1

The Search for Foundation

From Reflexive Philosophy to Hermeneutics

The Promise of a Project

As a beginning philosopher, Ricoeur found himself at the juncture of three major philosophical orientations: the French reflexive philosophy, the philosophy of existence of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers, and Husserl's descriptive phenomenology.[1] French reflexive philosophy appears in Ricoeur's own description as a way of thinking which can be traced back to the Cartesian *cogito*, through Kant and the French post-Kantianism, having Jean Nabert as its most prominent figure.[2] If preoccupation with epistemological issues, translated in the predominance of matters of justification and certitude, has been the overriding concern of such a line of thought, what Ricoeur retains from reflexive philosophy is its fundamental responsibility before reason. Ricoeur would often speak with unconcealed admiration of his first philosophy teacher, Roland Dalbiez.[3] His realist drive, manifest in his bold resistance to all idealist claims to immediacy or apodicticity, has remained a marked feature of his overall work.

1. Our brief historical survey is indebted to Ricoeur's own recounting of his intellectual journey. Cf. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 1–54, and Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*.

2. Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," 187–88.

3. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 4.

But this high regard for precision and intellectual integrity fully accepts the challenge of the existentialist concern for finitude, contingency and limit-experiences. Indeed, thought cannot be separated from life.[4] In this sense, Ricoeur's personal encounters with Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier (the great Christian personalist) were destined to have discernible echoes in his own work.[5]

It is also true, however, that Ricoeur's encounter with existentialism took place within the more general context of the resurgence of the Hegelian studies in France after 1930.[6] Whilst the structure of Hegel's particular presence in Ricoeur's thought will be discussed in more detail later, it may be noted by way of anticipation, the undeniable Hegelian flavor of Ricoeur's untiring drive to mediate. In *Fallible Man*, he writes:

> Man is not intermediate because he is between angel and animal. He is intermediate within himself, within his selves. He is intermediate because he is a mixture, and a mixture because he brings about mediations.[7]

Ricoeur's mediations are never allowed, however, to lapse into facile amalgamations, skepticism or mere negativity.[8] As will become apparent, Ricoeur sees dialectic as being more than a mere "logic of appearance."[9] Mediation is both a given and a task. It always presupposes a tension which, rather than being exhausted in a final synthesis, opens the discourse to reality. An eloquent example here is Ricoeur's celebrated tension between faith and reason, described at times as an "internecine war," which had continued to haunt him in his later writings.[10]

4. See for instance the noting of the suicide of his fourth child. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 51.

5. Cf. ibid., 6–7.

6. See Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, 10ff. Under the influence of Kojeve's famous lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a whole generation of intellectuals made use of a predominantly anthropological reading of Hegel.

7. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 3.

8. Cf. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 11.

9. As Descombes notes, before 1930, "dialectic" had primarily a pejorative meaning. The neo-Kantians considered Hegel's philosophy as helplessly idealist, and consequently his dialectic simply a logic of appearance. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, 10.

10. Ricoeur recounts the acute sense of conflict between faith and reason which has marked his intellectual life from the very beginning. On the one hand, his Protestant upbringing provided him with a strong sense of both religious experience (identified later with Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence) and the preeminence

Nonetheless, it has been rightly maintained, I believe, that Ricoeur's first sketch of his grand project of a *Philosophy of the Will* bears the undeniable mark of Kantianism.[11] In his later years, Ricoeur labeled this "programming of his work" promised at the end of *Voluntary and the Involuntary* as "most imprudent."[12] Was this beginning of a system, subsequently abandoned? Is Ricoeur's own deploring of it an indication that perhaps a *kehre*, a reorientation, took place in the meantime? We suggest that a turn to the specific way in which Ricoeur engages with Husserl, and perhaps more importantly, the way in which some fundamental phenomenological concerns continued to inform his later works, may provide an answer to this question.

Anthropology under the Aegis of Phenomenology[13]

Husserl's project aims to radicalize Descartes by establishing the *ego cogito* as the only foundation for science.[14] Descartes's long detour of anchoring the *cogito* in the divine perfection is rejected since, Husserl believes, such a move reinstates the gulf between exteriority and interiority, betraying thus Descartes's own radical intention.[15] If the outside is doubtful, one indeed has no choice other than to start with that which is immediately given.

of the Word of God (under the influence of Barth's theology, especially his famous commentary on Romans). Cf. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 5ff.

11. See for instance Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative;* Lowe, *Mystery of the Unconscious;* Bourgeois, *Extension of Ricoeur's Hermeneutic*; Anderson, *Ricoeur and Kant*; etc.

12. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 13.

13. In what follows, we shall not seek to present a neat description of Husserl's doctrine. Even if such an endeavour were shown to be unequivocal, it is doubtful that in the light of our concerns here that would be particularly illuminating. In fact, Ricoeur notes a certain incongruity between the phenomenological method described by Husserl and the concrete way in which he employed it. Cf. Ricoeur, *Husserl*. chapter 1. Note also the different interpretations of Husserl by his followers. Cf. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 11.

14. Ricoeur claims that an adequate description of Cartesian philosophy must acknowledge its two sources, God and the *Cogito*. (For a somewhat similar interpretation, see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:351.) In this light, Husserl does not radicalize but rather destroys the original sense of Cartesianism, asserts Ricoeur, which amounts to an implicit "atheism" structural to his phenomenological method. Cf. Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 84ff. See also Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 109.

15. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 7ff. Husserl believed that doubt "should have put an end to all objective externality and should have disengaged a subjectivity

In this way, the access to reality, promised in the celebrated call "*Zu den Sachen!*," has as a necessary intermediate stage the "world-for-me." The most primitive reality is the reality of consciousness. The constitution of meaning in consciousness led to the famous distinction between acts of consciousness or intentions (the *noesis*), and their intentional correlates, the *this* or *that* of experience (the *noema*). The phenomenological analysis aims to describe the relationship between the *noesis* and the *noema* without posing questions of factuality. Phenomenology "brackets" the sensible reality (*epoché*) because its interest lies not in the *what*, but rather in the *how* of description. It is important to note that the phenomenological use of consciousness as "the consciousness of . . . something," is not connected with empirical consciousness; therefore, it is not the object of psychology.[16] In fact, Husserl took a great deal of effort in criticizing psychologism.[17] Rather than being concerned with "psychological facts," phenomenology is interested in what is "original," in enduring "essences." To know a thing is to know its meaning (what Husserl called *eidos* of a thing), its fundamental structure. How one can do this? By exploring its various appearances. Only after the "detour of imaginative variations" (*Abschattungen*, i.e., "profiles" or "sketches") can an adequate appropriation of the "objectification" (in the "realist" sense) be achieved. The call to "the things themselves" aims thus to go beyond the "naïve" realism of immediate self-perception, by promoting subjectivity to "the rank of a transcendental."[18] Husserl believed that in this way, self-certitude itself receives a more fundamental anchoring.

But it is important to note the kind of transcendentalism described in such a process. The ego is not endowed here with an Olympian perspective, since the actual perception is always situated in a point of view. The "appearing" as such, is always perspectival. There are always "horizons in need of clarification."[19] The "essence" of a thing is not immediately given,

without an absolute external world." See Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 83.

16. Husserl's transcendental ego cannot be objectified. Instead it serves as the foundation of psychology, in the same way as it serves as the foundation of all the other sciences. (This is why Ricoeur insists that Husserl's psycho-physical body has no connection with the incarnate body of the existentialists.) Cf. Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 35–48.

17. See Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 1:90–196.

18. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 103.

19. "And in each actual experience it is surrounded—for essential reasons and not because of our weakness—with horizons in need of clarification." Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 177, quoted in Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 141.

presupposing instead a conscious and oriented effort. Husserl often refers to it as the attempt to get beyond a mere "natural attitude." This is a gradual process, (assimilated at times as a special spiritual discipline) attained through the "imaginative variations" of the phenomenological reduction.

We should also stress in this connection the way in which Husserl thought he went beyond Kant. On the one hand, the things "as they appear to us," the world of phenomena, represent the "natural attitude" which must be overcome by ascending from the relativity of a particular positing of a concrete being, to its *eidos*. On the other hand, the being-in-itself, as an existence without me, is a false in-itself, a mere absolutisation of the ontic, of the "this" or "that" of "particular beings."[20] Hence, Husserl's transcendentalism is not secured by the category of *a priori* knowledge, but gained by the effort of gradual accumulations of the "profiles" of the object.

This insistence upon the grasping of the "essence" of a thing, as the necessary correlate of a genuine scientific endeavor, may appear to bring Husserl closer to Plato. Yet, the equal stress put upon the process of reduction, the attempt to reach a life-world, especially characteristic of his later works,[21] uncovers a different horizon of concern, indicating his allegiance to a concrete, intersubjective world. Husserl's radical pretension of establishing a "the third way," neither idealist nor materialist, neither objectivist nor psychological, was the main focus of Ricoeur's careful scrutiny. He writes:

> I attempted to dissociate what appeared to me the descriptive core of phenomenology from the idealist interpretation in which this core was wrapped. This led me to distinguish in Husserl's opaque presentation of the famous phenomenological reduction, the competition between two ways of approaching the phenomenality of the phenomenon. According to the first, ratified by Max Scheler, Ingarden and other phenomenologists of the time of the *Logical Investigations*, the reduction made the

20. Paraphrased from Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 177.

21. Ricoeur bases his interpretation here mainly on *Ideen I* and *Ideen II*. As in the case of Heidegger, he pleads for a fundamental continuity in Husserl. Such a narrative integration is, as it will become apparent, structural to Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity. In this light, Husserl's or Heidegger's "*kehre*" (and arguably Ricoeur's himself), is not based upon some language of decision or a radically immanent "conversion." All "conversions" must have a connection with the outside, an "exteriority" component. What arises from this is a vision which challenges the fundamentally "docetic" paradigms of both a transcendental knowing subject over against the world (the Cartesian epistemological picture), or an agent as a center of assertion (the Hobbesean "political" paradigm). We shall return to the meaning of such an interpretation below.

> appearing as such of any phenomenon stand out more sharply; according to the second, adopted by Husserl himself and encouraged by Eugen Fink, the reduction made possible the quasi-Fichtean production of phenomenality by pure consciousness, which set itself up as the source of all appearing, more original than any externality. Carefully respecting the rights of the "realist" interpretation, I thought I could maintain the chances of an accord between a phenomenology that was neutral with respect to the choice between realism and idealism, and the existential tendency of the philosophy of Marcel and Jaspers.[22]

These concerns are already apparent in the first books of his *Philosophy of the Will*. In *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricoeur proceeds by an extension of Husserl's *eidetic* analysis to other spheres than that of perception, more precisely those of the will and affectivity. The cluster of themes introduced here, the phenomenological analysis of "project" (with its intentional correlate "the thing to be done by me"), the dialectic of acting and suffering and the nature of "character," will be developed in Ricoeur's later work (especially *Oneself as Another*). The next two volumes reunited under *Finitude and Guilt*, came as a correction of the "generic man" of the *Voluntary and the Involuntary*. The correction imposed itself because an analysis of "man's fundamental structure" tended to leave outside its zone of interest the empirical, the concrete aspect of human existence. The province of the "bad will," the mystery of the "fallenness of existence," has implicitly called for further ontological clarifications.

The first step in this direction is made in the *Fallible Man*. Ricoeur attempts here to ground the dialectic of the voluntary and the involuntary in an ontology of disproportion. Such an ontology, which takes its cue from an attempt to re-think human constitution as a finite-infinite polarity,[23] can account for a structural fragility of the finite will, but not for evil will as such. The analysis bears the mark of what Paul Ricoeur calls "the brilliant discovery of Kant," that is to say, it places the above endeavor in connection with the special place of transcendental imagination, as the third term in which reflection looks for its fulfillment.

22. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 11.

23. Ricoeur believes that making finitude a global characteristic of human reality is an overstatement since "none of the philosophers of finitude have a simple and un-dialectical concept of finitude" (Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 3). In the same vein, he rejects absolute transcendentalism, a freedom over against nature, in the manner of Sartre's philosophy.

It is this special place of productive imagination, between sensibility and understanding, as both determinative and determinable,[24] that sets the stage for Ricoeur's specific type of reflection. Genuine reflection is always "upon the object."[25] Correspondingly, the resulting "consciousness" of such an act is not yet self-consciousness but remains "purely intended, represented in the correlate."[26] It must be noted that in spite of a somewhat classical starting point as an infinite-finite polarity, Ricoeur does not re-iterate traditional anthropological subdivisions in terms of faculties.[27] The reality of the human invites a constant movement within the whole, unveiling itself as a dialectic of activity and passivity, openness and perspective. Whilst *Fallible Man* remains somewhat unique to the extent that an ontology is attempted here, such an ontology remains in many ways abstract. Fallibility, as Ricoeur himself recognizes, somewhat "slipped" between finitude and guilt.[28] A genuine account of the "evil will" will require a more radical methodological shift, which would enable an encounter with the historical and the contingent evil will.

This methodological decision will first make its way in *The Symbolism of Evil*. But this already prefigures Ricoeur's next step, the passage through symbolic thought, in other words, the beginning of hermeneutics. Before going further, however, it is instructive to chart two cardinal dimensions in this initial prefiguration of the self's journey.

The Continuous Significance of Reflective Philosophy

Ricoeur's fundamental trust in the "power of knowing," coupled with his undeterred belief in the radical nature of reflection, appear to place him unequivocally in the reflective camp.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that in spite of his insistence upon the priority of the world in the phenomenological analysis, Ricoeur insists at least in equal measure upon the early Husserl (from the *Logical Investigations* to the *Cartesian Meditations*), where consciousness is defined more by its distance from the signified things. It is just such a distance that

24. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 104 (SS 20; book 1, ch. 2).

25. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 18.

26. Ibid., 18–19.

27. Ricoeur emphatically rejects for instance the Cartesian distinction between an infinite will and a finite understanding. Ibid., 25ff.

28. See Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 16.

constitutes the power of signifying for Ricoeur.[29] This unveils an emancipatory dimension, grounded perhaps in Ricoeur's secret belief that in some way Descartes was, in his fundamental intention, closer to the truth than Husserl. Whilst Descartes transcends the *cogito* by means of God, Husserl transcends the ego by the *alter ego*.[30] Admittedly, Descartes's transcendence proved to be problematic. Yet Husserl's tacit acceptance of Kant's "transcendental illusion" has never seemed to question the immediacy of his own type of transcendence. Such considerations also anticipate the thought that perhaps the criterion of "reality" cannot be settled in a framework established within the confines of a self-world dualism.

We remember that part of Husserl's strategy has been precisely to set aside discussions about what is "real," and to concentrate upon the "experience" of knowledge *per se*. There is a sense in which, indeed, such an attitude is liberative, to the extent that it questions our categories and presuppositions, anticipating a phrase dear to Ricoeur, namely, the celebrated "return to the first naiveté." But this openness is also a barrier because such uncommitted attitude seems to suggest an ideal neutrality. Ricoeur was to comment later that in this sense phenomenology in its innermost intention "was condemned never to be completed and perhaps never genuinely to begin."[31] Or Ricoeur wants more. Not only a consciousness established in "stable unified significations,"[32] but the mystery behind its genius. As we shall see, this attempt at radical grounding opens the question of the nature of the speculative dimension in Ricoeur's writings. Nonetheless, the move itself rightly targets a different form of idealism inherent precisely in Husserl's descriptive aim.

29. Husserl seems here to treat perception only as a privileged mode of fulfillment. Of course, perception may be illusory or it may remain unfulfilled. In his last works, Husserl tends to ascribe a foundational role to perception depotentiating the claim of consciousness to constitute itself. See Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 204–5. Ricoeur's desire to preserve both horns of the dilemma (that is to say, a narrative integration of Husserl, which would retain in a radical way, both the early and the late Husserl), is telling in connection with his specific way of mediation.

30. For details, see Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 84ff.

31. Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 11.

32. Ibid., 41.

The Limitations of the Phenomenological Description

"The great discovery of phenomenology is intentionality,"[33] writes Ricoeur. The theme of intentionality (of consciousness as "consciousness of . . ." with its fundamental orientation towards the "outside") marks the break with the Cartesian identification between consciousness and self-consciousness. It is in this fundamental openness to the world, that the "de-centering" of the self is first anticipated. Phenomenology promises a better description of the connection between self and the world, precisely by focusing upon the dynamic of their interaction, rather than relying upon an abstract concept of knowledge. In such a scheme, the mind no longer opens unproblematically, in an *a priori* fashion, domains of objectivity. Nor is objectivity a mere product of the empirical verificationist principle. It rather appears as "a synthetic constitution . . . as a uniting of meaning to presence."[34]

Ricoeur felt however that Husserl's descriptive dimension, in spite of its attempt to go beyond a mere subject-object distinction is still too abstract, incapable of accounting for the richness of experience. His existential concern for concrete existence starts to question fundamentally the somewhat pejorative treatment of the "ontic" and contingent in Husserl. In fact, Ricoeur's own version of phenomenology (focusing as it does upon non-cognitive aspects (willing, motivation, action) as opposed to the more intellectualist versions of Levinas or Merleau-Ponty), can be seen as an attempt to dissociate his language of mediation from the idealistic tendency of Kant's practical positing. Intentionality discloses a structural thematization already at work in the consciousness itself. As fundamentally "outside-oriented," the meaning-bestowing consciousness, as the *noesis* of the *noema*, reflects a somewhat basic "spontaneity" of the soul, a pre-formed willing, revealing its fundamental connectedness with the world of objects. Genuine knowledge has its root in such fundamental dynamism, which connects the "inside" with the "outside." But this turn to a more ontological consideration of Kant starts to unfold

33. Ricoeur, "On Interpretation," 189.

34. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 40. It is important to acknowledge therefore that Ricoeur, unlike Kant, does not subordinate knowledge to empirical criteria. Ricoeur insists that "the objectivity of the object is constituted on the object itself." Furthermore, "objectivity is neither in consciousness nor in the principles of science; it is rather the thing's mode of being." Ibid., 38–39. This opens up a potential theological elaboration of "objectivity" grounded in a conception of particularity.

a deeper problematic of the subject which would continue to haunt Husserl's project. Let us take a closer look at how this happens.

