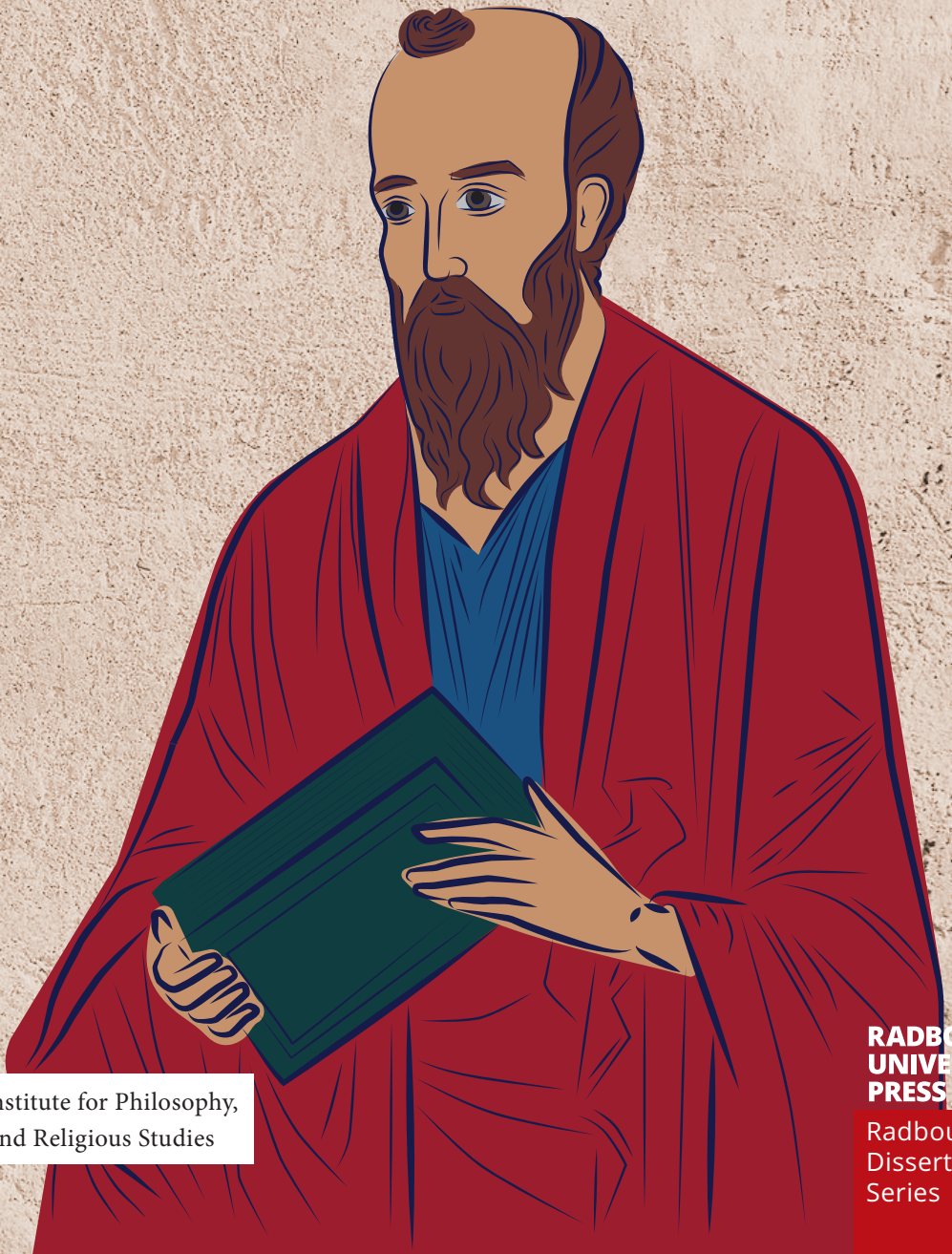


Dialectical Trust in Potentiality and Transformation

Ricoeur's Attestation, Agamben's Pistis, and
Philosophical Reflections on the Apostle Paul

Adriani Milli Rodrigues



Research Institute for Philosophy,
Theology and Religious Studies

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INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul in Contemporary Philosophy:
Hope of Change and Transformation

The apostle Paul is a relevant figure in the landscape of contemporary European continental philosophy. Many studies attest to his relevance¹ and reveal the reasons for this interest.² While there is a plurality of angles and specific purposes in the

¹ There are also voices against the constructive use of Paul in contemporary philosophy. For instance, Michel Onfray criticizes Alain Badiou's interaction with Paul in *Saint Paul: la fondation de l'universalisme* (*Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*). Instead of seeing Paul as a voice against the empire, Onfray suggests that the Paul's writings should be read as the conceptual basis upon which Constantine later established the Christian empire, which implies that Paul was ultimately an "empire-builder." Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, trans. Jeremy Leggatt (New York: Arcade, 2007), 236. See also Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto*, 131-154; William Rasch, *Sovereignty and Its Discontents: On the Primacy of Conflict and the Structure of the Political* (London: Birkbeck Law Press, 2004), 121-129. In contrast to this position of continuity between Paul and Constantine, Giorgio Agamben views the movement of institutionalization in Christianity as contrary to what is found in Paul's writings. He argues that "the church, after the first two centuries of hoping and waiting, conceived of its function as essentially one of neutralizing the new experience of the word that Paul, placing it at the center of the messianic announcement, had called *pistis*, faith." Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books; Princeton University Press, 2007), 88. Another type of criticism against the use of Paul in contemporary philosophy is the charge of anachronism. From a historical point of view, Paula Fredriksen affirms that systematic projects related to ancient texts, which refer to philosophical and theological readings of these texts, impose concerns and categories that are alien and, therefore, false to their ancient authors. Paula Fredriksen, "Historical Integrity, Interpretive Freedom: The Philosopher's Paul and the Problem of Anachronism," in *St. Paul among the Philosophers*, ed. John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 71-72. While Lorenzo Chiesa does not use the argument of anachronism, he is unconvinced that the use of Paul in Badiou and Žižek really applies to the contemporary scenario. See Lorenzo Chiesa, "Pasolini, Badiou, Žižek und das Erbe der christlichen Liebe," in *Wieder Religion? Christentum im zeitgenössischen kritischen Denken* (Lacan, Žižek, Badiou u.a.), ed. Marc de Kesel and Dominiek Hoens (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 2006), 107-126. In dialogue with the charge of anachronism, Gert-Jan van der Heiden suggests that the use of Paul in contemporary philosophy is an example of how powerful his texts are (along with other ancient texts that are considered classics), in the sense that "they continue to appeal to readers throughout different centuries." To be sure, readers from other historical and cultural contexts bring their own questions, interests, and prejudices. However, hermeneutically speaking, this is only one side of the coin since the readers are also exposed to what the text says and might be changed by it. Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy: The Outcast and the Spirit* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 10-11.

² See David Odell-Scott, ed., *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians* (New York; London: T&T Clark, 2007); Caputo and Alcoff, eds., *St. Paul among the Philosophers*; John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010); Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries, eds., *Paul and the Philosophers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Peter Frick, ed., *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers: The Apostle and Contemporary Continental Philosophy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Antonio Cimino, Gert-Jan van der Heiden, and George Henry van Kooten, eds. *Saint Paul and Philosophy: The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); Antonio Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth: Pauline Themes in Agamben, Badiou, and Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Olivier Boulnois, *Saint Paul et la philosophie: Une introduction à l'essence du christianisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2022); van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*. Van der Heiden helpfully summarizes the turn to Paul in the 1990s by highlighting four influential publications: (1) Heidegger's lectures on Paul ("Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion"), delivered in 1920-1921 and with a focus on 1-2

use of Paul in contemporary philosophy, it could be said that many of them find in the use of Paul's writings a hope of change or transformation. In the introduction of *Paul and the Philosophers*, Ward Blanton suggests that the essays in the volume "revisit new and old questions about how one construes hope in emancipatory community formations."³ This hope is somehow related to the potential of Paul's messianic resistance to escape Imperial suppression.⁴ Likewise, Peter Frick introduces the volume *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers* by highlighting that most contemporary philosophers using Paul tend to see him as "an ally in their attempt to deconstruct a world that accords with neoliberal political and economic policies in the new post-Berlin Wall era."⁵ In short, philosophical appropriations of Paul envisage a deconstruction of "the structural evils of the world,"⁶ which refer to power structures that "devalue human lives individually and collectively" through exploitation, poverty, and inequality.⁷ Similarly, in the introduction of *Paul's New Movement*, Slavoj Žižek, John Milbank, and Creston Davis discern in Paul a "revolutionary possibility that ruptures with the predetermined coordinates of the world and offers an entirely new kind of political subject altogether."⁸ In one of the first books on contemporary philosophy and Paul (*St. Paul Among the Philosophers*), John Caputo introduces the collection of essays, which is philosophically focused on the figures of Alain Badiou and Žižek, underscoring an essential desire or hope. In his words, "what is finally at stake for Žižek, as for Badiou, is what Paul calls 'life,' that is, the new order, the new space opened up by the event, the freedom and ambience of grace, beyond the law, where we find such fragile treasure as life has to offer in the midst of life's risky and contingent course."⁹

The hope for the potential of change or transformation is particularly observed in two recent philosophical works on the apostle Paul. In *Saint Paul et la philosophie*, Olivier Boulnois speaks of Paul's faith in terms of the personal reconfiguration of

Thessalonians and Galatians, were published in 1995 in the volume *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*; (2) Jacob Taube's lectures on Paul's political theology in Romans (*The Political Theology of Paul*), delivered in 1987, were published in 1993; (3) Alain Badiou published *Saint Paul: La fondation de l'universalisme* in 1997; (4) Giorgio Agamben published *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* in 2000. In this book, Agamben dialogues with interpretations from Heidegger, Taubes, and Badiou, and emphasizes the dialectical dynamics of Paul's thought. van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 5-8.

³ Blanton, "Paul and the Philosophers: Return to a New Archive," in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 4.

⁴ Blanton, "Paul and the Philosophers: Return to a New Archive," in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 6.

⁵ Frick, "Paul in the Grip of Continental Philosophers: What is at Stake?," in *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers*, 4.

⁶ Frick, "Paul in the Grip of Continental Philosophers," in *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers*, 8.

⁷ Frick, "Paul in the Grip of Continental Philosophers," in *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers*, 5.

⁸ Milbank, Žižek, and Davis, *Paul's New Movement*, 2.

⁹ Caputo, "Introduction—Postcards from Paul: Subtraction versus Grafting," in *St. Paul among the Philosophers*, 14.

one's being in the world, which breaks with a factual form of life toward his/her own existence. While still belonging to the order of the world, the person enters into a new relationship with the world, where social differences no longer count.¹⁰ In *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, van der Heiden emphatically underlines the potential of transformation as the book's key idea: Paul is "the announcer of a new beginning leading to a transformation of reality," which basically involves "a singular mode of living" that implies "a mode of being and a mode of thinking," and this possibility of change or transformation is not reduced to the intrinsic "order and dynamics of the world itself."¹¹

Paul's *pistis* in Contemporary Philosophy: Trust in the of Potential Transformation

The aforementioned brief references to Paul in samples of contemporary philosophy indicate that the hope for the potential of change or transformation is articulated in different ways in the literature, focusing on varied key topics, ranging from political philosophy to personal experience or subjectivity, to mention a few of the philosophical areas involved in the discussion on the apostle Paul. One of the ways in which this articulation takes shape is in terms of philosophical explorations of Paul's notion of faith (*pistis*). In this case, *pistis* broadly describes the hopeful conviction or trust that reality can change. As Antonio Cimino points out, representative continental philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben use Paul's *pistis* as part of their critique of traditional metaphysics.¹² More precisely, they discern in Paul's writings a temporal ontological orientation that serves as an alternative to the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm of ontotheology.¹³ In short, while in ontotheology the chain of beings is hierarchically established or caused by the highest being, metaphysically grounding the identity of each being in the cosmos, philosophical readings of Paul in contemporary thought identify in

¹⁰. Boulnois, *Saint Paul et la philosophie*, 245.

¹¹. van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 12.

¹². Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 1. See, e.g., Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹³. Gert-Jan van der Heiden and Geurt Henk van Kooten, "Epilogue: Saint Paul and Philosophy—The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 327-334; Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 129. For a larger discussion on the concept of ontotheology, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *Ontology After Ontotheology: Plurality, Event, and Contingency in Contemporary Philosophy* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2014).

his letters a subversion of ontotheology, in which the apostle promotes a perspective of contingency and non-conformity with the temporal form of the world (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 7:31), since “Paul’s God prefers the lowly,” the weak (1 Corinthians 1:27-30).¹⁴ To put it more sharply, from this standpoint, Paul’s God is not the ontotheological ground of being but the critical “dissolver of the things that are and of the present form of the world.”¹⁵ In other words, the critique of traditional metaphysics envisages the deconstruction of the present structures of the world, metaphysically grounded in ontotheology. This deconstruction assumes the hopeful trust in the potential of transformation.

The critique of ontotheological metaphysics motivated by these contemporary philosophical readings of the apostle Paul is associated, accordingly, with a critique of the forms of rationality and the political ontology that this metaphysics entails. In this larger context, the reinterpretation of concepts such as truth, trustworthiness, subjectivity, temporality, conviction, universality, and ethos is undertaken in the philosophical turn to Paul. It is precisely in the articulation of these concepts that we can discern the crucial importance of Paul’s *pistis* in these philosophical reflections.¹⁶ To be sure, Paul and the Greco-Roman literature at large explore the notion of *pistis* in its social, epistemological, psychological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions, involving particularly the ideas of trust and trustworthiness related to God, Christ (the Messiah), and human beings in Paul. However, in present-day continental philosophy, the interest in Paul’s *pistis* is not focused on the epistemological or theoretical dimension but rather on the conviction, the attitude of life, or the ethos of non-conformity with the present form of the world.¹⁷ To put it another way, the debate is not epistemologically situated in the Nietzschean opposition between faith and reason, in which faith/*pistis* is against knowledge and describes a nihilist negation of the world. Instead, the interpretation of Paul’s *pistis* in the contemporary turn to Paul in continental philosophy emphasizes the ethos of conviction and commitment. More precisely, this ethos of faith is the ethos of non-conformity to what is considered the “rule ‘in the world.’”¹⁸

¹⁴ van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 71.

¹⁵ van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 334.

¹⁶ Gert-Jan van der Heiden, Geurt Henk van Kooten, and Antonio Cimino, “Introduction: On the Philosophical Affiliations of Paul and Πίστις,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 4-5. See also Simon Critchley, “You Are Not Your Own: On the Nature of Faith,” in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 224-255. This text also appears as the fourth chapter of Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 155-206.

¹⁷ van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 325-326.

¹⁸ van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 327.

Paul's *pistis*, Potentiality, and Dialectical Transformation: Giorgio Agamben

According to this view, the ontological bearing of the ethos of *pistis* is the ultimate contingency of the present structure of the world, which defines the things that are (being) and the things that are not (non-being). To put it more sharply, this idea of contingency means that “being does not coincide with the present order or form of the things that are,” that is, “living does not coincide with the orders in which we live our lives.”¹⁹

However, the affirmation of contingency in the ethos of *pistis* is not nihilistic. Rather than focusing on negation, the emphasis is on potentiality and transformation. Paul's idea that God chooses “the things that are not” (*ta mē onta*), that is, “what is low and despised in the world,” in order to deactivate (to use Agamben's translation of the verb *katargeō*, as it will be indicated in Part II of this monograph) the “things that are”²⁰ (*ta onta*) (1 Corinthians 1:28) indicates that “what appears to be nothing” in the order of the world “is in fact the very source of other possibilities of being.”²¹ Therefore, the notions of contingency, potentiality, and transformation imply that the ethos of *pistis* is an “ontological alternative to both ontotheology,” on the one hand, “and nihilism,” on the other.²² According to this standpoint, Paul's God is not only the dissolver of the things that are in the current order of the world (against ontotheology) but also the creator of new possibilities for the things that are apparently nothing in this order (against nihilism).

If the conviction of contingency in the ethos of *pistis* involves both the movement of negation, that is, non-conformity with the order of the world, and affirmation of the potential of transformation, then Paul's *pistis* is most aptly described in terms of a dialectical dynamics.²³ To be sure, this is not a dialectical Hegelian synthesis between negation and affirmation, as *pistis* emphasizes transformation rather than mere synthesis.²⁴ But this world transformation is not to be understood as a kind of replacement either, as the dualistic opposition between this world and another world holds. Taking into account the interests of the present research, it is noteworthy that the idea of a dialectics of transformation in Paul, which is contrasted both to a

^{19.} van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 332.

^{20.} Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references in this monograph are to the NRSV - *New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). Greek expressions from Bible references are taken from Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, NA 28.

^{21.} van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 332.

^{22.} van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 333.

^{23.} van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 345.

^{24.} van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 335.

Hegelian synthesis and a dualistic replacement, is one of the main contributions of Giorgio Agamben for present-day philosophical readings of Paul.²⁵

Nevertheless, the idea of a dialectical Paul is not a consensus in the literature. For instance, Badiou resists a dialectical interpretation of Paul and the event, given his criticism of the Hegelian dialectical absorption (and eventual negation) of the particular in the universal.²⁶ He emphasizes in the conclusion of his book on Paul, “Paul, we have insisted, is not a dialectician.”²⁷ Others stipulate a dualist rather than a dialectic view of Paul or claim that Agamben’s reading of Paul is dualist. For example, Daniel Boyer speaks of Paul’s “hermeneutical dualism,” which matches anthropological dualism. In his words, “Just as the human being is divided into a fleshly and a spiritual component, so also is language itself. It is composed of outer, material signs and inner, spiritual signification.”²⁸ Conversely, Simon Critchley argues that Agamben’s reading of Paul is dualist. He charges the Italian philosopher as a “crypto-Marcionite.”²⁹ Taking into account that Marcion (of Sinope) understood Paul’s discussion of grace and works, faith and law, spirit and flesh in terms of binary ontological dualism,³⁰ Critchley sees in Agamben a Marcionite radical “antinomian conception of faith,” particularly in Agamben’s view of *katargeō*.³¹

On the other hand, while studies that affirm Paul’s cosmological (stoic) monism are opposed to the dualist position,³² this affirmation is still distinct from the dialectics of transformation mentioned above. According to stoic monist cosmology, there is no opposition between the permanent and the transitory, but only an eternal immanent repetition (one spirit/*pneuma*), which may imply some form of development but not a strong sense of historical transformation.³³ However, Paul does distinguish the divine *pneuma* (*to pneuma to ek tou theou*) from the *pneuma* of this world (*to pneuma tou kosmou*) (1 Corinthians 2:12), and the divine *pneuma* earnestly

²⁵ van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 8.

²⁶ See chapter 6, “The Antidialectic of Death and Resurrection,” of Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 65–74.

²⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 110. See also van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 108.

²⁸ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 7. Boyarin explains that the hermeneutics of dualism is a major point of his book on Paul. He points out in the introduction, “I will argue throughout this book that many outstanding problems in Pauline interpretation can best be approached through this hermeneutical perspective.” Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 7.

²⁹ Critchley, “You Are Not Your Own,” 251. Critchley does not intend to adopt a Marcionite interpretation of Paul, as he claims that Agamben is following “Marcion, not Paul.” Critchley, “You Are Not Your Own,” 251.

³⁰ Critchley, “You Are Not Your Own,” 248.

³¹ Critchley, “You Are Not Your Own,” 251.

³² See, e.g., Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³³ van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 26.

desires the liberation and transformation of creation (Romans 8:20-26).³⁴ Notably, this desire for transformation is distinct from a dualist replacement of creation by another cosmological or spiritual reality. But coming back to the discussion of monism, if Hegel's cosmological understanding of the spirit as strictly rational and immanent, teleologically and necessarily moving towards totalization, is taken as a modern version of monism, the *pneuma* underscored by Paul in his letters is not purely immanent but comes from God and is anchored in the event of the coming of the Messiah.³⁵ Van der Heiden suggests that the divine *pneuma* in Paul is not merely the world order (monism) nor is strictly transcendent (the dualism of two completely independent worlds).³⁶ Instead, he argues, this *pneuma* in Paul describes the principle of possibility and transformation, which is not merely assimilated in the world order, but interrupts the regularities of existing order (against monism). At the same time, this *pneuma* is not strictly another cosmological reality that will merely replace the reality of this world (against dualism).³⁷ Hence, van der Heiden concludes that Paul's pneumatic hermeneutics operates from a dialectic historical and contingent (rather than Hegelian and necessary) perspective that is defined in terms of "a fragile balance between monism and dualism."³⁸

To a large extent, van der Heiden's dialectical elaboration of Paul's hermeneutics follows Agamben's perspective.³⁹ Whereas Critchley sees in Agamben a dualistic rather than dialectical understanding of Paul's faith, in which the interpretation of *katargeō* conveys a Marcionite radical antinomian view, as indicated above, the Italian philosopher seems to articulate a more nuanced position. As I will further explain later in Part II of this monograph, Agamben speaks of an "inner dialectic" of the law in Paul defined by a dialectical sense of *katargeō*, which does not simply mean the destruction of the law but rather describes more broadly a messianic deactivation that actually leads to its ultimate fulfillment. Thus, instead of the antinomian language of annulment and destruction, the Italian philosopher emphasizes the paradoxical dialectical ideas of deactivation and conservation or preservation of a potential that bring about the fulfillment of the law.⁴⁰ This messianic sense of *katargeō* underscores the dialectics of transformation, that is, "the transformation of the law impacted by faith."⁴¹

^{34.} van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 27.

^{35.} van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 34-35.

^{36.} van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 36.

^{37.} van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 36-37.

^{38.} van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 42.

^{39.} See van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 7-8.

^{40.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95-99.

^{41.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 99.

Potentiality and Transformation in Agamben's Account of Paul's *pistis*: Hermeneutical Explorations

Agamben's notion of dialectics in Paul's *pistis*, focusing on potentiality and transformation, could be further elucidated and articulated from the perspective of hermeneutics. In order to explain this need for hermeneutical elaboration, I will use Cimino's problematization of the philosophical appropriation of Paul's *pistis* in Heidegger, Badiou, and Agamben. According to Cimino, these three continental philosophers use Paul to elaborate a metaphysical alternative to ontotheology.⁴² More specifically, their use of Paul emphasizes a performative and eventual view of truth, in which the focus is on experiencing rather than merely conceptualizing truth.⁴³ In particular reference to Agamben, Cimino underscores that the performative and non-propositional emphasis implied in (Agamben's account of) Paul's formulation of *pistis* is defined in terms of the trustworthy consistency between utterances, words, and inner disposition that defines the concept of *homologia* and is understood in the sense of veridiction.⁴⁴ In Cimino's words, (Agamben's account of) "Pauline *homologia* does not mean propositional truth, but performative truth, understood as *veridiction* or truth-telling. The performative experience of 'the word of faith' does not match any of the logical or ontological frameworks of traditional metaphysics."⁴⁵

In Cimino's estimation, this non-metaphysical (in the sense of being against traditional metaphysics) performative and experiential approach to truth is too subjective. If truth can only be performed and experienced, instead of more objectively investigated or perused, it is difficult, if not impossible, to clearly distinguish truth from untruth, Cimino argues.⁴⁶ In the opposition between Paul's *pistis* and Platonic-Aristotelian ontotheology,⁴⁷ as framed by the appropriations of Paul in present-day continental philosophy, the contemplative theoretical reflection of ontotheology requires some form of distance that allows the theoretical observation (or passive description) of philosophical principles by the thinker.⁴⁸ On the other hand, contemporary paradigms using Paul's *pistis* follow a complete experiential and subjective involvement, in which the performative and existential view of truth eliminates any possibility of distance in philosophical reflection. In other words, the

⁴² Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 129-130.

⁴³ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 133.

⁴⁴ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 142-143.

⁴⁵ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 143.

⁴⁶ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 140, 145-146.

⁴⁷ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 147.

⁴⁸ Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 137. Cimino calls this the "metaphysics of sight" in ancient philosophy. Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 130. See also Antonio Cimino and Pavlos Kontos, eds., *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Sight* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

existential account of truth in these present-day readings of Paul is defined by “how one experiences the world and the self.”⁴⁹ To put it more sharply, “existential truth can only be enacted or experienced from a first-person perspective and turns out to be an intransitive experience. In sum, one cannot see it but can only live in it.”⁵⁰

Therefore, Cimino’s problematization raises the question of selfhood and experience in contemporary philosophical approaches to Paul’s *pistis*. A challenging dimension of this question is the problem of untruth or, more precisely, the risk of “contaminated truth”⁵¹ in Cimino’s reference to “the implications of *pistis* for untruth.”⁵² In response to this problem, he explores Plato’s engagement with sophistry and dialectics as a tool to analyze *pistis* in the discussion of truth.⁵³ Overall, this exploration of sophistry and dialectics attempts to account for deception and fallacy in convictions about truth. Bringing Cimino’s problematization for the purposes of the present research, if Paul’s *pistis* is interpreted as a trust in the potentiality and transformation of reality, this trust runs the risk of being misguided or untrue. Thus, his problematization of *pistis* in contemporary continental philosophy points to the need to articulate selfhood and the experience of trust in connection with key concepts such as trustful involvement and uninvolved distanciation. However, while Cimino proposes an engagement with Plato’s exploration of sophistry and dialectics to address the problematization of *pistis* in present-day continental philosophy, I suggest another route in the context of contemporary continental philosophy itself, namely, a dialogue with Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical conception of attestation.

Agamben’s *pistis* – Ricoeur’s Attestation: Explorations on Hermeneutical Trust

In order to justify the proposal of a dialogue between Agamben’s *pistis* and Ricoeur’s attestation for the hermeneutical articulation of trust or conviction in potentiality and transformation, I need to provide a brief explanation addressing three main questions: (1) Why is attestation a promising concept to be used in dialogue with (Agamben’s account of) Paul’s *pistis*? (2) How is attestation able to address the problem of truth and untruth in the experience of trust? (3) Why would Ricoeur be a fitting

⁴⁹. Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 137.

⁵⁰. Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 137.

⁵¹. Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 147.

⁵². Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 145.

⁵³. See Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*, 147–162. See also Johannes M. van Ophuijsen, “Making Room for Faith: is Plato?,” in *The Winged Chariot: Collected Essays on Plato and Platonism in Honour of L.M. de Rijk*, ed. Maria Kardaun and Joke Spruyt (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 119–134.

interlocutor for Agamben, especially considering the notion of trust in potentiality and transformation?

As I will explain in Part I of this study, Ricoeur's attestation is a hermeneutical conception of selfhood that interprets the self with trust and suspicion, given the possibility of other realities and interpretations. The openness to suspicion is a form of hermeneutical distantiation⁵⁴ that makes trust non-absolute but, at the same time, does not suppress trust, since suspicion is non-absolute either. In other words, trust and suspicion interact dialectically in attestation in such a way that it is possible to speak about potentialities and transformations of the self, communities, and history, in light of events that are taken as glimpses of or may give testimony (attest) to potentiality and transformation. But, again, the trustful hope of potentiality and transformation needs to be still hermeneutically open to a non-absolute form of suspicion. This brief explanation arguably shows that (Ricoeur's) attestation is a promising concept to be used in dialogue with (Agamben's account of) Paul's *pistis*, as attestation and *pistis* could be seen as accounts of trust or conviction in potentiality and transformation. Moreover, attestation is a hermeneutical account of trust that interacts with the possibility of truth and untruth in the experience of conviction, as trust and suspicion are interpreted dialectically. Interestingly, the dialectics of *pistis* in Agamben seems similar to the dialectics of attestation in Ricoeur, since one reality of sovereignty is not simply replaced or suppressed by another (Agamben), just as trust and suspicion do not interact in the form of simple replacement or suppression (Ricoeur). Thus, a dialogue between Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* could bring to the trust in potentiality and transformation a hermeneutical engagement with the possibility of uncertainty in the experience of trust. In short, the present study proposes that Ricoeur's dialectical and hermeneutical conception of attestation is a helpful resource for further exploring Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis*.

Overall, Ricoeur is arguably a relevant name to be included in present-day philosophical readings of Paul. The English version (Paul the Apostle: Proclamation and Argumentation) of his text *Paul apôtre. Proclamation et argumentation* appears as a book chapter in Part III of the multi-author edited volume *Paul and the Philosophers*.⁵⁵ This text is also mentioned in a footnote, which is related to the statement that Paul's *pistis* is a proclamation of contingency, in the epilogue or conclusion of the book *Saint Paul and Philosophy*.⁵⁶ Likewise, the introduction of the book briefly mentions

⁵⁴ See Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism: Reconsidering the Relation of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Ricoeur," *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 14 no 1 (2023): 25-43.

⁵⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre. Proclamation et argumentation: Lectures récentes," *Esprit* n. 292 (Février, 2003): 85-112. English translation: "Paul the Apostle: Proclamation and Argumentation," trans. David Pellauer, in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 256-280.

⁵⁶ See van der Heiden and van Kooten, "Epilogue: Saint Paul and Philosophy," 343n17.

Ricoeur in a list of continental philosophers who reflect on the apostle Paul.⁵⁷ While I will explore in more detail the essay *Paul apôtre* (2003) in Part III of the present investigation, the essay indicates that the French philosopher was interested in the philosophical discussion on the apostle Paul in contemporary continental European philosophy. More importantly, considering the purposes of this research, the essay reveals that Agamben is his main reference in this discussion. Indeed, Ricoeur outlines in the essay many of the points formulated by the Italian thinker and he seems to generally agree with Agamben's dialectical perspective on Paul, as I will show in Part III of this monograph.

To be sure, we find in the literature different possibilities for the comparison between Ricoeur and Agamben.⁵⁸ However, a dialogue between Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* offers a fruitful contribution to the conception of trust in potentiality and transformation in the larger context of philosophical readings of Paul's *pistis*, potentially expanding Agamben's perspective of potentiality and transformation with the hermeneutical conception of trust and uncertainty in the experience of conviction. On the one hand, this dialogue could further elaborate on Ricoeur's appreciation of Agamben's interpretation of Paul, as observed in *Paul apôtre*. Conversely, the potential for elaboration on Agamben's account of Paul's dialectics could find in the dialogue with Ricoeur a relevant avenue of expansion, particularly considering the methodological hermeneutical place of distantiation in Ricoeur's approach and the resultant conceptual attention to the notion of suspicion or uncertainty in the dialectical reflection on trust. Arguably, Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* are largely compatible dialectical reflections on trust in potentiality and transformation, as I intend to show in the present study.

Purpose, Methodological Remarks, and Outline of the Study

In light of these considerations, this research aims to formulate a dialectical account of trust through a dialogue between (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's account of) Paul's *pistis*, with implications for the present-day philosophical reflections on the apostle Paul. The main implication in view is the contribution of the hermeneutical conception of trust and uncertainty to formulating the experience of conviction in potentiality and transformation. To achieve this goal, the study is organized into

⁵⁷. See van der Heiden, van Kooten, and Cimino, "Introduction," 4-5.

⁵⁸. See, e.g., Colby Dickinson, "The Guises of Violence: Paul Ricoeur and Giorgio Agamben on the Transition from Metaphor to Politics," in *Paul Ricoeur and the Task of Political Philosophy*, eds. Greg S. Johnson and Dan R. Stiver (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013); Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Literature As Experiment: The Ontological Commitment of Fiction," *Aesthetic Investigations* 3, no. 1 (2019): 47-64.

three main parts. The first two parts will deal with attestation and *pistis* individually, while the third part will articulate a constructive dialogue between the two, focusing on the hermeneutical experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

Before I unpack the outline of these three main parts, a few methodological remarks on the approach to be adopted in the study are in order. In parts one and two, which deal respectively with Ricoeur (Part I) and Agamben (Part II), I briefly dialogue with secondary sources and then move to primary sources. In other words, I initially summarize discussions in the secondary literature and then spend more time in close dialogue with selected texts from Ricoeur and Agamben, respectively. This is a common hermeneutical approach in the discussion of European continental philosophy. The selection of primary sources in each part takes into account their thematic contribution to the hermeneutical discussion of attestation in Ricoeur and the messianic understanding of *pistis* in Agamben. In Part I, I selected the following writings from Ricoeur: *La symbolique du mal* (The Symbolism of Evil), *De l'interprétation* (Freud and Philosophy), *The Hermeneutics of Testimony*, *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy*, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Oneself as Another), *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (The Course of Recognition), *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting). As I will explain in the introduction of Part I, this selection of Ricoeur's writings illuminates the notion of attestation as we consider the hermeneutical categories of self-understanding, recognition, and history. In Part II, I chose the following writings from Agamben: selected texts from the *Homo Sacer* series—*Homo sacer*; *Stato di eccezione* (State of Exception); *Il sacramento del linguaggio* (The Sacrament of Language); *Il Regno e la Gloria* (The Kingdom and the Glory); *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* (Remnants of Auschwitz); *Altissima povertà* (The Highest Poverty); and *L'uso dei corpi* (The Use of Bodies)—and *Il tempo che resta* (The Time that Remains). As I will explain in the introduction of Part II as a whole and in the introduction of chapter 4, this selection of the *Homo Sacer* series will be useful for a delineation of the broad picture of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political messianism, while *Il tempo che resta* contains a more detailed discussion of trust in his account of messianic *pistis*.

As the reader transitions from Part I to Part II, one notices that the framework of discussion of Ricoeur's attestation is quite distant from the conceptual framework of Agamben's *pistis*. More precisely, the former is situated in the context of selfhood (philosophical anthropology), whereas the latter is delineated in a discussion of potentiality in political ontology (metaphysics). However, as the reader moves from one framework to the other, it is important to keep in mind that I am aware of the distance between these two different frameworks and intend to constructively articulate a larger phenomenological framework of analysis in Part III, which connects philosophical anthropology (selfhood) and political metaphysics (ontological

potentiality) from a historical and temporal perspective, where a dialectical account of trust and uncertainty plays a crucial role. This larger articulation is beneficial for the dialogue between (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's) *pistis*, a dialogue framed in terms of potentiality and transformation, as informed by the broad historical and temporal framework of philosophical anthropology and metaphysics.

With these methodological remarks in mind, the three parts of the study are outlined as follows. Part I will describe and systematize the dialectical concept of attestation in Ricoeur. The concept is particularly articulated in the context of a reflection on selfhood. This part will be divided into three chapters. The first two will interact with the topic of attestation in Ricoeur's writings, whereas the third one will attempt to outline a systematic picture of dialectical attestation. The systematic overview of chapter 3 attempts to address the question, *what is at stake in the idea of attestation?* This question will be answered with the formulation of the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of attestation. The main contribution of Part I for the present study as a whole will be the articulation of attestation as a hermeneutical experience of conviction in potentiality and transformation, which dialectically involves trust and suspicion.

The focus of Part II will be on the dialectical notion of Paul's *pistis* in Agamben. The notion is delineated in the context of Agamben's understanding of messianism. Similar to Part I, Part II will be divided into three chapters. The first two chapters (4 and 5) of this part will interact with Agamben's writings, while the third one (chapter 6) will sketch a systematic overview of *pistis*. The systematic overview of chapter 6 will address the question, *what is at stake in the idea of pistis?* This question will be answered with the articulation of the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of *pistis*, in the context of the political messianism of the *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta*. The key contribution of Part II for the purposes of the present study will be the articulation of Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* as an experience of trust in potentiality and transformation in the framework of political messianism.

Then, in Part III I will articulate a constructive dialogue between (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's account of) Paul's *pistis* to formulate a dialectical account of trust or conviction in potentiality and transformation as a contribution to present-day philosophical reflections on the apostle Paul. The first chapter of this part (chapter 7) will delineate the conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's account of) Paul's *pistis*, which will be subsequently undertaken in the next chapter (chapter 8). The structure of the comparison and dialogue will follow the categories used in previous chapters of the *how*, the *what*, and the *why*. In this constructive dialogue, I will formulate a dialectical conception of trust that deals with the reality of contingency and uncertainty, especially considering the task of a temporal understanding (non-ontotheological metaphysics) of phenomenology in contemporary thought. In short, the concepts of

contingency and uncertainty arguably enrich the reflection on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

Finally, in the conclusion of the study, I will summarize the main points of the research and sketch the overall picture of the dialectical and phenomenological formulation of the concept of trust or conviction in potentiality and transformation, as proposed in the present investigation. I will also suggest potential avenues of reflection for future studies on dialectical trust in the context of philosophical readings of Paul.

PART I

DIALECTICAL ATTESTATION IN THE HERMENEUTICS OF PAUL RICOEUR

Introduction and Dialogue with the Secondary Literature

The first part of this study is devoted to the dialectical concept of attestation in the hermeneutics of Ricoeur. This concept is articulated in the context of a hermeneutical reflection on selfhood and problematizes particularly the interaction of trust and suspicion in the experience of conviction, which are considered significant hermeneutical elements for the conception of trust in potentiality and transformation in the present research.

This part is structurally organized into three chapters. The first two depict the notion of attestation in Ricoeur's writings. Then, the third outlines a systematic picture of dialectical attestation guided by the question of *what is at stake in the idea of attestation*. To facilitate understanding the chapters, I will introduce the concept of attestation in Ricoeur in dialogue with the secondary literature below.

The concept of attestation was explicitly developed by Ricoeur in the 1990s, even though it was already embryonically present in his essay on moral philosophy from 1978.⁵⁹ The elaboration of this concept appears in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), in which attestation is considered "the password for this entire book."⁶⁰ Given the importance of attestation for Ricoeur's hermeneutical project since 1990, this notion has received particular attention in the literature.⁶¹

^{59.} Paul Ricoeur, "Reply to Ted Klein," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Lewis E. Hahn, The Library of Living Philosophers, vol. 22 (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1995), 368. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 22, no. 3 (Fall 1978), 175-192.

^{60.} Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990). Translation taken from *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 289n82.

^{61.} See Jeff Lewis, "Attestation and Testimony: Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of the Self and Jean Nabert's Hermeneutics of Testimony," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 3, no 1 (1991): 20-28; Pamela Sue Anderson, "Agnosticism and Attestation: An Aporia concerning the Other in Ricoeur's 'Oneself as Another,'" *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 1 (1994): 65-76; Jean Greisch, "Testimony and Attestation," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, no. 5-6 (1995): 81-98. Reprinted in Richard Kearney, ed., *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 81-98; Peter Kemp, "Ricoeur between Heidegger and Levinas: original affirmation between ontological attestation and ethical injunction," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, no. 5-6 (1995): 41-61. Reprinted in Kearney, ed., *Paul Ricoeur*, 41-61; Mark S. Muldoon, "Ricoeur's Ethics: Another Version of Virtue Ethics? Attestation is Not a Virtue," *Philosophy Today* 42, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 301-309; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Announcement, Attestation, and Equivocity: Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Ontology between Heidegger and Derrida," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, no 3 (2001): 415-432; Josué Pérez, "The Concept of Attestation in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2001); Jean-Philippe Pierron, "De la fondation à l'attestation en morale: Paul Ricoeur et l'éthique du témoignage," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 91, no 3 (2003): 435-459; Yasuhiko Sugimura, "Pour une Philosophie du témoignage: Ricoeur et Heidegger autour de l'idée d'«attestation» (bezeugung)," *Études théologiques et religieuses* 80, no 4 (2005): 483-498; David W. Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension Between Love and Justice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 28-36; Sebastian Kaufmann, "The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2010); Jean-Luc Amalric, "Affirmation originaire, attestation, reconnaissance:

As the introduction to *Soi-même comme un autre* shows, his project attempts to reformulate the conception of selfhood as an alternative to the tradition of the Cartesian model and its subject-object relationship.⁶² The notion of subject in this model has been fiercely criticized by the so-called masters of suspicion (Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche) and existential philosophies (Marcel, Jaspers, and Heidegger).⁶³ In light of these various sources of criticism, Ricoeur seeks to adjust the reflexive tradition to the epistemic humility of acknowledging that the cogito is “shattered.” This acknowledgment implies at least two moves. First, a broken cogito is misleading and unable to give access to immediate knowledge. In his essay on Freud in 1965, the French philosopher already criticizes the assumption of “immediate consciousness” in the Cartesian model. In his words, “A philosophical reflection is the contrary of a philosophy of the immediate. The first truth—*I am, I think*—remains as abstract and empty.” He concludes, “a philosophy of reflection is not a philosophy of consciousness.”⁶⁴

Second, the shift of emphasis promoted by acknowledging a wounded cogito allows the realization that there is more to the human subject than cognitive knowledge. In contrast to Descartes’ radical doubt of everything except the thinking subject, abstractly stripping out the ‘I’ of one’s autobiographical features or historical identity,⁶⁵ Ricoeur considers the subject or the self as an agent rather than merely a knower. Agents can perform actions, have a specific identity, and be morally responsible for their actions.⁶⁶ This focus on action, related to the phenomenological emphasis on experience, entails an ethical dimension of selfhood rather than only

Le cheminement de l’anthropologie philosophique ricœurienne,” *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 2, no 1 (2011): 12–34; Denis Thouard, “Subjectivité et identité. Le sentiment de soi chez Paul Ricoeur,” in *L’éthique et le soi chez Paul Ricoeur: huit études sur Soi-même comme un autre*, eds. Patrice Canivez et Lambros Couloubaritsis (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Septentrion, 2013), 88–95; Sebastian Purcell, “Hermeneutics and Truth: from aletheia to attestation,” *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 4, no 1 (2013): 140–158; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “On the Way to Attestation: Trust and Suspicion in Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75, no 2 (2014): 129–141; Chiara Pavan, “La réduction qui mène à l’ontologie: les implications de l’attestation chez Paul Ricoeur,” *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 113, no 1 (2015): 105–143; Pol Vandavelde, “Two French Variations on Truth: Ricoeur’s Attestation and Foucault’s ‘Parrhesiastic’ Attitude,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 46, no 1 (2015): 33–47; Beatriz Contreras Tasso, “Afirmación originaria, Apropiación de sí y Atestación: tres ejes para una hermenéutica de la recepción en Paul Ricoeur,” *Critical Hermeneutics* 1, no 1 (2017): 91–124; Adriani Milli Rodrigues and Ellen Nogueira Rodrigues, “Atestação e ética em Paul Ricoeur: implicações da dialética entre o sujeito e a alteridade para uma ética da compaixão,” *Kriterion* 64, no. 154 (2023): 289–313.

⁶² See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 1–11.

⁶³ David Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2007), 7–8.

⁶⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation. Essai sur Freud* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965). Translation taken from *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 43.

⁶⁵ Pérez, “The Concept of Attestation in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 11.

⁶⁶ Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 8.

the dimension of cognitive knowledge. Furthermore, the focus on action provides the necessary hermeneutical mediation or detour for self-knowledge. In the continuation of his critique of the idea of immediate consciousness in his essay on Freud, the French philosopher argues that “reflection is the effort to recapture the Ego of the Ego Cogito in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts.” In fact, “A reflective philosophy . . . has to be ‘mediated’ by ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. In these objects, in the widest sense of the word, the Ego must lose and find itself.”⁶⁷ While Ricoeur’s discussion on attestation in the 1990s dropped the language of Ego in favor of self or selfhood, he retained this mediation idea of hermeneutical objectification related to human action for the elaboration of self-knowledge. Indeed, this idea of mediation represents a reversal of the Cartesian model in that self-consciousness hermeneutically becomes the “result rather than the starting point of philosophy.”⁶⁸

This indirect approach, described by a detour of objectification of the self, is usually called the long way of hermeneutics in Ricoeur’s philosophy. As Jean Grondin underscores, self-knowledge, the goal of philosophy and the task of every human being, does not occur through introspection or reflective self-awareness; it can only be achieved through the endless effort of interpretation, that is, the long way of understanding the configurations or “objectifications” of meaning as they have been handed down to us by myths and symbols . . . , history and culture, art, literature and science itself. They provide us with the great books and sources of meaning out of which we carve our own hermeneutical identity and self-awareness.⁶⁹

Sebastian Kaufmann highlights that this is “the detour through the *what* of experience” (action) “to access the *who* of the self” (agent).⁷⁰ The attestation concept attempts to precisely provide the connection between objectification and the self, that is, the link between action and agent. In other words, “Attestation is the link between the external and the internal side of experience,” since “to attest to a capacity is to attest to my own self.”⁷¹ According to Ricoeur, attestation is “*the assurance of being*

⁶⁷. Ricoeur, *Freud and philosophy*, 43.

⁶⁸. Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 65.

⁶⁹. Jean Grondin, “Ricoeur: The Long Way of Hermeneutics,” in *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*. Routledge Philosophy Companions, eds. Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2015), 155. See also Raymond Moloney, “Stages in Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (1992): 118–128; Richard Kearney, “Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Translation,” *Research in Phenomenology* 37, no. 2 (2007): 153; Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 7.

⁷⁰. Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 14.

⁷¹. Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 59.

oneself acting and suffering.”⁷² To put it more sharply, attestation is the trust in the power to recognize oneself as the agent of the objectification of one’s actions and say, “It’s me here.”⁷³

The connection attestation provides, in the form of trust, between the self and its external objectification underlines another significant aspect of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics: the idea that otherness dialectically belongs to the self. Indeed, this principle is expressed in the title of the work *Soi-même comme un autre* (*Oneself as Another*). This means that “otherness is not something that is external to the self” but “part of its very own constitution.”⁷⁴ Hermeneutically speaking, I understand myself through otherness. Ontologically speaking, I become myself through my appropriation or recognition of otherness.⁷⁵ This conception involving attestation reveals that the interpretation of objectified action and experience, which Ricoeur defines as hermeneutical phenomenology, connects epistemology and ontology. The French philosopher speaks of epistemology (attestation), phenomenology, and ontology as the critical aspects of discussion in his explanation of attestation, considering that attestation is situated in epistemology.⁷⁶

From this perspective, the epistemology of attestation begins with hermeneutical phenomenology and intends to arrive somehow at ontology. The phenomenological itinerary followed in *Soi-même comme un autre* and *L’attestation* starts with linguistics and moves to action, narrative, and ethics. This itinerary constitutes the hermeneutical detour of the analysis of fragments of human action, in which attestation is approached indirectly. As John van der Hengel emphasizes, “attestation must be mediated” since it relies “upon analytic philosophy as well as pragmatic philosophy and narrative theory, as well as other explanatory disciplines of action.”⁷⁷ In other words, attestation is informed by signs and works of the objectification of human action.⁷⁸

In *Le Conflit des interprétations*, Ricoeur portrays the ontology of the self as the “promised land” of phenomenology. Nevertheless, given the hermeneutical acknowledgment of the wounded *cogito*, he adds that “like Moses, the speaking and reflecting subject can only glimpse this land before dying.”⁷⁹ Based on his

⁷² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

⁷³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

⁷⁴ Pérez, “The Concept of Attestation in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 142.

⁷⁵ Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 244. See also John van der Hengel, “Can there be a Science of Action?: Paul Ricoeur,” *Philosophy Today* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 246.

⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “L’attestation: entre phénoménologie et ontologie,” in *Les métamorphoses de la herméneutique*, eds. Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991), 382.

⁷⁷ van der Hengel, “Can there be a Science of Action?” 247.

⁷⁸ Pavan, “La réduction qui mène à l’ontologie,” 126-127.

⁷⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Le Conflit des interprétations: Essais d’hérmenéutique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969). Translation taken from *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL:

phenomenological itinerary, characterized by detours where traces of human action had been hermeneutically gathered in different disciplines, Ricoeur attempts to delineate glimpses of the ontology of the self at the end of his discussions on attestation in *Soi-même comme un autre* and *L'attestation*. In summary, the long way of hermeneutical phenomenology sketches the promised land of ontology on the epistemological basis of attestation.⁸⁰ However, the point of hermeneutics and the awareness of the wounded *cogito* is that the phenomenological interpretation of traces of human action is always open to criticism from other interpretations. This reminder seems to be part of the explanation of why Ricoeur elaborates his hermeneutical discussion of attestation dialectically without eventually arriving at a synthesis.⁸¹ His dialectical procedures seem to be associated with the indirect approach that describes this long way of hermeneutics. Don Ihde points out that our French philosopher elaborates “concepts indirectly and dialectically rather than directly and univocally.”⁸²

The dialectical shape of attestation, however, is not without difficulties. In the provocative title of his essay *Oneself as Another or Another as Oneself?*, Henry Venema questions whether, in *Soi-même comme un autre*, the self is really another or if the other eventually ends up being a repetition of oneself. Venema argues that Ricoeur fails to establish a proper relationship between the self and the other, as his account of otherness seems narrow and tends to reduce the other to a reflection of the self.⁸³ Arguably, an answer articulated from a Ricoeurian perspective would be that the notion of attestation assumes a wounded *cogito* and, therefore, always takes into account the role of suspicion and uncertainty, particularly the suspicion of myself, in a dialectical relationship with trust, especially self-trust. In other words, attestation does not follow Hegelian dialectics since it does not attempt to formulate a final synthesis that eventually overcomes suspicion altogether. Nevertheless, even though this is an explicit methodological assumption in Ricoeur's attestation, as it will be further explained in this Part, Pamela Anderson underscores that suspicion does not sufficiently hold an independent and autonomous status in attestation since its role serves the purpose of the reconfiguration and eventual affirmation of trust in Ricoeur.⁸⁴ From this standpoint, she is unconvinced that the role of suspicion in the dialectics of attestation in Ricoeur is sufficient and appropriate. In other words, the asymmetric nature of Ricoeur's dialectics, in eventually favoring trust

Northwestern University Press, 1974), 24.

^{80.} Pavan, “La réduction qui mène à l'ontologie,” 138.

^{81.} Grondin discerns a Hegelian influence in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, particularly in his “patient recollection of the objectifications of meaning.” However, the French philosopher is clearly unhegelian in that “there is no end-point in this process.” Grondin, “Ricoeur,” 156.

^{82.} Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, 6-7.

^{83.} Henry Venema, “Oneself as Another or Another as Oneself?,” *Literature & Theology* 16, no. 4 (2002): 410-426.

^{84.} Anderson, “Agnosticism and Attestation,” 65-76.

over suspicion, seems to make the dialectical shape of attestation problematic. This point deserves to be further explored, and I will come back to it in my concluding remarks of Part I, after providing a systematic picture of attestation.

Overall, this basic introduction to the notion of attestation in Ricoeur's hermeneutical project indicates that dialectics essentially defines the nature of attestation.⁸⁵ The present Part aims to deepen the understanding of the dialectical nature of attestation in Ricoeur's philosophy by exploring the fundamental question of *what is at stake in his idea of attestation*. This question is unpacked as follows: why did the French thinker develop this concept in his hermeneutical philosophy? What is attestation? Why does he do so dialectically? How dialectical is attestation? Why is his dialectical approach asymmetric, eventually favoring trust over suspicion? Arguably, discussing these questions requires a systematic account of attestation in Ricoeur. This account will be elaborated in two steps. First, I will identify concepts that provide the hermeneutical basis for developing dialectical attestation before the 1990s. Reflections on the hermeneutical nature of the symbol (*La symbolique du mal*, 1960) and of the self (*De l'interprétation*, 1965) in the 1960s, just as his essays on testimony (*L'herméneutique du témoignage*, 1972) and ethics (*The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy*, 1978) in the 1970s are particularly relevant in this step.

Second, I will delineate a systematic account of attestation since the 1990s. Considering the crucial and encompassing role of otherness in dialectical attestation,⁸⁶ I will explore three significant categories in the description of attestation: self-understanding, recognition, and history. The category of self-understanding and attestation underscores, among other concepts, that the self dialectically interacts with its otherness. In the discussion of recognition and attestation, the focus is mainly

^{85.} For the larger discussion of dialectics in Ricoeur, see Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 115-134; Roberta Picardi, "Le Lieu de la Dialectique Hégélienne dans la Pensée de Paul Ricoeur," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 99, no. 4 (2015): 599-639; Gonçalo Marcelo, "From Conflict to Conciliation and Back Again: Some Notes on Ricoeur's Dialectic," *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra* 38 (2010): 341-366; Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Dialectic and Dialogue in the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and H. G. Gadamer," *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 3 (2006): 313-345; Stephen N. Dunning, "History and Phenomenology: Dialectical Structure in Ricoeur's the Symbolism of Evil," *Harvard Theological Review* 76, no. 3 (1983): 343-363; Peter J. Albano, "Toward a Dialectical Apologetic of Hope: The Confrontative Dimension of Paul Ricoeur's Contribution to Fundamental Theology," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 15, no. 1 (1986): 77-88; Leonard Lawlor, "Dialectic and Iterability: The Confrontation between Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida," *Philosophy Today* 32, no. 3 (1988): 181-194; Patricia Ann Fleming, "Paul Ricoeur's Methodological Parallelism," *Human Studies* 13, no. 3 (1990): 221-236; Roger K. Olson, "Paul Ricoeur's Dialectical Understanding of Time and Self as Basis for Interreligious Dialogue" (PhD diss., University of Manitoba, 1998).

^{86.} In *Soi-même comme un autre*, which is mainly guided by three dialectical ideas (analysis and reflection; sameness-*idem* and selfhood; selfhood and otherness), the dialectics of selfhood and otherness is considered more fundamental than the other two dialectical ideas. Besides, otherness is broadly conceived as polysemic, which means that it goes beyond the otherness of another person. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 317-318.

on my dialectical relationship with other people. Concerning the category of history and attestation, otherness is temporally remote but dialectically present in the form of memories. The elaboration of these three categories will be based respectively on *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2004), and *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000).

The interaction with Ricoeur's writings in this research assumes an overall conceptual unity of his work without denying the development of his ideas throughout the years.⁸⁷ This assumption of unity allows this Part to offer a systematic description of attestation in Ricoeur. Moreover, the selection of Ricoeur's writings used in this chapter takes into account their thematic contribution to the hermeneutical discussion of attestation. After these introductory remarks, we turn to identifying concepts before the 1990s that provide the hermeneutical basis for the development of dialectical attestation.

⁸⁷. See Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 1.

CHAPTER 1

The Hermeneutical Basis for the Development of Dialectical Attestation

One of the significant hermeneutical discussions that seem to anticipate aspects of Ricoeur's idea of attestation appears in the treatment of evil in *La symbolique du mal* (1960). I will begin this chapter with the hermeneutics outlined in this work, with a particular focus on the phenomenology of confession and self-understanding.

1.1 The Phenomenology of Confession and Self-Understanding

In *La symbolique du mal* (1960),⁸⁸ the French philosopher explores the notion of evil from the phenomenological perspective of confession (*aveu*)⁸⁹ instead of approaching it using speculative reasoning in philosophical discourse. His phenomenology of confession has assumptions about the self and its use of language. First, confession implies consciousness, more precisely, “religious consciousness.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Ricoeur seems to develop a philosophy that intends “to integrate confession with the consciousness of self.”⁹¹ Second, confession is expressed by language, inasmuch as it is “an utterance of man about himself.”⁹² In confession, consciousness self-reflexively speaks. Considering that this experience is “embedded in the matrix of emotion, fear, anguish,”⁹³ its emotional language is highly symbolic. Ricoeur argues that the language of confession objectifies emotions in discourse. To put it more sharply, “the confession expresses, pushes to the outside, the emotion which without it would be shut up in itself, as an impression in the soul. Language is the light of emotions. Through confession the consciousness of fault is brought into the light of speech;

^{88.} Paul Ricoeur, “La symbolique du mal,” in *Finitude et culpabilité*, livre II (Paris: Aubier, 1960). English translation published as *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

^{89.} The first title of the introduction of *La symbolique du mal* is “Phénoménologie de l’aveu,” which is translated in the English version as “Phenomenology of ‘Confession.’” Compare “La symbolique du mal,” 11 and *The Symbolism of Evil*, 3. It is noteworthy that the English literature on Foucault usually highlights the distinction between *aveu* and *confession* in French. For instance, Alberto Romele points out that the term *aveu* is more neutral than *confession*. While the latter “has a stronger religious connotation,” the former “is closer to a judicial one.” Alberto Romele, *Digital Hermeneutics: Philosophical Investigations in New Media and Technologies* (New York; London: Routledge, 2020), 153–154. If this distinction is helpful to read Ricoeur, his phenomenology of confession would aim at a broad idea of confession, which could describe the telling of everything that is found in someone’s thought. But his discussion of the “Phénoménologie de l’aveu” clearly interacts with a religious perspective of confession.

^{90.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 3.

^{91.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 10.

^{92.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 4.

^{93.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 7.

through confession man remains speech, even in the experience of his own absurdity, suffering, and anguish.”⁹⁴

The complexity of evil revealed in the confession of sin involves multiple layers of experience and a web of different meanings interwoven in the emotions. The French philosopher categorizes these layers in terms of the experiences of defilement, sin, and guilt. Defilement describes a strain from the outside;⁹⁵ sin refers to a personal fault;⁹⁶ and guilt defines the subjective internalization (consciousness) of the responsibility for the fault.⁹⁷ The deep emotions that permeate these layers of experience, having the feeling of guilt as the climax, are equivocal, implying a variety and the consequent opacity of meanings.⁹⁸ In this context of confusion, language is necessary “to elucidate the subterranean cries of the consciousness of fault.”⁹⁹ Confusion is related to the assumption that sin is “alienation from oneself.”¹⁰⁰ From this standpoint, Ricoeur speaks of “the threat of meaninglessness” and argues that “sin makes me incomprehensible to myself.”¹⁰¹ This lack of self-understanding is linguistically expressed in the phenomenology of confession as the person raises questions about their own actions. The French philosopher maintains, “the experience of being oneself but alienated from oneself gets transcribed immediately on the plane of language in the mode of interrogation.”¹⁰² Hence, language “reveals the experience of alienation as astonishing”¹⁰³ contradiction.

Ricoeur stipulates that language is expressive of feelings as a necessary stage of their experience. In other words, symbols always mediate experience and are “never immediate.”¹⁰⁴ Given the assumption that “language is essentially symbolic,”¹⁰⁵ symbolic mediation basically refers to the mediation of language. Furthermore, the French philosopher defines the mediation of symbols as a “guide for ‘becoming oneself.’”¹⁰⁶ In his discussion of the dimensions of symbols, he speaks of psyche and cosmos as “two poles of the same ‘expressivity’; I express myself in expressing the

^{94.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 7.

^{95.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{96.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 9.

^{97.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 101.

^{98.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{99.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{100.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{101.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{102.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{103.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 8.

^{104.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 10.

^{105.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 10.

^{106.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 13.

world.”¹⁰⁷ This means that, according to the symbolic mediation of language, a talk about the world mirrors the contours of human reflexive experience.

To be sure, language does not only contribute to self-understanding but is also present in the knowledge coming from another person. This principle is evident in Ricoeur’s account of the role of prophetism in the transformation of the experience of sin. “Knowledge of sin” comes through prophetic utterance, which is not a philosophical speculation.¹⁰⁸ As the French philosopher emphasizes, “the prophet does not ‘reflect’ *on* sin; he ‘prophesies’ *against*,” since “prophecy is this mixture of threat and indignation.”¹⁰⁹ The emotional tone of the prophetic cry against sin indicates that the prophet “does not ‘think’ in the Hellenic sense of the world; he cries out, he threatens, he orders, he groans, he exults.”¹¹⁰ In fact, there is a dialectic in prophetic discourse between threat and promise, since the prophets ultimately proclaim the possibility of repentance and transformation. In short, prophetism promotes the consciousness of sin that leads to confession and change. Ricoeur highlights that “the same prophet who announces the imminent catastrophe joins promise to threat. The mother-cell of prophecy is, then, no longer the prediction of a calamity, but the double imminence of catastrophe and salvation.”¹¹¹ This is not a dialectic of speculative thought, but “a dialectic in imagination and experience,” a “dialectic of destruction and salvation.”¹¹² According to the prophetic appeals, the conditional “ambiguity of history” is “held in suspense by the ethical choice” or response of the person.¹¹³ The French philosopher concludes that “if the sinner were only the object of the prophetic accusation, he would no longer be invoking.”¹¹⁴ Thus, confession of sin is the goal of prophetism, inasmuch as it intends to promote the awareness of sin by means of emotional utterances.¹¹⁵

It is noteworthy that Ricoeur discerns in the confession act of invocation the very “birth of the Self.”¹¹⁶ He explains that “the first person who invokes feels himself become second person for this perception that sees right through him.”¹¹⁷ The birth of the Self is spelled out in terms of self-awareness, which refers to “the field of subjectivity as the *task* of knowing oneself better.”¹¹⁸ This task does not involve only

^{107.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 13.

^{108.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 53.

^{109.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 54.

^{110.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 53.

^{111.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 68.

^{112.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 68.

^{113.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 68.

^{114.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 69.

^{115.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 82.

^{116.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 85.

^{117.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 84.

^{118.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 85.

knowledge but also ethics, “the ought-to-be of self-awareness” in “the examination of conscience” or in “my own observation of myself.”¹¹⁹ As the French philosopher underscores, the privileged mode of self-awareness is “interrogation,” that is, “the putting in question of the meaning of acts and motives.”¹²⁰ Ricoeur qualifies this “interrogative thought” in terms of suspicion and claims that “suspicion of myself” is the necessary edge that “separates the appearance from the reality.”¹²¹ He postulates the existence of the “absolute Seeing” of ethical judgment (God) as the foundation for the view that my consciousness has of myself.¹²² This foundation allegedly preserves the distinction between “the reality of my existence” and “the consciousness that I have of it.”¹²³ This foundation and distinction ultimately attest that sin “is internal but objective,” as it is not reducible to the “consciousness of guilt.”¹²⁴

As Ricoeur indicates, a helpful example of this self-awareness is found in the apostle Paul’s confession in Romans 7. He acknowledges a duality in his own self. “To will the good is present with me, but not to accomplish it; for the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do’ (Rom. 7:18-19).”¹²⁵ According to the French philosopher, this evil part of the self, which Paul calls flesh, “stands before me as an alienated part of myself.”¹²⁶ Therefore, Paul identifies a disruption of myself, since there is the “I of reason and the I of flesh.”¹²⁷ In Romans 7:25 he explains, “It is, then, I myself who by reason serve a law of God and by the flesh a law of sin.”¹²⁸ Obviously, Paul is aware of his sin. While Ricoeur thinks that the self is born with self-awareness, he underscores that consciousness is born with guilt.¹²⁹ In summary, “a responsible agent appears, to face the prophetic call and its demand for holiness.”¹³⁰ Moreover, “the realism of sin, measured by the eye of God, is absorbed into the phenomenalism of guilty conscience, which is the measure of itself.”¹³¹

In the conclusion of *La symbolique du mal*, the French philosopher discusses the relationship of symbolic language and philosophy with reflexive consciousness. He stipulates that the task of the philosopher attentive to symbols is “to break out the enchanted enclosure of consciousness of oneself, to end the prerogative of self-

^{119.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 85.

^{120.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 85.

^{121.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 85.

^{122.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 86.

^{123.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 86.

^{124.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 86.

^{125.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 142.

^{126.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 142.

^{127.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 142.

^{128.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 142.

^{129.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 143.

^{130.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 143.

^{131.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 143.

reflection.”¹³² In fact, the symbol indicates that it is not being that is within the *cogito*, but is rather the *cogito* that belongs to being. From this standpoint, Ricoeur speaks of “a second Copernican revolution” or “the second naïveté” where “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.”¹³³ For the French philosopher, symbols of guilt portray “the situation of the being of man in the being of the world.”¹³⁴ However, he acknowledges that a philosophy that starts with language has its own presuppositions. These presuppositions need to be made explicit and declared as beliefs.¹³⁵ The philosopher needs to “wager on the beliefs, and try to make the wager pay off in understanding.”¹³⁶ In this way, this philosophy will speculate about the symbols in such a way “to disclose the rationality of its foundations.”¹³⁷ Many points raised in this conclusion are elaborated in *De l’interprétation*, particularly the question of the *cogito*, a second naïveté, and beliefs regarding language and understanding.

In summary, Ricoeur’s discussion on the phenomenology of confession in *La symbolique du mal* reveals several assumptions about self-understanding. First, it presupposes a situation of confusion and self-alienation, in which the self does not comprehend itself and its actions. Second, it highlights the idea of consciousness self-reflexively speaking and objectifying emotions in discourse. Third, considering the situation of self-alienation, the use of language is helpful in elucidating the deep feelings of consciousness. In fact, a talk about the world mirrors the contours of human reflexive experience. The assumption here is that experience is always mediated by symbols and language, and this is part of becoming oneself. Fourth, self-understanding is also attained by the other’s use of language to speak about me. This is an important way of self-awareness. Fifth, the self is basically defined by a duality, in which I am able to observe myself, and it is expressed in terms of consciousness of myself. This duality of the self refers especially to the disruptive context of self-alienation, described by the consciousness of guilt and the suspicion of my own motives. Positively, the other side of this consciousness is the task of ethics.

Before I turn to the brief discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of *De l’interprétation*, with a particular focus on self-consciousness and self-understanding, it is important to highlight, given the larger purposes of the present investigation, that the French philosopher mentions Romans 7:18-19, 25, namely, Paul’s emphasis on a divided self and his double reference to the law (the law of God and the law of sin) as part of the

^{132.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

^{133.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

^{134.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.

^{135.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 357.

^{136.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 357.

^{137.} Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 357.

discussion of the birth of the self in the experience of self-awareness in confession, with a guilt consciousness in *La symbolique du mal*.

