INTRODUCTION

For the person who takes philosophy seriously, the question of the meaning of human existence cannot but remain a fundamental concern. It may even be affirmed that the unique vocation of the philosopher is to understand, with increasing depth and rigour, the significance of being human. What then is the meaning of human existence? This is the simple but global question, which I have endeavoured to answer in this consideration of the thought of Paul Ricoeur.

But why the thought of Ricoeur? The choice is far from fortuitous. First of all, the understanding of human existence is the central reference of his philosophical exploration.1 Secondly, a distinctive feature of his philosophical venture is the “reflective” or “hermeneutical” way in which he approaches the human self.2 Since there exists no imme-

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1From the point of view of their development, the writings of Ricoeur manifest a continual concern with the meaning of human existence. In the first book-length study in English devoted to Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology, Rasmussen writes: “There is a central theme in the writings of Paul Ricoeur. Fundamentally his thought emanates from the question ‘who is man?’. Methodologically his works represent a systematic quest for the resources for understanding the nature of man.” See David M. Rasmussen, Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology: A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricoeur (hereafter referred to as MLA) (1971), p.3. Ricoeur himself has characterized his work as a “philosophical anthropology.” See Charles E. Reagan, Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work (1996), pp. 19, 49, 99, 118.

2It was Vansina who first described Ricoeur’s philosophical enterprise as a “reflective philosophy of limits.” See Dirk F. Vansina, “Schets, orientatie en betekenis van
diate knowledge, the human self has to be recovered in its concrete full-
ness through its expressions in ideas, actions, works, monuments, and
institutions. 3 Finally, his philosophical project aims at no less than an
integral understanding of human existence, taking into account both
the limits and the possibilities of being human. Ricoeur’s thought there-
fore strives to explicate the ultimate meaning of the human self, its
relationship to itself, to other selves, and to Transcendence. 4

In the course of the three essays that will appear in this and two sub-
sequent issues of Budhi, I intend to bring out the meaning of human
existence as elaborated in Paul Ricoeur’s Philosophy of the Will and in
his “social-political writings”. 5 For the greater part, these texts were

Paul Ricoeurs wijsgerige onderneming,” (1963), pp. 170-176. This study is a condensed
version of Vansina’s doctoral dissertation, the first one to deal with Ricoeur’s philoso-
phy—”De filosofie van Paul Ricoeur: Problematiek en dialektiek van zijn metode”
comprehensive essay was later on published in French as “Esquisse, orientation et sig-
nification de l’entreprise philosophique de Paul Ricoeur,” (1964), pp. 179-208, 305-
321.

Ihde, who wrote the first thesis in English on Ricoeur in 1964—”Paul Ricoeur’s
Phenomenological Methodology and Philosophical Anthropology” (Ph.D. disserta-
tion, Boston University, 1964), 248 p. — and who later on published the first book-
length introduction to Ricoeur’s thought, also acknowledges the “reflective” orienta-
tion of Ricoeur. According to Ihde: “The guiding commitment, made in varying ways
throughout his career is to what Ricoeur calls reflective philosophy. In its broadest sense
reflective philosophy stands in the Socratic tradition of seeking to understand one-
self in understanding man.” See Don Ihde, Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philoso-

3 In Ricoeur’s own words: “Only the consideration of works definitively distin-
guishes the reflective method from every kind of introspection by insisting on this
detour through the specific objects of our potency for existing.” See “Nature et liberté”
(1962), p. 35; PSE, 40.

4 By stressing this, I align myself with the interpretation put forward in Bergeron’s
remarkable study of Ricoeur’s thought. See Rosaire Bergeron, La vocation de la liberté
mainly focuses on the themes of method and language, thus designedly underplaying the
“religious” dimension of Ricoeur’s philosophical project. See Ihde, HP, pp. XIX-
XX, 142 note 1.

5 Philosophy of the Will comprises two volumes. For Volume One, see VI translated
into English as FN. Volume Two, Finitude et culpabilité was published in two parts:
L’homme faillible HF translated as Fallible Man FM; La symbolique du mal SM as The
Symbolism of Evil SE.
written by Ricoeur between 1950 and 1965. For this reason, one may speak of them as his "early writings". These "early" writings may be characterized as dealing more explicitly on "existential" concerns, in contrast to the "latter" or more recent writings that treat more predominantly on "hermeneutic" questions. For my purpose, I will intensively examine Ricoeur's writings from 1936 (the year of publication of his first article) to 1965 (the year of publication of De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud which clearly demarcates the "hermeneutic" period). At the same time, I make some allowances for writings that belong more to the "hermeneutic" period like essays on language published before 1965 and for "social-political writings" published after 1965. The twofold division of Ricoeur's thought, after all, is not to be interpreted in a rigid manner. The "existential" period and the "hermeneutic" period are not two separate, clear-cut stages. They are more like two strains, converging at times in one and the same creative movement.

Several reasons encouraged me to pursue this tripartite study of Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and "social-political writings". Foremost among these is the awareness that these sources hold a vast richness worthy of exploration. At the same time, I realize that an exhaustive presentation of all the aspects of Ricoeur's thought will have to wait for

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A first collection of the "social-political writings", Histoire et vérité HV was put out by Ricoeur in 1955, undergoing second and third editions in 1964 and 1967, each time being augmented with other texts. For the English translation History and Truth based on the 1964 edition, see HT. For another collection in English translation, see PSE. For a recent collection on social-political issues, see Lectures 1: Autour du politique (hereafter L1).

6 Ricoeur himself makes use of the distinction between "existential" and "hermeneutic" in appraising his philosophical itinerary. See "A Philosophical Journey: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language" (1973), pp. 88-96.

7 For Ricoeur's first article, see "Responsabilité de la pensée" (1936). For De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud, see DI. The English translation Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation inverts the French title. To observe Ricoeur's original emphasis on interpretation, I prefer DI as abbreviation for this work.

8 To my knowledge, the first treatise explicitly dealing with questions of language dates back to 1962. See "Introduction au problème des signes et du langage" (1962). An example of a social-political text published after 1965 is "Le philosophe et le politique devant la question de la liberté" (1969).
another occasion. For now, I have reserved for myself the task of examining in depth Ricoeur's "early" writings as a kind of preparation for a future encounter with his most recent writings. But more importantly, I want to offset the tendency of previous lengthy studies on Ricoeur's thought in English that seem to deliberately underplay these basic texts, even such a central text as the Philosophy of the Will. As a consequence, the wider context and proper significance of Ricoeur's ongoing investigations—his Empirics or the dialogue with the human sciences like psychoanalysis, linguistics—become hidden from view. Above all, I contend that only by meditating long and hard on the "early" texts can one appreciate the scope of Ricoeur's philosophical venture and the novelty of the hermeneutical turn of his thought.

I do not think then that Ricoeur's "early" writings have been completely superseded by his recent writings. One wonders whether there is not perhaps a certain forgetfulness of the former texts engendered by a vague familiarity with their themes. In any case even though there may not be much present interest on Ricoeur's "early" thought, it is this same thought that has enabled his "hermeneutic" reflection to become what it is today.

It may well be that one breaks new ground in Ricoeur studies by attempting to effect the rapprochement of the Philosophy of the Will to the

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9 In saying this, I do not intend to neglect Ricoeur's hermeneutical writings. It would not only be naive but also unfair to interpret Ricoeur without considering his recent writings. But in this study, these sources are used insofar as they throw light on the original problematic which I take to be at the heart of Ricoeur's philosophical quest—the constant and approximative effort to express the manifold sense of human existence. See Sens et existence: En hommage à Paul Ricoeur, recueil préparé sous la direction de Gary-Brent Madison (1975), p. 7.

10 Mary Gerhart thinks it regrettable that "many American readers are acquainted with only isolated texts such as his Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation." According to her, this work is not a central text in terms of Ricoeur's life work. She also adds that the English translations of Ricoeur's major volumes have not permitted an easy overview of the development of his thought. See Mary Gerhart, "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory as Resource for Theological Reflection" (1975), p. 496. David Stewart is right in saying that "the unity" of the Philosophy of the Will is "obscured by its having been translated by three different persons and published by three different publishers." See David Stewart, "Paul Ricoeur and the Phenomenological Movement" (1968), p. 234 note 1.
“social-political writings.” In deciding to bring about the meeting of these two sets of texts, I make the wager that there exists a vital “junction” between the systematic body of thought represented by *Philosophy of the Will* and the less systematic “social-political writings.” Furthermore, I wager that each one of the two sets, in illumining the other, throws more light on both of them.

To carry this project through, there is a need to discover a theme that will serve as a unifying framework, not only for interpreting the *Philosophy of the Will* but also the “social-political writings” as well. This theme, if it is to account for the intimate link between the two sets of sources, must not be imposed from the outside but yielded by the sources themselves. Where then is the vital articulation to be found?

To unravel a theme in the writings of a living philosopher, or better still, to allow his writings to unfold their proper theme, is a risky enterprise. It involves traveling down a long and winding path that may bring one to the originary source of his philosophical reflection. Without pretending to have done full justice to the richness of Ricoeur’s thought, I would like to propose a “reading” of the *Philosophy of the Will* and the “social-political writings” in terms of the *conjoint theme of responsibility and hope*. How this conjoint theme of responsibility and hope emerges, grows, and unfolds itself in Ricoeur’s writings is the fascinating venture gladly undertaken here. It may be mentioned that this conjoint theme of responsibility and hope recalls the original orientation of Ricoeur’s philosophical project. Its orientation is essentially “ethi-

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11 To my knowledge, this *rapprochement* has never been attempted before. By themselves, the social-political writings merit a prolonged commentary. These writings remain unexplored except for the studies by Secrétan, Stewart, and Trevijano-Etcheverria. See Philibert Secrétan, “La pensée politique de Paul Ricoeur” (1968); David Stewart, “The Christian and Politics: Reflections on Power in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur” (1972); Pedro Trevijano-Etcheverria, “La dimension horizontal de la esperanza en el pensamiento de Paul Ricoeur” (1972), “La dimension vertical de la esperanza en el pensamiento de Paul Ricoeur” (1972). One can also consult with profit the “Editors’ Introduction” in PSE, 1-19.

12 This would be in keeping with Ricoeur’s manner of philosophizing which is always sensitive to points of contact or “junctions.” According to Ricoeur, the great questions are always posed at the points of articulation. See “Dimensions d’une recherche commune” (1948), p. 846. Javet also insists on this aspect in his excellent essay. See Pierre Javet, “Imagination et réalité dans la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur” (1966), pp. 146, 149.
cal” in the broadest sense of the word. To use a more Ricoeurian term, it is “poetic” for it awakens in us the desire to be or the power to exist creatively. It is in this way that one has to view Ricoeur’s Poetics. This Poetics is both at the beginning and at the end of his philosophical exploration. It is both its source of inspiration and its pole of attraction.

Implied in the method of approach here is a certain manner of interpreting the totality of Ricoeur’s writings. It may be appropriate to explicate it here. I start from the viewpoint that Ricoeur’s philosophical project is not a closed finished system but an ongoing search, alive and open to further developments. I strive then to avoid the danger of presenting any particular aspect of his thought as an established conclusion. His philosophy is not to be read “backwards” but “insofar as it goes on.” This implies that I seriously take the fact that Ricoeur started

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13 In an early text, Ricoeur refers to philosophy as an ethics insofar as “it decides on the meaning of man and his directive tasks.” See “Dimensions d’une recherche commune” (1948), p. 838. He thus understands ethics in the manner of Spinoza’s conatus—the constant effort for creative renewal. Ricoeur affirms this idea many times. For example, in a text of 1962: “Philosophy is ethical insofar as it transforms alienation into freedom and beauty (sic for béatitude); for Spinoza, this conversion is attained when knowledge of the self becomes equivalent to knowledge of the unique substance; but this speculative process has an ethical meaning insofar as the alienated individual is transformed by this knowledge of the whole.” See CI, 324; CINT, 329.

14 By “poetic,” Ricoeur means more than poetry as a literary genre. According to him: “Poetry is more than the art of making poems. It is poiesis, or creation in the largest sense of the word;” See CI, 456; CINT, 467.

15 In 1950, Ricoeur envisioned this Poetics as a “second Copernican revolution which displaces being from the center, without however returning to the rule of the object.” See VI, 35; FN, 32.