From a transcendental perspective Husserl's phenomenology may be seen as an attempt to extend Kant's inquiry from the possibility of science to the possibility of all experience. Kant's passage from a "successful science" to its conditions of possibility, tended to produce a narrow concept of knowledge (which the positivists took uncritically), and by implication, a narrow concept of the world (an intellectualist account in which the world is a mere idea of reason, necessary to unify our scientific experience). To extend the inquiry to the whole of experience is to question the status of Kant's transcendental subject with its unproblematic apperception. In this respect, Husserl's insight is essentially correct; we do need an "eidetic" reduction of all immanent life, which must be the correlate of the transcendental reduction (the bracketing of physical reality). Nevertheless, a number of problems remain. Ricoeur rightly asks: Is Husserl's radical ideal of scientificity sufficiently convincing?[35] Is not Husserl's "methodological conversion" also a metaphysical decision?[36] How can one distinguish adequately between a phenomenological and a psychological reduction? Seen from this perspective, Ricoeur's appeal to the masters of suspicion (especially to Freud in this context) can be understood as an effort to purge the eidetic reduction from its idealistic traits. A genuine description must put this "methodological conversion" to the test of reality.

Thus, Ricoeur expands the phenomenological project on two fronts: on the one hand, he pursues the fundamental constitution of the self in its objects, implied by its orientation towards the world (explored by strands of post-husserlian thought and particularly by Heidegger, in the concept of *Lebenswelt*), and on the other, he questions the very presupposition of such a process, to the extent to which it may draw its energy from a false consciousness, an unreliable intuition or perhaps a "false conversion." Both extensions seem to be prompted by an inner conflict which, Ricoeur believes, dominates all phenomenology, the requirement of reduction and the requirement of description.[37]

35. See Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences*, 102ff, where Ricoeur tries to uncover the main features of Husserl's idealism by showing that in fact such a claim to radical foundation remains in a very important sense at the level of intuition, therefore based in subjectivity.

36. See for instance Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 36; or his critique of Husserl via Kant, cf. Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 190ff.

37. Ultimately, the fifth meditation (cf. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 89–148)

In sum, Ricoeur wants to question both the idealism of consciousness and the idealism of "sense" implicit in Husserl's radical grounding. This anticipates a dialectic of appropriation and distanciation, dialectic which would become very much part of the fundamental grammar of Ricoeur's philosophical style.

The Impoverished Self: The Hermeneutics of Suspicion

The Dispossession of the Self: The Guide of a Phenomenological Aporia

But phenomenology anticipates something else. As it is well known, Husserl believed that perception could be in principle fulfilled. But is such potential of fulfillment always readily available to our experience? The world confronts us with experiences which can hardly be "reduced," like time and "negativity." Such experiences do not lend themselves to tidy description. Can we always rely upon the integrity of the intellectual act that guides the phenomenological analysis?

It is in this connection that the stark contrast between Husserl's phenomenology and that of Hegel is most apparent. Whilst the aim of both is "to let experience appear and speak for itself," the great difference between the two is that for Husserl, the negative remains foreign.[38] What is more, this inexorable presence of the negative announces the end of phenomenology. This happens, paradoxically, notes Ricoeur, "at the very moment when it promises an immense enrichment of the description, properly so-called, of the human experience."[39] Genuine attentiveness to the "Other" must pay serious attention to what, in Kantian language, remains inscrutable, that is

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is unable to account properly for the existence of the other, and therefore to respond adequately to the charge of solipsism, contends Ricoeur. The apperceptive transfer, or "analogizing apperception" which "must at once respect the originality of the experience of the Other and root it in the experience of the owned body, . . . creates as many problems as it solves because this is not a type of reasoning." It is rather a "prereflective," "antepredicative" experience. Cf. Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 126.

38. It must be said that Ricoeur recognizes that Phenomenology itself begins with a critique of the reflective consciousness. Thus "any investigation into 'constitution' refers to something pregiven or preconstituted" (Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 102). But "Husserl's phenomenology is incapable of taking the failure of consciousness all the way," concludes Ricoeur (ibid.).

39. Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 206. (See also Ricoeur, "Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity," in *From Text to Action*, 227ff.)

to say, to the experience of evil and the irrational. Indeed, the world confronts the self with an ambiguous axiology, which profoundly questions the efficacy of a mere "methodological conversion." Is such a possibility readily available within the structure of the world? Moreover, can it be subsumed within a general logic of history of the Hegelian type? If it cannot, philosophy must not be content with establishing isles of rationality in an ocean of questionable meaning, or with reconciling the good with the evil in a single ontological principle. Such a challenge carries with it an equally radical methodological counterpart: Is the ideal of description itself sufficient, in a world which does not seem to offer too much hope? If the answer is no, Marx's adage, that the task of philosophy is not to describe the world but to change it, must be taken seriously.[40] In a similar fashion, if the transcendental reduction, as a smooth and linear recovery of the *eidos*, is interrupted by negativity, the inner reduction is itself confronted by the irreducible reality of the unconscious.

