

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies

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Looking for the Just

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Abstract

This essay explores the idea of the just which allowed Ricœur to move beyond and expand the “little ethics” presented in *Oneself as Another*. One key development is that he moves beyond the idea of solicitude as a kind of benevolent spontaneity on the basis of the insight that not all intersubjective relations are face-to-face. This recognition that who the other is can be important allows him to show why the just is a notion that explicitly arises at the level of the distant and often anonymous other, which is that of social and political institutions where the question of justice rather than friendship is central. Another related development is that the idea of reciprocity is shown still to fall short of truly mutual recognition. Pursuing a just solution to social problems leads to the question of a limited but bounded pluralism and a concomitant role for tolerance at the level of society and politics.

Keywords: *Alterity, Justice, Violence, Mutual recognition, Tolerance.*

Résumé

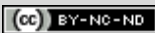
Cet essai explore l'idée du juste qui a permis à Ricœur d'aller au-delà et d'augmenter la « petite éthique » présentée dans *Soi-même comme une autre*. Un développement principal est qu'il se déplace au delà de l'idée de la sollicitude comme spontanéité bienveillante sur la base de une analyse qui monte que les relations intersubjectives ne sont pas toutes face à face. Cette reconnaissance de espèces différents dans la notion de qui est l'autre lui permet de montrer pourquoi le juste est une notion qui surgit explicitement au niveau des autres éloignées et souvent anonymes qui est le niveau de la société et des institutions politiques où la question deviens celle de la justice plutôt que l'amitié. Un autre développement important est que ici l'idée simple de la réciprocité faite défaut à la reconnaissance véritablement mutuelle. La poursuite du juste mène à la question d'un pluralisme limité mais lié et d'un rôle concomitant pour la tolérance au niveau de la société et de la politique.

Mots-clés : *Alterité, Justice, Violence, Reconnaissance mutuelle, Tolérance.*

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Looking for the Just

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The discussion of the idea of the just in Ricœur's late work is important and worth discussing for a number of reasons. The fact that that these reflections did not result in a book but come to us in essays is one reason why this is so. A second reason is that Ricœur discussed this topic from many different angles and in relation to different places where the idea of the just plays or can play a role, but he did so without presenting all this material in terms of one overarching argument or theory. In these essays, therefore, what we find is a good example of a need to think more about what is at issue. This is a conclusion that would have pleased Ricœur, who wanted his successors to build on his work, not just to comment on it or seek to explicate it. In this essay I intend to do both these things: to say something about Ricœur's reflections on the just and to try at least to begin to think beyond what he left us. I do so in order to point to some further questions about what may be involved in looking for the just and to suggest some ways in which we can begin to pull together what Ricœur did say about it.¹

Since this is an initial exploration of the topic, I have chosen a more synoptic than a fully-documented text based approach for my presentation. However I do believe everything I say here can be documented or shown to be drawn from Ricœur's published work—well, maybe not everything. I will, in fact, make one, I hope provocative, suggestion in closing that I believe is at least implicit in what Ricœur wrote but never so far as I can tell directly stated. I also want to try to cover a lot of ground, so these comments will be something less than full-fledged arguments or demonstrations of all the points I wish to propose. I hope, however, that readers will see programmatic implications in what I shall say and that it will incite them to join me in honoring Ricœur by allowing his work to give rise to further thought.

Exposition

The first thing that needs to be said is that there is a place for commentary and exposition in discussing what Ricœur had to say about the just. This is especially true because his later essays are a good illustration of how he worked. I mean by this, of course, his infamous tendency to take detours. This was an approach that so frustrates many English speaking philosophers of a certain style, who expect one just to make the argument and get to the point, that it has delayed an adequate appreciation of his work on their part. But, in fact, Ricœur's writings on the just are a good detour. Like so many of his other detours, they catch sight of and set off to explore either an important idea that appeared in an earlier work or a suggestion that was discovered on the basis of that earlier work. But they also do more than that. Like so many of his detours, Ricœur's reflections on the question of the just not only amplify something that was left undeveloped at a certain point, they also extend and sometimes in an important way revise, or even correct, something said earlier. Strikingly, they almost always also anticipate or acknowledge the question of the possible limits that apply to what is said. I see these limits and remaining questions as further problems left to us to consider and respond to, following his death in 2005.

