**“Theory and Practice in Ricoeur’s Work”**

**2015 SRS Conference Abstracts**

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**2. Abstracts**

Stephanie **Arel** (Boston University, USA)

*Death of the Father: Ricoeurian Reflections on Trauma, Religion, and Psychoanalysis*

This paper explores Ricoeur’s notion of fatherhood from three angles – psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and religious – examining how these lead ultimately to the idea of community embodied in Ricoeur’s notion of mutual recognition, which offers hope for justice or what I will articulate as a repair from trauma. Psychoanalytically, repair emerges through transference and requires not only a search for or understanding of the father but also an appreciation of the mother. As Ricoeur asserts, “the father’s body carries the memory of the mother’s body,” and “there is a father because there is a family not the reverse (“Fatherhood” 480). To elucidate this point, I refer to Julia Kristeva’s work in psychoanalysis on the mother and trauma, including her exploration of the death of *the* father in negotiating the analytic situation. Ultimately, I will show through Ricoeur’s three-part analysis of the father how repair and recovery requires a symbolic progression into relationship.

I begin with a discussion of Ricoeur’s presentation in *Conflict of Interpretations* of fatherhood according to psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex, the phenomenology of the spirit, and the representation of fatherhood in religion. Ricoeur’s argument leads to a kind of dance between desire, spirit, and God, which constitutes a move in expression from the non-specific “a” father to the particular “the” father. I will show that desire emerges psychoanalytically as an impulse that compels a shift from consciousness to self-consciousness, the drama of which emerges in Freud’s Oedipus complex. The economy of desire comes to fruition, according to Ricoeur’s analysis, in Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism;* through a psychoanalytic lens, this constitutes killing the father, or killing Moses, and represents the traumatic repetition within which religion (Christianity) situates itself.

From this starting point, and in reference to the psychoanalytic notion in Kristeva that emphasizes the need for “the” mother in the shattering required to process trauma, I explore how, as Ricoeur discusses, the father transpires into a symbol both signifying an ethical substance and a tie. Literally, *the* father binds the familial and religious units, implied as a sense of connectedness, reflecting Ricoeur’s move from Freud to Hegel, from phantasm to symbol, “from non-recognized fatherhood, mortal and mortifying for desire, to recognized fatherhood, which has become the tie between love and life” (“Fatherhood” 481).

However, the death of *the* father, noted by Freud and Ricoeur, leads to a religion of the son evidenced for Freud in the neurotic outcome of the Oedipus complex. But, I show that Ricoeur emphasizes the possibility of another outcome, which “belongs to the conversion of the phantasm into the symbol” (“Fatherhood” 492). Here Ricoeur asserts that death of the father simultaneously replicates “a murder on the level of fantasy and of the return of the repressed, and a supreme abandonment, a supreme dispossession of self, on the level of the most advanced symbol” (“Fatherhood” 493). Ultimately, I show that for Ricoeur, this “most advanced symbol” culminates in the “spirit among *us”* (my emphasis), specifically, “the spirit of community” (“Fatherhood” 495).

John **Arthos** (Indiana University, USA)

*Is the Detour the Right Path for Hermeneutics?*

As many Ricoeur scholars have noted, the figure that dominates Ricoeur’s thought more than any other is the figure of the detour, expressed variously as the long route, the indirect path, the roundabout, etc.[[1]](#footnote-1) It certainly works heuristically as a tool of figural invention, but it does much more than this. It spans method, matter and style elastically throughout Ricoeur’s writing career that we can think of it as almost an elemental idiom of his imagination. Like Hegel’s *Vorstellung,* it figures the pattern of the concept, “le caractère pensable et pensé de tous les modes qui l’engendrent.” The variations in the interrelated tropes of the displaced itinerary have a conceptual looseness that suits its expansive role in the corpus. It is applied promiscuously to procedures of research, (Husserl, Freud, Heidegger, Nabert, Ricoeur), to the outline of the phenomenon under investigation, and to the fate of the inquirer. As Ricoeur himself put it, “Detour/return is the rhythm of my philosophical respiration.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The figure gains particular salience when Ricoeur announces that “hermeneutics proves to be a philosophy of detours.”[[3]](#footnote-3) But the fact is that the language of indirections and detours is already pervasive in the writings of the fifties and sixties, before Ricoeur takes the turn towards the Heideggerian form of hermeneutics. It emerges in the interrogations of Nabert, Husserl, and Freud in the 1940s and 50s as a basic syntax in Ricoeur’s critical appropriations. With all these thinkers, the turn to indirection has a common root in the fight against transparent reflection, between what is immediate, present, and directly intuited. Ricoeur’s interlocutors are all to one degree or another reacting to the strains of an older reflective philosophy that had posited clear and simple ideas, self-evident truths, and an unfiltered encounter with the mind. But my concern with the adoption of this particular figure as the style and substance of Ricoeur’s conception of hermeneutics is that it carries its own baggage, a particular response to Cartesianism that comes to hermeneutics only through Ricoeur. So I want to ask: What is the detour around? Why is the passage indirect? In what sense is a long route a mediation? We need to become clearer about how Ricoeur’s characteristic figuring of mediation affects hermeneutics.

In the end I wonder if the inveterate figure of the circle, which Ricoeur also made frequent use of, is a more reliable partner for hermeneutics in the long run, since it doesn’t excite metaphysical suspicions, and lives comfortably within the enigmas of discursivity itself. The fair response that Ricoeur could give to this is that there is an undeniable truth in the detour as a figure of our tragic finitude. Our lives are repetitions, one way or another, of having to take the long route, of being lost in a dark wood, of learning the hard way, of only seeing ourselves for the first time through another’s eyes, etc. So perhaps what we need to do going forward is to find the movement of the detour in the relation of part to whole that circles in the constitution of our feeble understanding.

Paul **Custer** (Lenoir-Rhyne University, USA)

*Just Passing Through: Ricœur, Latour, and the Appeal to Experience*

This paper will compare the notion of *passing*, or *passing-through*, that figures both in Ricœr’s later work, including *Oneself as Another* (1992) and *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), and in Bruno Latour’s new *An* *Inquiry Into the Modes of Existence* (2013). For Ricœur, passing signifies the dependence of one’s projects (*phronesis* in *Oneself as Another,* *politics* in *Memory, History, Forgetting*) on a structure of veridication and realization that includes others (especially passed others) and a world outside. These passes, taken together, enable one both to correct one’s inertial drift into solipsism and to impel one’s projects by granting them grounds both discovered and disclosed — that is, *realized anew*. To Latour, passes represent movement through *hiatuses* — discontinuities (a change of place, meaning, personnel, rules, funds, etc. etc.) that pose a challenge to a being’s way-of-being, or even its existence. Latour argues that these passes, made and traced over time, carve out *networks*, which together disclose a plurality of coprimordial “modes of existence.” Both seem to cleave to a notion of “pass” as representing a *risky* but *necessary* encounter with a foreign, and possibly surprising, Real; and which, taken *seriatum* over time, gather into an *apprenticeship* to the Real. As such, and in both senses, “pass” represents for Ricœur and Latour an appeal to a refined and exalted notion of *experience*.

Darryl **Dale-Ferguson** (University of Chicago, USA)

*Meaningful Plurality: Reading Ricoeur with Feminist Philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff*

In a social and political world dominated by secular discourse, the assertion of a particular identity for the purposes of dissent, gaining recognition, and fomenting change meets with significant difficulties. A persistent difficulty is the threat of subsuming individual identity under the unity of group, or what is perhaps worse, subsuming the identity of a small group under the unity of the whole of society in service of efficiency and tranquility. Paul Ricoeur cautions against such a unification in his mid-century writings on truth and falsehood, noting tendencies in both religion and politics towards a totalitarian articulation of truth. Notable is the collection of essays *History and Truth* (1965). More recently, feminist philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff, in both *Visible Identities* (2006) and the collected essays in *Identity Politics Reconsidered* (2006*),* has argued for a critical realism that seeks to bring truth back into considerations of politics, particularly with respect to a politics of identity. Putting Alcoff and Ricoeur into conversation is beneficial for at least two reasons. Attention to identity, albeit a dynamic and thoroughly contingent one, marks an important entrance into ethical reflection on the orientation of parts to the whole within an ordered society. In this respect, Ricoeur’s contributions to a narrative theory of identity provides a robust concept of self that can bolster Alcoff’s argument for the ground and force of identity in modern life. In a similar way, Alcoff’s theorization of the intricate interactions between individual and group identities, with respect to race, gender, religion, etc., can provide clarity to Ricoeur’s attempt to think the ethical space between individuals and institutions. While Ricoeur understands ethics to operate largely within a bidirectional relationship between individuals and institutions, he provides little in the way of concrete theorization of this relationship. Thus, measured attention to a realist identity politics, like that proposed by Alcoff, offers insight into the possibilities and limitations of ethical life. This clarity and insight will be shown in this paper to be vital to the protection of social and political life from the threat of both totalizing and relativizing truth that motivates much of Ricoeur’s ethical thought.

