

PAUL RICOEUR

Philosophical Anthropology

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Writings and Lectures, Volume 3

Paul Ricoeur

Edited by Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée

Translated by David Pellauer

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Editors' Preface

Today anthropology is associated with a set of disciplines that have the common goal of providing knowledge about human beings. These disciplines are as numerous as are the aspects of reality that fall under this heading. No doubt they reflect its richness and complexity. No doubt they justify, for the most part, their pretension to objectivity. Yet, in becoming ever more specialized, they have become ever more jealous about their methods and the ways they construct their object. Hence the mirror they hold up to human beings is cracked. That the human sciences have become increasingly autonomous since the nineteenth century has contributed more than a little to the development of such a situation. For the competition among them is growing and the conflicts among their paradigms, which at the beginning opposed them to one another, at present place them in opposition to themselves. Psychology, sociology, ethnology, economics, history, and linguistics can serve as good examples. It is worth noting that they have not been able to block the claim of the natural sciences to say something about what it means to be human. Paleoanthropology, notably, demonstrates this – and what are we to say about the neurosciences and their program of “naturalizing” the mind and everything that, in a recent past, seemed to belong to such disciplines? To the simplicity of their models, the natural sciences also add an impressive claim to causal efficacy. In this way, the conflicts among paradigms that undermine the human sciences from within and prevent them from achieving unity find a solution in a form of a reductionism through which human existence gets entirely

explained by what is other than human. But beyond unity, it is human specificity that is thereby lost from sight. Invited to conceive of themselves as a thing among things, humans may well, to cite a well-known phrase, find themselves washed away like “a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.”¹

In these conditions, one can well understand the “urgent task” that constitutes philosophy in Paul Ricoeur’s eyes, an answer to the question: what is it to be human? The answer to this question, he says in the opening lines of the text we have placed first in this collection, is not that of “the human sciences,” which “find themselves dispersed among disparate disciplines and literally do not know what it is they are talking about.” But neither is the task that of an “ontology” that, under the influence of Heidegger, thinks there is nothing to learn from these same sciences and remains, therefore, too general and indeterminate. Instead it consists in an ever renewed effort to make sense of these disciplines in terms of one other. On the one side, in effect, philosophy cannot dispense with a radical interrogation into the being of human being. This interrogation, which begins with Plato, shows that anthropology has an older history than the disciplines which dispute among themselves in its name – a properly philosophical history that justifies the sought-for handholds Ricoeur looks for in this thinker but also in Aristotle, Pascal, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, to name only those he most often calls upon. On the other side, though, philosophy cannot deprive itself of the resources of the human sciences nor act as though they have contributed nothing, despite the fragmentary image they give of human beings, to the exploration of their being. Ricoeur’s dialogue with psychoanalysis bears exemplary witness to this, as does his interest in history, sociology, and the sciences of language.² His relation to structural anthropology, to be sure, appears more difficult. He does not follow Lévi-Strauss when he, in wholly rejecting traditional philosophy, affirms the same ambition and claims to construe logically the invariants of both mind and culture. But this relation finds a balance when the notion of structure is used simply as a tool for analyzing certain social phenomena such as myths or kinship. The value of this analysis can then be acknowledged and

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970), 422.

² The evidence presented in this volume complements the fuller evidence as regards psychoanalysis, which makes up the first volume in this series: Paul Ricoeur, *On Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

even taken as a necessary moment in our understanding of these phenomena.

This understanding, however, is never total, not only because the knowing subject, here more than elsewhere, belongs to its object, but even more so because the rationality it claims cannot “recover,” without some loss, “the irrationality” of its source. The analysis of myth included here confirms this – Ricoeur’s analysis appears exemplary in this regard. The “coherence of the *logos*” cannot be equated with the meaning of *muthos* and its interest as regards life. Nor can it be equated with the “depth of *pathos*” in which myth takes root. *Pathos*, *muthos*, *logos*: there exists a knot of relations among these three dimensions of human existence that philosophy cannot make sense of without cutting through the closure of conceptual discourse. This is why “philosophical anthropology is never finished,” contrary to the theoretical ardor of those disciplines that, in principle, know no limit.

This incompleteness, generally speaking, marks Ricoeur’s thought, as he himself wrote at the end of his last big book, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where he indicates the positive sense of life always being ahead of everything we can think or say about it.³ But it also reveals the difficulty we had to face in putting together this volume, which presents itself in two ways.