In saying that the essays on the just develop earlier work, I have in mind especially the chapters on the “little ethics” in *Oneself as Another*. It is probably possible to extend this investigation back to his earliest work, back so far even as *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, insofar as, as Ricœur himself recognized, there was an ethical worldview already implicit there.² But that is a task for another, larger investigation. So let me begin from *Oneself as Another*. Ricœur scholars are well aware of what was said in studies seven through nine of that work and how it relates to the theme of a philosophical anthropology that runs through Ricœur’s philosophy. If the question is, what does it mean, really, to be human?, Ricœur’s answer is, it is to be a self, a capable human being, someone who can act as well as know, someone who is capable of putting things into language, hence someone who can bind him- or herself for the future through promises, someone therefore who is aware of him- or herself as one self among others, and therefore someone who lives with and depends upon others. Most importantly, such capable human beings have a capacity for reflection. They can think about what they do, what they say, and who they are. It is this capacity to reflect that makes critical questioning and new initiatives possible, including asking about the nature of that which is said to be just, a just act, agent, or situation, for example. And beyond this, reflection allows us to ask what can be said about this very notion of the just itself taken as a basic idea or concept. We can do so because our language allows us to nominalize—in French one can even say substantialize—the adjective to speak of *the just* as itself a topic of inquiry. These capacities for language and reflection are further what allow us to impute our acts to ourselves as well as to others; hence along with what they have to say about the just, these capacities are closely tied to the question of our responsibility for what we do.³

To speak more precisely, the ethics spelled out in *Oneself as Another* has to do with living a good life; it is an ethics summed up as the aim of a good life lived with and for others, in just institutions.⁴ There is an internal dialectic that applies here to the teleological idea of the good life, the operative normative standards meant to achieve it, and practical wisdom when it comes to applying this aim and these norms to concrete situations that actualize this ethics of a good life. It is, however, the question of others and institutions more than the details of this dialectic that most interest me here. Let me turn therefore to these others.

In *Oneself as Another* the reference to life with and for others is immediately explicated through the idea of *solicitude*. This notion is said to unfold the dialogical dimension of self-esteem (which itself needs to be balanced by a self-respect that can come only through our relation to others).⁵ This discussion therefore leads to and introduces the theme of *reciprocity*, which is related to the “question of otherness as such.”⁶ Many commentators on Ricœur’s presentation of this ethics have focused on this idea of *solicitude* as the key to his ethics; we can even say they see it as basically constitutive for Ricœur’s ethics. I think this is an overstatement, if not a mistake. It is an overstatement if we overlook how the subsequent discussion of the just qualifies *solicitude* and in a way limits it, at least as “benevolent spontaneity” to a few others, those whom we can know or meet face to face and who, generally speaking, we can call intimate others: family, friends, lovers, neighbors.⁷ It is a mistake if we take seriously what Ricœur had later to say about the just as an answer to the problems of life with others that cannot be answered with *solicitude*, at least not with the *solicitude* one can extend to such intimate others. In fact, already in *Oneself as Another*, the discussion of *solicitude* quickly, within two pages, gives way to the question of *justice*, which is a social virtue. Significantly, it is Aristotle’s idea of friendship combined with the broader idea of the golden rule that provides the transition here from the few to the many.

