶

The story told tells about the action of the "who." And the identity of this " who" therefore itself must be a narrative identity. Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions. This dilemma disappears if we substitute for identity understood in the sense of being the same (*idem*), identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same [*soi-meme*] (*ipse*).⁸⁷

The narrative relation between our 'selves', our 'actions' and 'intentions' expresses the 'who?' of the character, as an array of lasting dispositions; acquired habits etc., by which a person is recognized.

The notion of narrative necessity is of interest here. Inverting contingency, that which could have happened differently, into the surprising part of the story; the temporal totality, the configuring act retrospectively transforms contingency into narrative necessity, if only regarding the uniqueness of the whole. Character is the whole, the narrative identity of sameness overlapping with selfhood, to which the selfhood of 'promising', 'keeping-one's-word' or 'not-being-(true-to-)one's-self' and 'acting-out-of-character' is a challenge regarding its permanence and a completion regarding its singularity.

According to Ricoeur, in this way the narrative relation qualifies as a compilation of Hume's demonstrable relations, firstly securing the narrative creature, the being 'is' and doing so demonstrating the first half of the bridge towards morality: the ethical dimension of personal identity.

[...] character assures at once numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across change, and, finally, permanence in time which defines sameness.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 147.

⁸⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative 3*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 246.

⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 122.

Morality as part of the Reason of Action

The new relation that 'ought' expresses concerning 'is' can be observed looking at the narrative constitution of our 'selves'; the kind of 'beings' we are. It can be explained by the aim for a good life, which directs us, as far as we perceive our 'selves' as the narrative unity of our lives. And finally, its reason can be made more intelligible through the assumption of the primacy of ethics over morality.

Attestation is the mode of access we have regarding our 'selves.' Narratives are the structures which constitute our characters. Given that narration implies ethical valuations and that self-attestation involves references to ethical aiming, the observation of the discussed notion of character bridges the Humean gap, but halfway.

'Ought' in an ethical sense is implied in the 'is' of our character, because we are aiming and valuing beings. Much like Hume's notion of moral sense, the ethical dimension of the self describes the fact that we experience reality colored by certain far-reaching preferences. Narrative ethics, in contrast, explains the ethical in a much more encompassing manner, regarding our valuing, our responsibility, our imputability and the involvement of our self-worth. As one attests to one's perceptions, so too does one attest to oneself and one's ethical aims, regarding one's life plans and one's life as a whole. This unity is demonstrable as far as we analyze our character and attestable as it comes to selfhood.

Morality, however, contains a sense of obligation and duty. The other half of the bridge between description and prescription addresses the relation between the ethical 'ought' of our aim and the moral 'ought' of the norms. Hume's distinction is concerned with the moral 'ought', expressing a law which is under no condition to be interpreted as a natural law. For Ricoeur, the ethical is more than good sentiments and the subordination of morality to the ethical, is key to the passage from narrative identity to morality.

The present study will be confined to establishing the primacy of ethics over morality - that is, of the aim over the norm. Is our inquiry into the ethical aim, leaving aside the deontological moment, a renouncement of any meaningful discussion, allowing free reign to effusions of "good" sentiments? Not at all. The definition that follows, on the contrary, will, because of its articulated character, give rise to a labor of thinking that will occupy the remainder of this study. Let us define "ethical intention" as aiming at the "good life" with and for others, in just institutions.⁸⁹

After considering some global aspects of the ethical, accounted for by narrative ethics, we will be able to conceive of its contrast with the narrower scope of morality.

The facts which we encounter along our paths, through experiences and our retelling of them, take on the narrative meaning of tools and obstacles, with respect to our 'selves', our actions and our aim. The relation between what we perceive to be and what we aim for is observed in our narrative self-interpretation to which we attest, when we act, and even when we express our most theoretical and logical concerns. The means, which reason affords to the exertion of our passions, of which Hume

⁸⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 171-172.

spoke, seem to cover a much broader domain, when we take our narrative identity into account. Where reason deals with causality, narrativity adds intending-to, a form of action never to be observed, yet available through attestation.

