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MANUSCRIPT

"One is what one does": from pragmatic to performative disclosure of the who

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Abstract
After taking into consideration the most relevant criticisms questioning the capacity of the thinking "I" to grasp itself in a transparent and undistorting way, I will ask what remains of first-person authority with regard to one's own identity. I argue that first-person authority is not to be abandoned, but rather reformulated in terms of public commitments that nobody else can take up in my place. After recovering the original meaning of Heidegger's claim "one is what one does," I turn to Arendt's performative disclosure of the "who" through political initiative and suggest reading the requirement of public exposure as a *model* allowing for a better understanding of self-identification. In order to discern more clearly the shape of this new paradigm of self-identification, I draw on Ricoeur's notion of self-attestation, Crowell's analysis of our "being-answerable" and Larmore's account of avowals in which we give ourselves a publicly binding shape. In synthetizing and prolonging the considerations of the abovementioned authors about the performative disclosure of the self, I demonstrate that one's identity—in the sense of ipseity—is both constituted and manifested by the commitments that the self endorses and for which it is held accountable in front of others.

Keywords Personal identity · First-person authority · Self-knowledge · Arendt · Heidegger

1 Introduction

To what extent am I able to grasp my own identity? It would seem that I should know myself better than anyone else does, and even have the final word when it comes to stating clearly who I am. If for no other reason, then because I am better acquainted with myself, since I spend so much time in my own company. Even more importantly, I am supposed to enjoy a special kind of authority in identifying

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my innermost convictions, my deepest feelings and my true desires. How precisely is the alleged "first-person authority" related to matters of personal identity? When we are trying to put together a comprehensive and intelligible picture of ourselves, it is mostly a matter of recomposing our convictions, passions and long-term projects into a coherent whole, identifying ourselves with some but not all of them. If I am in a privileged position to determine what precisely I believe or desire, then I should have the final word about my personal identity too. My self-conception would be the arbiter of my self-identity. This generalized conception of privileged access to the content of one's own consciousness is shared by many modern philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Both rationalist and empiricist philosophers agree that the human mind has immediate direct access to its own *cogitationes* in a large sense, while all transcendent entities are given only through the mediation of representations. Part of this conviction is the thesis that my beliefs or desires might be wrong about worldly factual matters, but I cannot be wrong about having such and such beliefs, desires or feelings.

However, the path from self-reflection to self-knowledge is lined with traps and possible failures as has already been underlined by many criticisms addressed to the Cartesian project of knowing oneself in the immediate certainty of reflection. First, I will briefly enumerate the main lines of such criticisms whose target is the alleged privilege of human subjects with regard to knowledge of their own mental life. The question then arises as to what remains of first-person authority with regard to determining one's own identity. My strategy consists of reformulating the relation that each of us bears to ourself in terms of performative self-identifications: to disclose "who one is" is not a matter of collecting correct representations of some elusive "innermost self," it rather consists of endorsing commitments and letting oneself being judged by one's capacity to act and live up to them. My final aim is not to reject first person authority *in toto*, but to provide a pragmatic account of identity that is able to answer the difficulties and dispel the illusions of the human being's direct access to herself, while establishing the self as a decentered but still indispensable place of authority.

2 The multiple pitfalls of self-knowledge

The first trap of self-knowledge consists of giving ourselves a coherence we do not possess: by means of "impure reflection," as Sartre called it, a person chooses one of her traits as representing her true essence, a core of her *self* and strives to organize her other traits around it in a forceful and artificial manner. The motivations for such an impure reflection are founded on all kind of reasons, among which is the tendency to exaggerate the good and to minimize the bad in ourselves. Thus, when Donald Trump boasts during an interview with CBS's Lesley Stahl "I think I am actually humble. I think I'm much more humble than you would understand," we have our reasons to doubt his humility, if for no other reason than for the performative contradiction inherent to such a statement. The "description under which you

value yourself"[1] might be a distortion of what you really are. That is why others are sometimes in a better position to point out some cognitive dissonance that is difficult for us to acknowledge, or to bring out some inner contradictions between our words and deeds. That is also the reason why it might be helpful to engage in a dialogue rather than in self-absorption when we sincerely strive to overcome our self-delusions.

Secondly, first person authority, understood as an epistemological privilege in the access to one's inner self, presupposes a self-reflective transparency. Within the field of phenomenology, such a presupposition is questioned by Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the opacity inherent in an embodied subjectivity. Since my bodily immersion in the world is a condition of my experience—"the darkness of the theatre necessary to the clarity of representation"[2]—and since part of my embodied being consists of "a past that has never been present" to consciousness,[3] I am obliged to acknowledge that any attempt to encompass my experience through an act of self-reflection impinges on some irreducible and un-representable residue, something I cannot fully thematize. My own body has a story of its own, shaped by my early affective interactions, that prevents me from achieving a full recollection of my life. We can add that it is precisely because of the opacity of ourselves to ourselves that others might reveal truths about us that we are unable or unwilling to recognize, such as unconscious strategies of repression or denials.

Finally, the two aforementioned predicaments of self-reflection point towards a larger problem that further complicates the thesis of the immediate givenness of *cogitationes* that is supposed to guarantee the certitude that mind has about its content. The reflective method distorts subjectivity insofar as it inevitably objectifies what it makes appear about ourselves. Within self-reflection, the reflected self appears as a fixed and static object, so that the reflective consciousness loses from sight the active, unfinished and flowing character of who one is. Merely speaking about ourselves in terms of some inner desires and beliefs is to forget that these do not exist as entities, but that we have to live them, or as Sartre puts it, nous *avons à les être*: only because there is a self actively endorsing its intentional stances, is there a spontaneous cohesion and interpenetration between them, which is lost when we step back from them in order to embrace them reflectively.