1.2 Self-Consciousness and Self-Understanding

In *De l'interprétation* (1965),¹³⁸ Ricoeur hermeneutically deals with the question of the self in relationship with the “crisis of language.”¹³⁹ In this crisis, language is mostly distorted, in the sense that meaning is paradoxically given and hidden.¹⁴⁰ According to this duality, language is both a form of revelation and distortion,¹⁴¹ which summarizes the hermeneutic problem in question.¹⁴² One of the main reasons for the problem of distortion is that human perception or consciousness is mediated. The French philosopher stipulates that the relationship between our mind and the real is not immediate. Rather, our grasp of reality is always mediated by symbols, since they are cultural instruments of apprehension, such as language, religion, art, and science.¹⁴³

The acknowledgment of this mediation is opposed to the Cartesian assumption of immediate consciousness. While Descartes doubted almost everything, he did not doubt consciousness. Hence, in Cartesian epistemology, the consciousness of meaning and meaning itself coincide.¹⁴⁴ As Ricoeur emphasizes, “things are doubtful” to Descartes, which means “that they are not such as they appear; but he does not doubt that consciousness is such as it appears to itself.”¹⁴⁵ However, he was convinced by the masters of suspicion (Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche) that Cartesian thought does not doubt enough, as Descartes should also doubt consciousness. In his reflections on the archeology of the subject, Ricoeur learned from Freud that consciousness is “capable of mistakes and self-deception,”¹⁴⁶ and that “the subject is never the subject one thinks it is.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, Freudianism is against the “illusions of consciousness.”¹⁴⁸

Given the illusion of immediate consciousness, our French philosopher understood from the masters of suspicion that interpretation must begin with doubts and suspicion. As he underscores, “this hermeneutics is not an explication of the object, but

^{138.} Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*. English translation published as *Freud and Philosophy*.

^{139.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 27.

^{140.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 7.

^{141.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 9.

^{142.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 17.

^{143.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 10.

^{144.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

^{145.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

^{146.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 422.

^{147.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 420.

^{148.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 428.

a tearing off of masks, an interpretation that reduces disguises.”¹⁴⁹ Whereas Descartes overcame “the doubt as to things by the evidence of consciousness,” the masters attempt to “triumph over the doubt as to consciousness by an exegesis of meaning.”¹⁵⁰ If Cartesian thought identified meaning by spelling out the consciousness of meaning, the masters seek meaning by deciphering the expressions of consciousness.¹⁵¹ The focus on the “mediate science of meaning” implies that understanding is not immediate access to consciousness, but the hermeneutics of its symbols and expressions.¹⁵² Considering that consciousness can also be false consciousness, Ricoeur suggests that Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche share the same starting point of “suspicion concerning the illusion of consciousness” and then adopt different methods to decipher it.¹⁵³ At the same time, our French philosopher thinks that none of them ultimately rejects consciousness, inasmuch as it is worth being deciphered.¹⁵⁴ In fact, the possibility of deciphering it implies that something can be revealed in consciousness, which means that “the relation hidden-shown”¹⁵⁵ seems to better describe how consciousness works.

Taking into account that each master of suspicion employs his own method to decipher conscience, Ricoeur intends to dialogue specifically with Freud’s psychoanalytic methodology in *De l’interprétation*. In fact, the French philosopher believes that Freud’s archeology of the subject is instructive to his hermeneutical reflection. Overall, Freud undertakes a regressive analysis described by the movement of relinquishing consciousness in order to recapture it. To be sure, the goal of psychoanalysis is a more lucid consciousness, but this results paradoxically from its initial dismissal. To ultimately illuminate our consciousness, Freud turns to the unconscious and its hidden desires. As Ricoeur emphasizes, “consciousness ‘has’ an unconscious; but this relation becomes manifest only in the dispossession of the consciousness which has that unconscious.”¹⁵⁶ From this perspective, the problem of an immediate consciousness is that it ignores the concealed influence of the unconscious. However, the methodological difficulty of displacing consciousness as the seat of meaning toward the unconscious is that the latter “cannot be reified as a region of the world.”¹⁵⁷ More precisely, “the reality of the unconscious is not an absolute reality, but is relative to the operations that give it meaning.”¹⁵⁸ Because the unconscious is not a reality to be explored in itself, the methodological activity of

^{149.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 30.

^{150.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

^{151.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

^{152.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33.

^{153.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 34.

^{154.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 34.

^{155.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 33–34.

^{156.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 438.

^{157.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 423.

^{158.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 436.

Freudian psychoanalysis needs to work with consciousness to uncover the influence of the unconscious in it. In this process, the goal is not to grasp naïvely the immediate meaning presented by consciousness, but to unmask or decipher it. This is why the methodological analysis is regressive and reductive. The archeology of the subject looks at what appears at the “surface” of consciousness and attempts to trace its meaning back to deeper and unconscious causes that are more clearly observed in the past history of the subject. This regressive movement reduces the meaning of what appears at the “surface” of consciousness to its causes. To put it more sharply, the French philosopher argues that “Freudianism is a reductive interpretation.”¹⁵⁹

Following Ricoeur’s reading of Freud, the unconscious is basically described by instincts and desires. To say that the unconscious is not a place to be explored in itself seems to be more concretely expressed by the idea that instincts and desires in themselves are not accessible as objects of analysis. As the French philosopher summarizes the possibility of getting “at the root of desire,” “desire is accessible only in the disguises in which it displaces itself, it is only by interpreting the signs of desire that one can recapture in reflection the emergence of desire and thus enlarge reflection to the point where it regains what it had lost.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, Freudian psychoanalysis is an “exegesis of desire,”¹⁶¹ in which “a pure economics of desire is intelligible only as the possibility of recognizing the emergence of desire in the series of its derivatives.”¹⁶² This exegesis identifies “hidden desires disguised in dreams and their analogues” in order “to unmask the nonprimal or nonprimitive sources of the ego, its foreign and alienating sources.”¹⁶³ According to Ricoeur, “the genius of Freudianism is to have unmasked the strategy of the pleasure principle, the archaic form of the human, under its rationalizations, its idealizations, its sublimations. Here the function of analysis is to reduce apparent novelty by showing that it is actually a revival of the old.”¹⁶⁴

Therefore, Freudian psychoanalysis seeks traces of the unconscious in the derivatives of desires in consciousness. While desires and instincts are not immediate objects of analysis,¹⁶⁵ they objectify themselves in dreams and ideals or illusions that emerge in consciousness. By means of regressive and reductive analysis, these objectifications are properly unmasked (interpreted or deciphered), not as the real seat of meaning, but as disguised representatives of another root of meaning. This

^{159.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 447.

^{160.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 424.

^{161.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 457.

^{162.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 454.

^{163.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 448.

^{164.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 446.

^{165.} As Ricoeur indicates, “the reality knowable through the topography is a reality of the physical representatives of instincts and not of the instincts themselves.” Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 434.

methodological tactic to counter “the spell of false consciousness”¹⁶⁶ in the archeology of the subject reveals that the person is not the master of his/her own mind as he/she previously thought.¹⁶⁷ The conclusion is that “the ego is no longer the subject of the Cogito but the object of desire.”¹⁶⁸ In fact, Ricoeur speaks of a self-estrangement in the archeology of the subject, in which we become aware of expressions coming from “the other of oneself within oneself.”¹⁶⁹

Considering Freud’s categories of ego, id, and superego, while the ego is allegedly the representative of the external world (but having conscious and unconscious aspects), both the id and the superego inhabit the internal world of personality, the former referring to unconscious desires and the latter describing the law of morality that has conscious and unconscious aspects in the personality. Just as the unconscious desires (id) need to be methodologically unmasked by means of the analysis of their objectified disguised derivatives, the superego must also be deciphered “because it remains my ‘other’ within myself.”¹⁷⁰ To Freud, “the internal agency of morality derives from an internalized external threat,”¹⁷¹ and the moral person is essentially alienated due to the fact that he/she is “subject to the law of a foreign master” that is internalized.¹⁷²

In short, immediate consciousness cannot be trusted because the meaning offered by the cogito provides an indirect objectification of deeper feelings that are apparently forgotten. To use the analogy of language and hermeneutics, to trust immediate consciousness is to naïvely read literal words without interpreting their most profound meaning. A naïve literal reading misses the point of real meaning and results in self-alienation. At the same time, the meaning offered by immediate consciousness cannot be simply dismissed, since it constitutes the objectified masked derivatives that provide the key to identifying unconscious desires as the source of meaning.

Hence, Freud’s psychoanalysis designs a “dispossession of immediate consciousness,” undertaken by “a decentering of the home of significations, a displacement of the birthplace of meaning.”¹⁷³ In terms of interpretation, Ricoeur thinks of a “dispossession of immediate certitude,”¹⁷⁴ the suspension of “immediate meaning,” or the displacement of the apparent meaning.¹⁷⁵ Deliberately, this

^{166.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 446.

^{167.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 426.

^{168.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 425.

^{169.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 452.

^{170.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 448.

^{171.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 448.

^{172.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 448.

^{173.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 422-423.

^{174.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 432.

^{175.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 423.

movement of “dispossession” prevents “any premature or illusory achieving of insight.”¹⁷⁶ At the same time, our French philosopher does not dismiss the significance of consciousness or of the cogito. Rather, he proposes a reshaping of these concepts. Instead of speaking about the cogito, he prefers to refer to it in terms of “a wounded Cogito,” namely, “a Cogito that posits itself but does not possess itself; a Cogito that sees its original truth only in and through the avowal of the inadequacy, illusion, and lying of actual consciousness.”¹⁷⁷ Likewise, rather than immediate consciousness, Ricoeur emphasizes a “hermeneutic consciousness”¹⁷⁸ characterized by the “double movement of relinquishing and recapture.”¹⁷⁹ He underscores that the first task of displacement should not be isolated from the second task of recapturing the meaning in interpretation.¹⁸⁰ In other words, the first step does not mean the disjunction of all consciousness but envisions the achievement of “a new quality of consciousness.”¹⁸¹ In his interaction with Freud’s psychoanalysis, the French philosopher discerns in this method a dialectical relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, where one stands as homogeneously relative to the other without being “the absolute other.”¹⁸² For Ricoeur, this eventually makes psychoanalysis “a return to consciousness.”¹⁸³ At the same time, he modifies this method by adding to the regressive movement of the archeology of the subject what is called a teleology of the subject. Ricoeur acknowledges that Freud would probably reject this proposed addition.¹⁸⁴

Overall, the French philosopher proposes a dialectic between archeology and teleology. Whereas the regressive movement of archeology comes from his dialogue with Freud, the progressive movement of teleology is motivated by his reflections on Hegel. The former emphasizes remembrance and the latter underscores anticipation. In fact, Ricoeur does not only suggest a combination of regressive (Freud) and progressive (Hegel) hermeneutics. He also intends to modify Hegel’s phenomenology of Spirit and eventually update his previous ideas in *L’Homme faillible* (1960) about the relationship of desire with otherness and subjectivity in the constitution of the self.¹⁸⁵ To achieve this purpose, the French philosopher employs “the trilogy of fundamental feelings” borrowed from Kantian anthropology, namely, “the passions

^{176.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 431.

^{177.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 439.

^{178.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 432.

^{179.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 430.

^{180.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 423-424.

^{181.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 431-432.

^{182.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 430.

^{183.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 430.

^{184.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 498.

^{185.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 506-507. See Paul Ricoeur, *L’Homme faillible* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), 123. English translation published as *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Regenery, 1965), 163.

of having, power, and valuation.”¹⁸⁶ He associates these three concepts, respectively, with economics, politics, and culture. His discussion of this trilogy assumes that these concepts “institute new relationships to other persons,” and these relations are taken as meaningful moments of objectification of feelings.¹⁸⁷ This assumption is fruitful for the elaboration of a Hegelian “reduplication of consciousness and the advancement of self-consciousness.”¹⁸⁸

In the sphere of having, we find economic objectification. The warning against the danger of false consciousness in this realm does not come from Freud, but from Marx and his notion of monetary fetishism. False consciousness is related to economic alienation and ideological thinking. Ricoeur adds that “the areas in which these feelings, passions, and alienations multiply are new objects, values of exchange, monetary signs, structures, and institutions.”¹⁸⁹ He concludes that the person “becomes self-consciousness insofar as he” or she “experiences this economic objectivity as a new modality of his subjectivity.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, the French philosopher discerns in the objectification both the problem of false consciousness, which calls for the regressive approach of the masters of suspicion, and the reality of new things or relations that engender new modes of subjectivity, which invite the prospective approach of a modified Hegelianism. In his words, “this new objectivity gives rise to a specific group of impulses, ideas, and affects.”¹⁹¹ What Ricoeur seems to suggest here is the need for a dialectic between the presence of the old and the new. It is too reductive to affirm that the new forms are merely masks of old things and that the novelty does not really exist. In other words, new relations require the acknowledgment and the exploration of new aspects of subjectivity without ignoring their connections with older aspects.

In the realm of power, our French philosopher also articulates the relationship between objectivity and “the development of self-consciousness.”¹⁹² He indicates that Hegel employed the expression “‘objective spirit’ to designate the structures and institutions in which the relation of commanding-obeying, essential to political power, actualizes and engenders itself.”¹⁹³ Moreover, these objectifications engender alienations and “feelings, such as intrigue, ambition, submission, responsibility.”¹⁹⁴ The alienations refer particularly to the evils that accompany power, already

^{186.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 507.

^{187.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 508.

^{188.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 508.

^{189.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 508.

^{190.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 508.

^{191.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 509.

^{192.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 509.

^{193.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 509.

^{194.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 509.

identified by the ancients, such as Plato, in the image of the tyrant and his use of sophism, linguistically expressed in terms of flattery.¹⁹⁵

The sphere of worth or valuation is probably the most significant element of the trilogy of feelings for the interests of the present research. Ricoeur underscores here the concept of recognition and its crucial importance for the constitution of the self. He argues that each person wants to be “respected, approved, and recognized as a person. My existence for myself is dependent on this constitution of self in the opinion of others; my ‘self’ is shaped by the opinion and acceptance of others.”¹⁹⁶ This is actually a “mutual constitution” of the self.¹⁹⁷ In this sphere, the reality of objectification takes place in the form of cultural objects, such as “works and monuments of law, art, and literature.”¹⁹⁸ The French philosopher claims that the different images of cultural objects tell something about human beings and their relationships, shaping ideas of “human dignity and self-regard.”¹⁹⁹ However, cultural objectification may also lead to self-alienation, degradation, disrespect, and destruction.²⁰⁰

Overall, Ricoeur’s use of this trilogy exemplifies his philosophical exegesis of consciousness. The starting point of this method centers on the idea of objectification, that is, “the objective movement of the figures of man,” which “Hegel calls spirit.”²⁰¹ Our philosopher attempts to derive “from this movement of objectification the subjectivity that constitutes itself at the same time that the objectivity engenders itself.”²⁰² Instead of an immediate consciousness or self-certainty, this is the indirect approach to consciousness that explores subjectivity by means of its objectification.²⁰³ Ricoeur seems to postulate a dynamic or dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectification, in which the latter is explained by the former (regressive hermeneutics) but also brings new aspects to it (progressive hermeneutics).

The dialectical relationship between regressive and progressive hermeneutics envisioned here is particularly clarified by the comparison of the objectification of dreams in Freud and the objectification of cultural works of art. To be sure, the French philosopher speaks of a “functional unity” between them, but there is a qualitative difference in terms of aims. While works of art are “lasting and memorable creations of our days,” dreams are “the fleeting and sterile products of our nights.”²⁰⁴ Ricoeur indicates that a crucial distinction between them is the intentional mediation of

^{195.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 509.

^{196.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{197.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{198.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{199.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{200.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{201.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{202.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{203.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 510.

^{204.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 521.

an agent in the works of art who wants to communicate something to others. In his words, “if dreams remain a private expression lost in the solitude of sleep, it is because they lack the mediation of the artisan’s work that embodies the fantasy in a solid material and communicates it to a public.”²⁰⁵ This qualitative difference implies that works of art are not reduced to “mere projections of the artist’s conflicts,” but also present “the sketch of their solution.”²⁰⁶ If the French philosopher learned from Freud that dreams operate in terms of disguise, pointing especially to the past of childhood, Ricoeur argues that works of art emphasize disclosure. This means that they “tend to be prospective symbols of one’s personal synthesis and of man’s future and not merely a regressive symptom of the artist’s unresolved conflicts.”²⁰⁷ Ricoeur applies the same principle of disclosure to the experience of viewing works of art. The pleasure of viewers is not restricted to the revival of their own conflicts. Rather, the experience includes the pleasure of envisioning in the work of art some sense of prospective direction.²⁰⁸

Therefore, the dialectical hermeneutics of regression and progression emphasizes the respective poles of disguise or distortion and disclosure or revelation.²⁰⁹ The cultural activity of objectification sediments both disguise and disclosure.²¹⁰ Thus, the monuments of culture objectify and form “a certain dignity of man” tracing “a process of reduplicated consciousness, or recognition of the self in another self.”²¹¹ This recognition is key for the achievement of personal consciousness.²¹² One of the examples of the progressive movement of disclosure in the development of consciousness through the works of culture is the process of education. Ricoeur makes a play on the German words *Bildung* (education; culture; formation) and *Bild* (picture; image). In its prospective movement, education leads the person out of childhood in the past.²¹³ The French philosopher speaks of “*Bildung* in the twofold sense of an edification and an emergence of the *Bilder* or ‘images of man’ which mark off the development of self-consciousness and open man to what they disclose.”²¹⁴ He concludes that “this education, this erudition, this *Bildung* function as a second nature, for they remodel man’s first nature.”²¹⁵ Thus, the development

^{205.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 521.

^{206.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 521.

^{207.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 521.

^{208.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 521.

^{209.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 520.

^{210.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 523.

^{211.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 523.

^{212.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 523.

^{213.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 524.

^{214.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 524.

^{215.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 524.

of self-consciousness by means of education and culture belongs to the teleological movement of progression.

These assumptions about self-consciousness seem to provide the ontological ground for Ricoeur's understanding of language and its interpretation. From the standpoint of a prospective movement, language describes the symbolic objectification process that progressively shapes consciousness. Conversely, from the perspective of a regressive movement, inasmuch as language is an objectification of consciousness, the former takes its form from the latter, which implies that language retrospectively mirrors the hide and show of meaning in consciousness. This is why language paradoxically conceals or distorts but also discloses or reveals meaning.²¹⁶ Because self-understanding cannot be attained through immediate consciousness, the indirect way of objectification according to the mediation of language constitutes the only possible approach to self-understanding, provided that this is a hermeneutical knowledge, not a final knowledge, that always requires retrospective and prospective dialectical reflection. To put it more sharply, self-understanding necessarily involves language and interpretation (hermeneutics).

Given the paradox of concealment and disclosure of meaning in language, Ricoeur proposes that hermeneutics has a "double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen."²¹⁷ This is the dialectical task of demystification (reducing the illusions) on the one hand and the "restoration of meaning" (openness to what is being disclosed) on the other.²¹⁸ The first step conceives "interpretation as a tactic of suspicion and as a battle against masks."²¹⁹ Primarily, this battle is not against epistemological error or moral lying. Rather, the suspicion envisioned here is of alienating illusion.²²⁰ Suspicion is the hermeneutical attitude of the regressive movement.

On the other hand, the following dialectical step views interpretation as a restoration of meaning and its corresponding hermeneutical attitude is faith. This is what motivates the progressive movement. To be sure, faith is the opposite of suspicion in this dialectical framework of thought, but such faith is defined by Ricoeur as a second faith.²²¹ In contrast to a naïve first faith, he explains that the second faith is the one that "has engaged hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism."²²² In short,

^{216.} For a helpful study on this topic, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Truth (and Untruth) of Language: Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Derrida on Disclosure and Displacement* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2010).

^{217.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 27.

^{218.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 27.

^{219.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 26.

^{220.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 26.

^{221.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

^{222.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

this is a “postcritical faith.”²²³ This faith is aware of the points raised by suspicion and has taken them into serious consideration. Moreover, the second faith is interested in the reduction of illusions and does not overturn suspicion. Nevertheless, the French philosopher thinks that the attitude of suspicion without the company of a second faith is too reductive, due to the absolute presupposition of a non-hermeneutical suspicion that stipulates that language is totally unable to disclose new and real meaning. Indeed, he argues that faith believes “in a revelation through the word.”²²⁴ To put it differently, the second faith expresses “confidence in language,”²²⁵ namely, confidence that meaning can be revealed in it. This is what Ricoeur calls a “second naïveté,”²²⁶ an openness to listen. The crucial role of the expression *second* in “second faith” and “second naïveté” is to underscore that faith and naïveté are conceived as an openness that is critical and hermeneutical, and not uncritical and absolute. Therefore, the belief of the *second* faith (the *second* naïveté) is a belief “without positing absolutely the object of . . . belief.”²²⁷ While the regressive methodological tool of suspicion is characterized by an explanatory reduction of the object of meaning to its functional or historical causes, the progressive methodological tool of the second faith is the phenomenological procedure of description of the object instead of the intention to reduce it.²²⁸ As the French philosopher points out, “phenomenology is its instrument of hearing, of recollection, of restoration of meaning.”²²⁹

There are at least two reasons why Ricoeur avoids the idea of absolute belief in his hermeneutical conception of second faith. Even though he employs a Hegelian version of teleology in his account of the progressive movement of consciousness, the French philosopher emphasizes that this is a modified version. While Hegel’s teleology aims at absolute knowledge, Ricoeur affirms that faith (in the sense of trust) has a hermeneutical, not absolute knowledge. The first reason for this affirmation is the reality of evil. As he highlights, “the problem of evil forces us to return from Hegel to Kant—that is to say, from a dissolution of the problem of evil in dialectic to the recognition of the emergence of evil as something inscrutable, and hence as something that cannot be captured in a total and absolute knowledge.”²³⁰ This acknowledgment implies “the failure of systems of thought that would swallow up symbols in an absolute knowledge.”²³¹ According to this perspective, Ricoeur refuses “to transform faith into

²²³. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

²²⁴. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

²²⁵. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 29.

²²⁶. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

²²⁷. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 29.

²²⁸. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

²²⁹. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.

²³⁰. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 527.

²³¹. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 527.

gnosis.”²³² What the second faith or trust does is to discern hermeneutically signs (not proofs) of promise or hope in the symbols, “in spite of evil.”²³³

The other reason why second faith is not absolute has to do with the overall nature of philosophical reflection, according to Ricoeur’s perspective. Our French thinker indicates that the comprehension of the self of self-reflection constitutes the center of philosophy. In fact, the starting point of the broad tradition of modern Western philosophy, especially influenced by Descartes and Kant, is “the positing of the self” as “the first truth.”²³⁴ While he agrees with this general principle, Ricoeur is critical of this tradition, especially in two specific points. First, as already indicated above, he rejects Descartes’ notion of immediate consciousness and affirms that consciousness is “not a given” but “a task.”²³⁵ Therefore, self-reflection attempts to indirectly “recapture the Ego of the Ego Cogito in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts.”²³⁶ Second, this task of self-reflection should not be reduced to epistemology. Our French philosopher argues that this is the deficiency of Kant’s overemphasis on critical philosophy, where practical philosophy is basically dominated by his critique of knowledge.²³⁷ Conversely, Ricoeur stipulates that epistemology should be considered “only a part” in the larger task of recovering “the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works.”²³⁸ The problem that justifies this task is the postulate of an existential “diaspora” of the self. In his words, “I am lost, ‘led astray’ among objects and separated from the center of my existence, just as I am separated from others.”²³⁹ Indeed, “I do not at first possess what I am,” that is, “I am absent to myself.”²⁴⁰ In this context of self-alienation, the task of philosophical reflection is to make “my concrete experience equal to the positing of ‘I am.’”²⁴¹ While the French philosopher acknowledges that this gives an ethical flavor to the task, he claims that ethics should not be thought simply in terms of morality. Rather, his understanding of ethics refers especially to freedom and desires. He indicates that “philosophy is ethical to the extent that it leads from alienation to freedom and beatitude.”²⁴² In his philosophical project, the specific goal of ethics “is to grasp the Ego in its effort to exist, in its desire to be.”²⁴³ In order to achieve this goal, reflection

^{232.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 527.

^{233.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 528.

^{234.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 43.

^{235.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 44.

^{236.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 43.

^{237.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 44.

^{238.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 45.

^{239.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 45.

^{240.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 45.

^{241.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 45.

^{242.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 45.

^{243.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 46.

needs to employ the indirect method of observing “the works which bear witness to that effort and desire.”²⁴⁴ As Ricoeur highlights, “I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world.”²⁴⁵

This larger perspective about the nature of philosophical reflection has two important implications for our discussion. First of all, the ultimate goal of philosophy is not merely knowledge but authentic (non-alienated) existence. Epistemology contributes to this purpose instead of being itself the final goal. From this standpoint, the role of a second faith in self-understanding cannot be evaluated only through the lenses of epistemology, but it should be more broadly estimated in terms of practical philosophy (authentic existence). Moreover, this larger conception of the task of philosophical reflection entails interdisciplinary work. An exploration of the objectifications of the self in the world requires diverse approaches to different types of objects. Our French thinker points out that such philosophical enterprise “must include the results, methods, and presuppositions of all the sciences that try to decipher and interpret the signs of” the human person that are “lost in the world of culture.”²⁴⁶ Arguably, this proposal seems to be partially exemplified by Ricoeur’s interaction with Freudian psychoanalysis in *De l’interprétation*. Among other things, this interaction probably deepened his perception of the limitations of an epistemology-centered philosophy and highlighted the importance of desires along with their impact either on self-alienation or authentic existence in philosophical reflection. According to this proposal of interdisciplinary work, the role of second faith is not to provide absolute knowledge but to seek a growing understanding of the self through a hermeneutical dialogue with different disciplines in order to promote authentic existence.

In summary, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical discussion on the self and language in *De l’interprétation* reveals several assumptions about self-understanding. As I have indicated at the end of my remarks on *La symbolique du mal*, the French philosopher elaborates on the cogito, second naïveté, and beliefs regarding language and understanding in *De l’interprétation*. He speaks of a wounded cogito that needs to be suspected in its immediate meaning or certitude in order to avoid self-alienation. According to his proposal of a hermeneutic consciousness, the immediate meaning of consciousness needs to be properly interpreted and deciphered. Therefore, self-understanding begins with the acknowledgment of self-alienation but also postulates that underneath the language that expresses this alienation, we can hermeneutically find the desire to be. This is why the objectification of these desires sedimented by language needs to be hermeneutically explored, with the double motivation of

^{244.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 46.

^{245.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 46.

^{246.} Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 46-47.

suspicion and of a post-critical faith or trust (a phenomenological openness to meaning) in the development of self-consciousness that is hermeneutical rather than absolute. The enterprise of self-understanding is not limited to epistemology, as it involves ethics in the sense of grasping the desire to exist in its witnessing works objectified in culture. In this context, ethics is defined as the intentional movement from alienation to freedom.

The hermeneutical discussion of *De l'interprétation* also touches on the idea of the recognition of others and the importance of their opinion about myself for the constitution of the self. Furthermore, the importance of interdisciplinary work for the study of the different signs of the self objectified and scattered in the world of culture points to the significance, among other areas, of the study of language, memory, and history for the understanding of the self, which is mirrored in culture. Ricoeur explores these areas in his work as a whole.

1.3 Attestation to the Self and Self-Understanding

There are several aspects regarding the hermeneutical perspective of *De l'interprétation* discussed above that are elaborated in *L'Herméneutique du témoignage* (1972).²⁴⁷ As indicated above, Ricoeur employs the language of signs or witnesses of the desire to be in his discussion of the indirect method of observing the objectification of the self in the world. Hence, it seems natural that he would further elaborate on the concept of testimony or witness. The French philosopher defines testimony in terms of “words, works, actions, and . . . lives which attest to an intention.”²⁴⁸ Ricoeur stipulates that “we can recognize in testimony—not in the sense of the story of a witness who tells what he has seen but a work that attests—is that it is the expression of the freedom that we desire to be.”²⁴⁹ Therefore, testimony attests to something deeper than what is seen and reported. Another significant connection with the hermeneutical conception of *De l'interprétation* is that the study of testimony is potentially an

^{247.} Paul Ricoeur, “L’herméneutique du témoignage,” *Archivio di Filosofia (La Testimonianza)* 42 (1972): 35–61. The English translation of David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan used in this study was published as “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” *Anglican Theological Review* 61, no. 4 (1979): 435–461. For critical interactions with Ricoeur’s conception of testimony, see Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2020), 92, 226–227, 235; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “Testimony and Engagement: On the Four Elements of Witnessing,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 21 (2021): 22, 26–28, 31, 33–37; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “Witnessing the Uninhabitable Place: On the Experience and Testimony of Refugees,” *Research in Phenomenology* 52, no. 2 (2022): 228–229; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “Witnessing and Testimony in Hermeneutic Phenomenology,” *Research in Phenomenology* 52, no. 3 (2022): 315, 320–321, 330.

^{248.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 436.

^{249.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 460.

interdisciplinary enterprise. In his discussion of testimony, Ricoeur articulates ideas coming from philosophical, religious, juridical, and historical perspectives. Overall, as David Pellauer emphasizes, testimony is a category that combines the willingness to suspect and the willingness to listen.²⁵⁰

The French philosopher dialectically explores the notion of testimony in terms of epistemological paradoxes and polarities. Firstly, he philosophically argues that the hermeneutics of testimony describes the paradox of interiority and exteriority, namely, “the interiority of primary affirmation and the exteriority of acts and of existences.”²⁵¹ Secondly, Ricoeur delineates the semantics of testimony by means of dual relationships. He defines testimony as quasi-empirical,²⁵² and this action assumes a dual relation: (1) “the one who testifies” by using narrative statements and (2) “the one who hears the testimony.”²⁵³ The latter has not seen what the former testifies, but can only believe by hearing, not by seeing, what the former has to say.²⁵⁴ Between these two individuals, we find the testimony, which is the story situated in the “intermediary position.”²⁵⁵ Considering the way in which the one who hears the testimony deals with the story heard, “testimony is at the service of judgment.”²⁵⁶

The regular setting for testimony is a trial or dispute, with the presence of conflicting opinions, which can take place especially in juridical and historical contexts.²⁵⁷ The trial seeks to establish a decision of justice (either in a juridical or a historical sense), and the witness attempts to “attest that...,” to “testify for...,” or even to testify “on behalf of...”²⁵⁸ The testimony of the witness is expressed in terms of narrative argumentation, which intends to articulate proofs in the rhetoric of persuasion. It is noteworthy that, in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, proof and persuasion come from the same Greek root (*pistis-pisteuein*).²⁵⁹ This root is suggestive since this is the Greek terminology for faith, which was discussed in terms of second faith in *De l’interprétation*. To be sure, the witness is not merely a narrator. His/her credibility is strongly established by one’s historical characterization as a martyr. Assuming the possibility of false testimony, the proof of testimony is also associated with the witness and his/her acts. In more extreme cases, the test of conviction is eventually

^{250.} Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 47.

^{251.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 438.

^{252.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 438.

^{253.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{254.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{255.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{256.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{257.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 440.

^{258.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{259.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 441.

the price of life, when the witness/martyr runs the risk of suffering and even dying for his/her own testimony.²⁶⁰

Furthermore, Ricoeur speaks of the religious (prophetic and kerygmatic) dimension of testimony. He finds this dimension portrayed in the Bible, especially in Isaiah 43-44 and the Gospels of Luke and John. The French philosopher discerns in this dimension of testimony a dialectic of meaning between two poles that cannot be separated, namely, the reflexive pole of confession testimony (internal) and the historical pole of narration testimony (external). The second pole is illustrated in the Gospel of Luke and refers to the narration of things or facts seen, whereas the first pole appears in the Gospel of John and describes the internalization of the confession of faith. If narration testimony speaks of external events in the world, the referent of confession testimony is the self.²⁶¹

According to Ricoeur, the philosophical hermeneutics of testimony constitutes a philosophy of interpretation dialectically related to two poles (internal and external).²⁶² The internal pole underscores the reflexive judgment of self-consciousness, while the external pole highlights the historical judgment of signs (testimonies).²⁶³ In short, the hermeneutics of testimony is dialectically composed of two exegeses, namely, the narrative “exegesis of historic testimony” and the reflexive “exegesis of the self.”²⁶⁴ To use Hegel’s language, without subscribing to his synthesis of replacement, these are “the internal testimony of the spirit” and the “testimony of external signs.”²⁶⁵ For instance, the dialectical relationship of the external and internal poles is observed in the interaction between the witness and his/her testimony. The witness testifies of something or someone else. In other words, he/she testifies about the other. At the same time, the testimony given belongs to the witness and manifests his/her own involvement with the things and/or persons narrated in the story.²⁶⁶

A particular feature of the hermeneutics of testimony as a philosophy of interpretation is observed in the idea of trial, which underscores the necessary interpretive choice between false and true witnesses.²⁶⁷ In the interpretive judgment of testimony, “one also attests where one contests.”²⁶⁸ Furthermore, Ricoeur suggests a dialectic in this trial between things seen and things said. The testimony of things seen only reaches judgment through a story, that is, by means of the things said. In

^{260.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 442-444.

^{261.} See Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 444-453.

^{262.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 453.

^{263.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 453.

^{264.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 454.

^{265.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 458.

^{266.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 456.

^{267.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 455.

^{268.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 455.

fact, the judge in court makes up his/her mind about things seen by others only by hearing the things said.²⁶⁹

In contrast to a Hegelian synthesis, our French philosopher rejects the possibility of an identification of the two poles of testimony that could absolutely prove that the testimony given by someone is not an illusion. This verification would ensure the identity between the historical judgment of testimony and the reflexive judgment of self-consciousness. But the identity between these two judgments can be only interpreted, it is not given.²⁷⁰ To postulate this identity would imply the achievement of absolute knowledge, but Ricoeur clearly rejects this possibility. Rather, he affirms “the finitude of consciousness.”²⁷¹ As already indicated above in the discussion of *De l'interprétation*, this finitude limits the process of self-consciousness, according to which consciousness “cannot appropriate itself in a totally intuitive reflection but . . . must make a detour through an interpretation of the contingent signs . . . in history.”²⁷² Furthermore, in its interpretation of historical signs, consciousness is incapable “of bringing “all the signs together in a coherent whole.”²⁷³

Despite these limitations, Ricoeur suggests that the relativity of the hermeneutics of testimony should not be seen as problematic. The problem appears if we confuse hermeneutic philosophy with the philosophy of absolute knowledge in logical empiricism.²⁷⁴ He maintains that “to attest is of a different order than to verify in the sense of logical empiricism.”²⁷⁵ The order of attestation or testimony is the “modality of judgment,” according to which interpretation verifies what is probable.²⁷⁶ It is on the basis of this modality that the distance between the two poles of testimony (internal: reflexive judgment; external: historical judgment) can be reduced in order to avoid illusions as much as possible.²⁷⁷ In addition, the French philosopher seems to assume a broad understanding of epistemology, in which the “scientific ideal” of empirical verification governs “only one of the different requirements of thought, which reigns in only one of the centers of reflection, namely knowledge of objects.”²⁷⁸ By contrast, this statement appears to imply that self-understanding and the knowledge of signs in history, which are related to the modality of judgment in the context of testimony, belong to a different realm of this broad conception of epistemology.

^{269.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 439.

^{270.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 457.

^{271.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 458.

^{272.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 457.

^{273.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 460.

^{274.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 459–461.

^{275.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 459.

^{276.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 458.

^{277.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 458, 460.

^{278.} Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutics of Testimony,” 458.

In summary, the hermeneutics of testimony establishes the basis for Ricoeur's understanding of attestation. Ultimately, testimony attests to the self and its desire to be. Another important aspect is that the category of testimony involves an interdisciplinary reflection, particularly considering the areas of philosophy, religion, law, and history. Moreover, the modality of judgment that characterizes the interpretation of judgment hermeneutically combines the attitude of suspicion (especially considering the existence of other voices and conflicting opinions and the possibility of false testimony) and an openness to listen to what is said. Other dialectical polarities of testimony describe the relationship between the one who speaks and the other who hears the testimony, just as the dimensions of interiority (the consciousness of the self) and exteriority (the narration of historical events). The relationship between the one who speaks and the other who hears underscores the modality of judgment in the sense that, by definition, the latter can only believe by hearing, not by seeing. This modality implies a larger conception of epistemology, where the desire for absolute empirical knowledge is replaced by the reasoning of probabilities, which does not rule out suspicion but underscores trust or belief. In addition, the dialectical polarities of interiority and exteriority connect testimony with self-understanding and the memories that give rise to history. These ideas are developed in Ricoeur's later work.

1.4 The Attestation of Freedom and Actions of Objectification

In *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy*²⁷⁹ (1975, 1978), the discussion of attestation becomes explicit. In his explanation of freedom as the starting point of ethics, Ricoeur underscores the relationship between attestation and objectification: "freedom can only attest to itself in the works where it objectifies itself."²⁸⁰ This statement results from the recognition that "I cannot see my freedom, nor can I prove that I am free."²⁸¹ In the absence of factual certitude offered by empirical observation, "I can only posit myself as free and believe myself to be so."²⁸² Therefore, attestation includes the element of belief.

^{279.} This article was originally published in 1975. See Paul Ricoeur, "Le problème du fondement de la morale," *Sapienza* 28, no. 3 (1975): 313–337. However, the English version, translated by David Pellauer, was changed and enlarged by Ricoeur himself, being published in 1978. See Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy." Due to the revision in the English version, I indicate in the title of this section both the dates of 1975 and 1978.

^{280.} Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 176.

^{281.} Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 176.

^{282.} Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 176.

The starting point of freedom is described by “the belief that ‘I can’” and this belief is central to self-understanding: “I am what I can do . . . I can do what I am.”²⁸³ In fact, this starting point of self-understanding correlates “belief and act,”²⁸⁴ which means that the starting point is defined by attestation. Due to the fact that “the causality of freedom does not apprehend itself, it must recover itself by way of the whole long detour of its works and action.”²⁸⁵ Since no particular act exhaustively expresses the causality of freedom, Ricoeur argues that “the ‘I can’ must be matched by a whole course of existence where no individual act is a sufficient witness to it.”²⁸⁶ To put it more sharply, the belief of attestation is supposed to reflect a history of actions instead of a singular act. More specifically, the objectification of attestation implies temporality, with a sequence of actions.

From this perspective, the French philosopher frames the fundamental problem of ethics as follows: “what does it mean for someone to attest to” his/her “freedom?”²⁸⁷ The answer focuses on doing, not on seeing. The attestation of freedom finds its meaning in the “appropriation by means of the work.”²⁸⁸ Ricoeur dialogues with Hegel’s discussion of the actualization (*Verwirklichung*) of freedom. As the French philosopher indicates, Hegel argues in *Philosophy of Right* that freedom “is not in possession of itself” and “can only attain itself through the long detour of its doing.”²⁸⁹ According to Hegel, in its actualization, freedom produces “itself outside of itself as a second nature.”²⁹⁰ Ricoeur employs this movement of actualization to define ethics, which implies an “odyssey of freedom across the world of works, this proof-testing of the being-able-to-do-something . . . in effective actions which bear witness to it.”²⁹¹ Therefore, ethics is defined as the movement of actualization between the initial belief of “I can” and the history of actions that attest or bear witness to that belief. To put it in another way, ethics is basically defined by the process of attestation.

Our philosopher connects the idea of “I can” with what he considers the primary trait of the self, previously mentioned in *De l’interprétation*, namely, “the desire to be.”²⁹² According to that connection, this is the “desire to do something,” which expresses the idea of “being-able-to-do-something.”²⁹³ The reason why Ricoeur has discussed so far the notion of ethics from the perspective of the self, instead

²⁸³. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 176.

²⁸⁴. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 176.

²⁸⁵. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 176.

²⁸⁶. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 176.

²⁸⁷. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁸⁸. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁸⁹. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁹⁰. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁹¹. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁹². Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

²⁹³. Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 177.

of moving directly to the true moral challenges related to the freedom of the other, relates to the assumption that the freedom of the other is analogous to my freedom. With a Husserlian tone, he states that “there can be no problematic of the second person if I do not know the meaning of ‘I’ and of ‘ego.’ The other is indeed another me.”²⁹⁴ Accordingly, “if I did not understand what it means for me to be free, and to have to really become free, I could not will it for others.”²⁹⁵ From this standpoint, the task of ethics is summarized by the key term recognition. To be more specific, the task in view is to recognize that “the other person is like me” and, thus, acknowledge that his/her freedom is like mine.²⁹⁶ However, just as my freedom is attested by means of actions, the recognition or attestation of the freedom of the other needs to be objectified and witnessed by my actions. To use Ricoeur’s words, the “recognition of the freedom of the other person . . . seeks incarnation.”²⁹⁷

With regard to his conception of self-understanding, the French philosopher reaffirms the presupposition of human alienation underlined in *De l’interprétation*, now in dialogue with Hegel and with an emphasis on ethics. In fact, this presupposition makes the structure of ethics similar to hermeneutics in the sense that both start from works that “are foreign to me that I may reappropriate myself.”²⁹⁸ The very idea of a reappropriation implies that this process of recovery presupposes that our initial condition, both for ethics and hermeneutics, is the “experience of alienation, of being a stranger to oneself.”²⁹⁹ The notion of duality in the self is not only emphasized negatively in terms of alienation but also explored positively by using a category further elaborated in later writings, namely, the idea of promise.³⁰⁰ The point is that the human being is a promise maker due to one’s capacity to count on himself/herself in advance of himself/herself.³⁰¹ This implies the potential of a temporal duality, in which the person can change his mind in the future. In his interaction with Nietzsche, the French philosopher mentions that promises assume the continuity of the same will in the challenging context of the temporal disarray of

^{294.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 178.

^{295.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 178.

^{296.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 179.

^{297.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 183. Ricoeur explains that “justice, for example, is not an essence which I read in some atemporal heaven, but the institutional instrument by means of which several freedoms may coexist.” Hence, “if I want you to be free, justice, we could say, is the schema of actions to be done to make institutionally possible the community and communication of freedom.” Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 182.

^{298.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 184.

^{299.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 184.

^{300.} Ricoeur dialogues with Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, particularly its first part, regarding the role of promise.

^{301.} Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” 185.

desires.³⁰² Another example of a duality of the self appears in Ricoeur's discussion of the moral imperative. He indicates that "I appear to myself as a twofold being," where "one part of me . . . commands the other."³⁰³ Heidegger develops this relationship of "commanding and obeying" in his elaboration of the idea of conscience (*Gewissen*), "that doubling by which a 'voice' is addressed to me."³⁰⁴ Heidegger's idea of *Gewissen* appears in Ricoeur's later writings in his discussion about the concept of attestation.

Overall, the notion of duality of the self is an important aspect of the later elaboration of the concept of attestation in Ricoeur. The ideas of alienation, promise, and conscience are also detailed in the elaboration of attestation in other works. Furthermore, it is possible to discern connections of several concepts in this essay with ideas from previous discussions. The emphasis on freedom illustrates the point of believing without seeing, which was affirmed in the discussion of testimony, and the idea of attestation is described in terms of the dialectical and historical and temporal interplay between belief and objectification. Other important emphases are the connection between the desire to be and the belief that "I can" (desire to do something); the notion that my view of the other depends on my understanding of myself, which makes the recognition of the other as someone like me the task of ethics; and the conclusion that both ethics and hermeneutics start from external works of objectification in order to reappropriate the self.

In short, considering the overarching purposes of the present research, this description of the hermeneutical basis for the development of dialectical attestation in selected works before the 1990s highlights notions such as confession and the interplay of trust and suspicion, which are embryonic developments toward the dialectics of attestation, to be more clearly articulated after the 1990s. At least three important conclusions about the initial contours of attestation could be drawn from these embryonic developments. First, they constitute evidently a discussion about selfhood, more specifically, a reflection on self-understanding, which indicates that attestation is a genuine part of Ricoeur's philosophical (hermeneutical) anthropology. Second, they have a distinctive dialectical nature, as we can see in the interplay of trust and suspicion. Third, they dialectically delineate the potential for transformation, as the notion of confession expresses both the birth of the self, on the one hand, and the promise of a redemptive, far-reaching transformation of the self, on the other.

With these embryonic ideas of anthropological dialectic transformation shaping the initial contours of attestation in mind, I move to the delineation of a systematic account of attestation in selected works since the 1990s in the next chapter.

³⁰². Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 185.

³⁰³. Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 185.

³⁰⁴. Ricoeur, "The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy," 185.

CHAPTER 2

Attestation and the Categories of
Self-Understanding, Recognition,
and History

In this systematic account of attestation, I will explore the relationship of attestation with self-understanding, recognition, and history. The discussion of self-understanding provides the basis for the topics of recognition and history, inasmuch as Ricoeur defines attestation as “fundamentally attestation of self.”³⁰⁵ This delineation is organized into three categories, namely, self-understanding, recognition, and history. Taking into account that otherness is key to dialectical attestation, in the category of attestation and self-understanding, the self dialectically interacts with its own otherness. The work selected for this discussion is *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). With regard to attestation and recognition, otherness is situated particularly in the dialectical relationship of myself with other people. The work selected for this discussion is *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2004). Finally, in the category of attestation and history, otherness is dialectically present in the form of memories. The work selected for this discussion is *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (2000).

In the discussion of each category, I will first summarize the main ideas of the work selected that conceptually inform the delineation of the category in question. Then, I will outline how these ideas systematically shape the understanding of the category under discussion. In this outline, I will also dialogue with hermeneutical concepts of the selected works before the 1990s, previously described in the present study. Considering that this Part aims at deepening the understanding of the dialectical nature of attestation, the discussion of each category will be guided by the fundamental question *what is at stake in the idea of attestation?* In other words, why is attestation necessary, considering the larger context of Ricoeur's hermeneutical project? This is the *why* of attestation. In addition, what is the specific role of attestation and the category in question in Ricoeur's hermeneutics? This is the *what* of attestation. Moreover, how is this role conceptualized and how dialectical is this role? This is the *how* of attestation. Inasmuch as attestation is fundamentally attestation of self, the discussion of the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of attestation will be necessarily related to the *who* of attestation. This is the reason why I will start with the category attestation and self-understanding.

2.1. Attestation and Self-Understanding

The work *Soi-même comme un autre* is crucial for the understanding of attestation in Ricoeur. This is arguably the work where a major development of this concept is found. As already indicated in the introduction of the present Part, the French philosopher underscores that attestation is “the password for this entire book.”³⁰⁶

^{305.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

^{306.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 289n82.

This is explained by the fact that the main topic of *Soi-même comme un autre* is the hermeneutical concept of selfhood. Therefore, attestation is key to the hermeneutics of selfhood, which means that self-understanding fundamentally involves attestation.

2.1.1. The Hermeneutics of the Self and Attestation

Overall, *Soi-même comme un autre* contains two major discussions of attestation, one in the introduction and the other in the last chapter on ontology (study 10). The first discussion emphasizes an epistemological dimension of attestation. But the introduction also touches on ontological aspects that are further elaborated in the last chapter. In fact, Ricoeur begins his remarks about “the ontological commitment of attestation” in the last chapter mentioning that this is a continuation of what was left in the introduction.³⁰⁷

The introduction emphasizes that *Soi-même comme un autre* connects three philosophical intentions. The first refers to the primacy of reflexive thought over Cartesian immediate consciousness.³⁰⁸ The second is the distinction of two conceptions of personal identity, essentially defined by permanence in time, expressed by the Latin terms *idem* and *ipse*.³⁰⁹ *Idem* describes sameness, which is static or immutable, especially in terms of character. Given that sameness is not taken univocally but dialectically, *ipse* refers to permanence in time in the dynamic sense of moral self-constancy in the context of changes, which is particularly observed in the act of promising, and is described by the language of *ipseity* or selfhood.³¹⁰ Ricoeur views these two ideas of sameness and selfhood as dialectical poles for the understanding of personal identity. Finally, the third intention adds another dialectical conception, which is the relationship of the self with otherness (“the other than self”³¹¹). Ricoeur explains that otherness is dialectically “constitutive of selfhood,” that is, “the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other.”³¹²

The first two dialectical notions of personal identity (selfhood and sameness, selfhood and otherness), indicated in the second and third intentions, constitute the conceptual tools that Ricoeur uses to create an alternative to the philosophies of the subject (or of the cogito) in his discussion of the self, as he affirms in the first intention.³¹³ According to our philosopher, the Cartesian philosophy of the subject begins with a strong emphasis on doubting. Indeed, the implicit formula of *Cogito ergo sum* is “I

³⁰⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 299.

³⁰⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 1.

³⁰⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 2.

³¹⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 2-3, 309n11, 318. Ricoeur explains that the self is “a phenomenological concept, and *man*, an anthropological concept.” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 313.

³¹¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

³¹². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

³¹³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 4.

doubt, therefore I am,” since “doubting is thinking” and to think “doubt, one must be.”³¹⁴ Surprisingly, while the focus is on doubting, this conclusion about the existence of the self is the first certainty in Cartesian epistemology. By stretching the idea of doubting to its limit, Descartes eventually arrives at indubitable certainty. Ricoeur points out that Cartesian doubt is suspicious that “things are actually as they seem.”³¹⁵ Paradoxically, Cartesian certainty implies that they are truly what they seem to be.

Our philosopher fiercely criticizes the narrow relationship between thinking and existing in Cartesian thought, particularly because he discerns in this articulation an “epistemologizing tendency,” in which the “I” is narrowly defined as “understanding” or “the act of thinking.”³¹⁶ In other words, the subject is “a thing that thinks,” that is, “doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagens and senses.”³¹⁷ Ricoeur argues that this is an “ahistorical identity of the ‘I,’” which is “entirely different from the narrative identity of a concrete person,” who is “the speaker, agent, character of narration, subject of moral imputation,”³¹⁸ as he elaborates later in the chapters of *Soi-même comme un autre*. In summary, the Cartesian self, the “I exist thinking,” is the “first truth immediately known by reflecting on doubt.”³¹⁹ However, the price of this certainty about the self is “the loss of its relation to the person who speaks, to the I-you of interlocution, to the identity of a historical person, to the self of responsibility.”³²⁰

While this critique of the Cartesian self already points, by way of contrast, to the hermeneutical self that Ricoeur intends to outline, he first compares the role of doubt in Descartes with the role of doubt in Nietzsche. If in *De l'interprétation* our philosopher mentions the masters of suspicion and dialogues more specifically with Freud to elaborate on his opposition to Cartesian consciousness, in the introduction of *Soi-même comme un autre* he dialogues with Nietzsche to also emphasize his rejection of the Cartesian cogito. While the focus of the dialogue with Freud was the relationship between the conscious and the subconscious and its implications for language, the dialogue with Nietzsche explores the non-foundational status of philosophy and language. The German philosopher is considered the culmination of the criticism of the Cartesian cogito. In his deconstruction of metaphysics, Nietzsche defines philosophy as rhetorical and argues that language is totally figurative and,

³¹⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 6n9.

³¹⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 6.

³¹⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 7-8.

³¹⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 7. Ricoeur takes this list from René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979), 19.

³¹⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 7.

³¹⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 8.

³²⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 11.

therefore, deceitful.³²¹ While this challenge did not prevent him from thinking and writing, which implies philosophical reasoning and the use of language, the Cartesian pronouncement “I exist thinking” could not represent an exception to Descartes’ generalized doubt since this belongs to the rhetorical displacement of language as well.³²²

Nietzsche questions the very process of perception and thinking by objecting to a presumed relationship of causes involving thoughts, desires, feelings, and subject-object reasoning. To him, these causes are completely concealed to our consciousness and are potentially imaginary. Hence, the process of perception and thinking is taken as purely the interpretation and simplification of our consciousness.³²³ Therefore, in his attack on ‘the facts’ of positivism, the German philosopher challenges the idea of causation. In contrast to Cartesian thought, Nietzsche stipulates that the ‘I’ is not “inherent to the cogito” but “an interpretation of a causal type,” which places “a substance *under* the cogito or a cause *behind* it,” and this “is simply a grammatical habit . . . of connecting an agent to every action.”³²⁴ According to his rejection of the idea of causation, Nietzsche questions what he considers to be an “arbitrary unity . . . between the actor and his or her deed.”³²⁵ In short, Ricoeur summarizes Nietzsche’s “exercise of hyperbolic doubt” as an extension of Descartes’ doubt, which is “turned against the very certainty that the latter believed he could eliminate from doubt.”³²⁶ To put it more sharply, Nietzsche doubts “better than Descartes. The cogito too is doubtful.”³²⁷

Taking into account the exercise of doubt undertaken by Descartes and Nietzsche, we find two opposite views about the human self. The first emphasizes the cogito, a transparent consciousness, and is labeled as “exalted subject.”³²⁸ The second is doubtful about the cogito, which is an opaque consciousness, and is labeled as “humiliated subject” (anticogito).³²⁹ Ricoeur agrees with the criticism of the former and concludes that “the ‘I’ of the philosophies of the subject is *atopos*, without any assured place in discourse.”³³⁰ At the same time, he assumes that it is necessary to develop a hermeneutics of the self. To be sure, Ricoeur believes that this necessity

³²¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 11.

³²². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 13.

³²³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 14. Ricoeur cites Nietzsche’s fragment from November 1887 to March 1888 found in *Will to Power*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh: T. N. Fowles, 1910), no. 477, p. 7.

³²⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 15.

³²⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 15.

³²⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 15.

³²⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 15.

³²⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 16.

³²⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 16.

³³⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 16.

is not merely justified in terms of epistemology, but it is ultimately required by ethics, as I will emphasize below. But the French philosopher acknowledges that this enterprise demands an epistemological, and even an ontological ground.³³¹ In broad strokes, this ground is envisioned in the three intentions of *Soi-même comme un autre*, already mentioned above. These intentions actually constitute the major features of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. The first feature is the indirect approach or "the detour of reflection by way of analysis," in contrast to a Cartesian immediate consciousness, while the other two features refer to the dialectics of selfhood and sameness and of selfhood and otherness.³³²

These three features are fleshed out in the sequence of studies in *Soi-même comme un autre*. The indirect approach of analysis begins in the field of philosophy of language (studies 1 and 2), following the tradition of analytic philosophy, but in dialogue with the hermeneutical tradition, with particular attention to semantics and pragmatics. What drives this discussion to the hermeneutical dialectics of selfhood and sameness and of selfhood and otherness is the fundamental question "who?", which is raised in two ways. According to the discussion of semantics, "Of whom" does one speak in designating persons, as distinct from things, in the referential mode?"³³³ Then, in the context of pragmatics, "who speaks by designating himself or herself as 'locutor' (addressing an interlocutor)?"³³⁴

The second step of the indirect approach moves to a philosophy of action (studies 3 and 4), still following the tradition of analytic philosophy. The focus of this step is on the relationship between action and agent. Considering the transition from the first to the second step, from language to action, speech acts are a key concept in this philosophy of action. Since "speech acts are themselves action," "speakers are themselves actors" and "the agent of action designates himself or herself as the one who is acting."³³⁵ Again, the fundamental question "who?" ("Who is speaking?" and "Who is acting?"³³⁶) is used to drive the discussion to the hermeneutical dialectics of selfhood.³³⁷

The third step deals with the notion of personal identity (steps 5 and 6), which is approached at the intersection of the analytic and hermeneutical traditions. Personal identity assumes the concept of temporality and is defined narratively. This is why Ricoeur speaks of narrative identity. In fact, the narrative approach

^{331.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 16.

^{332.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 16.

^{333.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17.

^{334.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17.

^{335.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17.

^{336.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17.

^{337.} Ricoeur explains that analytic philosophy methodologically guides the detour of hermeneutics "by means of 'what?' and 'why?', although it will be unable to follow all the way to the end of the return route leading back to the question 'who?'—who is the agent of the action?" This means that he uses the analytic tools to arrive at the who question indirectly. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17.

connects language and action, inasmuch as narrative is the mimesis of action.³³⁸ This step leads to the fourth and final detour of the hermeneutics of the self, which refers to “the ethical and moral determinations of action” (studies 7-9).³³⁹ This final step deepens the discussion of the connection between the action and its agent, exploring it in terms of imputation and responsibility. Ricoeur underscores that the ethical reflection represents the “fullest development” of the dialectic of the self (*idem* and *ipse*), inasmuch as the “autonomy of the self” is related to the “solicitude for one’s neighbor and with justice for each individual.”³⁴⁰

Overall, these steps summarize the hermeneutics of the self in contrast with the philosophies of the subject/cogito. The difference is twofold, and the second point explains the first: (1) the self is not grasped directly, and (2) it does not constitute the epistemological place of foundation. According to the French philosopher, “To say *self* is not to say *I*. The *I* is posited—or is deposed. The *self* is implied reflexively in the operations, the analysis of which precedes the return toward this self.”³⁴¹ Furthermore, he adds two points to this discussion, one related to the polysemic character of the ontology that permeates the hermeneutics of the self, and the other regarding the epistemological ground for the articulation of this hermeneutics. It is in the discussion of the epistemological ground that Ricoeur develops the notion of attestation, which means that attestation is key for the articulation of all these steps of the hermeneutics of the self. It is not by chance that attestation is called “the password for this entire book.”³⁴²

First of all, the ontological topic of human action provides the thematic unity for all steps in the hermeneutics of the self.³⁴³ Human action is elaborated in terms of self-designation, power to act, and moral imputation.³⁴⁴ More precisely, the hermeneutical steps follow the sequence of “describing, narrating, and prescribing” human action.³⁴⁵ Ontologically speaking, action is “a fundamental mode of being” and, therefore, is also defined by the polysemy of being, as pronounced by Aristotle.³⁴⁶

³³⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

³³⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

³⁴⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

³⁴¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

³⁴². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 289n82.

³⁴³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19.

³⁴⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20.

³⁴⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20.

³⁴⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20. This is one example of the polysemy of being in Aristotle, with particular reference to potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*): “But since the unqualified term ‘being’ has several meanings, of which one was seen to be the accidental, and another the true (‘non-being’ being the false), while besides these there are the figures of predication (e.g. the ‘what’, quality, quantity, place, time, and any similar meanings which ‘being’ may have), and again besides all these there is that which ‘is’ potentially or actually: - since ‘being’ has many meanings . . .” Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI.2. Translation taken from W. D. Ross on <http://classics.mit.edu>. See also Franz Brentano, *On the Several*

Thus, there is a “polysemy of action,”³⁴⁷ and Ricoeur explores this polysemy of the meaning of the self in the several uses of the question “who”: “Who is speaking of what? Who does what? About whom and about what does one construct a narrative? Who is morally responsible for what?”³⁴⁸ Moreover, the French philosopher acknowledges that the posing of questions, such as he does, is historically and linguistically situated, which means that they need to be hermeneutically interpreted as well.³⁴⁹ In other words, while helpful for hermeneutical thinking, these questions do not lead to a place of epistemological foundation. Likewise, the thematic unity provided by the notion of action is not taken foundationally but analogically.³⁵⁰ The unity in view is the “analogical unity between the multiple uses” (polysemy) “of the term ‘acting.’”³⁵¹ Indeed, polysemy includes both sameness and plurality. According to the dialectics of *idem* and *ipse*, the idea of analogical unity belongs to the stable aspect of ontological sameness (*idem*). But this should not be ontologically understood in terms of being-as-substance. In fact, the ontology of acting (act and potentiality) relates to a multiplicity of historical expressions (*ipse*).³⁵² In addition, Ricoeur claims that the dialectics of the self and the other implies that the polysemy of otherness inscribes the mark of plurality or diversity in ontology, preventing the ambition of cogito philosophies of arriving at an ultimate foundation.³⁵³ In fact, he suggests that his hermeneutics of the self could be called “practical philosophy” or “second philosophy,” in the sense that the philosophies of the cogito are considered “first philosophy.”³⁵⁴ If Ricoeur spoke of a *second* faith and a *second* naïveté in *De l’interprétation*, now he mentions a *second* philosophy. In all these cases, he seems to use the language of *second* to describe a post-critical (hermeneutical) reflection.

Nevertheless, what is the epistemological ground of such a non-foundational philosophy? More specifically, how can this philosophy causally connect agent and action in the articulation of the hermeneutics of the self? As indicated above, a crucial aspect of Nietzsche’s suspicion is his doubt about causality. To answer this

Senses of Being in Aristotle, ed. and trans. Rolf George (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). For a more detailed discussion of actuality and potentiality in Aristotle, see *Metaphysics* IX. See also Stephen Makin, “Energeia and Dunamis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 400–421.

³⁴⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20.

³⁴⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19.

³⁴⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19.

³⁵⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19–20.

³⁵¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19.

³⁵². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 20. For a helpful study on Ricoeur’s ontology of act and potentiality, see Matthew A. Daigler, “Being as Act and Potency in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” *Philosophy Today* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 375–85.

³⁵³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁵⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 19.

question, Ricoeur develops his notion of attestation. In fact, he affirms that this notion permeates the three major features of his hermeneutics of the self, namely, the indirect approach of reflection by means of analysis and the dialectics of selfhood and sameness and of selfhood and otherness.³⁵⁵ While attestation is present throughout the steps followed in the hermeneutics of the self, it comes progressively to full expression in the last steps, from ethics to ontology.³⁵⁶ In short, the French philosopher defines attestation as the type of “certainty that hermeneutics may claim” and qualifies it as *atopos* (without an assured place of discourse).³⁵⁷ This means that attestation is fundamentally different from *episteme* (science), inasmuch as the latter is defined as “ultimate and self-founding knowledge.”³⁵⁸ Moreover, attestation is described as a kind of belief. But this belief belongs to the epistemic realm of personal agents (non-doxic belief, the grammar of “I believe in”), not of objects (doxic belief, the grammar of “I believe-that”).³⁵⁹ The language of believing in someone reflects the etymological and philosophical kinship between attestation and testimony: “it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes.”³⁶⁰ The relationship between attestation and testimony also provides the answer that attestation can give to suspicion. Considering the existence of both true and false testimonies, Ricoeur indicates that “there is no recourse against false testimony than another that is more credible,” which implies that “there is no recourse against suspicion but a more reliable attestation.”³⁶¹ According to our philosopher, attestation is vulnerable to “the permanent threat of suspicion” and, therefore, is “a discourse aware of its” fragility, namely, “its own lack of foundation.”³⁶²

To be sure, this epistemological awareness flows from an ontological fragmentation, as the lack of foundation is closely related to the polysemy of being and the historical and linguistic contingency of the question “who?,” mentioned above.³⁶³ However, there is also a positive connection between attestation and ontology, namely, the idea that “attestation is fundamentally attestation of self.”³⁶⁴ More precisely, this is a trust in the power to act (“I can”). To put it in another way,

³⁵⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁵⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21. Ricoeur adds that attestation “slowly make its way from study to study, until it is confronted head-on in the tenth study.” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 73n13. See also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 129n20.

³⁵⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁵⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁵⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁶⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁶¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

³⁶². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22. For a helpful discussion on the hermeneutics of suspicion in Ricoeur, see Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*.

³⁶³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

³⁶⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

“a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to accusation in the form of the accusative: ‘It’s me here.’”³⁶⁵ Actually, Ricoeur discerns in this definition of attestation an identification with the idea of conscience (*Gewissen* in German, which is semantically related to the word *Gewissheit*, certainty).³⁶⁶ From this perspective, he also defines attestation as “the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering.”³⁶⁷ In his dialectical thinking, which is particularly observed in the idea of conscience, the French philosopher indicates that attestation “is always in some sense received from another,” but “it still remains self-attestation.”³⁶⁸ According to him, it is precisely the presence of self-attestation that constantly guides each step of the hermeneutics of the self (“linguistic, praxic, narrative, and prescriptive”) to the question “who?,” preserving it “from being replaced by the questions ‘what?’ or ‘why?’”³⁶⁹

In short, due to attestation, the hermeneutics of the self is equally distant from the Cartesian cogito and the Nietzschean anti-cogito (cogito as illusion). In contrast to Descartes, attestation is “credence without any guarantee,” and different from Nietzsche, it is also “trust greater than any suspicion.”³⁷⁰ This is the overall tone of the epistemological perspective of attestation indicated in the introduction of *Soi-même comme un autre*. Whereas the presence of attestation is assumed throughout the steps of the hermeneutics of the self in the book (studies 1-9),³⁷¹ which are followed by the concluding discussion on the type of ontology envisioned in this hermeneutical project (study 10), attestation is explicitly mentioned a few times in these hermeneutical steps. I will mention four statements. First, in the study on the semantics of action (study 3), attestation defines the realm of knowledge without empirical observation (“attestation escapes sight”).³⁷² This type of knowledge is described in terms of veracity, which is different from true or false propositions related to the “adequation of knowledge to its object.”³⁷³ Second, in the study on personal narrative identity (study 5), Ricoeur seems to suggest that my memory and the assumption that my body belongs to myself are situated in the realm of attestation.³⁷⁴ Third, in the study of the self and the ethical aim (study 7), attestation describes “the certainty of being the author of one’s own discourse and of one’s own

³⁶⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

³⁶⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

³⁶⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

³⁶⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22-23.

³⁶⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 23.

³⁷⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 23.

³⁷¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.

³⁷². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 72-73.

³⁷³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 73.

