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Responsibility and the Physical Body: Paul Ricoeur on Analytical Philosophy of Language, Cognitive Science, and the Task of Phenomenological Hermeneutics

Geoffrey Dierckxsens

ABSTRACT: This article examines Paul Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy of language. I argue that Ricoeur's idea of responsibility is exemplary for understanding this discussion and for understanding how Ricoeur conceives of the task of phenomenological hermeneutics in relation to analytical philosophy and cognitive science. According to Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language explains how we use ordinary language for ascribing responsibility to the actions of agents (e.g., X is responsible for giving a speech). I argue that Ricoeur shows that the task of cognitive science is similar: explaining the causal relation between human action and the physical body (e.g., the debate on responsibility and neuroscience). Yet analytical philosophy of language insufficiently understands responsibility, for Ricoeur, in making an abstraction of the question of what it means to be responsible. Whereas analytical philosophy of language explains the causes of human action, so Ricoeur contends, it does not explain its motives, because these are not empirical relations that we can identify by means of common language. The task of phenomenological hermeneutics consists then, so I aim to demonstrate in line with Ricoeur, in understanding the motives of human action, which implies interpretation of text and of the self's narrative identity: in narratives we learn the reasons for being responsible.

KEY WORDS: hermeneutics, Ricoeur, phenomenology, cognitive science, philosophy of language, analytical philosophy, body

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Although Paul Ricoeur finds without doubt much inspiration in analytical philosophy for developing his own phenomenological hermeneutics, only recently have Ricoeur scholars begun paying considerable attention to his relation with Anglo-American philosophy. In fact, Ricoeur's discussion with analytical philosophy was the main topic of the Ricoeur centenary in Paris in 2013. In the introduction of a special issue of *Ricoeur Studies*, published in the wake of this conference, Johann Michel writes: "While there has been a genuine enthusiasm for studies devoted to Ricœurian thought over the past twenty years or so, there is clearly a relative dearth of secondary literature on the significance that analytic philosophy holds for Ricœur's work" (Michel 2014, 4). Indeed, in the wake of the Ricoeur centenary scholars have been examining the function of analytical philosophy in Ricoeur's thought, and how Ricoeur uses analytical philosophy for developing his own phenomenology and hermeneutics (Leclercq 2013, Petit 2014). In this article I examine Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy of language in light of the concept of *responsibility*. The aim of this examination is to demonstrate that responsibility is a key concept for understanding Ricoeur's relation with analytical philosophy, and his conception of the task of phenomenological hermeneutics in relation to cognitive science: to understand the motives of human action, rather than finding their causes.

This article consists of three sections. In the first section I examine Ricoeur's relation with analytical philosophy of language in general, as Ricoeur understands this relation in what is probably his main text on analytical philosophy: *La sémantique de l'action* (Ricoeur 1977). I argue that this relation is ambiguous. On the one hand, Ricoeur uses analytical philosophy of language for defining his own phenomenological hermeneutics. For Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language helps to clarify the concepts of this hermeneutics in explaining how they relate to ordinary language that is publically accessible and thus to empirical reality: analytical philosophy of language withholds phenomenological hermeneutics from idealism, i.e., from being an analysis of experience based on only private intuition. On the other hand, hermeneutics supersedes analytical philosophy of language according to Ricoeur. For him, analytical philosophy of language insufficiently understands the experiences that correspond to our concepts in common language, and that give meaning to these concepts. In the second section I argue that Ricoeur's understanding of responsibility is exemplary for understanding his ambiguous relation with analytical philosophy of language. Therefore I discuss both his interpretation of semantics and of pragmatics in *Oneself as Another* and in his article "The Concept of Responsibility," published in *The Just* (Ricoeur 1992, 30ff.; Ricoeur 2000, 11-35). According to Ricoeur, semantics and pragmatics explain how we use ordinary language to ascribe actions to agents and their physical bodies, and which we thus identify as causes (e.g., x is responsible for giving a speech). For Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language explains in this sense responsibility as a causal relation identifiable in empirical reality by means of common language. In that sense, Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy highlights his idea that phenomenological hermeneutics should be understood in relation to empirical reality: the domain of cognitive science. Yet semantics and pragmatics are also insufficient, for Ricoeur, for understanding the lived experience of being responsible, which allows comprehending the motivations for being responsible. Rather than examining lived existence, semantics and pragmatics stick to analyzing concepts in common language, and investigate how these concepts allow explaining the causes of actions and events. In the final section I investigate more exactly the extent to which Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy of language, and his idea of responsibility, demonstrates the specific task of phenomenological hermeneutics in relation to cognitive science. Ricoeur's idea of responsibility in *Oneself as Another* and his distinction between *explaining* and *understanding* in *From Text to Action* illustrate this task (Ricoeur 1992,

16ff.; Ricoeur 2007a, 135). Morally imputing people makes sense when we not only identify the cause of their actions, but also understand the motives of their actions. Phenomenological hermeneutics, being the interpretation of text and of the self's narrative identity, allows one to understand these motives. I argue then that Ricoeur demonstrates that the task of phenomenological hermeneutics thus consists in understanding *the motives* of human action, as opposed to explaining *the causes of human action*, which is the task of cognitive science.

Ricoeur and ordinary language philosophy: an ambiguous relation

Generally speaking, Ricoeur is well known for his interest in analytical philosophy, which he discusses at several occasions in his writings. For example, in *La sémantique de l'action* Ricoeur discusses analytical philosophy of language in order to examine the points in common and the differences between ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology (Ricoeur 1977). In *Oneself as Another*, to give another example, Ricoeur elaborates ordinary language philosophy, analytical theories of personal identity, as well as analytical theories on ethics, morals and justice in the context of his own hermeneutics of the self (Ricoeur 1992).

For Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language is essential for defining his idea of phenomenology. Indeed, as Ricoeur writes in *La sémantique de l'action*, he defends what he calls a “linguistic phenomenology” (“*phénoménologie linguistique*”), rather than a “psychological phenomenology” (“*phénoménologie psychologique*”) (Ricoeur 1977, 14). Scholars agree that, in drawing on ordinary language philosophy, Ricoeur aims to avoid reducing phenomenological experiences to ideas directly derived from consciousness (cf. Husserl's eidetic reduction). In his article, “À l'autre école. Paul Ricoeur, lecteur de la philosophie analytique,” Bruno Leclercq contends that Ricoeur's discussion with analytical philosophy allows him to avoid “a certain interpretation of phenomenology, namely the idealistic subjectivistic interpretation” (Leclercq 2013, 28). Ricoeur's hermeneutics implies a phenomenology that takes into account concepts of ordinary language philosophy, and should thus not merely rely on ideas that are derived from subjective experiences alone, regardless of their meaning in our ordinary language, which is commonly understandable.

In “Ricoeur et la théorie de l'action” Jean-Luc Petit summarizes Ricoeur's understanding of the relation between phenomenology and philosophy of language as follows:

La phénoménologie a besoin de l'analyse linguistique pour sauver l'objectivité noématique du sens des actions contre la double tentation du mentalisme introspectionniste et de l'intuition des essences à même les exemples. L'analyse linguistique a besoin de la phénoménologie pour contrebalancer sa tendance à l'éparpillement du sens des actions dans la contingence des habitudes linguistiques en retrouvant l'ancrage des modes d'expression dans l'existence. (Petit 2014, 147)

Ricoeur aims to reconcile phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy, as Leclercq and Petit clearly attest, in arguing in favor of their complementarity. Ordinary language philosophy saves phenomenology from idealism and mentalism: ordinary language can make the noematic structure of experiences commonly understandable, keeping it from being merely the result of private intuition. Phenomenology, in its turn, withholds ordinary language philosophy from linguistic contingency: language is not only an arbitrary 'game' of rules and signs, but expresses lived experiences proper to human existence, which phenomenology can analyze and comprehend.

Indeed, in *La sémantique de l'action*, Ricoeur argues that a philosophy of language is crucial in aiding phenomenology. Ricoeur contends that there are two reasons for combining phenomenology with philosophy of language. The first reason is that, in so doing, phenomenology answers to the problem of introspection, that is, the problem of how to translate inner lived experiences into public language. The second reason, for Ricoeur, is that phenomenology based on philosophy of language answers the question of how to translate particular lived experiences into general essences or ideas.ⁱ When Ricoeur defends, in the wake of Husserl, the idea of a phenomenological reduction that aims to define lived experiences through essences and ideas, the significance of these essences and ideas thus essentially also relates to the significance of concepts in ordinary language. For Ricoeur, ordinary language helps in expressing and understanding the essence of these experiences and in that sense of phenomenology and hermeneutics in general.

However, Ricoeur's understanding of the relation between ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology in *La sémantique de l'action* is ambiguous. On the one hand, Ricoeur contends that ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology have the common task of explaining reality by means of common language (Ricoeur 1977, 115).ⁱⁱ Ricoeur thus believes that

phenomenology should describe experiences of consciousness by means of concepts of common language, and not merely reduce these experiences to idealistic essences. Following Ricoeur's line of reasoning, philosophy of language demonstrates the objective concepts that relate to the subjective experiences phenomenology describes. For example, the concept of responsibility in ordinary language relates to the inner experience of being responsible.

Conversely, the experience of being responsible can be made commonly understandable by means of common language. Yet, as Petit also confirms, at the same time ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology differ fundamentally for Ricoeur (Petit 2014, 148). Whereas phenomenology describes experiences of consciousness, ordinary language philosophy examines the use of common language.ⁱⁱⁱ It is important, I think, to stress that Ricoeur aims to maintain this tension between these two methods, and that, for him, hermeneutical phenomenology ultimately thus supersedes ordinary language philosophy. As will become clear later in this article, responsibility is a key concept for understanding how Ricoeur conceives of the shortcomings of ordinary language philosophy, and how he defines the specific task of phenomenological hermeneutics. Given that phenomenology is inspired by ordinary language philosophy for Ricoeur, he also believes that phenomenology goes 'beyond' or 'underneath' ordinary language philosophy. According to him, ordinary language philosophy fails "to reflect upon itself" (Ricoeur 1977, 12). This means that ordinary language philosophy only examines the concepts that are given in common language, but does not question the inner experiences that these concepts express. Phenomenology, on the other hand, reflects upon these experiences. This is the aim of a phenomenological reduction.^{iv} For Ricoeur, phenomenology thus searches for the existential experiences that lie 'underneath' the concepts humans use in ordinary language. In that sense, phenomenology is more fundamental than ordinary language philosophy. For example, the word 'responsibility' in common language refers to experiences that relate to actually being responsible. Yet since these experiences can only be explained by means of reference to inner experience, ordinary language philosophy, which is limited to the public domain of language, fails to capture them.

In sum, for Ricoeur the relation between ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology is thus dialectical rather than exclusive. This means that hermeneutics should create a dialogue between ordinary language philosophy and phenomenology, even though these methods differ

essentially: analysis of speech (“investigation portant sur des énoncés”) as opposed to interpretation of lived experiences (“investigation portant sur des vécus”) (Ricoeur 1977, 13). This dialogue is possible, following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, because ordinary language philosophy analyzes concepts that express the experiences that hermeneutics and phenomenology examine.