In his 1912 *Allgemeine Psychologie*, Natorp points out the main difficulty of all attempts aiming to seize or to investigate subjectivity in a reflexive attitude. To analyze or reflectively to grasp subjectivity in terms of contents of consciousness means to objectify it and thus to convert it into its opposite. Dan Zahavi provides the most concise and convincing summary of Natorp's criticism of the distorting, falsifying and mostly reifying effects of reflection: "the subject itself cannot be made into an object, nor can it take itself as its own object. Rather, the moment we start to think of the subject as an object, we stop thinking of it as a subject."[4] This "Natorp's

[1] Korsgaard (1996, p. 101).
[2] Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 117).
[3] Ibid., p. 280.
[4] Zahavi (2005, p. 74).

challenge" to any investigation of subjectivity concerns not only the use of reflective methods in psychology or phenomenology, it also reveals the difficulty of disclosing one's identity through reflective self-identification. There is a gap between the flowing nature of the self and the way it appears within reflection. Heidegger further develops Natorp's criticism of reflective phenomenology when he emphatically characterizes Dasein as being *immer unterwegs*,[5] as existing in such a manner that its "not yet" belongs to it. Sartre's objection against reflexive grasping of one's *self* stems from the same emphasis on never-ending self-transformation inherent in the temporality of Being-for-itself: being in the present includes being ahead of oneself in the future, and being behind oneself in the past.[6] "I am what I am not, I am not what I am" is a refrain repeated ad nauseam in many pages of *Being and Nothingness*.[7] All the above-mentioned problems seem to indicate that the relation that I have to myself, and that is constitutive of my subjectivity, should not be understood as a relation of self-knowledge. If the relation in question were primarily epistemic, I would need to transform myself into an object of knowledge, depriving my subjectivity of its most essential characteristics, since subjectivity means transcendence, flow and activity, something that is at stake and has to be actively endorsed. Contrary to the initial presupposition about our privileged position to state *who we are* thanks to our self-acquaintance, we are obliged to acknowledge the impossible task of freezing our *becoming*, our constant "not-yet" in a coherent and stable whole.

In order to overcome these manifold difficulties, I propose to re-consider the fundamental nature of our relation to ourselves in terms of practical commitment to a certain kind of self-identity for which we are accountable to others. In other words, the self cannot disclose its own identity through an act of self-knowledge, but rather through the attempt to become one with this dynamic of always being ahead of oneself. My claim is thus the following one: we disclose our identities (in the sense of *ipse*) by practically committing ourselves to a certain way of being, and not by means of self-knowledge. I will first sketch a pragmatic theory of personal identity that presents the self-disclosure as de-centered, as dependent on our public appearance and linguistic performance judged by others. However, I do not reject the first-person authority *in toto*, but in the final part of my paper, I will reinterpret it from the practical point of view with the help of Paul Ricoeur, Steven Crowell and Charles Larmore. The shared idea in all the three authors is that while I have no privilege in knowing myself in my true identity, nobody else can substitute for me when it comes to endorsing certain reasons for action and nobody else can answer on my behalf where I stand. The question is then not how do I *know* my identity, but rather how do I *achieve* my identity in front of others within the practice of giving and asking for reasons.

[5] Heidegger (1953, 79).

[6] Sartre (1943, p. 111).

[7] Sartre (1943, pp. 303, 366, 537). "The necessary condition for me to be what I am not and to not-be what I am […]." (p. 366); "my ontological structure is not to be what I am and to be what I am not." (p. 537).

3 One is what one does

As I have already suggested, a promising way to meet Natorp's challenge and other potential pitfalls when grasping oneself through self-reflection is to follow a path opened by Heidegger's proposal to consider the self not as some internal entity, but in its worldly performances and relations. The self is unveiled concomitantly with its care about the world shared with others and not through some kind of "inner perception of psychic lived experiences, processes and acts."[8] If there is anything like self-reflection, it has to be in a very different, optical meaning, according to which we are reflected back from the success and failures of our *commertium* with the world and others:

> The self is there for the Dasein itself without reflection and without inner perception, before all reflection. Reflection, *in the sense of a turning back* [*Ruckwendung*] is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure [my emphasis]. The way in which the self is unveiled to itself in the factical Dasein can nevertheless be fittingly called reflection [*Reflexion*], except that we must not take this expression to mean what is commonly meant by it—the ego bent around backward and staring at itself—but an interconnection such as is manifested in the optical meaning of the term "reflection." To reflect means, in the optical context, to break at something, to radiate back from there, to show itself in a reflection from something.[9]

Dasein recognizes itself insofar as it receives its concrete shape from things it copes with and from the other people with whom it shares its world. In other words, our identities take shape in the itineraries that we follow in the world day after day, in the activities we engage in and the tasks that we perform, in the appropriate ways to be the kind of persons we are aspiring to be. Thus, Dasein unveils itself in the mirror provided by the (mostly social) world and its own positioning within it. This sort of reflection from the world and from others, rather than self-conception through reflection, is the primary way in which *we disclose who we are.* The thesis that we originally encounter our *selves* through our worldly projects was stressed by pragmatic readings of Heidegger proposed by Hubert Dreyfus, Mark Okrent, John Haugeland and Mark Wrathall, among others. On this reading, our identities would be mostly the function of what we perform, since the way in which we engage in the world and with others is prior to the way we think of ourselves.

