

Laudatio:

Paul Ricœur on The Long Detour of Hermeneutics

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Paul Ricœur's philosophy is a prominent expression of the ideas that shaped the 20th century and represents the new philosophical spirit emerging in the 21st century. His work covers a wide range of themes and philosophical concepts that have been debated over the past century and are still relevant today. His philosophy is not confined to any school or ideology, and it has evolved in synchronization with the concerns and aspirations of our times. The vastness of Ricœur's published work makes it challenging to comprehend his philosophy fully.¹ However, it is vital to provide an overview highlighting the unique aspects of the scholarship of the philosopher who has tackled diverse themes and engaged with various interlocutors throughout his intellectual journey. Central to his thinking is his hermeneutic work, which requires reflection and careful study. In my other works on Ricœur, I outlined the different stages that structure Ricœur's oeuvre, dividing it into the following chronological and thematic stages:² I. Formation and Influences (until 1950), II. Phenomenological Stage (1950-60), III. Hermeneutic Stage (1960-90), IV. Practical Philosophy (1990-2005).

It is worth noting that although Ricœur devoted significant efforts to hermeneutics, he also engaged with other topics that depart from this framework. What are the main principles that guide Ricœur's thought? To keep himself updated, he adheres to a methodological principle of not revisiting topics he has already

¹ See Vansina, F. D. *Paul Ricœur: Primary and secondary bibliography, 1935 - 2000*, Leuven: Leuven University Press; Peeters, 2000.

² Agís, M. *Knowledge and Practical Reason: Paul Ricoeur's Way of Thinking*, Munster : LIT Verlag, 2012, p. 44.

covered: “When I have written a book on a topic, I don’t speak about it after that, as though my duty has been done in its regard, leaving me free to continue on my way.”³ Ricœur’s work does not constitute a grand philosophical system. Instead, each new work builds upon the previous one, exploring uncharted territories and themes left unaddressed. Ricœur compares his trajectory to a journey, where he advances with eagerness toward new horizons while always keeping in mind the path that has led him to the current point. This starting point, in turn, becomes the foundation for new destinations. He maintains this attitude consistently, as when he states, “I see the tie between my different books in another way. After having completed work, I find myself confronting something that has escaped it, something that flies outside its orbit, becoming an obsession for me, and forming the next subject to examine,” He declares further: “One can say that the theme of the new book is off-center in relation to the preceding one but with a return to subjects that had already been encountered, touched upon, or anticipated in earlier discussions. What had been a fragment becomes the new envelope, the totality.”⁴

1. Intellectual Inheritances

Despite the seemingly fragmented nature of his work, it is possible, and even necessary, to attempt an overview of his scholarship, revealing the common thread and guiding principles. Ricœur has reflected on his philosophical trajectory in various writings. One such work is titled *Réflexion faite: autobiographie intellectuelle*,⁵ another is a book of conversations with F. Azouvi and Marc de Launay, *La critique et la conviction*, and yet another, titled *Auto-compréhension et histoire*.⁶

In the latter book, Ricœur reflects on the philosophical influences that shaped his thinking, spanning over half a century, during his early years of inquiry. He acknowledges being influenced by two opposing philosophical traditions (his two “philosophical loves”). The first is associated with Gabriel Marcel and Emmanuel Mounier. It leads him toward existentialist exploration and the problem of commitment, a theme he continuously explores throughout his life, even if it does not

³ Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with Francois Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, Translated by Kathleen Blarney (Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 76. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 119).

⁴ Ibidem, 81, 82, respectively. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 125-126, 127).

⁵ Ricœur, P. *Réflexion faite: autobiographie intellectuelle*, Esprit, Paris 1995b.

⁶ See Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", in Calvo Martínez, T., Ávila Crespo, R. (eds.) *Paul Ricœur: los caminos de la interpretación*, Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991.

always conclude with concrete developments. The second tradition is associated with Edmund Husserl. Ricœur acknowledges Marcel's philosophy's profound influence and distinctive way of practicing and transmitting it. "Gabriel Marcel is by far the person with whom I maintained the deepest relationship, beginning in the year of my *agregation*, 1934-5, and again later, visiting him periodically up to his death in 1973. During his famous "Friday evenings," which I began to attend in 1934, a theme for discussion was chosen, and the rule was always to start from examples, analyze them, and resort to doctrines only to support the positions defended. There, I tasted a kind of discussion entirely lacking at the Sorbonne. At Marcel's, one had the impression that thinking was alive. . . . I believe that this is what I fundamentally owe to him: to have dared to try to do philosophy and to do it in a situation assumed polemically."⁷ Marcel's work is highly regarded by Ricœur; however, there are noticeable differences in their approaches. Ricœur suggests that Marcel's conceptual framework is somewhat lacking. While they share many fundamental beliefs, Ricœur disagrees with Marcel's usual method of transitioning from one concept to another, as if they were variations that arise from resonances and dissonances.

In Husserl's philosophy, Ricœur finds intellectual and reflective rigor, laborious analyses, and complex articulations within the phenomenological realm. Ricœur accepts and even seeks the inherent polarity in the intersection of these influences as a source of philosophical creativity, a driving dynamism of all his work. Throughout his entire intellectual career, Ricœur has refused to recognize a single master or follow a single school, combining various influences in his work. Despite this, it is essential to recognize the significant impact of Jean Nabert's ideas on Ricœur's philosophical work. According to P. Colin, Nabert holds a special place among Ricœur's mentors. Colin suggests that Ricœur's work is only truly philosophical because of his loyalty to the philosophical lines traced by Nabert. Nabert is a reference point and a "relegation" for Ricœur's thought in reflective philosophy.⁸ Ricœur always engages with various authors, selected for different reasons, ultimately choosing a unique line that shapes his originality. His style of philosophizing introduces a new and highly suggestive hermeneutic model in the contemporary landscape. In the midst of numerous philosophical debates, the rise of a philosopher who, while not rejecting established ideas, thoughtfully develops his own theories shows that philosophy is still possible, relevant, and valuable. The ideas of others are not forgotten or ignored, but they are also not unquestioningly accepted without critical examination. Ricœur places

⁷ Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 23. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995, 41-42)

⁸ Colin, P. "Herméneutique et philosophie réflexive", in Greisch, J., Kearney, R. (eds.) *Paul Ricœur: Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, Cerf, Paris, 1991, pp. 16 ss.

