

The Meaning of Being Human in Ricoeur's *Philosophy of the Will**



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It is easy to lose one's bearings in the forest of philosophical literature created by Ricoeur and his commentators. Yet the situation is far from hopeless if we hold steadfastly to this rule: *there is no better guide to Ricoeur than Ricoeur himself*. Of course, this is neither to be interpreted as the immediate acceptance of whatever he says nor the facile abdication of that critical attitude demanded by him. Rather, it is to underline once more the active attention and the patient alertness which must be constantly accorded to him, enabling us to bring out *an* underlying melody of his thought. For indeed, an unmistakable melody comes forth through his incessant repetitions and accentuations. To hear this harmonious flow is to *understand* Ricoeur.

Methodological Perspectives: Justification of the Abstraction of the Fault and Transcendence

On the first page of *Freedom and Nature*, we are immediately struck by Ricoeur's great concern to justify the provisional abstraction of the fault and Transcendence—an abstraction which determines the scope and approach of this first part of the *Philosophy of the Will*. Our task in the present section is to examine and understand the justification of this twofold abstraction. In a first point, we look into the *necessity and possibility of bracketing the fault*; in a second point, the *necessity and possibility of bracketing Transcendence*.¹

* Part Two of a series of monographs, the first of which appeared in *Budhi* I, No.2, 1997, pp. 129-182.

¹ As far as I know, Vansina has done the only thorough historico-critical examination of Ricoeur's claim—the “ontologization” of the fault in Kierkegaard, Jaspers,

A. Necessity and Possibility of the Abstraction of the Fault

What are the reasons invoked by Ricoeur for the *necessity* of suspending the *fault* which “profoundly alters man’s intelligibility”?² We may distinguish two reasons: the one pertaining to the level of method; the other, to the level of doctrine. On the level of *method*, there is a necessity of bracketing the fault because Ricoeur’s intention is to give a pure description of the human’s essential structures—an “eidetic” description in the sense that it is a study of essences or an “elucidation of meanings.”³ The human essential structures then have to be separated from the fault which distorts them and which is only accessible to an “empirical” reflection.⁴ On the level of *doctrine*, there is a necessity of bracketing the fault because it is *ir-rational*; it is the “absurd.”⁵ By this, Ricoeur means that the fault can be conceived “only as an accident, an interruption, a fall” and “does not constitute a part of a system together with

and Heidegger. With both sympathy and force, Vansina convincingly shows that the young Ricoeur partially misconstrued the thought of these existential philosophers. According to Vansina, Ricoeur upholds a clearer demarcation between finitude and guilt as a way of *safeguarding hope* and avoiding agnosticism as well as atheism. The ultimate reason, however, is to be found in Ricoeur’s refusal of the fundamental option of existentialism for a radical historicity and extreme subjectivity, severed from all objectivity. See Dirk F. Vansina, “La problématique énochale chez P.Ricoeur et l’existentialisme,” *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 70 (November 1972), pp. 587-619 (Résumé-Abstract, pp. 636-637); see esp. pp. 612-619. See also Vansina, “Schets, orientatie en betekenis van Paul Ricoeurs wijsgerige onderneming” (1963), pp. 115-116; “Esquisse, orientation et signification de l’entreprise philosophique de Paul Ricoeur” (1964), p. 183.

² VI,7; FN,3.

³ VI, 37; FN, 37. See also VI, 7, 40, 130,215; FN, 3-4, 40-41, 136, 230. In another article, Ricoeur speaks of the “eidetic reduction” which “consists in grasping the fact (*Tatsache*) in its essence (*eidōs*).” See “Kant et Husserl” (1954), p. 46; “Kant and Husserl” (1967), in HAP, 178.

⁴ What Ricoeur means by “empirical” at the time of *Freedom and Nature* may be gleaned from the following passage: “We need to *learn* about the world of passions by a method other than existential deepening of eidetics: by daily life, novel, theater, epic. This world constitutes an obscuring of consciousness which does not lend itself to being *understood* as an intelligible dialogue of the voluntary and the involuntary.” See VI, 263-264; FN, 280 (Ricoeur’s emphases).

⁵ VI, 7, 27, 30; FN, 3, 24, 27. See also “Note sur l’existentialisme et la foi chrétienne,” *La Revue de l’Évangélisation* (Le christianisme devant les courants de la pensée moderne) 6 (1951), pp. 147-148.

the fundamental possibilities contained in willing and the involuntary.”⁶ Thus, for Ricoeur, the necessity of bracketing the fault arises from methodological as well as doctrinal considerations.

We have just mentioned that human essential structures are available to an “eidetic” description while actual existence is only available to an “empirical” reflection. If we now add that the possible fulfillment of human existence is evoked in a “poetic” discourse, we come up with the three parts—*Eidetics*, *Empirics*, and *Poetics*—that make up the *Philosophy of the Will*. To recall the remark we made in Part One, it is with one creative stroke that Ricoeur projected his monumental philosophic program. Let us pause here to show how the double abstraction of the fault and Transcendence bears on the tripartite organization of the *Philosophy of the Will*. There exists a relationship for it is, in a way, the double abstraction of the fault and Transcendence which dictates the logical priority of the *Eidetics* over the *Empirics* and the *Poetics*.⁷ First of all, the *Eidetics*—abstracting from the fault and Transcendence—reveals the *neutral structures* of human existence, that is to say, “the *fundamental possibilities* offered equally to innocence and to the fault as a common keyboard of human nature.”⁸ Secondly, the *Empirics*—acknowledging the *event* of the fault—reflects on the *concrete existence* of faulted human being, prefacing this with an analysis of *fallible* human being. Lastly, the *Poetics*—acquiescing to the *presence* of Transcendence—proposes to express in imaginative discourse the promised reconciliation of human existence with the source of creation. Such a way, however, of presenting the *Philosophy of the Will* remains static and ignores Ricoeur’s reminder that “the priority in principle of pure description over the poetics of the will does not exclude the possibility that the totality of themes might be elaborated simultaneously.”⁹ We must therefore strive

⁶ VI, 27; FN, 24. See also HF, 10; FM, XVIII.

⁷ It is interesting to note that twenty years after *Freedom and Nature*, Ricoeur still maintains the necessity of eidetics or the logical primacy of a phenomenology of the will. See “The Problem of the Will and Philosophical Discourse” (1970), p. 275. See also VI, 10, 257; FN, 6, 272 and Bourgeois, *Extension of Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic*, p. 141.

⁸ VI, 29; FN, 26 (emphases added).

⁹ VI, 36; FN, 34. In the same passage, Ricoeur immediately adds: “Empirics and poetics gave rise to that description as their own prolegomenon.”

to grasp the articulation of the three parts of the *Philosophy of the Will* in a dynamic manner.