16 One can apply the advice of Ricoeur on how to read Husserl’s work to Ricoeur’s own writings. Ricoeur tells us: “It is a mistake to read Husserl’s work ‘backwards’, to project the end on the beginning, and to retain of it only what tends toward that final stage. If, on the contrary, we read that work ‘as it goes on’, we are struck, not only by a certain radicalization of problems in the direction of the ‘primordial’ and of the ‘originary’, but also by the abandonment, along the way, of possibilities that will no longer be used.” See “Sur la phénoméologie: I” (1953), p. 836; “Phenomenology” (1974), p. 165 (Ricoeur’s emphases). In an even earlier text, Ricoeur makes the following remark which can again be applied to his own work: “One needs to orient oneself within Husserl’s work, just as in that of Leibniz. Each is a labyrinth with several entries and perhaps several centers, each relative to different perspectives on the total work.” See H, XXXII; HAP, 29.
out with an original project, the *Philosophy of the Will* with a complete *Eidetics, Empirics, and Poetics*. This same project has developed, transformed, and radicalized itself in its march towards its primordial intention.

I approach Ricoeur’s thought as an unfolding dynamic where each new element shares and grows in the development of the whole. It is permitted to regard each one of his works as a “total particularity” on the condition that every new work be posed against the background of all the other works.\(^{17}\) For all his works have a dialectical pattern not only *within* them but also *between* them. This becomes even more understandable if one recalls once more that Ricoeur’s philosophical reflection has followed an itinerary whose main contours had already been drawn from the very beginning. Without any exaggeration, one can say that this itinerary has been “willed” by him.\(^{18}\)

There is then a unity and continuity in Ricoeur’s thought but this is to be grasped in a pluriform, not in a uniform way. For instance, to speak of his “latent” hermeneutics or its “extension” may succeed in highlighting the recent phase of his philosophy but may also fail to bring out what one may call the “groping gestures” during his philosophical exploration, the “creative turns” that led to hermeneutics.\(^{19}\) In the end, one must be sensitive to the movement of incessant surpassing in Ricoeur’s thought.

What now remains is to enumerate briefly the order followed in this series of essays on Ricoeur. In the first of these essays, I give a general

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\(^{17}\) In Ricoeur’s view: “Each work of a philosopher is like a ‘total particularity’ (Leibniz) and the entire work of this philosopher is only a particular totality.” See “La recherche philosophique peut-elle s’achever?” (1966), p. 33 (my translation; this article first appeared in 1965).


\(^{19}\) According to Bourgeois, there are two ways of reading the continuity and constancy in the development of Ricoeur’s thought: “On the one hand, an attempt can be made to show the constant elements that have either remained the same throughout the development or have deepened by extension. On the other hand, the attempt can be made to see the later positions as already entailed in the first stages. This is what we have tried to do throughout this work.” It is striking that immediately following this passage, Bourgeois himself admits that “Ricoeur has undergone some changes in central positions which cannot be considered merely as becoming explicit or as extensions.” See Patrick L. Bourgeois, *Extension of Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic* ERH (1975), p. 147.
panoramic view of the philosophical exploration of Ricoeur, presenting in a first section, his conception of the task of philosophical reflection, and in a second section, a survey of his philosophical journey. Two main parts comprise the body of this research.

In the second essay to appear in the no. 3 1997 issue of *Budhi*, I am hoping to be able to present the meaning of human existence in Ricoeur’s *Philosophy of the Will*. I will begin by clarifying its methodological perspectives in view of understanding the justification of the abstraction of the fault and Transcendence. Then I will elaborate on the *Eidetics* or the phenomenological-existential description of the human being’s fundamental possibilities. Here, the discussion centers on the theme of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary which is approached by a method that goes from pure description to active participation. During this discussion which examines in detail the role of the lived-body for an only human freedom, the significance of responsibility as consent to necessity emerges. I will then spell out the first moment of the *Empirics* in a transcendental analysis of the fallibility of being human; as well as the second moment of the *Empirics* in a phenomenological-hermeneutic reflection on the avowal of the fault by the human self. While the transcendental reflection strives to comprehend the disproportion of human existence, the hermeneutic reflection attempts to interpret the human avowal of the fault that is expressed in symbols and myths. At the close of this reflection on the human being as fallible and as fallen, we are made aware of the significance of hope as affirmation of sense over nonsense. This affirmation of the preponderance of sense over nonsense, which is also an affirmation of Transcendence, is already an aspect of the *Poetics*.

In the third essay to appear in the no. 1 1998 issue of *Budhi*, I hope to present the meaning of human existence gleaned from Ricoeur’s “social-political writings”. The theme of the creative interplay between responsibility and hope will be used as a *leitmotiv* to discover the meaning of being human on the cultural, social, and political spheres. In this essay, I will limit myself to the examination of three topics which, I believe, reveal what is essential in Ricoeur’s social-political thinking and give an idea of its vast scope. Thus, I will discuss Ricoeur’s critique of civilization and culture in Section One, his reflection on the Christian and society in Section Two, and his reflection on politics and the State in Section Three. In the Conclusion, I attempt a critical appraisal of
Ricoeur’s thought. Only after having taken into account its manifold aspects does one garner the right of evaluating it. I hope to show that the originality of Ricoeur’s thought lies in its renewal and invention of being human as a ceaseless desire to be and effort to exist between responsibility and hope.
The Philosophical Exploration of Paul Ricoeur

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REMARK

First a personal remark. In this study, I have tried to adhere to a certain simplicity of style and presentation in order to communicate to as many readers as possible (who are not Ricoeur specialists) what is at stake in Ricoeur's writings. Like Ricoeur, I strongly hold that the philosopher is also someone "who wants to comprehend his/her time and help other people change their situation by understanding it." As someone coming from a developing country in Asia, I consider it my responsibility to convey back to my own people whatever insights of Ricoeur may shed light and cast hope on our present situation. Philosophy, as I take it, must also aspire to be a wisdom that seeks to give meaning and richness to the life of a whole people. This does not imply, however, that I do not address myself to the Ricoeur specialists. It is especially in the notes that I have tried to pursue a dialogue with them. This study

1See "Prospective et utopie: Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), p. 178 (my translation; reprinted in HV, 301-316).

2In an admirable essay, Strasser makes these penetrating remarks on authentic wisdom: "It is a kind of 'knowing' which lies beyond optimism and pessimism; for that [person] is a wise [person] who has sublimated in a knowledge of higher value both the naive confidence in the meaning of the world and the radical anxiety regarding its senselessness." See Stephan Strasser, "After Scientific Philosophy: Myth or Wisdom?" (1963), p. 50.
then may be approached on two levels: the level of the "non-specialist" and the level of the "specialist" whom I regard as both worthy of listening to the message of Paul Ricoeur.

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, we shall retrace the philosophical exploration of Paul Ricoeur. We propose to engage in a critical dialogue with him—thinking with him, thinking after him, thinking against him. In this way, we hope to arrive at that "amiable understanding" of his thought which comes after a long frequentation and savouring of his works. ³ But we are likewise fully aware that this kind of familiarity can never be totally achieved.⁴

On the threshold then of attending to Ricoeur's writings, it is necessary to become aware of our stance. In this regard, Ricoeur proves himself to be an exemplary guide by the way he has approached the works of other philosophers like Jaspers, Marcel, and Husserl.⁵ His consideration of their philosophies reveals at once an attention that gives itself completely to the work at hand. If Ricoeur insists on this pledge of attention, it is because for him, truth appears only to those attentive in spirit.⁶ And what is to be attentive if not to listen? But there are vari-

³ "Histoire de la philosophie et historicité" (1961), in HV, 70; "The History of Philosophy and Historicity" (1965), in HT, 67.
⁴ "Objectivité et subjectivité en histoire" (1953), in HV, 40; "Objectivity and Subj ectivity in History" (1965), in HT, 37.
⁵ Consider, for instance, the warm enthusiastic praise of Jaspers for the study on his philosophy written by Ricoeur and Dufrenne: "But the présentation and criticism of my work done by Dufrenne and Ricoeur bring out something of a novelty, which is an encouragement for the author himself. This book is not only my philosophy, but also the philosophy proper to Dufrenne and Ricoeur. Their thought manifests a way of philosophizing which is so serious, comprehensive, communicative, and not at all polemic, even in the sharpest criticisms that I must express my profound gratitude to the authors and my sympathy for the spirit of their work." See J, 8 (my translation).
⁶ One of Ricoeur's earliest essays deals on the theme of attention. See "L'attention: Etude phénoménologique de l'attention et de ses connexions philosophiques" (1939), pp. 15, 18, 22.
uous ways of listening. What is demanded is an “understanding” listening, or if one goes by the language of Heidegger, an “untroubled” listening. This “untroubled” listening is none other than that vigilant attention which allows the rhythm proper to each work to emerge.

But even this diligent attention itself must break out, if one is not to remain a mere spectator, into active participation or recollection. It is this recollection beyond the level of attention that the young Ricoeur retains from the philosophy of Marcel. This movement of active participation wherein I let go of myself, become relaxed, become available to the other, finally culminates in a movement of opening myself with the other to being, of letting being be thought in us. There begins to reign a silence that creates a space in which authentic questions surge up to be heard, understood, and perhaps answered. In this investigation, then, there will be a constant care to adhere to Ricoeur’s attitude towards the thought of others—to maintain a stance of creative attention that assists truth and being to come forth.

I. THE TASK OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ACCORDING TO RICOEUR

Under this first section, we will answer three questions in a gradual effort to orient ourselves in Ricoeur’s writings. First, what is the fundamental experience that serves as the vital source of Ricoeur’s philosophi-

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8 Ricoeur speaks on the task of discerning the rhythm distinctive to each philosopher in his comparative study of Marcel and Jaspers. See MJ, pp. 15, 33, 35, 39.


cal reflection? Second, what are the distinctive features of Ricoeur’s way of thinking? Third, what is the task of philosophical reflection according to Ricoeur?

A. The Fundamental Experience of Ricoeur’s Philosophical Reflection

Every philosophy, whether it be in the form of a system or a systematic paradox, arises from a primordial core of experience which is its vital source, assuring the organic unity of its parts. This original source or Ursprung, however, is not of a logical order. It is rather an inexhaustible intuition that is ceaselessly explored by the philosopher in discourse. To understand a philosophy then is to grasp its central intuition, its manifold developments, its organic interconnections or its systematic organization. It is a centripetal movement that goes against the centrifugal movement of explanation by sources.

We may then ask: What is the fundamental experience that has nurtured Ricoeur’s philosophical project and that will guide us in understanding it? What is “the profound originality, the incomparable intention, and the unique vision of the real” that Ricoeur proposes to us? What image of being human and view of the world do his writings uncover before us? In a way, to begin the enterprise of understanding Ricoeur’s thought in a questioning stance is to assume the spirit of his philosophy. For Ricoeur himself asks: “To understand a philosopher, is this not also to come to grips with the question which he alone encountered and posed?” The task of identifying oneself with the question even becomes more urgent when one realizes that the philosophical question is someone; it is the philosopher himself. From hereon, understanding a philosophy becomes a “sort of ‘loving struggle’ quite

15 Ibid., 47; ibid., 43. See also “Note sur le voeu et la tâche de l’unité” (1952), in HV, 194; “Note on the Wish and Endeavor for Unity” (1965), in HT, 193.
akin to the efforts we make in order to communicate with our friends.”

To answer our first question, it may not be futile to go back in time—some sixty years ago—and examine what the young Ricoeur held important enough to commit to writing at the very beginning of his philosophical research. Perhaps, we may discover in these earliest texts the germ out of which developed his philosophical enterprise. Let us then place ourselves before the two essays of 1936: “Responsabilité de la pensée” and “Le risque.” The titles themselves suggest the ethical concern of Ricoeur.

In the first essay “Responsabilité de la pensée,” we see the twenty-three year-old Ricoeur immediately distancing himself from a philosophy that opposes thought to action. Moreover, he makes the salient observation that philosophers often tend to exile themselves from the reality of the everyday world, thus projecting a wrong image of intellectual impartiality and ignoring the immense responsibility of the thinker. Ricoeur then builds an eloquent case for the overwhelming responsibility of reflection.

The responsibility of reflection is a threefold responsibility—to my self, for my fellow human beings and history, and before God. Here, Ricoeur distinguishes between a human or “penultimate” viewpoint and a divine or “ultimate” viewpoint. From the human or “penultimate” viewpoint, I hold a responsibility to my own self for reflection is my most personal act. It is not an anonymous venture; it is really the commitment of myself. Furthermore, I have to be responsible for other human beings with respect to my reflection because “its history, when it is no longer mine, remains eternally mine.” What impresses most the young Ricoeur is that reflection leaves its irrevocable “imprints” on history. Consequently, we must realize our responsibility in putting our

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19 At this time, Ricoeur has already obtained a Licentiate in Philosophy and passed the agrégation, ranking second place, at the Sorbonne.