Is it not the case then that, in order to succeed, the phenomenological experience itself is in need of an absolute guarantor as in the Cartesian project? Is not perception, as a form of "unthematic spontaneity" or "not-yet-formed will," part of a more fundamental "enabling" which must guide the phenomenological reduction itself? Moreover, is Husserl's methodological conversion sufficient? Does not the structure of reality call for a more fundamental "healing" if phenomenological analysis is to be successful? For the theologian, such a direction of inquiry has soteriological intimations. In many ways, Ricoeur's interest in the will may be seen as a potential response to precisely such problems.[41]

As we have already noted, in Ricoeur's first books on the will, under the aegis of phenomenology, the structure of the will unveils itself in a dialectic of self and world. On the methodological plane, this gradually effects a passage from *eidetics* to *empirics*, that is to say, from a purely phenomenological and transcendental perspective to hermeneutics. From the perspective of content, this effort of reading the self in the world would raise, as we have just seen, not only questions about ontology and soteriology, but also about the enigma of evil. It will be this *aporia* of the bad will which will constitute the privileged field of exploration in the

40. See Marx's address to Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world . . . the point is to change it." Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 158.

41. Ricoeur will recall later that "it was with regard to a specific problem, that of bad will, that I had first become aware of the general condition for self-understanding." Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 23.

encounter with the masters of suspicion. A different kind of terminology insinuates itself here that claims to unveil a more fundamental logic: the logic of desire.

The Dispossession of the Self: Toward a New Foundational Science?

The "horizonal" characteristic of Husserl's "elusive ego," was only the beginning of the self's passion. The passage through Freud, Marx and Nietzsche would have to effect the real break down of its pretensions. Nevertheless, the mark of reflexivity, the meaning question, is still there guiding Ricoeur in his response to these challenges.

In what follows we shall take a closer look at this encounter. What all those masters of suspicion seem to have in common is their fundamental critique of the very premise of phenomenology, consciousness itself. To this extent, contends Ricoeur, Freud, Nietzsche and Marx confront phenomenology "on the same ground."[42] The fact that it is Freud who tends to occupy Ricoeur more than the other two is hardly surprising, for it was Freud who effected the final and perhaps most decisive humiliation of the human subject. Ricoeur writes:

> First there was the cosmological humiliation inflicted upon man by Copernicus, who destroyed the narcissistic illusion by which the home of man remained at rest in the centre of the universe. Then there came biological humiliation, when Darwin put an end to man's claim to be unconnected with the animal kingdom. Finally came psychological humiliation. Man, who already knew that he was lord of neither the cosmos nor all living things, discovers that he is not even lord of his own psyche.[43]

Freud's most disturbing claim is that consciousness cannot be trusted, that it lies to itself and that its true motivations are not immediately accessible. In the face of such a challenge Ricoeur wants to re-think and re-ground the concept of consciousness. Is reflexive philosophy still possible after psychoanalysis?

To this end, Ricoeur brings the claims of psychoanalysis under close scrutiny. A philosophical appropriation would imply an assessment of its claim to truth, its possibilities and its limits. But Ricoeur's ultimate

42. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 99.

43. Ibid., 152.

concerns rest with his projected philosophical anthropology. He aims to attain a vision of humanity that would be able to integrate in itself the dialectic of consciousness and the unconscious. Freedom and dignity must pass through the bondage of the "economic" model, as he calls it, only to emerge again as a more truthful dialectic of fragility and responsibility. This latter claim also spells out the primary concerns of the present analysis. As in the case of phenomenology, even if a faithful description of the psychoanalytic theory and practice were possible, that would only be of secondary importance. What is important in the present context is the particular way in which Ricoeur appropriates it.

Ricoeur summarizes the principal claims of psychoanalysis under three headings. First, psychoanalysis is an analytical procedure for investigating the human psyche; secondly, it is a method or a therapy for the treatment of neurotic disorders, and thirdly, it is a doctrine connected to the previous two practices, which tries to indicate their theoretical foundation or establish psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline.[44] Let us analyze in turn the principal traits of this rather loose association.

To begin with, Ricoeur fully accepts the main challenge of psychoanalysis. The reflexive subject must acknowledge its own fragility. Ricoeur's reply to its crisis is to separate the Cartesian certainty from genuine self-knowledge. Self-adequation no longer precedes reflection. Self-consciousness is no longer a premise, but a task. The search for such adequation presupposes a labor, a travail.[45] Ricoeur is quick to point out that this is not a form of resignation. In fact, it is precisely this acceptance that opens the possibility of an inquiry into the scientific status of psychoanalysis itself. There are a number of ramifications to this problem which will be addressed in turn below.

We shall concentrate especially on the essay "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings" not only because Ricoeur addresses the problem of truth in psychoanalysis and its claim to scientificity in a systematic fashion, but also because it pushes psychoanalysis to its limits. This latter treatment may be thus seen as a correction of a somewhat theoretical bias which characterized his earlier collection of essays on Freud (*De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud.*)[46] By uncovering

44. Cf. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 255.

45. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 101–2.

46. Ricoeur notes and seems to accept Gabriel Marcel's disavowal of the book as a lapse into abstraction. He writes: "I would reproach myself for having constructed everything on Freud's most theoretical texts . . . and not having sufficiently confronted

psychoanalysis's proximity to other points of view (theory of texts, theory of history, natural sciences, ideology, etc.), Ricoeur displays once again the same movement within the whole, so characteristic of his philosophical anthropology.

After noting psychoanalysis's filiation with the natural sciences and its procedures of validation, Ricoeur dives into what he considers to be a necessary preliminary analysis; an inquiry into the nature of the psychoanalytic "facts." He identifies here the proper object of the psychoanalytic practice as being not desire as such, nor the realm of instincts, but desire as meaning, desire in its interaction with the social institutions and the world of culture.[47] As we shall see below, if this leads to the problematization of the "psychoanalytic facts," it nevertheless breaks its initial narrowness ascribed to it by Freud himself, in his metapsychology. Closely bound up with the notion of desire, Ricoeur enlists four traits of the psychoanalytic practice.