Eidetics, Empirics, and Poetics—as we understand them—form a methodological ensemble designed by Ricoeur to support a certain vision of being human.¹⁰ We have to keep pointing out that Ricoeur wishes to safeguard both responsibility and hope as a way of access to the “reconciliation in ontology” that constitutes his philosophical endeavor.¹¹ As a philosopher vowed to the elucidation of integral human experience, Ricoeur wants to account *rationally* not only for the *reality* of *faulted* human being but also for the *possibility* of *fallible* human being. He must show then not only the relation but also the important distinction between finitude and guilt. In his eyes, the identification of finitude with guilt finds its origin in Kierkegaard.¹² From Kierkegaard on, guilt loses its *moral* character and assumes an *ontological* significance in the philosophies of existence, more specifically, those of Heidegger and Jaspers.¹³ This coincidence of guilt and finitude is esteemed by Ricoeur “to be one of the gravest confusions of contemporary ‘existential’ philosophy,” adding that here, “guilt loses its character as a *bad* use of freedom to become the constitutional limitation of existence.”¹⁴ Guilt

¹⁰ In our view, there is an intimate link between method and doctrine in philosophy. After all, isn't a method forged to unravel a set of problems and unfold a certain vision of reality? We fully agree with Stephan Strasser who affirms that “the method used by a philosopher is not a device which simply helps him to discover the truth” but rather “like the content of his philosophy, an expression of his vision of man, of nature, of the world, and of the transcendent.” See Strasser, “After Scientific Philosophy: Myth or Wisdom?” (1963), p. 41.

¹¹ See VI, 22; FN, 19. See also Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, Vol. 2, pp. 568-569.

¹² See VI, 30; FN, 27: “This movement from a theory of the fault as a fall to a theory of the fault as birth and unveiling of freedom seems to be outlined by Kierkegaard, who conjoins the two ideas most equivocally: that corruption is born of the intoxication of freedom and that consciousness is born of the fault.” See also MJ, 143-144.

¹³ VI, 28 note 1; FN, 25 note 11.

¹⁴ See “Philosophie et religion chez Karl Jaspers,” *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 37 (1957), p. 227; “The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion,” translated by Forrest W. Williams, in *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers: A Critical Analysis and Evaluation*, Library of Living Philosophers, edited by P.A. Schilpp (New York: Tudor, 1957), pp. 632-633. In his address to the Brussels International Congress of

then, according to Ricoeur, is *not* identical with human finitude. Yet there is no denying the avowal of the fault by guilty human being. Isn't the human avowal of the fault a recognition of responsibility, and thus of the close relation between finitude and guilt? Human responsibility for the fault has to be accounted for but it has to be conjugated with the hope of pardon which restores, and thus presupposes his original innocence, more original than his guilt. It must then be possible, even if only on the level of "imaginative variation"¹⁵ to arrive at the neutral structures of human existence, the "common keyboard of human nature on which mythical innocence and empirical guilt play in different ways."¹⁶ Against this background, we may now trace the dynamic interaction between *Eidetics*, *Empirics*, and *Poetics*.

Eidetics—with the double abstraction of the fault and Transcendence—is unthinkable without both the *Empirics* and the *Poetics*. As Ricoeur points out, the *Eidetics* is sustained by both the *Empirics* and the *Poetics*. In Ricoeur's words:

...the fragile and really veiled experience of my freedom would not support the pure description of this region where freedom rules if it were not completed by the exemplary myths of innocence, by a sort of reminiscence of purity which itself corresponds diametrically to the hope of purity expressed in terms of a Kingdom of God.¹⁷

Empirics, in its turn, refers to the *Eidetics* insofar as the former deals with the fault or the passions which are seen as "ramifications or

Philosophy in 1951, Ricoeur also reproaches Plotinus and Spinoza for the confusion between finitude and guilt. He says: "...the philosophies of existence, which have done so much to reintroduce error [translation here for *faute*] into philosophical reflection, proceed no differently than Plotinus and Spinoza: for them also finitude is the ultimate philosophical alibi for guilt, a temptation which seems inherent in a philosophical treatment of the notion of guilt." See "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1951), p. 136; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 230.

¹⁵ VI, 7-8, 28; FN, 3-4, 25. This is one of the basic tenets of Husserlian phenomenology retained by Ricoeur.

¹⁶ VI, 29; FN, 26. See also VI, 23; FN, 21; HF, 9; FM, XVI.

¹⁷ VI, 186; FN, 197.

distortions" of the essential structures studied by the latter.¹⁸ Furthermore, the *Empirics* also holds sway over the *Poetics*. In order for the fault to be seen "as a lost innocence, as a lost paradise," it must not be set only against a myth of innocence "before" history but also against another myth of freedom "after" history.¹⁹ As for the *Poetics*, we have already been made aware that its "hope of purity," exemplified by the myth of innocence, gives an impetus to the *Eidetics* of human fundamental structures. The myth of innocence in *Poetics*, we are told, is "the desire, the courage, and the imaginary experience which sustains eidetic description of the voluntary and the involuntary."²⁰ Likewise, the *Poetics* animates the *Empirics* of the self-imposed bondage of faulted human being with "...the hope of freedom revealed in the reminiscence of innocence."²¹

Let us go back to the question of the abstraction of the fault. What, precisely, is suspended with the bracketing of the fault? Ricoeur answers at once that "it is *the universe of passions and of the law*, in the sense in which St. Paul contrasts the law which kills with the grace which gives life."²² Passions and the law form "the vicious circle of *actual* existence."²³ The image of this "vicious circle" formed by the self is enlightening for it visualizes to us what Ricoeur calls the *fault*, that is to say, "a positing of the self by itself: the self as radical autonomy, not only moral but ontological ..."²⁴ The fault then is a "frenzied preoccupation with the self."²⁵ It is not only a self-imposed bondage to *Nothing* or *Vanity*

¹⁸ VI, 7; FN, 3. See also VI, 263-264; FN, 280.

¹⁹ VI, 28; FN, 26. See also VI, 31; FN, 29. According to Ricoeur, this is what distinguishes the Christian notion of guilt from the existentialist notion. In the Christian tradition, guilt is conceived "only as *fall*, that is to say, as a debasement with respect to ..., as a *lost* primordial innocence...." See "Philosophie et religion chez Karl Jaspers" (1957), p. 227; "The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion" (1957), translated by Forrest W. Williams, p. 632 (Ricoeur's emphases).

²⁰ VI, 31; FN, 28.

²¹ VI, 28 note 3; FN, 26 note 13.

²² VI, 23; FN, 20 (Ricoeur's emphases).

²³ VI, 24; FN, 20 (emphases added). See also VI, 293; FN, 310.

