RICŒUR ON SELF-CONSTITUTION BY ALTERITY-EXPERIENCE.
HERMENEUTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE FRACTURED COGITO

Introduction

After deconstruction and critics of the Cartesian cogito and the crisis of the subject, the notion of the self plays an important role for theoretical philosophy as well as for practical philosophy. As philosophers like Michel Foucault, Bernard Williams or Charles Taylor make clear, the self is an important notion for explaining actions and practical beliefs; ascribing actions and beliefs presupposes an entity to which they can actually be ascribed, without such an entity the ascription would not make sense. When making such ascriptions, we – at least implicitly – claim that there somehow is a reliable entity existing in time. But there seems to be some trouble with the concept of the self and (personal) identity, since some philosophers like Derek Parfit1 and - in certain regards - Gerson Reuter2 maintain that under certain ontological constraints such an entity like a self with personal identity does not exist. The crucial question, I posit, is, whether we need an ontology (in a strong sense) of the self, and – if that should indeed be the case – which ontological approach is most suitable to describe a fundamental notion of our ethical praxis in a non-monistic manner and without strong metaphysical claims.

But why is the notion of the self so interesting for philosophers? It seems to be, because it is fundamental for reflecting praxis – but at the same time it is not definable by merely descriptive criteria. Authors like Searle maintain that the self is an irreducible notion.3 In his opinion, the self is not analyzable in terms of naturalistic notions only, for example the mapping of regions of the brain, because, to only mention one point, such a reductive

1 Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons, Oxford 1984, 210-17.
2 Gerson Reuter, Wem schreiben wir mentale Eigenschaften zu? Biologische Lebewesen als Subjekte von Erfahrungen, in: W. Detel / A. Becker (Hrsg.): Der natürliche Geist, Berlin 2008, p. 65-96, p.83. At least he seems to consider the state of an person as a secondary matter of human life or it seems as if personal identity or personality would be an epiphenomenon. But we don’t have to think about substances if we are talking about a person and an organism. Already Plessner used the term of double aspectivity to binding back the talk of substance as a matter of different vocabularies (H. Plessner, Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch, Berlin 1975).