On the one hand, “anthropology” is not a central term of Ricoeur’s philosophical vocabulary. It does not appear in the title of any of his major works and does not correspond to any particular orientation of topic or method. Its use in some of the texts included in this volume must not mislead us: it does not appear frequently in Ricoeur’s other published works. One might therefore doubt its pertinence and think that it does not justify the importance we are giving it. Yet the anthropological import of Ricoeur’s thought exceeds his use of the term – to such an extent that his whole philosophy can be seen from this perspective. When, in his intellectual autobiography, he turns to the project that he had conceived to be his “life’s work,” for which the Philosophy of the Will, considered as a whole, realized the first step, Ricoeur expressly characterizes this as a project in “philosophical anthropology.”⁴ Yes, he then goes on to express regret over the imprudence of one who was at the time a “debutant in philosophy” and states that the last portion of his initial program,

³Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁴Paul Ricoeur, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 12.

which was intended to deal with the "relation of the human will to Transcendence," remained unrealized and, with it, the whole idea of "a poetics of the experiences of creation and re-creation" that could respond to the "pathetics" of suffering and of the fault.⁵ But it does not follow that he simply abandoned this project. Nor does it follow that nothing of this poetics was realized in his subsequent work, even if this was at the price of an *epoché* applied to Transcendence and, with it, to religious life, taken henceforth as one application among others as a species of the "rule-governed creation" that is language and that finds itself set forth, in three different ways, in *The Symbolism of Evil*, *The Rule of Metaphor*, and *Time and Narrative*.⁶ Whether it was a question about symbols, metaphor, or narrative, "the idea of an ordered creation still belongs to philosophical anthropology."⁷ And one can think that this is also the case, for even stronger reasons, for the notions elaborated in the later works: action, the human person, memory, history, recognition. Let us repeat therefore, if anthropology did not have an assigned place in Ricoeur's thought, this was because it constitutes his overall philosophy.

However, the difficulty does not disappear for all that. It changes its meaning. If Ricoeur's philosophy as a whole is an "anthropology," if everything that he produced philosophically – books, articles, lectures – can be arranged in one way or another in terms of this broad heading, how, then, to choose from among them? And, once this choice has been made, what order ought they to be given? The risk here is double, as is the temptation to forget that Ricoeur did not express the intention to publish such a collection during his lifetime.

The problem of choice does not really arise for those texts that explicitly deal with the relation between philosophy and anthropology or that directly address the question "What is it to be a human being?" Such is the case for "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of a Philosophical Anthropology," "The Unity of the Voluntary and the Involuntary as a Limit-Idea," "Human Beings as the Subject of Philosophy," and "The Addressee of

⁵ Which one may well take as the real motivation behind the whole project.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); *Time and Narrative*, 3 volumes, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984–8).

⁷ Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," 14.

Religion: The Capable Human Being.” But these are not all the texts we have chosen. For the others, the problem still stands. Our hesitations, in reminding ourselves that every choice implies a rejection, sharpened our awareness that we had – and still have – other texts that could legitimately have been included in this volume. In the end, we kept those that, apart from their intrinsic interest, seemed to us to best bear witness, when brought together, to the diversity of perspectives, methods, and concepts implied in Ricoeur’s anthropology. Diversity need not necessarily exclude unity. Among these texts, some clarify the genesis of the big books, while others add to them, and still others can be read independently of the rest, but together they outline a trajectory whose coherence easily triumphs over the apparent variety of themes and problems.

That coherence may seem surprising if one knows that almost sixty-five years separates the first and last text. Yet, the more time one spends with Ricoeur’s work, the more one sees how constant were his initial intuitions. Between the lecture on “Attention,” given in 1939 just before his going off to war and captivity, and the remarks he had prepared for the awarding of the Kluge Prize on “personal capacities” and “mutual recognition,” in 2004, just a few months before his death, it is possible to trace a continuous line despite the turns and detours.

The lecture on attention, which remained unpublished,⁸ is noteworthy not only because it constitutes Ricoeur’s first important contribution to the philosophical world,⁹ nor because it is the first expression of a style that happily joins rigor and depth, but because we find there already all the “polarities,” or, as Ricoeur also liked to say, all the “tensions,” that structure his later works – beginning with the one that opposes the voluntary and the involuntary. But this is not all that needs to be said: the first summit in Ricoeur’s anthropology, represented by *Fallible Man*, which followed by ten years *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, can already be glimpsed in this

⁸If one considers that the text published in 1940 in the *Bulletin du Cercle philosophique de l'Ouest* was the result of what were really artisanal methods and that its diffusion, owing to the impending war, remained confidential.

⁹The rare previously published texts in the journal *Le Semeur* – “Note sur la personne,” 38:7 (1936): 437–44; “Note sur les rapports de la philosophie et du christianisme,” 38:9 (1936): 541–7 – then in *Être* – “Responsabilité de la pensée,” 1:1 (1936–7): 4–5; “Le Risque,” 2:1 (1936–7): 9–11; “Socialisme et christianisme,” 4:1 (1936–7): 3–4; “Nécessité de Karl Marx,” 5:2 (1937–8): 6–11 – do not bear comparison with it.

study on attention.¹⁰ Fallible man is already there in attentive man – and this also is the case for what the late Ricoeur will call the “capable human being.”