²⁴ VI, 32; FN, 29. See also J, 381.

²⁵ In an essay on Jaspers, Ricoeur considers that "vanity" is at the root of "every philosophy which passionately emphasizes the subjective." In the same passage, Ricoeur specifically makes this judgment of all existentialist philosophy: "The culpability of

but it also introduces the "inauthentic infinite" which blocks the manifestation of the "authentic infinite" of freedom.²⁶ The fault as passion is "...the will making itself prisoner of imaginary evils, a captive of Nothing or, better of Vanity."²⁷ With this self-imposed bondage of consciousness is implied a refusal of necessity which likewise entails a defiance of Transcendence.²⁸ Here, we have to note that Ricoeur in no way denies the fruitfulness of a reflection on the fault. In fact, he admits that the fault is "an event with immense possibilities" insofar as it is "a discovery of the infinite, an experience of the holy in reverse, of the holy in the demonic"²⁹ But the fault as *absurd* may only be accessible to an "empirical" analysis of concrete existence but not to an "eidetic" description of essential structures.

After giving the reasons put forward by Ricoeur for the necessity of suspending the fault, we may now inquire on the *possibility* of practising this abstraction. Is the *epoche* of the fault a feasible enterprise? It would seem so if we keep present in mind what Ricoeur tells us from the very first page of *Freedom and Nature*—that a pure phenomenological description is *not* necessarily an "empirical" description, that is to say, "a picture of the forms of man's actual voluntary activities"; a phenomenological description can be an "eidetic" description.³⁰ In this sense, Ricoeur conforms to the Husserlian view of "eidetics" as a description that "can take as its springboard even an imperfect, truncated, distorted experience, or even a purely imaginary one."³¹ In no way does this "eidetic" description imply a description of "the lost paradise of innocence" but of "the *fundamental possibilities offered equally to inno-*

philosophy takes refuge in the concern for Self (*Selbst*) which animates all of existentialist philosophy. A strange shriveling up, a frenzied preoccupation with the self, besets every such philosophy." See "Philosophie et religion chez Karl Jaspers" (1957), pp. 230, 235; "The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion" (1957), translated by Forrest W. Williams, pp. 635, 641-642.

²⁶ VI, 28, 94, 351; FN, 25, 98, 374. See also "L'expérience psychologique de la liberté" (1948), p. 450; "Dimensions d'une recherche commune" (1948), pp. 845-846.

²⁷ VI, 261; FN, 277.

²⁸ VI, 449; FN, 477.

²⁹ VI, 25; FN, 22; see also VI, 30 note 3; FN, 28 note 16.

³⁰ VI, 7; FN, 3.

³¹ VI, 28; FN, 25 (Ricoeur's emphases). See also VI, 7-8, 31; FN, 3-4, 28; H, 24-25, 223-227.

cence and to the fault as a common keyboard of human nature.”³² It is precisely because this fundamental nature “subsists even within the most complete fault” that there exists the possibility of understanding it.³³

B. Necessity and Possibility of the Abstraction of Transcendence

What are the reasons put forward this time by Ricoeur for the necessity of suspending *Transcendence* “which hides within it the ultimate origin of subjectivity”?³⁴ As in the abstraction of the fault, we may distinguish two reasons: the one pertaining to the level of method; the other to the level of doctrine. On the level of *method*, the “eidetic” description which is suitable for the elucidation of the human’s intelligible structures becomes inadequate for the “poetic” elaboration of the human being’s reconciliation with the source of creation. On the level of *doctrine*, *Transcendence*, as the intimate summit of human subjectivity, is *meta-rational*; it is the “mysterious.”³⁵ In a way, the abstraction of *Transcendence* is inseparably linked to the abstraction of the fault insofar as the experience of the fault implies an affirmation of *Transcendence*. If fault is the *captivity* of freedom, then *Transcendence* is the very *liberation* of this freedom. In the words of Ricoeur: “Thus men live *Transcendence* as purification and deliverance of their freedom, as *salvation*.”³⁶

The abstraction of *Transcendence*, however, does not imply the conception of subjectivity or the *Cogito* as a positing of the self by itself. Ricoeur repeatedly warns us that this vain self-positing of the *Cogito* is precisely the *fault*. To quote him:

The Self—written with a capital S—is a product of separation. The ruse of the fault is to insinuate the belief that participation of the will in more fundamental being would be an alienation, the submission of a slave into the hands of Another. Thus, the Self, taken in this special sense, is the I estranged from being; the Self is an alienated I.³⁷

³² VI, 29; FN, 26 (emphases added).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ VI, 7; FN, 4.

³⁵ In the Marcellian sense. See VI, 7, 181; FN, 3, 192.

³⁶ VI, 31; FN, 29 (emphasis added).

³⁷ VI, 32; FN, 29.

Human alienation ends with the “*death of Self*” which is only an aspect of a more radical experience—his reconciliation with Transcendence or his receptivity to the “*gift of being*” which “heals the rents of freedom.”³⁸ But here, we approach a new creative realm that is properly the domain of the *Poetics*.

It may be appropriate to bring to a close these methodological considerations by showing the advantages to be gained by the double abstraction of such significant realities as the fault and Transcendence. As a preliminary remark, we need to look at the abstraction proposed by Ricoeur neither as a “reduction of vision” nor as an “amputation of being.”³⁹ We must take care to interpret the meaning of *abstraction* or *epoche* in the original sense intended by the founder of phenomenology. In *Ideas I*, Husserl emphatically insists that the phenomenological *epoche* is not to be taken as a denial, as an ignoring, or even as a Cartesian doubt.⁴⁰ It is in this Husserlian sense, we believe, that Ricoeur’s abstraction of the fault and Transcendence must be understood. The fault and Transcendence are provisionally placed within parentheses in order to allow the appearance of essential structures that would otherwise be obscured.

The great merit of the abstraction of the fault consists in safeguarding human responsibility. This responsibility is based on an understanding of the primordial relationship between freedom and necessity—an understanding of freedom as “a *rule over motives, powers, and even over the necessity built into its very heart.*”⁴¹ Since this primordial relationship between freedom and necessity is distorted by the fault, it is not only necessary but advantageous to bracket it. For the fault as a vain positing of freedom can either take the form of a *defiance* of necessity or the form of a *capitulation* to necessity. In both instances, there is an evasion of responsibility. Only in bracketing do we break then to the “fundamental possibility of the ego which is its *responsibility.*”⁴²

³⁸ VI, 33; FN, 30.

³⁹ VI, 36; FN, 33.

⁴⁰ H, 96-104.

⁴¹ VI, 33; FN, 30 (Ricoeur’s emphasis); also VI, 293; FN, 310.

