

OTHERNESS AND DESIRE IN PAUL RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS OF THE SELF

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Paul Ricoeur's ideas of otherness and desire. Both play a significant role in Ricoeur's philosophy in general, and in his hermeneutics of the self in *Oneself as Another* in particular. The thesis I defend in this article is that desire for otherness is nevertheless a blind spot in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. In order to defend this thesis I will examine Ricoeur's triadic understanding of the other in the final chapter of *Oneself as Another* and in his essay "Multiple Étrangeté." I will argue that in his triadic understanding of otherness, Ricoeur clearly describes three different experiences of the other affecting the capable self in talking, acting, narrating and being responsible, i.e., the experience of the world affecting the flesh, the experience of compassion for other people in relations of solicitude, and the experience of the other that is the inner voice of conscience. I will further argue that Ricoeur's understanding of otherness nevertheless insufficiently describes the experience of desire for otherness in the particular sense of the self's attraction to otherness, which is different from these three experiences and which is nevertheless a significant experience for understanding the self's capacity to talk, act, narrate and take responsibility.

Keywords: Other; Desire; Self; Flesh; Conscience.

Introduction

This article aims to examine Ricoeur's understanding of otherness in relation to his understanding of desire. Otherness and desire are without doubt both important concepts in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, and in his philosophy as a whole. Desire has a significant place in Ricoeur's philosophy from his earliest writings on. It already plays a major part in the first and the second volumes of the 'tritych' on the philosophy of the will, published in 1950 and 1960, *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* respectively². The significance of the idea of otherness in Ricoeur's philosophy received new impetus in 1990 with the publication of Ricoeur's major work

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² See: Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. E. V. Kohák (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007) & Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. C. A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

on intersubjectivity, *Oneself as Another*³. In the final chapter of this book, but also in his essay “Multiple Étrangeté,” which has recently been re-published in the third volume of *Écrits et conférences*⁴, Ricoeur develops a triadic understanding of otherness: the other in the sense of the world that affects the flesh, other people, and the other that is the inner voice of conscience.

Recently, critics have questioned Ricoeur’s understanding of otherness, arguing that otherness is reduced to the self in Ricoeur’s description of the other⁵. This article focuses on Ricoeur’s triadic understanding of otherness in his hermeneutics of the self, and particularly examines the consequences of this understanding for the idea of *desire*. If, according to Ricoeur, the other should be understood in terms of the self, as these critics contend, to what extent does Ricoeur describe the experience of desire for the *other* than self?

This article argues that desire for otherness is a blind spot in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self. The first section argues that, for Ricoeur, the relation with the other is metaphysical, and lies at the foundation of his hermeneutics of the self. The three sections that follow explain Ricoeur’s triadic understanding of the other as meta-category: the other of the flesh, other people, and the other as the inner voice of conscience, which describe the other on three different levels. I will argue that each of these levels describes a particular experience in which otherness affects the capable self, and accordingly motivates the self to action: to talk, to act, to narrate and to take responsibility. I will further argue that Ricoeur’s description of these three different experiences of otherness nevertheless all remain unclear on the idea of desire for otherness, and on how this desire affects the capable self in talking, acting, narrating and taking responsibility.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴ See: Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* & Paul Ricoeur, “Multiple Etrangeté,” in: Paul Ricoeur, *Anthropologie Philosophique. Écrits et conférences 3*, J. Michel & J. Porée (eds.) (Paris: Seuil, 2013). I use my own translations when quoting from this work.

⁵ These critics more specifically discuss the relationship between Ricoeur’s and Levinas’ understanding of the other, and argue that Levinas’ description of the other offers a better explanation of the other than self. See, for example, Peter Kemp, “Ricoeur between Heidegger and Levinas,” in: R. Kearney (ed.), *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE, 1996), 41-61. For a similar criticism of Ricoeur’s interpretation of Levinas see: Patrick L. Bourgeois, “Ricoeur and Levinas: Solitude in Reciprocity and Solitude in Existence,” in: Richard A. Cohen & James L. Marsh (eds.), *Ricoeur as Another. The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: SUNY, 2002), 109-26. See also, in the same volume: Richard A. Cohen, “Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian Response to Ricoeur on Levinas,” 127-60. For a theory that argues that Levinas has a better understanding of the other’s vulnerability see: Nathalie Maillard, *La vulnérabilité. Une nouvelle catégorie morale?* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2011). For an alternative comparison with regard to the idea of vulnerability see: Cyndie Sautereau, “Subjectivité et Vulnérabilité chez Ricoeur et Levinas,” in: *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricoeur Studies* (4:2), 2013, 8-24.

The other as meta-category

The idea of the other is imperative for Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. Significant in this respect is the title of Ricoeur's major work on the self, *Oneself as Another*, which already suggests that the self should be understood in reference to the other and vice versa. In the secondary literature, commentators acknowledge Ricoeur's insistence on understanding the self in close relationship to the other. Johann Michel, for instance, interprets the publication of *Oneself as Another* as what he calls "the turn to intersubjectivity" in Ricoeur's philosophy⁶.

Ricoeur's idea of otherness is strongly influenced by Levinas. In particular, Ricoeur recognizes in Levinas' idea of the other a breakthrough in contemporary moral philosophy. In his article, "The Concept of Responsibility," Ricoeur claims that Levinas introduces the idea that the "vulnerability" and "fragility" of "other people" are the primary "object of concern" or "care," and, in that sense, "the source of morality"⁷. However, Ricoeur perhaps elaborates most on Levinas' philosophy in *Oneself as Another* (1990), in which he devotes a considerable part of the seventh and tenth chapters to a discussion of Levinas' idea of the other, and in which he builds on this idea to define his own notion of the self⁸.

Ricoeur's idea of otherness, nevertheless, has been the inspiration for much discussion. Whether or not the other should be understood in terms of the self is the main point of divergence between Ricoeur and Levinas themselves. In 1990, Ricoeur summarized this difference in a letter to Levinas as follows: "If there is a difference between you and me, it consists precisely in that I support the thesis that the other would not be recognized as the source of interpellation and injunction if he were not capable of evoking or awaking self-esteem"⁹.

