Is There a Gap Between the Hermeneutical and the Ethical? A Discussion on Paul Ricoeur's Moral Attestation of *Here I am*

R. Lekshmi[1]

Abstract

Paul Ricoeur is a philosopher of wide ranging interests whose main concern is hermeneutics. His hermeneutics is self-reflexive, an existential appropriation that eventually gives way to self-understanding. Questions pertaining to self-identity, the problem of the other and intersubjectivity are presented by him in a tensive style, keeping the scope of interpretations wide open. While discussing the question of self-identity, he moves towards intersubjectivity which is centred on self-esteem. It provides a context for self-constancy which gives to a moral identity, an attestation of Here I am. Here arises the basic issue, how the narrative identity which is hermeneutical give rise to an ethical relation. If so, Ricoeur must be ready to see that there is an asymmetric relation between the same and the other which can be termed ethical. Though he says that conscience contains an injunction to attest ourselves to say, Here I am, it is a statement of "said" and not one of "saying". Only a statement of "saying" can interrupt ontology and enact the movement from the same to the other which is ethical. Hence, Ricoeur stands at the hemeneutical level which cannot abandon ontology. But the polysemic nature of alterity posed by him never closes the possibilities of an ethical interpretation.

Keywords Hermeneutics · Self-understanding · Identity · Alterity · Intersubjectivity · *Here I am*

Introduction

The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur can be best identified as hermeneutical. His constant preoccupation was with a hermeneutics of the self. His is a self-reflexive philosophy which is presented in a tensive style. Ricoeur is, perhaps, widely read for

✉ R. Lekshmi
  lekshmirk72@gmail.com

1   Department of Philosophy, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram 695581, India

his catholicity of interests inclusive of structuralism and linguistic analysis, hermeneutics and phenomenology, psychoanalysis and the question of the subject, religion, faith, ethics and the like. Some of his major concerns include questions like "who am I", "what am I", the problems pertaining to self-identity and the problem of the other. The discussion of this paper is centred on the major issue of how to philosophically situate the moral dictum, *Here I am* presented by Ricoeur. Is it to be placed in the context of the hermeneutical–philosophical or in the ethical? If we are to situate the dictum in the ethical, how far Ricoeur is successful in trying to confine himself within the borders of the hermeneutical–philosophical and allow the ethical to make its way into the hermeneutical.

According to Don Ihde, the guiding thread which unites the diverse interests and which holds the clue for the direction of Ricoeur's thought is the question of hermeneutics. For Ricoeur, "hermeneutics is the theory of the operation of understanding of texts" (Ricoeur, *The Task* 1973: 2).[1] At first, hermeneutics is interpreted as the theory of exegesis where exegesis refers to Biblical commentary while hermeneutics deals with the rules and methodological principles that underpin such exegesis. It was Schleiermacher who shifted the focus of attention from understanding a given text to the understanding of understanding itself. Gradually hermeneutics took a turn from epistemology to ontology through Heidegger. By moving away from the writer to the text, the contemporary hermeneutics took varying standpoints: one group concentrating mainly in the recovery of the authorial intention and the other in its total rejection. Reaching the hands of Ricoeur, hermeneutics mainly becomes an existential appropriation.[2] Ricoeur has developed hermeneutics by seeing its interconnections with literature, spirituality, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and other areas. In fact, he could make a distinction between hermeneutics that set out to dispel illusion and hermeneutics that set out to reveal a hidden truth. He calls the former, the hermeneutics of suspicion. He further posits the hermeneutics of recollection of meaning what might more briefly called the "hermeneutics of revelation" (Patrick, 2000: 132). For him, encountering a text is not a mere intellectual exercise rather an assimilation of the text, especially its value system. Appropriation mediates between the text and the self which eventually results in self-understanding. In recent years, the hermeneutic question has come into its own as a philosophic question linked both to the philosophy of language and to what is now emerging as new interest in the foundations of the human or social sciences.

For Ricoeur, understanding, explanation and appropriation constitute a triad in hermeneutics. Dilthey attributed explanation to the natural sciences and understanding to the human sciences while Ricoeur tried to bring a dialectical relationship between them. While explanation is concerned with the semiological system, understanding is tied to the semantic system. That is why Ricoeur tries to graft the semantic pole into the semiotic pole so that interpretation will be complete. By trying to reconcile explanation, the epistemological pole with understanding, the ontological pole, Ricoeur attempts to weave together a hermeneutic fabric with the epistemological strands of Dilthey and the ontological strands of Heidegger and Gadamer (Dorairaj 2011: 37). The third element of the triad is appropriation which completes the process of understanding. It is existential appropriation or assimilation. Any interpretive activity is closely related to self-understanding. In

his conversation with Richard, Kearney Ricoeur says: "It is by an understanding of the worlds, actual and possible, opened by language that we may arrive at a better understanding of ourselves" (Kearney and Mara 1996: 45).