³⁷⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 129.

acts,” which “becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well.”³⁷⁵ Fourth, in the study on the self and practical wisdom (study 9), the French philosopher depicts attestation as conviction. He mentions that the German term for conviction is *Überzeugung*, which is etymologically related to *Bezeugung* (attestation). It is in the context of this statement that he affirms that attestation is “the password for this entire book.”³⁷⁶ According to this discussion, attestation is understood in terms of practical reason, as a moral judgment or conviction. It is noteworthy that moral judgment implies a definition of living well. From this perspective, “attestation is found at the core of ethics,” since “attestation is not only the conviction of acting and judging well but the conviction of having the right idea of the good life.”³⁷⁷

In the final chapter on ontology, Ricoeur underlines that his hermeneutical steps in the discussion of the self imply a “general ontological commitment . . . formulated on the basis of the notion of attestation.”³⁷⁸ From an ontological standpoint, he speaks dialectically (sameness-idem and ipseity) of attestation in terms of “the assurance that each person has of existing as the same in the sense of ipseity, of selfhood.”³⁷⁹ Our French philosopher mentions that, because of his interaction with the Cartesian cogito and its critique by Nietzsche, his explanation of attestation in the introduction had an epistemological flavor and was initially defined as certainty. However, he argues that the discussion of attestation is not “purely epistemic, as if it were a matter of simply situating attestation on a scale of knowledge.”³⁸⁰ Instead of being reduced to epistemology, Ricoeur situates the alethic discussion of attestation in the realm of ontology. Referring back to the idea of polysemy of being (or beings), he cites Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 6.2) to affirm that “*being-true* and *being-false* are original significations of being,” just as other categories (actuality, potentiality, etc.).³⁸¹ As I will indicate below, Ricoeur attempts to delineate a modified version of this concept from Aristotle. It is from this ontological signification of being as true that derives the epistemology of attestation as trust and credence, which was indicated in the introduction.³⁸²

In fact, Ricoeur suggests that being-true is the ontological ground of the indirect approach of hermeneutics, providing the connection between reflection and analysis. But this is affirmed by means of attestation. “What is first attested to is the being-true of the *mediation* of reflection by analysis.”³⁸³ This ontological connection

³⁷⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 180.

³⁷⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 289.

³⁷⁷. Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 59.

³⁷⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 298.

³⁷⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 298.

³⁸⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 299.

³⁸¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 299.

³⁸². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 299-300.

³⁸³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 300.

gives the analysis “a *realist* twist” that allows it to be used for a reflection on the self.³⁸⁴ For instance, it is the assumption of this ontological connection that enables the French philosopher to apply the concept of narrative identity (analysis) to the notion of personal identity, with “the ontological bearing of affirmations about the self” (reflection).³⁸⁵ Without this connection, narrative identity would be merely reduced to fiction.³⁸⁶ Therefore, the indirect approach of hermeneutics entails that the detour of linguistic analysis is connected with “the ontology implicit in hermeneutics.”³⁸⁷ This assumption is contrary to the reduction of language to only language games and against the “closed semanticism” that “everything is language,” inasmuch as these axioms make language “incapable of accounting for human action as actually *happening* in the world.”³⁸⁸ Rather, the ontological ground of being-true implies that language is able to express being.³⁸⁹ In summary, being-true engenders the alethic nature of attestation. On this ontological basis, attestation discerns the being-true of the self as expressed “through the objectifying mediations of language, action, narrative, and the ethical and moral predicates of action.”³⁹⁰

This ontological ground, however, does not rule out the role of suspicion. It is precisely in the discussion of suspicion that Ricoeur departs from Aristotle and shows how his version of being-true is different from Aristotelian metaphysics. If suspicion is opposed to attestation, the former belongs to being-false and the latter pertains to being-true, according to Aristotle’s ontology. However, the French philosopher does not assume a strict contraposition between being-false and being-true, as Aristotle allegedly does.³⁹¹ Rather, Ricoeur ascribes to suspicion the same alethic status as attestation, inasmuch as both are epistemological and ontological concepts. This entails that suspicion interacts with attestation in different ways, that is, not only in the sense of opposition. Dialectically, “Suspicion is also the path *toward* and the crossing *within* attestation.”³⁹²

The discussion of attestation is not only necessary to provide an ontological ground or connection for the dialectics between reflection and analysis in hermeneutics. Attestation is also present in the ontological consideration of the dialectics of personal identity, namely, sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipseity*). This distinction is not only described epistemologically in the sense of different meanings

³⁸⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 300.

³⁸⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 300.

³⁸⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 300.

³⁸⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 301.

³⁸⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 301.

³⁸⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 301.

³⁹⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 302.

³⁹¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 302.

³⁹². Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 302.

in personal identity but ontologically defined as different modes of being as well. The French philosopher stipulates a dynamic ontology of selfhood, in “which the self can be said to be *acting*.”³⁹³ This ontology is a reinterpretation of the Aristotle’s notion of *energeia-dunamis*, in which Ricoeur construes the power-to-act (based on Aristotle’s *energeia*) as a “power of being” taken as productivity and not merely potentiality.³⁹⁴ Productivity has priority over consciousness and shapes the detour of self-consciousness.³⁹⁵ In light of this priority, Ricoeur employs the Heidegger’s emphasis on *Gewissen* (conscience), in which attestation is “attestation of conscience,” and conscience is conscience of attestation.³⁹⁶ On the basis of the ontological ground discussed so far, Ricoeur assumes that the attestation of conscience perceives in the initiative of the self “a specific coordination with the movements of the world and all the physical aspects of action.”³⁹⁷ This perception takes a detour in the objectification of human productivity as “the shortest path from the self to itself.”³⁹⁸

The ontological conception of attestation in terms of consciousness informs not only the understanding of selfhood in its dialectical relationship with sameness-*idem* but also in its dialectics with otherness, which the French philosopher considers the most fundamental dialectics in *Soi-même comme un autre*, inasmuch as this dialectic “keeps the self from occupying the place of foundation.”³⁹⁹ According to Ricoeur, “Husserl thought of the other than me only as another me,” whereas our French philosopher attempts to follow the reverse movement of thinking about “the self as another.”⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, just as sameness is not univocal but conceived in terms of *idem* and *ipse*, otherness is conceived as polysemic, encompassing “a diversity of centers of otherness.”⁴⁰¹ This shows the association of Ricoeur’s dialectical philosophy of the self with plurality. Overall, he defines otherness in terms of passivity, which is spelled out in the triad of the body (“the experience of one’s own body”), the

³⁹³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 308.

³⁹⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 315–316. In this discussion, Ricoeur dialogues with Spinoza’s concept of *conatus*—(self-)preservation.

³⁹⁵. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 317. See also Declan Sheerin, *Deleuze and Ricoeur: Disavowed Affinities and the Narrative Self* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), 111.

³⁹⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 309. Following his remarks on being-toward-death in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1953), the German philosopher explores the idea of conscience (*Gewissen*), which is related to attestation (*Bezeugung*). See Heidegger’s specific discussion on attestation in *Being and Time* in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1996), 247–278.

³⁹⁷. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 314.

³⁹⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 313. Ricoeur speaks of “the question of ‘who?’ . . . answered only through the detour of the question ‘what?’ and the question ‘why?’” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 310–311.

³⁹⁹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318. See also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 317.

⁴⁰⁰. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 326.

⁴⁰¹. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

other person or people, and conscience (*Gewissen*).⁴⁰² The passivity of conscience is described as “the most deeply hidden passivity” and refers to the relationship between the self to itself.⁴⁰³ One of the expressions of this relationship is the idea of the *voice* of conscience, which implies that the self interacts or speaks to itself. Taking into account that attestation is understood as conscience, attestation works with memory, inasmuch as “conscience projects after the fact its force of attestation on all the experiences of passivity placed before it.”⁴⁰⁴

Our French philosopher dialogues with two interlocutors in his discussion of conscience and otherness. He values Levinas’ reflection on otherness but disagrees with the assumption of “the utter dissymmetry between the Same and the Other,” which Ricoeur attempts to bring together in a dialectical relationship.⁴⁰⁵ From Heidegger, he takes the idea of conscience (*Gewissen*) as attestation, but he criticizes the German philosopher for demoralizing the conscience. Conversely, Ricoeur assumes that ethics is key to the understanding of conscience and attestation.⁴⁰⁶ In summary, Ricoeur associated attestation with Heidegger’s conception of conscience (*Gewissen*), related to the term *Gewissheit*, which means “certainty.”⁴⁰⁷ But this attestation or testimony of the conscience⁴⁰⁸ is contrasted to the idea of “the certainty of the ego.”⁴⁰⁹ Considering that “Levinas never speaks of the attestation of the self,” precisely because he suspected that this would lead “back to the ‘certainty of the ego,’”⁴¹⁰ Ricoeur also related conscience to suspicion. Hence, conscience is the place where “illusions about oneself are bound up with the veracity of attestation.”⁴¹¹ In its turn, the presence of suspicion may challenge “the alleged surplus of meaning” attested by the conscience regarding the conviction and obligation implied in the ethical concept of living well.⁴¹² The temptation against this challenge is to restrict the phenomenon of conscience and attestation such as Heidegger did, avoiding

^{402.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

^{403.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

^{404.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 318.

^{405.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 338. For a critical assessment of Ricoeur’s own comparison with Heidegger and Levinas on this point, see Kemp, “Ricoeur between Heidegger and Levinas,” 41–61.

^{406.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 348, 349, 351. I am using the interchangeable language of morality and ethics in a general way. More specifically, Ricoeur distinguishes the former from the latter by highlighting that ethics is “the optative mode of living well,” while morality is “the imperative mode of obligation.” Also, he speaks of ethics as “living well with and for others in just institutions.” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 330.

^{407.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.

^{408.} Ricoeur, “L’attestation,” 402.

^{409.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 340.

^{410.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 340.

^{411.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 341.

^{412.} Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 341.

any additional moral qualification.⁴¹³ However, Ricoeur thinks that attestation is a kind of understanding that is not reduced to merely knowing something,⁴¹⁴ but it is dialectically defined by otherness and,⁴¹⁵ therefore, includes the field of ethics, that is, the injunction coming from the other that becomes part of self-attestation.⁴¹⁶ Therefore, in his reflections on attestation, if Ricoeur is in between Descartes and Nietzsche in terms of the cogito, he is in between Levinas and Heidegger in terms of conscience and ethics.⁴¹⁷

2.1.2. A Brief Systematic Account of Attestation and Self-Understanding

Personal conscience is key for a systematic account of attestation and self-understanding in Ricoeur's philosophy. In contrast to Cartesian consciousness, his notion of conscience is more than epistemological abstract thinking. To put it more sharply, conscience reflexively operates with reference to concrete historical actions and operations of the self. This means that self-understanding is not attained directly by means of the abstract operations of conscience itself. Rather, by reflexively observing actions, personal conscience grasps the self implied in them.

But this observation is not an empirical observation. Therefore, the understanding generated by it is not scientific episteme. In fact, this reflexive observation focuses on implied personal agency rather than on causal relationships between objects. If the understanding of causation constitutes the connection to be discerned between objects in the study of action in the realm of empirical sciences, the correspondent to that in the understanding of the self is attestation. While causality describes a foundational unity or connection between objects, attestation reflexively discerns an analogical unity between the actions and the self. Given the indirect way by which consciousness operates to attain self-understanding, the deductive comparisons of analogical thinking constitute the basic reflexive procedure of attestation, which is about the self. By avoiding the affirmation of causation, attestation openly acknowledges that self-understanding is not conclusive and does not rule out suspicion.

An illustration of the indirect way of conscience or attestation in self-understanding is that conscience does not work by providing a clear picture of the relationship between the agent and the action to be empirically scrutinized. Arguably, the controlling metaphor of the inductive reasoning of causation is

⁴¹³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 341.

⁴¹⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 350.

⁴¹⁵. Ricoeur, "L'attestation," 398-399, 402.

⁴¹⁶. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 351-352, 355.

⁴¹⁷. For a critical assessment of Ricoeur's own comparison with Heidegger and Levinas on this point, see Kemp, "Ricoeur between Heidegger and Levinas," 41-61.

seeing. In contrast to that, “attestation escapes sight.”⁴¹⁸ In fact, the expression *voice* of conscience implies that what conscience offers is primarily something to be heard, not to be seen. Hence, the reflexive observation of action is deductively and analogically informed by hearing. Even what conscience offers to be “seen” in terms of memories is not something to be empirically analyzed but reflexively processed by the narrative use of language. Indeed, the suggestion that “hearing” is the controlling metaphor of the deductive and analogical reflection of attestation reinforces the idea that language is the privileged realm for the reflection of action and agency.

While the self-understanding provided by attestation does not rule out suspicion, Ricoeur does not think that the self-understanding of attestation is merely a conviction (certainty, belief) at the level of meaning. Rather, this conviction has an ontological ground. According to the assumption of ontology as polysemic and plural, acting and being true (just as being false) are modes of being. This ontological ground allows the (true and/or false) connection between language (especially the language expressing action) and reality, just as the (true and/or false) connection between the movements of physical action in the world and the self. Another significant aspect of the polysemic nature of ontological plurality is the conception of otherness, which is defined in terms of passivity, that is, being the target or the object of action. In fact, there are different centers of otherness, among which our French philosopher mentions the conscience, the body, and other people. If the experience of the conscience and of the body are taken as experiences of otherness, the self is ontologically defined by its own otherness. This means that self-understanding or attestation refers to our interactions with the otherness of ourselves (especially what the conscience says to us) and with the otherness of other people (especially what other people say to us). The limitation of consciousness, which cannot grasp the self directly, and the complex plurality of other people make the task of attestation and self-understanding difficult and provisional. This is why suspicion needs to be always taken into account. At the same time, the emphasis on plurality and otherness highlights the ethical dimension of attestation and self-understanding, in which conscience does not only recognize oneself acting, but also evaluates the action in light of its moral responsibility regarding others. Moreover, the voices of other people attest to the self acting and also morally evaluate the action. Both the conscience and other people impute the action to the self, making the self morally responsible for its action. This phenomenon underlines that attestation and self-understanding belong to the realm of practical reason.

This discussion of recognizing oneself as the agent of an action leads us to a more detailed discussion of attestation and recognition.

⁴¹⁸. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 72-73.

2.2. Attestation and Recognition

Ricoeur particularly explores the understanding of attestation in terms of recognition in *Parcours de la reconnaissance*.⁴¹⁹ He speaks of an “epistemic synonymy between attestation and recognition.”⁴²⁰ Jean-Luc Amalric suggests that the concept of recognition in *Parcours de la reconnaissance* deepens the meaning of attestation expounded in *Soi-même comme un autre*.⁴²¹ Overall, the French philosopher discusses three major interrelated themes in this work, namely, self-identity, otherness, and the dialectics of recognition and misrecognition.⁴²² These themes are developed in the three chapters of the book, respectively entitled “Recognition as Identification,” “Recognizing Oneself,” and “Mutual Recognition.”⁴²³ The initial elaboration of attestation as recognition describes the Cartesian idea of “attestation of certitude,” where to recognize presupposes a knowledge to identify or confirm something as true.⁴²⁴ Then, Ricoeur turns to the discussion of attestation as self-recognition, according to the reflexive consciousness of capacities and moral responsibilities. The moral dimension leads to the discussion of alterity, which highlights the necessity of being recognized by others. Considering that all these aspects of recognition are permeated by the possibility of misrecognition, the French philosopher keeps attestation open to suspicion. In the section below I will outline the key concepts of identity and otherness mentioned in this brief introductory overview.

2.2.1. Identity and Otherness

In the preface of *Parcours de la reconnaissance* Ricoeur connects the ideas of identity, recognition, and gratitude. He suggests that personal identity requires recognition, that is, to be recognized. When this demand is fulfilled, there is a reaction of gratitude.⁴²⁵ In the introduction, he dialogues with different definitions of recognition, coming from lexicography. One definition describes the ability to identify or distinguish a judgment or action. Another definition emphasizes the acceptance of something as true. A third definition refers to the reaction of bearing “witness through gratitude that one is indebted to someone for (something, an act).”⁴²⁶

^{419.} Paul Ricoeur, *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2004). English translation published as *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

^{420.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 249. See also Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 147, 252.

^{421.} Amalric, “Affirmation originaire, attestation, reconnaissance,” 13.

^{422.} These three themes are indicated in the review of the book outlined in the conclusion. See Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 249.

^{423.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, vii (Contents).

^{424.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 30.

^{425.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, xi.

^{426.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 12.

It is noteworthy that, in general, these definitions imply memory. Furthermore, our French thinker mentions philosophical frameworks for the discussion of recognition. In Kant's transcendental philosophy, recognition is related to *a priori* conditions. For Bergson's reflexive psychology, recognition takes place in the context of memories. In its turn, Hegel's discussion of freedom highlights the demand for recognition in the context of social struggle.⁴²⁷ With these frameworks in mind, Ricoeur presents the linguistic focus of his own trajectory: to think about recognition in a movement from active (to recognize) to passive voice (to be recognized).⁴²⁸ In this movement, he discerns both the dimension of cognitive knowledge, in the act of identifying or distinguishing (active voice), and the dimension of moral recognition, in "the demand to be recognized" (passive voice).⁴²⁹ The French philosopher underscores that the movement from active to passive voice is increasingly informed by "the problematic of mutual recognition" and, accordingly, "recognition acquires a status more and more independent in regard to cognition as mere knowing."⁴³⁰

Recognition in the active voice, with its focus on cognitive knowledge, is discussed in the chapter on recognition as identification, where Ricoeur dialogues with the philosophies of judgment of Descartes and Kant. The dialogue with the former highlights the ideas of perception, knowledge, and doubt. In the context of suspicion and doubt, the attestation of certitude makes recognition a confirmation necessary to overrule the threat of error.⁴³¹ However, as already indicated previously, Ricoeur does not subscribe to the Cartesian *cogito*, which means that suspicion should also be extended to the attestation of certitude. In other words, this attestation of certitude does not overrule suspicion and should be aware of the danger of misrecognition. Considering Kant's philosophy of judgment, the act of identifying is described as the establishment of "a relationship between one thing and another."⁴³² Therefore, recognition as identification involves the cognitive activity of connecting concepts according to a "transcendental deduction" of consciousness.⁴³³ Nevertheless, for Ricoeur, the Kantian view is too abstract and lacks the notion of temporality. Our French philosopher takes into account that in the succession of time objects may appear, disappear, and then reappear. Thus, from a temporal perspective, objects are not always presented to our perception, and our recognition or identification that they are the same is necessary precisely because of these lapses of time.⁴³⁴

^{427.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 17-18.

^{428.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 19.

^{429.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 19.

^{430.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 20.

^{431.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 30.

^{432.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 23.

^{433.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 46.

^{434.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 64.

An important step in the movement from active to passive voice, that is, from recognizing to being recognized, is the recognition of oneself. Ricoeur indicates that *ipseity* in French corresponds to the English notion of *self* or *selfhood*, which is defined as a “reflexive self” and characterized by recognition, since a “reflexive consciousness of oneself” is implied in self-recognition.⁴³⁵ The idea of a reflexive self is a modern update of the Greek account of action (especially the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*), moving the emphasis from the action to its agent. More specifically, by modern he means particularly the reflexive philosophy of Descartes (the Cartesian turn to the subject/cogito) and Locke, and the practical dimension of Kant’s second critique (practical reason, moral philosophy). Therefore, the starting point of Ricoeur’s reflection on self-recognition is the attempt to continue “the Aristotelian analysis of action, with its notion of rational desire, within the setting of the reflexive philosophy inaugurated by Descartes and Locke, then extended to the practical dimension by Kant’s second Critique and brought by Fichte to its highest transcendental power.”⁴³⁶

This attempt is named the phenomenology of the capable human being, shortly declared by the expression “I can”, which our French philosopher considers a neo-Aristotelian, post-Kantian, and post-Hegelian enterprise.⁴³⁷ In fact, this phenomenology presupposes the idea of attestation. Ricoeur explains that he adopted this idea in *Soi-même comme un autre* “to characterize the epistemic mode of assertions having to do with capacities.”⁴³⁸ He highlights that attestation “expresses the kind of belief attached to expressions of the type *I believe that I can*, distinguishing it from belief as a weak form of theoretical knowledge.”⁴³⁹ Thus, attestation is not defined by theoretical belief but by practical knowledge. In addition, our French philosopher makes a distinction between doubt and suspicion, probably ascribing the former to the realm of theoretical knowledge and the latter to the area of practical knowledge. In his words, “the assurance that attaches to assertions introduced by the modal

⁴³⁵. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 89.

⁴³⁶. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 90-91.

⁴³⁷. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 91. As Pellauer indicates, “Ricoeur adopts the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that our most basic lived experience is that of a lived conviction that ‘I can.’” Pellauer, *Ricoeur*, 15. With regard to Ricoeur’s modified appropriation of Hegel, it suffices to say, for the purposes of this study, that our French philosopher dialogues with Honneth’s appropriation of Hegel’s project of founding a social theory with a normative sense. Like Ricoeur, Honneth rejects Hegel’s metaphysics of the absolute in the Jena period. In contrast to Hegel, the starting point of Honneth’s project is the character of human plurality in all intersubjective transactions. Ricoeur seems to appreciate this starting point and also agree with the Hegelian interest in the formulation of a social theory with a normative sense. See Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 186-200.

⁴³⁸. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 91.

⁴³⁹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 91.

form *I can* has as its contrary not doubt, but suspicion, which can be refuted only by a reassurance of the same epistemic tenor as the contested certitude.”⁴⁴⁰

In his account of the phenomenology of the capable human being (“I can”), our French philosopher describes the reflexive character of the self by saying that the self recognizes itself “in the moment of self-designation.”⁴⁴¹ More precisely, the phenomenology of “I can” underscores that the subject is able to make events happen in the physical and social world. “In this ‘making something happen,’ the subject can recognize him- or herself as the ‘cause,’ in a declaration of the form: ‘I did it.’”⁴⁴² Ricoeur unpacks the expression “I can” especially by discussing the linguistic abilities of being able to say and, more specifically, being able to narrate (particularly to narrate oneself), and also by the moral idea of imputability. In his discussion on being able to say, Ricoeur moves from semantics (the *what* of the action) to pragmatics (the *who* of action). He argues that speech-acts theory in pragmatics constitutes a significant analytical tool for reflexive philosophy, inasmuch as it moves backward from the statement itself (the semantics of statements) to the act of stating (who is speaking). Actually, this backward movement describes the hermeneutical detour to the *who* by means of the *what*.⁴⁴³

Due to the ability to narrate oneself, the notion of personal identity is understood in terms of narrative identity.⁴⁴⁴ This is “the reflexive way of talking about oneself narratively.”⁴⁴⁵ As Kaufmann explains, “narrative is one of the main tools that human beings have in order to recognize or to reject their authorship and involvement in actions. When we tell a story of ourselves, we are giving an interpretation about our own involvement in the actions.”⁴⁴⁶ Hence, “The capacity to narrate oneself is a specific way of attesting to oneself, ascribing to oneself several actions as one’s own or, on the contrary, denying one’s involvement in some.”⁴⁴⁷

^{440.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 91.

^{441.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 93.

^{442.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 96.

^{443.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 95.

^{444.} See also Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 113. For a helpful discussion of Ricoeur’s understanding on the narrative identity of the self and its historical condition, see Edi Pucci, “History and the Question of Identity: Kant, Arendt, Ricoeur,” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard M. Kearney (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 125-136; Joseph Dunne, “Beyond Sovereignty and Deconstruction: The Storied Self,” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard M. Kearney (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 137-158; David Rasmussen, “Rethinking Subjectivity: Narrative Identity and the Self,” in *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard M. Kearney (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 159-172.

^{445.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 99.

^{446.} Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 54.

^{447.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 99.

As indicated previously, personal identity is dialectically constituted by the poles *idem* (the “immutable identity” of sameness) and *ipse* (the “changing identity” of the self/ipseity in its “historical condition”).⁴⁴⁸ This sameness aspect of identity is understood as “permanence in time,” especially considering the “biological identity grounded in the ‘genetic code.’”⁴⁴⁹ This identity is recognized when the person appears, disappears, and reappears.⁴⁵⁰ Conversely, the ipseity pole is conceived in terms of transformations. These transformations may involve even confusion in personal identity, particularly voiced by the question *Who am I?*⁴⁵¹ Therefore, if the *idem* pole is described as sameness, the *ipse* (the self) is related to otherness. While recognizing the former, the French philosopher clearly emphasizes the latter, as he usually focuses on the dynamic rather than the static pole in his approach to dialectics. According to this focus on ipseity/selfhood, personal identity is dynamically understood as narrative identity.⁴⁵² Ricoeur highlights that the reflection on promises is the climax of the dialectics of sameness and ipseity.⁴⁵³

Besides the dialectics of *idem* and *ipse*, Ricoeur proposes another narrative level of dialectics for personal identity on the plane of characters and actions.⁴⁵⁴ In this dialectic, personal “identity is confronted by otherness.”⁴⁵⁵ From the perspective of recognition, when the person is recognized, one receives the full assurance of his or her identity by others regarding his/her capacities.⁴⁵⁶ Narratively speaking, the story of one’s life includes interactions with others (external diversity). This dialectic includes the poles of self-identity (“private identity”) and the identity of others (“public identity”). As far as memory is concerned, self-identity involves “individual memory,” and the identity of others is described by “collective memory.”⁴⁵⁷

A comparison between these two dialectical conceptions reveals that the French philosopher stipulates a dialectic of reflexivity and alterity in the context of mutual recognition, assuming that there is an original dissymmetry in the relationship

⁴⁴⁸. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 101. The French philosopher attempts to frame this dialectical conception in contrast to Locke’s account of identity, which maintains the mutual exclusion between the same and the other. According to this exclusion, to identify is to distinguish. Consequently, the self is the same as itself and not another, and its identity is opposed to diversity. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 120–122. Instead of a logical status of identity defined by the mutual exclusion of the same or the other, Ricoeur proposes an “existential status” where the other tends “to affect the same.” Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 151.

⁴⁴⁹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 102.

⁴⁵⁰. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 150.

⁴⁵¹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 102.

⁴⁵². Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 101.

⁴⁵³. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 102.

⁴⁵⁴. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 103.

⁴⁵⁵. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 103.

⁴⁵⁶. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 250.

⁴⁵⁷. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 103–104.

between the ego and others.⁴⁵⁸ Amalric even discerns in Ricoeur's conception of recognition an expansion of the dialect of being and act to a dialectic being, act, and otherness.⁴⁵⁹ In this expanded dialectics, he attempts to bring together the focus on the ego in Husserl's phenomenology and the focus on alterity in Levinas' phenomenology.⁴⁶⁰ The *ipse* pole in the dialectics of personal identity would be the connection with the identity of others in the dialectical interaction with alterity, inasmuch as ipseity/selfhood is defined by otherness. From this standpoint, alterity is part of self-recognition, in the sense that selfhood itself is characterized by otherness, and also defines the recognition of others. This connection with alterity is particularly noticed in Ricoeur's reflection on promise. In fact, these two levels of dialectics in narrative identity, the first focused on personal identity and the second related with otherness, are associated with the concepts of memory and promise. The interaction with these two concepts is an innovation of *Parcours de la reconnaissance* in comparison with *Soi-même comme un autre*, as they amplify the emphasis on the temporality of the self.⁴⁶¹ Memory retrospectively points to the past, being paired with the dialectical pole of idem/sameness and oriented to mineness (my memories).⁴⁶² Conversely, promises prospectively envision the future, being paired with the dialectical pole of ipse/ipseity and oriented to the other (alterity).⁴⁶³

In Ricoeur's phenomenology of promises, the capacity to make them presupposes the abilities of the phenomenology of the capable human being ("I can"), namely, the capacity to speak, to act in the world, to recount or narrate, and to impute to oneself the origin of one's acts. In this respect, Ricoeur speaks of "the power to promise."⁴⁶⁴ With these presupposed abilities, promises are defined as the act by which the

⁴⁵⁸. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 152.

⁴⁵⁹. Amalric, "Affirmation originaire, attestation, reconnaissance," 24.

⁴⁶⁰. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 157, 160, 260. The relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics in Ricoeur's thought results from his challenges to the uncritical notion of subject in the cartesian model that he finds in Husserl. In contrast to Husserl, our French philosopher proposes a *hermeneutical* phenomenology and, paradoxically, he finds the ground of this proposal precisely in his reading of Husserl. In the essay *Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*, Ricoeur postulates two premises. The first is that hermeneutics abolishes one type of phenomenology, namely, Husserlian idealistic phenomenology. The second premise affirms the dialectical relationship between phenomenology and hermeneutics, where one is the presupposition of the other. See Paul Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," *Noûs* 9, no. 1 (1975): 85-102. See also Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*; Saulius Geniusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of Imagination," *Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences* 38, no. 2 (2015): 223-241. According to Ricoeur, Husserl's most intensive expression of idealism appears in his works *Nachwort* to the *Ideen* and *Cartesian Meditations* [3]. See Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 86.

⁴⁶¹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 249.

⁴⁶². Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 254.

⁴⁶³. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 254-255.

⁴⁶⁴. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 257.

self commits itself. This self-commitment comprises both linguistic and moral dimensions. In the linguistic dimension, the act of promising is essentially a speech act. In the moral dimension, promises are a commitment toward the other. As the self commits itself to do something, the one who promises puts himself/herself under a binding obligation. In this context, the French philosopher speaks of the ipseity of the promise, that is, the will to self-constancy, even in contexts where someone is confronted with changes in circumstances and changes of heart. In this way, the identity is preserved in spite of everything that might incline one to break his/her word. This preservation of identity or self-constancy is also defined as fidelity.⁴⁶⁵ As Kaufmann indicates, “promises are a kind of projection of sameness to the future.”⁴⁶⁶

Therefore, the concept of promise provides a helpful articulation of the elements discussed in the phenomenology of the capable human being and the notion of attestation. This concept assumes the abilities of action, with particular reference to language (pragmatics) and speech acts, just as the idea of narrative identity and moral commitment, with a focus on otherness. The changing circumstances in the narrative of life stimulate modifications of ipseity/selfhood in personal identity and, consequently, in the moral relationship with others. However, promises are speech acts that express to others a self-commitment to future constancy and moral faithfulness. This is a helpful example of how the relationship with others (alterity) impacts personal identity in terms of selfhood and morality, where there is self-recognition and the recognition of the other, especially with regard to the moral rights that the other has in relation to my own actions, because of my promise.

Moreover, considering the assurance and confidence expressed by promises, the idea of attestation is present in the sense of recognizing myself as the agent of the promising action, which presupposes the capacity of speaking to someone and acting in the world, initially in terms of speech acts, where I narrate a future situation to someone and hold myself morally responsible for my projected actions. Besides the assurance communicated in speech acts as the promise is enunciated, the confidence of attestation is also present in the assurance that I will be capable of performing the promised actions in the world in the future and that I will be morally committed to the other and to the memory of my words, even if circumstances and my own personal identity change somehow. Obviously, this is the description of a true promise, assuming that false promises are possible as well. This constitutes the weakness of attestation, which cannot rule out the possibility of suspicion. Actually, the other who believes my promise will also trust in my capacity to perform the projected actions in the future and that I will be morally faithful to him/her and to my

^{465.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 109-110, 123-124, 127-130, 254-255.

^{466.} Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 76.

past speech acts, even if things change. Usually, the belief of the other in my promise will be based on my own reliability or trustworthiness as a speaker, which means that he/she will probably consider his/her memory of my personal narrative identity to evaluate whether my previous actions had been consistent with my words.⁴⁶⁷

Gert-Jan van der Heiden helpfully summarizes the attestation of promises in terms of trustworthiness as follows:

Despite the fact that we do not know whether we remain the same – or rather, we know that we change and do not remain the same – we nevertheless promise. Consequently, since this promise is not founded in any certainty about whom we will be in the future, it is in and by promising itself that we attest to the fact that somebody else can rely upon us: by promising we attest to the other that we can be trustworthy. In turn, at one point in the future, the other may remind us of our promise and appeal to us to keep our promise. By making this appeal, the other also attests to our capacity to keep a promise, regardless of the fact whether we do or do not keep it: if the other would think in advance that we are not capable of keeping our promise, it would be meaningless for him or her to appeal to our promise; hence by appealing to us, the other attests to our capacity to be reliable and be accountable for the promises we make.⁴⁶⁸

This reflection on promising is an example of the attestation of self-recognition in connection with the recognition of others in the context of reflexive philosophy, situated in the realm of practical reason and focused on the moral ideal of living well.⁴⁶⁹ In self-recognition and the recognition coming from others, the self finds self-esteem.⁴⁷⁰ In fact, self-recognition seems to be aligned to the dialectical idea of myself as another. Ricoeur argues that “I esteem myself as another. It is the other in me that I respect.”⁴⁷¹ According to this perspective, self-esteem is the “interpretation of oneself mediated by the ethical evaluation of our actions.”⁴⁷² In the recognition given to others, the self offers respect to them and takes moral responsibility for his/her actions. However, this ideal needs to take into account that social relationships are marked by asymmetry and negotiation, which are spelled out in at least three

^{467.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 130–131, 255.

^{468.} van der Heiden, “On the Way to Attestation,” 136.

^{469.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 148–149.

^{470.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 217.

^{471.} Ricoeur, “L’attestation,” 395.

^{472.} Ricoeur, “L’attestation,” 394.

challenges.⁴⁷³ First, there is the reality of nonrecognition or misrecognition of others and the struggle for proper recognition.⁴⁷⁴ Second, considering that the actions of the capable human being imply the exercise of power over someone who is the target of the action or who is even used as a tool for action, this acknowledgment raises the moral issue of the use of power and the risk of violence.⁴⁷⁵ Third, the risk of disregarding the fact that mutuality dialectically implies proximity and distance, intimacy and respect.⁴⁷⁶ This seems to be the ethical role of dialectics in promoting recognition and respect for others, inasmuch as it encourages proximity without overlooking the dissymmetry of the relations. In the dialectics situated in the asymmetry between me and others, Ricoeur affirms the need for a just distance at the heart of mutuality, protecting it “against the pitfalls of a fusional union.”⁴⁷⁷

Indeed, the discussion of the power to act and its agency entails an ethical appreciation and evaluation of our capacities that lead to reflections on the rights to certain capabilities (liberty to act), under the notion of social justice, and the conflictual dimension of “plurality, alterity, reciprocal action,” and mutual recognition.⁴⁷⁸ From the perspective of the passive voice of recognition, which highlights the demand to be recognized, “attestation has become a demand, a right to require, under the rubric of the idea of social justice.”⁴⁷⁹ Kaufman highlights that Ricoeur refers to *mutual* rather than *reciprocal* recognition precisely because mutuality presupposes differences and asymmetry between the members.⁴⁸⁰ Even the related ethical concepts of gift and gratitude are dialectically found in the asymmetry between the giver and the receiver.⁴⁸¹ In this sense, Ricoeur presupposes the preservation of a twofold alterity and finds “distance in the proximity,”⁴⁸² to cite Simone Weil. Hence, the phenomenology of the capable human being and the role of attestation is situated in the context of the ethical discussion of action and recognition, according to the asymmetry of plurality.

2.2.2. A Brief Systematic Account of Attestation and Recognition

The discussion of attestation in terms of recognition deepens the notion of self-understanding in at least two ways. First, this discussion explores the possibility of recognizing or identifying the self in the context of the changing reality of the

⁴⁷³. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262.

⁴⁷⁴. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 245-246, 250, 256-258.

⁴⁷⁵. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 149; Ricoeur, “L’attestation,” 394-395.

⁴⁷⁶. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262-263.

⁴⁷⁷. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.

⁴⁷⁸. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 149.

⁴⁷⁹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 148.

⁴⁸⁰. Kaufmann, “The Attestation of the Self as a Bridge between Hermeneutics and Ontology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 232.

⁴⁸¹. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 262-263.

⁴⁸². Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 263.

historical or temporal condition. Second, the recognition of attestation is elaborated with reference to the plural reality of otherness, in which the relationship and the recognition of others are essential for the identity of the self. However, the role of suspicion is also present in these two lines of discussion, inasmuch as the risk of misrecognition is part of the picture of attestation.

The possibility of recognition implies that there is some kind of stability regarding personal identity in the dynamic flow of historical reality. Stability includes the sameness (*idem*) of personal traits and the self-constancy (*ipse*) intentionally kept. On the basis of this presumed stability, the ability to recognize describes the cognitive capacity of connecting or deducing the unity of something or someone that appears, disappears, and reappears throughout time. The constancy that allows identification is especially related to the self-reflection about capabilities and the corresponding moral responsibilities from the actions promoted by these capacities. If there is an active notion of recognition in terms of identifying, the passive language of being recognized refers to a social demand, inasmuch as personal identity requires recognition.

The concept of promise particularly elucidates the understanding of attestation in terms of recognition. First of all, the speech act of promising entails several capabilities, especially the linguistic abilities of speaking, narrating, and imputing. Second, in the phenomenology of promises, we find both self-recognition and the recognition of the other. As far as self-recognition is concerned, the one who promises presupposes that he/she will be capable of acting in order to fulfill the promise. Furthermore, the one who promises considers that he/she will be the same (self-constancy) person in the changing future. To use the language of self-attestation, making promises implies the self-assurance or confidence of personal capacities and self-constancy that will be recognized by the other who is receiving the promise. In other words, moral self-constancy enables the preservation of the identity to be recognized. On the other hand, promises usually imply the attestation of the other, that is, the recognition and the confidence of the other, who believes that the person making promises will be both able and morally committed to act according to what was promised. Moreover, the speech act of promising assumes that the other has rights about my actions and that I am morally responsible for them in terms of otherness. Finally, promises are not only defined by attestation but also by suspicion, since there is no absolute guarantee that they will be kept, only confidence.

In short, the attestation implied in recognition is particularly situated in the realm of practical knowledge of actions (the phenomenology of *I can*), inasmuch as someone recognizes oneself or the other person as the cause of events happening in the world. This recognition takes place especially by the use of language and narration, where the person narrating attests to or recognizes the authorship of actions with reference to oneself or to another person. In fact, both the attestation

of recognizing and the attestation of being recognized are crucial for the self, considering that one receives full assurance of his/her personal identity on the basis of his own recognition and of the recognition of others regarding his/her capacities and their corresponding moral responsibilities. The assurance gained by means of recognition or attestation is related to the notion of self-esteem. It is noteworthy that the idea of otherness and plurality describes not only the recognition of others but also self-recognition, since self-esteem implies the otherness of the self, where I esteem myself as another. Furthermore, otherness is at the heart of attestation in the sense that mutual recognition is permeated by asymmetrical plurality. This idea of asymmetry is a warning against the danger of symmetry in recognition, which is, in fact, a misrecognition. This danger highlights the proper place of suspicion in the discussion of attestation in terms of recognition.

The attestation of recognition and the attestation of being recognized are particularly related to the topics of memory and history, which is the record of recognition and misrecognition. This is the theme of our next section.

2.3. Attestation and History

The relationship between attestation and history in *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* is related to the concepts of memory, the epistemology of history (critical hermeneutics), and the historical condition (ontological hermeneutics). Indeed, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* is structured around these three concepts. The first part deals with memory or recollection and elaborates on memory and its connections with imagination, uses and abuses of memory, and the personal and collective dimensions of memory. The second part moves to the epistemology of history, which covers the topics of memory taking the form of archives and documents, the dynamics of explanation and understanding (*Verstehen* and *Erklären*), and the literary representation of history. The third part explores the historical condition of reality by exploring particularly the concept of temporality.⁴⁸³ These three aspects will be briefly explained in the section below, with particular reference to the role of testimony.

2.3.1. Memory, Testimony, and Attestation

Ricoeur phenomenologically depicts testimony as a transition point between memory and history.⁴⁸⁴ More precisely, testimony is the declarative memory externalized,

⁴⁸³. Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000). English translation published as *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.

⁴⁸⁴. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21. For a helpful discussion of the development of the concept of testimony in Ricoeur, see Esteban Lythgoe, "Ricoeur's concept of Testimony,"

epistemologically moving from orality to writing (archives, documentation). Its use by the historian may involve a lack of confidence in a given testimony. But in this case, he/she will eventually confront the testimony in question with other competing testimonies. As Emmanuel Alloa indicates, the witness is called precisely when one cannot be sure about the facts, that is, when the matter is empirically unverifiable.⁴⁸⁵

In this context, the critique of testimony requires the confrontation of several testimonies.⁴⁸⁶ The fact that the suspicion of a testimony leads to its comparison with other testimonies implies that suspicion is not necessarily against testimony, but it may contribute critically to the reliability of the given testimony if the testimony in question shows its strengths in comparison with other testimonies. This criticism of testimony promoted by suspicion connects the historical and judicial dimensions of testimony because testimony raises confidence and/or suspicion. Indeed, the core meaning of testimony is recognized when we bring to light the conditions of suspicion, which question the trustworthiness of testimony.⁴⁸⁷ The realm of trust is actually a common ground for testimony and promising. Both are acts of discourse and reveal their soundness in the temporal stability of the agent of discourse. In the course of time, a stable agent reiterates the same testimony or keeps one's word in the case of promise. In other words, when the person is steadfast over time, this reinforces the credibility or trustworthiness of testimony (pointing to the past) and promises (pointing to the future).⁴⁸⁸

Just as in the case of promises, the practice of listening to a testimony positively presupposes a predisposition to trust in what other people say. This is the tendency to have confidence in the word of another, a confidence in the word heard.⁴⁸⁹ Furthermore, limited cases of testimony, which are testimonies given in pain, as in the case of survivors, tend to exacerbate our predisposition or willingness to trust in the word of another because of our empathy with suffering.⁴⁹⁰ Assuming that testimony is “the trace of the past in the present,” there is also the confidence that the

Analecta Hermeneutica 3 (2011): 1-16. See also Pierron, “De la fondation à l’attestation en morale.” Ricoeur dialogues with other philosophers who elaborate on the concept of testimony, such as Marcel, Nabert, Heidegger, and Levinas. See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 108-128.

^{485.} Emmanuel Alloa, “Du témoignage ou de l’ininterprétable,” *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 6, no 1 (2015): 102.

^{486.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 146-147.

^{487.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 161-162.

^{488.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 164-165.

^{489.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 180.

^{490.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 175.

testimony heard will promote both the understanding of the present by the past and of the past by the present.⁴⁹¹

While the problem of false testimony negatively brings us back to the discussion of the weakness of testimony, inasmuch as it is open to suspicion, the crisis of belief and suspicion cannot lead someone to doubt everything. I doubt some testimony to the extent that I have confidence in some other testimony.⁴⁹² In this way, discordant testimonies are used to establish a plausible and probable narrative. This is a measuring exercise of questioning and reinforcing attestation.⁴⁹³ This idea of confronting different testimonies is suggested in the following threefold declaration of the witness: (1) I was there; (2) Believe me; (3) If you do not, ask someone else.⁴⁹⁴ The third phrase reveals that the seed of criticism is implanted in actual testimony instead of necessarily leading to a naïve realism of testimony.⁴⁹⁵ In connection with these three points, Ricoeur indicates in *Parcours de la reconnaissance* that testimony has two dialogical sides: (1) “the assertion of factual reality” and (2) “the certification or warranting of the declaration by the witness.”⁴⁹⁶ This dialogical structure indicates that the intention of testimony is not merely conveying information (side 1) but to convince the other (side 2), that is, to make the audience certain about what is declared. In other words, “the witness asks to be believed,” as one does not only state “I was there” (side 1), but adds “believe me” (side 2).⁴⁹⁷ This means that the key aspect of testimony is its reliability.⁴⁹⁸ Without it, the declarative aspect of testimony becomes empty. In this sense, an effective testimony involves three basic characteristics: language, confidence, and charity. This last characteristic results from the fact that the audience is open to believing that the witness means what he/she says.⁴⁹⁹ To be sure, the testimony may be received with confidence or suspicion, but in many cases, its confirmation or disconfirmation tends to require the confrontation of this testimony with another testimony.

This reflection on testimony shows the commonalities between historians and judges. Both are concerned with proof, and the witness's credibility is open to the “manipulation of suspicion.”⁵⁰⁰ Moreover, both work with the same linguistic structure of testimony, which is the oral phase of declarative memory that is eventually inscribed in archives or documents. The critique of testimonies deals with “trust and

^{491.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 170.

^{492.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 180–181.

^{493.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 181.

^{494.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 497.

^{495.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 278.

^{496.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 130.

^{497.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 131.

^{498.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 131.

^{499.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 132.

^{500.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 317.

distrust with regard to the word of others,” and this critique is undertaken by means of “clarification and argumentation.”⁵⁰¹ The reliability of discordant testimonies is sought by probabilistic logic, somehow related to “the Popperian criteria of verification and falsification.”⁵⁰² This logic is elaborated in the discussion of *Verstehen* or understanding to *Erklären* or explanation in Ricoeur’s essay *The Model of the Text* (1971).⁵⁰³ According to our French philosopher, the genius of the art of guessing (understanding) interacts with the more scientific scrutiny of critical validation (explanation).⁵⁰⁴ While explanation is described in terms of empirical verification in the inductive logic of natural sciences, the methodological procedure of explanation in the sphere of human and social sciences refers to the logic of validation. Different from verification, “validation is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures of legal interpretation. It is a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability.”⁵⁰⁵ Ricoeur compares the procedures of validation or invalidation with Karl Popper’s notion of falsifiability,⁵⁰⁶ in the hermeneutical sense that “an interpretation must not only be probable but more probable than another.”⁵⁰⁷

Ricoeur does not discuss the concepts of memory, testimony, and history only from the perspective of critical hermeneutics, dealing epistemologically with trust and suspicion. He also explores the dimension of ontological hermeneutics, conceptualizing the mode of being in terms of its historical condition.⁵⁰⁸ In ontological hermeneutics, Ricoeur emphasizes the power to remember, which is related to other powers, such as the power to speak, act, recount, and impute. Our French philosopher dialogues with Heidegger, since the German philosopher stipulates that “attestation is the mode in which the concept of the potentiality-of-being-a-whole and that of being-toward-death are given to be understood.”⁵⁰⁹ Assuming the historical condition of being, Ricoeur identifies in Heidegger a historical understanding of attestation in which it projects three temporal ecstasies: (1) attestation of the past, (2) attestation of the present, and (3) attestation of the future. The attestation of the future is called by Ricoeur anticipation, whereas the attestation of the past is testimony. The present

⁵⁰¹. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 338.

⁵⁰². Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 338.

⁵⁰³. Paul Ricoeur, “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text,” *Social Research* 51, no. 1-2 (1984): 185–218. This is a reprint of *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 1971), 206. See also Alison Scott-Baumann, “Text as Action, Action as Text? Ricoeur, Λόγος and the Affirmative Search for Meaning in the ‘Universe of Discourse,’” *Discourse Studies* 13, no. 5 (2011): 593–600.

⁵⁰⁴. Ricoeur, “The Model of the Text,” 207.

⁵⁰⁵. Ricoeur, “The Model of the Text,” 206.

⁵⁰⁶. See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

⁵⁰⁷. Ricoeur, “The Model of the Text,” 206.

⁵⁰⁸. The transition from critical to ontological hermeneutics is indicated in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 343.

⁵⁰⁹. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 362.

of attestation is understood in terms of the phenomenology of the capable human being (“I can”), which implies particularly the powers of speech, action, narrative, and imputation. According to these temporal ecstasies, the certainty of the present frames the attestation of the future and the witnessing of the past. Hence, attestation radiates out of the future of anticipation toward the past of retrospection.⁵¹⁰

Therefore, according to the historical condition of being, ontology is framed by testimony about the past, present capacities, and future anticipation. Nevertheless, these three features are not independent of one another, inasmuch as testimony and anticipation can be done by means of present capacities. For instance, when the power of attestation is related to the memory concerning the past, the presence of the absent implies the fiduciary character of the eyewitness in the representation (testimony) of the past presence of memories. From this standpoint, attestation of what has occurred makes the distinction between memory and fiction. In this sense, attestation refers to mnemonic potentialities, which are part of the capable human being (“I can,” particularly the capacities related to action, speaking, narration, and moral imputation). With regard to the future, the French philosopher emphasizes the ability to make promises, which is “prospective,” that is, “turned toward the future.”⁵¹¹ This ability presupposes all the capacities of the phenomenology of the capable human being. In Ricoeur’s words, “the ability to promise presupposes the ability to speak, to act on the world, to recount and form the idea of the narrative unity of a life, and finally to impute to oneself the origin of one’s acts.”⁵¹² Overall, the capacities regarding past, present, and future are recognized in the mode of certainty (attestation), but they are subjected to suspicion because of their character of belief.⁵¹³

The historical condition of being attests to present capabilities, covering both mnemonic capacities regarding the past and capacities for projections or anticipation (such as the power to promise) about the future. However, the attestation of these capabilities can be mistaken and open to uncertainties. Examples of deficiencies include failures of memory (Ricoeur speaks of “forgetting and manipulated memory”⁵¹⁴). Without ignoring these challenges, in attestation, doing history involves a “hermeneutical phenomenology of memory” that undertakes a “historicization of memory” and implies an “open dialectic”: “resolute anticipation, the repetition of the past, and present concern.”⁵¹⁵

^{510.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 361-362.

^{511.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 127. Nietzsche also discusses promise in connection with memory or the inability to forget in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche’s discussion is mentioned by Ricoeur in the Epilogue of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 488, 603n39.

^{512.} Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, 128.

^{513.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 388-393.

^{514.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 427.

^{515.} Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 392.

2.3.2. A Brief Systematic Account of Attestation and History

In the discussion of history, the speech act of testimony constitutes a crucial category for the understanding of attestation. The documents that serve as sources for historical elaboration usually result from the recollection of personal and collective memories. The speech act of testimony provides the bridge between memory and the inscription of archives by serving as the linguistic externalization of the recollection of memory. The interpretation of the historian is largely focused on the testimony offered in the form of documents. Nevertheless, testimony is marked by plurality, given the existence of competing testimonies. Inasmuch as the use of testimony is necessary for history, historical reasoning is not empirically verifiable, since it needs to evaluate the reliability of one testimony in comparison with others. This critical task reveals that historical epistemology ultimately involves juridical reasoning, in which suspicion critically contributes to establishing the reliability of testimony. In contrast to empirical verification, this type of reasoning is defined as qualitative probabilistic logic that attempts to comparatively validate arguments by the deductive conclusion that one is more probable than the other.

While promises attest to actions regarding the future, testimony attests to actions performed in the past. Both cases assume a relationship between the self and the other, according to which there is a tendency to believe in the word from another, on the one hand, and the desire to be believed, on the other. The witness does not only testify about alleged facts but also wants to convince the hearer about them, even by reinforcing the reliability of his/her testimony through reference to other testimonies. At the same time, the appeal to belief implies the possibility of false testimony.

Whereas the epistemological critique of testimony dialectically involves trust and distrust, which is characteristic of attestation, the ontological dimension of attestation stipulates that history is not reduced to cognitive interpretation but ultimately refers to the historical condition of reality. This condition is actually a mode of being in which attestation points to capacities related to the past, the present, and the future. While in the present the self attests to its diverse capabilities (*I can*), its power to remember (mnemonic capacities) enables the relationship with the past by means of the attestation of the self through memory. Likewise, the capacity of temporal anticipation allows the attestation of the self about the future in the form of promises. However, this ontological reflection includes the possibility of making mistakes in the attestation of the past, the present, and the future. These mistakes may include incapacities and/or moral deviations.

Considering that the narration of history explicitly or implicitly identifies agents of actions and assumes that they are morally responsible for them, expressing the evaluation of the actions by praising or blaming the agents (which are, indeed,

forms of recognition), attestation is necessary for the ontological and epistemological cohesive structure of the historical representation regarding the past.

After the discussion above of attestation in terms of the categories of self-understanding, recognition, and history, I will conclude this Part with a systematic overview of dialectical attestation.

CHAPTER 3

A Systematic Overview of Attestation

This systematic overview of attestation in Ricoeur is organized in two steps. First, I will outline how the hermeneutical concepts of the selected works before the 1990s (described in chapter 1) shape the categories of self-understanding, recognition, and history (described in chapter 2). Then, I will explore the fundamental question of Part 1 (*what is at stake in the idea of attestation?*) in light of these three categories. This exploration will take into account the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of attestation. The *why* refers to the context and importance of attestation in Ricoeur's project. The *what* describes its role in this project. The *how* explains the way in which this role is enacted, especially considering the dialectical shape of attestation.

3.1 Attestation and the Hermeneutical Basis before the 1990s

3.1.1 Self-understanding

In the category of self-understanding, the hermeneutics of *La symbolique du mal* points to the need for self-understanding inasmuch as the work underscores the situation of confusion and self-alienation, in which the self does not comprehend itself. The way to self-understanding requires an attention to language, which objectifies what takes place in consciousness and elucidates confused feelings. This statement has ontological overtones, since the use of language does not only express something about the self but ultimately constitutes the reality of becoming oneself. Another ontological premise is the otherness of the self, since my consciousness is able to observe my self, evaluate it (especially in the experience of guilt), and be suspicious about its motives. Considering the larger purposes of the present research, it is noteworthy that Ricoeur's discussion of otherness, guilt, and suspicion is exemplified with references to the divided self in the apostle Paul, particularly in Romans 7:18-19, 25.

The hermeneutics of *De l'interprétation* elaborates on the idea of confusion and self-alienation by exploring the notion of a wounded cogito, according to which there is no immediate meaning in consciousness. This is an explicit opposition to the Cartesian cogito.⁵¹⁶ In fact, to take consciousness in its immediate meaning, as Descartes proposes, produces self-alienation instead of self-understanding. This is why self-understanding needs to adopt the approach of a hermeneutical consciousness, which follows an indirect procedure that attempts to decipher the self in the objectivation of itself in language and culture. According to this hermeneutical detour, self-understanding requires interdisciplinary efforts to identify the objectifications or signs of the self scattered in the works of culture.

⁵¹⁶. In light of what I have indicated on page 90, note 402, Ricoeur's critique of the Cartesian cogito implies a critique of Husserl's phenomenology, which assumes a Cartesian understanding of the subject.

Self-understanding via these efforts of hermeneutical identification is not merely an epistemological enterprise but it is rather driven by ethical concerns. More specifically, self-understanding hermeneutically attempts to grasp the self in its *desire to be*. Since this desire is defined by freedom, self-understanding becomes an ethical enterprise that leads from alienation to freedom. However, the notion of a wounded cogito reminds us that self-understanding is always permeated by suspicion. The assurance that the self is moving from alienation to freedom in the hermeneutical process of self-understanding is actually a post-critical faith, which has taken the path of suspicion. This “second” faith is hermeneutically confident that language is able to reveal meaning, and in this sense this faith hermeneutically attempts to discern signs (not proofs) of the desire to be of the self in the symbols of language.

In *The Hermeneutics of Testimony*, testimony also attests to the self and its desire to be. The internal aspect of the dialectics of testimony is that the one who bears witness speaks from his/her own consciousness. Then, the external aspect refers to the narrative the witness offers to describe the self. From the perspective of self-understanding, it could be said that the self gives testimony about itself, in the sense that it has a consciousness and elaborates a narrative of actions about oneself. In this case, the self attains self-knowledge by its own testimony about itself. This is the testimony of an internal otherness. Furthermore, the self can attain self-understanding by listening to the testimony of other people about it. This is the testimony of external otherness. In fact, the plurality of external otherness implies that it is possible to have different and even conflicting testimonies about the self. In both cases, the self-understanding achieved by means of testimony results from hearing (not from seeing) and probabilistically comparing (not empirically verifying) different testimonies. However, the possibility of false testimonies entails that suspicion always plays a role in the process of self-understanding.

Taking into account *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy*, the ideas of confusion and self-alienation seem to be assumed and imply the need for self-understanding. Self-understanding is apparently defined in terms of the self reappropriating itself by means of a hermeneutical reflection on external works that fragmentarily mirror the self. Furthermore, self-understanding becomes an ethical task because my view of the other, especially in terms of his/her freedom, depends on the understanding that I have of myself and of my freedom. My freedom cannot be seen or empirically proved, but attested, believed, or inferred from a history of my actions (not merely from a single act).

3.1.2 Recognition

In a sense, self-understanding implies the capacity of recognizing itself and the passivity of being recognized by others. The ideas of confusion and self-alienation

mentioned in *La symbolique du mal* and *De l'interprétation* (particularly present in the notion of a wounded cogito in *De l'interprétation*) that justify the need for self-understanding also represent problems for a proper recognition of the self. These problems underline the danger of misrecognition and acknowledge the role of suspicion. Moreover, recognition implies otherness. If my consciousness is able to observe and evaluate my self, as *La symbolique du mal* indicates, there is an internal otherness in the phenomenology of my consciousness recognizing my self. To be sure, in *De l'interprétation*, the indirect approach of hermeneutical reflection assumes that the self recognizes itself and/or is recognized by others in the objectifications of language and culture. But *De l'interprétation* also highlights the significance of the recognition coming from others for the constitution of the self. From this perspective, recognition is seen both as a cognitive ability and an ethical requirement.

As far as *The Hermeneutics of Testimony* is concerned, the act of recognition and the passivity of being recognized can take the form of testimony. The recognition of the self happens in the internal testimony of conscience and in the external testimony of narrative. In addition, the self recognizes itself in testimony and can be recognized by others as well. Once again, the existence of false testimonies implies the risk of misrecognition and/or a lack of recognition. The presence of plurality is another element of complexity for recognition, since different and conflicting testimonies entail distinct and perhaps opposing forms of recognition. Considering that attestation in *The Hermeneutics of Testimony* and *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy* is by hearing, not by seeing, the element of otherness emphasizes that recognition takes the form of listening to different testimonies and comparatively evaluating them in terms of probability. Moreover, *The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy* indicates that freedom cannot be recognized directly by seeing, but by observing and hearing its signs. The theme of freedom shapes the desire to be, mentioned above, and the more elaborated notion of the desire to act (*I can*), according to which actions express the desires and the reality of the self. In other words, volitional actions are the means by which the self is recognized in terms of identification. Also, the self can be recognized from a moral point of view, where actions and agents are morally evaluated from the standpoint of freedom, which is implied in the idea of individual responsibility.

3.1.3 History

History is a place of self-understanding and recognition. The hermeneutics of *De l'interprétation* emphasizes that interdisciplinary efforts are necessary to identify the objectifications or signs of the self scattered in the works of culture. Inasmuch as the self is mirrored in historical records, history is clearly one of these disciplines, as the discussion of *The Hermeneutics of Testimony* indicates. In fact, this essay seems

to provide the hermeneutical basis for the later reflection on history and attestation. The exploration of testimony in the essay involves the interdisciplinary areas of philosophy, religion, law, and history. Particularly fruitful is the interaction of history and law for the understanding of testimony. Testimony implies that history is a judgment between trust/belief or suspicion, in which historical endeavors work by hearing, not by seeing. The judgment of history follows a probabilistic reasoning, and not an empirical observation. Moreover, the notion of testimony entails that history operates in a dialectic of someone speaking and another hearing. From another point of view, historical reflections hear diverse, and even conflicting, voices or testimonies. This implies otherness and plurality. Furthermore, history is informed by a dialectics of personal conscience or conviction and a linguistic narration of actions in the context of testimony.

3.2 What is at Stake in the Idea of Attestation?

3.2.1 The Why of Attestation

The categories of self-understanding, recognition, and history constitute specific and interrelated dimensions of attestation. A crucial notion in the discussion of attestation as self-understanding is the concept of consciousness. In its turn, the reflection on promises seems to encapsulate most of the ideas related to attestation as recognition. Finally, the topic of testimony is key for the understanding of attestation in terms of history. Overall, the elaborations on consciousness (self-understanding), promise (recognition), and testimony (history) are marked by the notions of plurality and unity. Plurality and otherness are part of the ontological ground of attestation as a whole, including self-understanding, recognition, and history. It is important to notice that ontological plurality and otherness are complex ingredients in a phenomenology of temporal experience, which is different from the rational uniformity of the abstract Cartesian account of the self. Instead of universal rational abstraction, temporal experience is narrated, which also involves different narrators. This is why the self-understanding of consciousness, the recognition of promises, and historical testimonies assume that the identity of the self is narratively constructed rather than abstractly or idealistically defined.

Conscience is one of the centers of otherness in the discussion of self-understanding. In fact, conscience is objectified in different actions and is also shaped by a reflection on them. Furthermore, consciousness is unable to fully grasp reality, given the polysemic complexity of plurality and otherness. Likewise, promises imply otherness by definition, inasmuch as I promise something to someone. By promising something to them, I am recognizing them. Even the otherness of the self

is latent in promises, as I am able to recognize myself acting in the future despite the complexity of my own otherness and temporal change. With regard to other people, to whom I give my promise, they can also recognize that I will be able to act in the future despite the temporal possibility of change. Considering that my promises make my actions accountable to others, plurality shapes the understanding of ethics. Indeed, the idea of mutual recognition assumes the reality of otherness and (asymmetric) plurality. Similarly, as far as testimony is concerned, the plurality of witnesses entails the complexity of different and even opposing testimonies. Actually, the very concept of testimony assumes the reality of otherness in the sense that I give my testimony to someone. More broadly, my historical condition implies that my comprehension of others and of myself depends on the understanding of history. In history I can see my own otherness in the past and the otherness of others. Even my knowledge of that is shaped by the testimonial words of others.

Overall, we could affirm that self-understanding, recognition, and history define dimensions of attestation according to different centers of temporal otherness. Conscience, which is crucial to self-understanding, highlights my own otherness. Promises emphasize my recognition of others and their recognition of my ability and constancy to fulfill them. By keeping my promise, I am recognizing them in the sense that my actions are accountable to them. Testimonies intend to present the otherness of myself and the otherness of others in the temporal otherness of the past.

This indication of different centers of otherness does not mean, however, that self-understanding, recognition, and history are described by only one center of otherness. There is plurality also here. For instance, self-understanding is not only attained through the otherness of conscience. While conscience is crucial for self-understanding, the idea of being recognized by others and the temporal otherness of history are also significant for self-understanding. Likewise, whereas Ricoeur's conception of recognition seems to put the emphasis on being recognized by others (an ethical demand), recognition describes active identification and self-recognition as well, as the notion of promise encompasses different active and passive aspects of recognition. While promises qualify recognition as projected into the future, recognition can refer to the past as well. Finally, history does not merely involve the otherness of the past. The representation of the past in history is also related to self-knowledge and the recognition of others in the present, for instance.

Nevertheless, the polysemic reality of plurality and the complexity of otherness do not preclude the possibility of attaining self-understanding, the ability to recognize and be recognized, or the plausibility of making history. But in order to affirm these possibilities, plurality needs to be accompanied by some kind of unity. Unity is affirmed when Ricoeur speaks about analogical unity in the relationship between the self and its actions in the discussion of self-understanding. In like

manner, unity is implied when he presupposes temporal stability of the self in terms of sameness (*idem*) and self-constancy (*ipse*), which is necessary, especially for the discussion of recognition. In the same way, unity is present in the cohesive representation of the past in the narrative of history.

But the limitation of consciousness (the wounded *cogito*) and the complexity of plurality (otherness) require a modest account of unity. An analogical unity between agents and actions is not causal or foundational unity. Temporal stability of sameness and constancy does not rule out the dangers of misrecognition and symmetric recognition. A cohesive narrative history resulted from validating specific testimonies through probabilistic judgment that considered them more probable than the others without being able to prove their reliability empirically. In short, modest accounts of unity are trusted, but without eliminating the role of suspicion. Actually, suspicion is even required for probabilistic reasoning.

What is at stake in the idea of attestation? Why is it necessary? Attestation seems to be Ricoeur's modest account of unity in an almost overwhelming temporal reality of plurality and otherness. Assuming a dominant temporal paradigm of plurality and otherness, is the affirmation of unity plausible? The French philosopher seems to perceptively stipulate that the polysemy of plurality is inclusive, which means that suspicion cannot be absolute. Otherwise, suspicion would not be open to otherness. In fact, attestation is defined not only as epistemologically possible but also as a mode of being in the polysemic plurality of ontology. In its non-absolute suspicion open to otherness and polysemic plurality, attestation dialectically makes room for trust and faith. The relevance of this ontological dimension of plurality and otherness for the articulation of trust and faith in attestation is a promising avenue for the later comparative dialogue with Agamben's *pistis*, which is the focus of Part II. However, as I summarize the need for Ricoeur's attestation, to propose its epistemological and ontological plausibility does not explain the necessity of attestation. Why is this modest account of unity necessary? The answer to this question seems to be situated in the realm of ethics. It seems that attestation is epistemologically plausible but ethically necessary. In fact, epistemology is at the service of ethics, given that the latter is defined by plurality. In other words, Ricoeur does not only acknowledge temporal plurality; he wants to reflect on how to deal with it properly. Therefore, attestation is necessary for self-understanding, recognition, and history, and these categories are significant because they are intended to ethically promote personal freedom, self-esteem, and responsible action for myself and for the other by means of a proper understanding of myself and of the other, in the context of our historical condition. Ricoeur spells out these concepts especially in terms of the desire to be, the ability to act, and the idea of a good and just life, in opposition to personal alienation and injustice.

3.2.2 The What of Attestation

As already indicated in the *why* of attestation, attestation is defined as a modest account of unity in an almost overwhelming temporal reality of plurality and otherness. In other words, despite all the limitations of the self in the dimensions of self-understanding, recognition, and history, it is possible to formulate a narrative identity of the self hermeneutically using the conscience, promises, and testimony. This hermeneutical formulation can be tentatively articulated because it is possible to identify in the symbols of language and culture signs of the capabilities of the self and its ultimate desire to be. While Ricoeur learned from the masters of suspicion (especially Freud in *De l'interprétation* and Nietzsche in *Soi-même comme un autre*) that interpretation requires suspicion, he did not hyperbolize it but used suspicion hermeneutically. Instead of hyperbolized suspicion, the French philosopher affirms the reality of temporal (narrative) contingency, which hinders him from embracing either abstract rational necessity or complete skepticism. Thus, Ricoeur does not use rational necessity or skeptical suspicion to utterly reject that something new (meaning) is possible. Rather, he is hermeneutically open to potentiality.

In light of this openness, attestation is ultimately a qualified (post-critical) trust in potentialities. In short, this is the *what* of attestation. By trusting in potentialities, the self is more open to trust than distrust. This emphasis on potentialities is particularly noted in Ricoeur's phenomenology of the capable human being ("I can"), which is a temporal or historical account of potentiality. More specifically, the "I can" in Ricoeur's phenomenology of the capable human being is not stated abstractly *a priori*. Instead, the capacities are temporally confirmed inasmuch as they are constantly enacted in history and interpreted and narrated by the self and by others. In other words, the history and narrative of enactments bears testimony or attests to the reality of these capacities. From this standpoint, we are not Cartesian subjects abstractly affirming the potentialities of human capacities. Rather, we may affirm them phenomenologically as historical and temporal witnesses.