First is its semantic aspect, that is to say, desire brought to speech, told, confessed. Psychoanalysis is closer to a practice of interpretation and deciphering, than to a report of facts of observable behavior. By connecting us with a universe of "motivation and meaning,"[48] psychoanalysis uncovers its kinship with the practice of interpreting texts.

The second trait is its intersubjective character. By looking at the patient-analyst relation, Ricoeur highlights the relevance of the "the work" of the analyst.[49] The concept of transference, used in the struggle against resistances, when the patient "repeats instead of remembering," uncovers, not only the semantic aspect of desire, but also its orientation towards an "other." Psychoanalysis is more than mere "energetics," a mere economy of desire, or a "mechanics" of instinctual forces.

The third trait is the "psychic reality" in the psychoanalytic practice. Again, in apparent contrast to Freud's own positivistic intention, psychoanalysis does not operate in Ricoeur's opinion with a neat real/imaginary distinction. The "work of mourning" (the reaction to the loss of an object) is of utmost importance at this juncture. In spite of the insistence to confront the fantasies of desire with the reality principle, Ricoeur contends that the psychoanalytic cure does not actually vanquish the fantasy,

the experience of analysis as such." Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, 24.

47. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 163. See also Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 248.

48. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 248.

49. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 179.

but rather resituates it "at the level of the imaginary."[50] To the extent that, through sublimation, the psychoanalytic cure reorients our imagination, a subtle teleological dimension is revealed at the heart of an endeavor which draws its force from an archaeological model.

The last dimension, the narrative character of the psychoanalytic experience, anchors desire in a lived history performing a double function. The configuration of the case in the analytic practice articulates, first of all, a series of lived events into a meaningful whole. But the events themselves as recounted, receive a new efficiency. That is to say, the work of the analyst not only describes a past history, but *refigures* it; it somehow brings about the cure in the very process of recounting.

In the light of such observations, the claims of psychoanalysis need to be re-interpreted. First of all, perhaps unsurprisingly, Ricoeur contends that psychoanalysis remains interesting precisely by its praxis. The movement from misunderstanding to recognition designates a practice whose itinerary eventually transcends the theoretical corpus of metaphsychology. Yet, Ricoeur is reluctant to establish another theoretical starting point.[51] He concludes by spelling out the specific kind of truth corresponding to each dimension of desire listed above. The corresponding verification implied by such a description remains in this way fragmented, requiring the articulation of the entire network of the analytic practice (theory, hermeneutics, therapeutics and narration).[52] Ricoeur's only answer to the potential objection of circularity is to point to the relative autonomy of each domain. In other words, it is by virtue of the irreducible specificity of each sphere (which makes impossible its subsumption under a circumscribing totality) that the argument escapes a vicious circle, and a reciprocal reinforcement of the various fields is possible.

50. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 253.

51. In criticizing Freud's theoretical model of energy distribution Ricoeur stresses the social dimension of any theoretical paradigm by appealing to Kuhn (ibid., 271). That is to say, a theory is more than a mere noetic insight pursued under the guide of *Selbstreflexion*. On similar grounds, he rejects a pure phenomenological, linguistic or reflexive interpretation of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur identifies the same problem in all those attempts, namely, the rendering of the problem of the unconscious as a special case of consciousness. All those attempts carry with them an implicit idealism of consciousness (ibid., 262). See also Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation*, 337–446. As we shall see below, for Ricoeur the insertion of "an objectual" phase in the process is essential. The cycle of *Selbstreflexion* must come to an end if the challenge of Freud is to be taken seriously.

52. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 270.

The Problematic of the "Real"—Redemptive Overtones

But how are we to understand its relevance? How is reflexive philosophy and philosophical anthropology instructed by it? Let us look in turn at the nature of its truth claims, and at the way in which such claims impinge upon the constitution of the Ricoeurian subject.

First, it should be recalled that Freud wanted to conceive psychoanalysis as a natural science. After all, he was an *Aufklärer*. Ricoeur's resistance to "reconstruct" experience on the basis of his theoretical models is therefore understandable. But if Freud's metapsychology is problematical, where does the force of psychoanalysis's criticism lie?

What must be noted first is that psychoanalysis derives part of its validity from its success. What the cure performs first is, in a first approximation, an extension of consciousness. It does that precisely by making us aware of the mystification and the deceptions of the *id*, how consciousness lies to itself in its hidden aims of wish-fulfillment. It is this criticism which establishes the condition for all genuine knowledge. But this does not imply that psychoanalytic practice is a mere enlightenment, a kind of cure through knowledge. If that were the case, the patient would be at the complete disposal of the analyst, and psychoanalysis itself would be no more than a technique of domination or manipulation. Rather, psychoanalysis draws its force from its practical dimension. It is within psychoanalysis as fundamentally *praxis*, a praxis that ultimately rests neither upon a speculative construction nor upon a mere behavioral report, that truth can emerge. That is to say, both diagnosis and the cure itself have a concrete historical, empirical and social dimension. Desire as meaning is always attached to an object of desire. Moreover, it is not enough for one to know that he or she fits into a certain system of forces and motives. One needs the power to break its spell. That is why the overcoming of resistances is "a work," a struggle of an "other." Similarly, it is the work of an "other" which breaks in the cycle of *Selbstreflexion*, announcing the subject's self-delusion. This recognition of exteriority marks again the anteriority of the ontic plane to the reflective plane.[53] And this brings us to another important implication which separates Ricoeur's appropriation of psychoanalysis from other linguistic or phenomenological interpretations. It is precisely this bondage to the cycle of desire which prompts

53. See also Ricoeur, "Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," in *Conflict of Interpretations*, 244.

the insertion of the "objectual phase" in the analytic practice.[54] This testifies again to the double nature of "exteriority," as both empirical or "natural" and intersubjective. Ricoeur anticipates here the explanation-understanding dialectic which, as we shall see, lies at the very heart of his understanding of both texts and history. Explanation is required because "man's alienation from himself is such that mental functioning does actually resemble the functioning of a thing."[55] From an epistemological perspective, such a position prevents an idealism of consciousness. From a theological perspective, this speaks about a "fall" into the world of objects, a failure to be a human being. There is predictability and "control" because the "the subject" is no longer free. Even in Freud's own system this is more than a mere reflection of his own positivist and materialist position. Ricoeur discerns, in fact, a certain movement in the Freudian corpus, from a mere "mechanics" apparent in his first writings, towards an interpretation of culture, art and religion and finally to a re-interpretation of the previous edifice in the light of the eros-thanatos polarity.[56] This movement towards what Ricoeur calls "a romantic dramaturgy of life and death,"[57] betrays a certain tragic view of existence. Repetition, as the great law of the economy of desire, ends in death.

