

Imagining a Life: On Imagination and Identity

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Abstract

A reflective study on the role of imagination in constructing the subjective of self involves both the theme of the representation and that of the imagination as a common speculative practice. In this paper, the author will proceed from a speculative overview around the issue of personal identity to a hermeneutical analysis onto certain uses of imagination in some of the most recent scientific researches. The aim is to (re-)determine which anthropological(-philosophical) model should be regarded as better mirroring the current scientific advancements in recognising the function of imagination in personal identity determination. The author proposes here that Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of the capable human being offers a productive approach to the dialectic of experience, imagination and self-representation in the human identity development. Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology reveals the profound and constitutive intertwining between the mind and body, reality and imagination, self-representation and social interaction, relation and recognition.

Keywords: Identity, Representation, Imagination, Hermeneutics, Science

Introduction

In philosophy, especially in philosophy of knowledge, the theme of imagination has a long history. It is the result of a long and varied speculative tradition that can be traced back to Aristotle, who, in his *On the Soul*, distinguishes imagination from both, sensation ('sensations are always true, imaginations are for the most part false'; Arist., *On the Soul*, III, 428a) and opinion ('imagination cannot be (1) opinion plus sensation, or (2) opinion mediate by sensation, or (3) a blend of opinion and sensation'; *Ib.*). Of a more naturalistic orientation was St. Augustine of Hippo ('the mind is destitute of images presented by the imagination, so long as it has not been informed by the senses of external things'; *Letters of St. Augustine*, Lett. VII, chap. II), while St. Thomas Aquinas includes the imagination among the four interior senses (together with common sense, instinct and memory; see *Summa Theologica*) giving to it both, a positive and negative function (imagination works between the mind and body, providing first 'reasons' via perception which are subsequently purified by the intellect; but it is a function that may confuse images with reality and in no cases it penetrates the essences). In the modern era, René Descartes in particular attributes a stronggnoseological value to it, giving to imagination a strong role even in reference to the construction of self-knowledge (see *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*; Rule XII). David Hume, who aligns with Thomas Hobbes, places the imagination more explicitly at the base of the constitution of the self. He interprets this process in a negative way conceiving the identity as a 'fiction' ('The identity which we ascribe to the mind of man is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies'; see D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*; Book I, Part IV, Sect. VI). He starts a long line of discussion on the construction and substance of personal identity, which is currently the bearer of important theoretical and practical implications and dilemmas, even in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. This problem, too, has ancient and varied roots, linked to the most original thematic of mind-body dualism, self-knowledge and immortality (or permanence of the individuality of the deceased). In some ways, classical religious-philosophical paradoxical dilemmas persist in Hume's ideas, inherent in the dialectic of permanence and change or, better, the dilemma of the permanence of personal identity in the continuous changes in experiences, feelings, dispositions, beliefs, interests and the like of a specific person. The debate has now been deepened and diversified not only thanks to the results of scientific research, but also, thanks to the great narrative literature that has been able to re-propose and propose old and new dilemmas concerning personal identity.

The cases of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1772-1831), Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867) and *Doll's House* (1879), Luigi Pirandello's *The Late Mattia Pascal* (1904) and *One, No One and Hundred Thousand* (1926) are emblematic. They variously thematise the dilemmas concerning human identity and the realisation of life, the crisis of identity and the search of authenticity, the fragmentation of an existence and the effort for unifying it, the dialectics between mind and (inner) 'demons', self-representation and the real world, the others and the mask, and so on. All of them variously question the nature, constitution and validity of personal identity rejecting its substantialist interpretation, which means to consider personal identity, as essentially already given at birth. Beyond narrative literature explorations and imaginary representations, an attentive analysis and evaluation requires scientific and speculative work at different levels both onto psychological, sociological and educational human development and onto the exact theoretical-practical definition of what subjectivity, identity and personality in effect are. The question becomes even more complicated (1) interdisciplinarily and speculatively pondering the different theoretical perspectives and (2) putting in connection the dialectical comparison of different theories of identity with ethical, social or cultural value systems. How is human identity formed? What is the difference between identity and personal identity? What makes someone a person? What determines that a subject stays the same, despite the variety in experiences, mind-body changes and so on? What remains as recognisable for a person being 'the same person'? And which are the connections between personal identity developments and social and cultural values?