We can add with Dreyfus that the traditional model of reflection, seeking to establish *who we are* through better discrimination of what we really believe and desire, is always practically motivated: "Only in cases of breakdown do I find myself having to choose my life plan and worrying about my desires and the risks involved in trying to satisfy them."[10] Reflection in the more traditional sense ("know thyself!") is thus always situated, always solicited, be it from outside ("I do not recognize you

[8] Heidegger (1994, p. 95).
[9] Heidegger (1975, p. 226).
[10] Dreyfus (1991, p. 302).

anymore," one's partner might observe); or as the result of one's own failing ("Am I really a philosopher, if most of my papers are left unfinished due to my dissatisfaction with them?"). In these and many other cases, we become a problem to ourselves. We are prompted to determine more thoroughly what our principal beliefs might be and what we primarily desire. Still, not even then is my relation to myself one of knower of something to be known, of some elusive "I" that would have been buried deep inside me. Rather, I am solicited to establish a more explicit and less prejudicial relation to the world in order to seek *out there* what should hold true and what should be done.

However, can we infer from these observations that "one is what one does"? Can we subscribe to Dreyfus' "stark" reappropriation of Heidegger and redefine one's identity simply in terms of absorbed coping?

> In opposition to the interpretation of man as essentially a subject, Heidegger reminds us that as being-in-the-world Dasein must take a stand on itself and must be understood "in what it does, uses, expects, avoids—in the environmentally available with which one is primarily concerned" [SZ 119]. (…) Or to put it even more starkly, "'One *is*' what one does" [SZ 239].[11]

Let us consider first if such an interpretation is faithful to its primary source, i.e. to *Sein und Zeit*. It is symptomatic that Dreyfus fails to mention the quotation marks in Heidegger's apparent identification between Dasein's being and its absorbed dealing with things, since these quotation marks seem to indicate Heidegger's ironical distance from such a claim. Most importantly though, Dreyfus fails to take into consideration the context of §47 of *Being and Time*, in which the quoted passage receives a meaning pointing in the opposite direction from his interpretation. Whereas everyday Dasein actually "understands itself initially and for the most part in terms of what it is accustomed to take care of,"[12] only by maintaining its distance from this daily concernful dealing, can Dasein disclose itself in a different way, namely in its irreplaceability and its "ownmost being." Only then does the possibility of understanding oneself as a whole remain open. The entire passage clearly points to the fact that self-understanding of our ownmost being is hidden, concealed by the pseudo-clarity of our social roles. While taking care of things and answering to their solicitations, we interpret ourselves in terms of the world we instrumentally disclose, we identify ourselves with our serviceability, and we thus tend to forget that our being consists primarily of an unfounded ability-to-be for which we have to take responsibility. Only anxiety "individuates [*vereinzelt*] Dasein to its ownmost being-in-the-world" and discloses the fundamental possibilities of Dasein "as they are, undisguised [*unverstellt*] by innerworldly beings to which Dasein, initially and for the most part, clings."[13] The ownmost self cannot be thus completely equated with what one pursues and what one takes care of, since the public norms have always already decided about the right way to engage in such activities and about

[11] Dreyfus (1991, p. 147).
[12] Heidegger (1953, p. 239).
[13] Ibid., p. 191.

the kind of person one has to be in order to fulfil them. Thus, the pragmatic reading of Heidegger has its limitation that even Dreyfus' former pupils are ready to acknowledge. As Wrathall puts it, "no social practice can finally express what it is to be a self."[14]

Does it mean that there is nothing true about the thesis *that one is what one does*? I think its core intuition is worth saving, albeit in a different meaning from that of Dreyfus and at a certain critical distance from Heidegger's account. Several doubts will finally lead us to part ways with Heidegger: First, it seems questionable that only in being-towards-death one becomes able to reveal one's proper self. In fact, such an account appears to be rather individualistic: insofar as "anxiety individuates," it also cuts our immersion in being-with-others and there are no plausible paths in *Sein und Zeit* indicating how to restore primordial human togetherness in its authentic form. Secondly, "what one does" can have different meanings and refer to labor, taking care of others, fulfilling one's duties or accomplishing a moral or a political action. Are all of these modalities of *vita activa* alienating? Should we consider all of these various activities as signs of Dasein's fallenness, as obstacles to gaining a proper understanding of one's selfhood? In the end, it remains questionable whether the public sphere is no more than the sphere of alienation of my innermost possibilities-to-be and that we should interpret our worldly engagements it in terms of *Vervallen*, of our falling into things. If Heidegger were right that our dealings with things and others are reducible to a "levelling down of all possibilities of being,"[15] then the only way to disclose the mineness of my existence would be a kind of liberation from all such kinds of objectification. However, Hannah Arendt, among others, shows it is not the case. With her help, I will try to save and to precise the initial intuition, according to which each of us *is* what she does.

4 The performative disclosure of the who within the public realm

While Heidegger conceives of the public as the space of "falling," Arendt rehabilitates the public world as precisely the only space where the individual can manifest her unique identity. In an oft quoted passage of *The Human Condition*, Arendt claims that "in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world."[16] In this shift from Heidegger to Arendt, we witness an original and almost ironic reversal. Authentic disclosure of one's identity is neither private nor silent; on the contrary, it has to be performed in the public realm which is also the realm of opinion and talk (that would be too quickly dismissed by Heidegger as "idle talk"). For Heidegger, *Selbstheit* is to be achieved only through Dasein's silent and solitary confrontation with the contingency of its being, precisely in order to avoid the kind of justification characteristic of *Gerede*. The self of Dasein is then disclosed

[14] Wrathall (2017, p. 239).
[15] Heidegger (1953, p. 127).
[16] Arendt (1998, p. 179).

as precisely the instance that answers—without speaking!—only to the "call of conscience."[17] While for Heidegger, withdrawing from the public realm allows the authentic Dasein to attain its identity in the sense of *Selbstheit*, for Arendt, the actor—in order to become a distinct self—is supposed to justify her stance while letting herself exposed to the *doxa*.[18] In an almost Hegelian move, the self of the actor has to appear on the public stage and let its identity be judged by others in order to learn what it is worth. From the Arendtian perspective, the political action discloses "who" (the actor is) only insofar as it discloses the "world" in some of its possible meanings that can be shared with others.