We have tried to make this coherence as visible as possible. This led us to combine several criteria and to superimpose three orders – chronology, methodology, and themes. One and the same trajectory, therefore, is outlined by the “phenomenology of the will,” the “semantics of action,” and the “hermeneutics of the self,” which are unfolded in turn in this book. These three orders, however, are not rigidly bound together. For example, we sometimes have taken some liberty as regards chronology. The phenomenological method that is used in the first pieces is not abandoned in the turn to semantics and hermeneutics. Rather, it serves to enrich them. This is why, in the last text of Part III, which mostly deals with the Kantian hermeneutics of religion, it is still a question of a phenomenology of the capable human being.

But if the idea of a “hermeneutic phenomenology” is not likely to offend readers familiar with Ricoeur’s work – who will have learned to understand each of these terms in terms of the other¹¹ – we do need to say something more about the choice of the word “semantics,” for it does correspond in this collection to distinctly different uses.¹² We wanted first to place the accent on the encounter, at the

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák; *Fallible Man*, revised trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).

¹¹ See, for example, the essays in Part I, “For a Hermeneutical Phenomenology,” of Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 25–101.

¹² At least four different usages of the term are evident, which correspond to four different theoretical contexts. During the period of Ricoeur’s discussion with structuralism, it is associated with a linguistics of discourse like that of Émile Benveniste – in opposition to the linguistics of *langue* developed by Roman Jakobson on the basis of Ferdinand de Saussure. It is a proximate sense that is used a bit later in Ricoeur’s discussion of metaphor, where it designates a level of analysis – that of the sentence – which is intermediary between those which privilege, respectively, semiotics and hermeneutics. Ricoeur’s discussion with English-language analytic philosophy leads to a third sense, directly linked to the opposition – central to this philosophy – between “semantics” and “syntax.” Finally, Ricoeur himself proposes an enlarged sense of the term in “Le discours de l’action,” in *La Sémantique de l’action*, ed. Dorian Tiffenau (Paris: CNRS, 1977), 1–137, as we explain below. [This long paper reproduces much of the material from a course Ricoeur had taught at Louvain in 1971. – Trans.]

beginning of the 1960s, between phenomenology and analytic philosophy, for almost all the texts published during this time, particularly those dealing with human action, bear witness to this encounter. By publishing material from his course on the semantics of action in *La Discours de l'action*, in 1977, Ricoeur himself ratifies this use of the term. But, in this work, he proposes not only to "enrich English-language analytic philosophy and . . . the phenomenology of Husserl . . . in terms of each other," but also to underscore "the difference between action . . . and behavior" as explained by the "natural sciences."¹³ And, in order to do this, he suggests broadening the sphere of meaning of discourse about action to include action itself. This is what is suggested by the title of the paper included in this volume, "The Symbolic Structure of Action," where symbolism is "constitutive" and not simply "representative." Having taken this step, nothing prevents our taking another and recognizing the meaningful – or symbolic – dimension of human life in general. This is what we wanted to indicate by speaking of a "semantics of acting" – where this latter term has a larger meaning than does the concept of action as envisaged by specialized theories, as is attested to by Ricoeur's many references to Aristotle's *energeia*, Spinoza's *conatus*, or Jean Nabert's "affirmation." That human beings are "symbolic animals" is what Ricoeur continues to remind all those who would define them by other criteria – without failing to add that such a property, far from simply being something added to a preexisting biological structure, characterizes its very own acting. Hence it is not difficult to understand why thought about human beings is thought that "starts from the symbol," as shown by the text we have placed first in Part II.¹⁴

This prescription, to repeat, cannot be observed by any science, whether "natural" or "human": it is addressed in human beings to the art of interpreting. One can speak almost indifferently, in this sense, of a semantic or a hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur's anthropology. "Hermeneutic of action" – Ricoeur himself sometimes speaks of his enterprise in these terms.¹⁵ Thus we have not sought to trace a clear frontier between these methodological concepts. They serve simply to mark out an itinerary whose continuity, as already stated, wins out over its breaks.

¹³ Ricoeur, "Le discours de l'action," vii.

¹⁴ And which has only a small part in common, as we shall see, with the well-known conclusion of the *Philosophy of the Will*.

¹⁵ For example, in Paul Ricoeur, "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy," trans. David Pellauer, *Philosophy Today* 40 (1996): 446.