Far from solving the theoretical and speculative challenges of identity, nowadays strong disciplinary differentiations bring further complexifying elements. Thus, the idea of inconsistency of the self finds not only incisive reasons (for example) in the post-modern and post-human approaches. Yet, it can also avail itself from the ever richer framework that the mental and brain's sciences are defining around the mechanisms and dynamics. Without a doubt, the risk of reversal of perspective in the most radical simplification lies here (considers, for example, the case of Changeux; see Changeux 1983). We need a lot of attention in this work of revision, which is connected to the growth of our knowledge concerning the self and person.

As the discovery of physics of the particles and the study of the role of electromagnetic field in the unitary constitution of the matter and the relationships between the singular objects in the space nothing has changed in the experience and factuality of the singular (unified) objects, in a similar way we should probably ponder that something analogous has happened and must be understood in relation to the (unified) personal identity and person.

How can the new scientific progress refute or rebut that unifying property that causes one to recognise oneself as that person 'who he is'? And, what is the relationship between the different dimensions of psychic and personal life and the unitary expression of the identity in relation to the self and the social sphere?

Imagination today

The most recent research on imagination go along the triple thematic line of *imagination*, *mental imagery* and *self-representation*, with a persistent, sceptical anchoring. But, there is also a wider debate in the ethical sphere – on the role that imagination plays in developing our practical competence and on the relationship between imagination, emotions, moral values and social reality (in connection to this, see Nussbaum, 1993).

In philosophy, the question of imagination is currently (preponderantly) discussed in those branches of philosophy that are placed in the framework of cognitive science. Above all, the investigation concerns the relationship between memory and the imaginative function; the role of imagination in the mental prefiguration of action and experience; the role of imagination together with the functioning of empathy and interaction, and the role of imagination in counterfactual reasoning. A certain number of research initiatives develop studies on a subject closer to the areas of philosophical anthropology, which is consistently sensitive to the psychological, psychopathological and psychiatric implications of the question concerning imagination and identity. Here, there are three major investigative grounds: (1) the one in which the question of imagination correlates to the problem of autism; (2) the other in which the implications of the imagination are investigated in pathological frustration; and, finally, (3) that which studies the role of imagination in the schizophrenic experience. (1) Regarding autism, one of the damaged areas of the so-called *Wing's triad* concerns imaginative skills (see Wing & Gould, 1979; Baron, Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985; Carpenter, Tomasello & Striano, 2005; Rogers, Cook & Meryl, 2005³).

Scientists, such as Gregory Currie and Ian Ravenscroft, even judge autism as a substantial deficit of imaginative capacity, which must thus be considered as a ‘disorder of imagination’ (see Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002; Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985; Carpenter, Tomasello & Striano, 2005). (2) The pathological aspects of frustration concern different levels of imaginative life because frustration, understood as the destruction of a belief, reveals implications both on the level of a representation of the others and the world, and on the level of self-representation and the recognition of others. This is the destruction of a false self-representation, a false representation of a relationship or of the other. Even the pathologies connected to frustration have been understood as a disorder of the imagination. The imaginative processing of a certain belief would disappear because of the impact of the representative and affective interior needs feed into a testbed of the ‘reality’ and of experiential practice. However, there are also those who oppose this thesis by differently revealing the dense dialectical interweaving of imagination and belief experiencing frustration (see Gendler, 2007). (3) A complex pathology, such as schizophrenia may be the manifestation or counter-effect of a chronic delusion and a massive and radical emotional detachment from reality. The debate on the reality and on the causes of schizophrenia is wide and non-linear, and a certain number of scholars place attention on the role played in it by imaginative functions, and not only in the sense of the loss of distinction and substantial differentiation between the real and imaginative (see Harrison, 2005; Frith, 1992; Campbell, 1999; Langdon, Davies & Coltheart, 2002; Zahavi, 2000).