⁴² “Méthodes et tâches d’une phénoménologie de la volonté” (1952), p. 139; “Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will” (1967), in HAP, 232 (emphasis added).

Likewise, the great merit of the abstraction of Transcendence consists not only in safeguarding human responsibility but above all, the human *hope* of fulfillment in Transcendence. This restoration of human integrity by Transcendence ushers in a radically new and creative dimension. To avoid thinking of Transcendence as "a sort of violation of subjectivity,"⁴³ it is not only necessary but salutary to bracket it in order to prepare an understanding of its highest mystery as the "*something else*"⁴⁴ awaited by all of us in hope. To sum up, the double abstraction of the fault and Transcendence holds the advantage of safeguarding the *responsibility* and *hope* of being human by allowing us to delineate first, with clarity and rigor, the fundamental limits and possibilities of being human.

I. EIDETICS OF THE WILL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-EXISTENTIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL POSSIBILITIES OF BEING HUMAN

Here, we begin our own attempt at a "creative repetition" of the *Philosophy of the Will* by unfolding the dominant movements of *Freedom and Nature*.⁴⁵ For such a dense work where one can easily miss the forest for the trees, we need to practise a "close reading" of the text as a

⁴³ VI, 33; FN, 30.

⁴⁴ VI, 451; FN, 480 (Ricoeur's emphases).

⁴⁵ Ricoeur has rendered his own précis of this first cascade of the *Philosophy of the Will*. See "L'unité du volontaire et l'involontaire comme idée-limite," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* (session of 25 November 1950) 45 (January-March 1951), pp. 1-2, 3-22, 22-29; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea," translated by Daniel O'Connor, in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, edited by Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O'Connor (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), pp. 93-112. We take into account the principal ideas found in this presentation, amplifying those points which Ricoeur stresses in the following five articles: 1) "Compte-rendu de thèse" (1951); 2) "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP; 3) "Nature et liberté" (1962), "Nature and Freedom" (1974), translated by Donald Siewert, in PSE; 4) "Philosophy of Will and Action" (1967); and 5) "The Problem of the Will and Philosophical Discourse" (1970), translated by Peter McCormick.

whole and several “re-readings” oriented by definite themes. These latter “re-readings” then provoke a kind of revolutionary movement in the entire work, bringing the parts to gravitate around the chosen themes. In this way, we are enabled to select the significant passages germane to the topics under consideration.⁴⁶

Consequent to this procedure, our discussion will be focussed on three main topics: first, Ricoeur’s method which goes *from pure description to active participation*; second, the understanding of *the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary* brought about by this method; and third, the far-reaching significance of this reciprocity—the elaboration of a theory of human freedom or *responsibility as consent to necessity*.

A. From Pure Description to Active Participation

1. The limits of “pure description”

It may be said that Ricoeur, in beginning his study with the proposed task of *describing* and *understanding* the fundamental structures of the voluntary and the involuntary, remains faithful to Husserl, especially to the latter’s conception of “eidetic” phenomenology.⁴⁷ From the very first page, Ricoeur not only recalls but also applies the basic lessons which are to be retained from Husserlian “eidetics.”⁴⁸ To begin with,

⁴⁶ What we propose here is akin to the procedure done by Guilead in his study of the later Heidegger which met the high approval of Ricoeur himself. See “Préface” to Reuben Guilead, *Etre et liberté: Une étude sur le dernier Heidegger*, *Philosophes contemporaines, Textes et études*, 12 (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts; Paris: Béatrice Nauwelaerts, 1965), p. 7.

⁴⁷ VI, 7, 28 note 2; FN, 3-4, 25 note 12. Through the years, Ricoeur has reaffirmed his allegiance to Husserl on this score. See “Philosophy of Will and Action” (1967), p. 15; “The Problem of the Will and Philosophical Discourse” (1970), translated by Peter McCormick, pp. 275-276; and “A Philosophical Journey: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language” (1973), pp. 89-90.

⁴⁸ In his “Compte rendu de thèse,” Ricoeur explicitly cites the two methodic axioms, borrowed from Husserlian phenomenology, which ensure the possibility of his enterprise, namely the *eidetic reduction* or the immediate comprehension of the practical operations of consciousness from well-chosen examples and the *intentionality* of consciousness which provides a distinguishing mark to each practical operation. See “Compte rendu de thèse” (1951), p. 633.

description does not necessarily have to be "empirical"; it can be "eidetic" insofar as it is a study of essences or a "rigorous analysis of meanings."⁴⁹ Furthermore, this "eidetic" description can use as its basis "even an imperfect, truncated, distorted experience, or *even a purely imaginary one.*"⁵⁰ Thus, "eidetic" description discerns then the "essences" which are the *a priori* structures of all lived experiences capable of being understood directly "in terms of a single model, *specifically an imaginary model....*"⁵¹ But if from the start, Ricoeur gladly acknowledges the affinity of his method to Husserl's "eidetic reduction," he also critically distances himself from other objectionable aspects of Husserlian method, as for instance, "the famous and obscure transcendental reduction" which is "an obstacle to genuine understanding of personal body."⁵² It will be shown how Ricoeur puts his own stamp on the eidetic method.

Ricoeur embarks then on an "eidetic" description that strives to lay open the basic structures or essences of the voluntary and the involuntary. By "essences," he understands "meanings or principles of intelligibility" which are "underivable or even non-temporal."⁵³ An "eidetic" description therefore searches for the "unchanging meaning" of being human to which all experiences have to be subsumed if they are to make sense.⁵⁴ Yet, the essential meaning does not dispel the specificity of these

⁴⁹ VI, 40; FN, 40-41. See also VI, 19, 37, 215, 405; FN, 16, 37, 230, 431.

⁵⁰ VI, 28; FN, 25 (Ricoeur's emphases); also VI, 170; FN, 179.

⁵¹ VI, 8; FN, 4 (emphases added). See also VI, 185; FN, 195; HF, 128, 161; FM, 170, 222.

⁵² VI, 7; FN, 4. In a well-thought out article, Kohak examines the reasons for the hesitation of existential philosophers like Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and even Ricoeur to fully accept the phenomenological and eidetic reductions, despite the deep indebtedness of these philosophers to Edmund Husserl. Kohak contends that the phenomenological and eidetic reductions are not only presupposed but also applicable within the context of existential philosophy. What Husserl brackets is not "existence" or the incarnate Cogito understood by the existential philosophers but "existence" insofar as it is spontaneously objectified by the "natural standpoint." It is therefore the causal, objectivistic *mode of explaining* existence—not "existence" as experienced in the first person—which Husserl brackets or "puts out of action." See Erazim V. Kohak, "Existence and the Phenomenological Epokhe," *Journal of Existentialism* 8 (Fall 1967-1968), No. 29, p. 22. See also "Translator's Introduction" to FN, XIII-XIV.

