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The Question “Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?” as the Focus of Ricœur’s Existential Philosophy

The question “Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?” is formulated by Ricœur in his work titled *Oneself as Another*,¹ so this book is, in a way by definition, a point of departure for deliberations intended to justify the title thesis of the present article. It follows from this thesis that the question encapsulates the most important themes concerning an “existing being”, defined as such a being that has the capacity of relating to its own being. For the sake of our considerations, we will first try to outline why the role played by this question in *Oneself as Another* can be regarded as

¹ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 168.

strategic,² and then we will attempt to show how this question is linked with existential themes contained in Ricœur's other works.

Point of Departure: *Oneself as Another*

As regards the role played by this question in the work of *Oneself as Another*, it is worth noting, first of all, that it makes a clearly perceptible distinction between the *idem* personal identity, determined by "character", and the *ipse* identity, determined by "keeping the promise". Well, the second part of this question referring to me as "one who you can (or at least 'could') count" indicates that there is actually the possibility of my keeping the promise. If you should count on me, this will be mainly because you recognize that I can keep the promise made to you. As for the first part of the question ("Who am I, so inconstant?"), contrary to appearances, it does not deviate from the question of the *idem* personal identity, delineated by "character". First of all, Ricœur argues, the permanence of character must not be equated with its immutability.³ From the analyses presented in *Oneself as Another* it follows that it is justifiable to attribute to character "immutability of a most peculiar sort" at best,⁴ hence immutability that to some extent is stipulated, that on close inspection turns out to be not so much constancy par excellence, but rather a gradual modification of a relatively system.⁵ For if most components of a given person's character (such as the DNA code, or date or place of birth) are constant, there are also changeable components (habits). Character is modified in the sense that a person's habits get accumulated ("Habit gives a history to character").⁶ Second, even if we assumed that the most constitu-

² See Gilbert Muriel, *L'identité narrative. Une reprise à partir de Freud de la pensée de Ricœur* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2001), 162.

³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 120–121.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 120.

⁵ See Peter Welsen, "Personal Identity as Narrative Identity", in: *Between Suspicion and Sympathy. Paul Ricœur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003), 193.

⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 121.

tive components of character are its stable components, not changeable ones, we would have to accept, anyway, that the constancy of character does not warrant the constancy of a particular person’s conduct. However stable their character would be, one of its most essential determinants is the fact of being embodied and, by definition, being embodied entails the inconstancy of conduct. One who is embodied is thus imperfect (fragile) in the most elementary sense of the word, pointed out by Pascal or others. Since a “drop of water” mentioned in Pascal’s *Thoughts* is enough to kill a person, it can surely enough disturb the bodily state so much that they are no longer able to function as before.

As for the second part of the question (“that notwithstanding you count on me”), linking it with the issue of the *ipse* personal identity does not, apparently, give rise to any objections as to the essence. Once more, suffice it to say that where a reference is made to the possibility of “being someone that another counts on”, it is possible to keep a promise. By counting on someone we assume in fact that they can keep a promise.

Having shown that both the first and second parts of the question at hand point to issues related to Ricœurian poles of personal identity (the first part refers to the *idem* pole and the second part to the *ipse* pole), we have barely made an initial step in our process of justifying the thesis about the strategic significance of this question in *Oneself as Another*. Our task is also to show that this question refers directly to the relationship between the pole of *idem* identity and the pole of *ipse* identity. To manage this task, we may need to underscore the word “notwithstanding”. Although we have situated this word in the second part of the question (which we assigned to the issue of *ipse* identity), we are fully entitled to isolate it from that part and treat it as a link between both parts. What is more, we have the right to identify in this link an expression that defines the nature of the relationship existing between the two poles of personal identity (*idem* and *ipse*), alluded to in the first and second part of the question, respectively.⁷ The set of components

⁷ Notably, Ricœur emphasises this phrase using italics. It is likely that Ricœur wants to make clear that the power of this phrase lies in its definition of the relationship between *idem* identity with *ipse* identity. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 168. See also the original French edition: *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990), 198 (“Qui suis-je, moi, si versatile, pour que, *néanmoins*, tu comptes sur moi?”).

constituting *idem* identity appears in this relationship as a factor that imparts the stigma of instability and unreliability: the realisation of “you can count on me” is overshadowed by the threat posed by “I am so inconstant”. Nevertheless, we can in no way presuppose that “you can count on me” will be shattered into pieces on account of this stigma. Therefore, “notwithstanding” is characterised by ambiguity. On the one hand, it shows that the constituents of *idem* identity threaten *ipse* identity; on the other, it suggests that even in the face of the threats they pose, the building of *ipse* identity can continue. In this sense, this word points to the possibility of “transcending” by building *ipse* identity and the influence of factors that constitute *idem* identity.