21 “Responsabilité de la pensée” (1936), pp. 4-5. This threefold responsibility will be stressed again in the following essays: “Vérité: Jésus et Ponce Pilate” (1946), p. 382; “L’expérience psychologique de la liberté” (1948), pp. 445-449.

22 “Responsabilité de la pensée” (1936), p. 4 (Ricoeur’s emphases; my translation).
“imprints” on things and on other persons. From a divine or “ultimate” viewpoint, I am responsible before God for I am always before God, not in the sense that God is the supreme object of thought but because God is implied as a pole of appeal and response of the philosophical act itself.\textsuperscript{23} In this way, reflection is a part of the religious drama; it belongs to the economy of the fall and redemption. Ricoeur concludes this first essay by affirming that “the responsibility of reflection therefore signifies a fundamental option: idolatry or service.”\textsuperscript{24}

In the second essay “Le risque,” we note the same concern to be responsive to the whole gamut of the human situation. This time, however, the accent is placed on the necessity of risk and, by implication, of hope in becoming a person. What already strikes Ricoeur, at this time, are the conflicts and contradictions which either arise from without—the social milieu—or from within ourselves. In view of these conflicts, we must risk and hope to create our own unity, originality, and even way of life.

In these crucial moments when we have to risk, Ricoeur sketches for us three human attitudes. First of all, there is the stance of the “unhappy” consciousness who knows neither to choose nor to compromise because one refuses to recognize the “situation and the true task” of a human being.\textsuperscript{25} Second, there is the attitude of the “heroic” consciousness who takes risks but in an aggressive manner. This stance exalting the vital values alone is regarded by Ricoeur as wanting in humility. Finally, there is what he calls the “simple” consciousness who risks calmly, understanding one’s situation in the hierarchy of creation. This is the person who modestly takes “the attitudes which are within human measure.”\textsuperscript{26} In this third attitude, the person again inserts itself in a religious context whereby a human action becomes an offering to God in hope.

We must add, however, that Ricoeur does not identify the act of risk

\textsuperscript{23} Ricoeur characterizes the philosophy of Pierre Thévenaz as “Protestant” in the sense that it is a philosophy responsible before God. See “Un philosophe protestant: Pierre Thévenaz” (1957), p. 41. The affinity between Thévenaz and Ricoeur, especially with regard to their esteem of human freedom as a freedom of response is noted by Czarnecki. See Jan Czarnecki, “L’histoire et la vérité selon Paul Ricoeur” (1955), p. 155.

\textsuperscript{24} “Responsabilité de la pensée” (1936), p. 5 (Ricoeur’s emphasis; my translation).

\textsuperscript{25} “Le risque” (1936), p. 10 (Ricoeur’s emphases; my translation).

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
with the act of faith. The act of risk remains a human attitude even when it assumes a religious dimension. Risk is proper to situations that depend on me. In the act of risk, I am the subject. I choose; I invent my person. In the act of faith, I encounter the Other. I am chosen; I receive. Faith is only possible within a certain receptivity which demands a real displacement of the axis of my life.

In these two earliest texts of Ricoeur, we cannot help but be struck by the presence of the conjoint theme of responsibility and hope. We underline "conjoint" in order to stress the mutual implication between the aspect of responsibility and the aspect of hope within the fundamental experience which Ricoeur evokes here. It is this fundamental experience of responsibility and hope which appears to us as the vital source of his philosophical reflection. But what precisely is this conjoint experience of responsibility and hope?

To understand it, we have to acknowledge the religious origin of Ricoeur's problematic of human existence. Put succinctly, at this early stage of this study, the conjoint experience of responsibility and hope refers to the drama of human existence that unfolds itself against the background of the inscrutable event of the fault and the undeniable presence of Transcendence. My vocation, as a human being, is to assume responsibility for the fault—which I initiate in freedom and which is also already there—before the creative presence of Transcendence on Whom I affirm hope for my deliverance. To exist then between responsibility and hope is to involve myself in the twofold movement of liberating myself from the fault in which I am enslaved and of reconciling myself with Transcendence from whom I am alienated. But this reconciliation of myself with Transcendence, which is also a reconciliation with my own self and with others, though glimpsed in and through creative encounters, remains at the horizon of my existence.27

It is Ricoeur's genius to have articulated, in an original manner, the philosophical "approximations" of this basic experience of responsibility and hope, richly laden with meaning.28 Here, I wish to point out the close link between this primordial experience and the methodological

27 VI, 34; FN, 32.
28 Ricoeur makes use of what he terms a differentiated method of "successive approximations." The general presupposition of this method is that the phenomenon
ensemble that serves to elaborate it. As in an authentic work of creation, it is difficult to say exactly whether the methodological ensemble was forged before the central intuition or whether the originary insight itself conjured up the set of methods, capable of exploiting it to the full. In any case, it is with one creative stroke that Ricoeur envisioned his monumental philosophic program—the Philosophy of the Will.

The conjoint experience of responsibility and hope also leads us to perceive that the problem of the meaning of human existence—the problem of the limits and possibilities of being human—is intimately linked with the problem of Transcendence itself.29 We will grasp the full implications of this problem as we go along. For the moment, it is sufficient to see how Ricoeur’s philosophical reflection arises from the conjoint experience of responsibility and hope, and how the two poles of this originary experience dynamically interplay with each other. Responsibility anchors the human being’s striving towards Transcendence while hope gives an impetus to the effort to cope with the situation. Together, responsibility and hope give a unique orientation to Ricoeur’s philosophical venture and provide the distinctive atmosphere for his multi-faceted philosophical activity.

manifests several levels of meaning which give rise to the various interpretations on it. One should therefore take care to locate the particular level which corresponds to a certain interpretation. For an example of this procedure, see “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire: Progrès, ambiguïté, espérance” (1951), in HV, 81-98; “Christianity and the Meaning of History: Progress, Ambiguity, Hope” (1952)(another English translation in HT, 81-97).

29 As Ricoeur says later on: “A philosophy of the subject and a philosophy of Transcendence—which is what a philosophy of man’s limitations is in the last resort—are both determined in one and the same movement.” See VI, 440; FN, 468.
B. THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF RICOEUR’S WAY OF THINKING

1. The dynamic bond between thought and action

Let us next inquire: What are the distinctive features of Ricoeur’s way of thinking that will make us appreciate better the singularity of his philosophical reflection? To answer this question, there is no bypassing Ricoeur’s first critical assessment of himself, namely, the “Préface” to the first edition of *Histoire et vérité.* Indeed, it is often instructive to find out what an author himself values in his work.

According to this “Préface” of 1955, there is a continuity in rhythm and theme that emerges despite the disparity of the texts anthologized here. These texts which revolve around two poles—the methodological and the ethical—are linked together by a single rhythm. For Ricoeur, the reflection on the ultimate significance of our insertion in history is inseparable from the concern to actively intervene in the creative renewal of our civilization. Negatively put, Ricoeur’s “style” of thinking thus distances itself from the dichotomy (once popular in a certain brand of existentialism) between “committed thought” and “uncommitted thought.” If Ricoeur refuses this dichotomy, he rejects even more forcefully the radical opposition set up by Marx himself between *theoria,* which merely contemplates the world, and *praxis,* which transforms it. Positively put, Ricoeur’s manner of reflection strives to maintain the dialectic relation between work and speech. This is because the greatness of being human lies within this very dialectic. The first essential feature, therefore, of Ricoeur’s way of thinking is the firm conviction in the dynamic bond between thought and action.

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31 According to Ricoeur, a politics of culture must make a wager on the “efficaciousness” of the “uncommitted” artist since one never knows, with absolute certainty, in what way he collaborates in the renewal of humanity. In the words of Ricoeur: “The wager is that useless man, loquacious man, protesting man, the dreamer and the utopian, is the bearer of an undeniable efficaciousness. The risk is that the man of culture, who appears to be contributing something because he says expected things, is finally an artisan of stagnation and perhaps of dissolution, whereas the negative individual appears in reality to be the herald of a new epoch.” See “Que signifie ‘humanisme’?” (1956), pp. 91-92; “What Does ‘Humanism’ Mean?” in PSE, 82.
In what may be considered as Ricoeur's *credo* of life, he affirms:

As a university professor, I believe in the efficacy of instructive speech; in teaching the history of philosophy, I believe in the enlightening power, even for a system of politics, of speaking devoted to elaborating our philosophical memory. As a member of the team of *Esprit*, I believe in the efficacy of speech which thoughtfully elucidates the generating themes of an advancing civilization. As a listener to the Christian message, I believe that words may change the "heart," that is, the refulgent core of our preferences and the positions which we embrace.\(^{32}\)

Here, we remark that Ricoeur lists down his *personal* preoccupations which are equally *social* concerns. In his view, the philosopher is someone who seeks to understand his time and who, at the same time, desires to help others transform their situation by hammering out illuminating perspectives on it.

2. *The desire for unity and the respect for singularity*

If we now follow Ricoeur's advice to take the two central notions of *Histoire et vérité*—history and truth—as indicating the orientation of his research, we will find out the second essential feature of his way of thinking. It is the *remarkable desire for unity* which is combined with the *profound respect for singularity*.\(^{33}\) We detect here a sensitive appreciation of the various irreducible levels of truth and history that have to be unfolded in depth by a method of successive "approximations." At the same time, we discern a constant obsession with the reconciliation of these irreducible levels but this is always accompanied by the emphatic distrust of premature syntheses. This accounts for the "involuntary" structure of Ricoeur's essays, making each one of them "a sort of *dialectic with a postponed synthesis*."\(^{34}\) There is then a unity to truth and history but this unity is not to be achieved at the cost of violence.

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 10; ibid., 6. This is the reason why Ricoeur likes to repeat Spinoza's well-known theorem: "*Quo magis res singulares intelligimus eo magis Deum intelligimus.*"

Neither eclectic nor dialectic, this unity is given as a task to be constantly pursued in hope.

We have just pointed out Ricoeur’s desire for unity and respect for diversity. We should take care not to separate the one from the other for Ricoeur’s thought unfolds between these two poles. On the one hand, there is the concern to describe the uniqueness and irreducibility of human existence, to take into account its tragic misery and paradoxical grandeur. On the other hand, there is the exigence to recover the unity of human existence, to insert it within the fullness of being. Thus far, we have seen the two distinctive features of the “reflective” way of thinking by which Ricoeur aims to recover the concrete fullness of human existence and of being—the conviction in the intimate bond between thought and action, and second, the passion for the unity that respects singularity. But what do we mean when we speak of Ricoeur’s “reflective” way of philosophizing? It is now time for us to examine the particular meaning given to reflection by Ricoeur.

3. The “reflective” manner of philosophizing

In a 1966 essay which meets the challenge of the human sciences to philosophy, Ricoeur acknowledges his belonging to the tradition of reflective philosophy which has as central reference “the question of the subject.” This means that, for this stream of thought, the fundamental philosophical question is: “What is a subject for whom there is meaning?” Properly speaking, there has never been the reflective philosophy or the philosophy of the subject. What has existed are a series of “reflective styles” that arise in response to the various challenges posed to philosophy. For his part, Ricoeur places himself within that “broad tradition of modern philosophy that begins with Descartes and is developed in Kant, Fichte, and the reflective stream of European philoso-

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35 VI, 399,448; FN, 425, 476-477.
36 “La philosophie à l’âge des sciences humaines” (1966), p. 93 (Ricoeur’s emphases). For this section, we use as guideline Bergeron’s brief but concise presentation of reflective philosophy. See Bergeron, VI, pp. 18-22. That the fate of human subjectivity is at stake throughout the whole of Ricoeur’s work is emphasized by Gary Brent Madison. See Madison, “Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of the Subject,” in PPR, 75.
phy.”

In the tradition of the Cartesian Cogito, the starting point is the positing of the self. This positing of the self is considered as the first truth which can neither be verified like a fact nor deduced as a conclusion. It is this positing of the self as existing and thinking that makes up the first trait of reflection. But this reflection, taken as a return to the givenness of immediate consciousness, remains abstract as long as a second trait is not added.

To put it negatively, reflection is not intuition. To philosophize in a “reflective” way is to accept that there is no direct path to self-knowledge; there is no immediate knowledge of subjectivity. Reflective philosophy represents then the displacement of immediate consciousness as object by mediated consciousness. We can say that reflective philosophy is not a philosophy of the immediate. In a paradoxical sense, we can even say that it is not a philosophy of consciousness, if by this, we understand immediate self-consciousness. Reflective philosophy then takes self-consciousness, not as a given but as a task. To express it positively, reflection is “the appropriation of our effort to exist and of our desire to be, through the works which bear witness to that effort and desire.”