Responsibility as causal relation and as motivated action

Ricoeur’s discussion of analytical philosophy of language in *Oneself as Another* consists of a reading of both semantics and pragmatics. I will discuss these accordingly, in order to demonstrate that both semantics and pragmatics show the causal relation between responsibility and agency according to Ricoeur, but also insufficiently understand the motivations of responsibility. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur examines semantics, and in particular Strawson’s semantic analysis of the concept of ascription in his theory on basic particulars in *Individuals* (Ricoeur 1992, 30ff.). Ricoeur contends in *Oneself as Another* that, for Strawson, there are two types of “basic particulars” or “things” that human beings identify as individuals in ordinary language: “physical bodies” and “persons” (Ricoeur 1992, 31). In Ricoeur’s opinion, Strawson’s idea of basic particulars demonstrates the extent to which human beings use ordinary language to recognize persons and physical bodies as “same” or “idem,” in ascribing to them physical and mental attributes (Ricoeur 1992, 32). In this regard, human beings use speech to identify certain persons or objects *as being the same* in space and time. Ricoeur writes, it is within a situation of interlocution that speaking subjects designate to their interlocutors which particular they choose to speak about out of a range of particulars of the same type, and that they assure themselves through an exchange of questions and answers that their partners are indeed focusing on the *same* basic particular as they (Ricoeur 1992, 31). For example, human beings talk about John, and identify John as the tall person standing in the corner or the person that just gave that speech. The same use of the concept of ascription applies for physical bodies. For instance, it is possible to recognize a rock as grey or heavy, or a table as round and yellow. Following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, Strawson’s analysis of basic particulars thus demonstrates the basic semantic concept of ascription, or the logical structure of this concept in ordinary language, which humans use to ascribe to each other mental and physical attributes, e.g., John weighs sixty pounds and recently made a trip. Further, according to Ricoeur, this concept demonstrates that the attributes humans

particularly ascribe to persons are *actions*. As Ricoeur also writes in “The Concept of Responsibility,” “*action*” is “placed at the center of [Strawson’s] theory of ascription” (Ricoeur 2000, 21).

For Ricoeur, Strawson’s analysis of basic particulars demonstrates the concept of responsibility in the basic logical semantic sense, which points to the basic common use of the word ‘responsibility’ in ordinary language. This use of the word ‘responsibility’ allows human beings to identify persons *as the cause of actions*, in ascribing to them physical and mental predicates. For example, humans say that John is the person who is responsible for writing a letter and that William is the person who is responsible for playing ball. Furthermore, this basic logical concept of responsibility also applies in some cases for identifying physical objects or phenomena as the cause of *events*. It is possible to say, for instance, that pollution is responsible for the warming of the climate or that a rock that falls in the water is responsible for creating a wave.

In this regard, Ricoeur discusses in *La sémantique de l’action* John Feinberg’s article “Responsibility and Action.” According to Ricoeur, Feinberg explains the sense in which human beings use the concept of responsibility for “ascription of causality” (Ricoeur 1977, 56). Ricoeur’s interpretation of Feinberg’s concept of ascription is similar to his interpretation of Strawson’s concept of ascription. As Ricoeur points out, Feinberg’s idea of ascription of causality expresses the extent to which human beings use the concept of responsibility for ascribing to each other actions, in the basic semantic sense of identifying each other as the cause of these actions, not necessarily in the moral sense of accusing each other of these actions. According to Ricoeur, Feinberg’s idea of responsibility also expresses the meaning in which human beings use the word responsibility to ascribe causes to events. As Ricoeur explains, it makes sense in ordinary language to say, for example, that a drop in the atmospheric pressure on one part of the globe is responsible for a storm on another part, or that an earthquake is responsible for a flood (Ricoeur 1977, 56).^v

If, for Ricoeur, Strawson’s analysis of ascription explains the basic semantic concept of responsibility, this analysis also fails, according to Ricoeur, to understand the motivations of responsibility. For Ricoeur, Strawson’s analysis of ascription explains the morally neutral concept of responsibility, “with no consideration of any relation to moral obligation” (Ricoeur 1992, 21). As Ricoeur writes, there is a “gap” between “ascription in the moral sense [and]

attribution in the logical sense” (Ricoeur 2000, 22). To “attribute” an action to a person in the logical sense is not the same as to “ascribe” in the moral sense of ascription. Ascription in the latter sense expresses the idea of moral “imputation” or of “holding an agent responsible for actions which themselves are considered to be permissible or not permissible,” “praiseworthy” or “blameworthy” (Ricoeur 1992, 100). Further, not only is Strawson’s semantic concept of responsibility amoral, as Ricoeur points out, this concept also makes an abstraction of the question of what it actually means to be responsible. Ricoeur’s distinction between self and same more exactly illustrates the extent to which he contends that semantics makes an abstraction of lived existence. According to Ricoeur, Strawson’s semantic analysis describes identity as “sameness [*mêmeté*] and not as selfhood [*ipséité*” (Ricoeur 1992, 32). For Ricoeur this analysis identifies the self as “same,” as psychophysical substance, or as “single spatio-temporal entity” (Ricoeur 1992, 32). Ricoeur writes:

In Strawson’s strategy ... the recourse to self-designation is intercepted, so to speak, from the very start because of the central thesis for identifying anything as a basic particular. This criterion is the fact that individuals belong to a single spatiotemporal schema The self ... is immediately neutralized by being included within the same spatiotemporal schema as all the other particulars. (Ricoeur 1992, 32)

The problem for Ricoeur is that Strawson’s semantic analysis fails to explain what it means, from a singular perspective, to speak, to act, to narrate and to be responsible, since this analysis defines the person as a physical body that is essentially the same, insofar as semantics is concerned, as other physical bodies.

Ricoeur has sufficient grounds to defend, in my opinion, that Strawson’s semantic analysis of the person in *Individuals* makes abstraction of the idea of being (morally) responsible. In Strawson’s line of reasoning, ordinary language has objective meaning. Hence, semantic concepts like ‘self,’ ‘other’ and ‘responsibility’ have a particular meaning that is understandable by the members of the language community that uses these concepts. It does not follow, however, that these concepts also have an ontological-existential equivalent. As Strawson writes in *Individuals*, “it is only a linguistic illusion that one ascribes one’s states of consciousness at all, that there is any proper subject of these apparent ascriptions, that states of consciousness belong to, or are states of, anything” (Strawson 1996, 103). In Strawson’s opinion, the ontological-existential idea of

subjectivity, and of being the subject of moral responsibility, does not follow from linguistic analysis, and is therefore no concern of semantics. According to Strawson's idea of the person, states of consciousness have the same basic meaning whether ascribed to myself or to any other person (Strawson 1996, 98ff.). Indeed, in semantic analysis, examples of ascription of physical and mental attributes are typically simplified to non-moral basic sentences that apply regardless of our lived experience. For instance, saying, "John walks through the door" or "William thought of something," differs from saying anything about the moral and ethical qualities of John's or of William's actions, or about the lived experiences that correspond to walking through a door or to thinking about something. As Ricoeur rightly points out, semantics typically uses these and similar morally neutral examples that make an abstraction of our lived existence, because this type of philosophy is interested, in the wake of logical positivism, in explaining basic logical concepts in ordinary language.

