Contributions to Hermeneutics

Volume 2

Hermeneutics is one of the main traditions within recent and contemporary European philosophy, and yet, as a distinctive mode of philosophising, it has often received much less attention than other similar traditions such as phenomenology, deconstruction or even critical theory. This series aims to rectify this relative neglect and to reaffirm the character of hermeneutics as a cohesive, distinctive, and rigorous stream within contemporary philosophy. The series will encourage works that focus on the history of hermeneutics prior to the twentieth century, that take up figures from the classical twentieth-century hermeneutic canon (including Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, but also such as Strauss, Pareyson, Taylor and Rorty), that engage with key hermeneutic questions and themes (especially those relating to language, history, aesthetics, and truth), that explore the cross-cultural relevance and spread of hermeneutic concerns, and that also address hermeneutics in its interconnection with, and involvement in, other disciplines from architecture to theology. A key task of the series will be to bring into English the work of hermeneutic scholars working outside of the English-speaking world, while also demonstrating the relevance of hermeneutics to key contemporary debates. Since hermeneutics can itself be seen to stand between, and often to overlap with, many different contemporary philosophical traditions, the series will also aim at stimulating and supporting philosophical dialogue through hermeneutical engagement. Contributions to Hermeneutics aims to draw together the diverse field of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics through a series of volumes that will give an increased focus to hermeneutics as a discipline while also reflecting the interdisciplinary and truly international scope of hermeneutic inquiry. The series will encourage works that focus on both contemporary hermeneutics as well as its history, on specific hermeneutic themes and areas of inquiry (including theological and religious hermeneutics), and on hermeneutic dialogue across cultures and disciplines. All books to be published in this series will be fully peer-reviewed before final acceptance.

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Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur

Between Text and Phenomenon

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Introduction

The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) is unrivaled with respect to its scope. No other thinker can claim to have been involved in more of the major debates of the twentieth century than Ricoeur. Freedom of the will, the unconscious, the body, evil, the problem of language, the relation of faith and reason, the philosophy of mind, personal identity, the question of justice, and countless other topics are addressed over the course of Ricoeur's intellectual career. It is thus impossible for any single volume to do justice to such a vast and wide-ranging body of work. The best that can be hoped is to shed light on some portion of this immense oeuvre. *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur: Between Text and Phenomenon* takes up this task by calling attention to one especially important aspect of Ricoeur's thought, namely, the interaction between his hermeneutics and his work in the school of phenomenology.

Ricoeur's first exposure to Husserlian phenomenology occurred in the early 1930s through the famous "Friday evenings" hosted by Gabriel Marcel, where Marcel came to have an influence on many young French philosophers. What was initially appealing to Ricoeur was the connection between Husserl's work and his already established interest in the tradition of French reflexive philosophy, represented by Jean Nabert and others. Although this tradition has mostly been forgotten today, in the broadest sense it might be described as an inheritance of the Cartesian and Kantian traditions which grant priority to the *cogito* and to the project of self-knowledge. Likewise, Husserlian phenomenology, especially in *Ideas I*, develops an egology. But, what Ricoeur admired about Husserl's work, in particular, was its increased methodological rigor as well as its novel discovery of intentionality which overcame the Cartesian conception of consciousness.

Called to military service in 1939, Ricoeur spent much of World War II in a German prisoner of war camp. To pass the time there, he began a full translation of Husserl's *Ideas I* in the margins of the book in the smallest imaginable handwriting. This personal copy, which Ricoeur carried back home in his knapsack, is on display today at the Fonds Ricoeur in Paris. This translation, along with an extended commentary, was published in 1950 and established Ricoeur's reputation as one of the leaders of the phenomenological movement in France. Ricoeur would go on to write

many articles on other aspects of Husserl's thought, including studies of Husserl's unpublished manuscripts. And he would continue to exert an important influence on the next generation of Husserl scholars through frequent seminars and working groups on phenomenology.