To philosophize in a “reflective” manner is to acknowledge that the authentic subjectivity is to be looked for in its intention, endeavour, and works. The human self is to be constantly discovered and rediscovered from the signs by which it expresses its act of existing in the world. This is the second trait of reflection. With this, reflection becomes concrete.

We see then that there is no “short cut” to this self-recovery. It requires a critical “detour”—the detour of a decipherment of the docu-

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39 DI, 50; DINT, 43.
40 DI, 61-62; DINT, 54-55.
41 DI, 51; DINT, 43-44.
43 DI, 54; DINT, 46 (Ricoeur’s emphases).
ments” of the life of the *Cogito*. Here, reflection must inevitably turn into *interpretation* since the signs deployed by the self in its works are indissolubly linked to the self’s act of existing. Ricoeur argues:

> Because we do not enjoy immediate self-possession and always lack perfect self-identity ..., we must endlessly appropriate what we are through the mediation of the multiple expressions of our desire to be.

At this point, Ricoeur rejoins the central insight of Jean Nabert who holds that the signs expressing the self are “the means, the milieu, and the medium thanks to which a human existent seeks to situate, project, and understand himself.” For this reason, reflective philosophy must take into consideration the results, methods, and presuppositions of the sciences like psychoanalysis and semiology which interpret the signs of human existence. In summary, Ricoeur’s *reflective* way of philosophizing presents these two aspects: *the refusal of the immediate knowledge of the self and the acceptance of the detour of an interpretation of the signs by which the self expresses itself.*

**C. The Promotion of Responsibility and Hope**

Let us finally pose the third and last question under this section: What is the task of philosophical reflection according to Ricoeur? Here, we base ourselves principally on the text of a lecture delivered by Ricoeur before a wide audience of students and teachers in 1965. In this talk entitled “Interrogation philosophique et engagement,” Ricoeur delineates the task of philosophical reflection in relation to three different levels of human activity, namely, everyday life, scientific life, and medi-

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47 “L’acte et le signe selon Jean Nabert” (1962), in CI, 221; “Nabert on Act and Sign” (1974), in CINT, 222.
tative life.\textsuperscript{50}

1. *On the level of everyday life*

What is the relevance of philosophical reflection to everyday life? Before answering this question, let us first show how reflection and lived experience are intimately bound up with each other. It is the role of reflection to raise lived experience to the level of rationality. In lived experience, however, there is “a wealth of meaning which reflection is unable to equal.”\textsuperscript{51} For this reason, reflection must continually return to this richness of meaning and nourish itself upon it.

But philosophical reflection also implies a rupture with the immediacy of lived experience. Like Plato, Ricoeur views philosophy as the “critical interval” between two immediacies, between a pre-critical “first naiveté” and a post-critical “second naiveté” or “a final intuition which remains the limit of reasoning thought.”\textsuperscript{52} Philosophical reflection therefore presupposes a distanciation from immediate experience in view of its more profound reappropriation. It is in this will to comprehend existence as far as possible, to clarify even its most obscure regions, that we are impressed by Ricoeur’s maintenance of rational comprehension as the aim of all philosophy.\textsuperscript{53} In his book on Jaspers, Ricoeur readily concedes that “a philosophy can arise from sentiment” but immediately adds that it cannot be a “philosophy of sentiment” for “a philosophy is, in principle, rational.”\textsuperscript{54} More than ten years later, he reiterates this acceptance of rationality as the inner telos of all philosophy when he declares: “For my part, I do not in the least abandon the tradition of ra-

\textsuperscript{50} See “Interrogation philosophique et engagement” (conference given at the Collège Sophie-Barat, 22 October 1965) (1968), pp. 9-21. This text has been ignored by Ricoeur commentators.

\textsuperscript{51} HF, 26; FM, 11. See also VI, 83; FN, 16: “To experience is always more than to understand.”

\textsuperscript{52} See “Aux frontières de la philosophie” (part 1) (1952), p. 767 (my translation).

\textsuperscript{53} In Ricoeur’s address to the International Colloquium of Philosophy held in Brussels in 1951, we read: “Even in the obscure forest of emotions, even in the course of the blood stream, phenomenology gambles on the possibility of thinking and naming.” See “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. See also “Philosophy of Will and Action” (1964) (1967), p. 15.

\textsuperscript{54} “Karl Jaspers” (1957), p. 379 (my translation)
tionality that has animated philosophy since the Greeks." In the eyes of Ricoeur, the philosopher must continually strive to reveal reason in existence, which reason is inseparable from a concrete sense of existence.

At this point, we would like to briefly remark how the exigence for rigour and lucidity relates anew with the central theme of responsibility and hope. In giving to reason the power of establishing order and unity to the disorder and confusion of our lived situation, are we not already laying down the groundwork for a responsible course of action? And doesn’t this rigorous and lucid exigence finally have as a condition the hope of an issue out of the dramatic situation of being human? We see in Ricoeur’s insistence on rational comprehension the first stirrings of hope. To reflect, in the manner of Ricoeur, is already to engage oneself in an act of hope.

Let us return to the question of the relevance of philosophy on the level of everyday life. To appreciate the importance of philosophical questioning on this first level, we have to become aware of certain traits of our present society that are taken for granted. Foremost among these is the invasion and domination of techniques in modern life. There are not only techniques to accelerate production but also to increase consumption, not only techniques for work but even for leisure. Our highly advanced technological society is a society that seeks to regulate its development on planning and calculation. In this sense, it is a “prospective” society which is dominated by “the will to assure a calculated, continual, regular growth of the entire economic and social life.”

It is correct to say that this “prospective” society is characterized by a rationality of means but it is likewise justified to add that it is recog-

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57 See J, 365. Secrétan speaks in a similar vein in his thought-provoking essay on Ricoeur’s philosophy. According to Secrétan, a paradox “gives rise to thought: on the manner of undergoing it or coming to terms with it depends the courage of man or his sadness.” See Philibert Secrétan, “Paradoxe et conciliation dans la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur” (1961), p. 198 (my translation).
58 “Prévision économique et choix éthique” (1966), in HV, 301-302 (my translation).
nized by an increasing absurdity of ends. Within this conflict between the rationality of means and the absurdity of ends is found the justification of philosophy in everyday life. The responsibility of philosophy on this concrete level is twofold: first, to put into question the means proposed by the society of abundance; second, to provide it with goals in order to banish absurdity and promote hope. In short, the task of philosophy is to introduce a perspective in the "prospective" society.

For Ricoeur, this perspective is provided by the twofold utopia of humanity, considered in its totality and in its singularity. We shall have the opportunity of developing this theme in Part Three of this study. For now, it is to be noted that Ricoeur takes the word "humanity" in an extensive as well as an intensive sense. In the former sense, humanity stands for all human beings, taken in their unity; in the latter sense, it stands for each human being, taken in his/her uniqueness. To will that all persons form one humanity and to will that each person realizes his/her unique humanity—such is the goal that philosophy can offer to the present society.

In this way, philosophy presents itself as it has always been—an ethics, not in the narrow sense of a "moralism" that confines itself to a code of prohibitions and obligations but in the broad sense (that we have already seen) of the realization of our effort to exist and of our desire to be. For Ricoeur, philosophical interrogation first begins with the wonder more primitive than the one before things—over one's self, the wonder over the disproportion between what we actually are and what we profoundly desire to be. Together with this philosophical questioning, there surges up then a philosophical responsibility which is manifested here by the recalling of the ethical perspective of the prospective society.

2. On the level of scientific life

We must now see the task of philosophy in relation to the second level—that of the scientific life. Let us remark that Ricoeur insists

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59 To be published in Budhi, no. 1, 1998.
60 "Interrogation philosophique et engagement" (1968), p. 11. See also "Le projet d'une morale sociale" (1966), p. 289; "The Project of a Social Ethic" (1974), in PSE, 166.
61 See above, pp.
strongly on the necessity of philosophy to maintain a dialogue with the sciences. Everyone, of course, knows that philosophy has always related itself to science or the sciences. The great philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and Hegel—were all conversant with the sciences of their times. This commerce between philosophy and the sciences is inevitable for philosophy has no object; it has the object of other disciplines.\(^2\)

Let us linger awhile on this circular relation between philosophy and nonphilosophy. If it is to preserve the depth of the experience which it takes up in its discourse, philosophy has to stay always in tension with nonphilosophy.\(^3\) Philosophy, after all, reflects "on experience, on all experience, on the whole of experience: scientific, ethical, aesthetic, religious."\(^4\) Philosophy runs the risk of turning into a mere play of words and ends up in "a pure linguistic nihilism" if we cease to relate philosophy with nonphilosophy.\(^5\) Philosophy then receives its sources from outside itself. But if it is dependent upon its sources, it is independent with regard to its point of departure, its method, and its point of achievement. In a sense, philosophy searches for its point of departure; it goes toward its point of departure.\(^6\) Thus, we may say that philosophy wishes to be first from the viewpoint of method or foundation, but it can only be so if it is second from the viewpoint of sources or motivation.\(^7\)

To return to our original question: What then is the significance of philosophy in the scientific life? To answer this question, it is necessary

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\(^3\) De Waelhens has written some memorable pages on the dialectic between philosophy and nonphilosophy. See Alphonse De Waelhens, "Philosophie et nonphilosophie," Revue philosophique de Louvain 57 (February 1959), pp. 5-43. This excellent essay figures as the introductory chapter to De Waelhens's book, La philosophie et les expériences naturelles, Phaenomenologica, 9 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), 211 p.


\(^5\) "Philosophe après Kierkegaard" (1963), p. 316


\(^7\) "Aux frontières de la philosophie" (1952), pp. 760, 775; "Préface de la première édition (1955)," in HV, 18-19; "Preface to the First Edition (1955)," in HT, 14
to grasp first the spirit that animates the modern scientific endeavour. Ricoeur furnishes us with three dominant traits: first, the diffusion of a model of truth patterned after the mathematico-empirical sciences; second, the fragmentation or compartmentalization of scientific knowledge; and third, the rise in prestige of the human sciences like psychoanalysis, linguistics, and sociology. In face of these developments, the task of philosophical reflection is not to complete science but to show its foundations and limits.

As for the model of truth spread by the exact sciences, the responsibility of philosophy is to situate the limits of its legitimacy—to point out what is susceptible to mathematical formalization and empirical observation.68 The task of philosophy here is to return to the original soil on which the great edifice of science is constructed, that is to say, the lived relationship of the existent subject with the world, a world with others.69 It is indeed paradoxical that in order to go back to the primordial relationship of the human being and the world before science, we have to rediscover a “second naïveté” after science.

With regard to the continual fragmentation of scientific knowledge, the task is not to construct a system of the sciences but to undertake a radical reflection on language.70 This reflection is possible insofar as scientific knowledge is also a language organized around certain principles, with its own lexicon and its own syntax. The responsibility of

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69 In the words of Ricoeur: “A philosophical critique of science, it seems to me, does not at all consist of criticizing the results of the methods of science. There the scientist has nothing to learn uniquely from the philosopher. Scientific knowledge is a proper mode of knowledge and a proper mode of results, principles, laws, etc. But the task for which the philosopher is responsible is to understand how scientific understanding takes place within the comprehension of my existence in the world.” See “Le langage de la foi” (1964), p. 21; “The Language of Faith” (1973), p. 216.
70 In Ricoeur’s view, a great change has come about in the philosophic scene after Hegel. Hegel, the last great philosopher of the system, accomplished the incredible feat of unifying together the totality of Western culture into a coherent system. What is remarkable about this feat is that for the first time, the entire Western heritage—not only the different philosophies from Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Modern Period but even nonphilosophy like aesthetics, politics, law, etc.—becomes presented in one and the same system. Today, no one is capable of undertaking this same task of unification. Furthermore, the heritage unified by Hegel has drifted away from us. See “Entretien” (1975), p. 10.
philosophy here would be to save the unity of human language by re-memorying it, by comprehending that the creative power of language implies its possible ramifications into different languages. To understand then that the various registers of language—scientific, poetic, ordinary, technical, mythical—are diverse ways of expressing our presence in the world, to situate these languages in relation to one another—such is the task of philosophy in the face of the fragmentation of languages which Ricoeur views as a fundamental problem of modern culture.

In view of the impact and influence of the human sciences today, the responsibility of philosophy is neither to ignore nor to refute them but to learn from them. The task of philosophy here is to situate the limits and the legitimacy of these human sciences. For that, the philosopher has to acquire competence in one or two scientific disciplines. In the dialogue with the human sciences, the crucial point is to discover that which cannot be objectified in us, that which makes us “subject,” capable of saying “I” and of relating not only with a third person or thing but with a second person, a “you.” This is precisely the problem of philosophical anthropology which does not only distinguish the “subjective” from the “objective” but which tries to comprehend the human being as the point of junction between the two. This philosophical anthro-

71 In an interview in 1966, Ricoeur argues: “...it is in language that these different points of view find their connecting link since the problem is to avoid simply juxtaposing these points of view in some facile eclecticism. ...What is needed is a philosophical structure developed in such a way on the level of language that we are led to appreciate the very close connection of these various approaches.” See “A Conversation” (1966), p. 2.


74 It is for this reason that Ricoeur sees great merit in the study of Strasser. See “Préface” to Stephan Strasser, Phénoménologie et sciences humaines: Vers un nouvel esprit scientifique (1967), p. 10.

75 In the course of reviewing B.F. Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity, Ricoeur remarks: “It is the task of another kind of reflection, of a philosophical anthropology, to delineate the sphere of validity, to reconnect what the scientific procedures necessarily isolate, to try to understand the whole dialectic at stake between the different institutional spheres, and to reopen the game which the partial fanaticisms tend to close according to the imperialistic concepts of one discipline.” See “A Critique of B.F. Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity” (1973), in PSE, 60 (Ricoeur's emphases)
pology has to be a dialectical philosophy which would distinguish and connect the diverse levels of experience into a systematic unity. But this dialectical philosophy, if it is not that of Hegel, must be a philosophy instructed by him.\textsuperscript{76}

3. On the level of meditative life

Finally, we come to the task of philosophy in relation to the third level which Ricoeur calls "the reflective life" or "meditative life." Here, we accede to the level of the truly philosophical questions—the fundamental questions of existence and being. Philosophy, for Ricoeur is born from the conjunction of two concerns: to give a foundation to the sciences and to provide answers to the basic questions of human existence.\textsuperscript{77} To pose these questions is to enter in a dialogue with the great philosophers. Everyone is, of course, familiar with the question asked by Aristotle who may be said to inaugurate philosophical questioning: "TI TO OV; Ti To On? What is being?" We learn from Heidegger that Leibniz radicalized this question further by asking it in a more dramatic manner: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" It is this question of being that we ourselves have to ask anew.

But today, Ricoeur tells us, this question of being is posed in a more complex, dramatic, and even tragic manner. But why is this so? Since the famous discovery of the \textit{Cogito}, the single question of being has been split into two questions: on the one hand, the question of being, nature, God; on the other hand, the question of human existence. The philosophy of Descartes supplies a model for modern philosophies which no longer take the form of a circle with a unique center but of an ellipse with two foci. This polarization in the question of being leads to what Ricoeur considers as "the great split of modern culture."\textsuperscript{78} By this, he means that we are now confronted with the alternative of two fundamental possibilities—two ways of existing, of understanding our-

\textsuperscript{76} See "Le 'lieu' de la dialectique" (1975), p. 102; "What is Dialectical?" (1976), p. 183.

\textsuperscript{77} See "Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie" (1976), p. 88.

\textsuperscript{78} "Interrogation philosophique et engagement" (1968), p. 19.

\textsuperscript{79} This alternative brings to mind the concluding affirmation made thirty years before by the young Ricoeur in his first essay, that we have already discussed. See above, p. 6. However, in the 1965 lecture, Ricoeur shows more restraint and modesty by recognizing that there are honest people on both sides.
selves, of explaining things. The first way is what Ricoeur calls an "atheistic humanism"—to make everything revolve around the human being as the sole center; the second way is what he calls a "theistic humanism"—to make everything revolve around a focus greater than the human being, in a *Word* more creative than the human word.

It is this alternative that determines the novel task of the philosopher today. The task is twofold: first, there is the need for a critical investigation; and second, there is the demand for a personal commitment. The first task of the philosopher is to clarify the alternative, that is to say, to show the repercussions of a choice in concrete life, in the dialogue with the sciences, most especially in the human sciences. But after this task of clarification, his second task is to make a commitment and bear witness to it. Here, we cannot but observe Ricoeur's respect for the irreducible choice of the other when he emphasizes that "to bear witness" implies both the courage to assume a risk and the modesty to confront one's choice with the other's choice. This shows us how seriously Ricoeur regards the rupture in the question of being.

Following the example of Ricoeur, we may venture here certain questions? Have we not perhaps reached a turning point where the two orientations—atheistic humanism and theistic humanism—converge together and nourish each other? Hasn't the atheist also begun to critically question the possibility of being human? In a way, we do not differ from the atheist. There is a believer and an unbeliever in every one of us. For having been confronted with the loss of meaning in work, leisure, sexuality, language, and even lately politics, we have also begun to ask: If God is dead, is the human being not also dead? It is difficult to give an answer. But Ricoeur is convinced of one thing. From now on,

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80 At the end of his subtle analysis of the function of *suspicion* in our present culture, Ricoeur comes up with this searching question and poignant answer: "Do we know man better than we know God? In the end, I do not know what man is. My confession to myself is that man is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken by man than spoken to man." See "Le langage de la foi" (1964), p. 31; "The Language of Faith" (1973), p. 224 (Ricoeur's emphases).


82 Ricoeur sees the loss of meaning in human existence as a counterpart of the universal objectification that is demanded by the instrument-oriented "prospective" society. See "Le langage de la foi" (1964), p. 20; "The Language of Faith" (1973), p. 215.
the affirmation of God has to be something completely different from before.

The novel affirmation of God must be able to integrate the criticisms of modern atheism to eliminate what alienates human beings, frustrates them, and makes them infantile.\textsuperscript{83} In short, we have to practise a recuperative kind of reflection to recapture what Ricoeur calls, after Nabert, the "primary affirmation" which is "not pronounced against man and without man, but with man and in the very depth of his desire to be responsible and autonomous."\textsuperscript{84} The affirmation of God need not be then the negation of being human but the affirmation of the power or the force of being human, not the powerlessness or the weakness of being human. We have to rediscover an affirmation of God that does not extinguish the freedom of human existence but makes it flourish. By then, the alternative is no longer a confrontation between two types of human beings, two ways of life outside us but an earnest dialogue between two aspects inside us. For Ricoeur, this is the fascinating and challenging responsibility that the philosopher in the future has to assume.

At the close of this section, we may retain three points. First, the fundamental experience of responsibility and hope serves as the vital source of Ricoeur's philosophical reflection. Second, his way of thinking manifests itself as dynamic, open, and reflective. Third, the task of philosophical reflection consists in the promotion of responsibility and hope in

\textsuperscript{83} We are urged by Ricoeur to take the critiques of the three masters of suspicion—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—as converging together in a global critique. Only when we view these critiques jointly do we perceive the problem besetting the modern mind—the problem of false consciousness. This problem of false consciousness or illusion is no longer just a problem concerning a single individual in error (in a purely epistemological sense) or in falsehood (in a purely ethical sense) but a problem concerning a whole culture. See "Le langage de la foi" (1964), p. 30; "The Language of Faith" (1973), p. 224.

\textsuperscript{84} "Interrogation philosophique et engagement" (1968), p. 20 (my translation).
human existence.

II. A SURVEY OF RICOEUR'S PHILOSOPHICAL JOURNEY

Under this second section, we present first, the major influences on Ricoeur's thought, and second, the significant stages of his philosophical journey. Here, we hope to be guided by the spirit of exploration for the following reasons. First of all, we wish to impart the primacy given in Ricoeur's philosophical enterprise to the act of questioning. Secondly, we wish to convey its sense of a search in movement which seeks to be both "creative repetition" and "unceasing renewal." Finally, we wish to indicate its unachieved structure inseparably linked with hope.

A. The Major Influences on Ricoeur's Thought

What impresses us in Ricoeur is the profuse acknowledgment of his debts, not only to his predecessors but also to his contemporaries as well. It is not possible here to trace out all the "sources," that is to say,

85 Ricoeur begins and ends his conversations with Marcel under the theme of exploration. See ERM, 10, 127-130; CRM, 215-256, esp. 217, 252-256.
86 "Note sur l'histoire de la philosophie et la sociologie de la connaissance" (1952), in HV, 65; "Note on the History of Philosophy and the Sociology of Knowledge" (1965), in HT, 61.
89 This is also what strikes Michel Philibert who locates the originality of Ricoeur, neither in reiteration nor in personal invention but in the movement of "creative repetition" of the history of philosophy. See Philibert Paul Ricoeur ou la liberté selon l'espérance, pp. 12, 28. In an essay written in homage to Ricoeur in 1975, Philibert again brings out Ricoeur's "creative humility"—the attention he gives to his precursors, enabling him to think creatively in turn. See Philibert "Marx, la machine et la manufacture," in Sens et existence: En hommage à Paul Ricoeur, pp. 152-153. In an essay published
“the influences which have not only been experienced passively but also assumed and in certain respects chosen” in Ricoeur’s thought.90 Perhaps, a gracious way of limiting the “sources” is to go by the influences that directly bear on the major works studied here. If we look up the finished volumes of Philosophy of the Will, we come up with the names of three thinkers whom Ricoeur considers as his true “maîtres à penser”—Marcel, Husserl, and Nabert.91 If we now consult the “social-political writings”, we come up with the name of Emmanuel Mounier whom we may take as representing a major influence that is decisive to Ricoeur’s thinking—Christian faith. In this survey then, we focus on: first, the influences of Marcel and Husserl; second, the influence of Jean Nabert; and third, the influence of Christian faith in Ricoeur’s thought.

1. Between Marcel and Husserl

Ricoeur openly admits that it was Gabriel Marcel, his former teacher, who gave him the “decisive philosophical shock” of his life.92 It comes then as no surprise that in 1950, Ricoeur dedicated the first volume of posthumously, Philibert summarizes the unique “blend of virtues” found in Ricoeur the philosopher: “No philosopher displays the same amount, and the same blend, of virtues that usually are antagonistic to one another: respect and admiration for others and ingenuousness and freedom in refusing to follow them unconditionally. Hunger and readiness to learn from them, not only what they think, or thought, but how to ‘re-think’ what they thought, following their ways, their walk, their gait, their bearing, then exploring sideways, thinking further on in the direction they opened, using their tricks to crack new bones, organizing meetings between them over the centuries, feeding them with our inventions and problems, imagining their replies, familiar and friendly with each and all.” See Philibert “Philosophical Imagination: Paul Ricoeur as the Singer of Ruins,” in PPR, 135.


91 In a conference which pays homage to Gabriel Marcel and Jean Wahl, Ricoeur makes this declaration: “I did not have with Jean Wahl the constant and close exchanges that I had the joy of having with Gabriel Marcel, whom I still dare to consider as one of my few masters, equal to Husserl and Nabert.” See “Entre Gabriel Marcel et Jean Wahl” (conference given in Geneva under the auspices of the Fondation Maria Gretler, in homage to Gabriel Marcel and Jean Wahl, 7–8 February 1975), in Jean Wahl et Gabriel Marcel, en collaboration avec Emmanuel Levinas et Xavier Tilliette, présentation de Jeanne Hersch, Bibliothèque des Archives de Philosophie, Nouvelle Série, 21 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), p. 57 (my translation; emphases added).

92 MJ, 13.
his *Philosophy of the Will, Le volontaire et l’involontaire*—the first systematic presentation of his philosophical vision—with the words “à Monsieur Gabriel Marcel, hommage respectueux.” Marcel is not explicitly mentioned in the two earliest texts that we have already examined but nevertheless, his presence is strongly felt in the themes of responsibility, risk, and hope. It is in 1940—in a phenomenological study of attention—that Ricoeur first refers to Marcel, more particularly to his notion of *recollement*.93 After spending the war years in Germany as a prisoner who perused the texts of Husserl and Jaspers, Ricoeur returns once more to the writings of Marcel in 1947. This time, it is to stage the lively encounter between Marcel’s philosophy of mystery and Jaspers’s philosophy of paradox.94

In a previous study on Jaspers’s philosophy which he co-authored with Dufrenne, Ricoeur already argues that a paradox always has as a background a union, and that a definitively rent philosophy is impossible. He thus holds, with Marcel, the belief in the primacy of reconciliation over division. Upon this belief in a primordial unity, whose essence is religious, depends the possibility of philosophy.95 Again with Marcel, Ricoeur views philosophy as integral only when it is a “réfection”—an effort of recuperation to discover and rediscover human unity.96 This theme of the restoration of human unity pervades *Freedom and Nature* which reserves a central place for another Marcellian concern—the mystery of my existence as incarnate. At the beginning of this book, Ricoeur avows: “Meditation on Gabriel Marcel’s work lies at the basis of the analyses in this book.”97 Indeed, we remark that Ricoeur adheres closely to Marcel’s thought when he traces the intimate link between incarnation and hope.98 But it is finally the explor-

94 Ricoeur’s comparative study on Marcel and Jaspers bears as subtitle, *Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe.*
97 VI, 18; FN, 15.
98 VI, 36; FN, 34. In the *Conversations* with Marcel, Ricoeur makes this final appraisal of Marcel’s thought: “You are of the same breed as Péguy, Emmanuel Mounier, and all those who have grasped the profound unity of the body and spirit. All your thought, despite the fact of the inhuman we were speaking about in an earlier conversation, testifies to the extreme proximity, the strict continuity between incarnation,
atory approach to lived experience—put into action by Marcel in the philosophical gatherings at his place—that has deeply marked the philosophical reflection of Ricoeur.  

The sympathy for Marcel’s work, however, does not prevent Ricoeur from submitting it to the test of strictness and rigor identified with Husserl’s phenomenology. It may be the unique distinction of Ricoeur to have been simultaneously exposed to the influences of Marcel and Husserl. After Ricoeur’s own account, it was in the same year—1934, to be exact—that he discovered Husserl in Ideen I and Marcel in the Journal Métaphysique. Since that time, Ricoeur has pursued a constant dialogue with these two precursors of his thought. In the 1940 article on attention, we already notice the dual reference to Marcel and Husserl. We also recall that Ricoeur worked, during the same period, on the French translation of Husserl’s Ideen I (published in 1950) and on the comparative study of the philosophies of Marcel and Jaspers (published in 1947). In the latter book, Ricoeur makes the suggestion that the works of Husserl can be of great help in broadening Marcel’s too narrow conception of intelligence. In 1949, Ricoeur comes up with his first monograph on Husserl entitled “Husserl et le sens de l’histoire.” A year later, Ricoeur publishes his first personal book, Le volontaire et l’involontaire wherein he conjugates his two sources of inspiration—Marcel and Husserl—in such a way as to cross out their limitations and bring out their advantages in a distinctive method, at once rigorous and respectful of the depth of existence.

Herbert Spiegelberg, who may be credited for first introducing Ricoeur to readers in English declared in his authoritative survey of the phenomenological movement in 1960 that Ricoeur was “the French

which is like the basso continuo of all our wanderings and quests, and hope, which is nothing other than a continual getting underway again.” See ERM, 129; CRM, 256.

99 Ricoeur evokes this period at the beginning of the Conversations with Marcel: “Let me recall Mr. Marcel, that time when as students we used to come to your home. We met in the hopes of getting to the very quick of experience and exploring its meaning.” See ERM, 12; CRM, 218.

100 “Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie” (1976), p. 53.

101 MJ, 369, 386.

102 Published in Revue de métaphysique et de morale 54 (July-October 1949), Nos. 3-4, pp. 280-316; “Husserl and the Sense of History” (1967), in HAP, 143-174. This essay foreshadows Ricoeur’s preoccupations in Histoire et vérité.
phenomenologist best informed about German phenomenology.”

But Spiegelberg also quickly added that Ricoeur’s interests and commitments extended far beyond phenomenology. In recognizing Ricoeur as an accomplished interpreter of Husserl’s phenomenology, we should not forget that Ricoeur himself has truly forged his own brand of phenomenology. Which aspects then of Husserl’s phenomenology are retained by Ricoeur? We may cite the two methodic axioms singled out by Ricoeur in his “Compte-rendu de thèse”: first, the “eidetic reduction” or the comprehension of “essences” from well-chosen examples; second, the intentionality of consciousness.

With Husserl, Ricoeur agrees that description does not have to be necessarily “empirical”; it can be “eidetic,” in the sense that it is a study of essences or an “elucidation of meanings.” Furthermore, this eidetic description “can take as its springboard even an imperfect, truncated, distorted experience, or even a purely imaginary one.” Again, with Husserl, Ricoeur subscribes to the notion of intentionality—that remarkable property of consciousness to be a consciousness of ..., of moving out from itself toward something else ....

Ricoeur, however, critically assimilates his sources. While he accepts the “eidetic reduction,” he rejects “the famous and obscure transcendental reduction which ...is an obstacle to genuine understanding of personal body.” In an article wherein he brings about a meeting of Kant and Husserl, Ricoeur points out that the major shortcoming of Husserlian method lies in its failure to appreciate the value of limiting

105 VI, 8, 19, 37, 130; FN, 4, 16, 37, 136.
106 VI, 28; FN, 25 (Ricoeur’s emphases). See also VI, 8, 185; FN, 4, 195.
108 VI, 7; FN, 4.
concepts. Consequently, Husserlian method has to incorporate the Kantian concern for a critique of the limits and foundation of experience.

We may say that Ricoeur both limits and broadens Husserl’s eidetic method. He limits it by showing that it is adequate for the constitution of things but proves inadequate for the constitution of persons. As Kant has rightly shown, the self of the other can only be constituted in respect. But even with regard to the mystery of incarnate existence, Ricoeur acknowledges the limits of Husserl’s method of “pure description” and its need to be complemented by Marcel’s method of “active participation.” Ricoeur then broadens the Husserlian method in order to remain faithful to the integral experience of the Cogito, including its existence as body.

Only in August 1973—during a Congress focussed on Gabriel Marcel—does Ricoeur venture to examine, critically and systematically, the influences of Marcel and Husserl upon his thought. Combining both a sense of respect and a sense of lucidity that give an authentic ring to his analysis, Ricoeur skillfully brings out the similarities as well as the differences between his two masters. What unites Marcel and Husserl together is their common opposition to philosophy as a system.

In other words, Marcel’s insistence on philosophy as “recherche”

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111 According to Ricoeur, the reason for his hesitation lies more in “the extreme complexity of the enterprise” than less in the absence of distance with regard to Marcel and Husserl. Ricoeur says: “Between Gabriel Marcel and Husserl, there is a kind of affinity and discordance that is very difficult to delineate. First of all, they seem near; then an abyss reveals itself between them; finally, a new proximity manifests itself at the most extreme point of divergence.” See “Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie” (1976), p. 53 (my translation).

112 Note, for instance, what Ricoeur writes of Husserl as a perpetual beginner: “No one more than Husserl had the sense of being on the way and even of being at the beginning. He claimed for himself ‘the seriousness of the beginning’; He aspired to merit the title of a ‘genuine beginner,’ on the path of that phenomenology which is itself at the ‘beginning of the beginning’ (“Postscript to my ‘Ideas...’,” p. 21.” See “Introduction à Ideen I de E. Husserl,” in H, XXXVIII note 2; “An Introduction to Husserl’s Ideas I” (1967), in HAP, 34 note 35 (Ricoeur’s emphasis).
and his admission of its discursive character recall to us Husserl's oft-repeated "zu den Sachen selbst" and his concern for clarity and distinction. But what separates Marcel from Husserl, inspite of their sharing the same sensitivity to phenomenological description, is the different way in which each one of them assumes what Ricoeur calls "the initial philosophical gesture." For Husserl, the point of departure is the reduction which, as a suspension of the belief in the existence itself of things, reveals the correlative structures of the object and the subject. For Marcel, the point of departure is the situation in which I am involved and which puts into question the distinctive mark of Husserlian phenomenology—the noematic-noetic correlation.

The divergence between Marcel and Husserl becomes even more pronounced when we consider that the subject implied in the reduction is a disinterested spectator while the subject implied in the situation is an incarnate being, an involved participant. This involvement of the subject in the situation accounts for the intimate connection between drama and philosophy in Marcel's thought. Husserl's thought, however, excludes drama from philosophy insofar as it is preoccupied with providing a foundation to the sciences. At this point, the two philosophical styles of Husserl and Marcel are farthest apart. The ideal of Husserl is philosophy as a rigorous science, in the sense of Fichte's Wissenschaft—an apodictic knowledge which serves as a foundation to all the other sciences. This rigorous knowledge can only be articulated by suspending ethical judgments with regard to the world, by renouncing to be a wisdom. But precisely, the ideal of Marcel is philosophy

113 "Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie" (1976), p. 57 (my translation).
115 According to Ricoeur: "Husserl believed he could separate the problem of rigorous science from the problems of wisdom, but once we reintroduce the existence of the body into the Cogito, the problems of science lead to those of knowing." See VI, 439, FN, 467.
as a profound wisdom, a philosophy that does not only teach us how to live but to "live well." As such, it proclaims a message to individuals as well as societies.\textsuperscript{116}

Here, we remark how Ricoeur tenaciously holds on to both these two ideals of philosophy—the justification of human existence and the foundation of the sciences.\textsuperscript{117} As he himself declares, the very questions arising from his long frequentation of Marcel's works continually lead him back to Husserl's works. For Ricoeur, the principal difficulty in Marcel's existential philosophy lies in the simple non-dialectical opposition of mystery and problem that cannot be maintained without ruining the philosophical enterprise itself, reducing it to a kind of fideism. We need to realize then that reason, whose task is one of determination, does not fully exhaust itself in the objectivation that characterizes the scientific technical understanding. The affirmation of the mystery of being must constitute itself as reflection—in a "second reflection"—not only to express itself but to maintain itself. In the concluding words of Ricoeur: "It is perhaps the essence of the primary affirmation that it engenders a second Copernican revolution, a second naiveté, which presupposes a first critical revolution, a first loss of naiveté."\textsuperscript{118}

2. The influence of Jean Nabert

The beautiful expression "primary affirmation" ("affirmation originaire") above is borrowed by Ricoeur from Jean Nabert. It makes thus a fitting introduction to the brief discussion here of Nabert's influence on Ricoeur's thought. The high esteem of Ricoeur for Nabert may be gleaned from the fact that the former dedicated to the latter in 1960 the second volume of Philosophy of the Will, Finitude et culpabilité, which was published in two separate books as L'homme faillible and La symbolique du mal. In general, the commentators of Ricoeur have been rather slow in including Nabert as one of his "maîtres à penser," on the

\textsuperscript{116}"Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie" (1976), pp. 68-69.

\textsuperscript{117}Ricoeur argues that the existence of philosophy itself is threatened when the two ideals are separated. In his view, philosophy can perish in two ways: either by being absorbed in science or by ignoring it completely and wanting to be self-inspired. See "Discussion" following "Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie" (1976), p. 88.

\textsuperscript{118}"Gabriel Marcel et la phénoménologie" (1976), p. 74 (my translation; Ricoeur's emphases).
same plane as Husserl and Marcel. To English critics who usually limit themselves to the trio Jaspers-Marcel-Husserl, Jean Nabert is virtually unknown. Among the lengthy studies, Bergeron’s book is a unique exception in that it accentuates the Nabertian orientation of Ricoeur. See Bergeron, VL, pp. 19-22. See also Henry Duméry, “Un philosophe de la volonté: Paul Ricoeur,” in Regards sur la philosophie contemporaine (Paris-Tournai: Casterman, 1956), p. 147.


flection which is not content with illuminating the problem of evil by means of the doctrine of freedom, but which constantly enlarges and deepens the doctrine of freedom under the sting of the evil it has incorporated within itself.”

Furthermore, there is the same insistence on the part of both Nabert and Ricoeur that ethics is less a question of following a code of obligations but more a task of appropriating “the meaningful history of our effort to exist, of our desire to be.” This view, which recalls to us Spinoza’s sense of ethics, presupposes that human existence itself is constituted by a twofold relation—”between an affirmation which institutes it and surpasses its consciousness, and a lack of being, which is attested to by the feelings of fault, failure, and solitude.” It is this inadequation or lack of identity of existence itself that obliges reflection to appropriate the primary affirmation, from which the self is in a way separated, through the signs of its activity in the world or in history.

Finally, there is the most intimate accord between Nabert and Ricoeur that reflection—since there is no direct intuition of the self by itself—has to pass through the long road of an interpretation of the signs wherein the self represents to itself the meaning of its action. As Ricoeur himself declares:

It is in Nabert that I found the best formulation of the close relationship between the desire to be and the signs in which desire is expressed, projected, and explained. I stand fast with Nabert in saying that understanding is inseparable from self-understanding and that the symbolic universe is the milieu of self-explanation.