What is more, several commentators on Ricoeur and Levinas criticize Ricoeur's interpretation of Levinas, and particularly question Ricoeur's attempt to

⁶ See: "Le tournant de l'intersubjectivité," in: Johann Michel, *Paul Ricoeur: une philosophie de l'agir humain* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2006), 73-119.

⁷ Ricoeur, "The Concept of Responsibility," in: Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. D. Pellauer (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 188 ff. & 329 ff.

⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "L'Unicité humaine du pronom je," in: Jean-Cristophe Aeschlimann, *Répondre d'autrui: Emmanuel Levinas* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1989), 37. "S'il y a entre vous et moi quelque différend, il se situe exactement au point où je soutiens que le visage de l'autre ne saurait être reconnu comme source d'interpellation et d'injonction que s'il s'avère capable d'éveiller ou de réveiller une estime de soi, laquelle, je l'accorde volontiers, resterait inchoative, non déployée, et pour tout dire infirme hors de la puissance d'éveille de l'autre." The translation is my own.

understand the relation with the other in terms of the capable self¹⁰. Nathalie Maillard, for example, argues that since Ricoeur thinks of the intersubjective relation in terms of mutual recognition and friendship, he does not offer many resources to understand the specific asymmetrical relation in which a vulnerable other depends on the self's care¹¹.

Whereas Ricoeur certainly offers, in Maillard's opinion, the resources for understanding the ethical relation in terms of action and in terms of the recognition of the other as a capable human being, Levinas nevertheless demonstrates, even more so than Ricoeur, that generosity begins in being affected by the other who is vulnerable, and is therefore also different from the capable self¹².

In a similar voice, Cyndie Sautereau argues that Levinas has a better understanding of the other's vulnerability than Ricoeur. As Sautereau points out, Ricoeur's philosophy is first and foremost "a philosophy of human *action*"¹³. In this respect, Ricoeur thinks of vulnerability in terms of subjectivity, or, more accurately, in terms of the negative of subjectivity. Levinas, on the other hand, understands vulnerability in the first place as the fragility of the other, distinct from the self's capacities. For Sautereau, Ricoeur's emphasis on capability thus risks a certain depreciation of vulnerability, insofar as Ricoeur conceives of vulnerability in the first place as a malfunction or fault in human action. The question Sautereau poses is whether Ricoeur's notion of vulnerability does justice to certain figures of vulnerability that should probably not be understood in terms of malfunction, which could be associated with people with a disability, for example.

Indeed, Ricoeur understands the other in terms of the capable self. According to Ricoeur, the relation between self and other should be understood within

¹⁰ See footnote 5.

¹¹ Maillard, *La Vulnérabilité*, 355-6. "Chez Ricoeur [...] le cogito brisé comme le soi reste tributaire d'une conception de la subjectivité active et capable. [...] La définition persistante de la subjectivité en rapport avec ses pouvoirs explique peut-être aussi pourquoi le thème de "l'homme souffrant" est traité sur un mode finalement mineur. [...] [O]n a vu que le thème de la vulnérabilité, dans *Soi-même comme un autre*, occupait une toute petite place et que son vis-à-vis, la sollicitude peinait à trouver son sens spécifique; qu'elle confondait même parfois, dans sa visée, avec la reconnaissance mutuelle et l'amitié. On ne peut donc pas dire que le philosophe [Ricoeur] donne vraiment toute sa place à la dimension vulnérable de l'existence humaine et au type de rapport intersubjective qu'elle commande."

¹² Maillard, *La vulnérabilité*, 358. "Ricoeur a certainement raison lorsqu'il soutient que l'homme possède des ressources de bonté contemporaines de et internes à son désir d'être et que la capacité de donner appartient à la sphère de ses pouvoirs. Mais il ne remarque pas suffisamment que la mobilisation de la générosité s'effectue sur le fond d'une affection par l'autre, que Levinas en revanche théorise [...]. La subjectivité, chez Levinas, est sensibilité; c'est l'expérience de sa propre vulnérabilité qui constitue le sujet comme sujet éthique [...]."

¹³ Sautereau, "Subjectivité et vulnérabilité chez Ricoeur et Levinas", 9 ff. "En effet, la philosophie de Ricoeur reste avant tout une philosophie de l'*agir* humain."

the ontology of what he calls “power and action [*puissance et acte*]”¹⁴. In a sense, Ricoeur’s ontology of the capable self already presupposes the interaction with the other than self. As Ricoeur states in “Multiple Étrangeté,” he aims to distinguish between two discourses: the metaphysical and the anthropological.¹⁵ Furthermore, it is Ricoeur’s opinion that the “meta-category” of the other is the subject of metaphysical discourse and that his phenomenological hermeneutics of the self presupposes this metaphysical discourse.¹⁶ According to Ricoeur, the “phenomenology of alterity [*la phénoménologie de l’altérité*]” is thus related to his “phenomenology of action [*la phénoménologie de l’agir*].” In that sense, alterity is included in the four dimensions of his hermeneutics of the capable self that explains what it means “to talk [*parler*],” “to act [*faire*],” “to narrate [*raconter*],” and “to hold oneself to be the subject of moral imputation [*se soumettre à l’imputation morale*]”¹⁷.

If Ricoeur does incorporate Levinas’ idea of the other into his understanding of the capable self, as the above-mentioned critiques of Maillard and Sautereau already suggest, one question is to what extent this understanding reduces otherness to the self. In the following, I will examine Ricoeur’s understanding of otherness, focusing particularly on the notion of *desire*. I will discuss Ricoeur’s triadic understanding of otherness in *Oneself as Another* and in “Multiple Étrangeté”¹⁸. I will argue that Ricoeur demonstrates in what sense otherness motivates human speech, action, narration and responsibility in a threefold sense (through the affect of otherness in the flesh, through the affect of other people, and through the affect of the other voice of conscience), but that Ricoeur nevertheless insufficiently explains desire for otherness – an experience that is significant for understanding human speech, action, narration and responsibility. If Ricoeur’s phenomenology of otherness mainly deals with the relation between otherness and the capable self, this phenomenology does not deal with the relationship between desire for otherness and the self’s capacity to talk, act, narrate and take responsibility.

