

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricoeur Studies

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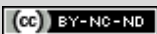
Introduction

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Introduction

Eileen Brennan

Most unusually for *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*, this is not a thematic issue. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to identify common interests among the contributors, all but one of whom turn to Ricœur for support in developing a project that they are truly passionate about. The exception to the rule is a contributor who wants to explore how Ricœur managed to execute one of his own projects: transposing concepts that were originally employed in Freudian psychoanalysis to the area of Memory Studies. In what follows I offer a reasonably detailed introduction to each of the papers in turn.

Johann Michel's "The Anthropology of Homo Interpretans" reopens the discussion on whether it really makes sense to view Paul Ricœur's entire work as "a kind of philosophical anthropology held together by a narrative thread, namely, an attempt to answer Kant's famous question: *What is man?*" and it does so in order to extend, refine and deepen that discussion. The question that motivates Michel, on this occasion, is the following: "in what way and to what extent can Ricœur's anthropology be described as hermeneutic or interpretive"? It seems to me that the phrasing of that question could give rise to a misunderstanding. Michel does not in fact hold that all of Ricœur's works are "directly" anthropological, and that all that remains for him to do is establish the part that interpretation plays in Ricœur's "description of mankind." As his article clearly demonstrates, Michel draws a relatively clear distinction between "Ricœur's first published works," including *Freedom and Nature*, on the one hand, and the two volumes that comprise *Finitude and Guilt* as well as various other later publications, on the other hand. He maintains that the former provide examples of an "indirect anthropology," which is not "interpretive," whilst the latter are directly anthropological and, in the case of the *Symbolism of Evil* at any rate, employ a "hermeneutic [which] also leaves room for an anthropology of man as an interpreting being, as an ordinary person faced with symbols and signs with double meanings (stain, sin, guilt)."

It is certainly the case that Michel's analysis of Ricœur's texts is fine grained, not only when it comes to identifying the type of anthropology to be found in a given work ("direct," "indirect," "an anthropology of vulnerability" or "an anthropology of capability,") but also when it comes to identifying the type of hermeneutics to be found there ("methodological and epistemological," "ontological" or indeed "anthropological.") Not surprisingly, given the title of the piece, Michel is most interested in the examples of, or resources for, anthropological hermeneutics that are to be found across Ricœur's many works. In the first part of the article, he sets out to demonstrate that "Ricœur's hermeneutics provides useful resources (the hermeneutics of symbols, the hermeneutics of texts, the hermeneutics of action, [and] the hermeneutics of the self) for developing an interpretive anthropology." However, he also points out its limitations in that regard: "even if one can discern an interpretive anthropology, it sometimes suffers from being too closely pegged to the model of the text, and more generally to permanently fixed expressions of life, whereas an interpretive anthropology also needs to be attentive to problematic, unfamiliar action in the making, as revealed to us in all its event-driven, indexical

glory." Michel then devotes the second half of his article to tracing a certain path, one that he describes as, the "historic, cultural and social conditions—as well as variations—that have brought Homo interpretans about," and he does this precisely because an anthropology of Homo interpretans presupposes such an account. Although this tracing of the historic, cultural and social conditions which give rise to Homo interpretans is intended to supplement Ricœur's valuable but nonetheless limited contribution to anthropological hermeneutics, Michel does not encourage his readers to view this 'schematization' as any kind of critique or counterpart to Ricœurian hermeneutics. It is, he says, simply a matter of "taking Ricœur's initiative further."

Hille Haker's "No Space. Nowhere. Refugees and the Problem of Human Rights in Arendt and Ricœur" makes an early reference to a particularly thought-provoking claim of Ricœur's: "It is as citizens that we become humans." I presume that the purpose of quoting that particular line is to help us understand why we ought to be very deeply concerned about the plight of the hundreds of millions of people worldwide who have had to flee their countries of origin, thus losing any *citizens'* rights they may have had. However, as the title of her article indicates, Haker is really more concerned with *human* rights. Drawing on works by Ricœur, Arendt, and others she sets herself the challenging task of deciphering "the human rights question as it relates to those people who flee from the political space in which they may or may not have *de jure* citizens' rights but certainly have lost them *de facto*." She is especially interested in what Arendt has to say about stateless persons and the problem of their being accorded human rights whilst being denied political rights.

In the first part of her paper, Haker discusses Arendt's "reservations, if not opposition, to the Human Rights Regime that became the guiding framework of international relations after World War II." On Haker's account: "Arendt reads the reference to inalienable human rights [in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights] ... as 'merely' natural rights, namely as unconnected to any right to political membership." Arendt argues that because they are "separated from the political sphere, human rights are merely abstract rights that cannot be enforced." It is in the second part of her paper that Haker approaches the question of Paul Ricœur's position relative to Arendt's often "bitter" critique of "the Human Rights regime," and she does so by way of "a detour through his ethical theory." She makes the following observation: "Ricœur would be opposed to Arendt's claim that all that matters is the right to membership in the polity; the human condition as *zoon politikon*, the political nature of sharing each other's lives in a polity that is today the global polity, is not as decisive for Ricœur's concept as it is for Arendt's." She notes that the key concepts in Ricœur's ethical theory are "recognition and responsibility, i.e. the capability to respond and the necessity to be held accountable and hold others accountable." She claims that these concepts and the analyses associated with them provide a promising "ethical underpinning" for the political.

In the third part of her paper, Haker takes a more direct approach, considering what Ricœur has to say about "Arendt's theory of power." She notes that, like Arendt before him, Ricœur calls for a move "from violence to creative power." However, in opposition to Arendt, he justifies it in terms of the moral responsibility that all human beings have to do as Aeneas did and "carry the burden of others on their shoulders." The following is an example of the erudition, but also the passion, with which Haker writes: "Aeneas, by the way, is one of the many refugees the Greek and Roman mythology remembers in its narrative configurations. Being vulnerable

himself, Aeneas, fleeing and having lost all rights, is *still* carrying his father on his back. He, not the Roman *civitas* or the “Founding Fathers” of the American Revolution [a reference to Arendt’s analysis], is Ricœur’s founding figure of human rights—a human being who does not lose his dignity *in transit*, because he does not lose his capability to respond. If this *vulnerable agent* is capable of responding to another’s need and aim to live a good life, how much more are others, not in transit, capable of responding”?

The title of Marc De Leeuw’s article is, “Paul Ricœur’s Search for a Just Community: The Phenomenological Presupposition of a Life “With and for Others.” It is described as “an exploratory paper, part of a larger study on Ricœur’s legal philosophy that focuses on the philosophical presuppositions of law and justice.” The article takes seriously Sophie Loidolt’s claim that “a phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity... opens up the foundation and existential dimensions of our legal community,” and it sets out to establish that there are important phenomenological aspects to Ricœur’s own, very distinctive conceptualization of intersubjectivity, i.e., intersubjectivity understood as “a complex intertwining of moral selfhood and a just community.” Its stated aim is “to examine how Ricœur’s critique of Husserl’s and Levinas’s notions of intersubjectivity informs his own alternative conceptualization of intersubjectivity.” The broader intention is, I assume, to demonstrate that Ricœur’s “alternative conception of intersubjectivity” fits neatly into the frame of Loidolt’s thesis on the potential that phenomenology holds both for clarifying concepts and problems in jurisprudence and for developing critical legal theory.

Esteban Lythgoe’s “How Does Paul Ricœur Apply Metapsychology to Collective Memory”? sets out to explain how Ricœur finally managed to draw together two areas of interest: psychoanalysis and history. More particularly, it tries to reconstruct Ricœur’s complex strategy for transposing what, in *Freud and Philosophy*, he had termed representation’s “twofold expressivity,” i.e., “the dialectic of knowledge and desire in representation,” from the level of the ego to that of survivors and their collective memory. As the article explains, it was in the 1990s that historians began to study “the testimonies of survivors of traumatic events, especially the Holocaust...[paying] attention to the effects of these events in the survivors’ communities and [on] their memories rather than describing the past ‘the way it happened.’” The article goes on to say that as “a contribution to this approach to history ... Ricœur applied some of the conclusions of his work on Freud.” However, initially at any rate, Ricœur faced a significant challenge because his earlier work on Freud had emphasized “the Freudian libidinal economy,” something that “hindered” him in his efforts to effect that transposition. The working hypothesis of Lythgoe’s article is that Ricœur overcame the difficulty in two steps: “The first one gathered psychoanalysis and history within the larger framework of otherness as flesh. The second step was a transcendental turn, which would lead Ricœur to inquire about the structures of collective existence that make it possible to apply psychoanalytic categories at that level [i.e., the level of collective memory]...”

Duygu Onay Çoker’s “Towards an Ethical Hermeneutics of Journalism” opens with a powerful testimony. It describes how the life of a young child was negatively impacted by the effective partition of the island of Cyprus in 1974. It explains that, during the early 1980s at any rate, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots could not “directly interact with one another... and thus [the author tells us] children like me learned the stories of the “other” through our parents

and had them reinforced in school and by the media. Although we all were living within spitting-distance of each other, especially in the divided capital city Nicosia/Lefkoşa, many generations grew up with this division fuelled by our own dominant national narratives.” The paper proposes a double critique—“personal/ societal”—which makes creative use of selected Ricœurian themes (narrative, the creativity of language, and linguistic hospitality) and whose purpose is decidedly ethical. One aspect of the double critique involves taking up the perspective of critical media studies and problematizing “the issue of otherness in the news.” Inspired by a Ricœurian ethics of hospitality, it recommends making the language used by the media more hospitable to the “other,” thus, “repositioning both news organizations and news items alike within Ricœur’s ethical paradigm of leading a good life with and for others in just institutions.”

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