a strong emphasis on the polemical structure of the influences that he has suffered and chosen. According to him, it's because he sees in it the origin of a style that remained constant throughout his development. He always finds himself fighting on two fronts or reconciling recalcitrant adversaries in dialogue. These fronts varied according to the times, and these adversaries were replaced according to the change in the philosophical landscape.⁹

Throughout different periods, different strands of thought have influenced Ricœur's thinking. At first, existentialism, as a new rationalism, stood in opposition to neo-Kantianism. This was followed by a phase in which the philosophy of the subject challenged structuralism. Later on, Ricœur became preoccupied with the philosophy of language and its inflation, with an emphasis on lived experience or action as a counterpoint. The next stage involved a debate between the postulates of analytical philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics. Lastly, the philosophy of argumentation clashed with deconstructionism. His book *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, published in 1986 (although its origin dates back to lectures given in 1975 at the University of Chicago), completes the framework presented in his lecture "Auto-compréhension et histoire" from 1987: "In these lectures, I examine ideology and utopia. My purpose is to put these two phenomena, usually treated separately, within a single conceptual framework. The organizing hypothesis is that the very conjunction of these two opposite sides or complementary functions typifies what could be called social and cultural imagination. . . In turn, my conviction, or at least my hypothesis, is that the dialectic between ideology and utopia may shed some light on the unsolved general question of imagination as a philosophical problem."¹⁰ Ricœur argues, among other things, that ideology and utopia have opposing pathologies. While ideology has both positive and negative connotations, utopia has a positive connotation as an imaginary place. However, the problem with utopia arises when people try to create it through violence and by destroying the existing world.

Oneself as Another is a significant work that marks a turning point in the extensive period dedicated to hermeneutic issues. One page in this work is relevant for bridging the hermeneutic and ethical perspectives. Ricœur explains the two fundamental ways of introducing the hermeneutic point of view. The first way applies the notion of the hermeneutic circle to pair the ethical objective of a good life with our particular choices to fulfill that objective. The second way ensures that interpretation becomes self-interpretation for the agent. In this way, "self-

⁹ Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 10.

¹⁰ Ricœur, P. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, (ed. G. Taylor) Columbia University Press, New York 1986, p. 1.

interpretation becomes self-esteem.”¹¹ Although hermeneutic issues remain relevant, Ricœur’s philosophy is now fundamentally practical in orientation, with his “Petite Éthique” (Studies VII, VIII, and IX) being considered as his “contribution to Moral Philosophy.”¹² He confronts the solitary Cartesian Cogito with the philosophy of action that entails a community of participants. According to Ricœur, action always involves others, and the problem of the other is, therefore, implicated in the narrative. While Descartes’ starting point is the subject as “I” and as “thinking I,” narratives transcend the first person. It can be said that narratives take all grammatical persons as subjects, although they use the third person in a privileged manner.

For this reason, in his book, Ricœur uses the term “soi” to designate the reflective capacity of all individuals. “The expansion of the reflective tradition consists in having moved from thought to action, in having approached man as an actor of his actions. In this sense, the question of *n/ho* does something is the central question.”¹³

2. A Broken Systematicity

Ricœur’s approach toward different philosophical fronts can be described as that of an attentive and concerned philosopher. He values the contributions of each era’s alternatives without dogmatically following any single line. He is like Locke’s worker (*Essay*), clearing the ground for knowledge by removing obstacles. Ricœur’s path involves discovering followers and detractors as he inaugurates a new model that corresponds to the tension arising in our time’s philosophy.¹⁴ According to a reading of the present panorama, we are in a post-Hegelian era, seeking our place in the ashes of the system. One can aspire to a new system without the possibility of synthesis or opt for fragmentary thinking. Ricœur chooses the second style but with his sights set on the utopia of the first. Therefore, he speaks of a *systematicité brisée* (broken systematicity) to refer to our time’s spirit, or using another graphic expression, a *cogito blessé* (wounded cogito), referring to his work.

Ricœur is not a systematic philosopher, as the era of grand systems has passed. However, his work is founded on a systematic approach, which is essential for the

¹¹ Ricœur, P. *Oneself as another*, transl. By Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 179. (French edition: Ricœur, 1990, 210-211).

¹² Ricœur, P. *The Just*, transl. By David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 13. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995c, 13).

¹³ Esquirol, J. M. "Entrevista a Paul Ricœur", *El Ciervo*, Barcelona, May 1991, p. 19. My translation

¹⁴ Ricoeur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 10.

intellectual rigor inherent in philosophical activity and the educational requirements for which his essays were created. Several of his books were originally based on courses taught at various universities worldwide, including *La métaphore vive* and *Ideologie et utopie*. Despite the systematic spirit, which Gabriel Marcel cautioned against, Ricœur continues to defend it, stating: “I continue to claim it, even if it tends toward a certain didacticism, which is partially explained by the fact that all my work has been put to the test of my teaching. I confess that I have always needed order, and if I reject any form of totalizing system, I am not opposed to a certain systematicity.”¹⁵

This aspect of Ricœur’s work, often overlooked or disregarded, is significant not only because it helps us to understand Ricœur’s didacticism and systematicity but also because it explains the well-formulated nature of his proposals, the mature ideas, and the careful construction of his discourse and bibliographical references. It seems as though the author’s books have already been rehearsed beforehand, taking into account potential objections arising from an impossible dialogue with the reader. This impression is not mistaken or fanciful, as the author himself stated that “from the 1960s and 1970s on, my books were almost always ‘tried out’ on my American students in the form of seminar courses before being written; the other side of the coin is that these works have perhaps retained an overly didactic form.”¹⁶

Before delving into the philosophical orientation of Ricœur’s scholarship, it is crucial to consider the influences that shaped his formative years prior to World War II. During this period, we can observe the impact of Husserlian phenomenology, although it was only partially understood at the time. Additionally, the French reflexive tradition, which was inevitably present in his academic training, had a lasting impression on Ricœur. The philosophy of existence of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers also had a significant influence. Although Ricœur had almost no relationship with the latter due to several failed attempts to establish a connection, Ricœur developed a deep friendship with Marcel. They would meet regularly, especially after the war. During this pre-war period, he was also influenced by E. Mounier and the *Esprit* Review. Ricœur stated that “The notion of person, so dear to Mounier, found a philosophical articulation, only more technical, if I may, in the work of the thinkers mentioned above [Marcel and Jaspers]. The connection between an individual and their community marked a significant step forward compared to the isolation encouraged by professional philosophers. Through the influence of Mounier, I learned how to integrate my spiritual beliefs into my political stance, which was something new for

¹⁵ Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 25. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 44).

