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Attention and the transformation of reflexive consciousness

Abstract: This chapter sheds light on how attention to symbols in Ricœur's thought can be put at the service of the restorative intention of philosophy, which underlies his early works, insofar as it allows for a better understanding of the forgotten human bond with the being of all beings. The argumentative strategy consists in elaborating the meaning and implications of a statement found in *The Symbolism of Evil* according to which the qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness is the task of a philosophy instructed by symbols. The chapter examines the correlation between the wager made by Ricœur in the conclusion of that book and his concern to include participation in existence in the starting point of philosophical thought. Three ideas are highlighted: the ontological function of symbolic thought, the help that psychoanalytic practice gave Ricœur in reflecting on the pedagogical and transformative process that accompanies the philosopher's experience of being instructed by symbols, and, finally, the role of the concept of *the second naïveté*, linked to that of attention, which refers to the longed-for fruit of philosophical practice born of this transformative and restorative tension.

Ricœur affirms at the end of *The Symbolism of Evil* that “a philosophy instructed by the symbols has for its task a qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness.”¹ In this chapter, I will explore the meaning of this affirmation.

As a starting point of reflection, we may consider the following: What is entailed in this qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness? Why does Ricœur consider that reflexive consciousness must be transformed? Why do symbols have this pedagogical role? What processes are put in place for this transformation to occur? What was he emphasizing when he specified the *qualitative* character of this transformation?

To respond to these questions, I would like to propose that it is possible to better understand the scope of this affirmation by framing it within Ricœur's first philosophical project, his philosophy of attention, and by analyzing it in light of the restorative intention that moved Ricœur's thesis, *Freedom and Nature*.

1 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

I will begin by presenting a summary of Ricœur's first reflection on attention, which will serve as a general context for my argument. I will continue by focusing on the revelatory power of symbols and their restorative role in Ricœur's thought. I will then link his call to a transformation of the "reflexive consciousness" to the starting point of thought in philosophical practice and to the recognition of the need for reflexive consciousness to regain a certain quality that allows the philosopher to embrace reality more fully. I will make use of Ricœur's expression: the *second naïveté*, to describe the longed-for fruit of the philosophical practice born of this transformative tension. This argumentation will allow me to highlight the important role that Ricœur accorded to psychoanalytic practice insofar as it points to the asceticism that is necessary for the transformation of consciousness to occur.

I hope that this chapter will help us not only to enrich our understanding of the relationship that Ricœur established between attending to symbols and the transformation of reflexive consciousness, but will invite us to consider more deeply, as philosophers committed to the search for truth, what is entailed in the practice of attention.

1 Ricœur's reflection on attention

I believe that it is possible to gain a better understanding of the reasons that moved Ricœur to assign a transformative role to symbols in the philosophical practice by taking into consideration his first philosophical project, his philosophy of attention. As stated above, in order to develop this idea, I will now give a summary of this project.

In 1939, Ricœur gave a lecture at the *Cercle Philosophique de l'Ouest* entitled: "Attention: A Phenomenological Study of Attention and Its Philosophical Connections." In this lecture, we find, in seminal form, some of the principal ideas which will guide the development of his thought. Ricœur presents two main concerns that sought conciliation through a reflection on attention. The first concern was to overcome the naturalization of consciousness that is proper to explicative psychology, which, by not recognizing the peculiarity of the acts of the cogito, reduces them to states of mere consciousness. The second was to show the interconnection between the ethical and the cognitive dimensions as revealed by the paradoxical character of attention, adding a volitional character to the root of knowledge. To respond to the first concern, he takes a phenomeno-

logical approach and, to address the second, he draws from the classical philosophical tradition.²

Ricœur's lecture finishes pointing to the need of re-signifying the term 'attention' in light of a philosophy which takes as its starting point man's participation in being.³ He does this by following Gabriel Marcel's line of thought, who, together with Husserl and Nabert, is held by Ricœur as one of his masters.

The 1939 lecture opens with an emphasis on the intentionality of attention. Ricœur sees in Husserl's concept of intentionality a way of escaping from falling into naturalistic reduction, since this concept offers, in his eyes, the possibility of conveying a particular type of relationship: act-object, which, when experienced, is not necessarily fully conceptualized. There is, therefore, an irreducible element of this relationship that forces us to think of it not in a symmetrical way, as if we were facing two elements that could be thought of separately, but rather, in a reciprocal way.⁴ Attention, described phenomenologically, gives reason for this irreducibility. Insofar as this act is an expression of our subjectivity, it manifests our dependence on objectivity. It encompasses a paradox that Ricœur expresses by saying: "my landscape changes aspect, without changing meaning."⁵ The act of attention manifests the relationship that exists between presence and meaning.