In a text, the symbolic meaning is independent of the semantic meaning. But in order to arrive at it one has to look at the whole textual context by which the sentence is situated. They reach out beyond the language and the truths revealed by symbolic meanings are human truths about human life and experience.[3] He finds hermeneutics as a theory of interpreting discourse, including the symbols which any discourse contains. Eventually, hermeneutics in Ricoeur's hands becomes a theory of text which takes texts as it starting point, but ultimately comes to see the world as textual, insofar as human existence is expressed through discourse and discourse is the invitation humans make to one another to be interpreted (Siims 2003: 31).

In his "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theology", Ricoeur is trying to develop a hermeneutics based on the problematics of the text. For him, "a text is any discourse fixed by writing" (Ricoeur, 1991: 106). In "Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning", he asserts that discourse is the event of language (Ricoeur, 1991: 9). He further holds that "if all discourse is actualized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning" (Ricoeur, 1991: 12). Firstly, discourse is fixed by writing, thereby leading to a dialectic between discourse as event and meaning. Secondly, discourse becomes autonomous and public in writing. Thirdly, discourse's actual reference to a world is realized differently in event and in meaning. Fourthly, the auditors in discourse vanish in the transition from speaking to writing for, in writing "an unknown, invisible reader has become the underprivileged addressee of the discourse" (Ricoeur, *The Model* 1973: 97). Hence, meaning surpasses and transcends the event (Dorairaj 2011: 34).

The movement from speech to writing involves a threefold distanciation. They are: 1. distanciation from the author; 2. from the situation of discourse; and 3. from the original audience (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutical Function* 1973: 134). In the context of distanciation, the text gets semantic autonomy with reference to the authorial intention, the original situation of discourse and the original recipients.[4] Here the text gets decontextualized from the socio-psychological contexts. As a result, it is open to any reader and to polysemous readings. It furthers self-understanding between the text and the self through appropriation. "From the Ricoeurian standpoint any interpretive activity is intimately related to self-understanding so that text interpretation as well as other kinds of interpretation turns out to be a means, a detour to the whole issue of self-understanding" (Dorairaj 2011: 38). In other words, hermeneutics in the hands of Ricoeur is a philosophy of self-understanding.

There are two closely related questions which are very fundamental to the philosophy of self-understanding in Ricoeur: The question, who am I ? and how should I live? As regards the first question, Ricoeur is indebted to Marcel, Heidegger and Merleau Ponty. To the second moral question, he is indebted to Aristotle and Kant. Ricoeur's philosophy is characterized by three features: it stands in the line of a reflexive philosophy; but it remains within the sphere of Husserlian phenomenology; and it strives to be hermeneutical variation of this phenomenology (Kearney ana Mara 1996: 148).

Grafting Hermeneutics onto Phenomenology

A reflexive philosophy considers the most radical philosophical problems to be those which concern the possibility of self-understanding. Ricoeur, in fact, considers the most fundamental philosophical problems to concern self-understanding while he retains subjectivity at the core of philosophy. His is no Cartesian-style subject; the subject is always a situated subject, an embodied being anchored in a physical, historical and social world. In both Descartes and Husserl, the cogito is something to be performed. Its performance leads to the distinction between the soul (thinking) from the body, so that the body is viewed from the pure perspective of thought. But Ricoeur extends the cogito to include with it what Descartes and Husserl excluded, the physical body. He says: "The Ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile circle of the Self's constant return to itself" (Ricoeur, 1996: 14). According to Ricoeur, breaking the circle of the self's constant return to itself is a way of passing from objectivity to existence, ".. the idea of reflexion carried with it the desire for absolute transparency, a perfect coincidence of the self with itself which would make consciousness of self indubitable knowledge…. It is this fundamental demand that phenomenology first of all and then hermeneutics, continue to project onto an ever more distant horizon" (Kearney and Mara 1996: 148).

One of the possible ways to ground hermeneutics in phenomenology is by taking an ontology of understanding. Here understanding is no longer a mode of knowledge but a mode of being. One does not reach it by degrees; rather, one is transported there by a sudden reversal of the question. Instead of asking on what conditions can a knowing subject understand a text or history, one asks, what kind of being is it whose being consists of understanding? The hermeneutic problem thus becomes a problem of the analytic of this being, Dasein which exists through understanding (Ihde, 1971: 6).