Yet Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy of language also covers the field of pragmatics. To what extent can pragmatics, in contrast to semantics, explain the idea of being responsible according to Ricoeur? In his discussion of analytical philosophy of language in *Oneself as Another*, he points out the essential difference between semantics and pragmatics. According to Ricoeur, semantics analyzes the logical significance of concepts in ordinary language. Pragmatics, in its turn, studies the performative function of ordinary language (Ricoeur 1992, 40). In other words, whereas semantics examines the *static logical structure* of concepts, pragmatics analyzes utterances or *speech acts* in ordinary language that we use to perform certain actions (e.g., promises, verdicts, predictions, etc.). As Ricoeur points out, pragmatics thus examines the concept of responsibility differently than semantics does. As I argued above, semantics, and Strawson's semantic analysis of ascription in particular, demonstrates the basic logical meaning of responsibility. According to Ricoeur, pragmatics, so I will argue next, demonstrates the significance of the idea of responsibility in analyzing moral speech acts.

According to Ricoeur, pragmatics points to the idea of *agency*. There is a fundamental difference, as Ricoeur points out, between examining the structure of concepts in language, as semantics does, and examining what it means to speak and to act. According to Ricoeur, pragmatics does the second thing. Hence, Ricoeur discusses pragmatics in *Oneself as Another* in order to define the self as speaking subject (cf. the second chapter of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur 1992, 42ff.),

and in order to define the self as agent (cf. the fourth chapter of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur 1992, 88ff.). Ricoeur writes in *Oneself as Another*:

the person as a basic particular does not stress the capacity belonging to the person to designate himself or herself in speaking, as [is] the case ... [for] the subject of utterance to designate itself; here [in Strawson's analysis of basic particulars], the person is one of the "things" about which we speak rather than itself a speaking subject. (Ricoeur 1992, 31)

For Ricoeur, pragmatics or speech act theory thus entails the idea of agency in that speech acts imply a subject of utterance: a subject performing the speech *act*. For example, verdicts imply a judge, or a person who judges; promises imply a person who promises, etc. According to speech act theory, the subject of speech is then also the subject of action in that speech acts have a performative function. For example, we use verdicts to perform certain tasks: holding persons responsible, sentencing an accused, maintaining justice, etc. Hence, Ricoeur suggests in *Oneself as Another* that "pragmatics" is better "equipped," than "semantics" to define the idea that the subject is an agent that performs responsible actions (Ricoeur 1992, 89).

According to Ricoeur, pragmatics, in contrast to semantics, demonstrates to a certain extent the idea of responsibility in the moral sense. Exemplary in this regard is Ricoeur's interpretation of juridical speech act theory, and particularly of H.L.A. Hart's article "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights" (Ricoeur 1992, 99) ^{vi} According to Ricoeur, Hart's article demonstrates the extent to which propositions in ordinary language are used to identify agents as the cause of legal and moral actions. In analyzing juridical speech acts of the type "verdictives," Hart demonstrates, according to Ricoeur, that legal and moral verdicts are propositions in ordinary language, which humans use to ascribe moral responsibility to each other (Ricoeur 1992, 100). For example, the judge's verdict in court determines whether action X is a murder or whether action Y is an assassination. Following Ricoeur's line of reasoning, pragmatics thus points to the idea of being morally responsible. A pragmatic theory of ascription, like Hart's, explains moral speech acts, which we use for attributing responsibility to others and ourselves. As Ricoeur points out, pragmatics demonstrates "self-designation" and "other-designation" in "a speech situation" (Ricoeur 1992, 111). For example, judges use legal verdicts for identifying others as responsible. And, in cases of legal defense, the accused recognizes her- or himself as

responsible or innocent. In this regard, pragmatics explains, like semantics, the empirical essence of responsibility or how humans use language for identifying others and themselves as persons or as the same, i.e., as physical bodies that are the cause of actions. Yet, as Ricoeur points out, pragmatics also explains, in contrast to semantics, how humans hold each other *to be morally responsible* by means of verdicts.

However, given that pragmatics, for Ricoeur, explains the idea of moral responsibility in terms of moral speech acts, this method ultimately insufficiently explains responsibility in the sense of “imputation” according to Ricoeur. For Ricoeur, understanding responsibility in this sense implies “ethical evaluation of human action in the teleological and deontological sense — in other words, in accordance with the good and the obligatory” (Ricoeur 1992, 112). Given that pragmatics does explain, as Ricoeur points out, the extent to which humans use moral and legal speech acts to ascribe moral responsibility to each other, pragmatics does however fail to explain the deontological and teleological significance of responsibility. More exactly, pragmatics does explain *how moral and legal speech acts work*, but pragmatics also makes abstraction of *morals*, or of *how to understand the meaning of the good and of duty*. Furthermore, pragmatics insufficiently captures the difference between self and other, and therefore of being responsible, because speech acts apply in the same basic sense to oneself and to others as well. For example, the verdict that John is responsible for an action has the same basic meaning as the verdict that William is responsible for an action, or that I am. Given that different verdicts identify different persons as the cause of different actions and that speech acts in that sense identify particular individuals (or ‘sames’), the significance of speech acts does not clarify the idea of ipseity or what it means to be a self, as a subject capable of speech, action, narrative and responsibility. Certainly, as Ricoeur points out, speech acts imply a speaking subject and in that sense also an agent. Yet explaining speech acts implies explaining a universal logical structure of speech, and this is possible without referring to existential features that allow for understanding the motives of responsibility or why humans are capable of performing responsible actions.