Looking for a narrative-hermeneutic approach

The two discursive lines on the imagination and imagine may be different as well as closely linked, particularly when the philosophical interest is deeply connected to a reflective research concerning the human being. Behind the idea of the human being as an ‘imagining animal’ there is the philosophical anchoring on the factuality of imagine and imagination both within psychic and existential human life. But, what kind of experience does the image form? And, how do we have awareness of the different uses of this reality or of the participation of it in the representational and experiential reconstruction of ourselves and the wider world? For a philosopher like Carlo Sini – who establishes a strong connection to Sartre’s existential phenomenology, the image is the heart of the ‘strategy of the soul’ (see Sini, 1989, p. VIII). Actually, it is Sartre who realises some of the most important and in-depth philosophical studies on the imagination (1936) and the imaginary (1940). Sini underlines how images exist in a specific, ontological way compared to other things. In effect, they reproduce the essence in a phenomenological sense, that is the essence connected to concrete individuality, having at the same time their consistency via consciousness and not via the material world (see *Ibidem*, p. 6). As if to say that things and the corresponding images are ‘one’ in essence and ‘two’ in manifestation, experience or even existence. From his Sartrian perspective, Sini strongly criticises what he calls ‘naive metaphysics’, in which reality is attributed only to something that is considered as possessing sensitive attributes and from which the idea of the image as a copy of the existing thing is taken; when instead the image is not a psychic state. On the one hand, there are no images in consciousness, because consciousness is not a container or a box. On the other hand, images form a certain type of consciousness, that is, they are an intentional act and not a thing. The image is consciousness of something (p. 8). Imagination constructions are synthetic organisations of experience. They are not perceptions or free products of the work of memory, but instead, they are directly connected to the unconscious or voluntary intentional functioning of the psychic-organic life. However, we can also have perceptual images (coming back home, I can immediately recognise my dog or the two rows of oak trees etc.). Yet, perceptive images are retentions, the result of perceptual activity that operates impacting on memory, and there is no same intentional productivity of imaginative work and imaginative knowledge. In the second chapter of Sini’s book image is intended as a way with which we have learned to understand ourselves and the world. On the one hand, this enriches our self-knowledge and, on the other hand, it lets a cultural prejudice operate. It is an acquisition that can be traced back to Descartes, and further to Plato. It is an acquisition that reveals the reflection of an orientation to the illusory behind a path of internalisation or uses turned to the interiority of the images. It is significant that Plato, the creator of the allegory of the Cave, never attributes images and shadows to the work of the mind. What Sini emphasises is that ‘the question of imagination [...] is the pivotal question and the underlying problem of all Platonism. It is the very core on which the operation of the ‘strategy of the soul’ is implanted’ (p. 67; the trans. is mine). This is the formation of the human person, of the political man, of the epistemic subject, of the creative innovation of the self. ‘Establishing the psychic image as a mediator between sensation and concept is an indispensable condition for the origin of a humanity characterised by the scientific knowledge of what we are.

This is certainly still the problem that Husserl recognised when he declared that psychology is for us the science of ultimate decisions' (p. 67-68; the trans. is mine). At the discursive level an intertwining between gnoseology, epistemology, psychology and philosophical anthropology seems to be determined here. And as for Freud, the 'scene' of the strategy of the soul becomes radicalised (p. 114). According to Freud's perspective, in fact, there is nothing productive in the imaginative function, when understood as potential functions of symbolic-representative productions and creations. Conversely, the psychoanalytic understanding constituted a rational penetration or reabsorption of psychic events and an anchoring of representative and spiritual life to the psycho-biological dynamism. Interiorly, the Freudian subject is representatively and symbolically impoverished. Yet, Freud also generates a new problematique regarding of the relationship between the psycho-representational dimension and reality. The effect of the dialectic between pleasure principle and reality principle on the level of psychic life and of the representative and evaluative reconstruction of the world produces a new configuration of the subjective-objective, representational-real and interior-exterior set-ups. The change in meaning, strong relativisation of the objective, the reality and the world reveal an increased centralisation on representative, imaginative and reconstructive functions within the realisation of personal identity and (ultimately) the world itself.

With Sini's analysis we take one step away from the opening of the hermeneutic-narrative path, the one with which we can rethink the representative and imaginative functions as not only ways to penetrate, know and tell about ourselves and the world, but also, the ways in which we reconstruct and remanufacture the world and ourselves, that is, the ways through which we realise ourselves, and how we participate to the realisation of the world as such.