Our judgements and our loving are results of the imaginative variations to which our narrative identity is submitted.⁹⁰ '[...] *the anticipation of ethical considerations are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating.*'⁹¹ Narrative seeks out variations, through thought experiments, exploring all possible 'is's' and seeking out 'ought's'. In this vein, Ricoeur calls literature (in the broad sense of the term) and narrative generally: a '*laboratory of moral judgement*'⁹².

Literature is a vast laboratory in which we experiment with estimations, evaluations, and judgments of approval and condemnation through which narrativity serves as a propaedeutic to ethics.⁹³

[...] we suspend all real moral judgment at the same time that we suspend action itself. But in the unreal sphere of fiction we never tire of exploring new ways of evaluating actions and characters. The thought experiments we conduct in the great laboratory of the imaginary are also explorations in the realm of good and evil. Trans-valuing, even devaluing, is still evaluating. Moral judgment has not been abolished; it is rather itself subjected to the imaginative variations proper to fiction.⁹⁴

Reason afforded the passions with the understanding of causal relations, but narrative experimentation through literature, in the broadest sense of the term, enables us to experiment with ethical situations, we might not ever even actually experience in our lives. The fact of fiction, suspending reality, gives way to ethical reflection, without immediate judgement. Hume can reflect upon himself, through the narrative of a raging storm, symbolic for the confusion that accompanies suspicion, without having to worry about actually drowning anytime soon.

Another way in which the ethical flows from narrativity is in our common understanding of our daily actions. When we intend to 'make coffee,' for example. Practices are narrative prefiguring units consisting of multiple basic actions in nesting relationships, regarding a common goal and a set of constitutive rules.⁹⁵ Like a move in chess, is determined by the rules of the game, through which we grasp how a move can be faulty, bad or wrong. Most of our actions are interpreted by way of grasping these unities and understanding them, from the start of their action-chain to the end, in terms of their goal.

Our lives are understood through narrative configuration as well, giving us the (maybe most) abstract goal of the fulfillment of a life, to which we aspire in all our *life plans*; the middle unit which guides our more concrete practices in a vague, multi-interpretable, flexible manner.⁹⁶ We can further

⁹⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 148.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, 140.

⁹³ Ibid, 115.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 164.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 155-157.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 157-158.

explain the relation between facts and values by the narrative understanding of our factual actions always already bringing along a standard inherent to the practices and a reflective potential, or tendency, which is making us look for the best way to interpret the fulfillment of our lives and the ways to reach it.

In order to understand our 'selves' as 'intending to', 'aiming at' and acting, we narrate and interpret the events we live through. Our 'selves', thus emplotted as characters, compile self-narratives into the unity of a life, engendering self-worth, or the lack thereof, based on the teleological aim towards a certain sense of fulfillment of said life. Most of our aiming is fueled by our self-esteem and by the involvement and implication of our narrative grasp of our 'selves' with respect to life plans and actions. Our plans, promises and actions are mostly understood through the conception of practices, which too relies on a narrative understanding and interpretation of basic actions, according to Ricoeur.

This fulfillment of our 'selves'/our 'lives' as the largest scope of narrative unity is designated as the ultimate epistemological limit of narrative ethics.⁹⁷ We feel good, we think good and we narrate good signifying a fulfillment of the whole interpreted through its parts (life plan and actions) and we interpret the fulfillment of our actions and life plans, through the fulfillment of the whole. A hermeneutical circle and with it the conflict of interpretations are therefore intrinsic to our ethical experience.⁹⁸

With respect to its content, the "good life" is, for each of us, the nebulus of ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled. It is the plane of "time lost" and of "time regained."⁹⁹

We interpret our 'selves', judging our actions with respect to the "good life" and valuing the "good life" through the experience of our actions. Our judgement holds a certain experiential evidence, in the sense that the adequation between our choices and ideals expresses a defeasible conviction.