Therefore, it could be said that the *what* of attestation is a trust in potentialities (human capacities) on the hermeneutical basis of testimony, which involves the hermeneutical self-testimony of the conscience, dealing with language and culture, that interacts with the testimony or the recognition of others, and the testimony of history, which is another temporal form of the testimony of others and/or self-testimony). Furthermore, the hermeneutical trust in potentialities (human capabilities), hermeneutically grounded in the testimony of the past, enables the self-confidence necessary for making promises about the future, inasmuch as the self assumes and anticipates that it will have the capacity to fulfill them in the future. Thus, the historical experiences of memory (testimony) and anticipation (promise) spell out the temporal understanding of the *what* of attestation, in terms of trust in potentialities.

In addition, it is important to qualify the *what* of attestation in terms of a linguistic or spoken trust in potentialities. The crucial role of language in attestation is noticed, for instance, in the characterization of both testimony and promises as speech acts and narratives about human capabilities. Also, the hermeneutical trust in potentialities discerns human capabilities in traces or testimonies, or even promises, indirectly found in the symbols of language in culture as a whole. From this perspective, the *what* of attestation is a hermeneutical trust in the potentialities of language. To put it more sharply, attestation has faith that language is able to express being, particularly the mode of being as true. This is the (second) faith that language can hermeneutically reveal meaning about the self. For example, the language of promise, when truthful, hermeneutically reveals the will to self-constancy, the desire to be faithful. The term hermeneutically here needs to be further clarified by the idea of asymmetric dialectics, which is the basic idea of the *how* of attestation to be briefly described below.

3.2.3 The How of Attestation

Taking into account the *why* and the *what* of attestation outlined in the previous sections, the answer to the *how* of attestation is basically dialectics. Conscience is situated in the dialectics between the self and the other. Active recognition identifies the self in the dialectics of the temporal continuity of sameness (*idem*) and self-constancy (*ipse*), while recognition as a whole is discussed in the dialectics of recognizing (active) and being recognized (passive), considering that these two poles are combined in the phenomenology of promises. Further, the historical reflection on testimony dialectically combines internal personal conviction with external narrative of actions. These dialectical dimensions in the ontology of attestation are accompanied by the epistemological dialectics of belief and suspicion, recognition and misrecognition, trust and doubt.

Why does attestation need to be dialectical? If attestation describes a modest account of unity in an almost overwhelming temporal reality of plurality and otherness, attestation needs to be able to acknowledge plurality and otherness, on the one hand, and to tentatively organize them in such a way that it leads to unity, on the other hand. The way Ricoeur does that is by delineating several dialectical poles. However, it is important to notice how this dialectic works, that is, how these dialectic poles interact. In keeping with the assumption of plurality and otherness, Ricoeur does not envision a final synthesis coming from a combination of the poles. Furthermore, the dialectics of attestation is not symmetric. The poles are not treated in the same way. In the discussion of mutual recognition, Ricoeur warns against the danger of symmetric plurality. In the case of trust and suspicion, while one does not overrule the other, suspicion necessarily contributes to the confidence of attestation,

as in the example of the role of suspicion in the probabilistic judgment of competing testimonies. While suspicion is never ruled out, it contributes to the attestation of conscience in self-knowledge, to the attestation of active and passive recognition (especially in the case of promises), and to the attestation related to the historical use of testimonies.

In this asymmetric dialectic, in a sense, attestation is paradoxically greater than suspicion, but it never suppresses the role of suspicion. This idea of being greater here means that this dialectical asymmetry of hermeneutical attestation renders trust plausible without making it absolute.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

Considering the contribution of Part I envisioned for the overall purpose of the present research, which is to introduce Ricoeur's attestation to the discussion of the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation, the systematic picture of the concept of attestation clearly indicates that this concept refers to a trust in potentiality and transformation. Indeed, the *what* of attestation is described as a post-critical (non-Cartesian, historical and phenomenological) trust of human potentialities on the basis of what can be witnessed about them or their glimpses in human experience and history. At the same time, the *why* and *how* of attestation, respectively defined in terms of plurality (or otherness) and dialectics, hermeneutically qualify the trust or faith in potentiality and transformation as non-absolute, given the importance of (non-absolute) suspicion and the contingent reality of uncertainty.

Yet, as I have indicated at the end of my dialogue with the secondary literature in the introduction of Part I, Pamela Anderson could be right in the criticism that trust is still greater than suspicion in the asymmetric dialectics of Ricoeur's attestation. To be sure, the structure of dialectical attestation itself has to be open to Anderson's point, given its affirmation of plurality and suspicion. Nonetheless, in my estimation, the measure of trust in attestation should not be seen merely as wishful optimism regarding potentiality and transformation. Rather, Ricoeur's affirmation of human capabilities and metaphysical contingency, which implies the anthropological (non-absolute) possibility of learning from others and the (non-absolute) potential for transformation, highlights the place of human responsibility for actions in the realm of ethics. In other words, the emphasis on trust and conviction in potentiality and transformation is also an ethical demand for responsible action in dialectical attestation.

After the description and systematization of attestation in Part I, my task in Part II will be depicting and articulating Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis*. As I

have previously indicated, the systematic delineation of Ricoeur's attestation (Part I) and Agamben's *pistis* (Part II) will be instrumental for the dialogue between the two concerning the experience of trust or faith in potentiality and transformation (Part III). As I transition from Ricoeur's attestation to Agamben's *pistis*, it is noteworthy that trust or faith is not purely subjective or naïve in Ricoeur's hermeneutical thinking, as attestation is necessarily shaped by a robust dialectics of trust and suspicion, and not by trust alone. However, the French philosopher focuses his analysis of dialectical trust on the level of selfhood (philosophical anthropology), while an elaboration of trust in the context of ontological and metaphysical potentiality is still lacking. My suggestion is that Agamben's discussion of Paul's *pistis* provides a helpful reflection about trust at the level of ontological and metaphysical potentiality (Part II) for the construction of a larger framework of trust in potentiality and transformation in the context of philosophical anthropology and metaphysics (Part III).

PART II

DIALECTICAL PISTIS IN THE MESSIANISM OF GIORGIO AGAMBEN

Introduction and Dialogue with the Secondary Literature

The focus of Part II of the present research is on the dialectical notion of Paul's *pistis* in Agamben. After the description and systematization of Ricoeurian attestation in Part I, which indicated that attestation is a dialectical account of trust or faith in the context of selfhood (philosophical anthropology), it is time now to move to the depiction and articulation of Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* as a dialectical account of trust or faith in the larger context of political ontology and metaphysics. Parts I and II provide the conceptual tools for the dialogue between Ricoeur and Agamben regarding the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation, which is the task of Part III. If attestation belongs to Ricoeur's hermeneutical project for philosophical anthropology, political messianism is the ontological metaphysical framework in which Agamben develops his dialectical understanding of Paul's *pistis*. Whereas *pistis* refers more directly to conviction and trust, messianism conveys the hope of potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political philosophy.

Part II is organized into three chapters. The first two chapters (4 and 5) interact more directly with Agamben's writings, while the third one (Chapter 6) sketches a systematic overview of Agamben's account of *pistis*. The systematic delineation in Chapter 6 addresses the question of *what is at stake in the idea of pistis*. The answer to this question explains the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of *pistis*, in the context of the political messianism of the *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta*. The main contribution of Part II for the purposes of the present study is the articulation of Agamben's *pistis* as an experience of trust in potentiality and transformation in the framework of political messianism.

Similar to Part I, I will introduce the dialectical notion of Paul's *pistis* in the messianism of Agamben in dialogue with the secondary literature below in order to facilitate the understanding of the following chapters.

While a treatment of contemporary philosophical messianism goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to briefly highlight the emergence of messianism as a philosophical topic in the discussion of German-Jewish thinkers, such as Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), and Gershom Scholem (1897-1982).⁵¹⁷ Philosophers in the French-speaking world,

⁵¹⁷ See Alex Murray, *Giorgio Agamben* (London: Routledge, 2010), 128; Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. Barbara Harshar (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Ivan Boldyrev, *Ernst Bloch and His Contemporaries: Locating Utopian Messianism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Critical Theory and Society*, ed. Stephen Eric

such as Emanuel Levinas (1906-1995) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), are also mentioned in the philosophical contemporary discussion of Jewish messianism.⁵¹⁸ In short, the messianic in contemporary continental philosophy describes “a ‘weak’ force” that “works from within” established forms in history “to undo its normative or proprietary claims.”⁵¹⁹ This would be an “immanent, pantheistic model of messianic time.”⁵²⁰ With this larger context of discussion in view, it is noteworthy that Agamben’s messianic reflection, which is “a certain (immanent) Jewish (Pauline) conception of messianism,”⁵²¹ often and explicitly dialogues with Benjamin. As Vivian Liska underscores, he wrote between 1982 and 1992 “several essays on Benjamin’s messianism that emphasize a redemptive reversal.”⁵²²

Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York; London: Routledge, 1989), 255-263; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, trans. Michael Meyer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Martin Kavka, “Reading Messianically with Gershom Scholem,” in *Rethinking the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, ed. Michael L Morgan and Steven Weitzman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 298-308.

⁵¹⁸. See Terence Holden, *Levinas, Messianism and Parody* (London: Continuum, 2011); Martin Kavka, “Levinas’s Accounts of Messianism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 361-382; Richard Kearney, “Derrida and Messianic Atheism,” in *The Trace of God: Derrida and Religion*, ed. Edward Baring and Peter E. Gordon (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 199-212; Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York; London: Routledge, 1994); Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (New York; London: Routledge, 2001), 97-192.

⁵¹⁹. Colby Dickinson, *Between the Canon and the Messiah: Between the Canon and the Messiah* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 5. See also Martin Kavka, *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Pierre Bouretz, *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Arthur Bradley and Paul Fletcher, eds., *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011); Michael G. Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power: Figures of a Time to Come in Benjamin, Derrida, and Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Arthur Willemse, *The Motif of the Messianic: Law, Life, and Writing in Agamben’s Reading of Derrida* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

⁵²⁰. Dickinson, *Between the Canon and the Messiah*, 39.

⁵²¹. Dickinson, *Between the Canon and the Messiah*, 72.

⁵²². Vivian Liska, “Messianic Language and the Idea of Prose: Benjamin and Agamben,” in *Messianic Thought Outside Theology*, ed. Anna Glazova and Paul North (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 94. See, e.g., Giorgio Agamben, “The Messiah and the Sovereign: The Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin,” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed., tr. and with an introd. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 160-174. Agamben delivered this lecture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in July 1992, which was initially published in *Anima e paura: Studi in onore di Mechele Ranchetti* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1998), 11-22. See also Carlo Salzani, “Walter Benjamin,” in *Agamben’s Philosophical Lineage*, ed. Adam Kotsko and Carlo Salzani (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 27-38; Vittoria Borsò et al., eds., *Benjamin–Agamben: Politik, Messianismus, Kabbala* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010).

The philosophical discussion of Paul's messianism, more specifically, includes names such as Martin Heidegger, Jacob Taubes, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou.⁵²³ These names, among others, are taken into consideration in the references to Agamben's messianism in the secondary literature, which is broadly outlined in this introduction.⁵²⁴ In fact, the work *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* constitutes the most developed messianic expression of our Italian philosopher⁵²⁵ and bears the influence of Heidegger and Taubes.⁵²⁶ A key feature of contemporary philosophical messianism, with particular reference to Agamben, is the rejection of the historical perspective of teleological Hegelian dialectics and all the determinations resulting from it.⁵²⁷ Hence, instead of a teleological future, the focus of this messianism is on the contingency and potentialities of the present, which offer the possibility of transformation.⁵²⁸ As Leland de la Durantaye underlines, the messianism of Benjamin and Agamben "is an attempt to grasp the potentialities of our present situation."⁵²⁹ Furthermore, according to the Jewish tradition of Benjamin's perspective, which influences Agamben's messianic thinking, the messianic is not an individual but a communitarian experience, necessarily involving political and public dimensions.⁵³⁰

Adam Kotsko summarizes Agamben's political thinking with two triads. The elements of the first triad are "messianism, potentiality, and the theory of language."⁵³¹ As already indicated, the messianism of our Italian philosopher

^{523.} See Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*; Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of the Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008); Badiou, *Saint Paul*.

^{524.} See Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Paul's Dialectic in Present-Day Philosophy," *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 32, no. 1 (2016): 39-55; Vassilios Paipais, "Already/Not Yet: St Paul's Eschatology and the Modern Critique of Historicism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44, no. 9 (2018): 1015-1038; Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Žižek, and others* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2010).

^{525.} Catherine Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben* (London: Routledge, 2008), 116.

^{526.} van der Heiden, "Paul's Dialectic in Present-Day Philosophy," 41. Agamben dedicates *Il tempo che resta* to Taubes *in memoriam*. He also mentions the connection of Taubes with Scholem. See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 3.

^{527.} Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 33-36; Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 81-120; Paipais, "Already/Not Yet," 1020-1021.

^{528.} Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 129; Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 120, 388; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "On What Remains: Paul's Proclamation of Contingency," in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 116; van der Heiden, *Ontology After Ontotheology*, 240-261.

^{529.} Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 376. See also Sami Sjöberg, "Remaking the Present through Language: Messianic Time in the Works of Yvan Goll and Isidore Isou contra Benjamin and Agamben," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14, no. 2 (2015): 204-206.

^{530.} Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 373.

^{531.} Adam Kotsko, *Agamben's Philosophical Trajectory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 58. See also Rasmus Ugilt, *Giorgio Agamben: Political Philosophy* (Penrith, UK: Humanities-Ebooks, 2014); Daniel McLoughlin, *Agamben and Radical Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Mathew Abbott, *The Figure of This World: Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology*

emphasizes the potentialities of the present. In its turn, the reflection on potentiality is related to the discussion of pure language.⁵³² Situated in the larger framework of the first triad, or more precisely as a problematization to be explored in this framework, the second triad is described in terms of “law, life, and sovereignty.”⁵³³ The elements of the second triad highlight the problematization of biopolitics,⁵³⁴ which is the problem of sovereignty power and the law that manipulate life. This is the problem of the crisis of the law, as it becomes coercive, repressive, and destructive.⁵³⁵ Van der Heiden argues that, from a Pauline standpoint, the law that was originally supposed to bring the good life “has turned into a universal accusation of everyone.”⁵³⁶ In the context of his suggestion that Agamben’s messianism somehow follows the tradition of Sabbatian Judaism, especially with regard to the problem of the law, Piotr Sawczyński explains that in this tradition, the fall of humanity entailed the reductionism of the “full potentiality of the law [...] to its penalizing function.”⁵³⁷ Scholem identifies in Jewish messianic utopianism an “anarchic

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); German Eduardo Primera, *The Political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben: Signatures of Life and Power* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Claire Colebrook and Jason Maxwell, *Agamben* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron, and Alex Murray, eds., *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Tom Frost, ed., *Giorgio Agamben: Legal, Political and Philosophical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2013); Nedoh Boštjan, *Ontology and Perversion: Deleuze, Agamben, Lacan* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 95–110; Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Thanos Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben: Power, Law and the Uses of Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2010); Andrew Norris, ed., *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jessica Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013); Eva Geulen, *Giorgio Agamben zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2005); David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics (To Imagine a Form of Life, II)* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Sergei Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); William Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben. Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

⁵³². Kotsko, *Agamben’s Philosophical Trajectory*, 57. For a larger discussion of language and literature in Agamben, see William Watkin, *Literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoeisis* (London: Continuum, 2010).

⁵³³. Kotsko, *Agamben’s Philosophical Trajectory*, 69.

⁵³⁴. For a larger discussion of biopolitics in the literature, see Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, trans. Eric Frederick Trump (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy C. Campbell (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). In fact, Esposito’s approach to biopolitics is contrary to Agamben’s position.

⁵³⁵. Paipais, “Already/Not Yet,” 1026; Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 379; Piotr Sawczyński, “Giorgio Agamben—a Modern Sabbatian? Marranic Messianism and the Problem of Law,” *Religions* 10, no. 1 (2019): 4, 8; Antonio Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith: Agamben’s Interpretation of Pauline Faith,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 61, no. 1 (2014): 138; van der Heiden, “On What Remains,” 120.

⁵³⁶. van der Heiden, “On What Remains,” 120.

⁵³⁷. Sawczyński, “Giorgio Agamben—a Modern Sabbatian?,” 6.

element” that is close to “the Pauline ‘freedom’” of “antinomian potentialities,”⁵³⁸ such as the question of the status and, more precisely, the application of the law/Torah in the messianic age.⁵³⁹ At the same time, there is the idea in utopianism that “The law as such can be fulfilled in its total plenitude only in a redeemed world.”⁵⁴⁰ Scholem presents Sabbatian groups as extreme examples of messianic freedom in the crisis of tradition in Jewish messianism.⁵⁴¹ I do not think that Agamben needs to be necessarily qualified as a Sabbatian once his proximity to utopian mystic Jewish messianism (Kabbalism,⁵⁴² for instance) is affirmed.

In any case, the messianic is particularly related to the problem of the law in Agamben.⁵⁴³ In his messianism, Paul’s discussion of faith in Romans is related to the law and not with reason. In other words, Paul’s pair in Romans is not faith and reason, but faith and law.⁵⁴⁴ In the dialectical relationship of this pair, faith is key for the law’s deactivation (*katargeō*).⁵⁴⁵ This deactivation is spelled out in terms of the *as not* (*hōs mē*) of 1 Corinthians 7:29–31, which does not entail a factual change in the sovereign reality of the law (that is, it does not destroy the law) but implies a “qualitative transformation” of a new experience⁵⁴⁶ or interpretation⁵⁴⁷ of the factual condition that enables a new use of this condition and, by implication, a new use of the law. This new “experience

⁵³⁸. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 21.

⁵³⁹. See also William David Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1952).

⁵⁴⁰. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 20. The following statements express the convictions of messianic utopianism: “A positive commandment or a prohibition could scarcely still be the same when it no longer had for its object the separation of good and evil to which man was called, but rather arose from the Messianic spontaneity of human freedom purely flowing forth.” Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 20. “Where everything is holy there will no longer be need of restrictions and prohibitions.” Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 24.

⁵⁴¹. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism*, 75.

⁵⁴². Matthew Sharpe explores the connection of Agamben with mystic medieval kabbalistic messianism, highlighting messianic kabbalist notions such as antinomianism, the fulfillment of the law as its transgression, the Torah as no longer applying, and the cosmic Sabbath. See Matthew Sharpe, “Only Agamben Can Save Us? Against the Messianic Turn Recently Adopted in Critical Theory,” *Bible and Critical Theory* 5 (2009): 40.2, 40.4, 40.7.

⁵⁴³. For examples of secondary literature on the notion of law in Agamben, see Thanos Zartaloudis, ed., *Agamben and Law* (London: Routledge, 2015); Anton Schütz, “Thinking the Law with and against Luhmann, Legendre, Agamben,” *Law and Critique* 11, no. 2 (2000): 107–136.

⁵⁴⁴. van der Heiden and van Kooten, “Epilogue,” in: *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 327.

⁵⁴⁵. Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 137.

⁵⁴⁶. Antonio Cimino, “Europe and Paul of Tarsus: Giorgio Agamben on the Overcoming of Europe’s Crisis,” in: *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 327; Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 130–131; van der Heiden, “On What Remains,” 118.

⁵⁴⁷. As van der Heiden indicates, the deactivation “does not reduce to nothing what is suspended but makes it free for another usage or interpretation.” Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “The dialectics of Paul: on exception, grace, and use in Badiou and Agamben,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 77, no. 3 (2016): 185.

through the filter of the *hōs mē*⁵⁴⁸ is the life of faith. As Gideon Baker indicates, the world “remains in place, but is no longer experienced as it was before.”⁵⁴⁹

According to this view, Antonio Cimino summarizes Agamben’s conception of messianism using three keywords from Paul, namely, vocation (*klēsis*), *hōs mē*, and use (*chrēsis*).⁵⁵⁰ In this structure, the *hōs mē* is the negative dimension of vocation on the one hand, in the sense of the messianic attitude of remaining in the same

⁵⁴⁸. Antonio Cimino, “Agamben’s political messianism in ‘The Time That Remains,’” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77, no. 3 (2016): 106.

⁵⁴⁹. Gideon Baker, “Paul and Political Theology: Nihilism, Empire and the Messianic Vocation,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 3 (2015): 303.

⁵⁵⁰. For discussions on Agamben’s notion of messianism, see Colby Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 86–98; Catherine Mills, “Messianism,” in *The Agamben Dictionary*, ed. Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 130–133; Attell, *Giorgio Agamben*, 213–253; Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 366–382; Ted Jennings, “Paul the Apostle,” in *Agamben’s Philosophical Lineage*, 76–86; Kevin McLaughlin, “Culture and Messianism: Disinterestedness in Arnold,” *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2008): 615–639; Richard Kearney, “Paul’s notion of *Dunamis*: Between the Possible and the Impossible,” in *St. Paul among the Philosophers*, ed. John Caputo and Linda Martin Alcoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 150–154; Alain Gignac, “Agamben’s Paul Thinker of the Messianic,” in *Paul in the Grip of the Philosophers: The Apostle and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. Peter Frick (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 165–192; Ezra Delahaye, “About *chronos* and *kairos*: On Agamben’s interpretation of Pauline temporality through Heidegger,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77, no. 3 (2016): 85–101; Sjöberg, “Remaking The Present Through Language,” 199–214; Tawia Ansah, “New Adventures of Old Pauline Law,” *Griffith Law Review* 18, no. 2 (2009): 385–404; Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky and Catharine Diehl, “The Image of Happiness We Harbor: The Messianic Power of Weakness in Cohen, Benjamin, and Paul,” *New German Critique* 105, no. 105 (2008): 57–69; Sergei Prozorov, “The Katechon in the Age of Biopolitical Nihilism,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 45, no. 4 (2012): 483–503; John Roberts, “The ‘Returns to Religion’: Messianism, Christianity and the Revolutionary Tradition. Part II: The Pauline Tradition,” *Historical Materialism* 16, no. 3 (2008): 87–95; Antonio Cimino, “Agamben’s political messianism in ‘The Time That Remains,’” 102–118; Boštjan Nedoh, “When the Tiger Leaps Into the Past: Holocaust, History, and Messianic Materialism in Giorgio Agamben, Walter Benjamin, and László Nemes’ Son of Saul,” *Angelaki* 24, no. 5 (2019): 44–60; Alfonso Galindo Hervás, “Delay or accelerate the end? Messianism, Accelerationism and Presentism,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 77, no. 4–5 (2016): 307–323; David Ferris, “Agamben and the Messianic: The Slightest of Differences,” in *Messianic Thought Outside Theology*, 73–92; Boštjan Nedoh, “Messianism between religion and post-religion: on Giorgio Agamben’s ‘new politics,’” *Journal for Cultural Research* 19, no. 4 (2015): 337–351; Eleanor Kaufman, “The Saturday of Messianic Time: Agamben and Badiou on the Apostle Paul,” in *Paul and the Philosophers*, ed. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 297–309; Christopher Brittain, “Political Theology at a Standstill: Adorno and Agamben on the Messianic,” *Thesis Eleven* 102, no. 1 (2010): 39–56; Alessandra Scotti, “Filosofare alla fine dei Tempi. Riflessioni Agambeniane,” *Scienza & Filosofia* no. 8 (2012): 92–105; Jenny Doussan, “Time and Presence in Agamben’s Critique of Deconstruction,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2013): 183–202; Alfonso Galindo Hervás, “Mesianismo Impolítico,” *Isegoría* 39 (2008): 239–250; Patrick O’Connor, “Redemptive remnants: Agamben’s human messianism,” in *The Messianic Now: Philosophy, Religion, Culture*, ed. Arthur Bradley and Paul Fletcher (London: Routledge, 2011), 155–172; Job de Meyere, “The Care for the Present: Giorgio Agamben’s Actualisation of the Pauline Messianic Experience,” *Bijdragen: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 70, no. 2 (2009): 168–184; Cimino, *Enactment, Politics, and Truth*.

factual condition, and it is the positive dimension of use on the other, in the sense of potentially enabling a new use of this condition.⁵⁵¹ This structure seems to correspond to what van der Heiden considers the messianic attitude of faith as a mode of living, which is more precisely described in terms of an attitude of perseverance in the factual condition. The messianic perspective of the present time does not offer something to be automatically experienced but rather “requires perseverance and persistence.”⁵⁵² This perseverance is spelled out by the basic refusal of conformity⁵⁵³ to the repressive sovereignty of the distinctions of the law, as experienced in the factual condition, and this refusal appears to inform the Agamben’s conception of deactivation.

The idea of faith as a mode of being highlights the Heideggerian view of Paul’s *pistis* (faith), in which the focus is on the *how* of faith instead of its *what* or content.⁵⁵⁴ Agamben explores this idea from the standpoint of language theory as he elaborates on the “performative character of faith”⁵⁵⁵ in Paul’s messianism. In his discussion of the word of faith (Romans 10:6-10), he affirms a transformation of language in which its denotative function of describing things in the world is deactivated so that language can be used in a new way, that is, only performatively. This means that language no longer refers to things, but it becomes self-referential. According to the potentiality of performative speech, language no longer refers to facts but rather produces them.⁵⁵⁶ In this case, instead of an emphasis on the *what* of language and its contents, the focus is restricted to the *how*. From this perspective, Lorenzo Chiesa speaks of “the word of faith as a form of life” rather than affirming the notion of a content of faith, in which “professing one’s faith is a self-referential speech whose effectiveness relies on its being performed.”⁵⁵⁷ In his discussion of performative faith, Peter Zeillinger connects performative speech, especially in terms of oaths, with politics and law systems. In his words, “Only with reference to subjects identifiable by their utterances, a system of law can be elaborated and a political structure based on juridical decisions can be established, in order to guarantee some sort of continuity, security, and equity for the individual as well as for the community.”⁵⁵⁸

551. Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 129-130.

552. van der Heiden, “On What Remains,” 118-119.

553. van der Heiden, “On What Remains,” 119, 129.

554. Paipais, “Already/Not Yet,” 1019. See Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 128.

555. Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 128.

556. Cimino, “Messianic Experience of Language and Performativity of Faith,” 135-137.

557. Lorenzo Chiesa, “Giorgio Agamben’s Franciscan Ontology,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2009): 105-116.

558. Peter Zeillinger, “Disillusioning Reason—Rethinking Faith: Paul, Performative Speech Acts and the Political History of the Occident in Agamben and Foucault,” in *Saint Paul and Philosophy*, 107.

This connection may suggest how Agamben's account of performative faith envisages the potentiality of a new use of the law and politics.

There are in the secondary literature at least two significant debates about the interpretation of Agamben's messianism that impact the understanding of faith in his thought. The first debate concerns the political efficacy of faith and its deactivation of the law. One of the criticisms against Agamben is that his ideas are quite vague in concrete politics.⁵⁵⁹ Antonio Negri disapproves of Agamben's proposal for being too mystical, contemplative, and passive, lacking constructive and productive activity.⁵⁶⁰ The focus on the *how* of faith instead of its content, just as the emphasis on the lack of content in non-denotative language, seems to contribute to the vagueness of how exactly performative faith deactivates the law. To be sure, Agamben avoids the idea of content in order to break the cycle of repressive sovereignty that is characterized by its contents. But arguably the price to be paid is a measure of vagueness in his theory. Moreover, Cimino even doubts that Agamben's messianism is able to break that cycle since this messianism appears to remain

captured by the logic of sovereignty insomuch as it only deactivates—or seems to deactivate—the Jewish law. Since the Pauline *κατάργησις* does not destroy, or abolish, but merely deactivates, or suspends, the old legal order, it still maintains a link to it in the form of a suspension or an exception. Therefore, as far as I can see, Pauline messianism does not succeed in breaking the circularity of sovereignty.⁵⁶¹

His conclusion is that once “the messianic suspension, or deactivation, underlying the *ὡς μὴ* cannot be a sovereign suspension, it can only be an inner, or spiritual, suspension without any of the visible effects or alterations.”⁵⁶² This conclusion implies that Agamben's messianic faith is more an existential experience rather than a concrete political attitude. In contrast to Cimino's view, Chiesa stipulates that Agamben's messianism ultimately entails a reconfiguration of biopolitics in terms of “positive biopolitics.” More specifically, messianic faith opens the possibility of a delineation of “new concepts of sovereignty, power, and law which, as forms of life, definitely undo the inclusive exclusion of bare life.”⁵⁶³ Therefore, according to

^{559.} Lotte List, “Political Theology and Historical Materialism: Reading Benjamin against Agamben,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, no. 3 (2021): 119.

^{560.} Antonio Negri, “Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic,” in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 123. See also Kearney, “Paul's Notion of Dunamis,” 154.

^{561.} Cimino, “Europe and Paul of Tarsus,” 304.

^{562.} Cimino, “Europe and Paul of Tarsus,” 306.

^{563.} Chiesa, “Giorgio Agamben's Franciscan Ontology,” 114.

Chiesa's position, Agamben's messianic faith is not only an existential experience but envisages an effective political break of the cycle of repressive sovereign law, even though this break is viewed in terms of potential rather than content.

Another criticism that challenges the political effectiveness of faith or *pistis* in Agamben is that his proposal is narrowly focused on the notion of sovereignty as the political problem to be addressed. According to Judith Butler, it is necessary to develop a broader understanding of the "analytics of power that would include sovereignty as one of its features but would also be able to talk about the kinds of mobilizations and containments of populations that are not conceptualizable as the acts of a sovereign, and which proceed through different operations of state power."⁵⁶⁴ Obviously, if the problem to be addressed is broader than the notion of sovereignty, the solution of Agamben's *pistis* becomes even less concrete or effective.

If the first debate problematizes the political effectiveness of the deactivation of the law performed by faith, the second centers on the question of whether Agamben's messianic faith is dualistic or dialectic in its relationship with the law. The dualistic interpretation is maintained especially by Simon Critchley, who considers Agamben a crypto-Marcionite in his reading of Paul.⁵⁶⁵ Marcion read Paul from the perspective of ontological dualism, separating the God of the world of creation from the God of the world of redemption.⁵⁶⁶ In his discussion of the suspension (*katargeō*) of the law in Agamben, Critchley argues that the Italian philosopher "seems to want to push Benjamin's messianism toward a radical dualism of, on the one hand, the profane order of the created world and, on the other hand, the messianic order of redemption."⁵⁶⁷

Conversely, van der Heiden maintains that Agamben's messianic faith is dialectic rather than dualist.⁵⁶⁸ In his interpretation of Paul's messianic concept of the remnant in Agamben, van der Heiden points out that the Italian philosopher envisages a transformation instead of a substitution of the definition of God's people by means of the messianic division of the divisions themselves provided by the law (in the old definition of the people),⁵⁶⁹ which implies the deactivation of the definition of the law. While the language of substitution belongs to dualism, the notion of transformation refers to the logic of dialectics. According to this logic, the suspension (*katargeō*) of the law is understood in terms of rendering it inoperative. More precisely, the suspension concerns first and foremost "the works of the law, i.e., the normal

^{564.} Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London: Seagull Books, 2007), 102.

^{565.} Critchley, "You Are Not Your Own," 251.

^{566.} Critchley, "You Are Not Your Own," 248.

^{567.} Critchley, "You Are Not Your Own," 251.

^{568.} For additional literature on Agamben's dialectic, see Negri, "Giorgio Agamben," 109-125.

^{569.} van der Heiden, "Paul's Dialectic in Present-Day Philosophy," 48-50.

functioning of the law” and not the law as such. At the same time, and here is the idea of transformation, the suspension paradoxically produces the ultimate fulfillment of the law.⁵⁷⁰ In contrast to the substitution of dualism and its emphasis on the nihilist⁵⁷¹ negation of the present world, the suspension or deactivation (*katargeō*) in Agamben’s reading of Paul’s dialectics “does not reduce to nothing what is suspended but makes it free for another usage.”⁵⁷² In my estimation, the idea that Agamben’s messianic faith is more dialectic than dualist offers a more nuanced portrayal of his thinking. However, the consideration of the view that Agamben’s messianic faith is dualist potentially stimulates the examination of the consistency of his dialectics and the way it functions.

In fact, the two debates regarding the political efficacy of messianic *pistis* and the question of dualism or dialectics are significantly connected. In the second debate, the affirmation of the notion of dialectics depends on the clarification of the concept of transformation and its distinction from the idea of negation and dualism. Arguably, the political efficacy of *pistis* questioned in the first debate is related to the conception of transformation and the type of dialectical thinking advanced by Agamben’s messianism. The critique of vagueness and the expectation of an unambiguous political efficacy that breaks the cycle of sovereignty in a more concrete way would seem to push Agamben’s messianic *pistis* and transformation to the actualization of a dialectical teleological synthesis, which the Italian philosopher presumably seeks to avoid. In opposition to Hegelian-type dialectics, Agamben would situate his dialectics in the realm of potentiality rather than actuality. His conception of transformation lacks concrete specification, in contrast to concrete results actualized in a Hegelian final synthesis.

Another criticism that involves the dialectics of *pistis* in Agamben concerns his use of the apostle Paul. To be sure, this is not a philosophical dispute about the internal consistency of Agamben’s theory but refers to the way he interprets Paul and employs this interpretation as the building blocks for his philosophical arguments. Overall, this type of criticism would come from theologians and New Testament (Pauline) scholars. Among the points of contention raised by Roland Boer⁵⁷³ is the

⁵⁷⁰. van der Heiden, “Paul’s Dialectic in Present-Day Philosophy,” 51.

⁵⁷¹. See Baker, “Paul and Political Theology,” 293–315.

⁵⁷². van der Heiden, “The dialectics of Paul,” 185.

⁵⁷³. See Roland Boer, “The Conundrums of Giorgio Agamben: A Commentary on *A Commentary on the Letters to the Romans*,” *Sino-Christian Studies* no. 3 (2007): 7–36. Boer’s points of contention include (1) Agamben’s use of the canonical Pauline corpus without any discussion of authorship issues debated in the literature; (2) Agamben’s assumption that *pistis* is always pre-legal (pre-law, in the sense of being prior to normative formally codified law) in Paul. In his reading of Romans 4 and Galatians 3 (especially vv. 15–19, 21–23), Boer suggests that *pistis* seems pre- and post-legal in Paul’s aporia. See Boer, “The Conundrums of Giorgio Agamben,” 12, 25–26. Concerning authorship debates about the canonical Pauline corpus, it seems to me that Agamben would benefit from a

dialectical interpretation of the keyword *katargeō* in Paul, which is articulated philologically but requires the use of imported concepts (that is, concepts not coming from Paul's thinking) to develop the ideas of deactivation and potentiality in Agamben's juridical argument.⁵⁷⁴

I will briefly come back to the debates on the effectiveness and the dialectics of Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* at the end of Part II. For now, it is sufficient to say that this overall introduction to the notion of *pistis* in Agamben's messianism indicates that dialectics largely defines the nature of this notion. Part II of the present study aims at deepening the understanding of the dialectical nature of *pistis* in Agamben's messianism by exploring the fundamental question of *what is at stake in his idea of pistis*. This question is unpacked as follows: why did the Italian thinker develop this concept in his messianic philosophy? What is exactly the messianic role of *pistis*? How dialectical is *pistis* and why? Overall, the discussion of these questions requires a systematic account of messianism and *pistis* in Agamben, which will be elaborated in two steps.

The first step will deal with the *Homo Sacer* series, while the second step will focus on the work *Il tempo che resta*. The selection of these writings from Agamben takes into account their thematic contribution to the understanding of messianic *pistis*. Whereas *Il tempo che resta* is generally acknowledged as the most explicit and thorough exposition of Agamben's messianism, as already indicated above, it is the *Homo Sacer* series that presents a clearer interaction between messianic thinking and political philosophy in Agamben. Therefore, I will start with the *Homo Sacer* series in order to delineate the broad picture of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political messianism.⁵⁷⁵ Then, I will move to *Il tempo che resta* in the second step to explore a more detailed and concentrated account of trust in Agamben's messianic *pistis*. The fundamental assumption that underlies this way of organizing the chapters is that *Il tempo che resta* is a helpful interpretive key for understanding the political messianism of *Homo Sacer*. Cimino expresses this idea by arguing that *Il tempo che resta* plays a "crucial role [...] in the development of the theories outlined in *Homo Sacer*."⁵⁷⁶ Given the focus of Part II on the concept of *pistis*, this interpretive key will be explored at the end of the discussion, after the overall picture of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the political messianism in the *Homo Sacer* series.

dialogue with Luke Timothy Johnson, *Constructing Paul: The Canonical Paul*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2020), 6-15, 33-41, 62-92.

⁵⁷⁴. Boer, "The Conundrums of Giorgio Agamben," 15.

⁵⁷⁵. For a discussion on Paul in the *Homo Sacer* series, see Adam Kotsko, "Paul and the Jewish Alternative," in *Agamben's Coming Philosophy: Finding a New Use for Theology*, ed. Colby Dickinson and Adam Kotsko (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 219-236.

⁵⁷⁶. Cimino, "Agamben's political messianism in 'The Time That Remains,'" 115.

As I intend to offer in Part II a systematic description of Agamben's dialectical *pistis*, I will first explore the conception of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the *Homo Sacer* series in chapter 4 to delineate the conceptual framework for trust in Agamben. Then, in chapter 5, I will provide a systematic picture of *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*. Finally, I will give a systematic overview of trust in Agamben's messianic *pistis* in chapter 6, with a focus on the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of *pistis*.

CHAPTER 4

Pistis, Potentiality and Transformation
in the *Homo Sacer* Series

This investigation of the concepts of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the political messianism of the *Homo Sacer* series requires an understanding of Agamben's methodological use of signature and philosophical archeology,⁵⁷⁷ according to which the genealogical roots of a given concept in a specific field of knowledge are found in another field. In the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben explores messianism as a methodological signature to discuss political theory and ontology. This methodology assumes that Western modern politics and ontology find their conceptual roots in Christian tradition and are a secularized form of messianic eschatology.⁵⁷⁸ Another field of knowledge that is methodologically used as a signature in the series, also associated with messianism, ontology, and political theory, is the area of language. Since language and discourse are intrinsic to both Christian religion and philosophy, as emphasized in *Il sacramento del linguaggio*, the performative discussion of *pistis* is particularly significant.

The present chapter will be attentive to the methodological use of messianism and language as signatures for the discussion of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political thinking in the *Homo Sacer* series. Given the thematic focus of the present chapter, two titles of the series will not be treated in this chapter, namely, *II,2. Stasis* (2015) and *II,5. Opus Dei* (2012), as I do not see them as crucial for the purposes of the chapter. In most of the titles, we can discern traces of potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political messianism. They become more clear as he discusses the ontological ground of political thinking. The concept of *pistis* or faith is not explicitly developed in these discussions, even though I will briefly mention references to it in my treatment of *Altissima povertà* and *L'uso dei corpi*. The lack of development of the concept of *pistis* or faith is the reason why most of my subtitles below focus on potentiality and transformation. Still, I assume that *pistis* or faith is implied in them in the sense that Agamben has a conviction or trust in potentiality and transformation. Furthermore, we have a different situation in *Il sacramento del linguaggio*, where language and *pistis* are the focus of discussion rather than political messianism, although this discussion has important implications for political thought as well.

^{577.} According to Agamben's archeology of signatures, instead of merely seeking to trace historically the origin of concepts, he works with analogies, resemblances, and correspondences to hermeneutically orient the intelligibility of historical phenomena and identify a split that gave rise to a conception. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 57, 66. See also Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 473, 536, 566.

^{578.} Agamben stipulates that modern political philosophy needs to become "aware of its theological roots" to deal with its own contradictions. Also, he agrees with Schmitt's contention that political notions are actually theological conceptions that have been secularized. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,2. Stasis), 289-290.

With these remarks in view, the chapter is structured according to the following sequence: (1) Sovereign Law and the (Messianic) Potential of Transformation: I. *Homo sacer* (1995); (2) Glimpses of a (Potential and Transformative) New Use of the Law: II,1. *Stato di eccezione* (2003); (3) Faith and Trust in Language and the Potential of Truth: II,3. *Il sacramento del linguaggio* (2008); (4) Potentiality and Transformation in Deactivation: II,4. *Il Regno e la Gloria* (2007); (5) The Potential (Transformation) of Subjectification: III. *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* (1998); (6) The Potential (Transformation) of Use and Form-of-life: IV,1. *Altissima povertà* (2011); and (7) Potential (Transformation) in Use, Relational Ontology, and Form-of-life: IV,2. *L'uso dei corpi* (2014).⁵⁷⁹ Then, I will conclude the chapter with a systematic summary of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the *Homo Sacer* series.

4.1 Sovereign Law and the (Messianic) Potential of Transformation

In *Homo sacer* (1995),⁵⁸⁰ Agamben introduces the discussion of potentiality, and its implied possibility of transformation, in the political context of the juridical problem of sovereignty and the law. As the discussion of potentiality is articulated for a political reflection, he combines the areas of ontology, metaphysics, and political philosophy. More precisely, Agamben criticizes the primacy of actuality over potentiality in Western metaphysical and political thinking. As the Italian philosopher explains the problem of sovereign law, he points to the solution or transformation of this problem from the perspective of a messianic hope. In other words, messianic hope focuses on the problem of the law. Agamben points out that the purpose of the coming of the Messiah in the monotheist religions (such as Judaism, Christianity, and Shiite Islam) is to resolve the problem of the law.⁵⁸¹ According to this view, the arrival of the Messiah means the fulfillment of the law, which ultimately implies its full consummation. The Italian philosopher claims that the Messiah is a “limit concept” in Paul, as the letter to the Romans paradoxically and dialectically conceives the fulfillment of the Torah in terms of its transgression.⁵⁸² From a political and juridical standpoint, Agamben stipulates that messianism is a modified “theory of the state

⁵⁷⁹. For a critical guide to the *Homo Sacer* series, see Colby Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

⁵⁸⁰. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1995). English translation published as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁸¹. See part one (The Logic of Sovereignty), section four (Form of Law), 4.5.

⁵⁸². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. *Homo Sacer*), 49.

of exception.”⁵⁸³ Instead of its proclamation by a sovereign authority, “there is the Messiah to subvert its power.”⁵⁸⁴ Therefore, the messianic paradoxical and dialectical fulfillment and transgression of the law finds its juridico-political expression in the state of exception.

The state of exception constitutes a paradoxical legal situation where the transgression and the execution of the law cannot be distinguished.⁵⁸⁵ Even though “the exception is a kind of exclusion,” Agamben highlights that it is not an absolute exclusion in the sense of becoming unrelated to the rule. More specifically, “what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule’s suspension.”⁵⁸⁶ Thus, the exception does not suspend the relationship with the law but rather changes the type of relationship.⁵⁸⁷ Assuming that the exception reveals “the structure of sovereignty,” the Italian thinker stipulates that in this structure law includes life in its suspension.⁵⁸⁸ Instead of application, the precise form of relation of law with life in this case is abandonment.⁵⁸⁹ By holding life in its ban, abandoning it, law shows its “originary force,” which Agamben calls “The matchless potentiality of the *nomos*.”⁵⁹⁰ This reference to the potentiality of the law, which is paradoxically capable of maintaining “itself in its own privation” and of applying “in no longer

⁵⁸³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 50. For a discussion of the state of exception and the law in Agamben, see Walter Brogan, “On Giorgio Agamben’s Naked Life: The State of Exception and the Law of the Sovereign,” *Epoché* 16, no. 1 (2011): 113–124.

⁵⁸⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 50.

⁵⁸⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 50.

⁵⁸⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 19.

⁵⁸⁷. “The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.” This capacity of maintaining itself in a relationship to “an exteriority” describes the “particular ‘force’ of law” and constitutes “the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 19. The Italian philosopher combines several perspectives to formulate this conception. He dialogues with Carl Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty, who defines the sovereign as the one who decides about the state of exception. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 13. He mentions Alain Badiou’s political translation of set theory, where it is possible to belong to a set without being necessarily included in it or to be included without belonging to it. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 24. Agamben also employs Nancy’s idea of ban and abandonment to conceptualize exception. The one who has been banned is neither inside nor outside the legal order. Rather, they are abandoned by the law in terms of being “exposed on the threshold” where “life and law” are “indistinguishable.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 27.

⁵⁸⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 27. In his dialogue with Benjamin, the Italian philosopher underlines that the essence of the state of exception is the indiscernibility between law and life, in which the law loses its particular content and eventually ceases to exist as such, in the sense that it “becomes indistinguishable from life.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 47.

⁵⁸⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 28.

⁵⁹⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 28.

applying,” is tied to Aristotle’s notion of *dynamis mē energein*, that is, “the potentiality not to pass into actuality.”⁵⁹¹

Agamben also speaks of potentiality in his political and ontological discussion of constituting power. In the intricate dialectical relationship of constituting and constituted powers, while the latter presupposes the former, sovereignty presents itself as the pretense fixation of the constituting power.⁵⁹² In opposition to this pretension, Agamben points to the difficult and fundamental task of differentiating constituting power from constituted sovereign power to discern, then, a constituting power that is not exhausted in constituted sovereign power.⁵⁹³ Ontologically, the exploration of constituting power comes down to the issue of “the ‘constitution of potentiality’ (*Il potere costituente*)”, which opens the floor to new ways of thinking about the relation potentiality-actuality, from a fresh ontological perspective of the categories of modality.⁵⁹⁴

Therefore, the problem of relation observed initially in the discussion of the law in the structure of exclusion or ban is fundamentally ontological. It is in the realm of first philosophy that Agamben points to the possibility of releasing the constituting power from the bonds of the sovereign ban, as he envisions a new understanding of “the relation between potentiality and actuality,” which provides a different “conjunction of possibility and reality, contingency and necessity.”⁵⁹⁵ The Italian philosopher argues that this new⁵⁹⁶ articulation of potentiality needs to replace the ontology that gives priority to actuality (*energeia*) over potentiality (*dynamis*) in order to unleash political theory from the dominance of sovereignty.⁵⁹⁷

Agamben explains that, in Aristotle’s view, potentiality paradoxically precedes and conditions actuality but is eventually subordinated to it. At the same time, Aristotle protects the autonomy of potentiality as having modes of existence. One of its modes is “im-potentiality (*adynamia*),” that is, “*the potentiality not (do or be)*.”⁵⁹⁸ According to this mode, potentiality is “able *not* to pass over into actuality” and,

^{591.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 27. From this standpoint, the Italian philosopher problematizes the type of relation implicit in the structure of the ban, inasmuch as it offers no content, and asks what form of law is expressed in this structure. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 28.

^{592.} Agamben dialogues with Negri’s phenomenology of constituting power. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 39.

^{593.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 38.

^{594.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40.

^{595.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40.

^{596.} Agamben argues that he is taking steps beyond the work of “Spinoza, Schelling, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40.

^{597.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40.

^{598.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40. Agamben cites Aristotle, “Every potentiality is impotentiality of the same and with respect to the same’ (*tau autou kai kata to auto pasa dynamis adynamiai*)” (*Metaphysics*, 1046a, 32). Or, even more explicitly: ‘What is potential can both be and not

therefore, does not disappear into actuality. Examples of *adynamia* include the fact that an instrument player and an architect keep the ability (power/*potenza*) to play and build when they are not playing or building.⁵⁹⁹ In other words, potentiality “is sovereignly capable of its own im-potentiality [*impotenza*],” that is, the modality of *adynamia* keeps its relation with actuality by way of its own suspension, in the sense that its movement to actuality is suspended.⁶⁰⁰ In his interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (1047a, 24-26; *De anima*, 417b, 2-16), Agamben points out that the movement from potentiality to actuality implies that *adynamia* (“its own potential not to be”) is set aside. However, this setting aside does not mean the destruction of im-potentiality, but rather its fulfillment. This fulfillment is spelled out as turning “potentiality back upon itself in order to give itself to itself.”⁶⁰¹ Thus, the movement from potentiality to actuality does not entail the destruction of the former in the latter but constitutes “the preservation [*sōtēria*, salvation] of what is potentiality by what is in actuality.”⁶⁰² This conception of potentiality unveils the ontological structure of sovereignty, especially as the law applies to the exception by means of its suspension (a relation of ban or abandonment). Ontologically speaking, in this suspension the potentiality of the law keeps its relation with actuality by means of *adynamia*. From Agamben’s standpoint, potentiality as both “potentiality to” and “potentiality not to” is how Being grounds “itself sovereignly,” in the sense that there is nothing “preceding or determining it . . . other than its own ability not to be.”⁶⁰³

This reference to Being grounding itself sovereignly, without anything external determining it, seems to indicate that Agamben’s exploration of potentiality as *adynamia* (not to) points to a potentiality of transformation in a messianic (modified) state of exception, where Being is no longer defined by the sovereign power. For instance, social identities do not need to be determined by the political sovereign power any longer, according to this view of potentiality. The most extreme determination of the sovereign power, which is depicted by Agamben as the paradigm of biopolitics, which ultimately defines the nature of political life, is the bare life of the *homo sacer*. The figure of the *homo sacer* encapsulates what is captured by the sovereign ban,⁶⁰⁴ as the sovereign ban produces the “bare life” of the *homo sacer* in

be. For the same is potential as much with respect to being as to not being’ (*to dynaton endekhetai kai einai kai mē einai*) (1050b, 10).” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40-41.

^{599.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 40.

^{600.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 41.

^{601.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 41.

^{602.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 41. This quote is part of Agamben’s citation of *De anima*, 417b, 2-16.

^{603.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 42.

^{604.} The *homo sacer* is portrayed in the threshold of law (human law) and religion (divine law). Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 69.

the formal structure of exception.⁶⁰⁵ One of the main features of modern biopolitics is the constant redefinition of (political) life, distinguishing between “authentic life and a life lacking . . . political value,” which is bare life.⁶⁰⁶ One example of this complex redefinition is that, in the case of the Jews under the Nazis, the Jews “could be sent to the extermination camps only after they had been fully denationalized.”⁶⁰⁷ Another example is the difficulty to define the political status of the refugees, who are the *homo sacer* or bare life of our times.⁶⁰⁸ While the situation of the Jews under the Nazis constitutes “a flagrant case of a *homo sacer*”⁶⁰⁹ in the recent past, the example of the refugees in the present indicates that the structure of exception is becoming the rule,⁶¹⁰ as it “is continually operative in the civil state.”⁶¹¹ The Italian philosopher also mentions the transformation of the Third World population into bare life as a result from the democratic and capitalist projects of “eliminating the poor classes through development.”⁶¹²

While Agamben seems to use messianic language to express trust or hope in potentiality and transformation of the problem of sovereign law, which is observed especially in the context of the state of exception, he seems to spend more time in *Homo sacer* explaining the problem of this law. This explanation is important to define what is the political problem (and by implication the metaphysical ground) to

^{605.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 71. Bare life is not “natural life nor social life.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 89. That is, “this life is not simply natural reproductive life, the *zoē* of the Greeks, nor *bios*, a qualified form of life,” but “a zone of indistinction.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 89. That is, “this life is not simply natural reproductive life, the *zoē* of the Greeks, nor *bios*, a qualified form of life,” but “a zone of indistinction.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 92. In the threshold of this structure, life can be killed without being considered a homicide (human law) nor a sacrifice (divine law). Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 71. The structure of exception is Agamben’s rereading of “the myth of foundation of the modern city” in Hobbes and Rousseau, in which their idea of “state of nature” is reinterpreted in terms of the state of exception. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 91–92. In this reflection, the Italian philosopher initially discusses bare life in dialogue with Foucault’s conception of biopolitics and Arendt’s stipulations regarding the framework of totalitarian states. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 99. This reflection also emphasizes the importance of the body in juridical politics, as the concept of *habeas corpus* indicates: “law needs a body in order to be in force.” In this context, he argues that *corpus* carries a twofold meaning; namely, it is “the bearer both of subjection to sovereign power and of individual liberties.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 103.

^{606.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 110.

^{607.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 110.

^{608.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 109–111.

^{609.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 95. Agamben points out that the extermination of Jews did not take place in the sphere of religion or law, but in the threshold of the biopolitical realm. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 96.

^{610.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 139.

^{611.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 91–92.

^{612.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 147.

be addressed by the messianic trust in potentiality and transformation, which are further elaborated in the next volumes of the series.

4.2 Glimpses of a (Potential and Transformative) New Use of the Law

In *Stato di eccezione* (2003),⁶¹³ the messianic trust in potentiality and transformation appears in a question on the problem of sovereign law: “What can be the meaning of a law that survives its deposition?”⁶¹⁴ Agamben stipulates that this question was first formulated in early Christianity, more precisely in Paul: “What becomes of the law after its messianic fulfillment?”⁶¹⁵ As already indicated in *Homo sacer*, the Italian philosopher highlights that “the suspension of the norm” in the state of exception “does not mean its abolition, and the zone of anomie that it established is not . . . unrelated to the juridical order.”⁶¹⁶ To put it more sharply, the state of exception suspends the application of the law and not the force of the law as such.⁶¹⁷ Connecting political philosophy and ontology, Agamben stipulates that the suspension of the law in the state of exception is ontologically spelled out by the radical separation of potentiality and actuality that unleashes a mystical force.⁶¹⁸ Moreover, in his comparison of the state of exception with language, the idea of the norm keeping its force, despite not being applied, is similar to grammar, inasmuch as it produces “a speech without denotation” by isolating “language from discourse.”⁶¹⁹

⁶¹³. Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003). English translation published as *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

⁶¹⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 220. This question was raised in the Marxist tradition (“What becomes of the law in a society without classes?”) and was also faced by Benjamin. Agamben explains that Benjamin promotes the idea of immanent eschatology without redemption and hereafter. As a result, the sovereign is not transcendent (as it is in Schmitt’s political theology) but confined to the created world. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 215.

⁶¹⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 221.

⁶¹⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 185. Indeed, the suspension is paradoxically intended to maintain order in the sense that the state of exception opens a (temporary) lacuna to safeguard “the existence of the norm and its applicability to the normal situation.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 191.

⁶¹⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 192. This is somehow related to Schmitt’s notion that the state of exception is not described by anarchy or chaos since some order still characterizes it. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 194.

⁶¹⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 199. Agamben also employs the language of mysticism in the statement that “the suspension of law” seems to unleash “a force or a mystical element.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 209.

⁶¹⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 197.

The Italian philosopher also speaks of the person of the sovereign as “a living *nomos*,” with a subordinate “written law” related to the life of the people.⁶²⁰ In fact, the central purpose of *Stato di eccezione* is to unveil the fiction hiding the “secret of power,” namely, that there is no essential connection between norm and life. Rather, the center of the machine produced by the state of exception is “an empty space,” but the fiction of a “substantial articulation” that “has been artificially and violently linked” in the West since the First World War.⁶²¹ The Italian thinker proposes the unmasking of this fiction of the biopolitical machine with the intention to move forward to “the possibility of reaching a new condition.”⁶²² The exposure of the fiction opens up a space between law and life “for human action,” as the question about the “use of law after the deactivation of the device that, in the state of exception, tied it to life” can be posed.⁶²³ The Italian philosopher envisions “the use and human praxis that the powers of law and myth had sought to capture in the state of exception.”⁶²⁴

Inspired by Benjamin, Agamben defines “another use of the law” in terms of “its deactivation and inactivity [*inoperosità*],” which is different from “the erasure of the law.” In his messianic glimpses of the new use of the law, he emphasizes, “One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good. What is found after the law is not a more proper and original use value that precedes the law, but a new use that is born only after that.” The Italian thinker speaks of the world “as a good that . . . cannot be appropriated or made juridical.”⁶²⁵ This vision of the world is defined by use rather than ownership, which is a concept of potentiality and transformation to be further elaborated below in my treatment of *Altissima povertà* and *L'uso dei corpi*.

4.3 Faith and Trust in Language and the Potential of Truth

In *Il sacramento del linguaggio* (2008),⁶²⁶ we move from the discussion of the problem of sovereign law and the messianic trust in potentiality and transformation, in

^{620.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 226. Agamben uses the Latin concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas*. The former refers to the “physical person” of the sovereign in “the biopolitical tradition” and the latter to “the legal tradition.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 238.

^{621.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 240–241.

^{622.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 241.

^{623.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 242.

^{624.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 242.

^{625.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,1. State of Exception), 221. This is a reference to Benjamin's posthumous fragments.

^{626.} Agamben, *Il sacramento del linguaggio: Archeologia del giuramento* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 2008). English translation published as *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. Daniel

the previous volumes of the series, to a reflection focused on faith and the notion of trust, which is related to language and the potential of truth. As the subtitle *Archeologia del giuramento* indicates, this work discusses the concept of oath, and this discussion includes significant references to *pistis*. In dialogue with French linguist Émile Benveniste (1902-1976), particularly regarding his investigation of oath in ancient Greece, Agamben underscores the non-foundational nature of oath, which is a mode of assertion that “supports, guarantees, and demonstrates, but does not found anything.”⁶²⁷ The connection between *pistis* and oath appears especially in the dialogue with Philo of Alexandria (ca. 15 BCE-50 CE), where the Italian philosopher makes a few remarks about the concept of *pistis*: “men have recourse to oaths to win belief, when others deem them untrustworthy [*apistoumenoi*, lacking in *pistis*, that is, in credibility].”⁶²⁸ Elsewhere, the notion of unreliability is spelled out in terms of people not being true to their word.⁶²⁹

Agamben explores the concept of oath in the context of Greco-Roman thought and highlights that this is a juridical and religious concept.⁶³⁰ In ancient Latin sources, he finds the idea that an “oath is a verbal act intended to guarantee the truth of a promise or an assertion.”⁶³¹ For example, Cicero’s remarks on oaths emphasize the notion of *fides* (trust), “which regulates relations among men as much as those between peoples and cities.”⁶³² In this view, to violate their own oath entails the violation of trust. Conversely, faithfulness is defined as “the correspondence between language and action.”⁶³³ With regard to ancient Greek sources, the Italian philosopher underlines references to divine testimony.⁶³⁴ For instance, he mentions Philo’s discussion of God making an oath to Abraham (cf. Genesis 22:16-17) in *Legum allegoriae* (204-8). In Agamben’s translation, Philo underscores the belief of those who think that “it is inappropriate” for God “to swear; for an oath is added to assist faith

Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

⁶²⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 303. This quote is a translation of E. Benveniste, “L’expression du serment dans la Grèce ancienne,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 134, no. 1-3 (1947): 81-82.

⁶²⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 304. This quote is a translation of Philo, *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* § 93 (τοῦ γε μὴν πιστευθῆναι χάριν ἀπιστούμενοι καταφεύγουσιν ἐφ’ ὅρκον ἀνθρώποι).

⁶²⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 306.

⁶³⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 308-309.

⁶³¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 314.

⁶³². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 318.

⁶³³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 318.

⁶³⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 314.

[*pisteōs eneka*] and only God... is faithful [*pistos*].”⁶³⁵ However, the passage concludes, “let God be His own surest guarantee [*pistis*] and evidence.”⁶³⁶

In this archeological approach in Greek and Latin traditions, the Italian philosopher highlights a deep connection between oath and faith. In Homer, *pistis* and *horkos* (oath) are used synonymously.⁶³⁷ In dialogue with Dumézil and Benveniste, he underlines that the most ancient conception of these traditions understands faith in terms of “trust” and “personal loyalty.” Concisely, it describes “the high esteem in which someone is held as a consequence of our having confidently given ourselves over to him, building ourselves in a relationship of loyalty.”⁶³⁸ According to this double perspective of faith being given and received in a relationship of reciprocity, Agamben brings together objective and subjective, active and passive meanings of faith, in the sense that “trust is both the confidence that we accord to someone—the trust we give—and the high esteem in which we are held by someone—the trust or credit we have.”⁶³⁹ He also points out the implicit inequality and asymmetrical relationship of the two parties in the exchange of submission and safety. In this asymmetrical reciprocity, to place *fides* in somebody guarantees in return his support and protection. Even the connection between *fides* and *credere*, which was later developed in Christian Latin tradition, is aligned with this perspective. As the Italian philosopher explains, *credere* initially meant “‘to give **kred*,’ to put one’s faith in someone from whom one expects protection and, in this way, to link oneself with him in faith.”⁶⁴⁰

Going beyond the realm of personal relations, the concept of faith is applied to the relationship of peoples and cities in the sphere of “international public law.” One example of this broader application is the recourse of *deditio in fidem* in the context of war, where a weaker city could capitulate and submit “itself unconditionally to the *fides* of the enemy, thus obligating the victor in some sense to a more benevolent form of control.”⁶⁴¹ In the *deditio in fidem*, the association of faith and oath is also present, in the sense that oaths are exchanged to sanction the bound relationship between these cities.⁶⁴² Therefore, *fides* usually implies an oath and is spelled out as “a verbal act” in “which one abandons oneself completely to the ‘trust’ of someone else and obtains, in exchange, that one’s protection.” Moreover, the connection of faith and oath requires a “conformity between the parties’ words and actions.”⁶⁴³

⁶³⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 315.

⁶³⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 316.

⁶³⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 319.

⁶³⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 320.

⁶³⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 320.

⁶⁴⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 320.

⁶⁴¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 320.

⁶⁴². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 320.

⁶⁴³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 321.

This conformity indicates that oath is a notion broader than faith, which is one of its key elements. Indeed, an oath is defined by two main elements, namely, *pistis*, described as “the reciprocal trust in the words offered,” and *sacratio-devotio*, which is the curse against perjury (a non-correspondence between words and actions).⁶⁴⁴ The curse “is added to the oath to guarantee what at the beginning was entrusted entirely to *fides* in speech.”⁶⁴⁵ In other words, the curse is against those who are not committed to their own words, that is, “the one who transgresses *fides*.”⁶⁴⁶ The curse highlights the religious and political-juridical dimension of the oath as a “sacrament of power.”⁶⁴⁷ Agamben defines a sacrament as something “done with the sanction of the oath.”⁶⁴⁸ More specifically, the curse determines the scope of the law in terms of punishment.⁶⁴⁹ Furthermore, the curse may also imply “exclusion from the religious community,” which is a form of being put “outside the law.”⁶⁵⁰ The connection between curse and law appears in Paul’s idea of the “curse of the law” (Galatians 3:10-13; cf. Deuteronomy 21:23), where the understanding of redemption presupposes a religious and juridical conception of curse and law.⁶⁵¹

Given the necessity of ensuring the correspondence between words and actions, which is the function of the curse of the law in the oath, faith and oath are essentially “an experience of language.”⁶⁵² According to Agamben’s reflection on the theory of performatives (speech acts) and their production (not merely a description) of correspondence between words and facts,⁶⁵³ the oath is the “originary performative experience of the world,”⁶⁵⁴ as it explains religion and law.

In the context of religion, while in the classical tradition *horkos* is “the most ancient being, the sole potency to which the gods are submitted for punishment,” the God of monotheism “is identified with the oath,” as “the being whose word is an oath or who coincides with . . . the true and efficacious word *in principio*.”⁶⁵⁵ Furthermore, as the religion of the *Logos*, Christianity affirms “the centrality of faith in the word as the essential content of religious experience.”⁶⁵⁶ From this perspective, the function of *fides* is performative, inasmuch as it performatively seeks to establish “the truth and

⁶⁴⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 324.

⁶⁴⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 333.

⁶⁴⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 334.

⁶⁴⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 329.

⁶⁴⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 347.

⁶⁴⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 329.

⁶⁵⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 327.

⁶⁵¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 329-330.

⁶⁵². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 340.

⁶⁵³. See Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 342.

⁶⁵⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 350.

⁶⁵⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 350.

⁶⁵⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 350.

trustworthiness of speech.”⁶⁵⁷ The oath is performatively close to the confession of faith (*homologia* in Greek) and in Romans 10:6-10 faith is a “performative experience of veridiction.”⁶⁵⁸ The Foucauldian notion of veridiction is contrasted with the denotative value of assertion, in which truth is independent of the speaking subject and evaluated according to “logical and objective parameters (conditions of truth, non-contradiction, adequation between words and things).”⁶⁵⁹ Conversely, the only criterion of truth (“performative efficacy”) in veridiction is “its relationship to the subject who pronounces it.”⁶⁶⁰ In the case of Romans 10:6-10, Paul does not spell out the notion of “word of faith” in terms of assertion, that is, “by means of the correspondence between word and reality.”⁶⁶¹ Rather, the focus is on the “performative experience of veridiction” of the speaking subject. More precisely, in the connection between his/her “lips” (confession) and “heart” (belief).⁶⁶² In fact, Agamben suggests that the modern debate of faith and reason points to two “co-originary” features of the word, namely, the denotative value of assertion (which is followed by the rationality of logic and science) and the performative value of veridiction (which is followed by law and religion).⁶⁶³

Regarding the potential of the oath to explain the law, the latter is constituted in its connection with the curse. Due to the power of the curse, the oath is called “the sacrament of power” or “the sacrament of language,” and it has the performative legal power to produce the bare life of *homo sacer*.⁶⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that the Italian philosopher associates the distinction mentioned in the previous paragraph between the denotative value of assertions and the performative value of veridiction with the discussion of the state of exception, which is particularly related in other writings (already described above) with the biopolitical production of bare life. In his distinction of denotative and performative, he explains that statements such as “yesterday I was in Athens” are no longer denotative “if they are preceded by the performative *I swear*.”⁶⁶⁵ The switch from denotative to performative means that “the model of truth” is no longer defined by “the adequation between words and things but” by the decisive “self-referential relation” of “the performative one in which speech unfailingly actualizes its meaning.”⁶⁶⁶ The same pattern happens in the state of exception, where “the law suspends its own application only to found, in this way, its being in force, so

⁶⁵⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 350.