In my opinion, Ricoeur points to the shortcomings of semantics and pragmatics regarding the ideas of the self and of responsibility. Given that semantics explains the logical sense of the concept of responsibility or what it means to ascribe actions to persons, and given that pragmatics explains the act of ascribing actions to persons in the context of situations of (moral or non-

moral) speech acts, these methods fail to address deontological and teleological questions about responsibility. Semantics and pragmatics make abstraction of the question, for example, of what it means, as a self, to perform good actions or of the question of what justice ought to be. These and similar questions, for Ricoeur, should be answered by means of a hermeneutics of the self in general and of the good life in particular (cf. the final subset of *Oneself as Another*, chapters 7 through 9), which aims at an ontological-existential understanding of ethics and morals and what it means to be responsible. Hence, Ricoeur points to the limits of philosophy of language to give an answer to the question: “Who is the moral subject of imputation?” (Ricoeur 1992, 16). Following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, philosophy of language explains what it means to ascribe responsibility to persons in using ordinary language, but it nevertheless fails to lead to an understanding of what it means for the self to be a responsible subject that participates in ethical and moral life.

Ricoeur’s idea of responsibility thus highlights his ambiguous relation with analytical philosophy of language. According to Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language explains the concept of responsibility in common language, which relates to empirical reality. Ricoeur’s hermeneutical understanding of responsibility in *Oneself as Another* differs in this regard from his early phenomenological understanding of responsibility in *Freedom and Nature*, Ricoeur’s first major work. In *Freedom and Nature* Ricoeur more specifically proposes a phenomenological analysis in which he derives the basic sense of responsibility from consciousness (Ricoeur 2007c, 55ff.). In this analysis Ricoeur argues that the experience that oneself is the cause of one’s own actions leads to the understanding of the basic sense of responsibility. As Ricoeur writes, the basic sense of responsibility lies in the experience that one is ready to respond to the question: “who did that?” (Ricoeur 2007c, 56). This idea of ascribing responsibility to oneself differs from Strawson’s semantic concept of ascription, which Ricoeur discusses in *Oneself as Another*, and according to which the basic sense of responsibility lies in the meaning of the word ‘responsibility’ in ordinary language. The concept of responsibility in ordinary language is an empirical concept, so Ricoeur suggests in *Oneself as Another*, since it applies to observable physical bodies. Language allows identifying persons as particular bodies that cause changes in the physical universe. Ricoeur contends that understanding responsibility implies taking into account “the causality that Galilean and Newtonian science has made unavoidable” (Ricoeur 2000, 23; see also: Ricoeur 1992, 99). To hold a person responsible is to identify this person as an agent that has “an interference that

effectively causes changes in the world” (ibid.). For instance, by means of empirical observation and common language it is possible to identify John as the person who fired the gun, and thus as the one responsible for the shooting. In this sense, John is an empirically observable self: a person with a physical body that caused certain actions. Understanding that the self is first of all a body is significant for understanding responsibility. Ricoeur thus uses semantics and pragmatics for understanding the idea of responsibility in the first place empirically, rather than as an idea that is directly derived from the ego. According to Ricoeur, the self that is capable of speech, action, narration and responsibility is first of all a psychophysical body or a unity of mind and body, and ordinary language allows us to identify this unity.

However, for Ricoeur, understanding responsibility ultimately implies more than ordinary language philosophy. This understanding implies the idea of moral imputation, which, in its turn, implicates the hermeneutical and phenomenological idea of self. For Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language makes it that responsibility is not merely an idealistic idea. Yet hermeneutics also supersedes analytical philosophy of language in Ricoeur’s opinion in understanding the experience of being responsible, which gives meaning to our concept of responsibility in ordinary language and which an analysis of this concept does not disclose. As Ricoeur writes in *The Course of Recognition*, “it is left to phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy to take up the question ... about the self-designation attaching to the idea of imputability as an aptitude for imputation” (Ricoeur 2007b, 107; see also: Ricoeur 2000, 22). Following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, understanding the motivations of moral responsibility is the task of hermeneutics and phenomenology. In other words, understanding moral responsibility implies understanding what it means for oneself to be a self, and to designate oneself as the subject of actions that are morally imputed.

Wittgenstein ‘upside down’

How then does Ricoeur define the task of phenomenological hermeneutics in his discussion of analytical philosophy of language? Semantics and pragmatics can clearly identify, as I have argued with Ricoeur, what the concept *responsibility* means in ordinary language, and even how we use moral and juridical speech acts to ascribe responsibility to others and to ourselves. Semantics and pragmatics consequently point to an important task of cognitive science: *identifying the causes of human actions*. Yet ordinary language philosophy neglects

understanding what it means to be responsible or to be a self capable of performing responsible actions, and this is the task of phenomenological hermeneutics: *understanding the motives of human action*.

In point of fact, Ricoeur's thought is often identified as a philosophical anthropology that aims at understanding the meaning of human action. Several Ricoeur scholars argue the question 'what does it mean to be human?' is a central theme in his writings. In his book, *Paul Ricœur: une philosophie de l'agir humain*, Johann Michel, for example, argues that defining the nature of human action is the hallmark of Ricoeur's thought. According to Michel, three major themes characterize his work and constitute his philosophy of human action: anthropology, hermeneutics and normative philosophy (Michel 2006, 14). Indeed, the question of human action is a point of discussion among Ricoeur scholars (Kearney 1996, Mei and Lewin 2012, Petit 2014). Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée recently published *Écrits et conférences 3*, a posthumous collection of several of Ricoeur's anthropological texts (Ricoeur 2013).

Ricoeur's idea of the task of phenomenological hermeneutics in relation to cognitive science becomes clearer, I think, when taking into account his distinction between understanding and explaining. In *From Text to Action* Ricoeur argues, in contrast to Dilthey, that "explanation" and "understanding" are complementary. Whereas explanation, for Ricoeur, applies to the physical domain of causality and cognitive science, understanding applies to the spiritual domain of motives and of the human science. Ricoeur's idea of the complementarity of hermeneutics and analytical philosophy is similar. Whereas analytical philosophy of language explains persons as physical bodies that cause actions, hermeneutics also aims at understanding these actions and their justification. As Ricoeur writes in *From Text to Action*, the human body "is at once one body among others (a thing among things) and a manner of existing of a being capable of reflecting, of changing its mind, and of justifying its conduct" (Ricoeur 2007a, 135). In other words, ordinary language philosophy allows identifying persons as the cause of actions, but hermeneutics and phenomenology also allow for understanding the motives of actions and, therefore, what it means for the self to perform responsible actions.