Scott **Davidson** (Oklahoma City University, USA)

*The Meaning of Life: Between Henry and Ricoeur*

The mutual admiration shared between Michel Henry and Paul Ricoeur is already well known, as are their philosophical differences. These differences come to the surface, for instance, in a debate over Henry’s book on Marx, included at the end of Henry’s article “La Rationalité selon Marx.” There Ricoeur accuses Henry of committing “interpretive violence” in his reading of Marx. By imposing his own philosophy on to Marx, Henry distorts Marx’s fundamental starting point. Instead of beginning with the living individual, Ricoeur contends that Marx’s starting point is the acting individual who enters into situations that one has not created. This means that the individual, though free, is always situated within unchosen circumstances (*Umstände*). This is unduly downplayed by Henry’s reading of Marx.

Although this debate appears to be merely an interpretive question over the meaning of Marx’s work, this paper will suggest that it actually goes much deeper and points to a fundamental philosophical difference between their respective conceptions of the meaning of life. Life, for Henry, is a radically internal, auto-affective experience of one’s own living. His entire philosophical oeuvre thus seeks to restore the self-intimacy that takes place in the enjoyment and suffering of one’s own life. Ricoeur’s account of the meaning of life, by contrast, is much less obvious, although I would contend that it is equally important to his thought. His starting point, in thinking about life, is precisely the one that he identifies in Marx. Instead of being defined in terms of affectivity, here the meaning of life is defined in terms of the acting individual who enters into circumstances that he or she has not created. Contained within this debate, we can thus locate the emergence of two contrasting paradigms of life: the immediacy of auto-affectivity as opposed to the mediation of the capable self who acts and suffers in the world. This paper will conclude with a set of suggestions about how these contrasting conceptions of the meaning of life inform their contrasting approaches to a number of other philosophical problems.

Brad **DeFord** (Marian University, USA)

*Life’s Losses and End: Ricoeur on Mourning and Forgiveness*

As a thanatologist, I am interested in the effects of the deaths of our loved ones and our mourning of those losses upon us and our thinking. As with all of us, much of Ricoeur’s personal life was appropriately private to him. However, over the last ten years of his life, the personal and the professional aspects of Ricoeur’s life took on an extraordinary and revealing conjunction. In a way resembling “life review” at the level of philosophy, Ricoeur gives the appearance of interpreting and integrating the range of his experiences of death throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

It is not insignificant that this is his first extended text since the death of his wife, Simone. Ricoeur acknowledges as much in his dedication of it to her memory. And we would do well not to forget that Ricoeur was orphaned at an early age; the “shadow of death” was cast over his life. In *Memory, History,* Forgetting, Ricoeur not only joins the work of memory to the work of mourning, but he also picks up themes from his earlier life and work, most notably *Oneself as Another*. He then puts them in conjunction with those related to his most recent personal experiences and arrives at basically two types of death: the experience of “the camps” is compared with personal death—and loss.

Each type of death deserves its own examination. For this conference I propose to separate what Ricoeur has written about violent death and extermination from what he has written about personal death and loss, less to contrast the two than to make the point that these are themselves distinct fields, with distinctly different hermeneutical challenges.

Andre **Duhamel** (Université de Sherbrooke, Canada)

*Le tragique de l’action entre théorie et pratique*

L’attention à la tragédie et au tragique est récurrente dans l’œuvre de Ricœur. Si elle est d’abord liée au mythe et au mal (1938, 1953a, b, 1960), puis au temps et au récit (1984), et enfin à l’action et à la mémoire (1990, 2004), elle écarte toujours l’affirmation d’un tragique de l’être au profit d’un tragique dans l’existence ou dans l’action. Dans la « petite éthique » de *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricœur intercale entre l’examen de la norme morale et celui de la sagesse pratique un interlude, le seul dans l’ouvrage, consacré au « tragique de l’action ». Cela permet, du côté pratique, de préparer la thèse selon laquelle les conflits internes à la moralité « renvoie[nt] à l’affirmation éthique la plus originaire », à savoir, « la médiation pratique susceptible de surmonter l’antinomie, la sagesse pratique du jugement moral en situation » (p. 318-319). Cela permet aussi, du côté théorique, de rappeler que s’il y a bien « instruction de l’éthique par le tragique », celui-ci ne peut être repris et absorbé par une philosophie générale qui en annulerait le pouvoir de rupture. La tragique de l’action semble ainsi ressortir d’une double impossibilité, pratique (car il émerge des apories de l’action morale) et théorique (il en assigne les limites) : comment comprendre que ce lieu paradoxal, qui paraît conduire à la paralysie tant de l’action que de la pensée, est pourtant dit instructif sur ces deux plans ?

Or, cet interlude insiste aussi lourdement sur l’origine de la tragédie dans les passions et la démesure humaines. Dans la tragédie, lit-on, les agissants sont traversés par des « grandeurs spirituelles », des « énergies archaïques et mythiques qui sont aussi les sources immémoriales du malheur », et leurs motivations « plongent dans un fonds ténébreux de motivation » et de « contraintes destinales » qui leur font toucher la « profondeur des arrière-fonds de l’action » et le « fond agonistique de l’épreuve humaine » (p. 281-283). Cette insistance semble orienter l’instruction de l’agir et de la pensée moins du côté de l’action et de la sagesse philosophique, que du côté de la mémoire d’un récit primaire et d’un passé intemporel échappant aussi aux ressources de la pensée philosophique : le mythe.

Nombre de lectures de cet interlude l’ont abordé seulement à partir de l’angle éthique, retenant en particulier la tentative de conciliation entre perspective téléologique et perspective déontologique que représente la sagesse pratique (Nussbaum 2002, Duhamel 2004). Mais ces lectures négligent les passages que nous venons de souligner et par suite ne retiennent guère l’importance de la « sagesse tragique » qu’ils appuient. Nous voudrions défendre ici l’idée que ces passages témoignent de la continuité de la réflexion ricoeurienne sur la tragédie, qui ne peut apparaître que si l’on convoque son herméneutique de l’action développée ailleurs. D’une part, cette continuité permet de souligner que la « sagesse tragique » puise dans une tradition anthropologique et symbolique, et d’autre part, qu’elle ne peut être pensée qu’à la frontière de l’éthique et d’une poétique, comme variation imaginative sur les inévitables apories de l’action. Ce détour symbolique et poétique permet ainsi, encore une fois, le passage « du texte à l’action »

Duhamel, A. [2004], « Raison pratique et tragédie selon Martha Nussbaum », in A. A. Benmakhlouf et J.-F. Lavigne (dir.), *Avenir de la raison, devenir des rationalités*, Paris, J. Vrin, 2004, p. 614-618.

Nussbaum, M. [2002] “Ricoeur on Tragedy. Teleology, Deontology, and Phronesis”, in J. Wall *et al*. (eds.), *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, London, Routledge, p. 264-276.

Ricoeur, P. [1938], « Logique, éthique et tragique du mal chez saint Augustin », in *Paul Ricœur : mal et pardon*, Éditions facultés jésuites de Paris, 2013.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1953a], « Sur le tragique », in *Lectures 3*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 187-209.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1953b], « Culpabilité tragique et culpabilité biblique », *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, 33 : 285-307.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1960], « Le dieu méchant et la vision “tragique” de l’existence », in *Philosophie de la volonté. 2 : Finitude et culpabilité*, Paris, Aubier, 1988, p. 355-373.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1984], « Au-delà du *muthos* tragique », in *Temps et récit. 2*, Paris, Seuil, p. 18-30.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1986], *Du texte à l’action. Essai d’herméneutique II*, Paris, Seuil

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [1990], « Le tragique de l’action », in *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, p. 281-90.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ [2004], « Le fonds grec : l’agir et son agent », in *Parcours de la reconnaissance. Trois études*, Paris, Stock, p. 111-126.

Joseph **Edelheit** (St Cloud State University, USA)

*Is a Hermeneutic of Suspicion Insufficient?*

David Tracy explains that a hermeneutic of suspicion is required because, “….some deadly unconscious systemic ‘distortions,’(e.g., sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, repressed hostile feelings, elitism, classism, homophobia, Eurocentrism, *reseentiment*, Islamophobia, colonialism, etc.) are disrupting the conversation, we must stop the conversation and use some appropriate critical theory to determine whether the suspicion is justified or not.” (David Tracy, “Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogue, *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds.) Paul Ricoeur provided late 20th century thinkers with this powerful constructive tool that has become a necessity of critical thinking, but now as we move into the second decade of the 21st century we have reason to ask: is a hermeneutic of suspicion insufficient for our critical thought?

In the past 30 years the list of systemic distortions, which Tracy offers, has become a litany for identity politics, a lens of divisive victimologies, a provocative impulse for trauma studies and now an equally divisive list for “trigger warnings” on campus. As survivors’ voices demand recognition, we are being asked to move from the mere theoretical suspicion to the praxis of labeling, warning and finally filtering, editing and even censoring so that more harm is not done. Is this the natural progression of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of suspicion or is this a radicalizing mutation or another example of deconstruction?