How then, does the psychoanalytic practice function as a work of truth? Can it possibly aspire to that comprehensive notion of truth that not only truthfully reveals a state of affairs but also brings about genuine healing? Is the psychoanalytic therapy a redemptive practice, able to transform and bring about freedom? At times, Ricoeur appears to suggest that . . . It is precisely by the enclosing into a genetic model, and a determinism of the past, that psychoanalysis is able to bring about a new problematic of freedom "no longer bound to the arbitrariness of free will but to determination which has been understood."[58] This seems to herald an idea of liberty specifically Christian and Pauline. Moreover, Ricoeur speaks further about the "re-education of our desire,"[59] and about "a new capacity to speak and to love"[60] opened by psychoanalysis. Is psychoanal-

54. Ibid., 185. Also Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 261.
55. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 261.
56. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 165.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 192.
59. Ibid., 194.
60. Ibid., 192–93.

ysis a prophetic voice heralding both "judgment" and "salvation"? Overall, Ricoeur seems to resist such a view. Indeed, according to Ricoeur, Freud remains more a tragic figure than a prophetic one.[61]

Nonetheless, psychoanalysis remains one of the most radical *possibilities* opened up to us.[62] Yet we may further wonder whether the ugly conspiracy of *thanatos* with the regressive principle can be contemplated from outside the perspective of freedom . . . Perhaps the "fall into nature," the bondage to the "object" can be genuinely seen only in the light of a symbol of resurrection that breaks the cycle of repetition. Perhaps the wandering nature of human desire and the difficulty of genuine loving, can be grasped only in the light of its overabundance. But Ricoeur would ultimately agree with that.[63] Was it not precisely such a problematic that prompted the insertion of other points of view? Indeed, in spite of its openings,[64] psychoanalysis remains fundamentally an archaeology. This is the reason why the regressive view of psychoanalysis must be confronted with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Freud's archaeology of the unconscious, burying as it does, the subject in a fate, must be complemented by a teleology of Spirit. It is only in such a light that the cycle of the "return of the repressed" is broken, and the phantasm may emerge as a symbol.[65] "Only a subject with a *telos* can have an *arche*."[66] Ricoeur's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* remains, however, overtly anthropological and historical. Whilst it undoubtedly enriches the picture by tracing the constitution of the subject in a dialectic of archaeology and teleology, for what Ricoeur calls "the vertical irruption of the Wholly Other,"[67] a different perspective is required. This different point of view is a philoso-

61. Ibid., 155.

62. Ibid., 192.

63. "Or, ce qui seul peut échapper à la critique de Freud, c'est la foi comme kérygme de l'amour: 'Dieu a tant aimé le monde'" (Ricoeur, *De l'intérpretation*, 515). Ultimately, Ricoeur seems to adopt the view (quite Reformed in character), that the symbols of evil can be only properly understood in the light of the symbols of the end. Thus, goodness and freedom are more primordial than evil and bondage. See also Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 156. This theme shall be explored in more detail below.

64. See the implicit teleology in Freud, especially in his interpretation of art (cf. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 174, 192–96). Freud naively believed that "only art is without danger" (ibid., 158).

65. Allusion to Ricoeur's application of this principle in his essay "Fatherhood: From Phantasm to Symbol." Cf. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 468ff.

66. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 161.

67. Ibid., 171.

phy of religion which is fundamentally "an interpretation of the divine names and the designations of God."[68] Since this latter endeavor remains distinct from concrete reflection, (which in fact, as Ricoeur notes, holds together regression and progression[69]), the criterion of "truth" remains in abeyance.

Perhaps we can now hint at why the status of psychoanalysis remains ambivalent in Ricoeur. The homology between Freud and Hegel reveals, among other things, their common rootedness in desire. Both regression and progression arise from a view of life as necessity and conflict. That is why a mere dialectic of archaeology and teleology remains insufficient. In such a case, however, we are left with an ambiguous "reality principle." On the one hand, the work of "truth" reveals only a tragic knowledge. Indeed, notes Ricoeur, Freud "turned to the language of tragic myth to say the essential."[70] Yet on the other hand, the "reality principle" as conflict and necessity, is mysteriously transfigured in the third term of the productive imagination, in a "sublimation" which breaks loose from the cycle of the "return of the repressed."

As a result, psychoanalysis as a work of truth tends to slip between two conceptions of the "real."[71] Such a situation may indeed help us to discern an opening between a romantic vision, expressed in hasty syntheses of freedom and nature, and a realism of cold descriptions which does nothing more than "accustom our eye to necessity." But how can we orient our love towards the right object? Ricoeur talks about imagination as a most sensitive zone, as a "blind point of knowledge,"[72] precisely because here is the field of competing "meaningful" projects. Imagination is indeed a frail territory.[73] We live in a culture which seems to appeal much more to imagination than to reason. Nonetheless, more must be said if such an opening is to become a viable alternative.