⁶⁵⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 344.

⁶⁵⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 344.

⁶⁶⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 344.

⁶⁶¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 344.

⁶⁶². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 344.

⁶⁶³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 347.

⁶⁶⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 351.

⁶⁶⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 342.

⁶⁶⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 342-343.

in the performative, language suspends its denotation precisely and solely to found its existential connection with things.”⁶⁶⁷

The performative value of an “existential connection with things” highlights the “ethical and political” issues that emerge from the relationship between human intelligence, language, and *ethos*.⁶⁶⁸ These complex issues reveal that human beings do not merely acquire “language as one capacity among others” but rather make this capacity their “specific potentiality.”⁶⁶⁹ More specifically, oaths imply ethical and political articulation of “life and language, actions and words” in such a way that speakers make themselves responsible for their words.⁶⁷⁰ In this sense, human beings put their “very nature at stake in language.”⁶⁷¹ Since language is open to “the possibility of both truth and lie,” the oath demands that human beings commit themselves to speak with their life for their words, “to testify in the first person for them.”⁶⁷² This ontological framework seems to inform what Agamben calls “the sacramental bond that links the human beings to language.”⁶⁷³

In this discussion of trust in the potential of truth in language, the Italian philosopher envisions a new type of politics. He argues that “only a politics that has broken his original connection with the curse will be able one day to make possible another use of speech and of the law.”⁶⁷⁴ Thus, whereas Agamben does not focus on the discussion of the law in *Il sacramento del linguaggio*, he does assume that his reflections on faith in the potential of truth in language are helpful for the articulation of political philosophy.

4.4 Potentiality and Transformation in Deactivation

In *Il Regno e la Gloria* (2007),⁶⁷⁵ the ideas of potentiality and transformation are particularly explored in the discussion of deactivation. The Italian philosopher elaborates on the concept of deactivation particularly in his reflection on “Pauline

⁶⁶⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 343.

⁶⁶⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 352.

⁶⁶⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 352–353.

⁶⁷⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 353.

⁶⁷¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 353. The original text quoted is in italics.

⁶⁷². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 353.

⁶⁷³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 355.

⁶⁷⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,3. The Sacrament of Language), 351.

⁶⁷⁵. Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2007). English translation published as *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarinini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

messianism,” which is considered “a corrective to the demonic hypertrophy of angelic and human powers” in the sense that they are deactivated. He argues that *katargeō* is Paul’s keyword to describe the relationship of the Messiah with these powers and that *argos* conveys the idea of “inoperative” instead of simply “destroying.” By deactivating or rendering inoperative the angelic and human powers (and, therefore, the law that gives expression to them), the Messiah “reconciles them with God.” This divine reconciliation also assumes that these powers had been previously “created through the Messiah” (cf. Colossians 1:15-20). According to this point of view, deactivation constitutes the *telos* of the angelic and human powers, just as the *telos* of the law, “which is no longer applied.”⁶⁷⁶

A similar idea of suspension or deactivation is observed in language. For instance, poetry⁶⁷⁷ constitutes a “linguistic operation that renders language inoperative.”⁶⁷⁸ Agamben explains that this is the point where language “has deactivated its communicative and informative functions” and, as a result, “rests within itself,” in the sense of contemplating “its power of saying [*potenza di dire*].”⁶⁷⁹ Instead of merely conveying information, a poem unveils the power of language, which is open to “a

⁶⁷⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 522.

⁶⁷⁷. Agamben emphasizes the deactivation of the semantic meaning of language in the acclamations and doxologies that produce glory in their “empty rotation.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 582. It seems that he has in view here the dimension of simple contemplation that was mentioned in the context of the deactivation of communicative information in poetry. From this perspective, he speaks of hymns as a “radical deactivation of signifying language, the word rendered completely inoperative and, nevertheless, retained as such in the form of liturgy.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 586.

⁶⁷⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 600. Following his archaeological investigation of signatures, the Italian philosopher claims that inoperativity, as expressed in the image of the Sabbath, is the proper dimension for God and human beings in Judaism (cf. Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:11) and Christianity. In dialogue with Philo, he emphasizes inoperativity as a characteristic of God. Agamben quotes *On the Cherubim*, §87 and 90. “Only God truly possesses inoperative [*anapauesthai*] being.” “The Sabbath, which means inoperativity [*anapausis*], belongs to God.” The Italian philosopher explains that inoperativity should not be understood in terms of “inertia or inactivity [*aprassia*],” but rather as “a form of action” without “suffering nor effort.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 599. See *On the Cherubim*, §87-90. In reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews (4:1-10), Agamben underlines the eschatological perspective of inoperativity and *sabbatismos* in the Midrash on Psalm 95:11. He points out that John Chrysostom’s commentary on Hebrews describes *sabbatism* in terms of the “eschatological glory that is, in essence, inoperativity.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 589. Moreover, in Pseudo-Dionysius “glory, the hymnical, and inoperativity are tightly conjoined and the hymns of the angels are defined as ‘divine places of thearchial inoperativity [. . . *katapauseōs*]’ (*Celestial Hierarchy*, 7,57).” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 590. Our Italian philosopher also highlights Augustine’s statements about the eschatological inactivity of the saints and of God in the glory of the eternal Sabbath, “which has no evening,” in *The City of God*. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 590-591.

⁶⁷⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 600.

new possible use.” Therefore, deactivation unleashes the possibility of a new use. Comparatively, the Italian philosopher suggests that what happens in the poem with “the power of saying” must also take place with “the power of acting” in the realm of philosophy and politics. To put it more sharply, inasmuch as philosophy and politics render biological and economic “operations inoperative, they demonstrate what the human body *can do*; they open it to a new possible use.”⁶⁸⁰

Furthermore, Agamben stipulates that Paul emphasizes an eschatological deactivation, given his notion of messianic time. More precisely, eternal life is not only “a future condition but the special quality of life in messianic time (*ho nyn karios*, the time-of-now), that is, the life in Jesus the Messiah.”⁶⁸¹ According to his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, our Italian philosopher indicates that inoperativity is what qualifies life in messianic time. In fact, inoperativity in messianic time is somehow an anticipation of “the sabbatism of the Kingdom in the present: the *hōs mē*, the ‘as not.’”⁶⁸² Agamben explains that the Messiah in Paul “has brought about the law and, at the same time, rendered it inoperative” (*katargein*). Likewise, the *hōs mē* dialectically maintains and deactivates “all the juridical conditions and all the social behaviors of the members of the messianic community” in the present.⁶⁸³ Following the perspective of “as not,” life does not “coincide with itself.” In fact, life in the Messiah implies revoking or rendering “inoperative at each instant every aspect of the life that we live.”⁶⁸⁴ The Italian philosopher makes here a clear distinction between *bios* and *zōē*: “the messianic life is the impossibility that life might coincide with a predetermined form, the revoking of every *bios* in order to open it to the *zōē tou Iesou*.”⁶⁸⁵ Nonetheless, he qualifies the inoperativity that deactivates *bios* as not merely “inertia or rest” but rather as “the messianic operation par excellence.”⁶⁸⁶ In this context, Agamben speaks of “metaphysical operators of anthropogenesis” in the sense of releasing human beings from their “biological or social destiny” to engage in the “indefinable dimension” of politics.⁶⁸⁷ He believes that politics is the sphere of “the inoperativity of

⁶⁸⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 600.

⁶⁸¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 596-597. To be sure, the apostle Paul does believe in eternal life in the eschatological future of the world to come, when “the just will enter the inoperativity of God” and be “under the sign of glory” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:35-55). However, Agamben affirms that Paul does not give details about glorified bodies. Conversely, in contrast to a more generic picture in Paul, theologians in the Christian tradition later developed “a doctrine of the glorious body of the blessed” that eventually separated “eternal life and its inoperativity” from, and even replaced, “the messianic life.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 597.

⁶⁸². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 596-597.

⁶⁸³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 597.

⁶⁸⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 597.

⁶⁸⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 597.

⁶⁸⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 597.

⁶⁸⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 599.

contemplation,” which deactivates “linguistic and corporeal, material and immaterial praxes,” and highlights “inoperative center of the human.”⁶⁸⁸

The Italian philosopher discerns in Paul’s statement that the Messiah will render all the principalities and powers inoperative (verb *katargeō*) (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28) the heart of Paul’s “messianic redemption.”⁶⁸⁹ Agamben argues that “the inoperative disarticulation of both *bios* and *zōē*,” announced in the conclusion of *Homo Sacer I*, should be the starting point for thinking politics beyond the glory of power.⁶⁹⁰ In fact, he announces the need for a future study on “the form-of-life and use”⁶⁹¹ under the assumption that “the decisive meaning of inoperativity as a properly human and political praxis will be able to appear in its own light.”⁶⁹²

Overall, the concept of deactivation of established powers is a key notion of potentiality and transformation in *Il Regno e la Gloria*. As deactivation opens the way to new possibilities of use without formally destroying the established power, this is a dialectical account of potentiality and transformation that release human beings by hollowing out pre-defined forms of humanity and society determined by the sovereign power.

⁶⁸⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 600.

⁶⁸⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 515, 557. The Italian philosopher finds in Paul a correspondence between angelology and “the critique of law and authority.” In his reading of Paul, “authority, like law (which ‘was ordained by angels’: Galatians 3:19; see also Hebrews 2:2), was given ‘for sin’ . . . and its power ceases with the arrival of the Messiah. No ‘angel’ nor any ‘power’ (*arkē*) can separate us from ‘Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:38-39), because ‘we shall judge angels’ as well (1 Corinthians 6:3).” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 522.

⁶⁹⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 608.

⁶⁹¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 371. For a helpful study on Agamben’s form-of-life, see Gian Fusco, *Form of Life: Agamben and the Destitution of Rules* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

⁶⁹². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 371. It is not clear what this would look like in *Il Regno e la Gloria*, but the Appendix seems to offer hints of what the Italian philosopher takes as unsatisfactory in modern politics and that should be overcome in this new reflection. He argues that *Il Regno e la Gloria* essentially reveals that the crucial problem of “politics is not sovereignty, but government; it is not God, but the angel; it is not the king, but ministry; it is not the law, but the police—that is to say, the governmental machine that they form and support.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 623. From this perspective, he warns against the illusion of viewing the government as “the mere execution of a general will and law” under an alleged “primacy of legislative power.” More emphatically, in opposition to the basic presuppositions of modern Western politics, the government is not merely the “executive power.” Instead, Agamben underlines that what we are witnessing today is the complete domination of the government and the economy over a presumed “popular sovereignty emptied of all meaning.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,4. The Kingdom and the Glory), 622. Still, using the concept of signature between theology and politics, Agamben assumes that Paul’s messianism is a corrective to this view, especially regarding his notion of deactivation.

4.5 The Potential (Transformation) of Subjectification

In *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* (1998),⁶⁹³ Agamben articulates a conception of potentiality and transformation especially related to the idea of subjectification, which is associated with a resistance to desubjectification. The ideas of subjectification and desubjectification are formulated in light of two important notions for Agamben, namely, the remnant and testimony. In fact, these two notions are combined in his discussion of the testimony of a remnant. This testimony shows the potential of resisting the desubjectification of the sovereign power and leads the Italian philosopher to explain the potential transformation of subjectification. With these connections in mind, I will briefly describe below Agamben's discussion of remnant and testimony as a preparation for his understanding of desubjectification and subjectification, which are key concepts for the notion of potentiality and transformation in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*.

Agamben defines "the messianic kingdom" as "a remaining time,"⁶⁹⁴ and this is not a millennial future nor a past golden age. In his words, "What is truly historical is not what redeems time in the direction of the future or even the past; it is, rather, what fulfills time in the excess of a medium."⁶⁹⁵ This dense statement needs unpacking. Our Italian philosopher conceives the notion of the remnant as "a theologico-messianic concept."⁶⁹⁶ Prophets in the Hebrew Bible emphasize that only a remnant will be saved (cf. Isaiah 10:22; Amos 5:15). Agamben follows a non-quantitative theological interpretation of the remnant. According to this interpretation, instead of a "numerical portion of Israel," the remnant expresses "the consistency assumed by Israel when placed in relation with an eschaton, with election or the messianic event."⁶⁹⁷ To put it in another way, the whole people of Israel "necessarily posits itself as remnant" when it comes to salvation. He suggests that the apostle Paul in Romans 9 and 11 provides a helpful explanatory picture of this principle. In these chapters, the "messianic event" is portrayed as "a series of caesuras" that divide Israel (and also the Gentiles), which each time constitutes them as remnants. The Italian philosopher discerns in Romans 11:5 (*en tō nyn kairō*) "Paul's technical expression for messianic time": "at this present time also [literally 'in the time of now' . . .] there is a

⁶⁹³. Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: l'archivio e il testimone* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998). English translation published as *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1998). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

⁶⁹⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 867. In the original text quoted, the expression *a remaining time* is in italics.

⁶⁹⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 867.

⁶⁹⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 869.

⁶⁹⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 869-870. The original text quoted is in italics.

remnant according to the election of grace.”⁶⁹⁸ Instead of merely dividing a part from the whole, the caesuras “divide the non-people from the people”.⁶⁹⁹ Therefore, the remnant is eventually “a redemptive machine allowing for the salvation of the very whole whose division and loss it had signified.”⁷⁰⁰

This conception of remnant seems to work methodologically as a signature for the discussion of the “the remnants of Auschwitz,” which are “the witnesses.”⁷⁰¹ The witnesses are not the survivors nor the dead, neither the saved nor the drowned, but “what remains between them.”⁷⁰² At this point, it is important to briefly articulate Agamben’s view of testimony here to clarify the definition of a witness as a remnant between two groups of people. First, the concepts of subjectification and desubjectification are crucial for the notion of testimony. Strictly speaking, “there is no subject of testimony” because to give testimony is to bear witness to a desubjectification and, by definition, the one who was desubjectified does not have a voice to testify.⁷⁰³ Second, subjectification is spelled out by the creation of “consciousness in the event of discourse.”⁷⁰⁴ Employing the words of Benveniste, our Italian philosopher proposes that consciousness is essentially a linguistic feature that appears in Being, in the sense that “I” designates in discourse the speaker who is announced as the ‘subject’ by the speaker himself. In short, the use of language is the bedrock of subjectivity. Subjectification implies that a living being speaks as the “I” in the event of discourse.⁷⁰⁵ In opposition to subjectification, desubjectification labels a living being that cannot speak in the event of discourse. While in subjectivity the subject speaks of the “world that is always *my* world,” in desubjectification there is no speaking subject, and the world is “never *my* world.”⁷⁰⁶ From this standpoint, Auschwitz constitutes the peak of desubjectification, which disarticulates and destroys the subject, producing, to borrow a term from Primo Levi (1919-1987), the *Muselmann*.⁷⁰⁷ This term was already mentioned in *Home Sacer* to

⁶⁹⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870.

⁶⁹⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870. Cf. Romans 9:6-8 – “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel”, 25-26 – “I will call them my people, which were not my people.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870.

⁷⁰⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870. Cf. Romans 11:26 – “so all Israel shall be saved.” Furthermore, Agamben compares the remnant concept with his understanding of messianic time, which is defined as the disjunction or caesura that divides historical time and eternity instead of being identified with one of them. Likewise, the remnant of the people of Israel describes the non-coincidence of the whole people with its part instead of coinciding with one of them. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870.

⁷⁰¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870.

⁷⁰². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 870.

⁷⁰³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 842.

⁷⁰⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 843.

⁷⁰⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 842.

⁷⁰⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 859.

⁷⁰⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 859.

describe “the most extreme figure of the camp.”⁷⁰⁸ More precisely, the *Muselmann* was “a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic.”⁷⁰⁹ This means that he is “mute and absolutely alone,” having “passed into another world without memory and without grief.” Thus, “He no longer belongs to the world of men in any way.”⁷¹⁰ In *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, Agamben construes the *Muselmann* as the ultimate secret of the intentions of biopower, namely, a survival completely detached from the possibility of testimony, “a bare, unassignable and unwitnessable life.”⁷¹¹

But the ruthless intention of biopower is not without difficulties, since it is impossible to completely “destroy the human.” Indeed, “something always remains,” and “the witness is this remnant.”⁷¹² According to this view, the locus of testimony is the threshold of the “human and the inhuman, subjectification and desubjectification.”⁷¹³ Thus, testimony implies more than one subject, namely, the human survivor, who is actually a pseudo-witness, and the inhuman *Muselmann*, who is the full witness. It is the inhuman *Muselmann* that “‘has touched the bottom,’ and therefore, has much to say but cannot speak,” as he has been “wholly desubjectified and silenced.”⁷¹⁴ This means that the human-speaking survivor is ultimately “the agent of the inhuman, the one who lends the inhuman a voice.”⁷¹⁵ Therefore, testimony is “a zone of indistinction” between the speaking and the silent, the human and the inhuman, where you cannot rigorously identify the real speaking subject or “I,” that is, “the true witness.”⁷¹⁶

Agamben argues that testimony situates “the subject in the disjunction between a possibility and an impossibility of speech” in the caesura of potentiality and impotentiality.⁷¹⁷ The articulation of testimony, subjectivity, potentiality, and

^{708.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 151.

^{709.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 151. For a critical analysis of Agamben's use of the term *Muselmann*, see Jill Jarvis, “Remnants of Muslims: Reading Agamben's Silence,” *New Literary History* 45, no. 4 (2014): 707–728.

^{710.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (I. Homo Sacer), 151.

^{711.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 865.

^{712.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 850.

^{713.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 851. This threshold is “the non-place of articulation.” The possibility of testimony results precisely from the “impossibility of conjoining” the human and the inhuman, language and the living being, where “the ‘I’ stands suspended in this disjunction.” As the Italian philosopher underlines, “In the non-place of the Voice stands not the writing, but the witness.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 848.

^{714.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 841.

^{715.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 841. To put it sharply, testimony happens when “the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 841.

^{716.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 841.

^{717.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 857. Agamben contrasts the concept of testimony with the Foucauldian notion of archive, which is a “system of relations

impotentiality indicates that the discussion takes place at an ontological level. The “occurrence of language in a subject” is not merely a “discourse’s utterance or non-utterance” but involves the human capacity of having or not having language, the possibility or impossibility of speech. This implies the presence of contingency, which is defined as “the capacity not to be.”⁷¹⁸ Contingency here is not taken as one modality alongside others, such as impossibility, possibility, and necessity. Rather, “it is the actual giving of a possibility, the way in which a potentiality exists as such. It is an event (*contingit*) of a potentiality as the giving of a caesura between a capacity to be and a capacity not to be.”⁷¹⁹ The Italian philosopher adds, “In language, this giving has the form of subjectivity. Contingency is possibility put to the test of a subject.”⁷²⁰ Taking into account that a witness speaks on behalf of those who are unable to speak, subjectivity bears witness, in its possibility of speech, to an impossibility of speech. To put it differently, “Testimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech.”⁷²¹ In the phenomenology of testimony, the movements of impotentiality and potentiality cannot be ascribed to a subject or a center of consciousness and “cannot be divided into two incommunicable substances” either. It is precisely the threshold of their inseparability and intimacy that defines testimony.⁷²²

Another significant feature of Agamben’s ontology that influences the discussion of testimony is his proposal of a redefinition of the understanding of modal categories (impossibility, possibility, necessity, contingency). These are not construed as epistemological or logical categories that deal structurally with propositions. Instead, they are thought of as “ontological operators,” with devastating consequences for biopolitical decisions about subjectivity.⁷²³ Agamben sees them as weapons “used in the biopolitical struggle for Being, in which a decision is made each time on the human and the inhuman.”⁷²⁴ Assuming that “Being gives itself in modalities,” modal categories do not derive nor are found in the subject (in contrast to Kant).⁷²⁵ It is rather the subject who is affected by them, as these operators “divide and separate, in the subject, what is possible and what is impossible.”⁷²⁶ Our Italian philosopher classifies “possibility (to be able to be) and contingency (to be able not to be)” as ontological “operators of subjectification,” making something possible come

between the unsaid and the said” where the subject disappears “into the anonymous murmur of statements.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 857.

⁷¹⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷¹⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858.

⁷²⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 858-859.

⁷²⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 859.

to existence, and “impossibility” (“negation of possibility”: “not [to be able to be]”) and necessity” (“negation of contingency”: “not [to be able not to be]”) as “operators of desubjectification.”⁷²⁷ As the subject is affected by these “operators of Being,” the modal categories are not presented to the subject to be chosen or rejected, but the subject is “a field of forces always already transversed by the incandescent and historically determined currents of potentiality and impotentiality, of being able to be and not being able not to be.”⁷²⁸

The desubjectifying weapons employed by biopolitical power are impossibility and necessity. However, testimony refuses to condescend to this desubjectification.⁷²⁹ Given its dual structure, meaning that the “subject of testimony is constitutively fractured” and has “no other consistency than disjunction and dislocation” in which potentiality and impotentiality of speaking, that is, the witness and the *Muselmann*, are inseparable, testimony “bears witness to desubjectification.”⁷³⁰ Therefore, the subject of testimony is a remnant of the catastrophic ontological weapon used by biopolitics.⁷³¹ While biopolitical power aims at desubjectification through impossibility and necessity, the testimony of the remnant implies trust in potentiality and transformation, as it refuses to accept desubjectification and entails the possibility of subjectification through contingency and language. In short, testimony speaks of events in terms of contingency and not in terms of necessity.

4.6 The Potential (Transformation) of Use and Form-of-life

In *Altissima povertà* (2011),⁷³² trust in potentiality and transformation seems implied in Agamben’s discussion of use and form-of-life, which are formulated in the context of Franciscan monasticism. According to him, the hope of Paul’s messianism is the “proper theological context” for “the problem of the juridical or nonjuridical nature of

⁷²⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 859.

⁷²⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 859.

⁷²⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 866.

⁷³⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 861.

⁷³¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 866. Agamben explains that the remnant is not a remaining substratum of teleological historical processes. There is no teleological end but only a remnant. As Agamben emphasizes, “there is no foundation in or beneath” the historical processes; “rather, at their center lies an irreducible disjunction in which each term, stepping forth in the place of a remnant, can bear witness.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (III. Remnants of Auschwitz), 866-867.

⁷³². Agamben, *Altissima povertà: Regole monastiche e forma di vita* (Vicenza: Neri Pozzi, 2011). English translation published as *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

the monastic rules,⁷³³ which is at the core of *Altissima povertà*. The Italian philosopher qualifies Paul's statement that "Christ as messiah is *telos nomou*, end and fulfillment of the law (Romans 10:4)," as containing "a series of aporias" between *nomos* and *pistis*.⁷³⁴ He also points out that Paul's letters contain "hints of a theory of use," especially in 1 Corinthians 7:20–31. This passage defines "the Christian form of life" in terms of "using the world and not using it or not abusing it."⁷³⁵ This principle of use in Paul is directly associated with the the main purpose of *Altissima povertà*, which is "to construct a form-of-life." Agamben views monasticism as a helpful example for this reflection, particularly considering their goal of a "communal form of life," in which life and rule "lose their familiar meaning in order to point in the direction of a third thing."⁷³⁶ He intends to clarify precisely the transformative potential of this "third thing."⁷³⁷

⁷³³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 925. The original text quoted is in italics.

⁷³⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 925. The original text quoted is in italics.

⁷³⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 997. Agamben underscores that "the original Greek *hōs mē katachromenoi* means 'as not abusing.'" Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 997.

⁷³⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 887.

⁷³⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 887. Agamben suggests that monasticism is a privileged object of analysis, especially because it constituted a promising alternative to the liturgical paradigm scrutinized in the archeology of duty of *Opus Dei*. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 888. In *Opus Dei* (2012), Agamben argues that Paul's ontology, more specifically, Paul's usage of *energeō* and *energeia*, is contrary to their regular meaning in Aristotle. He argues that the Aristotelian sense of *energeia* and *dynamis* conveys the notion of "a diverse and correlated mode of existing and being present." Conversely, *energeia* is "not a mode of being" in Paul but describes "the effectuation of a potency, the operation through which it receives reality and produces determinate effects." Examples of this alleged Pauline ontology include God rendering "everything effective and real" (*ho de autos theos ho energōn ta panta en pasin*, 1 Corinthians 12:6) and having "rendered effective the 'potency of his great power'" (*kata tēn energeian tou kratous tēs ischyos autou. hēn enērgēsēn en tō Christō*, Ephesians 1:19–20). Moreover, our Italian philosopher highlights the expression "according to the working of his potency" (*kata tēn energeian tēs dynamēōs*, Ephesians 3:7; cf. Philippians 3:21; Ephesians 1:20; 3:7). Agamben points out that these ontological terms are translated into Latin by Jerome in the Vulgate as *operare* and *operatio* (for instance, "Deus qui operatur omnia in omnibus," 1 Corinthians 12:6; "secundum operationem potentiae virtutis ejus, quam operatus est in Christo," Ephesians 1:19–20). See Agamben, *Opus Dei: Archeologia dell'ufficio* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012). English translation published as *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). Citations of this book are taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*. See Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. *Opus Dei*), 689. See also *Metaphysics* 1048a32. These examples in the New Testament indicate, according to Agamben, a new ontological perspective in the Christian tradition that is different from the classical metaphysical tradition. However, further liturgical developments in Christian tradition make the ontology of effectiveness quite different from the New Testament. The complete expression of the ontology of effectiveness in Christian tradition is the medieval (especially in Aquinas) conception of sacrament (*ex opere operato*), which excludes any substantial content of the person of the priest himself by making him only an instrumental cause. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. *Opus Dei*), 720. In other words, "the mystery of the liturgy is" actually "the mystery of effectiveness." Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. *Opus Dei*), 649. Only what is effective is real and, therefore, "what a human is" is absorbed by "what a human does."

The Italian philosopher argues that the Franciscan conception of use is a valuable legacy to be explored in the Western world, in the sense of thinking about “a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation.” To put it more sharply, “to think life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use.”⁷³⁸ This vision shapes not only the discussion of *Altissima povertà* but also the last volume of the *Homo Sacer* series, titled *L'uso dei corpi*, which intends to elaborate a theory of use in order to provide the basis for “a critique of the operative and governmental ontology” that still controls the destiny of human beings.⁷³⁹

In his remarks on monastic rules, Agamben emphasizes the intrinsic relationship or identity between life and rule, in which the latter refers to the existence of the person as a whole (“*forma vivendi*”) rather than to their specific actions.⁷⁴⁰ From this standpoint, the penalties for the monks who break the law do not imply a merely legal scenario but center on the idea of losing the opportunity to live a common life.⁷⁴¹ Agamben

Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. Opus Dei), 650. The Italian philosopher also sees further (secularized) developments of this ontology of effectiveness or operativeness in the imperative of Kantian ethics, which he calls the ontology of operativity and command,” or duty, where being becomes having-to-be. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. Opus Dei), 744, 750. In other words, this imperative implies a “being-already-decided” an ontology of “obligatory modality,” to use expressions that Agamben borrows from the “anthropology of command,” as articulated by Arnold Gehlen. Therefore, according to Agamben, Kant’s ontology of command (driven by a will or imperative) is a secularized and extreme form of the ontology implied in “the theological-liturgical tradition of *officium* and operativity.” He laments that Kant was blind to the fact that human beings, especially in his context of an emerging industrial revolution, are subjected to other forces and could mistakenly consider the moral duty of obedience to a command (assuming that external commands are easily interiorized) a matter of freedom. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. Opus Dei), 746-748. Assuming that this ontology of command is the dominant paradigm of our times, Agamben envisages the task of a new (messianic) philosophy in which ontological thinking overcomes “operativity and command” and ethics and politics are not defined by “duty and will.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. Opus Dei), 752.

⁷³⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 888-889.

⁷³⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 889.

⁷⁴⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 911. As a result, the rule cannot be strictly conceived as a law any longer, and life is not simply life anymore. From this standpoint, he defines cenoby as “a form of life” described in terms of “common life” (“*koinos bios*”). Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 899. This form of life includes, for instance, clothing (“monastic habit”), prayers, recitation of Scripture, and manual labor. However, the cenobitic form of life is not primarily defined by a list of activities to be performed but by its temporal existence, more precisely, “a total hourly scansion of existence, in which every moment has its corresponding Office or duty (*ufficio*).” In other words, the entire life is transformed “into an Office by way of temporal scansion.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 902, 907.

⁷⁴¹. Indeed, “the penalty par excellence is *excommunication*, the total or partial exclusion from the common life.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 913. The Italian philosopher even argues that the rules to be followed by a monk should be taken as “rules of an art rather than to a legal apparatus.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 915.

suggests that the proper theological context of the monastic rules is Paul's idea that "the Christian life is no longer 'under the law' and cannot in any case be conceived in juridical terms. The Christian, like Paul, is 'dead to the law' (*nomōi apethanon*; Gal. 2:19)."⁷⁴² This theological context underlines "the irreducibility of the Christian form of life to the law," in the sense that it is not reduced to "the observance of a precept," which means that this form of life does not have a juridical or legal nature.⁷⁴³

Moreover, the Italian philosopher differentiates the "two liturgies" of monks and priests. In the transformative potential of monastic liturgy, in which liturgy becomes life, the principle of *opus operatum* of the ecclesiastical liturgy does not work. In the ecclesiastical liturgy, an unworthy priest is still a priest whose sacramental activity is not invalidated, whereas in the monastic liturgy an unworthy monk cannot be a monk any longer.⁷⁴⁴ In both liturgies, Agamben discerns an indetermination of "being and acting and between law (writing) and life."⁷⁴⁵ However, there is a contrast between the movement of these two liturgies. In the ecclesiastical one, its operative movement of indetermination goes from "being into acting and of life into writing" (law).⁷⁴⁶ Conversely, the monastic liturgy moves from acting to being and from writing or law to life.⁷⁴⁷

Taking into account the Franciscan renunciation to the right of ownership,⁷⁴⁸ Agamben discerns a transformative potential in the Franciscan paradigm of use that is

^{742.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 925-926.

^{743.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 926. According to Agamben, a definition of the monastic rules as either juridical or nonjuridical is utterly anachronistic. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 926. In the monastic "threshold of indistinction between rule and life," the form of life is not defined by "either law or morals." Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 937.

^{744.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 956.

^{745.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 957.

^{746.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 957.

^{747.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 958.

^{748.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 975. Agamben explains that the notion of use was introduced among Franciscans by Hugh of Digne and Bonaventure in the thirteenth century and that the former defines natural law in terms of allowing everyone to use everything necessary for their subsistence without necessarily implying ownership. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 985. In opposition to this view, John XXII (1249-1334) affirmed the inseparable bond between ownership and use, where common use necessarily implies communal ownership. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 975. According to him, there can be no distinction between the right of use (*ius utendi*) and permission to use (*licentia utendi*), meaning that use is always regulated by law (*ius*). Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 979. In contrast to John XXII, the Franciscan standpoint postulated the possibility of conceiving human existence beyond the regulations of the law. It is this life "unattainable by law" that Agamben calls "form of life," which implies the "use of goods without having any right to them (neither of property nor of use)." Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 976. Our Italian philosopher explains that this idea of existing beyond the regulations of the law is associated with Ockham's subtle distinction between the natural right of use (*ius utendi naturale*) and "positive right of use" (*ius utendi positivum*). The former belongs to human

contrary to the prevailing operative and effectual ontology described by “the operativity of law and liturgy.”⁷⁴⁹ The Franciscan affirmation of use, in its “conflict with the law,” attempts “to deactivate it and render it inoperative.”⁷⁵⁰ This deactivation is necessary for the liberation of the “existential reality” of a form of life “from the signature of law and office or duty (*ufficio*).”⁷⁵¹ Nevertheless, the concept of use is not properly articulated in the Franciscan literature, as it is only negatively defined in contraposition to the law. In fact, the Italian philosopher stipulates that the Franciscan formulation would benefit from Paul’s discussion of use in 1 Corinthians 7:20–31, where the Christian form of life is framed according to the language of *hōs mē*.⁷⁵² This form of life envisages use as a third dimension between life and law, potentiality and act.⁷⁵³ Even though the Franciscan literature presumably lacks a proper articulation of the form of life, our Italian philosopher claims that the notion of use and the possibility of existing outside the jurisdiction of the law constitute the legacy of this literature to modernity, a legacy

beings in general but only in the situation of necessity, whereas a pact or constitution constitutes the latter. On the basis of this distinction, the Franciscans have solely the natural right, and not the positive right, to use things. Since the natural right is restricted to cases of urgency, their regular use of things derives from the notion of permission to use instead of a right to it. Agamben discerns in Ockham’s theory of use the ambiguity of being both outside (permission rather than right) and inside (natural right) the law, in which the state of exception is reversed and becomes absolute. While human beings in general are under positive law in a normal situation, the Franciscans have only permission (not a right) to use things. On the other hand, in exceptional cases (state of exception), the Franciscans resume their relationship with the law in terms of natural (not positive) rights. In short, they have no relationship with the (natural) law outside the state of exception. In short, they have no relationship with the (natural) law outside the state of exception. In this reversal, what is normal for others becomes an exception for the Franciscans, and what is an exception for others becomes normal, that is, a form of life for the Franciscans. Our Italian philosopher defines the state of exception as “the threshold in which the Franciscan form of life touches the” (natural) “law.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 979–980.

⁷⁴⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 995.

⁷⁵⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 995.

⁷⁵¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 995.

⁷⁵². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 997. Agamben suggests that the concept of form of life should be developed in the theory of use instead of merely a negative opposition to law, or even a limited notion of use in terms of act or *energeia*. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 998.

⁷⁵³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 998. In his dialogue with Pierre de Jean Olivi (1248–1298), our Italian philosopher discerns an eschatological perspective of the Franciscan form of life defined by use. Olivi follows Joachim of Fiori’s theology of history, where the eschatological ages are marked by the Spirit and the fulfillment of the law. From this standpoint, the eschatological nature of the Franciscan movement is not defined by a new doctrine but is expressed as a form of life that reproduces Christ’s life in the world in the age of the Spirit. In an eschatological tone, Agamben speaks of “the Franciscan form of life” as “the end of all lives” and describes “the highest poverty” and “its use of things” as “the form-of-life that begins when all the West’s forms of life have reached their historical consummation.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 1000.

that needs to be further elaborated. Agamben believes that this elaboration is potentially able to confront the operative ontology that resulted from a secularized liturgy and has dominated Western politics and ethics.

The horizon of this alternative paradigm to be elaborated seems to be initially revealed by the questions he raises at the end of *Altissima povertà*: (1) “what is a life outside the law, if it is defined as that form of life which makes use of things without ever appropriating them?” (2) “what is use, if one ceases to define it solely negatively with respect to ownership?”⁷⁵⁴ These two questions require an answer to another question: (3) what is “the essential connection between use and form of life?”⁷⁵⁵ Finally, (4) what kind of ontology and ethics would be elaborated from these previous answers?⁷⁵⁶ A discussion of these questions appears, at least partially, in *L'uso dei corpi*, which is discussed below. In short, *Altissima povertà* envisages a form of potentiality in the paradigm of (new) use and the transformation of a form-of-life, which is an alternative to the prevailing operative political and juridical paradigm of ownership that predetermines life.

4.7 Potential (Transformation) in Use, Relational Ontology, and Form-of-life

In *L'uso dei corpi* (2014),⁷⁵⁷ the concept of potentiality and transformation is further developed in the discussion of use, which leads to reflections on a relational ontology and form-of-life. If in *Altissima povertà* the Italian philosopher suggested that use was crucial for the Franciscans but this discussion was negatively circumscribed to the juridical dimension of the renunciation to the right of ownership, now he attempts to formulate a positive ontological view of use.⁷⁵⁸ This formulation centers on the idea of inoperativity, according to which Agamben intends to deactivate Aristotle's pair potency-act, where *energeia* (being-at-work) has primacy over potency. For Agamben, use is “a principle internal to potential, which prevents it from being simply consumed in the act and drives it to turn once more to itself, to make itself a potential of potential, to be capable of its own potential (and therefore its own

⁷⁵⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 1001.

⁷⁵⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 1001.

⁷⁵⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,1. The Highest Poverty), 1001. For a helpful discussion of ethics in Agamben, see Ype De Boer, *Agamben's Ethics of the Happy Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024); Ype De Boer, “The Profane Land of the Happy: On the Messianic Promise in the Work of Giorgio Agamben,” *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 808 (1–15).

⁷⁵⁷. Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2014). English translation published as *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Citations of this book will be taken from Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*.

⁷⁵⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1100.

impotential).⁷⁵⁹ From this perspective, the “inoperative work” takes place by the “suspension of potential” and, by “[r]endering inoperative the works of language, the arts, politics, and economy, it shows what a human body can do, opens it to a new possible use.”⁷⁶⁰ This statement reveals the broad scope of Agamben’s reflection of deactivation and, thus, potentiality and transformation, which includes language, arts, politics, and economy.⁷⁶¹ In contrast to an instrumental conception of use, as observed in Aristotle’s discussion of the instrumental role of the slave,⁷⁶² the Italian philosopher explores use from the standpoint of relational ontology. He argues that use is, first and foremost, the “use of self” since use is a relationship with something. In this relationship, “I must be affected by it” and, thus, I “constitute myself as one who makes use of it.”⁷⁶³ In dialogue with Stoicism, our Italian philosopher the self as relational rather than substantial and predetermined. This relational self is spelled out in terms of use, as the self “coincides entirely with the use that the living being

^{759.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1112.

^{760.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1112.

^{761.} In this context, our Italian philosopher mentions “a phenomenology of forms of life and of inoperativity” and refers to Benjamin’s argument that “shards of messianic time are present in history in possibly infamous and risible forms.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1112.

^{762.} Agamben dialogues with Aristotle’s conception of the “use of the body,” which is summarized into five points, with a special reference to the figure of the slave: (1) it is “an unproductive activity (*argos*, ‘inoperative,’ ‘without work’) compared with ‘the use of a bed or a garment’; (2) it refers to “a zone of indifference between one’s own body and the body of another,” as in the case of the body of the slave that is used by the body of the master, and (3) this zone is situated in the threshold of *physis*/nature and *nomos*/convention,” “the household and the city,” “*zoè* and *bios*”; (4) it does not constitute a *poiesis* (production) nor a *praxis* and, therefore, (5) the slave “is the human being without work who renders possible the realization of the work of the human being.” Paradoxically, he is a human being “excluded—and through his exclusion included—in humanity, so that human beings can have a human life,” in terms of “a political life.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1047. To put the last point more sharply, our Italian philosopher recalls Hannah Arendt’s distinction between modern and ancient notions of slavery. In the modern sense, the slave is a “labor-power at a good price with the goal of profits,” whereas the ancient notion is spelled out as “a matter of eliminating labor from the properly human life.” According to this ancient and abhorrent perspective, the slave is “not properly human,” but he makes “it possible for others to be human.” While “excluded from political life,” which defines true human life (“*bios politikos*”), he maintains a “special relation with it.” Agamben concludes that in this Greek view of human beings, “the slave, like bare life, stands at the threshold that separates and joins them.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1044–1045. He proposes that the modern development of technology is related to the instrumental conception of slavery and produces a new “form of slavery.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1099.

^{763.} Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1054. Use entails that human beings and the world are “in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; in the using of something, it is the very being of the one using that is first of all at stake.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1054.

makes of it.”⁷⁶⁴ Therefore, use implies “being affected” and “constituting-oneself . . . in relation with something.”⁷⁶⁵ To put it more sharply, “the living being uses-itself” in the sense that “the self is nothing other than use-of-oneself.”⁷⁶⁶

In this relational ontology, Agamben employs the language of deactivation and inoperativity. He speaks of the deactivation of the status of subject and object in the relationship of use. As these categories are rendered inoperative, he envisages “a new figure of human praxis” in use.⁷⁶⁷ The Italian philosopher suggests that use (*chreon*) in Western thinking is historically informed in different ways by the ontology of the Aristotelian duality of potential and act. In contrast to Aristotle’s *energeia*, he attempts to articulate an understanding of use as the “use of potential” that is not simply the “passage to the act” (“being put-into-work”).⁷⁶⁸ The Aristotelian tradition, as formulated by Aquinas in the culmination of medieval Scholasticism, conceives use only in terms of act, being unrelated to potentiality. In opposition to this tradition of being-in-act, Agamben proposes the notion of “being-in-use,” in which potentiality does not need to “pass into the act or be put into work.”⁷⁶⁹ This proposal involves ontologically rethinking the Aristotelian categories of *dynamis* (potentiality) and *energeia* (act). In Aristotelian ontology, “being (use) is divided into potential and act,”⁷⁷⁰ which implies that *energeia* (being-at-work) is the end of potentiality. Agamben’s proposal repudiates precisely this division and implication. Curiously, by highlighting Aristotle’s aporia of *adynamia* (impotentiality), the “potential not to,” he underlines “the possibility of not passing into act,” and claims that use is “beyond the simple opposition between potential and being-at-work.”⁷⁷¹ If use is defined as “use-of-oneself,” the opposition between subject and object is deactivated or neutralized, meaning that the self is not a subject but is rather “constituted in the relation of use.”⁷⁷²

Ultimately, Agamben envisages a profound modification of the modern conception of “the subject and its faculties,” which is based on the tradition of Aristotelian ontology. Examples of this modification include the idea that a pianist is not a subject who holds the potential to play. Rather, it is the use of the piano by means

⁷⁶⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1077.

⁷⁶⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1077-1078.

⁷⁶⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1078.

⁷⁶⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1054.

⁷⁶⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1072.

⁷⁶⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1081.

⁷⁷⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1081.

⁷⁷¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1082.

⁷⁷². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1084. Our Italian philosopher stipulates that there is no subject to “decide to put it to work or not” since the self is only a relation. He maintains that the act of will (decision) is what makes a subject the owner of techniques and actions in Western thought. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1083-1084.

of one's bodily parts that constitutes a pianist. Such reversal explains what he means by saying that it is not a subject's faculty or knowledge that defines use, which actually describes a form-of-life.⁷⁷³ Instead of a subject with faculties, the self "is opened up as a central inoperativity in every operation, as the 'livability' and 'usability' in every work."⁷⁷⁴ Instead of merely inertia or absence of works, the language of inoperativity depicts a new relation to works and, eventually, their redefinition. According to the Italian philosopher, works do not result from a potentiality "realized and consumed" in them. In fact, a work enacts a potentiality that is "still present, still in use... ceaselessly reopening it to a new, possible use."⁷⁷⁵ This active view of potentiality, which is preserved rather than inert, is associated with the notion of deactivation and inoperativity from the standpoint of the redefinition of work that cancels out the Aristotelian notion of *energeia* and subject. Instead of a subject of the work, the user renounces "every attribution and every property" (to echo the Franciscan position) and becomes only a witness, in the Latin sense of *auctor*, who "bears testimony of the work in the very gesture in which, in contemplation, he revokes it and constantly puts it back into use."⁷⁷⁶ In short, use as a form-of-life constantly deactivates being-at-work, restoring *energeia* to potential and canceling the dichotomies of potency and act, "being and acting, material and form."⁷⁷⁷

In this context, Agamben mentions the apostle Paul and emphasizes the notion of slave and a new use that deactivates the factual condition without implying ownership or substantial identity (see 1 Corinthians 7:21, 29-32). More precisely, "the messianic call" does not offer to slaves a "new substantial identity" that changes their "factual and juridico-political" condition.⁷⁷⁸ Rather, what is in view here is the possibility of using this condition in a new way.⁷⁷⁹ Likewise, the other factual conditions in 1 Corinthians 7:29-32 (weeping, having a wife, rejoicing, buying) are framed by the *hōs mē* ("as not") language, which creates an internal tension in each condition and thereby "revokes and deactivates it without altering its form."⁷⁸⁰ This is a modest (dialectical) account of potential transformation, since identities and forms are not destroyed but deactivated. Our Italian philosopher defines the messianic calling as "the deactivation and disappropriation of the factual condition" in the sense that it opens the way to the possibility of a new use.⁷⁸¹ It is from this perspective that he interprets the idea of a "new creature" in the messiah (2

⁷⁷³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1084.

⁷⁷⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1085.

⁷⁷⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1085.

⁷⁷⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1086.

⁷⁷⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1087.

⁷⁷⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1079.

⁷⁷⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1079.

⁷⁸⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1080.

⁷⁸¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1080.

Corinthians 5:17). Being a new creature essentially designates the ability “to render the old inoperative and use it in a new way.”⁷⁸² Furthermore, Agamben discerns in Paul’s language of buying “as not possessing” and using the world “as not abusing” (1 Corinthians 7:30–31), a contraposition to the conception of ownership in “Roman law as *ius utendi et abutendi*.”⁷⁸³ Instead of *dominium*, Paul proposes *usus*, according to which the world is never the “object of ownership but only of use.”⁷⁸⁴

In the third part of *L’uso dei corpi*, focused on “form-of-life,” Agamben explains what needs to be dialectically transformed. He criticizes the division of (political) life in Western politics, as inherited from Aristotelian ontology,⁷⁸⁵ according to which politics describes the human *ergon* or practice “founded on the separation, worked by the *logos*, of otherwise inseparable functions.”⁷⁸⁶ Therefore, separation is the key definition of politics, according to which life is divided into “a series of partitions that pass through the very body of *zoè*.”⁷⁸⁷ Agamben argues that this political qualification of life does not have a “content other than the pure fact of the caesura as such.”⁷⁸⁸ As already emphasized in *Homo sacer*, the separation of *zoè* and *bios* is the starting point of the “ontological-biopolitical machine” of Western politics, and he proposes that the West cannot think deeply about life inasmuch as this machine, which captures life “within itself by means of a series of divisions,” is not deactivated.⁷⁸⁹ In contrast to the separation of the biopolitical machine, our Italian philosopher points to the need for a politics defined as form-of-life, in which life is “indivisible from its form.”⁷⁹⁰ The notion of form-of-life assumes that potentiality cannot be totally separated from act and constitutes the essence or nature of individual beings. To affirm that “form-of-life is a being of potential” means that there is no such thing as a subject that has potential and decides to put it into act.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1080.

⁷⁸³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1080.

⁷⁸⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1080.

⁷⁸⁵. In Aristotle’s ontology, political life (*bios politikos*) is “a special qualification of life” that enables it to participate in the *polis*, defining virtue and happiness. However, this political life is founded on the division of *zoè* and the following exclusion of one of its parts, which is negatively included because its exclusion is foundational for politics. Aristotle divides the soul into faculties in *De anima* (Book II) and speaks of nutritive, sensitive, and intellectual parts. From the standpoint of this division, the nutritive or vegetative faculty is considered irrational and common to all living beings, meaning that it is not properly human, being unrelated to happiness in political life. In this ontological tradition, twentieth-century Western biopolitics did something unimaginable to Aristotle: the medical separation of vegetative or nutritive “life from the other vital functions in the human being.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1209–1211.

⁷⁸⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1211.

⁷⁸⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1210.

⁷⁸⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1210.

⁷⁸⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1210.

⁷⁹⁰. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1213.

⁷⁹¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1214. In contrast to the inseparability of form-of-life, Agamben historically discerns the political disjunction of bare life from forms of

Agamben envisages a political life informed by form-of-life, where the disjunction of bare life does not exist anymore, and life is mainly characterized by potential.⁷⁹² This is why he is interested in modal ontology since it contradicts the disjunction of Aristotelian ontology (essence and existence; potency and act) and stipulates that “substance does not ‘have’ but ‘is’ its modes.”⁷⁹³ Seeking an alternative to this traditional ontology, the Italian philosopher dialogues with Suárez (1548-1617), Spinoza (1632-1677), and Leibniz (1646-1716) regarding the articulation of a modal ontology. This is “an ontology in the middle voice”⁷⁹⁴ in which “being uses-itself,” meaning that “it constitutes, expresses, and loves itself in the affection that it receives from its own modifications.”⁷⁹⁵ This implies a redefinition of key ontological categories,⁷⁹⁶ particularly the neutralization of the binary hierarchical categories of cause and effect.⁷⁹⁷ Furthermore, the declination of being in the middle voice deactivates the categories of essence-existence and the movement from potency to act. Inasmuch as these fundamental categories are rendered inoperative, “[b]eing does preexist the modes but constitutes itself in being modified, is nothing other than its modifications.”⁷⁹⁸ In this modal ontology, being is not fixed or schematized in its modes, but “is a flux, and substance ‘modulates’ itself and beats out its rhythm.”⁷⁹⁹

The basic contours of Agamben’s ontology, with a focus on potentiality, seem to be delineated in the epilogue of *L’uso dei corpi*, which is titled “Toward a Theory of Destituent Power” and outlines several concepts in the *Homo Sacer* series.⁸⁰⁰ Taking into account

life already present back in Hobbes’ conception of sovereignty. According to this disjunction, life in the context of the state of nature is painstakingly vulnerable to the danger of death coming from others, and this explains why political life is defined in terms of the protection provided by the Hobbesian Leviathan. The disjunction of bare life from forms of life is also seen in the state of exception, in which the sovereign always decides everything. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1215-1216.

⁷⁹². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1217.

⁷⁹³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1230.

⁷⁹⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1176.

⁷⁹⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1177.

⁷⁹⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1179.

⁷⁹⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1177.

⁷⁹⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1181.

⁷⁹⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1183.

⁸⁰⁰. In the introduction of the epilogue, bare life is not to be confused with natural life, as the former results from a division of life undertaken by the ontological-political machine of exception that separates bare life from the form of life. This machine is the articulation of *zoè* and *bios* in Western thinking (Aristotelian tradition), in which the structure of exception divides life, excluding vegetative life from other functions of life and paradoxically making this exclusion the *archè* (foundation) of life. For our Italian philosopher, political thinking can only explore other possibilities if this machine is deactivated, and this is precisely the point of *Homo sacer*. The basic idea of *Stato di eccezione* is that the juridico-political structure of exception, that is, the machine to be deactivated, articulates two heterogeneous components, namely, *potestas* (the normative restrictive juridical dimension) and *auctoritas* (the anomic and extrajudicial dimension) to the point of bringing them to the threshold of undecidability between anomie and *nomos*, life and juridical order. Instead of having these two components distinguished and dialectically related,

that constituted power assumes the presence of constituent power, he introduces the provisional language of “destituent potential,”⁸⁰¹ which “never resolves itself into a constituted power.”⁸⁰² Overall, a destituent potential deactivates in the sense of making the relations of the elements inoperative, not simply destroying them. In fact, the neutralization of the relations intends to unleash the potency so far inactive and, thus, enable a new use of it.⁸⁰³ Our Italian philosopher argues that Paul’s approach to the law in terms of *katargein* is a helpful example for the elaboration of this theory. This term conveys the meaning of deactivation, rendering inoperative, causing to cease from work. This is what the messiah will do with “every power, every authority, and every potential’ (1 Corinthians 15:24).” Moreover, since he is the *telos* (fulfillment, end) of the law (Romans 10:4), where fulfillment means inoperativity, believers “have been ‘rendered inoperative [*katargethemien*] with respect to the law’ (Rom 7:6).”⁸⁰⁴ Agamben notices that Luther translates *katargein* into *aufheben* in German, which implies the ambiguity, as Hegel observes, of abolishing and preserving. Rather than destroying or annulling the law, which is just and holy, the apostle Paul emphasizes, according

such as in republican Rome, the state of exception makes them “coincide in one person alone.” When this happens, “the juridico-political system” becomes “a killing machine.” In *Il Regno e la Gloria*, the structural combination of two components is analogously observed in the relationships of rule and government, inoperativity and glory. Agamben emphasizes that glory, which constitutes “the ultimate mystery of divinity and power,” implies in this context the capturing of human inoperativity in “the economic-governmental machine.” Agamben emphasizes that glory, which constitutes “the ultimate mystery of divinity and power,” implies in this context the capturing of human inoperativity in “the economic-governmental machine.” Thus, this captured inoperativity is kept “in the form of glory and acclamation . . . through the media.” Overall, the Italian philosopher discerns in several concepts the same mechanism of the foundational constitution of the *archè* by means of the division of factual experience and the pushing it down to the origin of exclusion. The separation of bare life from politically qualified life is the division of life that founds a city. The “exclusion-inclusion of the animal” defines the human. The law is defined by “the *exceptio* of anomie,” the exclusion of inoperativity and its capture in the form of glory” establishes the government. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1265-1267.

⁸⁰¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1268.

⁸⁰². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1270. In his sketch of an ontological-political framework free from the Western Aristotelian notion of relation, Agamben explains that the main problem of the Western Aristotelian view of relation is that the elements constituted by it are presupposed initially as unrelated. This presupposition means that “being precedes relation and exists beyond it.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1269, 1271. Agamben’s proposal of overcoming this Western notion of relation focuses on the assumed disconnection of elements in Western thinking and their political and practical implications. Instead of the language of relation, a destituent potential affirms the concept of contact, which “is not a point of tangency nor a *quid* or a substance in which two elements communicate: it is defined only by an absence of representation, only by a caesura.” This means that when relations are suspended, their elements are only in contact. From this standpoint, Agamben claims that “potential and act are no longer in relation but immediately in contact.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1277.

⁸⁰³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274.

⁸⁰⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274.

to our Italian philosopher, the deactivation of “its action with respect to sin,” inasmuch as the activation of sinful desires is somehow related to the knowledge of the law (Romans 7:7-8).⁸⁰⁵ This is precisely the “operativity of the law” that is rendered inoperative or neutralized by messianic faith. Instead of its abolition, the law is “rendered destitute from its power to command.”⁸⁰⁶ In contrast to the law of commands (*nomos ton entolon*, Ephesians 2:15) and works (*ton ergon*, Romans 3:27), the law that remains is the law of faith (*nomos pisteos*, Romans 3:27), which is not defined by works but by the word (Romans 10:27).⁸⁰⁷ To put it more sharply, the messiah is “a destituent potential” in Paul that does not produce a new identity.⁸⁰⁸ This means that the messianic in Paul is not “a new and more universal identity but a caesura that passes through every identity—both that of the Jew and that of the Gentile.”⁸⁰⁹ More precisely, the messianic is the destitution (*destituzione*) of identities.⁸¹⁰ This conception is observed in the use of the expression *hōs mē* (“as not”) in the description of the Christian form of life in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31. The “as not” is spelled out in terms of “rendering destitute all juridical and social ownership, without this deposition founding a new identity.”⁸¹¹ Rather, to destitute is associated with the idea of “making use,” that is, the messianic form-of-life “deposes the social conditions in which it finds itself to live, without negating them, but simply by using them.”⁸¹²

As a result of deactivation, potential turns into a form-of-life, which is “constitutively destituent.”⁸¹³ This understanding is associated with the idea that

⁸⁰⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274.

⁸⁰⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274.

⁸⁰⁷. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274.

⁸⁰⁸. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1274-1275.

⁸⁰⁹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1275.

⁸¹⁰. “The messianic (Paul does not know the term ‘Christian’) does not represent a new and more universal identity but a caesura that passes through every identity—both that of the Jew and that of the Gentile. The ‘Jew according to the spirit’ and ‘Gentile according to the flesh’ *do not define a subsequent identity* but only the impossibility of every identity of coinciding with itself—namely, *their destitution as identities* [cioè la loro destituzione in quanta identità]: Jew as non-Jew, Gentile as non-Gentile. (It is probably according to a paradigm of this type that one could think a destitution of the apparatus of citizenship.)” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1275, emphasis supplied. I have inserted the original expression in Italian between brackets. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: edizione integrale 1995-2015* (IV,2. L’uso dei corpi) (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2018), 1275.

⁸¹¹. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1275.

⁸¹². Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1275.

⁸¹³. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1277. The Italian philosopher stipulates that whereas living beings generally find themselves in a specific form of life, they are not necessarily a form-of-life. Indeed, he assumes that the constitution of a form-of-life deactivates all the specific forms of life. Using messianic language, Agamben compares ontological deactivation with deponent verbs in Latin and their similarity with middle-voice verbs, where the distinction between active and passive voice is neutralized. Having Titian’s theme of deposition at the Louvre in mind, Agamben points out that “Christ has entirely deposed the

inoperativity and contemplation are qualified as “metaphysical operators” that release “living human beings from every biological and social destiny and every predetermined task.”⁸¹⁴ Different types of work, “linguistic and bodily, material and immaterial, biological and social,” are rendered inoperative or “contemplated as such in order to liberate the inoperativity that has remained imprisoned in them.”⁸¹⁵

In short, Agamben articulates a relational ontology of use in *L'uso dei corpi* that prioritizes potentiality. According to this ontology of potentiality, the self is dynamically constituted by use. This means that the self is constantly transformed by it. In other words, the self is a user (not an owner) and witness to the potentiality of new use and transformation into a form-of-life. Metaphysically, potentiality is a destituent power of forms of life imposed and socially predetermined in the works of language, arts, politics, and economy. But this destitution describes a modest account of transformation, which does not change the form and identity imposed but hollows them out.

4.8 A Systematic Summary of *Pistis*, Potentiality, and Transformation in the *Homo Sacer* Series

Overall, the notions of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation are articulated in dialogue with three intertwined conceptual categories. The first category is the juridico-political dimension of law, state of exception, and sovereignty. The second includes the destituent emphasis on deactivation and inoperativity, while the third underlines the ontologico-political proposal of potentiality in the context of use and form-of-life. What seems to traverse these categories is Paul's notion of *hōs mē*.

In the juridico-political category (law, state of exception, and sovereignty), Agamben defines messianism in *Homo sacer* as the solution to the problem of the law, paradoxically in terms of its fulfillment and transgression. More specifically, messianism is taken as a modified form of the state of exception, in which there is a zone of indifference between the execution or fulfillment and the transgression of the law. As a modified theory, the difference between messianism and the

glory and regality that, in some way, still belong to him on the cross, and yet precisely and solely in this way, when he is still beyond passion and action, the complete destitution [*destituzione*] of his regality inaugurates the new age of the redeemed humanity.” Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1277. I have inserted the original expression in Italian between brackets. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer* (IV,2. *L'uso dei corpi*), 1278. In connection with this messianic picture, he underscores that passivity and activity coincide in form-of-life. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1277.

⁸¹⁴. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1278.

⁸¹⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1278.

state of exception as such seems to center on the notion of sovereignty. Exception constitutes the structure of sovereignty inasmuch as the sovereign decides about the state of exception. The problem with the sovereign decision is that it postulates an essential connection between law or norm and life, making them a biopolitical zone of indistinction, but this is actually a fiction produced by the sovereign power. In fact, this postulation is the attempt of the sovereign to blur the distinction between constituting and constituted power, which limits the notion of life and potentiality in political theory. However, the messiah is not a sovereign. Rather, messianism envisages the disruption of the sovereign power and, therefore, uncovers the fictional nature of the biopolitical connection between rule or law and life, allowing a different view of life and potentiality.

The second category formulates the conception of this messianic disruption of sovereign power, which is spelled out as a destituent power (in *L'uso dei corpi*) and explained in terms of deactivation and inoperativity. In the language of Paul's messianism, as particularly elaborated in *Il Regno e la Gloria* and in *L'uso dei corpi*, *katargeō* describes the deactivation of political (sovereign) powers and of the law that gives expression to them. The Italian philosopher dialectically insists, on the one hand, that deactivation is different from destruction or abolition. More precisely, to deactivate is to render something inoperative, that is, to destitute it from its commanding power. From this perspective, the eschatological deactivation of the messianic time is a destituent power that is neither destructive nor intends to constitute a new commanding power.

On the other hand, Agamben also rejects the notion that inoperativity describes inactivity, inertia, or rest. Rather, his emphasis is on a form of remaining potentiality that has not been converted into actuality, and from this standpoint, it is seen as inactivity. Thus, instead of a mere absence of work, he envisages a redefinition of work that is free from the Aristotelian bonds that reduce the understanding of life and potentiality only with reference to actuality in Western ontology and politics.

Hence, the destituent emphasis of the second category leads to the discussion of potentiality in the ontologico-political category of this summary. In his philosophical archeology, Agamben presupposes that Aristotelian ontology is foundational for modern Western politics. Therefore, the messianic deactivation of (sovereign) political powers and their law implies a redefinition of ontology, focusing on potentiality. As he indicates in *Homo sacer*, the sovereign attempt to blur the distinction between constituting and constituted power requires that the former be released from the latter. In ontological language, the former is the potentiality, and the latter describes actuality, which implies that the Aristotelian priority of actuality over potentiality (where the existence of potentiality is basically reduced to its existence in actuality) corresponds to the political dominance of the constituted power over the constituting

power (where the existence of the constituting power is basically reduced to its existence in the constituted power). This explains why Agamben proposes a new relationship between potentiality and actuality, in which the former is able not to pass into the latter, according to Aristotle's notion of *adynamia*. The preservation of the existence of potentiality is spelled out in terms of the possibility of a new use. This is how Agamben answers Paul's question about the meaning of the law after its messianic fulfillment in *Stato di eccezione*, namely, a new use of the law. Thus, the messianic dialectical deactivation and fulfillment of the law does not mean its destruction but a new use. This is a confirmation that the connection made by the sovereign between law or norm and life is fictional. In the context of sovereign power and its biopolitics, the deactivation of powers and the consequent openness to a new use indicate that life is not restricted to a predetermined form (delineated by the sovereign). Therefore, the goal of messianic deactivation is to constantly make a new use possible, which defines a form-of-life.

The notion of form-of-life in the third category of this summary is arguably clarified by the messianic notion of *hōs mē*. Paul's *hōs mē* also refers to the category of deactivation since it describes the juridical condition of the messianic community as being rendered inoperative. In other words, life in the messiah deactivates each aspect of the life lived by this community. Paul's *hōs mē* is the messianic (Christian) form-of-life, which is a theory of use instead of ownership. This is a life released from the grasp of the law, as life is not property but common use.

These ideas also include the language of faith (*pistis*). In the discussion of destituent power, the operativity of the law is deactivated by messianic faith. This is not the abolition of the law but its redefinition (a new use). Instead of the law of works or operativity, what remains is the law of faith, defined by the word. As a signature, language (word) is associated with messianism and political theory. Given the fact that Christianity is a religion of the word (*logos*), faith (*pistis*) is performative (Romans 10:6-10). More precisely, *pistis* describes the performative experience of veridiction, which is common in the fields of law and religion, while different from the denotative value of assertions in the realm of logic and science. To put it more sharply, performative language suspends the denotative function of words to establish a new use of speech, namely, an existential connection (e.g., the interaction of the confession of faith of the lips with the belief of the heart—Romans 10:6-10) of the speaking subject with things. The understanding of being as substance in classical philosophy is denotative in the sense of describing things. By affirming performative rather than denotative language, Agamben seems to advance a philosophical perspective that is focused on the reality of new possibilities rather than the description of things as they are defined in actuality. Agamben seems to contemplate a similar pattern of the suspension of denotative language in the deactivation of the law in messianism, as a modified version of the

state of exception, and political theory, in the sense that they make possible a new use of the law. Just as the new use of language highlights new avenues (potentialities) for the power of saying, a new use of the law in politics underscores new possibilities for the power of acting.

In *Il sacramento del linguaggio*, Agamben situates the language of faith in the context of communal reciprocal relationships of trust and personal loyalty among people and cities. In these relationships of faith and faithfulness, there is a consistent correspondence between words and actions, which highlights the close connection between *pistis* and promise. At the same time, language is ambiguously open to the possibility of truthful and deceitful speech. This is exemplified by the idea that faith is one element of the oath, while the other element is the curse for a non-correspondence between words and actions (perjury). Therefore, even though the emphasis of our Italian philosopher is on the potentiality of language from the perspective of *pistis* and truthful promises in reciprocal relationships of loyalty in the messianic community, he is aware that language is negatively open to deceit, and this is particularly observed in the use of language by the sovereign power.

It is also important to highlight that Agamben's messianic perspective seems to develop a new understanding of ontology, metaphysics, and subjectivity. In *Il Regno e la Gloria* he speaks of contemplative life and inoperativity in terms of metaphysical operators. In *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*, contingency and possibility are qualified as ontological operators of subjectification, whereas impossibility and necessity are termed as ontological operators of desubjectification. Desubjectification describes the destructive weapons of the sovereign biopolitical power in the creation of bare life. On the other hand, subjectification refers to the creation of consciousness, which is linguistically constituted as the I who is speaking in the event of discourse. In the discourse of subjectification, I speak of the world as my world. Conversely, there is no discourse in desubjectification, as the world is not my world. At the same time, the testimony offered on behalf of the desubjectified, which is also formulated and delivered in the use of language, refuses desubjectification and constitutes a remnant that resists the destruction of the sovereign power. From this perspective, *pistis* could be associated with testimony in the sense of trust or conviction expressed by means of language that resists the desubjectification of the sovereign power. This conviction of resistance somehow aligns with the ontological operators of subjectification in the affirmation of contingency and possibility, in contrast to the weapons of impossibility and necessity used by biopolitical power. For the overall purpose of the present research, the association of *pistis* and testimony in Agamben is quite significant, as Part I showed that attestation and testimony are closely related in Ricoeur.

In *L'uso dei corpi*, Agamben's ontology of use deactivates substantial predetermined conceptions of the self and the modern framework of subject-object. While these

conceptions favor actuality over potentiality, the Italian philosopher emphasizes potentiality and stipulates that the self is constituted as it makes use of itself. Instead of a subject, the self is a user who does not possess (following the Franciscan assumption of non-property) a faculty to be actualized but rather enacts a potentiality in use that is always present as potentiality and, thus, constantly open to a new use. Accordingly, the self is a witness to a new use. Agamben explains that the deactivation of actuality, which unleashes the (remaining) potentiality imprisoned in it for a new use, is not a destruction of the elements taken as actual. Instead, this is a suspension of established relations between them, implying that a new use presumably involves the articulation of new interactions that even include reshaping the self. From this standpoint, trust in contingency and possibility (ontological operators of subjectification) assumed in the language of *pistis* envisages the transformation of a new self, in the sense that old uses that followed established relations regulated by the sovereign power are no longer operative in the messianic time.