The extreme polarization of our contemporary political and social ideologies provokes an additional stimulus to these questions. Does our public discourse regarding religion now require more than suspicion if we are going to both understand and empathize with each other? As Tracy argues, the hermeneutic of suspicion is an intervention, a corrective that permits the conversation to move beyond the systemic distortions. When Charlie Hedbo argues that free speech is quintessential to democracy, and hence, that which is claimed to be sacred to Islam can be sacrificed; the result is that satire, democracy and the sacred are explanations for the social chaos of terrorism, and hence, it is now appropriate to ask if a hermeneutic of suspicion is insufficient in our time. Our times continue to be illuminated by a radical ambiguity that defies both suspicion and mere tolerance, this essay argues for a hermeneutic of engagement.

A hermeneutic of engagement is a move to praxis, a communal commitment to make public discourse more accountable. Today, understanding especially our political and social discourse requires more than acknowledging the systemic distortions that interrupt our conversations. We must reaffirm that such conversations assume an ethical framework of accountability with the Other. For Ricoeur relationships with the Other require an ethical response and a hermeneutic of engagement will challenge us to go beyond suspicion to critically review the ethical implications of the ambiguous and divisive assertions that continue to disrupt our attempts to understand each other.

David **Fisher** (North Central College, USA)

*Summoned or Called? Ricoeur and Heidegger on Conscience*

[W]e are confronted in advanced democracies with prepolitical and transpolitical experiences that render obsolete any appeal for a normative conscience or for a return to the reason/revelation duo. For these pre- and transpolitical experiences head us toward a reconstruction (without recourse to the irrational) of the humanism derived from *Aufklärung*. . . . normative conscience, normative presuppositions, utilitarian nihilism, and the supposed need of democracies for authority are based on obsolete and discredited assumptions.”

—Julia Kristeva, “Rethinking “Normative Conscience”: The Task of the Intellectual Today”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Paul Ricoeur’s analysis of conscience in Oneself as Another occurs in the final study, “What Ontology in View”, Section 2 (“Selfhood and Ontology”) and Section 3 (“Selfhood and Otherness”) and in “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation”. The aim of these remarks is to compare Ricoeur’s notion of a “summoned subject” with Heidegger’s analysis of “The Call of Conscience” in response to the challenge posed by Julia Kriseteva cited above.

For Ricoeur, conscience is one of three centers of otherness; a “triad of passivity”: the experience of one’s own body (flesh); the relation of the self to the foreign other (intersubjectivity); and of the self to itself – “conscience in the sense of *Gewissen.*”

Ricoeur’s indebtedness to Heidegger’s account of “The Call of Conscience” (BT § 54 – 60) is clear.[[5]](#footnote-5) Conscience, for Ricoeur and Heidegger, is not a product of socialization, nor does either author make use of a stage model of human psychological cognitive and moral development (such as the work of Piaget or Kohlberg). Ricoeur’s criticism – that “Heidegger does not show how one could travel from ontology toward ethics” is based his understanding of the self as “being enjoined” or *called*:

“*Je suis appelé à vivir-bien avec et pour autri dans des institutions justes: telle est la pemierè injonction”* (*Soi-même comme une autre* 405). His account of a “summoned subject” builds upon his earlier analyses of Freud and the “hermeneutics of suspicion” as well as his response to Biblical literature.

The questions to be discussed are: (1) Whether or to what extent Ricoeur’s account of a “summoned subject” requires an affirmation of a transcendent ground for normativity, as in Augustine? and (2) Can Ricoeur’s understanding of conscience –in its identity and difference from Heidegger - respond to Kristeva’s suggestion about the obsolescence of “normative conscience”?

Adam **Graves** (Metropolitan State University of Denver, USA)

*Deontology with Dirtier Hands: Or How to Deformalize Kantian Ethics with a Little Help from Ricoeur*

The last few decades have witnessed a renewed interest in Kant’s practical philosophy--and not merely for its purely historical value, but as real contender in contemporary ethical debate. Many, though certainly not all, of those who champion some version of Kantian morality have tried to soften the hard edge of what might be called his strict “formalism”. Naturally, such defenders often paint a cheerier picture of Kant by highlighting aspect of his thought which had been downplayed (or even ignored) by previous generations of interpreters (such as the positive role played by certain cooperative inclinations, and our duty to cultivate them). Ricoeur’s treatment of Kant can be seen as part of this broader trend. As early as *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricoeur had asserted that Kant’s practical philosophy suffered from an unwarranted transposition of the formalism of the first critique onto the second critique. But instead of abandoning Kant, Ricoeur chose to develop a 'dirtier deontology'. In this paper, I focus on several strategies Ricoeur had used to develop this less formal sort of Kantian ethics.

Brian **Gregor** (California State University, Dominguez Hills, USA)

*Reading as Embodied Practice: The Role of the Text in the Care of the Self*

According to ancient pagan and Christian thinkers, truth and wisdom come at a price. In order to become capable of the truth, the self must undertake spiritual exercises aimed at transforming the self. In the words of Michel Foucault, truth requires askesis. Foucault is not alone in highlighting this aspect of ancient thought. He drew inspiration from Paul Rabbow and Pierre Hadot, and in turn inspired subsequent work by such scholars as Alexander Nehamas and Peter Sloterdijk. A few recent studies have begun to consider Ricoeur's possible contribution to this conversation, including Johann Michel's book *Ricoeur and the Post-Structuralists* (recently translated into English by Scott Davidson), which suggests a few ways in which Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology might be deepened by engagement with Foucault's later work on the care of the self.

My paper will consider more closely how specific practices of *askesis*, or spiritual exercise, might figure into Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self. I take my first cue from an overlooked section of Ricoeur's *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, where he discusses the way in which one can work on curing of one's emotions and passions. Ricoeur remains at the eidetic level, giving a phenomenological description of these affective dimensions of the self. But he also explicitly locates his description in relation to the classical model of philosophy as an art of living, in the ancient school of the Stoics as well as the modern neo-Stoic tendencies of Descartes.

Ricoeur identifies the role of thought, evaluations, and "bad imaginations" in giving power to the emotions. What is required, in his account, is a "revolution in the imagination" in which new possibilities can be given and the disordered emotions can be reordered. This reordering requires the mediating role of habit, which reorders the self at the level of soul as well as body. The disciplines that reorder the emotions are not disembodied, merely intellectual practices; they also include physical exercise, which helps to form the will and enables the self to take possession of itself as an "I can." Consequently, Ricoeur helps us to see the way in which gymnastics can serve as a spiritual exercise.

After a brief summary of these points, my paper will focus on showing more clearly how this understanding of embodied *askesis* connects with the larger contours of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the self, which is primarily text-based. Ricoeur allows us to see quite clearly how reading can function as a spiritual exercise. But it may not be clear how deeply embodied the spiritual exercise of reading is. The text mediates a semantic transformation in the self, but how does this transformation register at the level of the body? I will answer this question by returning to Ricoeur's work on the imagination in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, and also by connecting Ricoeur's hermeneutics with Ivan Illich's commentary on Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*.

Timo **Helenius** (Boston College, USA)

*The Adamic Myth as a Theory of Human Praxis*

The whole of Ricoeur’s work can be understood as a theoretical examination of human praxis or of human activity. This task was begun with *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* that addressed both the bodily and the linguistic activities of a human subject trying to understand his or her “fundamental possibilities.” In a way, Ricoeur’s later theorization of narrative identity—which brings together the analyses from *Time and Narrative* up to *The Course of Recognition*—relies on this dual approach to a living, acting, and suffering human subject who expresses his or her own experience of being in the world in both practical and linguistic terms.

In this paper I will focus on certain key elements in Ricoeur’s early texts that serve as a bridge from the phenomenological analysis of human possibilities to the hermeneutical reading of a subject’s activities. As a matter of fact, I will devote my attention to the very “wager” Ricoeur committed himself to in *The Symbolism of Evil* when stating that “it is as an index of the situation of man at the heart of being in which he moves, exists, and wills, that the symbol speaks to us.” For this reason, Ricoeur maintains in the same work that myths are “the medium for the primary symbols, which are themselves the medium for the living experience of defilement, of sin, and of guilt.” Put differently, the world of myths is a necessary mediation of lived human experience through language and culture, without which that experience would “remain mute, obscure, and shut up.” The symbolic richness of such a linguistic expression is an interpretative activity itself, but it also examines the human experience relating to our practical actions.

