Review

Paul Ricœur (2004), *Parcours de la Renaissance – Trois Études*, Paris, Stock, Collection 'Les Essais', 2004, 387 pp.

Paul Ricœur's latest book does not depart from the general movement of his philosophical work as he himself has understood it. As with his other books, he proceeds from 'recognizing a residue left over from the previous project, a residue that in its turn leads to a new challenge'.

What was it this time that encouraged Paul Ricœur to push his thinking further? The answer may be summarized in a word: identity.[1] *Parcours de la Renaissance* is the endpoint of the philosophical problematic of identity that has occupied Paul Ricœur starting with his trilogy *Temps et Récit*. At the conclusion of a research project aiming to establish a close correlation between 'the activity of telling a story' and the temporal nature of human experience Ricœur, in the 'Conclusions', reaches the point of developing the notion of 'narrative identity'.

If there is a story, it is of someone who acts and suffers, that is, a 'who' (individual or collective) that may be indicated in response to the question: 'Who did this?', 'Who acted in that way?' or 'Who did that happen to?' Thus there is an individual or collective entity whose identification is produced through the narrative process itself, be it historiographic or fictional (in the case of literary fiction). According to Ricœur: 'The story recounted tells the who of the action. So the identity of the who is itself only a narrative identity.'[2]

The idea of narrative identity thus allows us to think about the question of personal identity taking full account of the temporal nature of existence[3] – that of a being who, while coexisting with others, is made to change in the course of a story.

It is once again personal identity, especially in its reflexive dimension, that is the subject of *Soi-même comme un autre*. There identity is seen as a polarity: the *idem*-pole of biological identity and the constant features of the character, and the *ipse*-pole of the auto-determination of a self that recognizes *itself* as the responsible author of its actions. So a mediating role is assigned to narrative identity between these two poles.

And, according to *Soi-même comme un autre*, it is in the soil of a philosophy of ipseity that ethics is rooted. Hence the impossibility of reducing ethics merely to the sphere of moral law in the sense of Kant's practical philosophy.

So far we have only touched on the problematic of identity developed by Paul Ricœur in his previous books. In his new one, identity is immediately placed in the context of the notion of recognition.

Here Ricœur starts from two observations. On one hand he notes the lexicographic richness of a certain word (the noun *reconnaissance* and the verb *reconnaître*) whose meaning trail leads from the simple identification of a something as the 'same' to gratitude as in the phrase 'je vous suis reconnaissant' (I'm grateful to you). It is this polysemy that Ricœur scrutinizes in his Introduction with the help of the Littré and in particular the Grand Robert de la Langue Française. He notes the absence of genuine philosophy of *reconnaissance* despite the fact that the idea has had various, fairly noteworthy philosophical uses. Indeed we find it in Kant's 'recognition', in Bergson's '*reconnaissance des images*', and especially in Hegel's *Anerkennung* (recognition).

And yet an overall philosophical consideration has never been attempted and this is the task Ricœur allots himself: to put down the markers for a philosophy of *reconnaissance* which is based on what the lexicon suggests, but which it is still the philosopher's job to theorize[4] using the achievements of the history of philosophy. The enterprise is presented in the form of a process in three stages:

'Recognition as identification'; 'Recognizing oneself'; 'Mutual recognition'.

In this philosophical progress, which corresponds to the transition from a simple cognitive dimension to an eminently ethical dimension of the notion of recognition, Ricœur has focused particularly on the reversal between active and passive voice of the verb 'to recognize'. If in 'recognition as identification' it is the active voice that prevails – I recognize something (or someone) as the 'same' despite the changes it may have undergone – in mutual recognition (third study) 'I' (or 'we') ask to be recognized. This request may take the path of a 'struggle for recognition', as often happens in the case of people or human groups who are not, or do not have their rights, recognized. The intermediate stage of 'recognizing oneself' looks at the recognition we all perform of ourselves as speaking and acting beings. This recognition of oneself already implies alterity, recognition of the other. An alterity that is required in full when the subject is mutual recognition in the third study.

This is the book's overall plan. It now remains for me to give an idea, which will of necessity be succinct, of the *process* itself.

In his first study ('Recognition as identification'), in which Descartes and Kant in particular are referred to, Ricœur deals with the most active and epistemic sense of recognition: I recognize a thing when I do not make a mistake about what it is, when I distinguish it from what it is not. It will come as no surprise that at the start of this study Ricœur reminds us of the meta-categories of same and other as they were seen by Plato, especially in the *Sophist*. Those meta-categories are constantly mentioned throughout the book.