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.¹⁰⁰

The fundamental conflict of interpretations, foregoing our sense of self-esteem, regarding our 'aiming' for a 'good life' and our choices and actions, does not withhold Ricoeur to sketch the necessary form in which we envision the defeasible ethical content. We strive for fulfillment, with and for others, in just institutions. The observation of one's character as an interpretative unity of life shows how facts are telling of values. This bond between factual description and the ethical is explained by our aiming and vulnerable interpretation of fulfillment with and for others in just institutions. But the reason for

⁹⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 179.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 180.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 180.

the narrative relation between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, adds to this observation and explanation, the justification to argue from an aiming creature, to a law-like obligation and a sense of duty.¹⁰¹

Ricoeur’s exposition of ethics and morality and their respective differences¹⁰² can be boiled down to the distinction between; ethics being mainly concerned with the aim for ‘the good life’, and morality aspiring to grant the norms arising from this aim a universal as well as a constraining function.¹⁰³ Despite this contrast, the relation between morality and ethics still allows for a considerable correlation and a decent overlap. In this respect, an important characteristic we have to be mindful of is that, for Ricoeur, the ethical takes precedence over morality. Ethics; the aim, has priority and morality; the norm, albeit ethics’ indispensable filter, does not have the final word.¹⁰⁴ The latter has to have recourse to ethics upon reaching conflicting and/or contradictory situations. Ethics, according to Ricoeur, encompasses morality.¹⁰⁵

In his article *The problem of the foundation of moral philosophy*, Ricoeur stresses that the starting point of subject of the ethical is freedom.¹⁰⁶ Freedom, however, only shows itself in the objectivation of human action and when our action is believed to be free, the search for intention and value is warranted and the effort to justify the action is required. When the structure of law is introduced too soon, we lose sight of its function to help us examining our actions, regarding our effort to aim our free actions. The ethical understood as our strive to transform our blind assertion of the power-to-do, into an affirmation of it, needs morality as a restriction to our action, so as not to undermine our freedom and contradict the values given rise to by our desire-to-be and desire-to.¹⁰⁷ Only when the narrative generation of meaning has taken place does it make sense to look for possible universalization of certain norms and standards.¹⁰⁸

The only way a thinker like Immanuel Kant can make it appear reasonable to put human desires to the test of universalization, mistakenly placing the idea of law at the beginning of the ethical, instead of at the very end, is by asserting the core of the teleological as a natural/logical given.

¹⁰¹ A recent philosophical movement which differentiates between ethics and morality, is set out clearly in Stephen Darwall’s *Ethics and Morality*. The philosophical current, to which both Nietzsche and Ricoeur can be counted, is summarized by Darwall in the suggestion to understand the ethical as normativity in general and morality as a specific normative subset. Darwall defines ethics as ‘the subject of how we should (in the broadest possible sense of the term) live (in the broadest possible sense of the term)’, thereby offering an explanation of how Nietzsche’s critique of morality is possible without asserting another morality. Ricoeur’s assumption of the need for two distinct terms corresponds to Darwall’s analysis, with respect to the suggested differentiation of the encompassing status of the ethical, as well as with regards to the reactive and subsequently contemplating working of morality’s judgement.

Tristram McPherson, David Plunkett, *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 553.

¹⁰² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 170-175.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 171-172.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 170.

¹⁰⁶ Ricoeur, *Het Probleem van de Grondslagen van de Moraal*, 25-26.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 30-31.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 53.

The first proposition of The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals is the assertion that nothing can be conceived as higher under the sky and in reality at large than a good will. A teleological concept governs the whole attempt of a so-called deontological ethics.¹⁰⁹

The affirmation of freedom needs moral laws, but moral laws are subject to the conflict of interpretation and occasionally have to fall back on the free, ethical aim. Whenever we have several conflicting notions of justice, in our attempts to find norms that can objectify and generalize the aim for a ‘good life’, we find ourselves referring back to ethical values.

The controversy involves key words, such as “security,” “prosperity,” “liberty,” “equality,” “solidarity,” and so forth. These are emblematic terms that dominate political discussion from above.¹¹⁰

The question of a “good” government is answered through a contextual and ethical interpretation of these heavy-laden terms. For the same reason that these terms are vulnerable to propaganda, they are also a recourse for moral/political debate; they are emotionally charged, because they belong to the ethical, according to Ricoeur.¹¹¹

This encompassing and grounding feature of the ethical, regarding morality, is the final reason for the new relation that values express with respect to facts. With the concept of moral sense, Hume seeks to account for the universality of morality, while acknowledging that epistemological normativity does not allow a logical jump from universal reason to moral obligation. Ricoeur’s narrative ethics accounts for the values of a life well lived, involving more than shared moral sentiments while also accounting for the sense of obligation; the secondary working of our strive to be and live worthwhile.