Unlike many summations of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic of symbols, however, I will focus on a particular mythical praxis, or a symbolic tradition, that Ricoeur describes pre-eminent and privileged because of it being strictly anthropological. The myth of Adam is a primary human myth—as Ricoeur sums up, “Adam signifies man.” The task of this paper is to outline the multiple levels of meaning that Ricoeur condenses into this brief sentence. I will first explore the function of this myth to create a transtemporal typification or a “concrete universal” of human being. Second, I will open up the narrative character of a dramatic “fundamental history”—set up by the myth—that facilitates all understanding of human action and thereby also enables the narrative identity that Ricoeur discusses in his later works. Third, I will conclude with the “enigma of human existence” as studied by the myth in the “actual modality of man” or of being a practical human, who is also “capable of falling” (*capable de faillir*) in the emptying his or her subjectivity into an objectified existence as symbolic expressions. This last phase of my paper will portray the myth of Adam as a symbolic theory of human praxis.

Dale **Hobbs** (Marquette University, USA)

*Ricœur’s Hermeneutics of Translation and the Case of Religious Language*

This article discusses the motivations behind Paul Ricœur's account of translation as linguistic hospitality and tests this model against the difficult case of religious language. Although Ricœur's view accounts well for many of the ordinary occurrences of translation that we encounter in daily life, I argue that certain expressions of a primarily religious significance, such as a Christian’s recitation of the Lord’s Prayer or a Muslim’s endorsement of the *Shahada*, remain beyond its scope. I thus take issue with the attempts of some philosophers to extend Ricœur's model to religious speech without other qualifications. This limitation is a result of the peculiar purpose of these statements, which is to express certain existential commitments of the speaker, rather than to make any attempt at genuine communication with a religious outsider. That is, such expressions do not necessarily exhibit any desire to establish the sort of relationship between members of different religious communities that would be at stake in the case of linguistic hospitality. I contend that such an attempt at communication on the part of both speaker and interpreter is a necessary condition of linguistic hospitality as such, without which the model cannot legitimately be employed at all. Accordingly, since the religious expressions under consideration in the paper fail to meet the requisite conditions of Ricœur's model of linguistic hospitality, they remain untranslatable even within his practical hermeneutic framework. Certainly, this fact by no means diminishes the value of Ricœur's project in other contexts; without the general applicability of linguistic hospitality to the problem of translation, the motivation for a paper of this sort would be somewhat lacking. Nevertheless, the task of specifying the scope and limitations of Ricœur's model of translation – particularly in this difficult case of religious language – remains vital if the real and undeniable importance of that model to our understanding of translation in general is to be grasped in its proper context.

Cristal **Huang** (Soochow University, Taiwan)

*On the Hermeneutics of Jian and the Practice of Paul Ricoeur’s Philosophy: A Detour for Narrative Theology*

The main theme of 2015 Ricoeur conference is "Theory and Practice in Ricoeur’s work”. The main purpose of our paper is to research that after interpreting Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics on several stages: for example from our reading on his project in *Time and Narrative* via mimesis 1~2~3; and the idea of emplotment via poetic narrative; the experience of time as special link of order from a departure of present narrative toward both past and future; the idea of écart (space / Jian in Chinese) in his writing in *The Course of Recongnition*. We will make a detour to be back to *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Hermeneutics* and his idea on about distanciation.

Ricoeur brings to the world a possibility of making space (spacing in Chinese for example) in figuring within time, we wish to ask that is it possible to have a Hermeneutics of Jian? We will settle several stages for this possible project: [1] to re-interpret the mimesis 123 as an immediate link with threefold in one process; [2] to practice emplotment in time: to use time as a meta-base in order to re-build a renewal of emplotment from historical to new possibility; [3] the idea of making space via distanciation as an entrance of Hermeneutics of Jian. The Hermeneutics of Jian may be applied to interdisciplinary usages for example on questioning the meaning of life from the practicing Ricoeur’s philosophy. Through the Hermeneutics of Jian, we may apply to use for example the attitude of emplotment in time as certain hope for historical memories, via Ricoeur, we also suggest to apply oriental approach of identifying the existence of Jian. It is not a physical space, or a visible plot that is already being there, Hermeneutics of Jian is to try to distanciate from general meaning of certain social plots to our new mimesis as re-figuring in order to regain power from the practice of Hermeneutics of Jian. We will also to discuss the difference between making space and Jian. The Hermeneutics of Jian is to practice in narrative within time in order to open new understanding beyond general and historical impressions. Jian in terms of oriental approach we locate as making room via a door, but we also re-locate time (represented via the concept “sun”) within the door in having jian). Paul Ricoeur’s ideas of emplotment and distanciation bring to us the enlightenment of a space without concrete space, the Hermeneutics of Jian may bring to us the new re-figuration of general social problems in daily life-world a new path for searching the power of Jian.

Michael **Johnson** (Concordia College, MN, USA)

*The Just Measure: Theory and Practice in Ricœur’s Reflections on the Late Metaphysical Dialogues of Plato*

In his essays on “the just” in *The Just* and *Reflections on the Just*, Paul Ricœur makes clear the intimate connection between theory and practice in his hermeneutical phenomenology of the capable person. Drawing on his analysis of ethico-moral predicates of human action in *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur contends that the meaning of the “the just” is inseparable from practical application of the teleological and deontological levels of ethico-moral action to the moment of practical application in medical, business, judicial, and environmental ethics – that is, applied ethics. The original source of this practical orientation in Ricœur’s thought goes back to his reflections on Plato and Aristotle in the 1950s. In this paper, I will argue, first, that Ricœur’s rejection of a speculative solution to the aporias of time in favor of a poetic, or narrative, solution in *Time and Narrative* parallels his discovery of a dialectic of the Selfhood and Otherness at the heart of the “little ethics” of *Oneself as Another*, a dialectic already configured by narrative. Secondly, I will contend that the deep source for this parallel can be found in his early reflections in a course given at the University of Strasbourg in 1952-53 on the problem of being in the later metaphysical Platonic dialogues, namely, the *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and the *Timaeus*. These lectures have been recently published in a scholarly edition as *Being, Essence and Substance in Plato and Aristotle* (Eng. Translation, Polity Press, 2013).

Ricœur interweaves a manifold problematic in these lectures. First, he argues – following Jean Wahl, in my view – that the soul seeks after the Good beyond Being (of the Republic) through dialectical reflection, but that there is no *theoria*, no speculative “intuition,” of the Good, or the One. Secondly, a dialectic of the Great Kinds of Rest, Motion, Being, Same and Other function as second-order dialectic that structures the *koinonia*, or community/participation, of all the other Forms in and with one another – thus making predication (language) and dialectic possible. Plato also rescues “non-being” as relative otherness through the dialectic of the great kinds of Same and Other. In this way, the meaning of Being in distinction from beings is disclosed. Third, according to Ricœur’s analysis of these late Platonic dialogues, another axis of participation, or “being,” is necessary: a “vertical” participation of “sensible becoming” – what the Philebus called *apeiron*, or “unlimited – in the Forms, or the “limited” (*peras*). The Good – which is *speculatively* unknowable – makes possible both kinds of participation. On the horizontal level, the Good gives the “finality” of the possible relations of the Forms; on the vertical axis, participation is made possible by a synthetic Act, the “just measure” (*metrion*) or the timely (*kairos*) of the *Statesman* or the proper mixture (*metron*) of the *Philebus*. In the *Timaeus*, Plato tells a “likely story” (*eikôs muthos*) of the Demiurge providing an imaginative vision of the Form of “Living Thing” (the living dynamism of the Forms enlivened by the Good) which unites the dialectical movement of the Forms (the horizontal participation) with the sensible and unlimited. The imagination of the Demiurge, a higher form of soul who enjoys intuitive contact with the Good, creates a vision (*eikon*; a “true image”) of the Living Thing that creates an appetitive striving for sensible becoming, including human souls (or selves). In Ricœur’s reading, human participation in this vision, recreated by imagination and discourse (i.e., narrative) is enacted through our discovery through creation of the just measure in the Institution and Practical Wisdom of judgment in situation as outlined in the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*. The Good, or the One, which enlivens this twofold structure of participation, or, in other words, a double structure of Being as Act-Potency, is” beyond Being” (understood as essence). In this way, Ricœur inscribes in Act another kind of Otherness, an absolute (*kath’auto*) Other, that is beyond the relative otherness described in the *Sophist*. On my reading, this form of absolute otherness informs the third kind of Otherness described in *Oneself as Another* as conscience, or the structure of selfhood as “Being-enjoined.” In other words, it is through the attestation of the power of self to render imaginatively and in practical action and judgment, a good life with and for others in just institutions. It is through this poetic and practical act, not *theoria*, that contact is made to the Good beyond Being, Essence and Form.

Morny **Joy** (Calgary University, Canada)

*Paul Ricoeur: From a Theory of Action to Homo Capax*

In a late essay Ricoeur declares: “When I try to cast a retrospective glance at my work, I agree that it is – for the sake of a discourse of the second order – a personal reinterpretation offered to my readers. And I must say that it is only recently that I have felt allowed to give a name to this overarching problematics. I mean the problem of human capability, capability as the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology, or, to put it more in simple terms belonging to ordinary language, the realm of the theme expressed by the verb ‘I can’”(2002a: 280).