The same remark can be applied to the *themes* that this phenomenology, semantics, and hermeneutics apply to the “will,” “acting,” the “self.” To be convinced of this, it will suffice to consider together the intentional structure of the will and Ricoeur’s definition of reflection. Thanks to such a structure, the will finds its meaning in its actions; and it is in acting – and not “shut up alone in a stove-heated room”¹⁶ – that human beings understand themselves and truly become selves. Ought we to add to this that, for this to happen, one has to understand oneself “as another” and apply this insight not just to the individual – or to what we call the person – but also to societies and cultures? In asking this, we get a better measure of the complexity of the task assigned to a hermeneutics of the self as well as of the importance accorded in this way to the “uncanniness” that gives a title to one of the last texts included in this volume. But this “uncanniness,” or this alterity, is not just that of another “human being, someone similar to me,” as implied by the notion of mutual recognition, central to Ricoeur’s last work, for which the epilogue of this volume provides a kind of sketch. It is still in me, in my “flesh” and in all the ways that this finds itself stamped, from the early works on, by the seal of vulnerability or of “affective fragility.” Hence the text we have placed at the end of Part III makes specific “incapacities” correspond to the capacities of the “capable human being” – including the capacity to speak, to act, and to narrate.

This “correlation between capacity and fragility” finally appears therefore as the heart of Ricoeur’s anthropology. It explains in this way the encounter between an ontology of freedom and what presents itself not so much as an eschatology as a pedagogy of hope. The place made here for religion is not surprising. The thesis about the voluntary and the involuntary had early on stated that the question regarding human being is also the question of “man’s limitations.”¹⁷ Yet an anthropology of religion is not a religious anthropology. Hope, moreover, precedes every particular belief; and it is equally the horizon of action in its ethical and political dimensions. No doubt we should see in it an originary form of human time – a distinct form of that project from which every

¹⁶René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume I, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 116.

¹⁷Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 468.

capacity is derived.¹⁸ But this, as he says below, is just what Ricoeur invites his “perplexed reader” ceaselessly “to ponder.”

Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée

¹⁸ Otherwise the capable human being would be invulnerable, even capable of conquering his or her fragility.

Note on this Edition

The “essays and lectures” brought together in this volume scrupulously respect Ricoeur’s original texts in conformity with the policy of the editorial committee of the *Fonds Ricoeur*, the Ricoeur Archive. Any modifications that have been introduced have to do only with changes in punctuation, or typographical errors, or evident mistakes that may exist in the manuscripts or the already published versions; the most important of these are indicated by brackets. Other modifications have been made to quoted passages and references (which are often imprecise or incomplete). But we have not thought it necessary to indicate all of these; only the most significant of them are followed by the indication “Editors’ note.”

Catherine Goldenstein, the archivist of the *Fonds Ricoeur*, provided valuable assistance at every step in the preparation of this volume. We wish also to thank Olivier Villemot, who was responsible for producing the final word-processed version of this manuscript.

Translator's Note

As in the two previously published volumes in this series of papers by Paul Ricoeur – *On Psychoanalysis* (2012) and *Hermeneutics* (2013) – this volume gives English-speaking readers access to a number of important early papers or previously not widely known texts and lectures by Paul Ricoeur. Where a translation of one of these texts previously had appeared in English, I have retranslated it using the French text as now published, which was prepared from the papers now in the Ricoeur archive in Paris. The one exception is the Epilogue, which essentially reprints the English text of remarks Ricoeur prepared for the presentation ceremony of an award to him from the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in 1994, which poor health unfortunately prevented him from attending in person. A transcript of those remarks and a video of Ricoeur delivering them, which had been made before the ceremony, when it became known that Ricoeur would be unable to attend, continue to be available online at the Library's website.

Where brackets appear in the text, they represent indications by the editors of additions or corrections made by Ricoeur to his manuscript or typescript, and occasionally insertions made to ensure the continuity of the text in cases where a manuscript had not been previously edited for publication.

David Pellauer

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Introduction

The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of a Philosophical Anthropology

If philosophical anthropology has become an urgent task for contemporary philosophy, it is because all the major problems of this way of thinking converge on it and make its absence cruelly felt.¹ The human sciences find themselves dispersed among disparate disciplines and literally do not know what they are talking about. The renewal of ontology, on its side, provokes an identical question in its own way: who is this being for whom being is in question? Finally, the very “modernity” of human beings indicates a possible place for this meditation: if humans can gain or lose themselves in their work, leisure, politics, culture, what, then, is a human being?

From *Pathos* to Logic

There can be no question of resolving the problem of philosophical anthropology in just a few pages, nor even of posing the problem in its full breadth. But it may be possible to choose one problem in

¹This lecture was presented in Milan in 1960 and published in *Il Pensiero* 5 (September–December 1960): 283–90. An earlier English translation by Daniel O’Connor appeared in *Readings in Existential Philosophy*, ed. Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O’Connor (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 390–402. This was reprinted in Charles Reagan and David Stewart, eds, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 20–35. – Editors’ note.