⁵³ VI, 8, 130, 400; FN, 4, 136, 425.

⁵⁴ VI, 215; FN, 230.

experiences.⁵⁵ It is in this light that Ricoeur speaks of revealing the *fundamental possibilities* of being human.

Far from being banal description, however, an "eidetic" description only merits the name "phenomenology" insofar as it is "rigorous," precisely when it poses the preliminary question of the meaning of the appearance itself of things.⁵⁶ Eidetic phenomenology exercises its rigor primarily in the *clarification* of existence itself through the use of concepts and in the *delimitation* of principal concepts.⁵⁷ *Rigor*, nevertheless, must not be confused with *rigidity*. Eidetic phenomenology is a "sober" and "patient" brand of reflection.⁵⁸ As a "nonreductive yet descriptive thought," it arises from "the commitment to take things as they present themselves."⁵⁹ It does not only respect the originally given but also displays a radical openness to the broad and diverse range of phenomena.⁶⁰ In no way does it pretend to be a "totalitarian" form of thought but only a "preface" to reflection, leaving certain questions available for further development.⁶¹

⁵⁵ VI, 17; FN, 14. See also "L'attention: Etude phénoménologique de l'attention et de ses connexions philosophiques" (1940), p. 15.

⁵⁶ "Phénoménologie existentielle" (1957), p. 10.8; "Existential Phenomenology" (1967), in HAP, 203; "Présentation de la philosophie française contemporaine" (1966), pp. 15-16. According to Ricoeur, this is how Kant and Hegel understood the term well ahead of Husserl. See "L'humanité de l'homme: Contribution de la philosophie française contemporaine" (1962), p. 317.

⁵⁷ VI, 20, 37; FN, 17, 37. See also "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 115; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 214; "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), p. 26; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), p. 110.

⁵⁸ VI, 399; FN, 425. See also "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 114; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 213.

⁵⁹ VI, 19, 51; FN, 16, 52. See also "Philosophy of Will and Action" (1967), p. 20.

⁶⁰ VI, 76, 364; FN, 79, 388. We need to precise that Ricoeur distinguishes two tendencies struggling within Husserlian phenomenology. As a *descriptive method*, it manifests a generous effort to preserve the richness and diversity of the real. But as an *idealistic interpretation* of its own descriptive activity, Husserlian phenomenology represents a "radical effort to reduce all otherness to the nomadic life of the ego, to ipseity." See "Etude sur les Méditations Cartésiennes de Husserl," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 52 (February 1964), pp. 108-109; "A Study of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, I-IV," (1967), in HAP, 113-114.

⁶¹ "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), p. 28; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), p. 112. It

Ricoeur further nuances and deepens his method of eidetic description by differentiating phenomenological *understanding* (*comprendre*) from scientific *explanation* (*expliquer*).⁶² It is important to grasp the methodological contrast between understanding and explanation for upon it rests the manner of approaching the relationship of the voluntary and the involuntary. On the one hand, *explanation* proceeds "from the bottom up"; it is a reductive movement of thought where "the simple is the reason for the complex."⁶³ On the other hand, description as *understanding* proceeds "from the top down"; it is a non-reductive movement of thought where "the one is the reason for the many."⁶⁴ As a "*distinctive understanding*," description unveils "*the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary*."⁶⁵ This relation of reciprocity implies that the voluntary has no meaning of its own. It asserts that *only the relation of the voluntary and the involuntary is intelligible*. In Ricoeur's terse formula: "The involuntary is *for* the will and the will is *by reason* of the

is actually Bréhier who ventures the remark on phenomenology as a "preface" to reflection during the discussion following Ricoeur's exposition.

⁶² VI, 8-9; FN, 4-5. Let us note here that this is certainly not the first time Ricoeur opposes *understanding* to *explanation*. As early as 1940, he marks their essential difference. See "L'attention: Etude phénoménologique de l'attention et de ses connexions philosophiques" (1940), p. 1. He dwells again on this point in other instances: MJ, 77; "Le renouvellement du problème de la philosophie chrétienne par les philosophies de l'existence," in *Le problème de la philosophie chrétienne, Les Problèmes de la Pensée Chrétienne*, 4 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), p. 49; "Note sur l'existentialisme et la foi chrétienne" (1951), p. 143. In an article written in 1977, Ricoeur questions the "blunt opposition" between explanation and understanding. Instead of a methodological dualism, he suggests a "refined dialectic" wherein explanation and understanding would not mutually exclude each other but rather constitute "relative moments in a complex process called interpretation." According to this relation of mutual interpenetration: "Understanding precedes, accompanies, closes, and thus *envelops* explanation. In return, explanation *develops* understanding analytically." See "Expliquer et comprendre: Sur quelques connexions remarquables entre la théorie du texte, la théorie de l'action et la théorie de l'histoire," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 75 (February 1977), pp. 127, 145; "Explanation and Understanding: On Some Remarkable Connections among the Theory of the Text, Theory of Action, and Theory of History" (1978), translated by Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart, in PPR, pp. 150, 165 (Ricoeur's emphases).

⁶³ VI, 8-9, 236, 402; FN, 4-5, 86, 251, 427.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* See also "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 120; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 218.

⁶⁵ VI, 8-9, 18; FN, 4-5, 15 (Ricoeur's emphases)

involuntary.”⁶⁶ It is the voluntary one then which gives meaning to the *multiple* involuntary.⁶⁷

Explanation results from a “prejudice of naturalism” insofar as it reduces a phenomenon to the causal factors to which it can be attributed.⁶⁸ In this way, understanding entails a critique of naturalism insofar as it preserves a phenomenon in its full significance for the Cogito.⁶⁹ It involves then a “reversal of viewpoint and a discovery of the Cogito,” a “Copernican revolution” in understanding which Ricoeur regards as the first achievement in philosophy.⁷⁰

Ricoeur is not unaware of the limitations of pure description. For one thing, even if eidetic description may not be a naturalistic reduction, it always begins with a “definite loss of being.”⁷¹ Although Ricoeur repeatedly sees the necessity of going beyond eidetic description, his whole attitude consists in first drawing out all that it can give.⁷² There is thus no question of prematurely abandoning it. The task is to persevere in applying this limited understanding which is an “understanding of the threshold.”⁷³ It is part of Ricoeur’s genius not only to have seen the limits of pure description but also to have fully exploited these very limits.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ VI, 82; FN, 86 (Ricoeur’s emphases).

⁶⁷ VI, 37, 281; FN, 37, 297.

⁶⁸ VI, 82; FN, 86. See also VI, 357; FN, 381.