After the description and systematization offered in this chapter about *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the *Homo Sacer* series, the next chapter will explore Agamben's *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*. As indicated in this chapter, trust in potentiality and transformation is situated in the political and ontological context of sovereign power and its law, which do not make room for potentiality and transformation. However, an archeological deconstruction of this power and its ontological implications, followed by their deactivation through the potentiality of new uses of the law in the messianic time, lead to political and ontological transformation, which includes transformation in the context of selfhood, even though the current politico-juridical conditions do not change, at least not initially. In large measure, this describes the experience of *pistis* or trust in potentiality and transformation in the context of messianic time. The main contribution of this chapter on the *Homo Sacer* series is the delineation of Agamben's political thinking and its ontological framework, discussed in connection with messianism and *pistis*. The exploration of *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*, which is the task of the next chapter, will deepen the discussion of messianic time and Paul's *pistis*.

CHAPTER 5

Pistis in Il tempo che resta

From a diachronic or historical standpoint, *Il tempo che resta*⁸¹⁶ (2000) was published after only two volumes of the *Homo Sacer* series, namely, I. *Homo sacer* (1995) and III. *Quel che resta di Auschwitz* (1998). However, from a synchronic and systematic perspective, *Il tempo che resta* will be explored in this chapter as a key contribution for understanding the messianic hope or trust in potentiality and transformation outlined so far on the basis of the *Homo Sacer* series. Arguably, *Il tempo che resta* is the most explicit and extended treatment of messianism in Agamben. Since he considers the letters of Paul as “the fundamental messianic text for the Western tradition,”⁸¹⁷ the Italian philosopher uses the ten Greek words of Romans 1:1 (*Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou, klētos apostolos aphōrismenos eis euangelion theou*) as the starting point of his messianic discussion, comprising six parts and a conclusion (threshold), in dialogue with Paul’s letters in general. Overall, his messianic hope and trust in this book can be systematically organized into three main interrelated categories: separation, deactivation, and inversion. I will describe each one of these categories below in order to clarify the notion of *pistis* that emerges from this reflection.

5.1 Messianism and Separation

In the first section (“The First Day”: *Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou*), the Italian philosopher argues that “[t]he messianic separates the proper name from its bearer.”⁸¹⁸ Instead of using the Jewish royal name Saul (see Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 8, 11, 22, 24; 11:25, 30; 12:25; 13:1-2, 7, 9), known in the Hebrew Bible as the man distinguished by his beauty and stature (1 Samuel 9:2),⁸¹⁹ the apostle is identified in his letters as Paul, which in Latin (*paulus*) conveys the idea of being “small, of little significance” (see also 1 Corinthians 15:9).⁸²⁰ Thus, Agamben interprets the substitution of *sigma* (Saul) by *pi* (Paul) in Greek as “the passage from the regal to the insignificant, from grandeur to smallness.”⁸²¹ In

⁸¹⁶. Agamben, *Il tempo che resta: Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000). English translation published as *The Time that Remains*.

⁸¹⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 1.

⁸¹⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 10.

⁸¹⁹. Agamben mentions that Saul in the Koran “is called *Talut*, the highest.” Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 9.

⁸²⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 9. This point was highlighted by Augustine in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 72:4 (“Paulum . . . minimum est”). Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 11. In his brief remarks on Acts 13:9, the only NT passage where the two names Saul and Paul appear together (Σαῦλος δέ, ὁ καὶ Παῦλος), Joseph Fitzmyer mentions the Jewish custom of “bearing two names, one Semitic, the other Greco-Roman. Paul was his (*cog*)*nomen*, and Saul was the Semitic *signum* or *supernomen*.” Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 33 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 231.

⁸²¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 9.

fact, next to *Paulos* is the term *doulos* (servant, slave) in Romans 1:1 (see Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1). More specifically, he is “a slave of the Messiah” (*doulos Christou*). Our Italian philosopher underscores that slaves in classical antiquity did not have names in terms of juridical status but received their names from their owners, particularly in the event of their acquisition. Therefore, as the apostle becomes a slave of the Messiah, he must “lose his name, whether it be Roman or Jewish.”⁸²² To be sure, the messianic separation of a significant name does not constitute only a diminishing experience, but it also presupposes that the less important or weak things ultimately triumph over the strong ones (1 Corinthians 1:27-28).⁸²³ Agamben claims that *doulos Christou* is a technical expression in Paul, where the first term conveys a juridical condition that is transformed by the messianic event.⁸²⁴ This transformation describes “the neutralization,” rather than a simple abolishment, of “the divisions of the law and all juridical and social conditions.”⁸²⁵ From this standpoint, the language of *doulos Christou* expresses “the new messianic condition” in which the slave is considered “more than a slave” (*hyper doulon*, Philemon 16). This condition, the Italian philosopher underlines,⁸²⁶ is paradoxically stated in 1 Corinthians 7:22: “whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ (*doulos estin Christou*).”

While the first section highlights the messianic separation of a significant name to underscore the condition of servanthood, the third section (“The Third Day”: *aphōrismenos*) stipulates that the messianic separation is different from the one spelled out by the divisions of the law. According to Agamben, the participle *aphōrismenos* corresponds to the language of ‘Pharisees’ (‘the separated ones’) in Hebrew (*pārūš*, Aramaic *p̄rīšā*).⁸²⁷ From this perspective, Paul seems to ironically allude to his separation as a Pharisee in the past by using *aphōrismenos*. But he refers to this previous experience in order to negate “it in the name of another separation that is no longer a separation according to the *nomos*, but a separation according to the messianic proclamation.”⁸²⁸ Assuming that the language of *nomos* etymologically derives from *nemō* (‘assign,’ ‘attribute parts,’ ‘divide’),⁸²⁹ the Italian philosopher

^{822.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 11.

^{823.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 10.

^{824.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 12.

^{825.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 13.

^{826.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 13.

^{827.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 45. See Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990–), 184. The use of the participle ἀφωρισμένος in Romans 1:1 may imply that Paul is “playing on his Pharisaic background (see Phil 3:5e).” Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 232.

^{828.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 46.

^{829.} See Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 473.

underlines that Paul approaches the law as “instituting divisions and separations.”⁸³⁰ One example is Paul’s reference to himself as a Pharisee, literally a separated one, in Philippians 3:5, which is a separation according to the law: *kata nomon Pharisaaios*.⁸³¹ Another example is the reference to the law as related to the separation or hostile partition between people (a dividing wall) in Ephesians 2:14-15.⁸³² In his broad use of the language of law, Paul also speaks of “partitions of the *nomos*” traversing the interior of human beings (Romans 7:19-24).⁸³³ In this case, there is even a division of different types of law at work,⁸³⁴ including the law of sin (7:23). As Agamben points out, “The principle of the law is thus division. The fundamental partition of Jewish law is the one between Jews and non-Jews, or in Paul’s words, between *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē*.”⁸³⁵ In fact, the separation of Jews and non-Jews is “The fundamental division of the law”⁸³⁶ in Paul. Our Italian philosopher also claims that this question is crucial for “the Pauline critique of the law” and that “The Messiah is actually the instance par excellence for a conflict with the law.”⁸³⁷ It is noteworthy, however, that the way Paul deals with the divisions and separations of the law, in Agamben’s account, is by introducing another partition, namely, the messianic cut of “flesh/breath” (*sarx/pneuma*). In other words, Paul’s messianism confronts the nomistic partitions by “imposing upon them a further cut.”⁸³⁸ More precisely, he “divides the division itself.”⁸³⁹ The partition Jew/non-Jew is cut to clear the ground for the different logic of “the messianic law” (1 Corinthians 9:21), which leaves a rest, a remnant that “cannot be defined either as a Jew, or as a non-Jew.”⁸⁴⁰

Moreover, the fourth section (“The Fourth Day”: *apostolos*) of *Il tempo che resta* explores the notion of messianic separation from the perspective of time, more specifically, the messianic time. The Italian philosopher defines the apostle as the prophet of the messianic time. While the prophet announces the coming of the Messiah in the future, the apostle, who is sent by the Messiah himself, speaks about the present (the messianic time), since the prophetic announcement is no longer future but has been fulfilled in the present. According to this distinction, Paul’s technical expression “for the messianic event is *ho nyn kairos*, ‘the time of the now.’”⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 47.

⁸³¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 45.

⁸³². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 46.

⁸³³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

⁸³⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

⁸³⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 47.

⁸³⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 48.

⁸³⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 48-49.

⁸³⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

⁸³⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

⁸⁴⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

⁸⁴¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 61.

At the same time, Agamben distinguishes between the categories of messianic time and apocalyptic or eschatological time. The latter is understood as the end of time, whereas the former represents “the time of the end” to use Gianni Carchia’s (1947-2000) language.⁸⁴² This messianic time is “the time that contracts itself and begins to end” (see 1 Corinthians 7:29), that is, “the time that remains between time and its end.”⁸⁴³ This idea of remnant time means that messianic time is “neither chronological time nor the apocalyptic *eschaton*,” but “the time that remains between these two times.”⁸⁴⁴ Once again, the Italian philosopher speaks of a messianic cut, which divides the division of time.⁸⁴⁵

These conceptions of messianic separation or division are associated with Agamben’s notion of deactivation, which is our next topic.

5.2 Messianism and Deactivation

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The notion of deactivation is particularly elaborated in Agamben’s discussion of messianic calling (*klēsis*), which is the theme of the second section (“The Second Day”: *klētos*). Already in the first section, he emphasized the need for a treatment of the concept of messianic calling, as he was dealing with the new messianic condition of *doulos Christou* in 1 Corinthians 7:20-23. In the first section, the notion of messianic deactivation is expressed by the “neutralization” of “the divisions of the law and all juridical and social conditions.”⁸⁴⁶ The language of neutralization conveys the meaning of deactivation, which is different from the abolishment⁸⁴⁷ of such conditions. In light of 1 Corinthians 7:17-23,⁸⁴⁸ Agamben broadens the relevance of the messianic calling for the history of humanity, not being restricted to the history of Paul (Romans 1:1).⁸⁴⁹

After a brief reference to the Weberian conception of *Beruf* (vocation), which is taken as the secularization of the messianic calling into the modern idea of profession,⁸⁵⁰ our Italian philosopher stipulates that the messianic community (*ekklēsia*) is literally a community of messianic vocations.⁸⁵¹ Nevertheless, he explains that this vocation does not have a positive or material content but entails a movement

^{842.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 62.

^{843.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 62.

^{844.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 62.

^{845.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 62.

^{846.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 13.

^{847.} See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 13.

^{848.} In 1 Corinthians 7, the language of calling appears in vv. 15, 17-18, 20-22, 24.

^{849.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 14.

^{850.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 19-22.

^{851.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 22.

of nullification.⁸⁵² For instance, in the context of the messianic calling in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul states that “circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing” (7:19). From the perspective of the nullification of the meaning of circumcision/uncircumcision, everyone should “remain in the condition in which” they “were called” (7:20; see v. 24), staying either circumcised or uncircumcised, without trying to change the situation (v. 18). This is why Agamben paradoxically speaks of “the messianic vocation as the revocation of every vocation.”⁸⁵³ In the passage that provides, in Agamben’s estimation, the clearest picture of messianic life in Paul (1 Corinthians 7:29-32), *hōs mē* (“as not”) functions as a technical formula to depict this life and the basic meaning of the messianic calling.⁸⁵⁴ The statement “weeping *as not* weeping” (v. 30) is different from “weeping *as rejoicing*” or “weeping *as* [meaning =] not weeping.”⁸⁵⁵ “The messianic tension” articulated by the technical formula *hōs mē* pushes “each thing toward itself,” instead of dialectically pressing it toward its opposite.⁸⁵⁶ As a result, our Italian philosopher concludes, the messianic vocation completely revokes the factual condition in which each one was called without modifying the form of this condition.⁸⁵⁷ Despite the lack of immediate alteration of the form, the messianic *hōs mē* “makes it pass,” in the sense of preparing “its end. This is not another figure or another world: it is the passing of the figure of this world” (1 Corinthians 7:31).⁸⁵⁸ Agamben postulates here a zone of complete indiscernibility “between this world and the future world,” and this is related to “the structure of messianic time.”⁸⁵⁹ In short, the messianic vocation defined by *hōs mē* does not replace the factual condition with something else but renders it “inoperative,” “ineffective,”⁸⁶⁰ and “void of meaning,”⁸⁶¹ which is Agamben’s explanation of “deactivation.”⁸⁶²

Another key Greek term from Paul in Agamben’s conception of messianic deactivation is the verb *katargeō*. Etymologically speaking, our Italian philosopher

⁸⁵². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 23.

⁸⁵³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 23.

⁸⁵⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 23.

⁸⁵⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 24.

⁸⁵⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 24-25.

⁸⁵⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 23-24.

⁸⁵⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 24-25.

⁸⁵⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 25. This zone of indiscernibility in Paul is precisely what Agamben considers to be a key difference between Paul’s *hōs mē* and the *hōs mē* of 4 Ezra 16:42-46. Furthermore, the Italian philosopher suggests that Paul combines what is divided in describing different times in the *Qoheleth* (cf. Eccl 3:4-8). See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 25-26. Agamben also refers to Heidegger’s *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* in the early 1920s, where the German philosopher offers a few remarks on Paul’s *hōs mē* in 1 Corinthians 7:20-31. See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 33.

⁸⁶⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 28.

⁸⁶¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 31.

⁸⁶². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 28.

explains, the verb derives from the adjective *argos* (*a-ergos*), which conveys the meaning of “inoperative, no-at-work (*a-ergos*), inactive.”⁸⁶³ Thus, the compound verb *katargeō* expresses the idea of making inoperative, to deactivate, suspend the efficacy, and not the notion of annihilating or destroying.⁸⁶⁴ In Greek literature, the verb is essentially Pauline in the sense that its occurrences are relatively rare before Paul.⁸⁶⁵ Taking into account that the verb *argeō* corresponds to sabbatical rest in 2 Maccabees 5:25 LXX, Agamben points out that Paul’s discussion of the messianic effect on what is called the “works of the law” implies a “sabbatical suspension of works.”⁸⁶⁶ He claims that *katargeō* describes “a taking out of *energeia*, a taking out of the act. (In the passive, it means no longer being in the act, being suspended.)”⁸⁶⁷ In contrast, the verb *energeō* means “I put to work, I activate.”⁸⁶⁸

The next step for properly understanding messianic deactivation in Agamben is related to the notion of inversion.

5.3 Messianism and Inversion

In his discussion of the messianic calling and the notion of being a slave or servant of the Messiah (1 Corinthians 7:22), the Italian philosopher highlights that “the new messianic condition” involves the “transformation of all juridical conditions.”⁸⁶⁹ This transformation, however, is not the simple abolition of such conditions but their deactivation. A key messianic concept in this discussion is the notion of ‘make use’ (*chrēsai*, 1 Corinthians 7:21; see also v. 31).⁸⁷⁰ In opposition to Luther’s reading of *chrēsai* as freedom in 1 Corinthians 7:21, Agamben follows the interpretation that *klēsis* is ‘used’ precisely in the context of slavery. He emphasizes that ‘use’ is the form of *hōs mē* in the definition of messianic life. In other words, “To live messianically means ‘to use’ *klēsis*” and, in this type of life, “*klēsis* is something to use, not to possess.”⁸⁷¹ In his remarks on the idea of not possessing in 1 Corinthians 7:30–31, our Italian philosopher underscores that “Paul contrasts messianic *usus* with *dominium*” (property) in Roman law.⁸⁷² This contrast implies that the messianic vocation is not a new identity or a right. Instead, “it

^{863.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95. See Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 267.

^{864.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95–96.

^{865.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 96.

^{866.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 96.

^{867.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 96.

^{868.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 96.

^{869.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 13.

^{870.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26.

^{871.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26.

^{872.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26.

is a generic potentiality [*potenza*] that can be used without ever being owned.”⁸⁷³ From this standpoint, messianic life, in the form of *hōs mē* (‘as not’), means the dispossession of any “juridical-factual property (circumcised/uncircumcised; free/slave; man/woman).”⁸⁷⁴ Agamben sees the messianic vocation as the theological background for the Franciscan “form of life,” which affirms *usus* in opposition to property.⁸⁷⁵ This idea of use constitutes “a zone that is neither factual nor juridical, but is subtracted from the law and remains as a place of pure praxis.”⁸⁷⁶ Ontologically speaking, this conception involves what our Italian philosopher calls the messianic modal category of “impotentiality,” which in Paul’s language is “the power [*potenza*] . . . actualized in weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12:9).”⁸⁷⁷ The deactivation (*as not*) of the factual worldly conditions means that impotentiality allows the simple use.⁸⁷⁸

Besides Agamben’s inversion of property and use, he proposes a new way of thinking about the universal and the particular, which is exemplified by the messianic division of the nomistic partitions between Jews/non-Jews. This further cut deactivates the divisions of the law because it leaves a rest, a remnant, which is not defined by the categories Jew/non-Jew anymore. But this remnant does not represent a universal identity either (*Contra* Badiou’s view of Paul’s universalism).⁸⁷⁹ Even though the Italian philosopher affirms the importance of benevolence and tolerance as such, which are concepts that derive from Badiou’s universal approach, he rejects the overarching idea of a universal or transcendent principle of humanity beyond all differences among human beings that would lead to benevolence and tolerance. Instead of universal humanity, Agamben defines universalism in Paul, if the language of universalism can be used here, in terms of “an operation that divides the divisions of the law themselves and render them inoperative, without ever reaching any final ground.”⁸⁸⁰ In the same vein, the remnant that results from the messianic division is not a particular portion of the whole or “a numeric remainder.”⁸⁸¹ Rather than being a part of the whole, the remnant appears in the messianic time to prevent “divisions from being exhaustive and excludes the parts and the all from the possibility of coinciding with themselves. The remnant is not so much the object of salvation as its

⁸⁷³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26.

⁸⁷⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26.

⁸⁷⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 27.

⁸⁷⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 28.

⁸⁷⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 37–38.

⁸⁷⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 43.

⁸⁷⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 51–52. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul, la fondation de l’universalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

⁸⁸⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 52.

⁸⁸¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 54.

instrument, that which properly makes salvation possible.”⁸⁸² In short, the messianic remnant is that which “resists in each division.”⁸⁸³

The notion of remnant also informs Agamben’s conception of messianic time (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:29). The affirmation that the messianic event has already arrived implies that “its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its *parousia*, not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable.”⁸⁸⁴ Using Benjamin’s messianic language, the Italian philosopher underlines that “each instant may be . . . the ‘small door through which the Messiah enters.’”⁸⁸⁵ Agamben speaks of the messianic “tension that clasps together and transforms past and future.”⁸⁸⁶ In this (Pauline) tension, the two extremities of time, so to speak, “contract into each other without coinciding.”⁸⁸⁷ Instead of being a third party between two times, the messianic time “is a caesura that divides the division between times and introduces a remnant, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past.”⁸⁸⁸ To explain this inversion, our Italian philosopher borrows from Scholem the expression, “Messianic time is time of inversive *waw*.”⁸⁸⁹ The Hebrew verbal system takes into account two aspects, namely, complete (normally translated as past) and incomplete (normally translated as present or future). But if a conversive or inversive *waw* is added to the verb, a complete form becomes incomplete, and an incomplete one becomes complete. In this Hebrew linguistic comparison, “messianic time is neither the complete nor the incomplete, neither the past nor the future, but the inversion of both.”⁸⁹⁰ This conversive or inversive moment spells out the tension of the contraction of the two times and describes what Paul calls ‘the time of now’ (*ho nyn kairos*). Agamben explains it as follows, “the past (the complete) rediscovers actuality and becomes unfulfilled, and the present (the incomplete) acquires a kind of fulfillment.”⁸⁹¹ He strongly emphasizes that this does not involve a Hegelian “final result of a process” since “the messianic is not the chronological end of time.”⁸⁹²

^{882.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 56.

^{883.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 57.

^{884.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 71.

^{885.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 71.

^{886.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 74.

^{887.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 74.

^{888.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 74.

^{889.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 74. Agamben indicates that this is Scholem’s 83th thesis offered to Benjamin in 1918. See Gershon Scholem, *Gershom Scholem zwischen die Disziplinen*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 295.

^{890.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 75.

^{891.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 75.

^{892.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 76.

5.4 Messianism and *Pistis*

The most specific treatment of messianic *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta* appears in the two last sections (The Fifth Day and The Sixth Day) dealing with *Eis euaggelion theou*, which focuses on the announcement of the gospel (*euaggelion*) in Paul.

In his remarks in the section “The Fifth Day,” Agamben argues that, in the contraction of messianic time, the promise (*epangelia*) takes the form of announcement. In this context, *pistis* implies an essential unity between “promise and realization,” which highlights the idea that the promise has a “performative power.”⁸⁹³ Given this performativity, the Italian philosopher speaks of “the impossibility of distinguishing between the announcement and its content” and defines Paul’s *pistis* as the name of “this zone of indistinction.”⁸⁹⁴ As the expression of this performativity, the faith announced is also “the power of the announcement.”⁸⁹⁵ More precisely, “Faith is the announcement’s being in act, its *energeia*.”⁸⁹⁶ In other words, *pistis* is “the principle of actuality and operativity,” which “is not external to the announcement.”⁸⁹⁷

Another significant dimension of the concept of *pistis* emerges from its relationship with the law (*nomos*). Stipulating that *nomos* is a generic word with different meanings, Agamben seeks to specify in what sense Paul opposes the law against *epangelia* and *pistis*.⁸⁹⁸ He highlights, for instance, that the language of *nomos* is used both for and against *pistis* in Romans 3:27 (see also 1 Corinthians 9:21), where two types of law are contrasted, the law of works (*tōn ergōn*) and the “law of faith” (*nomou pisteōs*). Our Italian philosopher discerns here an “inner dialectic” of the law, between the opposition of its normative (related to works) and promissive (related to faith) elements.⁸⁹⁹ According to this broad understanding of *nomos*, he concludes that Paul’s messianism does not negate the law but affirms the ‘law of faith.’ This affirmation, however, does not imply replacing old precepts with new ones. Instead, it sets a “non-normative figure of the law,” which is its promissive dimension (*epangelia*, *pistis*), “against the normative figure of the law” (generally referred to as *nomos*, without being specifically qualified).⁹⁰⁰

Provided that most of Paul’s references to *nomos* concern the normative figure of the law,⁹⁰¹ the relationship of these two figures of the law is generally expressed in

⁸⁹³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 91.

⁸⁹⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 89–90.

⁸⁹⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 90.

⁸⁹⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 90.

⁸⁹⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 90.

⁸⁹⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 94.

⁸⁹⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95.

⁹⁰⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 95.

⁹⁰¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 94.

terms of the opposition between *epangelia* and *pistis* with *nomos*, and more widely in the antagonism of the messianic against the law. More precisely, the opposing relationship between these two sides is informed by Paul's messianic language of *katargeō*, already mentioned above in the discussion of messianic deactivation. While *pistis* is associated with *energeō*, *katargeō* is its opposite, in the sense that *katargeō* means the "taking out of *energeia*, a taking out of the act. (In the passive, it means no longer being in the act, being suspended.)"⁹⁰² According to Agamben, Paul is aware of the Greek duality *dynamis* – *energeia* (potentiality and act), but his messianism is distinct, especially due to the inversion it enacts. Following the perspective of inversion along the lines of Scholem's converse *waw* in messianic time, as mentioned above in the discussion of messianic inversion, where the unfulfilled become fulfilled, and the fulfilled becomes unfulfilled, "potentiality passes over into actuality and meets up with its *telos*, not in the form of force or *ergon*, but in the form of *astheneia*, weakness"⁹⁰³ (*dynamis en astheneia teleitai*, 2 Corinthians 12:9; cf. vv. 9-10). Therefore, the messianic inversion of potentiality-actuality is spelled out by the inversion of *ergon* (force, work) and *astheneia* (weakness). Our Italian philosopher argues that the *telos* of a power achieved in weakness is an idea close to the Greek understanding of a type of potentiality maintained in "privation (*sterēsis*) and im-potentiality (*adynamia*)" (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1019b9-10, 1046a32).⁹⁰⁴ At the same time, he claims that in Paul's messianism, "power does not wear itself out in its *ergon*; rather it remains powerful in it in the form of weakness. Messianic *dynamis* is, in this sense, constitutively 'weak'—but it is precisely through its weakness that it may enact its effects" (see 1 Corinthians 1:27).⁹⁰⁵

As far as the realm of the law is concerned, the Italian philosopher underscores that the promissive power (*epangelia*) was transposed into the works of the normative *nomos*. Responding to this transposition in terms of inversion, the messianic deactivation (*katargeō*) renders the works inoperative, giving "potentiality back to them in the form of inoperativity and ineffectiveness."⁹⁰⁶ Hence, Agamben associates the concepts of deactivation and fulfillment of the law, assuming that deactivation (the taking out of *energeia*) does not annul but rather conserves the *energeia* in order to lead the law to its fulfillment. In other words, the law is brought to fulfillment only and precisely by being "restored to the inoperativity of power."⁹⁰⁷ This is why the messianic event does not destroy or negate the law but deactivates it, making it "no-longer-at-work."⁹⁰⁸ A key

⁹⁰². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 96.

⁹⁰³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97.

⁹⁰⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97.

⁹⁰⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97.

⁹⁰⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97-98.

⁹⁰⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 98.

⁹⁰⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97.

notion here is that deactivation (“messianic *katargēsis*”) does not abolish but preserves power, as this preservation is necessary for bringing fulfillment.⁹⁰⁹

Our Italian philosopher emphasizes that Luther’s German translation for Paul’s language of *katargeō*, particularly observed in Romans 3:31, is *Aufhebung*, which conveys “the double meaning of abolishing and conserving” and constitutes the foundation of Hegel’s dialectic, as a form of secularized Christian theology. Agamben refers to this language in Paul’s messianism as “the transformation of the law impacted by faith and announcement,” which “becomes a key term for the dialectic.”⁹¹⁰ The difference is that Hegel conceives the *telos* and *pleroma* of the dialectic as the end result or synthesis of a universal process, whereas Agamben views the *telos* or *pleroma* of Paul’s dialectical messianism “as each instant’s relation to the Messiah.”⁹¹¹ If the contrast with Hegel’s dialectics highlights a different understanding of *telos* and *pleroma*, the comparison of messianism with the metaphysical tradition underlines a distinction of the focus. In classic metaphysics, the primary focus is on the “moment of foundation and origin,” whereas Paul’s messianism focuses on the historical “moment of fulfillment.”⁹¹² Nevertheless, the possibility of fulfillment is qualified “by retrieving and revoking foundation, by coming to terms with it.”⁹¹³ This seems to describe Agamben’s notion of deactivation. It is noteworthy that when our Italian philosopher thinks about the state of the law, dialectically suspended and fulfilled as a result of messianic deactivation (*katargeō*), he comes to the discussion of the state of exception, as defined by Schmitt. Even though Schmitt does not follow a messianic perspective, his notion of the structure of the law, Agamben argues, is actually messianic: it is not the norm but the exception that defines the structure of the law. Dialectically, “the law maintains itself in relation to the exception in the form of its own self-suspension. The norm is applied, so to speak, to the exception in dis-applying itself.”⁹¹⁴ What is excluded by the law receives this label from the law itself, and it is in distinction from what is excluded that the law defines “the normal

⁹⁰⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 99. Agamben quotes Chrysostom, “the rendering inoperative [*katargēsis*] is a fulfillment [*plērōsis*].” Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 99. See John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, trans. Paul W Harkins, Fathers of the Church, vol. 72 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 55.

⁹¹⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 99.

⁹¹¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 101. On the other hand, the Italian philosopher claims that Derrida’s conception of deconstruction is “a thwarted messianism,” “a suspended *Aufhebung* that will never come to know its own *plērōma*.” Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 103.

⁹¹². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 103.

⁹¹³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 103–104.

⁹¹⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 104. For a discussion on the Schmittian influence on Agamben’s *Il tempo che resta*, see Brian Britt, “The Schmittian Messiah in Agamben’s *The Time That Remains*,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010): 262–287.

sphere of its application.”⁹¹⁵ To put it in another way, “In defining the exception, the law simultaneously creates and defines the space in which juridical-political order is granted value.”⁹¹⁶

The first feature of the state of exception, which is applied to the understanding of a deactivated law under the effect of messianic *katargeō*, is that it is no longer possible to distinguish who is inside and outside the sphere of the law. This means that the state of exception brings the law to “the utmost limits of its enforcement” by including outsiders “in the form of exception.”⁹¹⁷ However, Agamben stipulates that Paul radicalizes this feature of the state of exception with the concept of remnant. The fact that it is no longer possible to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews in the messianic deactivation of the law (*katargeō*) does not mean that Paul is simply extending “the application of the law to the non-Jews.”⁹¹⁸ Instead, the concept of remnant actually entails that Jews and non-Jews cannot be distinguished anymore. Hence, the remnant, Agamben affirms, “is an exception taken to its extreme” since it “is neither properly inside nor outside.”⁹¹⁹

Furthermore, according to the Italian philosopher, it is precisely this paradoxical situation of “the law in the state of messianic exception” that Paul calls “*nomos pisteōs*, ‘the law of faith’ (Romans 3:27), as it can no longer be defined through works.”⁹²⁰ At the same time, in this *nomos pisteōs*, justice is manifested without the law (*chōris nomou*, Romans 3:21). Justice (without the law) is not the abolition of the law, but its ultimate fulfillment and *pleroma*. Therefore, Agamben concludes, “faith is both deactivation (*katargein*) and preservation (*histanein*) of the law.”⁹²¹ Our Italian philosopher also highlights the impossibility of distinguishing between the transgression and the observance of the law in the state of exception, considering that the law “is in force only in the form of its suspension.”⁹²² In the messianic time, the impossibility of this distinction regarding the observability of the law is formulated by Agamben in terms of “the impossibility of use.” He argues that “only faith may restore in *chrēsis*, in use.”⁹²³ Overall, in his emphasis on the deactivation of the law, the Italian philosopher underscores the “illegitimacy of each and every power in messianic time.”⁹²⁴

In the last section of *Eis euaggelion theou*, which is “The Sixth Day” of *Il tempo che resta*, Agamben provides a more detailed discussion of the concept of *pistis*. In Greek,

⁹¹⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 105.

⁹¹⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 105.

⁹¹⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 105.

⁹¹⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 106.

⁹¹⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 106.

⁹²⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 107.

⁹²¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 107.

⁹²². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 105.

⁹²³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 107.

⁹²⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 111.

its ancient meaning, as observed in Homer, is associated with *horkos* (oath) in the sense of qualifying the oath as trustworthy. In dialogue with Émile Benveniste, he explains that “‘Faith’ (or trust) is the credence that one enjoys in another, the result of placing our trust in him, having consigned something like a pledge to him that links us in a relation of loyalty.”⁹²⁵ According to this view, *pistis* is both objective-active and subjective-passive, as it describes “the trust we *grant* someone, the faith we place in someone,” and “the trust we enjoy on behalf of someone, the faith or the credit that we *possess*.”⁹²⁶

In the Greco-Roman world, the institution of *deditio in fidem* (already mentioned above in the discussion of *Il sacramento del linguaggio* in the *Homo Sacer* series) expressed a significant meaning of faith between cities at times of war, where the people are mutually connected through the exchange of solemn oaths. In the disparity of conditions revealed by such covenantal exchange, the weaker city surrenders unconditionally to the stronger and victorious one, which is now in a benevolent position. In this context, *pistis* conveys the idea of credit and trust between the two parties. Our Italian philosopher discerns in Paul’s use of *pistis* a certain understanding of *deditio in fidem*, inasmuch as this use implies “the unconditional self abandon to the power of another, which obliges the receiver as well.”⁹²⁷

Agamben stipulates that the ancient link between *pistis* and oath, however, comes to a crisis when the former attempts to emancipate paradoxically from the obligatory works regulated by positive law, which supposedly means the carrying out of the established covenant.⁹²⁸ Our philosopher defines the messianic as precisely the historical process of this crisis. Moreover, in Paul’s seemingly opposition of *pistis* and *nomos*, these are ultimately understood as two elements within the law itself (broadly conceived, *diritto* in Italian)⁹²⁹ instead of constituting an opposition between two completely different elements in themselves. This is why Agamben speaks of messianism as “a struggle, within the law,”⁹³⁰ and he describes the two elements in this struggle in different ways. The first element is defined in terms of promise (*epangelia*), covenant (*diathēkē*), personal loyalty, and constituent power. On the other hand, the second element is respectively spelled out in terms of commandment

^{925.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 114.

^{926.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 114.

^{927.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 116. Agamben emphasizes the similar picture of the covenant (*berit*) between Yahweh and the people of Israel in the Hebrew Bible as expressing the notion of *emunah*. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 117–118.

^{928.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 119.

^{929.} As the translator’s note indicates, Agamben uses two Italian words in reference to the law, namely, *legge* and *diritto*. While the former narrowly refers to “positive laws,” the latter is related to “rights,” broadly conveying the notion of justice, obligation, fairness. See Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 119.

^{930.} Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 118.

(*entolē*), positive law, constituted power, and positive obligation.⁹³¹ It is noteworthy that the contrast between constituent and constituted power, already observed above in the *Homo Sacer* series, is articulated here in terms of *pistis* and positive law.

The Italian philosopher elaborates on this struggle by saying that the sphere of the law “has become unobservable and incapable of producing salvation,” whereas faith, originally derived from the covenant, “can make salvation operative ‘without the law’ [*senza legge*].”⁹³² Nevertheless, what Agamben calls the “fracture between faith and obligation, between religion and law [*diritto*]” does not mean a complete breaking apart of the two elements, but it opens the way to *charis* (grace, gratuitousness). Instead of a complete separation between grace and law in Paul, the former is crucial for the understanding of faith as the fulfillment of justice and law (Romans 8:4) and for the conception that the law is the pedagogue that leads to the messianic (Galatians 3:24). From this perspective, our Italian philosopher qualifies the concept of grace in terms of excess (*perisseia*, Romans 5:15-21) and sovereignty (*autarkeia*, 2 Corinthians 9:7-8).⁹³³ The notion of *autarkeia* describes “the sovereign capacity to gratuitously carry out good works independently of the law.”⁹³⁴ Rather than a battle of powers, Paul portrays “a disconnection between them, from which *charis* sovereignly emerges.”⁹³⁵ By speaking of an effectiveness independent of the law, Agamben seems to assume that the messianic makes the law inoperative (deactivation) by going back to what predates the law, namely, the covenant of the promise (*epangelia*).⁹³⁶

With regard to the notion of excess (*perisseia*), he presupposes that Paul’s view of gratuitousness is different from Mauss’. While in the latter gratuitousness is the basis for mandatory service and, thus, for “exchange and social obligations,” in the former gratuitousness describes “an irreducible excess . . . to all obligatory service” and, ultimately, accomplishes their interruption.⁹³⁷ According to this view, grace is not a separate realm from obligation and the law but entails “the ability to *use* the sphere of social determinations and services in its totality.”⁹³⁸ Therefore, the idea of excess is connected with Agamben’s notion of use.

In conclusion, the Italian philosopher explains the ontological nature and the efficacy of Paul’s *pistis* from the standpoint of performative language. He argues that faith in Paul “is an experience of being beyond existence and essence,” which means

⁹³¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 118.

⁹³². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 119.

⁹³³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 120.

⁹³⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 121.

⁹³⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 121.

⁹³⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 122.

⁹³⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 124.

⁹³⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 124.

to say linguistically that it is beyond subject and predicate.⁹³⁹ As “an experience of the word,” the word implies a world. The so-called “world of faith” is “a world of indivisible events” instead of “a world of predicates, of existences and of essences.”⁹⁴⁰ This means that “the experience of the word of faith” is not denotative; that is, it does not refer to things. In his explanation of performative efficacy, which “does not describe a state of things” but rather produces “a real fact” immediately, Agamben emphasizes that the word of faith is efficaciously “realized in its very pronouncement.”⁹⁴¹ Therefore, he concludes, the performative necessarily entails “a suspension of the normal denotative function of language.”⁹⁴² Our Italian philosopher finds in this linguistic explanation a connection with the state of exception, namely, that in this condition, the “law suspends its own application in order to ground its enforcement in a normal case,” just as “in the performative does language suspend its own denotation only in order to establish links with things,” that is, generating real effects in the world.⁹⁴³

Agamben underlines that the messianic experience of the word is defined by performative *pistis*, which is expressed in terms of “an experience of a pure event of the word that exceeds every signification.”⁹⁴⁴ This experience, nevertheless, is animated by *nomos* or *pistis*. In the first case, the excess is articulated by *nomos* and perhaps even encapsulated in the forms of precepts and semantic content.⁹⁴⁵ Conversely, in the second case, *pistis* attempts to maintain the excess open and “beyond any determinate signification” as “the space for gratuitousness and use.”⁹⁴⁶ Considering his criticism of the first form, our Italian philosopher claims that the complete “juridicizing of all human relations” constitutes the crisis of both religion and law.⁹⁴⁷ On the other hand, what Agamben considers a “gratuitous use of time and the world” results from “a pure and common potentiality of saying,”⁹⁴⁸ which describes the experience of the word in its excess of signification.

Our philosopher suggests that potentiality can be conceived, according to Aristotle (cf. *De anima*, 417a21 ff.), as generic and effective. In the former, the movement from potentiality to actuality means the exhaustion or destruction of potentiality. For instance, this happens when it is said that a child can become a pilot. In contrast, effective potentiality implies conservation (*sōtēria*) or a remnant of potentiality in the act. It is in this second sense that Agamben conceives the

⁹³⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 128.

⁹⁴⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 129.

⁹⁴¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 131.

⁹⁴². Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 132.

⁹⁴³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 133.

⁹⁴⁴. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 134.

⁹⁴⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 134.

⁹⁴⁶. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 135.

⁹⁴⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 135.

⁹⁴⁸. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 136.

word of faith as a pure experience of the “power [*potenza*] of saying.”⁹⁴⁹ But this conception is qualified by Paul’s notion of weakness. More precisely, the word is not denotative, which means that it does not involve the accumulation of knowledge or the imposition of law. At the same time, this does not mean that the weakness of potentiality is “passive or inert,” as it renders “the word of law inoperative,” working to make everything “freely available for use.”⁹⁵⁰ In Agamben’s estimation, “*Katargein* and *chrēsthai* are the act of potentiality that fulfills itself in weakness.”⁹⁵¹

5.5 A Brief Systematic Account of Messianic *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*

In summary, the systematic overview of messianic *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta* delineated above was organized according to the categories of (1) separation, (2) deactivation, and (3) inversion.

The category of separation includes two types of divisions or separations, one performed by the law (nomistic separation) and the other by the messianic event (messianic separation). The latter is a solution to the problem created by the former. To use the language of potentiality and transformation, the messianic separation transforms the situation of the nomistic separation, which confers social identities to people by separating them. This is observed in the autobiographical life of the apostle Paul. According to the nomistic separation, he was a Pharisee, separated from the others. However, in the transforming separation of the messianic event, Paul loses his social name (based on the divisions of the nomistic separations) due to a further (now messianic) division by which Paul is socially diminished (weakened) to the status of the servant or slave of the Messiah. And even the juridical condition of a servant or slave, as defined by the nomistic separations, is transformed in the sense that the servant or slave of the Messiah, although still called servant or slave, is free in the messianic condition, which highlights the surprising (considering the patterns established by the divisions of the law) potentiality of the weak things in the messianic time. In short, the focus of Paul’s critique of the law is that it reductionistically and sovereignly divides people, identities (e.g., Jew, non-Jew; slave, free), and even the human self (e.g., the law of sin in Romans 7:19-24).

While the first category (separation) spells out the problem of the law and introduces the messianic solution to it, the other two categories further elaborate on the nature of the messianic solution. More specifically, the second category

⁹⁴⁹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 136.

⁹⁵⁰. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 137.

⁹⁵¹. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 137.

(deactivation) explains how the messianic solution addresses the problem of the law, and the third category (inversion) depicts the effects of this solution. Perhaps the second category tends to be more negative and the third more positive since the former deals with the problem, whereas the latter shows the results of the solution. Nonetheless, the interconnection among the categories makes their systematic picture more complex than that. The second category (deactivation) gives more specificity to the messianic solution presented in the first category (separation). To put it sharply, the messianic separation or division that is added to the problematic nomistic separation or division is not intended to abolish the separations established by the law nor the juridical factual condition created by them. Rather, the added messianic separation or division is a transformative movement of neutralization or nullification (deactivation). Hence, the second category is negative because there is no positive content in it. This is why the messianic calling of its community has no specific content. In other words, the messianic vocation is negatively a revocation that does not change the juridical situation. The individuals of the messianic community remain in their factual condition. The messianic calling does not modify the form of the identities socially established by the divisions of the law. At the same time, the movement of deactivation, as elaborated by the notions of *katargeō* and *hōs mē*, prepares the end of the juridical factual situation by hollowing it out and eradicating its content from within.⁹⁵² Therefore, in the movement of deactivation, there is no transformation of the juridical factual form as such, but there is a transformation of its meaning.

Given the negative parameters of transformation in the movement of deactivation (second category), one could say that the third category (inversion) does not have much to show in terms of positive or concrete results of the messianic solution to the problem of the divisions of the law (first category). This is why the notion of inversion seems a fitting description of the effects of deactivation. In fact, the concept of use is probably the keyword in the explanation of the notion of inversion. To be sure, the messianic condition does not confer a new identity or rights that abolish the form of the juridical factual situation. Nevertheless, the transformation of the messianic event makes possible a new use of this form or identity. This is actually a transformation or inversion of the logic of identity as a whole, which is no longer understood as something to be possessed but used. In other words, this is the ontological inversion of potentiality (use) over actuality (property). In the messianic inversion, what is deemed complete in the juridical factual condition, like the actuality of a property, is considered incomplete. Conversely, what is taken as incomplete, such as the potentiality of use, is deemed complete. The category of inversion assumes, on the one hand, that there is no final ground to be reached as a

^{952.} This is a helpful expression used by Negri and Dickinson in their account of Agamben's thought. See Negri, "Giorgio Agamben," 119; Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, 89.

new form of actuality. On the other hand, the notion of messianic inversion is also a sign of resistance against the determinations of nomistic divisions. The remnant left after the further division of the messianic does not receive a new identity but represents what resists the nomistic divisions and constitutes the potentiality of a new use of the juridical factual condition. This potentiality is the power of weakness, namely, a power of use (potentiality) rather than of possession (actuality), which follows again the logic of inversion.

What is, then, precisely the relationship of *pistis* with the messianic categories of separation, deactivation, and inversion? More importantly, how do they shed light on the understanding of *pistis*? Firstly, it is important to highlight that the categories of separation, deactivation, and inversion deal with the crisis of the law, which became oppressive and destructive. This crisis was caused by a relative separation of the normative dimension of the law, which involves works, from its promissive side, in which we find *pistis* and potentiality and envisions a relationship of trust and loyalty. In fact, the promissive dimension is the basis (constituent power) for and precedes the normative side (constituted power). These two sides of the law are two dimensions of ancient covenantal oaths, which involve curses for disloyalty and blessings for loyalty. What happens with the crisis of the law is that the normative dimension becomes brutally dominant, making the law unbalanced, non-relational, arbitrary, and violent. This brings us to the notion of sovereignty, where the law is marked by normativity and curses, with almost no space for covenantal relationships of trust, promises, and potentiality. Therefore, the nomistic separation of identities and peoples is also an attempt to separate the normative side of the law from the constituent power of the promissive dimension. In other words, it is the attempt to make normativity sovereign in its separation from the power of *pistis*. From this perspective, separation is not only what the crisis of the law does to people but ultimately describes the very nature of the crisis of the law, which is internally divided. In this context, messianic *pistis* is not against the law as such but against dysfunctional and sovereign normativity. The further cut or separation of the messianic event that neutralizes the separations of sovereign normativity looks like a state of exception, where the law is deactivated but still in force. Nomistic distinctions of sovereign normativity are no longer discernible as they should, in the sense that they are inoperative and void of meaning. Nonetheless, the law is still in force, as the law of *pistis*. It is from this standpoint that *pistis* dialectically deactivates (sovereign normativity) and conserves (promissive side, the constituent power of potentiality) the law, which are both a fulfillment and transformation of the law. Thus, the transformation of the law involves both deactivation and inversion, as the promissive side of *pistis* and potentiality becomes the constituent power of the law. To put it more sharply, *pistis* is the messianic transformative principle of operativity

that addresses the separation of the law, deactivates its normative sovereignty, and inverts the paradigm of use instead of possession, making potentiality constituent power rather than actuality. According to this view, *pistis* is an announcement of the promise of transformation that, given its performative power instead of denotative signification, is also the principle of operativity for the realization of this promise. It creates a space of use and potentiality by unveiling the crisis of the law and nurturing the trust in transformation, in which communities are defined by trustworthiness and loyalty.

After this systematic delineation of messianism and *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*, the last step in the exploration of dialectical *pistis* in Agamben's messianism in Part II is to provide a brief systematic overview of *pistis*, which will be based on the previous discussion on political thinking, messianism, and *pistis* in the *Homo Sacer* series (chapter 4) and messianism and *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta* (chapter 5). This is the task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

A Brief Systematic Overview of *Pistis*

Taking into account that Part II aims at clarifying the dialectical nature of *pistis* in Agamben's messianic conception, I will provide in this concluding chapter of Part II a brief systematic overview of *pistis*. Chapters 4 and 5 provided an overall picture of messianic trust or *pistis* in potentiality and transformation in Agamben's political thought, both in the *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta*.

The systematic picture of *pistis*, potentiality and transformation in the *Homo Sacer* series highlighted three main points: (1) the juridico-political dimension of the law (law, state of exception, and sovereignty), (2) the destituent emphasis on deactivation and inoperativity (messianic *pistis*, *katargeō*, and *hōs mē*), and (3) the ontologico-political proposal of potentiality in terms of use and form-of-life (messianic *hōs mē*, *pistis* and redefinitions of ontology and transformations of the self and the community – loyalty and promises). Similarly, the systematic account of messianic *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta* underscored three categories about the crisis of the law and the messianic solution related to *pistis*: (1) the nomistic arbitrary separation of people and identities, which results from the crisis of the division of the law itself (normative side, promissive side [*pistis*]), and the neutralizing messianic separations of the separations of the law; (2) the messianic deactivation of the law in the operative and performative power of *pistis* (*katargeō*, and *hōs mē*); and (3) the inversion (rather than simply abolition) in the messianic time of the juridical conditions established by the law, in which the law is fulfilled by *pistis* (promissive side as constituting power) in the creation of space for use and potentiality.

Overall, the tripartite systematic structure provided in chapters 4 and 5 articulates the same concepts but with different contours and emphases. In both chapters, the first category outlines the problematic situation to be addressed by messianic *pistis*, while the other two categories point to the horizon of solution in the messianic time. The second category underscores the negative or deconstructive dimension of the solution (deactivation), and the third elaborates on its more positive or constructive side (new use). The way in which these categories are shaped, however, is different in the sense that the *Il tempo che resta* is more specific in the treatment of the crisis of the law and the nature of *pistis* in the messianic time. In contrast, the *Homo Sacer* series offers a larger political and ontological framework for the understanding of the effects of the crisis of the law and for the nature of the messianic solution centered on the concept of *pistis*. Examples of these differences include, in the first category, the larger elaboration of the notion of sovereignty and biopolitics in the *Homo Sacer* series, while *Il tempo che resta* is more restricted to the nature of the problem of the law as such. Moreover, in the third category, the *Homo Sacer* series further develops the political and ontological dimensions of use, potentiality, and form-of-life, whereas the discussion in *Il tempo che resta* focuses on the notion of inversion. These differences suggest that our understanding of

Agamben's messianic *pistis* is enriched when both the *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta* are taken into account.

Having the systematic categories delineated in chapters 4 and 5 in mind, the overview to be articulated in this chapter will be guided by the fundamental question: *what is at stake in the idea of messianic pistis*? In other words, why is *pistis* important in Agamben's messianic project? This is the *why* of *pistis*. Moreover, what is the nature and role of *pistis* in Agamben's messianism? This is the *what* of *pistis*. Then, to further clarify the nature of *pistis* in this project, it is important to explore a more specific question: how is this role performed, and how dialectical is it? This is the *how* of *pistis*.

6.1 The Why of *Pistis*

In the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben defines messianism as the solution to the problem of the law. This problem is spelled out by the sovereign power that institutes biopolitics, where the distinction between law and life becomes indiscernible. Broadly speaking, this is the problem of the limitation and, eventually, the loss of freedom and life, ontologically described by the limitation leading to (almost) an extinction of potentiality. Since messianism is a methodological signature for the discussion of ontology and political philosophy, the language of Paul's *pistis*, in Agamben's archeology of concepts, as explored in *Il tempo che resta*, seems to clarify the way in which messianism is viewed as the solution to the problem of the law.

The Italian philosopher proposes an ambiguous relationship between *pistis* and law. On the one hand, the former is part of the latter. On the other, *pistis* is distinguished from the law. These paradoxical statements are explained by two senses of law. In the first case, the law is widely conceived as resulting from a covenantal relationship between two (normally asymmetrical) parties and contains two dialectical poles, namely, the element of promises to be fulfilled in this relationship and the element of norms that codify the obligations (arguably for the weaker party). In fact, the promissive side is the constituent power of the normative side. It is precisely in the realm of promises that *pistis* and potentiality are located, assuming that there is trust and credit between the parties. However, Agamben stipulates that the law undergoes a process of crisis, in which the element of promises is severely squeezed by the codified norms that eventually define the law in its narrow sense. It is against this narrow and dysfunctional law that *pistis* is conceived as being outside the law. Therefore, *pistis* is situated in the threshold of the demarcation of the law, being inside (in the broad sense of the law) and outside (in the narrow sense of the law in crisis) the law.

In the broader conceptual context of political and ontological philosophy delineated in the *Homo Sacer* series, the crisis of the law is depicted in terms of the

establishment of sovereign power and biopolitics, which limits the notion of life and potentiality. The sovereign power and its codified law divide people in the sense of creating arbitrary identities that are (deceitfully) seen as ontologically determined. Ontologically speaking, the sovereign power and its law establish what is actuality and attempt to destroy potentiality. From the perspective of selfhood, they promote the movement of desubjectification. All these initiatives tend to diminish and eventually eliminate the trust in the power of potentiality and the possibility of transformation. In this context, the contribution of messianic *pistis* becomes relevant. Its ontological relevance is the reversal from actuality to potentiality, implying the promotion of subjectification and trust in political transformation.

What makes *pistis* particularly important for the messianic solution to the problem of the law and sovereign power is its performative power. To be sure, the performative understanding of *pistis* is present in the *Homo Sacer* series (especially in *Il sacramento del linguaggio*). But its performative power is more specifically elaborated in *Il tempo che resta*. The connection between *pistis* and promise, which describes the promissive element of the law broadly conceived, also underscores the ambiguity of *pistis*, as it is located in the threshold or the zone of indistinction between the announcement of the promise and the actualization of its content. The performative power of *pistis* is ontologically qualified in terms of *energeia* in *Il tempo che resta*. This means that *pistis* is a principle of operativity and actuality in the announcement/*euaggelion* itself, making it a being in act.

Hence, the fundamental question of the chapter (*what is at stake in the idea of pistis?*) can be initially answered as follows: *pistis* is crucial for the messianic resolution of the problem of the law because it is situated in the threshold of the demarcations of the law, being inside and outside the law. Taking into account the law broadly conceived, the promissive element of the law is particularly characterized by the announcement, which contains *pistis* in its performative power (*energeia*), which is in the threshold of the announcement of the promise and its actualization. It is its power and its intrinsic relationship with the law that makes *pistis* the messianic element for the resolution of the problem of the law. This initial answer, however, needs to be further elaborated in the discussion of the *what* and the *how* of *pistis*. Such elaborations clarify what the performative power of *pistis* is all about and *how* it takes place from a dialectical standpoint.

6.2 The What of *Pistis*

In the introduction of Part II, in the context of my dialogue with the secondary literature on Agamben, I mentioned that his idea of faith as a mode of being follows

a Heideggerian view of Pauline *pistis* that focuses on the *how* of faith rather than on its *what* or content. This section on the *what* of *pistis* is not intended to contradict what was previously said. The present discussion still acknowledges that the focus of Agamben is on the *how*. The description of the *what* here does not attempt to detail the content of *pistis* in terms of specific beliefs but only outlines the nature of trust is presupposed in the *how* of *pistis*. The nature of trust is relevant for the clarification of the role of *pistis* in Agamben's messianic project.

Overall, the *what* of Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* is the trust in potentialities, over against the ontological political understanding of actuality (*energeia*). In other words, this is the trust in (pure) potentialities without any actual content, which reaffirms the idea that in Agamben *pistis* is not described by the *what* of a content. According to the deactivation (*katargeō*) of *pistis*, the trust of faith is that the messianic temporality brings back past potentialities that still (and always) exist ontologically (and, therefore, are really present and future potentialities) and, thus, have not been exhausted into current actualities established by the sovereign power. More specifically, *pistis* trusts the independent ontological status of potentiality. Taking into account the ontologico-political view that actuality defines the current order of the world (and this includes the definition of personal identities and selfhood) established by the sovereign power, which falsely announces it as a necessary order that cannot be changed, the trust of *pistis* affirms, through the way it uses language, the conviction of contingency and potentiality in the present (messianic) time, which implies transformation. Ultimately, the trust of *pistis* affirms not only the primacy of potentiality over actuality but envisages a political and ontological transformation, which gives transformation its own place, in the sense of going beyond a wishful hope of potentiality over actuality.

As the law in its narrow normative sense (a law in crisis) is deactivated in the messianic time, which is also the deactivation of actuality (as defined by the law in the normative articulation of the sovereign power), the trust of *pistis*, linguistically expressed in the speech-acts of promises, brings the law to its original form in its promissive dimension of constituent power and, in this sense, fulfills it. The performative power unleashed in this fulfillment is a destituent power, inasmuch as the trust in contingency and potentiality present in the promises suspends and unmasks the deceitful discourse of the sovereign power regarding actuality and necessity. Given the avoidance of actuality in Agamben's formulation of *pistis*, the promissive announcement of trust in potentialities is an event of the word that does not carry any content. Otherwise, it would become actuality. To put it differently, following Paul's *hōs mē* and the Franciscan paradigm of non-property, this is the idea of (potential) use without (actual) possession.

The conviction of *pistis*, spelled out as trust in potentialities, has metaphysical implications for philosophical anthropology regarding the transformation of selfhood. Inasmuch as *pistis* is linguistically expressed in truthful promises as a form of affirming contingency and possibility, the ontological operators of subjectification are in place against the destructive weapons of impossibility and necessity, which are the ontological operators of desubjectification used by the sovereign biopolitical power. Assuming that subjectification is the linguistic creation of consciousness (the I) in the event of discourse, the performative and promissive discourse of *pistis* powerfully promotes subjectification (and conversely resists desubjectification in the form of the testimony of a remnant) because the trust in contingency and possibility allows the self to speak of the world as “my world.”

Furthermore, the trust in potentialities is present in the anthropological contours of Agamben's ontology of use, which dismisses or deactivates substantial (predetermined) conceptions of the self and the Cartesian framework of subject-object, as these notions favor actuality over potentiality. In contrast to these notions, the self is constituted as it makes use of itself. Instead of a subject, the self is a user who does not possess (following Paul's *hōs mē* and the Franciscan assumption of non-property) a faculty to be actualized but rather enacts potentiality in use that is always present as potentiality and open to new use. Rather than a Cartesian subject, the self is a witness to new use. For the overall purpose of the present research, Agamben's criticism of the Cartesian subject and the emphasis on the self as a witness is quite significant, as Part I indicated that Ricoeur also criticizes the Cartesian subject and highlights the concept of testimony/witness in his account of selfhood.

Agamben explains that the deactivation of actuality, which unleashes the potentiality imprisoned in it for a new use, is not a destruction of the elements taken as actual, but it is, instead, a suspension of the relations between them. Therefore, a new use presumably involves articulating new interactions and transformations of the self. More specifically, the trust in contingency and possibility (ontological operators of subjectification) assumed in the language of *pistis* has a new self in view, where uses and relations imposed by the sovereign power are no longer operative in the messianic time.

Before I turn to the discussion of the *how* of *pistis*, nevertheless, I need to explain an apparent discrepancy in the comparison of statements in *Il tempo che resta* (2000) and *L'uso dei corpi* (2014), regarding the relationship of *pistis* with potentiality and *energeia*. As indicated above, the Italian philosopher speaks of *pistis* using the language of act (*energeia*) in *Il tempo che resta*: *pistis* is “the announcement's being in act, its *energeia*,” that is, “the principle of actuality and operativity,” which “is not external to the announcement.”⁹⁵³ On the other hand, the elaboration of the ontology

⁹⁵³. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 90.

of use in *L'uso dei corpi* affirms the expression “being-in-use” in opposition to “being-in-act,” which in the Aristotelian scholastic tradition means the end of potentiality in the actuality (*energeia* – being-at-work).⁹⁵⁴

The Italian philosopher intends to underscore the deactivation of the Aristotelian dichotomy of potency-act to restore *energeia* to potential.⁹⁵⁵ As we observed in the discussion of *Opus Dei* above, he discerns a similar paradigm of restoration to potentiality in Paul’s understanding of *energeia*, in opposition to the Aristotelian tradition. While this tradition conceptualizes *energeia* as a mode of being (actualization), Agamben argues that *energeia* in Paul rather describes the operativity or effectuation of a potency.⁹⁵⁶ Therefore, it is from this perspective of *energeia* and act, in terms of an operativity of potentiality, that the Italian philosopher is able to use the language of being-in-act and actuality for *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta*, since this language is not informed by the framework of the Aristotelian tradition, but by what he considers to be Paul’s ontology. Still, considering the interval of fourteen years between the two works, perhaps Agamben would prefer the language of being-in-use rather than being-in-act for *pistis* if *Il tempo che resta* were written after *L'uso dei corpi*.

In any case, the announcement of trust in potentialities of *pistis* seems to be more concretely observed in the practice of truthfully making promises in a community characterized by loyal and faithful relationships, which is a performative and political action that explores the *unceasing* power of potentiality.

6.3 The How of *Pistis*

In the *Homo Sacer* series, our Italian philosopher explains the messianic initial resolution of the problem of the law in terms of the deactivation (*katargeō*) of the sovereign power of the law, rendering it inoperative. If we can speak of deactivation as power, this is a destituent rather than a destructive power. This conception is elucidated by the notion of *pistis* as a performative power in *Il tempo che resta*. The power of *pistis* seems to produce an inversion. Its power is initially described by the act of *energeō* that rather effects *katargeō* (the taking out of *energeia*), with regard to normative sovereign law and power. In other words, *pistis* dialectically deactivates the law (narrowly defined) of sovereign power in order to preserve and fulfill it in its promissive dimension (broadly defined).

⁹⁵⁴. See Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1081-1082.

⁹⁵⁵. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (IV,2. The Use of Bodies), 1087.

⁹⁵⁶. Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (II,5. *Opus Dei*), 689. As Dickinson underlines, according to Agamben, “Paul is credited with inverting the Aristotelian relationship of potentiality-actuality.” Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer Series*, 170.

The connection between ontology and language sheds light on how the dialectical power of *pistis* works. Considering its performative power, the notion of *pistis* as trust and credit between parties has no power in itself unless trust or credit is announced. The focus on performativity and announcement defines the power of *pistis* in terms of an event of the word. In fact, the idea of deactivation is spelled out in the realm of language as a suspension of the denotative function of language, which is the regular use of language according to its conventions. As the denotative function is suspended, language is open to new use that no longer does not describe things as such but performatively produces new events. This suspension or deactivation of linguistic denotative conventions, which is compared to normative law, opens up new possibilities of language signification (the excess of signification) in contrast to the restrictions of meaning determined by the normativity of denotative conventions.

Paradoxically, this excess is connected with the idea of weakness. A non-denotative language is not powerful in the sense of establishing new meaning. As Agamben indicates, this is not a power conceived in terms of the accumulation of knowledge nor defined by the imposition of law. This perspective of weakness is aligned with the type of dialectic he has in view in the discussion of *pistis*. The power of *pistis* does not reach a final ground of Hegelian synthesis or an Aristotelian actualization. This power does not initiate a battle against the sovereign power of the law but rather deactivates it in such a way that it opens up life to a new use (the sovereignty of grace), which does not mean treating it as a juridical determination or possession. In other words, the notion of use opposes the idea of control.

It could be said that Agamben's *pistis* is dialectically weak compared to Hegel's dialectic (*Aufhebung*), which envisages the achievement of a *telos*, a result, a synthesis derived from a universal process. The *telos* in Agamben's *pistis* is dialectically weak because it does not abolish the law but empties its power without replacing it with a new one. Arguably, a replacement with a new power would not break the vicious cycle of normative law. At the same time, the weakness of not establishing a new power further enables the conservation of potentiality that is not exhausted (destroyed). This conservation of potentiality is what allows the freedom of a new use without ever establishing it as an absolute. Dialectically, the potentiality used to constitute its power is not destroyed by not destroying the law. Instead, deactivating the law allows a new use of its potentiality that is never exhausted.

How could this dialectically weak power of *pistis* be pictured outside the realm of language? It seems that the state of exception is the best example. The law is not abolished but used in a different way. Nevertheless, the messianic state of exception is not promoted by a biopolitical sovereign but by the performative power of *pistis*, where sovereignty is redefined in terms of graciousness and use. It is not easy to go beyond this elusive language of signature and reach the more concrete realm of

politics in the explanation of the *how* of *pistis*. But there seems to be something in the announcement of trust that may deactivate controlling powers and performatively produce inversions in which the weak find freedom in life without becoming a new sovereign.

As already indicated above, Agamben argues that the deactivation of *katargeō* describes “the transformation of the law impacted by faith and announcement,” and from this perspective of transformation, *katargeō* is key for the understanding of dialectics in Paul’s messianism.⁹⁵⁷ Therefore, the dialectics of *pistis*, in the sense that it performatively announces the deactivation of *katargeō* in messianic time, is a dialectics of transformation rather than of substitution, as indicated by the language of transformation of the law in Agamben’s interpretation of Paul’s messianism.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

The contribution of Part II for the overall purpose of the present study is to explore Agamben’s *pistis* as an experience of trust in potentiality and transformation in reflections on Paul in contemporary philosophy. In the systematic overview of *pistis*, this experience of conviction is particularly observed in the *what* of *pistis*, which is the trust in potentialities over against the ontological and political understanding of actuality, which includes arbitrary determinations about the order of the world and selfhood. The *why* of *pistis* clarifies the relevance of this trust in the context of the ontological and political determinations of the sovereign power and its law, while the *how* of *pistis* qualifies the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation as a dialectical movement that is non-absolute, in order to avoid a new form of sovereign power and actuality.

Yet, as I have emphasized at the end of my dialogue with the secondary literature in the introduction of Part II, there are at least two types of criticism against Agamben’s account of Paul’s *pistis* that might jeopardize its contribution to the reflection on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation. More precisely, critics wonder about the effectiveness and the dialectical nature of Agamben’s *pistis*. While a thorough analysis of these criticisms goes beyond the scope of the present study, a few remarks are in order here.

First, is Agamben’s account of Paul’s *pistis* sufficiently concrete and efficient? I think this will be still an open question for debate. I wish he could elaborate more on the content of *pistis*. Also, I am not sufficiently convinced that actuality is always

⁹⁵⁷. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 99. Dickinson explains, “For Agamben, Pauline thought engaged in its own version of a negative dialectics through its division of every pre-existing social division within our world.” Dickinson, *Giorgio Agamben’s Homo Sacer Series*, 174.

ontologically fictional and determined by the sovereign power. Moreover, I agree with Butler's point, mentioned in my dialogue with the secondary literature in the introduction of Part II, that there is more to the analytics of power operation than sovereign power.

Second, is the dialectics of Agamben's *pistis* really Pauline? I think Boer, also mentioned previously in the introduction of Part II, has a point about Agamben's use of imported (non-Pauline) concepts for the ideas of deactivation and potentiality in the dialectical interpretation of *katargeō*. Conversely, to what extent is it possible to dialogue formally with Paul's *pistis* without considering the material religious content of belief that is clearly present in Paul's writings?⁹⁵⁸ In short, material addition and/or subtraction could be problematic for Agamben's dialectical interpretation of Paul's *pistis*.

Despite all these open questions, I still think that Agamben's proposal has potential. My comment about actuality and Butler's point about sovereignty do not dismiss his proposal but call for more nuance. Sovereign power is still a problem to be addressed, and potentiality having primacy over actuality makes Agamben's theory quite attractive, in my estimation. As far as the dialectical interpretation of Paul's *pistis*, I have the impression that Agamben is able to creatively capture, to some extent, the complexity of the law in Paul's thinking, which has both a negative and positive relationship with *pistis*. The ideas of covenantal trust and the promissive side of the law are quite interesting, just as the avoidance of the language of abolition for the law since its fulfillment in the promissive dimension is in view. This creative grasp of Paul's complex thinking largely substantiates the dialectics of *pistis* in Agamben. Furthermore, it seems to me that Agamben's theory of use and deactivation creatively captures a crucial dimension of Paul's teaching on the messianic vocation in the political context of social identities in the first century. Although believers did not have the power to politically change the form of those identities, they could hollow out their limitations and political meaning in the daily life of the messianic community. This has profound implications for selfhood and the trust in potentiality and transformation.