Like Nabert, Ricoeur’s philosophical working hypothesis is concrete

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125 HF, 15; FM, XXVI. Ten years before, Ricoeur had already recognized the significance of Nabert’s insight that the fault offers a privileged instance for freedom to come to a self-understanding. See VI, 30, 56; FN, 28, 58.


128 For a fuller treatment of reflection as interprétation, see above, pp. 11-13.

reflection—the appropriation and reappropriation of the self through the mediation of the whole universe of signs. In pursuing this *concrete reflection* which preserves both the rationality of philosophy and the concrete sense of existence, Ricoeur remains faithful to what may be the most remarkable contribution of Jean Nabert.\textsuperscript{130}

3. The philosophical impact of the Christian faith

It is to Roger Mehl, the author of *La condition du philosophe chrétien*,\textsuperscript{131} that Ricoeur dedicated *Histoire et vérité* in 1955. We may infer from this dedication that Ricoeur here intends to explicitate his commitment as a *Christian* philosopher. As a matter of fact, he himself confirms this when he writes in the "Préface":

I hesitated to include the essay on "Christianity and the Meaning of History" because it goes much further than the others ... toward a profession of Christian faith and thereby breaks a certain modesty which to me seems essential to philosophical dialogue. ...Personal integrity, however, here required that I deal directly with the issues.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} On Nabert's lasting contribution to French philosophy, Ricoeur prophetically writes: "Jean Nabert wrote only three books: *L'expérience intérieure de la liberté*, *Eléments pour une éthique*, and *Essai sur le mal*. With the passage of time, these three books will stand beside the works of Brunschvicq, Alain, and Bergson as the masterpieces of French philosophy, outside of existentialism." Ricoeur concludes with these words of praise for Nabert: "For my part, I maintain that Jean Nabert is the French philosopher who has posed the question "What is man?" in all its scope. He posed the question as a philosopher. He did not sacrifice existence and life to reflection. In return, he did not detach reflection from sentiment. Neither did he allow himself to be mystified by a rationality, without attachment and without hold, nor allow himself to be fascinated by an existence, with neither reason nor direction. His Fichtean sense of the primary affirmation sheltered him from the influences of a humanism, much too facile and immediate; but in striving to make reflection coincide with sentiment, he sought to save, at the same time, the rationality of philosophy and the concrete sense of existence." See "L'humanité de l'homme: Contribution de la philosophie française contemporaine" (1962), pp. 321, 322 (my translation).


We may interpret this to mean that there is no orthodoxy in philosophy, in the sense that no philosophy can arrogate to itself the title of "Christian philosophy."¹³³ None the less, there is a problem of the "Christian philosopher" who also comes under the realm of Christian preaching. The "Christian philosopher" is a kind of "third" person—different from biblical person and hellenic person—insofar as this is a person of culture who also listens to the Word of God.¹³⁴ What is demanded of this person is that it does not become a "kingdom divided against itself" but someone who lives the "permanent tensions of faith and culture, seeking the signs of their future unity in the Kingdom to come."¹³⁵

According to Ricoeur, the Christian faith opens up a dimension of hope—a dimension of "possibility"—that has a "philosophical impact" and that can thus serve as the "directive principle" of philosophical reflection.¹³⁶ In what way is philosophical reflection affected by Christian hope? In philosophy, the concept of hope or the "Last Day" maintains the open-ended character of concrete history by giving it both a limit and a meaning.¹³⁷ On the one hand, the concept of hope provides us with a Kantian "limit-idea" to the extent that it designates a total meaning which is "thought" but not "known."¹³⁸ Hope makes us abandon the pretension of an absolute knowledge of history. This negative function of hope is expressed by the first of its twin categories—the "not

¹³³ See "La condition du philosophe chrétien" (review of R. Mehl, La condition du philosophe chrétien), Christianisme social 56 (1948), p. 555.

¹³⁴ See "Recherches d'anthropologie chrétienne sur le terrain philosophique: I. Les Grecs et le péché, II. Le philosophe en face de la confession des péchés," Supplément to La confiance (Correspondance Fraternelle et Privée des Pasteurs de France) 3 (1957), Nos. 1-2, p. 25.


¹³⁸ See "Foi et philosophie aujourd'hui" (exposé of Ricoeur followed by a discussion during the study week-end organized by the Groupe Parisien en Versailles, 30-31 Jan 1972), Foi-Education (Week-end Versailles) 42 (July-Sept 1972), No. 100, p. 10.
yet" (pas encore). On the other hand, the concept of hope imbues us with the courage to affirm the hidden meaning of history. If hope makes us aware of the limits of reflection, it is also that which enables us to go beyond these limits in the power of affirmation. 139 This positive function of hope is expressed by the second of its twin categories—the "from now on" (dès maintenant). In brief, the hope evoked by the Christian faith is recuperated philosophically "in the very delay of all syntheses, in the postponement of the solution to all dialectics." 140

To delve more deeply into the matter, we may distinguish a threefold relation between Christian faith and philosophical reflection in Ricoeur's work. 141 First of all, the Christian faith presents itself as a fundamental aspect of his personal perspective. It serves as a source of insight insofar as he is a philosopher who also "listens" to the Christian preaching. 142 In this way, Christian faith alerts and awakens the philosopher to reflect on his proper task—to manifest the signs of the hidden reality of the new human being—in an autonomous manner. 143 It is in this sense that Ricoeur speaks of the "hypothesis" governing his work, thought, and life. 144 Secondly, philosophical reflection may be considered as a sort of prolegomenon to Christian faith. At the same time that Ricoeur defends the autonomy of philosophical thought, he also

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139 In this light, hope manifests itself as a combatant answer to resignation. Ricoeur tells us: "...I would say that hope is the opening of the possible against the necessary; it is the affirmation, no matter what comes, that the human can be because it is given him to be possible." See "La foi soupçonnée," Recherches et Débats (Foi et religion, Semaine des Intellectuels Catholiques, 10-16 mars 1971) 19 (1971), No. 73, p. 69 (Ricoeur's emphases; my translation).


141 This is brought out in an interesting essay by Wells. See Harold Wells, "Theology and Christian Philosophy: Their Relation in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur," Studies in Religion (Toronto) 5 (1975), No. 1, pp. 54-55.

142 Ricoeur likens himself to Kierkegaard when speaking of himself as a "listener" of the Christian message. See "Démythologisation et herméneutique," (Nancy: Centre Européen Universitaire, 1967), 32 p., p. 17 (mimeographed text).

143 "La condition du philosophe chrétien" (1948), p. 554. See also MJ, 274.

144 See "Sciences humaines et conditionnements de la foi," Recherches et Débats (Dieu aujourd'hui) 14 (1965), No. 52, p. 139.
admits its limits, arising from the origin of faith in the Wholly Other.\textsuperscript{145} Thus, he preserves a sphere beyond his competence as a philosopher and speaks of his discourse as “preparatory” in that it removes conceptual obstructions which stand in the way of faith.\textsuperscript{146} Thirdly, there is an overlap of philosophical thought and Christian faith when Ricoeur makes statements for which the basis can only be a faith response to data which are radically given. As we have already seen, Ricoeur deems that the novel task of the philosopher today is not only to clarify the alternative between belief and unbelief in a critical investigation but also to make a commitment and bear witness to it.\textsuperscript{147}

Since we have specifically cited Emmanuel Mounier as standing for the third influence—Christian faith—on Ricoeur’s thought, it may be fitting to end this section with a short note of what Ricoeur regards as his debt to Mounier. In the “Préface” to the first edition (1955) of Histoire et vérité, Ricoeur listed as one of the four interests in his life his participation in Esprit, the leftist Catholic journal founded by Mounier in 1932. As a homage to Mounier who passed away in 1950, Ricoeur wrote a brilliant study wherein he points out the significance of Mounier’s movement of personalism:

Its main contribution to contemporary thought has been to offer a philosophical matrix to professional philosophers, to propose to-

\textsuperscript{145} To quote a passage that aptly describes Ricoeur’s philosophical approach to Christian faith: “The philosopher, even the Christian one, has a distinct task; I am not inclined to say that he brackets what he has heard and what he believes, for how could he philosophize in such a state of abstraction with respect to what is essential? But neither am I of the opinion that he should subordinate his philosophy to theology, in an ancillary relation. Between abstention and capitulation, there is the autonomous way which I have located under the heading ‘the philosophical approach.’...I take ‘approach’ in its strong sense of ‘approximation.’” See “La liberté selon l’espérance” (1968), in CI, 394; “Freedom in the Light of Hope” (1974), translated by Robert Sweeney, in CINT, 403.

\textsuperscript{146} Ricoeur takes great care not to fuse faith and philosophy together but to hold them together in a sympathetic tension. He clearly states: “The philosopher is not a preacher. He may listen to preaching as I do; but insofar as he is a professional and responsible thinker, he remains a beginner, and his discourse always remains a preparatory discourse.” See “Religion, athéisme, foi” (1969), in CI, 432; “Religion, Atheism, and Faith” (1969, 1974 translation by Charles Freilich in CINT), in CINT, 441.

\textsuperscript{147} See above, pp. 21-22.\textsuperscript{TM}
nalities to them, theoretical and practical holding notes containing one or several philosophies, pregnant with one or several philosophical systematizations. For many of us, this is our true debt to our friend.\textsuperscript{148}

Commenting on this essay which he included in the first edition of \textit{Histoire et vérité}, Ricoeur eloquently sums up the peculiar genius of Mounier:

He had a way of linking philosophical reflection, which was to all appearances the farthest removed from current events, to vital problems of our times; he refused to dissociate a criteriology of truth from a political pedagogy; he would not separate the “awakening of the person” from the “communal revolution”; he refused to take part in the anti-technicist movement under the pretext of “interiority”; he distrusted “purism” and catastrophism; he possessed a kind of “tragic optimism.” \textit{All that I regard as my debt to Emmanuel Mounier}.\textsuperscript{149}

Thus, what has clearly impressed Ricoeur in Mounier is his exhortation to witness to a \textit{vigoros} kind of Christianity—a “Christianity of the strong” which entails living history to its fullness with a courage and a hope that also consent to the responsibility and the anguish.\textsuperscript{150}

\textbf{B. The Unfinished Philosophical Quest of Ricoeur}

Our intention in this section is to simply evoke the principal themes in the still-unfinished philosophical quest of Ricoeur.\textsuperscript{151} In the case of...

\textsuperscript{148} See “Emmanuel Mounier: une philosophie personnaliste” (1950), in HV, 138 (this essay first appeared in a commemorative issue of \textit{Esprit} (Emmanuel Mounier) 18 (December 1950), pp. 860-867); “Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher” (1965), in HT, 136 (Ricoeur’s emphases).


\textsuperscript{150} This is a celebrated theme in Mounier’s personalism. Ricoeur points this out in his essay on Mounier’s philosophy. See “Emmanuel Mounier: une philosophie personnaliste” (1950), in HV, 135-163, esp. pp. 152-153; “Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher” (1965), in HT, 133-161, esp. pp. 149-151.

\textsuperscript{151} For a most succinct and yet highly-nuanced overview of Ricoeur’s philosophical itinerary, see Monique Lassègue, “L’oeuvre de Ricoeur,” \textit{Cahiers universitaires catholiques} (Paris) (November-December 1976), No. 2, pp. 18-22. Another clear and
such a self-critical thinker, it is worthwhile listening to his own account of his philosophical journey.\footnote{152} For Ricoeur’s periodic self-assessments do not only instruct us on the specific problems, questions, and tasks that occupy him. They also communicate to us a unique trait present from the very beginning of his enterprise—the keen awareness that the truth has to be ceaselessly approximated.\footnote{153}

According to Ricoeur, two phases may be distinguished in his philosophical itinerary—the first dominated by the problem of existence, the second by the problem of language. The growth of the existential concern into an hermeneutic interest is traced by Ricoeur in an address, “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” delivered before the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1971.\footnote{154}


\footnote{153} On the “relation of endless approximation” with the truth, Ricoeur writes: “Moreover, this relation of approximation is itself never known by absolute science. It too can only be presumed and stated in the modest and uncertain formula that I borrow from Gabriel Marcel: ‘I hope to be in the truth.’ The truth, not only formal and abstract, but actual and concrete, ceases to be asserted in a Prometheus act of taking a position on the self by the self and of adequation of the self to the self. The truth is rather the lighted place in which it is possible to continue to live and to think. And to think with our very opponents themselves, without allowing the totality which contains us ever to become a knowledge about which we can overestimate ourselves and become arrogant.” See “Preface: Response to My Friends and Critics,” translated by Charles Reagan, in Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, edited by Charles Reagan (Athens, Ohio: The Ohio University Press, 1979), p. XXI (Ricoeur’s emphases).