More precisely, Ricoeur criticizes in *From Text to Action* analytical philosophy of language, and particularly G.E.M. Anscombe's theory of intentions, for distinguishing between explaining the cause of events as a different kind of "language game" from understanding the motive of actions

(Ricoeur 2007a, 132ff.). Certainly, Ricoeur does not deny the fundamental difference between causes/effects and motives/actions. As he points out, for example, in the case of effects, it is possible to describe cause and effect as different physical facts, because there is “no logical connection of implication between cause and effect” (Ricoeur 2007a, 133). In the case of actions, however, identifying the motive implies “mentioning the action,” and describing the motive of the action thus implies explaining its logic. In the case of human actions cause and motive nevertheless overlap for Ricoeur (*ibid.*). This means for the idea of responsibility that holding agents responsible implies both identifying the causes of their actions, and their motives. For example, in court the convict should be identified both as the agent that caused (an) action(s), and as the person who performed (a) crime(s). As Ricoeur writes: “Human action is as it is precisely because it belongs both to the domain of causation and to that of motivation, hence to explanation and to understanding” (Ricoeur 2007a, 135).

Ricoeur’s idea of responsibility and his discussion of semantics and pragmatics demonstrate, so I am arguing, the relation between cognitive science and phenomenological hermeneutics. Semantics and pragmatics allow for understanding the empirical basis of the idea of responsibility. Responsibility is empirically observable, so Ricoeur demonstrates, in that it is possible to identify physical bodies as the cause of actions by using ordinary language: concepts (*cf.* semantics) and speech acts (*cf.* pragmatics). Such identification is also the task of cognitive science. Following Ricoeur’s line of reasoning, it makes sense to hold human beings responsible, because ordinary language makes it possible to understand what responsibility means: to identify a person as the cause of an action (or of multiple actions). In this regard, cognitive science’s task consists in explaining how human action relates to empirical reality: to our psychophysical constitution, our biological features, our neuronal composition, etc. Exemplary in this regard is the fact that in contemporary analytical philosophy and philosophy of mind, in particular in the free-will debate, there is an increasing interest in cognitive science. Recent theories in these fields examine morality in relation to natural feelings and human nature in general (e.g., Ethell 2010, McKenna 2012, Sommers 2012, Vargas 2013, Clarke, McKenna and Smith 2015). Several of these theories moreover make use of empirical data, and biological and neuroscientific knowledge in order to define the concepts of free will, agency and responsibility (Sinnott-Armstrong 2014, Mele 2014). Only in explaining the causes of human actions, so these theories claim, do we come to understand responsibility.

Yet, ascription of (moral) responsibility to agents would make little sense, so Ricoeur demonstrates in his discussion of analytical philosophy of language, if we were unaware of what it means to actually live through the state of being responsible corresponding to this ascription: of making promises, of experiencing expectations from others, of living up to one's role in life, etc. In that case responsibility would depend only on arbitrary language games: on linguistic rules relating to ascription. If we would never come to understand the motives of our responsible actions and those of others, then it would make little sense to use language in order to hold persons responsible. Similarly, it would make little sense, for example, knowing how to apply the rules of chess while never actually playing chess, and experiencing what it means for oneself to play chess and why others play chess.

According to Ricoeur, the task of hermeneutics is understanding the motives of human actions, which implies interpretation of the *narrative identity of self's lived existence*. This might come as no surprise, since Ricoeur's hermeneutics in general repeatedly aims to understand human action on the basis of the interpretation of texts and symbols. *From Text to Action*, where he attempts to define action derived from the structure of text, is perhaps most exemplary in this respect (Ricoeur 2007a). Further, in the subset on narrative identity in his hermeneutics of the self in *Oneself as Another* (chapters 5 and 6), Ricoeur explicitly discusses the distinction between, on the one hand, "identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*)," and, on the other hand, "identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbstheit*, French *ipséité*)" (Ricoeur 1992, 116ff.). This distinction lies at the very core of Ricoeur's idea of narrativity. At the end of that subset, Ricoeur further discusses what he understands as "the ethical implications of the narrative," explaining to what extent the question of narrative identity entails the questions of ethics, morals and responsibility (Ricoeur 1992, 163ff.). In the remainder of this article I will argue how Ricoeur demonstrates that being capable of responsibility implies being a self and having a narrative identity, and that philosophy of language, which focuses on the logical structure of language rather than on the meaning of texts or narratives, therefore fails to understand the motives of responsibility and of human action.

Ricoeur more exactly introduces his idea of ipseity in the opening chapter of the subset on narrative identity in *Oneself as Another*. In that chapter Ricoeur examines his notion of "permanence in time" (Ricoeur 1992, 116ff.). For Ricoeur, this notion marks the difference

between the same and the self. Ricoeur uses the concept *sameness* or *idem*-identity to explain the person's substantial identity, which remains unchanged over time (cf. Strawson's concept of the physical body). For example, part of the person's *idem*-identity, for Ricoeur, is the person's "genetic code" (Ricoeur 1992, 117). *Selfhood*, *selfness* or *ipse*-identity (Ricoeur uses these terms synonymously), on the other hand, refers to the self's identity that differs from the person's substantial sameness. More exactly, selfness is the person's ability to turn life into a 'singular story' or to form an identity by means of the narrative. For example, part of the person's ipseity, in Ricoeur's opinion, is the self's capability for making promises or for "keeping one's word" (Ricoeur 1992, 118). For him, the "singularity" of the self's existence relates then to the self's "character" in the sense of "the unity of a life considered a temporal totality which is itself singular and distinguished from all others" (Ricoeur 1992, 145). Following Ricoeur's line of reasoning, the capacity to make one's life into a singular narrative, to 'play a character in one's life story,' is what constitutes being a self, acting freely and responsibly in a singular sense. In this regard, responsibility implies ipseity for Ricoeur. This idea of selfhood in the sense of ipseity is, however, not yet covered by philosophy of language, which examines the linguistic significance of the concept of the self, but not its narrative structure.

Further, according to Ricoeur the idea of *ipse*-identity, which entails narrative identity, implies ethics and morals in general, and the idea of responsibility in particular. For him, *ipse*-identity relates to ethics and morals in a double sense. First of all, narrativity as such has ethical and moral significance in that stories often recount ethical and moral actions. As Ricoeur writes in *Oneself as Another*, the "art of storytelling is the art of exchanging *experiences*" in the sense of "practical wisdom" (Ricoeur 1992, 164). This means, for Ricoeur, that stories often contain "estimations" and "evaluations" that are "teleological" and "deontological" (ibid.). The actions of characters in stories are thus often ethically and morally loaded. We can think, for example, of Biblical literature, Greek tragedy, but also of ethical novels or stories like Dostoyevsky's. In this respect, narrative provides "the great laboratory of the imaginary" and "also explorations in the realm of good and evil" (Ricoeur 1992, 164). It is through hermeneutic interpretation of these stories that we come to learn the motives of responsibility. Secondly, not only do narratives have ethical and moral significance, as Ricoeur points out, ethical and moral action also finds its inspiration in imagination, and in narratives. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur writes in this regard about "the refiguration of action by the narrative," by which he means that stories and their

ethical and moral significance can aid moral judgment and practical wisdom (Ricoeur 1992, 165). Ricoeur also speaks about “ethical imagination,” “which feeds off narrative imagination” (ibid.). Humans find inspiration in ethical and moral stories for making ethical and moral decisions, and, in that sense, for performing responsible actions. The task of hermeneutics is understanding the motives of human action, and this implies interpretation of narratives and the ‘textual structure’ of the self’s narrative identity.

Further, Ricoeur demonstrates, I think, that the self’s capability to recount life into a singular narrative, and more exactly the self’s capability for “self-constancy” in keeping promises, makes the self accountable for his or her actions. Ricoeur writes in *Oneself as Another*:

Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another. The term “responsibility” unites both meanings: “counting on” and “being accountable for.” It unites them, adding to them the idea of 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 1992, 165)

This means that *ipse*-identity or the self’s capability to form a singular identity in identifying oneself with stories, and maintaining oneself in those stories, is the condition of free action, and, as a consequence, of responsibility. Given the predispositions of the self’s character, the self’s freedom lies in the capability to act according to the narrative character he or she creates for his or her own life. This capability makes the self accountable for acting in that it makes it that others can count on the self who is capable of acting in a constant manner. Consequently, contrarily to the causes of their actions, the motives for their actions are to be found in these singular life stories. It is the task of hermeneutics to interpret these life stories. Identifying someone as being responsible for an action does not amount only to finding out whether or not this person actually caused this action, but also what this person’s motives were for performing the action (e.g., whether he/she acted out of passion or deliberately, in a blurry haste or fully conscious). Holding selves responsible implies understanding their singular life stories and how they came to act as they did. It is one thing to explain ‘who did what’ (identifying agents as the cause of actions), it is yet quite another to understand ‘why someone is responsible for.’ Hermeneutics helps

understanding singular life stories, like the interpretation of a singular text helps understanding what the author meant to write. However, hermeneutics is not limited to a reading of the text. It can rely on rules or general traits of human existence that aid in comprehending the motivations of human actions. In this regard, phenomenology essentially adds to hermeneutics. Exemplary in this regard is Ricoeur's phenomenological analysis of *solicitude* in *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1992, 180ff.). Ricoeur's phenomenological concept of true sympathy demonstrates that solicitude or the act of care is motivated by passive feelings of true sympathy for the suffering of others. Ricoeur writes in *Oneself as Another*: Solicitude "occurs, originating in the suffering other":

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.' (Ricoeur 1992, 191-92)

Ricoeur's concept of solicitude describes human existential traits or features that allow us to be compassionate to the suffering of others, and how such feelings motivate an anxiety and concern for others. In that sense, this concept illustrates how lived experience motivates being responsible. In this regard, understanding responsibility entails having a narrative identity, and only through being a self, e.g., in living through moments of care, can one understand what it means to be responsible. Only in being able to keep promises, in maintaining a singular character, a singular life story, does one understand what it means to take responsibility.

In sum, Ricoeur's idea of narrative identity points to the task of phenomenological hermeneutics. This task is twofold. It consists of interpretation of both text and of action. Further, this interpretation is inspired by phenomenological analysis of experiences, like solicitude, that help understanding text and action. Ricoeur's idea of narrative identity moreover reveals that understanding human action is only possible in being a self, and in living through existence from a singular perspective. On the other hand, the task of cognitive science is, so Ricoeur points out, explaining the causes of actions. Phenomenological hermeneutics can use cognitive science and ordinary language philosophy to explain how concepts relate to empirical reality and are thus not idealistic. However, Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to human action also implies abandoning the basic principles of analytical philosophy of language and of cognitive science. If Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self finds inspiration in ordinary language philosophy, this hermeneutics

ultimately surpasses the domain of linguistics and empirical knowledge. In this regard, Ricoeur breaks with Wittgenstein's principle that philosophy should be limited to investigating language. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein famously states that philosophical problems "are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (Wittgenstein 1958, 47). Similarly, cognitive science reduces knowledge to causal relations in empirical reality. Ricoeur in his turn suggests that we should turn Wittgenstein's principle 'upside down,' and state that even though philosophy should find inspiration in the fact that language analysis certainly clarifies philosophical concepts and cognitive science explains causal reality, philosophical problems make little sense when we approach these problems in making an abstraction of the actual experiences that relate to them. Understanding these experiences is the task of phenomenological hermeneutics.