After this account of Agamben's *pistis* in Part II and having in mind the picture of Ricoeur's attestation in Part I, I will turn to a dialogue between these two notions in Part III, considering their contributions to the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

⁹⁵⁸. This is one of the critical points raised by Kearney, "Paul's Notion of *Dunamis*," 154.

PART III

RICOEUR'S ATTESTATION AND AGAMBEN'S *PISTIS*: DIALECTICAL TRUST IN POTENTIALITY AND TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

Taking into account that Parts I and II respectively presented the dialectical concepts of attestation in Ricoeur's hermeneutics and *pistis* in Agamben's messianism, the overall purpose of Part III is to articulate a comparative dialogue of these two conceptions as a contribution to the reflection on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation. In order to achieve this purpose, it is not enough to compare Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's messianic *pistis*, noticing similarities and differences in their approaches and conceptions. While this comparative investigation is valuable and necessary, it needs to be articulated in the context of a larger framework of analysis, in which potential implications for the reflection on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation are more clearly identified and further elaborated. Thus, Part III does not begin immediately with a comparative chapter on attestation and *pistis* but rather seeks to delineate the larger framework of analysis for this comparison.

This conceptual framework of analysis is particularly necessary due to an important distinction between Ricoeur and Agamben. While the latter elaborates on the concept of *pistis* already in the context of his philosophical reflection on Paul, the former articulates the notion of attestation in a different context of philosophical reflection. I see this distinction, however, as an opportunity for bringing Ricoeur's attestation closer to philosophical reflections on Paul for at least two reasons. First, as previously indicated in chapters 1 and 3, in his discussion before the 1990s of the category self-understanding, which is central to the notion of attestation, Ricoeur employs the example of a divided self in the apostle Paul, particularly in Romans 7, in the elaboration of the ideas of otherness, guilt, and suspicion. Second, I hypothesize that Ricoeur's hermeneutical notion of attestation is congruent with dialectical accounts that involve distrust and trust in philosophical ideas that dialogue with the apostle Paul, especially considering Agamben's messianic thought.

Chapter 7 will take the initial step in the formulation of a conceptual framework of analysis. Whereas our French philosopher does not elaborate on the notion of attestation in the specific context of a philosophical reflection on Paul, he does mention the divided self in Paul in the discussion of self-understanding in *La symbolique du mal*, as indicated above, and he also has a specific text on the apostle Paul that remarkably follows, in large measure, an Agambenian understanding of Paul. As will be indicated below, Ricoeur's discussion on Paul focuses particularly on the idea of selfhood, which is precisely the starting point of his reflection on attestation as well. While the focus of Agamben's messianic project is on political ontology and not philosophical anthropology *per se*, the dialogue of Ricoeur with Agamben in this text on the apostle Paul suggests that the messianism of the Italian

philosopher has assumptions about philosophical anthropology and selfhood that make this topic a promising avenue for dialogue between Ricoeur's hermeneutical attestation and Agamben's messianic *pistis*.

The next step in the formulation of the conceptual framework of analysis is the definition of the way in which philosophical anthropology and selfhood could be approached. In this step, I problematize the crucial notion of selfhood in contemporary phenomenology, focusing on a temporal or historical understanding of human experience and, therefore, of selfhood. It is also noteworthy that this problematization dialogues with philosophical readings of the apostle Paul as an alternative to ontotheology. More specifically, this problematization reveals the ontotheological roots of an idealistic (Husserlian) phenomenology with a non-historical and non-temporal conception of selfhood. These ontotheological roots point to a systematic connection between philosophical anthropology and metaphysics. In my estimation, this phenomenological discussion provides a valuable background for our dialogue with Ricoeur, Agamben, and the apostle Paul, as they tend to assume a temporal and historical conception of selfhood, as I will indicate below. Furthermore, the problematization of contemporary phenomenology includes an interesting discussion of trust and uncertainty from a temporal historical understanding of selfhood, which is potentially related to the dialectical notions of attestation and *pistis*. Moreover, in light of the ontotheological systematic connection of selfhood and metaphysics from an idealistic standpoint, it seems possible to suggest that a constructive dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben could provide an alternative systematic articulation of philosophical anthropology (selfhood) and metaphysics (political ontology) from a historical temporal perspective. In this articulation, trust and uncertainty play a crucial role.

After this articulation of a larger framework of analysis, which phenomenologically approaches selfhood from a historical temporal standpoint, with the potential to systematically connect philosophical anthropology and political metaphysics as an alternative to the systematic connection of anthropology and metaphysics present in ontotheology, I will finally move to the comparison of Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* in chapter 8. The structure of the comparison will follow the same categories (*why, what, how*) employed in the systematic overviews of attestation and *pistis* in chapters 3 and 6. The use of these same categories intends to establish a direct connection between the constructive work of Part III with the findings of Parts I and II.

Then, in the concluding remarks of chapter 8, I will attempt to formulate a constructive dialectical account of trust in dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben, with implications for the present-day philosophical reflections on Paul, namely, the hermeneutical conception of trust and uncertainty in the experience of conviction in potentiality and transformation.

With this overview of the steps to be taken in Part III (chapters 7 and 8), I will turn to the formulation of the conceptual framework of analysis, which starts with the interaction of Ricoeur with Agamben on the apostle Paul.

CHAPTER 7

A Conceptual Framework of Analysis

7.1. Ricoeur and (Agamben's) Paul

While I have not been able to find relevant references (for the purposes of the present research) to Ricoeur in Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta*,⁹⁵⁹ our French philosopher offers a significant discussion of *Il tempo che resta* in the article *Paul apôtre*.⁹⁶⁰ I will briefly outline Ricoeur's philosophical discussion of the apostle Paul in this article, with particular reference to Agamben. Taking into account the focus of the present chapter, this outline will be helpful for the identification of commonalities and/or differences between the French and the Italian thinkers. Even though the commonalities and/or differences do not refer directly to the topics of attestation and *pistis*, they might be useful starting points for a dialogue with these two continental philosophers, as the philosophical discussion of the apostle Paul is the common denominator between Ricoeur and Agamben in the article. In this sense, this introductory connection between these two philosophers will potentially provide the ground for a more specific dialogue with the dialectical notions of attestation and *pistis*.

The French philosopher begins his article with the following question, "What is my place in relation to recent readings on Paul?"⁹⁶¹ This question is further clarified by the indication of his theological (Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and other exegetes⁹⁶²) and philosophical (Stanislas Breton, Alain Badiou, Jacob Taubes, and Giorgio Agamben)⁹⁶³ references. The footnote on Agamben indicates that Ricoeur focuses on *Il tempo che resta*, which he qualifies as a "vigorous" reflection on the apostle Paul.⁹⁶⁴ Indeed, Ricoeur reveals that Agamben's perspective largely guides his own discussion in this article.⁹⁶⁵ The article explores Paul's proclamation and argumentation, as the title indicates. While the proclamation underscores "the resurrected Christ"⁹⁶⁶

^{959.} The index of *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* indicates a reference to Ricoeur in IV,2 "The Use of Bodies" (p. 1023), but this is only a reference of Agamben to Ricoeur's autobiography. In *The Signature of All Things*, Agamben mentions Ricoeur's archaeology of the subject in the book on *Freud and Philosophy*. See Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 96-97.

^{960.} See Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 85-112.

^{961.} Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 256.

^{962.} Ricoeur mentions Gunther Bornkamm and Peter Brown: "Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul apôtre de Jésus-Christ*, trad. Lore Jeanneret, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1971; Peter Brown, *Que sait-on du Nouveau Testament?*, trad. fr. par Jacques Michon, Paris, Bayard Presse, 2000." Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 85n1.

^{963.} Ricoeur references to "Stanislas Breton, *Saint Paul*, Paris, PUF, 1988; Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul et la fondation de l'universalisme*, Paris, PUF, 1997; Jacob Taubes, *la Théologie politique de Paul. Schmitt, Benjamin, Nietzsche et Freud*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1999; Giorgio Agamben, *Le temps qui reste. Un commentaire à l'épître aux Romains*, trad. fr. par Judith Revel, Paris, Payot et Rivages, coll. « Bibliothèque », 2000." Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 85n2.

^{964.} Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 262.

^{965.} Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 262.

^{966.} Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 256.

the argumentation is particularly related “to the aporias of the law.”⁹⁶⁷ The French philosopher explains that he took the “idea of an aporetic transition between proclamation and argumentation in the Pauline epistles” from “Agamben’s vigorous *The Time That Remains*.”⁹⁶⁸

Ricoeur’s dialogue with other philosophical readings of Paul, besides Agamben, includes Nietzsche’s accusation that Paul devalues life. The French philosopher argues that this accusation is a misunderstanding of Paul, who actually celebrates life.⁹⁶⁹ On the other hand, Ricoeur mentions the misunderstanding of a Hegelian “complete dialecticalization of the passage from death to live”⁹⁷⁰ in Paul. At the same time, he believes that Badiou’s position of “the anti-dialectic of death and the resurrection” is adequate, inasmuch as it counteracts a Hegelian dialectical reading of Paul.⁹⁷¹ However, he is also uneasy with Badiou’s anti-dialectic and “abstract” universalist interpretation of Paul.⁹⁷² This brings Ricoeur closer to Agamben’s dialectic approach concerning the aporias of the law in Paul’s argumentation, which is distinct from Badiou’s anti-dialectical⁹⁷³ reading of Paul and also different from a totalizing Hegelian dialectics in Paul.

Our French philosopher stipulates that “Agamben extends Taubes”⁹⁷⁴ in the messianic reflection, especially considering the aporias in the transition from Paul’s proclamation to argumentation. The aporias include the discussion of *hōs mē* (1 Corinthians 7) and the reversal “between use and possession—use without using, that is, without abusing as masters do”⁹⁷⁵—in the context of the contraction of time. Furthermore, the language of *katargein* applies a sort of *hōs mē* to the distinctions of the law, in the sense of deactivating it or inverting the relationship between “power and act (*energeia/dunamis*).”⁹⁷⁶ As a conceptual result of this deactivation, Agamben elaborates on the paradoxical nature of the remnant or remainder (Romans 11).⁹⁷⁷ In this context, Ricoeur mentions Agamben’s notions of *pistis* as power, the promissory (“pre-law” and the connections between promise, oath, and covenant) and the

⁹⁶⁷. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 266.

⁹⁶⁸. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 262. See also Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 266.

⁹⁶⁹. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 261.

⁹⁷⁰. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 261.

⁹⁷¹. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 261.

⁹⁷². Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 271.

⁹⁷³. For instance, Ricoeur agrees with “Agamben’s reservations concerning what Badiou says about the universal.” Instead of a “polarity between universal and particular,” Agamben proposes the paradoxical nature of the remnant, “which never comes down to a universal.” Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 276.

⁹⁷⁴. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 263.

⁹⁷⁵. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 264.

⁹⁷⁶. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 264.

⁹⁷⁷. Ricoeur, “Paul the Apostle,” 264.

prescriptive dimensions of the law, just as the translation of *katargein* as *Aufhebung* by Luther and Hegel's own dialectical notion of *Aufhebung*.⁹⁷⁸

The French thinker explains that Agamben's commentary on the first verses of Romans highlights "the self-presentation of the apostle."⁹⁷⁹ This gives Paul's messianic proclamation an autobiographical tone. The importance of the proclamation of "the messianic event" is compared to "all testimony that appeals to the credibility of a witness."⁹⁸⁰ Thus, the autobiographical tone of Paul's proclamation makes him a witness of the messianic event and his proclamation a testimony.

The emphasis on selfhood in Paul also appears in the aporias of the law that belong to Paul's argumentation. In Romans 7, for instance, Ricoeur identifies "the figure of scission as a divided self"⁹⁸¹ ("la figure de scission dans la division du moi"⁹⁸²). He even expands the idea of a "subjective division" ("la division subjective"⁹⁸³) as "both individual and collective."⁹⁸⁴ More precisely, our French philosopher speaks of "the wound" of "Pauline subjectivity"⁹⁸⁵ ("la subjectivité paulinienne"⁹⁸⁶) from a collective perspective, namely, "the pain" with "the loss of Jewish identity" in Romans 9:1-5, in light of the larger messianic nondifferentiation of Jews and Gentiles.⁹⁸⁷ From this collective perspective, Ricoeur suggests that Agamben places "the drama of Pauline subjectivity against the background of messianic hope, always disappointed and always renewed."⁹⁸⁸

Taking into account the purposes of the present chapter, this concise overview of Ricoeur's article *Paul apôtre* reveals at least three important points. The first two are more general in nature, while the third one is more specific and, therefore, constitutes a point for further elaboration in my dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben. The first general point is that our French philosopher was well aware of the philosophical reflection on the apostle Paul in contemporary continental European philosophy (considering that his article was published in 2003). In fact, his article suggests that he is not only aware of this reflection, but he is actually interested in this topic of discussion. Second, the article indicates that Agamben is Ricoeur's main reference in the philosophical discussion on the apostle Paul. The French philosopher describes many of the ideas elaborated by the Italian thinker and he seems to generally agree

⁹⁷⁸. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 265.

⁹⁷⁹. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 271.

⁹⁸⁰. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 271.

⁹⁸¹. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 272.

⁹⁸². Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 105.

⁹⁸³. Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 106.

⁹⁸⁴. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 272.

⁹⁸⁵. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 273.

⁹⁸⁶. Ricoeur, "Paul apôtre," 106.

⁹⁸⁷. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 273.

⁹⁸⁸. Ricoeur, "Paul the Apostle," 273.

with Agamben's dialectical perspective on Paul. Therefore, if Ricoeur's conceptions are more intentionally explored in the context of the philosophical discussions on Paul, which is the aim of the present research, Agamben is probably the best candidate (or at least one of the best ones) in the selection of a conversational partner for this endeavor, and this is obviously the choice of this investigation.

The third and more specific point is that a remarkable topic Ricoeur highlights in his discussion on Paul, as he dialogues with Agamben, is the notion of subjectivity or selfhood. As indicated above, the French philosopher notices in Agamben's commentary that Paul's messianic proclamation is closely related to his self-presentation as an apostle. In fact, as I have underscored in chapter 5, the Italian philosopher uses the ten Greek words of Romans 1:1 (*Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou, klētos apostolos aphōrismenos eis euangelion theou*) to organize the messianic discussion in *Il tempo che resta*. It is noteworthy that the sequence of the words starts with *Paulos*, and all the other nine are somehow related to him in the sense of qualifying or describing who he is or has become. Ricoeur's point about Paul's self-presentation or autobiography is particularly supported by the way Agamben designs the sections of *Il tempo che resta*. More precisely, four out of the six main sections are titled by keywords that directly qualify the apostle Paul, namely, *doulos*, *klētos*, *aphōrismenos*, and *apostolos*, respectively. To be sure, Agamben's focus is not on Paul himself, as he intends to discuss political philosophy. But Ricoeur's point is notably valid as we notice that the experience of Paul as *doulos*, *klētos*, *aphōrismenos*, and *apostolos* is the structural point of departure that Agamben employs to elaborate on his ontological discussions of political philosophy.

From this perspective, the movement from subjectivity or selfhood to community and political ontology is potentially a promising avenue for a fruitful dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben on Paul. In this movement, autobiography, testimony, and the credibility of the witness are important elements that Ricoeur highlights in his reading of Agamben's Paul. Furthermore, as I have indicated in Part I, Ricoeur's concept of attestation moves from the self to the other (even in his understanding of oneself, but also in the relationship with other people) in his dialectical account of unity and plurality. Similarly, the French philosopher discerns in Paul's subjectivity or selfhood a divided self, both in *La symbolique du mal* and in the article, that is not only individual but also collective. Interestingly, while this is more a Ricoeurian rather than an Agambenian reflection, Ricoeur sees Agamben's reading of Paul's discussion of Jews and Gentiles in terms of a wound or division that is not supposed to exist anymore, but this is not to be interpreted according to the horizon of Hegelian synthesis. Rather, the perspective here is of a dialectical and paradoxical movement of disappointment and renewal that informs Paul's subjectivity or selfhood in the context of the messianic hope.

In short, subjectivity or selfhood seems to constitute a promising avenue for starting a dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben on the philosophical reflection on the apostle Paul. To be sure, this avenue is probably more developed in Ricoeur than Agamben. Nevertheless, it is important to qualify this acknowledgment with five clarifying remarks. First, Ricoeur's reading of Paul from an Agambenian perspective highlights the topic of subjectivity or selfhood. Thus, the French philosopher does see the potential to develop the notion of Paul's subjectivity or selfhood in dialogue with the Italian philosopher. Second, taking into account that the intention of this research is to explore Ricoeur's conceptions in dialogue with the philosophical discussion of Paul, the potential that Ricoeur sees in Agamben arguably serves the purpose of bringing the ideas of the French philosopher in dialogue with specific philosophical reflections on Paul. Third, if it is plausible to say that (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's) *pistis* articulate in different ways the notion of trust, which obviously involves reflections on philosophical anthropology, it seems conceivable to start a comparison of these two concepts in the anthropological context of subjectivity or selfhood. Fourth, while the starting point of subjectivity or selfhood may perhaps favor Ricoeur's approach, a dialogue between Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* may constructively inform each other. For instance, Ricoeur's attestation may enhance reflections about subjectivity or selfhood in elaborations on Agamben's *pistis* and, conversely, the latter may build up reflections about political ontology in elaborations on the former. Fifth, even though Agamben's project is on political ontology, he does elaborate on significant anthropological phenomenological topics in the *Homo Sacer* series, as observed in chapter 4, such as subjectification and desubjectification, the linguistic creation of consciousness (*Quel che resta di Auschwitz*), ontology of use and the definition of the self in terms of use-of-oneself (*L'uso dei corpi*).

Overall, this constructive dialogue is potentially fruitful for philosophical discussions on the apostle Paul and the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation, moving from subjectivity or selfhood to political ontology and vice versa. Nonetheless, before we turn to this dialogue, I will firstly situate the potential of Ricoeur's approach to subjectivity or selfhood, particularly focusing on the notion of attestation, for philosophical reflections on the apostle Paul in contemporary hermeneutical phenomenology. Moreover, I will situate the potential of Agamben's approach to Paul, especially considering his ideas about Paul's *pistis*, for reflections on subjectivity or selfhood in contemporary phenomenology. This contextualization intends to highlight the contribution of the dialogue with Ricoeur and Agamben for phenomenological reflections on the apostle Paul, which will be significant for reflections on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

7.2 Ricoeur, Agamben, Paul, and Phenomenology

In order to situate the potential of Ricoeur's approach to subjectivity or selfhood for the discussion on Paul and hermeneutical phenomenology, I will engage with van der Heiden's analysis of the task of present-day phenomenology.⁹⁸⁹ Then, I will use Ezra Delahaye's⁹⁹⁰ investigation of subjectivity in Agamben's Paul to position the contribution of the Italian philosopher for phenomenology, taking into account the problematization of this field by van der Heiden.

7.2.1 Heidegger's (Religious) Phenomenology, Paul, and Ricoeur

On the basis of his comparison of Heidegger's lectures *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (The Phenomenology of the Religious Life)⁹⁹¹ in 1920-1921 with the lectures *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (Introduction to Phenomenological Research)⁹⁹² in 1923-1924, van der Heiden argues that Heidegger's reflections on the apostle Paul and Augustine in his lectures on the phenomenology of religion constitute a "recalibration of phenomenology under the guidance of religious experience."⁹⁹³ But why exactly does he think phenomenology needs to be recalibrated? It is precisely because the phenomenological method, as advanced by Husserl, is grounded in a Cartesian view of the self, where the subject is a transcendental ego (the *ego cogito*). Considering that the experience of the self is at the heart of phenomenology, Husserl's phenomenological approach is uncritically defined by the Cartesian subject or *cogito* as an allegedly "self-evident" presupposition.⁹⁹⁴ The Cartesian subject, van der Heiden adds, informs modern epistemology and finds its metaphysical roots in ontotheology.⁹⁹⁵ More specifically, the Cartesian notion of certitude is employed in the subject-object framework of modern scientific knowledge and derives from scholastic ontology, in which the human *cogito* is capable of abstract certainty, deriving this capacity from creation, as a signature of God (the highest being and the

⁹⁸⁹. See Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology: Heidegger on Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, and Descartes," *Forum Philosophicum* 26, no. 2 (2021): 207-226; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience: Towards a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Religion," *The Heythrop Journal* 64, no. 2 (2023): 162-172.

⁹⁹⁰. See Ezra Delahaye, "It Is No Longer I Who Lives. Heidegger, Badiou and Agamben on Subjectivity in the Letters of Saint Paul" (PhD diss., Radboud University, 2018).

⁹⁹¹. See Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*.

⁹⁹². See Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁹⁹³. van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 208.

⁹⁹⁴. van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience," 164; van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 211.

⁹⁹⁵. van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 208. For van der Heiden's focused discussion of ontotheology, see van der Heiden, *Ontology After Ontotheology*.

first cause) in the human being.⁹⁹⁶ Based on this metaphysical assumption, God is the “ground for the certainty of the self and for the modern ideal of certain knowledge.”⁹⁹⁷

Grounded in this ontotheological framework, the essence of the Cartesian subject is thinking. In thinking (*cogitare*), I experience myself, and this experience opens the way to phenomenology. To put it more sharply, “the self is only experienced as my self in the momentaneous enactment of my thinking.”⁹⁹⁸ According to the Greek Platonic roots of ontotheology, human thinking and being are not historical but purely abstract and devoid of temporal experience.⁹⁹⁹ As van der Heiden points out, Heidegger criticizes Descartes for abstractly framing human experience in terms of “an object of knowledge, or even worse, into a judgment that is absolutely certain and true.”¹⁰⁰⁰ As a result, the Cartesian focus on certitude “precludes any possibility of a fundamental uncertainty with respect to being,”¹⁰⁰¹ obscuring the “basic uncertainty given at the heart of self-experience.”¹⁰⁰²

In order to affirm the proper ontological place of uncertainty in self-experience, Heidegger underlines the way Augustine and the apostle Paul articulate, in different ways, the religious experience. In fact, as van der Heiden emphasizes, the relevance of these articulations is not restricted to the field of the phenomenology of religion but should also inform, more broadly, phenomenology as such since they touch the core of self-experience. In Heidegger’s reading of *Confessions* (Book X), Augustine underscores the idea of uncertainty in his account of self-experience. While Cartesian subjectivity grounds the certainty of the self in the ontotheological God who assures and tranquilizes, Augustine advances the idea that to be before God “means to become uncertain about oneself.”¹⁰⁰³ As van der Heiden underlines, “the self is not reduced to an object before the eyes of the divine intellect that, in Descartes’ repositioning, secures the ego as an object for possible certain knowledge” to offer “a firm grasp on what I am and securing the truth of the criterion of self-evidence.”¹⁰⁰⁴

In opposition to the ontotheological Cartesian assuring tranquilization of the self, Augustine concludes in Book X of *Confessions* that he is unable to “find God as an object in the external world.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Then, he attempts to find God inside his memory. However, instead of finding God, the analysis focuses on the inward experience itself, as the self searching for God is a self-relation, that is, an experience of the self,

^{996.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 211-213.

^{997.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 218.

^{998.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 214.

^{999.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 210.

^{1000.} van der Heiden, “Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience,” 165.

^{1001.} Heidegger, *Introduction to Phenomenological Research*, 172.

^{1002.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 215.

^{1003.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 217.

^{1004.} van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 217.

^{1005.} van der Heiden, “Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience,” 167.

which reveals “a particular self-concern.”¹⁰⁰⁶ More precisely, “he experiences *himself* as *searching* for God.”¹⁰⁰⁷ In fact, as Augustine highlights, God is “more inward than my innermost” (*interior intimo meo*) (*Conf.*, III.6.1). Whereas self-experience in Descartes is the abstract enactment of thinking, the experience of oneself in Augustine is the relational self-involvement of continually seeking God. By contrast, “*not searching for God*” or forgetting God implies “*losing oneself*.”¹⁰⁰⁸

From this perspective, van der Heiden phrases Heidegger’s interpretation of Augustine’s distress and uncertainty as follows, “the self is not posited as a certain and proper, solid ground for the activity of knowing, but rather discovers itself as nullity as being in a continuous temptation of falling, that is of losing its self”¹⁰⁰⁹ in pleasures (forgetting God) instead of continually seeking for God. Therefore, “the religious experience of the self” is not defined by having God as an object, which is impossible, but as having him only in “the enactment of searching for God.”¹⁰¹⁰ While Descartes’ ontotheological God is a source of certainty and rest for the self, Augustine’s God (considering the self-experience of searching for God) is “a source of distress”¹⁰¹¹ and uncertainty. Concisely, whereas the self in Descartes is essentially described in terms of certainty, the self involves distress and concern (the danger of losing oneself) in Augustine.¹⁰¹²

To be sure, Augustine is beyond the scope of the present investigation. But the brief outline delineated above about the distinction between Augustine and Descartes on the understanding of selfhood is not merely a detour in this section. Rather, it illuminates a similar contrast between the apostle Paul and Cartesian thinking, from Heidegger’s phenomenological perspective. Van der Heiden suggests that the turn to the letters of the apostle Paul in present-day philosophy is largely due to the potential of a stimulating alternative to ontotheology that is found in Paul.¹⁰¹³ Just as Descartes’ focus on certainty, which is related to the ontotheological attempt to secure and tranquilize, is opposed to Augustine’s emphasis on uncertainty and distress, a similar distinction is drawn in comparison with the apostle Paul. In this comparison, the attempt to secure and tranquilize flows from an ontotheological abstract metaphysics and anthropology. Conversely, a more concrete reflection that

¹⁰⁰⁶ van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 217.

¹⁰⁰⁷ van der Heiden, “Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience,” 167 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁰⁸ van der Heiden, “Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience,” 167 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁰⁹ van der Heiden, “Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience,” 167.

¹⁰¹⁰ van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 219.

¹⁰¹¹ van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 218.

¹⁰¹² van der Heiden, “The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology,” 219.

¹⁰¹³ van der Heiden, *Saint Paul and Contemporary European Philosophy*, 54.

approaches human life from a historical perspective will highlight the distress, uncertainties, and disturbances of contingent human temporal experience.¹⁰¹⁴

According to Heidegger's standpoint, as explored by van der Heiden, Paul's portrayal of Christian religious experience is different from ancient Greek (Platonic) metaphysics and anthropology,¹⁰¹⁵ in the sense that it underscores "the meaning of the historical for human existence and the disturbance with which it is experienced."¹⁰¹⁶ This makes Paul's understanding of human life a helpful resource for phenomenology.¹⁰¹⁷ As Heidegger's remarks on the Parousia in Paul emphasize, "peace and security" (1 Thessalonians 5:3) are announced by the world that is passing away and do not refer to a genuine religious experience in Paul.¹⁰¹⁸ Indeed, there is no certainty or security in the present and temporary form of the world.¹⁰¹⁹ Like the references to Augustine indicated above, Paul's "experience of being before God rather consists in weakness and distress."¹⁰²⁰ The temporal expectation of the Parousia, which cannot be dated, underscores a "fundamental uncertainty" and anxiety or distress in religious experience. Moreover, echoing his comments about self-loss in Augustine, van der Heiden speaks of *sarx* or flesh in the apostle Paul in terms of a self-relation that describes the self-loss that takes place when one "does not search for God."¹⁰²¹ The idea of self-loss is also present in Paul's appeal not to be conformed to the present form of the world (Romans 12:2), as Christians are constantly tempted to avoid the experience of uncertainty and distress, which derives from not feeling at home in this world. This is the temptation of "familiarizing oneself with the world, enjoying them, and living in the comfort of social appreciation by doing everything according to what is expected in the present order of the world."¹⁰²²

Following this perspective, van der Heiden concludes that the God of Paul is not defined in terms of the highest being that offers security and certainty in the contemplation of his eternal presence, as postulated in Greek ontotheology and followed by Cartesian subjectivity. Instead, Paul's "God is rather a destabilizing force that lays bare and allows the human to experience the abyssal insecurity of human, historical life and that ignites the distress that goes hand in hand with it."¹⁰²³ This would be the metaphysical assumption that informs the notion of Paul's selfhood.

^{1014.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 220.

^{1015.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 220.

^{1016.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 221.

^{1017.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 221.

^{1018.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 222.

^{1019.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 223.

^{1020.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 222.

^{1021.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 222.

^{1022.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 224.

^{1023.} van der Heiden, "The Christian Experience of Life and the Task of Phenomenology," 223.

Once again, it is important to explain at this point why these remarks should not be seen as a detour in the present research. More precisely, this explanation needs to clarify why I am discussing a Heidegger's rather than Ricoeur's phenomenological framework. For reasons similar to Heidegger, Ricoeur wants to revise phenomenology. As I mentioned in chapter 2,¹⁰²⁴ in his proposal of a hermeneutical phenomenology, the French philosopher challenges Husserl's idealistic phenomenology, particularly due to the uncritical view of the subject inherited from Descartes.¹⁰²⁵ Furthermore, Ricoeur's reflection on narrative identity, as I have also mentioned in chapter 2, offers a different formulation of selfhood that prioritizes historical experience in philosophical anthropology. As Dan Zahavi postulates, Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity is an alternative to the "dilemma of having to choose between the Cartesian notion of the self as a principle of identity that remains the same throughout the diversity of its different states and the positions of Hume and Nietzsche, who held an identical subject to be nothing but a substantialist illusion."¹⁰²⁶

Indeed, Ricoeur's concept of attestation emerges from a non-Cartesian understanding of selfhood, in the sense of operating in the framework of historical experience, and necessarily accounts for the anthropological condition of uncertainty to the point of making it constitutive (never suppressed) in the experience of attestation. To be more specific, the notion of attestation does not intend to assume something *a priori* about the self. Rather, the self attests to its own capacities inasmuch as it is able to (historically) enact them. Once they are historically enacted, observed or witnessed, and interpreted by the self, self-attestation is taking place. Still, self-attestation is never secure or certain but always open to correction, given the constant risk of false impressions and mistaken interpretations.¹⁰²⁷ Therefore, uncertainty is situated in a historical temporal sense of human existence and self-understanding, which is distinct from Descartes' abstract notion of subjectivity (*cogito*).¹⁰²⁸

In short, both Heidegger and Ricoeur propose, in different ways, a revised version of phenomenology, free from Cartesian subjectivity, that is undertaken from a historical temporal framework of human experience. This means that Heidegger and Ricoeur articulate a historical view of selfhood that rejects Cartesian abstract or idealist certainty and makes room for uncertainty in the context of temporal experience. Nevertheless, they come to this revision of phenomenology

¹⁰²⁴. See footnote 402 in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.

¹⁰²⁵. See Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." See also van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 25-43; Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*; Geniasas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of Imagination."

¹⁰²⁶. Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 56-57.

¹⁰²⁷. van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience," 170-171.

¹⁰²⁸. van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience," 170.

by approaching selfhood and anthropological uncertainty from distinct points of departure. Whereas Heidegger's reflections result from his reading of Augustine and the apostle Paul, Ricoeur's approach engages with the so-called masters of suspicion, especially Freud (in *De l'interprétation*) and Nietzsche (in *Soi-même comme un autre*), as indicated previously in chapters 1 and 2. If the German philosopher focuses on how Augustine and the apostle Paul portray religious experience and uncertainty, assuming that this type of self-experience is a legitimate source of self-understanding, the French philosopher takes into account the views of the masters of suspicion on uncertainty, who qualify religious experience as an illusory and deceitful form of self-understanding.¹⁰²⁹

This brief comparison between Heidegger and Ricoeur, as helpfully delineated by van der Heiden,¹⁰³⁰ highlights the understanding that Ricoeur's attestation articulates a temporal view of selfhood in the context of a revised version of phenomenology, in which uncertainty is approached as a crucial and constant dimension of human historical experience. Furthermore, the similarity between the projects advanced by Heidegger and Ricoeur reveals that the former uses the apostle Paul to approach uncertainty, while the latter engages with the masters of suspicion to elaborate on the topic of uncertainty. However, both the philosophical use of Paul and the masters of suspicion could be seen as a criticism of metaphysical ontotheology and anthropological Cartesian subjectivity. In this sense, this comparison with Heidegger suggests that Ricoeur's engagement with the masters of suspicion on the topic of uncertainty is surprisingly close to Heidegger's philosophical use of Paul.¹⁰³¹ Perhaps, Ricoeur's reference in *Paul apôtre* to Paul's idea of a divided and wounded self, mentioned above, along with the paradoxical statement of a non-teleological dialectics between disappointment and renewed hope as the messianic background for Paul's selfhood, could be further elaborated to align attestation and the notion of uncertainty with a philosophical reflection on the apostle Paul in Ricoeur's phenomenology.

After having tentatively sketched in broad strokes Ricoeur's temporal approach to selfhood, with a focus on attestation, in connection with philosophical readings of Paul and the task of a historical hermeneutical phenomenology, I will briefly explore the notion of selfhood in Agamben's Paul to position the contribution of the Italian philosopher for a historical phenomenology.

¹⁰²⁹. van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience," 169.

¹⁰³⁰. See van der Heiden, "Engaging with and Detaching from Religious Experience," 164-171.

¹⁰³¹. It should be also noted that, strictly speaking, Ricoeur develops the concept of distantiation in his engagement with the masters of suspicion, and this concept distinguishes him from other approaches to hermeneutical phenomenology (Heidegger, Gadamer, Arendt). Van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 26.

7.2.2 Selfhood in Agamben's Messianic *Pistis*

While Delahaye investigates the theme of Paul's selfhood in the philosophical readings of Heidegger, Badiou, and Agamben,¹⁰³² I will only summarize his findings about Paul's selfhood in the Italian thinker. In the previous subsection, I have highlighted the importance of temporal human experience for a non-Cartesian phenomenology, in which the place of uncertainty is affirmed in the experience of self-understanding. To be sure, Agamben's messianic conception is not an approach to self-understanding but an articulation of political ontology. Arguably, his reflection is more (politically) metaphysical than anthropological and, thus, the concept of uncertainty does not seem central to his understanding of selfhood. Nevertheless, the Italian philosopher introduces the idea of uncertainty in the realm of (political) metaphysics; that is, the current order of things is not as certain as it appears. This metaphysical conception of uncertainty is related to the notion of *pistis*, conceived particularly as an anthropological trust in a different form of experiencing life, associated with the trust in a new metaphysical order of the world.

Just as Ricoeur's account of attestation operates in the framework of historical temporal anthropology, Agamben's messianism is spelled out in terms of historical temporal metaphysics, more precisely, political metaphysics. At the same time, his messianic metaphysics has implications for understanding selfhood. It is in this sense that Delahaye is able to explore the notion of Paul's selfhood or subjectivity in Agamben. Taking into account that the Italian philosopher approaches metaphysics historically or temporally, from the standpoint of political ontology, its implied anthropology (selfhood) is also historical and temporal. This makes Agamben's approach compatible with the project of historical temporal phenomenology.

Delahaye identifies in Agamben's political messianism the crucial role of the law, which has a metaphysical and ontological role. The law has the power to organize (political) life and establish the order of things, determining what is valuable and what is not, according to this order. Likewise, the law determines what people and things are (being) and what they are not (non-being).¹⁰³³ To be sure, as observed in Part II, the Italian philosopher does not see a problem in the law itself, especially if we think in terms of the elements of the so-called pre-law, which includes oaths, promises, and *pistis* or faith. Rather, Agamben's concern focuses on what the law eventually becomes in the hands of the sovereign power, who uses it to reduce life to his own interpretation of what the world is. Hermeneutically speaking, while Ricoeur, considering his dialogue with the masters of suspicion, distrusts the interpretation of the self, Agamben is skeptical of the interpretation of the sovereign and his use of the law. Given the metaphysical political normativity of the sovereign's interpretation

¹⁰³². See Delahaye, "It Is No Longer I Who Lives."

¹⁰³³. See Delahaye, "It Is No Longer I Who Lives," 237.

of life and the world, the order of things enforced by law is taken as necessary (non-contingent). Moreover, the order of things, as instantiated by the law, gives people a certain identity as a community and establishes in it a certain set of values. Again, the normativity of the identity and the values make them seem necessary.¹⁰³⁴

It is precisely this sense of metaphysical necessity and ontological essentialism of the law, as used by the sovereign power, that Agamben challenges. The Italian philosopher introduces the notion of uncertainty against this presumed “necessary” order and identity, which normatively define being and non-being. The interpretation of life and the world given by the sovereign power, as codified by its law, is not as certain or metaphysically necessary as it seems. Rather than defined by a timeless essence, the ontological definitions of the sovereign power and its law are, in fact, historically and temporally shaped. Indeed, it is the temporal framework of analysis that enables Agamben to develop a messianic political thinking. If this historical temporal framework entails contingency, life in the world can be different from what is defined by the sovereign power and its law. The Italian philosopher seems to assume that the messianic is basically “a change in temporality,”¹⁰³⁵ in which only the messianic event can replace the sovereign power and its normative definition of temporality (that is, its metaphysical definition of the order of things and the ontological identity of people) “without renewing the logic of sovereignty.”¹⁰³⁶ This means that the messianic deactivates the metaphysical order of things and the ontological definitions or identities of the sovereign power without materially establishing a new metaphysical order and a new ontological identity, as indicated in Part II.

This lack of material content following the messianic deactivation of the sovereign power, particularly in the realm of metaphysics and ontology, allows Agamben to emphasize the idea of pure potentiality without actuality and to escape the logic of a new sovereignty. At the same time, one could argue that the lack of material content also appears to make Agamben’s alternative to the sovereign power rather vague, especially considering that deactivation would not mean the complete and immediate eradication of the sovereign power and the law, as also highlighted in Part II. However, it is possible to discern at least two specific points in Agamben’s reflection that could be further elaborated in the elucidation of how the messianic change of temporality, that is, the messianic deactivation of metaphysics and ontology as defined by the sovereign power, would look like. The first point is the concrete and historical example of the life and community of the Franciscan order, whereas the second one is the projection of a seemingly underdeveloped understanding of personal experience (selfhood) in general. In both cases, the idea of

¹⁰³⁴. See Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 26, 239.

¹⁰³⁵. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 199.

¹⁰³⁶. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 175.

personal experience is present since the life and community of the Franciscan order is a form-of-life, in the sense of life experienced.

This focus on lived experience brings us back to the discussion of (historical, temporal) phenomenology. The messianic event has not immediately changed the sovereign order of the world as such nor the ontological identities that derive from it. In other words, the form of the world has not changed yet. At the same time, the change in messianic temporality means that the world can be already experienced in a different way. In this new experience, the order of the world and the identities instantiated by it are not abolished but used in different ways. While the form of the world has not changed, the experience of it has already changed. In this sense, Agamben seems to promote a new understanding of selfhood, in which the self distrusts the way the sovereign power orders the world and defines the identity of people by means of the law. This distrust, however, cannot be absolute in the sense that the metaphysical order and the ontological identities are not to be dismissed as completely illusory, inasmuch as their forms do not cease to exist. From this perspective, trust (perhaps we could refer to it as the conviction of *pistis*) and distrust are crucial elements for this redefinition of selfhood. While the form of the world still remains, the potentiality of a new use in the old order of things with its old identities can only be experienced if the self does not trust in the necessity of what is seen in the current form of the world.

In the words of Delahaye, “Factually the world remains the same, yet it is radically different, because it is pregnant with its potentiality. The way the law says the world is, is no longer the entire story. The world is more than the sovereign’s interpretation of it.”¹⁰³⁷ Indeed, a different interpretation of the world is not based on what is seen but on the trust (*pistis*) that the world has the potential to be something else. This is a trust in what cannot be seen, and there is no absolute guarantee that this will be materially seen in the future. Yet, this potential can be somehow experienced in the form of new use.¹⁰³⁸ Nonetheless, this experience should not be taken as a merely subjective or internal change or trust in terms of selfhood. Messianic deactivation takes place in the context of messianic temporality. This means that deactivation does not happen by means of human thinking or activity. It is rather something to be acknowledged and embraced, which is key for the transformation of selfhood in terms of a new experience of the world.¹⁰³⁹

Therefore, the anthropological trust in a world that is different from the order established by the sovereign power and its law is not merely a trust about a new self-experience in the world (anthropology) but, more fundamentally, this is the trust

¹⁰³⁷. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 247.

¹⁰³⁸. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 213.

¹⁰³⁹. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 236.

that the world has the potential to be experienced in different ways (metaphysics). In fact, the law itself contains an “internal excess” (remnant) that goes back to the promissive dimension of the law (pre-law), where we find *pistis* (the law of faith).¹⁰⁴⁰ The idea of going back is a remarkable element of the messianic deactivation of the sovereign (metaphysical, ontological, and political) power in the context of messianic temporality. More precisely, the messianic deactivation of the sovereign power is not primarily an openness to what the world could be but, more importantly, to what the world “could have been”¹⁰⁴¹ before being ordered by that power. Thus, it could be said that the messianic now of deactivation contains the past,¹⁰⁴² since past potentialities are not exhausted or used up by present actualities (thus the importance of pure potentiality that remains [excess, remnant] in Agamben). It is in this metaphysical and ontological understanding (or trust) about the world of potentiality in the messianic time of deactivation that the self “is no longer what it is, but it is what it can be”¹⁰⁴³ or, more emphatically, what it could have been in the experience of a new use, which escapes the reduction of life established by the sovereign power, as instrumentalized by the law.¹⁰⁴⁴ As Delahaye points out, the messianic self “lives in a messianic time,” where “every moment is pregnant with the full past.”¹⁰⁴⁵ Thus, the messianic self “no longer lives solely in the present, but it also carries with it the potentiality of the past.”¹⁰⁴⁶

Overall, the conception of distrust in the sovereign normative interpretation of the world and of trust in the context of messianic temporality, which is a trust with anthropological and metaphysical dimensions, involving a new experience (a new selfhood) in a world full of potentialities, is not explicitly elaborated in Agamben's treatment of Paul's *pistis*. Nevertheless, it could be argued that these conceptions are assumed in the most elaborated and political dimension of *pistis* in Agamben, which is the dimension of *ethos* or community, where we find the performative place of *pistis*, especially as people (the new selfhood of messianic temporality) make promises to one another.

In general, the new selfhood of messianic temporality distrusts the normative and visible interpretation and articulation of the sovereign power about the order of the world and the identities established by it. This distrust is conversely fueled by a trust that the world is metaphysically and ontologically defined by invisible

¹⁰⁴⁰. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 216–217.

¹⁰⁴¹. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 207.

¹⁰⁴². Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 207.

¹⁰⁴³. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 197.

¹⁰⁴⁴. As Delahaye indicates, this escaping is what Agamben calls “form-of-life.” Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 174.

¹⁰⁴⁵. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 222.

¹⁰⁴⁶. Delahaye, “It Is No Longer I Who Lives,” 222.

potentialities, and not restricted to the seen actualities instantiated by the law of the sovereign power. Moreover, this trust is not only about the world and its potentialities but also describes the anthropological trust that the self can have a different experience of the world, particularly a new use of things and identities, even though they are still ordered and formally defined by the sovereign power. But these metaphysical and anthropological dimensions of trust become politically visible in the constitution of a messianic community. This community, which is further exemplified by the Franciscan order, is marked by a non-traditional adherence to the law, focused on the promissive aspect of it, where we find oaths and *pistis*. From this perspective, the community is characterized by trustworthiness and the suspension of power. Inasmuch as the participants of this community trust one another and everyone is trustworthy, there is no place for hierarchical power in the community. Thus, the communal practice of *pistis* or trust has the potential to deactivate the sovereign power.¹⁰⁴⁷

In short, the new self in messianic temporality, implied in Agamben's account of *pistis*, is a selfhood that is historically constituted in the enactment of a new way of living,¹⁰⁴⁸ that is, a new experience of the world marked by a new use of things and identities, and a new community of relationships defined by mutual trustworthiness and promises. This selfhood is not informed by the visible and presumed necessary identity established by the sovereign power but by the conviction in the unseen potentiality of the word and the possibility of new experiences, new uses, and a new community shaped by relational trust. In this sense, *pistis* or trust (that also causes distrust in the metaphysical, ontological, and political definitions of the sovereign power) is crucial for the historical constitution of (messianic) selfhood, which is not abstractly defined by an allegedly necessary identity metaphysically, ontologically, and politically decided by the sovereign power.

After these remarks on historical and temporal phenomenology and selfhood in connection with Ricoeur and Agamben, especially considering the role of uncertainty and trust in the concepts of attestation and messianic *pistis*, we find ourselves in a better position to compare these concepts in light of the larger framework of phenomenology and selfhood. But before I move to a more specific comparison of attestation and messianic *pistis*, it is important to clarify my option for the term selfhood. To be sure, Ricoeur employs the language of subjectivity and Delahaye uses this same language in his study of Agamben's Paul. Because of this, I have used the terms subjectivity and selfhood interchangeably to a certain extent in this chapter. However, I prefer the language of selfhood as it avoids the Cartesian baggage of subject-object framework and the idealist notion of subject. This preference explains why I have progressively

¹⁰⁴⁷. See Delahaye, "It Is No Longer I Who Lives," 251-253.

¹⁰⁴⁸. See Delahaye, "It Is No Longer I Who Lives," 255.

avoided the language of subjectivity and used, instead, the term selfhood since I assume that it conveys a historical and temporal understanding of the self.

While in ontotheology metaphysics and philosophical anthropology are connected on the basis of an atemporal (non-historical) ontological perspective, and Descartes is a vivid example of this connection, as the discussion above about the task of present-day phenomenology indicates, the alternative offered by Ricoeur and Agamben seems to provide a combination of philosophical anthropology and (political) metaphysics that are historically and temporally shaped and, therefore, affirm contingency in the non-teleological dialectical interaction of uncertainty or distrust and trust or conviction. The more specific comparison of attestation and messianic *pistis* in the next chapter will contribute to a better understanding of this combination, which is potentially helpful for philosophical reflections on the apostle Paul, particularly considering the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

CHAPTER 8

Attestation and Messianic *Pistis*

In the comparison of Ricoeur's attestation with Agamben's *pistis*, I will follow the same categories employed (*why*, *what*, *how*) in the concluding systematic overview of each one of these two concepts in Part I (chapter 3) and Part II (chapter 6). However, I will intentionally reverse the order of these categories. In the systematic overview of chapters 3 and 6, the order adopted was *why*, *what*, and *how*. This sequence was followed in those chapters because it served the purpose of systematically summarizing the findings of attestation and *pistis*, respectively. For this reason, the order moved from the context of the concepts (*why*) to their overall definition (*what*) and, then, to *how* they work. In other words, the movement was from the general to the specific. On the other hand, in the present chapter the comparison has in view what is common between attestation and *pistis* and, then, what makes them distinct from each other.

It is arguably plausible to suggest that the *how* contains the most common aspects of the two concepts. Succinctly, both accounts of attestation and *pistis* function dialectically in a non-Hegelian way. Next, the *what* is also similar because the two concepts are forms of trust ontologically grounded in (the affirmation of) potentiality and transformation. Conversely, the contextual task of the *why* leads to different explanations of the reasons Ricoeur and Agamben had to develop the notions of attestation and *pistis*. Obviously, we are dealing with different starting points, purposes, and projects. Broadly speaking, the French thinker begins with philosophical anthropology, whereas the Italian philosopher discusses political ontology. Therefore, using the reverse order of *how*, *what*, and *why*, in contrast to the sequence adopted in chapters 3 and 6, I will start this brief systematic comparison with the *how* of attestation and *pistis*.

8.1 The How of Attestation and *Pistis*

A crucial common feature of Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* is dialectics. Their dialectical thinking is non-Hegelian in the sense that these two continental philosophers avoid a final synthesis. Rather, they formulate a different type of dialectics that does not reach a settled position but is always open to contingency. However, while their dialectical thinking is non-absolute, the two dialectical poles are not symmetric either. Instead of a symmetric paradox established by the poles, which without a synthesis would simply amount to dualism, one of the poles becomes more prominent than the other in the interaction or confrontation between the two. Nevertheless, the most prominent pole does not achieve this position in isolation from the other one but rather by being somehow informed by it.

In Ricoeur, the dialectical poles are epistemologically framed in terms of trust and suspicion. He thinks about this polarity in connection with the ontological polarity of the self and the other, between unity and plurality. This connection with ontology makes the discussion of trust and suspicion more anthropological or phenomenological than epistemological, strictly speaking. The certainty of the self about itself and the unity of one's interpretation are challenged by the complex reality of otherness and the plurality of interpretations. More precisely, they raise suspicion about the self and its interpretation. But instead of undermining them, the self and its interpretation become hermeneutically informed and enhanced by the proper recognition of otherness and plurality, without becoming absolute but always challenged by the suspicion raised by otherness and plurality. Thus, trust is constantly informed and hermeneutically enhanced by suspicion, resulting in attestation without ever becoming absolute. In the dialectical process leading to attestation, trust becomes (always contingently) greater than suspicion, considering that suspicion cannot become absolute and, thus, also needs to be open to the plurality of interpretations (otherness). Furthermore, the dialectical asymmetry of trust and suspicion reflects the assumed emphasis on the reality of freedom and potentiality, just as the ethical demands of self-esteem and responsible action. In short, attestation is the contingent anthropological offshoot of a dialectical process in Ricoeur, according to which attestation never constitutes an established and final synthesis.

In Agamben, the dialectical poles are politically spelled out in terms of sovereign power and messianic event or temporality. While in Ricoeur the dialectical asymmetry of the poles makes trust more prominent than suspicion (resulting in attestation), provided that the former is still always informed and qualified by the latter, in Agamben's dialectical asymmetry the messianic event or temporality is not a power competing with the sovereign power. If the messianic event or temporality

is described in the language of power, this would be a different type compared to the sovereign kind of power. More precisely, the messianic event or temporality is a destituent power, as it deactivates the sovereign power. The messianic event or temporality is a different kind of power because it would otherwise become a new form of sovereign power eventually, which would mean that the essential logic of this power could not be really overcome, but it would be taken as rather necessary. Whereas Ricoeur dialectically avoids a totalizing trust in order to recognize otherness and plurality, Agamben dialectically eschews a totalizing (sovereign) power in order to delineate a new type of power that is not destructive. This is why the effects of the destituent power are not understood in terms of replacement but as primarily an inversion and transformation (new use) that follows the dialectic logic of *katargeō* or *Aufhebung* in initially keeping the outward form of the sovereign power but cunningly and subversively rendering it inoperative.

Therefore, while in Ricoeur the interaction of the poles is dialectical in the sense that one pole (trust) becomes more prominent than the other (suspicion), paradoxically by continuing to recognize the existence and the importance of the other pole (suspicion), in Agamben the interaction of the poles is dialectical in the sense that one pole (messianic event or temporality) suspends the other (sovereign power) in a dialectical way, namely, by initially keeping its form while deactivating its power. Hence, if the French philosopher attempts to avoid dialectical totalization by having the prominent pole recognize the other, the Italian thinker intends to eschew dialectical totalization by having the prominent pole suspending or deactivating the other, and not simply replacing it.

In this comparison of dialectical thinking in Ricoeur and Agamben, it is important to highlight at least two significant points, one about the place of attestation and *pistis* in dialectics, especially in connection with the focus on philosophical anthropology and political metaphysics, and the other on the dialectical role of suspicion in both continental philosophers. With regard to the place of attestation and *pistis* in dialectics, it should be noted that attestation, as I have indicated, is the dialectical provisional and contingent result of the prominent pole trust that engages with and recognizes the importance of the pole suspicion. By contrast, Agamben's *pistis* is not the result of the dialectical interaction of poles. Instead, *pistis* is associated with one of the poles, namely, the prominent pole of the messianic event or temporality and its dialectical suspension and deactivation of sovereign power. This difference seems justified by the fact that Ricoeur situates his dialectical thinking in the realm of philosophical anthropology, whereas the context of Agamben's dialectics is political metaphysics. To put it more sharply, Ricoeur's dialectical approach could be described in terms of the self-developing trust (the prominent pole) in its challenging and positive engagement with suspicion (the other

pole). The provisional and contingent result of this dialectical engagement is the attestation of the self.

Conversely, in Agamben, the prominent pole is not the self in dialectical engagement with the sovereign power (the other pole). If *pistis* is related to the self, the prominent pole does not become so because of the use of *pistis*. To put it in another way, the dialectical process in Agamben is not posed anthropologically but metaphysically. It is rather the messianic event or temporality (metaphysics) that becomes the dominant pole, and not the self and its confidence or *pistis* (anthropology). Now, Agamben's theory does have anthropological implications, in the sense that the self is invited to acknowledge and actively participate (*pistis*) in the messianic event or temporality as the non-visible true potential political reality of the world that deactivates the sovereign power. This engaged acknowledgment (*pistis*) allows the self to experience messianic time and, thus, participate in the dialectical suspension of the sovereign power. From this perspective, *pistis* is described as a form of deactivation, provided that this is not primarily taken in an anthropological sense but in a metaphysical way, which includes anthropology; that is, it is open to human participation.

These different emphases on philosophical anthropology and political metaphysics lead not only to different descriptions of the dialectical poles and their asymmetric interactions but also to distinct conceptions of the place of suspicion in dialectics. In Ricoeur's anthropological reflection, suspicion (the other pole) is something that the self needs to learn to acknowledge and embrace in the dialectical development of attestation. On the other hand, given Agamben's metaphysical focus, the anthropological participation in messianic temporality by means of *pistis* implies that the self needs to learn to be suspicious of the sovereign power (the other pole) and its normative and totalizing interpretation of life and the world. In short, in Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology, the self needs to learn from the other pole to be suspicious about itself without making it absolute (so the process continues to be dialectical between the poles). Conversely, in Agamben's political (messianic) metaphysics and its implied participatory anthropology, the self needs to learn to be suspicious about the interpretation that the other pole seeks to establish as absolute truth.

At the same time, it could be said that in both dialectical approaches the prominent pole is informed by the other. In Ricoeur, the other pole (suspicion) needs to be recognized, given the reality of otherness and plurality that challenges the certainty of the self. In Agamben, the other pole (sovereign power) needs to be recognized as the power that the self has to become suspicious of. Instead of inspiring suspicion, the other pole in Agamben's dialectics attempts to instantiate certainty about its interpretation of life and the world. In Ricoeur's anthropological

approach, suspicion is something to be partially and dialectically (without making it absolute) learned from skeptics, such as the masters of suspicion. On the other hand, in the metaphysical emphasis of the Italian thinker, suspicion is implicitly learned from *pistis* and its trust in messianic temporality.

If by observing Ricoeur's dialectical attestation and his reflection on suspicion we are able to discern in Agamben's dialectical *pistis* the implicit idea of suspicion regarding the sovereign power, we may also identify in Ricoeur a kind of Agambenian deactivation in his dialectical treatment of suspicion. As van der Heiden points out, the role of the suspicion pole in Ricoeur's dialectics is not to be understood in terms of a "dialectical complement" but rather as "a dialectical *corrective*."¹⁰⁴⁹ This correction is hermeneutically necessary because the interpretations performed by the self are influenced by a number of factors that mediate the process of interpretation ("cultural and historical affects, linguistic attunements, societal powers, physical forces, and bodily drives"¹⁰⁵⁰). In fact, the distinction between dialectical complement and dialectical corrective refers essentially to two types of dialectics, namely, the Hegelian dialectics of synthesis and Agamben's account of Paul's dialectics of *katargēsis* or deactivation.¹⁰⁵¹

From this perspective, the dialectical pole of suspicion as a corrective in Ricoeur is similar to the dialectical pole of messianic temporality and *pistis* in Agamben, in the sense that both perform the deactivation of the second pole. Moreover, both deactivation and correction cannot become absolute. This is why both Agamben's messianic *pistis* pole and Ricoeur's suspicion pole do not become the new constitutive power or norm.¹⁰⁵² In order to exemplify the (Agamben's account of Paul's) dialectics of deactivation in Ricoeur's hermeneutical thinking, van der Heiden explains that the positions of Descartes (absolute certainty) and Nietzsche (absolute suspicion), explored in the introduction of *Soi-même comme un autre* as the philosophical background for the articulation of attestation, should not be taken as dialectical poles that would lead to a Hegelian synthesis of a new position in Ricoeur.

Instead, Descartes and Nietzsche are taken as influential or perhaps even normative positions in streams of modern thought that radicalize either assurance or doubt, respectively. In this context, what Ricoeur does is to suspend these influential or normative positions by dialectically deactivating both the hyperbolic¹⁰⁵³ form of assurance in Descartes (certainty) and the hyperbolic form of doubt in Nietzsche (suspicion), liberating them to a new use, if I may employ Agamben's language here.

¹⁰⁴⁹ van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 33. Italics in the original.

¹⁰⁵⁰ van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 34.

¹⁰⁵¹ van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 35.

¹⁰⁵² van der Heiden, "Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism," 36.

¹⁰⁵³ As noted in Chapter 2, the term "hyperbolic" is employed by Ricoeur in *Soi-même comme un autre*. See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 15.

In fact, hyperbolic doubt or suspicion is also present in Descartes in his “attempt to remove the element of trust—namely, the trust in the authority of tradition—and replace it by certainty.”¹⁰⁵⁴ As van der Heiden indicates, Ricoeur’s formulation of attestation is not “a quest for certainty”¹⁰⁵⁵ simply qualified by suspicion in a dialectical Hegelian synthesis. Rather, the trust of attestation is different from Cartesian certainty, which is a hyperbolic form of assurance. Indeed, “Trust is not certainty. Those who are certain do not need to trust.”¹⁰⁵⁶ Likewise, Ricoeur also liberates doubt from the hyperbolic form of suspicion, which, by radically suspecting everything, becomes “methodological paranoia.”¹⁰⁵⁷ The hyperbolic form of suspicion is different from doubt in regular human experience, in which uncertainties result from “the multiplicity of perspectives that characterize the human condition.”¹⁰⁵⁸

Therefore, attestation implies a different use of the concepts of assurance and uncertainty, if we take into account the influential hyperbolic forms of Cartesian certainty and Nietzschean suspicion. These absolute forms are mutually exclusive and, therefore, non-dialectic. Just as in the hyperbolic form of assurance, the hyperbolic form of suspicion demands complete certainty from a position, even though this demand is done skeptically. Once such radicalized demand cannot be met, the conclusion is that nothing can be trusted, which implies that there is no room for testimony.¹⁰⁵⁹ On the other hand, by interacting dialectically (in the Agambenian sense of *katargēō*) with assurance and uncertainty, Ricoeur’s attestation deactivates their hyperbolic forms, which results in non-absolute and, therefore, modest accounts of trust and distrust that are not mutually exclusive, but dialectically and asymmetrically constituted, in the sense that “By its very nature, trust is accompanied by the possibility of distrust.”¹⁰⁶⁰ In this asymmetric dialectics, trust experiences critique or doubt and can be called a “post-critical faith.”¹⁰⁶¹ From this perspective of the suspension of influential modern paradigms that postulate hyperbolic forms of certainty and suspicion, Ricoeur’s attestation is close to Agamben’s *pistis* in its deactivating role of absolute forms and interpretations.

To sum up this comparative discussion of the *how* of attestation and *pistis*, the dialectical thinking of Ricoeur anthropologically situates attestation at the (provisional and contingent) end of the dialectical engagement of the trust of the self with uncertainty. On the other hand, Agamben’s dialectical vision anthropologically

^{1054.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 37.

^{1055.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 37.

^{1056.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 37.

^{1057.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 38.

^{1058.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 38.

^{1059.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 37.

^{1060.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 40.

^{1061.} van der Heiden, “Distantiation, Post-Critique, and Realism,” 39.

situates *pistis* as a form of trust and participation in the political metaphysics of messianic temporality, which dialectically deactivates sovereign power and enables a new use of life, without becoming a new sovereign or absolute power. In this context, comparing Agamben with Ricoeur, the Agambenian self defined by *pistis* learns to be suspicious of the sovereign power and its normative interpretation of life and the world. Coming back to Ricoeur's attestation, now in its comparison with Agamben, it is possible to discern in attestation a dialectical deactivating role that suspends the influential modern paradigms of hyperbolic certainty or suspicion, allowing a new use of trust and uncertainty in a modest version that does not become absolute, but that is dialectically and asymmetrically constituted.

This comparative reflection about the dialectical non-Hegelian *how* of attestation and *pistis* is quite helpful for the subsequent task of comparing the *what* of attestation and *pistis* below. To be sure, this is not an exhaustive account of the *how* of attestation and *pistis*. The next sections also contribute to understanding the *how*, even indirectly. But these remarks on the dialectical nature of the *how* are primordially significant for the comparative clarification of attestation and *pistis*. With this dialectical perspective in mind, I will turn now to the *what* of these two concepts.

8.2 The What of Attestation and *Pistis*

The *what* of attestation and *pistis* can be briefly stated as the trust in potentialities (and transformation). This is an ontological reason for the asymmetric nature of the dialectical functioning of attestation and *pistis*. By focusing on potentialities, the self is more open to trust than distrust. At the same time, the affirmation of contingency rather than necessity, which is part of the focus on potentialities, tends to lead the self to distrust discourses that emphasize necessity.

Both Ricoeur and Agamben formulate their notions in dialogue with Aristotle's account of potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*). In fact, both discern in the Greek philosopher the attempt "to grant potentiality an ontological status of its own."¹⁰⁶² Ricoeur underlines Aristotle's discussion of being in "the distinction of *act* and of *power*"¹⁰⁶³ and proposes "a *ground at once actual and in potentiality*."¹⁰⁶⁴ By interpreting potentiality in terms of productivity (Spinoza's *conatus*) and effectiveness,¹⁰⁶⁵ the French thinker formulates the notion of power-to-act according

¹⁰⁶². Dickinson, "The Guises of Violence," 134.

¹⁰⁶³. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 303 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁶⁴. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 315 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁶⁵. Already in the essay *Nature et liberté* (Nature and Freedom) from 1962, Ricoeur speaks of reality in terms of *dunamis*, which does not convey the idea of "potency in the sense of tendency to form, but potency in the sense of operations, effectiveness, expansiveness of action." Paul Ricoeur,

to the conception of “human action and being together as both act and potentiality.”¹⁰⁶⁶ While he still seems to follow the premise that *energeia* has primacy over *dunamis*, Ricoeur appears to counter a “unilateral” focus on the former by claiming that human action is both act and potentiality,¹⁰⁶⁷ in the sense that it “never ceases to be both at the same time.”¹⁰⁶⁸ Moreover, his emphasis on otherness and plurality reinforces “the potential for otherness” constantly “lurking” in “a concrete actualized form.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Ricoeur’s concern with a unilateral focus on actuality is close to Agamben’s criticism of the exhaustion of potentiality once it becomes actual in the developments of the Aristotelian tradition. While the Italian philosopher seems more radical in his affirmation of the independent ontological status of potentiality,¹⁰⁷⁰ which avoids the idea of actuality, Ricoeur’s notion that potency still exists along with actuality instead of being exhausted in it, is similar to Agamben’s idea that potentiality does not cease to exist. In addition, Agamben’s interpretation of Paul’s ontology, according to which *energeia* describes the operativity or effectuation of a potency, seems somehow similar to Ricoeur’s idea of potentiality as productivity and effectiveness.

To be more specific regarding the projects in which these ideas explicitly or implicitly appear in relation to the concepts of attestation and *pistis*, once again, the starting point of the French thinker is philosophical anthropology, as noted in his phenomenology of the capable human being (“I can”), whereas the point of departure for the Italian philosopher is political ontology and metaphysics, as another use of the identities and forms normatively created by the sovereign power becomes possible in messianic temporality. In fact, messianic temporality brings back past potentialities that still exist ontologically and, thus, have not been exhausted into current actualities established by the sovereign power. Furthermore, even the deactivating notion of dialectical *katargeō* is specifically related to potentiality, as *katargeō* brings about the taking out of *energeia*, that is, the suspension of the effectiveness of actuality dictated by the sovereign power. In this sense, the deactivation of *katargeō* makes room for potentiality.

“Nature and Freedom,” in *Political and Social Essays*, ed. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), 39. See Paul Ricoeur, “Nature et liberté,” in *Existence et nature*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 134.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 315.

¹⁰⁶⁷ “The difficult dialectic between the two Greek terms is in danger of disappearing in an apparently unilateral rehabilitation of *energeia*. Yet it is on this very difference between *energeia* and *dunamis*, as much as on the primacy of the first over the second, that the possibility ensues of interpreting human action and being together as both act and potentiality.” Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 315.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Dickinson, *Between the Canon and the Messiah*, 182.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Dickinson, *Between the Canon and the Messiah*, 182. Ricoeur’s interaction with figurative language also reinforces the idea of potency or potential, as he assumes that “Poetry and fiction intend being, not as given, but as possible.” Daigler, “Being as Act and Potency in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” 375.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Dickinson, “The Guises of Violence,” 137.

Despite these differences, both approaches can be qualified as temporal and historical accounts of potentiality. For instance, the “I can” in Ricoeur’s phenomenology of the capable human being is not simply stated abstractly *a priori*. Rather, the capacities are temporally confirmed inasmuch as they are enacted in history. More precisely, the temporal enactment attests or bears testimony to their existence. In this sense, we affirm the possibilities of human capacities as historical witnesses (according to the phenomenological framework of temporal experience) and not as modern Cartesian subjects (according to the rationalistic framework of subject-object).¹⁰⁷¹ This underscores the profound connection between attestation and testimony, which suggests that the *what* of attestation is a trust in potentialities (human capacities) on the basis of testimony, including self-testimony, the testimony of others (a form of recognition), and the testimony of history (another temporal form of the testimony of others and even of self-testimony). This trust in potentialities (human capabilities), grounded in the testimony of the past, is essential for the possibility and self-confidence implied in the practice of making promises, as we assume in this practice that we will have the capacity to fulfill them in the future. Thus, the temporal experiences of testimony (memory of the past) and promise (anticipation of the future) are crucial for understanding the *what* of attestation, in terms of trust in potentialities. It is also noteworthy that testimonies and promises are speech-acts about human capabilities, which qualify the *what* of attestation as a *linguistic or spoken* trust in potentialities.