¹⁶Ibidem, p. 49

me. This was in addition to my studies at university and my participation in Protestant youth movements.”¹⁷

Ricœur was initially passionate about the work of Karl Jaspers. This led him to collaborate with Mikel Dufrenne on a book titled *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'existence*, and he authored another book titled *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers*. Ricœur dedicated these works to Jaspers. In addition, he contributed to Paul Arthur Schilpp's edited work, *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, with an essay titled “The Relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion.”¹⁸ In this essay, Ricœur aimed to clarify Jaspers's ambiguous stance on religion. Ricœur had a two-fold approach to Jaspers's opposition to religion. Firstly, he viewed it as a way of protesting against the demands of freedom. Secondly, he saw it as the emergence of authentic philosophical faith. Based on this, Ricœur noted how Jaspers appropriated the status of “metaphysical speculation” of religious faith, which he ultimately triumphed over. In conclusion, Ricœur addressed some personal questions regarding Jaspers's religious conception.

Subsequently, Ricœur began working on his first major work, *Philosophie de la Volonté*. In this work, he dedicated the first part, titled “Le volontaire et l'involontaire” to G. Marcel. According to Ricœur, “The study of relations between the Voluntary and the Involuntary forms the first part of a more extensive whole bearing the general title *Philosophy of the Will*. (...) the fundamental structures of the voluntary and the involuntary which we shall seek to *describe* and *understand* acquire their full significance only when the abstraction which enables us to elaborate them is removed.”¹⁹ This abstraction shares similarities with what Husserl called eidetic reduction, which involves bracketing facts to reveal the idea of meaning. However, Ricœur criticized Husserl for failing to acknowledge the empirical reality of the will and its various disguises. Thus, the work can be seen as an eidetic theory of voluntary and involuntary actions. “In *Le Volontaire et l'Involontaire* - M. Maceiras tells us - the reflective method consists of a phenomenological description in that it aims to extract from the lived experience the essential meanings and structures of the intention, the project, the motive, the desire, etc. Without speaking of phenomenology, ‘in order not to invest myself with the authority of Husserl,’ the method is a Husserlian-style description of the intentional structures of the practical and affective cogito.”²⁰ Thus, while the

¹⁷ Ricœur, P. *Réflexion faite*, p. 18. [My translation]

¹⁸ Ricœur, P. “The relation of Jaspers' Philosophy to Religion”, en Schilpp, P. A. (ed.) *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*, Open Court Publishing, La Salle (Illinois), 1957 (1981), pp. 611 to 642

¹⁹ Ricœur, P. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Translated by Eruvim V. Kohák, Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 3. (French edition: Ricœur, 1950, 8).

²⁰ Maceiras, M. “Presentación a la edición española”, in Ricœur, P. *Tiempo y Narración I*, p. 15. [my translation]

imprint of Husserlian phenomenology is evident, the heritage of French reflective philosophy is no less prominent, an aspect that we can appreciate in Ricœur's treatment of the "absolute involuntary" (character, unconscious, life) and even the philosophy of existence of Gabriel Marcel. Regarding the tension between these three early influences on his thought, Ricœur confesses that "Between French reflective philosophy, the philosophy of existence of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers, and the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl, tensions were certainly perceived, but they were considered healthy conditions of a militant philosophical activity."²¹

The underlying principle guiding this description is the interdependence of voluntary and involuntary bodily responses. This means that the volitional choice and the physical limitations that affect it should be considered when considering a decision. The abstraction of guilt and transcendence is a unique feature of this initial methodology. The presence of guilt leads to a revolutionary approach because it tends to express itself through indirect language. Ricœur's focus on the theme of the will is motivated by his desire to provide a practical complement to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Ricœur believed that, in the practical field, it was necessary to perform an eidetic analysis of the structures of the project, voluntary motion, and consent to the absolute involuntary and to carry out a dialectical analysis of the relationships between activity and passivity. "It seemed to me that it was necessary to do in the practical field what Merleau-Ponty had done in the theoretical field, namely, on the one hand, an eidetic analysis of the structures of the project, of voluntary motion and consent to the absolute involuntary; on the other hand, a dialectical analysis of the relationships between activity and passivity."²²

However, Ricœur still had to mediate the confrontation between the philosophical ideas of Husserl and Marcel. While he adopted Husserl's methodology, he borrowed Marcel's concept of a concrete, flesh-and-bone subject. To address these requirements, he proposed an ontology opposing both monism and dualism - the ontology of disproportion. The second part of his work, *Finitude et Culpabilité*, revisits this ontology, with the book divided into two parts: *L'homme faillible* and *La symbolique du mal*. The second volume complements the first by introducing what is within pure abstraction and parenthesis and focusing on empirical will rather than essential description. We are entering a terrain of *empirique de la volonté* (empirics of the will) that deals with two guiding ideas: the opaque and absurd nature of the fault. Secondly, the transition from innocence to fault cannot be described, even empirically, but through

²¹ Ricœur, P. *Réflexion faite*, p. 18.

²² Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 12. [My translation]

a concrete myth.²³ The project aims to connect empirical will with a concrete myth. In *L'homme faillible*, Ricœur attempts to develop the ontology of disproportion outlined in the first volume. This part is organized around three strong priorities and three fragile mediations that correspond to each other. In his words: "I found that imagination, as explained by Kantian schematism, acts as a mediator on the theoretical level between the limited perspective of perception and the unlimited perspective of the verb. Similarly, on a practical level, I noted that respect creates a connection between the limitations of one's character and boundless happiness. Finally, I observed that the emotional vulnerability that accompanies the desires for possession, power, and ambition combines the vastness of the sense of belonging to the entirety of things and the intimacy of being affected in the present moment (*hic et nunc*)."²⁴

The ontology of disproportion was explicitly developed by rejecting both monism and dualism and reconciling reflective thought and feeling. This approach differs from classical existentialism, where finitude and guilt tend to merge into one, as *L'homme faillible* analyzes their differences and relationships. Ricœur says, "The fragility of man, his vulnerability to moral evil, arise from the constitutive disproportion between infinity and finitude."²⁵ This concept, which has a Pascalian resonance, forms the basis of Ricœur's ontology of disproportion. It describes the ontology of finite will, an anthropological reality that serves as the gateway to evil and guilt.