It would seem from this statement that the theme of capability emerged only towards the end of Ricoeur’s work as a unifying concept for his philosophical anthropology, but if one looks carefully at his work it has been in evidence from near the beginning – insofar as it is closely interwoven with his preoccupation with action. In one of his early essays on phenomenology in English, Ricoeur did discuss the notion of “I can” as being at the heart of “I think” (1979 [1964]: 66). Yet it seems that he had to undertake a long journey, through numerous detours, before he could clarify his ideas on the topic of capability, specifically as an ontological dimension of humanity.In this presentation I would like to follow the somewhat divergent explorations that finally culminated in the above introductory statement. I intend to trace the different aspects of Ricoeur’s work where he develops his ideas on the topic of action, as it progresses from merely a theoretical abstraction toward its culmination in capability as praxis. Nevertheless “action,” in relation to activity, the agent, and agency, can appear as quite different facets in Ricoeur’s diverse works in hermeneutics, structuralism, analytic philosophy, narrative, and ethics. There are many different scholars who have provided fine individual analyses of these different phases, but not a comprehensive overview. While I will not be able to go into great detail about all of these developments in relation to such a variety of modalities of action, I will nevertheless attempt to provide an overview of the various influences that diverted Ricoeur’s attention, as well as the impact that they had on his work. It is only with *The Course of Recognition* (2005 [2004]) that Ricoeur will provide a phenomenology of *homo capax*, designated not simply as capacity or capability, but as “the power to act” that is linked to certain human rights. His further discussions of plurality, alterity, mutuality and reciprocity, especially in connection with the notion of “being recognized,” complete, as it were, Ricoeur’s trajectory from a phenomenological and textual theory of action to a praxis that informs a dynamic and lived experience.

Sebastian **Kaufmann** (Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile)

*Hermeneutics as an Exercise of Care*

Ricoeur in an article called “Existence and Hermeneutics” affirms that “[e]xistence becomes a self -human and adult- only by appropriating this meaning, which first resides ‘outside,’ in works, institutions, and cultural monuments in which life of the spirit is objectified”. This work of “appropriation of meaning” is precisely the “work of philosophical hermeneutics”. Thus, the task of hermeneutics has not only a philosophical interest, but a practical interest. Through the work of philosophy we can perform a task that is essential: to become a human and adult self.

In my presentation I try to make sense of this task. First, I look for its foundations. I argue that we need to appropriate the meaning that is spread through works, institutions and cultural monuments because there is a distance between our will and the articulation of our thoughts and actions. We need to use what is already there: a language, a symbolic system and a tradition. Then, there is a gap between what comes from us and what it ends up being said and done. It is not rare that we feel that what we say, think and do, don´t reflect exactly what we want to express.

This gap between what we want to articulate and what is articulated is the source of misunderstandings and feelings of alienation.

In the second part of my presentation, I show how hermeneutics can perform the task of the appropriation of meaning. I argue that through this task we do not only “recover” a lost meaning but we also create a meaning.

Finally, in the third part of my presentation, I argue that this task of hermeneutics is an exercise of the care of the self in the tradition that is described by Foucault in the sense that through this task we use a technology (the hermeneutical analysis) that helps the self to become a “better self”. Then, we can say that the hermeneutical task is an exercise of the care of the self.

**Todd Mei** (University of Kent, UK)

*Outlines for Constructing Ricoeur’s Theory of Truth*

Philosophical hermeneutics since Heidegger takes truth as a form of disclosure as its basis for understanding the meaning of being. Given Ricoeur’s critical development of disclosure in relation to specific areas of the human sciences, one would expect that his conception of truth might be readily distinguishable. While there are several moments throughout his career when Ricoeur devotes attention to the problem of truth—for example, in *History and Truth*, his conception of manifestation in his biblical hermeneutics, and when discussing convictions and non-epistemological beliefs in *Oneself as Another*—a more unified theory is never formulated. This can be seen as a somewhat odd omission given the emphasis he places on a hermeneutical form of reasoning. What is a theory of reasoning without a theory of truth?

The aim of this paper is to outline a conception of truth based on various texts that span Ricoeur’s career. I conclude with notes on the expressly and uniquely ethical nature of what might be termed “Ricoeur’s Theory of Truth.”

Elyse **Purcell** (SUNY Cortland, USA)

*Oneself with Another: Transference, Memory and Psychiatric Illness*

One in five adults in the U.S. has a mental illness.[[6]](#footnote-6) Contemporary neurobiological psychiatry relies heavily upon explaining psychiatric illness as a disorder of brain biochemistry that needs to be corrected. While the aim of understanding the biology of psychiatric conditions is necessary for medical assistance, mental health practioners have argued that understanding the implications for life narratives and the social experiences of the patient can play a significant role in treatment: “the effective psychiatric professional understands how to engage the person’s condition and life narrative using tools of biology and psychosocial interventions so that impairment is diminished, while adaptive attitudes and behaviors are fostered.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Thus, the treatment of psychiatric conditions requires not only pharmacological interventions, but also social interventions through therapy and lifestyle changes in order to lead a flourishing life.

While many psychiatrists agree on this aim for therapy, they are at a loss as to what a flourishing life in the concrete would be. The aim of this paper, then, is to extend the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur to articulate what those concrete aims could be. According to Ricoeur, how we come to find consistency in our identity while remaining dynamic and relational individuals is through our narrative relation with ourselves, with others, and with society. This consistency with dynamism is a dialectical relation that begins with the recognition of two parts of our identity: what Ricoeur calls *“*idem-identity” and “ipse-identity.”Simply put, idem-identity concerns our character or sameness. Ipse-identity, by contrast, is that which idem-identity opposes and it concerns our personhood or selfhood. Both aspects of identity are interwoven in a dialectic of identity.

Mental illness, however, can change this idem-identity – one’s matter, sameness or character – insofar as the physicality, or biochemistry, of one’s body is different. Likewise, psychiatric illness can alter one’s ipse-identity –one’s personhood or selfhood – because it structures the whole that one is and affects the narrative one has lived in the past and the possibilities one intends for the future.

Following Ricoeur, then, the goal of a psychiatrist or mental health counselor in this situation should be to help make the tensions of one’s narrative identity livable and productive for the patient. To articulate this goal in the concrete, then, I will first discuss this challenge facing mental health practioners in therapy and transference, and then turn to Ricoeur’s accounts of narrative and memory in order to provide a concrete aim in understanding how life narratives and social implications can positively shape a patient’s outlook.

L. Sebastian **Purcell** (SUNY Cortland, USA)

*Narrative Identity and Self-Constitution: Ricoeur and Korsgaard on Ethics*

Paul Ricoeur and Christine Korsgaard never knew each other or substantively engaged in each other’s work. They worked, of course, in different philosophical traditions. Nevertheless their central ethical texts pursue a surprisingly similar strategy in order to furnish the foundations for moral norms, and to make sense of the more nuanced concerns of our ethical lives. For both, the metaphysical impasse of personal identity, that selves are not natural or even socially given kinds, proves to be the “pass” for an ethical conception of personal identity. For both a broadly Kantian strategy furnishes the outline for this ethical conception. And for both, it is Aristotle’s moral psychology which tempers the Kant’s deontological principles.

Given the broadly common approach both Ricoeur and Korsgaard take to the matters of ethics and identity, the purpose of this essay is double. First, it aims to develop a better sense of the ways in which identity figure into the normative aims of each thinker not only to clarify their differences, but especially to further reflection on the character of the philosophic traditions each addressed. In this regard, the essay seeks to make some scholarly strides as a piece in comparative philosophy. Second, I aim to provide the grounds on which Korsgaard’s project might be helped by drawing Ricoeur’s more robust sense of personal identity. In this regard, then, I make the philosophic case for the relative superiority of Ricoeur’s conception of the relation of personal identity to our moral and ethical obligations.

Because the matter is a complicated one, I begin, in part II, with a point of commonality for the two philosophers: the problem of human action. I then move, in part III, to the use each makes of a Kantian deontological framework, where Ricoeur maintains a sort of primacy for Aristotelian eudaimonism, but Korsgaard does not. In part IV I turn to the implications of their approaches for conceptions of selfhood, arguing that it is here that Ricoeur’s more robust account of human narrative identity, as the lived tension of ipse and idem, might be helpful to Korsgaards’ account of self-constitution. Finally, the essay closes with remarks for future work in this comparative and ethical vein.

B. Keith **Putt** (Samford University, USA)

*Blurring the Edges: Ricoeur and Rothko on Metaphorically Figuring the Non-Figural*

As one reads Ricoeur’s extensive bibliography and comes to appreciate the breadth of his interests as he develops his dialogical method of reflection and his emphasis on the surplus of meaning, one may well be perplexed at a significant lacuna that permeates his work. Ricoeur has concentrated his hermeneutics almost exclusively in the areas of language and action, prosecuting various topics, such as self-knowledge, imagination, religion, justice, forgiveness, ethics, and translation—just to name a few—by limiting his examinations to the semantics of discourse theory and the pragmatics of human capability. The glaring “elephant in the room” that discloses its presence by its very absence is the compelling contributions that the arts, particularly the visual arts, make to comprehending the specific issues that Ricoeur considers to be so essential for philosophical investigation. That omission stimulates the question of what exactly Ricoeur would say about the existential implications of art and of how exactly he would situate those critical implications into his phenomenological hermeneutics.