⁶⁹ VI, 51, 66, 181; FN, 52, 68, 191.

⁷⁰ VI, 16, 206; FN, 12, 221. See also VI, 9, 33; FN, 5, 30-31.

⁷¹ VI, 19, 37; FN, 16, 37.

⁷² VI, 37, 82; FN, 37, 85.

⁷³ See “L’antinomie de la réalité humaine et le problème de l’anthropologie philosophique,” *Il Pensiero* ((September-December 1960), No. 3, p. 274; “The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology,” translated by Daniel O’Connor, in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, edited by Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O’Connor (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967), p. 391. In this translation, “intelligence du seuil” is simply rendered as “preliminary understanding.”

⁷⁴ The following remarks are indicative of Ricoeur’s keen awareness of the limits and validity of a method: “One cannot, as a matter of fact, practise a method without being attentive to its limitations; there is a chance that in discovering what limits a method, one also discovers what justifies and founds it.” See “Sympathie et respect: Phénoménologie et éthique de la seconde personne” (1954), p. 380 (my translation). Ten years later, Ricoeur makes a similar remark: “The consciousness of the validity of a method is never separable from the consciousness of its limits.” See “Structure et

2. The resources of "active participation"

We are informed that within each of the three broad sections of *Freedom and Nature*—corresponding to the three moments of the voluntary and the involuntary—the descriptive method will follow "a transcending movement which appears ultimately alien to the native genius of Husserlian psychology."⁷⁵ With this broadening and deepening of pure description, Ricoeur breaks out of the confines of Husserl's "eidetics" which is "all too clear."⁷⁶ The paradoxical thing is that "eidetics" itself presupposes its own surpassing "in a certain tact, in a certain spirit of delicacy which uncovers the birth, awakening and growth within the limits of mature forms."⁷⁷

What is demanded then of us on this new level? The present task for us is the conversion of our onlooker's *passive attention* into an *active participation* in the mystery of our existence. In Ricoeur's own words:

The bond which in fact joins the willing to its body requires a type of attention other than an intellectual attention to structures. It requires that I participate actively in *my incarnation as a mystery*. I need to pass from objectivity to existence.⁷⁸

Here, we are being asked to move away from an *intellectual* into an *existential* regimen, to take leave of the level of "statics" for the "dynamics" of existence.⁷⁹ In Marcellian terms, active participation obliges us to leap from the level of "problem" to the level of "mystery." On the level of "problem," "the criteria of validity are independent of the person who recognizes them" while on the level of "mystery," "I am in 'involved,' 'in the sense that one is involved in an affair.'"⁸⁰ Active participation is none other than a *recollection* (*recueillement*) which is, at the same time, an

herméneutique" (1963), in CI, 34, 48; "Structure and Hermeneutics" (1974), translated by Kathleen McLaughlin, in CINT, 30-31, 44.

⁷⁵ VI, 18; FN, 14.

⁷⁶ VI, 204; FN, 219.

⁷⁷ VI, 136; FN, 143.

⁷⁸ VI, 17-18; FN, 14 (Ricoeur's emphases).

⁷⁹ VI, 129, 155, 252; FN, 135, 163, 268.

⁸⁰ "L'attention: Etude phénoménologique de l'attention et de ses connexions philosophiques" (1940), p. 27 (my translation). See also MJ, 361.

availability (*disponibilité*), “an abandon to” and “a relaxation in the presence of” the real.⁸¹

With this unabashed use of Marcellian terminology, Ricoeur acknowledges the profound influence of Gabriel Marcel upon his thought. It is significant to note that Marcel’s method of active participation enables Ricoeur to transcend Husserl’s method of eidetic description. By strategically situating himself at the intersection of “two demands: those of thought nourished by the mystery of *my* body, and those of thought concerned with the distinctions inherited from Husserlian descriptive method,” Ricoeur meets the twin requirements of philosophical thinking which are *clarity* and *depth*.⁸² Through the dialectic of pure description and active participation, these two preoccupations are thus brought into a dynamic equilibrium: first, the concern to *understand* (*comprendre*) even those sectors of consciousness that seem to resist lucidity and order; second, the exigence—leading back to the existentialist thinkers and even beyond them, to Ravaisson, Maine de Biran, and Descartes—to *experience* (*sentir*) the mysterious bond with my body.⁸³ In a way, a certain priority goes to understanding which Ricoeur takes as “the duty of the philosopher.”⁸⁴ But if in understanding, we *distinguish* with the aid of concepts, we only do so in order to *promote the living unity* of the voluntary and the involuntary. In sum, the originality and force of the method in vigor in *Freedom and Nature* lies in the fruitful interplay of pure description and active participation.

B. *The Reciprocity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary*

It may be a valuable aid to first pass in review the global *design* of Ricoeur’s descriptive enterprise in *Freedom and Nature*. After this summary recall, we may then proceed to the study proper of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary. This principle of reciprocity supplies us with two movements of thought to be developed: first, *the reintegration of consciousness in the body*; and second, *the reintegration*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28. See also MJ, 366-367.

⁸² VI, 18; FN, 15 (Ricoeur’s emphasis).

⁸³ MJ, 38.

⁸⁴ “Compte-rendu de thèse” (1951), p. 634 (my translation).

of the body in consciousness. These will make up the two main parts of this section.

To shed *new* light on the age-old question of the unity of being human—such is Ricoeur's principal goal in *Freedom and Nature*.⁸⁵ As he readily attests himself, the *three guiding ideas* of this book are:

...the *reciprocity* of the voluntary and the involuntary, the necessity of going beyond psychological dualism and seeking the common standard of the involuntary and the voluntary in *subjectivity*, and finally the primacy of *conciliation* over paradox.⁸⁶

The study then of the voluntary and the involuntary offers a propitious occasion to revitalize "the classical problem of the relations between 'freedom' and 'nature,'" or, as we express it in the perspective of our work, between *responsibility* and *necessity*.⁸⁷

The *reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary* is the primary situation that orients Ricoeur's descriptive enterprise. This reciprocity has to be taken in at least three senses. First of all, it affirms the indivisible unity of the voluntary and the involuntary: "Only the living interrelationship between the voluntary and the involuntary is intelligible."⁸⁸ Secondly, it means that the involuntary has no meaning by itself. Thirdly, it signifies that the voluntary determines the meaning of the involuntary: "The involuntary is *for* the will and the will is *by reason* of the involuntary."⁸⁹ This reversal of perspective dictates the circular movement of description which begins by outlining the voluntary function, then proceeds by examining the involuntary structures needed to make the voluntary function intelligible, and ends by integrating the involuntary structures in the voluntary synthesis.

⁸⁵ "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), p. 1; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), p. 93. See also "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 114; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 213.