In quoting Descartes, Ricœur shows how for him the act of identifying cannot be separated from that of distinguishing. The dual operation of identifying and distinguishing that is at the root of his theory of judgement also affects the conduct of life, since in Descartes it corresponds to the desire 'to incorporate into our belief' only what we can hold to be true. It is in this context, where the epistemic and the ethical are not yet completely separate, that we see appearing, in the French translation approved by Descartes of his *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, the idea of 'recognition'. In the fourth Meditation we in fact find incidences of the notion *reconnaissance* that are all the more significant because they arise against a backdrop of doubt. The

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first occurrence coincides with the victory over the hypothesis of an evil genius because of trust in God. 'For . . . I recognize [from the Latin *agnosco*] that it is impossible that He should ever deceive me.' The second relates to renewed confidence in his own powers of judging true from false: 'I find in myself a certain power to judge . . . ' wrote Descartes.

After Descartes' contribution Ricœur turns to Kant's theory of judgement. It takes in the condition of time, which is the basis of *Rekognition* as an activity of the understanding. But in spite of this contribution it is not possible to use only the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In it assumptions with regard to what Husserl called ante-predicative experience are not questioned. If Ricœur refers to it this is to highlight the role of change in the operations of recognition, which always run the risk of error.

Through this highlighting of change at the very heart of recognition as identification we pass from something to *someone*. Here Ricœur is thinking of the scenario of recognizing people, who at first sight have been made unrecognizable by the effects of time, in Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé*, which is the last book of *À la recherche du temps perdu* and also the narrative of the revelation of his vocation as a writer experienced by the narrator. And in the conclusion to this first study (p. 104) we read Proust's masterly observation on the contribution of the literary work: 'the recognition by the reader within himself of what the book is saying is proof of its truth and vice versa . . .'.

The second study, 'Recognizing oneself', is innovative in comparison to *Soi-même comme un autre*, of which it is the continuation, precisely because it puts 'recognition' at the centre of the question of ipseity. The epigraph is Rimbaud's phrase: 'I recognized that I was a poet.' Here the issue is recognition of the self as 'able': able to talk, act and so recognize itself as responsible for what it says and does. And we owe a debt to the legacy of Greece, which enables us to think about this recognition of humans as having *agency*. Ricœur attacks the topic of recognizing the self with the *Odyssey*. In this regard the household's delayed recognition of Ulysses on his return to Ithaca is a significant example. In it can be seen the part played by signs, marks on the body, that cause the initial failure of recognition to turn full circle into recognition so that the hero can re-assume his role as king and spouse. After Homer the tragedies – Ricœur analyses in particular the case of Sophocles' character Oedipus – in their turn prepare the ground for Aristotle's ethical analyses dealing with deliberation, decision and right action, in other words practical wisdom. As Ricœur writes, 'the *phronimos* [the prudent person who acts thoughtfully], who is mentioned as early as Book II [of the *Ethics to Nicomachus*], prefigures this reflexive self implied by the recognition of responsibility'.[5]

The Moderns' progress was in the area of reflexive consciousness. Coming after Descartes, Locke promoted the philosophical use of the notions of consciousness and reflection. Thus we owe to him, Ricœur says, 'a decisive thrust' towards a hermeneutics of the self (p. 137). Ricœur also stresses the considerable contributions of Kant and Fichte to constructing a genuine reflexive philosophy. This does not stop him highlighting the failings of Kant, who remained a prisoner of his formalism in his treatment of the subject's moral autonomy, because he did not consider ipseity and thus the recognition by the concrete self of its capacities.

Approaching the ability of the self to give its word, affirm, bear witness, Ricœur confesses his debt, as he has often done, to that great French reflexive philosopher Jean Nabert (p. 142). In his *Eléments pour une éthique*,[6] Nabert foregrounded the need, in a reflexive philosophy, a philosophy of the self, for a detour via the *what* and the *how* of experiences where the self affirms itself, and stressed that this should be done before returning to the *who*. For Ricœur too this detour via 'the objectal aspect of experiences' is necessary, otherwise the self is threatened with mis-recognizing itself.

Furthermore, in all his analyses of the self's ethical capacities, Paul Ricœur bears continually in mind how fragile they are. He alludes to the new horizons opened up by the idea of responsibility, which is better equipped to take account of the victim's viewpoint, since it tends to replace the notion of imputability.