Friendship, to be sure, as Aristotle said, is always for the sake of the good, and friends do take care of one another, even beyond what law or custom may require, so friendship is an illustration of what may be involved in solicitude for the other. But as Ricœur points out in the introduction to his first collection of essays on the just, friendship is not enough. It is not enough because it is “not capable of fulfilling the task of justice.”⁸ Looking back, we find this judgment was already there in *Oneself as Another*, where we are already told that friendship may not be able to fulfill that task, but that “through mutuality” (note the change already from reciprocity), “it borders on justice.”⁹ If we are able to see why this is so, we may also begin to see why the discussion of the just extends and revises the little ethics in *Oneself as Another*.

Obviously, it is the level of *institutions* in *Oneself as Another* that introduces the question of the just as a qualifier, an adjective. In fact, Ricœur tells us that it is only in *Reflections on the Just* that he tries to trace this adjective “back to its terminological and conceptual source,” beyond his earlier reflections on justice as relating to a moral rule and an institution.¹⁰ Given his participation in seminars at the Institut des hautes études sur la justice and at the École Nationale de la Magistrature, it is the law that drew most of his attention in thinking about justice in this sense of a moral rule and also an institution. And we must recognize that the results he obtained there are central to his understanding of this more abstract but constitutive notion of the just. But the law along with the legal system was not the only area in which he raised the question of the just. We can also speak of it in relation to politics, to memory and history, to society overall, and even in relation, as already indicated, to the problem of mutual recognition. Before turning to these areas, though, I want to say something more about how the later work on the just extends and revises the little ethics of *Oneself as Another* in relation to the question “who is the other?”

This is worth emphasizing because a more general point to be made about Ricœur’s late work has to do with this very idea of the other. Much has been written in the last few decades trying to make sense of the idea of alterity, of the other as other, where the goal is not to fall into any reduction of otherness to a version of sameness. One thinks here, of course, of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, or John D. Caputo and others like him who build on the work of Derrida and Levinas. One of Ricœur’s great insights and contributions to this discussion is that he came to see that otherness is more complex than this discussion might suggest. In a word, not all forms of otherness are the same. This is clear, for example, in *Memory, History, Forgetting* in the distinction made between the otherness of the past in contrast to the present.¹¹ Nor is this otherness of the past the otherness of other people. A similar point applies to the distinction made in that work between the memory image and the imagined one. In relation to our looking for the just, the point is that other people are not simply other selves. Yes, they are all selves, other selves, but in their relations to one another they differ in significant ways without falling into the sameness such an abstract idea of selfhood may suggest. By the time of *Reflections on the Just*, Ricœur came to see this clearly.

There are places in Ricœur’s work where he found it helpful to think in terms of what I would characterize as a Cartesian coordinate system upon which one can map different philosophers’ positions; that is, in terms of two intersecting orthogonal axes. One can see this, for example, in his work on the imagination, where an axis that runs from absent to present intersects one that runs from imaginary to real. Something similar applies in the later work on the just. By the time he got to the second collection of essays, Ricœur had seen that he needed to add a new axis that crosses the axis already implicit in the three moments of the little ethics. This earlier axis turns out to be a vertical one that descends from the good through the obligatory to

the fitting. What the new horizontal axis adds are the distinctions that can be made between oneself and others I have just referred to, which retrospectively can be seen to be already present in the little ethics. That is, there is an axis that maps the relation of the self as an individual to other selves by passing through a range that runs from the nearby or intimate, known others, who are only a few, to more anonymous others, who are many, to all others, including those in the past and the future. This is an axis that not only passes through institutions; it is also a map of them since concrete forms of family life and of friendship themselves are always structured in dynamic historical and institutional ways.