One of the few exceptions to the exemption of the arts from Ricoeur’s philosophy of reflection is the final chapter on aesthetic experience in *Critique & Conviction* where he responds to the specific question of why art is “singularly lacking” in his work. In the ensuing conversation, he admits how influential art is for him personally and, then, extrapolates from his personal approbation certain hermeneutical connections between the arts and his broader discourse theory. For example, he explicitly conjoins polyfigurative art with the “density” of metaphor, since both address the reality of multiple dimensions of meaning, of what one could call the “blurring” of polysemy and plurivocity that allows for an over-determination of sense and reference. Such a “blurring” leads inevitably to his work on figuration and mimesis, whereby the communicative dynamic of art exposes new worlds of meanings and new morphologies of experience. Indeed, he confesses that the mimetic iconic augmentation of experience in art comes to a unique expression in non-figurative painting, in which preoccupation with the “object” has been replaced with a more abstract interest in restructuring reality.

I propose to take Ricoeur’s mimetic and refigurative perspective on non-objective art and use it as an idiom for examining the artistic intention of Mark Rothko in the multiform canvasses of his “classical” period from 1949 until his death in 1970. Rothko unequivocally denied being an abstractionist, a colorist, or a formalist, insisting, on the contrary, that he desired to communicate discrete dimensions of experience and emotions to his viewers, specifically experiences of the sacred and the spiritual. His large canvasses with their blurred edges force the spectator into an intimacy of experience that opens the potentiality of heterogeneous interpretations. In other words, one might consider his paintings to be metaphors of dense meanings that imitate reality not though facile representation but through a Kierkegaardian repetition of worlds that track

Ricoeur’s own ideas of pre-, con-, and re-figuration. In other words, I shall argue that Rothko’s “abstract expressionism” adequately illustrates Ricoeur’s contention that non-figurative art succeeds far better than representational art in refiguring new worlds of meaning.

Jeffrey **Sacks** (The Mount Sinai School of Medicine, USA)

*On Recognition and Nonrecognition: Paul Ricoeur, Mutual Recognition and the Intersubjectivists*

*The Course of Recognition* is one of the last major works from Paul Ricoeur, a major thinker and philosopher of the twentieth century. In it, he moved his theory of dialectical phenomenological hermeneutics into the intersubjective relational world of psychoanalysis. His model of philosophical anthropology encounters the domains of self, identity, narrative-identity, other, and self recognition, as well as mutual recognition. Ricoeur argues that each of these themes are superimposed on each other and applied to the dissymmetry of any human relationship, the so called “abyss.”

This talk will attempt to clarify and summarize the essence of Paul Ricoeur’s thinking- his fifty-year opus. These texts weave the two domains of philosophical anthropology and psychoanalytic thinking; culminating in contemporary concepts that are of interest and importance to the psychoanalytic community today. These two worlds overlap in language, tone, praxis, and content: mutual recognition. Ironically, these worlds appear to have not yet mutually recognized each other. These acts of nonrecognition will be clarified, and the domains of mutual recognition will be articulated.

Ricoeur’s blending of philosophical anthropology and psychoanalytic thinking serves as an ideal pedagogical model for teaching psychoanalytic principles from a philosophical vantage point especially as they appear to arrive at overlapping constructs in this case mutual recognition. After all, pedagogue was originally among the ancient Greeks a slave who attended the children of his master and on their way to school often acted as a tutor. Psychoanalysis deserves this ancient tradition and Paul Ricoeur takes us on the journey from ancient times to contemporary psychoanalytic principles.

Ricoeur’s concepts of poetic semantic imagination, belonging, tradition, ideology and utopia will be introduced and explored within the contemporary clinical concepts of the third (way) co-constructionism, dissociation and creative space.

My goal is to summarize Ricoeur’s work leading to *The Course of Recognition,* and to point out uncanny similarities in works of major relational/intersubjective psychoanalytic leaders in the field today (Bromberg, Stern and Levenson, Benjamin.)

I suggest that this blending of disciplines serves as an ideal pedagogical model for psychoanalytic teaching for beginning as well as advanced students.

Roger **Savage** (University of California, Los Angeles, USA)

*The Wager of Imagination*

Paul Ricoeur’s investigations into the function of imagination highlight similarities between aesthetic experiences afforded by individual works and utopian alternatives to current social and political practices and ways of life. On the one hand, Ricoeur emphasizes how poetry, literature, music and works of art renew reality in accordance with the worlds they project. On the other hand, he stresses how visionary utopias are critical to reforming or revolutionizing *praxis*. Like works of art, these visionary outlooks renew the real from within. This renewal and regeneration of orientations, modes of thinking and styles of living attest to the imagination’s productive power. This power, I will argue, is accordingly also the source of a wager based on the solutions that works and acts provide to questions, problems and crises to which they reply.

Looking to the work of art to account for the way imagination is operative in moral and political acts that we admire accentuates the kinship between aesthetic judgment and the prospective dimension of the rules exemplified by such acts. In his essay on Hannah Arendt’s concept of political judgment, Ricoeur sets the historical spectator’s retrospective view against the social agent’s forward-looking one. By relating judgment’s prospective dimension to the logic of hope, I will show how the wager of imagination figures in an eschatology of freedom such as the one Ricoeur places in dialectical relation with an ontology of prior understanding. Moreover by setting the logic of hope against the temptation of thought to elevate itself to the level of the absolute through “grasping history as the totalization of time in the eternal present,”[[8]](#footnote-8) I will link this wager to as yet unfulfilled claims. These unfilled claims are the “spring of action,”[[9]](#footnote-9) which Ricoeur suggests Hegel destroyed. In conclusion, I will ask whether the wager of imagination offers a key to the enigma of humanity as a singular collective when there is no plot capable of equalling the idea of a common, universal history.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Charles **Sharp** (California State University, Fullerton, USA)

*Transgression and Transcendence in Aesthetic Experience*

Transgression and transcendence appear to be incompatible concepts; the former aligned with sins and the latter concerning the divine. Yet, within aesthetic experiences, I suggest that the two concepts are intimately intertwined, perhaps even indistinguishable. For postmodern, anti-humanist thinkers, particularly Foucault, transgression illustrates the importance of will-to-power, and is invoked specifically to avoid the conations of a self-determining subject implied by humanist ideas of transcendence. However, Foucault draws inspiration for his concepts specifically from aesthetic works of authors including Bataille, Baudelaire, and Sade. That the appreciation of such writing may lead to socially deviant behavior or be used to justify immorality is a concern, but such negative results could be considered as pathological aspects of the way in which the experience of art informs the practical world. Transgressions of restrictive and unjust social norms could be said to be important in refiguring and reshaping those norms. That art inspires acts suggests the importance of the cultural imagination in configuring the social world, which is an idea explored in depth by Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur suggests that new understandings arise via transcendence within immanence, which is an important and useful rethinking of traditional concepts of transcendence that are placed in opposition to immanence. I argue that if works construed as transgressive are able to affect change in the practical world, it is because the experience of those works is transformative as a transcendence within immanence. Transgressions, if they are to lead to refigured social norms, could be viewed as adjustments to the norms and mores of society. If transgressions are not linked to social changes and are relished simply because of their deviance, they can be understood as pathogenic – merely and permanently deviant.

These ideas can be examined further via Ricoeur’s premise of the cultural imagination as the pairing of ideology and utopia. Pathological transgression can be aligned with the negative pole of utopia as meaningless escape, which is quite similar to the way in which postmodern thinkers conceptualize divine transcendence. Perhaps the pleasure derived from transgressions of this type, the pleasures of sin, can be said to give only a false sense of the real transformative power of art, which following Ricoeur, presents us the opportunity to critically assess claims of power and to refigure the world. This places a far greater emphasis on the importance of art’s critical role in culture than a blurring of the distinction between the social and aesthetic realm, which is in danger of disempowering the work of the imagination altogether. It further places a greater emphasis on the role of others in the cultural imagination allowing for a non-pathological concept of power in concert that trumps individual will-to-power as simply power over others. Rethinking the transformative power of transgression vis–à–vis transcendence within immanence places a different degree of social responsibility on scholars and critics to assess the potential interpretations of art in terms of their relationship with the cultural imagination.