Ricœur's study on attention in his thesis *Freedom and Nature* aims to show that there is a passive receptive aspect in knowing, and at the same time aims to show that there is an active aspect in this receptivity which calls for criticism. The emphasis on receptivity seeks to show that the meaning revealed by the presence of the object does not belong to the cogito as far as it is not he who creates it. Therefore, the object, which its meaning opens up in the encounter with the subject, must be respected. This implies that the subject must seek the purest disposition, that which, within the limits of his fallibility, allows this meaning to be accepted (received) as it is.

2 In particular, Ricœur relies on the reading of a series of articles by Jean Laporte. The latter published in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* in 1931, 1932 and 1934 "Le libre arbitre et l'attention chez saint Thomas"; in 1937, he published "La liberté selon Descartes"; and in 1938, "La liberté selon Malebranche." In these articles, the concept of attention occupies a central place in Laporte's argumentation.

3 Although Ricœur ends his lecture by pointing out the limits of the concept of attention, I consider that it is possible to interpret this critique as an invitation to re-signify this concept, taking into consideration other references made by him. See Ricœur, "Attention," 36.

4 See Ricœur, "Attention," 25.

5 See Ricœur, "Attention," 30.

In his 1939 lecture, Ricoeur suggests the possibility of developing a descriptive realism based on the notion of receptivity derived from attention.⁶ In this idea can be seen his confidence in the power of the object to reveal itself when the subject voluntarily seeks to neutralize the forces that block or distort this manifestation. He tells us: “through the very character of attention, through its interrogative character, we understand that knowing is not situated in the register of doing, of *producing*. It is neither action nor passion.”⁷ In addition, it is the active aspect of the cogito’s receptivity that calls on a critical element, since I am not pure receptivity. There is, at the root of the act of knowing, a fundamental “I” that is never a *fiat*-creator but the active mode of this receptivity of meaning. Every act, being an expression of a capacity of the subject, is always conditioned by a series of cultural, affective, and corporal factors that for the subject himself can be more or less conscious. This structural-ontological dependence, which is informed by activity, points to the fact that the human being is, in the terminology used in *Fallible Man*, a mediation of finitude-infinity.

This awareness of the cogito’s finitude-infinity, of its being a wounded cogito, an embodied cogito not transparent to itself, will be increasingly integrated into Ricoeur’s thinking. The dialogue with different authors, especially those he calls “masters of suspicion” allows him to delve deeper into this aspect, whereby he does not claim to deny the impulse towards truth in humans, nor the confidence in the power of the manifestation of the object, but rather to invite caution. This has consequences for philosophy, since philosophers, who are committed to the search for truth, are obligated to revise their presuppositions and expectations (that could lead them to not see what actually is, but what they want to see or eliminate what they do not want to see).

Underlying the different descriptions of attention, whether in dialogue with psychology or phenomenology, Ricoeur affirms that the “naïveté of looking” is the essential element that constitutes it. He tells us:

There is a fundamental opposition between two attitudes, one consisting in inflecting perception in the direction of some anticipation, the other in seeking an innocent eye and senses, in opening one’s mind, in welcoming the other as other. Through this respect for the object, we place ourselves in the hands of the object, much more than we inscribe the object to our past account. The true name for attention is not anticipation but surprise [étonnement]. This oppo-

6 See Ricoeur, “Attention,” 39.

7 Ricoeur, “Attention,” 39.

sition remains unperceived at the level of sensory perception because our senses are rarely disinterested. It is capital at the level of thinking in search of the truth.⁸

Attention, as a cognitive attitude of a subject who voluntarily places himself “in the account of the object,” allows the object to reveal its richness, in a game of acceptance and spontaneity that remains always open and subject to critical review due to the very structure of the cogito, which is an embodied and wounded cogito.

In my opinion, it can be affirmed that there is in Ricœur’s position a realist *exigence* that plays a fundamental role within a broader epistemic dynamic. This *exigence* is linked to the human experience of being in the world and belonging as a whole.⁹ It must be understood in the sense that Ricœur denies consciousness the privilege of being the creator of meaning, he recognizes the most primordial experience of belonging as a whole and affirms the need for an asceticism of reflexive consciousness to consent to this belonging.¹⁰ Consciousness must be oriented and reoriented considering what it recognizes as pre-given. This occurs within a cognitive experience marked by the mediation of the personal body (*corps propre*) and the dependence-independence of meaning. I will return to this point a little further on.