To bring the problem of evil into the structure of the will, Ricœur found it necessary to renew the empirical-descriptive method. According to him, the phenomenology of the voluntary and the involuntary only explains the weakness of a being exposed to evil and susceptible to doing evil, but not the actual evil itself. Therefore, he took a different approach. To grasp the specificity of evil will, Ricœur introduced the detour of symbols and myths into his reflections, which means he mediated on the centers of cultural worlds. This led to the creation of *The Symbolism of Evil*, the second part of *Finitude and Guilt*, which concludes his *Philosophy of the Will*. "The *Symbolism of Evil* was born out of a methodological revolution. The book argues that the will does not identify itself as evil nor does it confess guilt unless one contemplates the symbols and myths conveyed through the great cultures that have shaped the Western conscience."²⁶ The "graft of hermeneutics on phenomenology" is

²³ See Ricœur, P. *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will. II: Finitude and Guilt*, (Translated by Charles Kelbley), Chicago, H. Regnery Comp., 1965. (French edition: Ricœur, 1960).

²⁴ Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 12. [My translation].

²⁵ Ricœur, P. *Réflexion faite*, p. 28 [My translation].

²⁶ Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 13. [My translation].

being born. However, more than a graft, it is a full-fledged criticism of a method such as phenomenology that fails to fully contemplate human reality and its expressiveness through symbolic and linguistic creations. The detour proposed by Ricoeur through the symbolic route seeks to overcome a presupposition common to Descartes and Husserl that deforms human reality due to its narrowness: the apodicticity of the Cogito. Hence, “The subject does not know themselves directly, but only through the signs deposited in their memory and their imagination by great cultures. This opacity of the Cogito is not concerned in principle only with the experience of the bad will but rather the entire intentional life of the subject.”²⁷

3. The Long Path of Hermeneutics

The transition from the real world to the world of text brings to light the limitations of Husserlian phenomenological method, as pointed out by Ricoeur in the 1960s. To overcome the impasse that phenomenological idealism leads to, using myths and symbols in the hermeneutic path proves to be crucial. It allows for indirect reflection (*réflexion indirecte*), which contributes to an understanding of human existence and reflective awareness of one’s being. This perspective is evident in Ricoeur’s works dedicated to phenomenology, published after the translation of Husserl’s *Ideen I*, which are grouped in his book *À l’école de la phénoménologie* (1986). “In my essays on Husserl, after the translation of *Ideen I*, I already made it clear that there is no immediate and transparent self-consciousness. Instead, I argued that it is necessary to take a detour through the signs and works that are displayed in the world of culture.”²⁸

Until this moment, nothing had required particular concern for language in the concepts of finitude and guilt, perhaps because direct language was sufficient to talk about voluntary and involuntary elements. However, to introduce the reality of evil into the structure of the will, another language was needed, an indirect language that is carried out through metaphors and symbols, such as “stain,” “burden,” “slavery,” etc. At this moment, a concern for symbolic language is imposed, which leads to a double problem: linguistic and exegetical. The progression of these parts leads to the need for philosophical hermeneutics. While the first part of *Finitude and Guilt* leads to the possibility of evil, in the second, it resorts to rules of decipherment applied to the world of symbols to achieve the understanding of evil. In this way, in *The Symbolism of*

²⁷ Ricoeur, P. *Réflexion faite*, p. 30.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 34. [My translation]

Evil, the second volume of *Finitude and Guilt*, we find the first meaning that Ricœur will use of hermeneutics: a decipherment of symbols, themselves understood as expressions of double meaning, the literal, usual, current meaning, which guides the revelation of the second meaning, effectively pointed out by the symbol through the first.²⁹ As I have had the opportunity to explain in other works,³⁰ this Ricœurian conception of the symbol as an expression of double meaning is influenced by the conception of the symbol that we owe to Mircea Eliade's phenomenology of religion. However, Ricœur delves into the heuristic and philosophical dimension of the symbol. For him, it is an element that invites reflection – as the famous adage as the title to the Epilogue of *The Symbolism of Evil*, which by dint of repetition has acquired a certain philosophical “popularity”: “*le symbole donne à penser*” (the symbol makes one think), reminds us.

Ricœur's work on Freud's ideas and its impact on philosophy and hermeneutics marks the next stage. The polarity that led to the conflict of interpretations can be seen already. The interpretation in *La symbolique du mal* was an amplifying interpretation. It paid attention to the excess of meaning that the symbolism of evil implicitly contained, and only reflection could elevate it to a significant plenitude. However, this interpretation was opposed to a reductive interpretation, which Ricœur believed he saw perfectly illustrated in Freudian psychoanalysis in the case of guilt. A new polarity was introduced, leading to the so-called conflict of interpretations but within the limits of a specific symbology.

Ricœur's interpretation of Freud's works reveals to him that the conflict at hand is not limited to the issue of guilt but instead pertains to a broader philosophy of culture. Ricœur's traditional reading of the symbolism of evil and Freud's critical reading go head-to-head, with Ricœur's aim to reconcile them rather than sacrificing one for the other. The crux of the matter for Ricœur is Freud's new understanding of a human being. He emphasizes that *De l'interprétation - essai sur Freud* is not a psychology book but a philosophical one. “My problem is the consistency of Freudian discourse.”³¹ In *La critique et la conviction*, Ricœur criticizes himself regarding the point of view adopted to penetrate the thought of Sigmund Freud. A self-criticism builds on Gabriel Marcel's incomprehension of the path he takes in *De l'interprétation*. “When I wrote my book on Freud, I have to say, however, that he disavowed me. He told me

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 31. [My translation]

³⁰ Agís, M. *Del símbolo a la metáfora. Introducción a la filosofía hermenéutica de Paul Ricœur*, University of Santiago de Compostela Press, 1995 (Foreword by Paul Ricoeur), Chapter I.