[...] the way in which the distinction between ethics and morality responds to the Humean objection that there is a logical abyss between prescribing and describing, between what ought to be and what is. One can expect that the teleological conception by which we shall characterize ethics will link up in a direct way with the theory of action and its extension in the theory of narrative. It is, as a matter of fact, in the immediate evaluations and estimations applied to action that the teleological viewpoint is expressed. In contrast, the deontological predicates belonging to a morality of duty appear to be imposed from outside of— or from above — the agent of action, in the various forms of constraint which, precisely, are termed moral ones, all of which lends weight to the thesis of the irreducible opposition between ought and is. However, if we are able to show that the deontological viewpoint is subordinate to the teleological perspective, then the gap between ought and is will appear less unbridgeable than in a direct confrontation between description and prescription [...].¹¹²

Ricoeur does not only solve Hume’s epistemological doubt, with his narrative relation between is and aim and the practical relation between aim and norm, but he also answers to Hume’s ethical suspicions. According to Hume, there is nothing more real to us than our passions. The specific manner in which morality relates to the ethical shows how abstract universal pondering, encompassed by the ethical, is capable of influencing our actions, through narrativity. It actually shows why we were motivated and influenced to ponder the abstract and logical order of things in the first place.

¹⁰⁹ Wall, *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral thought*, 293.

¹¹⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 259.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 259.

¹¹² Ibid, 171.

4. Ricoeur's Mediation

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.'¹¹³ 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/mediative epistemology, regarding its direction and coordination. The self, as ontological 'opening onto the world' who's connection to the world is characterized as 'a relation of total concern: everything concerns me'¹¹⁴, 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.¹¹⁵

We attest to our intending-to and our capabilities, through the narrative configuration of events and their teleological implications and the narrative configuration and self-identification of character. Our (self-) reflection is mediated by narrative analysis and never directly intuited. Action is exclusively understood via detours and acting seems to stagnate and be virtually impossible, when the ground from which one is thought to be acting is in doubt, making us question: "who am I?".

Having discussed how Ricoeur's notion of ipseity as change and 'own-ness' moved to the foreground in the crisis of the self, stressing the need for ascription and sameness from the basis of selfhood, we can now relate the underlying flexibility of the 'ontological opening unto the world' to its *narratively mediated* self-attestation through the permanence of the 'desire-to-be.'

The constant necessity of self-ascription, to which the 'who?' attests, is telling of a basic selfhood in the absence of any identifiable content. This constancy of a nothingness, that is not entirely empty but keeps upsetting until one finds oneself, can be compared to two major influences on Ricoeur's thought. The notion of 'originary affirmation' of Jean Nabert, which Ricoeur places at the center of the ethical and at the basis of morality¹¹⁶ and the notion of 'conatus' of Baruch Spinoza, which Ricoeur uses to express his preference for a Spinozist reading of Aristotle, especially compared to Heidegger's take on Aristotle¹¹⁷. Many thinkers have pointed out the resemblance of Ricoeur's adherence to Nabert and his sympathy with Spinoza and it might strike us all the more within the context of extreme existential destitution.

Nabert's analysis of the fault, in *Éléments pour une éthique*, identifies the appearance of a start/beginning of an opportune moment within reflection, which would otherwise be a continuous stream of a desire-to-be.¹¹⁸ The feeling of fault can be employed to understand oneself. When we feel

¹¹³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 308.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 314.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 312.

¹¹⁶ Ricoeur, *Het Probleem van de Grondslagen van de Moraal*, 31.

¹¹⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 315.

¹¹⁸ Jean Nabert, *Elements for an Ethics*, Trans. William Petrek (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 3-4.

we are at fault, the separation of the self and the action in question becomes much harder, if not impossible. This first moment introduces an insurmountable ‘mineness’ of the fault and correlatively of the ‘faulty action’. But the ‘who am I?’ it occasions separates the self from the ascribed characteristic and affirms its existence apart from its history. Nabert’s affirmation of selfhood, at the moment of forced reflection and ‘unfulfilled own-ness’/‘dis-content’ is a ‘primary’ affirmation, because it affirms itself.