The two sides of imagination

Another philosopher, Virgilio Melchiorre, is bound to the tradition of French phenomenology, from which he develops a research referred to imagination through the problematic field concerning the construction of the utopian consciousness. Imagination can reach the point of denial and passing of the reality. This can happen in close correlation with the functioning of imagination in constituting and reconfiguring the self. Imagination is an organ of the liberty. It is an 'instrument' of historical construction and of making of history (see Melchiorre, 1972, p. 81 and 85). In fact, it is via the imaginative experience and realisation that the concrete possibility of realisation and transformation of the world is given. Melchiorre thinks that every historical progress draws strength from the work of utopia. Hence the idea that history needs imagination. However, his speculative itinerary tends to anchor the theme of the imaginative function on the anthropological discourse. Melchiorre states:

Catch up the sense of the imaginary is also to inscribe its scope in the essentially temporal structure of the human being [...] The liberation of the mythical conscience and, finally, the emergence of historical consciousness corresponds to the recovery or acquisition of the properly imaginative dimension. At this point the maximum problem of the imaginary will be repeated, that is the one that reaches the top of the symbolic expression: a historical symbolism, that I have already called utopian, will have to be the landing point of our research' (*Ibidem*)

The transformation of time by virtue of utopia coincides with the emancipatory liberation of symbolic in the inner life. For Melchiorre, if the absent is the object of the work of imagination, then imagination in itself is the 'organ' of the future. 'The being of the human being is [...] always a being in prospect, in a relationship of orientation with the world'. In some ways, we can talk about an idea of subjectivity understood as an emancipatory push towards the future, perhaps (somehow) in accordance to the same tensional dialectics of the *archê* and the *telos* that Paul Ricoeur has theorised by crossing the Hegelian phenomenological-anthropological perspective with the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective. We would not simply push out with the future, but in a difficult and conflicting dialectics, in which the work of imagination on memory can be (characteristically or even pathologically) fixed on the past, due to the painful, traumatic and non-outdated images of the experienced past or projecting oneself on the future, according to a projects of life, the utopias or even the alienating escape.

For Melchiorre, 'when the imaginary is pushed forward to give new different space and time and to reorganise the images of memory, it always does so in the sense of an existential determination, albeit in the sense of the possibility. In effect, the material that the imagination elaborates is in the order of the determination and it is like such conditioning' (p. 35; the trans. is mine).

Certainly, the liberation of the imaginary is understood as an essential part of an individual's development, that much of normal development is intended to play precisely on the valorisation and correct harmonisation of representational and creative functions, symbolisations, imaginative satisfaction and the like.

Melchiorre is aware of the paradox connected to the emptying the creative productions from their symbolic charge. In some way, that duplicity in human's vision and work of imagination is recomposed in a kind of anthropological re-elaboration, which psychoanalysis had managed to express distinctly between the Freudian and Jungian modelling.

On the one hand, Freud observes that even an artist is somehow an introverted, not very far from neurosis (see Freud, 1967, p. 384). On the other hand, reflecting on the scarce symbolic significance of today's life, Jung points out that, in general, 'one half of humanity batters and grows strong on a doctrine fabricated by human ratiocination; the other half sickens from the lack of a myth commensurate with the situation' (Jung, 1965, p. 331).

To summarise, imagination has to be considered, on the one hand, as a substitutive, compensatory and sublimatory operation and, on the other, as a landing place to reality and an individual 'fullness' or 'truth'. These are not the only two schools or interpretative approaches but the expressions of the possible alternative functioning of the deep and influencing work of imagination. As for Freud, we can ponder of a range of expressions of the self that varies from phantasmal production to symptomatic manifestations to the alienating sublimation. As for Jung, we can ponder of a range of issues that range from the expressive and emancipatory research of an *individuation* to the mythical-symbolic-religious project of a new vision of life. This discourse should be intended not to refer to fixed issues or to completed and totally comprehensive models. Rather, perhaps, we should reason in terms of perpetual questioning that continuously arises by varying degrees, with continuously new formulation being produced, in order to attack and undermine the modelling referred to here, or to open up other types of modelling. The most recent generations, more than in the past, seem more attached to fragments, speed, surface, variation, adrenaline, impulse and gusto. This could be a sign of fragile, mobile, liquid, vague and uncertain personalities. The life story tends to degrade to an illustrated-collage-of-life or to a non-narrative combination of literally 'figural' exemplary moments. And, an illustrated collage does not mean a unified, internalised and recognised history (of life). Indeed, it seems that a radical submission to the tyranny of the images predominates today. This total dominion of the image seems to be paid for at the price of a very strong impoverishment of the imaginative and expressive resources of interiority. The enchantment of the dialectic productive image and imagination seems to be broken. Nonetheless, the possible inclusive contribution of hermeneutics, like that represented by Melchiorre, does not lose importance. In many ways we are brought closer to the perspective of Ricoeur, manifesting itself by virtue of a greater anthropological-philosophical proximity (at least compared to Sini).