I want to say a bit more about this horizontal axis. The range of the few applies to cases of at least two being involved to a number that is difficult to specify but that is bounded by the notion of intimacy and the possibility of direct action. It involves people who know a lot about one another and relations that tend to be face-to-face and ongoing. To use Martin Buber's categories, it is the realm of I-thou relations, a realm of shared experience, shared memories, and shared expectations. It is a realm characterized by love, where this is a love that goes beyond the self-esteem one may rightly feel for oneself and beyond any simple means-end calculations in relation to these intimate others. Solicitude at this level is fundamental but can also be spontaneous and go beyond what is expected in responding to the needs of others. At the limit, we would do anything for our friends and family, although this obviously needs to be checked by our ethical ideal of a good life and our moral norms that follow from it. It is easy to see that solicitude in this sense goes beyond self-esteem and even self-respect in that it is directed toward an other or some others rather than toward oneself. In some cases, it will even call for self-denial and self-sacrifice.

Next comes the broader range that runs from the few to the many, an interval where we move beyond the idea of face-to-face relations and beyond the realm where a simple dialogical relation is applicable, even when there are straightforward questions of right and wrong, just and unjust, praise and blame to consider. It is the place where we meet the anonymous other, someone we may meet and greet occasionally face-to-face—say the clerk at the check-out counter in the grocery store or in some government office—but never really get to know in an intimate way. At the limit, it includes others whom we will never meet face-to-face. It brings us into “society” in all its manifold forms, spheres, and “cities.” It is here that the question of what constitutes the just in relation to justice as a social virtue really begins to enter into discussion. What is it to be just to such anonymous others (and vice versa, to be dealt with justly by them in return)? What is it to speak or act justly at this level? How does the idea of something just apply to such a person or persons? Solicitude no longer seems an adequate reply. We may donate to aid to the victims of some disaster far away, but there is little we can do directly for them. Even the idea of sacrificing ourselves begins to get stretched here in that the object for which one is willing to sacrifice oneself changes. One can risk one's life for one's country or a better, more just world. In fact, a concern for new concepts that we can name as equality, respect, and dignity comes into play here, as do the ideas of rights and their assertion and protection. Here too the idea of hierarchy as the distinction between those who give orders and those who obey plays a different role than it does on the more intimate, face-to-face level, where in fact it is never really absent however much it may be damped down, as in the case of friendship. At the limit lies the idea of the all, everybody, including our predecessors and successors. This idea of everyone plays at least a regulative role in our thinking about not just justice as that which lies between our idea of the good and some established social and legal order, but about the very constitutive idea of the

just as that which makes justice under a rule of law possible. In the best case, justice would be justice for everyone.

To build on this mapping that locates the self and others in relation to the vertical hierarchy of the good, the obligatory, and the fitting of the little ethics, I want now to shift perspective a bit to ask: Why does the question of the just as a basic concept arise? That is, when do we begin to look for the just? Ricœur's answer is when we recognize its absence, when we experience the unjust and want to cry out, "that's not fair!" On this basis, we can say that the just we seek is that which overcomes or replaces the unjust. This does not mean we must idealize the just to the extent of a utopian vision where all problems simply disappear, although as Ricœur's lectures on ideology and utopia showed, there is always a role for a utopian imagination.¹² What we must say is that when we get close to the universal in relation to the just we are working with a regulative not a determinative idea, but it is a regulative idea that responds to an experience of the unjust that functions very much like what Kant in his ethics calls a "fact" of reason. To which we might add another such fact we today accept, namely, that things continue to change over time, so problems are always likely to recur. The limit here, of course, is what Ricœur calls the never absent dimension of the tragic that accompanies human existence and actions.

Part of the difficulty in looking for the just, Ricœur teaches us, I am arguing, comes from our tendency to try to reduce everything to the level of the face-to-face, where the answer to the unjust lies in dialogue, but dialogue that can only involve a small number, ideally only two even if there is an audience. If nothing else the question of scale when we consider society makes this impossible. Not everyone can meet face to face, nor can everyone speak, nor can we be solicitous to more than a small number of people. Moreover, history shows that a search for an answer to unfairness, especially in cases where significant harm is done to oneself or others, can also turn into a search for vengeance or the beginning of a blood feud, a demand for an eye for an eye. This is something that can happen not only at the level of intimate relations but something that all too often occurs at their border where we move beyond the level of everyday intimacy. In the worse cases, this search for vengeance can reach to the very many others, when it is directed against those who are not us, not like us. The problem with vengeance, of course, is that it is self-perpetuating and endless. As such, it fails to resolve the problem. Where then ought we to look for the just? And when we do look, what do we find?