The above question avoids every way of formulating the idea that hermeneutics is a method able to compete on an equal basis with the method of the natural sciences. Understanding is no longer a mode of knowledge. To assign a method to understanding is to remain entangled in the presuppositions of objective knowledge. One must deliberately move outside the enchanted circle of the problematic of subject and object and question oneself about being. Understanding thus becomes a mode of being, the mode of that being which exists through understanding.

In characterizing hermeneutics as an essential mode of reflexivity, the questions such as what interpretation is, what is being interpreted and who is an interpreter become enigmatic. In that sense hermeneutics is also enigmatic. Here the circularity of the hermeneutical experience and the interpretive model appears. The circularity involved is not merely between the text as a whole and its parts or between text and tradition but the interplay between self-understanding and its understanding of the world. It leads to the contention that interpretation never comes to an end or hermeneutics opens up the doors for rearticulation.

Ricoeur invites us to move from Heidegger back to Husserl and to reinterpret the latter in Heideggerian terms. Here he mentions about the later Husserl, in whom one can seek the phenomenological foundations of this ontology (Ihde, 1971: 8). The critique of "objectivism" is carried to its final consequences in the last phase of phenomenology by Husserl. It concerns the hermeneutic problem directly in the sense that it has as its theme, the "*Lebenswelt*", "the life–world", i.e., a level of experience anterior to the subject–object relation. This does not mean that the contributions of early Husserl are not worthwhile. Considered from the point of view of early Husserl and Heidegger, the early phenomenology can appear as the first challenge to objectivism, since what it calls phenomena are the correlates of intentional life. Nevertheless, it remains that the early Husserl only constructed a new idealism in the sense of being reduced to a simple correlate of the subjective mode of intention. Thus, finally it is against the early Husserl and his idealizing tendencies of the theory of meaning that the theory of understanding has been erected. Understanding becomes an aspect of Dasein's openness of being. "The question of truth is no longer the question of method, it is the question of the manifestation of being whose existence consists in understanding being" (Ihde, 1971: 9).

Ricoeur prefers Husserl's long phenomenological route, rather than Heidegger's short ontological route to understanding. The long route begins by analysis of language. The understanding, which is the result of the analytic of Dasein, is precisely the understanding through which and in which being understands itself as being. It is within language itself that one must seek that understanding is a mode of being.[5] If the goal of both these philosophical traditions—the ontological as represented by Heidegger and phenomenological as represented by Husserl—is the same, namely understanding, then what is the point of taking the long route? The answer for Ricoeur is that the hermeneuticists like the phenomenologist before him try to resolve problems rather than dissolve them (Simms, 2003: 36–37).

Ricoeur further holds that a purely semantic elucidation remains suspended until one shows that the understanding of multivocal for symbolic expressions is a moment of self-understanding. The semantic approach thus entails a reflective approach. The long route preferred by Ricoeur follows the hermeneutic circle. Ricoeur's statement of the hermeneutic circle is a little different from Heidegger's.[6] "We must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand" (Ricoeur, 1960: 351). Hermeneutics proceeds from a prior understanding of the very thing that it tries to understand by interpreting it. However, Ricoeur does not see this as a vicious circle, but as a living and stimulating circle. In doing hermeneutics, each half of the equation—understanding to believe and believing to understand—should seek kinship with the other, a kinship of thought with what life aims at. (Ricoeur, 1960: 352).

One must break the hermeneutic circle and go beyond it. This is achieved by transforming into a wager. "The wager is that I shall have a better understanding of man and the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings if I follow the indication of symbolic thought. That wager then becomes the task of verifying my wager and saturating it, so to speak, with intelligibility. In return, the task transforms my wager; in betting on the significance of the symbolic world, I bet at the same time that my wager will be restored to me in power of reflection, in

coherent discourse" (Ricoeur, 1960: 355). Hermeneutics looks at the symbols in texts as phenomena and, in so doing, uncovers the intentional attitude that makes them meaningful.