Conclusion

In this article I examined Ricoeur's discussion of analytical philosophy of language. I argued that Ricoeur demonstrates with this discussion the task of hermeneutics. This task consists in, so Ricoeur demonstrates, comprehending the motivations of human action, as opposed to explaining the causes of human action, which is common to cognitive science. I argued furthermore that Ricoeur's idea of responsibility highlights his ambiguous relation with analytical philosophy of language, and the task of phenomenological hermeneutics. For Ricoeur, analytical philosophy of language, semantics and pragmatics in particular, explains how we use the concept of responsibility to ascribe actions to agents that caused them (X is responsible for opening the door). Phenomenological hermeneutics should take into account this concept in Ricoeur's opinion, in order to define responsibility in relation to the physical body. Semantics and pragmatics are thus necessary propaedeutics of phenomenological hermeneutics in that these methods enable one to avoid an idealistic approach to phenomenology and hermeneutics, according to which the idea of responsibility is derived from inner consciousness alone. Yet Ricoeur also stresses the insufficiency of ordinary language philosophy for understanding responsibility. Phenomenological hermeneutics helps one to understand the experience of being responsible, and thus supersedes analytical philosophy of language that makes an abstraction of this experience. Just like we only learn the game of chess in actually playing it and not only in

knowing its rules, we only learn the meaning and the motives of responsibility in actually being responsible and not only in knowing the linguistic rules for using the concept of responsibility. Phenomenological hermeneutics should include ordinary language, but, at the same time, surpass it: hence Ricoeur's ambiguous relation with analytical philosophy of language. Similarly, phenomenological hermeneutics should find inspiration in cognitive science. Cognitive science provides information about the empirical constitution of the physical body (natural feelings, neurons, bodily processes) that helps one to explain human action. A phenomenological hermeneutics that aims at understanding human action can then draw on empirical knowledge about human action. On the other hand, phenomenological hermeneutics takes a step further in understanding the motives of human action through interpretation of narratives and the self's narrative identity, and this interpretation thus means leaving aside the public domains of language and empirical knowledge.

Post-doctoral researcher, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences (CAS), Prague

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ⁱ “a) l’analyse linguistique évite les difficultés de toute introspection, à savoir le recours au sentiment vif, à l’intuition: Wittgenstein, en faisant le procès des ‘descriptions ostensives privées’ a fait le procès de toute phénoménologie qui se présente comme une modalité de ‘perception interne’; à quoi l’analyse linguistique oppose

l'investigation des énoncés publics dans lesquels s'exprime l'expérience. b) la phénoménologie, en prétendant saisir l'essence sur l'exemple, rencontre une seconde fois l'embarras du recours à l'intuition: il s'agit de 'voir' l'essence sur l'exemple" (Ricoeur 1977, 113-14).

ⁱⁱ For Ricoeur, Husserl's phenomenology is similar to ordinary language philosophy, like the philosophy of the second Wittgenstein, Austin, Hampshire or Anscombe, in that both Husserl's phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy hold that philosophical problems should be understood by applying the correct language. While Husserl's phenomenology examines the essence of the experience of consciousness by applying phenomenological concepts based on the model of rigorous science, ordinary language philosophy investigates reality by searching for the correct meaning of common language. "Pour la philosophie du langage ordinaire, il n'est pas question de reformuler celui-ci selon les exigences d'une 'langue bien faite'; il s'agit bien plutôt de se placer à l'intérieur du langage ordinaire, de façon à exhiber ce qu'il signifie réellement, précisément en tant que langage ordinaire. A cet égard, les recherches du second Wittgenstein, dans les Investigations philosophiques, celles d'Austin, de Hampshire, de E. Anscombe, représentent une révolution comparable à celle qui amena Husserl à opposer une science descriptive du vécu à l'idéal mathématique de définitude et de saturation; pour ma part, je ferai correspondre terme à terme les deux jeux d'opposition, du côté de la philosophie analytique entre langue bien faite et langage ordinaire, du côté de la phénoménologie entre essences exactes et essences inexactes" (Ricoeur 1977, 115).

ⁱⁱⁱ "La phénoménologie se tient au niveau du sens du vécu, l'analyse linguistique au plan des énoncés; celle-ci définit le niveau d'expression, celle-là le niveau de constitution. La phénoménologie définit le plan de fondation, l'analyse linguistique le plan de manifestation" (Ricoeur 1977, 128).

^{iv} "Si, en effet, la réduction [phénoménologique] n'est pas la perte de quelque chose, ni aucune soustraction, mais la prise de distance à partir de quoi il n'y a pas seulement des choses mais des signes, des sens, des significations, - la réduction phénoménologique marque la naissance de la fonction symbolique en général; ce faisant, elle donne un fondement aux opérations contingentes de l'analyse linguistique" (Ricoeur 1977, 13).

^v "[C]ertains emplois de la notion de responsabilité dans la langue ordinaire ... n'ont rien à voir avec l'accusation, mais concernent la causalité. Bien plus, dans certains emplois, cette assignation de causalité déborde le champ de l'action humaine et s'adresse à des événements naturels; nous disons qu'une baisse de pression atmosphérique en tel point du globe est responsable d'une tempête en un autre point, que l'étincelle est responsable d'un incendie. Feinberg parle en ce sens d'attribution de causalité, de pure assignabilité causale; cet emploi est légitime car il est compréhensible et a, si l'on peut dire, sa grammaire propre" (Ricoeur 1977, 56).

^{vi} Ricoeur sees an example of moral speech acts in H. L. A. Hart's "The Ascription of Responsibility and Rights." See Hart 1948. In *La sémantique de l'action* Ricoeur also writes: "Selon l'auteur [H.L.A. Hart], pour interpréter les propositions de langage ordinaire du type 'Il a fait cela,' il faut les rapprocher des décisions juridiques par lesquelles un juge statue que ceci est un contrat valide, que ceci est un meurtre et non un assassinat. ... Les décisions juridiques sont donc prises comme paradigmes des propositions du langage ordinaire. Elles en révèlent le caractère spécifique qui consiste non pas à 'décrire' mais à 'ascrire' (describe vs. Ascribe)." (Ricoeur 1977, 51-52).