Analysis of the self's capacities reaches a higher level when, as he proceeds, Ricœur is led to consider memory and promise. The experience of memory is unavoidable in constructing the self: being able to remember what one has done and recognizing one's responsibility for what has happened, that is, the effects of one's action (or omission). For everything relating to the what or the how of memory Ricœur turns, as he has already done in *Mémoire, histoire, oubli*,[7] to Bergson's analyses, in *Matière et mémoire* in particular, but without ignoring Aristotle's *De memoria et reminiscentia*. He also considers the three great movements that most contributed to the study of the capacity for recall that is constitutive of memory: psychological associationism, psychoanalysis and the phenomenology of Husserl, whose analyses in volume XXIII of *Husserliana* may be seen as a model of phenomenological description. Neither does he ignore the threat weighing upon memory, that is to say the erasure of traces and then the shipwreck of forgetting; this is also the opportunity to recall the contribution of Freud, who linked active forgetting resulting from repression to the theory of the unconscious.

In Bergson's work it is by asking the question 'Who remembers?' that recognition of images turns out to be inseparable from recognition of the self, or coincident with it, because that is how we interiorize the temporality of our lives, our duration. Ricœur calls again on the analysis of inner time in Book X of St Augustine's *Confessions*, to which he had devoted the study placed at the beginning of *Temps et récit*. Thus he shares Charles Taylor's position, seeing in the *Confessions* the inception of the tradition of *inwardness*. In the Modern period Locke was to turn this tradition of inwardness in the direction of reflection. His *Essay on Human Understanding*, notes Ricœur, began the 'sequence that, taken together, formed notions of identity, consciousness and self' (p. 179), even though he did not go as far as distinguishing *idem* identity from *ipse* identity, as has already been indicated.

However, in Ricœur's view it is not with memory, and so by turning back to the past, that self-recognition acquires its paradigmatic dimension, but by turning towards the future in the shape of promise. Memory is retrospective and inclines to *idem*-identity, while promise is prospective. In allowing the self to discover its greatest powers (remaining true to one's word, keeping a promise or, negatively, betraying it) it shows itself to be the paradigm of ipseity, of self-maintenance in spite of temporality and changes, including those at the level of feelings, which happen in us all.[8]

And so relationship with others, which is essential for the constitution of personal

identity, appears clearly with promise, a theme that has recently been the subject of several of Ricœur's contributions.[9] 'The mark of the greatness of promise', he writes, 'is in "reliability"' (p. 192). This is what in friendship is called 'faithfulness'. In this connection Ricœur mentions the notion in Gabriel Marcel's work of 'creative faithfulness', which allows one to preserve the distance between 'self-maintenance' and the 'constancy' of a determined will (p. 197).

Ricœur concludes 'Recognizing oneself' with a thought that is already directed towards the social dimension of our 'capacities', our powers of action. Here he draws on sociologists' writing on social practices (Bernard Lepetit) and in particular on a great economist, Amartya Sen, who was able to introduce into the field of economics a reflection on the association between freedom and choice of lifestyle on the one hand and social responsibility on the other. According to Amartya Sen it is important to get 'rights to certain capabilities' recognized in order to guarantee concrete freedom for individuals, since this recognition is itself the crucial element of a theory of social justice.

With these ideas established Ricœur sets out on the third stage of his journey – 'mutual recognition' – which takes to its highest level the alterity that was already required by the constitution of personal identity and self-recognition.

Ricœur is fully aware that mutual recognition is not automatic. Nothing is more difficult than the road to social esteem and recognition of one person by another. Relations between human groups are burdened with contempt, which is equivalent to mis-recognition in the area of recognition-identification. On the institutional level recognition has more often than not to be won from a situation where misunderstanding prevails. According to Ricœur, who has also learnt from the German philosopher's most recent interpreters (Honneth, Taminiaux), Hegel understood this very well when he made *Anerkennung* the end of a long process of struggle for recognition. Following Fichte, he was able to approve 'the original correlation between the relationship to self and the relationship to the other' (p. 255), but without ceasing 'to look unflinchingly at the negative', to paraphrase Hegel himself. Furthermore, Hegel's philosophy of law and the state, which is the endpoint and the dialectical transformation of the tradition of 'natural law' initiated by Grotius, enables him to provide a moral response to the 'challenge' of 'the state of nature' (all-out war) posited by Hobbes in *Leviathan* as what would threaten human life on all sides, if it were not for the institution of a government likely to bring peace within its borders.