The Semantic Level of Hermeneutics

The ontological roots of understanding can be reached by reflection alone. In language also, understanding occurs through the movement of reflection. Hence, semantics can be the best reference for the whole of hermeneutics field. The task of hermeneutics is to discover meaning. The hermeneuticist sees the world related to the individual through the mediation of text. Ricoeur holds that from exegesis to psychoanalysis is a certain structure of meaning, which can be termed double meaning or multiple meaning whose role is to show while concealing (Ricoeur 1969: 12). Ricoeur holds that there is no self-understanding which is not mediated by signs, symbols and texts; in the last resort, understanding coincides with the interpretations given to these mediating terms (Kearney and Mara 1996: 151). (1) Mediation by signs: it is to say that language is the primary condition of all human experience. For instance, psychoanalysis as a talk cure is based on the primary priority between desire and speech. Since speech is heard before it is uttered, the shorter path from the self to itself lies in the speech of the other which leads one across the open space of signs. (2) Mediation by symbols: By symbols is meant those expressions carrying a double sense. The double sense expressions are hierarchically ordered into the most universal symbols, and finally, the symbol merges into living metaphor. Ricoeur is interested in symbolic meanings; they reach out beyond the language in which they are couched to the broader text. Through its symbolic meanings, it is the text as a whole that tells us some truth about the world. 3) Mediation by text: Ricoeur has a predilection for written texts and tends to examine oral discourse as if it were written. Indeed, writing opens up new and original resources for discourse. Discourse acquires a threefold semantic autonomy, in relation to the speaker's intention, to its reception by its original audience and to the economic, social and cultural circumstances of its production. Writing bears itself free of the limits of face-to face dialogue (Ricoeur, 1991: 17).

The most important consequence of all this is that an end is put once and of all to the Cartesian and Fichtean—and to an extent Husserlian—ideal of the subject's transparency to itself. To understand oneself is to understand one as one confronts the text and to receive from it the conditions for a self other than that which first undertakes the reading. Once freed from the primacy of subjectivity, the first task of hermeneutics is to seek in the text, itself on the one hand, the internal dynamic which governs the structuring of the work and, on the other hand, the power that the work possesses to project itself outside, and to give rise to a world which would truly be the thing referred to by the text (Kearney 1996: 152–153). The internal dynamic and external projection constitutes what Ricoeur calls the work of the text. It is the task of hermeneutics to reconstruct this twofold work.

In this context, it must be added that the important influence of Gadamer on Ricoeur is that of distanciation. Distanciation is the effect of being made distant

from the producer of a text and the cultural conditions under which he or she wrote.[7] Ricoeur writes: "The essence of a work in general, is to transcend its psycho-sociological conditions of production and be open to an unlimited series of readings, themselves. In short, it belongs to as text to decontextualise itself as much from a sociological point of view as from a psychological one and to be able to recontextualise itself in new contexts" (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutical Function* 1973: 133). In the context of the hermeneutics of Ricoeur, distanciation turns out to be the very condition of interpretation because it paves the way for semantic autonomy.

Closely related to distanciation is existential appropriation (Dorairaj 2011: 90). To Ricoeur, understanding, explanation and appropriation constituted a triad He develops this dialectic in two movements: from understanding to explanation and from explanation to comprehension where appropriation plays a crucial role. As already stated, Ricoeur fused the dialectical relationship between explanation, which is concerned with the semiological system and understanding to that of the semantic system.

Appropriation culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently or simply begins to understand himself (Ricoeur, *The Model* 1973: 118). Ricoeur holds that "to understand is to understand oneself in front of the text" (Ricoeur, *The Model* 1973: 88). Doing hermeneutics—interpreting texts—is the quote to self-understanding as a human being. To read, then is to do hermeneutics, and to do hermeneutics is to understand ourselves.

The Reflective Level of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics must be grafted onto phenomenology not only at the level of semantics is but also at the level of reflection. "Reflection, says Ricoeur is a critique, not in the Kantian sense of a justification of science and duty, but in the sense that the cogito can be recovered only by the detour of a decipherment of the document of its life" (Ricoeur 1969: 17). The purpose of all interpretations is to conquer a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself. By making himself contemporary with the text, the interpreter can appropriate its meaning himself. Every hermeneutics is thus self-understanding by means of understanding others. Reflection thus becomes the appropriation of our effort to exist and our desire to be means of the works which testify to this effort and this desire.

The cogito is not only a truth as vain as it is invincible; it is like an empty place which has been occupied by a false cogito (Ricoeur 1969: 17). The so-called immediate consciousness is false consciousness. What falsify consciousness are the layers of illusions and prejudices that mask the genuine cogito or the "ego" of the ego cogito" (Ricoeur 1969: 170). Ricoeur, in fact, finds Marx Nietzsche and Freud as the masters of unmasking the false consciousness. Hence, reflection is indirect. Because existence is evinced only in the documents of life and since consciousness is first of all false consciousness, it is always necessary to raise by means of a corrective critique from misunderstanding to understanding. Phenomenology under Ricoeur's use takes on a

different significance in this context. In the iconoclastic and suspicious hermeneutics of false consciousness phenomenology becomes in contrast an implicit hermeneutics of belief (Ihde, 1971: xvii). Hermeneutics of belief involves interpretation of symbols, but it is also a philosophical enterprise that aims at self-understanding. Nothing ultimately meant what it first seems to say. The underlying structures, objective in nature, always gave apparent meanings but no subjective considerations of meanings which can happen through structural transformations overtime.