¹⁴ Sautereau, “Subjectivité et vulnérabilité chez Ricoeur et Levinas,” 397.

¹⁵ Ricoeur, “Multiple Étrangeté,” 393. “Il faut [...] distinguer soigneusement le niveau de discours que l’on peut appeler métaphysique, en insistant sur la fonction *méta-* en tant que telle, et le niveau de discours relevant de la compréhension et de l’interprétation du soi humain.”

¹⁶ Ricoeur, “Multiple Étrangeté,” 397. “[C]’est la fonction de la méta-catégorie de l’autre de disperser les modalités phénoménales de l’altérité.” & Ricoeur, “Multiple Étrangeté,” 395. “[L]a phénoménologie herméneutique se comprend mieux elle-même lorsque qu’elle place son propre discours sous l’égide de la fonction *méta-* [...]”

¹⁷ Ricoeur, “Multiple Étrangeté,” 396-8.

¹⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* & Ricoeur, “Multiple Etrangeté.”

The Flesh

In his phenomenology of otherness, Ricoeur understands otherness in a triadic sense, which he presents in the final chapter of *Oneself as Another* and in “Multiple Étrangeté” in terms of the other of the world that affects the flesh, in terms of the stranger, the foreigner or the other human being, and in terms of the inner forum or the voice of conscience¹⁹. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur understands the other in terms of:

the *triad of passivity and, hence, of otherness*. First, there is the passivity represented by the experience of one's own body—or better, as we shall say later, of the *flesh*—as the mediator between the self and a world which is itself taken in accordance with its variable degrees of practicability and so of foreignness. Next, we find the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the *foreign*, in the precise sense of the other (than) self, and so the otherness inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity. Finally, we have the most deeply hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is *conscience* in the sense of *Gewissen* rather than of *Bewusstsein*²⁰.

In short, the other, for Ricoeur, is the other that affects the self passively, first in the sense of the strangeness of the world that affects the flesh, secondly in the sense of other people that affect the self, and thirdly in the sense of the inner voice of conscience that affects the self.

As these lines suggests, Ricoeur aims to understand the other essentially in relation to the self. Significant in this respect is the choice of the adverb *as* in the title of his work on the self and the other: *Oneself as Another*. This choice not only suggests that the other, even in the sense of the foreign that is other than self, is also a self and vice versa, but also that otherness and strangeness should not be understood without reference to the self. Indeed, as Ricoeur asserts in *Oneself as Another*, otherness “belongs [...] to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological constitution of selfhood

¹⁹ See: Ricoeur, “Multiple Étrangeté,” 400. “J’ai proposé dans *Soi-même comme un autre* de faire éclater dans trois directions l’exploration du champ varié de l’altérité: vers la *chair*, en tant que médiatrice entre le soi et un monde lui-même pris selon ses modalités multiples d’habitabilité et d’étrangeté; vers *l’étranger* en tant qu’il est mon semblable pourtant extérieur à moi-même; enfin, vers cet autre que figure *le for intérieur*, désigné par la voix autre de la conscience adressée à moi du fond de moi-même.”

²⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

[...]”²¹. With this assertion, Ricoeur’s phenomenology of otherness marks a rupture with Levinas’ philosophy, according to which the other is radically other than self²².

The first figure of the other that Ricoeur describes is the other of the world that affects the flesh. In his description of the flesh, Ricoeur draws on Maine de Biran’s theory of sensation, as well as on Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of the flesh and the body.²³ More precisely, the flesh designates, for Ricoeur, the possession of a sensible body, in the sense described by Maine de Biran’s idea of “touch,” and by Husserl’s concept of “*hulē*,” in the sense of the body that is part of the material world that affects it.

According to Ricoeur, “affection” of the flesh of the body is the primordial relation with the other insofar as it is the ontological condition of interactions with others. As Ricoeur writes, the flesh “is the origin of alteration of ownness”²⁴. This means that what Ricoeur calls the flesh marks the condition of sensible relations between the self and the outside, that is, with the other that is the sensible world.

Ricoeur’s phenomenological analysis of the flesh demonstrates, I believe, in what sense the affection of the flesh is the primal contact with alterity, and, in that sense, conditions the self’s capacity to act and to interact with others. In Ricoeur’s understanding, “selfhood implies its own proper otherness, so to speak, for which the flesh is the support”²⁵. Moreover, in this regard, “the otherness of the flesh” precedes “the stranger”²⁶. Ricoeur’s notion of the flesh thus defines the condition of the relation with the world. It explains that relations with the world occur through the sensation of the strangeness experienced in the contact of one’s own body with this world. In this line of reasoning, to talk, to act, to narrate and to be responsible already imply being affected by the world, and interactions with others imply the sensation of the

²¹ Ricoeur, “Multiple Etrangeté,” 317.

²² See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008) & Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006). The central aim of both of Levinas’ major works, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, is to break with the idea, typical of “Western thought” that the other should be understood in terms of a totality or essence, and particularly in terms of an ontology of the self. *Totality and Infinity* aims to demonstrate that the relation with the other cannot be reduced to the “totality” of a concept (p. 21). In a different way, *Otherwise than Being* is written in defense of understanding the manifestation of sense in the relation with the other (the “Saying” as Levinas calls it) in non-ontological terms (i.e., the “said”): “The correlation of the saying and the said, that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands” (p. 6).

²³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 320 ff.

²⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

²⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

²⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

strangeness felt in the contact of one's own body with the world. For instance, talking to other people already implies being affected by the surroundings of the place in which one is talking.