Doctoral candidates, in Ricoeur's days, were required to submit two separate works to their committee: one that was more technical on a topic in the history of philosophy and a second more original work. Accompanying his translation and commentary on Husserl, Ricoeur presented *Freedom and Nature* in 1948 as the second part of his dissertation. This work was clearly inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, which emphasized the ambiguity of the body as both a subject and an object of perception. Ricoeur sought to extend this approach to the practical sphere in a project which he called an "eidetics of the will." Its aim was to describe the essential, invariant structures of human action in terms of the ambiguity of the body as both a voluntary source of the will that undertakes projects and an involuntary object in the world that is determined by the facticity of life, birth, and the unconscious. What was most innovative about this approach was Ricoeur's attempt to show the reciprocity that takes place between the voluntary and the involuntary through the notion of "consent to the involuntary" in which the self freely accepts its facticity.

This approach underscores the fact that Ricoeur was quite wary of the idealistic tendencies of Husserlian phenomenology, especially as they are expressed in *Ideas I*. Husserl's Idealism casts a shadow over his interpretation of subjectivity and the experiences whose meanings are constituted by it. Husserl establishes the subject of experience as a pure ego that is set apart from the natural world and adopts the standpoint of a spectator of the world. From such a perspective, the meaning of experience becomes reduced to its meaning for the pure ego. The Ricoeurian ego, by contrast, is not defined as a theoretical spectator but as a *homo capax*, or, a capable human who has the power to act in the world. But the powers of human praxis are fragile and precariously exposed to their limits, and as a result, the practical subject is a mixture of activity and passivity, capable of both acting and suffering. This is why the Ricoeurian self, instead of being a transcendental master or an unshakeable foundation of meaning, can be described as a "wounded cogito," irreducible but marked by its limits. And indeed, the subsequent works in Ricoeur's trilogy – *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* – address the limit-experiences resulting from the experiences of fault, sin, and evil whose meanings remain an enigma and a mystery to oneself. The inquiry into the meaning of such limit-experiences calls for a passage beyond a purely phenomenological discourse and supplementation by other modes of discourse – such as those of symbols and myths.

It was his investigation of symbols and myths that sparked Ricoeur's initial interest in the field of hermeneutics. Indeed, in addition to his work in introducing Husserlian phenomenology to France, Ricoeur played an equally important role with regard to hermeneutics. From the 1960s and onwards, Ricoeur introduced French readers to the hermeneutic tradition, both through his exposition of other hermeneutic thinkers (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Bultmann, Gadamer) as well as the development of his own original contributions to the field. As the editor of a series

with the French publisher Seuil, he helped to bring about a French translation of Hans Georg-Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. The two philosophers initially met at a conference in 1957, which sparked a series of letters between the two and the eventual pursuit of a French translation of the work. As with his relation to Husserl, Ricoeur saw an important breakthrough in Gadamer's work. Post-Heideggerian hermeneutics challenges the Husserlian pretense to establish a presuppositionless starting point for phenomenology and provide a direct access to the phenomena. Instead, understanding is mediated by the work of interpretation to the extent that it always takes place within the context of a tradition that establishes an orientation and direction for meaning. But, while Ricoeur recognizes the importance of the hermeneutic starting point, he is at the same time wary of certain aspects of Gadamer's thought. One source of concern is that tradition can also be a way of narrowing or ossifying the possibilities of meaning in an ideological manner. His own hermeneutics will thus place an emphasis on the importance of innovation and creation within a tradition, and on the need of a critical interpretation of what is transmitted by tradition.