Seeing the word “notwithstanding” as a component of the question at hand that concerns a dependency between the *idem* and *ipse* identities, we have managed to grasp the essential quality of this relationship but we have not elucidated it sufficiently. It is obvious that Ricœur, having isolated two types of personal identity, is not content merely with revealing the tension that builds up between them but also shows the principle underlying their unity, represented by “narrative identity”. Where, then, can we find a reference to narrative identity in the title question? To find this reference, we should probably bear in mind that in line with Ricœur’s concept (who draws on Hannah Arendt)⁸, “telling the story of a life” (determining the narrative identity of a given person) naturally constitutes an answer to the question “Who?”⁹ Narrative identity is underpinned by exactly the same question (“Who?”), which here unfolds into our central question. It cannot be denied that a person who asks “Who am I?” is in a situation where he or she tries to grapple with the narrative of themselves. Ricœur argues that this struggle with the narrative of oneself does not cease even when the person asking “Who am I?” experiences such a profound personal identity crisis that they describe themselves using the formula “I am nothing”. Actually, it turns out that nothingness indicated by this formula “is not the nothing of which there is nothing to

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 186.

⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

say”.¹⁰ On the contrary, this nothingness is susceptible to being spoken about, and this can be illustrated by Musil’s novel *The Man Without Qualities*.

However, if we assume (as Ricœur does) that even people who refer to their life as nothingness do not thus deprive their life of the narrative dimension, we are even more compelled to assume that the one who asks “Who am I, so inconstant?” will not lose the narrative dimension. Certainly, it is obvious that only someone who has some kind of a narrative about themselves can assert their own inconstancy. The space extending between the initial “Who?” and its elaboration in “Who am I, so inconstant?” is an area within which the narrative dimension becomes visible. No doubt, this dimension becomes more perceptible when this question is extended by another crucial component to take the form: “Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?”. Extended in this way, the question implies not only that the Inquirer has in mind some experiences demonstrating their own inconstancy but also that he or she is considering a project concerning their future conduct. But having some experience of oneself, which is extended over time, or considering a project of one’s conduct in the future implies in fact some kind of reconfiguration of the narrative of oneself.

The Involuntary Vs. *Idem* Personal Identity (*Freedom and Nature Vs. Oneself as Another*)

The discovery of a close relationship between the question “Who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?” and the conception of narrative identity as *idem* and *ipse* identities sufficiently corroborates, as we can expect, the thesis we put forward at the beginning, namely that the question fulfils a strategic role in *Oneself as Another*. How can we demonstrate that the question is where the most important themes of Ricœur’s existential themes intertwine, not only those contained in *Oneself as Another*, which is a work considered to be the most representative of his later work, but also in his earlier works? To this end, rather, we can no longer move the

¹⁰ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 166.

question of narrative identity to the foreground in the course of our argument because Ricœur deals with it more closely only in *Time and Narrative* (volume 3 in particular), and then in much greater detail in *Oneself as Another*. The situation looks different in the case of Ricœurian distinction between *idem* personal identity and *ipse* identity. Although this distinction appears late in Ricœur's work, there are important reasons to believe that its prototype was sketched already in the early period, especially the differentiation between "the involuntary" and "voluntary" made in the aforementioned *Freedom and Nature*.¹¹ Is it not that the sphere referred to in this volume as "the involuntary" coincides to a large extent with a sphere, as explained in *Oneself as Another*, that defines *idem* personal identity? And is it not that there is a far-reaching convergence between "the voluntary" sphere of *Freedom and Nature* and the sphere of *ipse* identity described in *Oneself as Another*?