³¹ Ricœur, P. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Translated by Denis Savage, New Haven : Yale University Press, 1970, p. xii. (French edition, Ricœur, 1965, 8).

very clearly that I had given in to what he called the ‘spirit of abstraction.’ And I understand his judgment better to the extent that now I would reproach myself for having constructed everything on Freud’s most theoretical texts, . . . and not having sufficiently confronted the experience of analysis as such.”³²

At this stage, Ricoeur rediscovers the importance of language and its fruitful location in the hermeneutic field. His initial concern when beginning this work was to know how a reading or interpretation of symbols and a philosophy of reflection can be combined. There are reasons that justify his interest in psychoanalysis because, as he had already announced in the presentation of *Finitude et Culpabilité*, thinking based on the symbol must be interdisciplinary, and it must integrate psychoanalysis, political philosophy, the conception of right, etc. This orientation had already been indicated in an article from 1954, where he tells us that, busy with an elucidation of guilt, aiming to distinguish and coordinate finitude and guilt, he turned to psychiatric literature to critique guilt’s health and authenticity.³³ It is apparent that one of the reasons that influenced Ricoeur’s decision to study Freudian psychoanalysis was its significant role in the philosophical discussion on language at the time. This shows the development in Ricoeur’s ideas, moving from positions close to phenomenology in his *Philosophy of the Will* to a more hermeneutic perspective in his approach to psychoanalytic interpretation. Ricoeur stated that his research into psychoanalysis was strengthened by the “falsification” of phenomenology, in the sense defined by Popper. “Whereas many people saw it as a sort of integration of psychoanalysis and phenomenology; on the contrary, I was confirming in my work that this could not be done, that something decidedly resisted it.”³⁴ The psychoanalytic interpretation was impossible to integrate into phenomenological discourse. On the contrary, it can be understood as a hermeneutic modality by directing its efforts toward the question of the interpretation of a second-degree discourse and its meaning. “Psychoanalysis – M. Maceiras tells us –, in addition to being energetic, can be understood as a hermeneutics or exegesis of the apparent meaning that is explained by the recourse to the latent. Freud interprets the symbol through a reduction, which leads Ricoeur not to discard the Freudian concept of interpretation but to rely on it throughout all of his later work.”³⁵

Regardless of the results reached in addressing the issue of guilt, the question of plurality and conflict of interpretations was already raised. Ricoeur recognizes this

³² Ricoeur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 24. (French edition: Ricoeur, 1995a, 43-44)

³³ Ricoeur, P. “«Morale sans péché» ou péché sans moralisme?”, en *Esprit*, 1954, pp. 294-312.

³⁴ Ricoeur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 30. (French edition: Ricoeur, 1995a, 51).

³⁵ Maceiras Fafán, M. “Presentación a la edición española”, en Ricoeur, P. *Tiempo y Narración I*, p. 19. [My translation]

when he confesses, “It is to the preparation of my book on Freud that I owe the recognition of the speculative tensions linked to what I called the conflict of interpretations. The recognition of the equal right of rival interpretations seemed to me to be part of a true deontology of reflection and speculation.”³⁶ It was a conflict between two hermeneutics: of “amplification” and of “suspicion” (*souççon*), which includes Freud, Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche. In this way, in the phase that begins after the publication of his work on Freud, “the question was no longer limited to a particular symbolic structure, but open to the symbolic structure as a specific language structure.”³⁷ Ricœur tunes in with the change experienced by a good part of the philosophical schools, known as the linguistic turn, and evolves from phenomenology that we could describe as existential toward hermeneutics. Richard Rorty’s book, *The Linguistic Turn Essays in Philosophical Method*, dates back to 1967 and was published at the University of Chicago, a University to which Ricœur is also linked. Rorty uses hypothetical criteria of coherence to deconstruct the figure of philosophy that linguistic philosophers had constructed as an expression of their outward difference (traditional philosophy) and their shared identity or community of belonging.

As understood by Ricœur, hermeneutics inherits the reflective tradition as a whole and its phenomenological variant in particular. Thus, to the hermeneutic contribution of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer, we must add the mark left by the reflective philosophy of Nabert, Fichte, Kant, and Descartes. This inheritance can be specified in a few points. Ricœur centers the extensive work that opens his book *Du Texte à l’action - essais d’herméneutique II* (1986) around “the very primacy of the question of self-understanding; the emergence of the question of meaning, in favor of the phenomenological epoché applied to any premature pretension to pure and simple existence; “careful inspection of active and passive hierarchies of synthesis.”³⁸ Hermeneutics, for its part, adds to phenomenology the confession of the opacity of self-consciousness for itself, the recognition of the priority of incomprehension in relation to the true understanding of oneself, the need for a long detour (*détour*) through signs, symbols, and other cultural creations; the finitude of understanding and the conflict of interpretations that results from that finitude; the open character of mediations. Hermeneutics, seen from Ricœur’s perspective, brings closer to the possibility of understanding life to the extent that it shortens the distance between written creations and the world of the interpreter. In the author’s words, “the hermeneutic enterprise consists essentially in attenuating, diminishing, if need be

³⁶ Ricœur, P. *Réflexion faite*, p. 38. [My translation]

³⁷ Ricœur, P. "Auto-compréhension et histoire", p. 16. [My translation]

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 16-17. [My translation]

annihilating, distance, whether distance in time or distance in space; this is what I was resisting by holding that one does not know oneself, that one has to go by way of the detour of others, always valuing the detour of critique.”³⁹ We are witnessing a critical “grafting” of hermeneutics into phenomenology that, due to its magnitude and solidity, is destined to produce a new orientation in phenomenology, as long as its current followers are sensitive to this Ricœurian contribution.

The notion of *interpretation* can no longer be understood as a mere technical activity inherent to an exegetical science that seeks to discover meanings. Interpretation, the primary object of hermeneutics, is a constant search for meaning. Through this means, it involves an encounter with Being, or rather, with the need to reveal the meaning of Being. The notion of interpretation no longer belongs to a strictly methodological dimension but rather approaches an ontological dimension. However, ours is not a favorable time for substantialist ontologies, and the one that Ricœur’s hermeneutic project proposes a *particular* ontology that is not confined to substantialism or overshadowed by the phenomenology of the thing. It is characterized by an analysis of Being as an act rather than a form, a living existence that we can only understand through the dialectic of its conditioning nature and its creative and spiritual possibilities.

Being comes to coincide, according to the new meaning given by Ricœur, with “being-interpreted.” The self cannot be analyzed from itself but requires a significant detour of the signs, symbols, and figures of culture, from which the impossibility of a single and universal hermeneutics follows. There will be various styles of interpretation, and consequently, the nascent ontology will also be contingent, non-substantialist, militant, and always dependent on the development of interpretation. An ontology of absolute consciousness is now impossible because Being, consciousness, and the self are results of interpretation and, therefore, must appear at the end of the reflective activity, not at its beginning.