In spite of their differences, phenomenology and hermeneutics share something essential in common: this is what Ricoeur calls "the choice for meaning." The discovery of intentional consciousness, in Husserlian phenomenology, is the discovery of the directedness of consciousness toward meaning. For phenomenology, then, every question concerning being is thus a question about the meaning of being. The same can be said of hermeneutics, insofar as it too regards all experience to be meaningful and seeks to disclose meanings that are hidden or latent within it. This connection between the two discourses leads Ricoeur to call for a graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology. In so doing, phenomenology is opened up to a non-idealistic conception of meaning, in which meaning is discovered in addition to being produced. This trajectory is not entirely absent from Husserl's phenomenology, either; it turns up later when Husserl practices a method of questioning back from conscious experience to its origins in the pre-conscious lifeworld. And conversely, Ricoeur acknowledges that one could legitimately speak also of a grafting of phenomenology onto hermeneutics. In so doing, hermeneutics is able to establish a critical distance from the lived experience of belonging to a tradition. Phenomenology can thus lead hermeneutics beyond the mere acceptance of a tradition and bring about a deeper understanding of its meaning.

Based on this mediation between phenomenology and hermeneutics, it could be said that Ricoeur's thought is placed under a twofold demand: between the rigor of the text and the requirements of the phenomenon. The rigor of the text calls for fidelity to what the text actually says, while the requirement of the phenomenon is established by the Husserlian call to return "to the things themselves." A naïve interpretation of this dynamic might suggest that this would pull Ricoeur's thought in two irreconcilable directions – either toward the text that is distanced from the world or to the things that stand apart from the text. But, as Ricoeur's "hermeneutic phenomenology" reminds us, these two movements are in fact reconcilable. There is a hermeneutic component of phenomenology in its attempt to go beyond the surface of things to their deeper meaning, just as there is a phenomenological component of

hermeneutics in its attempt to establish a critical distance toward the world to which we belong. For this reason, Ricoeur's thought involves a double movement proceeding from the text to the phenomenon and from the phenomenon back to the text.

While the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics was an explicit theme of many essays in the middle of his career, it is important to highlight the fact that hermeneutic phenomenology remains present in his later work as well, even though it is not thematized directly there. This can be observed, for instance, in *Oneself as Another* (1990). The influence of phenomenology is already evident on the opening pages in which the French use of "*se*" in reflexive verbs points back to the reflexive dimension of self-experience. Although Ricoeur maintains that the reflexive experience of the self is irreducible, he also acknowledges that it is exposed continually to the threat of suspicion and critique. In response*, Oneself as Another* sets out to develop a hermeneutics of the self that restores self-understanding by way of a hermeneutic detour through the philosophy of language, the philosophy of action, the question of personal identity, and the ethical determinations of action. The back and forth movement between phenomenology and hermeneutics also guides the structure of Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004). The first part of the book begins with a study of the phenomenological experience of memory "in the spirit of Husserlian phenomenology." Ricoeur examines memory starting from the question of what is remembered, passing through the question of how it is remembered, and ultimately arriving at the question of who is remembering. But, to the extent that memory is always accompanied by the threat of falsification and the shadow of forgetting, this phenomenology of lived experience must also be accompanied by a hermeneutics of history. The role of this critical hermeneutics is to discern and uncover the distortion and forgetting that can take place in individual memories through the recovery of traces of the past.

These brief examples serve as a reminder that Ricoeur's later work continues to operate under the twofold requirement of the rigor of the phenomenon and the rigor of the text. Even if his hermeneutic phenomenology is not an explicit topic of Ricoeur's focus, it nonetheless still underlies the movement of his thought in his later works. The chapters collected in this book will highlight further, and in much greater detail, how this back and forth movement between phenomenology and hermeneutics takes place throughout Ricoeur's oeuvre.

The first part of the book provides a contextual background for Ricoeur's thought by examining some of the most significant sources of his hermeneutic phenomenology.

Marc-Antoine Vallée explores the existentialist influences on Ricoeur's early approach to the ontological question. He invites us to rediscover Ricoeur's thinking on being and human existence before the formulation, in *The Conflict of the Interpretations* (1969), of the well-known distinction between a "short route" and a "long route" as two different ways to graft the hermeneutic problem onto the phenomenological method. He shows that another distinction was crucial at the time: an opposition between "unifocal" ontology and "bifocal" ontology, represented respectively by Heidegger and Sartre, on the one hand, and by Jaspers and Marcel, on the other hand. This opposition appears in Ricoeur's first books on Karl Jaspers

and Gabriel Marcel, in 1947, and structures the reflection on the ontological question in his *Philosophy of the Will* (1950/60), where the existentialist approach of the early works encounters phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches.

The question of the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics becomes a central issue, in Ricoeur's work, during the 1960s and the 1970s. Leslie MacAvoy's chapter "Distanciation and *Epoché*: The Influence of Husserl on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics" shows that Ricoeur's concept of distanciation is central to his critical hermeneutics elaborated during this period. This concept gets its critical potential from Husserl's notion of the *epoché*. The *epoché* is a bracketing of the natural attitude that inaugurates the phenomenological attitude. From this vantage point, the sense of reality is established through a synthesis of the actual and the possible. The *epoché* introduces the possible in the real by opening up a space for the imagination in the activity of eidetic variation. The role of the *epoché* is echoed in Ricoeur's treatment of the text as the opening up of a second order reference. The text exposes the reader not only to other possible worlds but to other possible ways of being, thus affording a perspective from which one can question current ways of being.

Richard Kearney's contribution continues this reflection on the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics in Ricoeur's work by questioning the way the hermeneutical turn in the direction of language and texts, during the 1960s and the following decades, seems to move him away from important insights about "carnal signification" that were present in his early phenomenological works, especially in *Freedom and Nature* (1950). However, Kearney's intention is not simply to go back to this phenomenology, as if the hermeneutical turn were a mistake. On the contrary, his aim is to improve this idea of "carnal signification" in a hermeneutical context inspired mostly by Ricoeur's later writings, especially *Oneself as Another* (1990). This "carnal hermeneutics," which is situated at the crossroads of the phenomena of flesh, embodiment, language, and interpretation, brings Ricoeur's thought into dialogue with the works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas.

The questions of the self and of our belonging to the world, at the core of Ricoeur's hermeneutics during the 1980s and 1990s, are taken up by the chapters in part II.

Claude Romano wonders whether all the innovations in Ricoeur's thinking on selfhood in *Oneself as Another* (1990) is diminished by his effort to retain some aspects of modern philosophies of consciousness taken up by French reflexive philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology. The question here is whether selfhood can properly be conceived as a form of identity, as Ricoeur suggests. Romano explains why, according to him, this cannot be the case. This does not mean that Ricoeur's concept of selfhood, which Romano sees as a major contribution to reflection on the self, should be abandoned. But we should seek a better way of understanding the relationship between selfhood, understood as the ability to endorse and be responsible for our commitments, and our qualitative identity.

Carmine Di Martino explores another aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology of the self by developing a "genealogy of ipseity" that takes account of the fact that otherness is, from the outset, constitutive of selfhood. He shows that, in the

context of *Oneself as Another*, this otherness presents itself in the triple form of otherness of the flesh, of others, and of the voice of conscience. Di Martino, however, gives a certain primacy to the otherness of others over the other two forms of alterity, since he maintains that the otherness of our own body and of the voice of our conscience arises, strictly speaking, only from the otherness at work in the intersubjective relationship. In order to understand this point better, he puts Ricoeur's thought in dialogue with the works of Axel Honneth, René Spitz, and Jan Patocka, who allow us to understand how our belonging to the world is marked fundamentally by our relationships with others.