68. Ibid., 469. See also ibid., 22.

69. Ibid., 175.

70. Ibid., 158.

71. That is to say, in spite of Ricoeur's right refusal to associate psychoanalysis with "a technique of the night," dealing with the "dark side of humanity" (cf. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 120), a genuine concern for "truth" cannot forever elude ethical categories. As we shall see below, without explicitly addressing this ambiguity a genuine re-enchantment of the world remains highly problematic.

72. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 82.

73. See 1 John 2:15–17.

Toward a Structure of Emancipation?

It is now time to draw together the main epistemological implications of Ricoeur's appropriation of psychoanalysis. It is significant to recall that Ricoeur insists in circumscribing psychoanalysis within its own specific point of view. The suggestion is made that, in fact, its strength lies precisely in its narrowness. This is why we must not be too bothered by its excessive claims. The ideal of unity is not given up, but genuine unity, it is claimed, is not possible without the recognition of such limits. Ricoeur fully accepts, for instance, the incapacity of phenomenology in the psychoanalytic practice. "A critique of Freudian meta-psychology must be completely non-phenomenological."[74] If consciousness is false-consciousness, I can no longer trust the *noema-noemata* relation. In this case, a transcendental analysis in the Kantian manner appears to be the only viable option. Under the guidance of Kant's distinction between the empirical and the transcendental subject, Ricoeur connects dialectically empirical realism (meant to prevent a "fanciful metaphysics" of the unconscious),[75] with transcendental idealism, by dint of the inaccessibility of the unconscious.[76] The unconscious, Ricoeur avers, is always mediated by interpretation. At first sight, this seems to be a mere application of a Kantian insight to the realm of the psyche. The facts of the psyche, like the things in the world, are both constructed and received. Ricoeur comments that seeking meaning is no longer "a spelling out a consciousness of meaning," but rather "a deciphering of its expressions."[77] In this context he also compares the counterfeit-manifest or revealed-concealed relation from such a scheme with the distinction between the things' appearance and their reality.[78] While such claims depotentiate the Cartesian certitude which set the stage for the modern epistemological discussions, they also seem to question the status of all transcendental approaches. A psychic event, is not less problematical than an event in the world. As meaningful events, both are on the threshold of realism and idealism. Now I am fully

74. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 103.

75. Ibid., 108.

76. In fact this is a mere explicitation of Kant's transcendental idealism, which according to Kant, necessarily involves empirical realism. "The transcendental idealist is, therefore, an empirical realist, and allows to matter, as appearance, a reality which does not permit of being inferred, but is immediately perceived." Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 347.

77. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 148.

78. Ibid., 149.

aware that Ricoeur's transcendental idealism is a transcendentalism of consciousness (the reality of the unconscious as a diagnosed reality), and in this sense Kantian rather than Platonic. Yet, arguably, the Kantian idealism meets its Platonic counterpart precisely in the notion of the "real": what is genuinely real? In this sense, Ricoeur's refuge in Kant remains insufficient in the long run since epistemology must give an account of its ontological roots or its implicit theory of categories. Yet, we may well have in Riceour's analysis more than an application of a categorial discussion in a settled epistemology. The mediation by interpretation which qualifies the "object" of psychoanalysis as being more than instinct or desire (the semantic, intersubjective, "imaginative" and narrative character of desire), recalls Ricoeur's celebrated concrete reflection. In such a context what becomes important is not so much the limits, but the way in which the discourse opens towards the world, transgresses the limits. It is in such a light that the archaeological point of view points in fact to a teleological perspective. This is also the underlying reason for the homology Ricoeur draws between psychoanalysis, Hegel's *Phenomenology* and a philosophy of religion. This reasserts the old concern for "wholeness." It is in the same field that we are moving.

But it is at this juncture that one can, in spite of Ricoeur's insistence upon the divergence of the points of view enumerated, identify the profile of a fundamental common structure of reflection. Thus, psychoanalytic practice starts and ends in the analytical practice itself. Similarly, Hegel's phenomenology begins with the immediate and returns to it. As we shall see in more detail later, the interpretation of symbols and the hermeneutics of the texts follow the same pattern.

As we shall endeavor to show later in the project, within such a scheme, it becomes very difficult to distinguish between the Kantian "limit-idea" and the "otherness" of the third term in which imagination specifies and fulfils reflection as "concrete reflection." Moreover, the structure of what is genuinely "real" remains elusive if our starting and ending in experience is not theologically qualified. Critical thought may well contain an implicit promise of liberation. But how do we recognize genuine freedom? Is psychoanalysis able to bring about a true vision of reality or the advent of genuine healing? Or is it a mere postponement of pain by means of an utopian hope? This question must be retained not so much in its explicit epistemological guise, as in its ontological ramifications. Yet what psychoanalysis amply confirmed is at least the fact that the encounter with symbols, the deciphering of the signs, is more than a

mere epistemological exercise, touching as it does upon problems ontological and soteriological.

In conclusion, it is not as a new foundational science, or as a new claim to totality that Ricoeur encounters psychoanalysis. Rather, it is as a potential "redemptive technique," as a promise of freedom, able to resume reflection beyond the dark aspects of experience, that it arouses his interest. As a parable of the passage from bondage to freedom, it performs perhaps the most radical challenge to philosophic anthropology in epistemological guise. As we have seen, how "reflection survives" remains at least undecided if not problematic. Nevertheless, the theological lesson is that the question "What can I know?" needs a more original grounding. Epistemology is not only about justification and warrant, but about freedom as well.[79] In this sense this encounter may well be the antechamber of a poetics, anticipating perhaps its form if not its content, preparing the ground for the passage from "what is" to "what can be," from actuality to possibility. Only such a poetics may be able to obviate in a genuine sense the logic of repetition and the cycle of death.

79. Ricoeur tends to use epistemology in the strict Kantian sense as a science of justification and validation. It is criticism which tends to be accorded a richer semantic content (critique of metaphysics, ideology, self . . .). Part of our purpose is to substantiate a view of theological epistemology which would restore the rights of knowledge in a way which would invite rather than alienate ontological and soteriological considerations.