On narration, recognition and personal emancipation

The theoretical relevance of imagination in Ricoeur's philosophy of the human being has its roots in his trilogy *Time and Narration* (1983-1985), particularly in connection with the role played by the triple mimesis in the framework of narrative theory. The key term of this work 'is certainly *mimesis* in all its dialectical richness, ... [for it] presides over the complex architecture of the trilogy, that is, the power of language to prefigure the action, which itself is readable as a text and inserted into the symbolic plot of a given cultural universe, that is the power of language to configure the human and temporal world of praxis in the two different but converging modes of historical and fictional narration. Finally, the power of language of re-figuring, of saying a new praxis, of shaping in a new way and of preserving and renewing the sense of human action and suffering' (Jervolino, 1993², p. 157-158; the trans. is mine).

In a sort of correlative (re-)determination, the whole work is based on the hermeneutic circle formed by experienced and narrated time. If all that is narrated takes place temporally, there is no temporality without narration (and, obviously, no narration without experience). *Time and Narration* can be read as a hermeneutic investigation on the historicity of existence. We are historical beings, in fact. And, narration is precisely the modality that makes this dimension of historical individuality effective in personal development and emancipation. In fact, the personalities mature placing themselves in a narrated time and within a determined (narrated end experienced) tradition, according to a modality that makes the identity can be constituted through those texts and stories which are expression and testimony of a given social identity and culture. In this sense, the formation of identity and its representative and expressive modalities pass through the symbolic mediation, of the determined experiential and representative heritage of that certain tradition. In the general conclusion of *Time and Narration*, Ricoeur introduces the concept of narrative identity, a concept that he will largely develop and deepen later in his *Oneself as Another* (1990). As Ricoeur explains:

The notion of narrative identity, introduced in *Time and Narrative 3*, responds to a different set of problems: at the end of a long voyage through historical narrative and fictional narrative, I asked whether there existed a structure of experience capable of integrating the two great classes of narratives. I then formed the hypothesis according to which narrative identity, either that of a person or of a community, would be the sought-after place of this chiasm between history and fiction. Following the intuitive preunderstanding we have of these things, do we not consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of the stories that people tell about them? And are not these life stories in turn made more intelligible when the narrative models of plots — borrowed from history or from fiction (drama or novel) — arc applied to them? It therefore seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 114n).

In *Oneself as Another*, the narrative identity is carried out starting from the comparison with the positions of modern criticism on personal identity as developed by John Locke and David Hume, the demystifying philosophers of the subject (in fact, ‘the lesson that, without the guideline of the distinction between two models of identity and without the help of narrative mediation, the question of personal identity loses itself in labyrinthine difficulties and paralyzing paradoxes was first taught to philosophers of the English language and of analytic formation by Locke and Hume’; p. 125). It is in response to this that Ricoeur develops his philosophy of the capable human being, which matures in a philosophy of personal identity understood as a dialectical-emancipatory process of self-realisation and mutual-recognition. This is a phenomenological hermeneutics of personal identity based on the dynamism of power and act according (1) to the four fundamental moments of being able to talk, act, narrate and feel responsible, and according (2) the inter-relational dialectics of mutual recognition.

The narrative function, which is structurally connected to the imaginative functions, plays a pivotal role here. Ricoeur subsumes it from his vast interdisciplinary research on time and narration which is articulated between narratology and hermeneutics, while the second speculative pillar, that is, the concept of recognition, is analysed for the first time in his 1965 *Freud and Philosophy*, in which he intertwines Hegel’s dialectical phenomenology with Freud’s psychoanalysis (see Busacchi, 2016). As Ricoeur explains in *Freud and Philosophy*:

I do not pretend to complete Freud, but to understand him through understanding myself. I venture to think that I advance in this understanding of Freud and myself by revealing the dialectical aspects of both reflection and Freudianism.

What I wish to demonstrate, then, is that if Freudianism is an explicit and thematised archaeology, it relates of itself, by the dialectical nature of its concepts, to an implicit and unthematized teleology.

In order to make this relationship between a the matised archaeology and an unthematized teleology intelligible, I will make use of a detour. I propose the example – or rather the counterexample – of the Hegelian phenomenology, in which the same problems present themselves in a reverse order. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is an explicit teleology of the achieving of consciousness and as such contains the model of every teleology of consciousness. But at the same time this teleology arises on the substrate of life and desire; thus we may say that Hegel himself acknowledges the unsurpassable character of life and desire, in spite of the fact that this unsurpassable is always already surpassed in spirit and in truth (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 461).

In particular, Ricoeur connects Hegel’s master-slave dialectics with Freud’s analyst-patient therapeutic relationship. The latter is understood as the search for authenticity through the excavation of the past, while the first is understood as research into realisation of meaning in the progressive effort. Both symbolise the two polarities of the individual dialectic of recognition, which is perpetually tensed between regression and progression. Ricoeur explains:

In order to have an *archê* a subject must have a *telos*. If I understood this relationship between archeology and teleology, I would understand a number of things. First of all, I would understand that my notion of reflection is itself abstract as long as this new dialectic has not been integrated into it. The subject, we said above, is never the subject one supposes. But if the subject is to attain to its true being, it is not enough for it to discover the inadequacy of its self-awareness, or even to discover the power of desire that posits it in existence.

The subject must also discover that the process of ‘becoming conscious’, through which it appropriates the meaning of its existence as desire and effort, does not *belong* to it, but belongs to the *meaning* that is formed in it. The subject must mediate self-consciousness through spirit or mind, that is, through the figures that give a telos to this ‘becoming conscious’. The proposition that there is no archeology of the subject except in contrast to a teleology leads to a further proposition: there is no teleology except through the figures of the mind, that is to say, through a new decentering, a new dispossession, which I call spirit or mind, just as I used the term ‘unconscious’ to designate the locus of that other displacement of the origin of meaning back into my past (p. 459).

This anthropological model seems to suggest the idea that both, the realisation or maturation of personal identity and personal psychic health, are not only dependent from the possibilities of expression and action, but on the success and advancement in the dialectics of emancipation and recognition.

According to this perspective, what is the level of relevance of the imaginative-narrative functions? And, when and how does it come into play? To provide an answer to this, it requires first to hold the fact that Ricoeur does not accept a unitary and substantial conception of identity. In *Oneself as Another* he writes:

When we speak of ourselves, we in fact have available to us two models of permanence in time which can be summed up in two expressions that are at once descriptive and emblematic: *character* and *keeping one's word*. In both of these, we easily recognize a permanence which we say belongs to us. My hypothesis is that the polarity of these two models of permanence with respect to persons results from the fact that the permanence of character expresses the almost complete mutual overlapping of the problematic of *idem* and of *ipse*, while faithfulness to oneself in keeping one's word marks the extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same and so attests fully to the irreducibility of the two problematics one to the other (Ricoeur, 1992, p.118).

In his vision one part or dimension of our identity, which he calls identity-*ipse*, is mobile, experiential and historical, while another part or this dimension, which he calls identity-*idem*, is fixed, structural and coincides with our biological being. The latter structural dimension provides the support of the neuronal, psychological and mnemonic functions which are necessary for the maintenance, development and realisation of the historical identity. And precisely because we develop such a historical identity, the components of the theory of narration become the fundamental pillars of the development of personal identity. In fact, without the functioning of these components, no virtuous dialectics of recognition would produce effects of maturation, emancipation and realisation on identity and subjective personality. Ricoeur persistently comes back on the mechanism of narrative mediation (through symbolic and linguistic representation) with which a sort of circular dialectic between identity-*idem* and identity-*ipse*, and between psycho-biological (deterministic) mechanisms and experiential (meaningful) contents, is at work. In some ways, we can say that narrative mediation is the *functional* fulcrum of the development of personal identity, where the dialectics of recognition can be called its *existential* fulcrum (see Busacchi, 2015). Speaking on narrative identity in his last book *The Course of Recognition* (2004) Ricoeur says:

the idea of narrative identity gives access to a new approach to the concept of ipseity, which, without the reference to narrative identity, is incapable of unfolding its specific dialectic, that of the relation between two sorts of identity, the immutable identity of the *idem*, the same, and the changing identity of the *ipse*, the self, with its historical condition. It is within the framework of narrative theory that the concrete dialectic of sameness and ipseity an initially blossom, in expectation of its culmination in the theory of promises (Ricoeur, 2005, p. 101-102).