The hermeneutics which reflective philosophy must include should be a hermeneutics of the I am. Only in this way can the illusions and the pretensions of the idealist, subjective, solipsistic cogito be conquered. The question, who am I is not an objective fact to be discovered. It is a question which is specific to a certain kind of being, namely being a subject of temporal, material, linguistic and social unity. The question who am I is built upon Marcel's conception of embodied subjectivity as a fundamental predicament. Here I am both the seeker and the sought. The circularity involved in this context gives a dialectical character to selfhood. The ability to grasp oneself as a concrete subject of such a world demands a complex mode of understanding by integrating discourses belonging to different orders of time. It is to the temporal dimension of selfhood that Ricoeur addressed his narrative model of understanding as well as hermeneutics.

Ricoeur takes into consideration both the cosmological and phenomenological conceptions of time. In this composite temporal framework, the narrative model only fits into. Narrative's temporal complexity is linked to Aristotle's characterization of narrative as "the imitation of action". Ricoeur holds that just as human time is experienced as an anticipation of the future through the retentions of the memory, so narrative consists of a three-stage mimesis [8.] Mimesis 1 is prefiguration, the pre-understanding we have of what narratives consist of that we bring to a text in reading it. It constitutes the way in which human acting is prefigured with basic competencies—the ability to raise questions like who, why, etc. in the use of symbols and competency in the temporal syntagmatic structures of narration. Mimesis 2 is emplotment or configuration, the ordering of events and the establishing of relations between them. It does the imaginative configuration of the elements of mimesis 1. The level of emplotment which brings the diverse elements of a situation in an imaginative order. The linear chronology of emplotment is able to represent different experiences of time. It need not be according to the before and after of the cosmological time. It well imitates the continuity that is usually expected for life, the model for personal identity and self-understanding. Mimesis 3 is refiguration, the act of reading whereby our understanding of the world is increased by the new stand on it that the narrative has provided (Simms, 2003: 79). It is a redescription of our past experiences, bringing to connection unseen agents, actors, circumstances which offers a possibility of restructuring a future.

From Hermeneutic Interpretation to Ethical Interpretation

The real purpose of the analysis of the mimetic structures of narrative or of time in narrative is to show hermeneutics not only as a process of reading texts but of reading lives. Ricoeur further makes it a point that if the answer to the question of

"who" is to be more than a mere proper name, it is to be a narrative. "To answer the question, 'who? … is to tell the story of a life. The story told tells about the action of the who'. And the identity of this 'who' therefore itself must be narrative identity" (Ricoeur, 1988: 246). Identity is understood as "being the same" (*idem*) and "oneself as self-same" (*ipse*) and for Ricoeur the latter meaning constitutes narrative identity of a person (Kemp 2002: 99). *Idem* stands for sameness, the empirical perseverance in one's own being and memory. *Ipse* refers to selfhood, others in its constitution. *Ipse* is disclosed when the self interprets a text. We discover new meanings of ourselves when making our life a narration. *Idem* can include changes within the cohesion of one life time. In order to be a person, one should have both of these attributes, *idem* and *ipse*. Moreover, one's life is entangled with other's lives. [9]

Initially, Ricoeur claimed that we have a pre-understanding of narrative. Later on, he is coming up with the question, what it is that makes us to have a pre-understanding of narrative. The question invites the entire philosophy of life discussed by him. What it is that narrative mediates between is description and prescription (Simms 2009: 103). "In order to act I must first describe the given situation in the world, then I must decide what I should do. Describe, narrate, prescribe is Ricoeur's formula for action" (Ricoeur, 1992: 114). What follows from the above statement of Ricoeur is that narrative evaluates situations and tells us what we should do, in a moral sense. Seeing our own lives as narrative is what gives us a sense of "connectedness of life". But this concept allows some *idem* into *ipse*. Here the other enters into the composition of the same (Ricoeur, 1992: 121). This leads Ricoeur to emphasize the importance of keeping ones word as a way of demonstrating self-constancy.

Ricoeur does want to establish the primacy of ethics over morality. By morality, he means the norm or set of rules that are established for us to be able to live our lives in a moral way. By ethics, he means the aim of living a life that might be described as good (Ricoeur, 1992: 171). To lead a good life is to read it as a story. Hence, there is a direct parallel between life and narrative. "Life is narrative; in living we create the story of our lives" (Simms 2009: 105). The chief line of argument in seeing life as narrative according to Ricoeur is ethical. Though he begins his enterprise with the hermeneutics of self-understanding, he recontextualizes himself philosophically in an ethical situation.