Jim **Sisson** (Middle Georgia State University, USA)

*The Grateful "Course of Recognition": Ricoeur and the Transformative Grace of Gratitude*

Starting from Ricoeur’s definition of gratitude in *The Course of Recognition,* “Gift Exchanges and Mutual Recognition” (232-246), I discuss the relationship between gratitude and the sense of shame. Specifically, Ricoeur defines gratitude as “the sentiment in such acts [as gifts, salaries, and honoraria] that both separates and connects giving and giving in return. It is the quality of feeling that ensures the soundness of the dividing line that runs through such mixed cases of giving and selling” (240). I wish to elucidate Ricoeur’s qualification that “gratitude is a weak boundary that also exposes the gift to those different forms of corruption. . . , the paradox of the relation between the generosity of the gift and the obligation of giving a gift in return” (240). How does genuine gratitude avert forms of “corruption,” “hypocrisy” (240), and shame in an unequal exchange? Ricoeur parses the word *reconnaissance* in his discussion of gratitude and asserts, “Gratitude lightens the weight of obligation to give in return and reorients this toward a generosity equal to the one that led to the first gift” (243). There is more to be said about this “reorientation” invoked as Ricoeur discusses *reconnaissance-gratitude.* Turning to the *Grand Robert*, to recognize means to “testify through one’s gratitude that one owes something to someone” (*Course of Recognition* 284). Gratitude reorients a posture of debt and obligation, a posture akin to shame. Ricoeur’s assessment of the second creation myth in Genesis becomes useful at this juncture: “But shame is far from being a curse” (*Thinking Biblically* 44). Ricoeur uses the example of nakedness. Before the fall, “nakedness is exempt from shame” (44). Post-Fall shame induced by nakedness is not a permanent condition however. The shame of the Fall reorients the first humans to, an act of grace, a gift of clothing in Genesis 3:21. After shame comes a susceptibility to gratitude for a gift given without desert. Ricoeur notes the “joy of shared nakedness” celebrated in the Song of Songs (44). In the embrace of the naked lovers of Song of Songs, shame is overcome. Silvan Tomkins’s work on affect and shame is useful to pair with Ricoeur’s thought: “The shame response is an act which reduces facial communication. . . . the individual calls a halt to looking at another person” (*Shame and Its Sisters*, Sedgwick and Frank, eds.). In love this shame is overcome: the lovers gaze upon each other’s nakedness with desire and attraction. Facial and bodily communication is expanded, not reduced, reduction being an indication of shame. Lovers appreciate the other. They give themselves to the other for whom they are grateful. Ricoeur describes, “For the regime of gratitude, the values of exchanged presents are incommensurable in terms of market costs. This is the mark of what is ‘without price’” (*CR* 243). Gratitude bridges any gaps between giving and receiving (243-4). Gratitude hence overcomes feelings of loss. Tomkins makes the connection between shame and mourning, “In this respect it is not unlike mourning, in which I become exquisitely aware of the self just because I will not surrender the love object which must be surrendered” (*Shame and Its Sisters* 138). The last act of grace then is gratitude before the “gift of death.”

Michael **Sohn** (Cleveland State University, USA)

*Word, Writing, Tradition*

Abstract omitted at the request of the author.

John **Starkey** (Oklahoma City University, USA)

*Ricoeur, Neville, and the Hermeneutics of Religious Symbols*

Two of the finest theorists of the hermeneutics of religious symbols in recent times are Paul Ricoeur and Robert Neville. Each presents decades of work and a myriad of publications on the topic {Neville, a former president of the AAR, has authored more than 20 major books, related in various ways with the topic}, and the two share much: a positive approach focused on ‘retrieving the truth of broken symbols,’ if one may so combine signature phrases; a willingness to combine premodern, modern, and postmodern beliefs and ways of stating such beliefs, i.e. a willingness to take religious beliefs seriously, to consider both the subjects and object(s) of religious feeling and discourse, and to critically examine the social claims implicit in such beliefs; a concern with keeping positive religious claims and philosophic examination of such claims distinct though not separate; a positive respect for ontology, however much and however differently qualified that regard may be; and, not least, an engagement with the ‘linguistic turn’ of 20th century philosophy combined with a sense (different in each case) that the linguistic turn can, although it need not, obscure such truth as might be attained in religious feeling, practice, and thought.

But it is another feature of the work of each that I propose to address: concern with method. Each has seen the necessity to combine multiple philosophic approaches and likewise the necessity to engage in interdisciplinary work. But they come at this concern quite differently. Ricoeur works from the bottom up as it were, one issue at a time, favoring close reading of individual thinkers and incessantly comparing and contrasting approaches so to arrive at some modest, indeed painstakingly delineated and delimited, synthesis—a synthesis that will in turn serve as the basis for a further and deeper examination. Neville, conversely consciously works systematically, never losing sight of what he take to be an intellectual obligation to take responsibility for our overarching metaphysical visions, visions that he believes inevitably through perhaps only implicitly situate and qualify whatever lower level claims we might make—although he himself insists that system need not be closed and infallible but can be flexible and constantly under correction.

More than that, although Ricoeur was no stranger to the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Pierce or the scientifically guided speculations of Whitehead and the process movement, and although Ricoeur never lost touch with ‘the bloodstream’ implicit in phenomenology and in the concreteness of religious faith, for the most part Ricoeur’s focus was textual, as fitted his time and place in Continental thought both philosophic and theological. Neville’s work, by way of contrast, takes its bearings precisely from the Anglo-American pragmatic and process traditions, such that Neville constantly situates language about the object(s) of religious feeling and thought within a larger experiential frame. I believe it is time we begin to think the contributions of these seminal thinkers together, as offering both mutual correction and mutual support.

Dan **Stiver** (Hardin-Simmons University, USA)

*Ideology Critique on the Ground: Ricoeur on Embodiment and Ideology Critique*

The Marxist tradition of ideology critique launched powerful criticisms of religion while at the same time struggling with problems of self-referentiality, that is, how does ideology escape the question of ideology? After World War I, Karl Mannheim posed this as a paradox (terminology applied by Clifford Geertz) for which there has not been a clear answer—yet there have been developments that are fruitful steps towards a response. One is the realization that claims of truth and science over against ideology cannot be maintained in principle in the sense that the former appeals are themselves embedded within narratives that cannot be fully justified. In the post World War 1 years, there arose both the idealist Communist Revolution and the more pessimistic Frankfurt School that struggled with how even Marxist ideology critique could fall prey to ideology critique. We wrestle with this tension still. Ideology, which is a form of narrative, in the broad Marxist tradition is almost always seen as negative. Emphases on the narrative shape of humans, such as their religions, however, are usually positive. How do we relate these two traditions? Paul Ricoeur's insight that ideology actually has a three-fold narrative structure that includes a positive and a negative dimension pointed to a dialectical way forward, realizing that humans inevitably develop ideologies (narratives) that conserve and integrate meaning, yet there is a structural instability that inevitably tends towards overreaching and distortion.

This is an important insight in itself, but what I wish to explore further is the role of embodiment in such a dialectic. In light of much contemporary reflection on embodiment, the issue is not ideology on the one side and the unvarnished truth or science on the other. Nor is it embodiment on one side and rationality on the other. What is not so clearly seen in light of these philosophical reflections is that any ideology critique also does so. What is the way out? Does this not just deepen Mannheim's Paradox? In a certain way, it does complicate matters further. In another way, however, it points perhaps not to a definitive solution but to a way forward—not a theoretical calculus but a practical response. Ricoeur himself suggested that there was no theoretical solution but only a practical one.

What I would like to do is then bring together Ricoeur's early work on embodiment into dialogue with his later work on ideology in order to flesh out what such a practical response would look like. The dimension of embodiment can balance his later emphasis on utopia as the response to the perils of ideology and also bring out the way the constructive function of ideology, which Ricoeur brings to the Marxist table, can actually help to alleviate the dissimulating functions of ideology and in a certain way address Mannheim's Paradox. The notion of a postcritical naivete as a description of the application stage of Ricoeur's hermeneutical arc will be a helpful heuristic toward ideology critique “on the ground.”

George **Taylor** (University of Pittsburgh, USA)

*The Use of “Distant Reading” to Analyze the Work of Ricoeur*

We are all familiar with the task of a “close reading” of Ricoeur, where through examination of individual texts we seek to uncover its deeper meaning. The rise of digital analysis of texts also allows for sophisticated “distant reading,” whereby we analyze continuities or discontinuities across Ricoeur’s texts over time. The present paper offers a preliminary report on digital reading of Ricoeur that focuses on potential models for this kind of exploration, with secondary attention to particular results.

As we are aware, Ricoeur’s own corpus is extremely vast, and the secondary literature is burgeoning. It is an arduous task to track the development of themes within Ricoeur and also within the secondary literature. In part Ricoeur’s thought changes – for example, his definition of hermeneutics – in part he at many points presents the suggestion of important ideas that are not systematically thematized – for example, his use of the term “practical concept” – and in part he often drops in nuggets of ideas while discussing other topics – for example, a paragraph on Kierkegaard in the midst of an analysis of Hegel.