In *Le Conflit des interprétations* (1969), subtitled *Essais d'herméneutique*, Ricœur continued his fragmentary way of proceeding. Structuralism, psychoanalysis, and phenomenology are present and, of course, always in dialogue with hermeneutics. Ricœur also confirms the unbroken affiliation between hermeneutics and phenomenology in this work. What the conflict put at stake, this time, was the destiny of the question of the subject and the understanding of oneself. The option of structuralism was clear: to advocate for an anonymous functioning of sign systems without subjective handles. This conflict between hermeneutics and structuralism is

³⁹ Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 33. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 36).

now overcome, at least in the approaches of the 1960'. However, the work is more extensive, and the development of this problem is significant. The first work that heads the book raises, for the first time, the two possible ways of founding hermeneutics in phenomenology. Ricœur will speak of a "short way," which is that of an ontology of understanding, in the manner of Heidegger. This name responds to avoiding debates about the method that turns it into an ontology of finite being to find understanding there, not as a way of knowing but as a way of being. The "long road," which is the one our author intends to take, also has the ambition of taking reflection to the ontological level, but in a gradual way, following the claims of semantics and reflection. The work also has other essays of the magnitude of "The problem of double meaning - as a hermeneutic problem and as a semantic problem" - where the issue of symbolism is confronted from different strategic levels. The first is that of hermeneutics, the level of texts to be confronted with the semantics of linguists, which, in turn, is divided into two other levels: lexical and structural semantics. This is to cite just two essays included in this work, which can give an idea of its enormous relevance in the whole of his scholarship.

The second volume of his hermeneutic essays, entitled *Du texte à l'action* was published in 1986 and included a series of works articulated around three major themes: hermeneutic phenomenology, the relationships between the hermeneutics of the text and hermeneutics of action, and finally, essays on ideology, utopia, and politics. Although there are several books between this second volume and the first, both works have in common the fragmentary nature of the composition and the thematic solidity that marks the hermeneutic reflection. It is one of the most valuable books for understanding Ricœur's philosophical hermeneutics and undoubtedly the one that offers the greatest number of specific contributions on this subject. The book radiates meaning to other thematic areas the author has explored in his extensive scholarship and is closely related to hermeneutics.

4. Semantic Innovation: Metaphor and Narrative

Ricœur states that "*The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative* form a pair: published one after the other, these works were conceived together. Although metaphor has traditionally belonged to the theory of 'tropes' (or figures of discourse) and narrative to the theory of literary 'genres,' the meaning-effects produced by each of them belong to the same basic phenomenon of semantic innovation. In both cases, this innovation is produced entirely on the level of discourse, that is, the level of acts of language equal

to or greater than the sentence.”⁴⁰ In metaphor, understood not as a substitution belonging to the order of words but as a tension between two meanings at the level of the sentence (metaphor statement), innovation consists of the production of a new semantic relevance through an impertinent attribution. It remains alive as long as we are able to perceive, through the new semantic relevance, the resistance of words in their current use. In narration, for its part, semantic innovation consists of the creation of a plot (intrigue). By virtue of it, ends and causes are brought together in the temporal unity of total and complete action. The three volumes of *Temps et Récit* deal respectively with the configuration of time in the historical story, in the fictional story, and with a “third time,” between the cosmological and the phenomenological, which is generated with the configuration of the plot. *Le temps raconté* is the subtitle of the third volume in which he analyzes the Augustinian aporia between lived time and measured time, which Aristotle introduces in *Physics*. This aporia was recovered in contemporary philosophy by Husserl, in this case against Kant’s intuited time, arriving at an existentialist formulation in Heidegger, the third in contention, who introduces into the debate the criticism of the vulgar concept of time when constructing his hermeneutics of temporality, of the historical consciousness of Being. Ricœur adds what he calls an imperfect mediation: the story, defined by him as the guardian of time, to the extent that it would not be time thought but counted.⁴¹

Ricœur investigates a new semantic field, different from symbolism, on which he had focused his previous hermeneutic work. A decision, by the way, criticized by his admired Gabriel Marcel, who followed Ricœur’s work very closely until his death, as the author himself says: “the fact that I moved from the problem of the symbol to the problem of metaphor to find a semiotic basis and an instrument of language that had been coded and known through the history of rhetoric, this amounted in his eyes [Marcel’s] to losing a certain thickness of the symbolic which was more important than its linguistic trace in the metaphorical. For myself, I thought that metaphor allowed me to treat the semantic core of the symbol.”⁴²

The Rule of Metaphor (La métaphore vive) is made up of eight studies in which each of them develops a specific point of view, forming a complete treatise. Furthermore, each one “develops one specific point of view and constitutes a complete whole. At the same time, each forms part of a unique path, which begins with classical rhetoric,

⁴⁰ Ricœur, P. *Time and Narrative*, vol I, Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.ix. (French edition: Ricœur, 1983, 11).

⁴¹ Ricœur, P. *Time and Narrative*, vol III, Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 241. (French edition: 1985, 435).

⁴² Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 25. (French edition: Ricoeur, 1995a, 44).

passes through semiotics and semantics, and finally reaches hermeneutics. The progression from one discipline to the other corresponds to changes of the linguistic entity chosen for consideration: the word, the sentence, and then discourse.”⁴³ Each of the points of view is legitimized within the framework of the corresponding discipline, and, at the same time, there is a well-founded concatenation of them on the progression from word to phrase and from this to discourse. Of the eight studies, the last one bears the significant title of “Metaphor and philosophical discourse, “which indicates the importance of a work that ends in the problem that could be described as the guiding thread of his entire hermeneutic stage. It is a chapter that constitutes “a plea for the plurality of modes of discourse and for the independence of philosophical discourse in relation to the propositions of sense and reference of poetic discourse.”⁴⁴

Both works have in common their interest in the problem of human creativity. Ricoeur explores this topic indirectly, by examining the idea that certain rules regulate all human creativity. His aim is to discover these rules and how they generate creativity. In *La Métaphore Vive*, he looks for the most remarkable example of creativity in the semantic innovation of metaphor. Meanwhile, in *Temps et Récit*, he focuses on the protagonist of a story, as the creation of a story involves the creation of meaning, specifically, a structure of meaning or plot. As a result, he confirms that creativity takes on a dual form: metaphorical and narrative. The question that arises is what leads to the transition from metaphorical to narrative creativity: “Why did the question of narrative impose itself on me after metaphor? Of course, I could draw a line between the two: in both books, it is a matter, as I have just said, of semantic innovation, in other words of the question: how do we create meaning in speaking? We create it by placing together incongruous semantic fields this is metaphor - or by constructing a plot - this is narrative.”⁴⁵

