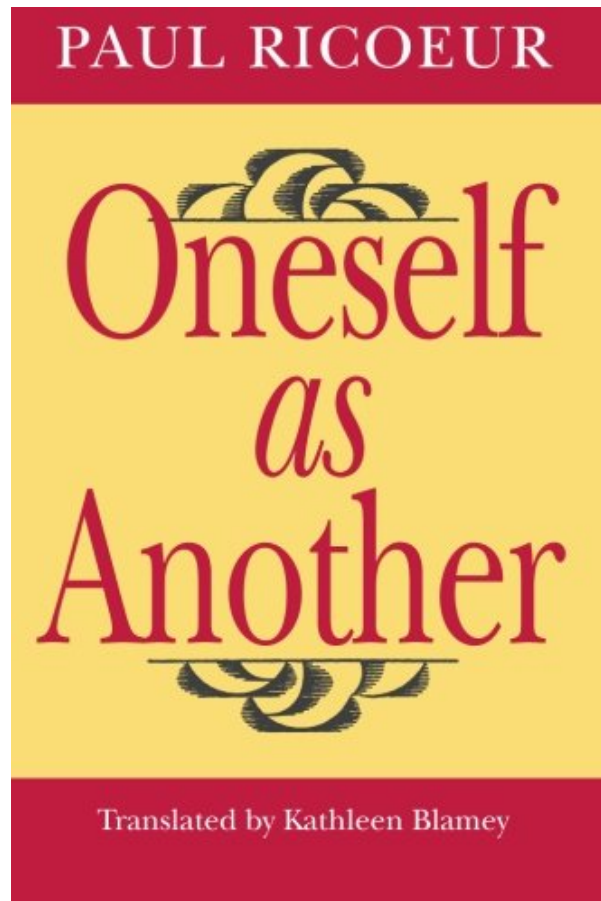


ONESELF AS ANOTHER BY PAUL RICOEUR



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PAUL RICOEUR

Oneself
as
Another

Translated by Kathleen Blamey

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- Terry Skeats, Bishop's Univ. Lib., Lennoxville, Quebec

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ONESELF AS ANOTHER BY PAUL RICOEUR PDF

Paul Ricoeur has been hailed as one of the most important thinkers of the century. *Oneself as Another*, the clearest account of his "philosophical ethics," substantiates this position and lays the groundwork for a metaphysics of morals.

Focusing on the concept of personal identity, Ricoeur develops a hermeneutics of the self that charts its epistemological path and ontological status.

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THE SELF'S MULTI-LAYERED IDENTITY

By barryb

“SELFHOOD” has a multi-layered identity consisting of: “trait-sign-model”; motivational-base-of-attestation”; “disposition”; “phronetic-stance-of-loyalty”; & “universal-narrative-work-space”. All of these layers are discussed in detail by Ricoeur; and often, with corresponding Greek concepts.

This “multi-layered-self” has as its task: the “emplotment-of-praxis-positing”. Every aspect of this “intentionality” also gets fully addressed by Ricoeur. It has its own series of: “narrative-reference”; “evaluating-historical-possibilities”; “evaluation-of-attestation”; “dianoia-of-disposition”; & then “configured-plotment”

This “multi-layered-plotment” has an internal inertia of “REFLEX”. It constitutes a “folding-back” upon the “multi-layered-self” with a “multi-layered-attribution”; which could be any of the following: esteem; disteem; contingency-qualifications; & “competing-positing-projects”

In other words, this undertaking was “massive”. So do not expect easy reading or easy appropriation of his ideas. Instead, expect engagement with the text, a little additional vocabulary work; and then, ultimately; a feeling of “accomplishment”, for having gone down this road with Ricoeur. Dig in and enjoy the rewarding struggle. 5 stars for this profound thinker.

26 of 27 people found the following review helpful.

Who Am I as Another? A self.

By Charles W. Murry

Without a doubt, Paul Ricoeur's "Oneself as Another" is dense and indicative of Ricoeur's expansive familiarity with myriad philosophical trajectories and traditions, from Ordinary Language Philosophy to Phenomenology to Deconstructionism, to name a few. It is this philosophical fluency, which allows Ricoeur to articulate an extensive philosophy of the self, an inquiry into the nature of the identity of the human person. Given the sections to which my inquiry is primarily confined (Studies 5-7), it goes without saying that such a review as my own can hardly do justice to this particular other, who is Ricoeur, or to the extent of his philosophy of self. I will, however, attempt to draw out what I view as essential to these sections, which necessarily presuppose that which leads up to the current issues and anticipates future ones.