The use of models of distant reading in interpreting Ricoeur should help address these challenges that reading Ricoeur presents. The present paper will be an outgrowth of work undertaken as a participant, for a week in June, at the National Humanities Center’s first Institute in Digital Textual Studies. Digital textual studies is a subcategory of the burgeoning field of the digital humanities and holds great promise for more developed models of analyzing texts across an area of study. Distant reading seems to hold particular promise for analyzing such a rich and diverse corpus as Ricoeur’s and for trying to bring together themes within the secondary literature on Ricoeur as well.

David **Utsler** (University of North Texas, USA)

*From the Text of Nature to Environmental Action: Activism in Environmental Hermeneutics*

In his essay, “Environmental Philosophy *is* Environmental Activism,”[[11]](#footnote-11) J. Baird Callicott argues for the importance of ideas, critical thinking, and conceptual frameworks for direct action. Cognitive contexts are not important as an add on to action as a help or supplement, that is, a bit of theory that might help practice out. Callicott’s arguments are built from the premise that all action reflects ideas or a worldview. People act, self-aware or not, from the ideas that shape their values, desired ends, and motivations. Environmental philosophy, Callicott argues, is itself a form of activism as it is absolutely crucial that ideas are shaped by the kind of critical thinking that philosophy offers.

The connection between the “theory” of environmental philosophy and the “practice” of environmental activism is served in a singular way by philosophical hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur’s thought in particular provides numerous pathways that demonstrate the connection for which Callicott argued and in ways likely that Callicott had not even conceived in his 1999 essay. This paper will propose a kind of “environmental hermeneutics” that is aimed at providing conceptual frameworks for activism (i.e. a worldview that motivates one to act) as well as justifications for activism (i.e. the arguments an activist will need to reach the goals activism sets out to achieve in the first place).

Hermeneutics, as both Ricoeur and Gadamer believed, is highly practical in that what it concerns itself with is precisely real world events. Hermeneutics does not take place outside the world but in it. This paper will argue that our environment or the natural world in which we dwell is a place that we are constantly interpreting. Human beings and the world about us comprise a very complex set of relations to which we attach meanings and understanding—i.e. interpretations. The way in which we read our world is informed by our worldviews, which must be continually reassessed critically. The strong connection between theory and practice in Ricoeur’s work will aid activists in understanding this process to better inform their own goals and methods in their activism.

Environmental activism, I contend, needs hermeneutics. To rephrase Callicott: Environmental hermeneutics *is* environmental activism.

Pol **Vandevelde** (Marquette University, USA)

*Ricoeur on History and Forgiveness*

I examine Ricoeur’s views on forgiveness and its place in history. Although he shares Arendt’s wish that the social energy generated by forgiveness in personal encounters be harnessed to a political process, Ricoeur also concludes, like Arendt, that “there is no politics of forgiveness” (Ricoeur 2000, 635). I analyze Ricoeur’s arguments against such a politics of forgiveness and argue against it, using Ricoeurian arguments in favor of the role of institutions in *Oneself as Another.* I examine the following points.

1. Although forgiveness is usually an act that takes place in the limited public encounter of a perpetrator and a victim who judges whether the deed can be forgiven, there is no argument based on a principle that could replace the face to face encounter of perpetrator and victim with an institutional representation through proxies. Ricoeur’s emphasis on the passive side of the self and the role of just institutions give us the resources to defend the possibility of communal forgiveness.
2. Although forgiveness is the privilege and right of victims, there is no argument based on a principle that could make illegitimate the fact that a community can forgive another community for crimes that resulted in the killing of now absent victims. Ricoeur’s views on memory in its positive aspect as giving voice to the dead and in its negative side as perpetuating guilt can be used to show how memory requires forgiveness for being true attestation to those who suffer and who need more than revenge.
3. Although forgiveness is supposed to be unconditional in the sense that it is performed in the absence of any calculation toward a reward or benefit, which makes it distinct from reparation or reconciliation, Ricoeur gives us the means to understand “unconditionality” as being dialogical. This view can be used to show that if a group comes to an agreement to forgive, which will involve some form of discussion about why and for what purpose a group should forgive, this discussion does not turn forgiveness into a process of reconciliation or reparation. As Ricoeur has shown, discussion and recognition of each other’s position does not amount to a sheer calculation or trade-off: if we do this, you will do that.

In sum, although Ricoeur seems to reject the possibility of communal forgiveness, his own views in *Oneself as Another* offers us the means to support communal forgiveness.

Dong **Yang** (University of Georgia, USA)

*Metaphor Monism or Metaphor-Metaphysics Dualism?: Analyses and Reflections on the Derrida- Ricoeur Debate*

In this paper I am going to consider the debate Derrida has with Paul Ricoeur on the relationship between metaphor/ rhetoric and metaphysics. Their divergence can be traced back to Heidegger’s original idea that “the metaphorical exists only inside the metaphysical.” Being somehow pessimistic about metaphysics and a loyal follower of Heidegger, Derrida believes that all the metaphysical concepts are worn-out (usé) metaphors and indicate the law of economics (usure), hence all the concepts are dead metaphors. Ricoeur, on the contrary, denies Heidegger --Derrida theory by insisting on the fundamental difference and distinction between metaphor and metaphysics. He wrote a response, composed of five major counter-arguments, in the last chapter of his work *The Rule of Metaphor* in order to differentiate what he calls the speculative discourse and poetic discourse. The debate, in a word, is about metaphor monism of Derrida and metaphor-metaphysics dualism of Ricoeur.

In this article I endeavor to examine the Derrida-Ricoeur debate and reflect upon it. After a brief summary, I will show my agreements with Ricoeur’s criticism that Derrida has made two fundamental mistakes in his theory of metaphor—1) the limited vision: Derrida, inconsistent with his argument in “Signature Event Context”, completely grounded his theory in semiotic and semantic spheres without being aware of the interrelationship between word/ sentence and discourse, which is the condition for the creation of metaphor to be possible. As how Ricoeur criticizes, “the creation of new meanings, in connection with the advent of a new manner of questioning, places language in a state of semantic deficiency; lexicalized metaphor must intervene to compensate for this lack”. 2) The impossibility of forming the concept of metaphor. For Derrida, every concept starts with a sensory metaphor, then it becomes difficult to envision how can the concept of metaphor itself be formed through this process. In other words, the concept of metaphor becomes an obstacle for Derrida’s theory to universalize. There is an inner problem concerning the logical priorities of the concept of metaphor and the metaphor itself; and this can only lead to a circular and unsatisfactory result.

—END—

1. Boyd Blundell, “Refiguring Virtue,” *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur*, Brian Treanor and Henry Isaac Venema, eds. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 158. Fred Dallmayr has serious reservations about the tactic of the detour as a fundamental method of thought, seeing it mainly as a process of argumentative circumlocution. So for instance the argument of the little ethics in *Oneself as Another* “tends to proceed in quasi-Hegelian fashion from one side to the opposite side, with practical wisdom finally brought onto the stage as *deus ex machina*.” Fred Dallmayr, “Ethics and Public Life: A Critical Tribute to Paul Ricoeur,” *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, John Wall, William Schweiker, W. David Hall, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 213-32; here 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is a comment to Charles Reagan recorded in Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kristeva’s remarks were part of a symposium organized to “contest Cardinal Ratzinger’s denunciation of relativism.” In the last homily he gave before becoming Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger described modern life as ruled by a “dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely” of satisfying “the desires of one’s own ego.” An eminent scholar familiar with the centuries-old debates over relativism, Ratzinger chose to oversimplify or even caricature a philosophical approach of great sophistication and antiquity. His homily depicts the relativist as someone blown about “by every wind of doctrine,” whereas the relativist sticks firmly to one argument—that human knowledge is not absolute. Gathering prominent intellectuals from disciplines most relevant to the controversy—ethics, theology, political theory, anthropology, psychology, cultural studies, epistemology, philosophy of science, and classics—this special double issue of Common Knowledge contests Ratzinger’s denunciation of relativism. A “Dictatorship of Relativism”?: Symposium in Response to Cardinal Ratzinger’s Last Homily, *Common Knowledge*, Vol, 13, Nos. 2/3 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, for example, Michel Harr, *Heidegger and the Essence of Man*, Karen S. Feldman, *Binding Words: Conscience and Rhetoric in Hobbes, Hegel, and Heidegger*, Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, and "Against Self-Criticism" by Adam Phillips, in *London Review of Books* 2 March 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mental Health Report, 2012 <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jan/19/news/la-heb-mental-health-us-20120119>. The report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Survey on Drug Use and Health, released Thursday, includes information from 68,487 completed surveys about mental illness (as defined by the American Psychiatric Assn.'s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV) and substance abuse among adults and children. Rates have remained fairly stable since 2009, with only a slight uptick in overall numbers. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. NYTimes, Jan. 18, 2015, *Letter to the Editor* by Michael J. Lustick, M.D. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/22/opinion/rethinking-our-diagnoses-of-mental-disorders.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J. Baird Callicott, “Environmental Philosophy *is* Environmental Activism,” in *Beyond the Land Ethic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 27 – 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)