Agamben’s emphasis on potentiality is also temporal, considering that he speaks of messianic temporality and *pistis* in the sense of bringing to the present the potentiality of the past, which was not exhausted in the actuality established by the sovereign power. Also, the idea of *katargeō* as taking out the *energeia*, in the sense of suspending the effectiveness of actuality (sovereign power), has a temporal dimension. Indeed, the Italian philosopher is more radical in his account of (pure) potentiality, inasmuch as he seeks to disconnect it from what he considers to be the problematic notion of actuality, which is the deceptive necessity proclaimed by the sovereign power. When compared with Agamben, Ricoeur’s approach seems more positive about actuality, even though the French thinker presupposes the continuing existence of potentiality along with actuality. In fact, the idea that human capacities are temporally affirmed on the basis of the testimony of their enactment means that potentiality is confirmed by observing its (non-exhaustive) transformation into actuality. To put it more sharply, actuality is the historical evidence of the (continuous) existence of potentiality, which is evidenced by bearing testimony. It is on this basis that promises are made, grounding the trust that the still existing

¹⁰⁷¹ See Gert-Jan van der Heiden, “Witnessing, Truth, and Realism: A Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Approach,” *Critical Hermeneutics* 6, no. 2 (2022): 177-183.

and overflowing potentiality can be (non-exhaustively) actualized again in the future. From this perspective, the understanding of the *what* of attestation as (spoken) trust in potentialities points to signs or testimonies of (overflowing) present potentiality (non-exhaustively present) in actuality and argues for the plausibility of the repetition of a (non-exhaustive) new actualization, or at least a similar actualization of the continuously existing potential.

On the other hand, Agamben interprets actuality from a political standpoint and not simply as historical evidence as Ricoeur does. Politically speaking, actuality is the current order of the world established by the sovereign power, which falsely affirms this order as necessary and, thus, argues that it cannot be changed. While the French philosopher is interested in deactivating the power of interpretive paradigms that postulate hyperbolic absolute forms of certainty or suspicion mistakenly promoted as necessary, the Italian thinker emphasizes the deactivation of the effectiveness of the actuality promoted by the sovereign power, which involves more specifically the deactivation or the unmasking of the discourse that this power makes about the necessity of actuality.

Overall, the deactivation performed in attestation and by *pistis* are similar in the sense that both challenge accounts of necessity and, therefore, affirm contingency and potentiality. In attestation, hyperbolic or absolute forms of certainty or suspicion are deactivated as non-necessary. The experience of life is contingent and complex, demanding the interaction of more modest accounts of trust and distrust that are not absolute. From the perspective of *pistis*, the actuality established by the sovereign power is not necessary. A new use of its forms is possible, and the potentialities from the past still exist, as they have not been exhausted in actuality. But the new use does not become the new norm, and neither are the potentialities actualized, so the logic of absolute sovereign power is not repeated. While in Ricoeur's historical understanding of actuality the idea of a repetition of actuality positively reinforces the argument of testimony, in the sense of evidence to the continuous and overflowing existence of potentiality, in Agamben's political interpretation of actuality the repetition of actuality precludes potentiality and, thus, the effectiveness of actuality has to be deactivated.

It is also important to highlight, in this context, the spoken nature of the trust in potentialities in the *what* of Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis*. According to this view, the concepts of attestation and *pistis* are defined by testimonies and promises, which qualify these concepts as speech-acts. As such, they have performative (destituent) power. Attestation affirms the continuous existence of potentiality by bearing witness to its historical (non-exhaustive) signs in actuality and grounds the promise of the actualization of the same potentiality (or even more) in the future. Testimonies are also used to deactivate absolute discourses of complete

certainty or complete suspicion, given the plurality and variety of testimonies that offer different possibilities of trust and distrust, providing a more complex picture of assurance and doubt. Likewise, *pistis* deactivates the effectiveness of the actuality of the sovereign power, especially by suspending the effectiveness of its discourse in the sense of unmasking the deceptive sovereign affirmation of the necessity of actuality. To put it more sharply, the deceptive discourse and proclamation of the sovereign power about necessity is deactivated by a truthful proclamation or announcement of *pistis* regarding pure potentiality. Indeed, the announcement itself carries the present potentiality of the past since the announcement of *pistis* recovers the promissive dimension of the law before the normative actualization of the law performed by the sovereign power.

If in Ricoeur promises are based on the testimony of the continuous existence of potentiality in the historical (non-exhaustive) evidence of actuality, in Agamben promises are announced as something that must precede political actuality and, in this sense, they truly carry the reality of potentiality. Given the avoidance of actuality in Agamben's formulation of *pistis*, the announcement of trust in potentialities is an event of the word that does not carry any content; otherwise, it would become a new political (necessary) actuality. The implication of Agamben's view is that *pistis* cannot have any content or historical evidence or testimony (in this sense, it is distinct from attestation) besides its own announcement of potentiality against actuality, which reaffirms the idea of (potential) use without (actual) possession. Perhaps, the idea of temporal evidence of different uses could hermeneutically bring Agamben closer to Ricoeur's emphasis on testimony, since testimony does not mean the absolute possession of truth, but the use of an interpretation that is contingent and that has to be hermeneutically confronted with other testimonies. In any case, Agamben is accused of nihilism because his account of *pistis* has no actual content¹⁰⁷² but describes truthful proclamation of pure potentiality and new ways of use announced by faithful promises.

After these comparative remarks on the *what* of attestation and *pistis*, it is time to turn to the contextual *why* of these two concepts.

8.3 The Why of Attestation and *Pistis*

¹⁰⁷² See Colby Dickinson, "Canon as an Act of Creation: Giorgio Agamben and the Extended Logic of Messianism," *Bijdragen: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 71, no. 2 (2010): 132-158; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, "A Hermeneutics of Attestation: The Death of God and his Messengers," in *Beyond Nihilism?*, eds. Chris Bremmers, Andrew T. K. Smith, Jean-Pierre Wills (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2018), 168.

The *why* of attestation and *pistis* is justified particularly by the respective philosophical context in which these notions are formulated. As already indicated before, Ricoeur articulates the concept of attestation in the context of modern philosophical anthropology and the discussion of selfhood. Conversely, Agamben explores Paul's concept of messianic *pistis* in the context of modern political metaphysics and the discussion of sovereign power. In these intellectual contexts, the notions of attestation and *pistis* respond to different types of problems.

The problem Ricoeur's attestation addresses is the self-limitation of consciousness (wounded *cogito*), marked by self-alienation and confusion and illusions that impact interpretation. Moreover, the self faces the complexity of plurality and otherness, which offer different and even conflicting forms of interpretation. In this confusing scenario, which rules out the possibility of Cartesian certainty, one may raise the question of whether the self can have any assurance of its own interpretation. The answer that attestation gives is positive, if the conception of assurance is epistemologically modest (not causal or foundational) and temporally provisional, because it does not rule out the continuous presence of suspicion or distrust. At the same time, attestation does not give suspicion or distrust an absolute say. Just as attestation assumes that trust and assurance cannot be absolute, it also presupposes that suspicion and distrust cannot be totalized, giving room to a modest and provisional form of trust.

The best way to express this modest and provisional account of trust seems to be the experience of testimony. A testimony always involves interpretation and may be either trustworthy or misleading. When confronted with a plurality of testimonies, conflicting interpretations tend to raise suspicion and distrust of previous testimony. If we depend on a testimonial report to know something, we cannot be absolutely certain about it. What we can do is compare it with other testimonies about the same thing. Other testimonies may increase our trust in the first testimony if they are similar to it. Or they may decrease this trust if they are discrepant in comparison to the first testimony heard. Overall, what testimony provides is an identification of elements in historical reality that seem to attest or offer evidence to the trustworthiness of a given interpretation about oneself, others, and even history.

If we stop at this point, I could give the impression that the *why* of attestation is to answer the problem of knowledge in modernity. While Ricoeur attempts to provide an account of attestation epistemologically plausible, his anthropological and ontological elaboration leads us to phenomenology and ethics. If I am not able to interpret and, therefore, understand myself and the other at any level of trustworthiness in my historical and temporal condition, it is not possible to speak of personal fulfillment, good life, responsible action, and justice. To be sure, I need to have a measure of suspicion regarding my self-alienation and the injustice

that my misjudgments may cause to myself and others. Nevertheless, a modest and provisional form of trust in understanding attestation is necessary for ethical reasoning and action. From this perspective, the *why* of attestation, in the context of the problematization of the self and the complexity of reality, is epistemological plausibility, but especially ethical responsibility and practice in the anthropological reflection on selfhood. For instance, attestation grounds the ethical practice of making promises, which implies a form of anticipatory trust or assurance that the self will be able to fulfill them in the future.

On the other hand, the problem that Agamben's *pistis* primarily addresses is not misjudgment or the complexity of interpretation but the question of power. More specifically, the sovereign power limits freedom and controls life. To use ontological language, this power attempts to extinguish potentiality and create an actuality to be believed as necessary. This shift from the problem of interpretation to the one of power indicates that we are moving from the realm of philosophical anthropology and selfhood to the sphere of political metaphysics. If the focus before was on the problem of the self, the focus now is on the problem of authority and political power (the sovereign).

The answer of *pistis* to the problem of political power is initially distinct from what attestation does with the problem of the self. Attestation affirms the possibility of some form of assurance or trust, which is modest and always provisional, in the interpretation of the self, after undergoing a hermeneutical process of dealing with the suspicion and distrust raised by the plurality of other interpretations and testimonies. Conversely, *pistis* rejects any possibility of assurance or trust in the authority of political power. Instead of a hermeneutical process leading to a modest and provisional form of trust, *pistis* aims at unmasking and deactivating the deceitful affirmation stipulated by the sovereign power that the current order of the world is necessary.

While *pistis* distrusts the stipulations of the established political power, it trusts that the form of this world ruled by the sovereign power is passing away due to the reality of messianic temporality. In other words, a different form of political metaphysics is arriving and *pistis* is the way by which the self can already participate in it. Even though the forms of the old political metaphysics of the sovereign power are still present and are not yet visibly replaced by the new forms of messianic political metaphysics, the new order of the world can be experienced by the self in the use of the forms of the old order in a new way, which anticipates the new metaphysical order of the world. The language of order is more clearly understood in terms of identities created by the sovereign power. But the new metaphysical order of messianic temporality is a different type of order, in which identities are not established and political metaphysics is defined in terms of potentiality and not actuality, in contrast

to what the sovereign power does. In other words, the new metaphysical order has no specific content in order to allow for pure potentiality. Overall, the new political order is described by contingency and non-identity.

The participation of *pistis* in messianic metaphysics basically refers to speech and implies performative power, which deactivates and unmask the discourse of the sovereign power on the necessity of its political and metaphysical order. Furthermore, the performative power of *pistis* reactivates the past potentiality that still exists and has resisted the actualization performed by the sovereign power. This potentiality is found in the promissive dimension of the law, which was apparently lost in the actualization of the law constituted by the sovereign power. According to this view, the performative power of *pistis* reactivates the meaningful experience of making promises and, thus, presumably intends to form relationships that are trustworthy.

We can draw an interesting comparison of the performative power of *pistis* for deactivation and reactivation. On the one hand, the performative power of deactivation unmasks the deceiving metaphysical discourse of the sovereign power about its order as necessary actuality. On the other hand, the performative power of reactivation reestablishes the existence of truthful discourses in a community that affirms contingency, in contrast to the lies of the sovereign. Free from the political metaphysical domination of the sovereign and its discourse about the order of reality (actuality), which hides its own political intentions, the self is enabled to speak by itself something about reality, and this is already a form of potentiality, enunciating promises with truthful and ethical intentions. Arguably, the fact that Agamben is not interested in defining the content of the promises, given his focus on potentiality rather than actuality, seems to entail that the emphasis on promises highlights particularly positive intentions and trustworthiness.

This emphasis is relevant for the political building up of a new community and for the anthropological process of subjectification. Considering that subjectification, as indicated in chapter 4, is activated by the affirmation of contingency and possibility, the trustworthy promise of *pistis* for new use could be understood in terms of the activation of subjectification. Besides, as the performative announcement of *pistis* unmasks the discourses of necessity and impossibility (the negation of other possibilities) of the sovereign power, *pistis* resists or deactivates desubjectification. This idea of activation of subjectification and deactivation of desubjectification is further elucidated by the discursive understanding of conscience and the ontological conception of use-of-oneself, also mentioned in chapter 4. To be more specific, in the performative discourse of subjectification, a new conscience of the self emerges in which the self is not defined by the necessity of an identity established by the sovereign power but is constantly and contingently shaped by a new use, according to the idea of use-of-oneself in the context of the ontology of use.

If in Ricoeur some form of (hermeneutical) trust in the interpretation of the self is necessary for a meaningful experience of making promises, in Agamben promises cannot truly exist without the complete distrust and performative deactivation of the sovereign power. The political context of Agamben's discussion clarifies this point. With the controlling metaphysical authority of the sovereign power in place, there is no room for people to meaningfully speak something about the future with freedom, which ultimately makes the experience of promises void. With the deactivation of the sovereign power and its control over the order of the world, however, to say that the performative power of *pistis* reactivates the meaningful experience of making promises seems to imply, from a political standpoint, the messianic creation of a new community (as a matter of fact, Agamben's example of the Franciscan order is a community) that is not defined by the identities established by the sovereign power, but is rather characterized by truthful intentions and trustworthy relationships, under the political and metaphysical assumption of an open future. As indicated above, the new community is accompanied by the idea of a new self, according to the performative activation of subjectivation in the affirmation of contingency by the announcement of *pistis*, which conversely deactivates the desubjectivation of the sovereign power, promoting instead a new discursive conscience of the self and a contingent understanding of the self in the experience of new use, according to the ontology of use and the notion of use-of-oneself.

At this point, we may discern the ethical dimension of Agamben's *pistis*. In the context of a political metaphysics, *pistis* is negatively the performative means by which the self participates in the messianic deactivation of an oppressing, desubjectifying, and lying political power. Positively, *pistis* is the performative means or power that creates a new (messianic) community, where the freedom of contingency is experienced in the political and performative reality of trustworthy relationships and truthful intentions. *Pistis* also performatively promotes the subjectification of the self and the contingent understanding of use-of-oneself, according to the experience of new use in the messianic community.

In short, the *why* of attestation and *pistis* addresses different problems according to the philosophical focus adopted. Attestation addresses the anthropological problem of self-alienation and the complexity of plurality and otherness, which highlights the suspicion that the interpretation of the self cannot be trusted. Attestation answers this question by stipulating that neither trust nor doubt can be absolute and suggests a modest and provisional (hermeneutical) form of trust. On the other hand, *pistis* addresses the political problem of oppressive sovereign power, which suppresses freedom, controls life, and denies contingency. *Pistis* participates in the messianic solution of this problem by deactivating the sovereign power and reactivating potentiality to be experienced in community. From the perspective of selfhood, this

means the activation of subjectification and the deactivation of desubjectification, along with a new conscience associated with a contingent understanding of the self (use-of-oneself), according to the experience of new use.

Despite the contextual differences in philosophical anthropology and political metaphysics for understanding the *why* of attestation and *pistis*, these two concepts find common ground in their ethical dimensions or implications. In fact, ethics is a crucial aspect of the *why* of attestation and *pistis*. In these two performative concepts, the ethical dimension is clarified by the experience of making promises. Attestation, as understood in the experience of promises, affirms a measure of trust in the self for ethically responsible action. Similarly, *pistis* envisages a new community marked by trustworthy and subjectifying relationships, especially observed in the experience of making promises to each other, which are diametrically different from life under the oppressing and desubjectifying control of the sovereign power.

With these comparative ideas in mind about the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of attestation and *pistis*, I will conclude the present chapter with a brief outline of systematic considerations regarding trust and dialectical thinking, taking into account relevant implications for the present-day philosophical reflection on the apostle Paul regarding the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.

8.4. Trust and Dialectical Thinking

8

The conceptual framework of analysis delineated in chapter 7, along with the subsequent comparison of the *how*, the *what*, and the *why* of Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* in chapter 8, indicate that these two concepts are anthropologically and metaphysically distinct from absolute forms of certainty or of suspicion. As Cartesian subjectivity illustrates, absolute forms of certainty assume an idealistic view of the self and a non-temporal (ontotheological) metaphysical understanding of the world. Conversely, absolute forms of suspicion entail a paranoid attitude toward the self and the world. Overall, both absolute hyperbolic positions fail to portray the complexity of life as temporally and historically experienced, which usually involves different measures and interactions of assurance and uncertainty.

From the standpoint of Ricoeur's attestation, the self is normally inclined to trust its own judgment, and it needs to learn to be hermeneutically suspicious about itself in order to mature its own trust, which Ricoeur would call a second faith, as indicated in chapter 1. From the perspective of Agamben's *pistis*, the self is invited to trust in the (messianic) metaphysical potentialities of the world and, therefore, learn to be suspicious of the metaphysical and political effectiveness of the established sovereign power. Hence, in the two accounts, the self needs to temporally learn to

deal with trust and suspicion. This interpretation of the self and the world does not involve an abstract synthesis of trust and suspicion nor a necessary elimination or replacement of one of them, which underlines the asymmetrical dialectical nature of attestation and *pistis*. If we take the accounts of attestation and *pistis* together, there is something to be suspicious of about myself (Ricoeur) and about the (sovereign) present order of the world (Agamben). Likewise, there is a potential in myself that can be trusted (Ricoeur) and a metaphysical transformative potential in the world that I should trust (Agamben). Nevertheless, suspicion and trust are not dualistically isolated from each other. Rather, they interact dialectically. Trust in myself and my potentialities becomes more mature, modest, and provisional as I undergo the hermeneutical process of dealing with uncertainty. Also, my informed suspicion of the metaphysical sovereign power in the world derives precisely from my trust in the (messianic) transformative potentialities of the world. The main difference between Ricoeur and Agamben on this point is that trust and suspicion refer to the same self in the conception of the French philosopher, while in the perspective of the Italian thinker they refer to different powers (messianic and sovereign).

To be sure, this difference could be minimized if we think that Ricoeur has a double understanding of the self. Yet, we still need to remember that Agamben does not envisage a beneficial interaction with the sovereign power but only a beneficial new use, in the context of messianic temporality, of the forms and identities created by this power. We could say that suspicion is approached differently in Ricoeur's attestation. If we further compare him to the masters of suspicion, Ricoeur and the masters use suspicion with different measures and goals, but they all take the same content of suspicion into consideration. In contrast, the idea of new use in Agamben is a use of the form and not of the content defined by the sovereign power. In any case, in the comparison between Ricoeur and Agamben, we should not expect that a project on philosophical anthropology will always coincide with the other on political ontology. At the same time, absolute forms of certainty or suspicion in the understanding of the self are deactivated by Ricoeur's attestation, just as the sovereign power in the understanding of the world is deactivated by Agamben's *pistis*.

The idea of deactivation of absolute forms, but not necessarily their abolition, explains the asymmetric nature of dialectics in Ricoeur and Agamben. Suspicion, trust, and even the metaphysical order of the sovereign power are not abolished, but their absolute power is suspended, allowing a new use of suspicion and trust, which become more modest, given their hermeneutical use and the use of the identities and the order created by the sovereign power, which are used in new ways. A new use indicates that they have not been abolished but resignified. Still, the dialectics in place is asymmetric in the sense that it prioritizes trust over suspicion (Ricoeur) and the messianic community of truthful promises over the metaphysical order of

the deceitful and desubjectifying sovereign power (Agamben). The asymmetry of this dialectical priority is justified ontologically and ethically. Ontologically speaking, attestation and *pistis* share a high view of potentiality. While trust may find some form of rationale in *historical* actuality (Ricoeur's testimony), this justification is still unable to turn trust into certainty due to the different possibilities of an open future. On the other hand, if we speak of *political* actuality from an Agambenian standpoint, the situation becomes even more problematic given the fact that the sovereign power deceitfully proclaims the current oppressive and desubjectifying order of the world as actual and, thus, necessary. This Agambenian point provides the connection between the ontological and ethical justification for asymmetric dialectics. The deactivation of a deceitful and desubjectifying power is ethically important for the existence, by contrast, of a truthful affirmation of a community of freedom and contingency. Even in Ricoeur's attestation, the trust in the (capacities of the) self, characterized by freedom and contingency, is ethically important for affirming individual responsibility and the need for a just recognition of the other.

The ethical dimension of asymmetric dialectics brings us to the idea of ethos or community in the discussion of attestation and *pistis*. Arguably, Agamben's political approach makes the discussion of *pistis* more directly related to the notion of ethos or community, in the sense that *pistis* describes trustworthy relationships in the messianic community. Nevertheless, the ethical dimension of attestation, emphasizing moral responsibility and the importance of proper recognition of the other, even in the context of memory and history, indicates that Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach to selfhood has the potential of a fruitful dialogue with Agamben's reflection on ethos or community. In fact, the concept of making promises, which is relevant for both attestation and *pistis*, evidences the potential of this dialogue. If truthful promises are the best image of the envisaged ethos or community in the dialogue of attestation and *pistis*, the element of trust is obviously underscored in the relationships of this community. But how about suspicion or uncertainty? Is there still a place for that in the ethos or community of attestation and *pistis*? In the dialectical structure of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the answer seems positive. Nevertheless, in Agamben's political ontology the answer does not seem clear. One element that complicates things is that we do not really know when the order of this world (to use Paul's language of 1 Corinthians 7:31), that is, the order defined by the sovereign power according to Agamben, will definitely pass away.

If we focus on the messianic time of deactivation, in which the order of the world is passing away, we are still in a dialectical temporal reality, where the experience of new use still deals with the present order of the world, formally speaking. In this time of deactivation, the experience of truthful promises in the messianic ethos or community already takes place, but perhaps individuals still need to be reminded that

the effectiveness of the sovereign power is suspended, even though this is not what appears to be seen in the present order of the world. From this perspective, suspicion of sovereign power is continuously necessary in the messianic community, where the experience of trust and promises is the main subjectifying feature (or testimony) of this new ethos. Conversely, to speak of the complete disappearance of the sovereign power, which is potentially part of Agamben's affirmation of pure potentiality in history, could not only lead to the disappearance of the place of suspicion but ultimately to the extinction of dialectics itself in Agamben's political metaphysics. Nevertheless, this potential non-dialectical scenario of pure potentiality does not belong to the main focus of the present research.

In order to further strengthen the dialectical place of trust and suspicion or uncertainty, from a temporal phenomenological perspective, for the understanding of the ethos or community in attestation and *pistis*, I would like to propose a constructive systematic connection between Ricoeur and Agamben in the context of the philosophical interpretation of the apostle Paul.

To briefly mention the concepts developed in dialogue with Paul, Agamben derives his (non-Hegelian) dialectical understanding from the interpretation of Paul's *katargeō* (deactivation) and the *hōs mē* notion of use. The conception of sovereign power is related to his interpretation of the law in Paul. The view of a community without a predefined political metaphysical identity is associated with Paul's discussion of the remnant, and the performative idea of trust and trustworthiness, particularly situated in the political context of relationships, comes from the interpretation of Paul's *pistis*. All these concepts are ontologically and metaphysically framed by a temporal messianic standpoint, which also derives from his reading of Paul.

As far as Ricoeur is concerned, his interaction with Paul, as observed in chapter 7, is aligned with Agamben and highlights the idea of selfhood. The French philosopher notices that Agamben uses the first verses of Romans, which contain Paul's self-presentation and presupposes the credibility of his self-testimony (autobiography), as the starting point of the political remarks in *Il tempo che resta*. In other words, Ricoeur discerns in this strategy a movement from selfhood (Paul's self-experience) to political metaphysics. The French philosopher also identifies in Paul the idea of a divided self, which is similar to his dialectical anthropological understanding of selfhood in the elaboration of the concept of attestation, and he argues that Paul's idea of scission has individual and collective dimensions. Moreover, Ricoeur underscores the aporias of the law in Paul, in his dialogue with Agamben.

In light of this concise outline of the dialogue of Agamben and Ricoeur with the apostle Paul, I would like to highlight one aspect of the aporias of the law in Paul, which does not seem to be elaborated by the Italian and French philosophers, at

least not sufficiently, that could be particularly helpful for the systematic connection between Ricoeur and Agamben in the movement from philosophical anthropology to political metaphysics. While the Italian thinker focuses on the political dimension of the law in his dialogue with Paul for the dialectical (as the law is also good in its initial promissive intentions) elaboration of the notion of sovereign power, which is understandable when we consider that his project is on political philosophy, Paul's writings speak of the law also from an anthropological perspective, and Ricoeur's reflection on selfhood seems close to Paul's emphasis. More precisely, Romans 7:22-23 contains a complex aporia in which the language of the law is used in different ways, even anthropologically. "For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Rom. 7:22-23 NRSV).¹⁰⁷³

It is noteworthy that both Ricoeur and Agamben use Romans 7 in their reflections, as indicated in chapters 1 and 5. Ricoeur employs the example of a divided self in the apostle Paul in the discussion of self-understanding in *La symbolique du mal*, particularly in the elaboration of the ideas of otherness, guilt, and suspicion about himself. This is an example of Paul's rhetorical and autobiographical self-awareness and confession. The French philosopher cites Romans 7:18-19 to highlight the acknowledgment of duality in Paul's own self. Then, he cites Romans 7:25 to underline how a divided self (reason and flesh) respectively serves two laws: the law of God and the law of sin.¹⁰⁷⁴ Likewise, Agamben refers to Romans 7 in *Il tempo che resta* to highlight the broad use of the language of the law in Paul. Interestingly, the Italian philosopher discerns in Romans 7:19-24 a connection between political law and selfhood, as he speaks of "partitions of the *nomos*" traversing the interior of human beings. Agamben also underscores the division of different types of law at work in Romans 7:23, including the law of sin.¹⁰⁷⁵

These remarks from Ricoeur and Agamben about Romans 7 highlight the relevance of vv. 22-23 in the constructive proposal I intend to offer in the comments below. In this passage, the same term law is used to describe "the law of God," "another law" in my bodily members, "the law of my mind," and "the law of sin." These four references to the law come down to two opposing conceptions of the law. The first ("the law of God") and the third ("the law of my mind") references are connected and contrasted or, more emphatically, are in conflict with the second ("another law")

¹⁰⁷³. *synēdomai gar tō nomō tou theou kata ton esō anthrōpon, blepō de heteron nomon en tois melesin mou antistrateuomenon tō nomō tou noos mou kai aichmalōtizonta me en tō nomō tēs hamartias tō onti en tois melesin mou* (συνήδομαι γὰρ τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, βλέπω δὲ ἕτερον νόμον ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου ἀντιστρατεύμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζοντά με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας τῷ ὄντι ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου).

¹⁰⁷⁴. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 142.

¹⁰⁷⁵. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 49.

and the fourth (“the law of sin”) references, which are also connected. New Testament scholars James Dunn and Douglas Moo are representatives of two influential forms of interpreting these two opposing conceptions of law in the passage. The former scholar gives a temporal emphasis, while the latter has a more anthropological focus.

Instead of “an anthropological dualism,” Dunn stipulates that “the ‘I’ split” of the passage in question refers to the “‘I’ of the believer” as being temporally “stretched between the old epoch of sin and death (and law) and the new epoch of grace and life (and Spirit).”¹⁰⁷⁶ According to this temporal perspective, the “I” of the flesh belongs to the old epoch, and this is “the ‘I’ who has not yet died.”¹⁰⁷⁷ Furthermore, Dunn argues that the different references to the law in the passage do not imply distinct types of law but rather assume a “different way in which the law was experienced when it was used by sin (vv 8, 11, 13).”¹⁰⁷⁸ To put it more sharply, these are not different laws but different experiences of it. As Dunn points out, “Under the power of sin the law is experienced as very different from the law of God.”¹⁰⁷⁹ In this sense, “the warfare” of “the two laws” is actually the law lending “itself to different usages.”¹⁰⁸⁰ The captivity of the law is thus understood as the condition of the self in its belongingness to the old age, which means that it “is caught up in and cannot escape the perverse functioning of the law as used by sin.”¹⁰⁸¹ Arguably, Dunn’s conception of the law here is similar to Agamben’s dialectical view of the law, which is good in its initial promissive dimension but becomes perverted by the political use of the sovereign power. It is in the context of the different uses (experiences) of the law that Agamben interprets Paul’s *pistis* as being performatively employed for the messianic restoration of the promissive (potentiality) dimension of the law and, therefore, leading to a new experience of it, according to its initial intentions. In addition, Dunn’s temporal emphasis is compatible with Agamben’s notion of messianic temporality, which implies that the old order of the world is passing away.

Overall, if Dunn’s interpretation is followed, the expression “another law” (*heteron nomon*) that describes the order or the functioning of the anthropological members in Romans 7:23 does not constitute *another type* of law, in contrast to the law of God, but *another use* of it, which depicts the perverse use of the law by the power of sin in the old age. However, Moo is unconvinced that the term *heteron* describes

¹⁰⁷⁶. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 394.

¹⁰⁷⁷. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 394.

¹⁰⁷⁸. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 395. See also Romans 7:5. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 376–377.

¹⁰⁷⁹. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 395.

¹⁰⁸⁰. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 396.

¹⁰⁸¹. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 396.

only another use.¹⁰⁸² He claims that it is difficult to see the Mosaic law “on the side of the flesh, in the sense that it indwells or compels the flesh to sin.”¹⁰⁸³ Instead, Moo affirms, “While the Mosaic law has been used by sin, it never, even when so used, ceases to be God’s good, holy, spiritual law (see vv. 7-13).”¹⁰⁸⁴ Following this standpoint, he anthropologically distinguishes “The law of my mind” in Romans 7:23, which he defines as “the inner moral monitor that responds to, and appropriates, God’s law,” from the *other* law of the members that is related with “the law of sin,” underscoring “the individual’s natural propensity to sin (concupiscence) that answers to the demand and call of sin.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Even though Ricoeur does not elaborate theologically on his dialectical understanding of a divided self in the discussion of attestation, Moo’s anthropological focus on a divided self (“the law of my mind” as responsive to God’s law and “another law” in the members as responsive to the law of sin) is close to Ricoeur’s anthropological conception of selfhood, in which trust and suspicion are involved.

While I do not intend to enter into the intricacies of the exegetical discussion of Romans 7:22-23, this debate helpfully elucidates (temporal) metaphysical and anthropological dimensions of Paul’s discussion of the law for philosophical purposes. Both dimensions are dialectical, involving trust and suspicion. In the temporal metaphysical view, the sovereign power of sin perverts the use of the law in the old age, making human beings captive under the law. In other words, the use of the law belongs to this power and its use determines the experience that human beings will have of the law. From this perspective, Agamben’s proposal of a new use based on Paul’s *hōs mē* of 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 is innovative because it gives to the person, and not to the sovereign, the possibility of using the law in new ways and, thus, starting an autonomous new experience that does not depend on the decisions of the sovereign power. But, coming back to the use of the law by the power of sin in Romans 7 and the resulting negative experience that human beings have of the law, the self needs to be aware that this use is actually a perversion of the law. This awareness highlights the idea of suspicion against the power of sin regarding its use of the law and the resulting negative human experience of the law. On the other hand, provided that this is a perverted use of the law in the old age of sin, there is also a dimension of trust in the law, as Agamben underscores, considering its original intentions and attested by the possibility of a different use via *pistis* (the law of faith) in the new messianic age or temporality.

¹⁰⁸². Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 486.

¹⁰⁸³. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 487.

¹⁰⁸⁴. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 487.

¹⁰⁸⁵. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 487.

In the anthropological dimension, the self is divided in the sense that, on the one hand, the law of God is appreciated by the anthropological law of the mind, whereas, on the other hand, another law or principle of action is found in the self that goes against the law of God and follows the law of the sovereign power of sin in the old age. Apparently, the concept of attestation and the assumption of a temporal self could be used here, in the sense that Paul can attest to what he rhetorically calls the law of his mind by means of the testimony of his own conscience (the attestation of conscience), while what he terms as another law in his members can be attested by the testimony of his own actions, which can be recognized by himself and by others (the attestation of recognition and of memory). Furthermore, this reflection about Paul's self-experience (selfhood), which obviously involves a rhetorical and metaphorical language about the law and about himself, corroborates Ricoeur's point of Paul's autobiographical approach, where his self-testimony rhetorically frames an anthropological and metaphysical discussion, as Agamben does it in *Il tempo che resta*.

Overall, this articulation of (temporal) metaphysical and anthropological dimensions of the law in Romans 7:22-23, as a potential systematic connection between Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis*, emphasizes a dialectical understanding of the law that refers to the metaphysical order of the world and the anthropological functioning or order of the self. The law in these two dimensions is dialectical because it can be used in the world (even simultaneously) in negative and positive ways (the law of sin, the law of faith or *pistis*), and/or it can describe (even simultaneously) negative and positive aspects of the self. The two poles of the law's (political) metaphysical and anthropological dimensions are qualified as positive and negative from an ethical perspective and highlight the attitudes of trust and suspicion, respectively. To use Paul's language in Romans 7:22-23, trust is related to the goodness of the (metaphysical) law of God and the (anthropological) law of my mind, and suspicion refers to the perverse and harmful (metaphysical) law of sin and the (anthropological) law of my members. Now, turning to Agamben's political and metaphysical *pistis* along with Ricoeur's anthropological and hermeneutical attestation, what makes the metaphysical law a matter of suspicion is the perverse and harmful use of political sovereign (sinful) power. Likewise, what makes the anthropological law a matter of suspicion is the perverse and harmful use or action of a sovereign (sinful) power present in the self.

This combination of Agamben's political metaphysics and Ricoeur's hermeneutical anthropology in this systematic construction has at least two significant implications. First, to use Ricoeur's anthropological focus on selfhood, the sovereign power is not only present in political metaphysics but also in the self. Second, to use Agamben's political concern with the sovereign power, the sovereign power in the self does not only lead to hermeneutical mistakes and the lack of proper recognition in the community but can also be harmful and oppressive to the self (desubjectification) and the community. These

implications raise again the question, to come back to the discussion above about the place of suspicion in the community of *pistis* and attestation, on whether the deactivation of the sovereign power and its respective use of the law, contrasted with the practice of truth and truthful promises in the community of *pistis*, would mean the suspension of suspicion. I have already highlighted before that the sovereign power still appears to be effective, although deactivated, in a world that is still passing away. In this context, the trust and the ethos of *pistis* need to be continuously suspicious about the appearance of effectiveness of the sovereign power in the current order of the world.

However, the systematic connection of political metaphysics and hermeneutical anthropology articulated in this chapter suggests another point of reflection. Even though the political sovereign power is probably more oppressive to the community, the anthropological sovereign power is also harmful to the relationships. This is why another important dimension of *pistis* in the deactivation of the political sovereign power is the creation of a community marked by trustworthiness, which could be seen as an anthropological deactivation of the sovereign power in the context of the self. To use the language of attestation, the fulfillment of promises and other practices that give evidence of trustworthiness in the community offer a testimony that the sovereign power has been deactivated not only in political metaphysics but also in the anthropological dimension of the self. But just as Ricoeur's suspicion of the misinterpretation of the self continues in the context of attestation, the community of *pistis* and attestation also needs to be suspicious about the possibility of the resurgence of the harmful actions of the sovereign power in the anthropological dimension of the self. In other words, the nature of the problem is not only (political) metaphysical but also anthropological, which reinforces the notion of contingency also from an anthropological perspective. While Butler's criticism of Agamben, mentioned in chapter 6 and summarized by the statement that there is more to the analytics of power operation than sovereign power, was still situated in debates on political thought, this dialogue with Ricoeur has brought the problem of power and sovereignty to an anthropological dimension, which is also a form of enlarging the framework of power operation from the perspective of suspicion.

Still, from an asymmetric and non-Hegelian dialectical standpoint, the continuation of suspicion or uncertainty does not mean the elimination of trust. Likewise, the affirmation of trust does not imply the elimination of suspicion or uncertainty, as the former is important precisely when there are reasons for suspicion or uncertainty. As already indicated above, from a temporal phenomenological perspective, suspicion or uncertainty has its dialectical place that cannot be totalized, given the ontological assumption of contingency and otherness just as the ethical commitment to responsibility, proper recognition, and trustworthiness that performatively shape the community of attestation and *pistis*.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation aimed to formulate a dialectical account of trust through a dialogue between (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's) *pistis*, with implications for present-day philosophical reflections on the apostle Paul. The key implication in view is the contribution of the hermeneutical conception of trust and uncertainty to formulating the experience of conviction in potentiality and transformation. The intention of bringing Ricoeur to dialogue with Agamben assumed that philosophical reflections on the trust of Paul's *pistis* in potentiality and transformation could benefit from a hermeneutical approach that includes the role of uncertainty or suspicion as we think about the self in the experience of trust. In other words, a hermeneutical approach in reflections about the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation adds a movement of distantiation of the self from its convictions without necessarily losing them.

In order to achieve this goal, the study was organized into three main parts. Overall, the first two parts treated attestation and *pistis* individually, while the third one articulated a constructive dialogue between the two. I will briefly summarize below the structure and the findings of each part, with the intention to offer an overview of the research as a whole, highlighting its contribution to a dialectical account of trust in potentiality and transformation, particularly in the context of present-day philosophical reflections on Paul.

The focus of Part I was on dialectical attestation in Paul Ricoeur. This part was divided into three chapters. The first two interacted with Ricoeur's writings, whereas the third one attempted to sketch a systematic picture of dialectical attestation. In chapter 1, I delineated the hermeneutical basis for the development of dialectical attestation in selected writings before the 1990s, which was the time when Ricoeur started to elaborate the notion of attestation more clearly. Then, in chapter 2, I explored the notion of attestation using three categories (self-understanding, recognition, and history) that helpfully spell out the meaning of attestation. The systematic overview of chapter 3 employed these categories to address the question, *what is at stake in the idea of attestation?* This question was answered with the formulation of the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of attestation based on its hermeneutical assumptions and the categories of self-understanding, recognition, and history.

The context for the *why* of attestation is the complex reality of ontological plurality and otherness in temporal experience. Plurality and otherness characterize the conscience in self-understanding (the divided self, as exemplified by Paul in Romans 7, of a wounded *cogito*), the practice of promises in the category of recognition, and the experience of testimonies in history. Also, these categories assume that the identity of the self is narratively constructed rather than abstractly or idealistically defined, being distinguished from the rational uniformity of the abstract Cartesian account of the self (*cogito*). This narrative conception of the self is informed by plurality and otherness in the sense that different narrators and (even conflicting) narratives coexist. In this context,

is a modest account of unity (attestation) in an almost overwhelming temporal reality of plurality and otherness epistemologically plausible? Ricoeur's answer is positive, inasmuch as plurality and otherness are continuously acknowledged in non-absolute accounts of unity, implying that these accounts cannot be trusted or even distrusted in an absolute sense. Otherwise, trust or suspicion would not be open to otherness. However, given this epistemological and ontological complexity, why would a modest account of unity (attestation) be necessary? In short, attestation is needed because the conscience of hermeneutical self-understanding, the temporal recognition of promises, and testimonies in history ethically promote personal freedom, self-esteem, and responsible action, for myself and the other, in opposition to personal alienation and injustice, by means of a proper hermeneutical (non-absolute) understanding of myself and the other, in the context of our historical condition.

In light of the *why*, the *what* of attestation concisely describes trust in potentialities, in the sense that it is epistemologically plausible to have a modest hermeneutical account of unity in an almost overwhelming temporal context of plurality and otherness. More importantly, the ethical justification of the *why* also highlights that attestation is possible. The hermeneutical formulation of attestation can be tentatively articulated because it is possible to identify in the symbols of language and culture signs of the self's capabilities and its ultimate desire to be. While Ricoeur learned from the masters of suspicion that interpretation requires suspicion, he did not hyperbolize it but rather used suspicion hermeneutically, assuming the reality of temporal contingency (instead of necessity) and the consequent openness to potentiality.

In this openness, attestation is a hermeneutical (post-critical, informed by non-absolute suspicion) or non-absolute trust in potentialities. By trusting in potentialities, the self is more open to trust than distrust, but this openness is temporal and historical rather than abstract and idealist. For instance, the phenomenology of the capable human being is a temporal historical account of potentiality, as the capacities are attested to inasmuch as they are constantly enacted in history and recognized, interpreted, narrated, and testified by the self and others. Furthermore, the *what* of attestation is a linguistic or spoken trust in potentialities, as both testimony and promises are speech acts and narratives about human capabilities. Thus, attestation has faith that language is able to express the mode of being as true. This is the (second) faith that language can hermeneutically reveal meaning about the self. For example, the language of promise, when truthful, hermeneutically reveals the will to self-constancy, the desire to be faithful.

The *why* and the *what* of attestation prepare the ground for the *how* of attestation, which is dialectical. Conscience (self-understanding) is shaped by the dialectics between the self and the other. Recognition takes place in the dialectics of recognizing (active) and being recognized (passive), which are the two poles in the phenomenology of promises. The historical reflection on testimony dialectically combines internal personal conviction

with external, so to speak, narrative of actions. Overall, these dialectical dimensions in the ontology of attestation are accompanied by the epistemological dialectics of belief and suspicion, recognition and misrecognition, trust and doubt. In keeping with the ontological assumption of plurality and otherness, Ricoeur does not envision a final synthesis coming from a combination of the dialectical poles. Furthermore, the dialectics of attestation is asymmetric. For ontological (potentiality) and ethical reasons, the poles are not treated in the same way. In the case of trust and suspicion, while one does not overrule the other, suspicion contributes to the confidence of attestation, as in the example of the role of suspicion in the probabilistic judgment of competing testimonies. While suspicion is never ruled out, it contributes to the attestation of conscience in self-knowledge, to the attestation of active and passive recognition (especially in the case of promises), and to the attestation related to the historical use of testimonies. In this asymmetric dialectic, attestation is paradoxically greater than suspicion but never suppresses its role. As a result, dialectical attestation hermeneutically renders trust plausible and relevant without making it absolute.

In Part II, the focus was on dialectical *pistis* in the messianism of Giorgio Agamben. This part was divided into three chapters as well. Similar to Part I, the first two chapters interacted with Agamben's writings, while the third one attempted to sketch a systematic overview of *pistis*. In chapter 4, I explored the connection between political messianism and *pistis* in the *Homo Sacer* series. Then, in chapter 5, I depicted the notion of messianism and *pistis* in *Il tempo che resta* using three categories (*separation* made by the law, *deactivation* of the law, and *inversion*) that helpfully express the messianic notion of *pistis*. The systematic overview of chapter 6 dialogued with these categories to address the question, *what is at stake in the idea of pistis*? This question was answered with the articulation of the *why*, the *what*, and the *how* of *pistis*, in the context of the political messianism of the *Homo Sacer* series and *Il tempo che resta*.

The idea that messianism is the solution to the problem of the law provides the overall context for the justification of the *why* of *pistis*. More specifically, in the context of Agamben's political philosophy, the problem of the law is essentially the problem of the sovereign power that institutes biopolitics, where the distinction between law and life becomes indiscernible. In other words, the use of the law by the sovereign power engenders the limitation and, eventually, the loss of freedom and life, which ontologically describes the limitation and extinction of potentiality. In this context, the language of Paul's *pistis* clarifies how messianism is viewed as the solution to the problem of the law in Agamben's ontology of political philosophy. In his understanding, the relationship between *pistis* and law is ambiguous. On the one hand, the law broadly refers to a covenantal relationship between two (normally asymmetrical) parties and contains two dialectical poles, namely, promises and norms that codify the obligations (arguably of the weaker party). It is precisely in the realm of promises that *pistis* is located, in the sense

that there is trust and credit between the parties. However, the law undergoes a process of crisis, in which the element of promises is squeezed and almost completely eliminated by the codified norms that eventually define the law in its narrow sense. It is against this narrow and problematic view of the law that *pistis* is conceived as being outside the law. Therefore, *pistis* is crucial for the messianic resolution of the problem of the law because it is situated in the threshold of the demarcations of the law, being inside and outside the law.

In light of the context of the *why* of Agamben's *pistis*, the *what* shortly refers to trust in potentialities, over against the ontological political understanding of actuality (*energeia*). According to the deactivation (*katargeō*) promoted by *pistis*, the trust of faith is that the messianic temporality brings back past potentialities that still exist ontologically and, thus, have not been exhausted into current actualities established by the sovereign power. Taking into account the ontologico-political view that actuality is the current order of the world established by the sovereign power, which falsely announces it as a necessary order that cannot be changed, the trust of *pistis* affirms, through the way it uses language, contingency and potentiality on behalf of truth. As the law is deactivated in the messianic time, which describes the deactivation of actuality (as defined by the law in the normative articulation of the sovereign power), the trust of *pistis*, linguistically expressed in the speech acts of promises, brings the law to its original form in its promissive dimension and, in this sense, fulfills it. The performative power unleashed in this fulfillment is a destituent power, inasmuch as the trust in contingency and potentiality present in the promises suspends and unmasks the deceitful discourse of the sovereign power affirming actuality and necessity. Given the avoidance of actuality in Agamben's formulation of *pistis*, the promissive announcement of trust in potentialities is an event of the word that does not carry any content. Otherwise, it would become actuality. Following Paul's *hōs mē* and the Franciscan paradigm or signature of use, this is the idea of (potential) use without (actual) possession. Indeed, the conviction of *pistis* as trust in potentialities has metaphysical implications for philosophical anthropology. First, inasmuch as *pistis* is linguistically expressed in truthful promises as a form of affirming contingency and possibility, the ontological operators of subjectification are in place against the destructive weapons of impossibility and necessity, which are the ontological operators of desubjectification used by the sovereign biopolitical power. Second, the trust in potentialities is related to Agamben's ontology of use, which dismisses or deactivates substantial (predetermined) conceptions of the self and the Cartesian framework of subject-object, as these notions favor actuality over potentiality. In contrast, the self is constituted as it makes use of itself. Instead of a subject, the self is a user who does not possess (following Paul's *hōs mē* and the Franciscan assumption of non-property) a faculty to be actualized but who rather enacts a potentiality in use that is still present as potentiality and, thus, is always open to a new use. From the standpoint of the community,

the announcement of trust in potentialities proclaimed by *pistis* is more concretely observed in the practice of truthfully making promises in a community characterized by loyal or faithful relationships, which is a performative and political action that explores the *unceasing* power of potentiality.

As far as the *how* of Agamben's *pistis* is concerned, the messianic initial resolution of the problem of the law is spelled out in terms of the dialectical deactivation (*katargeō*) of the sovereign power of the law, rendering it inoperative. If we can speak of deactivation as power, this is a destituent rather than destructive power. The deactivating power of *pistis* produces an inversion. It dialectically deactivates the law (narrowly defined) in order to preserve and fulfill it in its promissive dimension (broadly defined). The idea of deactivation is spelled out in the realm of language as a suspension of the denotative function of language, which is the regular use of language according to its conventions. Inasmuch as the denotative function is suspended, language is open to new use, which does not describe things as such anymore but performatively produces new events. This suspension or deactivation of linguistic denotative conventions, which is compared to normative law, opens up new possibilities for language signification (the excess of signification) in contrast to the restrictions of meaning determined by the normativity of denotative conventions. Paradoxically, this excess relates to the idea of weakness. A non-denotative language is not powerful in the sense of establishing meaning. In fact, this perspective of weakness is aligned with the type of dialectic he has in view in the discussion of *pistis*. The power of *pistis* does not reach a final ground as it does in Hegelian synthesis or Aristotelian actualization. Hence, this power does not initiate a battle against the sovereign power of the law but rather deactivates it in such a way that it opens life to a new use (the sovereignty of grace), which does not mean treating it as a juridical determination or possession. In other words, the notion of use is opposed to the idea of control. Arguably, a replacement with a new power would not break the vicious cycle of normative sovereign law. Therefore, the dialectics of *pistis*, in the sense that it performatively announces the deactivation of *katargeō* in messianic time, is a dialectics of transformation rather than of substitution, as exemplified in the transformation of the law in Agamben's interpretation of Paul's messianism.

Finally, Part III articulated a constructive dialogue between (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's) *pistis* in order to formulate a dialectical account of trust as a contribution to reflections on the experience of conviction in potentiality and transformation, particularly considering present-day philosophical interactions with the apostle Paul. Given the interest in framing the dialogue in connection with philosophical readings of Paul, the first chapter of this part (chapter 7) delineated the conceptual framework for the comparative analysis of (Ricoeur's) attestation and (Agamben's) *pistis*, which was later undertaken in the next chapter (chapter 8). In short, the framework of analysis took into account Ricoeur's interaction with Agamben's Paul and Ricoeur's focus on the notion

of selfhood. In addition, I explored the connection of Ricoeur's attestation, Agamben's *pistis*, and the idea of selfhood in the apostle Paul from the perspective of a temporal understanding of phenomenology. With this framework of analysis in mind, I turned to a comparative dialogue between attestation and *pistis* in chapter 8. The structure of the dialogue followed the categories used in previous chapters of the *how*, the *what*, and the *why*. On the basis of this dialogue, I formulated a dialectical conception of trust following a temporal interpretation of selfhood and metaphysics rather than from an ontotheological view of reality.

The *how* of Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* is defined by non-Hegelian dialectics. Their dialectical thinking does not reach a settled position but is always open to contingency. Ricoeur anthropologically situates attestation at the (provisional and contingent) end of the dialectical engagement of the trust of the self (first pole) with uncertainty or suspicion (second pole). On the other hand, Agamben's dialectical vision anthropologically situates *pistis* as a form of trust and participation in the political metaphysics of messianic temporality (first pole), which dialectically deactivates sovereign power (second pole) and enables a new use of life without becoming a new sovereign or absolute power. In this comparison, to use a Ricoeurian interpretation of Agamben, the Agambenian self defined by *pistis* learns to be suspicious of the sovereign power and its normative interpretation of life and the world. Conversely, to use an Agambenian understanding of Ricoeur, Ricoeur's attestation dialectically deactivates or suspends hyperbolic certainty or suspicion, allowing a new use of trust and uncertainty in a modest version that does not become absolute, but that is dialectically and asymmetrically constituted. The dialectical asymmetry of trust and suspicion reflects the assumed emphasis on the reality of freedom and potentiality, just as the ethical demands of responsible action and communal faithful relationships, especially in the context of promises.

The *what* of attestation and *pistis* is essentially the trust in potentialities. By focusing on potentialities, the self is more open to trust than distrust. At the same time, the affirmation of contingency rather than necessity, which is part of the focus on potentialities, tends to lead the self to distrust discourses that emphasize necessity. Both attestation and *pistis* constitute temporal historical accounts of potentiality. In attestation, we affirm the possibilities of the human capacities or potentialities as historical witnesses of their enactment. This trust grounded in the testimony of the past is crucial for the possibility and self-confidence implied in the practice of making promises, as we assume in this practice that we will have the capacity to fulfill them in the future. In *pistis*, potentiality is also temporal, as messianic temporality brings to the present the potentiality of the past, which was not exhausted in the actuality established by the sovereign power. In messianic *katargesis*, the effectiveness of actuality (sovereign power) is suspended, making room for potentiality. While the French philosopher is

interested in deactivating the power, so to speak, of interpretive paradigms that postulate hyperbolic absolute forms of certainty or suspicion mistakenly promoted as necessary, the Italian thinker emphasizes the deactivation of the effectiveness of the actuality promoted by the sovereign power, which involves more specifically the deactivation or the unmasking of the discourse that this power makes about the necessity of actuality. The idea Agamben's *pistis* cannot have any content besides its own announcement of potentiality against actuality, which reaffirms the idea of (potential) use without (actual) possession, is close to Ricoeur's understanding of testimony in attestation since testimony does not mean the possession of truth, but the use of an interpretation that is contingent and can be confronted with other testimonies. This similarity could suggest a hermeneutical distinction between *historical* actuality (Ricoeur), which is to be explored in a non-absolute form via testimony, and *political* actuality (Agamben), which is a violent necessity created by the sovereign power.

The *why* of attestation and *pistis* addresses different philosophical problems. Attestation deals with the anthropological problem of self-alienation and the complexity of plurality and otherness, which highlights the suspicion that the interpretation of the self cannot be trusted. Attestation answers this question by stipulating that neither trust nor doubt can be absolute and suggests a modest and provisional (hermeneutical) form of trust. On the other hand, *pistis* addresses the political problem of oppressive sovereign power, which suppresses freedom, controls life, and denies contingency. *Pistis* participates in the messianic solution of this problem by deactivating the sovereign power and reactivating potentiality to be experienced in community. From the perspective of selfhood, this means the activation of subjectification and the deactivation of desubjectification, along with a new conscience associated with a contingent understanding of the self (use-of-oneself), according to the experience of new use. Despite the contextual differences in philosophical anthropology (Ricoeur's attestation) and political metaphysics (Agamben's *pistis*) for the understanding of the *why* of attestation and *pistis*, these two concepts find common ground in their ethical dimensions or implications. Ethics is crucial for the *why* of attestation and *pistis*. In these two performative concepts, the ethical dimension is clarified by the experience of making promises. Attestation, as understood in the experience of promises, affirms a measure of trust in the self for ethical and responsible action. Similarly, *pistis* envisages a new community marked by trustworthy and subjectifying relationships, especially observed in the experience of making promises to each other, that are diametrically different from life under the oppressing and desubjectifying control of the sovereign power.

Based on the dialogue between the *how*, the *what*, and the *why* of attestation and *pistis*, I concisely proposed a dialectical conception of trust following a temporal interpretation of selfhood and metaphysics. Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* are anthropologically and metaphysically distinct from absolute forms of certainty and

suspicion. In Cartesian subjectivity, absolute forms of certainty assume an idealistic view of the self and a non-temporal (ontotheological) metaphysical understanding of the world, whereas absolute forms of suspicion entail a paranoid attitude toward the self and the world. Overall, both absolute hyperbolic positions fail to portray the complexity of life as temporally and historically experienced, which usually involves different measures and interactions of assurance and uncertainty. From the standpoint of Ricoeurian attestation, the self is normally inclined to trust its own judgment and needs to learn to be hermeneutically suspicious about itself in order to mature its own trust, which Ricoeur would call a second faith. From the perspective of Agamben's *pistis*, the self is invited to trust in the (messianic) metaphysical transformative potentialities of the world and, therefore, learn to be suspicious of the metaphysical and political effectiveness of the established sovereign power. Hence, in the two accounts, the self needs to temporally learn to deal with trust and suspicion. This interpretation of the self and the world does not involve an abstract synthesis of trust and suspicion nor a necessary elimination or replacement of one of them, which underlines the asymmetrical dialectical nature of attestation and *pistis*.

If we take the accounts of attestation and *pistis* together, there is something to be suspicious of myself (Ricoeur) and of the present (sovereign) order of the world (Agamben). Likewise, there is a potential in myself that can be trusted (Ricoeur) and a metaphysical transformative potential in the world that I should trust (Agamben). Nevertheless, suspicion and trust are not dualistically isolated from each other. Rather, they interact dialectically. My trust in myself and my potentialities becomes more mature, modest, and provisional as I undergo the hermeneutical process of dealing with uncertainty. Also, my informed suspicion of the metaphysical sovereign power in the world derives precisely from my trust in the (messianic) transformative potentialities of the world.

In the movement from the self to the other and, thus, to the world, the ethical dimension of dialectical attestation and *pistis* takes us to the idea of ethos. In this context, truthful promises are the mark of attestation and *pistis* in the relationships of the community. However, I suggested paradoxically (or, to be more precise, dialectically) that there is also a place for suspicion or uncertainty in this community. This suggestion was especially articulated in light of Paul's aporia of the law in Romans 7:22-23, which philosophically offers a potential systematic connection between Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis*. In this aporia, a dialectical understanding of the law could be philosophically associated with the metaphysical order of the world and the anthropological functioning or order of the self. According to this systematic connection, to use Ricoeur's anthropological focus on selfhood, sovereign power is not only present in political metaphysics but also in the self. Moreover, to use Agamben's political concern with the sovereign power, the sovereign power in the self does not only lead to hermeneutical or interpretive mistakes and the lack of proper recognition in the

community but is potentially harmful and oppressive to the community and the self, as observed in Agamben's notion of desubjectification.

To be sure, from an Agambenian standpoint, the trust and the ethos of *pistis* need to be continuously suspicious of the apparent effectiveness of the sovereign power. But even though the political sovereign power is probably more oppressive to the community, the anthropological sovereign power present in the self is also harmful to the relationships. Hence, another important dimension of *pistis* in the deactivation of the political sovereign power is the creation of a community marked by trustworthiness, which could be seen as an anthropological deactivation of the sovereign power in the context of the self. To use the language of attestation, the fulfillment of promises and other practices that give evidence of trustworthiness in the community testify that the sovereign power has been deactivated not only in political metaphysics but also in the anthropological dimension of the self. Therefore, the community of *pistis* and attestation needs to be suspicious of the possibility of the resurgence of the harmful actions of the sovereign power and also in the anthropological dimension of the self. To put it more sharply, the nature of the problem is not only (political) metaphysical but also anthropological, which leads to the notion of contingency from an anthropological perspective.

In short, from a temporal understanding of phenomenology and a non-Hegelian dialectical standpoint, the continuation of suspicion or uncertainty does not mean the elimination of trust. Conversely, the affirmation of trust does not imply the elimination of suspicion or uncertainty. Overall, the ontological assumption of contingency, potentiality, and otherness, just as the ethical commitment to responsibility, proper recognition, and subjectification are crucial presuppositions that shape the nature and the role of trustworthiness and uncertainties in the community of attestation and *pistis*.

From a broad perspective, the present study suggests that bringing Ricoeur's hermeneutical attestation into dialogue with Agamben's account of Paul's *pistis* contributes to reflections on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation, especially in the context of studies on the apostle Paul in contemporary philosophy. Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach includes the role of uncertainty or suspicion as we think about the self in the experience of trust, adding a movement of distantiation of the self from its convictions without necessarily losing them. The dialogue offers a rich combination of philosophical anthropology and (political) metaphysics in reflections on potentiality and transformation. In short, I could highlight two main contributions to Agamben's *pistis* offered by Ricoeur's hermeneutical attestation: one broadens the idea of sovereign power according to the complexity of power operation, and the other further nuances the understanding of actuality. First, an anthropological dimension of sovereign power is applied to the self, who needs to be hermeneutically suspicious not only of political sovereign powers (political metaphysics) but also of itself (anthropology). Second, a distinction between *historical* actuality, explored in a non-absolute way via

hermeneutical testimony in connection with use, and *political* actuality, which is an absolute approach of sovereign power defining necessity against contingency and potentiality. This nuance could potentially offer more content to the experience of *pistis*, which would find dimensions or even pieces of actuality not controlled by sovereign power in the context of use and attestation.

These two contributions could be further explored in future studies, particularly in the context of reflections about Paul in contemporary philosophy concerning (1) the analytics of power operation and (2) perspectives on the dimensions of actuality. These studies would enrich the present discussion on the experience of trust in potentiality and transformation.¹⁰⁸⁶

¹⁰⁸⁶ Future studies would potentially benefit from dialogues with recent literature exploring topics such as trust or *pistis* and selfhood or subjectivity (especially involving trust and suspicion) in Paul. See Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith: Discourses of Pistis in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2024); Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020); Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4: Paul's Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Benjamin Schliesser, "Abraham did Not 'Doubt' in Unbelief" (Rom. 4:20): Faith, Doubt, and Dispute in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *Journal of Theological Studies* 63, no. 2 (2012): 492-522; Stanley Stowers, "Paul as a Hero of Subjectivity," in *Paul and the Philosophers*, 159-174. See also Benjamin Schliesser, "Shades of Faith: The Phenomenon of Doubt in Early Christianity," *Religious Studies* 59, no. 3 (2023), 479-494; Benjamin Schliesser, *Das Phänomen des Zweifels im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020); Benjamin Schliesser, *Was ist Glaube? Paulinische Perspektiven* (Zürich: TVZ, 2011); Benjamin Schliesser, "Faith in Early Christianity. An Encyclopedic and Bibliographical Outline," in *Glaube: Das Verständnis des Glaubens im frühen Christentum und in seiner jüdischen und hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, ed. J. Frey, B. Schliesser, and N. Ueberschäer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 3-50; David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of ΔΙΑΚΡΙΝΩ," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 4 (2005): 733-755. For theological approaches to trust and doubt, see Teresa Morgan, *The New Testament and the Theology of Trust: 'This Rich Trust'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Hugh F. Crean, "Faith and Doubt in the Theology of Paul Tillich," *Bijdragen* 36, no. 2 (1975): 145-164; Frank D. Rees, *Wrestling with Doubt: Theological Reflections on the Journey of Faith* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001); Anthony Thiselton, *Doubt, Faith, and Certainty* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).

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Summary

Trust in the potential for change and transformation is a significant topic in philosophical readings of the Apostle Paul in contemporary thought. Giorgio Agamben is one of the main names in this discussion, given his account of Paul's messianic *pistis*. On the other hand, Paul Ricoeur, who is also interested in Paul, is not often considered in these discussions. However, the present investigation proposes that Ricoeur's hermeneutical reflection, especially his concept of attestation, enriches the philosophical discussion on Paul and the notion of trust in potentiality and transformation.

The study selects Agamben as Ricoeur's conversation partner for this proposal due to three main reasons: (1) Ricoeur appreciates Agamben's reading of Paul; (2) both Ricoeur and Agamben develop a dialectical concept of trust in the potential for transformation; and (3) a combination of their approaches connects philosophical anthropology and political metaphysics for philosophical discussions on the Apostle Paul. With these interests in view, this investigation aims to formulate a dialectical account of trust through a dialogue between Ricoeur's hermeneutical attestation and Agamben's account of Paul's messianic *pistis*. The intention of bringing Ricoeur into dialogue with Agamben assumes that reflections on the trust of (Paul's) *pistis* in potentiality and transformation could benefit from a hermeneutical approach that includes the role of uncertainty or suspicion as we think about the self in the experience of conviction or trust.

The study is organized into three main parts to achieve this goal. The first two treat Ricoeur's attestation and Agamben's *pistis* individually, while the third part articulates a constructive dialogue between the two for a dialectical account of trust in potentiality and transformation. The dialogue offers a rich combination of philosophical anthropology and (political) metaphysics in contemporary thought.

Samenvatting

Vertrouwen in de mogelijkheid van verandering en transformatie is een belangrijk onderwerp in filosofische interpretaties van de apostel Paulus in het hedendaagse denken. Giorgio Agamben is een van de belangrijkste namen in deze discussie geworden door zijn beschrijving van Paulus' messiaanse *pistis*. Anderzijds wordt Paul Ricoeur, die ook geïnteresseerd is in Paulus, niet vaak besproken in deze discussies. Het huidige onderzoek stelt echter voor dat Ricoeurs hermeneutische denken, en daarin vooral zijn begrip attestatie, de filosofische discussie over Paulus en de notie van vertrouwen in potentialiteit en transformatie verrijken kan.

Deze studie kiest Agamben als gesprekspartner van Ricoeur om dit duidelijk te maken en wel vanwege drie belangrijke redenen: (1) Ricoeur waardeert Agambens lezing van Paulus; (2) zowel Ricoeur als Agamben ontwikkelen een dialectisch begrip van vertrouwen in de mogelijkheid van transformatie; en (3) een combinatie van hun benaderingen verbindt filosofische antropologie en politieke metafysica in de filosofische discussies over de apostel Paulus. Met deze overwegingen in het achterhoofd wil dit onderzoek een dialectische beschrijving van vertrouwen geven aan de hand van een dialoog tussen Ricoeurs hermeneutische attestatie en Agambens beschrijving van Paulus' messiaanse *pistis*. De intentie om Ricoeur in gesprek te brengen met Agamben wordt ingegeven door de hypothese dat reflecties op het vertrouwen van (Paulus') *pistis* in potentialiteit en transformatie baat kunnen hebben bij een hermeneutische benadering die de rol van onzekerheid of achterdocht meeneemt in het denken over het zelf vanuit de ervaring van vertrouwen.

Om dit doel te bereiken is de studie onderverdeeld in drie delen. De eerste twee behandelen respectievelijk Ricoeurs attestatie en Agambens *pistis*, terwijl het derde deel een constructieve dialoog tussen de twee tot stand brengt om tot een dialectische beschrijving van vertrouwen in potentialiteit en transformatie te komen. De dialoog biedt een rijke combinatie van filosofische antropologie en (politieke) metafysica in het hedendaagse denken.

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Curriculum Vitae

Adriani Milli Rodrigues was born in 1983 in Colatina, Espírito Santo, Brazil. He received a bachelor's degree in Theology from the Adventist University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2006, and a master's degree in Religious Studies from the Methodist University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2009. In 2017, he obtained a PhD in Religion (Theological Studies) at Andrews University, in the United States of America. A revised version of his dissertation was published in 2018 by Fortress Academic, entitled *Toward a Priestly Christology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christ's Priesthood*. Between 2016 and 2024, he was a professor of systematic theology at the Adventist University of Sao Paulo, and since 2024 he has been Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Philosophy at Andrews University. Moreover, he has been a visiting research fellow at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam since 2020 and was a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford between 2022 and 2023. As a PhD candidate in the department of Metaphysics and Philosophical Anthropology at Radboud University, Adriani started working on his dissertation about dialectical trust in potentiality and transformation in 2019.