Although it would be risky to synthesize the architecture of a work in three volumes like *Temps et récit*, relying on the author’s statements, we can highlight several fundamental concepts in structuring this great project. Firstly, two notions are considered guidelines: “configuration” and “refiguration,” to which we must add a third called “prefiguration.” This last is the previous pre-comprehensive moment, baptized as mimesis I; the second is the moment of composition, referred to in *Temps et récit* as mimesis II, formed by all the narrative operations that deal with the articulation of the action and the characters in a plot. The third is the moment that

⁴³ Ricoeur, P. *The Rule of Metaphore. Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 3. (French edition: Ricoeur, 1975, 7).

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, P. *The Rule of Metaphore*, p. 7. (French edition: Ricoeur, 1975, 11)

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 81 (French edition: Ricoeur, 1995a, 126).

gives rise to the reader's participation, who must remake the work through reading and interpretation, called mimesis III. Ricœur defines refiguration as the transformation of living experience under the effect of the narrative. In the first volume of this trilogy, he confronts the relationship between history and narrative. His peculiar approach to the problem of history is not carried out as a philosopher of history would. He is not exactly interested in the history of historians, with great roots in France, but rather in discovering to what extent the specific history is a narrative. When studying the question of temporality in the fictional story, he faces the problem of the permanence of large narrative structures, discussing some of the structuralist proposals that concern the narrative field, even carrying out three application exercises at the end of the second volume, examining novels: one of them in English, *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf; another by Thomas Mann in German, *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*); and another in French, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) by Marcel Proust.

The third volume is dedicated to refiguration, the thematic thread of the work “How does a language restructured by emplotment lead to a rereading of our own experience in accordance with the main lines of the narrative? ... I return here, in a more plausible and better argued fashion, to a thesis present in *The Rule of Metaphor* as a sort of grand postulate of language, namely that the relation between language and reality, experience or the world, whatever term you like, is a dialectical one (...). Given that the sign is not the thing, that the sign is in retreat in relation to it, language is constituted marginally, in a sense, in relation to experience and becomes for itself a spoken universe. Whence the legitimacy of the discourse of linguists who exclude the extralinguistic from their field and resolutely confine themselves to language.”⁴⁶ Once the transition between configuration and refiguration has been studied, Ricœur recovers the initial problem. Hence, in the third volume, he seeks to discover to what extent time, the fundamental structure of human experience, is refigured through narration. To do this, he rereads three classic authors in their treatment of time: Saint Augustine, Husserl, and Heidegger. What he is looking for in the work of each of these three authors is an aid to support their proposals for the interpretation of time in the light of narration. According to Ricœur, “If there is no one to recount the history of the universe since the Big Bang, if there is no narration of great cosmological events, there is no time.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ricœur, P. *Critique and Conviction*, p. 86. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 132-133).

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 87. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 132-133).

5. Hermeneutics of the Self and Practical Philosophy

In *Oneself as Another* (*Soi-même comme un autre*), published in 1990, he delves into the problem of narrative identity and the concept of identity or personal reference, as well as other facets of human creativity and action that can be attributed to an individual through identifying marks. For this reason, the work is guided by the question of “who?” Who is the subject of the discourse? Who is the subject of the action? Who is the one in the story? Who is the subject of moral imputation? Each of these questions affects an area but converges in what Ricœur calls “hermeneutics of the self” (*herméneutique du soi*), in which the other is present, co-implicated in the problematic of the self. This is precisely what is hidden behind the book’s title, which invites interpretation without being a riddle due to its multiple readings. It contains the three philosophical intentions that run through the work. The first refers to the reflective mediation on the position of the subject, as expressed in the first person singular (“I am,” “I think”). All languages invite us to establish this first intention by distinguishing between the reflective “self” and the individualizing “I.” The second *philosophical* intention of the work refers to the double perspective in which identity can be broken down, according to the old Latin distinction governed by the terms *idem* and *ipse*. Thus, a dual perspective of identity is born around the concepts of the “same” and the “identical.” The first term has a comparative use that allows it to be compared to “other,” “opposite,” and “different,” etc. It leads Ricœur to equate it to idem-identity (or sameness), as opposed to ipse-identity (or ipseity). The third philosophical intention is derived from the previous one because ipse-identity generates a dialectic complementary to that of ipseity and sameness, called by Ricœur as the dialectic of “self” and “other than self.”

The first six studies of this work deal with the theme of the “capable man” (*l’homme capable*), which is a diverse way of exploring all the possibilities that arise from the question “who?” but now with a focus on the question “I can.” These studies examine what a person is capable of, such as speaking, acting, relating to others, etc. Both questions are complementary, as they seek to discover who can perform specific actions, such as speaking, acting, and telling their own story. The latter question connects narrative and identity, linking current approaches with a topic already raised in the conclusion of the third volume of *Times and Narrative*: narrative identity.

In this way, Ricœur leads to the theme of personal identity, deeply rooted in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, stressing the aforementioned distinction between identity-*idem* (sameness, in English) or sameness, and identity-*ipse* or ipseity (selfhood). To

clarify both concepts, he resorts to a couple of very illustrative examples: “sameness is the permanence of a person’s fingerprints or genetic code; on the psychological level, it is what is displayed as a character- the word “character,” moreover, is interesting, being the term used in printing to designate an invariable form. While the paradigm for *ipse* identity is, for me, making a promise. I shall hold firm, even if I change; it is an identity that willed, sustained, and proclaims itself despite change.⁴⁸ The question of narrative identity is outlined in its entirety once the author has distinguished the two modalities of identity that he calls *idem* and *ipse*, a division that did not exist in the first approach to the topic in *Time and Narrative*.