⁸⁶ VI, 319; FN, 341 (Ricoeur's emphases). See also VI, 21, 42; FN, 18, 42.

⁸⁷ "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), pp. 4, 22, 26; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), pp. 95, 108, 111.

⁸⁸ "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 119; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 218. See also VI, 8; FN, 5.

⁸⁹ VI, 82; FN, 86 (Ricoeur's emphases).

Decision, action, and consent are the three essential aspects of the voluntary that are distinguished by Ricoeur. According to him: "To say 'I will' means first 'I decide,' secondly 'I move my body,' thirdly 'I consent.'"⁹⁰ These three moments of the will give rise to the three cycles of description that constitute the three main parts of the book.

In determining the three moments of the will, Ricoeur appeals to Husserl's well-known principle of the *intentionality* of consciousness—all consciousness is a consciousness of...⁹¹ However, Ricoeur's interpretation of this "golden rule of Husserlian phenomenology" is distinctive in that it associates the notion of intentionality, not with the reflective acts of pure consciousness, but with the dynamism of the will: "...consciousness constitutes itself by the type of object to which it projects itself."⁹² If we now designate the activity of consciousness as *noesis* and the object of this activity as *noema*, we may call the approach of Ricoeur as a *noetic-noematic* method. This method maintains that the noetic pole is known through the noematic pole; the *experiencing* consciousness reveals itself in the *experienced* object.⁹³ Consequently, the articu-

⁹⁰ VI, 10; FN, 6. These three moments, which description reveals as complementary, present themselves in a progressive order when considered from the viewpoint of "practical mediation." This means to say that the distance from things gradually disappears as one moves from decision to consent. See "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), pp. 5, 18; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), pp. 96, 105.

⁹¹ Ricoeur defines "intentionality" as follows: "With Husserl, we shall call the centrifugal movement of thought turned towards an object intentionality: I am in that which I see, imagine, desire, or will. The first intention of thought is not to prove my existence to me, but to relate me to the perceived, imagined, or willed object." See VI, 42; FN, 42-43; see also VI, 363-364; FN, 387.

⁹² VI, 10; FN, 6. Ricoeur's distinctive interpretation of intentionality is also noted by Rasmussen in his book. See Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology: A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 31.

⁹³ Granted that Ricoeur is greatly indebted to Husserl, it is important to find out how the former has "read" the latter. For, as Gisel points out in an impressive article, what Ricoeur retains from Husserl already foreshadows the characteristic traits of the hermeneutic model that will be later on elaborated. Ricoeur strongly objects to the presentation of Husserlian phenomenology as a simple case of psychology of introspection. On the contrary, phenomenology inculcates the lesson that there is no apprehension of the self except through the detour of its objective expressions in the world. In short, the *noesis* can only be deciphered in the *noema*. See Pierre Gisel, "Paul Ricoeur," *Etudes théologiques et religieuses* 49 (1974), No. 1, p. 32.

lations of willing are to be discerned in the forms of the "willed" which, as correlate of willing, command the description.

But what are the forms of the "willed"? First of all, the intentional object of decision is the *project*. The project then is the correlate of decision, the first moment of willing. However, the project only becomes real through effective action brought about by voluntary movement. This effective action or *pragma* is the correlate of action, the second moment of willing. But the will still has to acquiesce to the necessity to which it cannot change. The detour into the voluntary makes us aware of this *necessity* which is the correlate of consent, the third moment of willing.

Recalling now the principle of reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary, Ricoeur announces that the articulations of willing, not only help in delineating the forms of the willed, but also serve as points of reference for the involuntary structures. Thus, to understand the project as object of decision, one must consider the *motives* for it. In the same way that motives have to be referred to choice, the bodily abilities as *organs* of voluntary motion have to be related to effort. Finally, to understand the necessity to which the will must consent, one has to inquire into the three forms of the absolutely involuntary—character, the unconscious, and biological life. Neither motive nor organ, this absolutely involuntary is the invincible *situation* that limits the will.

After giving a summary overview of *Freedom and Nature*, let us now turn to the understanding of the *reciprocity* of the voluntary and the involuntary. This reciprocity may be taken as a struggle against a "dualism of understanding" which Ricoeur also calls a "dualism of method"

...because it is instigated by the very method by which consciousness interprets its own life and because it expresses the two directions of thought, the reflective direction which tends to a positing of the *cogito* by itself, and the direction of objectification which tends to absorb the body and all subjective life into the system of objects elaborated at the level of scientific consciousness.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), p. 19; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), p. 105. See also VI, 17; FN, 14; "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), pp. 127, 130; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 223, 225.

It is important to note that these two movements of thought are *interdependent*. At the same time that consciousness recoils upon itself and *exiles* itself in its capacity for reflection, it also *expels* outside itself the body and pushes it to the side of things.⁹⁵ The task of *understanding* then is to reinsert these two opposing tendencies of consciousness within a *more fundamental* attitude—that of *reciprocity*.⁹⁶ Thus, the recuperation will also take two directions, paralleling the movement of reflection and the movement of objectification: first, the reintegration of consciousness in the body, and second, the reintegration of the body in consciousness. Or to speak in a Marcellian manner, we have to make a “second reflection” to recuperate, first the non-reflective aspects of the voluntary, and second, the non-objective aspects of the involuntary.⁹⁷

As we have pointed out, the triadic structure of the voluntary and the involuntary gives rise to the three main parts of *Freedom and Nature*, namely, *deciding: choice and motives*, *acting: voluntary motion and capabilities*, and *consenting: consent and necessity*. Each main part follows Ricoeur’s *horizontal* procedure of describing, first, the voluntary structures; second, the involuntary structures; and third, their synthesis. Thus, the first part opens with the pure description of deciding, continues with the study of the bodily involuntary and motivation, and closes with the movement from hesitation to choice. The second part starts with the pure description of acting, goes on with the analysis of bodily spontaneity, and finishes with the discussion of moving and effort. The third part begins with the pure description of consenting, proceeds to examine the three forms of experienced necessity—character,

⁹⁵ Ricoeur makes the observation that “the expulsion of the body beyond the circle of subjectivity” may be interpreted, from a certain viewpoint, as “the revenge of a subjectivity which feels exposed, abandoned, thrown into the world and has lost the naïveté of the original compact.” See VI, 21; FN, 18. See also “L’unité du volontaire et de l’involontaire comme idée-limite” (1951), pp. 4-5; “The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea” (1967), p. 95.