In addition, Ricoeur underlines the deep relationship between personal realisation and social interrelation, that is to embrace a vision of personal realisation via mutual recognition. As he writes:

We can complete this panoramic survey of the problem of narrative identity by referring to another dialectic than that of the *idem* and the *ipse*, the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness. The question of identity in this sense has two sides, one public, one private. The story of a life includes interactions with others (p. 103).

Eventually, ‘the course of self-recognition ends in mutual recognition’ (p. 187). And, ‘the alternative to the idea of struggle in the process of mutual recognition is to be sought in peaceful experiences of mutual recognition, based on symbolic mediations as exempt from the juridical as from the commercial order of exchange’ (p. 219).

If *narrative identity* unifies the cultural-historical-spiritual dimension of life with the biological and neurological sphere, *mutual recognition* unifies all the differences opening the way for personal and social realisation.

The road to recognition is long, for the ‘acting and suffering’ human being, that leads to the recognition that he or she is in truth a person ‘capable’ of different accomplishments. What is more, this self-recognition requires, at each step, the help of others, in the absence of that mutual, fully reciprocal recognition that will make each of those involved a ‘recognized being’, as will be shown in my next chapter. The self-recognition at issue in the current chapter will remain not only incomplete, as in truth mutual recognition will, but also more mutilated, owing to the persistent dissymmetry of the relation to others on the model of helping, but also as a real hindrance (p. 69).

However, it is the dialectics between experience and imagination to make narration and recognition two effective forces and keys of human emancipation.

Conclusion

If considered as a referential model, Ricoeur’s anthropology contains a significant synthetic function, capable of reabsorbing in a comprehensive formulation the speculative and scientific problematic of the dialectical relationship between imagination, experience and personal identity. In fact, his anthropological model is not a simple interdisciplinary hybrid, that is, the result of an amalgamation of extra-philosophical acquaintances. Ricoeur uses an interdisciplinary method via an epistemological-hermeneutical model whose procedure combines the descriptive and explanatory functions of the biological and natural sciences with the interpretative and comprehensive functions of the human and social sciences. And, there is a close interweaving of method and anthropological research. This emerges with particular and immediate evidence in the book-dialogue with the neurobiologist Jean-Pierre Changeux, in his work *What Makes Us Think?* ([1998] 2000). As for Changeux, Ricoeur approaches the question of personal identity via the ontological and scientific issues of the mind-brain relationship in a way that he will fully develop in a subsequent philosophical work, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000). By dialoguing with Changeux, Ricoeur declares the thesis that a subtle ‘semantic dualism’ insinuates itself between the experiences organised at a prelinguistic level and the objectified formal forms of the mental. To him, it is no exaggeration to say that the semantic gap is so great between the cognitive sciences and philosophy. The gap between the experienced phenomenological and the known object runs along the dividing lines between the two approaches of the human phenomenon. However, this semantic dualism can only form a starting point. The multiple, broad and complete experience is made in such a way that the two discourses do not stop being linked by multiple points of intersection. In a certain way, it is the body itself that is lived and known. And, it is the same mind that is lived and known; it is the same human being who is ‘mental’ and ‘bodily’ at the same time. From this ontological identity may depend on a third discourse that goes beyond both phenomenological-hermeneutical philosophy and science (see Changeux & Ricoeur, 2000, p. 14). Here, Ricoeur distinguishes a connection to the study of personal identity the objective discourse of explanatory disciplines, the critical-intuitive and ethical-practical discourse of the understanding and speculative knowledge, the over-philosophical discourse of the poetic and the religious. It is by considering this that his phenomenological hermeneutics of the self cannot only be understood as a new and far-reaching anthropological synthesis. It puts at its centre element the fulcrum of the instability and problematic of personal identity, that is, imagination. And, it recognises the dialectical process as the key to a new design that justifies and explicates the ‘substance’ of personal identity. Together with the narrative function, imagination plays a pivotal role in Ricoeur’s philosophy of the capable human being, that is to say that imagination plays the same role as experience, emotion, culture, education and social life in personal emancipation and realisation.

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