The final three Studies of the work showcase the author’s contribution to the field of moral philosophy, which he refers to as the “Petite Éthique.” Despite the apparent difference in themes, there is a strong connection between the first and last parts of the work. The author reflects on the ethical implications of the “capable man” and “personal identity” discussed earlier. The “Little Ethics” engages in a debate between three different positions in moral philosophy: teleological ethics, influenced by Aristotle’s philosophy, which aims to achieve the “good life”; deontological morality, inspired by Kantian philosophy, that focuses on duty and obligation; and practical wisdom that emphasizes situational decision-making when dealing with complex cases. Practical wisdom is a middle ground between deontological and teleological perspectives, where the desire for a fulfilled life drives ethics. The distinction between the terms “ethics” and “morality” is noteworthy as they have different linguistic roots (Greek and Latin, respectively) but the same meaning. The author justifies this semantic distinction as follows: “I reserve the term “ethics” for the *aim* of an accomplished life and the term “morality” for the articulation of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by the effect of constraint.”⁴⁹

The book *Soi-même comme un autre* highlights a shift in the philosophy of Ricœur, where he moves away from the long hermeneutic stage and explores practical matters. This perspective is evident in his works on justice, such as *Le Juste* (1995) and *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit* (1990) -*Love and Justice*- a text of a conference published in Tübingen in French and German. Ricœur acknowledges that he had previously overlooked the importance of this topic in his work, as he speaks of the discipline’s relative neglect of the juridical questions compared to ethics or politics.⁵⁰ Justice has been a topic of interest for philosophers throughout history, with many approaching it from a moral

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 90. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995a, 138).

⁴⁹ Ricœur, P. *Oneself as another*, p. 170. (French edition: Ricœur, 1990, 200).

⁵⁰ Ricœur, P. *The Just*, p. Vii. (French edition: Ricœur, 1995b, 7).

or political perspective, often overlooking its specific legal significance. However, conferences such as those held at *Le Juste*, in judicial institutions or European universities, provide an opportunity to rectify this oversight. At the inauguration of the Institute of Higher Studies for Justice (IHEJ), a conference entitled “The fair: between the legal and the good” was given, which enables a discussion of the concept of fairness and unfairness from a legal perspective, moving away from the usual political philosophy or philosophy of history perspectives. The National School of Judiciary is an institution that deals with the legal aspect through the judiciary, which involves laws, courts, judges, and sentences, where the law is applied to individual cases. This context offers philosophers the opportunity to reflect on the specific nature of law within its natural context, situated between morality and politics. This unique space is where the word, as spoken by the law, opposes conflict and violence to contribute to social peace. This is precisely what is defended in the lecture given at the Supreme Court on “The act of judging.” The short-term purpose of this act is to settle a conflict, while its long-term purpose is “to contribute to social peace.” The other works integrated into *Le Juste* should be understood in accordance with the two axes established by the author in the Studies of *Soi-même comme un autre* that Ricœur baptizes the Little Ethics. There, he proposes the existence of a horizontal axis related to the dialogic constitution of the self, of ipseity in the face of sameness, and of a vertical axis related to the hierarchical constitution of the predicates that qualify human action in terms of morality. The philosophical place of justice is located at the intersection of the two axes.

During his time at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1996, on the occasion of his investiture as Doctor Honoris Causa, he left us two works reflecting some of his latest topics of concern. Thus, in his conference “Justice et vérité,” he echoed what was stated in his book *Le Juste*, as we saw a split between the moral and political perspective and the legal perspective, with which the topic has intimate connections. And, in his Investiture speech as Doctor Honoris Causa, he made a plea in favor of the need for current philosophy to dialogue with science. This problem is present again in his book *Ce qui nous fait penser. La nature et la règle* (Paris, 1998), where he dialogues with J.-P. Changeaux, professor at the Collège de France and the Institut Pasteur, about science and its results, maintaining a debate that delves into the moral and regulations of scientific research, as well as in the orientation of their projects and the impact of their achievements.

In his book, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, he recovers the problem of history, which he had first dealt with in *Histoire et vérité*, published in 1955, and to which he had returned years later from the perspective narrative in the second volume of *Temps et*

récit. With this work, he tries precisely to cover a gap that he detects in *Temps et récit* and *Soi-même comme un autre*. In these works, “temporal experience and the narrative operation are directly placed in contact, at the price of an impasse with respect to memory and, worse yet, of an impasse with respect to forgetting.”⁵¹ In addition to this private concern, which affects an aspect of his work, other reasons have to do with the public commitment assumed by our philosopher: “the idea of a politics of just memory.” It is a work that has three different parts: the first, dedicated to the memory and constructed as a true phenomenology of memory; the second, dedicated to the history and epistemology of the historical sciences in charge of recording, archiving, keeping alive the memory of the events that occurred to preserve them from oblivion; and, the third, a meditation on oblivion carried out through a hermeneutics of the historical condition. The problem common to these three parts revolves around the representation of the past. But the book also has an epilogue titled “Le pardon difficile,” a unique piece where the concepts of memory, history, and oblivion intersect: “Forgiveness—if it has a sense, and if it exists—constitutes the horizon common to memory, history, and forgetting.”⁵² The last chapter of this book is also dedicated to this conceptual crossroads, articulated through the combination of guilt and forgiveness.

In *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2004), one of his latest contributions, he raises the question of recognition as one of the key threads of his philosophical work by distinguishing objective recognition (objectivity), self-recognition (subjectivity), and mutual recognition (intersubjectivity).⁵³ He chooses Descartes, Kant, Aristotle, and Hegel as guides for each one of these stages while not forgetting the dialogue with other contemporary philosophers (Husserl, M. Mauss, Lévinas). From these three recognitions, mutual recognition is not just an intellectual quest but also the path toward effective and lived recognition, closely related to *gratitude*, the last form of recognition exposed in this book. We can consider this vindication to be part of his spiritual and philosophical legacy as it appeared in a work published a year before his death, on May 20, 2005.

Paul Ricœur’s philosophical work was vast and intricate. However, we can summarize his philosophical standpoint as being based on dialogue. Ricœur engaged in a dialogue with various authors and schools of thought, which required an

⁵¹ Ricœur, P. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Transl. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (*University of Chicago Press*, 2004), p. xv. (French edition: Ricœur, 2000, I).

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 457. (French edition: Ricœur, 2000, 593).

⁵³ Ricœur, P. *The course of recognition*, Translated by David Pellauer, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. x. (French edition: Ricœur, 2004, 10).

interdisciplinary approach to account for the plurality of perspectives. This dialogue was respectful of others but not submissive. In short, it was grounded in the belief that the task of thought must face a perpetual and positive conflict of interpretations, a paradigmatic expression of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics.