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To cite this article: Gert-Jan van der Heiden (2014) On the way to attestation: trust and suspicion in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 75:2, 129-141, DOI: [10.1080/21692327.2014.942350](https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2014.942350)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2014.942350>



Published online: 09 Oct 2014.



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## On the way to attestation: trust and suspicion in Ricoeur's hermeneutics

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*(Received 26 March 2014; final version received 3 July 2014)*

In this article, I will explore the archeology of the concept of attestation in Ricoeur's work. In a brief discussion of his early reflections on Husserl's concept of the ego (as an example of reflexive philosophy), I show how the dialectic of trust and suspicion enters Ricoeur's hermeneutic concerns. I argue that this dialectics remains present in his account of attestation. By a brief confrontation with Heidegger's notion of attestation as developed in *Being and Time*, I show that the uniqueness of Ricoeur's account of attestation is to be found in this dialectic of trust and suspicion that he reinterprets in his later work in light of the concept of attestation.

**Keywords:** hermeneutics; Paul Ricoeur; attestation; trust; suspicion

How can humans understand themselves? How can they understand what they are capable of doing and for which actions they are accountable? Moreover, what level or type of certainty can we attain in these matters? These questions form the core of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy and motivate him throughout his work, as he notes for instance in his *Autobiographie intellectuelle*.<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur has always considered himself to be an heir of 'reflexive philosophy', and he characterizes this school as follows:

A reflexive philosophy considers the most radical philosophical problems to be those which concern the possibility of *self-understanding* as the subject of the operations of knowing, willing, evaluating, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as he immediately adds, this does not mean that he adopts the concepts of the ego, the I or the cogito developed by philosophers such as Descartes, Kant and Husserl, which are exemplary for reflexive philosophy. Rather, as he emphasizes throughout his work, due to the wounds afflicted to this cogito, reflexive philosophy needs to turn to hermeneutics and, as he argues in his later works, the concepts of ego and I need to be replaced by a concept of the self.

If we understand Ricoeur along these lines, it makes sense to consider *Soi-même comme un autre* as one of the culmination points of his oeuvre.<sup>3</sup> There are good reasons to do so, not only in relation to the development of his work, but also in light of the impact his work has had on the humanities. In *Soi-même comme un autre* his analyses of narrativity, ethics, politics, the difference of *idem* and *ipse* in relation to human identity are brought together in an effort to *attest* to humans as *capable* beings – capable of acting, speaking, narrating and being responsible. Although many of these notions have already

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found their way into other branches of the humanities, there is at least one concept that is only now entering the picture: the concept of attestation. For instance, whereas the notion of narrativity has already highly influenced the contemporary reflection on (the philosophy of) history, the importance of Ricoeur's concept of attestation as well as his related analyses of testimony are only recently being discovered and interpreted even though his later works on history are much more centered on the concepts of testimony and attestation than narrativity.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly enough, Ricoeur offers the concept of attestation in the first place as an answer to his central question of what kind of being the human self is. What does it mean to act, speak and be responsible? How can the human self come to understand itself in this way? According to Ricoeur, the notion of attestation offers an answer to these questions and this gives rise to the question of what exactly is truly discovered in and by this concept? Can we not say that this concept is already present in Heidegger's account of the self in *Sein und Zeit*, who uses the same notion to think Dasein's self-attestation (*Bezeugung*)? To understand what Ricoeur adds to this discussion, it is of crucial importance to examine the origin of this concept in his work. As I will argue, this origin is to be found in a dialectic that is present throughout his work, namely in the dialectic of trust and suspicion. In this article, I will explore this prefiguration of attestation in order to show Ricoeur's specific understanding of this concept. To locate Ricoeur's understanding of attestation and its origin, I shall use some of his reflections on Husserl and Heidegger as illustrations: the reflections on the first show how and in response to which problems the dialectics of trust and suspicion is brought into play, whereas the reflections on Heidegger show how this dialectic marks the difference with Heidegger's conception of attestation (*Bezeugung*) in *Sein und Zeit*. It is Ricoeur's genius, as I argue here, to have demonstrated the fundamental problem of trust and belief at the heart of every understanding of the self. One might say that in contrast to other hermeneutically oriented authors such as Heidegger, for whom the concept of trust and belief plays no significant role at all, Ricoeur has seen that the finitude of every human self-understanding implies that this understanding cannot be thought without the question of attestation and testimony.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Trust and suspicion in Ricoeur's early hermeneutics

In *Réflexion faite*, when looking back on the transformation from phenomenology to hermeneutics that takes place in his work in the late fifties, Ricoeur writes the following:

Speaking of the detour through symbols, I was questioning a presupposition common to Husserl and Descartes, namely the immediateness, the transparency, the apodicticity of the *Cogito*. The subject, I asserted, does not know itself directly but only through the signs deposited in memory and in imaginations by the great literary traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Three terms describe here the problematic nature of the cogito as conceived in the Husserlian and Cartesian tradition: immediacy, transparency and apodicticity. Self-knowledge, Ricoeur claims, is never given to the subject in an immediate or transparent way, but can only be attained (although never fully) by means of an interpretation of 'the signs left behind in the subject's memory and imagination by the great cultures'. These signs, of course, are first and foremost myths, symbols and narratives, that is, signs announcing a meaning that is not immediately available to the reader but requires the work of interpretation to decipher it. More precisely, in the 1960s Ricoeur defines a symbol to be any

linguistic structure that announces in the wake of its literal meaning a second hidden meaning that is never given apart from the first meaning and requires the work of interpretation. Only these types of linguistic structures require the work of interpretation. Yet, why does Ricoeur think that such a detour is necessary? What affected the cogito and made it into a ‘*Cogito blessé*’, a wounded cogito that cannot uphold the claim of immediate self-knowledge and self-transparency?

### 1.1. *The wounded Cogito in Husserl’s phenomenology*

Although Ricoeur argues that Husserl and Descartes share a conception of the *Cogito* presupposing immediacy, transparency and apodicticity, it is clear for him that Husserl already wounds the cogito. In the third book of *De l’interprétation*, his study on psychoanalysis, Ricoeur discusses a particular difference between Husserl’s phenomenology and Freud’s psychoanalysis.<sup>7</sup> There, he already describes how Husserl’s phenomenology leads to a decentering of the cogito. Let me restrict myself to discussing Husserl.<sup>8</sup>

Husserl’s phenomenology begins with the so-called phenomenological reduction. This reduction, as Ricoeur underlines, is in itself already a suspension of the immediate experiences of the cogito. The natural attitude needs to be suspended in order to find the true beginning of consciousness. Commenting on this reduction, Ricoeur writes:

Thus phenomenology begins by a humiliation or wounding of the knowledge belonging to immediate consciousness [...] By thus dissociating the true beginning from the real beginning or natural attitude, phenomenology reveals the self-misunderstanding inherent in immediate consciousness.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, phenomenology starts with the insight that our immediate consciousness is caught up in *misunderstanding*. The natural starting point of our consciousness is accordingly marked by a self-illusion that needs to be overcome. Our trust in consciousness is interrupted: the self needs to find *another* beginning and is in search of *true* evidence concerning itself.

Yet, a particular difficulty arises on the level of this newly begotten evidence as well. This difficulty concerns Husserl’s distinction between apodictic evidence and adequate evidence as discussed in the *Cartesianische Meditationen*. Apodictic evidence is evidence that excludes any doubt about the existence of a particular being. Adequate evidence, on the other hand, might very well be caught up in an infinite process of further clarification. Referring to this distinction, Ricoeur notes that although phenomenology departs from apodictic evidence, namely the evidence *that* something is, this apodictic evidence concerning my own existence does not coincide with adequate evidence concerning *what* something is: in distinction to apodictic evidence, an adequate evidence (about me or about any object) implies complete evidence in which all that is pre-meant (*Vormeinungen*) and co-meant (*Mitmeinungen*) is fulfilled.<sup>10</sup> Adequacy and apodicticity, as Husserl subsequently notes in § 9, do not always go hand in hand. For the ego cogito this means that only a kernel of the adequate experience is offered, namely the living self-presence. As Husserl continues, ‘while, beyond that, only an indeterminately general presumptive horizon extends, comprising what is strictly non-experienced but necessarily also meant [*Mitgemeintem*].’<sup>11</sup> Hence, the immediate certainty that I am, is accompanied by a co-implied horizon (concerning what or who I am) of what is not properly experienced but always co-meant.

Consequently, despite the self-evidence of the cogito in its living presence, the possibility of self-deceit and of having illusions about oneself or the world one inhabits, is inscribed in the very structure of this implicit, co-implicit horizon accompanying the cogito's apodicticity. As Ricoeur puts it: 'The *cogito* is at once the indubitable certainty that I am and an open question as to *what* I am.'<sup>12</sup> One of the consequences of this gap between apodictic and adequate self-understanding is that the latter can never be fully attained and that, consequently, every self-understanding is provisional and requires the work of interpretation as a supplement to the unfulfilled adequate evidence.

This first wounding of the cogito becomes an even greater wound in Husserl's later work. Here, the notion of the horizon within which our understanding of the things in the world and of ourselves takes place, is developed in terms of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). Horizon is then the term to refer to those (cultural, historical and social) constitutions that remain implicit in the constitutions that are thematized. Ultimately, horizon refers to the unthematized lifeworld in which we always already live and at which the continual, endless questioning back (*Rückfrage*) of phenomenology aims but which it never attains. This is why Husserl describes it as an obscure horizon and why the project of phenomenology is caught up in a never-ending questioning back (*Rückfrage*); as he writes:

Again and again we realize that, beginning with the superficially visible, the manners of appearing belonging to the unifying multiplicities are themselves unities of multiplicities which lie deeper and which constitute them through appearances, so that we are led back to an obscure horizon – which, however, can still be opened up through methodical regressive inquiry [*Rückfrage*].<sup>13</sup>

Here, the ego is fully decentered and primacy is given to the lifeworld; however, the lifeworld itself can never fully be reached and turns out to be 'phenomenology's paradise lost', as Ricoeur puts it.<sup>14</sup> To overcome these problems in phenomenology, Ricoeur points to a necessary and indispensable 'detour' through language, interpretation and hermeneutics in order to come to self-understanding; Husserl's never-ending questioning back is itself the first example of such a detour and the mark of human finitude in their self-understanding.

## 1.2. *The conflict of interpretations*

Since an immediate self-understanding is impossible, self-understanding requires the mediation of the symbols and great texts of our culture.<sup>15</sup> This detour, however, intensifies the wounds of the ego. In fact, although Ricoeur does not sharply distinguish between the wounded and the broken cogito, we might say that this mediation introduces a second wound, a problem of *hermeneutics*, that leads to a broken or shattered cogito, 'le *Cogito* brisé'. This second problem concerns the *conflict* of interpretations. It is this problem of the conflict of interpretations that brings into the play a dialectic between trust and suspicion, which will remain present in Ricoeur's work despite the different developments this work demonstrates. Let me briefly describe this conflict and the rise of the dialectic of trust and suspicion in the vocabulary of the symbol as employed by Ricoeur in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup>

A symbol announces an as yet undisclosed meaning of human existence. By way of a literal meaning that is known to all, it announces a more profound, symbolic meaning when used symbolically in a myth. For instance, it uses the figure of a stain to express that our human nature is stained by sin. Since the symbol announces such an as yet

undisclosed meaning, it may help us to come to self-understanding. However, a symbol does so in an *ambiguous* way: in the wake of a literal, transparent meaning, a hidden, symbolic one is announced that requires interpretation. It is important to note that this ambiguity is not only due to the vagueness of the announced symbolic meaning. It rather characterizes the very *disclosive power* of the symbol itself: the symbol's announcement of new, symbolic meaning can be approached in two different ways.

First, one may have faith in the promise of meaning with which the symbol addresses us and one listens to the symbol in the *trust* that it tells us something profound about our existence. In the 1960s, Ricoeur's privileged example of this mode of interpretation is the phenomenology of religion that takes the myths and symbols of guilt and evil seriously as linguistic utterances that teach us about our existence. Ricoeur's own reflections on the symbols of evil in *La symbolique du mal* belong to a similar mode of interpretation: the myths and symbols are interpreted to understand what they say about human existence and about the human self.<sup>17</sup> Beyond the particular interpretation of religious myths and symbols on which Ricoeur focuses in the 1960s, the constitutive element of trust and credence of this mode of interpretation will remain of crucial importance throughout his work.

Second, one might also *distrust* the symbolic announcement. Rather than listening to what the symbol has to say, one withdraws from its voice and tries to interpret the hidden structure that lies behind this appearance of meaning. In contrast to Ricoeur's own interpretations in *La symbolique du mal*, Friedrich Nietzsche's well-known account of evil (*das Böse*) in *Zur Genealogie der Moral* offers a clear example of this second mode of interpretation: rather than listening to the myths on evil, Nietzsche distrusts the very symbolism of evil and therefore asks what this symbolism *hides* from our view. By way of this approach, Nietzsche discovers that this symbolism is born out of resentment against the aristocratic morals in which evil does not play a role. Not only Nietzsche, but also the other masters of suspicion, Marx and Freud, offer important examples of the mode of interpretation that distrusts the meaning symbols offer because this announcement of meaning conceals something more fundamental. For these masters of suspicion, symbolic meaning is mere appearance and illusion behind which power structures hide in order to work efficiently.

Applied to the context of the cogito, such a hermeneutics of suspicion looks for the archeology of consciousness: what are the structures from which consciousness and everything that appears for consciousness originate? By showing that even the immediacy of self-experience has been displaced and distorted by an underlying structure, the hermeneutics of suspicion shatters the lived experience of the Husserlian ego and exposes it as an illusion.<sup>18</sup> This implies that not only adequate evidence but also apodictic evidence is under threat here. As a result, the crisis of the cogito is deepened to such an extent that the cogito itself becomes an illusion.

Despite his clear affinity with the first mode of interpretation, Ricoeur affirms that the second mode of interpretation is a genuine form of hermeneutics. Moreover, due to this plurality of modes of interpretation, a general theory of hermeneutics (aiming at a unified self-understanding) is impossible: 'there is no general hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis, but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation. The hermeneutic field [...] is internally at variance [*brisé*] with itself.'<sup>19</sup> Here we fully see how the hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur's attention to the question of self-understanding displaces the concern for immediacy, apodicticity, and adequacy. The provisional character of our self-understanding and the continual deferral of the Husserlian lifeworld leads to a necessary detour along interpretation which in itself implies a fundamental

plurality: the detour along a hermeneutics of the self will never arrive at the unified ontology it is hoping for. Moreover, rather than arriving at a form of certainty, the understanding is caught up in a struggle of *trusting* and *distrusting* modes of interpretation leading to different and even conflicting conceptions of our mode of being. Consequently, the hermeneutic quest for an ontology of the self only provides a shattered ontology of the self, ‘*une ontologie brisée*.’<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3. A brief discussion with Heidegger

As a consequence of the aforementioned decentering, wounding and shattering of the cogito, a hermeneutics of the self is no longer concerned with foundations or certainty. It rather finds itself caught up in a conflict between trust and distrust, between belief and suspicion concerning the disclosive structure of the symbol. To a certain extent, one may argue that the question of deceit and illusion is already present in Descartes’ *Meditations* in the form of the evil genius (*malin génie*). Nevertheless, it is the concept of God that allows him to get rid of this possibility of uncertainty and provides, as Ricoeur puts it, ‘a guarantee that finally reabsorbs veracity into truth, in the strong sense of self-founding theoretical knowledge.’<sup>21</sup> Yet, as soon as one no longer accepts this guarantee, the possibility of the evil genius reappears in the guise of a suspicion that distrusts even the hermeneutic evidence with which symbolic language offers us a new perspective on reality and human existence.

To prepare my discussion of attestation in the next section, let me point how Ricoeur’s position in the first stages of his hermeneutics can be distinguished from Heidegger’s ontology developed in *Sein und Zeit* (even though a number of issues in *Sein und Zeit* inspire Ricoeur’s considerations). In a similar way as the lifeworld is the paradise lost of phenomenology, Ricoeur describes the ontology of the self as the unreachable promised land of hermeneutics.<sup>22</sup> It is exactly this necessary deferral of an ontology of the self to which Heidegger *Sein und Zeit* does not subscribe. Perhaps, the difference between Heidegger and Ricoeur in this respect is first and foremost concerned with the domain or the place in which, as Heidegger calls it, the disclosure of our mode of being takes place.

According to Heidegger, this place is Dasein. Dasein is open to its own mode of being by means of a non-mediated understanding of this being – ‘non-mediated’ is understood here in contrast to the mediacy to which Ricoeur refers in his own account of hermeneutics, namely the necessary detour of hermeneutics along cultural phenomena such as symbols, stories and literature. This is also why Ricoeur opposes the long detour of his own hermeneutics to Heidegger’s ‘short way’ to an ontology of Dasein.<sup>23</sup> As Jean Greich notes, these ways have the same goal, namely understanding the mode of being of the human self, but they arrive at this goal in a fundamentally different way.<sup>24</sup> In *Sein und Zeit*, understanding (*Verstehen*) is the most fundamental meaning of *alētheia* as unconcealment or disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*). In its understanding, Dasein is not only an openness for the world but also the very place where (*Da*) this disclosure of world and being takes place. For Ricoeur, however, although the human being is open to understand, the disclosure of meaning (and of our own mode of being) itself takes place through the detour of the symbol. Also later, in his accounts of metaphor and narrative, Ricoeur emphasizes the mediating role of language as the locus of disclosure of our existence: our understanding of our potentiality-for-being (*Sein-können*) or of the lifeworld is mediated by the disclosure of symbols and stories.<sup>25</sup>

With respect to Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, this has one important implication. Since understanding (and any form of disclosure) of the self occurs in and through a linguistic

mediation, and since linguistic disclosure is caught up in a complex mixture of disclosure and concealment, we require a *twofold* attitude to that in which the meaning of existence is manifested: one attesting to the capacities, possibilities and capabilities of man manifested by the symbol (or disclosed in a narrative) and one being attentive to the illusions and the possibilities of deceit that may be introduced by the same stories. It is this attention to the possibility of being-deceived in our self-understanding that distinguishes Ricoeur from Heidegger: although Heidegger recognizes that the realm of everydayness may hide and obscure the possibility of an authentic self-understanding, he does seem to offer in his account of attestation the possibility of an understanding of our authentic potentiality-of-being that is freed from the obscurities of everydayness. Exactly at this point, Ricoeur insists that self-understanding cannot absolve itself from the dialectic of trust and suspicion. In the vocabulary of the symbol from the 1960s, this means the following. With respect to Heidegger's conception of truth as disclosure, Ricoeur's concept of the symbol as the medium in and through which our selves are announced to us, is stronger marked by the ambiguity of an announcement *that both discloses and conceals*. Hence, the mediating character of the symbolic and fictional language does not replace the apodicticity and transparency of the cogito by the *Faktum* of our understanding of being, but rather by a dialectic of trust and suspicion in the interpreter.<sup>26</sup> This dialectic corresponds to the ambiguous nature of the linguistic announcement, which is marked by an irreducible mixture of disclosure and concealment – or in Heidegger's vocabulary, an irreducible mixture of truth and untruth – to which different practices of interpretation respond. It is this vocabulary that I will use, despite Ricoeur's critique of Heidegger, to capture in which sense the concept of attestation, developed in *Soi-même comme un autre*, responds to the problems discussed in this section.

## 2. The ontology of the self in *Soi-même comme un autre*

Even though one might argue that Ricoeur's work on hermeneutics from the 1960s onwards is caught up in an epistemological enterprise, this epistemological interest is always concerned with an ontological question. This can immediately be seen when we consider Ricoeur's hermeneutics in a Heideggerian light: the two practices of interpretation – the hermeneutics of trust and the hermeneutics of suspicion – find their ontological basis in the specific form of disclosure – truth as *aletheia* – characterizing the symbol: the symbol's mode of announcing human existence is a mixture of concealing and disclosing.<sup>27</sup> This very basic idea I traced in the early Ricoeur continues to play a crucial role in *Soi-même comme un autre* in which attestation is the name for the type of announcement through which the self comes to self-understanding. To a certain extent, the *Preface* of this latter study introduces the same problematic as the one that occupied Ricoeur's mind in the 1960s, although he no longer describes it in terms of the context of (religious) symbols, and the names of Descartes and Nietzsche replace the ones of Husserl and Freud. Yet, these names play the same role: the first one still represents the quest for a certain foundation of the self, whereas the latter one is still placed under the same heading of 'the shattered cogito', which according to Ricoeur could be 'the emblematic title of a tradition'.<sup>28</sup>

### 2.1. *Attestation between certainty and illusion*

Between Descartes' certainty and Nietzsche's shattering of the Cogito, Ricoeur tries to develop a hermeneutics of the self in which self-understanding is described in terms of the self who attests to its own capacity to speak, act, narrate, and be responsible. In nine



subsequent studies, which have a definite fragmentary character, Ricoeur develops the different capacities to which the self attests itself in and by the self's different actions. In the final, tenth study, he aims to develop 'the analogical unity of human action' by showing how these different human capacities belong together on an ontological plane in unitary figure of a potentiality-for-being (*Sein-können*) to phrase it in Heideggerian terms. The crucial notion in this final study is without a doubt attestation since this term characterizes the type of self-understanding the self can attain.

The concept of attestation offers such a middle way between Descartes and Nietzsche, as Ricoeur writes:

To my mind, attestation defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim, not only with respect to the epistemic exaltation of the cogito in Descartes, but also with respect to its humiliation in Nietzsche and his successors. Attestation may appear to require less than one and more than the other.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, attestation is not only an alternative for the kind of certainty Descartes claims to have found but also for Nietzsche's insistence on the illusionary character of our self-understanding. To capture this middle way between certainty and illusion, Ricoeur argues that attestation should not be understood in the framework of *episteme* in the sense of a science as ultimate foundation. Rather, as he suggests, attestation and attesting-to is a form of belief, conviction or credibility.

Also these latter terms need to be understood in the right way. In our everyday language, 'belief' can have different meanings; in particular, it can be a synonym of opinion or *doxa*. As *doxa*, belief still belongs to the philosophical framework of *episteme* and affirms the supremacy and primacy of *episteme* over any 'mere' opinion. However, as Ricoeur notes, due to the work of the masters of suspicion such as Nietzsche, a hermeneutics of the self has to acknowledge that such an *episteme* does not exist in the case of self-understanding. Therefore, this epistemological framework of self-understanding needs to be left behind. To distinguish it from *doxa*, as opinion or 'believing-that', Ricoeur connects attestation to 'believing-in'. Attestation is thus closely connected to our everyday notion of testimony that also always requires that one believes *in* what is said and in the witness who says it: 'it is in the speech of the one giving testimony that one believes'.<sup>30</sup>

The practice of promising shows in an exemplary way how and why this idea of attestation as believing-in may indeed be constitutive for our self-understanding. Since the human self cannot be understood in terms of a permanent substance, the practice of promising has a pertinent meaning in human interaction. 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. In this context, attestation indeed has a disclosive power: it is only in and through attestation that our trustworthiness and reliability is brought into play as one

of our capacities. Yet, attestation does more: I, when I promise, as well as the other, when he or she appeals to me to keep my promise, believe in my capacity to keep a promise, although this credence goes hand in hand with the possibility that it is only an illusion. This is the typical mode of the disclosure of attestation: neither I nor the other knows whether I will keep my promise; yet, at the same time, neither I nor the other thinks that this capacity is a mere illusion; both of us believe in it.

Consequently, to conceive self-understanding in terms of attesting to our capacity to, for instance, keep a promise does not offer any solid foundation or certainty; it rather offers a fragile and vulnerable self-understanding: we may not live up to our capacity and the other's believe in us may turn out to be a mere illusion. In addition, the example of the promise also indicates that in this type of self-understanding, it is not only the self who is the source of this understanding – as, for instance, Husserl and Heidegger seem to maintain in their own ways – but also the other who can be the source of my self-understanding since he or she may attest to my capacities and thus open me up to this capacity.

To account for the fragility of self-understanding, Ricoeur refers to the similarity between attestation and testimony. In order to have access to what a witness experienced, we are depending on his or her testimony. We have no other access to this experience than by way of what the witness tells us. However, the particular access a testimony offers to an experience or an event *requires* that we believe the witness: as long as we don't believe the witness, we will not accept his account of the events. Yet, since we rely on the trustworthiness of the witness, the possibility of being led astray by the testimony cannot be excluded – the witness may be lying and committing perjury or the witness may not be recollecting the events in their proper order. In this sense every testimony carries within it the possibility of falsity and lie. True testimony cannot exist without the possibility of false testimony. Basically, this example of testimony can be reduced to the example of promising again: a testimony may be false because in it we rely on the (implicit or explicit) *promise of the witness to tell the truth*. Our trust attests to the trustworthiness of the witness and expresses that we believe that the witness can and will tell truth. However, we may always be misguided in this trust.

## 2.2. Attestation and truth

The examples of the promise and of testimony indicate how the question of truth in self-understanding is marked by the concept of attestation. Attestation is not simply truth as *aletheia* or disclosure – the witness is not simply the messenger that tells us about an incident or event. When self-understanding depends on attestation, we are confronted with the possibility of a witness that lies or is misguided about us (or about him or herself). Consequently, the disclosure of attestation – similar to the announcement of the symbol – is fundamentally ambiguous because it contains the possibility of falsity as concealment. We see here most clearly how the hermeneutic struggle between trust and distrust, credibility and suspicion, discovered in the 1960s continues to play a role in Ricoeur's determination of attestation and affects the question of truth in relation to self-understanding.

These consequences of attestation for the question of truth guide Ricoeur's reinterpretation of the concepts of truth and falsity in relation to self-understanding, as he discusses the tenth study of *Soi-même comme un autre*. He connects the alethic dimension of attestation – that is, attestation's announcement and disclosure of human capacities – with a more or less Heideggerian reinterpretation of Aristotle's being-true and being-false. Whereas attestation discloses human capacities and thus announces the truth of the human

self, this attestation cannot be separated from the possibility of deceit and illusion, that is, the possibility of concealment and falsity *in* attestation. Since this possibility cannot be avoided, the practice of suspicion, which helps us to trace and to unmask deceit and illusion, becomes an indispensable part of self-understanding.

To understand which role the work of suspicion plays in attestation, the comparison with testimony is once more helpful. A testimony grants us access to what happened or to what someone experienced. Since we have access to these experiences *only* by means of these testimonies, there is only one way to overcome a false testimony and this is by offering an alternative testimony, one that is more credible: 'But there is no recourse against false testimony than another that is more credible; and there is no recourse against suspicion but a more *reliable* attestation.'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the work of suspicion becomes an indispensable ingredient of attestation to unmask false attestation. Yet, this work is done for attestation's sake, as Ricoeur emphasizes: we unmask a false self-understanding because we are searching for a more reliable self-understanding. Therefore, Ricoeur writes that in this new account of being-true and being-false in terms of attestation and suspicion, the latter is not opposed to the former, but rather 'suspicion is also the path toward and the crossing within attestation. It haunts attestation, as a false testimony haunts a true testimony.'<sup>32</sup> So it is only in and through the work of suspicion that attestation can actually deepen itself and free itself from certain illusions.

### 2.3. Ricoeur's and Heidegger's attestation

Up to now I have stressed that Ricoeur's conception of attestation complicates the issue of the Heideggerian account of truth as disclosure. I did not yet indicate how Ricoeur's attestation relates to the one Heidegger develops in *Sein und Zeit* under the heading of *Bezeugung* in his account of the call of conscience (*Gewissensruf*).<sup>33</sup> To deepen our understanding of the debate between Heidegger and Ricoeur, a brief account of the difference between their conceptions of attestation might be illuminating.

In the context of *Sein und Zeit*, attestation is to be understood out of 'the disclosedness of Dasein', which itself is the fundamental mode of Dasein's being-true in *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>34</sup> In Heidegger's work, attestation has a specific task, namely to call Dasein back from its everydayness and to call it to its authentic potentiality-for-being-one's-self, as is explored in § 54 and further. Heidegger argues that this call is the call of conscience by which Dasein calls itself, although this call is 'as a foreign voice' for Dasein in its everydayness.<sup>35</sup> Heidegger's conception of attestation is connected to the notion of *Entschlossenheit*, of a resoluteness with which Dasein should listen to this call. This element indicates that attestation moves beyond the realm of mere knowing and presupposes a wanting to have a conscience (*Gewissen-haben-wollen*). Consequently, the proper comportment to this call of conscience is not described in terms of belief, credibility or trustworthiness, but rather in terms of resoluteness. For Heidegger, conscience is a witness that testifies to Dasein's authenticity and draws Dasein out of its inauthenticity. Therefore, for Heidegger, the problem in relation to this witness is not whether Dasein should trust it since he has already established (or posited) in advance that the call of conscience is a witness of the *truth* of Dasein; the only problem is whether Dasein *wants* to hear this call and *wants* to have a conscience. By not wanting to have a conscience, it silences its own call to authenticity. Hence, the possibility of self-deceit is not inscribed in the heart of attestation; Heidegger acknowledges at best a self-flight and this self-flight is not a consequence of an unreliable attestation, but is rather due to a lack of resoluteness.

The force of Ricoeur's account of attestation is that it shows how the problem of deceit and illusion belongs to the very nature of attestation itself. In fact, for Ricoeur, attestation and testimony carry with it the problem of deceit and illusion. This problem of deceit adds something to the attitude of resoluteness. Since Heidegger limits the problem of attestation to the question of whether we *want* to hear this call and *want* to have a conscience, resoluteness provides the certainty (*Gewißheit*) typical to conscience (*Gewissen*). Although believing-in in Ricoeur's sense requires resoluteness since believing-in expresses also a certain conviction, the resoluteness with which this believing-in relates to conviction can never offer any certainty to itself and it cannot be guaranteed by any will, as Heidegger's *Gewissen-haben-wollen* seems to imply. For Ricoeur, the locus of truth is the fragile locus of attestation, always in-between certainty and illusion. As a consequence, Ricoeur's attestation is never simply an attestation to what humans can do, but also always an attestation to its own vulnerability and to the continual threat of self-deceit.

### 3. Conclusion

With the concept of attestation, Ricoeur directs the attention of the humanities to the importance of conviction, belief, credence and trustworthiness in human social relations and human self-understanding. Although the certainty of self-understanding is a paradise lost for the hermeneutic variant of reflexive philosophy, Ricoeur's analyses of attestation indicate that human capacities do not need to be founded or grounded, but rather become active and operative when we attest to them in others and ourselves. It is only because others (as well as we ourselves) expect us to be the agent of our actions that we attest to this capacity of being the agent of our actions. It is because others count on us that our capacity to take our responsibility is attested to.

At the same time, Ricoeur's work attests to the fragility of this form of self-understanding that depends on attestation. The possibility that we are guided by illusions when we place our trust in the capacities of others and ourselves is part and parcel of this attestation. One might say that, in contrast to Heidegger, Ricoeur has discovered that the disclosure of our capacities by our self-understanding is fundamentally fragile and founded in trust and, therefore, always haunted by the possibility of deceit and thus always requiring an additional movement of suspicion. At the same time, this trust is truly foundational since without being prepared to take this risk and to trust that human beings are capable of acting, speaking and being responsible, these capacities will never come to light. Whereas his theories on narrativity already have found their way into the humanities, his conception of attestation still holds something in store for the humanities that has not yet been addressed sufficiently, namely the central role of our own believe and trust in human, social and cultural capacities to which the humanities continuously attest in their effort to think culture, society, and humans. Ricoeur, as noted in the introduction, has started to develop this emphasis on the crucial role of trust in attestation in his later work on the philosophy of history: with respect to *Temps et récit*, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* shows a clear shift in emphasis from narrative to testimony and attestation, bringing the issue of trust into the center of attention. It is exactly with respect to this issue of trust that Ricoeur's concept of attestation holds something in store for the humanities and their task to reflect on the many crises of trust in our society. After all, is it not the task of the humanities, in light of the continuous crises in trust that plague our societies on many levels, to offer concepts and analyses to understand what trust is and how it functions in human existence with others in trustworthy institutions?<sup>36</sup> Contributing to an answer to this question might be the future of Ricoeur's concept of attestation.

## Notes

1. Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*. Hereafter, as well as for other books in which the English translation is quoted, references will be made as #1/#2, where #1 refers to the page number in the French edition and #2 to the English translation.
2. Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," 187.
3. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*.
4. For the connection of attestation and testimony in the philosophy of history, cf. Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. For the contemporary reflection on the importance of this issue, cf. e.g. the special issue of the *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 8 (2014), which is partly devoted to this problem as well as recent studies such as Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*.
5. Cf. also Greisch, "Testimony and Attestation."
6. Ricoeur, *Autobiographie intellectuelle*, 30/16.
7. Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, 366–406/375–418.
8. A striking and thorough analysis of the role of Freud in this regard can be found in Pirovolakis, *Reading Derrida & Ricoeur*, 25–42.
9. Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, 368/377.
10. Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, § 6.
11. *Ibid.*, 62/23.
12. Ricoeur, *Conflit*, 240/239.
13. Husserl, *Die Krisis* 170/167–168.
14. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, 31/14.
15. Ricoeur, *Conflit*, 240.
16. For the description of the two modes of hermeneutics that are described below, cf. e.g., Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, 29–44. This is also discussed in the literature under the heading of a teleological and archeological mode of interpretation, cf. Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, 131–166.
17. Ricoeur, *Philosophie de volonté*.
18. Beyond Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, also Derrida's reading of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène* in which language displaces and disrupts the possibility of such a living experience, can be counted as a typical example of a hermeneutics of suspicion. For a confrontation with Ricoeur's reading of Husserl, cf. chapter 1 and 2 of Pirovolakis, *Reading Derrida & Ricoeur*.
19. Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, 35/26–27.
20. Ricoeur, *Conflit*, 23.
21. Ricoeur, *Soi-même*, 34/22.
22. Ricoeur, *Conflit*, 28.
23. *Ibid.*, 7–28.
24. Greisch, *Paul Ricoeur*, 140–141.
25. Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action*, 127.
26. This *Faktum* is Heidegger's point of departure in *Sein und Zeit*, 5
27. Other ways of accounting for the difference between Ricoeur and Heidegger can be found in Kemp, "Ricoeur between Heidegger and Lévinas"; and in van der Heiden, "Announcement, Attestation, and Equivocity".
28. Ricoeur, *Soi-même*, 22/11.
29. *Ibid.*, 33/21.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 34/22. I have added the italics to the translation since it is also in the French original.
32. *Ibid.*, 350–351/302.
33. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 54. For Ricoeur's remark, see also *Soi-même*, 347, 358, 401. For an explicit distance between understanding and knowing in Heidegger's phenomenon of attestation, cf. 403.
34. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 269/314.
35. *Ibid.*, 277.
36. Ricoeur, *Soi-même*, seventh study.

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