Ricœur's main answer is based on considering the law and the legal system that administers and enforces it. The advantage of looking here is that it makes clear the role that can be played by a third party to any dispute, for the sake of argument, a judge who will be impartial if not always infallible.¹³ Many important insights follow from thinking about how a just judge can reach a just solution to an unjust situation. Thinking about the trial process, meant to lead to a just solution, for example, reveals that the trial process is intended to shift the dispute away from a search for vengeance by elevating it to the level of language, thereby helping to dampen the threat of violence. Reliance on language helps accomplish this by introducing the idea of rational argument into the process. But argument here, while meant to be rational, is not mechanical or merely deductive, and it always leaves room for rhetoric in both the good and the bad senses of this term. Legal arguments are based on allegations regarding both the law and the alleged injustice. They are rule-governed but disputable appeals as to what can count as evidence, so nothing is settled until the final judgment is reached. Finding the just, we must therefore say, depends upon *judgment*, which cuts off the argument by imposing a solution.¹⁴ This solution is one meant to establish or re-establish a *just distance* between the parties involved.

It is this idea of a just distance that forms the core of Ricœur's idea of the just by deriving it from and connecting it back to the self-other relation. In the best cases, all the parties involved, including any audience, will recognize this just distance and accept it. In practice, we may think this is unlikely to occur in criminal trials, as it is not likely many criminals willingly accept their sentence, but we are talking about the operative idea here. On this level of disputes within the law, it is also easy to see that there is already a possible connection to the question of just recognition, which for Ricœur would be a form of mutual recognition, an idea that will continue to accompany us in what follows.

In fact, from Ricœur's last book on recognition, we can propose an addition to the idea of a just distance as a necessary condition for defining the just. This would be that a just distance and mutual recognition establish or reestablish a *state of peace*. Ricœur, unfortunately, did not have time to fully develop what he meant by a state of peace in *The Course of Recognition*, but I would suggest that by drawing on its application in the law court we can say that what is at stake is not simply peace between the parties involved, but also peace as regards society as a whole. In this sense, a just solution is one that reaches beyond the specific problem or situation to the level of society as a whole that finally depends on a willingness of those who live within it to live together. This willing to live together, too, is a theme that shall accompany us in what follows as we move beyond the setting of the law court to the larger one of politics.

Thinking More

First, however, I want to note two boundary questions that arise already at within the legal system, of which Ricœur was aware but not able to resolve. The first one stems from the idea of punishment. Ricœur had discussed this in *The Just* in the essay titled "Sanction, Rehabilitation, Pardon" as a practical question regarding the reintegration of the punished person into society, a question that involves more than recognition (in the form of a legal acknowledgement) that the criminal has paid society's penalty. It comes up again in a much more radical form in an essay that was not included in either of the two volumes on the just, but published in the L'Herne volume devoted to him. Significantly, that essay is titled "Le juste, la justice et son échec" ("The Just, Justice, and its Failure").¹⁵ The problem is that as a basic notion the idea of the just should be able to justify itself. For Ricœur, it does so to a certain extent as the idea of the good considered in terms of the relationship of oneself to others and through its convertibility with other basic concepts or transcendental ideas.¹⁶ Yet justice in practice is never able to justify in a convincing way its right to punish someone. It cannot do so because it cannot overcome the paradox that the solution to the suffering of one party should be further suffering imposed on another, the guilty party. In a word, it is the problem of *violence* that reappears here, a topic I shall have more to say about in a moment. All that can be said regarding the normative world of a legal system is that the justice that works in practice there is not founded on pure reason, not even on pure practical reason, but rather on a shared willingness to live together that makes society possible, in other words, on shared convictions, customs, and traditions—and at the limit the glimmer of the idea of a universally applicable reason. This is a conclusion that along with the second boundary question that arises in regard to the law points us ahead to the question of the just in relation to politics, where politics as the realm that encompasses all the other spheres of society while being one among them can stand for all of them.