\footnote{154} See “From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language,” translated by David Pellauer, Criterion 10 (Spring 1971), No. 3, pp. 14-18 (reprinted in RM, 315-322 and in PPR, 86-93). The text of this address was reprinted in expanded version in Philosophy Today under the title “A Philosophical Journey: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language” (1973), pp. 88-96.
1. The existential-phenomenological phase

We already know that Ricoeur wrote his first two books on the existentialist philosophies of Jaspers and Marcel. At this time, Ricoeur describes the existentialist philosophies as arising from "the conjunction of the phenomenological method illustrated by Husserl and the question of existence coming from post-Kantian ...[and] from post-Hegelian philosophy." From the later Husserl, the Husserl of the Lebenswelt, a rigorous method of description is appropriated and applied systematically to the problem of existence. This recuperation of integral human experience centers around three themes that constitute what Ricoeur calls "the three melodic cells of existential phenomenology," namely, the body-as-mine, freedom, and the other.

Ricoeur acknowledges the merits of the existentialist philosophies, insofar as they can be grouped together. Their force lies in the proclamation of a "humanism," in having confronted our contingency, and in having affirmed our responsibility. But their weakness consists in the failure to forge together existence and truth. In overstressing "subjectivity," philosophy at this time either repudiates the whole of science, relegating it to the level of "objectivity" (in the manner of Marcel), or accentuates, in opposition to the natural sciences, the rupture between the human and nature (in the manner of Sartre). In both instances, the attitude of philosophy towards the natural and social sciences is colored by what Ricoeur calls a "certain primitivism" or an "anti-scientific obscurantism."

It is against this background that we must consider the first installment of Ricoeur's lifetime project of the Philosophy of the Will—Le volontaire et l'involontaire which appeared in 1950. Here, the task is to elaborate an Eidetics of the will—a description of the essential struc-

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155 See J and MJ.
159 "Le philosophe" (1971), pp. 50, 51.
tutes or, in a language more akin to the existentialists, the fundamental possibilities of being human.\textsuperscript{160} The method, which combines Husserlian rigor and Marcellian depth, brings about the provisional abstraction of the fault and Transcendence. It is necessary to bracket the fault because it is ir-rational. As such, it is already a distortion of the human being's essential structures. It is likewise necessary to bracket Transcendence because it is meta-rational. As such, it is already a revelation of our ultimate origin.

We notice here the continuity as well as the discontinuity of Ricoeur's problematic with that of the previous existentialist thinkers. The task remains the description of human existence but this time, focussed on the significance of the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary. According to Ricoeur, one can speak of this phase as "existential phenomenology," in the sense that it tried "to extract from lived experience the essential meanings and structures of purpose, project, motive, wanting, trying, and so on."\textsuperscript{161} We also notice that instead of the existentialist question "What does it mean to exist?" the question "What does it mean to will?"—embracing the questions of incarnate existence and freedom—is posed. In this way, Ricoeur strives to preserve both the concrete dimension of existence as well as fulfill the rigorous aspiration of philosophical reflection.

In 1960, the second installment of Philosophy of the Will appeared in two parts under the collective title, Finitude et culpabilité. The first part, L'homme faillible, deals on the question of fallibility or the possibility of the fault. The second part, La symbolique du mal, grappling with the experience of the fault. Here, the task is to elaborate an Empirics of the will—to distinguish finitude from guilt, to show their difference and connection.\textsuperscript{162} For Ricoeur, now nurtured by his meditation on the works of Kant and Nabert, this descent of reflection into the tragic abyss of existence, its confrontation with, and purification from the experi-

\textsuperscript{160} VI, 7; FN, 3. See also Ihde, HP, pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{161} "A Philosophical Journey: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language" (1973), pp. 89-90.
\textsuperscript{162} MJ, 143-44.
ence of evil, is a necessity. This inevitable detour through the expressions of evil in myths and symbols obliges a recasting of method and signals the inauguration of the *hermeneutic* phase in Ricoeur’s philosophical research.

2. The hermeneutic-phenomenological phase

Ricoeur readily acknowledges the gradual unfolding of the import and range of the hermeneutic problem in his itinerary. Initially, hermeneutics presents itself as intertwined with the problem of a specific kind of language—*symbolic language*. If the essential structures of the will were previously accessible to direct description, such is no longer the case with the experience and avowal of evil which are couched in the indirect language of symbols and myths. The task then is to reflect philosophically on myths and symbols through the *method* of hermeneutics. This hermeneutics involves a kind of *interpretation*

...that respects the original enigma of the symbols, that lets itself be taught by them, but that, beginning from there, promotes the meaning, forms the meaning in the full responsibility of autonomous thought.

At this stage, Ricoeur identifies and limits hermeneutics to the interpretation of symbolic language. This convergence of hermeneutics and symbolic language is clearly posed in the first part of Ricoeur’s dialogue with Freud in *De l’interprétation*.

In his intellectual history, Ricoeur supplies us with four reasons for the shift in his interest from the problem of the will to the problem of language: first, the encounter with psychoanalysis; second, the confrontation with structuralism; third, the interest in the problem of religious

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163 According to Ricoeur, the problem of evil is the “critical point” and “incomparable touchstone” of all philosophical reflection. See “Kierkegaard et le mal,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 13 (1963), pp. 292-293.


165 See DI, 18; DINT, 9: “I have decided to define, i.e., limit, the notions of symbol and interpretation through one another. Thus a symbol is a double-meaning linguistic expression that requires an interpretation, and interpretation is a work of understanding that aims at deciphering symbols.”
language, more specifically as raised by the theologies of the Word in the post-Bultmannian school; and fourth, the interest in the British-American school of ordinary language philosophy. Let us briefly take these up one by one.

The problem of guilt not only compels Ricoeur to encounter the psychoanalytic interpretation of guilt but also the problem of the general structure of language according to psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic interpretation of cultural symbols and religious myths makes him aware that there is not only one but two kinds of hermeneutics—the one reductive and the other recollective. Psychoanalysis is a “reductive” hermeneutics insofar as it explains symbols and myths only as “the disguised expressions of representations and affects belonging to the most archaic of man’s desires.” But there is also a “recollective” hermeneutics that strives to restore the symbols and myths in their original richness of meaning. This new awareness of the conflict of interpretations obliges Ricoeur to enlarge his vision of hermeneutics beyond the decipherment of symbolic expressions. The problem, at this time, is the reconciliation of these conflicting hermeneutics. De l’interprétation, according to him, contains this double recognition of the necessary detour through symbols and the conflictual structure of hermeneutics.

From psychoanalysis, Ricoeur takes a step to linguistics. The affinity of these two disciplines becomes apparent the moment one perceives that the Freudian unconscious is capable of a linguistic formulation. This excursion of Ricoeur into linguistics also coincided with the general...

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169 In Ricoeur’s view, this conflict of interpretation is what defines most closely the modernity of our cultural existence. See “Démythologisation et herméneutique” (1967), p. 23.

170 The similarity and difference of the Freudian unconscious with the structural unconscious in linguistics is more fully treated in “La philosophie à l’âge des sciences humaines” (1966), pp. 93-99.
eral change in the philosophical climate in France at that time. Thus, in assessing a quarter-century of French philosophy (1945-1970), Ricoeur clearly points out that "the new massive fact" to be reckoned with is the leading role assumed by the social sciences, especially linguistics.171 For this reason, he reiterates the urgent need of philosophy to dialogue with the social sciences.

Ricoeur's dialogue with structuralism, "an explanation which was first successful in linguistics" bears out this concerted effort to learn from the social sciences.172 One must realize the value at stake here to appreciate this necessary confrontation with structuralism. What structuralism radically questions is not only the "humanist" view affirmed earlier by the existentialist philosophies but the "subject" itself, the "I" that is "the axis of all philosophical reflection," and more especially, the central reference point of a reflective philosophy adhered to by Ricoeur.173 However, the challenge of structuralism can also be seen as paving the way towards the renewal of the philosophy of the Cogito, a prelude to its authentic reappropriation. In Ricoeur's reaction to structuralism, we note first a movement of achieving competence in this particular domain, and secondly, a movement of articulating the nexus between hermeneutics and structuralism. He sees this reconciliation in the dialectic between the stage of "structural analysis" and the stage of "hermeneutic comprehension."174

The post-Bultmannian theologies of the Word also gave an impulse to Ricoeur's interest in the problem of language. According to Ricoeur's account, Bultmann imposed two fundamental limitations upon the theory of religious language: first, the polarity between kerygma and myth which led to the primacy accorded to the problem of demythologization; and second, the opposition between interpretation and expla-
nation. In recognizing these limitations, the post-Bultmannian theologians were able to escape from a romanticist kind of hermeneutics by subordinating both the problem of demythologisation and the problem of existential appropriation to the broader problem of how to interpret religious language. In turn, this interpretation of religious texts or biblical hermeneutics has to be related to a general hermeneutics taken as the interpretation of written language or texts.\textsuperscript{175} At this point, the problem no longer consists in recovering the “world” disclosed by the text. In other words, the hermeneutical task is “to discern the ‘issue’ or ‘thing’ of the text (Gadamer) and not the psychology of the author.”\textsuperscript{176} The question then is the appropriation of the meaning of the text which demands that the subject relinquishes his claim as the radical origin of meaning.

As for the influence exerted by the British-American school of ordinary language philosophy upon his inquiries, Ricoeur cites this twofold contribution: first, the discovery of the polysemic structure of ordinary language brought out in the “variability of semantic values” and in the “sensitivity to contexts” becomes the “basic condition for symbolic discourse”; secondly, ordinary language functions as a treasurehouse, “a kind of conservatory for expressions which have preserved the highest descriptive power as regards human experiences, particularly in the realms of action and feelings.”\textsuperscript{177} The task then in a linguistically-oriented phenomenology would be to recapture the intentions of ordinary language experiences. Yet though Ricoeur admits the analysis of ordinary language to be fruitful and even a necessary first stage, he is not at all impervious to its shortcomings. He himself urges a radical questioning of the exclusive fascination and overwhelming attention accorded to the problem of language.

\textsuperscript{175} “Text-interpretation” is defined by Ricoeur as “...the process by which disclosure of new modes of being...gives to the subject a new capacity for knowing himself.” See IT, 94.


\textsuperscript{177} “A Philosophical Journey: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language” (1973), pp. 95-96. See also “A Critique of B.F.Skinner’s Beyond Freedom and Dignity” (1973), translated by David Pellauer, in PSE, 52-55.
What must be put into question is the “inflation of the problem of language in contemporary philosophy.” For the creativity of language discloses something other than language itself. Language conveys us back “to life which carries it, to action of which it is only a segment, finally to experience which is ‘carried to language.’” Ricoeur is in no way advocating a nostalgic return to the past—to the time of existentialism. Rather, he is seriously reflecting here on the inexhaustible insight that being human is language, that one speaks because one has something to say, but what one has to say is the “elsewhere” of language. At this point, the philosopher has to confess that we are not the origin of language. In Ricoeur’s own words: “...the human is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken by us than spoken to us.” Is this experience of being created by the power of the word, “a power that is ... a call in which I leave off all demands and listen,” what Ricoeur’s Poetics is all about? To answer this question requires another study.

In this brief survey of Ricoeur’s philosophical itinerary, we have kept ourselves to the essential minimum needed in situating the problematic of this study—the meaning of being human as elaborated in the Philosophy of the Will and the “social-political writings.” We have followed Ricoeur’s distinction of two phases—the existential and the hermeneutic—in his philosophical enterprise. But we have done so, we believe, not with the tenacious idea of marking off clear-cut divisions and affixing neat labels to his thought. We have tried to seek first the questions that animate Ricoeur’s investigation from within, to sketch the various tasks that present themselves in his itinerary, and to evoke the original movement by which his thought responds to its sources.

179 Ibid. (emphases added).
180 In this way, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics opens out to an ontology that strives to think the relationship between language and reality. To cite a relevant text: “When I speak, I know that something is brought to language. This knowledge is no longer intra-linguistic but extra-linguistic; it moves from being to being-said, at the very time that language itself moves from sense to reference. Kant wrote: ‘Something must be for something to appear.’ We are saying: ‘Something must be for something to be said.’” See MV, 386; RM, 304.