The ethical way of interacting with others is the way that one preserves his self-constancy. The ethical discussed by Ricoeur aims at good life with and for others in just institutions. It is centred on the ethics of self-esteem, i.e. to regard oneself as the worthy subject of a good life. It is a context for evaluation to see ourselves as selves (Kemp 2002; 99). "Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person. A response to the question. 'Where are you' asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: '*Here I am*'; a response that is a statement of self-constancy" (Ricoeur, 1988*:* 165) [10] The gap between "what am I" and "who am I" (from *idem* to *ipse*) constitutes narrative identity: the constancy involved in declaring "Here I am" constitutes moral identity. Ricoeur holds that narrative identity gives rise to moral identity and the tension involved between them is a fruitful one.

Hermeneutics as a Critique of the Ethical

Here arises the question, how the narrative identity gives rise to the moral identity? It can be put as follows. Self-esteem is inseparable from solicitude which unfolds the dialogical aspect of self-esteem. Taking clues from Aristotelian friendship, Ricoeur describes solicitude as based on the exchange between giving and receiving (Ricoeur, 1992: 179). While taking a critique of Levinas, Ricoeur holds that Levinas supports an asymmetric relation where the ethical response is reduced to dreary duty. Hence, it becomes evident that Ricoeur's position is symmetry in ethical relations.

When answering the Biblical *Here I am* (Hinneni) the subjectivity becomes the elect, it becomes a unique one.[11] It cannot be sameness nor the selfhood, i.e. neither idem nor ipse. The self (who I am) is an impossible identity. Ricoeur deconstructs the relationship between the same and the other finding that this separation is a hyperbolic one (Ricoeur, 1992: 337). He uses substitution to deconstruct the separation. He says: "Who is a hostage to the other if not a same no longer defined by separation but by its contrary, substitution" (Ricoeur, 1992: 340). Ricoeur folds sameness and otherness into the same. In his view, reciprocity forms the basis of ethical relations. One is capable of directing benevolent feelings towards oneself but only through the benevolence of others. It makes the relation of self and other as ontological rather than ethical. In this context, it is worth quoting the Levinasian words to see what constitutes the ethical. "The other is not only an alter ego; the other is what I myself am not" (Levinas, 1987: 83).

The intersubjective recognition can be found in three models which he presents for the integration of identity and alterity.[12] The first model is translation. By this, he means the translation of another's ideas into one's own terms—we do not appropriate the other, and we elevate rather through a respect for the world view of the other. The second is the exchange of memories. It can be explained as follows. We are co-authors of one another's narrative identities. The third is the model of forgiveness. The way of sharing memories goes beyond recognition. It is a gift of new possibilities. Here the narrative identity of one's subjectivity opens the space for ethics. But here he develops the theory of alterity as polysemic, i.e. the alterity is irreducible to the alterity of other persons. [13]

Ricoeur further moves to say that phenomenology of passivity is the means to the consideration of the ontology of alterity: "passivity becomes the attestation of otherness" (Ricoeur, 1992: 318). He speaks about the triad of passivity and hence of otherness. First, there is the passivity represented by one's own body of the flesh as the mediator between the self and the world taken in degrees of variability in practicality and foreignness. The second one is the passivity implied by the relation of the self to the foreign, i.e. the otherness inherent in intersubjectivity. Finally, the most hidden passivity, that of the relation of the self to itself, which is conscience (Ricoeur, 1992: 153).

Ricoeur contests that it is impossible to construct the dialectic of the same and the other in a unilateral manner either from self to other or from other to self. The

former structures the epistemic awareness of the other as an ego while the latter structures the ethical dimension of injunction. For him, the third passivity is the call of conscience which he intends to defend as a legitimate site of alterity. "Conscience is, in truth, that place par excellence in which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with attestation" (Ricoeur, 1992: 341). Conscience contains an injunction to attest ourselves in the presence of another. It authorizes to say, *Here I am*: the response Abraham gave to God. In this context, the attestation of Here I am is to believe in one's ability to respond to the face of the other, an alterity to which belongs the aporia of the other. Thus, Ricoeur leads us to the polysemy of the other. The phenomenological passivity of the self and the other expressed through flesh, other self and conscience proposes intersubjectivity and alterity. But it still keeps the passage from the ontology to the ethical unexplained. As long as the otherness of the other is expressed in polysemic language, the attestation of the self, Here I am, stands hermeneutic but not ethical though it has moved from the status of episteme to aletheia.

Both epistemology and ontology operate at the domain of the same which treats the other as reducible to the same. When the otherness of the other is preserved carefully, it leads to the ethical relation. The ethical becomes a critique of the philosophical hermeneutics. In Levinasian terminology of alterity, it is a face-to-face relation between I and the other. Here the possibility of a dialogical speech is saying and not said. It is prayer in Levinasian terminology where speech is putting my world into the words and giving it to the other. It is an asymmetric relation where the possibility of a hermeneutical language is at stake. The dialogical model of language is very important in the context of hermeneutics. Hence, the possibility of an ethical relation of saying is questionable within the hermeneutic tradition.[14] Simon Critchely puts it: "Saying is a performative doing that cannot be reduced to a propositional description". By contrast, the said is a statement, assertion or proposition of which the truth or falsity can be ascertained. The saying is non-thematizable ethical residue of language that escapes comprehension, interrupts ontology and is the very enactment of the movement from the same to the other (Critchley, 1999: 18). The above argument leads to find that Ricoeur stands in reflexive philosophy. It never can abandon ontology. Here the question is how to fill the gap between a reflexive hermeneutical philosophy and an ethical philosophy where election constitutes the uniqueness of subjectivity. Again, it also leads to see whether the Biblical ethical–moral dictums like *Here I am* can be situated within the strict boundaries of philosophy.

It is in this sense that Ricoeur has become important to the interpretation of religious texts since most of the times they are held to the word of God. In fact, scriptures embody the Ricoeurian style of the dialectic of reading. For Ricoeur, appropriation of the meaning of a text by a reader opens up the referential function of the text to new level, that of how we live in the world. For Burton Christie, Ricoeur's dialectic of event and meaning is a powerful tool for explaining how the saying of God endures over time. The "saying" of the saying is an event, something that has the capacity to change people's lives. So the speech event prompts a "new" understanding of life but the meaning contributes to deeper understanding of life (Burton 1993: 19). That the sayings of God change the lives of people; a movement from text to action in Ricoeur's terms is true. But how the

gap between the hermeneutical to the ethical be filled in this context still awaits further interpretation for in that movement to the ethical there should have been a move to keep the otherness of the other.

In the introductory passage to *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur writes: "My concern is to pursue, to the very last line, an autonomous, philosophical discourse". He was very cautious about the boarders. "If I defend my philosophical writings against the accusation of cryptotheology, I also refrain with equal vigilance, from assigning to Biblical faith a cryptotheological foundation, which would most certainly be the case if one were to expect from it some definitive solution to the aporias that philosophy produces in abundance, mainly in relation to the status of the ipse –identity or the practical narrative, ethical and moral planes" (Ricoeur, 1992: iv).[15]

Conclusion

The hermeneutics of Ricoeur is a hermeneutics of self-understanding fundamental to which is the need that humans strive to make their lives intelligible and fruitful. Ricoeur's endeavour consists in grafting hermeneutics to phenomenology towards a philosophy of existence and the flagship in this endeavour is his narrative theory. He states that the problematic of existence is given in language and must be worked out in discourse. But at the same time his analysis is no longer a text as such but the human subject which, in fact, is not a Cartesian cogito but a fact of "who I am", which one must achieve, create or to which one must attest in his life.

The whole philosophy is presented in a tensive style which he describes as "fault lines": lines that can intersect in different ways in the different aspects of lives giving different meanings. It is "poetics" which can provide multiple strategies by which understanding and coherent sense of life is possible. Philosophy has to develop a theory of interpretation allowing the polysemic nature of language in order to make sense of the fullness of discourse. But such polysemic understanding of language need not be keeping any borders in its discourse.

Notes

1. Palmer in his *Six Modern Definitions of Hermeneutics* gives an elaborative account of the history and development of hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969: 33–34).
2. Appropriation, says Ricoeur, is my translation of the German, *Aneignung* which means to make one's own what was initially alien (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* 43).

Appropriation is the process by which the revelation of new modes of being gives the subject new capacities for knowing himself.

3. Beginning with the celebrated work, *The Symbolism of Evil,* Ricoeur sees hermeneutics merely as a method of interpreting symbols.
4. Text displays a fundamental characteristic of the historicity of human experience, i.e. it is communication in and through distance. Ricoeur organized this concept around four themes: 1) text as a relation of speech to writing, 2) text as a structure of work, 3) text as the projection of a world and 4) text as the mediation of self-understanding.
5. In Heideggerian terms, Ricoeur's world of the text is the lived world of Dasein.