All experiences which involve nothing less for the self than its assurance of being to a certitude which cannot pass over into any one of them but judges them and keeps the self from absolutely despairing of itself at the very moment that it is most distant from itself. [...] The act by which I affirm the absolute affirmation is worthless unless it is the absolute affirmation which affirms itself in me and through me and thus guarantees my affirmation and sustains it. [...] The moment at which I completely take possession of this affirmation is rather the moment in which it completely takes possession of my consciousness. [...] Strictly speaking, the initiative of affirmation is wrested from me.¹¹⁹

Ironically it is this first initiative, wrested from the self, that enables all our further initiative, in a way similar to the way in which in Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophy we are always, necessarily, forced to be free, exclusively excluding ‘the freedom not to be free.’ According to Nabert, reflection moves toward primary affirmation, so as to progress and expand itself, and not to return to itself and settle down.¹²⁰

Spinoza’s analysis of the degrees of the power of existing, provides Ricoeur with a reading of Aristotle, in which potentiality is actual. Spinoza’s ‘conatus’, ‘*the effort to persevere in being, which forms the unity of man as of every individual*’, holds the same strive and need, which we saw in the working of reflection with respect to the feeling of fault, and in the experience of ipse free from idem. Van den Hengel goes so far as to say that ‘*the self is this energy, this desire and lack connoted by the term conatus.*’¹²¹

Ricoeur applies the ‘conatus’ to the relation between the phenomenological view on the self as the acting and suffering and its foundation of actual potentiality.¹²² The presence of the possible seems to be characteristic of the situation of our acting and suffering ‘selves’ to which we attest. The influence of Nabert and Spinoza on Ricoeur’s narrative identity brings to light an important metaethical aspect of narrative ethics. This unarrived, unsettled, ever longing, ever searching character of human reflection and existence is key to the epistemological status of attestation and its ontological consequences.

Many thinkers have rightfully characterized Ricoeur’s account of personal identity and in line with it his narrative ethics, by pointing out its fundamentally mediative structure. Van den Hengel, for instance, states that when it comes to action; ‘*The priority of the agent is not such that it can bypass the analysis of the “what” of actions by way of their “why.”*’¹²³ Instead, ever mediated, one has to have recourse to the “what?” and “why?” of action to know oneself.¹²⁴ Van den Hengel calls these reflective

¹¹⁹ Nabert, *Elements for an Ethics*, 46-47.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 57.

¹²¹ Cohen, *Ricoeur as Another*, 86.

¹²² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 315.

¹²³ Cohen, *Ricoeur as Another*, 79.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 86.

movements: *'the long detours of the traces of the self'*¹²⁵. They are connected to the 'realist twist', by which Ricoeur typifies the hermeneutic dependency of reflection on analysis.

The ontology of the self has explanation as its first dialectical opposite. As Ricoeur insists, attestation must be mediated by analysis just as the "who?" must pass by the "what?" and the "why?" Attestation relies therefore upon analytic philosophy as well as pragmatic philosophy and narrative theory, as well as other explanatory disciplines of action[...] these analyses provide an epistemological core at the heart of attestation.¹²⁶

Like we have seen in the beginning of this paper, Ricoeur, in relation to the place of the self-founding cogito and the denied cogito, indicates the place of his hermeneutics of the self as atopus. There is no direct target in the describable world, as it comes to the personal. Unmediated our 'selves' are indescribable. Via the analyses of language, action and our narration we attest to the self, who's actuality is conceived foremost with respect to one's potential-to, one's power-to-do. Narrative ethics situates the ontological status of the ethical and morality also beyond an essentialist/Platonist world of self-founding values and a meaningless world of denied values.

In this regard, David Pellauer speaks of *'the interpreted self'*¹²⁷ which naturally leads to considerations of an ethical and eventually of a moral nature, and which is always exclusively discovered through interpretation.

[...] our identity as selves has to be discovered in a manner similar to the way we discover the identity of a character in a narrative, and since this identity always bears the stamps and limits of an interpretation, we can also call it the key to a hermeneutic of selfhood in contrast to any claim to an immediate intuition of or coincidence with something such as a pure Cartesian ego.¹²⁸

Interpretation, mediation, narration and even symbolization can all be seen as characteristic of the epistemological and ontological actualization of the self, of the ethical and of morality, by attestation. The epistemological core of attestation as ontological constitution of the self consists of *analysis* as the precondition of reflection, which is ever mediated by analysis and from its outset indirect. Ricoeur himself puts it as follows:

Attestation, in fact, first finds opposite it the articulation between reflection and analysis, in the strong sense that analytic philosophy gives to this notion. What is first attested to is the being-true of the mediation of reflection by analysis. This situation is, in a good many respects, without precedent. The main paradox consists in the fact that it is the passage through analysis, which other authors would have called objectification, in an expressly critical sense, that gives the entire process a realist twist.¹²⁹

The paradox of indirect certainty containing a realistic mood, is not the only seemingly contradictory feature of Ricoeur's hermeneutical ontology of narrativity. Essential to the notion of attestation is its productive relation with suspicion. The bridge between objective facts and personal values originates

¹²⁵ Cohen, *Ricoeur as Another*, 86.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 87.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 189.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 189.

¹²⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 300.

from the self-attestation to a demonstrable character and to the 'own-ness' of selfhood, but so does the possibility for self-doubt. Suspicion can lead towards attestation and is an intrinsic part of it. We have seen this in the crisis of the self, but it is also constitutive of the dialogue between ethical aiming-for and moral judging-of.

It is not simply the contrary of attestation, in a strictly disjunctive sense as being-false is in relation to being-true. Suspicion is also the path toward and the crossing within attestation. It haunts attestation, as false testimony haunts true testimony. This adherence, this inherence of suspicion with respect to attestation, has marked the entire course of these studies.¹³⁰

Hume's moral sense secures a moral influence on our actions. Ricoeur's narrative ethics accounts for morality's influence by way of a detour, given that our sense of obligation is foremost related to our aim for a "good life." More importantly the moral and ethical feelings and thought we attest to can be suspected and critically examined, because all attestation is vulnerable to suspicion.

This inherent adherence of suspicion to attestation secures the flexibility of our action and self-understanding. The ethical content and the moralities that flow from it can never be indubitably grounded. At the same time, suspicion is dependent on attestation, regarding the alternative and contradicting possibilities it assumes. The infeasible structure of narrative identity and its ethical reality is given in the fact that the only alternative to a suspected attestation is another, more trustworthy attestation. Ethical and personal content is fundamentally defeasible, but narrative ethics logically eliminates suspicion toward morality in general. This infeasibility is lost when one would try to rationally ground narrativity and morality.

Practical reason, then, must not elevate its claims beyond the median zone that extends between the science of immutable and necessary things and arbitrary opinions, both of collectivities and of individuals. The acknowledgement of this intermediary status of practical reason is the guarantee of its sobriety and of its openness to discussion and criticism.¹³¹

With respect to Nietzsche's radical ethical suspicion, which does not explicitly take into account the difference between the ethical and morality, Ricoeur interprets the equation of conscience to bad conscience¹³² as a dogmatic/radical suspicion.¹³³ The attestation to a hidden and extreme origin of moral sense is never itself subjected to suspicion, betraying suspicion's value, regarding freedom.

Alison Scott-Baumann has argued that *Ricoeur used suspicion to face up to itself and also to moderate its own potentially corrosive effects.*¹³⁴ Pointing out how Ricoeur saw through the archeological philosophies of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, regarding their extreme forms of suspicion, Scott-Baumann emphasizes the working of 'the absolute viewpoint'¹³⁵, to which these philosophies are subject. Radical suspicion is thus shown to contain an equivalent rigidity to indubitable foundationalism.

¹³⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 302.

¹³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Trans. Kathleen Blamey (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 201.

¹³² Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 347.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 346.

¹³⁴ Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Continuum Books, 2009), 171.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 150.

Ricoeur answers to this radical suspicion with the notion of *'the optative mood of living well'*,¹³⁶ the common origin of both Nietzsche's radical lively anti-morality and of any other ethical aiming and moral ruling. That is to say that even if we assert a force behind our every interpretation, a will to power, derailing our sense of obligation and turning us against our 'selves,' then we still have to have recourse to our optative mood, in view of which our moral sense would appear problematic and through which we can suspect and reinterpret and retell, our narrative identity, the "good life" and the norms we establish. Nietzsche's ethical suspicion and its many narratives despite their dogmatic radicalism attest to this wish to live well.

A large part of the thinkers and philosophers who make up the reception of Ricoeur and his narrative ethics appropriate it to make it arrive at a specific set of moral conclusions. John Wall, for instance, explicitly states that he finds Ricoeur's agnosticism to be lacking concerning *'the radical anthropological possibility that the ordinary creation of meaning in the world may rest on a radical creative capability that is ultimately a mystery and a paradox.'*¹³⁷ Ricoeur's narrative ethics sets out from an *'ascetism of the argument'* to avoid any *'self-foundational claim.'*¹³⁸ Leaving open, from the prospect of *'the philosopher as philosopher'*, whether *'the source of injunction, is another person [...] living God, absent God – or an empty place'*,¹³⁹ Ricoeur purposefully reject dogmatic claims.

Even though Wall, in his book: *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility*, warns about the danger of idolatry as an evil inclination, he still goes on to posit an absolute and mysterious teleological foundation at the bottom of our moral humanity. Assuming an *'inner perfection'* to inclusivity, Wall elevates the goal of moral humanity beyond interpretation, consequently condemning as inhuman and immoral any other moral content.

What, in the end, should moral creativity produce? The answer I develop throughout the following chapters is that human beings are called to produce ever more radically inclusive moral worlds with one another. This language of "inclusivity" does not describe a complete moral norm but, rather, moral life's inner poetic perfection or possibility.¹⁴⁰

By assuming an inherent telos, by which to judge any ethical or moral content, Wall admits to morality's grounding in the ethical while still imposing a supra morality on the whole, which is self-founding nonetheless. This founded version of Ricoeur's philosophy is vulnerable to suspicion again, because it can make us doubt about our ethical aim, which is now obligated to be radically inclusive.

Luiz Rohden, in an attempt to appropriate Ricoeur's narrative ethics moves from the ethical quality of literary narratives to morality as judgement of texts.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 352.

¹³⁷ John Wall, *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005), 53.

¹³⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 24-25.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 355.

¹⁴⁰ John Wall, *Moral Creativity*, 11.

¹⁴¹ Luiz Rohden, "Ethical Assumptions and Implications of Hermeneutic Practice as Practical Wisdom," *Ricoeur Studies* 10, no. 2 (2019): 12.

In this judicative practice readers reassess not only their theoretical views, but also review and potentially redirect their actions. Thus, the interpretation of literary texts enables readers to (re)adjust to the concrete situation under the aegis of the implementation of justice, freedom and a good life in contrast with dogmatic, racist, sexist, and totalitarian practices.¹⁴²

Our human capacity for reflection and interpretation which ‘*renders us more open, human, free and, therefore, wise*’,¹⁴³ according to Rohden, can be useful, but the structure of narrativity that ensures this capacity, allows for any narrative and does not lead to any particular morality. Ricoeur’s narrative ethics and its subordination of morality with respect to the ethical, does restore a valuable place for morality but not in a necessary or indubitable manner with respect to its content.

Rohden’s version of ‘the good life’ is filled with ‘*principles such as freedom, human rights, and cooperative coexistence with nature*’ and condemns ‘*dogmatic, racist, totalitarian, and anti-ecological postures*’ and ‘*the market-based and life destructive logic that is hegemonic.*’¹⁴⁴ If Ricoeur’s narrative ethics, however, has any explanatory force, Rohden’s condemned features are also ‘*proposed by creative imagination*’ and desired ‘*through [their] interpretation*’ just like his ‘thought experiments’ of ‘*values and worlds that are better*’.¹⁴⁵ The dogmatism, which Rohden objects to is an aspect of his appropriation, because he too undermines the indefeasible character of narrative ethics, by subjugating the ethical to one specific morality.

I could summarize many more thinkers who have inappropriately appropriated Ricoeur’s narrative ethics immediately nullifying its valuable metaethical position. Van den Hengel uses the distinction between doxa and epistémé, which Ricoeur makes at the start of *Soi-même comme un autre* to situate attestation as non-doxic belief, to introduce his article on the type of knowledge of human action available to us.¹⁴⁶ He thereby suggests the distinction stemming from the distinction between directly seeing (epistémé) and hearing from others (doxa). Attestation as ‘believe in’, not as direct observation and not as mere hearsay (non-doxic¹⁴⁷), is instead revisable but also granting stability.

The attestation to the mediation of reflection by way of analysis; the attestation to the forced ascription of the feeling of fault and to the breaking free of the self in the question ‘who am I?’; the attestation to the Spinozist dynamics of the actual potentiality of the acting and suffering ‘self’, all can be attributed a certain ‘ontological vehemence.’

I find again here the sort of ontological vehemence language expresses being, even if this ontological aim is as though postponed, deferred by the prior denial of the literal referentiality of ordinary language.¹⁴⁸

Ricoeur’s narrative ethics offers a middle ground between metaethical skepticism, given that narrativity points out a structure to be analyzed and interpreted, and ideological/dogmatic foundationalism, given

¹⁴² Luiz Rohden, “Ethical Assumptions and Implications of Hermeneutic Practice as Practical Wisdom,” 12.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 16.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Cohen, *Ricoeur as Another*, 71.

¹⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 21

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 301.

that the ethical is primary to morality and that content-wise narrative ethics is ever vulnerable to suspicion and revision. The ethical as a part of who we are can be narratively related to facts and logic, without morality assuming the rigid place of a natural law.

In *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, Tristram McPherson and David Plunkett give a definition of what they perceive to be the proper subject-matter of metaethics. In the introduction, titled: *The Nature and Explanatory Ambitions of Metaethics*, they state that; '[...] metaethics is a theoretical activity characterized by an explanatory goal. This goal is to explain how actual ethical thought and talk—and what (if anything) that thought and talk is distinctively about—fits into reality.'¹⁴⁹ They further characterize their 'hermeneutic project,'¹⁵⁰ as endeavor to pack together a wide range of divergent studies, regarding the interpretation of actual ethical thought and talk. As demonstrated, narrative ethics offers an elaborate account of how the ethical and morality fit into reality and thus deserves to be discussed within the metaethical debate.

A minimal ethical and moral content, inspired by narrative ethics, would consist of the careful and unasserting attitude, which the down-to-earth conception of the ethical through narrativity enables. Admittedly, narrative ethics in the first place only describes the vulnerable and moveable state of our ethical experience, factually. It seems however that a certain self-awareness makes the reflective movement all the more fruitful. On a more serious note we can say that the experience of the utter despair of self-loss, explained by narrative ethics, is a situation to be avoided. The uncertainty regarding personal identity and direction, could be exerted to assume one's responsibility, but it could also be misused by the seduction of a conception of the ethical as indubitable and self-founded as many dogmatic ideologies and religions would have it.

If there is any meaning to life, anything worthwhile to attest to and live for, we can be certain that those distractions and noises that would prevent us to accurately approach it, would be bad, independent of what is good, or life fulfilling. If we were to classify both; the aimlessness of ultimate suspicion towards the logical possibility of said meaning, and; the rigid rationality, which assumes a moral structure midair, due to its own standards of 'pure reason', as noises and distractions possibly preventing serious and playful aiming and norm fabricating, we could draw up some preliminary ethical, maybe even moral considerations, following from Ricoeur's narrative ethics.

At this point the theory of action is extended from acting to suffering beings. This addition is so essential that it governs a large part of the reflections on power as it is exerted by someone on someone, as well as the reflections on violence as the destruction by someone else of a subject's capacity to act; by the same token, it leads to the threshold of the idea of justice, as the rule aiming at the equality of the patients and agents of action.¹⁵¹

Assuming the ethical and moral implications, which follow from Ricoeur's analysis of acting and suffering beings, we could say that the persuasion of one another, with respect to some ideological

¹⁴⁹ McPherson, *The Routledge Handbook of Metaethics*, 1.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹⁵¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as another*, 157.

content, impossible to logically come back from once asserted, destroys the other's capacity of carefree narration and deprives the other from one's own-ness, regarding one's response. The bond between the personal, the ethical and morality is reinforced within the notion of responsibility. In order to be responsible, one must be able to respond (attest), with one's own response (narrative identity), to the possibilities of actions, practices, life plans and 'the good life' (the ethical), according to the promises and rules implied (morality), by said attestation. A minimal moral rule could than state that we shall not confuse, let alone destroy, each other's responsibility, regarding one's aim for a good life, through dogmatically obscured, ideological gambling, neither by assuming too much certainty through idolization, nor through deconstruction holding out too little.

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