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THE WORD AS GRACE: THE RELIGIOUS BEARING OF PAUL RICOEUR'S PHILOSOPHY¹

David E. Klemm

Claiming that Ricoeur's philosophical project constitutes an extensive elucidation of his famous maxim, "the symbol gives rise to thought," the paper attempts to clarify the religious basis of Ricoeur's project. Part 1 presents Ricoeur's sense of "religion" in relation to Kant. Part 2 articulates Ricoeur's conception of the structure of human being as well as the ultimate principle grounding it: here the problem of fallenness emerges as the religious problem. Part 3 demonstrates how for Ricoeur language as such donates the capacity to overturn human fallenness and restore a proper relationship to the ultimate principle.

According to Ricoeur's famous maxim, "the symbol gives rise to thought."² By "symbol" Ricoeur refers to the *word* in its essential being: an appearing thing that signifies thought. The maxim has three intertwined meanings, each substantiated in the structure of Ricoeur's systematic philosophy: 1) The word is the phenomenal source of or occasion for thought; reflection is always preceded by and begins from a word spoken to one. 2) The word discloses being and so gives something to think about; language presents a meaningful world for reflection. 3) The word can transform thinking (words can change the thinker's motivating disposition and through it redirect the intentions of thought). From beginning to end, Ricoeur's philosophical project constitutes an extensive elucidation of this maxim and its religious significance.

In this paper I attempt to carry out the clarification of the religious bearing of Ricoeur's philosophy: Ricoeur describes how the word as word (language as such) functions as grace such that philosophical thinking, which is necessarily referred to words and symbols as the medium of its own thinking of being, is itself always already a religious thinking. In part 1, I begin by presenting the meaning of "religion" for Ricoeur in relation to Kant's philosophy of religion. Religion represents indirectly the meaning of the participation of human thinking in the ultimate (first and final) principle of all thinking (or purposive activity) as the ground of hope for living a life pleasing to God. In part 2, I articulate Ricoeur's conception of the structure of human being (as a thinking about being) as well as the ultimate principle grounding it. Human being is essentially fallible and actually fallen individualized sub-



jectivity; God is the absolute principle of individuality. The religious problem emerges here for Ricoeur as for Kant: given the fallen human condition, is hope no longer a real possibility? In part 3, I indicate how Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy addresses the religious problem for human beings: the word as word donates the capacity to overturn human fallenness and restore a proper relationship to the ultimate principle. For Ricoeur philosophy in its innermost character as the correlation of pure reflection and interpretation of word is religious. Theology is properly construed as reflection on the religious character of all thinking in its gracious relation to the word.

I

As with Kant, religion for Ricoeur is the domain of culture in which the question arises: "For what may I hope?" Ricoeur's reflection on religion carries out the Kantian intention to determine and to demonstrate how religion is more than ethics, that is, how the question "For what may I hope?" is different from the question "What must I do?"³ He belongs to the post-Kantian tradition of philosophy, insofar as for Ricoeur the reception of Kant's critical philosophy still sets the agenda for thinking.⁴ Ricoeur characterizes himself as a philosopher as a "post-Hegelian Kantian,"⁵ and Ricoeur's reflections on religion refer often to Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.⁶

Ricoeur modifies a fundamental distinction drawn by Kant, whose import must be clarified to avoid an ambiguity when using the term *religion*. Kant says, "There is only *one* (true) *religion*; but there can be faiths of *several* kinds."⁷ For Kant, "ecclesiastical faith" refers to the institution of religion as a social phenomenon in history, whose statutory laws derive from a particular revelation (e.g., the Jewish, Mohammedan, Christian, Catholic, Lutheran, etc., faiths). "Pure moral religion" (or "rational faith") refers by contrast to the motivating disposition of honoring God as author of the moral law by fulfilling all duties as divine commands.⁸ For Kant, ecclesiastical faith is the contingent vehicle or means to achieve the universally valid pure moral religion as proper end of a rational being. The purely rational religious goal of living a life pleasing to God is unconditionally binding on all moral agents. Actual attainment of the goal is not achievable for embodied human beings living in time and place, however. The goal imposes a necessary yet uncompletable moral task, because two incentives compete at the heart of human free will: a purely rational incentive of the moral law and a sensuous incentive of self-love.

According to Kant, a human being is good or evil depending on which of the two incentives he or she makes the condition of the other in freely adopting a maxim of acting.⁹ Because of their dual constitution, human beings naturally possess an ineradicable propensity both to moral goodness and to

moral evil. Although actual moral perfection is therefore unattainable,¹⁰ it is nonetheless possible to overcome radical evil in the human will in principle through “a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation (John III, 5: compare also Genesis I, 1), and a change of heart.”¹¹

Pure moral religion is for Kant the proper critic and interpreter of ecclesiastical faith.¹² Once purged of their pretensions to know divine things that transcend possible experience, particular representations within ecclesiastical faiths (for example, interpretations of New Testament passages) can legitimately be used to illuminate the moral struggle in the heart of human being between conflicting propensities as well as the goal of the victory of the good principle over the evil principle in a universal ethical commonwealth.¹³ Such representations may be helpful in cultivating a properly moral disposition, but they are not strictly speaking necessary to do so. Reason alone is the necessary and sufficient incentive for morality. The rational mind needs no concrete examples, after all, to be persuaded that each person ought to become an example of a moral disposition herself or himself.¹⁴ The archetype of a person morally pleasing to God is already present in human reason.¹⁵

Kant knows that religious representations may also be seriously misleading. They imperfectly schematize the necessary but unknowable ideas of the self as free, the world, and God that are presupposed by pure moral religion. And they can easily lead precritical minds to draw false inferences from schematisms of analogical imagination to objective determinations of sensible reality. Because the human intellect cannot dispense with schematism as a means of showing the sense of a concept, positive religious representations are ineliminable. Rational critique can, however, remove the transcendental illusion that positive religious representations refer to supersensible reality rather than provide schematized examples of the ideas of pure reason. Moreover, religious feelings of wonder, veneration, worship, or even admiration should not be assigned to representations of exemplary religious figures (e.g., Jesus) or to their virtuous actions (as if they were something extraordinary and meritorious on their own), but only to “the original moral predisposition itself in us.”¹⁶

Ricoeur retains and modifies the Kantian distinction between institutional religion and the moral essence of religion. What part does he retain? According to Ricoeur, religion as positive ecclesiastical faith is in principle comprehensible by philosophy as a particular instance of a system of beliefs, feelings, and maxims for action. Religion in this positive sense is properly subject to the full scope of philosophical critique.¹⁷ The ultimate criterion for interpretation of positive religion is a concept of the essence of religion, a concept which for Ricoeur includes but is not reducible to moral duty. Ricoeur accepts the Kantian doctrine of the ethical function of religion and Kant's definition of the representative content of religion.¹⁸ He also fundamentally

accepts Kant's arguments to justify his doctrine of religion in the first and second critiques: For theoretical reason, God is an ideal of pure reason which cannot constitute an object of knowledge but has its proper purpose as a principle regulating the human drive to know things from the standpoint of systematic unity. For practical reason, God is a postulate to account for the presupposed unity between virtue and happiness in moral action. When thinking about religion, Ricoeur intends to remain within the (Kantian) limits of reason alone. He does propose some modifications within Kantian doctrine, however.

First, Ricoeur extends the Kantian doctrine on the essence of religion that religion supplements duty with hope. For Kant and Ricoeur, the specificity of the religious within the ethical pertains to representations of "the total object of the will" as opposed to the mere analytic of the good will.¹⁹ But Ricoeur emphasizes to a greater degree than Kant that religion "represents a new object in relation to the *Faktum* of the moral law, and it maintains a specific exteriority with relation to the synthesis that it effects."²⁰ Ricoeur extends Kant's emphases in showing how religious representations of the total object of the will can and do transform the human desire for totality through the biblical message of "participating in the kingdom of God, of entering into the kingdom of reconciliation."²¹

In other words, if belief in God includes both formal knowledge of the proper relationship between human thinking and the ultimate principle as well as emotional conviction that all thinking is and should be answerable to the ultimate principle, such that knowing the good unites with a capacity to do the good, then Ricoeur differs from Kant himself by showing how language functions to bring about genuine belief in God, especially how the word creates the element of transforming conviction or trust.

Recall that for Kant, the concept of grace plays an ambiguous role in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.²² Kant says that it is necessary to admit a concept of grace, because when human reason has adopted the evil maxim by assuming an immoral disposition, it is conscious of its own inability to satisfy its moral duty.²³ Fallen reason is duty-bound to do as much as lies in its power to bring about a change of heart, but what is possible for fallen reason is not enough. Hence, because the moral law implies the capacity to obey it, fallen human being can reasonably hope that "what is not within his power will be supplied through cooperation from above," to make up the deficiency. At the same time, Kant says that the concept of grace remains incomprehensible to human reason, both in its theoretical and practical employment.²⁴ We cannot know what grace is and we cannot adopt it into moral maxims of action.

Ricoeur extends the Kantian account of religious hope at exactly this point, by describing (not explaining) how religious representations of the totality

of things donate grace through the word. Religious representations are products of a mythopoetic imagination that do not merely schematize a pure idea of reason but additionally address human beings with the enabling quality of *gift* by extending to them the actuality of a reasonable *promise*.²⁵ To the naive believer in the biblical message, God as absolute agent extends an unmerited promise of reconciliation to human beings as finite agents. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the second (post-critical) naiveté shows how the interpreted voice of the text, embodied in the text as word, brings about the desired change of heart.²⁶

Second, Ricoeur proposes a different relationship between the positive religions and the essence of religion (or "natural religion") than does Kant. Kant determines the particular appearances of positive religion as accidental to and separable from the universal natural religion.²⁷ In my judgment Ricoeur agrees in principle with Schleiermacher rather than Kant on the formulation of the relationship between positive religion and the essence of religion.²⁸ In his early speeches on religion, Schleiermacher argues that there is no natural religion entirely separable from positive religion, because in general it is logically impossible to separate universal concepts from their concrete manifestations in language. One cannot communicate a universal concept to oneself or another without determining its sense by means of a particular manifestation in image and word.²⁹ Just so, one cannot conceive of a natural religion apart from its positive manifestations through acts of communication and interpretation. The religious significance of this point for Ricoeur is that just as philosophy necessarily thinks a necessary and universal speculative concept of God (as ultimate principle), so it names God in word and thus enters the domain of particular religious discourse (e.g., biblical discourse and its interpretations within a believing community) wherein Ricoeur locates the linguistic possibility for converting human thinking, willing, and feeling from the evil principle to the good.

II

In *Fallible Man* (1960), a work of phenomenological reflection, Ricoeur analyzes the structure of human being as a whole. It is possible from this analysis to infer the speculative formulation of the first principle according to Ricoeur. Briefly, to be human is to perform mediations in thought between discontinuous and conflicting aspects of the self and the world. Ricoeur begins in Kantian fashion with given objects of human consciousness, analyzes their constitutive elements, and reduces them to the conditions in the subject making the synthesis possible.³⁰ He articulates the synthesizing activity at three levels: knowing, doing, and feeling.

In theoretical activity, an object of knowing displays a prior synthesis between finite perceiving (receiving the presence of things intuitively) and

infinite signifying (determining the meaning of things through concepts). In virtue of its receptivity, human knowing carries a finite element marked by bodily perspective; in virtue of its intentionality, human knowing carries an infinite element marked by conceptual transcendence. Mediating between the infinite and finite dimensions of meaning and appearance is the activity of the transcendental imagination, which projects an image as intermediary between particular percept and universal concept.³¹

The same structure appears in the practical synthesis, which mediates between the finite conditions of personal character and the infinite demand of the moral law. The mediating term is respect, in which the personal features of character combine with the desire to obey the moral law to project an intended course of action. The practical synthesis is weaker than the theoretical synthesis because of the split in the agent between willing an action out of respect and actually performing it.³² Willing must bring about its object in a separate act of doing. In the theoretical synthesis, by contrast, the object is already given to the senses for conceptual determination in thinking by means of the image. One can will a moral act and still not do it; one cannot signify a given object without seeing it.

The weakness discernible in the split will becomes more serious at the level of affective synthesis.³³ Feeling for Ricoeur combines an intention and an affection. One's feeling *of* something at the same time both designates evaluative qualities (e.g., good or bad) felt in things, persons, or the world, and it manifests the way in which the self finds itself inwardly affected (e.g., attracted or repelled).³⁴ Whereas knowing designates the duality of subject and object, feeling manifests a pre-reflective or hyper-reflective sense of what it means to inhere in and belong to the totality of being—"something more profound than all polarity and duality."³⁵ Feeling is the motivational source for all theoretical and practical determinations, and in it the mediating self is torn between the finite sensible desire (*epithumia*) for pleasure and the infinite rational desire (*eros*) for spiritual beatitude. The mediating heart or feeling accompanying immediate consciousness of self (*thumos*) remains a field of conflict between vital feelings for particular pleasures (e.g., having, power, worth) and spiritual feelings of openness to the totality of being (e.g., joy, anxiety, courage). In the fragile human heart, mediation is threatened and struggle prevails. In principle, singleness of heart (purity of motivating disposition) is less easy to achieve than either truth in thinking (knowing) or rightness in doing (legality if not morality in action). The concept of grace for Ricoeur refers to the desired singleness of heart: the gift of a change the heart changes thinking and willing, knowing and doing.

Taken as a whole, human being is a structure of fallibility in having to mediate between discontinuous and conflicting aspects of itself and world. Fallibility names the whole movement of *infinite originating affirmation* (the

infinite term of thinking, willing, feeling) through an *existential difference* (the finite term of each) by *human mediation*.³⁶ Fallibility is a potentiality and a power to fail in performing the mediations, but there is nothing inevitable about failure. Fallibility without fault is a formal obligation and possibility for human beings, and it can be comprehended as such through the work of phenomenological reflection.

Moreover, the structure of fallibility is mirrored in the structure of ordinary language: Private experiences of mediation become public in language.³⁷ The results of theoretical and practical mediations are articulated in the form of declarative sentences: the subject-term picks out something singular (e.g., a perceptual object or a person), the object-term designates a universal quality, a class of things, a type of relation, or a type of action (which is said of the subject), and the copula marks the synthetic connection constituting the being of the object.³⁸ Affective mediations come to discourse indirectly through symbols, metaphors, and ironic uses of language.³⁹

According to Ricoeur, pure reflection reaches a limit with the analysis of fallibility: it cannot follow the leap from the structure of fallibility to actual fallenness. The act of evil is inscrutable for reflection, because therein the will freely negates its freedom and stands in contradiction with itself by defying the moral law. Although one cannot think the evil act, its meaning comes to language through a symbolism of evil which shows what reflection cannot directly think and thus calls for a second form of reflection—a hermeneutics of symbols and double-meaning expressions.⁴⁰ Likewise, according to Ricoeur, the divided will cannot redeem itself from evil through an act of reflection. Once the will has fallen into contradiction with itself, it cannot will its way out of self-contradiction. Once evil is willed, it becomes a weighty habit and burden: any additional willing further divides and defeats itself. Redemption from evil, if it is to occur at all, must come to the human being through a symbolic language that grants what it signifies.

Let us focus now on the originating conditions making possible the finite and fallible acts of human mediation. According to Ricoeur, the finite ground of mediation is the productive imagination of the individual self. Ricoeur conceives of the self as a structural unity composed of 1) a principle of *universal subjectivity* (source of intellectual functions of conceptual determination), 2) a principle of *particular personality* (source of organic functions of perceptual receptivity), and 3) a principle of *individualized subjectivity* (source of concrete mediations between universal determination and particular receptivity). The self is the finite composite of these three principles, most basic of which is the principle of individual subjectivity as the principle grounding actual syntheses of intellectual form and organic content.⁴¹

The speculative idea of God is, then, the absolute ground of the totality of finite selves in relation to the totality of the world within which they exist as

individualized subjectivities. God is absolute individual, the unknowable but necessarily presupposed ultimate principle grounding the collection of finite, localized and temporalized activities of mediation. As such, the idea of God is a limit-idea regulating the quest for knowledge as ultimate principle but not constituting an object of knowing. Insofar as thinking that communicates is always also speaking, the idea of God as absolute individual is an idea that cannot be merely idea but must also appear in finite sensible reality (minimally language) as the symbol, image, or word “God” (although no sensible reality literally is God). It follows that the being of God is the identity and difference between God as idea and God as word: God is God as the mediating activity between the idea of God and the sensible reality through which idea appears (and which is not itself God). Moreover, in every instance of thinking and speaking, God is being God. How so? Let us return to the analysis of finite individualized subjectivity for guidance.

According to Ricoeur, the mediating activity of thinking (involving the first two principles) always presupposes an implicit or explicit reference to the self as individualized subject and foundation of conscious acts (the third principle).⁴² Reflection is always capable in principle of becoming self-reflection by tracing the mediating activity back to the individualized subject as source. But it is an illusion to believe that self-reflection grasps with cognitive certainty the unified being of the subject as identity of thinking and being. Self-reflection necessarily objectifies the subject, which in the nature of the case is always subject and never object. Self-reflection grasps only a mediated (reflected) subject, not the originating ground of reflection itself. The individualized I remains unknowable despite the fact that reflection can establish *that I am*.⁴³

In order to account for self-ascription (that these representations are mine), reflection in all cases must presuppose a more fundamental phenomenon of immediate self-consciousness—a non-intuitive, pre-conceptual acquaintance of the subject with itself. Immediate self-consciousness, the I as self-positing, expresses itself in language indirectly. The positing of the I in language sets up the task of hermeneutics: To know not merely *that I am* but also to understand *who I am* requires hermeneutics in addition to reflection: “The first truth—*I am, I think*—remains as abstract and empty as it is invincible; it has to be ‘mediated’ by the ideas, actions, works, institutions, and monuments that objectify it. It is in these objects, in the widest sense of the word, that the Ego must lose and find itself.”⁴⁴

The individualized subject, as mediating unity of universal intellectual form and particular sensible content, can lose and find itself in cultural works because the medium of its mediating activity is *language*, and language is itself a unity of intellectual form and sensible content. Ricoeur agrees with Gadamer that being that can be understood is language, by which is meant

that anything we can conceive at all comes to being in language.⁴⁵ Language is the medium of being achieved in thought as the individual connection and distinction between universal thought and particular percept.

The aim of Ricoeur's hermeneutical investigations into meaning in language is to show how words as individualized thought-things can indirectly present the meaning of being as self as a finite mediating unity in relation to the first principle—the principle of the absolute unity of thinking and being or the absolute individual ground of all mediating activity. Although Ricoeur himself does not put it just this way, it is quite consistent with the intention of his thought to recall that the word "I," when uttered or understood, formally (and emptily) instantiates the being of the self as the finite individual mediating of thought and perception: In saying and understanding "I," universal subjectivity appears here and now, combined with particular personality, both as the source of mediating activity and as the feeling accompanying immediate self-consciousness. Let us return by analogy to God.

If the individualized subject (self) is finite ground of that individual's discourse, by formal analogy the idea of God may be posited as absolute ground of all discourse. God as God comes to language as language as the absolute principle of linguistic syntheses. Just so, the word "God," when uttered or understood, formally and emptily instantiates in language (in the word) the idea of the absolute unity of thinking and being that is necessarily presupposed by all thinking: In saying "God," the presupposed absolute ideal ground appears here and now *as* the word whose meaning is the negation of anything thinkable or perceivable insofar as one refers all thinking about being thereby to what is not a thinkable concept or intuitable thing, nor any "I," but the absolute principle of any and all thinking about being.

III

In this part, I focus on the religious elements of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory. Recall that whereas Kant asserts that the needed change of heart is possible under the purely rational incentive of the moral law, Ricoeur's hermeneutical reflections attempt to show how the change of heart is possible for fallen humans through the word. Recall also that for Ricoeur, the overturning of fallenness is signalled not merely by a moral conversion to live a life pleasing to God, but additionally by a religious conversion in fundamental attitude from one of self-confidence in moral autonomy to gratitude for God's transforming gift (grace) of faith, hope, and love.

The possibility of transforming the individual self through the hermeneutics of symbolic expressions resides according to Ricoeur in all the ways that language exceeds thought. Whereas thinking is the active ideal determination of sensibly-given reality, speaking is the sensible (real) appearance of thinking (ideality). Words signify thoughts, and they present things. Language has

the double capacity to say and to show, because words are themselves thought-things and so mirror the structure of the individual self. Just as things (i.e., a synthesized manifold of impressions) affect the senses (or are recalled as so doing by memory), words can affect the whole individual self as mediating being and give rise to new possibilities for thinking, willing, and feeling. Ricoeur analyzes the structure and significance of human understanding of words at several levels, including symbol, myth, metaphor, and narrative. At all levels, productions of language display the principle of individuality. They are individual unities-in-difference of a universal element and a particular element.

Most basically, language in general is a synthesis of *langue* (universal structures, or collective and synchronic systems studied in the science of semiotics) and *parole* (particular messages, or singular and diachronic discourse studied in semantics).⁴⁶ Neither element is reducible to the other, and neither element can be eliminated from a full account of language. This basic structure reproduces itself at distinct levels of language. Discourse, for example, is a synthesis of a particular *event* (determined in terms of the illocutionary, perlocutionary, and interlocutionary exchanges between speakers in time) and universal *meaning* (defined as the atemporal propositional content of a sentence). Similarly, the meaning of discourse divides into elements of *sense* (the “what” as combination of subject and predicate) and *reference* (the “about what” of that combination whereby discourse intends the world).

Ordinary discourse presents to its users the shared world of everyday interaction (minimally the common world of sense perception) by means of single-meaning expressions (including highly controlled literal references of scientific uses of language). When the meaning of ordinary discourse is not immediately evident or brought to clarification through question and answer, the one addressed must traverse across the “hermeneutical arc” of interpretation. Interpretation moves 1) from an initially received message (particular element) in an event of dialogical exchange, 2) through distanciation from the event by means of structural analysis for the sake of grasping the formal sense of the discourse (universal element), 3) to a critical appropriation of the meaning in a new event of interpretation which comprehends the unity in difference of sense and reference (as unity of particular and universal elements).⁴⁷

Dialectically related elements of discourse (such as event and meaning, and sense and reference) tend to be held together in living speech, but tend to become detached in written discourse. Texts take on “semantic autonomy” insofar as meaning is exteriorized from the initial event of discourse and must be returned to a temporally new event; the shared world among interlocutors is dismantled and must be constructed through the imaginative work of interpretation, and the individualized subjectivity of the other speaker is re-

placed by the individualized subjectivity of the text itself (the “voice of the text”) and must be allowed to speak through a deciphering of clues in the objective structure of the text.⁴⁸

With the substitution of writing for speaking, the hermeneutical problem finds its full manifestation. Texts are coded through genre, structural composition, and style. Through interpretation of these codes, the reader must work out both the projected “world of the text” as its sense and the mode of being instantiated within it as its referent. Texts fall into three systematic categories for Ricoeur, according to the dimensions of self and world that they project for the imagination. Each type of text dialectically “overturns” (transcends by negating and sublating) its antecedent type. By the word “overturn,” Ricoeur means that the subsequent type of text manifests a dimension of discursive synthesis that is latent (present but unnoticed) in the preceding type of text.

1) *Descriptive texts* use the conceptual syntheses of ordinary and literal discourse to project an actual world of sense perception (whether still existent or no longer immediately present for sense perception, e.g., the world of ancient Greece). They refer to real persons, places, and things within the actual world. Descriptive texts engage the capacity of the self as reader to reflect the real world, its structure and contents.

2) *Literary texts* (poetic texts) “overturn” the reference of descriptive texts to an actual world and manifest in its place a possible world as a redescription of the actual world. The metaphorical syntheses of poetic texts engage the reflexive capacity of the self to understand its own present mode of understanding as one possible way of relating self to world against which a new possibility can arise. How so? Poetic texts, by enabling a possible world to arise against the actual one in the reader’s imagination, engage the reader in reflexive understanding of his or her own self-constituting interpretative activity. In following the text’s overturning of its descriptive reference, the reader finds his or her own actual individuality displaced and a new possibility to be oneself arises against it.⁴⁹ The metaphorical function of the literary text brings out something latent but present in descriptive text and conceptual syntheses, namely, the capacity of thought in language to see and to show the similar in the dissimilar. Live metaphors reveal the process by which concepts are generated in the first place.

3) *Religious texts* overturn the poetic reference to a possible world and manifest the ground and goal, first and final principle of any possible or actual world. They engage the capacity of the reader as individualized subject to understand both his or her own reflective and reflexive capacities as absolutely dependent on the absolute ground of thinking and being. The intentionality of religious texts is a “qualitative transformation of reflexive consciousness.”⁵⁰ Religious texts make manifest a fundamental feature of

both literary and descriptive texts (and thus the word as word): all thinking presupposes as the condition of its possibility and presents indirectly through the medium of the word its participation in God as absolute ground. How does Ricoeur articulate the possibility for the religious overturning of descriptive and literary texts?

The possibility for the overturning of the descriptive quality of text by the literary one resides in the metaphorical process, which is minutely analyzed by Ricoeur.⁵¹ Ricoeur proposes his tension theory of metaphor in place of the inherited substitution theory of metaphor. Metaphor is not a rhetorical figure marked by substitution of one word for another on the basis of resemblance for evocative or decorative purpose. Metaphor is an operation of semantic innovation within discourse at all levels. The metaphoric process is most easily determinable at the level of the sentence, at which an audacious mediation is made to tease the mind into thinking something new and thereby showing a new dimension in the worldly reality referred to by the metaphor.

Metaphors refer to possible being or "being as." By means of impertinent predication, a tension occurs in the copula "to be" itself: in the literal sense of the metaphorical sentence, "is" means "is not"; in the metaphorical sense, "is" comes to mean "is like" or "is as." For example, in "nature is a temple where living columns rise," the "is" literally negates itself. However, the reader responds to the impertinent predication according to Ricoeur "by drawing a new semantic pertinence out of the ruins of the literal meaning" and in so doing "the metaphorical meaning also sustains a new referential design."⁵² The verbal icon (the poetic image of nature as living temple) evokes a basic mood in the reader as a place of manifestation in which a new mode of being comes to stand: a mode of openness to the sacred as it illuminates the natural world. It is important to understand that for Ricoeur literary works signify modes of being by creating and discovering them on the states of affair, persons, things, described in the fictional world of the text. In the end, the signifying capacity of the described objects allows language to refer metaphorically. The world as shown poetically is a living word.

Central for Ricoeur's theory, and central for grasping its religious bearing, is the claim that the language of metaphor is a schema for the production of emergent meanings. With this point we rejoin the Kantian problematic of grace. According to Ricoeur, metaphoric language, in its literal unsynthesizability, grants indirectly a formula for new meaning mediated through the productive power of the imagination. The emergent meaning is not fully objectified, but is also *felt*, so that the reader is assimilated to the imagined meaning as much as he or she performs the predicative assimilation. Passion and action combine in making sense of metaphor: "We feel *like* what we see *like*" in metaphor, says Ricoeur.⁵³ Negation of literal sense reverberates on feeling so as to affect an *epoche* of organic sensibility directed to literal

objects and to enable transformation of feeling. Metaphor releases the productive imagination to project new meaning, to which the individualized subjectivity responds in mood as a way of synthesizing the experience as poetic; in this way the metaphor can “insert us within the world in a nonobjectifying fashion.”⁵⁴

Ricoeur explains that religious texts overturn the literary quality of text by their use of symbols. Symbol is, for Ricoeur, the most primordial form of discourse in that it proceeds from the pre-semantic origin or post-semantic goal of language: symbol is less spoken *by* men than spoken *to* men “through the expressivity of the living cosmos.”⁵⁵ Symbols are first read on the world or some structural elements of the world such as the sky, the sun, or moon, the waters, earth, and vegetation.⁵⁶ Symbols also manifest their meaning directly in the psyche, through dream and image: Cosmos and Psyche are the two poles of the same ‘expressivity’; I express myself in expressing the world; I explore my own sacrality in deciphering that of the world.”⁵⁷ Ricoeur acknowledges the proximity of his thinking on symbol to the later Heidegger: the speaking of symbol is “like a voice of being.”⁵⁸

Insofar as symbols manifest indirectly the ultimate principle of thinking and being, and hence speak with the voice of the identity and difference of self and world (psyche and cosmos), they are religious symbols. When literary texts (those displaying the metaphorical process) utilize or create religious symbols, they become religious texts. Metaphor on its own occurs in the purified air of the *logos* as a discursive innovation proceeding through a predicative twist. But metaphor is always capable of carrying symbolic meaning and thus manifesting the pre- or post-semantic order of symbol: the rootedness of discourse and life (*logos* and *bios*) in the absolute ground of individuality. When metaphor projects symbolic meaning, “showing is at the same time creating a new mode of being.”⁵⁹ At this point, the capacity of the word to function as grace becomes evident. What, then, is the religious mode of being and how can texts intend it for human appropriation?

The religious mode of being, in a post-critical age, is appropriated interpretation of the symbolic appearance of God beyond God’s disappearance as a direct object for thought. Appropriated interpretation means that the symbol gives rise to: 1) a theological grasp of the identity and difference between the ultimate principle guiding all thinking of being (the idea of God) and the appearing symbol (the reality of God);⁶⁰ 2) a willed intention to live a life pleasing to God through obedience to the moral law and respect for the humanity of the Other; 3) a feeling of hope (faith, love) as a change of heart (motivational disposition) rooted in response to God’s advent in language. How is such a mode of being intended in the religious text? When Ricoeur refers to the religious text, he usually means the Bible (although on systematic grounds he need not restrict himself to biblical writings). Ricoeur both pre-

sents minute interpretations of particular biblical texts, and he articulates basic rules of interpretation. It will be impossible in this essay to do more than to indicate briefly the rules for reading the Bible as a religious text.⁶¹

According to Ricoeur, the Bible is a complex literary text; as a whole it displays the metaphoric process. Its distinct forms of discourse (narrative, prophetic, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnic) function individually and collectively as poetic models for redescribing actual reality. These forms are modified by the presence of symbols which serve as “qualifiers” that Ricoeur calls “limit-expressions.”⁶² Symbolic limit-expressions function to “transgress” or overturn the normal course of metaphoric process, and to “intensify” its effect so that the forms of discourse “coverage upon an extreme point which becomes their point of encounter with the infinite.”⁶³ The religious qualifications of the poetic linguistic model brings the poetic capacity for semantic innovation to its completion in a “cosmic disclosure” linked with a “total commitment,” in which it stands before the source and origin of poetic meaningfulness.

For example, the name “God” functions as a symbolic qualifier within the biblical modes of discourse. Ricoeur’s analyses aim at disclosing how the use of the qualifier overturns the poetic model in favor of religious disclosure both within individual texts and collectively as a whole. Narrative discourse names God in the third-person past tense as singular agent in the founding events of the community. Likewise deploying third-person past tense are prescriptive discourse, which names God as a righteous giver of the law who demands holiness, and wisdom discourse, which names God as hidden pre-existent wisdom who addresses those who ask about the meaning of existence. Prophetic discourse names God in the first-person future tense as a voice behind the prophet. Hymnic discourse names God in the second-person present tense, as one who may respond to praise, supplication, and thanksgiving. Taken together, the polyphony of meaning that sounds through the intertextuality of the biblical forms reveal a hidden God, the unnameable: “Yahweh—he is—is not a name that defines God, but one that signifies an act of deliverance.”⁶⁴

Ricoeur gives more detailed work on the New Testament forms of parable, proverb, and eschatological saying within the gospels. The symbol “Kingdom of God” from the sayings of Jesus drives the poetic model of redescribing social life to its religious limit in vividly presenting the image of a kingdom that is no actual kingdom, but the source and goal of all social existence in justice and love.⁶⁵ The gospels as a whole are read as a parable of Jesus as the Christ, in which “Christ” functions as symbolic qualifier driving the poetically presented possibilities to their religious overturning in a human figure of fallibility without fault who manifests the divine will.

Moreover, in Ricoeur’s magisterial *Time and Narrative*, which demon-

strates the thesis that "Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence,"⁶⁶ the possibility is systematically sketched out for understanding the biblical narrative as a whole as overturning the meaning of temporal existence through the reference to God as eternal source and goal of time. If the structure of human being in the world is temporality, and the meaning of temporality is care (Heidegger's *Sein zum Tode*), the biblical references to God's eternity can function as religious qualifier to present and enable carefree existence, a mode of being that is in time but not of it (i.e., not determined by anxiety).

Conclusion

The religious significance of Ricoeur's philosophy can be summarized in three points: 1) Ricoeur shows how philosophical reflection necessarily leads to the hermeneutics of symbols; thinking about thinking entails thinking about the words in and through which one thinks. 2) He describes how the word as word through metaphorical process and religious disclosure functions as a source of grace for human thinking. 3) He demonstrates that philosophical thinking (which includes both pure reflection and hermeneutics), is always already religious thinking (all clear thinking exhibits the religious passion for the infinite, the unconditioned principle of the unity of thinking and being). Thinking does so both in the strivings of reflective thought and in the transforming disclosures of the interpreted word. Theology is precisely philosophical thinking about thinking in its relation to the word.⁶⁷

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NOTES

1. I wish to thank Gary L. Bailey for his helpful reading of the penultimate version of this paper.

2. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 347, see pp. 347-57.

3. Paul Ricoeur, "The Demythization of Accusation," translated by Peter McCormick, in Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 344. The question is posed in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), B833, p. 635.

4. See for example the elucidation surrounding Ricoeur's claim that "we are in every way children of criticism, and we seek to go beyond criticism by means of criticism, by a criticism that is no longer reductive but restorative." Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 350.

5. See, among many citations, "Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 4 (1975), p. 142, as well as Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., translated by Kathleen McLaughlin (Kathleen Blamey, vol. 3) and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985-1988), vol. 3, p. 215.

6. See, for example, Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," "Guilt, Ethics, and Religion," and "The Demythification of Accusation" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 335-53, 402-39. For more detailed arguments, see Pamela Anderson, *Kant and Ricoeur: The Philosophy of the Will* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion Series, 1993).

7. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, translated by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 98.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96. "God" refers of course to the ultimate idea of pure reason, presupposed as regulative principle in the theoretical use of reason and source of the recognition of the moral law in the practical use of reason.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 44, p. 92.

14. To schematize a concept means to "render the concept intelligible by the help of an analogy to something sensible" *ibid.*, p. 59.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

17. For Ricoeur, philosophical critique of the concrete forms of religion include not only the rational critique of Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers but also historical criticism and the radical criticism of religion as will to power (Nietzsche), tool of class struggle (Marx), universal neurosis of humankind (Freud). See for example Ricoeur, "Religion, Atheism, and Faith," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 440-67.

18. Ricoeur, "The Demythification of Accusation," p. 344.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. See the "General Observation" on grace in Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p. 40-49.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

25. Ricoeur, "The Demythification of Accusation," p. 344.

26. For a reference to the "second naiveté," see *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 351. For a reference to voice of the text, see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, pp. 98-99.

27. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, pp. 142-55.

28. Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, translated by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially

"On the Essence of Religion," pp. 96-140 and "On the Religions," pp. 189-224, especially pp. 192-93. Schleiermacher defined the essence of religion neither as metaphysics nor as morality but (in the *Speeches*) as intuition and feeling of the infinite in the finite and later (in *The Christian Faith*) as the determination of immediate self-consciousness he called the feeling of absolute dependence. Ricoeur's conception of the essence of religion is, on the whole, quite close to that of Schleiermacher (who also understood his work as a "post-Hegelian Kantianism").

29. This point is developed in detail by Schleiermacher in his lectures on dialectic. See *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, edited by Rudolf Odebrecht (1822) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), pp. 5, 24, 50, 126.

30. Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, translated by Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, n.d.), p. 28.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-71.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-121.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-202.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

37. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 19.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

39. *Fallible Man*, p. 129.

40. Thus Ricoeur draws a distinction between two inseparable forms of reflection: pure reflection (thinking directed toward the meaning of the universal or infinite element in the being of thinking) and hermeneutics (thinking directed toward the meaning of the particular or finite element in the being of thinking). Actual thinking mediates between particular and universal elements.

41. The structure of the self is universal subject united with particular personality in individual self. The term "individualized subject" refers to the individual self as unity in difference of universal subjectivity and particular personality. For an argument for this thesis, with special reference to Ricoeur commonality with Schleiermacher's *Dialectic*, see David E. Klemm, "Individuality: The Principle of Ricoeur's Mediating Philosophy and Its Bearing on Theology of Culture," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, edited by David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 275-91.

42. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 42.

43. For Ricoeur's most recent analyses of self-reflection, see *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially pp. 1-26.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

45. For Ricoeur's critical appropriation of Gadamer, see Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), especially pp. 53-54, 59-62, 64-68, 70-78, 89-94, 117-18, 131, 191-92, and 243-44.

46. Central references for Ricoeur's analysis of discourse include *Interpretation Theory*, especially pp. 1-24, and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 131-44.

47. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 161.

48. See *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 25-26, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 145-64. For analysis, see David E. Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur: A Constructive Analysis* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1983), especially pp. 80-102.

49. For more detailed analysis, see Klemm, *Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 86-90.

50. Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 356.

51. For Ricoeur on metaphor, see Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, translated by Robert Czerny (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 165-81, and *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 45-70.

52. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 230.

53. Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," *Critical Theory*, volume 5, number 1 (1978), p. 156.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

55. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 319. For the connection between symbol and metaphor, see *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 45-70.

56. *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 10.

57. *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 12-13.

58. "Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," p. 219.

59. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 88.

60. See Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur*, Chapter 5, "The Religious Dimension of Text and Understanding," pp. 109-39, especially 132.

61. For more detailed analyses, see David E. Klemm, "Theological Hermeneutics and the Divine Name: Ricoeur and the Cross of Interpretation," in Klemm and Schweiker, *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 255-72.

62. Crucial texts include Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, volume 43, number 4 (1979), pp. 215-27, and Paul Ricoeur, "Towards a Hermeneutics of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review*, volume 70, number 1&2 (1977), pp. 1-37.

63. "Biblical Hermeneutics," p. 109.

64. "Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 18.

65. See "Biblical Hermeneutics," especially pp. 101-2.

66. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, p. 52.

67. For a more detailed argument that Ricoeur contributes to the tradition of mediating theology with its characteristic method of correlation, see David E. Klemm "Ricoeur, Theology, and the Rhetoric of Overturning," *Journal of Literature & Theology*, volume 3, number 3 (1989), pp. 267-84.