Language is another constitutive element of our belonging to the world to be taken into account, as strongly demonstrated by Ricoeur before *Oneself as Another* in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) and *Time and Narrative* (1983–1985). Michaël Foessel addresses the issue of whether Ricoeur's hermeneutics leads to a form of linguistic idealism in which the self in enclosed in language. In response to this question, he contends on the one hand that textuality cannot be reduced to a set of cultural objects in the world, but instead constitutes a fundamental dimension of our being in the world. If this is true, reading is not simply one activity among others, but the paradigmatic transaction in which the self engages is a hermeneutic of meaning. But on the other hand, to read is not only to enter the world of the text; it is to enter into the textuality by which the world presents itself to us. In this sense, Fœssel helps us to understand how Ricoeur's hermeneutic continues the phenomenological ambition of presenting the things themselves, which distinguishes it from a pure linguistic idealism.

Part III "Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Tradition, Memory and History" examines another very important aspect of the alterity that constitutes the self. The self does not exist on its own, instead it is defined in part by its belonging to a world that is already there. As such, it inherits a past that precedes it. The influence of the past is explored in part III in terms of the role of tradition, memory, and history.

Michael Sohn, in "Word, Writing, Tradition." focuses on Ricoeur's earlier writings on tradition, specifically his critical engagement with French structuralism and philosophy of language during the 1960s through the early 1970s, which inform his later more well-known reflections on the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Instead of pursuing the now familiar themes of critique and ideology, distanciation and belonging, the chapter examines the themes of word or speech (*parole*) and writing (*écriture*). Sohn contends that Ricœur offers a critique of a dead and static notion of tradition, and instead develops a living and dynamic sense of tradition, as an eventful address of speech mediated by writing through the phenomenon of the "written voice" and the "listening reader." By attending to and parsing the meanings of *parole* and *écriture*, this chapter unfolds a philosophically rigorous and linguistically informed concept of tradition.

The contributions of Jeanne Marie Gagnebin and Luis António Umbelino shed light on our bodily relation to time and space. Jeanne Marie Gagnebin examines Ricœur's reading of *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, which is developed in the second volume of *Time and Narrative* (1984). She insists first and foremost on the corporeality of involuntary memory. Highlighting both the strengths and

weaknesses of Ricoeur's interpretation, Gagnebin argues that Ricoeur has not sufficiently emphasized this corporeal dimension of memory that is so crucial in Proustian descriptions, where it is primarily the body that remember through the senses of taste, smell, touch, etc. Far from being secondary, the anchoring of memory in corporeality is essential to the sudden rediscovery of the time that was believed to be lost forever.

If Ricoeur has neglected this embodied aspect of memory in his reading of Proust, Luis António Umbelino shows that the bodily space we inhabit consists of an architectural materiality marked by memories. Taking several themes developed especially in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), Umbelino helps us to realize that memory is far from being an exclusively temporal experience, but also has a very important spatial dimension. Just as the analyses of *Time and Narrative* described a third time in between the objective time of the sciences and the purely subjective experience of time, Ricoeur's reflections on built and inhabited space brings out a third space between the objective geometrical space and the absolute here of my body. And this built space is not separate from human time, since this space is deeply marked by history.

Pol Vandevelde, in "What Kind of Past Is the Referent of Historical Narratives?", examines two ways to circumscribe the "enigma of the past": first, the distinction between the past that is no longer (*Vergangenheit*) and the past that is still relevant and meaningful to us (*das Gewesene*) and, second, the distinction between an event (*Ereignis*), as what makes history possible, and a historical fact, as what falls into historical times and can be recorded. In order to situate this problem, Vandevelde appeals to Nietzsche's views about the "uses and disadvantages of history for life." Like Nietzsche, both Heidegger and Ricoeur acknowledge the power of the present to capture the past. However, against Heidegger's view that there is a sharp rupture between the event and historical facts, Ricoeur utilizes narrative to establish continuity between these two poles. As a case study, Vandevelde examines some "events" at the end of WWII that belong to "German suffering" and the historical delay that took place between the "happening" of these events and their recognition several decades later as "historical facts."