The latter question appears rhetoric as it can hardly be supposed that keeping a promise is a voluntary act by definition. In order to justify an affirmative answer to the previous questions concerning the juxtaposition "involuntary-*idem* identity", it is appropriate to note that none of the elements constituting *idem* identity (components determining "what" of the "who"¹²) is chosen but encountered. I have only some influence on the way my habits are formed; however, the more crystallised they are the less power I have to change them. The accumulated layers of habit tend, Ricœur says drawing on Ravaisson (and ultimately on Aristotle), "to cover over the innovation which preceded it, even to the point of abolishing the latter".¹³ Would it not be good, contrary to the thesis assuming the convergence of "the involuntary" described in *Freedom and Nature* with *idem* identity, to make an objection that while the sphere of *idem* identity is by definition a principle of my individuation, my uniqueness and distinctness from Others, the sphere of "the involuntary" is circumscribed by at least two such factors that seem to be a principle of indeterminacy and universality rather than individuation, uniqueness, and mineness? This claim, justifiable (at least to some extent), need not be

¹¹ Bernard Ilunga Kayombo, *Paul Ricœur. De l'attestation de soi* (Paris: Harmattan, 2004), 23. See also Domenico Jervolino, *Ricœur. Herméneutique et traduction* (Paris: Ellipses, 2007), 92–94.

¹² Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 122.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 121.

binding. It is true that in *Freedom and Nature* we come across formulations such as “the unconscious certainly does not think”,¹⁴ “the unconscious ... is the indefinite matter, revolting against the light which all thought bears with it”,¹⁵ “there is no *my* unconscious as there is *my* personality”,¹⁶ all confirming that this allegation is not unfounded at all. When we follow more closely the line of argumentation presented in this work and concerning particular moments of the involuntary, we notice that Ricoeur, contrary to appearances, does not refute the view attributing mineness to the unconscious. All he does is negate that mineness characterising the unconscious is a trait of the *Cogito* defined as an “idealistic”, in other words, disembodied, self-transparent, and self-determining object. Ricoeur holds that the idealistic concept of the *Cogito* does not stand up to criticism; the only concept that can be accepted is the one assuming the integral *Cogito*: the embodied, non-transparent *Cogito* that embraces not only the sphere of the voluntary but also the involuntary. The constitutive feature of the *Cogito* so defined is (analogically to Heidegger’s *Dasein* or Marcel’s “embodied existence”) mineness, which implies that not only the sphere of the voluntary but also each of the Ricoeurian moments of the involuntary (character defined as a way of being of my freedom, the unconscious, and life) bears the imprint of mineness. Nothing prevents us from acknowledging the convergence of the involuntary and the sphere delimiting *idem* identity.

The conclusion that mineness belongs with the involuntary is crucial for our considerations not only because it allows us to maintain the proposition positing the convergence of the involuntary sphere and the sphere circumscribed by *idem* identity. The weight of this observation lies in the fact that it determines an additional direction permitting us to capture the intimate affinity between the existential content of *Freedom and Nature* and *Oneself as Another* even more vividly when the distinction between *idem* identity and *ipse* identity serves as the primary point of reference. This additional yet only slightly different direction of reflection is associated mainly with the concept

¹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, transl. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 378.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 392.

of “proper’ otherness”¹⁷ presented in *Oneself as Another*. Here Ricœur, in opposition to what Husserl does in his fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, does not treat “the sphere of ownness” (or the sphere of mineness) and the sphere of otherness as mutually exclusive but shows that the most basic existential data indicate that the scope of ownness overlaps with that of otherness. This is about being embodied. The point is that not every experience of one’s embodiment is an experience of being a body which feels “own”. The body that we experience as our own appears as another. In what sense another? It is so mainly because being embodied does not follow from my choice; likewise, I have no influence on the fact that being embodied determines all my actions; it is not within my power to change the fact that I, as an embodied being, share various sensations, pervading me through and through but emanating from outside of me, so to speak.

Obviously, all above-mentioned features of one’s own body that provide for its otherness could be successfully included in the sphere of the involuntary. And if Ricœur resolves in *Oneself as Another* that “the flesh precedes the distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary”,¹⁸ he does thus, presumably, not to suggest that situating one’s own body (the living body) in the sphere of the involuntary is unfounded but to accentuate the transcendental status of own body. Being embodied constitutes a sine qua non condition for the possibility of all action and experience.

How to affiliate the question of otherness of one’s own body (proper otherness) with the substance of the title question “Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?” While locating the otherness of own body only at the level of its transcendentality, we find it hard to trace any immediate link with the content of this question; however, we must not forget that in line with Ricœur’s conception the otherness of one’s own body is multidimensional and it shows up wherever passivity is experienced. As an embodied being, I am forced to bear with the unique, intrinsic rhythm of my body’s life generating most varied, sometimes very unpleasant, sensations. I am also destined to encounter “the world” and stand its impact upon me.