This second boundary is close to the paradox of imposed suffering in that it is the problem of what is it that gives a third party, whether an individual or an institution, the *authority* to pass judgment? In terms of the larger political order, it is the well-known problem of what legitimates sovereignty. So while looking at the law and the legal system give us important insights into the nature of the just, as involving a just distance and social peace, and even something that can approach mutual recognition, the law and the legal system serve more to illustrate what we mean by the just rather than to fully justify it as a concept.

A similar point can be made about the political order. To show this fully it would be necessary to return to Ricœur's important earlier work on the political paradox and the fragility of political discourse, which long antedate the little ethics of *Oneself as Another*.¹⁷ I can put it briefly, however, by pointing to a few salient facts about the political order. First, it is a realm that is essentially a site of contestation. One can argue not only about whether a particular law should be enacted, but also about whether any law at all is required, as well as about the very form of government, even whether there should be a government at all. Obviously, in one sense the idea of something just is meant to be a solution to all these challenges. But I have already also mentioned the problem of the status of authority, which when we ask about specifically political authority, Ricœur says, "shifts the axis of discussion from the properly moral problematic to a more precisely civil one."¹⁸ It does so because "the accent is shifted from the force of moral constraint, constitutive of moral obligation, to that of social, psychological, political constraint that is constitutive of the power to make oneself obeyed."¹⁹ This is a particular problem in the modern world because solutions that earlier worked, which Ricœur characterizes as systems based on declared or asserted authority, no longer hold sway once we say that political authority issues from the will of a sovereign people. And it is not simply a question of legitimating this new authority. It also has to be inscribed as a fact. This is a problem that takes many forms linked to the question of representation, usually in relation to elections. Ricœur also sees it as linked to the question of how to connect another set of intersecting axes: the horizontal one of wanting to live together and the vertical one of domination, what Max Weber called *Herrschaft*. In effect, it is a problem that combines in varying ways the ideas of status and power to give them sufficient symbolic force to function effectively.

The idea of the just as providing a solution to these problems is also an indication of the limits of any concrete instantiation of this idea. I would explain this by saying that the idea of the just in the sense for which Ricœur is looking lies at the intersection of the universal and the historical. This is why it can be given a dialectical interpretation if we are willing to turn this notion of an intersection into one of mediation, in Ricœur's sense that any mediating term has to be shown to be able not only to connect but to move back and forth between the poles. I think it was something like this dialectic that Ricœur was seeking in his own reflections on the just. I make no claim to be able to spell out fully this dialectic here, instead I want to consider two more points in our search for the just. The first has to do with what limits this dialectic, by surrounding it; I mean, the possibility and reality of violence. The second will take us to my suggestion mentioned earlier about an idea that may take us beyond what Ricœur was able to say about looking for the just.

Ricœur did not often speak of violence, but when he did it is clear that it is one of the indications of the limits of the just. An important early short essay from 1967, "Violence and Language," makes this clear.²⁰ There he sets the reality of violence, as the title indicates, in opposition to language. Hence it is human violence that is really at issue. Nature can be

destructive, but it is cases of violence directed against us through the force of language that tells us this is the case. The real problem of violence comes rather when we add the “violence of desire, of fear, of hate,” violence that is intended to dominate if not eliminate the other.²¹ Ricœur’s great insight is that saying this, naming it as violence, already points us toward the opposite pole, language that can refuse or overcome such destructiveness, as we have seen in relation to the court of law. Ricœur believed this can be seen in the case of any argument in favor of violence. To argue for violence, he says, is to contradict oneself in that the argument itself commits us to language understood as a search for meaning, itself understood in a non-violent sense. Why is this so? It is because such discourse always has an implicit goal. That goal is meaning in the sense of making sense of things, whether that be our own existence, other human beings, or the worldhood constitutive of our very being in the world. But no one, Ricœur says, ever fully possesses, that is, owns or takes control of such discourse, if only because the very idea of possession already tips us back toward the side of violence and domination.²²

Implications

What lessons are we to draw from this? They are both theoretical and practical. On the theoretical side, we need always to remember and bear witness to language’s search for meaning, not as some externally imposed end, another form of domination, but as the “full manifestation of the orientation” of language’s own internal dynamism. Similarly, any turning of the demands of reason into merely instrumental reason will be a concession to violence. This is so because there is no objectivity without subjectivity, and any understanding that leaves out the subject, which concretely is the self, will leave the door open either to “an anarchic and violent affirmation of the subject,” on the one hand, or its denial, on the other.²³ More practically, Ricœur already in 1967, thirty-some years before his reflections on the just, counseled the necessity to always bear witness to this close tie between violence and language, yet also to their fundamental opposition. In light of what was said earlier, this suggests that the just also has a mediating role to play here, between violence and language. Beyond this, though, Ricœur adds a further limit, the prohibition of murder, even while admitting that sometimes, as in times of war, violence can be necessary. The real test is whether even in war an act would make peace impossible. Echoing Max Weber, without explicitly naming him, he concedes that this little ethics of non-violence is itself an ideal, by saying that what Weber called an ethics of conviction can never take the place of that of responsibility. But then he adds another note, one that is directly applicable to our reflections on the just today. Recognizing the possible non-violent practice of discourse itself, Ricœur says, requires us “to respect the plurality and diversity of languages” themselves, including those of instrumental reason and abstract calculation.²⁴

Here I think is the origin of the idea that so fascinates Richard Kearney of the need for what can be called linguistic hospitality. To conclude, I want to go further than Kearney, however, and suggest that in light of what Ricœur was to say about the just, in all its senses, what more is required is a kind of *moral hospitality*. This is a hospitality that would acknowledge—and accept—the existence of differing conceptions of the good life if only as the very condition of possibility of living together in a pluralistic world. This is not the place to make a detailed argument for this suggestion. However, it seems to be heuristically plausible if we ask one more time how looking for the just extends and revises Ricœur’s little ethics. Looking back, we can recognize that it was in fact human plurality that set this search in motion. Along the way that

plurality began to tip over into the recognition that plurality today—actually, always—has also meant a bounded pluralism in the sense that there can be a number of different and competing ideas about the good life, lived with and for others in just institutions. Again, it is the use of violence as an unnecessary use of force meant to dominate others that indicates *a* limit, if not *the* limit, to such pluralism and the concomitant tolerance it implies. Recognizing this fact—and doing so willingly and even gladly²⁵—suggests that in the end search for the just turns into the question of tolerance. This too is a topic that brings the question of limits into play. Should we say with John Rawls that the question only really applies to liberal democracies and the assumption of a workable overlapping consensus? An even harder question arises if, with Ricœur, we acknowledge that any instantiation of the idea of the just does not remove once and for all the threat, much less the reality, of violence. The tragic dimension of human action never really ever disappears, although it may be possible to live in light of the hope that it one day will.²⁶

- ¹ My argument is largely drawn from the essays collected in Paul Ricœur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Ricœur discussed the topic in a number of other essays and interviews during the period in question, not all of which I have been able to access. See the listing in F. D. Vansina, *Paul Ricœur: Bibliography 1935–2008* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008).
- ² See, for example, the discussion that followed Ricœur's presentation of his thesis work to the Société française de philosophie in 1951. The English version appears as Paul Ricœur, "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limiting Idea," in *Readings in Existential Phenomenology*, eds. Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O'Connor (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967): 93–112.
- ³ A key essay here, beyond what is already said in *Oneself as Another*, is the essay in *The Just*, titled "The Concept of Responsibility: An Essay in Semantic Analysis," 11–35.
- ⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 172.
- ⁵ Self-esteem and self-respect represent the "most advanced states of the growth of selfhood" (Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 171) because self-esteem "remains abstract as long as it lacks the dialogic structure which is mediated through the reference to others" (172).
- ⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 183.
- ⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 190.
- ⁸ Ricœur, *The Just*, xiii.
- ⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 184.
- ¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1.
- ¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- ¹² Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- ¹³ The judge in the court of law does not tell the whole story about judgment, even if he or she does model a different kind of practical reason than a strictly deductive one. In a legal case, a judgment must be reached. Even if open to appeal, it eventually reaches a level that cuts off the debate. The same is not true for the physician, who can always order more tests, or the historian, who can postpone a judgment and return to the archive for further research. Both the latter cases are significant in that they can be reopened, although in the medical case death may cut off the search for a cure. In the case of history, though, new subsequent events will always make it possible to call a judgment into question.
- ¹⁴ See here the essays "Interpretation and/or Argumentation," and "The Act of Judging," in *The Just*, 109–32.

- ¹⁵ Paul Ricœur, "Le Juste, la justice et son échec," in *L'Herne: Paul Ricœur*, eds. Myriam Revault d'Allonnes and François Azouvi (Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, 2004): 287–306. The essay was reprinted as a separate small volume by the same publisher, Éditions de l'Herne, in 2005.
- ¹⁶ Ricœur, "Le Juste, la justice et son échec," 288.
- ¹⁷ See Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965): 247–70. And, "The Fragility of Political Language," trans. David Pellauer *Philosophy Today* 31 (1987): 35–44.
- ¹⁸ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 20.
- ¹⁹ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, 20.
- ²⁰ Paul Ricœur, "Violence et langage," *Recherches et Débats: La violence* 59 (1967): 86–94. I will cite the English version "Violence and Language," in Paul Ricœur, *Political and Social Essays*, ed. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974): 88–101.
- ²¹ Ricœur, "Violence and Language," 89.
- ²² In this early essay, Ricœur illustrates this with regard to three realms of discourse: political discourse, poetic discourse, and philosophical discourse. They all in their specific ways are marked by this dialectical relationship of language and violence. In the case of politics this may be seen in the obvious example of attempts to impose one's will or a group's will on others, through what Tocqueville called the tyranny of the majority, so that the ultimate majority turns out to be one absolute ruler. But even in states or societies subject to a rule of law, violence is not absent in that this rule of law itself requires respect and can serve to exclude those who don't belong. Poetic language may seem a more puzzling case, at least at first glance. Doesn't poetry celebrate the world by, in Heideggerian language, letting things be? To be sure, Ricœur says, but it also makes an impact on us, where the very act of preserving the opening to being can itself be a form of violence. Philosophical language, finally, for all its commitment to order and coherence, is always marked by rhetoric as well as rationality. This can be seen in the very fact that it has to choose a question to pursue and a way to begin, and it is never complete, even if "everything is to be found in any great philosophy" ("Violence and Language," 96). This is an important essay because it is one of the few places I am aware of where Ricœur directly addresses the nature of philosophical discourse in relation to his larger philosophy of language and forms of discourse.
- ²³ Ricœur, "Violence and Language," 99.
- ²⁴ Ricœur, "Violence and Language," 101.
- ²⁵ Here it is useful to remind ourselves about something important pointed out in *The Course of Recognition*, namely, that *reconnaissance* in French means gratitude as well as acknowledgment.
- ²⁶ Earlier versions of this essay were first presented at the "Reading Ricœur Once Again/Relire Ricœur à notre tour, Collóquio Internacional," held in Lisbon, Portugal, in July 2010; and at the Society for

Ricœur Studies Annual Meeting, in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, in November 2010. I want to thank the audiences there for their helpful comments on those papers.