Following this line of reasoning, Ricoeur's notion of the flesh explains the very condition of desire: "The fact that the flesh is most originally mine and of all things that which is closest, that its aptitude for feeling is revealed most characteristically in the sense of touch [...], these primordial features make it possible for the flesh to be the organ of desire, the support of free movement"²⁷. Insofar as it defines the condition of the self's sensible relation with the world, Ricoeur's notion of the flesh points to the very origin of the self's desires: sensation is the locus of desire.

However, if Ricoeur's analysis of the flesh demonstrates the affective experience that conditions action, interaction with others, and desire, it does not therefore explain, so I contend, the experience of desire for otherness. Certainly, the flesh, as understood by Ricoeur, may refer to several sensible relations with the other, including that of desire for others. However, even though Ricoeur's notion of the flesh defines the condition of desire for others, it essentially refers to the other in terms of the self, that is, in terms of the strangeness of one's own body, felt in the contact with the external world. Understood in this sense, the other of the flesh refers to the contact with one's own body, and thus not, in the first place, to an otherness beyond the body that is the object of desire.

It might be objected that desire for others ultimately amounts to a desire of one's own flesh, since that which is experienced in desiring others *is* the sensation of one's own flesh evoked by the other. However, this does not appear to be Ricoeur's point, because he emphasizes that the flesh is not the object of desire. As Ricoeur states, the flesh is "the organ of desire," and is not "the object of [...] desire"²⁸.

Furthermore, Ricoeur's notion of the flesh designates a passive relation in which one is affected by the other, rather than a relation of desire for others, which appears to imply, in addition, a description of the experience of being attracted to the other than self. In other words, Ricoeur's phenomenological analysis of the flesh in *Oneself as Another* is unclear about how the experience of desire for otherness should be understood. Significant in this respect is that Ricoeur primarily gives examples of passive relations to illustrate his notion of the flesh. For instance, he mentions the

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

²⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 324.

sensation of bodily effort, and the sensation of suffering caused by others.²⁹ Given that Ricoeur's notion of the flesh defines the medium of the relation of desire for others (i.e., being affected by others), it does not define the relation with the object of desire (i.e., the experience of desire).

If Ricoeur's idea of the flesh insufficiently describes, as I am arguing, the experience of desire for others, an analysis of such an experience nevertheless appears to be significant for understanding the capable self. The following passage from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* illustrates the significance of desire for others to the understanding of the self's capacity to act and interact with others. In the second book, the Elder Zosima tells the story of a doctor who declares that he loves humanity and that he is even willing to make the greatest sacrifices for humanity as such, but that he nevertheless cannot spend time with others. Zosima quotes the words of the doctor:

In my dreams, he [the doctor] said, "I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity [...]; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together, as I know by experience. As soon as anyone is near me, his personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. [...] I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me"³⁰.

Apparently, the doctor in Dostoyevsky's example lacks the capacity for interaction with others. The otherness of other people, which marks the difference with regard to his own self, is exactly what makes him reject others. However, if the doctor's failure to appreciate the other than self is the reason for his incapacity to interact with others, it appears that this interaction (i.e., to talk, to act, to narrate and to hold oneself the subject of moral imputation) presupposes, in a certain sense, desire for otherness, or is, at least, influenced by it to some extent.

Even if one is capable of recognizing another human being in the other, or another self, as is the case for the doctor in Dostoyevsky's example, desire for this other, in the sense of the attraction to the other's otherness, appears thus to be at play in interactions with this other. In this respect, narration about others, for example, is possibly influenced by desire for others, both in positive and negative ways. Racist

²⁹ See: Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 320 ff.

³⁰ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (Mineola (NY): Dover Publications Inc., 2005), 48.

discourse and action, for example, are often linked to xenophobia³¹. In the positive sense, desire for otherness stimulates the self's welcoming of strangers.

In sum, given that, for Ricoeur, the notion of the flesh describes the passive moment of being affected by the other that conditions desire, this notion insufficiently describes the relation to the other in terms of desire. It appears then that to explain such a relation, and, in that manner, to explain in what sense this desire influences interactions with others, implies a phenomenological analysis other than Ricoeur's analysis of the flesh.

Other People

If, as I have argued in the previous section, Ricoeur's analysis of the flesh clearly describes the affective relation with the world that is the condition of desire, but nevertheless insufficiently describes the experience of this desire itself, it might seem that Ricoeur's analysis of solicitude in *Oneself as Another* gives a description of this experience. Indeed, Ricoeur's analysis of solicitude reflects the second element of his triadic understanding of otherness in that it analyzes the ethical relation with other people. What is more, solicitude, for Ricoeur, is based on Aristotle's notion of desire³².

To what extent does Ricoeur's analysis of solicitude express the idea of desire for otherness? For Ricoeur, solicitude should be understood in relation to Aristotle's idea of true friendship, which includes mutual desire. As formulated by Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*, "friendship [...] presents itself from the outset as a *mutual* relationship, [r]eciprocity is part of its most basic definition [...]." Moreover, he states that: "According to the idea of mutuality, each *loves* the other *as being the man he is* [...]; the greatest good that a friend *desires* for his friend is to stay just as he is"³³.

While Ricoeur's idea of solicitude is thus inspired by Aristotle's idea of mutual desire, he is also critical of this idea insofar as it inadequately explains, in Ricoeur's opinion, the ethical relation with the other, which Ricoeur understands as solicitude. As Ricoeur writes: "One will readily grant that there is no place for a

³¹ See for instance the report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) 2001 <<http://www.unesco.org/most/migration/imrdx.pdf>>.

³² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 180 ff.

³³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 183, 184. My emphasis.

straightforward concept of otherness in Aristotle³⁴. While Ricoeur's notion of the flesh appears to describe the condition of a sensible relation with the other, but not desire for the other, his notion of solicitude is closely related to the idea of desire. However, apparently this idea should also not be understood as desire for otherness.