Ricœur’s lecture on attention—which begins by drawing on Husserl’s descriptive phenomenology and continues by recollecting valuable insights from the French philosophical tradition of Descartes, Malebranche, and Pascal—ends, as mentioned above, by pointing out the need of going beyond the concept of attention to reach that of participation.¹¹ According to Ricœur, the pretended pure objectivity entailed in the concept of attention should be overcome by a way of thinking which is nourished by participation in being. It is thus that participation in existence is hypothesized as a new philosophical starting point that al-

8 Ricœur, “Attention,” 36.

9 In his early lecture on Attention, Ricœur says: “I am in the world, I am a piece of it, it holds me, encompasses me, supports me, will absorb me.” (Ricœur, “Attention,” 43). What I call a “realist *exigence*” in Ricœur’s thought is closely linked to the early influence of Marcel’s notion of participation. In *The Symbolism of Evil* Ricœur uses the word ‘realism’, referring to sin, to indicate that “it cannot be reduced to its subjective measure, and nor can sin be reduced to its individual dimension; it is at once and primordially personal and communal.” (Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 83) In other words, it expresses a consciousness that is not its own measure.

10 This “realism” should not be understood within the epistemological opposition realism-idealism, which, as we know, Ricœur seeks to overcome insofar as it is trapped in the object-subject opposition.

11 The key influence of Descartes—and through him that of scholastic tradition—on the Ricœurian concept of attention is highlighted by Michael A. Johnson. See Johnson, “The Paradox of Attention,” 79–108.

lows access to a deeper understanding of the human being and its bond with the being of all beings. From this starting point, the form of relationship with presence changes, and therefore the categories for thinking about it also change.¹²

The search for a way of thinking nourished by this new starting point of conceiving subjectivity will guide the development of his thesis, in which he walks again with Husserl along the path of descriptive phenomenology, but seeks to go beyond it.¹³ This development aims “to understand the mystery as reconciliation, that is, as restoration, even on the clearest level of consciousness, of the original concord of vague consciousness with its body and its world.”¹⁴

Ricœur states in his thesis that to grasp the freedom of the subject one must change one’s point of view, hence a change of perspective is necessary, since “freedom has no place among empirical objects.”¹⁵ I consider that we can extend this requirement to symbolic thought and affirm that conversion, which involves a *new kind of attention*,¹⁶ is equally necessary to grasp the bond with being and with the sacred which the symbol reveals.

Ricœur wants to think with symbols because he is confident that they could be placed at the service of opening access to a better understanding of the original pact with being. Thinking with symbols, looking at them from a certain perspective of the “I,” in Ricœur’s eyes, does something: it restores-transforms. What is at stake, at the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil*, is Ricœur’s philosophical starting point, the same point that from a perspective of participation in existence, was raised in his early lecture on attention.

12 See Ricœur’s reference to Marcel, *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, 292–293 (cited in Ricœur, “Attention,” 52).

13 Ricœur’s philosophical project in his *Philosophy of the Will*—as Herbert Spiegelberg rightly points out, in his well-known history of the phenomenological movement—is trans-phenomenological. Ricœur’s developments on attention, in particular, reveal his attempt to go beyond pure description. In this endeavor, he draws from different traditions but is mainly guided by the influence of Marcel in terms of the restorative intention of his reflection. Jean-Luc Almaric points out the key influence of Marcel on Ricœur’s concept of attention. See Almaric, *Paul Ricœur, l’imagination vive*, 105.

14 Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 18.

15 Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 12. Later on, he will say: “even though a particular objectivity—that of concepts of the Cogito—always provides a more subtle problematic for the sense of mystery than a naturalistic objectivity, it seems to us hopeless to believe that we might ‘save the phenomena’ without the constant conversion which leads from the thought which posits concepts before itself to a thought which participates in existence” (Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 16).

16 In order to capture the bond of the cogito with its body, he states the need for a different type of attention. And this attention implies: “that I participate actively in *my incarnation as a mystery*. I need to pass from objectivity to existence” (Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 14).

I will now first explain how this development on attention illuminates the function Ricœur attributes to symbols, and, secondly, I will examine his attempt to go beyond phenomenology under the aegis of Marcel's concept of participation. I intend to show that a chosen starting point of thought—that of participation in being—has a transformative power and it responds to a restorative intention. This is relevant for understanding the performative role of attention in philosophical practices.

2 What the symbols reveal

I return to Ricœur's statement that has given rise to this reflection, placing it into context: "a philosophy instructed by the symbols has for its task a qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness."¹⁷ We find ourselves at the conclusion of *The Symbolism of Evil*, at the start of the passage in which Ricœur makes a "wager" that seeks to transcend the hermeneutic circle by making of symbolic thought a starting point for philosophical reflection. His wager is expressed in the following terms: "I wager that I shall have a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings if I follow the *indication* of symbolic thought."¹⁸ Ricœur seeks to free the reader from a possible misunderstanding: to believe that "the justification of the symbol by its power to reveal constitutes a simple augmentation of *self-awareness*."¹⁹ The human reality that symbols help to decipher could not be reduced to "one or other dimension of finitude." It is a reality that could not find its justification within the realm of "reflexive circumscription." Ricœur states that in "treating the symbol as a simple revealer of self-awareness, we cut it off from its ontological function."²⁰ I will now try to explain in more detail the implications of this ontological function in light of what the attentional structure reveals to us.

When we consider the symbol as an object, as a presence charged with a meaning offered to the attention of the subject, we find that the symbol does not get its justification within the subject. Its meaning is actively received by the subject and in this active reception, the object opens its multiple faces (its multiple layers of meaning), just as the physical object progressively manifests itself to the subject following changes of attention. The symbol overflows into the current consciousness of the subject; it carries—like every object that is of-

¹⁷ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

¹⁸ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

¹⁹ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

²⁰ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

ferred to us—a disproportion between presence and meaning; and this invites us, as we are faced with the partiality of what is received and the excess of what is given, to place ourselves in a disposition of listening to it. The symbol has a peculiarity, which makes it particularly fertile as an object in Ricœur's eyes, and that is the fact that the meaning that its presence manifests touches spheres of human existence that have been particularly forgotten by modern man, that is to say, the link with both being and the sacred.

Ricœur, in an article contemporary to the text I am analyzing, "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," puts into context the concern that gives rise to his meditation on symbols, which he recognizes as being that of a specific era and which led thinkers such as M. Eliade, C. Jung, G. Bachelard, and even S. Freud, to deal with them. He affirms that "[t]he historical moment of the philosophy of the symbol is that of oblivion and also that of restoration. Forgetting the hierophanies, forgetting the signs of the sacred; loss of man himself as belonging to the sacred."²¹

The conviction of the revealing power of symbols, of an existing bond with being that has been lost from sight (it exists but has been excluded from the field of attention), is a postulate that goes together with the confidence that attending to an object (presence charged with a meaning) from a *better existential positioning* has a power capable of *transforming* the reflexive conscience, making something appear that was already there but not seen. Attention to the symbol, being the consciousness to the correct disposition of openness, awakens the reflexive consciousness as if from a dream. It awakens it from the naturalistic dream in the first place and secondly, from the dream of believing oneself to be "the remote and uninterested spectator."²² This awakening talks to us of the restorative moment of philosophical practice instructed by symbols.

Throughout his book *The Symbolism of Evil*, the symbol is presented to us as an object that *manifests*, *reveals*, and *gives access* to reality. It has a hierophantic dimension. Ricœur shows us that the symbol speaks to us "as an index of the situation of humans at the heart of the being in which they move, exist, and desire."²³ This dimension of the *givenness* of the symbol, its *reality*, requires that it be preserved, respected, and heard. And in this sense, it sets out limitations and

21 "Le moment historique de la philosophie du symbole, c'est celui de l'oubli et aussi celui de la restauration. Oubli des hiérophanies, oubli des signes du sacré ; perte de l'homme lui-même comme appartenant au sacré" (Ricœur, "Le symbole donne à penser," 176; my translation). This part was omitted in the English translation of this article.

22 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 354.

23 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356 (translation modified).

demands that shape the disposition of the philosopher, as I shall illustrate at the conclusion of this paper.

3 Attention to symbols

Ricœur's commitment to symbolic thought places him, as he says, within the task of verifying this wager and saturating it with intelligibility.²⁴ He adduces that this task transforms the wager in such a way that it empowers the philosopher. He tells us: "in betting on the significance of the symbolic world, I bet at the same time that my wager will be restored to me in power of reflection, in the element of coherent discourse."²⁵ So, it is a philosophical wager with transformative power.

Ricœur refers to a qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness. And we may now address the following questions. What was the author trying to emphasize when he specified the qualitative character of the transformation? What would a reflexive consciousness need to undergo for this transformation to take place? We find the answer in the Oracle's invitation to *Know thyself better*, which Ricœur interprets following Plato's *Charmides* as *to situate thyself better in being*. Ricœur highlights that "to know thyself" is not purely reflexive, "it is first of all an appeal by which each man is invited to situate himself better in being"²⁶ and he quotes from *Charmides*: "Be wise and *Know thyself* are fundamentally the same thing" (165a) In the god's greeting, there is, therefore, a piece of advice that invites us to a qualitative transformation. In the same way, we may find in the invitation Ricœur makes to symbolic thought, an invitation to situate oneself better in being, to take another *existential starting point* in order to *understand* and *not just explain* reality.

In his article "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought," in which we find several of the elements which also appear in his last chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricœur explicitly frames the meditation on symbols around the problem of the starting point of philosophical thought: one that is a radical starting point like those of Descartes or Husserl, or one that recognizes its limitation and takes into consideration the fullness in which that subject is immersed. Ricœur's reflection on this matter also involves the existential condition of the subject with-

²⁴ See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

²⁵ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

²⁶ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

in this plenitude.²⁷ It is interesting to note that Ricœur mentions that we have to consider, not only the fullness in which the subject is, but also, the fact that the subject has *forgotten* his dependence on being.²⁸ This existential condition of oblivion is, in my judgment, what calls for a qualitative transformation (or a restoration) of the reflexive conscience.

Ricœur is in search of a thought that is “in vital relation” with the object that the philosopher is seeking to comprehend, in other words, a thought that is born out of participation in existence. He tells us:

the task of the philosopher guided by symbols would be to break out of the enchanted enclosure of consciousness of oneself, to end the prerogative of self-reflection. The symbol gives reason to think that the *Cogito* is within the being, and not vice versa. Thus, the second naïveté would be a second Copernican revolution: the being which posits itself in the *Cogito* has still to discover that the very act by which it abstracts itself from the whole does not cease to share in the being that challenges it in every symbol.²⁹

Once again, we see that what is at stake is the starting point, which is the existential point of the philosopher’s quest for truth, and which implies a process that passes through different stages. I will elaborate on this point by appealing to the path Ricœur follows in dialogue with Husserl and seeking to go beyond Husserl, under the impulse of Marcel. In addition, I will highlight, following Ricœur, the role of psychoanalysis as a discipline at the service of the ascesis of reflection.

I want to emphasize that for Ricœur the qualitative transformation of consciousness implies a process of liberation, a conversion of the way of looking at reality, in order “to break out of the enchanted enclosure of consciousness of oneself, to end the prerogative of self-reflection.” He has indicated that to let the symbol unveil its potentialities of meaning, the philosopher “must abandon the position—or rather, the exile—of the remote and disinterested spectator,”³⁰ a position that he attributes on several occasions to the pure transcendental ego.³¹ We find here the same critique and the same impetus which was present in his early lecture on attention, and which drove his project of a philos-

²⁷ Ricœur speaks specifically of the fullness of language. But this fullness could also be understood, in Marcel’s terminology, as the subject who is within the mystery.

²⁸ See Ricœur, “The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought,” 107–108.

²⁹ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

³⁰ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 354.

³¹ In his lecture on attention, he criticizes placing the subject of attention on a transcendental “I” while telling us that attention is the most personal act that can take place. The truth appears to attentive minds at a particular moment in their history. See Ricœur, “Attention,” 41–42.

ophy of the will by speaking of a new starting point for thinking about subjectivity.

One of the aspects that Ricœur dwelt on in his first reception of Husserl, following E. Fink's reading, was the transformative power of phenomenological reduction, as an existential act that transforms the perspective of the subject, so that there is a field that is open only to those who carry out the reduction.³²

The description of the process involved in Ricœur's bet for the symbolic thought has a certain parallel with the process involved in phenomenological reduction. The opening of the field of philosophical hermeneutics, the fruit of its wager, resembles the experience of the subject who sees the eidetic world opening up, having carried out phenomenological reduction. There is a certain solemnity in Ricœur's announcement of the opening of the field of philosophical hermeneutics: "Then there opens before me the field of philosophical hermeneutics properly so called."³³

Ricœur's wager rests on another wager, so it could be explained as the bet of a subject who operates a second reduction. He wagers that a philosopher who has freed himself of naturalism thanks to descriptive phenomenology, must operate a second reduction and free himself from the illusion of considering the transcendental as the absolute primitive;³⁴ that is to say, the illusion of being able to develop a philosophy without prepositions. The region of consciousness that discloses this wager is that of confession; which, without this second reduction, is easily reduced to "error, habit, emotion, passivity—in short, to one or another of the dimensions of finitude that have no need of the symbols of evil to open them and discover them."³⁵ Hence, it is a matter of seeking access to the same phenomenological reality, our finitude, but from a starting point that allows a better understanding of the ontological bond. The wager is not only

32 The presentation of Husserl's thought, made by his faithful disciple Fink, which is followed by Ricœur, places great emphasis on this liberating character of reduction. Gaston Berger, who is another of the authors on whom Ricœur bases his interpretation of Husserl, follows, in turn, Fink's emphasis on it. See Berger, *Le cogito dans la philosophie de Husserl*, 55; Fink, "Was will die Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls?,"; and Ricœur, "An Introduction to Husserl's Ideas I," 26.

33 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

34 See Ricœur, *Husserl*, 228. Ricœur acknowledges the great potentiality of the phenomenological method. He describes Husserlian phenomenology as a struggle between two tendencies: the descriptive, respectful of otherness, and the interpretative, which seeks to reduce otherness to the monadic life of the ego. He recognizes in Husserl the honesty with which he faces the difficulty in which "the realist character of description" places him, since, in following it "the Other never ceases to exclude himself from the sphere of my monad" (Ricœur, *Husserl*, 130).

35 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

that this bond could be revealed, which is the fundamental presupposition contained in the bet, but that the reflexive consciousness that seeks to understand this bond, in so doing, will be *qualitatively transformed*.

The quality that this process seeks to restore is a certain naïveté, a look capable of being guided by the objects (by the symbol in this case), which was the essential attribute with which Ricœur describes attention. Since attention, as I previously argued, is not pure receptivity but the receptive-activity of an embodied cogito who dialogues with the conditions of his finitude, there is a critical element that must be incorporated. This is the reason why the naïveté that is sought is necessarily *second*. Because humans have forgotten and lost the naïveté that gave access to the knowledge of their bond with being, *restoring* it implies a critical path that recognizes the prerogatives of the object, whilst recognizing the contingency and restriction of any starting point. Ricœur tells us: “the time of restoration is not a different time from that of criticism; we are in every way children of criticism, and we seek to go beyond criticism by means of criticism, by a criticism that is no longer reductive but restorative.”³⁶

It is revealing that, in this time of criticism, a discipline such as psychoanalysis, which, according to Ricœur, can lend itself to reductive interpretation, helps him to reflect on the pedagogical and transformative process that accompanies the philosopher’s experience of being instructed by symbols. Ricœur highlights that it is necessary to pass through the stage of dispossession to get close to the sought-after second naïveté that allows us to “return to the simple attitude of listening to symbols.” Since this dispossession concerns consciousness as “the place and origin of meaning,” he viewed Freudian psychoanalysis “as the discipline best equipped to instigate and carry through this ascesis of reflection.”³⁷ Ricœur stresses that psychoanalysis contributes to attaining a *new quality of consciousness* by shifting the locus of meaning towards an origin that we do not control. It may be said that, from the perspective of reflection, he endorsed the role played by realism in psychoanalysis recognizing in it the moment of “dispossession of immediate certitude, a withdrawal from and a humiliation of our narcissism.”³⁸ According to Ricœur, the failure of “reflective consciousness” that Freudian realism brings about begins a process of converting consciousness. In a certain sense, it is possible to affirm that the fruit of this “conversion” regards

³⁶ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 350.

³⁷ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 494–495.

³⁸ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 432. This sense of realism is not “the naïve realism of giving the unconscious a consciousness” (Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 438). Ricœur, studying Freudian psychoanalysis, highlights that attention opposes narcissism. See Montoya, “The Ego’s Attention and the Therapist’s Attention to Reality in Freud,” 94–95.

the *situation of the self in being* since it faces the subject with the necessity of “letting go all avarice with regard to itself” and acknowledging the presumption contained in his immediate self-certainty.³⁹

Ricœur suggests that psychoanalysis points to ontology by criticizing consciousness. According to him, the pretension of consciousness of setting itself as the origin of meaning is contested to some extent by the interpretation it proposes of symbols, dreams, myths, and fantasies. He states: “The philosopher who surrenders himself to this strict schooling is led to practice a true ascesis of subjectivity, allowing himself to be dispossessed of the origin of meaning.” He continues:

All of psychoanalysis speaks to me of lost objects to be found again symbolically. Reflective philosophy must integrate this discovery with its own task; the self [le moi] must be lost in order to find the “I” [le je]. This is why psychoanalysis is, if not a philosophical discipline, at least a discipline for the philosopher: the unconscious forces the philosopher to deal with the arrangement of signification on a level which is set apart in relation to the immediate subject.⁴⁰

This being dispossessed is a condition, a necessary first step, in a broader dynamic that constitutes the philosophical task. “[Having] a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings”⁴¹ is only possible when the philosopher embraces the limitations imposed by his or her belonging to the world and exercises a critique of the claims of consciousness to be the origin of meaning. However, the recognition of the limits of consciousness does not imply considering all consciousness as primarily false. Without denying the value that Ricœur acknowledges to the psychoanalytic method, it is important to point out that for him there is a fundamental distinction between a reductionist critique and a critique that performs a restorative task.

According to Ricœur, examples of reductive criticism would be those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud since they share “the decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as ‘false’ consciousness.”⁴² This kind of decision leads to a reductive filter, it excludes *a priori* that consciousness could be also true. To my judgment, the sought-after naïveté is the key element of ensuring a criticism that is not reductive but restorative. The decision to pursue naïveté enlarges the field of receptivity giving room for truthfulness along with self-deception. This approach helps to restore man’s way of relating with the given.

³⁹ See Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 103.

⁴⁰ Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 20.

⁴¹ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355

⁴² Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

4 Attention and philosophical practice as an exercise of the second naïveté

The starting point of participation led Marcel to conceive philosophical practice as a secondary reflection exercise. By this, he understood a form of asceticism that should lead one back to the mystery of one's embodied presence.⁴³ For Marcel, through the secondary reflection, it is possible to rediscover the authentic experience of feeling. In conversation with Ricœur, Marcel recalls what he has written about secondary reflection saying:

there is a primary reflection which, roughly speaking, is purely analytical and which consists, as it were, in dissolving the concrete into its elements.

But there is, I think, an inverse movement, a movement of retrieval, which consists in becoming aware of the partial and even suspect character of the purely analytical procedure. This reflective movement tries to reconstruct, but now at the level of thought, that concrete state of affairs which had previously been glimpsed in a fragmented or pulverized condition.⁴⁴

The existential tenor of Marcel's reflection compels him to take into consideration the purifying aspect of philosophical practice, which implies, above all, the liberation from a reflection understood as pure criticism.⁴⁵

Ricœur, for his part, also seeks to take the starting point of participation, which in the light of his reflection on the fundamental role of language for the understanding of human beings, is expressed in the requirement to think from that place in which the symbol speaks to us: the fullness of language.⁴⁶ Like Marcel, he also poses the demand for an ascesis on the prospect of philosophical practice, since he affirms, as we have seen, that his philosophical wager leads to qualitative transformation. The term that he uses, second naïveté, a term that is conceptually close to secondary reflection, expresses, however, an accent of its own. If we delve into the conceptual framework that accompanies his use of naïveté, we find two factors: it refers to the quality of the way of looking⁴⁷ and it emphasizes the idea of immediacy.⁴⁸

⁴³ See "connaissance" and "réflexion seconde" in Plourde, *Vocabulaire philosophique de Gabriel Marcel*, 122–132 and 436–439, respectively.

⁴⁴ Marcel and Ricœur, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, 235.

⁴⁵ See Marcel, *Être et avoir II*, 33.

⁴⁶ See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 357.

⁴⁷ Related to the character of the looking we have that the naïveté of attention implies innocence, openness, "the reception of the other as the other" (Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 155).

The rejection of the ideal of pure objectivity and the fact that the naïveté of my looking has been lost calls for a naïveté which is second. The richness enclosed in the pursuit of a *new naïveté* is at the same time what calls for a critique and what ensures that this critique is not reductive.⁴⁹

He characterizes the second naïveté as “a creative interpretation of meaning, faithful to the impulsion, to the gift of meaning from the symbol, and faithful also to the philosopher’s oath to seek understanding.”⁵⁰ Reading this description at the light of the analysis of attention, we find that there is another occasion in which he has spoken of a faithfulness involved in the second naïveté which brings us back to the role of attention. In *Freedom and Nature*, speaking of the perception of values, Ricoeur states a simple fact which is related to the reception of the meaning that the symbol carries. He tells us:

I do not will unless I see, but I cease to see if I absolutely cease to will. That is the difference in principle which separates the truth of the good from the truth of an object.

The attention which the latter requires activates only a pure understanding shorn of passions, while the attention demanded by the former mobilizes my whole being. Values are never given to an observer-consciousness impartiality and objectivity has no longer the same meaning in relation to value as in relation to empirical objects. This explains the gaps and the more or less lasting blindness which afflict our perception of the good.⁵¹

We may say that the realities that the symbols disclose are “never given to an observer-consciousness impartiality.” They are only given within the commitment of the wager, that is, the bet that it is possible “[to] have a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings [following] the indication of symbolic thought.”⁵²

He continues by saying “evaluation, separated from loyalty, can only disappear in an endless question. We must constantly return to a second naïveté, sus-

48 By this term, he also refers to a pre-critical, pre-reflective form of reception, the immediacy of belief. See Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 51 and *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

49 Ricoeur identifies the second naïveté with the second immediacy that hermeneutics aims at. He says, speaking of the hermeneutics of Symbols “I believe that being can still speak to me, no longer indeed in the precritical form of immediate belief but as the second immediacy that hermeneutics aims at. It may be that this second naïveté is the postcritical equivalent of the precritical hierophany” (Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 298).

50 Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 348.

51 Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 76

52 See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

pend the reflection which itself suspends the living relation between valuation and project.”⁵³

This faithfulness requires attention and shapes the philosopher’s dispositions in a twofold way that calls to mind the mediation involved in the act of attention understood as active-receptivity.

Receptivity: due to the revealing power of the symbol.

Active (the critical dimension): due to the opacity of both, the symbol and the conscience.⁵⁴

Both dimensions are interrelated. Receptivity, modulated by a certain activity, allows the symbol to reveal its true scope, that is, the fact that its ontological function is only carried out when the cogito actively leaves the circle on which it tends to lock itself and accepts its own commitment. On the other hand, the activity which gives form to the receptivity of the cogito is what maintains the openness, without which, this function is not fulfilled, and it exercises as well a critical task. Attention, as a new position of existence in front of symbols, operates the qualitative transformation of the reflexive consciousness in this interplay between activity and receptivity.

5 Conclusion

The interpretative line I have followed, in light of Ricœur’s philosophy of attention, has led me, on the one hand, to consider the symbol as an object capable of revealing to the philosopher dimensions of reality that he has lost from sight, and, on the other, to highlight the transformative and restorative power of a philosophical practice instructed by symbols. This is provided that the philosopher positions himself in an open-minded disposition and actively seeks to neutralize prejudices and expectations.⁵⁵

The symbols reveal, in their obscurity, the surplus of meaning, the irreducibility of the reality to which they point. They indicate, as well, insofar as we find them already given, the radical contingency that always accompanies our appre-

⁵³ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 76.

⁵⁴ The opacity of symbols can refer to the irreducible element that escapes any apprehension and that Ricœur highlights by speaking of the relation act-object in his lecture on attention. It denotes the surplus of meaning that accompanies every presence. He tells us: “This opacity constitutes the depth of the symbol, which, it will be said, is inexhaustible” (Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 15).

⁵⁵ Ricœur refers to man’s “bond with being and the being of all beings,” more specifically, the bond with what he considers sacred. See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 5.

hension of them.⁵⁶ There is in Ricœur confidence in the revealing power of the symbol before an attentive gaze, while there is also an awareness of the partiality of any starting point because of the very synthesis between the voluntary and the involuntary in the apprehension of any meaning. Under the broad label of the involuntary, we have the social, cultural, and historical influences, including the mediation of language, all these should be considered under the critical gaze of hermeneutics.

The *better* that qualifies *the situate thyself better in being* of the Oracle is what indicates the qualitative aspect of transformation. An object can be apprehended from various points of view, hence, what is at stake is the assumption that there is a better existential starting point for the philosopher in his or her search for truth to which the object—that he or she seeks to understand—signals with its presence. Ricœur recognizes the fullness in which the embodied cogito is found and incorporates a conscious impulse to situate oneself better in order to receive *better*, or, in other words, to “have a better understanding.” This impulse transforms the subject that enters into this dynamism and plays a restorative function.

I have considered Ricœur’s original motivation to think with symbols, that is to say, his confidence that symbols open the access to “a better understanding of man and of the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings,”⁵⁷ to emphasize the restorative intention that animates his philosophical reflection. Thinking with symbols, looking at them from a certain existential disposition, in Ricœur’s eyes, does something: it restores and qualitatively transforms. The transformation of reflexive consciousness, of which Ricœur speaks, is linked, as we have seen, to the question about the philosophical starting point, concerns our “belonging as a whole” and involves an asceticism of reflection. The latter was exemplified in dialogue with psychoanalysis.

Taking this reflection to its concreteness in human experience, may I suggest that in order for a philosopher to situate himself or herself better in being, he or she must, in the first place, voluntarily seek to restore the form of his or her attention. By attention I mean the active receptivity of an embodied cogito, which opens himself voluntarily to receive the being to which he finds himself united, a being which offers itself to him through the mediation of a presence (that of the symbol, for example). Therefore, it is the form of our attention, when critically

56 See Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 19–20. A fundamental component of this beginning with symbols is linguistic mediation. I do not stress, nor do I enter into this aspect insofar as it goes beyond my intention. In this case, speaking of the disproportion involved in all apprehension, I include the disproportion that accompanies every linguistic act and every discourse.

57 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 355.

exercised from an impulse of openness to being, that positions us better in the being. If what Ricoeur says about the transformation of the reflexive consciousness is not pure rhetoric, I must suppose that to undertake the path he proposes—if I accept the bet—I, as a philosopher, must start from the very form of my attention. In so doing, attention fulfills its performative character and I can be instructed by symbols.

If naïveté belongs to the essence of attention, if the naïveté that allowed us to access the bond with being has been lost and if the philosopher wants to “have a better understanding of this pact with the being,” would not the first philosophical task be to restore one’s ability to pay attention, following the critical path pointed out by attention itself?

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