The critical hermeneutics is practiced by Heidegger where he "destroys" the metaphysical tradition which conceals the originary unconcealedness of Being: by Derrida when he deconstructs the metaphysical tradition including Heidegger's notion of an original unconcealedness and by Marxists when they engage in ideological critique.

6. According to Schleiermacher, meaning of the part of the text is only understood within the context of the whole text. The whole text is never given unless through an understanding of the parts. One cannot understand a part of a text independently from the other parts, that is, without understanding the whole and the vice versa. Therefore understanding requires a circular movement from parts to whole and whole to parts. By dialectical interaction between the whole and the part, each gives the other meaning and understanding is seen to be circular. The hermeneutic circle as a problem is described by Heidegger in his *Being and Time*. There he points out that, as a consequence of understanding of existence being dependent on understanding of the world and vice versa any interpretation which is to contribute understanding must already have understood what is to be interpreted.
7. In Ricoeur's view, Gadamer's attitude towards tradition is primarily revelatory. In contrast, Habermas sets out to take a suspicious attitude towards tradition in class society.
8. Ricoeur links narrative's temporal complexity to Aristotle's characterization of narrative as "the imitation of action". Ricoeur's account of the way in which arrative represents the human world of acting turns on these stages of interpretation which he calls mimesis 1, mimesis 2 and mimesis 3. Tragedy, for Aristotle, is an imitation of action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude—through pity, and fear effecting the proper purgation (catharsis) of these emotions.
9. In *idem* there is an empirical perseverance in one's own being and memory and in *ipse*, others in constitution. The *ipse* is disclosed in the interpretation of the text.
10. When answering the Biblical Here I am the subjectivity becomes the elect.
11. Catherine Chalier, "Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas: Self-respect or the Dignity of Being Elected?" observes: Ricoeur passes over it in silence, namely an exceptionable election by the Good which for the elected one is always already effected. "The election by the Good is not an action, but non-violence

itself. Election is an investiture of the non-interchangeable". This election is beyond my so-called spontaneity and also—and even more perhaps—beyond any dreary duty: we should describe it as pre-originary" or "preliminary" and as unassumable passivity that Ricoeur criticizes. It is passivity that places the subject "beyond the free and the non-free". It would be wrong, Levinas argues to understand it on the basis of a dialogue. The passivity is the being –from *beyond being* of the Good".

12. The elements of intersubjectivity in Ricoeur are clearly found in his celebrated work, *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur, 1992: 318).

13. Metaphor creates multiple possibilities of meaning. Ricoeur characterizes this attribute of metaphor as polysemic. But polysemy is not ambiguity. Polysemy means several things all at the same time and the reader does not need to choose between the possible meanings (Ricoeur 1986: 91).

14. The distinction between saying and said corresponds to Lacan's demarcation inherited from Ben veniste, of the orders of the subjects' act of speaking and the formulation of this act of speech into a statement. Given that philosophy qua ontology speaks the language of the said, it is propositional; it fills the later problem faced by Levinas, the methodological problem. In Otherwise than Being, he is asking: "how is the saying, my exposure to the other, to be said, or given a philosophical exposition that does not betray this Saying?" Levinasian thinking or his style of writing became more sensitive to the problem of how the ethical saying is to be thematised and necessarily betrayed within the ethics of deconstruction, ontological said. Levinas claims that the philosopher's efforts consists in the reduction of the said to the saying and the disruption of the limit that divides the ethical from the ontological.

15. David Vessey in his article, "The Polysemy of otherness: On Ricoeur's One-self as Another" makes the following observations. Ricoeur's contribution to theories of intersubjectivity is best captured in his own phrase, "the polysemy of otherness". Alterity is recognized and distinguished in all its forms taking care not to reduce them to one another if inappropriate. Narrative identity is rich with intersubjective elements and provides for a nuanced understanding of forms of recognition. The phenomenology of passivity reveals more alterity within ipseity through flesh, the other self and conscience. Each passivity has intersubjective elements, but no passivity is reducible to intersubjectivity. What we get from Ricoeur, then, is a careful proliferation—a virtual taxonomy—of alterity.

It may be said that for Ricoeur, attestation is a form of self-certainty which needs to be explicitly contrasted with *episteme*. Attestation reveals something—in that sense it belongs to truth as *aletheia*—but it does not posit a foundation a principle, a proposition which can be the basis for justifying other beliefs. It is a belief, but a "belief in..." rather than a "belief that...". Rather than a conviction, it is a trust: "a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to an accusation" (Ricoeur : 1992). That is, attestation is the sense of the self which testifies to the "I can" across linguistic, pragmatic and ethical contexts.

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