¹⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Therefore, the nature of this rhythm and my exposure to “the world” give rise to my inconstancy, alluded to the title question.

Own Otherness and Limitation of Openness to the World (*Oneself as Another Vs. Fallible Man*)

By acknowledging that the issue of own body interpreted as own otherness concerns not only the relationship of an existing being to itself but also between this being and the world (i.e. with non-own otherness) we arrive at this crucial moment of our deliberations where it becomes feasible to capture the uniformity of Ricoeur’s existential thought embracing not only *Freedom and Nature* and *Oneself as Another* but also *Fallible Man*. For in the latter work, the central position is occupied precisely by the relationship between an existing being and the world, especially how this relationship is conditioned by the sphere which is referred to as “involuntary” in *Freedom and Nature* and “own otherness” in *Oneself as Another*. According to Ricoeur, it does not suffice to say that the constitutive moment of the being of an existing being is this original openness to the world but he says we also need to note that this openness is inherently limited.

I experience this limitation both as Affected One and Acting One. The world reveals to me one side at a time, but never “holistically”, so every time I grasp it from a certain perspective. The prototype of such an inevitably one-sided view of the world (described once by Husserl, and then by Merleau-Ponty) is an inevitably perspective-bound perception (seeing) of encountered things; however, as emphasised by Ricoeur, the world reveals itself to me one-sidedly not only when I grasp it “theoretically” (as Seeing One) but also when I grasp it “practically” (as Acting One) or in emotional terms (as Feeling One). In our deliberations, we are not concerned with a detailed analysis of the individual *modi* of Ricoeur’s limitation of openness to the world. For now, we are mainly interested in two things: that each modus of this limitation is conditioned by my being embodied, and that the inalienability of limitation of openness to the world (conditioned by my being embodied) can demonstrate that my being-in-the-world is characterised by insurmountable “inconstancy”.

As regards the first of these two issues, it is probably not necessary to seek some special justification for the claim that being embodied conditions all *modi* of my limitation of openness to the world. The view that just as the perspective-bound perception of a specific thing (limitation of openness to the world in the sphere of *theorein*), affected by my orientation and posture, the way I realize my activeness, determined by the specific nature of my body constituting my character (limitation of openness to the world determined in the sphere of *praxis*) seems convincing. It is also obvious that the broadly understood sphere of emotions, various sensations play a very important role, especially those sexually oriented, in other words, sensations that are strictly “bodily”.

As for the second aspect, the analyses carried out by Ricœur in his *Fallible Man* show that the correlation between the inalienability of my limitation of openness to the world and inconstancy of my being-in-the-world can be traced in all *modi* of this limitation. This dependence manifests as fallibility, thus implying fragility and inconstancy inscribed in the condition of existing being. While in the cognitive sphere the evidence for this fragility is the inability to achieve “adequate evidence” (the sense that Husserl assigns to this concept in his *Cartesian Meditations* implies the incompleteness of perception resulting precisely from the inevitability of being perspective-bound), in the sphere of action, this evidence is represented by the tension between an effort to form an integral project consolidating my activity (an effort that manifests itself as a quest for happiness defined in a quasi-Aristotelian style) and character that is representative for me, squeezing this activity into a more or less tight frame that makes its fuller development very difficult.

The fragility of my being-in-the-world reaches its climax, as Ricœur believes, not so much in the sphere of *theorein* or *praxis* but rather in the emotional sphere. In this sphere, evidence for this kind of fragility is a conflict (very painful for existing being) between desiring partial, or momentary, pleasures (e.g. a sexual act) and longing to have a holistic orientation in one’s life, in other words, desiring to accomplish a coherent existential project. It is all the more difficult to cope with this conflict that our desires directed towards the world are by their nature rather vague; whoever has them sometimes has to go to great lengths to make them clear. Ricœur makes a reservation that the said conflict would not seem less dramatic even if we accepted

that the scope of what constitutes one pole of this conflict (or more precisely, the scope of the above-mentioned longing for “integral activeness”, described by Aristotle as “pursuit of happiness” in his *Nicomachean Ethics*) coincides with the scope of what is demanded by practical reason in the Kantian sense of the word. This conflict would indeed appear in a slightly different form: in this case as a constantly rekindled tension between the need for sensual stimulation and the desire to be guided by the a priori moral law recognized by reason; nonetheless, its origin would be in fact the same. In such a case, the place where it originates should be described, to use Kantian terminology, as *Gemüt* (mind).¹⁹ The claim that inconstancy is a constitutive feature of my being remains unchallenged.

Transcending Existential Inconstancy: The Question of Action (*Fallible Man, Time and Narrative*)

Do the thematic parallels between *Oneself as Another* and the works *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* permit a view that the question “Who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?” is the focal point of Ricœur’s existential philosophy? Most probably not because the aforementioned parallels may constitute evidence that the strategic role in Ricœur’s thought is played by the first part of the said question, the one about constancy. How can we, however, legitimize the view that this strategic role is played by the whole question? To do so, it will not be enough to simply recall that the question of relationship with Another, or more precisely with this Other who I call “you”, is present in Ricœur’s work (who, significantly, considers Gabriel Marcel to be his master, a philosopher of existence whose programme was dialogical) in various configurations, practically from its very beginning. Although it is quite easy to provide examples taken from works

¹⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, transl. Charles. A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 77–78. Incidentally, Ricœur notes that an outline of the conflict at hand could already be found in Plato; this time, however, we are dealing with a tension between what is expressed *epithymia* and what is implied by the notion of *logisticos*; in this case the conflict takes place in *thymos* (the Spirited).

that represent the successive periods of Ricœur's work and confirm his considerable and sustained interest in this issue, the mere use of such examples would not yet be sufficient evidence that our question deserves, not only due to its first part but also the second, to be regarded as the focus of his existential philosophy. If we wish to demonstrate that this name should be applied to the question seen as an integral whole, we should first of all bear in mind that the second part is "non-autonomous" in the sense that, right from the start, its content is juxtaposed (thanks to the special linking word "nonetheless") with what the first part implies. Nevertheless, precisely because the second part of the question follows the word "notwithstanding" its content indicates something that plays the role a "transcending" factor in relation to what the first part says. "You count on me" acts as a transcending factor (i.e., as the *transcendens*) towards the phrase "I am so inconstant".

Should we, with regard to the stipulations made above about the relationship between what is denoted by the first and second parts of the question, not deal with, in the first place, the possibility of transcending inconstancy interpreted as a constitutive feature of an existing being? So long as we cannot determine what transcending existential inconstancy might involve, it will be difficult to make clear the possibility of "transcending existential inconstancy because you count on me". So, which works by Ricœur should be consult to confirm this possibility? Are we forced only to referring back, one more time, to the concept we discussed at the beginning, contained in *Oneself as Another*, whereby *idem* identity is transcended by *ipse* identity? If this were the case, it would mean that the main thesis of the present paper, indicated in its title, is seriously undermined or even overturned. The thesis posits that, as we initially explained, the central question "Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?" gathers themes presented not only in *Oneself as Another* but also in other works representative for the existential philosophy of Ricœur. This fear is unfounded, however. To make certain of that, we need to reach for *Fallible Man* once more. Here, Ricœur speaks not only about limitation of openness to the world but also about transcending it.²⁰ This transcending is not about abolishing this limitation but about unveiling a horizon against which the limitation of openness to the world is

²⁰ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 28–29.

revealed precisely as a limitation. And the act of revealing limitation as a limitation is by definition an act in which it is, as it were, pushed further into the background. The significance of limitation of openness to the world seems to be diminished by this act. According to Ricœur, limitation of openness to the world is generated in the “theoretical” sphere, that is to say, perspective-bound perception is transcended by signifying (“I say more than I see when I signify”)²¹ the encountered thing. Limitation of openness to the world is generated in the “practical” sphere (i.e. character); it is transcended by “pursuit of happiness”²²

Although (as we have ascertained above) we are permitted to assume that each variant of transcending the limited openness to the world, as presented in *Fallible Man*, constitutes at the same time, by its very nature, a variant of transcending existential inconstancy, our deliberations will be best served by the one that Ricœur calls “pursuit of happiness”.²³ Why this one? Because Ricœur situates pursuit of happiness in the domain of action, hence in this domain where which he claims Another cannot be excluded. Such a view on the nature of action is enunciated probably most clearly by Ricœur in a work from his later output, namely the first volume of *Time and Narrative*: “to act is always to act ‘with’ others”.²⁴ It must be nonetheless emphasised that Ricœur does not equate action with “cooperation” or “helping each other” when he says that each action is interaction (*inter-action*, as it were). He says that interaction may take the form of cooperation but not necessarily; apart from cooperation, he also distinguishes two other types of interaction: competition and struggle.²⁵ Nevertheless, if “pursuit of happiness” (which we identified earlier as the *transcendens* of existential inconstancy) is situated in the domain of action, and at the same if cooperation is one or the basic types of action, does this not imply that existential inconstancy is indeed transcended via a relationship with Other expressed by the formula “You count

²¹ Ibidem, 28.

²² See Jean Greisch, *Paul Ricœur. L'itinérance du sens* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2001), 64–70.

²³ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 64–69.

²⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 55.

²⁵ Ibidem, 55.

on me”? For does the concept of cooperation not embrace, by definition, the idea that if you count on me, I count on you? Inference like this might be deemed correct provided that we had a guarantee that Ricœurian “pursuit of happiness” is situated in the area constituted by cooperation, not struggle or competition. How do we know, however, that this is the case under Ricœur’s conception?

While searching for arguments that could justify the thesis that, in line with Ricœur’s conception, pursuit of happiness is situated in the area of action represented by cooperation, it is worth recalling, first of all, that Ricœur assumes that the scope of pursuit of happiness, defined in Aristotelian terms, in fact coincides with that of the “highest good” posited by Kantian practical reason.²⁶ Now, as we know, if one of the two components of Kantian “highest good” is “virtue” (i.e. the willingness to respect the a priori moral law and simultaneously a conduct in line with this law), we are bound to agree that Ricœurian “pursuit of happiness” definitely points to cooperation rather than competition or struggle.

The above argument can surely be reinforced by saying that Ricœur’s “character” (i.e. the principle of limited openness to the world, associated with the “practical” sphere) and “pursuit of happiness” (i.e. the principle of transcending limited openness to the world, associated with both the “practical” and the emotional sphere), when viewed in conjunction, conjure up the idea of “person” interpreted in a quasi-Kantian style. This is the idea of a person for whom the basic point of reference is the second formula of the categorical imperative, read as a “dialogical” existential project,²⁷ that is to say, an existential project realized through cooperation with Others and not through struggle or competition.

Another kind of argument supporting the claim that the Ricœurian conception of seeking happiness involves cooperation rather than competition or struggle can be formulated by invoking the concept of “precious moments”, which is an important component of this conception.²⁸ This applies to those special moments when I have a very clear feeling that obstacles that restrict

²⁶ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 66–67.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 72.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 68.

my action seem to vanish completely; suddenly, they reveal to me new, extremely promising horizons. It is then that I gain an “assurance that I am on the right path”.²⁹ Is it not that Ricœur, by describing these “precious moments” in such a way, suggests that in cases like that I have a sense of interaction with others rather than competition or struggle? After all, it is probably not that “removing obstacles”, mentioned by Ricœur in *Fallible Man*, means that I have a sense of “definitive victory over others”, or a sense of “no resistance from others towards me”. Such a “triumphant” (and “selfish”) interpretation of the concept of “precious moments” would be unconvincing, mainly because in the whole argument on happiness presented in *Fallible Man*, there are quite strong reflexes of the Aristotelian ethics that underscores the value of friendship.

If, therefore, it can be safely assumed that the Ricœurian concept of pursuit of happiness allows for cooperation rather than for competition or struggle, can it be then safely assumed that it posits an immediate correlation between pursuit of happiness and the case of “you counting on me”? This question is by no means obvious. On the one hand, it can be reasonably claimed that as long someone cooperates with me, they count on me in some way. On the other, though, there are reasons to believe that I can be relied upon by someone to whom I have made a promise. I make promises not to anyone who I cooperate with.

The Question of Tacit Promise (Around *From Text to Action*)

A rather useful clue on how to capture the relationship between the pursuit of happiness and the situation where “you count on me”, in line with Ricœur’s idea, is furnished by one of his later texts: the article “Initiative”, which is part of *From Text to Action*. We learn from it that the concept of promise has a much broader semantic scope than a verbal commitment. For there is also a “tacit promise”, made to Another by initiating action: “Every initiative is an intention to do something and, as such, a commitment to do that thing, hence

²⁹ Ibidem.

a promise that I make silently to myself and tacitly to another”.³⁰ Therefore, if every initiation of an action is by definition a promise, it follows that pursuit of happiness, insofar as it represents an action (or more precisely, “finalisation of an initiated action”), should be referred to as “keeping a promise”.