In fact, Ricoeur's idea of solicitude is closely related to the notion of obligation toward the other, and in this sense is at odds with desire. In this respect, Marcel Hénaff relates Ricoeur's criticism of Aristotle to the idea of the Golden Rule³⁵. According to Hénaff, although Aristotle's idea of friendship introduces the concept of mutuality, it does not yet define solicitude, expressed by the principle of the Golden Rule, of the obligation to recognize the other.³⁶ In other words, Ricoeur sees in Aristotle's idea of friendship an expression of mutuality, in the sense of giving in order to receive equally in return, but this mutuality is not yet reciprocity in the sense of the recognition of the *obligation* to give equally in return. Thus, Hénaff's interpretation of Ricoeur points out that he is critical of Aristotle's notion of friendship because it does not imply the idea of mutual obligation. Indeed, Ricoeur explicitly indicates that the equality of solicitude "is not that of friendship, in which giving and receiving are hypothetically balanced"³⁷. As these lines suggest, Ricoeur sees in Aristotle's idea of friendship traces of the recognition proper to solicitude, but this recognition is nevertheless not the same as that of solicitude.

In Ricoeur's understanding, solicitude is the ethical foundation of the moral principle of respect for others, which finds its cultural roots in the Golden Rule, or in the obligation to give equally in return. Ricoeur identifies the Golden Rule as Hillel's Talmudic principle: "Do not do unto your neighbor what you would hate him to do to you. This is the entire law; the rest is commentary." In its positive formulation, the Golden Rule is defined in the Gospel of Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, as the

³⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 187.

³⁵ Marcel Hénaff, "Remarques sur la Règle d'Or. Ricoeur et la question de la réciprocité," in M. Revault-d'Alonnes & F. Azouvi (eds.), *Cahier de l'Herne Ricoeur* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 326-37.

³⁶ Hénaff, "Remarques sur la Règle d'Or." 331. "[L]a réciprocité que Aristote critique [...] et qu'il reconnaît pourtant à la racine de l'amitié, c'est celle de toute la tradition, *celle aussi qu'énonce la Règle d'Or: une exigence de réplique* qui peut être formulée positivement ("Fais à autrui") ou négativement ("Ne fais pas..."), mais qui contient cette nécessité du *mouvement en retour*. [...] Incontestablement la morale aristotélicienne édulcore déjà la vieille logique du geste en retour, [...] mais pas toujours ou pas assez. Il faudrait pour cela pleinement reconnaître l'altérité d'autrui. Cela manque chez Aristote souligne justement Ricoeur."

³⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 190.

principle: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” or in the Gospel of Luke in the Sermon of the Plain, as the rule to “Treat others as you would like them to treat you”³⁸.

The Golden Rule, as Ricoeur understands it in these three different senses, is related to solicitude insofar as it formulates, in the form of a rule, the sense of justice proper to the relation of solicitude. More precisely, it translates solicitude into the principle of charity or love of neighbor. In this sense, the principle of treating others as yourself expresses the experience proper to solicitude – to esteem another as oneself. The Golden Rule, being this principle of charity, in its turn has the same significance as the purely formalistic norm of respecting others as persons, i.e., the second formulation of the categorical imperative³⁹.

Certainly, solicitude in Ricoeur’s understanding is spontaneous and therefore not merely a response to an obligation, norm or rule. In Ricoeur’s view, care or solicitude is the spontaneous recognition of the suffering of another in true sympathy or compassion for that suffering. Solicitude “occurs, originating in the suffering other [...]”:

Being confronted with the suffering other, the self [...] gives his sympathy, his compassion, these terms taken in the strong sense of the wish to share someone else’s pain. [...] In true sympathy, the self [...] finds itself affected [...]. For it is indeed feelings that are revealed in the self by the other’s suffering [...], feelings spontaneously directed towards others. This intimate union between the ethical aim of solicitude and the affective flesh of feelings seems to me to justify the choice of the term “solicitude”⁴⁰.

These lines suggest that solicitude (i.e., the act of caring for another) begins with the passive affect of concern, understood as sympathy or true compassion. Through spontaneous affects of sympathy for another, who is vulnerable and exposed to suffering, one cares, in estimating another’s life as valuable, in the sense that one is anxious about another’s suffering⁴¹. Given that solicitude is a spontaneous way of being

³⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 219.

³⁹ In this regard, I follow Johann Michel’s interpretation of Ricoeur, according to which the Golden Rule allows Ricoeur to understand the moral principle of respecting others not in the purely formalistic Kantian sense of the second formulation of the categorical imperative, but in close relation to the concrete historical principle of the Golden Rule. See: Michel, *Paul Ricoeur*, 291 ff.

⁴⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 191-192.

⁴¹ Derived from the Latin *sollicitare*, the French word *sollicitude* (which means *secouer violemment* – being agitated in a violent manner) carries within it the significance of caring in terms of being anxious, troubled, or worried. “Solliciter,” *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*, eds. Oscar Bloch & Walter von Wartburg (Paris: PUF, 2008).

affected, it is not simply “a dreary duty” according to Ricoeur⁴². Therefore, solicitude does not entail merely acting according to the Golden Rule that obligates justice. Rather than expressing the idea that we recognize justice as the result of the recognition of a norm, rule or obligation, Ricoeur’s idea of solicitude expresses the sense of justice proper to compassion.

To be sure, solicitude introduces equality into the relation between self and other insofar as it implies the sharing of another’s suffering in compassion. For Ricoeur, true compassion means “[b]eing confronted with the suffering other,” and suffering with the other in “the strong sense” of sharing “someone else’s pain”⁴³. In Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, solicitude should thus be understood in the original sense of the word, as caring, in terms of being anxious about the suffering of the other. Thus, solicitude, for Ricoeur, is a sharing in another’s suffering, which implies a sense of justice, or the feeling that the suffering of another is unjust, distressing, “too much to support;” hence, the feelings of sharing in another’s suffering, as if this sharing would introduce equality into an unbalanced relationship. In Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, solicitude is the spontaneous recognition that the suffering other is in need of justice.

Given that solicitude, for Ricoeur, is the spontaneous recognition of justice for others, it conflicts with Aristotle’s idea of equality as mutual desire. Certainly, Ricoeur does not ignore the fact that Aristotle’s idea of mutual desire is also closely related to justice. As Ricoeur explains, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle makes his famous distinction between three kinds of friendship: friendship for the sake of the “good” of the beloved, friendship for the sake of “utility,” and friendship for the sake of “pleasure”⁴⁴. It is the first kind of friendship that is closest to justice insofar as friends equally desire the good for each other.

Furthermore, as Ricoeur points out, even if friendship is essentially self-love or “*philautia*” in Aristotle’s definition, in the sense that “one must love oneself in order to love someone else,”⁴⁵ Aristotle’s idea of true friendship for the sake of the good is not egoistic. To be more precise, following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, in Aristotle’s idea of true friendship, the friend is not a means to be used to one’s own advantage, as is the case in friendship out of utility and in friendship out of pleasure. Rather, according to Aristotle’s idea of true friendship, the friend *as such* is desired. As Ricoeur

⁴² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 193.

⁴³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 191.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 182.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 182.

writes: “According to the idea of mutuality, each loves the other *as being the man he is* (8.3.1156a18-19). This is precisely not the case in a friendship based on utility, where one loves the other for the sake of some expected advantage, and even less so in the case of friendship for pleasure”⁴⁶. In Ricoeur’s interpretation of Aristotle, this means that the object of true friendship is the good, which is the intellect: “what is lovable in each of us is the best of the self, the thinking part, the intellect”⁴⁷. In this respect, the ideal friendship for Aristotle is the friendship between two men who spend time together thinking.

According to Ricoeur, the mutual character of Aristotle’s idea of friendship makes it a relation that is close to justice. In Ricoeur’s reading of Aristotle, friendship is just insofar as friends give equally in return for what they receive from their friends. In Ricoeur’s words, Aristotle’s definition of friendship concerns “each of two friends rendering to the other a portion equal to what he or she receives.” For Ricoeur, this means that Aristotle’s notion of friendship introduces justice on the level of “interpersonal relationships” among “a small number of partners,” as opposed to justice on the level of “institutions” among “many citizens”⁴⁸. The mutuality on the level of shared affection in the desire between friends to spend time with each other introduces equality between both parties to the friendship. In that kind of friendship, according to Aristotle, there is a sense of justice, which is similar to what Ricoeur calls solicitude.

However, while Ricoeur recognizes the ethical and just character of Aristotle’s idea of friendship, and acknowledges that this inspires his own idea of solicitude, he nevertheless distinguishes Aristotle’s idea of equality from his own idea as expressed in solicitude. For Ricoeur, Aristotle understands friendship as equal in the sense that friends mutually enjoy each other’s company, while Ricoeur’s idea of equality in solicitude means that self and other “share” each other’s suffering⁴⁹.

In his discussion of Aristotle, Ricoeur points out that there is an essential distinction – which he considers is lacking in Aristotle’s definition of friendship – between sharing the suffering of a friend, and mutual enjoyment or pleasure among friends. In his own words, “Aristotle [...] fails to notice [...] the dissymmetry opposing suffering to enjoyment. Sharing the pain of suffering is not symmetrically opposite to

⁴⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 183.

⁴⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 185.

⁴⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 184.

⁴⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 192.

sharing pleasure.”⁵⁰ Significant in this respect is that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* the ideas of mutual suffering and mutual desire, both proper to friendship, are introduced in the same sentence: “men cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together’; nor can they admit each other to friendship or be friends till each has been found lovable and been trusted by each”⁵¹.

In her book on the relationship between the friend and the other in the works of Aristotle and Ricoeur, Gaëlle Fiasse argues that Ricoeur is skeptical about Aristotle’s thoughts on living together, as understood in the context of a history of ideas, based on the Ancient Greek ideal of being together and thinking together⁵². Fiasse points to the fact that Aristotle defends a notion of desire that Ricoeur does not support. Indeed, as he writes in *Oneself as Another*:

I shall not linger on those characters of ancient *philia* that have more to do with the history of *mentalites* than with conceptual analysis, such as the tie between friendship and leisure — related to the condition of the free citizen, from which are excluded slaves, metics, women, and children — and the narrowing of living together to thinking together, itself oriented toward the sage's contemplative life, as described in the final book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵³

In short, Ricoeur does not appear to accept Aristotle’s idea of mutual desire in his own concept of solicitude, since this idea is reserved for the Ancient Greek ideal of a shared contemplative life between men. Thus, for Ricoeur, the important similarity between the relation of solicitude and that of friendship is that both are essentially relations of equality, of sharing another’s experiences, and, in this sense, of mutual recognition through shared affection. However, the nature of this living together, as defined by Ricoeur’s idea of solicitude, is essentially different from the nature of living together expressed by Aristotle’s idea of mutual desire.

I am not arguing, of course, that Ricoeur would defend the thesis that care necessarily equals suffering, or that it would be impossible to desire to care for others, even if these others cause one to suffer. However, there are several reasons, in my opinion, for concluding that even though Ricoeur’s idea of solicitude does not contradict the idea of desire for others this idea of solicitude does not necessarily imply

⁵⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 191.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 146 [1156b, 26-9].

⁵² Gaëlle Fiasse, *L'autre et l'amitié chez Aristote et Paul Ricoeur* (Leuven: Peeters), p. 65 ff.

⁵³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 188.

this kind of desire. Firstly, Ricoeur thinks of solicitude essentially in terms of mutual recognition through compassion, rather than in terms of mutual desire or desire for otherness. Secondly, he defines solicitude as a relation of “passivity,” and as a “summons to responsibility,”⁵⁴ that is, as a relation in which there is a recognition of the need for justice for others, rather than as a relation grounded in desire for others. What is more, the feelings Ricoeur ascribes to solicitude stimulate “the affective *flesh*.”⁵⁵ As explained above, the notion of flesh, for Ricoeur, designates the self’s passive contact with the world, rather than the self’s desire for otherness.

One might perhaps object that, for Ricoeur, desire for others amounts to self-esteem. Indeed, according to Ricoeur, self-esteem is the reflexive expression of the desire for the good life with and for *others*. As Ricoeur writes in his discussion of Aristotle, “self-esteem is the primordial reflexive moment of the aim for the good life”⁵⁶. Moreover, in his analysis of self-esteem in the first subsection of Chapter 7 of *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur writes that self-esteem is “the reflexive movement to which the evaluation of certain actions judged to be good are carried back to the author of these actions [...]”⁵⁷. For Ricoeur, self-esteem thus motivates the capable self to act for the good life: we act in accordance with what we believe is good because it adds to our self-esteem. However, understood in this sense, self-esteem expresses above all the idea of the self’s desire for the good life, rather than the idea of a desire for otherness.

It appears then that Ricoeur’s analysis of solicitude defines an ethical relation in which there is a recognition of other people, but for this very reason it insufficiently describes the desire for otherness. Ricoeur’s analysis of solicitude explains in what sense other people, on the level of face-to-face encounters, motivate the capable self to ethical action, and in this sense to interaction with others. For example, feelings of compassion could guide the self in taking responsibility. The question that remains regarding Ricoeur’s understanding of otherness in the sense of other people, however, is in what particular sense desire for otherness (or the incapacity for this desire as in Dostoyevsky’s example of the doctor) influences the self’s interaction with others. In this regard, desire for otherness remains a blind spot in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self.

⁵⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 189.

⁵⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 192.

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 188.

⁵⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

Conscience

The third figure of otherness in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self is represented by what Ricoeur understands as the inner voice of conscience. In the remainder of this article I will examine to what extent conscience is related to otherness and desire in Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. To what extent does Ricoeur's idea of conscience represent the idea of desire for otherness?

For Ricoeur, the other, in the sense of the voice of conscience, designates all possible others that the self encounters in the aim for the good life, insofar as these others can speak to the inner voice of conscience. As Ricoeur states, "[l]istening to the voice of conscience would signify being-enjoined by the Other"⁵⁸. Moreover, Ricoeur understands "being-enjoined" in the first place as the call "to live well with and for others in just institutions"⁵⁹. For Ricoeur, the other that calls to our conscience could be understood, for example, as the third who calls for justice on the level of institutions, but also as the other who calls for solicitude in face-to-face encounters. Ricoeur also refers to the other of conscience as "the Freudian superego," in the sense of the moralizing voice constituted by the morals of one's "ancestors"⁶⁰. The otherness of conscience in Ricoeur's phenomenology of the other should thus not strictly be understood as the otherness of other people. As Ricoeur writes in the concluding remarks to *Oneself as Another*, it is important "to stress [...] the need to maintain a certain equivocalness of the status of the Other on the strictly philosophical plane, especially if the otherness of conscience is to be held irreducible to that of other people"⁶¹.

However, if Ricoeur's analysis of conscience describes the relation with the other in the broad sense just explained – of the other that calls to the inner voice of conscience – this analysis does not appear to describe the experience of desire for the other. There is an intimate link, however, between Ricoeur's idea of conscience and his idea of desire in that conscience is affected by the desire for the good life. According to Ricoeur, the call of conscience amounts to the call to live well with and for others in just institutions. In this line of reasoning, it is thus the capable self's belief in a certain

⁵⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 351.

⁵⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 351.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 354.

⁶¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 355.

idea of the good life that motivates the self to speak, act, narrate and take responsibility in a certain manner.

Nevertheless, as I argued above, the aim of the good life is not so much a desire for otherness as it is a desire for an idea of the good life. Granted that the aim for the good life, in Ricoeur's understanding, calls to the inner voice of conscience, this does not necessarily imply that Ricoeur's idea of conscience describes the idea of desire for otherness. Furthermore, Ricoeur's phenomenological analysis of conscience describes the experience of being "enjoined" by the inner voice of conscience, rather than the experience of desiring otherness. Ricoeur, more specifically, defines the experience of being enjoined by the inner voice of conscience as "the passive side" of "conviction," by which he means the passive experience of being affected by a guilty conscience⁶².

It is important to note in this regard, however, that Ricoeur understands the experience of conscience in an unusual sense. It is not merely an experience of self-accusation or of suffering from bad conscience. As Ricoeur explains in the last chapter of *Oneself as Another*, which is devoted to the theme of conscience, he attempts to avoid thinking of conscience either in terms of "bad" or in terms of "good" conscience.⁶³ Even though Ricoeur himself uses the word *accusation* in his description of conscience, his idea of conscience reflects the experience of what Ricoeur understands as attestation, rather than the experience of passive self-accusation. Significant in this regard are Ricoeur's references to Heidegger and to the German word *Gewissheit* (which means "certainty") in his description of conscience⁶⁴.

More specifically, attestation is Ricoeur's idea of "truth," understood not in the "epistemic" sense of a factual "certainty," but in the sense of *alētheia*, similar to both Aristotle's and Heidegger's interpretations of this term⁶⁵. Attestation thus marks the self's capacity to comprehend being, which is, in Ricoeur's understanding, the foundation of the self's capacity for speech, action, narration and responsible behavior. As Ricoeur understands it, attestation is the "assurance," the "credence" or "trust" of "existing in the mode of selfhood"⁶⁶. Moreover, this belief that one's being is true

⁶² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 352.

⁶³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 341.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22. "This word [Gewissen] is better [to describe conscience] than the French *conscience*, which translates both *Bewusstsein* and *Gewissen*; the German *Gewissen* recalls the semantic kinship with *Gewissheit*, 'certainty.'"

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 299.

⁶⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 302.

accompanies “language, action, narrative, and the ethical and moral predicates of actions”⁶⁷. In this line of reasoning, the self’s capacity to talk, to act, to narrate and to take responsibility is motivated by the self’s belief that a specific act, whether in the specific sense of speech, action, narrative or responsibility, is the right thing to do, taking into account that it is possible that this is never grounded on a factual truth, and might turn out to be different from what one believes it is.

Thus, Ricoeur ultimately defines conscience as “suspicion,” in the wake of Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s critique of morality⁶⁸. For Ricoeur, conscience is thus understood in the dialectical sense of “recognition” through dialogue. Drawing on Hegel’s critique of moral postulates, Ricoeur looks for the foundation of ethical and moral life not simply in the passive experience of suffering from bad conscience, as founded on a “legislator outside of this world,” but in natural “desire,” “satisfaction of action”⁶⁹. This interpretation of conscience therefore allows Ricoeur to combine the idea of ethical and moral life based upon conscience with the idea of this life being grounded in the desire for the good life with and for others in just institutions. Similarly, Ricoeur is inspired by Nietzsche’s critique of bad conscience as the promoter of inauthentic values⁷⁰.

Ricoeur defines conscience as “the other side of suspicion,” by which he understands the self’s conviction to act for the good life, and not merely the result of “good conscience” that amounts to “self-justification” or “self-glorification,” but in the sense of being suspicious of the danger of moral hypocrisy.⁷¹ In other words, Ricoeur’s idea of conscience should be understood as the self’s deliberation on how to talk, act, narrate and be responsible, taking into account different aspects of ethical and moral life, such as communal moral values or the morality of one’s ancestors that possibly call to conscience. This idea of acting in accordance with one’s conscience implies avoiding the pretense of living up to ethical and moral standards in a better manner than one actually does, which would be moral hypocrisy. In “Multiple Étrangeté,” Ricoeur also formulates the idea that conscience amounts to inner deliberation, referring to conscience as the “inner forum” (*le for intérieur*)⁷².

⁶⁷ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 302.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 341 ff.

⁶⁹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 343.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 345 ff.

⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 347.

⁷² Ricoeur, “Multiple Etrangeté,” 412.

Ricoeur's idea of conscience as attestation demonstrates, I believe, the self's capacity for deliberation on ethical and moral life, in order to talk, act, narrate and take responsibility. This deliberation is, in turn, motivated by others who affect the inner voice of conscience. In this line of reasoning, telling a story, for example, is influenced by one's belief – formed through a dialogue with others – that there is something significant to be narrated. Exemplary in this respect is the idea of the moral of the story, inspired by common moral values. Otherness thus plays a major part in Ricoeur's idea of conscience.

Moreover, in drawing on Aristotle's idea of desire for the good life, and in defining conscience as the self's capacity to deliberate on one's desire for the good life with and for others in just institutions, Ricoeur describes a notion of conscience that is based on desire. However, ultimately Ricoeur remains silent about how desire for otherness affects the self's experience of conscience, and in that way stimulates the self to talk, act, narrate and take responsibility. Ricoeur's phenomenology of the other thus describes to what extent others affect the self's conscience. For example, the moral values of others in one's community possibly call to the self's conscience. However, it is one thing to examine the experience of others calling to conscience, as Ricoeur's analysis of conscience does, and another to describe the experience of the self's desire for otherness. One question that Ricoeur's analysis of conscience leaves open is to what extent the self's desire for the other, in the particular sense of that which is strange, influences the self's deliberation on the good life. How do we understand the self's attraction to otherness (or lack of it), and its influence on the capable self? Xenophobia, for example, could influence how we judge the morals of our ancestors and in that way both the self's conscience and its deliberation about what is good.

In the end, there remains a blind spot, so I have been arguing, in Ricoeur's phenomenology of otherness, insofar as he does not sufficiently explain how desire for others influences the self's capacity to speak, act, narrate and take responsibility. While his phenomenology does describe, as this article has aimed to show, three different experiences of being affected by others (the experience of the flesh, of care for other people and of the call of the voice of conscience), it does not explain the experience of desire for otherness and in what sense this experience plays part in the self's interaction with others.

Perhaps it may well be argued that Ricoeur's phenomenological analyses of desire in *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* demonstrate the significance of desire

for others in understanding the self's interaction with others. However, even though Ricoeur explains the relationship between desire, volition and action in *Freedom and Nature*, these analyses are not essentially about the relation with the other.⁷³ Further, Ricoeur's analysis of desire in *Fallible Man* deals with the idea of desire being the condition of evil, rather than with the idea of desire for otherness⁷⁴.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from my investigation of Ricoeur's understanding of desire in his phenomenology of the other. First of all, Ricoeur understands otherness in a triadic sense in his metaphysical discourse on the relation between self and other: the other of the world that affects the flesh, other people, and the other as the inner voice of conscience. Secondly, in his triadic understanding of the other, Ricoeur describes in what sense otherness affects the body and, in that sense, he explains to what extent otherness conditions desire – it motivates free action with regard to others: talking, acting, narrating and taking responsibility. For example, for Ricoeur, having sensations of others in the world influences the self's capacity for narrative. Acts of care, to give another example, are influenced by affects related to the suffering of others. Nevertheless, the idea of desire for others remains a blind spot in Ricoeur's philosophy. While Ricoeur explains the effects of others on the self as the condition of desire for others, he remains silent on the experience of this desire itself, and on the influence of this desire on the self's capacity to talk, act, narrate and take responsibility.

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⁷³ In this regard Johann Michel argues that it is only with the publication of *Oneself as Another* and under the influence of Levinas' philosophy that intersubjectivity becomes a major theme in Ricoeur's thought. See footnote 6 of this article.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 81 ff. Levinas' analysis of metaphysical desire in *Totality and Infinity* possibly better explains the relation between desire for others and the interaction with others. However, examining to what extent that is the case exceeds the limits of this article. For Levinas' analysis of metaphysical desire, see: Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33 ff.

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