But before launching into the theme of Hobbes's 'state of nature' and the great Hegelian reply, updated in our time by Axel Honneth's normative sociology, Ricœur emphasizes the original asymmetry that characterizes the relationship to others and which mutual recognition alone is able to overcome. To support his argument he refers to both the phenomenological analysis of the experience of others in Husserl's *Fifth Cartesian Meditation*, which starts from the egological pole, and Emmanuel Lévinas's philosophy of alterity, which reverses the intentional objective by proceeding from the domain of the other towards the I domain.

The point of placing these considerations of the asymmetry between me and others at the start of the reflection on mutual recognition is in the end, as Ricœur says in his 'Conclusion' to the book, not to forget everything that threatens to 'undermine

from within the power of reconciliation attached to the process of recognition', but without discrediting 'the advance' towards mutual recognition. This advance can never be completed and so will always need to be restarted in relation to the forms and modes assumed by mis-recognition.

Nonetheless, mutual recognition is not missing from our most concrete experience, as is attested by all that Hegel thought under the heading *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) and especially the family moment. However, Ricœur takes a step beyond Hegel when he reflects on what anthropologists (starting with Marcel Mauss) and sociologists have revealed about the 'economy or mutuality of the gift', arriving at that form of *reconnaissance* which is gratitude (in the sense that word has in Latin languages).

I feel that for Ricœur, and I do not think I am misrepresenting him, mutual recognition is realized above all in friendship (and love), where each person is full of gratitude for the very fact that the other exists.[10] And so, after quoting Simone Weil's 'magnificent lines' (pp. 278–9) on friendship, Ricœur ends his journey (p. 377) by reproducing the famous phrase from Book I of the *Essais*, where Montaigne tells of his friendship for his dead friend La Boétie, but cannot 'find a reason for it': 'because it was him, because it was me'.

The complexity and richness of Paul Ricœur's *Parcours de la Reconnaissance* can only truly be appreciated through attentive study of the book. As for the questions he raises, I can see some relating to mutual recognition. I think more work needs to be done on the gap between mutuality at the interpersonal level (for instance in friendship) and mutuality at the social and institutional level. Is every request for recognition to be legally acceptable? And by what criteria? Then, what are the social and identity mechanisms that are constantly being refashioned and that work against mutual recognition?

Finally, among the extreme situations the request for recognition faces, there are some where the only 'solution' is to give up on being recognized. That is the case, posited by Plato, of the just person who is thought unjust. By persevering on the path he has chosen the just man agrees to accept the consequences of being misunderstood and scorned, and can thus remain faithful to what he desires, that is, Good which transcends his own person. In extreme cases of this type, which is witness, what becomes of the request for mutual recognition? Is it not suspended, bracketed, until truth bursts through *after the event*? Then recognition is uncertain and deferred. Even if it is hoped for (or expected) it no longer comes as mutuality. All this means that the journey chosen by Paul Ricœur deserves to be continued and might lead to areas that the author is familiar with, but into which *Parcours de la Reconnaissance* has not ventured.

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Notes

1. On this topic see my text 'Narrative Identity and Ipseity by Paul Ricœur (from Ricœur's *Time and Narrative to Oneself as an Other*)', posted on the internet: http://www.onlineoriginals.com, which is the translation of a paper given in Portuguese to the International Conference held in 1993 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) on the occasion of Paul Ricœur's 80th birthday.
2. Paul Ricœur (1987), *Temps et Récit*, vol. III *Le Temps raconté*, Paris: Seuil, p. 355.
3. See in *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) the chapter entitled 'L'identité personnelle et identité narrative', where Ricœur states that personal identity 'can only be precisely articulated in the temporal dimension of human existence'.
4. 'How does one move from the regime of the rule-bound polysemy of the words of natural language to the formation of *philosophèmes* worthy of appearing in a theory of *reconnaissance*?' Ricœur asks himself (p. 32). And he mentions the *dislocation* that philosophical problematization causes compared with the order of the dictionary, in which it has already noted the gaps between one meaning and another.
5. *Parcours de la Reconnaissance, op. cit.*, p. 129.
6. See Jean Nabert (1962), *Eléments pour une éthique*, introduced by Paul Ricœur, Paris: Aubier/Montaigne.
7. Paul Ricœur (2001), *Mémoire, histoire, oubli*, Paris: Seuil.
8. Nietzsche's suspicion about the unity of the self and so its identity is also present in Ricœur's analyses related to memory and promise.
9. See his paper (2004), 'La promesse d'avant la promesse' in the collection *La Philosophie au risque de la promesse*, edited by Marc Crepon and Marc de Launay, Paris: Bayard.
10. I refer the reader to the book's dedication: 'To Frans Vansina, minor brother, my oldest friend.'