Whereas the third part focuses on the mediations that take place between the experience of the present and the belonging to a past, the contributions in the final part identify a variety of challenges that confront Ricoeur's efforts to mediate between differences. In this way, they engage in an effort to re-examine and re-deploy a Ricoeurian philosophy.

In "The Conflict of Hermeneutics," Marc de Launay asks how Ricoeur situated himself among the different hermeneutical conceptions of text and history. Despite Ricoeur's renunciation, in *Time and Narrative*, of the ideal of a total mediation of history represented by Hegel's philosophy and his appropriation of Koselleck's work in the sense of an open mediation, de Launay thinks that Ricoeur puts himself in an uncomfortable position. Indeed, Ricoeur found himself in the position of relying on different competing and conflicting philosophical schools: on the one hand, a Kantian inspired lineage including Schleiermacher and Koselleck, and on the other hand, a more Hegelian way of thinking represented principally by Gadamer.

De Launay argues that Ricoeur's "ecumenical intent" to reconcile these different hermeneutics cannot be maintained in the end. He demonstrates this point through a critical discussion of Ricoeur's interpretation of the biblical story of "original sin."

Scott Davidson's "Intersectional Hermeneutics" provides a phenomenological assessment of Ricoeur's version of the hermeneutic circle, arguing that it imposes an unwarranted restriction on the "things themselves." This narrowing of the text is traced to the introduction of structuralism into Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Guided by the example of critical controversy over the interpretation of Shakespeare's play "The Tempest," Davidson shows that structuralist explanation narrows the meaning of the text and, in turn, inhibits access to the phenomena that are sought. To salvage Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Davidson then proposes a productive dialogue with intersectional theory. On the one hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutics can provide a methodological framework for intersectional theorists that situates their work within a hermeneutics of understanding. On the other hand, Ricoeur's hermeneutics benefits from this new connection with intersectionality to the extent that it provides a substitute for structuralism and combats "false consciousness." As a result, "intersectional hermeneutics" is faithful at once to the spirit of Ricoeur's hermeneutical project and to the things themselves.

Sebastian Purcell, in his essay, aims to differentiate Ricoeur's hermeneutics from a Heideggerian conception of the finitude of human understanding. This brings Ricoeur's work into contact with some of the most pressing problems in contemporary Continental metaphysics. Drawing from the work of Alain Badiou, Purcell argues that Ricoeur develops an infinite hermeneutics, which thus develops Heidegger's sense of hermeneutics significantly. This position is demonstrated by tracing the itinerary from Heidegger's account of *aletheia* to Ricoeur's account of attestation. The conclusion is that Ricoeur offers a viable new opening for the future of hermeneutics.

In "Constructing Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory of Truth," Todd Mei constructs a theory of truth from various texts that span Ricoeur's career. While there are various works in which Ricoeur devotes attention to the problem of truth—for example, in *History and Truth* (1955), his conception of manifestation in his biblical hermeneutics, and when discussing convictions and non-epistemological beliefs in *Oneself as Another*—a more unified theory is never formulated. Mei's construction of a comprehensive theory of truth begins by situating Ricoeur between Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosure and MacIntyre's view that truth is monolithic. Mei contends that fragility acts as the founding concept for a Ricoeurian theory of truth. This means that the core of his theory is ethically grounded as opposed to emphasizing ontological disclosure, consistency of beliefs with a metaphysical principle, or the analysis of the reasonableness of propositions.

Each of these chapters, in its own way, recognizes the variety of different approaches to understanding the phenomena and providing sound interpretations of their meaning. In this sense, the task of a Ricoeurian philosophy is first and foremost that of opening a space of reflexivity, where the validity of the claims that we make about the world and ourselves can be explored. This means that philosophy, in trying to say true and essential things about different phenomena (the body, the

self, history, tradition, etc.), must first expose itself to the conflict of interpretations. And it is after opening up this space of possibilities that the work of mediation between different claims and interpretations can begin. The search for the best interpretation and the richest set of meanings is precisely the aim of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology.

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