⁹⁶ For Ricoeur, “reciprocity” and “practical mediation” are interchangeable terms. By “practical mediation,” he means “the pact, the connivance which binds the consenting will to its situation, to the absolute involuntary element reasserted in its subjectivity.” See “L’unité du volontaire et de l’involontaire comme idée-limite” (1951), p. 18; “The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea” (1967), p. 105.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 9, 11; *ibid.*, pp. 96, 99, 100.

the unconscious, and biological life—and concludes with the movement from refusal to consent.⁹⁸ One can, however, follow a *vertical* procedure in describing the reciprocal bond of the voluntary and the involuntary.⁹⁹ Here, one puts the accent on the *reintegration of consciousness in the body* and the *reintegration of the body in consciousness* by confronting, side by side the two aspects of this reintegration on the three levels of the will. We prefer to follow this *vertical* procedure in order to stress the primitive pact of the voluntary and the involuntary.¹⁰⁰

1. *The reintegration of consciousness in the body*

In this movement of reintegrating consciousness in the body, we must “pass beyond self-consciousness and see consciousness as adhering to its body, to all its involuntary life and through them, to a world of action”¹⁰¹ Our task here is to show this adherence of consciousness to its body on the three levels of the will: *deciding*, *acting*, and *consenting*.

a. *Deciding*

We begin with the *pure description of deciding*.¹⁰² Three aspects need to be pointed out: the *intentional* aspect that culminates in the *project*,

⁹⁸ One cannot but be awed here by the “triadic allure” of Ricoeur’s thought. According to Michel Philibert: “The setting up of a threeway colloquium, like the use of trilogies and triptychs, signals an allure of Ricoeur that will mark his work from one end to the other and goes further than school rhetoric.” See Philibert, *Paul Ricoeur ou la liberté selon l’espérance*, p. 7 (my translation).

⁹⁹ This is actually Ricoeur’s procedure in his presentation of the theses of *Le volontaire et l’involontaire* before the Société Française de Philosophie. See “L’unité du volontaire et de l’involontaire comme idée-limite” (1951); “The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea” (1967).

¹⁰⁰ This is the same argument of Michel Renaud in the first Licentiate thesis on Ricoeur presented at the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie in Louvain. See Renaud, “Anthropologie et épistémologie chez Paul Ricoeur” (Licentiate thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1963), 247 p., esp. pp. 18, 33.

¹⁰¹ VI, 12; FN, 8. See also “L’unité du volontaire et de l’involontaire comme idée-limite” (1951), p. 5; “The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea” (1967), p. 96.

¹⁰² We may take this stage of pure description as an eidetic abstraction within the broad abstraction of the fault and Transcendence. Unlike the latter abstraction

the *reflexive* aspect that refers to *myself*, and the *receptive* aspect that brings out the *motivation* of willing.

Before analyzing the intentional aspect of decision, let us see the justification of the distinction between *decision* and voluntary *action*. It is possible to distinguish them because their interval is *not* necessarily one of *time* but of *meaning*: "It is one thing to *indicate* an action in a project, another thing to act bodily *in conformity with the project*."¹⁰³ The decision and its execution may either occur simultaneously or separately. In any case, the execution of a project is still its criterion. Notwithstanding this, "a decision can be separated in time from any corporeal execution, yet it is the *power* or *capability for action* (movement) which makes it an authentic decision."¹⁰⁴ This "*power*" differentiates a voluntary decision from a simple wish or command.

The intentionality of decision: the project

Against Descartes who defines thought in terms of self-consciousness, Ricoeur maintains with Husserl that the originality of thought lies in its *intentionality*—its outward movement towards an object. Before proving my existence to me, thought first relates me to the perceived, imagined, or willed object.¹⁰⁵ In this perspective, "to decide" means to turn myself *to* the project. Ricoeur offers us this definition of *decision*: it "...*signifies, that is, designates in general, a future action which depends on me and which is within my power*."¹⁰⁶ Unlike other types of judgments which "designate in general,"¹⁰⁷ decision affirms that something is "to

which remains operative throughout the entire work, the former abstraction ceases at the close of this first stage. With its ceasing, we regain the presence of the *body*, lived *duration*, and the *event* of the *Fiat* of choice.

¹⁰³ VI, 38; FN, 38 (Ricoeur's emphases). See also VI, 215, 400; FN, 230, 426.

¹⁰⁴ VI, 39; FN, 40 (Ricoeur's emphases).

¹⁰⁵ VI, 42, 363-364; FN, 42-43, 387.

¹⁰⁶ VI, 42; FN, 43 (Ricoeur's emphases). See also "L'unité du volontaire et de l'involontaire comme idée-limite" (1951), p. 6; "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea" (1967), p. 96; "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté" (1952), p. 117; "Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will" (1967), in HAP, 216; HF, 68-69; FM, 78-79.

¹⁰⁷ We follow Kohak's translation for "*désigner à vide*." See his note on this term in FN, XXXVI. From Husserl, Ricoeur borrows the two different ways of designating an object: "in general" (or "emptily") and "specifically" (or "concretely"). *To designate*

be done." Among practical judgments, decision further distinguishes itself in that it is a *categorical affirmation of a personal action*.¹⁰⁸ In brief, I involve myself in the project which is *to be done by me*.

The most significant feature of the *project* is its *future temporality*: "To decide is to anticipate."¹⁰⁹ The future is intended by an act within my power. But the future can also be intended by acts not within my power like a command, wish, desire, or fear. In such instances, I submit myself to the future. Far from equating it to the project of consciousness, Ricoeur holds that the future is not an act but the *condition* of an act, "the *fundamental situation* which makes possible the future dimension of the project of expectation and other acts."¹¹⁰ I do not project then a future; I project *in* the future. Here, we see that consciousness acts within the context of a future it does not create.

Decision, we have seen, signifies an action within my power. Ricoeur clarifies this power or capability of decision with the help of the idea of the *possible*. To dispel any ambiguity, *theoretical* possibility has to be distinguished from *practical* possibility: "An event becomes possible—a specific possibility—because I project it."¹¹¹ This *possibility of the project*, however, has to accord itself with the *possibility of the world* which has an inflexible order. Both these possibilities converge together in the *possibility of the body*—its capacity to realize the project. These three forms of possibility, which are contemporaneous, do not exhaust the notion of the possible. The possible not only concerns the action but also the very *being* of the subject: "For in doing something, I *make myself be*. I am my own *capacity for being*."¹¹² This theme of self-determination serves as the transition to the *reflexive* aspect of decision.

in general is to signify an object having definite characteristics, without seeing or imagining its characteristics. *To designate specifically* is to perceive an object before me, seeing or even imagining its characteristics.

¹⁰⁸ VI, 45; FN, 46.

¹⁰⁹ VI, 48; FN, 48.

¹¹⁰ VI, 51; FN, 51-52 (Ricoeur's emphases).

¹¹¹ VI, 53; FN, 54.

¹¹² VI, 54; FN, 55 (Ricoeur's emphases)