As well as Dreyfus's absorbed coping, Arendt's disclosure of the "who" is thus coextensive with the disclosure of *pragmata*, albeit in a new, different sense; not in the sense of tools and *manipulanda*, but in the sense of *things that are held in common* (from multiple perspectives) and that remain matters of contestation and debate.[19] *Pragmata* are to be understood as our shared affordances, open possibilities for concerted action in the public sphere. The intentionality of political action aims at these shared states of affairs concerning all kinds of public goods, whose meaning is inevitably underdetermined, so that engaging oneself politically implies entering the debate about the concerns and purposes that bind the political community.[20] The political action is thus not reducible to an instrumental manipulation of things according to one's pre-established ends. It is not pragmatic in this narrow sense. Most of all, the political praxis is explicitly stipulated by Arendt as *being its own end*, against the tendencies to think of politics as a kind of means for achieving some supra-political ends.

At the same time, Arendt doesn't hide that the individual enters the political arena of politics, among other reasons, with the intention of achieving fame or—as she puts it—with the ambition of gaining a relative, earthly immortality.[21] However, the political actor cannot dedicate her speech and deeds precisely to this end, as if shaping her public image were the *telos* of her endeavors. Achieving a concrete individual shape is rather a by-product of disclosing the world, its tensions, actions to be undertaken, in one's political speech; it is not a matter of bragging about one's accomplishments, as we see in too many contemporary political self-promotions. Since Arendt's conception of self-disclosure through political action and speech is rather normative than descriptive, much of contemporary politics is simply not in line with her thought. Nevertheless, her analysis constitutes a powerful tool, allowing for a better understanding of some cases of the political acting of such actors

[17] Heidegger (1953, p. 274).

[18] See Tchir (2017, p. 116).

[19] As Klaus Held shows, the Greek concept of *pragmata* does not refer merely to equipment, but to "possibilities for action that we take into consideration in conversation with others or in consulting ourselves, in order to reach any given aim." (Held 2002, p. 65). Held's extension of the concept of *pragmata* invites us to consider things as we encounter them first and foremost not only as equipment, but rather as things that matter to our shared concerns, as our common undertakings or possibilities for collective action.

[20] This view is developed in Tchir (2017, p. 15).

[21] Arendt (1998, p. 19).

who disclose their identity indirectly, through their *initiative* and their capacity to propose an example to be followed.

Let us consider Gorbachev's program of reforms and Mitterrand's assessment of it in almost pure Arendtian terms. In the late 1980s, François Mitterrand, in a TV interview, was asked if he believed in the sincerity of Mikhaïl Gorbachev with regard to his politics of perestroika. "I don't know," answered Mitterrand, "and the issue of his sincerity is of no importance [qu'il soit sincère ou non n'a pas d'importance]. What truly matters is that by introducing these kinds of reforms, he modifies the political game and triggers arrangements that will surely move things along."[22] In Mitterrand's reply to a journalist, we can see three core aspects of the Arendtian lesson: (1) What really matters is what kind of change the political actor introduces into our shared world. (2) His unique "who" is not a matter of some kind of truthfulness to his inner self; what matters is the difference he brings in the kind of deliberation about our common undertakings. (3) In a certain sense, *who one is* gets articulated not only according to one's intentions, but also through their reappropriations by other co-actors. That is why the political actor is judged and held responsible both for his deeds and words, but also for their repercussions, at least to some extent. When Gorbachev initiated the liberalizing reforms of *perestroika* ("restructuring") and *glasnost* ("openness"), he certainly didn't intend to provoke the tidal wave of change culminating with the fall of the Berlin wall and he surely didn't plan to dismantle the Eastern bloc. He began a new process, opened the way for a transformation of an authoritarian state into a republic where singular voices can be heard, leaving at the same time more space for autonomy to other socialist countries. To be sure, the consequences of his achievements were entirely different from what he intended, but it is nevertheless possible to establish not only a chronological but also a logical link between his reforms and the subsequent disintegration of authoritarian regimes in the East. Precisely to this extent, Gorbachev's identity as political actor involves some of unintended results of his initiative insofar as it was developed to its consequences by other actors.

To sum up, the actor achieves her identity in plurality with others, although she does not achieve her purpose exactly as she intended it. Insofar as such performance is a public thing, *res publica*, the individual person loses control over the use and meaning of her action. It turns into an occasion for other individuals to reappropriate any such achievement and bestow on it a meaning of their own. If the actor is but an initiator of new process, if her identity is intertwined with the unpredictable consequences, then she is not the *author* of her identity. That's why Arendt sides with Hegel in her explicitly de-centralized conception of self-identification that depends on the social interplay of other individual self-assertions. "For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people," she says already in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*.[23] The individual cannot escape the tension between who is she for herself and who is she for the other. Under conditions of plurality, the meaning of political action is judged by those who witness it in multiple different ways.

[22] Comments reported by Tassin (2005, p. 152).

[23] Arendt (1994, p. 476).

Gorbachev might be a true Arendtian hero for some, while many others still consider him a criminal responsible for all the evils resulting from the disintegration of the Eastern bloc.