The vision of a “tacit promise”, presented in *From Text to Action*, has a special, if not decisive, significance for our considerations. By invoking it, we gain the last missing link in argumentation showing that the concept of pursuit of happiness outlined in *Fallible Man* coincides with the concept of *ipse* personal identity as demonstrated in *Oneself as Another*, determined by keeping a promise. According to this argumentation, a uniform existential concept that emerges from these works posits that by seeking happiness I realize an action through which I keep my tacit promise made to you. I transcend my inalienable inconstancy precisely by acting this way, which is tantamount to keeping the promise I made to you tacitly.

While the above-presented arguments about the sequence “existential inconstancy–pursuit of happiness–keeping the promise addressed to you” seem to ultimately determine the accuracy of the thesis assuming that in the question “Who am I, so inconstant, that notwithstanding you count on me?” the most important themes of his existential philosophy are intertwined, there still remains a rather significant doubt to consider concerning Ricoeur’s concept of a tacit promise. Namely, it is not clear why we should actually agree that “to initiate action means as much as to make a promise to Another”. The action that I initiate need not benefit Another, but Ricoeur himself admits that every promise has a beneficiary.³¹ So, how could we argue that a promise has been made to Another if there is no information confirming that he is the beneficiary? To remove this uncertainty we should, most probably, once again invoke Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity.

This is about the component of the said concept concerning a narrative of oneself. By indicating that answering the question “Who am I?” is spinning a narrative about oneself, Ricoeur by no means claims that this narrative will be the most satisfying only when I lose interest in how Others react to it. On

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics 2*, transl. Kathleen Blamey, John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 217.

³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, transl. David Pellauer (Cambridge–London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 129.

the contrary, he expresses the conviction that a disruption – and a total block in particular – of communication between me and Others, will in fact entail my sinking into the state of suffering. One of the basic conditions to prevent my suffering, as maintained by Ricœur, is my continued endeavours to formulate a narrative about myself that Others are willing to hear and accept.³² Ricœur notes that the need to share a narrative of oneself with others follows in particular from the fact that any action that I take is necessarily mediated “symbolically” (that is, mediated by culturally embedded “signs, rules and norms”),³³ which gives it an inherently “pre-narrative quality”.³⁴ My action is “quasi-text”,³⁵ which calls for being narrated. Ricœur goes even further by saying that not only all my actions call for being narrated but all my life experiences in general. By combining them into a coherent narrative, I attest to the integrity and significance of my life, gaining self-understanding, which is also self-esteem.³⁶

If it is the case that I, as Acting One, have an opportunity to attain self-understanding tantamount to self-esteem only when I manage to work out and convey to others a narrative of myself that is acceptable to them, it can be presumed that their role as witnesses of my initiation of actions ennobles them, at least in some measure. If this role ennobles them in some way, does this not imply that they are in some sense beneficiaries of the initiative undertaken by me? Our doubts concerning the accuracy of the Ricœurian concept of “tacit promise” are dispelled. It is possible that you count on me even when I, “so inconstant”, make merely a silent promise to you. It is likely that in this silence you will find a nucleus of a narrative that answers my repeated question “Who am I?”

³² Paul Ricœur, “La souffrance n’est pas la douleur”, in: *Souffrance et douleur. Autour de Paul Ricœur*, eds. Claire Marin, Nathalie Zaccai-Reyners (Paris: PUF, 2013), 21–22.

³³ Paul Ricœur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, in: *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London–New York: Routledge, 1991), 28.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 179.

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Abstract

The question "Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?" makes reference not only to the "*idem* personal identity–*ipse* personal identity" relationship (*Oneself as Another*), but also such relationships as "the

involuntary–the voluntary” (*Freedom and Nature*), and “limitation of openness to the world–transcending the limitation of openness to the world” (*Fallible Man*). In each of those relationships there is a strong correlation between the first and the second element. While the first part of the question is associated with the question of *idem* personal identity, the involuntary, and limitation of openness to the world, the second part of the question relates to the question of *ipse* personal identity, the voluntary, and transcending limitation of openness to the world. Taken as a whole, the question indicates that there is a possibility of keeping a promise (also the tacit promise mentioned in *From Text to Action*) that implies transcending “existential inconstancy”.

Keywords: Ricoeur, *idem* identity, *ipse* identity, voluntary, involuntary, limitation of openness to the world, action, keeping promise, existential philosophy



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