The project that Ricoeur engages in is an arduous one, though it is taken for granted in everyday language. The "I" of the person in common parlance asserts itself as one who is--an ontological and unambiguous reality as real and as given as the air that "I" breaths. Ricoeur's desire is to transcend the hegemony of "I," however, and to articulate a philosophy of self where the "I" is neither the first principle, but nor is it simply another "separate further fact." In other words, Ricoeur seeks to develop a conceptualization of selfhood that is neither the conventional exalted ego identified by Descartes, nor one which is the utterly humiliated and reduced self of deconstructionist philosophy. A self conceived in the former terms exhibits god-like status and, without the support of a trusting God to ensure one is not being deceived, that god-like status (of being an ontological reality) is ultimately all that can be conceived of as certain and a solipsistic attitude of suspicion is difficult if not impossible to avoid for all that is deemed other. A self understood in terms of the latter deconstructionist thought echoes the Nietzschean assertion regarding perspectivalism where no ontological realities are to be found. Instead, only a fabricated and utterly contingent person (if it can be called such) is present, and who really amounts to not much more than a grammatical convenience and semantic fluke. In either case meaning and value meet either a nihilistic fate or a narcissistic existence. Meaning and value, perhaps, can be construed here in terms of Ricoeur's project of hermeneutical and phenomenological descriptions of oneself as another, respectively. With regard to the two fates, I understand

the latter in terms of the essential turn to the subject where the self becomes first principle, the primary datum by which and through which all other reality is "given" meaning, and the former as the deconstructionist paring away at the self until nothing remains but a series of chance, albeit intrinsically neutral, events, i.e. no self as such.

Ricoeur sees in this philosophical quagmire of self a confrontation between the concept of identity as "sameness" (Latin *idem*) and identity as "selfhood" (Latin *ipse*). When approached from a foundationalist point of view, a posited ontological self threatens the possibility of diversity within and outside of that self. Any kind of change is dangerous inasmuch as it threatens the sameness which constitutes that self. Ricoeur cited for example the notion of self as understood by Locke as demonstrating such a problem. For Locke, substantial identity which corresponds to the ability to identify the self-same over time, is bound up with memory, and memory becomes substantive reflection in the moment where in the end sameness prevails. Ricoeur comments that Locke's approach marks "a conceptual reversal in which the selfhood was silently substituted for sameness" (126). When approached from the point of view of deconstruction, where no substantive self is to be found (i.e. no principle of sameness which Ricoeur will refer to as permanence in time) the self is fleeting and elusive, an epiphenomenon that is traced to physical events, brute and neutral facts, which are hermeneutically vacuous. As representative of this line of thought, Ricoeur offers the example of Hume (and later Derek Parfit) whose doubt and suspicion render the verdict that the self is an illusion. Hume only finds "a diversity of experiences and no invariable expression relative to the idea of a self" when he enters "most intimately" into himself (127).

Part of the drive for this philosophy of self for Ricoeur, then, is the desire to formulate an answer to the question of selfhood that mediates between Locke's substantive sameness, which leaves no room for alterity without destroying the self that is constituted by uninterrupted continuity, and Hume's illusory self, which Hume is unable to find upon looking for it. In objection to Hume's nihilistic analysis and conclusion, Ricoeur is quick to point out that there is, indeed, "someone who claims to be unable to find anything but a datum stripped of selfhood [heat, cold, any perception in the memory]; someone who penetrates within himself, seeks and declares to have found nothing" (128). What then drives us to impose an identity on successive sense perceptions and to "assume that we possess an invariable and uninterrupted existence during the entire course of our life" to which some kind of sameness of self can be posited? (127).

This drive to impose an identity, to ask the question "Who am I?" (regardless of the answer), is the essential hinge around which Ricoeur's philosophy of self revolves because it asserts over against ontological certainty and deconstruction emptiness an agent "who" asks. Yet, this "who" who asks is always a "who" who acts; further, this self who acts is someone recognizable, reidentifiable (either by oneself or by another), and such re-cognition and re-identification only become necessary where sameness is threatened: this threat Ricoeur identifies as time. Of this Ricoeur says: "Looking back, the greatest lacuna in our earlier studies most obviously concerns the temporal dimension of the self as well as of action as such" (113). Time is an implicit dimension in action, thus identity. But what provides that essential "permanence in time" to which the self can look to as a composite whole, a singular self, and not simply a "separate further fact"? The answer to this question involves a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutical descriptions of and prescriptions for the self and the placing of selfhood in between a dialectic of *idem* and *ipse*, that is, of sameness and selfhood. This is accomplished by positing that identity is rooted in narrative. Narrative is by definition temporal. For Ricoeur, then, personal identity, the self, "can be articulated only in the temporal dimension of human existence" (113-114). Narrative becomes the mediator between description and understanding (and eventually prescription), between *idem* and *ipse*, and between the self and the other.

Ricoeur's reliance on the phenomenological tradition is evident in the very title *Oneself as Another* as it is throughout the work. This phrase is not simply (or only) a reference to an analogical relationship signified by

"as," between oneself and other, but an indication of the project as a phenomenological endeavor from start to finish. The "I" so common in everyday language, with its conventional tie to the Cartesian tradition is bracketed in an effort to resolve paradoxes regarding identity. The self, then, is not approached as an "I," but as an experienced self--as something that constitutes substantive appearance over time.

The self as rooted in action becomes the question of "who?" acts and how actions are always interactions. The encounter time and again with such "facts" of life (i.e. actions) acquire meaning only in the context of acquired habits and acquired identifications. That is to say, our experiences are always interpreted in the context of one's previous encounters with the phenomena corresponding to the experience. This, of course, brings oneself back to the experience of that self and points to the title's deeper phenomenological presuppositions. Just as we cannot experience a "chair" as meaningful object crafted for the purpose of sitting without prior experiences with items of this type, neither can we know ourselves except through encounters with other such phenomena--a history of encounters that teach us what a self is, hence, oneself as another.

What other philosophical approaches (and theological approaches as well) have sought is substantive reference, an ontological basis for the self where the self is the starting place, the origin, the point of departure. By introducing the narrative identity (or the temporal dimension) into the constitution of the self Ricoeur has attested that the self is something which cannot be an ontological point of origin out of which everything else is known, but is rather the destination arrived at--and still only to find that the destination is not final, but is only layover. Perhaps in theological terms, the self is the "already" and the "not yet" of the person.

The difference between person and self as implied in Ricoeur's analysis is a distinction between "what" I am and "who" I am. Ricoeur's project is in the latter, but to provide an ontological basis of the self, (i.e. to avoid a deconstructionist and nihilistic spiral into nothingness), the whatness of "who I am" (idem) must remain part of this equation of identity. It is the difference between either a meon-ontological collapse into something (vis-à-vis the deconstructionist project) or an ontological collapse into solipsistic ego (via traditional Cartesian notions of self, or better expressed in Hume and Parfit). Narrative theory provides the mediation between the descriptive actions that constitute character and the intentional self-constancy that constitutes selfhood. The person is one who is dependent upon that other for a guiding hermeneutic and is fragile insofar as authentic selfhood is contingent upon keeping one's word.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

An amazing analyst

By Lazy reviewer

Ricoeur takes up the question of self-identity in this book, and probes the relationship of sameness or personal stability to selfhood or reflexive self-narration. It extends the ideas of his earlier work, especially *Time and Narrative*. Ricoeur habitually works within the traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics, and in this book [as in many others] is occupied in doing critique of the analytic writers on action, of Kant, and of phenomenology. He generates a stance that can uncover aporias rivaling [and as far as I know, deeper than] those found by post-structuralists, while holding that the subject is not just a discursive effect and is more profoundly ethical. His critical foci seem oddly chosen, since the more obvious scholars for critique would be Heidegger and Levinas, neither of whom is really central to his argument. Perhaps he was influenced by the fact that this book is an elaboration on the Edinburgh Lectures, which might naturally focus on analytic philosophy, and perhaps he is trying, as usual, to find grounds for mediating rival traditions and retaining what is valuable in each.

Ricoeur is worth study because of his conscientious and constructive critiques. His turns of thought are

persuasive, impressive, and valuable even to readers who are not professional philosophers of any stripe [such as myself]. The book is difficult but pretty accessible.

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