In the end, we can say that Arendt's concept of action allows identities to be rethought as performative productions that are achieved through acting in concert and in conflict with other actors. I think it is precisely in order to challenge our common ways of conceiving identities that Arendt introduces her concept of *persona* with its etymological connotation of entering the stage with a mask. In this original meaning, *persona* refers to the theatrical artifice allowing one to speak and to amplify one's performative utterance, but also to hide one's otherwise visible identity. At first sight, there is a paradox: the very notion of "uniqueness behind the mask" sounds like a *contradictio in adjecto*. How could a mask allow the individual to display his or her uniqueness? Does this not reduce the Arendtian account of the performative nature of the self to incoherence? I think the paradox is only apparent: the political form of disclosure does not aim to reveal the essence of the private actor, but rather to obtain an identity that the person did not have beforehand, through an intersubjective exchange of interpretations of the shared world and its stakes. Moreover, speaking as a *persona* allows the political actor precisely to overcome her individual, empirical psychology, and not to be judged for one's color, ethnicity, social class, religious beliefs and other pregiven identifications. Instead, the actor's *persona* is to be judged by criteria appropriate to her public performance. Obviously, such a claim seems to be an idealization or desideratum rather than a description of contemporary political interactions, where "*what* the actors are" (in terms of their predetermined identities) often matters more than what they are able to propose. Bickford and other feminist readers of Arendt reject her construal of *persona* as a "false universal,"[24] established from the dominant and masculine point of view. However, it seems to me that it is precisely the Arendtian prescriptive standpoint that enables us to criticize all attempts to reduce political action to an expression of some empirical identity as something sinister. Firstly, Arendt invites us to be more cautious and resist our prevalent tendency to consider political agendas, claims and demands as resulting from social, gender or ethnical roots of their proponents. Second, her point is that disclosing identity through its enaction is not a matter of cultivating the idiosyncrasies of individuals, it is not a matter of faithfulness to one's inner self, but is obtained only through interaction with others, where actualizing one's singularity amounts to actualizing our plurality.

There is, however, another implication of Arendt's performative theory of personhood that seems even more unsettling. From her perspective, people unable or unwilling to take a political stance seem to be reduced to their "whats" without ever achieving their identities as "ipse." Most individuals would thus be deprived of the constitutive possibility for achieving their personhood. Even those among us who take a political stance from time to time would hardly count as political actors initiating something new. If public appearance is a necessary condition for obtaining and confirming one's singularity, Arendt's account introduces a rather troublesome

[24] Bickford (1995, p. 319).

distinction between significant and insignificant persons.[25] One possible answer to such an objection consists of recalling that Arendt intentionally formulated her theory as a critical analysis of totalitarian regimes preventing their citizens from manifesting their singularity in the open public space. My own proposal aims to develop Arendt's performative theory along different lines. I intend to read her account of self-disclosure through public words and deeds not as a claim that only persons taking political action achieve their ipse-identities, but rather as a *model* accounting for something we all implicitly do all through our lives: specifically, we commit ourselves as actors and performers through our initiatives and we are held responsible for the implications of such commitments beyond what we are able to grasp reflectively.

The peculiarity of political action is that it compels the actor to account for her proposals and convictions in front of others. In our everyday lives, we do not always take an explicit stance. Most of us just try to to get through our to-do lists without becoming crazy. Thank goodness that there are pregiven norms of appropriateness already guiding our conduct, allowing us get things done in a sure and timely fashion. Since *das Man* has already decided about the right way of dealing with things and with each other, we are rarely solicited to give an account of our convictions as our own. On the contrary, anyone entering the political agora is confronted with a requirement to account for her own principles, to take an explicit stance and to engage in the game of giving and asking for reasons. However, we can observe the same dynamics even on the level of our everyday encounters and dealings with the others, since the security provided by *das Man* is never absolute. It breaks down every time we are confronted with heterogeneous and incompatible requirements, so that we are compelled to take responsibility for the standards according to which we act and judge. On all such occasions, the political model of self-disclosure identified by Arendt proves itself useful in order to get a better grasp of the nature of the relation that such self bears to its ownmost identity. It allows the acknowledgement that even in our everyday life and its practical concerns, we disclose *who* we are through exposing ourselves, i.e. through explicitly endorsing the principles according to which we act. The *uniqueness* of the person, emphasized by Arendt, should be understand neither as some exclusivity, inimitability or distinctiveness specific to this particular person, nor as a privilege reserved solely for politicians. It consists rather of acknowledging that *nobody else but me* can be held responsible for my commitments, convictions or desires to change things and that this accountability is something to be attested in front of the others. How is such accountability related to the authority of the first person that was questioned in the introduction of this article? To what extent am I able to account for *who* I am to others, notwithstanding the abovementioned pitfalls of the self-reflective model?

[25] Loidolt (2019) addresses the same difficulty from a different angle and explains the reasons behind Arendtian deliberate emphasis on the political dimension of "being a person."

5 First person authority without sovereignty

From what we have seen, Arendt leaves apparently very little space for first-person authority. In her account, one's identity is both ecstatic and non-internal (something made visible in the world) and de-centered (something to be confirmed by others). First-person authority regarding one's own identity is further questioned insofar as self-disclosure depends on the modifications or sheer refusals by other actors of one's proposal to act. Consequently, Arendt's enactive theory of self-identification entails the recognition that one is being judged, among other things, for the unforeseen implications of one's deeds and words. Although the actor's identity is "not given, but achieved" through her own initiative, such achievement is not autonomous, it is not a direct result of her freedom; it can be obtained only under conditions of plurality and requires the public space of mutual recognition of each other's performances.

It is also worth noting that Arendt tends to avoid talk about the *self* as a center of subjective experience, as if it had no role at all in shaping one's identity. What we need then—to complement Arendt's performative theory of self-disclosure—is an account of first-person authority that would not entail sovereignty, autonomy and self-transparency of consciousness. In other words, we are to reconsider first-person authority from a more pragmatic perspective. In this final section, I will try to delineate the basic tenets of such an account of first-person authority that avoids the difficulties inherent in the model of self-reflection and that resists our tendency to conceive of first-person authority as a matter of knowledge. In this endeavor, three authors will help me to reconsider first-person authority in terms of the practical relation that the self bears to itself: Paul Ricoeur, Steven Crowell and Charles Larmore. Even though these authors are rarely read in common, their implicitly convergent thoughts open the path to redefine the *autoposition of the self* in terms of endorsing public commitments through which each person discloses *who* she is by showing *where* she stands. In complement to the previous reappropriation of Arendt's performative self-disclosure, the following synthesis of Ricoeur, Crowell and Larmore will allow me to delineate the contours of a *new model of the first-person authority* that acknowledges the limits of self-reflective transparency, while retaining the crucial role of the publicly committing *self* in the intersubjective performance of its own identity.

5.1 Attestation in Paul Ricoeur

There are at least two striking differences between the function that Arendt and Ricoeur attribute to narratives with regard to one's identity. In Arendt, it is up to the spectators and not to the actor herself to identify her "uniqueness" within a coherent narrative. Secondly, according to Arendt any identification of the *who* is always done ex-post. On the contrary, Ricoeur takes our future-oriented commitments, promises and other kinds of performative acts as fundamental parts of our

story: when we give an account of ourselves, these narratives have a transformative impact on our way of living.

Paul Ricoeur wants, with his notion of "attestation" that is central to his opus magnum *Oneself as Another*, to emphasize that the sort of relation that I have to myself is not primarily a matter of self-knowledge. The basic relation that binds me to myself is, from his pragmatically oriented perspective, a matter of assuming responsibility for my own commitments. Rather than factual assertion, attestation is an illocutionary act through which I give a public account of my innermost convictions and desires. While doing that, I make plain how I propose to conduct myself in the future. My *attestation* is thus a kind of *testimony* about *where I stand,* in which I designate myself through speaking to another person.[26] My point is that such a testimony does not amount to a kind of proof that I have attained a true self-knowledge, as can be demonstrated by pointing out two main differences between claims of knowledge and those of attestation. The first difference between the attestation performed by the *who* and any other form of evidence upon which we rely in the matters of knowledge is the following: unlike other claims about some matters of fact, the opposition of an attestation is not falsity, but suspicion. To be sure, there is a kind of self-certainty in the act of declaring "I firmly believe I can bring this project to a successful conclusion," in the reassurance addressed to my fellows "You can count on me" or in Luther's famous words "Here I stand, I can do no other." Nevertheless, such a certainty reveals itself as rather fragile insofar as it can be always threatened by suspicion. We might always be challenged by all kinds of uncertainties relating both to the future and to our perseverance: "I don't trust you" or "I don't believe your commitment is a real one," our partners, friends or co-workers might say. After all, this is the price to pay for a speech act that cannot be founded on any matter of fact. From a broader perspective, it is also the price to pay for being a self only with respect to another. The second difference between attestation and factual evidence stems from the fact that the sincerity of my claim cannot be evaluated by its conformity to some present state of mind or to some unchanging core of my personality. Its sincerity or "felicity" can be only judged *ex post,* where only time will show if I had really committed myself as I had announced. Therefore, if there is any need at all to talk about the "truth" of selfhood and its performative disclosure, such a truth cannot be understood in a theoretical sense, but only in an existentially-practical one. One renders oneself trustworthy through acting in the light of one's commitments, i.e. through performing such commitments as felicitous acts of speech.

When I say "I want to marry you," "I intend to repay the money I owe you" etc., I am attesting to my commitment to respect—in the future—the implications of what I declare now. Such an attestation manifests my confidence in my *self-constancy* over time and against the odds of an unpredictable future. The first point to be stressed about such commitment is that it cannot be fulfilled by anyone else but me, it brings forth the uniqueness of my *self*. Secondly, the agent relates in a *practical* way to her intentions, desires and beliefs and her attestation cannot be understood as mere *knowledge* of her inner states. Thirdly, the attestation is grounded in

[26] Ricoeur (1990, pp. 195–197).

my endorsement of responsibility for both my speech acts and my actions as well as for the coherence between them. To put it differently, my attestations rely on my capacity to comport myself as morally imputable not only for my action, but also for my failures to act in accordance with the content of my speech acts. The first person authority is thus grounded in the self's capacity to *believe in* its constancy over time. And this *believing-in*, which is a practical attitude, based on confidence and threatened by suspicion, is radically different from *believing-that*, which is on the contrary based on evidence or ascertaining some matter of fact. Unlike the epistemological failures of the Cartesian self-transparency model, the authority that matters in this kind of self-identification does not concern a correspondence between my assertions and some current state of affairs, but the self's capacity to uphold its publicly articulated commitments. For all these reasons, first person authority—reformulated in terms of self-attestation—is to be conceived of as a practical attitude that I endorse in front of others.

5.2 "Being answerable" in Steven Crowell

In his 2013 book dedicated to *Normativity and Phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger,* Steven Crowell also acknowledges first-person authority without isolating the self in any monological model, since he situates the locus of such an authority in our "being answerable." Crowell proposes that we should reinterpret Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit* in terms of personal endorsement of the obligation by which I deem myself accountable for my allegiance to a set of norms guiding my conduct. To exist as "I myself" thus involves being answerable in the sense of being accountable for the principles of my action. Here again, "first-person authority" is formulated anew and discursively as "what transforms factic 'grounds' (determinants of my being) into potentially justifying 'reasons' (*Gründe*)."[27] The famous "paradox of human subjectivity,"[28] consisting of my being a mere part of the world that I am nevertheless constituting in my acts of consciousness, is restated by Crowell in terms of tension between two sources of normativity: there would be no practical identities of agents without shared norms (*das Man*), but there would be no norms if agents did not bind *themselves* to them through their personal commitments. While recognizing that the significance of an individual's activity depends upon a shared background of institutions, customs and practices, Crowell derives the binding force of social norms from one's own existential commitment, i.e. from a responsible endorsement of one's facticity. Although I acknowledge that I am not the original ground of norms allowing me to become a recognizable person, the "call of conscience" summons me to act as if my own action were the primary source of their validity. The abovementioned tension between the two grounds of normativity finds its solution in Crowell's revision of Heidegger's concept of "being-guilty": endorsing an existential guilt responsibly amounts to acknowledging oneself as being one of the authors

[27] Crowell (2013, p. 171).
[28] Husserl (1970, p. 178).

of *das Man*, as being a constitutive part of the coercive power of norms stabilizing the appropriate way to go around things.

At the same time, Crowell's account of resolute authenticity demarcates itself from Heidegger's insofar as the former deems insufficient the monological character of the "call of conscience" that authentic Dasein addresses to itself and to which it can answer only in a silent and radical solitude of Angst (or anticipatory resoluteness in the face of death). Unlike Heidegger's Dasein testifying its own authenticity *to itself*, Crowell's first-person authority is re-interpreted dialogically, as "the possibility of grounding as reason-giving."[29] By "grounding," Crowell intends the capacity of the person herself to "take over being a ground," in which she transforms the space of reasons provided by shared practices into reasons that she develops in her own way and for which she takes responsibility. If the authentic self-disclosure entails "being answerable" to others in the practice of giving and asking for reasons, then the relation in which the self attests to its personal identity belongs to a certain way of being-together with others. In the end, Crowell's perspective is closer to the Ricoeurian rather than the Heideggerian notion of attestation: "to bear witness for who I am" means taking up my practical identity and letting myself be judged by others for the coherence between my words and deeds. It also entails justifying—when called upon—the endorsement of my practical identity as part of *my own* reasons for acting, without the shelter afforded by *das Man*.[30] Once again, first-person authority does not entail any sovereignty of the subject and it is not a matter of *knowledge* about who we are. It rather points to a certitude that I am the only one who can provide an answer concerning the form of life I am endorsing, even though any intelligible way of living is beholden to preexisting norms that are not of my own making. In other words, I always enter an already normatively articulated space of reasons, but I can "take over being a ground" of my own stand within such a space. What matters for our purposes is that I expose myself in assuming responsibility for principles in whose light I act and that I manifest such capacity mostly when questioned about reasons of my stances by others.

5.3 Avowals in Charles Larmore

Charles Larmore emphasizes the essentially practical nature of the self even more explicitly than Ricoeur and Crowell. On his account, "the self is constituted by its commitments"[31] and "we exist only through committing ourselves to be what we are not yet."[32] Such claims seem to resonate heavily with Sartre's emphasis on authentic existence understood as self-creation through personal "engagement"[33] and indeed,

[29] Crowell (2013, p. 187).

[30] "To take over being-a-ground, then—that is, to possibilise what grounds me—is to transform the claims of nature or society (what "one" simply does) into first-person terms, into my reasons for doing what I do." (Crowell 2013, p. 209).

[31] Larmore (2010, p. 94).

[32] Ibid., p. 143.

[33] "L'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait." (Sartre, 1996, pp. 29–30).

Larmore recognizes Sartre as one of his main inspirations. Have we then lost from sight the *decentered* nature of the self that we have previously identified as one of the main lessons resulting from our accounts of Arendt, Ricoeur and Crowell? Would my selfhood be conceived of as something I achieve through autonomous self-creation? To dispel such concerns, Larmore makes plain, in the same vein as Crowell, that the self shapes itself only within the pre-constituted space of reasons to which it is responsive. To affirm otherwise and to claim that all reasons come to being through a fundamental choice of a subject, as Sartre does, is to make it impossible and unintelligible for anyone to truly choose one's way of living. "It is the normative order that constitutes the subject and not the other way around."[34]

Furthermore, Larmore extends the range of our commitments to a much larger scale than all the other abovementioned authors. According to the author of *The Practices of the Self*, we commit ourselves every time we declare what we believe or want. This allows Larmore to extend his practical reappraisal of selfhood even further, since on his account, first-person authority involves the authority that I enjoy with regard to the content of my thought. Even though such a claim might be reminiscent of Cartesian conception of transparent and unmistakable features of self-knowledge, Larmore demarcates himself sharply from Descartes by rejecting not only the substrate conception of the self, but also the model of cognitive reflection as a primary access to one's own mind. His alternative account of first-person authority is centered on the notion of "avowals," in which we declare what we believe or want. In what manner do such avowals capture and express a special relation that we have to ourselves? How does the self-relation inherent to avowal differ from the kind of "privileged access" to one's thought that is presupposed in the Cartesian tradition?

In Larmore's account of avowals—reminiscent of Ricoeur's theory of attestation—the nature of this exceptional relation to ourselves does not amount to any epistemic authority, but only a practical one. When I say "I love you," I do not describe some existing mental or physiological state, but I am avowing something that can engage me towards unforeseen consequences. "When I commit myself by way of avowing something, I am doing what I alone can do."[35] Here too, first-person authority, consisting of the fact that any doubt would be out of place, has little to do with knowledge. In avowals, "it is my essentially practical relation to myself that is coming to expression."[36] In other words, the fundamental relation that I bear to myself is not epistemic, but rather the relation of endorsing what I am declaring. "When I declare, without observation or inference, what I believe, and do so with the sort of conviction that is characteristic of an avowal, I thereby claim an authority that I refuse to others."[37] The point made by Larmore is that my avowal does not rest upon some self-observation of my inner states of mind, a point that he shares with Anscombe and Ryle. However, in addition to these authors, Larmore attributes a different goal to all such performative acts. If my avowals do not add anything new to

[34] Larmore (2010, p. 95).
[35] Ibid., p. 133.
[36] Ibid., p. 131.
[37] Ibid., pp. 127–128.

my previous knowledge, it is because their finality consists in endorsing their objects (beliefs, desires or emotions) explicitly. That is why they occur in some typical situations as a response to being summoned by our conscience or by the others. Sometimes we are solicited to avow our beliefs or desires explicitly in order to adhere to them more resolutely and to overcome some pangs of the *fluctuatio animi*; sometimes, we are formulating our feeling for the first time in order to embrace them, to express them to another person or to deal more resolutely with their implications; or perhaps we give an account of our stance because we are interpellated, precisely as is required when entering the political arena, as I have already emphasized with the help of Arendt.

Even then however, delineating my own self should not be conceived of as the primary goal of my attention: To be generous consists first and foremost of seeing others' needs; to disclose oneself as humble forbids any desire to brag about one's humility; to reveal oneself as courageous requires upholding a cause despite the danger. In order to manifest myself as generous, humble or courageous, my attention should then remain fixed on these goals, not on myself as the author of such action. My self-disclosure is again only concomitant to my dedication to a cause and to my ability to act in line with my commitments. Moreover, it remains decentered insofar as it is judged by those who witness my deeds and words, as we have seen in Arendt. We manifest our "who" while being absorbed by the task to be performed. The reflection of one's identity is mostly the result of our reflecting back from the tasks to be attended to and from the way in which other co-actors respond to our acting. "Although we are then referred back to ourselves as the self we alone have to be, that self is here a self committed to meeting the demands of the situation," says Larmore[38] in a formulation pointing to the optical meaning of the term reflection, already emphasized by Heidegger.

6 Conclusion

In prolonging Ricoeur's, Crowell's and Larmore's perspectives until their point of convergence, we can better understand how our identity—in the sense of *ipseity*—is both constituted and manifested by the commitments that the self endorses and for which it is held accountable in front of others. Such a synthesis brings forth *a new paradigm of the first person authority* that acknowledges and accommodates our partial opacity to ourselves as well as our fundamental dependency on the shared sphere of norms that are not of our own making. When we strive to identify ourselves within such a space, we have to comply with norms of intelligibility that are not entirely transparent to our consciousness. As a result, our self-identification within such a public field can never be made fully explicit and justified. Delineating one's own identity is then a never-ending task that each of us has to master not through self-reflection understood as monological scrutiny of one's inner mental states, but rather through ongoing replying to various requirements of identifying

[38] Ibid., p. 171.

oneself: tell me where you stand! To such an interpellation—that could be also critically assessed through Althussarian or Foucauldian perspectives—I am supposed to provide my *own* answer. Admittedly, such explicit commitment appears most visibly within the field of political action; nevertheless, we are required to endorse structurally similar commitments even in our daily lives, each time we are (a) faced with a conflict between incompatible constraints; (b) challenged to acknowledge our contribution to *das Man*; (c) confronted with some questionable or even disastrous implications of the way in which we enact our identities. It is true, making explicit our tacit commitments in all these cases typically involves a kind of self-reflection. However, the nature of self-reflection is never merely cognitive and cannot be reduced to impartial knowing of one's internal state, since the abovementioned examples clearly demonstrate that the act of self-reflecting is practically motivated from the start and has practical implications on our subsequent way of being-with-others. In other words, the practical dimension of self-reflection implies that we have become a problem to ourselves and that we are urged to repair a relation to ourselves precisely where it has been disturbed. Its aim and result cannot consist of discovering some deep already existing truth, but rather of strengthening or revising one's commitments.

At the same time, the finality of all such attempts to recover oneself and to overcome the uncertainties and tensions of our being-with-others should not be reconstructed in oversimplified fashion. Since we are *immer unterwegs*, since we are destined to exist ahead of ourselves, the goal of self-reflection does not consist of restoring a unitary self-relation. It rather entails dealing further with our internal contradictions without hypocrisy and getting a better grip on tensions between our self-conception and what we have observed about our publicly disclosed self. After all, a perfect self-identity, a completely unitary mode of being belongs to stones, chairs or mountains. In the case of human beings, their non-coincidence with themselves cannot be overcome in any permanent way and their opacity to themselves can never be entirely dissipated. Any endeavor to reorganize the part of our life that has been put into question or to harmonize the tension between our reality-for-others and our self-conception cannot result in a successful conclusion without some kind of self-delusion. Quite to the contrary, all attempts and approaches promising some happy reconciliation with oneself should be regarded with suspicion, as has been already noted in Hegel's famous aphorism: "a darned sock better than a torn one; not so with self-consciousness."[39] Rather than aiming for sewing, darning or mending, i.e. rather than aiming for some intellectualized reconciliation of the inner conflict—the practical and non-illusionary self-reflection aims at a better organization of this non-coincidence that constitutes the identity of each of us. The implicit truth to which the Hegelian quotation points is that the "gap" (our state of being torn) forms part of every public commitment. Not only does the singular "I" lose control over the use and meaning of her deeds and words, but even more importantly, it is the "having to be what one is not yet" that inhabits all of our acting and that makes

[39] Hegel (1986, p. 558).

us answerable beings, caring about achieving our personal identity while never having a chance to rest peacefully upon it, once it is recognized.

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