THE SELF IN THE MIRROR OF THE SCRIPTURES:

THE HERMENEUTICS AND ETHICS OF PAUL RICOEUR

AMANDA KIRSTINE FORD, BA Hons. BTh. MA.

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2012

ABSTRACT

In *Oneself as Another* Paul Ricoeur considers the nature of selfhood concluding that it can only be understood as polyvalent . He uses narrative identity to show that because selves both "act and suffer" human identity is intimately tied with encounter with the Other. The ethical dimension is explored in a mediation between Aristotelian teleological ethics and Kantian deontological morality, resulting in *phronēsis* or practical wisdom. The book ends with a number of aporias, including the problem of identifying the internal voice, heard in the conscience – the voice of attestation. In a related paper, which provided the impetus for this thesis - "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures" - Ricoeur considers the issues of identity from a religious perspective.

The thesis critically reviews the development of Ricoeur's thought, moving from philosophy through hermeneutics to ethics, and its implications for theology, moving from questions of the will, to biblical hermeneutics and Christian ethics. It questions the concept of narrative identity and is particularly concerned with the place of the incompetent narrator in community. It concludes that we must take seriously Ricoeur's insistence that biblical faith adds nothing to the consideration of what is good or obligatory, but belongs to an economy of the gift in which love is tied to the naming of God. However, to consider what this might mean in pastoral and ethical terms for those who understand themselves as summoned selves, and seek to find their image in the mirror of scripture, the thesis concludes with extended exercise in biblical hermeneutics, drawing on Ricoeur's consideration of genre as a *poetic* mode. The thesis suggests that the comic parables help us to hope for more than we experience in our frailty, while the tragic parables illuminate our incapacity and enable us to forgive others their failure.

Thesis length (including footnotes, not including Bibliography) 98,580

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My post graduate studies in theology have been undertaken while I have been in parish ministry in the Diocese of Leicester. I am grateful to the Bishop, the Rt. Rev'd Tim Stephens and to the Venerable Richard Atkinson who encouraged me and permitted me the time and resources for this work including sabbatical leave in 2010. I was introduced to the work of Paul Ricoeur by the Rev'd David Moss at St Stephen's House, Oxford and I am grateful to him and to Lucy Gardner, my tutor in Ethics, for encouraging my first faltering steps in serious theological study. My capacity for analytical thinking – such as it is - owes much to the debating skills and wide ranging knowledge of my colleagues at that time; the Rev'd Dr Alexander Jensen and the Rev'd Dr Joe Kennedy. In the Diocese of Leicester I have valued the friendship and wisdom of the team from the department of Mission and Ministry, including the Rev'd Canon Mike Harrison and the Rev'd Dr Stuart Burns, who have tolerated my enthusiasm for Ricoeur with great good humour. I am grateful to them for reading drafts of this thesis. I have had the enormous privilege of being supervised during this research by Professor Anthony Thiselton, whose quality of mind and breadth of knowledge has immeasurably enriched my studies – and my ministry. Anthony and his wife Rosemary have exemplified the "Summoned Life" for me in the kindness, patience and generosity they have shown me over the last seven years. I owe a great debt to the people of the Parish of the Resurrection and the Church of Christ the King, Beaumont Leys, whose narratives I have shared for the past ten years, and whose "acting and suffering" have challenged me and rooted my study in a real context. And finally, the last ten years combining ministry and study would not have been possible without my partner, Anne, who has sacrificed holidays, travel and fun to my obsession with Ricoeur.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

> *The Gospel is bad news before it is good news. It is the news that man is a sinner, to use the old world, that he is evil in the imagination of his heart, that when he looks in the mirror all of a lather what he sees is at least eight parts chicken, phony, slob. That is the tragedy. But it is also the news that he is loved anyway, cherished, forgiven, bleeding to be sure, but also bled for. That is the comedy. And yet, so what? So what if even in his sin the slob is loved and forgiven when the very mark and substance of his sin and of his slobbery is that he keeps turning down the love and forgiveness because he either doesn't believe them or doesn't want them or just doesn't give a damn? In answer, the news of the Gospel is that extraordinary things happen to him just as in fairy tales extraordinary things happen*.[1]

INTRODUCTION: Looking in the Mirror

We begin with a person, a mirror and a book, and drawing on the image offered by Frederick Beuchner, with the image of a man looking in the mirror as he shaves in the morning. What does he see? What account does he give of himself? What stories does he tell about the person whose face stares back at him each morning? As Buechner wryly observes, our protagonist does not tell his story in a unique form, but he gives it the familiar forms learned from other stories: stories from particular genres. When he suffers, the story is tragic; when he celebrates, it is comic. The bathroom mirror is not the only reflection which informs us about ourselves: we recognise ourselves in stories; tragedies and comedies, family histories and inconsequential anecdotes. In their turn, these stories shape us, as we try to behave more like the successful heroines and to avoid the mistakes of the tragically flawed heroes.

From these "reflections", in both senses of the word, we both see ourselves and understand ourselves better. In medieval iconography the figure of Prudence (Prudentia/ *Phronēsis*/

[1] Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), p. 7.

Practical Wisdom) is represented by a female figure gazing at herself in a mirror.[2] The image suggests that wise practical action has its origin in self-knowledge. Books, embodying the wisdom of the past, play their part in educating Prudence. A painting by Giotto, in the Arena Chapel in Padua, shows her with a mirror in one hand and a book in the other, prompting the question, "What is the book open in front of her: is she reading the Bible, or Plato?" Does she find her reflection in scripture or philosophy?[3] Kant suggests that Prudence has learned how to behave in a way which will bring rewards, or at least avoid punishment. Some readings of the biblical texts would concur, for "wisdom is the fear of the Lord" can be read as an exhortation to avoid God's judgement and punishment. However, the God of the biblical texts is also loving and merciful, calling us to "chose life!" in all its fullness – seeming to suggest a striving towards authentic existence. Although there is a widespread assumption that there is a connection between morality and faith, it is not at all clear what this is.

When the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) delivered the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in 1986 under the title "On Selfhood: The Question of Personal Identity" he included two lectures on questions of religious identity. Subsequently, *Oneself as Another,* the book based on the lectures, omitted these two papers. Ricoeur explains in the introduction that he prefers to keep autonomous philosophical discourse separate from biblical faith, but more importantly he claims that biblical faith adds nothing to the discussion of good or obligatory action.[4] This claim provokes a number of questions which this thesis sets out to explore. Initially these are questions about natural anthropology and supernatural identity; although on reading Ricoeur it is soon revealed that they are intrinsically linked with hermeneutics and so with the unique character of the biblical texts. The hermeneutic turn leads to an exploration of character and

---

[2] See for example, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, 1559, engraving
http://bruegelpieterpaintings.blogspot.com/2010/09/bruegel-pieter-paintings-4.html

[3] Giotto, 1302-1306, fresco in the Arena Chapel, Padua
http://www.abcgallery.com/G/giotto/giotto90.JPG
Andrea della Robbia, glazed terracotta c.1475
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/21.116
For a full discussion of the theme see e.g. Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982)

[4] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 23-25.

action, which in its turn develops into consideration ethical themes and the point where Ricoeur draws his line in the sand.

My questions concern the nature of the "summoned self" or the religious person and their moral and ethical choices. When asked for an easily intelligible description of my thesis I have always replied that it concerns Ricoeur's response to the question, "Why should reading the Bible make me behave differently?"[5] Ricoeur himself phrased the question in the following terms, "The problem I want to pose is that of how the entirely original configuration of the biblical scriptures can refigure the self", a question which he then rephrases as "How does the self understand itself in contemplating itself in the mirror held out to it by this book?"[6]

[5] William Schweiker asks, "Is responsiveness to the Word basic to Ricoeur's moral reflection? Does it in fact warrant a shift in his perspective on the human? Does it actually alter our understanding of the appearance of moral identity?" in William Schweiker, "Imagination, Violence and Hope: A Theological Response to Ricoeur's Moral Philosophy" in David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Meanings in Texts and Actions : Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, Studies in religion and culture (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 219-220.

[6] Paul Ricoeur, "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures" in *The Whole and Divided Self: The Bible and Theological Anthropology*, ed. by David E. Aune and John McCarthy, (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997), p. 205.

Walking with Ricoeur

Ricoeur was a prolific writer on philosophy and scripture, but my work begins with *Oneself as Another* which is widely acknowledged to be the finest of Ricoeur's achievements, drawing together many of the themes which interested him throughout his long life. David Vessey comments in a review:

> Oneself as Another *reads like a work late in a career. Some discussions are extremely truncated, with footnotes sending the reader off to other books written by Ricoeur; other discussions—new engagements with new themes or new thinkers—are meticulously spelled out. It's as if one were accompanying an experienced botanist on a nature walk, some plants seen over and over are past by briefly, while others bring the tour to an abrupt halt, sometimes even leaving the path to explore something not seen before eventually returning to the main stream more enriched (though not always clear why that particular detour was the detour you just took).* [7]

One quickly discovers how astute Vessey's description is: it is impossible to appreciate the arguments of *Oneself as Another* without recourse to Ricoeur's earlier work and it is often helpful to read later pieces in which he reiterates the themes of *Oneself as Another* in more discursive and generous ways. As for the book: it begins as a book about the self and ends as a book about ethics; it is a work of philosophy which takes the limits of philosophy seriously; it is a book based on a series of lectures which deliberately omits the lectures examining the same themes from a biblical perspective. The curious explorer realises that the guide is not interested only in philosophical topics, but in religious ones and so another horizon opens up ahead.

[7] David Vessey, 'The Polysemy of Otherness: On Ricoeur's Oneself as Another ', in *Ipseity and Alterity: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intersubjectivity*, ed. by Shaun Gallagher, vols (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen, 2002).

This thesis is structured in an attempt to create a way through Ricoeur's landscape which allows us to appreciate its breadth before becoming increasingly focused in a particular area of interest. We begin with a broad sweep of the most important routes and landmarks, described in Chapter Two. We then look in more detail at the areas of anthropology, hermeneutics and ethics, noting that similar features appear along the dual pathways of philosophy and religion, in Chapters Three to Six. Ricoeur concludes with a description of the self which is characterised neither by Cartesian confidence nor by Nietzschean despair. While the Cogito does not remain coherently intact, it has not been totally shattered.[8] The seeker examining the mirror of nature or philosophy is invited to reflect on his or her own identity with some confidence in its narrative unity. Individuals seek the good life "*with and for others, in just institutions.*"[9]

However, aporias remain, especially when ethical questions come to mind: Who will authenticate the good life? Whose voice is heard offering judgement deep in the heart of the self? The seeker looking in the mirror of scripture finds a plethora of testimonies; narratives, hymns, visions, offering an existential choice: Will you live like this? Those who take the wager (for Ricoeur it is never more than that) testify to a new understanding of identity – as summoned selves who inhabit a new world and a different economy. There is a body of work which attempts to suggest that Ricoeur offers religious answers to philosophical questions and I offer a critique of this approach. My own response has been to accept the aporias, although not uncritically, and to adopt a methodology which, I believe, is closer to Ricoeur's own, which is to return to the hermeneutic task. The final chapters of this thesis are a more speculative attempt to build on Ricoeur's foundations.

[8] René Descartes' phrase Cogito ergo sum, "I think therefore I am" suggests that it is the existence of thought that proves the reality of being.
[9] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172.

Walking on two legs

Ricoeur was not a systematician; he always seems pleasantly surprised when his students are able to show the patterns and threads in his work, as for example in his response to the introduction to a series of essays:

> *Lewis S. Mudge attempts to provide the reader with a coherent overview of my writings. It is precisely this attempt which requires my heartily felt thanks, because I am unable to draw such a sketch on my own, both because I am always drawn forward by a new problem to wrestle with and because, when I happen to look backward to my work, I am more struck by the discontinuities of my wanderings than by the cumulative character of my work.* [10]

Ricoeur's approach, as he describes it, is always to head straight for the next aporia and tackle that, rather than to take a systematic plan or set out a programme. This, it must be said, makes him both delightful and frustrating to read, as one is never sure whether one is on a main highway or simply heading up a track for a quick look at the view. It also means that one must read Ricoeur with a sharp sense of the hermeneutic task, for each point can only be fully understood in relation to the whole. The importance of hermeneutics for Ricoeur, and of Ricoeur's work for the whole field of hermeneutics, cannot be overestimated in my view. It is in this area that his interests in philosophy and scripture come closest to one another. Indeed it is arguable that his description of hermeneutics grew out of his work on the interpretation of biblical texts published in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation.*[11] Ricoeur was personally open

[10] Paul Ricoeur and Lewis Seymour Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1981), p. 41.
see also Ricoeur's response to John B. Thompson's introduction to his work, "*The perspective which he proposes corrects the inverse impression, to which I have a tendency to succumb: that of a certain lack of continuity in my writings. For each work responds to a determinate challenge, and what connects it to its predecessors seems to me to be less the steady development of a unique project that the acknowledgement of a residue left over by the previous work, a residue which gives rise in turn to a new challenge*." Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge ; New York, Paris: Cambridge University Press ;Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1981), p. 32.
[11] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*.

about his dual allegiance. Asked about reconciling philosophy and religious reflection he responded:

> *It seems to me that however far back I go in the past I have always walked on two legs. It is not only for methodological reasons that I do not mix genres, it is because I insist on affirming a twofold reference which is absolutely primary for me.*[12]

The origins of Ricoeur's decision to maintain a separation between the genres may be threefold. First, he writes of the confusion he experienced when he first encountered both critical philosophy and the theology of Karl Barth. Both challenged the assumptions of his pietistic protestant upbringing.[13] Secondly, his foundational training was shaped in France where theology was almost exclusively taught in Roman Catholic Seminaries, and philosophy in the universities.[14] Thirdly, he engaged in public debate in France during a time of extreme iconoclasm which may well have led him to be cautious of exposing his personal faith to critical opprobrium.[15] *Oneself as Another* is a work of "autonomous philosophical discourse" from which "the convictions that bind me to biblical faith" are bracketed out. Ricoeur is concerned both to defend his philosophy from accusations of "cryptotheology" and to refrain from assigning a "cryptophilosophical" function to faith. He concludes: "It is one thing to answer a question, in the sense of solving a problem that is posed; it is quite another to respond to a call…"[16]

However, now that we can look at the whole of his life, it appears that this separation, most clearly expressed in the period when his work was focussed on hermeneutics was exaggerated by some factors. Recently commentators have noticed the links between Ricoeur's earliest work and his much later writings. Peter Kenny describes "phases" of religious writing in Ricoeur's output and, citing Olivier Mongin, suggests that Ricoeur was comfortable with his dual allegiances in the period up to around 1970 and that it was only when he was labelled as a

---

[12] Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction : Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 139.
[13] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Lewis Edwin Hahn, The library of living philosophers v. 22, (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 5.
[14] I am grateful to Dr Alison Milbank for this observation and insight.
[15] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 17.
[16] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 24-25.

"cryptotheologist" by secular philosophers that he became more rigorous in separating his philosophical themes from his religious convictions. After his retirement, Ricoeur was able to return to religious themes, publishing a work of biblical exegesis with André LaCocque, and taking a more relaxed position towards biblical faith.[17]

Ricoeur's writing on religious themes is more or less restricted to work on biblical texts and it might be fair to say that he is a phenomenologist of faith rather than a theologian or apologist. It is perhaps a little unfair to go as far as Boyd Blundell in describing Ricoeur as an "amateur biblical hermeneuticist" or a "weekend exegete" given his teaching in the theology faculty at Chicago.[18] Ricoeur's main preoccupation is to show that faith is possible and rational, within the limits of reason alone. For this reason he generally avoids the language of revelation, which he considers a concept which is too often reduced to inspiration, and he is concerned to show that scripture is more than simply kerygma, or proclamation, but includes a call to reflection: interpretation of the manifestations of God.[19] Ricoeur asks how biblical texts impact on their readers and the conditions necessary for readers to both understand the text and integrate its meaning into life, because for him this *is* revelation.[20]

[17] *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny, (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2004), p. 93. Kenny refers to Olivier Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984), p. 205.See also Ricoeur's discussion of ontotheology in André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 331-361. A similar point is made by Richard Kearney in "Capable Man, Capable God" in *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Brian Treanor and Henry Isaac Venema, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 58.
[18] Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 4.
[19] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 149.
[20] Paul Ricoeur "Towards a Hermeneutic of Revelation" in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation.*

If we live like this, has revelation occurred?

Drawing heavily on Ricoeur, Rowan Williams suggests that a simple question arises from our encounter with scripture; "If we live like this, has revelation occurred?"[21]

Williams starts with Ricoeur's protest against Barth's account of revelation, which in its insistence on the absolute freedom and initiative of God, omits to question the nature of a creature who is capable of receiving, or responding to, God's initiative. Barth's "short cut" does not give full weight to the role of human reflection and appropriation in the process. As Williams recognises, Ricoeur's attentiveness to interpretation and learning takes anthropology seriously while protecting God's sovereignty. It is God who takes the initiative in a text which embodies or displays a world which we are invited to inhabit: a world which "breaks open and extends our own possibilities".[22]

Three key concepts contribute to Ricoeur's view of revelation. Firstly, God takes the initiative, by making an invitation rather than issuing a command. While such an account of revelation challenges human autonomy it does not impose simple heteronomy. Secondly, revelation has "generative power" creating a new kind of community and a new kind of people.[23] Finally, revelation "occurs as part of the process whereby a community takes cognisance of its own distinctive identity. It constitutes a concept of God for itself by asking what it is that constitutes itself."[24]

This account of revelation is not a lifting of the veil, nor a paralysing theophany, nor a blinding experience, but rather an encounter which engages the imagination and invites response. It is

[21] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000), p. 135.
[22] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 133.
[23] Williams draws on Gottwald's argument that we can only isolate an Old Testament doctrine of God through attending to the social structures of Israel.Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yaweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (London: SCM, 1979).
[24] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 135.

the response which provides the clue to the authenticity of the revelation, at the heart of Ricoeur's understanding: " ' If we live like this, has revelation occurred?'"[25]

Three questions arise from William's analysis. Firstly, questions of autonomy and anthropology are raised by the challenge of God's radical creativity. How do we reconcile human freedom and the human will to the image of an omnipotent God? In the words of the psalmist, "What are human beings that God is mindful of them?"[26] Secondly, there are questions about ontology and truth. How will we know whether revelation is authentic while we acknowledge that our struggle is located within the hermeneutic spiral which gives due attention to the need for suspicion of our own motives and those of the community? Finally, there are questions about the kind of individuals and communities called into being by revelation: how will the confession, "Jesus is Lord" shape behaviour and attitudes; what is the nature of Christian ethics?

When these questions have been considered we will return to the identity of the summoned self. What do we see in the mirror of scripture? What kind of people are those who have responded to the invitation? How do they behave? What motivates them? What influences their judgement? The wheel turns, and an investigation into Christian anthropology and ethics becomes once again a task in hermeneutics.

[25] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 135.
[26] Psalm 8:5 NRSV

The Route from Philosophy to Hermeneutics

When he began his life's work, Ricoeur's intention was to write a Philosophy of the Will. In doing so he was motivated as much by his interest in the problem of sin and guilt as by his concern for the philosophical problem of freedom and nature: the voluntary and the involuntary. Drawing on the work of Heidegger, Marcel and Jaspers he wants to show that philosophy is always dependent on something that precedes it, something given; perhaps life, being or reality. The task of philosophy is to make intelligible something that already *is*, in this case the tension between the given conditions of existence for humans and their sense of freedom and choice. He concludes that the given conditions include limits to the choices we can make. We cannot grasp or embrace everything that presents itself; hidden forces over which we have no control, such as bodily needs and unconscious desires; and suffering, which "reintroduces the body to the Cogito" and exposes its exteriority, vulnerability and contingency, subject to time and limited by death.[27] Faced with these truths we have the freedom not to consent to life: suicide is an option from which life and consent to life must be wrested. For Ricoeur, consent does not refute necessity but transcends it. We can consent to life stoically, or creatively – embracing existence in all its mystery. However, our consent can never be unreserved because of the scandal of evil.[28]

Characteristically, when Ricoeur turns to the problem of evil, he begins by asking about the ontology that makes evil possible. He explores the fallibility inherent in human nature and concludes that it is inevitable, given the dialectic tension between the finite and the infinite in human selfhood. However, when he turns to the lived experience of fault, his philosophy takes a significant turn to hermeneutics. Ricoeur does not engage with hermeneutics in order to understand texts but in order to learn about human life. The trajectory of his thought turns towards hermeneutics when he discovers that "the bad will" finds its originary expression in symbol and myth not speculative philosophy. From this period in Ricoeur's work came many

[27] Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary*, trans. by Erazim V. Kohak, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.,: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 451.
[28] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 466.

of his most influential ideas, building on the heritage of Husserl, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, his approach to texts combines both critical reflection and an affirmation of meaning – including the role of language in creating new possibilities. His study of hermeneutics was enriched by engagement with Freud, with structuralism and with speech-act theory.

The outcome of Ricoeur's turn to hermeneutics is an anthropology in which persons understand themselves in terms of "narrative identity". Ricoeur says that our own existence cannot be separated from the account we can give of ourselves:

> *It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves, it makes little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with an identity*.[29]

In *Oneself as Another,* Ricoeur suggests that narratives are not only descriptive but *prescriptive* as through a process of emplotment we make sense of events in the past, and through a similar process of emplotment which we might call *poetics* we imagine a future we might inhabit or in which we might act. We are pulled forward in the hope of living well. The ethical dimension to narrative identity is summarised as "the examined life" in which "the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and one's own acts become the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well."[30] As attractive as it is, Ricoeur's account of narrative identity is built on assumptions about capacity and capability which can appear to constrain our definitions of what it means to be selves. It is in this context that the role of the community must be stressed – perhaps particularly in the shared reading of particular texts and shared performance of identity.

[29] "History as Narrative and Practice", interview with Paul Ricoeur by Peter Kemp, *Philosophy Today,* Fall 1985, p. 219 cited in Maddison, G.B. *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity, Figures and Themes,* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989) p. 95
[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180.

If narratives in the widest sense play their part in shaping human identity, then it stands to reason that the biblical narratives will play their part in shaping Christian identity. But this banal description of the role of the Bible implies that it has no more impact than any cultural classic and there are some critics, Kevin Vanhoozer among them, who consider that Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics should offer a fuller explanation of revelation than this.[31] Vanhoozer is concerned to preserve a sense of historic reference in the biblical narratives. Ricoeur insists that texts have a real reference, which is neither the world of the author nor the world of the reader, but the world "in front of the text" which opens up new possibilities for those who read. He appeals to Heidegger in suggesting that the text embodies a trace which guarantees its connection to past historic events. However, Ricoeur's real focus is on the world of new possibility, the unique referent of the texts, which he identifies as the Kingdom of God. To encounter the Kingdom of God is to become aware of the summons, or invitation, to live in the Kingdom: to live as if revelation has occurred. This choice is, for Ricoeur, always a risk and a wager which will rest on conviction rather than proof. It is a choice which leads not only to particular courses of action but to actions which in themselves become testimonies to that conviction.

The desire to live according to one's convictions is common to all who seek the good life. Individuals desire to live authentic lives, in which they are true to themselves and demonstrate care for others. Philosophically speaking, this requires a means of judgement, for which Ricoeur uses a term borrowed from Heidegger: attestation. Attestation is the conviction of living well, for and with others. It is an epistemological category which cannot be proved by critical means, but only lived with conviction. Although attestation is a philosophical category it is related to the religious category of testimony, that form of conviction in which people give an account of events which they have witnessed or in which they have participated, often with profound effects on their self-understanding. If testimony refers to single events, attestation concerns the whole life project. The relationship between them is strongly identified with faith – in which the experience of revelation is proclaimed (witness is given) and lived out.

[31] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur : A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Travelling Well: Morality and Ethics on the way

Ricoeur's account of narrative identity concludes with beings who not only narrate, but act and suffer. The shaping of identity is dependent on others, individuals and communities, and this immediately lends an ethical dimension to existence. Ricoeur explores this ethical dimension in *Oneself as Another* in a mediation between Aristotelian ethics and Kantian morals. The ethical aim is incorporated into the paradigm of narrative identity through the tales of virtuous men and women, heroes and saints, the exemplar of good lives we aspire to imitate. However, aiming for the good life alone does not inoculate us against poor judgement, lack of knowledge, or selfishness, and so our judgements must be tested against moral norms, universalised in the Kantian imperatives. Aiming for the good, sieved through the moral norm, the best we can hope to achieve, having deliberated, is contingent practical wisdom to which Ricoeur gives the Aristotelian term; *phronēsis*.

Characteristically, Ricoeur does not conclude *Oneself as Another* on a triumphal note, but with a reminder of the limitations of human wisdom and a series of aporias that his anthropology faces. Confidence in human capacity is deflated by the tragic reality of life, reintroducing the themes of frailty and fault. Tragic wisdom enables us to move beyond the paralysis of moral conflict in the belief that some kind of action is possible even when we have no conviction that we have "deliberated well". Finally, Ricoeur returns to the problem of freedom and the will, this time couched in a discussion of autonomy and responsibility, as he struggles to balance care for the other with care for the self. Faced with the other, do we feel a duty of care heard as an injunction, or an empathetic identification heard as an invitation to love? He acknowledges that conscience, understood as the organ of discernment or the voice of judgement, is limited as a philosophical concept because it will not help us to identify the source of this voice.

Philosophical discourse ends with the aporia of the Other, and Ricoeur draws a line under the question of attestation and the good life. At the beginning of the quest, he has bracketed out the place of ethics in the summoned life, asserting that:

> *Even on the ethical and moral plane, biblical faith adds nothing to the predicates 'good' and 'obligatory' as these are applied to action. Biblical* agapē *belongs to an economy of the gift, possessing a metaethical character, which makes me say that there is no such thing as a Christian morality […] but a common morality […] that biblical faith places in a new perspective, in which love is tied to the 'naming of God'.*[32]

Without conflating the two disciplines, I shall observe that duty and virtue are both represented in the scriptures and play their part in the "naming of God" reframed as "the logic of equivalence" and the "logic of abundance". They act as mutual correctives, although Ricoeur does not offer an equivalent to *phronēsis* in the economy of the gift. This lacuna has been addressed by David Hall, who offers the "poetic imperative"- a paradigm closely related to theonomy.[33] In this thesis, Hall's solution is rejected in favour of that offered by John Wall's category of "moral creativity" which offers a more open ended striving towards the impossible possibility of a Kingdom where love and justice are reconciled.[34] Wall retains a sense of dialectic tension in his description of moral creativity which acts as a prolegomena to my final two chapters.

This work is not unusual in attempting to explore the relationship between Ricoeur's philosophical and theological writings. It sits within, and builds on, a significant body of work. David Hall helpfully characterises two approaches to this interface in Ricoeur's work as

---

[32] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 25. We should note that Ricoeur uses "metaethical" and "supraethical" as equivalent terms, to mean "beyond ethics" rather than "the sphere in which ethics exist".
[33] W. David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative : The Creative Tension between Love and Justice*, SUNY series in theology and continental thought (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
[34] John Wall, *Moral Creativity,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

apologetic and *poetic*. The apologists, he suggests, see Ricoeur's philosophy as a resource for exploring Christian identity and to defend an "orthodox" view of Christianity within a postmodern situation. Hall places Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Kevin Vanhoozer, Dan Stiver and James Fodor in this camp, noting that in each case, while appreciating the contribution that Ricoeur makes to biblical hermeneutics these writers question the priority that Ricoeur gives to philosophy over theology. Broadly speaking these "neo-Barthians" find Ricoeur's description of biblical texts as poetic, metaphorical and analogical, insufficiently robust as a description of the Word of God. Hall, rightly in my view, observes that at times these writers seem to be appropriating Ricoeur's work rather than genuinely articulating his actual position.[35]

The second approach is to take Ricoeur's philosophical work as a starting point for a refreshed exploration of biblical symbols. Into this *poetic* category Hall places himself, together with David Klemm, William Schweiker, Richard Kearney, and John Wall. These writers take seriously Ricoeur's insistence on the surplus of meaning in symbols, which encourages us to engage continuously with religious texts, provoking "further detours of interpretation on the way to understanding the truth of the ambiguity we are."[36] Ricoeur's open ended curiosity and determination to avoid totalising systems creates the potential for all manner of explorations and experiments. As his friend and translator, David Pellauer has written, "His death […] leaves us with work to do ourselves based on what he was able to accomplish."[37]

This thesis is not a critical reflection on Ricoeur's theology, perhaps because I am temperamentally unsuited to Christian apologetics; neither is it a work of theological or philosophical speculation, though I have been enriched by those who have undertaken that task, particularly by the work of Richard Kearney, John Wall and David Ford. Rather it has turned out to be a modest and exploratory exercise in hermeneutics, somewhat in the manner of Ricoeur's own theological writings. There is nothing startlingly new here, but rather a refiguration of familiar themes which perhaps allows us to see them in unfamiliar ways.

[35] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, pp. 8-9.
[36] Klemm and Schweiker, *Meaning in Texts and Actions*, p. 4.
[37] David Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the perplexed (London ; New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 1.

Two More Horizons

When faced with the question; "Who am I?" Ricoeur answers, "Always more than one thing". We are both *ipse* and *idem*, both the self and the other. But we are not divided; rather we are complex creatures who can only understand ourselves through the mediation of signs. In Christian theology we also understand ourselves to be divided: we are both fallen and saved.

Failing to reconcile the characteristics of the self, both fallible and capable, we return instead to the biblical texts to discover more about the way that God deals with fallen and restored humanity. Salvation is revealed not only through the direct promises God makes to his people through the prophets, but in the indirect promise of the hyperbolic extravagant language of the parables and the Kingdom sayings. In each case the context of the promise is often the realisation of human creatureliness, which I suggest is an inherently comic business. The genre of comedy restores hope to the protagonists, who find that they are able to get to their feet even after the world and its materiality have defeated them.

By contrast, other biblical texts, in particular the book of Job and the parables of descent, address men and women in their over-confident sense of capacity. Pride comes before a fall, not a mere slip on a banana skin, but a descent into tragic horror. Tragedy engenders a new kind of wisdom, related to *phronēsis*, but chastised by suffering. However, having set up comic and tragic genres as dialectic poles, we should not be surprised to discover that there is an interdependence or necessary tension between them. In the Jesus narrative the tragic victim is revealed, not only as the embodiment of eschatological hope but as the source and wellspring of forgiveness.

CHAPTER TWO: Development of Ricoeur's Thought

In following the direction of Ricoeur's thought one cannot trace the growth of one overarching theory or single idea. Looking back over seventy years of work, Ricoeur himself saw no systematic plan, but rather a series of recurring threads, themes and questions.[1] As one follows Ricoeur on his intellectual journey one has a sense of arriving from time to time at a junction, where the path diverges and new prospects and new horizons beckon; although the path often returns to familiar landscapes some paths are never taken and some landmarks are abandoned far behind. At times, it seems that external events influenced the decision to take a particular path; so for example, Ricoeur's departure from France in 1970 coincides with his break from structuralism. At other times one feels that despite Ricoeur's curiosity and openness he loses interest in certain lines of enquiry and abandons paths to take new routes.

It is possible to see key landmarks in the development of Ricoeur's thought from his initial philosophical exploration of the problem of the self, through the turn to hermeneutics, to the culmination of his work in ethics. This chapter attempts to indentify and describe those key landmarks so that the reader can be orientated for the rest of the discussion. We see how Ricoeur's interest in hermeneutics arises from the desire to understand the place of symbols of evil, stain and guilt in the experience of the "bad will". The double meaning of the symbol is also present in language in the form of metaphor, so both symbol and metaphor "give rise to thought" which creates new meaning. The same creative capacity is present in narrative which humans use to shape their lives. In exploring narrative identity, Ricoeur came to see how the relationship between action and suffering shapes our desire for the "good life, for and with others in just institutions".[2]

[1] Paul Ricoeur "Intellectual Biography" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, pp. 3-53.
[2] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172.

Ricoeur claimed, "No one is interested in my life.[…] My life is my work, I mean, my books and my articles."[3] This seems a disengenuous remark from a writer concerned with narrative identity. Ricoeur's work offers a rich description of the way that humans interpret life experiences and try to create a coherent and integrated narrative through that process. In the circumstances, it does not seem unreasonable to consider the impact of life experiences on Ricoeur's thought, for this reason reference is made to some biographical incidents in the following account of the development of his thought.

In the Beginning

Ricoeur's Christian faith was rooted in childhood experience. He was born in 1913 in Valence in France. His mother died while he was an infant and his father was killed during the first World War, so Paul and his sister, Alice were brought up by their grandparents in Rennes. It was a devout protestant household in which church going and bible reading played a significant part in life. Paul was a keen student, who showed early devotion to his studies by reading the text books for the coming academic year during the Summer holiday. He and his sister were enthusiastic members of the scouting movement, as was Alice's friend Simone Lejas, to whom Ricoeur became engaged at the age of eighteen in 1931.

The clash between faith and intellect began early and Ricoeur's first encounters with critical philosophy was so unsettling that he chose instead to read classical languages at the University of Rennes.[4] It was only when challenged to confront the source of his discomfort that he switched to the study of philosophy and began to engage in "an internecine war […] between faith and reason." He wrote his master's thesis on the *Problem of God in Lachelier and Lagneau*, deriving intellectual satisfaction from working on philosophers who granted a place for God in their philosophy without attempting to make an amalgamation between philosophy

[3] Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur : His Life and his Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.
[4] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 5.

and biblical faith. This "armistice" between the two disciplines would remain for the rest of Ricoeur's life.[5]

Ricoeur was introduced to the existential phenomenology which would form the foundation of his philosophic method in 1934 when he moved to the Sorbonne and met Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) who encouraged his students to treat a subject without recourse to the established authorities, basing their analysis solely on experiences that were either ordinary or puzzling - such as promises or the feeling of injustice.

Ricoeur had a lifelong dislike of violence which led to a struggle with the ethics of pacifism. His father's death in 1915 seemed to be rendered futile by the cruel injustice of the Versailles treaty. [6] Ricoeur wrote "…this doubt concerning the meaning of the death of my father gave my first pacifist convictions an extremely deep emotional character which I have never overcome."[7] Following his marriage in 1935 Ricoeur taught philosophy at the lycée in Colmar, Alsace and after a year of compulsory military service returned to teaching in Loriat, Brittany. His Christian faith, associated Christian Socialism and pacifism were reflected in a number of articles he published during this period.

Ricoeur was called up at the outbreak of the Second World War, only to endure many months of idleness during the "phoney war" until he saw active service in for a brief period in May 1940. Although during this period he was awarded the Croix de Guerre, he never wore the award or spoke about it.[8] Shortly afterwards, on 7th June 1940, he was taken prisoner. At first the regime was harsh, but gradually greater freedoms were conceded and Ricoeur was billeted with other teachers and intellectuals who were able to share books obtained from the Red Cross. During his incarceration Ricoeur continued his studies and confided in his former teacher Marcel that he was planning a major work of philosophy. When Ricoeur and his companions were moved to Arnswald in 1942 the conditions were even more favourable,

[5] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 6.
[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 8.
[7] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 127.
[8] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 8.

inmates were able to run classes for one another, and even to listen to the BBC on a radio constructed from parts smuggled into the camp. In January 1945 the prisoners were evacuated from the camp in the face of allied advances. They spent the next few months moving by rail or road and billeted in farms until they were liberated. Finally, in May 1945 Ricoeur was reunited with his wife and children, the youngest of whom, his five-year-old daughter, he had never seen.

Ricoeur and his family spent the years immediately after the war in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a town in the Massif Central in Southern France. The town, which Ricoeur characterised as a place of "militant pacifism"[9] had offered refuge to thousands of Jews fleeing the Nazi genocide, housing and educating Jewish children in the protestant Collège Cévenol, where Ricoeur now arrived to take up a teaching post. During the next few years Ricoeur was able to complete and publish the works he had begun while in prison, a translation of the works of Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and the first volume of his Phenomenology of the Will, *Le Voluntaire et l'involuntaire.*[10]

[9] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 19.
[10] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*.

The Phenomenology of the Will:Freedom and Nature

For Ricoeur, philosophy begins with subjective embodied experience, directly challenging Descartes' claim to establish the foundation of human existence through the primacy of thought. Ricoeur would argue that the Cogito: "I think, therefore I am", can neither be raised to the heights of "first truth" nor dismissed as illusion, but must be subject to rigorous questioning, to which he would return repeatedly in the course of his long life.

He began with two kinds of questions, ontological and ethical. Ontologically, the Cogito creates a dualism between the self as subject and the self as object: raising questions as to the identity, reality and validity of each term in the phrase. Ontologically, if the subject can be known only as an object, the subject becomes an empty signifier; does the knower know himself *as* a subject or only as an object and are subjective and objective knowledge different kinds of knowing? Ethically, questions arise concerning one subject's knowledge or *recognition* of another. What value is placed on other humans and how are they recognized, if all we see are objects? From the beginning Ricoeur was concerned as much with ethics as ontology, and with themes of capability and responsibility. His approach was influenced by his teacher Marcel, by the work of Jaspers, and by his contemporary, Merleau-Ponty. [11]

Ricoeur felt that as Merleau-Ponty was addressing the topic of the phenomenology of perception, he should explore the phenomenology of action. Having considered first the issue of determinism and the will, Ricoeur chose in particular to examine the practical problem of the voluntary and the involuntary.

[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) published *Phénomènologie de la perception* in 1945. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1962).

For Ricoeur, this was not only a philosophical problem, but one with a theological dimension, as he explained:

> *I had long admired Luther's treatise on the servile will, On Christian Freedom, as well as the great discussion in which he confronts Erasmus. Then the political context came to reinforce my orientation in the direction of these questions of freedom, evil and responsibility. Even earlier, I believe that I felt great admiration for Greek tragedy, which puts the problem of destiny in the foreground. Nor would I deny the influence on me of my formative training the Calvinist theology of predestination. The choice of my special area of study, the voluntary and the involuntary, is therefore strongly overdetermined.*[12]

Ricoeur began to examine the problem of freedom and nature by showing that "to will" demands not one impulse but three: "first 'I decide', secondly 'I move my body', thirdly 'I consent'.[13] The relationship among them is both dependent and independent. To decide, one must believe one has capacity. However, a decision without an action is unreal, hence the importance of action. Only once the action has been performed may one consider the motives involved. Ricoeur denies that a motive is a cause since it can only be considered in retrospect. Questioning one's motives completes the action. For the act to be voluntary, the will must consent to the act.

In this first important book, Ricoeur employs the dialectic method he would use throughout his life. He does not seek to find the synthesis between dialectic poles but to show the absolute necessity of each pole existing in tension with the other. The voluntary and the involuntary must both exist, in inevitable tension, since without one we cannot recognise the other.

The same inevitable tension is found in the experience of the self. Ricoeur draws on the work of Marcel to argue for the importance of embodied experience, in contrast to Descartes' view

[12] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 27.
[13] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 6.

of the body divided from the cogito as another object in the world. He argues that it is too easy to say that the body appears once as a subject, secondly as an object, or more exactly the first time as the body of a subject and the second time as an empirical object: we experience ourselves both *as* bodies and as located *in* bodies. [14] Ricoeur argued that at one pole, "I need to think of my body as myself, that is to say, as reciprocal with the willing which I am,"[15] while at the other pole, our bodies restrict our freedom by making demands which lead us to question whether any embodied act can be freely chosen. These themes are important because they reappear when we come to consider questions of responsibility in ethics.

Another theme is the possibility of innovation or creative freedom, which is explored through motives, habits and character: the embodied patterns which make freedom possible. Ricoeur shows how the "involuntary" needs of the body gain meaning only as they are taken up into the self's own "voluntary" search for meaning and being. The body is a component of the will because it is not merely a tool or instrument of the self, but part of the self's intentionality: its mode of being itself in the world.[16] This sense of "being" as a project of "being-in-the-world" is clearly influenced by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) whose trace can be seen in several strands of Ricoeur's thought. Ricoeur sees the project orientated towards authenticity, understood as a striving towards an authentic sense of self.[17] Just as the self is embodied, it is also situated and cannot be separated from the world. We cannot observe the world as if we stood outside it, nor can the world be reduced to a purely subjective experience as if it existed only in our heads as we construct it.[18] We are "thrown" into the world, which results in the "giveness" of existence and in the strange phenomenon of existence-before-knowing (the state we are in at the moment of our own birth, when we have a sense of being alive before we know ourselves). Ricoeur is careful to remind the reader, "my life is in no sense an object which presents itself […] in experiencing my life, I possess the very centre of perspective."[19]

---

[14] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 12.
[15] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 31.
[16] John Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 28
[17] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 62. citing Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York,: Harper, 1962), p. H 191.
[18] This marks Ricoeur's separation from the radical subjectivity of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, which replaced the cogito with the existential claim, "what I experience is all that is real".
[19] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 411.

Typically, Ricoeur attempts to mediate between Descartes' objectivity and the existentialists' radical subjectivity.

Ricoeur confessed he was reading Heidegger through "Jasperian glasses". In 1947, he had published the fruits of his war-time reading in collaboration with his fellow prisoner Mikel Dufrenne - a commentary on Jaspers' three volume *Philosophy.* Ricoeur's contribution to the book focussed on Jaspers' concept of limit situations – death, suffering, war and evil - and on the role of symbolic language in describing the experience of transcendence.[20] Jaspers had identified these limit experiences as experiences which point beyond the subject-object model to that which "transcends" them: experiences that reveal the limits of the model but are not adequate to describe what happens beyond it. It is crucial to appreciate Ricoeur's understanding of transcendence and limit in the light of Jaspers' thought, because there is a subtle difference between Kant and Jaspers in this regard: while for Kant limit ideas are "regulatory and not constitutive", for Jaspers they are constitutive and permissive. [21] At the end of *Freedom and Nature* Ricoeur wrote; "A genuine Transcendence is more than a limit concept: it is a *presence* which brings about a true revolution in the theory of subjectivity. It introduces into it a radically new dimension, the *poetic* dimension."[22] This is a theme which will recur throughout this thesis as Ricoeur's philosophy encounters limit experiences and in doing so returns to the creative poetic power of symbol and its interpretative demands.

Kant (1724-1804) argued that if we are free, as we believe or experience ourselves to be, we must be able to initiate an action and to do something novel spontaneously. Yet, science says that nature is ruled by cause and effect. In *Freedom and Nature*, Ricoeur takes the Kantian arguments and reformulates them, principally to counter Kant's denigration of affect with an insistence of the influence of feelings or motives on the action of the will.[23] The importance of

[20] Mikel Dufrenne and Paul Ricoeur, *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'Existence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1947).
[21] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 484. Also note that Ricoeur is more prepared perhaps than Jaspers to identify the Transcendent with God.
[22] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 486.
[23] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 130.

embodied experience is reflected in Ricoeur's critique of Husserl.[24] Husserl approached the problem of the subject from the perspective of experience, attempting to describe things "as they really are" while leaving on one side (bracketing out) the existence of the subject – that was simply to be taken for granted. Husserl recognises that "all consciousness is a consciousness of…", so creates a third term between the subject and object of Descartes' Cogito. While Ricoeur absorbed Husserl's insistence that consciousness cannot be separated from its object, he was not prepared simply to bracket out consciousness in itself, because of the emphasis which he placed on the embodied nature of consciousness.[25] Ricoeur argued that the self cannot be observed except through the actions of its body, writing "acting is not parallel to 'pure thinking' but rather parallel to enjoying, suffering, seeing: they are all the limit of 'pure thinking', of empty intention: they fulfil it."[26]

Ricoeur's exploration of the will through its components of *decision, action* and *consent*, concludes that we have freedom, but that it is "*only* human" and reaches a complete understanding of itself only with respect to some limit concepts. It is *motivated,* but our motivations are not fully available to us, they are neither transparent nor absolutely rational. It is *incarnate*, limited by our bodies, although we are given a vision of the body's potential for "gracious freedom". It is *contingent* because there is reciprocity between freedom and nature.[27] The Cogito is "broken up within itself"[28] but paradoxically this separation helps us to understand so much more by opening up different dimensions of the self. This will become one of the central themes of his later work.

In 1948 Ricoeur began teaching the history of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, a post which he held until 1955 when he received an invitation to teach at the Sorbonne. He

[24] Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenology, 1859-1938. Ricoeur had translated the *Ideen* as part of his doctoral submission, Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomeology und phänomenologischen Philosophie* first published 1913.
[25] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 219.
[26] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 206. citing Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* (Halle, 1922)
[27] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 484ff.
[28] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 14.

described his time at Strasbourg as "very happy years, the best I have ever known."[29] He settled into a pleasant routine of teaching and family life, returning to his childhood habit of spending the long summer holiday reading and studying in preparation for the term ahead. Ricoeur commuted between Strasbourg and Paris, but in 1957 the family were able to move into an apartment in a communally owned property in the Paris suburb of Chatenay-Malabry. The co-operative which owned Les Murs Blancs had been gathered around the catholic writer, Emmanuel Mounier, founder of the pacifist socialist journal *Esprit.* Ricoeur retained his pacifist and left-wing sympathies, voicing his opposition to the government during the war with Algeria – a position which led to his being arrested and subsequently held under house arrest for some weeks in the Summer of 1961. During this period Ricoeur was highly respected in France, he was widely read and quoted, and hundreds of students were attracted to his lectures. Charles Reagan comments that at this time Ricoeur was "well known as a man of courage and moral integrity."[30]

[29] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 20.
[30] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 25.

The Phenomenology of the Will:Fallibility and Evil

The second part of the Phenomenology of the Will was published in two parts: *Finitude et Culpabilité I: L'homme faillible* and *Finitude et Culpabilité II: La Symbolique du Mal*.[31] Ricoeur turned to the topics he had bracketed out of his earlier study; the problem of the failure to act and the problem of the failure to consent to the action, drawing a line, this time between finitude and guilt. Two very different books resulted, the first a work of phenomenological philosophy, the second a hermeneutical survey. The change marked a decisive move in epistemology and set the trajectory for Ricoeur's future work.

Fallible Man

Fallible Man begins with the experience of sadness which humans label "failure" that Ricoeur suggests has its origin in our sense of disassociation from ourselves. Having established that the polarity between freedom and nature is necessary to human existence, he admits that the tension between the poles creates a discomfort in us. Our selves are not integrated and it is the flaw or fault line between the soul and body, or between the will and the passions, which makes us vulnerable to the possibility of evil. Charles Kebley, the translator of this book, sets it out in the following terms;

> *Ricoeur frequently uses the words* faille *(break, breach, fault), which is akin to* faillibilité*, as well as* écart *(gap, di-gression),* fêlure *(rift),* déchirement *(a tearing, torn) to describe man's existential condition. The same sense is provided by the verb 'to err' (in the sense of wandering, going astray, deviating), which is retained in aberrant and error. This book, therefore, is concerned with that which allows for the possibility of a 'rift' in man, what enables him to 'err', become divided against himself and thereby to become the 'flawed' creature.*[32]

---

[31] (Paris: Aubier, 1960) In English as Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. by Charles A. Kebley (Chicago,: Regnery, 1965), and Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by Emerson Buchanan, Religious perspectives, v. 17, 1st edn (New York,: Harper & Row, 1967).
[32] Charles A. Kebley, translator's note Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. xxxv.

Ricoeur's concern is not the actuality of evil, but the ontology which makes evil a possibility. This book, which in some ways is the most theological of his philosophical books, makes no mention of the concepts of original sin or grace but is shot through with the conviction that there is a difference between humanity's ontological condition - vulnerable but sinless - and humanity's experience of the reality of sin.

The split in human nature is located between the dual poles of the finite and the infinite, a relationship suggested by Pascal (1623-1662) and mediated once more by Kant. The infinite is associated with Kant's three Transcendental Ideas (the soul, the Kingdom and God) and, perhaps under Jaspers' influence, Ricoeur seems content to accept the place of God in a philosophical scheme, as according to Kant we are "required" to assume by our nature. Only in particular instances, for example his insistence on the role of the body and the emotions, does Ricoeur depart from Kant's perspective.

Fallibility and Fault demonstrates Ricoeur's dialectic method and thought patterns, once its structure is understood. Ricoeur begins with man's knowledge of being in the world perceived through his body. Man is able both to perceive the world and to perceive his separation from it, although his experience is limited to the experience of the body. The body also demonstrates its lack or incompleteness through the sensations of need and desire. The body's perceptions are limited to a single viewpoint; it can only take one perspective at a time

Paradoxically, it is this last limitation which opens up the possibility of infinity, the transcendent pole of the dialectic of the body. As we reflect on the limitation of the single perspective we stand outside that perspective and recognise the possibility of other viewpoints. As we do so we transgress the limits of our situation and recognise the possibility of infinite viewpoints across time and space. By opening up such possibilities we become capable of willing or intending future action, of moving beyond the limitations of the here and now. Following Kant quite closely at this point, Ricoeur suggests that imagination is the mediator or transcendental synthesis between the finite and the infinite: the immediate sensation and the capacity to act, to change; for example to see from a different perspective. Ricoeur's

innovation is to observe that imagination is made concrete through speech, naming that which is not present and making intentions concrete in promises.[33]

He also stresses the role of speech in mediating experience, contrasting speech with seeing: seeing is the immediate experience of the body whereas saying is the mediated description. Crucially for Ricoeur, they cannot exist independently. There can be no saying without seeing since only that which shows itself can be named; there can be no seeing without saying since humans mediate all their experiences through symbols and language.[34] The mediation of imagination reveals the faults in human knowing, located in our inability to grasp the transcendent and in our inability to know our own minds, except as mediated through symbols and through others.

Ricoeur turns next to the category of action and our experience of ourselves as actors, reflecting on ourselves as protagonists and observing both mutability and constancy. The possibilities of mutability are infinite, but constancy is fixed and thus finite. Ricoeur labels our experience of constancy as "character". Once again, paradoxically, it is the fixed nature of character which allows innovation, as habits and skills develop so actions become both more limited and more powerful: walking upright becomes a fixed habit, but one which opens up the possibilities of running and ballroom dancing. Just as the single viewpoint of perception creates awareness of the possibility of other viewpoints, so the fixedness of character reveals the expanse of human possibility.

The limits of human possibility are revealed in the experience of universal humanity, as those who find themselves in Heideggerian terms, "thrown" into existence, and acknowledge "the

[33] This use of the transcendent is influenced, as has been suggested, more by Karl Jaspers than Kant, because the transcendent contributes to man's understanding – becoming a positive element of his philosophy, not just a vacuum or an aporia. Ricoeur contrasts his understanding with Kant's dialectic between sensibility and understanding. Ricoeur argued that there can be no objectivity, no *a priori* meaning without sensibility. Again, we can see the influence of Marcel and Jaspers, beginning from the pre-condition of existence rather than beginning with the Cartesian premise of thought.

[34] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 38.

radically non-chosen origin of all my choices"[35] and the reality of existence, "the already-there-ness" of my character at my birth.[36] Ricoeur asks if existence is the finite or "given" pole of action, what is its ultimate goal or end: its infinite dimension? Is the ultimate goal of humanity goodness or happiness? To answer this question he mediates between Kant and Aristotle. Whereas Aristotle associates happiness with the supreme good which is man's ultimate aim, Kant sets goodness and happiness in opposition.

For Kant, humanity's goal or object is "pure practical reason", while happiness is merely the sum of pleasure, or a material principle of the faculty of desiring, which is likely to disrupt or even corrupt the search for truth. Ricoeur suggests that Kant has confused pleasure and happiness, and has not appreciated that happiness is the highest good, while pleasure is simply the fulfilment of temporary physical want. Ricoeur insists that pleasure and happiness *are* related in the experience of the "good life" because neither the body nor the emotions can be abstracted out of philosophical enquiry.

Ricoeur has now amplified Pascal's paradigm and located the finite pole of human action in the fixed, given, properties of character, and the infinite pole in the transcendent goal of happiness. He now searches for the mediating idea which he finds in Kant's definition of personhood as that which implies moral responsibility. Kant stated that the person is "a being whose existence in itself is an end"[37] there follows a moral imperative against objectifying or instrumentalizing persons. To treat oneself and others as "persons" is to take a particular moral view, which, following Kant, Ricoeur terms "respect".

Respect is an important term for Ricoeur, closely allied to "self-esteem". While Kant believes that reason influences desire, Ricoeur searches for something which will motivate us beyond pure reason: reason, he argues, allows us to judge, but does not necessarily motivate us to choose the good. Respect is the mediator between reason and desire, happiness and duty, between the finite and immediate, and the infinite and transcendent. Respect teaches us that

[35] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 62.
[36] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 63.
[37] Kant, cited Ricoeur, *Fallible Man,* p. 71.

aiming for the good gives us a sense of "the good life". The fault in "respect" is the dualism in reason. I both *obey* reason and *command* through my reason: this leads to the possibility of a split whereby I can choose not to obey my reason. Once again we find there are two locations of fallibility: my inability to be wholly myself to myself because of the fact of my internal divisions, and the disproportionality of the divisions between the finite and the infinite.

Questions arise here regarding the need or otherwise for tension or struggle in this mediation. Do we value moral decisions which come easily? Do we need to be happy in order to be good, rather than good in order to be happy? The poet Schiller implied a critical response to Kant's maxims in this verse:

> *Willingly serve I my friends, but I do it, alas with affection.*
> *Hence I am cursed with the doubt, virtue I have not attained.*
> *This is your only resource, you must stubbornly seek to abhor them*
> *Then you can do with disgust that which the law may enjoin.*[38]

For Ricoeur, the solution to this problem is found in the concept of *self*-esteem, which he finds in a mediation between desire and happiness drawn from the work of Plato. In the relationship between *epithumia* (sensual pleasure) and *eros* (intellectual pleasure or blessedness), the mediator is *thymos*: a term usually translated as "spiritedness", relating to the emotions which make us capable of harnessing our desires to our rational goals or of hijacking our intellect in the service of our desires. Thus, *thymos* is concerned not only with pride and the need for recognition but with shame and indignation. *Thymos*, suggests Ricoeur, characterises humanity because it mediates between *bios* and *logos* (living and thinking) and helps us to recognise the subjectivity of the self-conscious self while also enabling us to belong to a community. *Thymos* is, as Ricoeur puts it "the human heart and the heart's humanity"[39] and is inherently connected to the passions in the economic, political and cultural aspects of human life.

[38] cited in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007), p. 190.
[39] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 107.

Ricoeur considers how the desire for possession, power and prestige contribute to the sense of loss or fragility in human experience, but are not, in themselves, the source of radical fault. Ricoeur argues we can imagine a world in which possession would not be achieved at the expense of others and we have created myths and utopias in which this is expressed. It is only because we can imagine a world in which possession does not divide us that we can experience possession as loss.

Power arises from economic activity creating political systems in which individuals or groups gain control of the labour of others through violence or coercion. Ricoeur argues that we only experience power as evil because we understand what absolutely benign power would be like, as it is, for example, conceptualised in theology in the vision of the Kingdom of God, where there is power without violence and authority is used to educate individual freedom.[40]

Finally, Ricoeur turns to our desire for recognition and esteem. He concludes that what is recognised is our humanity and in particular humanity in and for itself. This humanity is also expressed in the kind of cultural artefacts which exist purely for themselves such as art, drama and poetry. From our desire for esteem, we recognise the division of the self, the cleavage in the heart of man, because self-esteem depends not just on the experience of the esteem of others, but of the esteem of another who is myself. As he puts it, "I believe that I am worth something in the eyes of another who approves my existence; in the extreme case, this other is myself."[41]

Once more Ricoeur insists that the pathological forms of self-esteem, whether self-overestimation or self-depreciation in all their multiple expressions, must be understood only in the light of its non-pathological "truly constitutive" form. Having established that each of the *thymic* quests has a truly constitutive benign form, Ricoeur acknowledges that we do not experience them in this form, but rather in flawed expressions. He concludes that there must be something in human ontology which makes failure possible and this is the fault, understood

[40] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 120.
[41] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 124.

either as division or tension which he has described in each of his three polarities; knowing, acting and feeling. In each case, as we have seen, it is not simply our inability to grasp the transcendent which leads to our sense of limitation or loss, but our capacity to transcend our limitations which reveals our sense of loss to us.

For Ricoeur, the fault in man is a place of least resistance, a vulnerability, which creates a space in which evil may make a home. His claim is that evil, however radical, is not primordial. Just as we see possession, power and prestige through the lens of avarice, tyranny and vainglory, it is through the lens of evil that fallibility is revealed.[42] Ricoeur concludes that man's origin (his radical state of fallibility without fault) is hidden or forgotten. Philosophy, which because of man's embodied and situated condition, he now conceives as "ethics" presupposes a "concrete man who has missed the mark"[43]

Ricoeur will reflect on humanity's lived experience of fault in a markedly different fashion.

The Symbolism of Evil

Starting from Husserl's insight that "consciousness is always consciousness of something" Ricoeur recognises that consciousness is always mediated through something else, and explains "The subject […] does not know itself directly but only through the signs deposited in memory and imagination by the great literary traditions."[44] With this starting point, he does not consider "evil" as an abstract topic, but as it is expressed in the symbols and myths of Western culture.[45]

[42] "Fallibility is the condition of evil, although evil is the revealer of fallibility." Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 144.
[43] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 142.
[44] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 16.
[45] Ricoeur explains simply that he is not qualified to move outside the sphere of his own culture, so he constrains his study to the Hebraic and Christian Scriptures and Greek tragedies.

This book reflects Ricoeur's interest in Jung and Freud (still relatively unknown in France at this time) and also of Mircea Eliade's approach to the history of religions.[46] He establishes a definition of myth as the narration of events, existing in a space outside geographical space and a time outside historical time, which establish the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself in the world. Myths have a "symbolic function" which discovers and enables "the bond between man and what he considers sacred."[47] In the light of his later engagement with Bultmann, it is important to understand that for Ricoeur myth is never allegory, it is not a trope of meaning but meaning itself. [48]

The symbolic function of myth leads Ricoeur to a discussion of symbols themselves. Although at this point he had not engaged with the immerging structuralist movement in France, one sense that he is articulating ideas that will later come into direct engagement with the work of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault and Derrida. For Ricoeur, symbols exist in three dimensions: the cosmic, as man reads the sacred into creation and sees it manifested in the stars, the winds and some creatures; the oneiric, manifested in symbols appearing in dreams and the inner world; and the poetic imagination, which makes present the things of the world.[49] A symbol is more than merely a sign, it points not only beyond itself, but to itself. This claim is fundamental to Ricoeur's understanding of symbol which cannot be reduced either to analogy nor to allegory: the meaning of symbol "is constituted in and by the literal meaning", and cannot be translated or explained, only interpreted.[50] This brings us to the final and most important claim of the book, that "the symbol gives rise to thought."[51]

---

[46] Discussing Mircea Eliade's *Patterns in Comparative Religion,* Ricoeur writes "What I retained from Eliade was not primarily his distinction between the sacred and the profane, but his conception of the symbol as the fundamental structure of religious language." *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 17.
[47] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 5.
[48] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*. Ricoeur does not cite David Strauss, but his approach is broadly similar to that taken by Strauss in David Friedrich Strauss, *The life of Jesus critically examined*, trans. by George Eliot, ed. by Peter Crafts Hodgson, Lives of Jesus series (London: SCM, 1973). The Jesus narrative, in particular the stories of the miracles, are seen as expressions of myth or symbol, particularly the symbol of the Kingdom of God.
[49] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 13.
[50] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 16.
[51] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 19 and 347ff.

Taking a "history of religions" approach, Ricoeur begins with the sensation of defilement arising from contamination, an idea which may seem irrational to a modern mind but illustrates its "pre-ethical" origins in the distribution of the sacred and profane. Defilement leads to divine vengeance or retribution which in turn creates suffering. This sequence can be reversed to show that how suffering is rationalised as the experience of divine retribution for violating the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. This rationalisation leads in its turn to a fear of retribution and the creation of the taboo which anticipates and forestalls punishment in the prohibition of contact. Through this process the transcendent becomes that "before which man cannot stand" since, "no-one can see God – at least the God of taboos and interdicts – without dying. It is from this […] that the sacred gets its character of separateness."[52]

Ricoeur moves from the personal experience of defilement to the more general condition of sin, which he characterises both as an experience of bondage and as an experience of separation. He suggests that neither is possible without the confession of a deity, since these experiences presuppose that we stand "before God" and that this God has called us to be holy as God is holy in a covenantal relationship: "it in this exchange between vocation and invocation that the whole experience of sin is found."[53]

For Ricoeur, the experience of sin is "religious" and not "moral" because it is located in the experience of calling or summons, which precedes the legislative command, "thou shalt not". We shall see him make a similar distinction between the religious and the moral in dialogue with Lévinas in *Oneself as Another*.[54] He also insists, in a theme he would amplify in "Toward a Hermeneutics of the Idea of Revelation"[55], on the priority of summons and prophetic utterance over philosophical speculation. The prophets do not consider the nature of God, they transmit God's command, threat, order or exultation. Ricoeur follows a movement through the biblical text from a God of Justice (Deuteronomy) to a God of Conjugal Bond (Hosea) to a

[52] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 33.
[53] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 52.
[54] See also "The Summoned Subject" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 262-275.
[55] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 73-118.

Sovereign God: a movement which in its turn changes humanity's defining sin from disobedience to abandonment to pride.

Ricoeur turns finally to the sensation of guilt, which arises in man faced with his own sin. This is where we return to the broader themes of the Phenomenology of the Will, as man feels himself to be both responsible for his sin and in bondage to it: worse he is responsible for his own captivity, he finds he has a *servile will.* [56] In the experience of guilt, the summons has become internalised, it is no longer God who speaks, but the voice of the conscience. And the conscience, particularly the guilty or bad conscience, simply contributes to man's sensation of guilt. Ricoeur examines St Paul's "curse of the law" in the following exegesis: it is within his conscience that man attempts to "measure" or judge his own sin in order to avoid sinning. This attempt to avoid sin leads to its propagation because the law becomes increasingly atomised and the proper tension between the *radical* demand and the *differentiated* prescription is destroyed.[57] The "curse of the accursed conscience" is also a curse of alienation, as one becomes the tribunal of oneself, a process leading to distrust, suspicion and contempt.[58] Ricoeur returned to the problem of conscience in *Oneself as Another*, and it is examined in more detail in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Ricoeur is under no illusion that he has solved the philosophical problem of the servile will, rather he confesses that the "concept of the servile will must remain an indirect concept, which gets its meaning from […] symbolism" and that "We shall not be able to get closer to it except by the mediation of the second-order symbols supplied by the myths of evil."[59] In the book, he proceeds to examine a series of such second order symbols; the myths of creation, Greek myths with their tragic vision of existence, the Adamic myth, and the Gnostic myth of the exiled soul and to ask whether they have a common dynamic. In exploring this common dynamic Ricoeur gives primacy to the Adamic myth, for his own cultural and religious reasons. His reflection on the relationship between the Adamic myth and tragedy plays a

[56] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 101.
[57] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 144.
[58] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 145.
[59] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 151-152.

significant role in the argument of this thesis, but not in the development of this thought, so we set it aside for later discussion.

The final chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil* is probably one of the most important texts in Ricoeur's oeuvre. It sets out several of his key ideas and the agenda for the next phase of his work. He concludes that there is a hiatus between the two approaches he has taken – the abstract description of fallibility and the "re-enactment" of fault. These approaches cannot be juxtaposed, neither can philosophy transcribe (or allegorise) religion. There must be a third way; "A creative interpretation of meaning […] faithful to the gift of meaning from the symbol, and faithful also to the philosopher's oath to seek understanding."[60] He sees a number of positive encouragements to this activity. Firstly, the symbol already exists, like the experience of life, it is a "given", a "gift" which invites interpretation. Secondly, he feels that the kind of interpretation he proposes will act as a counterbalance to the technical, logical analysis of language which has reduced its fullness.[61] Finally, he sees this form of interpretation as a locus for the interplay of all the tools of exegesis (he refers in particular to the phenomenology of religion and the psychoanalysis of language).[62] This move from reductive criticism to a restorative one will acknowledge the heritage of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

In the concluding sections of the book, Ricoeur introduces three significant terms.

He acknowledges that we cannot encounter myths and symbols with the primitive naïveté of the past as they have lost their immediacy in the modern world. We must aim instead, he says at a *second naïveté,* "in and through criticism". The process of interpretation enables us to go beyond criticism, to a recreation of language through which we can hear the call afresh.[63]

[60] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 348.
[61] He is referring not only to the infant science of semiotics, but also to the whole panoply of historical and form criticism dominating Biblical studies in this period.
[62] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 349.
[63] "Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again." Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 349.

In hermeneutics, meaning and understanding are not inextricably locked together, but exist in a circular relationship; *the hermeneutic circle*, where "we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand."[64] The reader's presuppositions will direct the questions asked of, or about the text, so the process always begins with existing understanding, just as greater understanding may well lead to more questions.

Ricoeur recognises that the philosopher can become stuck in a circle, or spiral, of endless reflection, he suggests that in order to escape it is necessary to turn the hermeneutic circle into a *wager* which can only be tested by practical action. This is a task which Ricoeur describes in his later writing as attestation or testimony, important categories in his understanding of proof.[65] He summarises, "A philosophy that starts from the fullness of language is a philosophy with presuppositions. To be honest, it must make its suppositions explicit, state them as beliefs, wager on the beliefs and try to make the wager pay off in understanding."[66]

From the study of symbols, two paths presented themselves to Ricoeur, the first led towards psychoanalytic theory and the second towards the study of hermeneutics. Both would result in conflict with the French intellectual elite. Between 1958 and 1963 Ricoeur read the works of Freud and attended the seminars of the prominent public intellectual and Freudian analyst Jacques Lacan. He did not agree with Lacan's structuralist reading of Freud and when Ricoeur's book *De l'interpretation:Essai sur Freud* was published in 1965 Lacan launched a vitriolic and very personal attack on Ricoeur, not least because his own theories hardly featured.[67] Since Freud had engaged with culture, Ricoeur felt he was justified in treating the work as one might that of Plato or Descartes and argued that it was not necessary to behave as either a practitioner, or an analysand. He uncharacteristically fought back against Lacan,

[64] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 351.
[65] See e.g. "The Hermeneutics of Testimony" in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 119-154. "Emmanuel Lévinas: Thinker of Testimony" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 108-126. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 21-23,129, 297-356
[66] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 357.
[67] (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1965) in English, Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy; An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denis Savage, The Terry Lectures (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970).

rejecting the "fantastic exclusivity of certain Freudians" as he would any totalitarian system.[68] As a consequence Ricoeur found himself out of step with the intellectual climate. Lacan's theories were well known and structuralism had begun to dominate many areas of thought, while the phenomenological method that Ricoeur employed was unfashionable.

Freud and Philosophy

Ricoeur's detour through symbol had led him to conclude that the sensation of guilt resulted from a religious or "meta-ethical" cause, not from the consequences of ethical transgression. Guilt is the rationalisation of human suffering in particular experienced as alienation from the 'true self' or the divine. The symbolic function of myth is to enable people to recover the bond with what they consider sacred. For Ricoeur, guilt is part of the matrix of humanity's utmost possibility, contrasting with Freud's explanation that it is the result of neurotic impulses arising from the repressive action of cultural norms.[69] While Ricoeur sought to actualise the richest and most spiritual meaning of symbols through his "hermeneutics of recollection"[70] Freud sought to unmask the truth, by demystifying the symbols presented for interpretation in the clinical setting. This process, Ricoeur characterised as a "hermeneutic of suspicion".[71] He sets Freud beside Marx and Nietzsche as the "masters of suspicion" who challenge man's confidence in knowing himself by uncovering motives over which he has no control. Each individual is forced to question whether he is controlled by his id or ego, at the mercy of the forces of economic history, or driven by his own will for power. The "masters of suspicion" are also the fathers of the reductive method, looking below the surface of behaviour or language in an attempt to schematise or simplify experience and so to explain it.

The term "hermeneutic of suspicion" has been used more frequently by Ricoeur's followers than Ricoeur himself, and must be treated with caution, as has been admirably demonstrated

[68] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy, English edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 159-160.
[69] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 34.
[70] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 34.
[71] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 9, 27, 543 and others.

by Alison Scott-Baumann who points out that we must appreciate the difference between healthy self-doubt and unhealthy scepticism.[72] While Ricoeur is committed to the importance of explanation, he is equally committed to the project of human possibility and he seeks to describe psychoanalysis in both reductive and constructive terms. The hermeneutic of suspicion must be balanced by the hermeneutic of recovery, the revival of naiveté.

Psychoanalysis offered Ricoeur not only interpretative tools, but a deeper understanding of the workings of language. The analyst interprets not the dream as dream, but the dream as reported: the dream discourse or dream account. In the dream account phenomena such as "displacement" in which images are disguised or distorted and "condensation" in which the account is limited or censored, reveal the workings of the unconscious as do as the dream images themselves. Ricoeur finds a parallel between the dream accounts and symbolic texts, as both demand interpretation and both are "overdetermined".[73]

However, he is critical of Freud's topology of desire, expressed through the relationship between the id, ego and superego. In asking about the "subject" - the Cogito revealed by analysis - Ricoeur concludes that the unconscious is as much of a mystery as the conscious and that while the id, ego and superego are useful as tools of interpretation, outside the intersubjective situation of analysis they are no longer meaningful.[74] Ricoeur observes that Freud does not adequately distinguish between description and metaphor, and at times appears to attribute real existence to the powers he describes.

Considering the semantics of desire within the limits of philosophy provides a more productive theme. The *language* of symbols expands rather than limits reflection, in particular when they are located in the dialectic between meaning and desire that Ricoeur associates with the

[72] Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, ed. by James Fieser, Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy (London and New York: Continuum, 2009). See particularly Chapter Four, p.67ff.
[73] Ricoeur describes the work of the analyst in the terms of the biblical exegete, who drawing on the "four senses of scripture", applies his tools to the text . He also alludes to the medieval idea of the "book of nature", but does not follow this analogy to its logical conclusion, that the task of the philosopher might be to interpret the "book of the self". Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 25.
[74] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 420.

philosophical tradition of Plato, Spinoza and Liebniz. [75] He reconstructs the discourse between desire and meaning as one between the regressive movement orientated toward the infantile (the archaeology of the subject) and a progressive movement directed towards "a *telos* of satisfying fulfilment". Drawing on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, in which the spirit of history moves progressively towards richer and fuller meaning, Ricoeur described a movement of progressive synthesis in which the wounded self would achieve both understanding and healing through a process something like an "education of desire."[76] Ricoeur reveals an underlying assumption that humans develop through life in ways which have profound moral, spiritual and personal meaning. We will see the implications of this when we look more closely at the shaping of narrative identity in Chapter Three.

Ricoeur's study of Freud is a diversion from which he returns to a more focused study of language and hermeneutics. As we have seen, it reveals themes which emerge in his later anthropology. However, before we consider the substance of his turn to hermeneutics, we turn to events which had a significant effect on Ricoeur's life and academic career.

The Intrusion of Reality

Throughout the 1960's, Ricoeur had been an outspoken critic of the French university system. At that time, there were more than 100,000 students at the Sorbonne and neither the facilities nor the time for effective teaching. For this reason, Ricoeur chose to leave in 1967 for new campus university in the Paris suburb of Nanterre, intended to become more of a learning community. Problems emerged from the beginning because the university attracted both right wing students to the law faculty and left wing students to the faculty of letters. After *les évènements* in Paris in the Summer of 1968 an unhappy rump of leftist students gravitated to Nanterre perceiving it to be the most vulnerable of French university establishments. The stage was set for unrest.

[75] cf. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 164.
[76] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, pp. 20-22.

Ricoeur had been appointed Dean of the faculty of letters for the academic year 1969/1970. In January 1970 the conflict between students escalated into violence when the students attempted to ban academic staff from using the canteen. When Ricoeur and some of his colleagues attempted to enter the cafeteria they were met by a student brandishing a rubbish bin who threatened Ricoeur and finally up-ended it over Ricoeur's head. [77] It was a humiliating attack and Ricoeur was "mortified". As his friend and biographer, Charles Reagan comments: "Here, a man of peace, a pacifist, a man of reason and argument, a devout believer in mercy and forgiveness, a man gentle in every way, was the target of a physical attack."[78]

Ricoeur took a short leave of absence, but in the following month the situation continued to escalate and many other faculty members simply refused to enter the campus fearing for their personal safety. Eventually, Ricoeur decided that the police must be invited onto the campus to restore law and order. The arrival of the police led to a pitched battle, which drew leftist students from all over Paris. As the police became increasingly frustrated by their inability to establish order, they began inflicting savage beatings on the students and eventually the National Guard had to be called in to intervene. The disturbances lasted only three days, but the campus was left in chaos, with thousands of francs of damage done to its buildings. Ricoeur felt that he had failed; failed to lead the university, failed to implement change sufficiently quickly and failed to inspire the students to behave reasonably. He resigned almost immediately. In later years, he reflected on the Hegelian dilemma he faced, "I was torn between the willingness to understand, to negotiate, and on the other hand, a very strong feeling of duty with respect to [the] institution."[79]

Following his disappointment at Nanterre, Ricoeur accepted an invitation to take up a post at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. Although it is sometimes suggested that this departure led to a decisive break with the French establishment he returned to the newly

[77] David Pellauer describes it as a "waste basket" in Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 3.
[78] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 35.
[79] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 128-130.

reorganised Nanterre after three years and remained on the staff until 1980. [80] During the same period, Ricoeur spent at least one semester a year teaching at the University of Chicago, where his friends Mircea Eliade, and André LaCocque worked in the theology faculty. He was appointed to the John Nuveen Chair working jointly across the divinity and philosophy schools, where he followed Paul Tillich. Although Ricoeur does not often refer to Tillich in his writing, his theology was clearly influenced by their friendship, particularly, I would suggest, in his reading of Spinoza.[81] It is fair to say that during this period his interests turned increasingly towards British and American philosophy, while his reputation in France faded.

[80] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 41.
[81] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 132.

The Hermeneutic Turn: The Conflict of Interpretations

Among the factors in Ricoeur's move away from continental philosophy were the shift in his interest from phenomenology to hermeneutics as he became engaged more or less contemporaneously with structuralism, the problem of religious language and the "ordinary language philosophy" of the British and American schools.[82] He noticed how in each of these fields a different hermeneutic method was employed to interpret texts. Ricoeur acknowledged that at times this led to *conflicts* of interpretation. Characteristically, his dialogue with each was an attempt to resolve the conflict.

Structuralism and its consequences

Structuralism and its successor deconstructionism became highly charged political theories in the France of the 1960's and were used to critique assumptions of power, tradition, the structures of society and the canon of literature. Its foundations are generally attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist who sought to show that linguistics could become a truly scientific discipline by attempting to describe the underlying structures of all language. Saussure's theory was founded on the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign which only gains its meaning in relationship to other signs, this relationship he terms difference. (For example, the word orange does not gain its meaning by reference to fruit or sunsets, but derives it from its difference between the other colour words red and yellow). In France Saussure's ideas had been taken up by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) who had applied them to anthropology and then to the structure of myth. Structuralism was further radicalised by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) who developed an anti-metaphysical view of language in which difference becomes an anti-ontological category and language is cast adrift from any reference to the external world. Texts are cast off from their authors to become the possessions of readers who are free to interpret them as they will.

[82] He describes the development of his own thought in the biographical essay published in the appendix to Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor : Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 317.

Ricoeur's engagement with structuralism was careful, but passionate, certainly much of his biblical criticism is highly influenced by structural analysis. At first he embraced it, considering meaning to be largely about detaching text from authorial intention, but later he came to believe that structuralism had deep flaws and confessed the tone of the essays published in *The Conflict of Interpretations* now sounds polemical.[83] It is arguable that this digression into structuralism had damaging effects on Ricoeur's theory of textuality and at times the relationship between the text and the world is hanging by a thread, but it should be remembered that this was merely a stage in the development of his thought and in his later writings the balance is somewhat restored. [84]

Ricoeur's critique of structuralism is based on three main complaints: the first is that it focuses on *langue*, the underlying structure of language rather than its embodied existence in speech or texts. Ricoeur argues that language is not static but changes its meaning according to context. Lévi-Strauss had claimed that the basic structures of human culture (kinship, myth, language) are unchanging and demand a study of forms rather than origins. Structuralism claims to uncover the deep structures of human culture and so to explain historical phenomena in systematic terms.[85] For Ricoeur, form and origin should be seen as complementary axes; the axis of co-existence and the axis of succession, and he argued that you cannot treat words as independent signs, they must be located in time (narrative forms) and space (sentence structures). Ricoeur's existentialist phenomenological heritage makes him suspicious of any system which does not refer to the subject in its embodied, temporal and spatial (historic) reality. He came to see structuralism as "transcendentalism without a subject"[86].

---

[83] Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976). *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 23.

[84] This critical view is expressed by Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 349.

[85] Ricoeur's rejection of this aspect of structuralism explains his particular interest in the theories of Gerhard Von Rad. For in contradistinction to Lévi-Strauss' theory of myth as a static system of signs, Von Rad showed how Israel's identity was dependent on a "foundational event" located in history.

[86] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 18., Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 132.

Secondly, Ricoeur came to realise that language cannot be separated entirely from reference. Although words gain meaning from each other, they also make reference to something beyond language. In order to solve the problem of subject and reference, Ricoeur turned to the work of Sanskrit linguist, Emile Benveniste (1902-1976), and his work on language as *discourse*. Benveniste emphasised that discourse is always "someone saying something about something". Not only does this solve the problem of subject and reference but also of intersubjectivity. In discourse "someone says something about something to someone".

By treating language as discourse, Ricoeur is able to solve the third problem thrown up by the Structuralists, which is the problem of polysemy. The same word has many different meanings, but in discourse a speaker makes choices between the possible meaning of the word. Not only does context become important, for the listener to appreciate the choice made by the speaker, but the choice made by the speaker is open-ended and allows the possibility of new sentence and new meanings.[87]

Polysemy turns out to be a basic condition of creativity which allows words to have more than one meaning and to acquire new meanings. However, the actual functioning of polysemy can only be grasped by semantics in the context of discourse: the place of the word in the sentence and the context of the sentence. Polysemy depends on a contextual action (choice) which filters out some of the surplus meanings so that a univocal discourse can be produced from polysemic words. "Polysemy, by endowing the word with a surplus of meaning that must be sifted through interpretation, provides the basis for the creative extension of meaning through metaphor."[88]

In his dialogue with structuralism Ricoeur moved from a reductive interpretation to a position where language recovers its fullness.

---

[87] Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 84. In structuralism, the problem of novelty is answered by Lévi-Strauss with reference to the concept of *bricolage*, the building of new objects from parts of old ones.

[88] John B. Thompson, editor's introduction to Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 12.

The problem of Religious Language

I have already referred to the problems which Ricoeur recognised arising from attempts at general hermeneutics and the different hermeneutic methods employed within different disciplines, notably in biblical hermeneutics. Ricoeur wanted to move beyond Dilthey's opposition between *Verstehen* and *Erklären* (understanding and explanation), and beyond the demythologising agenda of Bultmann which he argued, by setting kerygma in opposition to myth, obstructed the unique problem of religious language.[89] He began reading Macquarrie and others on religious discourse, but was also interested in the new form criticism practiced by Von Rad, Jeremias, Via and Perrin which made connections between the biblical narrative and confessions of faith. Ricoeur was not the only philosopher or theologian who wanted to understand how words could "do things" and especially how divine words could do specific things such as bless or convert people.

Ricoeur speculated on the connection between general hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics. Acknowledging that biblical hermeneutics was under an obligation to answer the general questions such as: "What is a text? i.e. what is the relation between spoken and written language? What is the relation between explanation and understanding within the encompassing act of reading? What is the relation between a structural analysis and an existential appropriation?"[90] he also identified a series of specific issues for biblical hermeneutics, concerning the kerygmatic kernel of preaching; the connections between faith and word; the character of 'disclosure' and the concept of revelation. These topics will be explored in more detail in a later chapter on Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics, they are enumerated here to illustrate their influence on the turn he now made towards "ordinary language philosophy"

[89] Paul Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann" in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p.49-72.
[90] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 321.

Ordinary Language Philosophy

Speech-Act theory, found in the writings of John R. Searle[91] and J.L. Austin [92], provided the tools which enabled Ricoeur to answer at least some of his questions of general hermeneutics.[93] Speech-Act theory describes discourse in three terms; as a *locutionary* or propositional act (the act of saying), an *illocutionary* act (what we do in saying) and a *perlocutionary* act (what we do by the fact that we speak). They confirm the principle that Ricoeur has deduced from Benveniste, that interpretation cannot be reduced to 'understanding sentences', but must also be attentive to their context, intention and effect.

Ricoeur claims that texts can be treated as speech-acts because they are "inscribed discourse". By this he does not mean that texts are merely a record of speech, but rather that texts have the character of discourse. He compares the two in the following terms. Discourse as a language event is realised temporally and in the present; it is self-referential because the subject is always implied; it is concerned to refer to a world that it claims to describe or represent and is dependent on an interlocutor to whom it is addressed. In comparing speech to text, Ricoeur observes that a text fixes something, but what is fixed is not the speech event, but the meaning of the speech event (its *noema*) understood as all three aspects of the act. A text is self-referential, it refers to itself alone and has been set free from its author and the sociocultural conditions of its production. The text opens up a world: it "projects" (in both senses of the word) a world. Finally, the text has an interlocutor who is the reader, indeed it has an endless number of readers, a universal possibility.

---

[91] John R Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
[92] J L Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
[93] See "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" reproduced both in Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 131-144. and Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy, English edn (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 75-88. Also, "The Model of the Text" reproduced both in Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 197-221. and Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, pp. 144-167.

If we consider these claims made by Ricoeur, we can see that he has moved some way from the structuralist reading of texts and is arguing that texts are capable both of referring to something outside themselves, in this case "the world in front of the text" and of making things happen, whether by illocutionary or perlocutionary force.

Ricoeur's first attempt to bring his hermeneutic theories together was an extension of his work on symbols, *La métaphore vive* published in French in 1975. [94]

The Rule of Metaphor

The Rule of Metaphor can be read as an attempt to recover Aristotle's view of rhetoric as a form of argumentation which links the art of persuasion with the logical concept of the possible. Rhetoric, understood in these terms, has a place in speculative philosophy which Ricoeur attempts to recover first linguistically and then ontologically.

Classic rhetoric employs metaphor as an ornament, a type of trope in which a figurative word is substituted for a literal one based on some sort of resemblance. Ricoeur argues against this description of metaphor on two counts: firstly that metaphors depend not on single words, but on sentences; secondly that they are not merely ornaments but produce new meaning. Drawing on the work of literary critics, I.A. Richards, Max Black and Monroe Beardsley, Ricoeur shows that metaphors operate at the level of the sentence. Metaphors create tension by violating the linguistic code (my love is *not* a red rose) and resolve the tension when their meaning is interpreted as a creative innovation *in the context of the whole* (she is as *fresh and lively* as a flower newly sprung in June). As Black demonstrates, metaphors acquire meaning from their context: when "the chairman ploughs through the discussion" it is the sentence framing the term "ploughs" that reveals its metaphorical character, where the tension is not between two terms (love/rose) but between two semantic domains, the verb and the rest of the sentence.[95]

[94] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*.
[95] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 84ff. See also Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 46ff.

Understood in this way, metaphor cannot be misinterpreted as a form of imitation nor as a type of allegory. Drawing on the work of Mary Hesse, Ricoeur suggests that metaphors are like scientific models: instruments of redescription which not only give us a mental picture of something, but also allow us to imagine its operation in new contexts. A metaphor becomes more than a way of seeing, it becomes a way of being, which is revealed by poetic language. This realisation is connected to Aristotle's understanding of poetics, as a redescription of life, which creates new plots from the experience of life, and does not merely imitate it. Ricoeur's description of metaphor as creative language is not especially distinct, but his interweaving of metaphor and narrative, together with his claim that metaphor can be the locus of cognitive insight, are significant. [96] By identifying the poetry of metaphor with the poetry of plots, understood as the redescription of human action, Ricoeur has taken steps on the next part of his journey, *From Text to Action.*

Ricoeur reached the age of sixty-five in 1978, but had barely begun to demonstrate the breadth or depth of his thought. He continued working on hermeneutic themes, publishing and teaching widely, and exploring the relationship between history and story, narrative and identity, and text and action. This exploration culminated in the publication of the three volumes of *Temps et Récit* between 1983 and 1985.[97]

[96] Cf Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 353.
[97] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughin and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984). Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

From Text to Action: Time and Narrative

The Rule of Metaphor and *Time and Narrative* were conceived together as explorations of semantic innovation, but they go further by showing how innovation leads to understanding. Both metaphor and narrative enable new things to spring up in language and allow the imagination to refigure understanding. Ricoeur claims, "whether it be a question of metaphor or of plot, to explain more is to understand better."[98]

The move towards narrative introduces a temporal dimension which Ricoeur explores through the philosophy of time, the epistemology of history and the hermeneutics of literary fiction. His conclusions are set out in the first paragraphs of his three-volume work: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal existence."[99] Ricoeur's ambition is to relate the language of grammar to the structure of human knowing.[100] The English translation, which renders *Temps et Récit* as *Time and Narrative,* masks the reference to structuralist theories of narrative and history which Ricoeur challenges. Structuralist readings of literature, distinguish between story and plot, (*histoire* and *récit*) between "Time and Telling" whereas Ricoeur shows that they are inextricable. [101]

The first part of Ricoeur's exploration is concerned with the philosophy of time. The philosophical challenge is to reconcile our sense of fixed identity with our experience of change with the passing of time. Augustine wants to stop and seize the present moment only to find that it can never be truly experienced in the present since as soon as we reflect on experience it is already past. The paradox, he thought, is that the act of remembering takes

---

[98] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. x.
[99] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 3.
[100] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 40.
[101] V. I. A. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, Publications of the American Folklore Society. Bibliographical and special series v. 9, 2d edn (Austin,: University of Texas Press, 1968). Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse : An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning : Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)., Vanhoozer suggests Ricoeur's book should be entitled Time and Telling according to Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 354.

place in the present, as does the act of expectation or hope. There is a dialectic between the intention (*intentio*) of the mind, towards rest and stillness (the qualities of eternity) and the restless movement of thought in which the mind is distended (*distentio*) to include past, present and future, the reality of birth and death (the characteristics of our contingent creatureliness). Aristotle approached the same problem through the medium of plot, and in particular in his *Poetics*, from which Ricoeur takes the concepts of *muthos* (emplotment) and *mimēsis* (imitation or representation). *Muthos* provides the narrative, through which we describe events in time, but emplotment is more than a series of episodes, it is a process of sifting and structuring which reveals our understanding of events. Ricoeur combines Augustine's threefold present with Aristotle's concept of *mimēsis* and so distinguishes between three forms of *mimēsis: mimēsis*$_1$ is the conceptual network of pre-understanding, *mimēsis*$_2$ the configuring of events in the process of emplotment, *mimēsis*$_3$ the refiguring, or representing of events. All three stages are present in the creation of texts and in their reception – as we shall see this is a significant development in Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

However, Ricoeur turns next to the relationship between the events of the past and their description, arguing that history is always narrative and never simply the chronicle of a list of events. Applying the mimetic pattern, he concludes that historiography depends on choices, made from the perspective of the present, shaped by narrative conventions. This is not an unproblematic presentation, sometimes the form insists that we identify nations, or even geographical features, as protagonists, but it highlights the complex relationship between truth (understood as a record of events) and narrative. Ricoeur also reminds us that as the present is always changing so history is always contingent and unfinished and there will always be opportunities for new interpretations.

The second volume is a discussion of literary fiction considering "games with time". These include devices which vary the sequence of the narrative from the sequence of narrative time including the use of flashbacks, interruptions in the narrative and concealed incidents, changes in narrative voice in which the same event is described from differing perspectives, in *Mrs*

Dalloway, *The Magic Mountain*, and *Remembrance of Things Past*.[102] These literary games are not mere forms of arbitrary capriciousness in which all the bonds tying narrative to cosmic time are broken. Rather, they create imaginative worlds in which the reader can explore the aporias of living between "mortal time and monumental time" or "lived time and cosmic time."[103]

In the third volume, Ricoeur revisits the aporetics of temporality, through a re-examination of the mediation between Augustine and Aristotle, and an examination of the "ordinary" concept of time with reference to Heidegger. From Heidegger, Ricoeur takes the dimension of Care/*Sorge*/solicitude, the dialectic between the sense of thrownness, or lack of control of being in the world, and desire for being with its ownmost possibilities. Heidegger locates the history of the individual within the history of the world: "the existence of the historical Being-in-the-world, what is ready-to-hand and what is present-at-hand have already in every case, been incorporated into the history of the world."[104] This helps Ricoeur to show that narrative identity, the story of a life, is shaped not only by the individual but by their world and culture, so fits into the threefold *mimēsis* he has drawn from Aristotle.

He considers how narrative identity may be shaped through our encounter with texts, seeking a balance between the author's configuration of the text and the reader's refiguration in terms of experience. Ricoeur concludes that whereas philosophical hermeneutics ends with the reader arriving at a new understanding, literary hermeneutics seeks both understanding *and* application. "Refiguration seemed to me […] to constitute an active reorganisation of our being-in-the-world, performed by the reader following the invitation of the text […] to become the reader of oneself."[105]

---

[102] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925). Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Secker and Warburg, 1927). Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. by Terence Kilmartin and Andreas Mayer C.K. Scott-Moncrief, 3 vols (New York: Random House, 1981).
[103] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 130.
[104] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 440. cited Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 79.
[105] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 47.

Ricoeur acknowledges that he has gone further than he proposed when he began his exploration of *Time and Narrative* and concludes that there can be no thought about time without narrated time. The boundaries between historiography and fiction have become almost non-existent; both depend on a poetic recreation of events which Ricoeur recognises can be problematic particularly in dealing with questions of responsibility and agency, a problem which returns us to the philosophical question of constancy in identity with which we began. When something happens we ask, "Who?" and the answer comes in the form of a proper name. The only guarantee of permanence, justifying our association of the action with the name is "the story of a life."The story tells the action of the 'who', and the identity of this 'who' therefore itself must be a narrative identity."[106]

Three aporias conclude *Time and Narrative* and set out the agenda for Ricoeur's future work. Narrative identity, which seems to guarantee constancy, turns out to be neither entirely stable nor seamless: it can include change and mutability within the cohesion of a lifetime. [107] Narrative makes the relationship between being and eternity productive, but only within the horizons of history: between the limits of experience and expectation. Thirdly, narrative has its own temporal limits (we cannot describe either our own birth or death) and it leaves the questions of ethics unanswered.

Time and Narrative was widely read and widely praised. Ricoeur's reputation, especially in the English speaking academic world, continued to grow and in 1986, he was invited to give the Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. The content of these lectures show the development of Ricoeur's thought as he moved from the consideration of narrative identity to its ethical implications for "acting and suffering persons". However, before Ricoeur could publish the lectures, personal tragedy intervened. Shortly after his visit to Edinburgh, Ricoeur learned of the suicide of his much loved son Olivier. This death, which brought to an end a life-long battle with alcohol, drugs and depression, had a profound impact on Ricoeur, who

[106] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 246.
[107] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 246. – see *Remembrance of Things Past, Vol 3,* p. 1089

was unable to work for some months. When the book based on the Gifford Lectures was finally published, it contained an "Interlude" on "Tragic Action" dedicated to Olivier. [108]

Soi-Même Comme Un Autre is the culmination of Ricoeur's thought, built on the foundations of his hermeneutic work, it revisits the philosophical theme of the self and extends it to an exploration of action and responsibility. It is arguably Ricoeur's greatest work.[109]

In *Oneself as Another* Ricoeur demonstrates that human identity is a proper hermeneutic subject, because it is narrative identity shaped not only by literature but also by institutional culture. The intersubjective dimension of human identity, expressed in the relationship between character, action and plot, reveals its ethical character as Ricoeur shows how our sense of ourselves depends on others and that dependency gives rise to obligations shaped by our desire to live good lives and by the duties we owe to one another in the institutions that shape us. Mediating between Aristotelian teleological virtue ethics and Kantian deontological morality, Ricoeur finds a third term in the concept of *phronēsis* or practical wisdom.

[108] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 241-249.
[109] The book is described by as "magisterial" by the editors *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by John Wall, William Schweiker and W. David Hall, (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.; as "his masterpiece" by John Wall, *Moral Creativity : Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility*, AAR Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 27. By Stiver as "the closest to a one-volume presentation of his thought yet available" Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001), p. 29. and as "elegantly written, clearly organised and closely argued" by Charles Regan in Richard A. Cohen and J. Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 4.

The Ethical Turn: Oneself as Another

Oneself as Another marks a return to the problem of selfhood. Ricoeur finds the problem of the Cogito adrift between the impossibility of Descartes' foundational claim and the unacceptability of Nietzsche's atomised subjectivity, and he engages in a hermeneutics of the self until he is able to offer the revised proposition of a self which is both able to do more than reflect only on itself, and is able to reflect on the world in a manner which is more than purely subjective.

The overarching theme is that the plurality of our experience of self is not only inevitable, as he had shown in *Freedom and Nature,* but helpful. Beginning in the field of semantics, he notes that the self can be indicated by one of three personal pronouns; I, you, and he or she, or by one of three designations; a definite description, a proper name or an indicator. This polyvalence is not problematic in terms of identity since the terms can clearly identify the same person. However, it does not answer the question of ontology and cannot help us to grasp what a self "is".

This problem is considered by turning to the language of embodied selves and adopting Strawson's category of a "basic particular" to designate a schema such as "body" or "person" which enables us to make an empirical description even though it is beyond definition. [110] Classifying persons in this way helps to ask questions about the relationship between them and their bodies, but leads to more fundamental questions concerning intersubjectivity. Each of us has a body and in it we experience certain sensations including that of consciousness. Because other persons have bodies, we attribute those same sensations to them. But, how do I know that the experience I ascribe to myself and attribute to you is the same experience?[111]

Having pursued the problem as far as possible within the philosophy of language, Ricoeur turns to the pragmatic study of language in speech-act theory arguing that all speech depends

[110] P.F Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1957).
[111] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 38.

on intersubjective relationships because even the simplest descriptive phrase, such as "the cat is on the mat" is logically equivalent to saying "I affirm to you that the cat is on the mat". Thus, *all* speech is action (affirmation) in the presence of the other and Ricoeur's theme is beginning to take shape: for every advance we make in the direction of the selfhood of the speaker or agent there is a comparable advance in the otherness of the partner.[112]

When Ricoeur moves from speech to more generalised theories of action the question "who?" is subjugated to the questions "what?" and "why?" leading to a consideration of motives and causes. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe, Ricoeur concludes that motives, as internal desires, are not observable phenomena unless voiced, and when they are unvoiced or unrealised only the subject can test the veracity of his or her own claim so that the truth about motivation becomes a matter of *attestation*: being true to oneself. By contrast, the external causes or forces on an action can only be examined after it has taken place. Ricoeur follows Donald Davidson suggesting that the adverb "intentionally" locates intention in the set of causes. Ricoeur is content to allow intention and cause to enrich each other, while noting that neither Anscombe nor Davidson properly accounts for the role of the agent who intends and acts *in sequence*. As soon as this temporal dimension is introduced, the problem of the constancy of the subject returns.

The question "How do we know that the person who intends is the person who carries out the intention?" is now examined from the reverse – the problem of attribution after the event. We can only confidently attribute an action to an agent if we recognise the chain of motives that lie behind an action and acknowledge that there will be both internal and external causes. Internal causes are represented in the cultural world, and can be externalised in speech, external causes can be observed. All this is notwithstanding the problem of unconscious motivation, which Ricoeur acknowledges, concluding with Aristotle that we cannot be blamed for that for which we cannot be held responsible including our unconscious drives.

[112] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 44.

We can only confidently attribute an action to an agent if we can *relate* cause and effect. Ricoeur argues that we cannot submit to a primitive, pre-Galilean view of cause and effect, but must describe the relationship between them in terms of disjunction and conjunction. He agrees with Kant that "causality in accordance with the laws of nature is not the only causality"[113] It is unnecessary to trace an endless chain to the First Cause as some events begin in the midst of the world. Ricoeur draws a parallel with the role of integral unity in a narrative – you need sufficient causes to understand an action, not an endless series. The cause and effect sequence stretches in both directions (for the want of a nail…a kingdom was lost). "The problem is then to delimit the sphere of events for which the agent can be held responsible."[114] Repercussions may spread topographically as well as temporally, but there is a difference between historical responsibility and moral responsibility.

Questions of agency lead Ricoeur to contemplate the problem of the agent's control over his or herself as an 'acting and suffering' subject which leads him to develop the notion of character, drawing on the categories of *idem* and *ipse* to enrich his account of narrative identity.[115] In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur identified *ipse* with narrative identity, and *idem* with character, seen as the stable dimension of personality. In *Oneself as Another* he associates narrative identity with the interplay between *ipse* and *idem*.

At first sight, the question of permanence in time is connected exclusively to *idem* which relates to identity recognised through time; a single cognition – that is Andy – becomes re-cognition – that is Andy again. The second criterion depends on resemblance, Andy is wearing that yellow suit; the man wearing the same suit is Andy. However, the criterion of resemblance demands judgement, are we sure that Andy is wearing the suit and has not loaned it to his friend? The criterion of similitude has to be replaced by a third criterion; that of uninterrupted continuity which also allows for the changes brought about, for example, by aging. Time no

[113] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 103.
[114] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 106.
[115] The Latin *idem* means "the same", whereas *ipse* is "the self". In French the standard word for selfhood is *Ipséité*.

longer guarantees permanence but has acquired factors of dissemblance, of divergence, and of difference.[116]

Having established that *idem* has a dimension of change within the criteria of permanence, Ricoeur considers its relationship with *ipse*, which he had previously identified with narrative identity, through an examination of *character* and *keeping one's word.* The first, he suggests, expresses itself in the overlapping of *ipse* and *idem,* whereas the second marks the point of extreme polarity between them.[117]

In the Aristotelian model, *character* "designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized."[118] Lasting dispositions are acquired involuntarily, creating the habitual responses by which *idem* is recognised, and it becomes possible to say when someone is acting "out of character". But dispositions can be acquired voluntarily, as a person chooses and practises the qualities in which they recognise themselves – their *ipse*. In the latter case, recognition becomes loyalty, a sense of fidelity which contributes towards maintaining the self. [119] There must be a dialectic between innovation and sedimentation, and between otherness and internalisation, which allows character to develop and yet maintains the continuity of narrative identity. [120] As we shall see in the next chapter, Ricoeur uses Dilthey and MacIntyre to examine the relationship between narrative and life in the fullest sense. It takes on the fullness of threefold *mimēsis* applied to a whole life project, which then takes on the possibility of direction or goal.

The goal of the "good life" drawn from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* is the starting point for Ricoeur's exploration of the relationship between identity and ethics. Aristotle is concerned

[116] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 117.
[117] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 118.
[118] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 121.
[119] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 121.
[120] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 122.

with the attainment of the virtues, the qualities which enable men to act well.[121] Aristotle's account of the virtues cannot be adopted without critique because it is limited to the performance of specific roles in society, according to the goods inherent in practices. Ricoeur has to appeal to the concept of *phronēsis* or practical wisdom, the quality shown by a wise man faced with a practical issue, as the test of a good life, he is then able to define ethical intention as *"aiming at 'the good life' with and for others in just institutions."*[122]

Evidence of virtue in praxis can only be verified by *attestation* which "appears when the certainty of being author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts become the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well."[123] Ricoeur describes this sense of satisfaction with the self which is the subject of interpretation as "*self-esteem*". The self is worthy of esteem not principally because of its accomplishments but because of its capacity to reflect and evaluate. The question, Ricoeur asks, is whether mediation of the other is required along the route from capacity to realization. Aristotle considered friendship among the necessities for a good life and Ricoeur considers why a person might need friends, others with whom a reciprocal, equal and mutual relationship is possible.

Ricoeur explores the question of equality between friends in the light of his thinking on otherness. He contrasts Heidegger's idea of Care/*Sorge*/solicitude with Lévinas' summons to responsibility. Lévinas presupposes a primordial injunction initiated by the Other, "thou shalt not kill". Ricoeur contrasts the injunction from the Other with an invitation "love me", which returns the initiative to the self, acting from solicitude arising from empathy. However, Ricoeur concedes that neither situation holds the fragile balance between giving and receiving, the equality or reciprocity which Aristotle has described as a necessary corollary for friendship.

[121] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996).
[122] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172.
[123] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180.

The reciprocity inherent in friendship points to the reciprocity demanded in communities, while alerting us to the difference between friendship and justice. Friendship depends on equality whereas justice moderates between those whose rank, wealth and power are disproportionate. Ricoeur draws on John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* to show that justice is not only an issue of morality or duty, but *also* of solicitude and mutual indebtedness which extends interpersonal relationships into institutions of mutual consent. However, because our ethical aim can be corrupted, by power or violence, it must be passed "through the sieve of the norm".[124] These norms are Rawls' theory of distributive justice and Kant's categorical imperative, which Ricoeur then replaces with the Jewish formulation of the golden rule, "Do not do to your neighbour what you would hate to have done to you". He argues that this formulation locates the rule within an event involving an agent and patient, or a victim and an adversary. While this law can be applied to situations involving the relationships between individuals, it is insufficient for the creation of just societies, which must find ways of addressing both the problem of conflicting goods and the need for individuals to have autonomy while being subject to the law. Ricoeur concludes that moral judgements in society may be arrived at through "public debate, friendly discussion, and shared convictions" in particular situations, but all attempts to give priority to a universal rule or law will fail. [125]

The ethical aim must be tested by the norms of the community, but the law cannot be the ultimate arbiter, in the end the ethical aim will always take precedence over the moral norm. He summarises his "little ethics" in the following proposal; "(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm, and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to an impasse in practice […].[126]

The outcome in practice is *phronēsis*, practical wisdom that respects both the self and the other as capable and responsive selves, which searches for a just mean, and which is reflective, informed and careful.

[124] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.
[125] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 291.
[126] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.

Ricoeur interrupts his meditation on practical wisdom with the "Interlude" on Tragedy, which has a twofold effect: it reminds the reader of the contingency of human existence and introduces the place of mystery in human experience. The importance of this move and its place in the dialectic between Ricoeur's philosophical thought and theological allegiance are covered in detail later in this thesis.

When Ricoeur considers the role of institutions, he asks whether institutional rules allow individuals to demonstrate respect for each other in all situations, first by questioning whether we should ever be bound by rules set by another. This, he argues, is the situation which arises when I make a promise, binding myself to an action in the future. Respect for myself should not allow me to constrain my future freedom, but duty to myself will insist that I am faithful to my intention. There must be a relationship of solicitude between *ipse* and *idem*, the self which I experience as selfhood – free, changing, growing and learning – and the self which I experience as constant – predictable and reliable. Ricoeur's second test is to ask whether one should always tell the truth to someone who is dying; a case which he considers cannot be regulated by general rules. In both cases there must be a mediation between the moral norm and solicitude.

Clearly Kant's universalising principle requires reconstruction, and Ricoeur turns to Habermas for a universalising principle which is not rooted in a transcendental foundation but will enable agreement to be reached through "argumentation" on practical questions. By argumentation, Habermas means not simply argument, but the whole cultural structure in which argument may take place (whether judicial, philosophical or religious). Ricoeur agrees that argumentation solves the dilemma between justice and equality, and contributes to overcoming the impasse between sterile universalism and cultural relativism, but acknowledges the problem of preserving universality in the face of convention which is shaping the argumentation in the first place, potentially against the rights and values of individual cultures. Ricoeur attempts to redefine the argument as one between argumentation itself, perceived as a language game, and conviction attested to in the desire for universality.

In the concluding study in the book, Ricoeur considers the ontology implied by his extended detour through the self and the other. Assurance that one is "being oneself acting and suffering" depends on attestation, which Ricoeur now links to action. The link is explored in the mediation between language and action, between reflection and action, and between judgement and action. He claims that while linguistic analysis gives meaning to action; action guarantees that linguistic expression is not trapped in language games which are unable to move outside the world of language or to refer to anything in the world of phenomena. Attestation "mediates between language, action, narrative and the ethical and moral predicates of action." This claim is supported through appropriation of Aristotle's dialectic of *energia-dunamis*, (potential-actuality); Heidegger's use of *Gewissen* (conscience) to equate with attestation, and Spinoza's description of *conatus* – the striving of being within the created world, to understand the "ground" against which selfhood stands out. However, the book ends with three aporias; these are the experiences of passivity; in the body, in our relationships with others and in conscience.

The penultimate paragraph of the book has been extensively quoted and has been the starting point for numerous works, including to some extent, this one. In it, Ricoeur has to admit that he has reached the limits of philosophy:

> *Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end.*[127]

Revisiting the Past

Ricoeur's late works reflect the concerns which had preoccupied him over a long life. He returned to fill in the lacuna, to document conversations and to restate his ideas with more clarity. His primary concern is to understand more fully what it means to be a capable human being, replaying all the associated themes of capability, action, selfhood and responsibility to others.

Long after the conventional age of retirement, Ricoeur had continued teaching and participating in academic conferences. Each summer, Pope John Paul II would invite a small group of intellectuals to join him at Castel Gandolfo to share ideas. Ricoeur was among the participants in 1983, 1985 and 1994. In 1988, a celebration of Ricoeur's work was held at Chateau Cérisy-la-Salle in Normandy, organised by Jean Griesch and Richard Kearney.[128] Five years later a similar conference held in Naples marked Ricoeur's eightieth birthday and

[127] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 355.
[128] Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 66.

resulted in the publication of a festschrift of essays.[129] In 1999, a conference focussed on Ricoeur's ideas was held in Chicago which resulted in the publication *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*.[130]

By the time Ricoeur gave up his tenure at the University of Chicago in 1991, when he was seventy-eight years old, the battles of the 1960's and 70's were long forgotten and the French intellectual community were ready to celebrate his achievements. He was awarded the Philosophy prize (and 50,000 francs) from the Academie Français and was the subject of numerous articles and broadcasts, including an hour-long television special in which he was interviewed by his friend, Olivier Abel. The reality of suffering and the problems of mortality and loss became more prominent in Ricoeur's thought during the 1990's. In the early years of the decade his wife Simone had a stroke, subsequently suffered from a heart condition and by 1996 she was dying of a degenerative disease. Ricoeur jotted down the outline for a book on dying, but he laid this work aside as Simone's health deteriorated. She died in January 1998.

For himself, Ricoeur was determined to "live up to death" and completed his substantial work, *Memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* in September 2000.[131] Whereas in *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur had not questioned the role played by memory, either in the recording of history or in the formation of narrative identity, these are the themes to which he now turns.[132] He considers the difference between memory and imagination, both of which are ostensibly descriptions of "calling to mind" an image. Memory recalls the image of the absent "having been" but is, like history, linked to a past existence or reference. Ricoeur suggests that it is memory which ensures that we have an idea of the past *as* past: which situates us within time. Memory is an attribute of capability, because memories can be summoned, but this capability is fragile, because we can forget, or have our memories blocked, manipulated or abused.

---

[129] Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney, *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, Philosophy & Social Criticism (London, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).
[130] *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall.
[131] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[132] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

Memory has a part to play shaping individual narrative identity, and in preserving the continuity of character, but because we live in the collective memory of those with whom we share life experiences, continuity of the self is not only dependent on the memory of the individual. Shared memory extends beyond close groups to include those who never meet, as a contributing factor in the shaping of national identity and history.

Ricoeur re-describes the task of the historian in mimetic terms, as the movement from encountering documentation, through critique to re-creation. Documents, such as diaries and eyewitness accounts on which historians rely are in themselves inscriptions of memory. They can be judged only as forms of testimony claiming, "I was there". Ricoeur describes once again the hermeneutic task which must undertake a mediation between critique and conviction, between explanation and understanding, before history can be written. The writing of history is a kind of *Poetics* resulting in *représentance*, a text which "stands in for" the past in the present. Ricoeur draws the analogy between historians and judges, both of whom must rely on testimony in order to reach a judgement.

Ricoeur considers the limits of history between absence and closure. At one pole there is "forgetting", at the other is "commemoration" which attempts to close down the story and so to gain control over it.[133] There may also be a third limit, the excess of history. Ricoeur considers whether in the vexed issue of genocide we may be presented with so much history that we cannot bear to witness it. Once again, he stresses the importance of the witness prepared to give testimony, "I was there".

Forgetting and forgiveness intersect at the moment of appeasement, but have separate trajectories; forgetting as the problematic of memory's faithfulness to the past; forgiveness in the sensation of guilt and desire for reconciliation with the past. Forgetting is explored through the ancient idea of a memory as a trace, such as the imprint left by a ring in sealing wax, which can be obliterated. Ricoeur considers the sufficiency of this image from the perspectives of

[133] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 408-411. citing Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 3 Volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 1997, 1998)

both biology and philosophy and concludes that neither accounts for the making of the mark in the first place, for the moment of "the first impression." Drawing on Bergson, Ricoeur postulates a repository of sense experience which has not yet been brought to mind, but exists only in the unconscious. This enables him to distinguish between experiences not yet found- a source of gift and revelation- and experiences forgotten. In making this move Ricoeur has distinguished 'forgetting' as the consequence of some kind of action; blocking by the subconscious, manipulation through the force of ideology, or obligated by institutional command.

With his final meditation on forgiveness, Ricoeur returns to the themes of *Fallibility and Fault*. He considers the role of institutions and the problems of guilt, punishment and moral responsibility. An inevitable corollary is the return to the problem of dissymmetry in relationships of power and exchange which Ricoeur explores through the economy of the gift. This theme is explored in more detail in Chapter Six.

While *Memory, History, Forgetting* attempts to address the lacuna in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur's little book *Parcours de la Reconnaissance* returns to the problematic of the self and the other which is the theme of the first part of *Oneself as Another*.[134] The polysemy of "recognition" offers a starting point, which Ricoeur traces through a course from identification, through identity to recognition - in its sense as a term of social approval. The task of identification involves the mind grasping an object and distinguishing it from others: a judgement with a familiar problematic as the self is divided (in Cartesian terms) between the intellect that conceives and the will that chooses.[135] Kant's theory of representation offers another impassable division between transcendental understanding and human sensibility which Ricoeur chooses to bypass via Husserl's appeal to the place of intentionality: the movement towards that which is not yet represented, the implicit horizon of incarnate

[134] Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. by David Pellauer, Institute for Human Sciences Vienna lecture series, English edn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).
[135] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 34.

existence.[136] Recognition is limited by change, which at its extreme limit renders a person unrecognisable. Ricoeur reflects on a scene in Proust's *Time Regained* where the diners at a party appear "disguised" by their "powdered wigs" and halting gait.[137]The course of recognition includes the acknowledgement of loss; the former appearance of the diners is lost, only recalled in memory and we recognise our own fate in their aged faces. Recognising ourselves in the characters in literature leads us back to the theme of narrative identity as it contributes to the themes of capability and responsibility.

Taking examples from the Homeric myths, and borrowing heavily from the work of Bernard Williams, Ricoeur considers the relationship between recognition and responsibility in the accounts of the return of Ulysses to Ithaca and Oedipus to Colonus.[138] In each case, recognition brings consequences; those who recognise Ulysses as a person must acknowledge the rights and privileges due to him. Oedipus recognises himself as the person who carried out a series of transgressive acts and acknowledges capability without responsibility.[139] Oedipus blames the gods, he is no longer the protagonist but the victim. However, Ricoeur insists, this change does not diminish the place of initiative in human existence. Rather, it returns him to the dynamic between *bios* and *ergon*, the practice of the virtues and the *desire* for a good life.

Using a familiar pattern in speech-act theory, Ricoeur suggest that "I can" is logically equivalent to "I believe I can" a form which ties attestation to recognition in the phenomenology of the capable self. The wise man recognises himself in the fragile approximation of "living well" for and with others. Ricoeur now introduces a further dimension to self-esteem, which arises from shared social practices or actions in common, instituting social bonds and social identity. Social identity becomes a new locus for self-esteem

[136] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 60.
[137] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 66.
[138] Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
[139] By appealing to the Greek myths Ricoeur is able to maintain a separation between capacity and will which helps his argument. A more "psychologised" version of tragedy, for example the Shakespearian appeal to hubris, would complicate his argument.

which takes on the guise of recognition, understood as the attribution of status or rights. Attestation becomes "a right to require" under the idea of social justice.[140]

The problem of mutual recognition leads to a rehearsal of Ricoeur's discussion with Lévinas on the dissymmetry between the self and the Other and its consequences for justice. He considers three models of intersubjective recognition: love, where the recognition of oneself within the matrix of family ties extends to include the temporal past of one's ancestors and future of one's children; law which extends the horizons of responsibility and respect; and social respect which extends recognition to authority and institutions. In each case, a Hobbesian view would regard these relationships as competitive and potentially violent. In contrast, Ricoeur seeks the possibility of a primordial state in which mutual recognition does not involve struggle. Ricoeur considers "a state of peace" the highest form of mutual society. However, it can only be achieved in a mediation of *agape* and *philia*, love and justice. Ricoeur develops his concept of the "economy of the gift" to argue that there are motivations for recognition that can be distinguished from the lust for power and removed from the fascination with violence.

In *Le Juste* and *Le Juste 2* Ricoeur offers a reverse perspective on the mediation between virtue and morality from that in *Oneself as Another* in which he prioritised the "aim for the good life", asking whether, with Rawls, one should not rather give priority to the just over the good. [141] Ricoeur contrasts justice which preserves the social contract, to "fairness" which preserves the possibility of personal conviction. He addresses some lacunae in *Oneself as Another*, considering the issues which arise from the conflict of goods in a multi-cultural society in conversation with Habermas and Apel, and the related problem of the unconvertability of goods – demonstrated by the impossibility of converting freedom into wealth, for example.

---

[140] Ricoeur, citing Amartya Sen, Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 141-145.
[141] Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). First published in French *Le Juste*, Editions Espirit, 1995. Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on The Just*, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). First published in French, *Le Juste 2*, Editions Espirit, 2001

The themes are continued in the second book, where Ricoeur contemplates prioritising "the just" over "the wise", and considers the movement from friendship to justice. He returns to the problem of the Other in an essay on translation. Resistance to the foreigner is overturned in the act of translation; however, the translator is faced with the dilemma of fidelity and betrayal, between loyalty to the mother tongue and fidelity to the foreign language. Ultimately translation is an act of mourning for the ideal of the perfect translation.

The final section of the book contains a series of case studies in which Ricoeur examines some practical issues using the resources he has developed in his ethical studies. Among these is a discussion of the respect due to the mentally handicapped which contributes to our argument on the limitations of narrative identity in Chapter Three.[142] However, the outworking of Ricoeur's method is seen most effectively in the final piece which is the transcript of his testimony to the French courts in a criminal case brought against the government for the use of HIV infected blood in medical transfusions. Ricoeur was asked to comment on a government minister's use of the phrase "responsible but not guilty." In doing so he distinguished between criminal acts, for which individuals are responsible, and political acts which are carried out by institutions, and noted that different forms of judgement and different kinds of punishments apply in the two cases. He drew attention to the problem of conflicting goods: the discordance experienced between the desire for urgency and the need for accuracy; the desire for scientific truth and the need to observe confidentiality; and loyalty to the nation conflicting with the safety of individuals. Ricoeur considered a shortfall in the French legal system (which depends on investigation rather than adversarial system) is its tendency to underestimate the value of argument in reconciling contradictory positions. His final appeal privileges the victim: we must listen to the voice of the suffering, and prioritise fairness over duty. As we will see later, Ricoeur prefers to reverse the minister's claim and to suggest that there are times when we are guilty even if not responsible.

[142] "The Difference between the Normal and the Pathological as a Source of Respect" in Ricoeur, *Reflections on The Just*, pp. 187-197.

Living up to Death

While Simone was dying, Ricoeur had begun thinking about the problem of death, and jotted down the ideas for a book including the headings "1. The figures of the imaginary, 2. Mourning and cheerfulness, and 3. Am I still a Christian?" with notes on biblical texts. He began a series of conversations with his friends, Olivier Abel and Catherine Goldenstein, which were interrupted not only by Simone's death, but also by a significant deterioration in Ricoeur's own health. However, he had confided in Catherine Goldstein while editing *Memory, History, Forgetting,* that he was making "great progress" in his reflections on "having-to-die".[143] He was determined to celebrate the gift of life, as he told friends gathered for his ninetieth birthday, "There's the simple happiness of still being alive and, above all, the love of life, shared with those I love, so long as it is given to me to do so. Is not life the first, the inaugural gift?"[144] When Ricoeur was awarded the John W. Kluge prize for lifetime achievement in the humanities in 2004, he was too ill to travel, although he recorded a film of his acceptance speech.[145] After his death in May 2005, a single essay and various fragments of Ricoeur's reflections on life, death and resurrection were published in *Vivant jusqu'à la mort suivi de fragments*.[146]

Ricoeur wrote of the testimony of a life as the true location of its value and meaning in the world. He is consistently described by his students and friends as a man of remarkable humility and compassion. His writing demonstrates his determination to see the value in other people's ideas before he considers where they may be inconsistent or in error. His is not the mind of a critic or an iconoclast, but of one who searches for truth and expects to find it everywhere.

---

[143] Paul Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 93.
[144] Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, p. 94.
[145] A transcript can be found at http://www.loc.gov/loc/kluge/prize/ricoeur-transcript.html
[146] Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*.

CHAPTER THREE: Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

As we have seen, Ricoeur's interest in hermeneutics arose from his exploration of evil which emerged from the problem of the failure of the will. Following Husserl, he recognised that human meaning is always conveyed in symbolic form and so began to consider how those forms are interpreted. He moved from the richness of polyvalent meaning carried by symbols to an appreciation of polyvalent meaning in metaphor and subsequently in all human language. Ricoeur saw that in texts language takes a fixed form which enables interpretation to move beyond the immediate time and context of its production and over time his sense of what constituted a text became increasingly expansive until it included any expression of human understanding, including human lives themselves. This climactic turn culminated in the formulation of the concept of narrative identity.

It is widely agreed that narrative identity is the key concept in Ricoeur's philosophy: Kellner considers it foundational to his anthropology, while John Wall goes further to suggest that narrative identity constitutes the "Poetics of the Will" which completes Ricoeur's proposed Phenomenology of the Will.[1] While Ricoeur himself avoided foundational and totalising claims, he admitted: "I have no idea what a culture would look like where no one any longer knew what it meant to narrate things."[2] We cannot understand Ricoeur's ethics without appreciating the hermeneutic foundations on which they are built, foundations which have implications for anthropology as much as for our reading of texts.

I shall briefly give an account of the trajectory which leads Ricoeur to his understanding of narrative identity, from which two questions arise: How adequate is the account of texts and readers on which the concept of narrative identity is built? And, how adequate is narrative identity as an account of human ontology?

---

[1] "The quintessence of Ricoeur's vision for humanity" Hans Kellner, "As Real as It Gets: Ricoeur and Narrativity" in Klemm and Schweiker, *Meaning in Texts and Actions*, p. 55. "It turns out […] that Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity constitutes a kind of "poetics of the will" after all" Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 36.
[2] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, p. 28.

Hermeneutics: the fusion of horizons

Much of Ricoeur's engagement with the history of hermeneutics is to be found in the essays in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences.* The title of this work refers to the conflict found in the field of hermeneutics between *Verstehen* and *Erklärung.*[3] The first term describes the hermeneutics espoused Schleiermacher (1768-1834) which promoted understanding achieved through non-empirical, participatory or empathetic assimilation into the mind of the author; contrasted with the prevailing empirical approach, which sought to explain the text by dissecting its language, grammar or form. Ricoeur sought, in the first instance, to challenge the assumption that *Verstehen* and *Erklärung* must be in opposition. He concluded that hermeneutics must be a two-fold process, which moves between a hermeneutic of suspicion (explanation / *Erklärung*) and a hermeneutic of retrieval (which goes further than empathy or *Verstehen*), to arrive at a "second naiveté" – a fresh apprehension of the text.

However, a simple appeal to both *Verstehen* and *Erklärung* does not solve a major problem for Ricoeur, which is the assumption made by Schleiermacher that meaning is located *behind* the text in the subjective experience or intentions of the author. This problem can be partially alleviated by the appeal, which Dilthey makes, to Hegel's concept of *Zusammenhang* (interconnectedness) and his emphasis on mediation of meaning through cultural signs.[4] Dilthey (1833-1911) attempted to turn hermeneutics into a special kind of science which would examine "life worlds": the broader context which is expressed not only in common language but common structures, practices and institutions. All can be interpreted for a richer understanding of what it means to be human.[5] This insight helps Ricoeur to move from the study of hermeneutics as the understanding of texts, to the study of understanding itself, since all reflection on what it means to be human turns out to be interpretation of the signs reflected

[3] It does not resonate in translation, but should imply something of the dialectic between the humanities and the sciences – what Ricoeur refers to as the "human sciences" and the "natural sciences". Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences.*
[4] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Arnold V. Miller and J. N. Findlay, *Phenomenology of spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
[5] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), p. 165.

back to us by other people, and self-knowledge is always the product of a hermeneutic process. Ricoeur asks, "if all self knowledge is mediated through signs and works, what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding?"[6]

The answer to this question is found in the radical reformation of hermeneutics demonstrated by Heidegger (1879-1976) in *Being and Time*. Heidegger's first claim is that understanding is not simply the outcome of critical reflection, but a mode of being which is characteristic of human being, of *Dasein*. We have a fundamental grasp of the world, which enables us to act within it without having to "reflect on it" constantly and we interpret when we bring our familiarity with the world to reflective consciousness. Then, interpretation makes things appear *as something*, as objects with a purpose or meaning and we are simultaneously aware of the world as the totality of *somethings*, practices, encounters and others. The world opened up by interpretation becomes a world we can inhabit.

Heidegger's formulation leads Ricoeur to a revised understanding of the hermeneutic circle. Whereas, for Schleiermacher the hermeneutic circle was conceived in terms of the relationship between the whole and its parts, or the text and its tradition, in a relationship which enables the reader to move from one to the other with greater levels of understanding, for Heidegger, and increasingly for Ricoeur, the hermeneutic circle refers to the relationship between our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. It confronts the reader with an existential task. There will no longer be a moment when the reader's work of interpretation culminates in a clear grasp of the meaning of the text, only a moment of decision – a wager – as to the claim the text makes on the reader's self-understanding. Understanding texts is no longer about finding "a lifeless sense which is contained therein" but unfolding the *possibility of being* indicated by the text.[7]

Ricoeur does not find evidence of intersubjectivity in Heidegger's hermeneutics; signs are there in the world in order to be grasped rather than shared. This leads Ricoeur to complain

[6] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 54.
[7] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 56.

that the limitation of Heidegger's hermeneutic is that, while it results in a broader understanding of being-in-the-world, it also seems to result in an anthropology that leaves *Dasein* addressing only itself. This may be an incomplete reading of Heidegger, and could be contrasted with Ricoeur's focus on the place of Care/*Sorge*/Solicitude in his later writing. However, at this stage he seeks to recover a missing phenomenological dimension, which he finds in the way that Heidegger's hermeneutic was taken up and developed by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*.[8] Initially, Gadamer's project is to prove that hermeneutics is not a form of *truth*, knowledge, or science, but is an entirely contingent, historically entrenched form of understanding (or *method*). Gadamer continues to place importance on the preconceptions, prejudices and traditions of the reader (all that makes up *Vorverständnis,* usually translated as 'pre-understanding' but probably better rendered "preliminary understanding") and on the same culturally determined characteristics, experience and tradition of the author.[9] The two viewpoints come together in Gadamer's term, "fusion of horizons".

Ricoeur continues to insist that hermeneutics must mediate between the two poles of *Verstehen* and *Erklärung* as a meta-critical discipline whose very capacity to reveal difference supposes an underlying accord.[10] The most decisive break Ricoeur makes with Schleiermacher and Dilthey is in his insistence that hermeneutics is no longer concerned with the world behind the text, but with the world *in front* of the text.

[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).
[9] Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, p. 12.
[10] For a full discussion of Gadamer's influence, see Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 70ff.

Ricoeur wrote:

> *The kind of hermeneutics which I now favour starts from the recognition of the objective meaning of the text as distinct from the subjective intention of the author. This objective meaning is not something hidden behind the text. Rather it is a requirement addressed to the reader. The interpretation accordingly is a kind of obedience to this injunction starting from the text. The concept of the 'hermeneutical circle' is not ruled out by this shift within hermeneutics. Instead it is formulated in new terms. It does not proceed so much from an intersubjective relation linking the subjectivity of the author with the subjectivity of the reader as from a connection between two discourses, the discourse of the text and the discourse of the interpretation. This connection means that what has to be interpreted in a text is what it says and what it speaks about, i.e. the kind of world which it opens up or discloses; and the final act of 'appropriation' is less the projection of one's own prejudices into the text than the 'fusion of horizons' – to speak like Hans-Georg Gadamer – which occurs when the world of the reader and the world of the text merge into one another.*[11]

For Ricoeur, the fusion of horizons does not result merely in understanding a text, but in acknowledging its existential claim. In order to unfold the process more carefully, he develops Aristotle's concept of *mimēsis* in a threefold movement echoing Augustine's threefold dialectic of human experience. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, the world opened up by a work of drama, fiction or history shaped through *mimēsis* (creative imitation) into *mythos* (plot). Ricoeur breaks *mimēsis* down into three stages.

Mimēsis$_1$ is the representation of what is remembered or already exists: it is the conceptual network of semantic pre-understanding, of symbolic language and of temporal sense which is part of human experience. Ricoeur employs Heidegger's sense of "being-within-time" to describe this temporal sense. *Mimesis*$_2$ describes the process of emplotment as it shapes individual event or incidents into a whole, configuring the succession of events into a shape

[11] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 319.

which reflects meaning. In doing so, the relationships between plot, character and thought are worked out and the contribution of the past to the present is assessed, so that the past is understood from the perspective of the present. It is the configuration in *mimesis*$_2$ which leads to refiguration in *mimesis*$_3$ where human experience, configured in plots experienced and interpreted as narrative, is refigured as action. In *mimesis*$_3$ narrative returns to the sphere of experience or action once again.[12]

In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur uses this paradigm as a description of the hermeneutic process whereby the meaning of a text is projected "in front" of the work, in a world which can be inhabited.[13] But, he goes further. As we have seen, he suggests that narrative is the only way that humans can make sense of their experience of time, and that narrative is inherent to our understanding of the passing of time in our own lives. Finally, drawing on Dilthey's concept of the connectedness of a life and Alasdair MacIntyre's "narrative unity of a life", Ricoeur shows how we make sense of the whole of life in the process of threefold *mimēsis*, and human identity becomes narrative identity, shaped in the form of a narrative and projected as narrative.[14] However, before we examine narrative identity, we must ask some critical questions concerning the adequacy of Ricoeur's hermeneutic moves. In particular, whether the claim made by the text can be completely distanced from the intention of the author, and secondly how we judge the veracity of the world opened up by the text.

[12] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, pp. 53-87.
[13] "What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities."Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 112.
[14] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue :A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Text and Reference

Texts are sometimes described as being either transparent windows or reflective mirrors in which readers either see the truth behind the text, or use the text to interpret their own situation. Ricoeur's hermeneutic is sometimes, in my view wrongly, assumed to treat the text as if it were a mirror in which the reader can find the reflection of anything he or she chooses. The problem arises initially because Ricoeur cuts the text free from the author, stating: "writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies."[15] Secondly, instead of seeing the translation of speech to text as a problematic move which cuts discourse away from its origins, Ricoeur welcomes distanciation as the positive condition of interpretation. Whereas in the tradition this move is seen as an ontological fall from grace, for Ricoeur meaning is *emancipated* in text. It is not surprising that many critics assume this means that the text has no meaning except what the reader makes of it.

Ricoeur offers a third analogy in which the text is neither window nor mirror but *projection*, like an image thrown onto a wall which already has a shape and a structure into which the reader can interpose him or herself. Even this analogy does not reflect the liveliness of Ricoeur's proposal, which engages the reader with the text until it becomes part of his or her own sense of identity and meaning.[16] It may, nevertheless, express something of the intangible nature of meaning, dancing in a pattern of light and dust motes, which challenges some readers of Ricoeur's work.

If, as Ricoeur seems to suggest, texts do not make any claim to propositional truth, but only to perlocutionary truth (tested by its effect on the reader), problems arise for readers of history and readers of religious texts. Readers of history expect to find descriptions of 'real events'

[15] Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 83.
[16] Although, it is arguably an unfortunate analogy, given the psychotherapeutic freight carried by the term "projection".

taking place in the past; readers of religious texts expect to find reference to a god who 'really' exists. The first problem for both categories of readers is that Ricoeur appears to consider that there are no special categories of texts: he posits a general hermeneutics which applies equally to histories, religious texts and literature. In this section we shall consider how Ricoeur faces this challenge when faced with writings about history. In the next chapter we shall consider how Ricoeur faces the challenge of biblical texts.

In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur asserts that all history writing is *emplotment*: the grouping of events in meaningful patterns. He begins by considering the author's role in shaping plots from the study of 'traces': the objects, documents and artefacts remaining from the past. These traces appear to anchor the narrative in time and space. However, traces are in themselves merely signs left in the world bearing the imprint of human culture, they are records of memories and interpretations of perceptions. It seems that history is already 'metahistory', a narrative of interpretations, and that the subject of history is not what people did, but what they thought about it. Ricoeur engages in dialogue with the historian Collingwood who suggests that since thinking about history is critical thinking, history is essentially a form of self-knowledge in which the historian judges himself. [17] This account seems to cut history adrift from any phenomenological reference, but Collingwood appeals to Bergson for a richer description of reference. [18] Bergson showed that perception is not meaningful in the immediate moment, but only as past perceptions intersect with the present. Since the past intersects with the present, as for example the memory of earlier notes in a sequence enables us to hear a tune in the present, but is not a phenomenon which can be perceived in the present, neither can it be explained. Thus, history is not amenable to empirical explanation, but only to interpretation.

Ricoeur develops Collingwood's use of Bergson by drawing on Heidegger. For Heidegger the present moment is always an intersection of past, present and future. An object which exists both has a past and is "present-at-hand" and being present it can be understood only as an object with potential. So, the mallet here in my hand in the present moment, fashioned from

[17] R.G. Colllingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946).
[18] Henri Bergson, Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, *Matter and Memory* (New York: London : Zone ; Distributed by MIT Press, 1988).

wood in the past, could be used in the future to hit tent pegs or summon a court to order. Heidegger enables us to appreciate that an object's connection to a past contributes to its present existence and its future contributes to our present understanding of its meaning. The trace existing in the present is necessary to our understanding of the past, even if it cannot guarantee our interpretation. Ricoeur argues that similarly there is an intersection between historical time and experiential time, such that one can indicate a place on the calendar and say "this is where we are now", or one can identify oneself as a member of a generation, or hold the document from the archive in one's hand today.

Had Ricoeur ended his discussion with this interplay between the phenomenological world and history, he might have strengthened the particular claims of history, albeit in a new way. However, he went on to consider whether literature might refer to parallel relationship between lived experience and narrative and this complicates the situation considerably. Ricoeur denies that history is about "the reality of the past" or that fiction is "unreal". Instead, he argues, the trace 'stands in' for the past, reminding of us of our indebtedness or connectedness, but is "ultimately irreducible to the category of reference" because it is located in the threefold dialectical structure we have seen described: there is no *single* reference since the reference is split between the past, the present and the future. [19] This threefold reference has parallels with the threefold nature of *mimēsis* which Ricoeur has used to describe the movement from configuration to refiguration occurring when a reader encounters a text. This movement requires the confrontation between two worlds, the fictive world of the text and the real world of the reader.

[19] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 157.

Ricoeur has a high doctrine of literature which owes something to Northrop Frye's view that fictions are "broken myths" which form partial glimpses of the deepest truths about the human condition, such that "the orientation of the whole universe of discourse [is] towards the still centre of words."[20] In doing so he opposes Frank Kermode's suspicion that literature is a form of trickery merely offering consolation in the face of death.[21] Ricoeur argues that configuration does more than disguise the reality of chaos with the illusion of order ("throwing the Apollonian veil over the Dionysian fascination for chaos"), claiming that it is one of the "unavoidable assumptions of discourse." [22] Emplotment is not merely a technique used by writers, but fundamental to the way humans understand themselves. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur argues that narrative may be the *only* way we can make sense of time, and that literary fiction enables us to reflect on it in a more productive way than does philosophical speculation.

For Ricoeur the same hermeneutical method should be applied to history and literature, because history makes sense of "traces" (phenomena in the present) by employing imagination and emplotment and fiction makes sense of experience (phenomena in the present) because it is a representation of human actions. Literature and life intersect like the split reference of a metaphor: when we read the text we read ourselves. Ricoeur cites Proust with approval:

> *Real life, life at last laid bare and illuminated – is literature, and life thus defined is in a sense all the time immanent in ordinary man no less than in the artist. But most men do not see it because they do not seek to shed light upon it.*[23]

[20] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 1957). Cited Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, p. 26. Frye himself drew on the work of others, see Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1960). Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Religion* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1893).
[21] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). The dichotomy between the Apollonian and Dionysian which originates with Nietzsche is discussed further in Chapter 8.
[22] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, pp. 27-28.
[23] Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol.3, p. 931, cited Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, p. 150.

In blurring the distinction between literature and history Ricoeur is merely echoing Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> *The distinction between the historian and poet [...] consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import that history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars*.[24]

I would argue that Ricoeur's use of Bergson and Heidegger ensures that he is not offering an unmediated hermeneutic in which the text is completely detached from its history or, by implication its author, not least because there is a subjective decision made in identifying the "trace". However, Ricoeur's use of everyday language philosophy and his anthropology of the speaking subject complicate the landscape.

By identifying the reference of a text with the world projected in front of the text, Ricoeur makes a parallel move from locutionary to perlocutionary language. Attention is turned from what the text says, to what the text achieves. In his discussion of speech-act theory in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur is mainly concerned with speech rather than text, but the implications do not vary. The reference of the utterance is the speaker, who is unable to make statements about the world, but only can only declare or assert - *the affirmation* is the real content of the sentence.[25]

Before we look more critically at "the world in front of the text" we might consider in more detail how texts achieve their impact, and pay attention to the intention of the author in this respect.

[24] Aristotle, *Poetics*, paragraph 1451b.
[25] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 43.

Authors and Readers

In order for a text to make an existential claim on a reader, it must first engage the reader in the project of reading. Ricoeur is not as indifferent as some might claim to the responsibility of authors for their texts, particularly when it comes to their duty to their readers.[26] He uses the analogy of texts as musical scores which are only concretised or completed in performance. Both scores and texts set boundaries for their readers, but also make them labour to create meaning.[27] Readers fill in the gaps left in texts and must also discern which threads of narrative are significant when presented with an excess of meaning (in red herrings, diversions, and sub-plots). The author must strike a balance between familiarity and strangeness: the first enables the reader to get lost in the text in a willing suspension of disbelief, but does not challenge or change the reader – the reader who does not have enough work to do gets bored; the second leaves the reader with too much work and may not provide enough signals to make sense of the narrative. Ricoeur is uncharacteristically brisk in condemning authors who indulge in this kind of obfuscation, complaining:

> *Modern readers risk buckling under the load of an impossible task when they are asked to make up for this lack of readability fabricated by the author. Reading then becomes a picnic where the author brings the words and the reader the meaning.* [28]

A healthy balance between banality and obscurity creates a pleasant reading experience, a feature explored by Hans Robert Jauss.[29] He describes the aesthetic of reading as opening up

[26] He could be categorised as adopting what Thiselton has referred to as a "moderate" reader response theory, see e.g. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, p. 31.
[27] "Reading is like the execution of a musical score; it marks the realisation, the enactment, of the semantic possibilities of the text" Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 159, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 167. He takes this idea from Roman Ingarden, who is in turn borrowing from Husserl, who suggests that a text does not really exist until it is realised in the act of reading, and that the reader completes the text by "filling in the gaps". Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and the Theory of Literature*, trans. by George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. by Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
[28] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 169.
[29] Hans Robert Jauss, *Aestheic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

space for understanding which moves from poetics to aesthetics to catharsis.[30] For Ricoeur catharsis is not only a poetic category but a rhetorical one which results in more than simply an emotional purging or moment of recognition, but drives the reader to a change of life, inhabiting the world opened up by the text.

One of the aesthetic strategies which enable the reader to enter the world of the text is metaphor, which contributes to the shock propelling us to consider new possibilities. As we have seen, Ricoeur places great stress on the capacity of metaphor to make new meaning. However, Vanhoozer is probably right to ask whether Ricoeur applies a sufficiently robust hermeneutic of suspicion to the use of metaphor.[31]

Ricoeur recognises two categories of metaphor: dead - which reveal idols, and living - which retain their symbolic power. However, it would be fair to say that in *The Rule of Metaphor* he is so concerned to demonstrate the "proper" use of metaphor in the creation of new meaning that he misses its ethical content. Dead metaphors pervade our language to the extent that they influence our thought processes and determine our thinking in ways which are largely subconscious.[32] We are so familiar with the way that metaphor gives meaning to experience that most of the time we don't notice it. We forget that rain is just rain. Instead, we have assimilated the pathetic fallacy and the very language of storms invokes fear and awe. Mark Johnson, working with Lakoff, has demonstrated how "root metaphors" create their own grammar and thought pathways, so that for example the whole tenor of our language about argument implies that it is a battle rather than a joint search for truth. [33] Dead metaphors not only fail to create new meaning but reinforce established patterns, many of which include unhelpful power relationships or inbuilt oppositions.

---

[30] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 176.
[31] "Lacking in Ricoeur's otherwise brilliant rehabilitation of metaphor is any indication of how one may judge the difference between good and bad metaphors" Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 66.
[32] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Mark Johnson was a student of Ricoeur in Chicago.
[33] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff and Johnson's work has developed into a whole "science" of neuro-linguistic programming, which attempts to change habitual thought processes through revealing and changing habitual language patterns.

However, there is a third category of metaphor, which Ricoeur does not consider: the "poisoned" metaphor, which is seductive but draws us into a world which is ultimately destructive rather than life affirming. It might be argued that some utopian literature falls into this category. The problem is that the liveliness of the metaphor is not sufficient to guarantee its veracity. The solution lies in Ricoeur's redefining of *proof* as attestation in life. Ricoeur adds a fourth term to Jauss' movement through poetics, aesthetics and catharsis, whereby the cathartic struggle is transformed into a new *poesis*.[34] In the context of discourse, metaphors have been revealed as a form of *poetic* language which re-present the world, in the reading of the text, *poesis* becomes realised when the life of the reader is re-presented in a new way.

Ricoeur's engagement with hermeneutics has brought him back to ontology, such that "understanding ceases to appear as a simple mode of knowing in order to become a way of being and a way of relating to beings and to being."[35] Though Ricoeur is not a literary critic, he is aware of the factors which contribute to the impact made by a text and it is obvious that some of these can be attributed to an author. He even considers the problem of the unreliable or immoral narrator, who draws the reader into a "dangerous" or "poisonous" world. A reader faced with such a text must be a suspicious reader who is on guard and prepared to take a critical stance. [36] However, what we will also discover is that for Ricoeur this author is not so much the romantic individual whose name appears on the cover of the book, but the whole Spirit and culture which informed the writing of the text.

Similarly, we should not be misled by the preceding description into assuming that the reader is to be understood only as an individual encountering the book as though on a desert island. Ricoeur has a more nuanced approach, which draws on the contributions of Jauss and Wolfgang Iser on the relationship between the collective expectations of reading communities

[34] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 330.
[35] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 44.
[36] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 163. citing Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Second edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

and individual responses.[37] Ricoeur characteristically concludes that the two are not opposed but complementary, each contributing to the other:

> *On the one hand, it is through the individual process of reading that the text reveals its 'structure of appeal'; on the other hand, it is inasmuch as readers participate in the sedimented expectations of the general reading public that they are constituted as competent readers*.[38]

Individual readers are shaped by their membership of reading communities and do not read independently. This makes them competent, for example in recognising the expectations of a genre, but it may also limit their interpretations. This has become clearer as the discipline of reception history has shown how 'readings' change, for example in new feminist readings of Dickens, or post-colonial readings of Kipling. Changes in reading communities affect not only on the reception of works, but the relationship between community identity and community narratives, because as Stephen Crites points out, narrative creates an "inner bond among tellers and hearers. Stories are community creating."[39] This becomes problematic when these stories are the foundational narratives which give identity to communities. We can see examples of this in recent works of historiography describing, for example, the progressive shaping of our understanding of the Celts and Romans in British history and the development of narratives which shaped "Scottish" identity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.[40]

Jauss takes reception history to a further level suggesting, as did Collingwood, that the meaning of a work is located *only* in its reception and which varies according to culture and history. In contrast to Gadamer, who argued that classic texts have an enduring meaning which

---

[37] See, for example Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978).and Jauss, *Aestheic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*.
[38] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 167.
[39] cited in Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 481.
[40] See for example, Simon James, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London: British Museum Press, 1999). *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: A Colony so Fertile* by Richard Hingley, reviewed in the LRB by Christopher Kelly, Feb 2010 . Stewart Sutherland "History, Truth and Narrative" in Martin Warner ed. *The Bible and Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility,* (London: Routledge, 1990)

allows them to be reinterpreted through history, Jauss refuses to see, even in the most cherished texts, anything other than a temporary stabilization of the dynamic of reception.[41] Ricoeur's counterargument takes a similar path to his riposte against Collingwood, suggesting that although we cannot identify classic works as if they gain their importance from some perspective outside time, reception history actually guarantees the status of some texts because of their enduring importance for communities. This paradigm has clear implications for the reception of biblical texts, not only because it denies the possibility of a single 'correct' interpretation, but also because it challenges interpretations which differ from those of the tradition, for example the changing reception of St Paul's theology of the cross.

The problem with Ricoeur's attempt to mediate between a 'classic' and 'progressive' view of texts is that he pays insufficient attention to the exercise of power within cultures. Despite his reference to authors who create "poisonous" worlds, he pays relatively little attention to the powers which unhelpfully constrain readers or colonise their thought: this has been a particular concern of feminist readers of Ricoeur.[42] Once we have established the role of the author embedded in culture in producing a text to be read by a reader who is part of a community of readers, we can see how constrained the possibilities of meaning have become. We might interpret this as a prophylactic against eccentric reading, but ought equally to be aware of its moral dimension and inherent conservatism. Similarly the world projected by the text must be tested: is it convincing? Is it ethical?

[41] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 172.
[42] see Helen M. Buss, "Antigone, Psyche and the Ethics of Female Selfhood" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, pp. 64-79. And "Women's Memoirs and Embodied Imagination" in Morny Joy, *Context and Contestation: Paul Ricoeur and Narrative* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997), pp. 87-96.

The World in Front of the Text

Such worlds are the fruit of *muthos* and *mimēsis* in Ricoeur's expansion of the concepts from Aristotle's *Poetics*. If we accept Ricoeur's proposal, that "What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities" it may be helpful to summarise some of the factors affecting the process of interpretation, which we have already considered. [43]

When I read, I may refuse to enter the world of the text. It may be simply that the author has given me so much work to do that I cannot be bothered. It may be that the world that the text depicts is so silly or banal that I have no interest in inhabiting it. I may read critically and discover that the world which the text projects is poisonous, or I may read and find the text challenging. If I find the text challenging, what resources can I use to ascertain its value for me – and how will I correlate that value with "truth"? For example, if I cannot assimilate Kant's world view, how do I know that is because at a linguistic or intellectual level I cannot make sense of what he is saying; or because I am not sufficiently embedded in his culture to assimilate his view into mine; or because I have intellectual or ethical differences with him; or because what he writes has no truth for me?

In order to answer these questions, we have to look in more detail at what Ricoeur means by "inhabiting" the projected world, or "realising" our ownmost possibilities. We need to consider what constitutes understanding when it is no longer defined as intellectual consent or acceptance of certain propositions. David Klemm has asked, "whether or not the hermeneutical consciousness can speak of the truth or falsity of the poetic language that it interprets?" and concludes that: "since in poetic language the metaphor suspends reference to the perceived world in order to redescribe reality, it must sacrifice its claim for truth-value in the narrow sense." [44]

---

[43] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 102.
[44] David E. Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur : A Constructive Analysis* (Lewisburg, London: Bucknell University Press, Associated University Presses, 1983), p. 160. cited Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 360.

I have already suggested that questions of truth or reference present particular problems for readers of religious texts and one of the most astute critics of Ricoeur in this respect is Kevin Vanhoozer, who asks how we enquire into the "realizability of the possible worlds projected by the poetic vision which form the context of utopias and the 'substance' of things hoped for?" and, whether "the vision of a 'reconciled humanity' [is] a real possibility?"[45] Vanhoozer asks these questions in the course of an examination of Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics because he is concerned about the legitimacy of the narrative, but it is just as valid as a general point, " If we follow Ricoeur's mediation of the imaginary and the real, we risk losing the distinction between truth and fantasy with regard to possibility."[46]

Thiselton suggests that Vanhoozer's question about status of the biblical narrative cannot be answered at the critical level, because it is a metacritical question, concerning the tools being used, not the status of the text.[47] However he concedes that because of Ricoeur's insistence on the narrative dimension of history, the critical element of "explanation" gets lost in his hermeneutics and we can become trapped in "an intralinguistic world in which the traditional notion of 'reference' has been transposed into an internal relation within a phenomenological system."[48]

In order to step outside this intralinguistic world we must take account of the way in which Ricoeur himself steps out of the hermeneutic circle, by taking the existential wager and moving from reflection to action. We must consider the category of application or attestation which Ricoeur suggests is the culmination of the hermeneutical process. The long quotation cited below describes how Ricoeur arrives at this conclusion. Here we see, for the first time, Ricoeur asking questions about the relationship between biblical hermeneutics and general hermeneutics and it is significant that he suggests that general hermeneutics should demonstrate how literature can be applied to life, as a sermon applies the insights of biblical exegesis to life-situations.

[45] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 107..
[46] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 12.
[47] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 360.
[48] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, p. 360.

> *A literary hermeneutics worthy of the name must assume the threefold task […] of understanding […], explanation […], and application […]. In contrast to a superficial view, reading must not be confined to the field of application, even if this field does reveal the end of the hermeneutical process: instead reading must pass through all three stages. A literary hermeneutics will, therefore, reply to these three questions: in what sense is the primary undertaking of understanding entitled to characterize the object of literary hermeneutics as an aesthetic one? What does reflective exegesis add to understanding? What equivalent to a sermon in biblical exegesis and to a verdict in juridical exegesis does literature offer on the level of application? In this triadic structure, application orientates the entire process teleologically, but primary understanding guides the process from one stage to the next by virtue of the horizon of expectation it already contains. Literary hermeneutics is thus oriented both toward application and understanding.*[49]

Application and Attestation

For Ricoeur, application replaces understanding as a hermeneutic category. In his hermeneutics and philosophical writing, Ricoeur generally replaces the term "application" with the term "attestation", a three dimensional term which describes a method of judgement; a kind of response; and a judgement of the self. The threefold definition echoes the move in Ricoeur's thought from hermeneutics to ethics to philosophy. As we will see later, attestation is related to "testimony" a category which Ricoeur uses almost exclusively to describe a response to the biblical texts. In the broadest terms, attestation is the kind of understanding implied in *mimēsis*$_3$, the application of understanding to life, or, in more Ricoeurian terms, living in the world projected by the text.

The origins of the philosophical use of the term "attestation" may lie in Heidegger's *Being and Time,* which portrays the workings of conscience as the *attestation* of *Dasein's* own most

[49] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 174.

potentiality for being.[50] Ricoeur himself used the term as early as 1957, but it is not fully explored until much later, notably in *Oneself as Another*.[51] Attestation describes a judgement which is provisional and contingent, arrived at through hermeneutic method. It is a kind of verification which is not provable in the scientific objective sense, but neither is it simply subjective.

Ricoeur applies this method of judgement in three contexts: as a general description of adequacy in contrast to other definitions of "truth"; as a way of judging claims about selfhood; and as a way of judging the relationship between language and reality.
In regard to the first of these, he sets out the conditions for attestation in contrast, for example, to Karl Popper's idea of truth and verifiability; "The belief belonging to attestation is of another nature. It has to do with confidence. Its contrary is suspicion, not doubt, or it is doubt as suspicion. It cannot be refuted but can be challenged. And it can be re-established and reinforced only by a new recourse to attestation..."[52]

In applying the category of attestation to anthropology, Ricoeur seeks to show that the self can be known and that the self that is known has both the constancy and capability that are necessary for the existence of an ethical or moral life. In order for the possibility of ethical life, the self must be able to take responsibility for its own past acts and to make choices about acts in the future. In order to do this we must recognize ourselves in the people that we once were, Ricoeur points to a "close semantic relationship between attestation and self-recognition, in line with the 'recognizing responsibility' attributed to the agents of action by the Greeks."[53] The importance of action as an expression of the self is reiterated throughout *Oneself as Another* where Ricoeur shows that there is an inextricable link between action and character. Attestation is the only test we can apply to the veracity of utterances: it is the link between

[50] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 341-342.
[51] The first reference is found in "Le paradoxe politique" *Esprit,* Vol 25, no 250, 1957, p. 730 according to Dauenhauer, see note 32, Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 135.
[52] Ricoeur, *Reflections on The Just*, p. 66.
[53] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 91.

language and reality. Ricoeur describes it as assurance but not certitude; confidence but not verification; believing-in rather than believing that[54]

The category of attestation comes together with Ricoeur's thinking about emplotment, in the paradigm of narrative identity. Narrative identity as a category describes the way in which humans understand themselves and the way in which they shape their lives. Narratives which shape meaning from events, whether historical or fictional, help humans to understand their own past lives and project worlds into which humans can imagine themselves. Lives become projects or tasks in *poetics*: in realizing the art of the possible.

[54] Paul Ricoeur, "L'Attestation: entre phénoménologie et ontologie," in *Paul Ricoeur: Les Métamorphose de la raison hermenutique,* ed. Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney, (Paris: Cerf, 1991) cited Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 111.

Narrative Identity

Ricoeur draws on Dilthey and MacIntyre to examine the relationship between narrative and life in the fullest sense[55]. MacIntyre develops his view of narrative identity from the perspective of ethics. He focuses on the process of emplotment as a means by which people make sense of their lives and so shape their understanding of "living well". We will see how Ricoeur develops this idea when we look at his ethics in further detail.[56]

Briefly, we need to recall that Ricoeur's original idea of threefold *mimēsis* was originally applied to the interpretation of texts, and was then applied to the interpretation of lives. Application, appropriation, or attestation is the culmination of both the threefold hermeneutic arc and the threefold narrative arc, because authentic attestation is paradigmatic to the interpretation of texts, "We are not allowed to exclude the final act of personal commitment from the whole of objective and explanatory procedures which mediate it."[57] Mark Wallace notes the different terminologies used by commentators in describing the threefold arc; Klemm uses "first naiveté", "critique" and "second naiveté"[58], while Mudge uses "testimony in the making", "critical moment" and "post critical moment"[59] Wall applies a threefold movement from *Time and Narrative Vol 3*, moving from "traditionality" which draws on Gadamer's "history of effects" to suggest the dimension of historical consciousness which informs our sense of who we are; "traditions" such as the genres, forms and structures which both permit innovation and suggest the possibilities and shapes it might take, and finally "tradition per se" which is the "claim to truth" in the reader's life. Tradition takes on a meaning similar to that David Tracy applies to the interpretation of classic literature, and which Ricoeur also applied to reading, as analogous to playing a piece of music.

---

[55] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204-225.Dilthey referred to the phenomenon of mutability within the cohesion of one lifetime as "*Zusammenhang des Lebens*".
[56] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 157ff.
[57] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 221.
[58] Klemm, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 69.
[59] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 18-32.

The overlaying of one over the other is not an exact science, but a process of enrichment, which depends on understanding Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Dan Stiver seems to show a flawed understanding, when he argues that the two cannot be overlaid: firstly he is confused as to how the critical stage of hermeneutic arc can lead to the "post-critical *construction* of the world in front of the text".[60] I would argue that he is using the wrong metaphor here since Ricoeur never speaks of the world in front of the text as a synthesis, or a creation of the reader; rather it is a poetic creation, both shaped by *and* revealed to the reader. Secondly, Stiver attempts to show that there must be an additional stage of "post-critical" understanding before refiguration can take place.[61] Stiver's confusion arises because he does not pay sufficient attention to Ricoeur's attempt to mediate between explanation and understanding in the critical stage of interpretation or the configuration stage of *mimēsis*.[62] I would argue that the process of interpretation oscillates between shaping and testing the narrative until a fragile equilibrium is found. Refiguration does not take place when the revised narrative is formed, but as it is lived out. Stiver's account suggests a stage in which we could be said to "understand" a text before making a choice about living in the world it projects, but Ricoeur does not offer us such a choice – rather he assumes that a text makes an existential claim on us, which we can only accept or reject. We might question whether this is an adequate description the responses available to us, but on balance, I think that Ricoeur applies his own categories clearly, so long as we recognise that the hermeneutic of suspicion, the critical phase, may include this notion of testing our understanding.

Ricoeur tells us, "narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutical circle."[63] It is the point at which hermeneutics breaks out of the circle into life. And he goes further: the hermeneutic circle is the self's ever evolving and dynamic interpretation of its own meaning

[60] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, p. 66. My emphasis.
[61] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, p. 75.
[62] David Tracy notes Ricoeur's use of the single term "develop" explanation, in contrast to the "enveloping" of understanding, and suggests that we need to appreciate that "develop" should probably include "challenge, correct, refine, complicate and confront" in its ambit. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 143 note 159.
[63] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 248.

and purpose in the world. It is resolved in life itself, in the application of meaning to attestation – it is the means by which the self can find its own fragile self-esteem.

Notwithstanding the obvious fact that we cannot recount the experience of our own birth, nor our own death, and that our stories are intertwined with numerous others whose details we are unaware of, Ricoeur concludes that we are able to speak of the "narrative unity of a life".[64] Such narrative coherence has two aspects; the connection which humans make between the temporally separate incidents and experiences of life and the meaning which they make from those connections.

Meaning making is a function of *ipse*, the self who both lives and interprets life, acting as both author and reader.[65] In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur saw the identification of *ipse* with narrative identity as an exact equivalence, but by the time of writing *Oneself as Another* he associated narrative identity with the interplay between *ipse* and *idem.* In doing so, he recognised the problem of constancy and faithfulness which has an impact on responsibility and trustworthiness. Consistency is a characteristic of *idem* which acts as one pole of a dialectic, the other pole of which is represented by *character*, the human possibility for development and change. In the later work, Ricoeur describes narrative identity acting as the mediator between these two poles, oscillating between two limits: "a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit, where *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of *idem*."[66] We will see in a later chapter that this interplay has implications for Ricoeur's ethics, where he employs the categories of *keeping ones word* and *character* to exemplify the two dimensions of permanence and change.[67] Character is expressed in action, while conviction (belief, self-belief, or self-understanding) will be attested in the whole of life. Attestation contributes to the evidence of the difference between *ipse* and *idem*, since only *I* can say "I promise", "I remember", "I can" and these statements cannot be verified in any scientific way, but only be

[64] And in this, he reaches very much the same conclusions as Alisdair MacIntyre, for many of the same reasons. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.
[65] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 246.
[66] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 124.
[67] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 118.

attested. *Keeping ones word* is an attribute of *idem*, in that it expresses the possibility of constancy, which guarantees that we can keep promises, live up to our intentions and take responsibility for our actions.

The self must be able to change in order that we can become more virtuous; changing stance when we find it inadequate to our circumstances and learning from our mistakes. While *character* describes those traits and habits by which a person is recognised and identified, and by which a person recognises and identifies him or herself [68], it is in emplotment - in the relationship between action and character - that the identity of the protagonist is constructed, either by an author, or by a person acting as the author of their own identity. Stability in character exists along a continuum: in genres such as myth and fairy tale character tends to be very stable, while in the great nineteenth century novels of George Eliot or Dostoyevsky, characters undergo considerable transformations while we continue to be convinced by the continuity of their identities.[69]

Emplotment establishes the relationship between character and plot, but it has a third dimension which is that of causality. Actions happen because characters have intentions and will but they are not without consequences, Ricoeur goes beyond the basic structuralist assumptions of Propp and Greimas to remind us that in plots we are dealing with humans acting and suffering. [70] As soon as there is action, there are ethical consequences, as actions always involve an Other, whether as victim or oppressor, co-conspirator or fellow sufferer.

Having established the relationship between narrative identity and ethics as a consequence of emplotment, we can see the relationship of emplotment to ethical judgement. It is easy to judge that Oedipus was wrong to sleep with his mother, or that we should not have driven the car over next door neighbour's cat. What we still have not established is how our absorption of these narratives might affect our future behaviour.

[68]Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 121.
[69] Ricoeur, O*neself as Another*, p. 148.
[70] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. Greimas, *On Meaning*. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 145.

We might wonder whether narrative can only be constructed from past events. But, Ricoeur tries to suggest that there is a teleological dimension to narrative identity, that in narrating life we are able not only to look back, but also to look forward, to "recount care".[71] He explores this further, following Von Wright, in the concept of *teleological explication,* whereby in understanding the intention we understand the cause.[72] Such an explanation demonstrates cause and effect in a way which articulates emplotment, but employs a non-scientific understanding of cause and effect, by relying on a process of interpretation rather than proof. Thus, I might explain an action in the past, but I cannot prove that it will achieve my goal in the future.

A further attempt to relate the interpretation of the past to the shaping of the future can be found in Ricoeur's appropriation of Freud. He describes psychology as an "archaeology of the self" which he places in a dialectic relationship with a "teleology of the self." His reasoning suggests that the symbols encountered in psychoanalysis not only assist in interpreting past actions, but presuppose the movement of a subject "drawn forward" by a succession of figures offering new meanings and future possibilities.[73]

Our capacity to respond to future possibilities, to instigate and create new ways of being, is all included in Ricoeur's use of the term *poetics*. While Aristotle's *Poetics* concerns the imitation of life in art, for Ricoeur the term implies a broader understanding: it is inextricably linked with the capacity of humans to behave creatively and to instigate action.

The development from partial action to a "life plan" also has its origins in the virtue ethics of Aristotle. As MacIntyre has shown, the Aristotelian virtues are established within the social context of particular practices, such that there is a consensus regarding the virtues of a "good" doctor, soldier or architect. Just as individual or partial goods (clarity of thought, compassion)

[71] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 163.
[72] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol 1*. translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 138.
[73] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, second edition (first edition, 1974), (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), p. 170.

are integrated to create the notion of a virtue internal to the practice, so MacIntyre suggests that partial goods can be integrated into the virtue necessary to a "good life".[74] Just as actions are integrated into projects (professional life, family life, community life) Ricoeur suggests that projects are integrated into a "whole life". In this case "life" designates *bios*, the person as a whole, whose life plan is the task or *ergon*, which moves towards to goal of a "good life."[75]

Realising a life plan is a process of resolving the tension between the voluntary and the involuntary, as we saw in *Freedom and Nature*, reflected in the tension between the narratives of the self's historically received past and its projected desired future. As John Wall has put it, "narrative unity is a task of realizing life plans in relation to one's actual and messy historicity."[76] Our self esteem may well depend on our narrative competence.[77] This leads us to question whether there are limits to the narrative identity which, for Ricoeur, is arguably *the* description of what it means to be human.

[74] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.
[75] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 178.
[76] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 79.
[77] Peter Kemp T. Peter Kemp and David M. Rasmussen, *The Narrative Path : The Later Works of Paul Ricoeur*, 1st MIT Press edn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), p. 66.

The Limits of Narrative Identity

Ricoeur offers an account of narrative identity which pays some attention to the role of history and culture, but is mainly focussed on individual life stories. I will return to some of the issues this raises when I discuss his ethics in more detail in a later chapter, but for the moment I want to consider whether his account of narrative identity offers an adequate anthropology.

Beyond personal history, other kinds of narratives make claim on us; narratives of national identity, narratives of corporate identity and narratives of religious identity.[78] These narratives of community sit alongside a set of narratives about the shaping of individual identity *by* the community, often seen as changing with historical circumstances. These narratives are catalogued by, among others, Stam and Eggar, Holstein and Gubrium, and Christopher Booker.[79]

Stam and Eggar argue that narratives of identity draw together experiences and relationships which are not merely located within cultures but are *created by the cultures*. They summarise, "The appearance of narrative structure is the consequence of the intentional interest of the narrator and the audience to which the narrative is addressed."[80] In each of the scenarios they describe there is an anxiety about the power of society in shaping the individual. David Reisman in *The Lonely Crowd* describes the world of 1950's corporate America as an "other directed society" in which individuals rely on the good opinion of others as the measure of their decision making so that "the idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual

[78] Stewart Sutherland, "History, Truth and Narrative" in Martin Warner, *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990). Stephen Denning, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organisations* (Woburn, M.A.: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005). James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
[79] Henderikus J. Stam and Lori Egger, "Narration and Life" in Joy, *Context and Contestation.* James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).
[80] Henderikus J. Stam and Lori Egger, "Narration and Life" p. 73.

autonomy in seeking to become like each other."[81] In the following decade, Peter Berger gives his account of the "self-fulfilling prophecy of the deviant child", and writes about the self and society as two sides of the same coin, "The structures of society become the structures of our own consciousness."[82] We hear echoes of Heidegger in Riesman's writing and see the influence of Foucalt on Berger. Each carries with it a moral stance valuing the independent, authentic individual over the helpless drone. Although these are works of sociology, they echo the literary dystopias of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell.[83]

With the arrival of post-modernity individual narratives are threatened not by the dominant metanarrative, but by the absence of metanarrative. Commentators agree that it is the multiplicity of narratives competing for our attention which affect our sense of self. Some, like Baudrillard, enjoy the thrill; others like Gergen are troubled by the impact of information overload. The "Saturated Self" which Kenneth Gergen describes, suffers from "multiphrenia" - "a life condition characterized by the consumption of multiple self-signifiers, none of which is privileged over the other, but all of which are allegedly genuine, each competing for the self you can be."[84] It is not just the multiplicity of symbols, and the flood of images, narratives and messages available to us to construct our own narratives which troubles Norman Denzin, but their shallowness and lack of contact with reality. He argues that we need to develop resistance to the prevailing culture and instead seek genuine existential experiences which will produce mythical meaning in everyday life.[85]

By contrast Baudrillard embraces this "hyperreality" in which everything is equally real, where Disneyland has the same status as Washington, and hyperspace is as real as your drawing room. Hyperreality puts an end to the story of the social self because we can constantly

[81] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 373, cited Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 44.
[82] Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology,*(New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 121, cited Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 51.
[83] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Penguin, 1955). George Orwell, *Ninety Eighty-four* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949).
[84] Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life,*(New York: Basic, 1991), cited Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 60.
[85] , Norman Denzin, *Images of Postmodern Reality* 1991 cited Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 62.

reinvent ourselves, broadcasting our "true life stories" on T.V. chat shows and reality shows.[86] For Baudrillard this picture is one of playful delight, it remains to be seen whether this is the reality as experienced in the future…

Once we are immersed in the narrative or while we are trying to make sense of the multiplicity of narratives, we find it extremely difficult to notice that we have a choice, either of narrative or of the narrative paradigm itself. Gary Greenberg is critical of fact that narrative identity has become a metanarrative in itself:

> *To conceive the self as author may be to give an adequate description of a kind of human selfhood, but this is just one among many possible stories about what a self is. It is a seductive story, offering us the authorial power that we capture in terms like "responsibility for oneself" or "shaping ones destiny" or "capacity for storytelling" – terms that preserve the unitary subject's place at the center [stet] of his or her narrative world. But we are seduced at a price: the erasure of the fundamental otherness of narrative, its exceeding and constituting us, albeit as beings who constitute ourselves.*[87]

The authenticity of this self cannot be interpreted in terms of a universal truth value, but rather depends on the acceptance by an "interpretative community" or within a particular language game – and the definition of either of these may be contested. Holstein and Gubrium remind us that we are still considering a paradigm of selfhood which is located in the developed West. Clifford Geertz, in particular, has highlighted the peculiarity of this boundaried, integrated, distinctive self within the context of the world's cultures and contrasted it with the communal identity of several Asian cultures, where the identity of the people is enacted in communal rituals, such as Balinese theatre, or in family or tribal life, and not located in individuals at all.[88]

---

[86] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 65ff.
[87] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, pp. 272-273.
[88] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 72.

What cannot be argued is that narrative identities are completely arbitrary. Holstein and Gubrium argue that the self is "first and foremost a p*ractical project* of everyday life."[89] They list the almost ubiquitous practices of storytelling and note some of their characteristics: they range from the anecdotal to the life-time experience; they are shaped in language games that cast selves in particular themes or plot lines, for example in twelve step programmes or behaviour modification systems; they occur in all kinds of institutional settings; they are used to process, screen and fashion people to fit into businesses and organisations; they are used in schools, clinics, counselling centres, correctional facilities, hospitals, nursing homes, support groups and self-help organisations. "In some sense, these settings invite participants to construct the stories they need to do their work, but they don't do so completely on their own terms."[90]

Ricoeur is, I think, aware of some of the critical responses to the proposal of narrative identity, and he attempts to explore them in exploring a number of aporias in *Oneself as Another*.[91] However, narrative identity is crucial to Ricoeur in preserving both ethical responsibility in the philosophical plane and free will in the religious one. And, in Western society in general, as Holstein and Gubrium say:

> *This is not merely a playful exercise. In certain societies, our own included, the self is a widely recognized, if not deadly serious, set of language games. […] As a matter of practice, self's representations construct the self as part of communicating it.*[92]

If we accept that some kind of narrative world is being co-authored between individuals and communities all the time and offered to individuals to inhabit, the second question that must concern us is the competence of individuals to make a free choice of the world to inhabit, or narratives to tell about themselves.

---

[89] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 70.
[90] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 105.
[91] for example in his discussion of Robert Musil's A Man Without Qualities, Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 149 and 166.
[92] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 70.

Narrative competence may be an acquired skill and not an inherent capacity. For example, David Pellauer confirms that Ricoeur "believes narrative is a universal aspect of the human condition" and asks whether narrative skills – both storytelling and interpretation – are not learned rather than innate. He writes; "Might it not be possible to show that these are skills that we in some sense learn, even if they are based upon some underlying competence or possibility within us?" [93]

There is considerable evidence to confirm Pellauer's hypothesis. The role of the development of language in the development of the sense of self was highlighted by Vygotsky and is strongly linked to the function of memory which impacts on our capacity to tell stories about our own past.[94] Such concerns highlight not only the need to examine the development of narrative skill as children grow, but also the implications for attributing ethical responsibility to those who do not have developed narrative capacity.

Joan McCarthy draws attention to the sense of self displayed by those who do not have linguistic capacity and expresses some concern about the prioritising of linguistic features which implies a judgement of inferiority on the inarticulate. McCarthy's solution is to focus on the role of other aspects of self, such as sensory pleasure and spiritual affect.[95] She has a point, but we must be careful to distinguish between value and virtue, and I think that she has missed the importance of the place of the individual in the narratives of others; those who cannot narrate may not have ethical responsibility, but they do have a place in the ethical life of the community.

[93] David Pellauer, foreword to Joy, *Context and Contestation*, p. xix. referring to Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, p. 28.
[94] Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, Studies in Communication (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: Wiley, 1962). Karl Sabbagh, *Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). Sabbagh reviews research which shows how memory is socially and linguistically constructed.
[95] Joan McCarthy, *Dennett and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self*, Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2007), p. 75.

The whole field of psychoanalysis is based on the need of the individual to create a coherent narrative. In psychoanalysis, as in Ricoeur's philosophy, we have to ask, who makes the choice of narrative or who authors it? The strong account of choice is exemplified by Heidegger, for whom authenticity demands taking responsibility for the uniqueness of one's own life and thus seizing authorship. Authenticity is guaranteed not simply by authorship but also by coherence, which for Heidegger meant the opposite of disconnectedness, the state when actions do not seem to hang together or we loose track of what we are doing. David Carr suggests that this sensation also occurs when our life loses its sense of coherence, when individual actions do not seem to connect to the whole. Carr suggests that radical disintegration of this kind results in *angst* -when nothing makes sense anymore.[96] Heidegger describes two scenarios, one full of activity and the other devoid of any novelty, both of which are empty of meaning. Carr characterises these as "distraction" and "disconnection", separate translations of Heidegger's "well-chosen word, *zerstreut."*[97] What Carr helpfully points out is that our narratives do not have to be particularly good, dramatic, exciting or satisfying to be coherent.[98] What he misses is that there are moments of spontaneous, out of character action, which may turn out to be authentic – this is why Ricoeur insists on consent in attestation.

While Heidegger is confident in human capacity to seize authorship and live authentically, others take a more nuanced approach. Both MacIntyre and Carr write in terms of co-authoring. Carr argues that while there is no pre-ordained, already authored narrative, and even though the roles society offers may provide conflicting pathways, there is only the inevitability of self-choice. "I am responsible not only for the particular action […] but also for the story or stories in which I 'find myself' involved"[99]

These writers are all concerned with the broad capacity of individuals to choose narratives from among those on offer by society. In a further area of human life, individuals may find the stories they wish to author are contested. This is particularly true in situations where narratives

[96] David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 87.
[97] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 88. citing Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 129.
[98] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 90.
[99] Carr, *Time, Narrative and History*, p. 93.

are being constructed on a therapeutic basis. Stam and Egger ask about ownership of the narrative in the therapeutic context. Who constructs it and who interprets it? In the case of psychoanalysis, the telling of stories which heal, who decides when healing has occurred? [100]Such a decision may have significant social consequences in the case, for example, of a convicted criminal who has been labelled mentally ill or psychologically disturbed. [101]

Donald Polkinghorne has suggested that a responsible narrative identity is constructed using elements not always of one's own choosing, but rather from the accidents, organic and social givens, and unintended consequences as well as self-motivated events.[102] Authenticity is not achieved when the story is constructed from fantasy, self-illusion and the self-deception that is the product of desire rather than real action. Neither is it achieved by the refusal to construct a story at all.[103]

Polkinghorne focuses on those who refuse to create a narrative, and so evade ethical responsibility by avoiding any kind of consistent life story – I cannot be blamed if I do not act consistently, I cannot be expected to keep my promises. However, we might also take into account those who are unable to make sense of life and to create a coherent narrative because their experience has been so distorted, so disturbed or chaotic as to make making sense of it a real challenge.

With regard to the criticism that bringing narrative to birth is a struggle, Ricoeur himself writes, with reference to *Oneself as Another,* "I did not emphasize enough our difficulty, even our incapacity to bring to language the emotional, often traumatic experience that psychoanalysis seeks to liberate."[104]

---

[100] Henderikus J. Stam and Lori Egger, "Narration and Life" in Joy, *Context and Contestation*.
[101] The hostility shown towards R.D. Laing is a good example of the way in which society "owns" the narratives of mental illness.
[102] Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, SUNY Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 152.
[103] Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, p. 154.
[104] Paul Ricoeur, "A response" in Joy, *Context and Contestation*, p. xxxix.

Up to this point we have considered the way in which narrative identity is constructed in a social setting and assumed to be integral to a healthy sense of personhood. In our chapter on ethics we will consider how this sense of personhood becomes a sense of "self-esteem" not only understood as the capacity of the individual to attest to an approximation of living well, but perhaps more importantly for individuals within communities to esteem "selves" and to value them within the narrative of the community. The aporias are serious, but not paralysing, as we move forward to consider the ethical dimensions of selfhood in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR: Biblical Hermeneutics

We have seen how, for Ricoeur, narrative identity is the consequence of interpretation. We turn now to consider the character of narrative identity shaped by biblical texts. This is the point when we ask, with Rowan Williams, "If we live like this, has revelation occurred?"[1] To answer this we have to ask, with Ricoeur, whether God is revealed in the texts, how the reader of the text can experience that revelation and, for revelation to occur, what are the natures of the text, the reader, and the revelation?

Ricoeur proposes that biblical texts should be approached in the same way as other texts, subject to the same hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval. The concept of 'second naiveté' is pivotal because it reveals Ricoeur's attitude to the mythological elements of biblical texts, which must be scrutinised but cannot be brushed out or dismissed in the manner which Bultmann appears to propose. For Ricoeur, the *kerygma* is located in the texts in the forms in which they exist; it is not a truth which can be "uncovered" once the mythological gilding has been removed.

For Ricoeur, the unique aspect of the biblical texts is not their origin, but their referent or referents. Ricoeur is confident that the texts refer to God: not a God revealed in the form of propositional truths, but revealed in the testimony of those whose narrative identity is shaped by their encounter with the texts. This account is problematic for some theologians and we will survey the main critical responses. However, the main theme of this chapter, as the preceding one, will be the nature of narrative identity and, in particular, the character of the summoned subject in the anthropology of religious being.

[1] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 135.

The Special Character of Biblical Hermeneutics

Ricoeur acknowledges that biblical hermeneutics is under an obligation to answer general questions such as: "What is a text? i.e. what is the relation between spoken and written language? What is the relation between explanation and understanding within the encompassing act of reading? What is the relation between a structural analysis and an existential appropriation?"[2] But, he also identifies a series of specific issues for biblical hermeneutics concerning the kerygmatic kernel of preaching; the connections between faith and word; the character of 'disclosure' and the concept of revelation. At first biblical hermeneutics seems to be a subordinate category of general hermeneutics, but "there is a complex relationship of mutual inclusion" between the two, and finally, there is an "inverse relationship" so that "theological hermeneutics […] subordinates philosophical hermeneutics to itself".[3]

Ricoeur does not offer a single hermeneutic method for the interpretation of scripture, but applies different interpretative tools according to the variety of biblical genres. We find him using form criticism, historical criticism, structuralist readings and narrative and literary readings in different circumstances. He insists that his approach to the texts is justified by their nature as a collection of writings of different genres with an internal dynamic which includes intertextual interpretation. In his essay "Towards a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation" Ricoeur suggests that we should expect revelation to be expressed in the forms which are most originary to faith, and then lists five forms of discourse or genres found in the bible; narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, hymnic and prophetic. [4] He argues that each must be considered holistically: meaning cannot be *extracted* from the text any more that the meaning of a symbol or metaphor can be separated from its linguistic form. "The literary genres of the Bible do not constitute a rhetorical façade which it would be possible to pull down in order to reveal some

[2] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 321.
[3] "Philosophical and Biblical Hermeneutics" in Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, pp. 89-90.
[4] The well known quotation reads: "A hermeneutic of revelation must give priority to those modalities of discourse which are most originary within the language of a community of faith" Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 90.

thought content that is indifferent to its literary vehicle."[5] Each must be interpreted on its own terms and understood to reveal an aspect of God. Together they embody a form of revelation which is anti-monolithic, "pluralistic, polysemic and at most analogical in form."[6] Ricoeur draws heavily on Northrop Frye to explore the unifying structure created by the relationship between the genres, expressed through the "thoroughgoing typological functioning of biblical significations" which create a network of interconnections of meanings which accumulate to reinforce each other.[7]

We can understand Ricoeur's approach if we briefly summarise his descriptions of the various genres. Narrative texts describe events which "make history" and have shaped the community. Ricoeur's reading of the narrative texts was strongly influenced by Gerhart von Rad's work on salvation history which identified the Israelite liberation from slavery as *the* foundation narrative of the chosen people.[8] God is revealed as an actor in events which have a transcendent character. God's actions are described in the narratives as witnessed, remembered and narrated by the community. Ricoeur argues that narrative provides the corrective to other texts where the presentation of God can seem monolithic. Although, for example the God of the Decalogue and Leviticus demands complete obedience, the Law is given on Sinai in the narrative context of a new covenant to show it is part of an evolving relationship and not an oppressive rule.

Other mediating relationships include that between prophecy and narrative – offering the counterpoint of promise and judgement, uncertainty and confidence; and prescription and wisdom which Ricoeur characterises as concerned with *ethos* and *cosmos,* the latter concerned particularly with suffering and the absence of God. Hymnic texts express the response of individuals and communities to God. Ricoeur draws on a typology from Westermann to show how symbolic expressions relating to God call for particular human responses. Thus the God who *saves* invites a confession of praise; the God who *blesses* invites expressions of gratitude;

[5] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 91.
[6] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75.
[7] *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 208ff.citing Northrop Frye, *The Great Code : The Bible and Literature*, 1st edn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982).
[8] Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 43.

the God who *punishes* demands repentance and obedience and the God who *shows mercy* invokes confidence and hope. [9] In the psalms all these responses are brought to language articulating meaning between the poles of lament and praise.[10] Finally, the prophetic texts contain the trace of this call and response on individuals and communities most directly.

All these genres constitute a whole which Ricoeur identifies as a poetic text. Like all poetic texts it reveals a new reality in which we are invited to participate. Thus far, the biblical text is interpreted with the same hermeneutic method as any poetic text. Ricoeur argues that this *areligious* sense of revelation restores the concept of biblical revelation to its full dignity because it reveals the unique reference of the biblical text. Its particularity lies in the One to whom all the partial discourse refers, to the Name which is the "point of intersection and the vanishing point of all our discourse about God, the name of the unnameable."[11] This point is beyond the limits of our perception and beyond the limits of expression. We are reminded that "The God who reveals himself is a hidden God and hidden things belong to him" and "The one who reveals himself is also the one who conceals himself."[12]

The Name is a limit expression in the philosophical tradition. Ricoeur is often understood as a Kantian philosopher, (and notably described himself as a "post-Hegelian Kantian"), but I believe that his view of limit expressions owes much more to Jaspers than to Kant. [13] For Kant, limit expressions mark the formal boundaries of practical reason and transcendence is treated as an empty or unknowable category. By contrast, Jaspers identified transcendence with God and construed limit experiences as constructive in that they shape and enable our thinking. For Jaspers experience of transcendence is shaped by our experience of guilt or fault, in which we not only recognise our failure but see the gap between contingency and perfect possibility. This contrasts with Ricoeur's insistence on the possibility of hope and original innocence as

[9] Claus Westermann, *What does the Old Testament say about God?*, Sprunt Lectures (London: SPCK, 1979). Cited by Ricoeur, "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures" in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, pp. 214-215.
[10] *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 216.
[11]Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*., p. 104
[12] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 93.
[13] Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 412-417. See also Pamela Sue Anderson, *Ricoeur and Kant: Philosophy of the Will* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993).

the ultimate ground of human experience, a religious position taken from Marcel. At times in his life, as we have seen, Ricoeur rigorously separated his philosophical stance from his religious position. However, it could be argued, and I would want to do so, that even in his philosophical writing, Ricoeur never loses this positive, permissive, constructive approach to limit expressions which can be hard to justify except on the grounds of faith.

The limit expression to which the biblical texts uniquely refer is expressed by Ricoeur in different terms: sometimes the referent is "God", on other occasions it is the world "wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities" called "a new creation, a new Covenant, the Kingdom of God".[14] In a later text, Ricoeur explains that the naming of God not only implies but *creates* a poetic world in which God exists, rules and sustains creation, which we can inhabit. Naming God is what the biblical texts do, specifying the religious at the heart of the poetic.[15] Naming God shapes our self-understanding not only as creatures in the cosmos, but as ethical and political beings as we shall see in Chapter Six.

Ricoeur's account of revelation has no pretensions either to the transparency of philosophical truth or to "heteronomy under the verdict of the magisterium" as he describes the truth claims of religion. He prefers to suggest that he is offering a claim of revelation which is not a boast but a "non-violent appeal".[16] This appeal, understood as an existential call on the reader, can be recognised as the unifying feature in the biblical texts: it is the call and response pattern which Ricoeur describes as the guiding thread in biblical exegesis.[17]

[14] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 102.
[15] Paul Ricoeur "Naming God" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 223.
[16] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 95.
[17] Paul Ricoeur, "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures" in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, pp. 201-220.

The Summoned Self

The *dialogic* structure of the biblical texts points to their unique referent, which we might tentatively describe as the Divine Other, or the One Who Calls. We turn now to consider some symbolic representations of the One Who Responds, variously described by Ricoeur as the "summoned subject", or the "mandated subject". To be summoned is to find oneself constituted by the very word one has been interpreting, and to discover that one is not self-grounding or self-constituting. Ricoeur writes; "My confession to myself is that man is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken by man than spoken to man."[18] This experience itself is described in the biblical texts in the typology of the summoned subject which begins with the prophet, whose call is directly reported. The typical prophetic narrative has a consistent structure which begins with an announcement of the divine presence followed by a command; it describes the response – which often indicates anxiety or a sense of inadequacy on behalf of the subject – and ends with the commissioning of the subject and reassurance of the continuing support and presence of the divine. Although "just one is called, a whole people is intended" and these narratives of vocation are intended to be models of the whole community's collective calling.[19] The typology points forward to the one the prophets foretell, and so helps the community to understand the Christ event. It is a typology which links glory and suffering, not only in the face of the prophets (exemplified by Moses) but in the face of the suffering servant (Isaiah), the face of Christ and the faces of the early Christian community.[20]

The link between glory and suffering reminds us of the role of testimony in the life of the summoned self. The one who responds to the call is the one who testifies to its power in his or her life.

[18] Paul Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work*, ed. by Charles E Reagan and David Stewart, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 237.
[19] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 266.
[20] 2 Corinthians 3:18

Testimony

Testimony forms the epistemological framework which Ricoeur applies to revelation. He considers its use in everyday life before considering its role in philosophy and religion. The key themes are quickly established: testimony is a form of judgement which is neither objective nor relative; it both provides something to be interpreted and is, in itself, the result of interpretation; and it is given weight by the commitment shown in suffering. In particular, testimony is concerned with events rather than the self.[21]

In the Christian context we are familiar with the semantic connection between testimony and commitment expressed in the use of the term "martur" (martyr) where witness is tested to the limit of death. Ricoeur also notes the connection between limit experience and testimony, which he sets in the context of philosophy: "Testimony should be a philosophical problem and not limited to historical or legal contexts" he suggests. [22] He attempts to find a philosophy in which the *experience* of the absolute can be joined to the *idea* of the absolute. The experience of revelation, he suggests, is a moment in which the self is divested of itself, and it is only in this divestment that the claim of the absolute can be experienced. However, the experience can only be expressed in contingent symbols demanding interpretation which in turn gives rise to testimony.

A witness gives testimony to report or relate that which they have seen or heard. It is, we might note, already an interpretation, since it is the product of an experience already absorbed and shaped by the witness. The witness themselves has made a judgement of what they have seen or heard and is sharing it with another. This other acts in a judicial role and points forward to the most common context for the giving of testimony, which is the trial.[23] The trial situation illuminates a number of characteristics of testimony; it takes place in the context of a dispute between two claims which cannot be resolved simply by a recourse to known facts;

[21] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 22.
[22] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 119.
[23] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 123-124.

there is an interplay between claim and defence which may involve persuasion as well as argument; finally it involves a decision based on the probable rather than on verifiable proof.[24] The witness must not only convince others, but must be convicted him or herself of the truth of his or her claim. This conviction is demonstrated in preparedness to suffer and to die for the truth. The relationship between witness and suffering is reflected in the great historical archetypes; the suffering servant, Socrates, Jesus.[25]

Although there are connections between the religious and secular uses of the word "testimony" as the semantic link between "witness" and "martyr" has proved, Ricoeur suggests that religion provides a further dimension to testimony which goes beyond secular use and proffers a new meaning. Giving an example from Second Isaiah Ricoeur demonstrates how the prophetic witness is sent in order to testify and the content of his testimony is God. [26] The testimony becomes proclamation and everyone who hears it becomes a witness. Ricoeur has made a connection between testimony and prophecy which does not negate the secular meanings of testimony but absorbs and expands them. Testimony becomes witness to the true nature of the divine: it makes claims about divine signs, and is to be judged against false ideas of the divine and against idols.

Ricoeur then applies these insights into the biblical account of revelation. He sees testimony as occupying the space between confession and history. Following Von Rad he suggests that the key Old Testament credo is that found in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 which testifies not only to the existence of God and his special relationship with his people but with their experience of his saving action.[27] This confessional discourse paves the way for the new meaning of testimony found in the gospels. Jesus sends his disciples to be witnesses to him: to testify that he is the Christ, the Son of God. While the evangelists move between the poles of historical narrative in Luke and confessional narrative in John, the two are nevertheless joined, and as we have seen

[24] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 126-127.
[25] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 129.
[26] Isaiah 43:8-13 and 44:6-8
[27] The Hermeneutics of Testimony in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 133.

in Ricoeur's writing on biblical genre, it is precisely the existence of these differences in the gospels which gives revelation its characteristics.

Richard Bauckham's development of the relationship between limit experience and testimony owes something to Ricoeur's work. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur repeatedly refers to events which are at the limits of experience and representation, most often citing the holocaust as an example.[28] In *Time and Narrative* he uses the term "uniquely unique events" for the same category.[29] As Bauckham suggests, whether we are considering the unimaginable horror of the holocaust or the overwhelming encounter with the resurrected Christ, the testimony of the eyewitness assumes a unique quality and role because the experience itself is beyond our imagining.[30] Bauckham is careful to preserve the unique character of each event and to stress that their relationship is only analogical, but he is keen to show that we have experience in our own immediate history of the value of testimony and that we ought to re-evaluate our view of the gospels in the light of this experience.

Ricoeur's exploration of these topics in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* was inspired, at least partially, by a critique of Bultmann's demythologising project. Ricoeur argued that although Bultmann was right to concentrate on the existential claim which the *kerygma* makes on the reader he had moved too quickly from Scripture to response without taking the "long detour" through the text which is necessary to fully understand it. Ricoeur observes that revelation is *only* possible because humans are capable of receiving it, and by whatever means revelation takes place we can only *observe* the human response: the divine initiative is outside the realm of study. For Ricoeur, the key to understanding lies in the character of biblical text which does not merely report events, but interprets them and testifies to their significance for the community of faith. Ricoeur argues that Bultmann is too confident about the existential signification of the New Testament accounts because he has lost sight of the gap between

[28] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 175,254,255, 258,498. See also Paul Ricoeur, "Historiography and the representation of the past" in *2000 Years and Beyond: Faith, Identity and the 'Common Era'*. ed. by Paul Gifford, and others, (London , New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 51-68.
[29] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, p. 188.
[30] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans 2006), p. 492ff.

event, report and testimony.[31] Whereas the tradition would see the text as a secondary witness which is a corrupted version of reality, Ricoeur prioritises the biblical text over other forms of discourse, identifying the reading experience as parallel to the experience of the earliest apostles, because it is a means by which we hear or receive testimony.[32]

Bauckham argues for a more direct link between eyewitness testimony and the texts of the gospels, while not taking Bultmann's short cut.[33] He follows Ricoeur's arguments on the interrelationship between history and interpretation, using them to support his claim that the gospels may well contain eyewitness testimony rather than versions of events handed down through oral tradition within specific worshipping communities. If Bultmann has conflated the distance between eyewitness and text, Bauckham suggests that the whole historical critical tradition has over extended it. He wants to recover the role of eyewitness testimony in the gospels without denying the importance of interpretation in those eyewitness accounts. When we understand testimony to include both event and interpretation, it becomes the form "where history and theology meet."[34] Bauckham shows clearly, drawing on the work of C.A.J. Coady, the relationship between testimony, trust and epistemology which is inherent to Ricoeur's understanding of the category of testimony. Coady shows how testimony relies on trust and how trust is inherent to all forms of knowledge, demonstrating how testimony "has the same kind of epistemic status as our other primary sources of information such as perception."[35]

Working from the perspective of historiography, and covering many of the same arguments found in our previous chapter, Bauckham concludes that the relationship between interpretation and event cannot be severed, and goes further by suggesting that participant observers were particularly valued by historians in the ancient world (presumably because they were able to offer more informed interpretation of events). Where their interpretation seems to draw on literary precedents, for example in the allusions to Genesis in the gospel account of

[31] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 68.
[32] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 56.
[33] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses.*
[34] Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 6.
[35] C.A.J. Coady, "*Testimony"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) cited Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 475.

the stilling of the storm, he finds this a natural outcome of the eyewitness' own cultural and theological experience. Eyewitnesses interpret their experience in the light of their knowledge of scripture but, as Bauckham points out, the value of their testimony is found not only their exegesis of the Hebrew scripture and their interpretation of events, but their subsequent activity testifying to the transformative power of the gospel.

To briefly summarise, Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutic describes revelation as an existential call or invitation to inhabit the kingdom of God. The biblical texts are not unified but interdependent because of their shared referent. Some biblical texts (perhaps notably the gospels) share the character of testimony because they describe the response of individuals and the community to the experience of the kingdom. While Bauckham takes a positive view of Ricoeur's description of revelation evidenced in the testimony of call and response, other commentators have accused him of restricting the reference of the biblical world to human experience. [36]

[36] Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naiveté : Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology*, Studies in American biblical hermeneutics 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990), p. 100.

Critical Response to Ricoeur's Biblical Hermeneutics

There is no doubt that some people find Ricoeur's analogical, polyvalent, polysemic account of revelation frustrating. Ricoeur's emphasis on call and response illustrates a theological stance, influenced by Heidegger, which refuses to describe God as an object, but attempts to find a way to express God as "being". For Ricoeur the biblical texts must be understood first and foremost as *poetic* texts with a capacity to invite the reader to a new way of being: "My deepest conviction is that poetic language alone restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to and order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject."[37]

We turn now in more detail to the critical response to Ricoeur's hermeneutic of the idea of revelation. Critical responses to Ricoeur's hermeneutics tend to focus on three questions; does he give an account which allows God to speak? Is his emphasis on text at the expense of experience? Or does he focus on human experience at the expense of divine initiative?

Authors and Readers: Who speaks?

The first problem arises from Ricoeur's adoption of many of the presuppositions of speech-act theory from Austin and Searle, with its emphasis on the role of the performer or reader in actualising the text at the time of reading. This account tends to minimalise the role of the author and to detach authorial intention from the meaning of the text. More significantly, Ricoeur often appears to detach text from its context, whereas for example Thiselton has argued that the perlocutionary force of any statement is dependent on its context within social processes and cultural institutions.[38] While speech-act theory is useful in understanding how a reader can adopt the stance of a text so that the *kerygma* is personalised as confession, it may not answer the problem of whether God speaks, or acts, through biblical texts.

[37] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 101.
[38] A good account of Thiselton's work on speech-act theory is given in Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001), pp. 20-24.

A moderated account of speech-act theory, that may help us, can be found in Nicholas Wolterstorff's work, which both Thistelton and Stiver have suggested shares characteristics with Ricoeur's approach. [39]Although Woltersdorff criticises Ricoeur, his use of speech-act theory to show how texts perform as acts of remembrance, celebration and promise is very close to Ricoeur's. Wolterstorff uses the idea of "authorised speech" to explore the role of the author in biblical writing and suggests that God speaks through biblical authors as a king speaks through his ambassadors. Biblical texts are thus authorized as divine discourse.[40] Ricoeur would not, I think, accept Wolterstorff's attempt to rehabilitate the authorial voice in any simplistic sense of "inspiration" or "command", but it is possible to read a more dialogical character in Wolterstoff's account which is close to Ricoeur's acknowledgement of authorial intention in the production of texts. [41] In other words, there is a sense in which God has authorised, if not authored, the biblical texts, and that authors have a responsibility towards the life worlds they describe. Ricoeur is certainly not offering an unmediated version of reader response theory, but something much closer to Iser's notion of "performative" reading.[42] I would argue that the main stumbling block Wolterstorff faces is his failure to empathise with Ricoeur's suggestion of the world projected by the text and beyond the text: indeed he describes this notion as "obscure."[43]

Although, particularly in his earlier work, we have seen that Ricoeur describes texts as "autonomous with respect to the intention of the author" he does not deny that the illocutionary stance of the author or the tradition which the text inhabits will affect the possibilities for its performance or meaning. [44] Thiselton suggests a variety of critical resources in support of a more balanced relationship between the illocutionary and perlocutionary

[39] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 363, 485, 569ff. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, pp. 125-136.
[40] Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse : Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[41] See Chapter Three
[42] Iser, *The Act of Reading*.
[43] Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 144. Although he, rightly in my view, recognises that this is Ricoeur's method of transcending structuralism while rejecting deconstructionism. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, p. 152.
[44] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.cited Wolterstorff, p. 146

aspects of language and draws particularly on Quentin Skinner and Recanati to suggest that perlocutionary force is partially dependent on illocutionary acts of assertion and our joint understanding of context. Recanati suggests that the self-referential nature of utterance makes the *utterance* an act or a thing in the world – a phenomenon or a fact in itself. Ricoeur argues that this is the case only insofar as the "authors of the utterance are put on stage by the discourse in act, and with the utterers in flesh and blood, *their* experience of the world, *their* irreplaceable perspective on the world."[45] Ricoeur echoes Recanati's use of theatrical analogy, but Recanati appeals not only to our experience as an involved audience, but also as critics, as Thiselton suggests: "As an audience we may be moved and transformed by the play, but we cannot ask critical questions about its function and truth, without breaking its spell, and looking behind the lines of the characters."[46] In other words, even if we accept Ricoeur's focus on the experience of the speaker or author, we should not lose sight of the broader context. Ricoeur's emphasis on "explanation" and the hermeneutic of suspicion should act as a corrective, but they can appear subordinate to the thrust of his hermeneutic theory.

If we accept Ricoeur's nuanced version of the relationship between the author and the reader, we may be left asking about the place of the community in both the formation and the reception of the text. We have already noted his insistence on the importance of intertextuality and the place of the whole canon, and this opens up a further criticism of Ricoeur, who can appear rather indifferent to the way that power is exercised in the creation of community. Kenny, rightly in my view, criticizes as reductionism Ricoeur's preoccupation with texts – and written language – as most constitutive of religion. He complains that Ricoeur ignores the place of liturgy, ethics and community in most of his discussion.[47]

[45] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p.48
[46] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutic,* p.365
[47] We might note that even when Ricoeur is challenged to consider the importance of liturgical reading, he only concedes the value of the lectionary and repetition as a means of protecting the whole of the canon from arbitrary choice. See the discussion in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 221ff.

Manifestation or Proclamation?

The liturgical, sacramental and community context in which biblical texts are read is one of the major preoccupations of a whole group of Ricoeur's critics. [48] It is rare for Ricoeur to pay much attention to the part played by contingent factors; geographical, biological and cultural, in his own faith, and the impact of the whole Western philosophical tradition on the shaping of biblical faith – for example in the formation of the Canon. [49] Werner Jeanrond expresses concerns about the restrictions of the closed canon, which Ricoeur agrees with at one level, describing the closed canon as "a vicious circle because the community chooses the texts which choose them"and commenting that religious institutions become corrupt when they close down meaning and totalise texts.[50] However, although the biblical canon has been closed, or frozen, not only by the Fourth Century Councils and by Thomist philosophy in the Middle Ages, but also "against tradition" by the Protestant Reformation, Ricoeur argues that it is protected from being totalized by the preaching which continuously reinterprets the foundational text and keeps it alive.[51]

Typically, Ricoeur posits a dialectic between the text and the community, and the community and the individual's decision or wager to commit to loving obedience to the text. For Ricoeur, the biblical texts thus become both self-sufficient and self-constituting, not only describing the experience of the people of God and the way they make sense of that experience, but showing how others might make sense of their experience and constitute themselves as people of God.

Ricoeur's confidence in texts derives from two sources; firstly from his conviction that meaning cannot be expressed, even in our own consciousness, except through the mediation of

---

[48] See for example: Werner Jeanrond, "Hermeneutics and Revelation" in *Memory, Narrativity, Self*, ed. by Junker-Kenny and Kenny, pp. 42-57., Peter Kenny, " Conviction, Critique and Christian Theology" in *Memory, Narrativity, Self*, ed. by Junker-Kenny and Kenny, pp. 92-116.

[49] Though he does so in his essay "The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures " in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 206.

[50] Ricoeur, response to Werner Jeanrond in *Memory, Narrativity, Self*, ed. by Junker-Kenny and Kenny, p. 59. Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 421ff.

[51] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 70. LaCocque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. xvii.

symbols or language, writing: "I have vigorously resisted the word 'experience' throughout my career, out of a distrust of immediacy, effusiveness, intuitionism: I always favoured, on the contrary, the mediation of language and scripture; this is even where my two affiliations confront one another."[52] Secondly, his belief that texts precede the capacity of the individual to articulate a personal faith; "I can name God […] because the texts that have been proclaimed to me have already named God."[53]

However, Ricoeur's emphasis on texts needs to be placed alongside his earlier writing on symbolism, where he draws on the writings of Freud and Eliade to offer a generalized account of the impact of symbols as manifestations of the divine or as the locus of limit experiences.[54] In rejecting the possibility of an unmediated experience of the divine, Ricoeur argues that we can only encounter the absolute through such "contingent signs of the absolute which the absolute it its generosity allows to appear."[55] When natural phenomena, such as sunrise, storms, plant growth or new birth become the locus of epiphanies they acquire symbolic meaning which gives rise to interpretation. Ricoeur would argue that these contingent signs of the absolute must be scrutinized with all the rigours of suspicion that modern scholarship, and the philosophical resources of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have placed at our disposal. In the Judeo-Christian tradition there is a tension between manifestation and proclamation, since the biblical texts themselves authorise a suspicion of manifested religion through the Hebrew prophets' critique of the worship of idols which they replace with proclamation of the Divine Name.

David Tracy follows Ricoeur's discussion of the difference between proclamation and manifestation which he sees as running parallel to the difference in the protestant-reformed/ catholic view of the centrality of word over sacrament. Arguing against Ricoeur's analysis he draws attention to the double tradition in Judaism: the mystic and ethical; and the contrast

[52] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 139. The "two affiliations" to which he refers are theology and philosophy.
[53] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 218.
[54] Ricoeur cites *Traité d'Histoire des Religions* published in English as Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by R. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958).
[55] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 111.

between two "ideals", the mystical-priestly-metaphysical-aesthetic, and the prophetic-ethical-historical religious traditions/religions.[56] With Eliade, Tracy argues that the divine, in hierophanies, theophanies, archetypes, myths and symbols, is experienced pre-verbally. These experiences give us a sense of participation in – and dependence on – the sacred, while simultaneously disclosing our separate, contingent, estranged selves. Tracy suggests that for "religions of the book" this experience is paradigmatically expressed in the "word of proclamation" which comes not only to reconfirm our radical participation in the cosmos but to disconfirm any complacency in that participation: to shatter our illusions that all the trappings, symbols and practices of our religion are anything more than idols.[57] He argues that Christianity and Judaism tend to focus on the power of the *word* to shatter the security of the religious person and so religious experience then becomes defined as faithfulness to the word and loses any connection with manifestation. Worse, the language of radical participation in religious manifestation is seen as extravagant or even blasphemous. The religion which emerges is unexpectedly secular in its values, "arid, cerebral and abstract".[58] Tracy argues for a Christianity which expresses both a prophetic-ethical-historical power to disturb, and a mystical-metaphysical-historical power to transform and envelop.[59]

In a lengthy footnote, Tracy acknowledges that Ricoeur's concentration on proclamation is nuanced in the four years between the writing of his *Semeia* article [60] and his essay on "Manifestation and Proclamation".[61] Tracy speculates whether Ricoeur's "Pauline itinerary" of proclamation, (rightly, in my view, identified as the Paul of Romans, Augustine and Calvin) could usefully be set in a dialectic relationship with his writings on the manifestations of evil in symbolism and myth in *The Symbolism of Evil.* When, in the latter essay, Ricoeur seeks to mediate between mythological and kerygmatic language: between manifestation and proclamation, he recognises that a world stripped of awe and wonder, and its ethical consequence – the desacralizing of birth and death; a world in which sexuality is meaningless,

[56] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 203.
[57] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 209.
[58] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 214.
[59] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, p. 215.
[60] Paul Ricoeur, 'The Specificity of Religious Language', *Semeia,* 4, 1975.
[61] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 48-67.

and in which there is no ritual or festival, is a world in which life is devalued. He cannot imagine a religious attitude that does not proceed from "a feeling of absolute dependence."[62] So he balances his critique, finding support for his insistence on mediation in places in the biblical texts where word and manifestation are intrinsically linked. Thus accounts of hierophanies are linked to moments of proclamation (in the call of Moses, the giving of the Law); salvation history is combined with cosmic history; and Jesus has a dual nature in which "the word became flesh".[63] The word, for Ricoeur, is an intensely human thing. It is both the means and the expression of human understanding; the way people make sense of the world and express their response to it.

The theological question, "Who is the Lord?" is answered through narrative identity. Ricoeur tracks the development of the narrative identity of Jesus, which enabled the early witnesses to make sense of the relationship between his life and the narrative of his death and resurrection, or the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. In the article "Interpretive Narrative" written in 1990, Ricoeur draws on the work of Robert Alter to stress the importance the mimetic shaping of the narrative as the locus of theological interpretation.[64] Using Greimas and the structuralists Ricoeur shows the intimate connection between character and action in the life of Jesus. He comments, following Hans Frei, that as the gospel writers become more attentive to motivation so their accounts gain in detail and become more "history-like".[65] For Ricoeur the human character is indissoluble from the *kerygma*, and the contingent nature of human existence inherent in the economy of salvation. He finds this thought summed up in the passion narratives in the phrase "the Son of Man had to be betrayed", which demonstrates how the refractory nature of human being becomes the "privileged pathway for the inevitable plan".[66]

Ricoeur argues, with a detailed examination of the application of semiotic theory to the betrayal motif, that the literary shape of the narrative reveals that perspective to be one of

[62] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 65.
[63] We should note here the influence of Gadamer, who included a whole chapter on this topic, "Language and Verbum" in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 418-428.
[64] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 181-199.
[65] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1974).
[66] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 183.

conviction, or testimony: in other words the gospel narratives are "confessional narratives" which have the *kerygma* at their heart. The *kerygma* is not the product of the narratives, or something which can be abstracted from them, but is the motivating, shaping, force in the narratives.[67] Ricoeur refines Bultmann's demythologising principle to suggest that myth should not be dispensed with, but interpreted and in this interpretation the *kerygma* will be revealed. The myth, Ricoeur argues, is the trace of man's attempt to grapple with the truth, not his projection on to it.[68] The content of the *kerygma* cannot be distilled in to a single proposition, but must become something more complex. The tradition history, or the history of interpretation, becomes part, not only of this process of self-understanding, but also of the world of the text itself, so that as Gregory the Great says; "Scripture grows with its readers".[69] We shall see how important the relationship between the teaching and life of Jesus becomes, when we look at them in more detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Ricoeur's account of proclamation is not uncontested.

Vanhoozer's Critique

Vanhoozer, in particular, argues that Ricoeur's account of proclamation does not pay sufficient attention to the *kerygma*, because it is focussed on the person who receives it. He asks:

> *Can Ricoeur's attention to narrative, together with its function of aiming at God's trace in certain events, save him from reducing salvation to an event not of history but of human subjectivity, a reduction that again threatens the distinction between theology and philosophical anthropology?*[70]

[67] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 187ff.
[68] Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 61.
[69] cited in LaCocque and Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, p. xi.
[70] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in hermeneutics and theology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 136.

Vanhoozer is suspicious of the ambiguity between poetry and history in Ricoeur's hermeneutic, suggesting that Ricoeur makes Jesus merely an illustration or example of Christian possibility, rather than its inaugurator.[71] For Vanhoozer, there is a distinction between poetic and religious language, which might be summarised as "poetic language refers to manifestation, while religious language refers to proclamation". Vanhoozer acknowledges the potential of poetic language to display limit possibilities and refer to limit conditions, but considers that it falls short of "religious" language because it does not belong to a specific community with distinctive social and ethical stances, neither does it call for an existential decision. Vanhoozer also distinguishes between "religious" language and theological language, arguing that "religious" language is not language "about God", but is the naming of God. [72] Ricoeur would surely argue that poetic language "names God". The problem, which both Wallace and Vanhoozer describe, is that for Ricoeur the referent of the biblical texts is not *only* God, but human experience of God and human dependence on God: is religious language about anthropology or theology?" [73] I would suggest that it is not so much that Ricoeur ultimately fails to distinguish between religious experience and human experience, but that he can only describe the summoned self in terms of absolute dependence and contingency on God. We have to bear in mind that, for Ricoeur, these things are conflated. When Ricoeur rejects theologies that make God a "subject" rather than a being, he goes on to argue that "being" is not a concept or an experience to be grasped, but rather that which constitutes us or bears us.[74] Only by asking questions about the question of "being" as it relates both to anthropology and ontology can we discover, says Ricoeur, whether Heidegger's "being" is the God of the Bible.[75]

Some critical response to Ricoeur reflects an assumption that biblical hermeneutics should be a "closed sign system" such that the criteria for biblical hermeneutics should be internal to the

[71] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 117.
[72]Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 121-122.
[73] Wallace, *The Second Naiveté*, Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 122.
[74] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 107.
[75] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 71.

biblical text.[76] This approach, which can be found, for example, in Topping, Holmer and Ward, reflects the influence of Barth's suspicion of external reference.[77] In his study of Barth, Ricoeur and the Yale School, Mark Wallace has drawn some careful comparisons which help to throw the particularities of Ricoeur's approach into relief. He argues for similarities between Ricoeur and Barth, suggesting that, for both, theological hermeneutics are seen as sustained enquiry into the biblical world beginning from belief or trust in the biblical world in order to understand it with an anti-historical bias which stresses the world of text rather than its *Sitz im Leben* .[78] There is evidence to support this view. Despite Ricoeur's insistence on historicity and testimony he can set them aside to argue that the most important characteristics of the biblical text are its internal laws of organisation and development – characteristics which show that we are dealing with a *poetic* text, and that "the only relation to reality that counts in a poetic text is not nature […] but rather the power to instil in listeners or readers the desire to understand themselves in the light of this Great Code."[79]

The difference between Ricoeur and Barth is that Ricoeur is not only concerned with the world of the biblical text, but regards it as inextricably linked with the anthropology of the reader who responds to it. In this, he shares some characteristics with the theologians of the Yale School; Frei, Kelsey and Lindbeck, with their emphasis on the role of the worshipping community.[80] However, there is a question of the status of the religious community within the wider world. For Barth and the Yale School, the text dictates the terms by which it can be understood and by which the community should act. Frei writes that "In the religious community, religious texts should govern theories of meaning and understanding, not vice

[76] Alexander S. Jensen, *Theological Hermeneutics*, SCM Core Texts (London and Canterbury: SCM, 2007), p. 179ff.
[77] Richard R. Topping, *Revelation, Scripture and Church : Theological Hermeneutic Thought of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Frei*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical studies (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[78] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 150.
[79] *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 209.
[80] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

versa."[81] Similarly Lindbeck argues for an "intratextual" approach, which tries to make sense of the text from the inside. These two approaches claim to deal with the "literal" sense of the text: "Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text."[82] This contrasts with Ricoeur's application of hermeneutics of suspicion which initially brings the resources of historical criticism and psychoanalysis to bear on biblical texts. We will see a similar pattern of approaches when we consider the question of biblical ethics.

Vanhoozer suggests that whereas Barth and Frei are not interested in analysing the world or the language of the creature, Ricoeur has developed a "natural theology of narrative".[83] But for Vanhoozer, writing from a reformed protestant stance, "natural theology" is not really theology at all. Vanhoozer is concerned with a *kerygma* which stresses the otherness of God, the *transcendent* God who is the source of judgement and grace, and argues that Ricoeur is describing the manifestation of the *immanent* God disclosed as present in ordinary things: God as ground of being. Vanhoozer suggests that Ricoeur erases the distinction between nature and grace. He does not agree with Ricoeur that God can be manifested in the poetic, and that narratives have an innate capacity to disclose the world as "graced". He concludes, "For Barth, God alone is the revealer, and neither nature nor a particular kind of narrative constrains God's freedom to reveal. For Ricoeur, however, revelation is not so much an 'impossible possibility' as a natural possibility shared by sacred and secular narratives alike."[84] I think we can see that Vanhoozer takes Barth's stance on this point.

The second of Vanhoozer's concerns is how the reader appropriates the revelation made possible in Ricoeur's account. Some of his questions are answered in the further consideration that Ricoeur gives to *attestation* in *Oneself as Another* (published in English two years after Vanhoozer's book), and we will consider the relationship between attestation and testimony

[81] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 156.
[82] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), p. 118.
[83] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 164.
[84] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 180.

later in this chapter, but let us first turn to Vanhoozer's critique focussing on the "ordinary" meaning of testimony, as an "eye-witness account". Using the resurrection as a test case, Vanhoozer recognises that Ricoeur has rejected an account of testimony which is *confined* to the recounting of eyewitness accounts such as those recorded in Luke/Acts, and concedes that Ricoeur will not accept "the subject's pretension to be the source of its own meaning and existence".[85] Accepting Ricoeur's claim that testimony bears witness to the signs the absolute has allowed to appear, Vanhoozer's problem lies with identifying *which* signs Ricoeur means: is Ricoeur referring to the historical events of the resurrection or to the biblical text as the sign? Vanhoozer recognises that for Ricoeur texts are more significant than events themselves (because they are fixed records of witness) but then complains that Ricoeur wants to preserve the ordinary meaning of testimony, with its notion of historicity, in his reading of the texts. This should not really surprise us, since Ricoeur states, in "The Hermeneutics of Testimony" that the religious meaning of testimony does not abolish the profane, but "conserves and exalts it."[86] Ricoeur's attempt to preserve historicity while privileging interpretation is an example of his desire to find *both* historicity *and* poetry in the biblical witness. Vanhoozer is not convinced and concludes that testimony belongs more to poetry than historical prose. He argues that Ricoeur allows the significance of the resurrection narrative to derive purely from its artistic power, and continues; "It is difficult to see why the historical events actually having happened should matter to Ricoeur."[87] He suggests that the poetic world created in front of the biblical text might just as well arise from a work of fiction as a work of history and as such, depends on the reader's imagination and not on divine revelation.

Vanhoozer is accurate in identifying Ricoeur's claim that the biblical text creates a poetic world which the reader can inhabit, but wrong in suggesting that testimony *primarily* relates to the *reader's* historicity "the manner of his being-in-the-world" and not to "deeds of men in the past."[88] It is clear from *Time and Narrative* that Ricoeur will not allow a separation between history and narrative, but rather insists that since all experience must be mediated, all narrative

[85] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 111.
[86] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 130.
[87] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 263.
[88] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 263.

is interpretation, and there can be no history which is not open to hermeneutic suspicion.[89] The extent to which any reader will accept Vanhoozer's criticism will depend on their acceptance of Ricoeur's appeal to Hegel and Heidegger in the notion of the "trace" - if some element of historical contingency can be acknowledged and understood, this paradigm is the guarantee of the intersection between the divine and the contingent to which the texts bear witness. Similarly, although Vanhoozer did not have access to the arguments at the time of writing his book, the close relationship between limit experience and testimony, highlighted earlier, also helps to ground interpretation in historical reality. It is undoubtedly difficult at times to hold the tension between Ricoeur's dialectic poles and perhaps Vanhoozer is looking for a greater degree of certainty than Ricoeur will surrender. Vanhoozer's critique is primarily Barthian, protesting that Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy is not a uniquely Christian re-presentation of the self, the world and interpretation, but is a general philosophy in which Christ is a particular illustration of more general principles.[90] While Vanhoozer is looking for evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit, or of grace, in the life of testimony, Ricoeur almost never refers to either.

Vanhoozer's third and perhaps most interesting question concerns the verifiability of the world in front of the text. If it is a divinely inspired possibility and not simply a product of human imagination, what resources should be used to test its claims? For Vanhoozer, the claims should be tested by the biblical text: for Ricoeur, the claims should be tested in Christian lives and communities. While Vanhoozer stresses the *kerygma*, Ricoeur stresses the confession. For Vanhoozer, the world which Ricoeur describes being opened up in front of the biblical texts is *not* the world of the Word. In particular, he complains that Ricoeur pays insufficient attention to the saving power of Christ. This is a valid claim and it seems to me that Ricoeur's diversion from orthodox soteriology has been somewhat overlooked. I would argue that Ricoeur's thinking brings us closer to René Girard than to St Paul: it certainly has more in common with Irenaeus than Augustine.[91] Similarly, I think Vanhoozer is correct when he observes that while Ricoeur is careful not to confuse Creation and the fall, he is not so careful when it comes to

[89] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*.
[90] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 276.
[91] See, e.g. Paul Ricoeur, "Religious Belief" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 27-40 Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, pp. 46-55.

Creation and Salvation. Ricoeur focuses on eschataological possibility more than certainty in the completed saving work of Jesus, which is problematic for Vanhoozer.[92] However, as we shall see, the intimate relationship between salvation history and "the economy of the gift" demonstrates that Ricoeur never allows a single interpretation or metanarrative to dominate his thinking. The dialectic between manifestation and proclamation is echoed in his concern to mediate between love and justice.[93]

Since, for Vanhoozer, "natural theology" is not theology, he concludes: "Ricoeur is not a theologian.[…] Ricoeur is perhaps best viewed as an apologist for the intelligibility of the Christian kerygma." adding, "Ricoeur does not proclaim the Gospel. Rather, like John the Baptist, Ricoeur serves the Gospel by baptizing our imaginations, philosophically preparing the way for the Word."[94] Perhaps Ricoeur himself would not disagree with this summary. However, it was written before the publication of *Figuring the Sacred.* While Ricoeur's philosophy, remaining within the limits of reason, cannot address the heart of the Christian *kerygma*, essays on the meta-ethical categories suggested by "the economy of the gift" show how Ricoeur was prepared to move beyond natural theology to consider the graciousness of God. [95] That graciousness is attested in the lives of individuals who understand themselves to be summoned subjects and witness to their self understanding in expressions of faith, hope and love.

The problem remains that of testing the claims of religious witness, in particular as they are expressed in narrative identity, the selfhood which bears witness to self understanding. Firstly, we consider the categories of testimony and attestation, as forms of evidence and then to reflect on conscience as the organ of discernment.

[92] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 245.
[93] Ricoeur "Love and Justice" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 315-330.
[94] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 284, 288.
[95] "The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God", p. 281, "Ethical and Theological Considerations of the Golden Rule" , p. 299 and "Love and Justice" p.320ff, in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*.

Testimony and Attestation

The terms "testimony" and "attestation" play significant roles for Ricoeur, the second in particular is almost unique to his writing although it has roots in Heidegger. The terms are semantically related but, in my opinion, it is a mistake to treat them, (as Stiver occasionally does), as indistinguishable. [96] Ricoeur almost always uses "testimony" in the context of writing about the absolute or the divine, whereas "attestation" is used about the self, as if it were a French reflexive verb. Whereas testimony relates to an event or series of events, which shape life decisions, attestation refers to the whole life project and an ongoing sense of self-esteem. Our task here is to consider the nature of attestation in the context of call and response.

Attestation refers to the self's witness to its own integrity or selfhood. It is the voice heard within confirming the direction of the whole life project. Ricoeur wants to show how it is possible for the voice of the Other to be heard at the heart of the self in "neutral" philosophical terms before he considers whether the voice could be the voice of the divine. Drawing on the work of Heidegger he shows how attestation acts as the expression of self-esteem found in authentic being. Heidegger suggested that authenticity for Dasein is found in being-towards-death as one's death must be one's own alone. Inauthentic being is the being-with-one-another which dissolves Dasein into the "they" (das Man). The "they" have no real existence, they are neither the one, nor the many, nor the whole, they dissolve into nothingness. [97] Authentic being must be singular and unique, and tested within the singular and unique being. This leads to consideration of the possibility of a reliable internal voice, the voice of conscience calling us to authentic being which is the voice attesting to being itself: "Conscience summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the "they"."[98] It is manifested as the call of care, the summons to return to the authentic self. It is distinguished from "public conscience" which is the call of the

[96] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, p. 205.
[97] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 164.
[98] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 319.

"they", whereas conscience is the appeal "to one's ownmost potentiality-for-Being, because the call comes from that entity which in each case I myself am."[99]

The Testimony of Conscience

Heidegger gives philosophical respectability to the place of the conscience as the organ of discernment or attestation. In considering conscience, Ricoeur explores in more detail whether what is heard is an inner or an outer voice, and questions its reliability. In an essay written in French in 1989, Ricoeur compared writings on conscience by Heidegger, Nabert and Lévinas.[100] He identified the experience which Heidegger calls "conscience" with Nabert's experience of originary affirmation and Lévinas description of the encounter with Glory or infinity. In each case he asks about the source of the experience and considers whether it is truly an experience of the Other. For each, the external source is different; the uncanny for Heidegger, the mediator of other testimonies for Nabert and the subjugating Other for Lévinas.

Ricoeur argues that Heidegger's description of conscience amounts to a internal voice which has no real sense of the alien or the transcendent and makes no reference to the demands of the other or others while, by contrast, the Other described by Lévinas is so extremely alien as to be unknowable and subjugates the self to the point of total passivity.[101] Ricoeur relies on Nabert to provide the moderation between these two extremes.[102] Nabert posits a non-foundational ethic which does not derive from a single transcendent absolute as in Kant, but arises from reflection on multiple focal points: specifically from experiences of fault. Nabert suggests that reflection on the experience of fault reveals the possibility of evil and the gap between our own being and that of the witness to the absolute. Only gratuitous self-sacrifice is efficacious in restoring and healing creation in this case and the reference to self-sacrifice acts as a sign post to religious sensibility. [103]

---

[99] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 323.
[100] "Emmanuel Lévinas: Thinker of Testimony" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*.
[101] Despite, paradoxically, Lévinas' insistence that the call is a call to responsibility.
[102] It is perhaps worth acknowledging that Ricoeur's interest in Nabert is not apparently widely shared and that few of Nabert's writings have been published in English translation. We are, therefore, reliant on reading Nabert through Ricoeur's eyes.
[103] Jean Nabert, *Essai sur le mal,* p. 149 cited Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 115.

As Ricoeur expresses it, the height or transcendence of the divine is not observed as something outside us, but recognized by something within.

> *It is not human beings who make themselves God's judge, but rather it is the divine, implicated in the founding act of consciousness, that makes itself the judge of the ideas human beings make of God. This discernment turns back against us, enjoining the most extreme divestment of our particularity. Exteriority is inseparable from height to the extent that my conscience cannot by itself bring about this divestment, without the testimony of certain acts, certain lives, that, despite their radical contingency, their plain historicity, speak in the name of the absolute.*[104]

Ricoeur agrees with Nabert that absolute divestment, emptying of the self, would be necessary in order to accomplish a "pure act" and such a possibility exists only in the terms of limit experiences. As soon as self-consciousness exists it will be forced to explain, analyse or otherwise attempt to make sense of experience: to interpret it. The question then arises; in the case of a "pure action" or an act of testimony, who is acting? Is the Other merely acting through us? Ricoeur does not flinch from asking, "Are we so far from what Lévinas speaks of as the *passivity* of being summoned?"[105] He rejects this possibility for two reasons, the structure of call that makes conscience "the voice that care addresses to itself" and the priority of testimony over accusation, that is the role of conscience in witnessing to the self's potential for being *before* measuring the inadequacy of its action to its most profound possibilities.[106] Ricoeur stresses that the voice heard in the conscience is a voice of *invitation* which preserves the autonomy of the self, writing "Conscience is fundamentally a principle of individuation rather than an instance of accusation and judgement."[107]

Where the voice of conscience is heard as a voice of accusation it is unmasked by Freud as the voice of the super-ego. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur outlines Freud's theory of

[104] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 116.
[105] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 117. My emphasis.
[106] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 271.
[107] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 273.

conscience, understood, together with the ego-ideal and self-observation, as a faculty of the super-ego. Freud suggests that conscience is the voice which says "no" whose origin is the parent, the figure of the ancestor, the "internal foreigner". In particular Ricoeur notes the submission of the ego to the super-ego which at times is pathological.[108] Ricoeur draws a parallel between Freud's ancestral voices and the Law, especially as understood by St Paul and interpreted by Luther.

False identification of the conscience with the voice of accusation leads Ricoeur to conclude "Christian faith does not consist in saying that it is God who speaks in our conscience." Rather, he uses a formulation from Gerhard Ebeling, who suggests that conscience is the locus where care for oneself, attention to the world, and hearing God intersect: "Only where God is encountered as a question of conscience are man and the world perceived to be a question of conscience."[109] To say that God alone speaks in the conscience would be to imply life under the law, while Paul is calling us to justification by faith. The two must be articulated in a process of discernment. Ricoeur concludes, "The Christian is someone who discerns 'conformity in the image of Christ' in the call of conscience." [110] Conscience is only the "receptive structure" which allows the voice of the ancestors, whether actual, historic or pre-historic, to be heard.

Ricoeur's description of conscience as the organ of discernment would be supported by Bultmann, who argued that conscience is a purely anthropological concept that only describes the self's knowledge of itself. Evidence for this view can be found in the frailty of the conscience, which can be "weak" or "sick" as St Paul teaches. Bultmann suggests that the authority of the conscience is related to its role as the organ of reception: it is the locus in which God's demand on humanity is heard, he writes, "the demand perceived by conscience

[108] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 185.
[109] Gerhard Ebeling, cited Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 273.
[110] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 274.

has its foundation in a sphere transcendent to man; to acknowledge that sphere is in the end the decisive thing, though man may err in what he believes he hears it demand."[111]

Bultmann was influenced by Heidegger and we can certainly hear echoes of his suggestion that the conscience is related to the call to authenticity. The relationship between conscience, self-knowledge and identity is even more strongly spelled out in the following interpretation, offered by Thiselton citing Yeo, Khiok-Khing;

> *" The weak" […] crave for identity and for recognition and acceptance by "the strong". If "the strong" set an agenda, "the weak" may be seduced into doing almost anything to gain what they seek, while compounding their own confusion and inner tensions by feeling the "wrongness" of it all at the same time. Their integrity has been compromised, polluted or tainted.*[112]

The failure of conscience here is clearly being associated with a failure to live with integrity, regardless of the content of the decision.

Although the voice of conscience seems to support an equation between Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" and Ricoeur's understanding of "self", Ricoeur will not allow complete identification. He reads Heidegger's account of conscience as the voice of self alone, which he says, "… reduces strange(r)ness to the facticity of being-in-the-world and does not allow for any sense of being enjoined or summoned by the other."[113] For Ricoeur, attestation must have the character of injunction or invitation, or it risks losing all ethical or moral significance. Attestation has a dimension of responsiveness, testifying to something or someone which makes us attentive to the call of the Other, even if we cannot be sure of its nature.

---

[111] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner, 1951), p. 218.

[112] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michegan, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, Carlisle, 2000), p. 644. citing Yeo, Khiok-Khing, "Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8-10" in *Biblical Interpretation, Mon 9*, (Leiden: Brill, 1995)

[113] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 354. Ricoeur may be misrepresenting Heidegger here, because he does not attend to Heidegger's discussion of "solicitude" or "care" as characteristics of authentic being.

When writing from a purely philosophical stance, Ricoeur can only be equivocal about the status of the Other:

> *Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end.*[114]

The temptation, for a person of faith, must be to assume that the absent source of the injunction is God. Jean Greisch asks "does not the relationship […] between attestation and testimony become strongest at the level of a hermeneutics of the religious self?"[115] Surely when selfhood is understood as entirely dependent for its existence on God the character of attestation is changed? In these circumstances attestation is tied to testimony and becomes almost an analogy for faith. Describing faith, Ricoeur writes it is: "a feeling of absolute dependence, in relation to a creation that precedes me; an ultimate concern at the horizon of all my preoccupations; an unconditional trust, which hopes despite…everything."[116] In asking about attestation in the light of faith we are asking, "if we live like this has revelation occurred?"[117] Whereas testimony is tested by external voices, attestation is tested by the voice heard in conscience.

However, Ricoeur explicitly rejects this conflation because he repeatedly refuses to consider a parallel between the problem of selfhood and the invitation or call from the Name. He insists that the response is a response to a call and *not* an answer to a question about the nature of the self. "It is one thing to respond to a question in the sense of resolving a problem that has been

---

[114] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 355.
[115] Jean Greisch, "Testimony and Attestation" in Ricoeur and Kearney, *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, p. 86.
[116] *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, p. 206.
[117] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, p. 135.

posed; it is something else again to respond to a call in the sense of conforming to the conception of existence it proposes."[118]

Ricoeur is insistent that the responding or summoned self is not the "ideal self" of some philosophical enterprises.

> *"I do not want to insinuate that the self, formed and informed by the biblical paradigms, crowns the self of our philosophical hermeneutics. That would be to betray our unambiguous affirmation that the mode of Christian life is a wager and a destiny, and those who take it up are not led by their confession either to assume a defensive position or to presume a superiority in relations to every other form of life, because we lack the criteria of comparison among rival claims*."[119]

Ricoeur wants to show that although religious selfhood is not the crown of selfhood, it is nevertheless true selfhood and shares the characteristics of autonomy and self-esteem that he describes in *Oneself as Another*. In order to do this, he has to show how the being enjoined or summoned overcomes the self but does not overwhelm it.

The Summoned Self in a Contingent World

The summons or call is understood as an experience of the absolute, and testimony is the means by which the *experience* of the absolute is joined to the *idea* of the absolute. Ricoeur suggests that the moment of experience is a moment in which the self is divested of itself, and it is only in this divestment that the claim of the absolute can be experienced. For Ricoeur, the problem is to describe the dialectic between the absolute and the contingent. He considers

[118] Paul Ricoeur, The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures, in *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. by Aune and McCarthy, pp. 201-201.

[119] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 263. This directly contradicts the view of Mark Wallace, who states, "Ricoeur maintains that it is allowing oneself to be appropriated by the figurative possibilities imagined by the biblical texts that the task of becoming a full self is most adequately performed. A person's willingness to become an apprentice to the summoning voice of the text begins the performance of a life well lived in relation to self and others" Mark I. Wallace, "The Summoned Self: Ethics and Hermeneutics in Paul Ricoeur in dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall.

whether an experience of the absolute might only exist outside time and, drawing on Nabert, asks "Does one have the right to invest with an absolute character a moment of history?"[120] At the other pole, he considers the total contingency of absolute dependency, taking Kant's example of the hero of faith as the exemplar of the person who always acts under the rule of law. Ricoeur rejects this as a description of a general and abstract response, not a genuinely contingent one.

Ricoeur also rejects Kant's sublime actor because this exemplar of the moral law does not experience original affirmation. To understand what he might mean by this we have to return to the end of his early book, *Fallible Man.* Here, Ricoeur suggests that there are three "moments" to original affirmation: "the verb" (by which he means the verb "to be"), "the idea" of happiness as a transcendental category, and "the experience" which is felt in the heart. The second two proceed from the first: the "yes" of being is the transcendental moment of originating affirmation. It is this affirmation that allows us to be open to the "project" of man, which reveals humanity "understood as a totality to-be-made-to-be" as the condition "of possibility of the person."[121] The experience of happiness, "originating affirmation" is felt here as the "Joy of existing in the very thing that allows me to think and to act."[122]

This account of original affirmation seems to have much in common with Spinoza's "ground of being" and can be understood as a purely philosophical and non-religious concept. Although Ricoeur uses emotive language here, we must bear in mind his distrust of the language of religious experience: its "immediacy, effusiveness" and "intuitionism."[123] He is describing something more akin to "sense" since originary affirmation is not an *experience* because it divests the person of any of the limitations which make them human. Only by this divestment can the absolute appear, graciously clothed in contingent signs.[124] The question which then

[120] Jean Nabert, *L'Essai sur le mal* cited in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 122.
[121]Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 136.
[122] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*. P.137.
[123] Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*.p. 139. Elsewhere he writes, "within the Reformed tradition, we feel repelled by anything that smacks of mysticism." Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 287.
[124] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 120.

arises is whether this sense is in the nature of a gift, or whether the divestment of the ego to which Ricoeur refers is achievable through an act of will. Following Vanhoozer's line of thought, we might ask whether this sense of divestment can be sought or chosen or whether it is a gift of grace.

Although Ricoeur describes originary affirmation as a philosophical category it is by no means clear that it is universal. It seems closer to a religious experience, at least in so far as it cannot be achieved by an act of will. It is also not clear whether "affirmation" is a reflexive act, or implies affirmation by another, specifically a divine other. The difficulty revealed here is the chasm between what we might see as the normal human task of self-making, and kind of self-understanding which arises from revelation, religious experience or encounter with the divine. Divestment is not to be confused with the "postmodern dispossession of the self" which Stiver, incorrectly in my view, attributes to Ricoeur. [125] Ricoeur's critique of Descartes does not result in a celebration of the fractured Cogito, but its reformation as "narrative identity". Selfhood is a task which is both an individual and a collective undertaking and responsibility.

When Ricoeur writes about the dynamic of losing one's self in order to find it, he is describing a sense of transcendence, not a general condition of anthropology. He is not a deconstructionist, but he recognises that the sense of transcendence can be deconstructing for the self. Vanhoozer also touches on the question of divestment in the search for authenticity. He proposes that Jesus' maxim: "whoever would save his life must first lose it", could be transposed to "whoever would posit himself as a self-constituting subject will never achieve authentic human existence."[126] Vanhoozer rightly perceives, I think, that this is not Ricoeur's position. For Ricoeur the subject who is not involved in constituting himself, in interpretation and the making of meaning is not human. Divestment is a limit experience which does not say anything about selfhood in itself, but must be interpreted in the space between divine initiative and human response. It is also perhaps worth reiterating the point made in the previous

[125] Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, p. 200.
[126] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 261.

chapter, that while the loss of ego may be a useful corrective to human arrogance, its total destruction results in mental breakdown.

Ricoeur returns to the biblical narrative where the saying "whoever would save his life must first lose it" is completed, "and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."[127] To some extent, the self must always divest itself in order to understand the matter of the text. This is task of bringing together the two horizons. As Ricoeur wrote, "But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text."[128] Ricoeur insists that we should understand this saying in terms of the narrative unity of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is in imitating the humility and suffering of Jesus, that the scholar will "renounce the representation of God as absolute knowledge" and "accept knowing just one thing about God, that God was present in and is meant to be identified with Jesus crucified."[129] This is divestment of the ego which gives testimony to our status as creatures whose call to be is the "joy of yes in the sadness of the finite."[130]

The Self in the Mirror of Scripture

Ricoeur postulates a new kind of selfhood, shaped by the biblical narrative and identified with Jesus. The summoned self is closely related to the divested self. To be summoned is to be "radically decentred" but to be reconstructed in a new form, with the assistance of an inner voice or inner teacher, a figure Ricoeur borrows from Augustine, noting that the image has its origins in a Platonic form of one who allows us to uncover or discover the eternal truths that we already know. [131] Whereas the external Platonic teacher illuminates what is already present, Ricoeur argues that the disciple needs inner instruction in order to discover the truth within. Augustine's Platonic metaphor breaks down, in Ricoeur's opinion, because Christ is both the

[127] Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, Matthew 16:25
[128] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 113.
[129]Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 288.
[130] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 140.
[131] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 265.

light who illuminates and the Word that is illuminated, neither of which can be substituted by an external teacher. The teacher's voice is heard within, not from without, it is internal "even more internal to myself than myself, the teacher remains the other of the soul."[132]

In conclusion, we might tentatively suggest that the voice of the Other heard in the depths of the self, is the voice of Oneself as Another, revealing a glimpse of divine glory at the heart of the self. This is not to concede to Vanhoozer that we are dealing only with human experience in Ricoeur's account of revelation, but rather to be reminded that those who are summoned also experience the indwelling of Christ. The conscience is the place where the "call of the self to itself is intensified and transformed by the figure that serves as its model and archetype: on the other side, the transcendent figure is internalized by the moment of appropriation that transmutes it into an inner voice."[133] To some extent this brings us full circle, since the summoned self is one who interprets himself or herself in the mirror of the scriptures and sees their choices reflected in the lives of those who bear witness through the text to the transformative power of God.

[132] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 270 footnote.
[133] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 271.

CHAPTER FIVE: Ricoeur's Mediation of Morals and Ethics.

Having considered the nature of self in narrative identity we turn now to consider its ethical dimension. We've seen how character and action are interdependent, and how the relationship between them moves narrative identity from hermeneutical philosophy to ethics concluding with a self who is capable of "*acting and suffering*".[1] We turn now to consider the place of the individual within the community and the character of his or her relationships with individuals and with the wider social sphere. These are the dynamic relationships between I, thou and them, experienced in all human life. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur considers the ethical and moral determinations of action within three spheres; the autonomy of the self, the impact of action on other selves, and the relationship of selves to others in the social context. At each turn he is concerned to show the relationship between autonomy and care for the other, each of which contributes to the individual's capacity to live "a good life". Life is judged, not just on its narrative unity or integrity, but also on its ethical and moral dimensions. The judgement which a person makes of themselves comes under the category of *attestation*; "when the certainty of being the author of one's own discourse and of one's own acts becomes the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well."[2]

We begin, in this chapter, with Ricoeur's exploration of morals and ethics in the philosophical realm. We shall see how Ricoeur moves through an Aristotelian model of virtue to a Kantian description of morality and finally suggests a dialectic mediation between them exemplified by *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom. At each phase of the journey we are confronted with aporias which a single philosophical approach cannot convincingly resolve, culminating when Ricoeur's description of *phronēsis* is curbed by a meditation on the "non-philosophical" category of Greek tragedy. [3] I will argue that while religious categories cannot offer solutions to Ricoeur's aporias – although this is an assumption made by some theologians - they have

[1] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 18.
[2] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180.
[3] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 241-249.

significantly influenced his underlying assumptions. While Ricoeur can honestly argue that he has kept theological and philosophical categories separate, there is evidence that his values are rooted in concepts which conflate religious and philosophical ideas, in particular his insistence on conatus and originary affirmation, together with his treatment of limit expressions which as we have already seen owes so much to the Roman Catholic writers, Marcel and Nabert.

The Little Ethic

Although there is no etymological distinction between the Greek term "ethics" and the Latin term "morality", Ricoeur uses them to describe two different paradigms: "ethics" to encompass the teleological aim for that which is considered to be good; and "morality" for the deontological imposition of that which is considered obligatory. The former he places in the Aristotelian virtue ethic tradition, the latter he associates with Kant. He proposes the following; "(1) the primacy of ethics over morality, (2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the norm, and (3) the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice."[4] His intention is to show that there is a relationship between what is and what ought to be: what is good and what is right. The ethical aim which forms the beginning and the end of his "little ethic" is summarised as "*aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions.'*"[5]

Ricoeur uses the dialectic method which he employed in *Fallible Man*, to demonstrate that virtue and duty occupy opposed poles that cannot exist without the other. In each case he moves through issues concerned with the self, the other, and the institution, showing how neither teleology nor deontology are sufficient.

Ricoeur develops his ideas through what Pamela Sue Anderson has called a Kantian architectonic.[6] He draws on Kant through the use of a triadic form which moves through the

[4] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.
[5] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172. Italics Ricoeur's own.
[6] Anderson has consistently promoted a Kantian reading of Ricoeur, or perhaps a Ricoeurian reading of Kant, her comments on this aspect of *Oneself as Another* are found in "Ricoeur's

universal, the particular and the singular, and follows Kant's clear distinction between philosophy and religion. However, it is important not to lose sight of the extent to which Ricoeur rejects Kant's formalising and universalising principles. Ricoeur uses Kant not as the foundation of his moral thought, but as a test – a kind of reflective framework – through which ethical decision making must pass.

In his exploration of the teleological virtue ethic, Ricoeur joins MacIntyre's concept of the "narrative unity of a life" with Aristotle's aim of "the good life". This enables him to deal with the difference between "virtue" and "the virtues" in such a way that he does not depend on Kant's premise that the "good will" is the only moral value which is good in and of itself.[7] The virtuous life is one lived towards an ideal and life becomes a project to be realised, in which the self attempts responsible movement from awareness of capacity to the actuality of action. Ricoeur writes, "Ethics is this movement between a naked and blind belief in a primordial 'I can', and the real history where I attest to this 'I can'." We can see the influence of Husserl in this formulation, in which the realization of the self in action suggests a projection of the self as a specifically *ethical* intentionality.[8] This projection of the self into the possible, with its ethical dimension has been called an exercise in "Moral Creativity" by John Wall: the relationship between past and present in narrative identity is not simply shaped by the past, but imagines the future in order to live a "good life".[9]Although Ricoeur did not write the projected third volume of his Metaphysics on the Poetics of the Will, in *Oneself as Another* he is engaged in kind of moral poetics, creatively imagining the self and projecting that imagined self into future action – a work in the world.

For Ricoeur, the capacity to act is always an act of courage based on a wager rather than a judgement. This wager is the result of the ongoing back and forth of hermeneutic reflection, moving between the idea of the good life and our realised decisions, and between individual

---

Reclamation of Autonomy: Unity, Plurality and Totality" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, pp. 15-31.

[7] The problem with Aristotelian virtues is that they are context specific, it is virtuous to be a courageous soldier, but not a courageous thief.

[8] John Wall, "Moral Meaning" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 51.

[9] Wall, *Moral Creativity*.

decisions and the whole of life. Life is likened to a text, "in which the whole and the part are to be understood in terms of the other."[10] For Ricoeur, as for Charles Taylor, "man is a self interpreting animal."[11] The resulting judgement, as we have seen, comes in Ricoeur's important category of *attestation*, which draws not only on Heidegger, but Spinoza and Tillich.[12]

However, this positive association between narrative identity and virtue is vulnerable on two fronts. Firstly, narrative identity, while benignly enabling a process of self-realization, is prone to instrumentalise others by the sheer fact of assimilating their stories in to the narrative of another self.[13] Secondly, the individual's capacity to live well is constrained by what Martha Nussbaum speaks of as the "fragility of goodness" – the contingent nature of life in the world. Individuals are not entirely the authors of their own lives and those who act and narrate also suffer from both intentional and unintentional causes beyond their control.[14] The ethical aim is fragile because the self never acts alone.

This leads Ricoeur to consider relationships where, he argues, we learn to value the self for itself by recognising the selfhood of others. Self-esteem, as a goal of the good life, becomes properly esteem of *the* self not *my*self. The self is valued for its capacity or capability: specifically for its capacity for self-evaluation. For Ricoeur "the main emphasis is to be placed on the verb, on being-able-to-do, to which corresponds on the ethical plane, being-able-to-judge."[15] Judgement and its corollary, justice, are concerned with fairness or equality and depend on our experience of relationships of equality which are exemplified by friendship. Friendship is that relationship with another whereby the interests of the other are as dear to us

[10] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 179.
[11] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.45 cited Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 179.
[12] "Virtue is the power of acting exclusively according to one's true nature […] Self-affirmation is, so to speak, virtue altogether." Spinoza cited by Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, The Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy (London: Collins, 1962), p. 33.
[13] See John Wall's critique in "Moral Meaning" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 53.
[14] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 178. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Revised edn (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[15] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 181.

as the interest in ourselves; we *need* friends in order to actualise our care or solicitude, and yet true friendship can never be instrumental – the friend is valued for their existence not their usefulness. We can see the trace of Heidegger in Ricoeur's invocation of the category of Care/*Sorge*/solicitude and in particular the importance he places on "*benevolent spontaneity*" that is autonomous or free action which he sees as "intimately related to self-esteem within the framework of the aim of the 'good life.'"[16]

Solicitude has its own problematic because of the asymmetry in relationships which are not reciprocal or equal. This imbalance of power is experienced both by the oppressor and the one who suffers, and in either case solicitude is denied, since the oppressor sees the victim only in instrumental terms, and the victim has no choice or autonomy in responding to the oppressor. This is a key issue for Ricoeur, which is explored in dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas and considered at length later in this chapter. The existence of this asymmetry leads to a need for moral frameworks for interpersonal relationships shaped by duty as much as by benevolent solicitude.

Ricoeur wants solicitude to be a matter of choice, but acknowledges that because relationships are not all "face to face" we owe a *duty* of care to those others who we will never meet because we are separated either by space or time. This wider solicitude is shaped by the life of "just institutions" which are not simply the structures of government or the judiciary, but the more ill-defined collective communities created by culture and history. Following John Rawls, Ricoeur argues that "the first virtue of social institutions" is justice. [17] It has a dimension concerned with virtue - facing towards the good - which extends interpersonal relationships to institutions, and a second, legal dimension - concerned with the specifics of the judicial system. In both dimensions we are faced with the problem, posed by Aristotle, of distributing fairly between those who have unequal shares, whether of wealth, status or talent. Rawls offers

[16] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 190, 311-312. Though note that in the second section, Ricoeur suggests a relationship between *Sorge* and *Praxis,* reiterating the stress on the relationship between selfhood, actuality and potentiality through action.
[17] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3. Cited Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 197.

a vision of distributive justice, which for Ricoeur consists of judgement made in pursuit of virtue as long as those judgements are located in relationships of solicitude between people.[18]

However, it emerges that just institutions cannot rely on the goal of virtue alone. As Hannah Arendt has observed, there is a gap between people's desire to hold power in common and the reality of domination which corrupts the relationships between groups as much as between individuals. The capacity of the public space to contain open debate is limited by the inevitability of abuse of power which drives the ethical aim towards the application of justice. It emerges that justice can be both an ethical aim and a procedural duty. The desire for justice is driven, Ricoeur suggests, by a sense of lack: by the primitive cry "that's not fair!" rather than by a clarity of vision about how human affairs should be organised.[19] Because of this, justice has a teleological dimension, however, it must be organised and shaped by due process. The existence of evil creates the third problematic, or aporia, for the ethical aim and points to the necessity for a moral or deontological corrective to counter the "bad will".

The Moral Norm

Just as Ricoeur has shown that the ethical aim is insufficient without the application of moral norms, so he seeks to show that moral norms are insufficient without an ethical aim. He repeats the threefold consideration of the moral norm as applied to individuals, to others and to communities through three Kantian maxims. The first maxim concerns the "good will", the second the "categorical imperative" – "Act in such a way that the maxim of your will can always hold at the same time as a principle of universal law" and the third, the so-called "second formulation" – "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."[20]

[18] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 202.
[19] Ricoeur, *The Just*, p. x.
[20] Emmanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 96. ¶ 4.429

Ricoeur suggests that the link between the deontological moment (What ought I to do?) and the ethical aim (to be good..) is found in Kant's assertion: "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except a *good will*".[21] Since ethical responsibility depends on the capacity of the individual to *choose* to act, Ricoeur's primary consideration is to preserve the capacity of the individual to act freely. His problem is to preserve the autonomy of the self while recognising that the "good will" is constrained by "sensible inclinations" or duty.[22] As we've seen Ricoeur argues that Kant's account of conscience does not sufficiently distinguish the voice of the other from the voice of the self. The moral imperative becomes internalised and the vocabulary of imperative is sublimated when "autonomy substitutes for obedience to another, obedience to oneself". This leads him to conclude, "obedience has lost all character of dependence and submission. True obedience, one could say, is autonomy."[23]

Ricoeur's second criticism of Kant's account of duty is that it makes no concession to the role of desire in the work of the will. Kant's account of duty, as Schiller complained, seems inextricably linked to coercion, or at least reluctance.[24] Whereas Kant assumed a conflict between reason and desire, Ricoeur argues that desire (which for him is strongly linked with *conatus* – the longing for existence, or the desire to be, described by Spinoza) is the primary motivating force for humans and must be integrated with reason. He draws again on Heidegger's category of solicitude to argue that self-love must indeed pass through the universalising norm to become self-esteem, but that nevertheless the will is driven by desire before reason.

Finally, Ricoeur considers the problem of the bad will, whereby human freedom of choice is perverted or misused. Evil, one of Jaspers' limit experiences which cannot be explained through normal critical philosophical means, constricts human capacity. Ricoeur argues that

[21] Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 61. ¶ 4.396
[22] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 206.
[23] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 210.
[24] Schiller's verse critique is cited on page 32.

we do not have complete freedom to act out of duty because of the existence of evil, which means that the "good will" is itself qualified in reality.

In each of these examples Ricoeur has taken Kant's maxim and demonstrated that it cannot exist as a foundational moral principle without recourse to the ethical aim, while acknowledging that because of the existence of evil, the misuses of power, and the fallibility of humans, the idea of duty and its expression in moral norms must play its part in the paradigm.

Kant articulates the universalizing principle of moral behaviour through the categorical imperative which Ricoeur argues is simply another formulation of the "golden rule".[25] The golden rule makes clear the mediation between the aim of the good life and moral obligation because it leaves the specific question of duty open and makes room for "moral invention" in terms of what is permitted. While Kant rejected the golden rule because of its use of the affective terms 'like' or 'dislike', Ricoeur argues that it serves the same purpose as the universal maxim, which is to challenge the asymmetry of human relationships and to insist on the value of each person as an end in themselves. The golden rule articulates the norm of reciprocity in behaviour between the self and the other and in doing so throws into relief the presupposition of inequality or asymmetry in human relationships: the interaction between agent and patient, the actor and the sufferer, the dominant and the submissive. Ricoeur concurs with Lévinas that this asymmetry leads inevitably to the possibility of violence, which for Ricoeur is a broad term referring to any practice in which persons are instrumentalized, expressed most particularly in control of the body of another – the ultimate denial of solicitude or self-esteem since it transgresses the other's selfhood.

Once again we can see how norms expressed as moral duties are necessary to challenge evil, but how Ricoeur has placed norms in relation to the ethical aim. He turns finally to the expression of norms in institutional contexts and to the problem of justice. As we have seen,

[25] Either in its Jewish or New Testament Form. He cites the Talmud, "Do not do unto your neighbour what you would hate him to do to you," and the gospels, "Love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:39), Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 219. The relationship between the categorical imperative and the golden rule is discussed further in the following chapter.

Ricoeur suggests that we have a primitive sense of justice that arises out of our sense of what is fair and is connected to the distribution of goods. He argues that these ideas of just division and just share belong to the ethical aim because they are concerned with the idea of equality, which we recognise as an Aristotelian concept. However, they intersect with morality and duty because we recognise that distribution will be fairest when carried out by some disinterested method agreed by the community. Duty relies on what Ricoeur calls the "fiction" of the social contract, which depends on the false assumption that one self or group of selves can adequately imagine the nature of the goods of others, and in which the *procedure* of justice (the method by which fairness is attempted) is assumed to engender the *principles* of justice.[26]

Individuals give up their autonomy in order to receive their "civil liberties as a member of the republic."[27] They are inherently vulnerable to unfair outcomes in which they have no say. Ricoeur's concern for the rights of individuals may well have its origins in his own upbringing as in a minority protestant community and seems to have been strengthened in his later years after his return to live in France. However, there is valid criticism that at times he seems indifferent to the playing out of power relationships in civic society. Although Rawls argues that distributive justice is based on contractual relationships in which individual interests are promoted within structures of deliberative decision making, Ricoeur is not convinced that he has paid sufficient attention to the reality that citizens lack all the information they need to make rational decisions or to the need to distribute goods of different kinds held to be of differing value by individuals. He wonders whether Rawls is really providing an ahistorical version of justice, or simply describing a version of the procedures of justice which "provides at best the formalization of a *sense* of justice that it never ceases to presuppose." [28]

[26] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 228.
[27] Ricoeur, *The Just*, pp. 9-10.
[28] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 236.

Practical Wisdom

Ricoeur completes the movement through virtue and morality by "the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice," by a turn to *phronēsis* or practical wisdom: the right action in a situation where goods or duties conflict, in which there is no universally valid solution, but only a responsible solution based on conviction. [29] However, before he makes his appeal to *phronēsis*, Ricoeur includes an "Interlude" exploring the role of tragedy as a non-philosophical source of wisdom. This interlude will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. It serves as a corrective to premature synthesis as well as a reminder that, for Ricoeur, not all sources of wisdom are philosophical.

In returning from the moral norm to the ethical aim, Ricoeur once again employs the Kantian threefold architectonic, but reverses the direction of travel to begin his exploration with institutions, because he argues "the individual […] becomes human only under the condition of certain institutions; and […] if this is so, the obligation to serve these institutions is itself a condition for the human agent to continue to develop."[30] He seeks to discover whether this obligation is simply a moral obligation or whether it serves the aim of a good life, and chooses to do this in dialogue with Hegel. In Hegel's writing the state is viewed as an expression of the Spirit (*Geist*) of history, imbued with judgment and self-knowledge superior to that of the individual – whose supreme duty is to be a member of the state. Ricoeur challenges Hegel's view of history and dethrones it, replacing it with the Hegelian term for "Ethical Life" (*Sittlichkeit*) which embodies a decentred or non-unitary civil society, characterised by respect for persons in their singularity and the pursuit of the good life in different modalities.[31] Thus he attempts to retain a sense of direction and movement through history, but to take away its unifying or universalising character. This move is criticised both by John Wall and Fred Dallmayr, who argue that Ricoeur has an overconfident view of civil society and drains

[29] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.
[30] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 254-255.
[31] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 256.

Hegel's concept of history of its finitude or human limitation, paradoxically underplaying its role in human suffering.[32]

Ricoeur's appeal to the concept of *Sittlichkeit* enables him to contrast the universal rule of democracy with a consideration of the "ends" of good government. In the light of twentieth century totalitarianism he asks what kind of state can minimize the inevitable violence of structures of domination by which even democracy is characterised. He finds that the state must be governed not by precept but by its goals or ends and that "good government" is that which enables people to recognise or remember its purpose – which is to enable people to live together and act together. The complexities of social life and conflicting interests of the citizens, together with uncertainty as to the "ends" of government, result in us recognising that political discussion will never reach a conclusion, although governments must at times make decisions. Such decisions gain their legitimacy through due process. Ricoeur suggests that there is a close parallel between Hegel's concept of the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) and the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) because each depends on the conviction that adequate and proper reflection has taken place, that by happy coincidence what is good for the state is good for the individual, and it is this conviction that leads to legitimation of the decisions of the state.[33]

Ricoeur revisits Kant's categorical imperative to argue that it does not properly distinguish between respect for humanity as a universal category and as individuals. He shows how this hidden rift in Kant's maxim creates situations in which universal rules cannot answer the need for respect for the individual. Two examples are given in which respect for a rule seems in conflict with respect for persons. The first aporia concerns the problem of promise keeping; whereby respect for myself will not allow me to bind myself to taking an action in the future, but duty to myself will insist that I am faithful to my intention. This allows him to revisit the dilemma presented by the division of self into *ipse* and *idem*; the self which I experience as

[32] Fred Dallmayr, "Ethics and Public Life: A critical tribute to Paul Ricoeur" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, pp. 213-232.
[33] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 258-261. See also Ricoeur, *The Just*, pp. 5-6, 10.

free, changing and learning; and the self which I experience as constant, predictable and reliable. He finds here, once again, a mediation between the moral norm and solicitude.

The second concerns situations such as euthanasia and abortion where the commandment against killing conflicts with respect for persons. At one extreme, respect for the rule demands keeping alive people with radically diminished mental and physical capacities, at the other extreme there is a danger that life is only protected for those fully recognised as "persons" who have attained adult, enlightened capacities. As we've seen, Ricoeur's emphasis on respect for persons (understood as interpreting, narrating selves) is itself vulnerable to this latter interpretation. Ricoeur confesses that "development" seems to be a part of human ontology which admits "degrees of actualisation" to our understanding of human selves.[34]

Ricoeur tries to show, contra Kant, that morality does not begin with autonomy (free will, or good will) but rather that autonomy is derived from the rule of justice worked out in just institutions and in reciprocity worked out on the interpersonal plane. He would argue that he is not describing social *conditioning*, but rather that our sense of self-esteem is worked out as we live in communities organised on the principles of universal respect for persons, and that self-esteem is learned by seeing and returning respect in the face of the other. Autonomy is not self-sufficient autonomy but depends on the "rule of justice" and the "rule of reciprocity".[35]

He considers the relationship between institutions and universal moral law, this time drawing on the work of Alan Donagon to show how moral absolutes such as the prohibitions against murder or lying cannot be universal because they can conflict with one another in situations such as the need to lie to protect another's life, or to kill in order to protect one's own life.[36] These prohibitions are not universal absolutes but legal duties shaped by historical contingency which may at times have to be "unmasked by a critique of ideologies".[37]

[34] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 271.
[35] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 275.
[36] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p 292-293
[37] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 280.

Ricoeur argues, drawing on Habermas and Apel, that forms of justice which appear to be based on moral absolutes are in fact expressions of practical wisdom of the kind arrived at through case law rather than universal principles.

However, Ricoeur is not suggesting a simple recourse to communitarian ethics, but rather a continuous striving towards universality in the manner advocated by Habermas, in which both deductive reasoning and empirical proof play a part in the dialogue. Ricoeur contrast the *real* dialogue advocated by Habermas with the fictional discourse which leads to the "fable" of Rawls' social contract.[38] His problem with Habermas lies in the difficulty of establishing an overarching paradigm in which different "cultures" can find a voice. Ricoeur protests that in its existing form Habermas' "ethics of argumentation" actually contributes to a "sterile opposition" between universal proceduralism and cultural relativism.[39] There is a danger that Ricoeur occupies this space with Habermas, and that his conclusions are nothing more than a banal appeal to "talk to as many people as possible". However, I think it can be argued that Ricoeur does not reduce the aims of the self to the aims of the community, nor relativise the aims of the individual under an overarching procedure of discourse, but rather aims for a creative, poetic mediation of genuinely other and conflicting goals into new areas of critically shared moral meaning. A key to this appreciation is to follow John Wall's suggestion that the "just institution" should be understood as a teleological aim rather than a practical reality. It might be explored more fully in the light of the eschaton, but since he will not discuss this non-philosophical limit expression at this point, Wall concedes that Ricoeur's account is somewhat unsatisfactory.[40]

Ricoeur's main concern is to show that argumentation is not an empty category, but a reality in which language games are mediated. If argumentation is not to assume an abstract or fictional character it must recover its relationship to *conviction*. He sums this up in the following sentence: "The articulations we never cease to reinforce between deontology and teleology finds its highest – and most fragile – expression in the reflective equilibrium between the

[38] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 282.
[39] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 287.
[40] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 155ff.

ethics of argumentation and considered convictions." The golden thread between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and his ethics is found here, in a footnote that recalls that the German term for conviction is *Überzeugung,* " a term related by its root to *Bezeugung*, which signifies "attestation" – the password for this entire book."[41] Through argumentation, attestation becomes possible for communities as well as individuals.

Practical wisdom results in practical action, not merely in abstract decision making. The community or institution chooses to act on the basis of conviction: a point beyond empirical verification, the point at which all that can be said is, "Here I stand, I can do no other". This is the temporary moment of closure, where comprehensibility reaches its limit; the consequences of which may be tragic, as we will discover.

For an individual standing in that place of conviction, the notion of responsibility holds together issues of ethical and moral judgement. Ricoeur considers responsibility in tandem with "imputability": an acceptance of responsibility which falls some way short of culpability. Being able to impute an action to an individual does not imply that the individual is responsible for the action in such a way that they can be held culpable for an action deemed impermissable in the legal sense. This distinction helps Ricoeur to reflect on the relationship between *idem* and *ipse* in the ethical sphere. The narrative of life creates the possibility of different degrees of overlap between responsibility and imputability: empirical continuity would insist at least on the latter, but there could be significant variation on the former depending on the extent to which the individual recognises his or her responsibility for actions in the past. Additionally, the principle of responsibility has to lead to the idea of accepting, and indeed suffering the consequences of one's own acts to an extent that cannot be determined in advance.[42]

[41] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 289. Footnote 82
[42] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 294.

Ricoeur does not make the connection between this experience of uncertainty or contingency and the Christian doctrine of sin, but writes simply of the paradox: "with imputability, there can be guilt without realization, without actualization; with responsibility, there can be guilt without intention; the bearing of our acts […] extends beyond that of our projects."[43]

[43] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 295.

Confronting the Other

We have seen how the study of ethics developed naturally from Ricoeur's philosophical enquiry into the nature of the will and the interpretation of human experience as the consistent direction of travel of his life's work. When we come to consider the limits of the ethical quest we find ourselves thrown back to the underlying philosophical limits - primarily concerned with the will and with fallibility and fault, and in particular with a discussion of ontology. In writing *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur was concerned to show how the nature of humans both enables them to act freely and constrains them from doing so. In *Oneself as Another* this paradox is explored in dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas. The dialogue between Ricoeur and Lévinas has been written about at length and is worthy of a PhD thesis in its own right.[44] I am not going to attempt a full discussion of the disputed territory, but rather to suggest that the conflict between them has its source in a theological rather than a philosophical difference. The problem begins with a discussion about the nature of the self, but I believe it masks a discussion about the nature of God.

Ricoeur mediates between Husserl and Lévinas to explore the problem of sameness and difference in human mutuality. Whereas Husserl claims that mutuality has its origins in sameness, Lévinas claims its origins in difference: Ricoeur wishes to show that they must be co-originary.

[44] See among others: Mark I. Wallace, "The Summoned Self: Ethics and Hermeneutics in Paul Ricoeur in dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, pp. 80-96. Richard A. Cohen, "Moral Selfhood: A Levinasian response to Ricoeur on Lévinas in Cohen and Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity,* pp. 127-160. Patrick L. Bourgeois "Ricoeur and Lévinas: Solicitude in Reciprocity and Solicitude in Existence" in Cohen and Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, pp. 109-126. David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation : Being Transformed* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters : Interpreting Otherness* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003), Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity : Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate, Perspectives in continental philosophy*, 1st edn (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

He sets out his project extremely clearly:

> *I would like to show essentially that it is impossible to construct this dialectic in a unilateral manner, whether one attempts, with Husserl, to derive the alter ego from the ego, or whether, with Lévinas, one reserves for the Other the exclusive initiative for assigning responsibility to the self. A two pronged conception of otherness remains to be constructed here, one that does justice in turn to the primacy of self-esteem and also to the primacy of the convocation to justice coming from the other.*[45]

As we have seen, Ricoeur follows Aristotle in his claim that it is our recognition of the other as a self of equal value which underlies both our self-esteem and our solicitude. Ricoeur considers the three types of friendship proposed by Aristotle: friendship for the sake of good; of utility; or of pleasure. Aristotle is concerned to know whether the happy man *needs* friends which might imply that friendship has only a utilitarian purpose. He concludes that it is in desiring his own being that a man recognises the value of being, and so comes to value the being of others. Friendship is necessary to actualise consciousness of existence, and further, to actualise joy in consciousness of existence. Aristotle has shown to Ricoeur's satisfaction that the other in the form of the friend is necessary to the "good life" and that there can be no sense of the other without a sense of self. At this point, we might say, he is closest to the Husserlian pole; it is in the experience of his own being that man comes to recognise the value of the being of the other.

Against Husserl, Ricoeur argues that there are limitations to our capacity to empathise with others since we cannot feel their emotions nor experience their memories. Our appreciation of the other is by analogy: your flesh is like my flesh; you are an embodied ego like my embodied ego. Analogy allows likeness but does not subsume it; "The analogical transfer from myself to

[45] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 331.

the other intersects with the inverse movement of the other towards it, it intersects with the latter, *but does not abolish it*, even if it does not presuppose it."[46]

At the opposite pole, arguing for unbridgeable difference between the self and the other, we find Emmanuel Lévinas. While Ricoeur follows Aristotle in finding friendship, involving a symmetrical relationship of mutuality and reciprocity, necessary to the good life Lévinas argues that ethical life derives from the absolute asymmetry between the self and the Other. The self comes to consciousness through encounter with the Other.

Drawing on both *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* Ricoeur claims that Lévinas is not describing a relationship, but an *epiphany* whereby the face of the Other is experienced as a voice, a summons, or an instruction without any possibility of reciprocity.[47] This dissymmetry removes all initiative from the self. The face of the Other becomes the face of the "master of justice" or the "persecutor" operating in the sphere of the moral imperative. [48] Ricoeur argues that because Lévinas privileges morality his schema is actually unethical, both because it is insufficient in situations where duties conflict, and because it takes away freedom. This is why he argues, "it is so important to us to give solicitude a more fundamental status than obedience to duty."[49] Actions which flow from a sense of regard for the other, rather than from duty or obligation, are the actions of "*benevolent spontaneity*" which the self undertakes on its own initiative, but in response to the encounter with the other, a response which may be one of pity, compassion or sympathy. [50]

Ricoeur seeks to define the two poles of initiative: considering our response to a command, and our response to suffering. He argues that just as there is asymmetry in heteronomy, there is another kind of asymmetry when the self is confronted with a victim: in this case all the

[46]Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 335. my emphasis
[47] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity; An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne studies. Philosophical series, (Pittsburgh,: Duquesne University Press, 1969), Emmanuel Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998).
[48] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 190.
[49] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 190.
[50] I think this is where we find the answer to a question about struggle in Ricoeur. Contra Kant, he seems to be saying that it is more important to have regard for the subject than duty towards them.

initiative lies with the self.[51] Because suffering cannot be shared and is not reciprocal, Ricoeur asserts that the relationship between the self and the suffering Other is never one of friendship and cannot come into the category of a "good" to be sought. It is rather, he suggests, a phenomenon linked to tragedy, in which we learn through catharsis, terror and pity. Whereas for Lévinas the self is constituted solely by its obedience to the cry of the other for justice, for Ricoeur the pre-existence (or at least co-originary presence) of the self is necessary for the cry of justice to be heard. Only a self, as it esteems itself as a self capable of reason, agency and good will, can exercise solicitude.

Ricoeur recognises that Lévinas is starting, like himself, from a phenomenological perspective. There can be no presuppositions, only subjective experience. Ricoeur argues that Lévinas takes this stance to an extreme position, refusing to absorb anything outside the self into its understanding. It is the complete opposite to the Husserlian project which considers that understanding must always be achieved through assimilation, leading to the assumption of a universal ground of being and of mutual dependency. Lévinas moves *beyond* ontology to a premise that any attempt to understand the other is not ethical because by definition it requires assimilation of the other into our own schema. This he describes as "totalising". As Ricoeur summarises; "To represent something to oneself is to assimilate it to oneself, to include it in oneself, and hence to deny its otherness." Faced with, or more properly, hearing the voice of, the Other, I have no legitimate power; I can take no legitimate initiative. "Self imputation, […], is not inscribed within an asymmetrical dialogic structure whose origin lies outside me." When the same becomes absorbed into a totalised system, the exteriority of the other can no longer be expressed in the language of relation and there is a rift in the possibility of relationship between them. [52]

Ricoeur views this rift or break as caused by the use of hyperbole, not as a literary or stylistic conceit, but as the practice of excess in philosophic argument, a practice of which he is highly critical because it derives from non-philosophical categories of limit experiences and limit

[51] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 191.
[52] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 336.

expressions. Ricoeur is, as we have seen, above all a philosopher of hermeneutic method.[53] Faced with epiphanies, his instinct is to seek to interpret the symbols and texts in which they are represented. His first point with regard to Lévinas' hyperbole is to note that it has brought us to the limit of understanding and thus to a place beyond interpretation. This both dissolves our sense of self and our sense of the Other. Ricoeur argues that there can be no ego which is totally separate from everything else, although Lévinas insists that the separation between self and ego must be as distinct as any other separation between self and Other. Ricoeur also protests that if there is total separation then we cannot understand the instruction or command of the Other, nor can we learn from the Other. In other words, the fundamental character of humans as interpreting beings is obliterated by Lévinas' description.

Ricoeur uses uncharacteristically strong language in his critique of Lévinas, continuing "Lévinas […] employs even greater hyperbole, to the point of paroxysm."[54] He goes on to consider the moral implications of Lévinas' suggestion that we are not only responsible to the Other, but that our responsibility takes us to the point of substitution such that we become subsumed by the Other. At this point we reach the anathema to Ricoeur, the loss of identity which makes the self the substitute for the other. We reach the point of "passivity beyond passivity" where the self no longer attests to itself but to the Other and therefore can no longer be considered a moral creature.

Ricoeur's protests against Lévinas' view of epiphany and Barth's view of revelation are remarkably close and rooted in the same issues. In each case, Ricoeur argues, it is necessary to show how humans are able to receive the gift because they are ready to interpret it, and he argues that Barth - by taking a "short cut" and Lévinas - by denying autonomy, fail to fulfil this necessity. This is why anthropology is so important to Ricoeur: it demonstrates how the nature of humans enables them to hear God and do God's will. It must be conceded, in due deference to Vanhoozer, that Ricoeur does not attempt to show that humans *do* hear God, only

[53] It is worth noting that Lévinas is informed by the experience of the holocaust, which later Ricoeur will come to appreciate and value as a limit experience which informs our understanding of limit.
[54] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 338. my emphasis

that they have the capacity to do so, and historically have interpreted experience as realizing that capacity. Similarly, Ricoeur seeks to show that the will *can* respond to its desire to do good, but not that there is any such thing as a purely "good will".[55] There is a clear parallel between the way he describes the productive (or poetic) imagination's capacity to respond to symbolic language that enables the self to receive the divine word and to act on it, and his description of conscience ready to hear to the voice of affirmation and solicitude that enables the self to act with the conviction of living well and to experience the possibility of conformity to Christ. [56]

We have now reached a most important aporia in our study of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and ethics, when we have to ask about the relationship between the morally responsible self of philosophy and the summoned self of religious faith. This must be done with very great care and respect for Ricoeur's distinction between what is demonstrable, through the resources of philosophy, and what is beyond the limits of philosophy and lies in the fields of myth or speculation. As we've seen, there is a temptation to see the summoned self as in some way the fulfilment or the crown of the self, as Mark Wallace suggests, but I do not think we can read this conclusion into Ricoeur's work. Wallace apparently finds no conflict between Ricoeur's description of the self as a "project to be realized" and Jesus' claim that one cannot find the self unless one loses it.

[55] Clearly, there are arguments on both sides, with Pannenberg, for example, arguing in the tradition of Augustine, Hegel and Kierkegaard, that "sin is a perversion of the structure of our nature as creatures" which compromises human autonomy. See Wolfhart Pannenberg and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Systematic theology Vol 2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), pp. 231-275

[56] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 271-275.

He writes:

> *The task of becoming a full self is most adequately performed by allowing oneself to be appropriated by the ethical possibilities projected by the biblical texts. In this gesture, a person's spiritual practice becomes her destiny as a moral subject: by taking the risk of becoming assimilated into the strange universe of the biblical text, one makes good on the wager that a scripturally refigured self is the crown of a life well lived.*[57]

I want to argue, not only that Wallace has ignored Ricoeur's own insistence that the summoned self is not the answer to the problem of the self, but also that he has taken a short cut in reaching this conclusion: one which not only pays insufficient attention to the problematic of "losing the self" but is indifferent to the role of the Holy Spirit and the act of grace whereby the self is "overcome" by the Spirit. A return to Ricoeur will show how he maintains the dialectic between autonomy and heteronomy by recourse to hermeneutics. As we saw in our earlier discussion of manifestation and proclamation, Ricoeur insists that moments of revelation or epiphany, which are indeed characterised by loss of self, are fugitive. These moments which Hegel called the moments of absolute or revealed religion and are described by Ricoeur as moments of "fusion of event and meaning" almost lie outside the description of "experience", this is why Ricoeur insists: "testimony requires interpretation." [58]

In this one phrase, we find the deepest connection between Ricoeur and Lévinas. Despite his concern for the face-to-face epiphany, Lévinas is clear that there can be no unmediated knowledge of God, writing; "There can be no knowledge of God separated from the relationship with men."[59] Like Ricoeur, Lévinas is wary of mysticism or any kind of "I-Thou" experience of God. However, Lévinas locates belief primarily, if not exclusively, in the ethical realm. A relationship with God, he asserts, is not primarily concerned with knowledge of

[57] Mark I. Wallace, "The Summoned Self" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 92.
[58] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 112.
[59] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 79.

God's nature, thoughts or deeds but is concerned with obedience to God's commandments.[60] In this, Lévinas explicitly disagrees with Ricoeur's reading of biblical polysemy, insisting rather that the prescriptive teachings should take priority over other texts and indeed break through them. He wrote: "From the outset Jewish revelation is one of commandment and piety lies in obedience to it."[61]

Ricoeur finds God in a variety of human experiences and God's expectations of his people reflected as both duty and aim. Duties are laid down in the Decalogue, and the book of Leviticus, the law which Jesus comes to fulfil. While Ricoeur considers the extent to which the golden rule articulates principles of morality in *Oneself as Another*, he shows how it points beyond itself in his discussion in "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule".[62] His insistence on the polyvalent nature of revelation contrasts with Lévinas view that the only mode of access we have to God is via the face (that is the face of the Other). For Lévinas ethics is "first philosophy" - it is the premise from which everything else proceeds. He describes the relationship between this ethical imperative and faith in the following terms:

> *'Going towards God' is not to be understood here in the classical ontological sense of a return to, or reunification with, God as the Beginning or End of temporal existence. 'Going towards God' is meaningless unless seen in terms of my primary going towards the other person. I can only go towards God by being ethically concerned by and for the other person.*[63]

[60] Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity*, p. 46.
[61] Emmanuel Lévinas and Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell readers (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, MA, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989), p. 200. It is tempting to consider what Lévinas might make of E.P. Sanders' "new" look at Paul and the Law, which offers a much more relational description of God's call on his people, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (London: SCM Press, 1985).
[62] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 293-302.
[63] Levinas in Richard Kearney, *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 189.

As Richard Cohen writes, "when [Lévinas] speaks about ethics and justice he is speaking about God. Morality and justice are the passage of a divine transcendence through the world."[64]

By making this connection, Lévinas, like Ricoeur, sought to keep philosophical and religious matters separate. Despite adhering to traditional Jewish practice, Lévinas did not write about his personal religious experience nor about issues of faith, but sought to distinguish between the public world of morality and justice, and the private world of prayer and ritual. Ricoeur would argue that this attempt fails because Lévinas' use of hyperbole leaves him describing the public world in terms which, Ricoeur considers, should be confined to the realms of "conviction". I believe that what is revealed in his dialogue with Lévinas is that Ricoeur's response is equally driven by his convictions and he is not so far away from Lévinas as he would have us believe.

We can demonstrate this by considering two areas where the distinction between critique and conviction become blurred in Ricoeur's writings: testimony and conscience. We have already seen how Ricoeur uses the category of testimony in religious experience as a parallel to the category of attestation in "ordinary" experience.

In his understanding of testimony, as a religious category referring to the interpretation of religious experience, Ricoeur draws on the work of Jean Nabert to reiterate the relationship between the self and signs in the universe.[65] In every situation, understanding and understanding of the self come together as a reflection of the signs and symbols in the world around us. Our understanding takes on a particular nature and is expressed in a particular way when, following Nabert, we "[recognize] the place of testimony at that point of [the] itinerary

[64] Richard A. Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 337.
[65] A helpful account of Ricoeur's debt to Nabert and other French reflexive philosophers is given in Eric Crump, "Between Critique and Conviction" in Cohen and Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*, pp. 161-186.

where concrete reflection asserts itself to rejoin what he calls that originary affirmation which constitutes me more that I constitute it."[66]

Originary affirmation is *not among our experiences*, but is the recognition of our absolute dependence on something other than self. For Ricoeur, the philosophical problem is that this experience of loss of autonomy cannot occur *before* our experience of autonomy but must be co-originary. He sets Nabert in a dialectic with Lévinas in an attempt to show how this can be, in "a philosophy where the attestation of self and the glory of the absolute would be co-originary."[67]

Originary affirmation is a limit expression describing something which exists before human experience. It belongs to those things, like our own birth, which we cannot know but only interpret. I would like to suggest that it is connected to Ricoeur's view of the nature of God in the following way. Ricoeur's version of Lévinas' account argues that coming to selfhood consists in the experience of the face-to-face with the Other, interpreted as the hearing of an injunction or command, "Thou shalt not kill", becoming internalised as obedience to the Other. We have seen that Ricoeur rejects this as an act by which the Other is substituted for the self. Instead he says, the first response to the Other must be the cry of self-awareness, "Here I stand!"[68]

This reversal has implications not only for our understanding of the self, but also for our understanding of God. The whole tenor of the encounter becomes then not the command of the "Master of Justice" to the slave, but rather the invitation of the Creator to the creature. Not the imperative, "thou shalt not" but the invitation, "Love me!" Ricoeur does not deny that God is a God of Justice, but reminds us that God is also a God of Love. We have returned to a hermeneutics of the idea of revelation which is "pluralistic, polysemic and at most analogical in form."[69] We will consider how this understanding contributes to a Ricoeurian view of

[66] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 110.
[67] "Emmanuel Lévinas: Thinker of Testimony" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 126.
[68] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 339.
[69] Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 75.

Christian metaethics in a later chapter. For the moment, I simply wish to show that at the very least there is a strong connection between Ricoeur's conviction regarding the nature of God and his critique of Lévinas' anthropology.

It can be argued that originary affirmation is not only closely connected to our human origins as creatures of a benign God, but also to the goal of existence as reunion with that same God. Ricoeur contrasts Spinoza's term, *conatus*, as an expression of desire for the good life, with Kant's concept of duty. For Spinoza *conatus* is the striving or yearning for life expressed as a natural movement towards goodness and happiness, an affective movement which replaces Descartes' free will or rational will. Richard Cohen points up the radical difference between Ricoeur and Lévinas on the role of *conatus* in moral responsibility. For Lévinas moral responsibility has its origins in the overturning of *conatus*, which he sees as a desire for the life of the self. By contrast, for Ricoeur solicitude arises out of *conatus* as the yearning for life experienced in common with others which stimulates an already present solicitude. For Ricoeur, the desire for a good life for and with others is co-originary with the desire to be. The parallels with his arguments regarding the co-origins of selfhood and epiphany should be clear.

However, Ricoeur refuses to name the primordial power towards which we are drawn and on which we are utterly dependent, even though he acknowledges it is what "Spinoza continues to name 'God.'"[70] I would argue that is precisely because Ricoeur refuses to name the teleological end of *conatus* that the power of the dynamic flow is made tenuous. Ricoeur's claim for a natural moral inclination would make sense in the context of a Thomist account of virtue, but as Cohen rightly points out, looks dangerously like "wishful thinking" as it is articulated. Lévinas, by contrast, does not equivocate on the necessity of duty or its relationship to the Other, since "No one is good voluntarily".[71]

[70] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 316.
[71] Cited Cohen, *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Lévinas*, p. 291.

In resisting the primacy of ethics over ontology, Ricoeur calls on Kant, but also on his religious faith, writing,

> *As radical as evil may be, it will never be more originary than goodness, which is the Ursprung in the field of ethics, the orientation to the good as being rooted in the ontological structure of the human being, or in biblical terms: creation, createdness.*[72]

A final distinction can be made between Ricoeur and Lévinas with regard to conscience: the voice of the other heard in the depths of the self. When this voice articulates moral disapproval Ricoeur associates it with the Freudian superego; the origins of the voice of the superego are the court of moral justice, namely the disapproval of flawed humanity rather than of the Divine. He will reject any claim that Lévinas makes that the voice of conscience is the voice of the Divine, both because of this association with moral disapproval and because he rejects any possibility of unmediated encounter.

Briefly conceding that Lévinas uses the category of the "trace" to distinguish between the face of the other and the face of the divine Other, Ricoeur concludes that he cannot say whether the source of the injunction is our ancestors or God, since it is beyond the limits of philosophical speculation.[73]

What kind of God?

If we dare to move beyond the limits of philosophical speculation to the realm of religious allegiance, I believe that we can find evidence which shows the influence of faith on both these philosophers. I would argue that it is significant that Lévinas is a Jew and Ricoeur a Christian in the protestant tradition, particularly when we consider the contribution each makes to the discussion about the nature of God. There are underlying traces of Christian thought in

[72] Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Human Capability" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 284.
[73] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 355.

Ricoeur's philosophy, for example in his teleological stance, in his repeated assertion that "However radical evil may be it cannot be as primordial as goodness" and in his desire to preserve an optimistic view of humanity: "man [as] the joy of yes in the sadness of the finite." [74] Similarly, while Lévinas is reluctant to combine theological and philosophical insights at one level, his privileging of ethics allows him to draw on religious themes and images much more comfortably. Indeed, as we have seen, there is little difference for Lévinas between religion and ethics; both act as the bond between the transcendent and the immanent. The relationship between God and ethics is obvious to Lévinas. It is paradoxical but explicit in Scripture, the God of Leviticus commands his people to be holy because "I am holy."[75]

While Judaism supports the notion of absolute alterity, Christianity posits a God who can also be man, who can eat and drink, suffer and die. He has been revealed in Jesus, whereas for Lévinas, no relationship with God is direct or immediate, the Divine is manifested only through my neighbour; the incarnation is neither possible nor necessary.[76] In considering the God who is both revealed and concealed in scripture, I want to draw on the work of Richard Kearney who offers a helpful hermeneutic of both Lévinas and Ricoeur.[77]

I would argue that, for religious as much as philosophical reasons, Ricoeur finds the God implied if not explicit in the writings of Lévinas at variance with the God of his own faith. Some reasons why this might be the case are articulated by Kearney in *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* where he examines various categories of the Other as symbols of the fracture within the human psyche. These are; strangers against whom we define ourselves; monsters as expressions of the uncontrollable; and Gods who embody the transcendent which is both awful and wonderful, both menacing and beautiful.[78] Kearney argues that the problem with Lévinas is that his description of the Other becomes confused between the categories; "We find that the

---

[74] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 222. and *Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, p. 156.* Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 140.
[75] Leviticus 11:44
[76] Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate,* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 164
[77] Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001). And Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*.
[78] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 4.

experience of irreducible alterity […] is at bottom indistinguishable from the experience of irreducible abjection […]. The God beyond being becomes an abyss beneath being. The Other becomes Alien"[79]

Kearney is concerned that we should be able to distinguish between strangers, gods and monsters, and suggests that one of the problems with Lévinas is that we cannot always do this in his account of the Other. This arises because of the radical refusal of all categorisation in Lévinas, since "according to this reading, the Other surpasses all our categories of interpretation and representation, we are left with a problem – the problem of *discernment.* How can we tell the difference between benign and malign others?"[80]

Kearney suggests that because Lévinas conflates the highest and the lowest, the Other and the other, there is no difference between the stranger and God, and no way of judging between them, so the self is traumatically persecuted by both. Before both the highest of the high and the lowest of the low the self empties itself of itself, "like a haemorrhaging haemophiliac helpless to stem the flow"[81] Kearney repeats the criticism made by Ricoeur that the self is pushed beyond humility to what Lévinas calls "passivity beneath (beyond) all passivity", but Kearney considers the consequences as bordering on "masochism and paranoia".

In so far as we can speak of a self at all, it is in terms of an "accused" or "hostaged" subjectivity. Kearney contrasts this unhealthy situation with another version, that offered by psychoanalysis, which suggests that we project onto others the things we find strange (other) in ourselves. When we recognise this, we recognise the other as ourselves.[82]

Our inability to distinguish between gods and monsters is also explored in the category of the sublime, where fascination is combined with revulsion. Kant suggested that an encounter with

[79] Kearney, Strangers, Gods and Monsters, p. 9.
[80] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 67.
[81] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 71.
[82] He cites not only Freud but Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves,* here.

the sublime could promote the experience of resistance and so recognises the value of our encounters with the sublime using examples of terrifying natural events.

> *Provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces if the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature.*[83]

Our mind discovers its own depths in the face of menace, but distance lends protection. Kearney suggests that a similar process occurs through the alienating role of the chorus in Greek tragedy, or the film screen in a horror movie; "Terror framed is terror defused."[84] However, as he points out, this diffusion can lead to indifference and so to complicity in violence or evil. A failure of the imagination can lead to a failure to imagine the experience of the victim, the depersonalisation of the act or its consequences. In other words, an encounter with the sublime can actually dehumanise us and make us less than ethical in our response to the Other.

Elsewhere, John Wall seeks to address the problem of our failure to act in the face of evil by redefining passivity. Wall grafts his idea of "moral creativity" onto Ricoeur's conflict with Lévinas, arguing that "Lévinas is right to insist on the other's absolute moral primordiality, but wrong to say that this reduces the self to absolute passivity. The command from the other could not be *ethical* were it not on some level a command requiring my own free and creative response."[85] Wall goes on to suggest that if God is the other then the other is also "God like" in his or her command. He uses the example of a starving child in Africa, suggesting that this child "creates" a radically new command.[86] Wall suggests that our failure to respond may be the consequence of our inability to make a choice, trapped in the grip of a tension between

[83] Kant, "an analytic of the sublime" cited Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 129.
[84] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 130.
[85] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 127.
[86] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 129.

possibilities. Wall concludes that even Lévinas is not positing a moral self which is totally passive, but rather one which is responding creatively to the tension between its passivity and responsibility. This creativity arises out of the tension between the self "stretched apart": stretching its practices and understandings in response to the other, and stretching towards its goal of narrative unity. It results in another impossible possibility in the face of the starving child, "We both can and cannot respond. We find ourselves called to the impossible possibility of a radical moral conversion."[87]

While Lévinas is not responsible for any tendency towards masochism, tired indifference toward suffering, or inability to choose, Kearney has highlighted two aspects of Lévinas' account of the Other which may explain some resistance to his paradigm. Lévinas' privileging of duty neither asks about our motivation nor our experience of resistance (one might say, of sin). By contrast, Ricoeur's appeal to *conatus* suggests an awareness of the need for a dynamic to explain our desire for the good life and suggests that it is our desire to think well of ourselves which motivates our actions. Kearney reminds us of the role played by narrative in Ricoeur's account of self-esteem. Without self-constancy and self-identity I cannot recognise myself as the person who made the promise in the past nor the person who might keep the pledge (in the future). It is narrative identity which guarantees fidelity.[88]

Kearney also makes the point that without memory (narrative and history) we cannot preserve the trace of those who are not here to preserve themselves, namely the victims of history. The hermeneutic model of memory, supported by Gadamer and Ricoeur sees otherness not so much in opposition to selfhood, but as a partner engaged in the constitution of its intrinsic meaning.

[87] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 134.
[88] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 79.

Kearney notes that the experience of passivity or receptivity before the "other" of conscience:

> *It is the other within who is calling us to act on behalf of the other without. If one closes off the other's passing in and out of the self, condemning the subject to a cloistered, autistic ego, then the other becomes so other as to remain utterly alienating – an absolutely separate alterity which torments, persecutes and ultimately paralyses. In this Levinasian scenario,[..] the self can only become ethical against its own nature and will; one finds oneself radically assaulted and denuded, stripped of one's interpretations in exposure to an absolute Other who demands expiation.*[89]

Kearney concludes, following Ricoeur, that hermeneutics teaches us that moral critique should not be pushed to moralistic extremes. Judgement is better informed by an unavoidable conflict of interpretations. "An ethics of otherness is not a matter of black and white, but of grey and grey. This is no call for relativism. On the contrary, it is an invitation to judge more judiciously so that we may, wherever possible, judge more justly."[90]

[89] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 80.
[90] Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 82.

CHAPTER SIX: Ricoeur and Biblical Metaethics

I've argued in the previous chapter that Ricoeur's refusal to admit that faith impinges on philosophical reflection is vulnerable to the criticism that some of his assumptions are underpinned by precepts which owe as much to conviction as to critique. Ricoeur's insistence that both the autonomy of selves and the requirement for solicitude are governed by a voice heard in the conscience – the source of which he is unwilling to identify – can appear at best overly cautious and at worst disingenuous. In particular, as I have argued, his argument with Lévinas over the character of the injunction to solicitude; whether heard as command or invitation, may be directly related to the nature of the Divine Other.

Despite all this, Ricoeur insists that faith does not contribute to philosophical questions of morality, and equally that the moral call on summoned selves is governed by a meta-ethical paradigm. In a much cited observation, Ricoeur reflects:

> *Even on the ethical and moral plane biblical faith adds nothing to the predicates 'good' and 'obligatory' as these are applied to action. Biblical agapē belongs to an economy of the gift, possessing a metaethical character, which makes me say that there is no such thing as a Christian morality, except perhaps on the level of mentalities, but a common morality (one that I attempted to articulate in the three studies devoted to ethics, morality and practical wisdom) that biblical faith places in a new perspective in which love is tied to the 'naming of God.'*[1]

This paragraph, in the introduction to *Oneself as Another*, has prompted considerable attention together with speculation on ways in which the "little ethic" could be related to biblical faith. Such attempts will be subject to critical examination. We will also consider the behaviour of summoned selves: asking how the person who sees himself or herself reflected in the mirror of

[1] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 25.

scripture should behave once they have turned away from the mirror. These accounts are set in the context of a brief examination of contemporary Christian ethics.

Ricoeur's insistence that biblical faith adds nothing to the ethical or moral planes is sometimes understood in reverse: as if he is arguing that his philosophical or anthropological insights add nothing to our understanding of biblical ethics. This is clearly not the case, and I will begin by showing how his mediation between Kantian morality and Aristotelian virtue is mirrored in scripture by the dialectic between justice and love. We have seen how, in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur demonstrates that the Kantian categorical imperative, which he ties to the Golden Rule, is insufficient in making decisions that will lead to a "good life for and with others in just institutions", without due attention being given to the role of affection, solicitude or care. Equally, we have observed how the desire for a good life, attested as "the conviction of judging well and acting well in a momentary and provisional approximation of living well" tends to instrumentalise others, and is seduced into doing so by the violence of the state unless mediated by duty.[2] Ricoeur introduces a third category, that of practical wisdom – *phronēsis* – to explore how mediation between the desire for good and the rule of duty might be fruitful. However, he offers no equivalent resolution to the biblical dialectic between love and justice. In this chapter we consider two attempts to fill this lacuna; David Hall's work on the "poetic imperative" and John Wall's proposal for "moral creativity."[3] I will argue, to some extent in contradistinction to both these writers, that it is not possible to arrive at a mediation of Ricoeur's categories into a specific Christian morality or biblical ethic. Biblical metaethics remains, in my opinion, one pole in the dialectic maintaining the tension in Christian experience between present reality and eschatological possibility.

I will concede that Ricoeur's decision to separate his "little ethic" from "biblical metaethics" can be read to support the movement towards a distinctive Christian ethic, such as those suggested from two very different perspectives by Stanley Hauerwas or John Milbank. But, I

[2] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 180.
[3] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*. Wall, *Moral Creativity*.

will indicate why I do not think that this is a helpful reading of Ricoeur's stance and offer some reasons to support his more mediating approach.

In considering Ricoeur's contribution to Christian ethics, or biblical metaethics, we are helped by his biblical hermeneutics which offers a model of polysemic, analogical thinking, encouraging us to see how differing perspectives moderate one another and mediate against monolithic approaches. Exploring these differing perspectives, I want first to consider how biblical justice relates to Kantian morality and the biblical *agape* relates to Aristotelian virtue.

Common Morality and Christian Morality: Kant and the Golden Rule

Ricoeur considers the biblical laws for the treatment of others not only equivalent to the Kantian imperatives but superior to them. The moral law, or the summary of the law, is expressed in the Talmud, "Do not do unto your neighbour what you would hate him to do to you" and in the gospels, "Love your neighbour as yourself."[4] The golden rule can be considered equivalent to the Kantian categorical imperative because it deals with the equal distribution of "goods", but is preferable because it recognises the power of affect in reflecting on what those "goods" might be. The golden rule challenges the individual to consider the asymmetry of power relationships in the interaction between "actors" and "patients" in specific empirical situations, not only in an *a priori* formulation. For Ricoeur, "The golden rule takes into account the whole of action and interaction, of acting and suffering. It is addressed to acting and suffering human beings, with all the fragility and vulnerability included in this fundamental condition of action."[5]

Up to this point, nothing that Ricoeur has written imposes a theological reasoning on a philosophical argument. The reasons that he has given for preferring the golden rule are argued according to philosophical principles. When he turns to consider how the golden rule is set in its religious, biblical, framework, Ricoeur's principle problem is not the nature of moral action,

[4] Matthew 22:39
[5]Paul Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 296.

but the very possibility of humans undertaking good actions. He frequently states that, like Kant, his exploration of the will began with the problem of evil. Kant asks how the radically evil, enslaved or incapacitated will becomes capable of exercising freedom; and responds by suggesting that humans can exercise good will because the concept of a "good man" - a human acceptable to God, namely Jesus - exists. As a result, we can work towards improving ourselves under the tutelage of this idea. For Kant the *origin* of religious symbols remains inscrutable, but their interpretation is possible within the limits of pure reason. Kant assumes that moral sense must have divine origins and concedes that this moral argument supports the existence of God. [6]

Kant's premise has not survived the scrutiny of the post-Enlightenment world. While it was possible for Kant to wonder at both the pattern of the stars and the pattern of moral reasoning and to see their origins in the same divine source, the transcendental origin of moral thought has long since been split away from the scientific explanations of the natural world, and confidence in human capacity for rational moral determination has itself been undermined by biology, sociology and psychology. [7] This has led to an apologetic for Christian distinctiveness that appeals to something other than pure reason. Whether opponents appeal to scripture like Barth and Hauerwas or to tradition like John Milbank and Jean Luc Marion, they stress the need for Christian ethics to compete with other world views in the contested public space.

One might observe that it is in this contested space that Kant's appeal to reason has reasserted itself so that, alongside those appealing for distinctive Christian ethics, another stream of

[6] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 297.

[7] William Schweiker, "Starry Heavens and Moral Worth: Hope and Responsibility in the Structure of Theological Ethics" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 117. The quotation from Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* reads "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*. I do not seek or conjecture either of them as if they were veiled obscurities or extravagances beyond the horizon of my vision; I see them before me and connect them immediately with the consciousness of my existence. The first starts at the place that I occupy in the external world of the senses, and extends the connection in which I stand into the limitless magnitude of worlds upon worlds, systems upon systems, as well as into the boundless times of their periodic motion, their beginning and continuation. The second begins with my invisible self, my personality, and displays to me a world that has true infinity, but which can only be detected through the understanding, and with which . . . I know myself to be in not, as in the first case, merely contingent, but universal and necessary connection"

"liberal" theologians has emerged, seeking an overarching rational paradigm partly in distinction to the perceived "irrationality" of fundamentalist religion. This debate is reflected in the writing of Elaine Graham and John Atherton in the work of the Centre for Public Theology in Manchester, and in Jonathan Chaplin's writing for Theos. [8] These writers do not primarily assert the Christian distinctiveness of their ethical stance, but draw on the rational and universal appeal of Christian ethical perspectives. The impact of faith on morality is treated as a phenomenon that exists, while God is bracketed out as a hidden cause beyond the limits of critical thinking.

One could read Ricoeur's appeal to Rawls distributive justice guaranteed by communitarianism as a form of public theology. However, as we have seen, his "little ethic" goes beyond a mere analysis of the duties of citizens. Ricoeur's critique of both Rawls' theory and Kantian principles when applied to institutions is that they depend on the "fiction" of a social contract which, in reality, is simply a form of utilitarianism subjugating the desires of the weak to the decisions of the strong.[9] He insists that, even in the realm of public morality, there must be a teleological goal – an idea of the "perfect state" which informs our justice system and ethical choices. He argues that human will is driven by more than duty. The existence of violence in the world drives us to demand the good and prohibit evil. The desire for good has its origin in the limit experience of evil – as such "doing good" is a teleological goal not a deontological obligation.[10]

Despite Ricoeur's debt to Kant, he does not follow Kant's arguments for the existence of God and will not stray beyond Kantian limits. We should not make the mistake of thinking that Ricoeur espouses a foundationalist account of "common morality". However, in his biblical hermeneutics Ricoeur finds moral and ethical dimensions in the "naming of God" – the

[8] See for example, R Audi and N Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997). John Atherton, *Public Theology for Changing Times* (London: SPCK, 2000). Nigel Biggar, 'God in Public Debate', *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 19, no. 1 (2006). Jonathan Chapin, *Talking God : The Legitimacy of Religious Public Reasoning* (London, Theos, 2008), p.^pp.

[9] Ricoeur draws on the work of Jean-Pierre Dupuy, a disciple of René Girard, see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 230.

[10] Peter Kemp, "Narrative ethics and Moral Law in Ricoeur" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 39.

interpretation of symbols. Interpreting the names of God is both an exercise in systematic theology and an exercise in practical theology: if God is called this, then God is like that; if this is what God is like, how should we respond? Ricoeur asserts, following Geertz, that "all religious symbolism aims at joining the two ideas of a cosmic order and an ethical order."[11]

While God is named as legislator and judge: the giver of the *Torah* and the one who demands satisfaction for sin, the one who repays and punishes, the one who demands obedience: these are not the only forms by which God is named. God is also merciful and compassionate, God frees the people from slavery, God forgives those who disobey and stray, God draws them on to realise new purpose. God is polynomial, both present and hidden, source of judgement and love. "God" says Ricoeur is the referent around which scriptural discourses circulate or the point at which they all converge. However, this referent is not just the index of their mutual belonging but of their incompleteness: the common goal which escapes them all. The divine name is precisely unnameable.[12]

> *The referent 'God' is thus intended by the convergence of all these partial discourses. It expresses the circulation of meaning among all the forms of discourse wherein God is named […] The referent 'God' is not just the index of mutual belonging together (appartenance) of the originary forms of the discourse of faith, It is their common goal, which escapes each of them*.[13]

Ricoeur suggests that the various biblical genres; Narrative, Prophecy and Law, are schema, procedures or methods which generate images of the Name. However, these are not so much static images as "figures of God's accompanying God's people" which ensure that we focus on the action of God rather than make propositional claims about God. These schema are diverse and incapable of forming a system. The schema present dangers because as anthropomorphic representations they may become idols: however they include their own corrective as the Name works on the schema by inverting them: God is father, mother, husband, brother and

[11]Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred,* p. 299.
[12] Paul Ricoeur, "Naming God" Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 217-235.
[13] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 228.

"Son of Man" – all of them. Our horizons are expanded as we find God named as Creator, compassionate, merciful, and as the sacrificial lamb who lays down his life for his friends. The schema demands "think more" while "the Name subverts every model, but only through them." [14] The Name both overturns and intensifies each of the models which scripture offers. The Name alone would paralyse our thinking and our actions, whereas the positive task of analogical models (while precarious and provisory) is to offer an invitation to ethical action.[15]

Christian Virtue and the Command to Love

As we've seen, the unifying feature of the biblical texts is the theme of call and response. The call is twofold, to love God and to love our neighbour. We ought briefly to recall here the debate between Ricoeur and his friend Lévinas on God's primal command. Lévinas insists that this command is the imperative "Do not kill!", but Ricoeur replaces it with an originary invitation, "Love me!". Ricoeur explores the nature of this call using the French phrase "*le commandment de l'amour*" which can be translated as both "the command *to* love" and the "command *of* love." As Fiasse points out, in this second reading, love is the subject of the sentence, it is love that takes the initiative and the response is not obedience, but a loving answer; "I act towards the other from love 'because' love was given to me by God."[16] We will explore later in this chapter the relationship between love as response and love as gift, but for the present, let us place the command to love alongside the command to act justly and look at the parallels between virtue and duty. To do this, we have to allow love to take its place among the theological virtues, faith and hope, which were added by Augustine to Plato's quartet of cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, justice and prudence.

---

[14] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 233.

[15] Ricoeur's writing on the Name reflects his earlier exploration on the symbol of the Father. Psychoanalysis unmasks the illusions projected onto the symbol, the fantasy in which God is imagined as father and experienced as the figure of power and of loss. In returning to the symbol we can discover the new intention that animates it, the primal father, the "God who comes". The hermeneutic of suspicion uncovers illusion and destroys idols, in order that the symbol may speak afresh. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 543.

[16] Gaëlle Fiasse, "The Golden Rule and Forgiveness" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 84.

Ricoeur's discussion of virtue in *Oneself as Another,* is based primarily on the writings of Aristotle and takes little account of the history of virtue ethics within the Christian tradition, but we should not ignore them.[17] The turn to narrative theology has resulted in a commensurate interest in virtue ethics focussing on patterns of practice which draw people to God and promote their flourishing.[18] Although this has occurred within both protestant and catholic traditions, the catholic Thomist heritage offers a particularly useful critique as it acts as something of a corrective to the predominantly reformed American protestant commentary on Ricoeur's biblical ethics.

Alongside the recovery of Christian virtue ethics, the appropriation of the concept of narrative identity has been apparent across a variety of disciplines leading to a consequent interest in *how* narrative shapes experience and can influence behaviour. Although we noted in an earlier chapter that narrative identity can be limited by linguistic capacity or colonised by inappropriate power relationships, it can also be positively formed by the acquisition of new linguistic forms. Neurolinguistic programming works therapeutically on this premise, describing how people are attracted by specific language patterns and can change their behaviour by consciously changing their language and metaphors.[19]

Studies have shown how narratives shape and change individual and corporate behaviour, both in homiletics and in business management.[20] Attention is paid to the way stories engage our emotions and imaginations: how they allow us to try our ethical positions or to test proposals. Not only insight into past action but motivation for future actions can arise in the combination

[17] There are passing references to Thomas Aquinas in *Oneself as Another,* (on the passions, p.97 and on fidelity, p. 266)
[18] Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 2.
[19] Stella Rose Charvet, *Words that Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendal/Hunt, 1995).
[20] A range of approaches to narrative preaching is described in *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry*, ed. by David J. Shlafer Mike Graves, (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2008). The business literature is dominated by Stephen Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Imprint, 2005).

of emotion and learning that arises from reading stories. [21] Richard Kearney has been particularly interested in this aspect of Ricoeur's work, and he enlarges on the relationship between virtue and narrative:

> *While ethics often speaks generally of the relation between virtue and the pursuit of happiness, fiction fleshes it out with experiential images and examples – that is with particular stories. To understand what courage means we tell the story of Achilles; to understand what wisdom means, we tell the story of Socrates; to understand what* caritas *means, we tell the story of St Francis of Assisi*.[22]

Although stories help us to see what virtuous behaviour looks like, and to imagine what it might feel like, our interest in stories has developed in the context of a distrust of metanarratives. There is no metanarrative of Christian virtue, only a variety of biblical readings promulgating a diversity of virtues. There are versions of virtue ethics in the writings of Gustavo Gutièrrez and the liberation theologians; James Cone and writers from the African American tradition; and Rosemary Radford Ruther and other feminists, as well as the former Methodist – now Episcopalian - Stanley Hauerwas, but each tends to select scripture to promote particular virtues: thus the peasant needs hope but the landowner should learn compassion; women need courage but men must learn humility; Kingdom values are to be preferred over loyalty to the state, and so on.

Harrington and Keenan observe that in Roman Catholicism the resurgence of virtue ethics has resulted in a reconsideration of the writings of Thomas Aquinas which has been helpful in shifting attention, in pastoral care and spiritual direction, away from a certain rule bound scrupulousness towards a broader and more imaginative sense of what a Christian ought to be: from the avoidance of evil toward the practice of good. But they also recognise that particular virtues are promoted according to social and historical context. Aquinas emphasised prudence as the "Queen of Virtues" required for practical, self-directing wisdom encouraging spiritual

[21] Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2004), p. 112 ff.
[22] Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, p. 114.

growth, whereas the Council of Trent emphasised caution, reluctance and self-constraint - virtues which would ensure compliance and conformity with the church. Harrington and Keenan consider that the antidote to the problem of diversity is to "determine the appropriate virtues."[23]

Keenan proposes updating the cardinal virtues taking account of the conflicts which arise between "goods" and the actor as agent intrinsically involved in relationships with others. He considers that "…virtues do not perfect what we have or what we do; rather they perfect who we are in the mode of our being, which is as being in relationships."[24] Basing his choices on the way we are in relationships, Keenan then offers four new virtues: self-care, regulating our relationships with ourselves; fidelity, regulating our relationship with other individuals; justice, regulating our relationships in community; and prudence, the regulator which keeps all three in balance. Boyd Blundell suggests that these virtues might be helpfully aligned with Ricoeur's little ethic; mapping self-esteem on to self-care, solicitude on to fidelity, and justice onto itself.[25] This exercise reclaims the catholic tradition in ethics in terms of contemporary philosophy and anthropology, and gains intelligibility by drawing on Ricoeur's philosophy, but does not demonstrate Christian distinctiveness in the virtues proposed. One could argue that while these proposals are supported by scripture and strengthened by the concept of God as creator, saviour and judge; neither is explicit or necessary to the scheme. We still appear to be dealing with virtues which have to justify their place relative to other (secular) virtues.

Anxiety about the relative merit of virtues can be a problem, as we've seen in Kant and Alasdair MacIntyre, but Brian Treanor suggests that we should not see difference as a problem – after all, he writes, we do not feel anxious about the variety of types of restaurants in the high street - and he suggests that we can pick our way through diverse virtues and identify unified

[23] Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, J*esus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Oxford: Sheed and Ward for Rowman and Littlefield 2002), p. 26.
[24] J.F. Keenan, 'Proposing Cardinal Virtues', *Theological Studies,* 56 (1995), p.723.
[25] See Boyd Blundell, "Refiguring Virtue" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 158-172, Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 105-128.

patterns.[26] Agreeing with Kearney, he affirms that virtue expressed in narratives is valuable because narratives put a face to ethical questions, in a way that abstract principles do not.[27] One solution is to look at the cross-cultural virtues expressed in some cultural narratives, and he cites *King Lear*, the *Odyssey* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* as examples.[28] Perhaps more importantly, he reminds us that there is no such thing as absolute relativism because there are victims who cry out for justice (some viewpoints are not just different, but wrong!).

Broadly speaking, if we draw on the tradition, parallels emerge between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Christian virtue ethics, just as we noted the parallels between Kantian moral teaching and the Golden Rule. Their shared characteristics include heroic role models, the challenge to perfection and the connection between character and action. The biblical narratives include images of virtuous persons; the prophets and the disciples; a divine command, "you must be holy as I am holy" and the challenge to go beyond normal moral behaviour in Sermon on the Plain; and a connection between intentions and their fruits.[29]

However, it is not at all clear that there is such a thing as a *distinctive* Christian virtue ethic, Christians who adopt a virtue ethic approach agree that the end or *telos* of human life is incorporation into the life of God, but they do not agree that how, or even whether, this *telos* influences moral choice along the way. On the one hand, arguing from a natural law perspective, Roman Catholic moral theologians such as Richard McCormick, Bruno Schiller and Josef Fuchs argue that Christian morality should be no different from that of any rational human, since Jesus is the norm for moral conduct for Christians and non-Christians alike. [30] On the other hand, liberal protestants may argue that the conduct of life can only be determined by the application of rational thought in the context of a fallen world, and will have no influence

[26] Brian Treanor "Emplotting Virtue: Narrative and the Good Life" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 173-189.. A similar approach is taken by Keith Ward in Keith Ward, *Ethics and Christianity*, ed. by H.D. Lewis, Muirhead Library of Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 95.
[27] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 185.
[28] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 184.
[29] Leviticus 11:44, Luke 6:17-49.
[30] See also the discussion in AM Mealey, *The Identity of Christian Morality* (Ashgate Publishing, 2008). Vincent MacNamara, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Dublin, Washington: Gill and MacMillan, Georgetown University Press, 1985).

on our ultimate end which is determined either by faith or predestination. Either way, there is no claim for a distinctive Christian morality.

Ricoeur's warning that there is no relationship between biblical metaethics and common morality may appear to fit neatly into the liberal protestant mode. However, I believe it is more nuanced than the broad generalisation of Lutheran "two world" ethics I have given above. But, before we consider his mediation between duty and virtue, expressed as justice and love, I want to look at one further model of Christian virtue ethics, that exemplified by Stanley Hauerwas, whose ethics the Roman Catholic writer Anne-Marie Mealey places in the same category as Ricoeur's biblical metaethics. While many would see Hauerwas as a fierce sectarian, arguing for a distinctive Christian ethics, Mealey reads him as one committed to dialogue from a Christian perspective.[31] In discussing Mealey's argument, we have to tread carefully, firstly to preserve the distinction which I believe both Ricoeur and Hauerwas are making between distinctiveness and intelligibility, and secondly to preserve the difference between virtue and the virtues.

Sam Wells, who acknowledges the influence of Hauerwas on his work, stresses the features that distinguish Christian virtue ethics from Aristotelian virtue ethics. He argues that that the teaching of Jesus is not concerned with moderation, prudence or fairness, but rather with God's extravagant generosity. So the workers who only complete an hour in the field are paid the same as those who have worked all day; we are exhorted to forgive not once, but seventy times seven. The concept of moral striving, which Aristotle lauds, is treated with ambivalence in the Christian tradition which places an emphasis on grace alone enabling people to respond to God's initiative. For Aristotle the *telos* is "good" incorporating wisdom and happiness, but the *telos* of Christian life is unification with God who is "good" which cannot be achieved by the application of wisdom. The cross is "foolish to the Greeks". While Aristotle inspires his

[31] Mealey, *The Identity of Christian Morality*, p. 7.

readers to be heroes, Aquinas, the great proponent of Christian virtue ethics, wants his readers to be saints.[32]

As we shall see, Ricoeur would concur with Wells and Hauerwas' emphasis on the extravagant generosity of God, and their reading of the parables. Similarly, there are writings in which Ricoeur refers to the summons to sainthood and martyrdom. However, I would argue against Mealey that you cannot read Ricoeur's biblical metaethics simply as a version of Hauerwas' Christian virtue ethics. Firstly, because Ricoeur's biblical metaethic does not draw on the Christian virtue tradition and while the identification of love as a virtue is an obvious one, it is not one that Ricoeur specifically explores. Secondly, because Hauerwas' virtue ethic depends on a strong concept of Christian community which clearly distinguishes between those who are inside the community of faith and those outside, and depends on the concept of conversion to support this paradigm.[33] Ricoeur's description of revelation is built on the invitation to inhabit a poetic world, and he offers a more incremental view of incorporation into the body of Christ. We might suggest that Ricoeur's protest against Barth's short cut through biblical revelation would be mirrored by a similar distrust of any short cut through conversion (which Ricoeur more usually describes as the "risk" or "wager" of faith). While I am sometimes wary of Ricoeur's own account of community, he never makes the mistake of seeing Christian life as life lived apart from its social, political or cultural setting. For this reason, the distinctiveness of biblical metaethics is, it seems to me, lived within the moral and ethical framework of cultural life, and not apart from it.

Broadly, Ricoeur identifies the Christian virtues; faith, hope and love, as "hyperethical" or "hypermoral". [34] They are located beyond philosophical enquiry (or cognitive analysis) in the sphere of religion. This is exemplified by Ricoeur's difficulty in identifying the "basic

[32] Wells, *God's Companions*, Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004).
[33] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 41.
[34] Paul Ricoeur "Love and Justice" Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 315-330.

normative content" of love as a Christian virtue.[35] Citing Pascal, he seems inclined to agree that love cannot be extracted from bodies and minds but is of a supernatural order. Its natural discourse is poetry, which is resistant to ethical analysis or conceptual clarification. For this reason alone it is not possible to prescribe a course of action which would demonstrate love for neighbour, or enemy, and there is a danger that we fall into "emotional platitudes "or "unthinking sentimentality."[36]

I would argue that for Ricoeur, writing from a biblical perspective, faith, hope and love, become something other than "virtues" understood as forms of behaviour in the Aristotelian or Thomist sense, but are rather better characterised as limit experiences in the Jasperian sense. They are terms which do not describe specific behaviours, but rather experiences which influence praxis, motivation and identity.

For this reason any encounter with them becomes an exercise in hermeneutics. In later chapters we shall consider hope and faith, but the first necessary detour into hermeneutics takes place in Ricoeur's mediation between love and justice. This mediation bears many of the hallmarks of the mediation between virtue and duty in the previous chapter, but is informed by "the economy of the gift".

[35] This essay begins with a critique of Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972)
[36] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 317.

The Economy of the Gift

Ricoeur tells us that when love is "tied to the name of God" it is allied with justice, when justice is located within the "economy of the gift" it takes on the unconditional character of love. The unconditional character of love is radically asymmetrical, because of the radical asymmetry between the Creator and the creation. The economy of the gift is a symbol of abundance and radical inequality, within which are located "the gift of creation, the gift of *Torah*, the gift of pardon, the gift of hope."[37] This phrase is open to interpretation - exploited by Ricoeur to challenge our thinking and take us deep into an exercise in hermeneutics.

Ricoeur explores the notion of gift in his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*. He refers to Marcel Mauss' seminal text on gift as a careful corrective to our simplistic understanding of gift as that which is given without expectation of return.[38] As Ricoeur points out, a gift does set up an obligation – an obligation of return; but the transaction exhibits a different character from the market form of exchange since it is the gift itself that compels the giving of a gift in return.[39] Lévi-Strauss developed Mauss' ideas through exploring the hidden potential of gifting as an initiator of a relationship of exchange. Similarly Pierre Bourdieu revealed the potential of the gift economy as a conduit through which relationships of power and domination are opened up. By contrast, Derrida separated gift and exchange, insisting that they are mutually exclusive concepts. Indeed, he saw gift as interrupting and subverting the money economy. Jean-Luc Marion argued that the gift could be separated from the economic relations by reducing it to pure *giveness* within the phenomenological bracketing of givee, giver and given object. The gift is then defined as purely immanent, revealed as that which gives itself as a gift.[40]

---

[37] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 299.
[38] Marcel Mauss and W. D. Halls, *The Gift : The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Routledge classics, Paperback edn (London: Routledge, 2002).
[39] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 480.
[40] W David Hall, 'The Economy of the Gift: Paul Ricoeur's Poetic Redescription of Reality', *Literature and Theology,* 20, no. 2 (2006), 191.

Ricoeur examines the implications of our expectation of gift – as the instigator of a process; giving, receiving, giving back – for our understanding of the golden rule. As Ricoeur points out, the golden rule demands no more than any gift *economy*, namely that you should reciprocate: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This arouses justified suspicion of many actions which claim to be carried out in a spirit of generosity such as giving to charity, the work of non-governmental organisations in the developing world and volunteering. All might be said to place obligations upon those on the receiving end of these good works and in some cases these are obligations that cannot possibly be repaid.[41]

When we consider the narrative context in which Jesus presents the golden rule to his disciples, we find that Jesus himself is aware of this critique, and so follows the rule immediately with a much more challenging trope, "If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them…But you must love your enemies and do good; and lend without expecting any return." [42] Not only is the market exchange attacked, any distortion of it arising from self-interest is dismissed. As Ricoeur suggests, we should not forgive our enemies in the hope that they will turn in to our friends.[43] The command to love is the necessary corrective to two vulnerabilities of the golden rule; those of reactive reciprocity, which does not prevent returning evil for evil, and instrumental reactivity, giving in order that you may receive.

The economy of the gift brings together two distinct conceptual realities in a new meaning. We are encountering a pithy example of *mimēsis*, which offers a new conceptual world which we are being invited to inhabit. However, some commentators do not seem to have noticed that this metaphor is not entirely original to Ricoeur. Hall, for example, seems unable to decide whether we "oppose gift and economy" or find it difficult to "think the terms apart from each other."[44] What he does not seem to have noticed is the double meaning that Ricoeur exploits, not only using economy in the sense of exchange, but as it is used in the phrase "divine

[41] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 481.
[42] Luke 6:32-35
[43] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 482.
[44] Hall, 'The Economy of the Gift: Paul Ricoeur's Poetic Redescription of Reality', 189, 190.

economy" to point towards the salvation narrative and the wider context in which Jesus' teaching, including the golden rule, is placed.

The use of the term "economy" in scripture is explored by Frances Young and David Ford in *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*. Their description is of a "root metaphor" which shows how the term *oikonomia,* embracing all manner of administration, government, provision, and stewardship, provides a rich way of describing God's dealing with the world. It shows how God is the source of all resources; that God has a plan for the whole of creation and all of time, how all ministry flows from God's storehouse of care. As the authors point out, the term is widely used in patristic writings to refer to God's dealings with all of creation, and I shall show later why this is important in linking the term "economy of gift" with the narrative of salvation.[45]

In the Pauline writings we see how the economics of abundance in which God's grace overflows freely, are contrasted with everyday experiences of scarcity. Girard and others have demonstrated how the economics of scarcity corrupt our human relationships as, according to mimetic theory, we are driven to compete not only for physical resources, but for status and even for love. The morality of reciprocity is an attempt to control the violence which underpins our social structures, but as Young and Ford point out, "All human relations of reciprocity are relativised by the God who 'enables every grace to overflow into you, so that in every way and all the time you have total self-sufficiency to overflow into every act of goodness' (2 Cor 9:8)."[46]

Ricoeur describes the economy of the gift as having a whole range of significations, touching every part of ethics. It is a symbol which is present at the beginning of creation – as its source, and the end – as its object of hope. Ricoeur describes "original and ongoing creation" as the symbol that articulates our sense of "radical dependence on a power that precedes us envelops us and supports us". It impacts on our relationships with our fellow creatures, such that "The

[45] Frances M. Young and David Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988), p. 169ff.
[46] Young and Ford, *Meaning and truth in 2 Corinthians*, p. 178.

sense of our radical dependence on a higher power thus be reflected in a love for the creature, for every creature – and the love of neighbour can become an expression for the supramoral love for all creatures."[47] And, "at the other extremity of the symbolic keyboard is found the eschatological symbol that gives rise to the representation of God as the source of *unknown* possibilities."[48] As he writes elsewhere, "In this way the God of hope and the God of creation are one and the same God at both extremes of the economy of gift. At the same time, our relation both to the law and to salvation is shown to belong to this economy by being placed "between" creation and the eschaton."[49]

Ricoeur suggests that the Bible sets up two ideals, with competing underlying logics, which he calls the "logic of equivalence" and the "logic of abundance". The golden rule works by the logic of the first and the command to love our enemies by the logic of the second. It might seem that the second supersedes the first and that there is no need for the two to be reconciled, rather they should be ranked or ordered. This would seem to be the message in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. The command to turn the other cheek, offer the cloak as well as the coat, walk the second mile, seem to overturn any concern for the reciprocity demanded by justice. Similarly the overturning of the Levitical commands, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" are couched in terms of extravagance which can only be undergirded by the logic of superabundance. However, Ricoeur argues that these two logics do not contradict each other, but rather they serve as mutual correctives.[50]

On the one hand the love command guards against the tendency of the golden rule towards undue self-interest expressed as the tendency to think not so much, "what must I do which is just?", as "what must I do to get what I want?". It also counters the potential to use the golden rule to justify returning evil for evil. On the other hand, the golden rule acts as a corrective to the use of the love command to justify self-abasement in the face of "love", a reading which has lead too often to the oppression of the weak; women, children, slaves for example.

[47] Paul Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 297-298.
[48] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 299.
[49] Paul Ricoeur, "Love and Justice" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 325.
[50] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 300.

Equivalence leans towards self-interest, superabundance towards self-negation, unless they act as a corrective to one another.

This hermeneutic exercise reveals that there is a relationship between love and justice in the biblical narrative and in the divine economy, just as there must be a relationship between virtue and duty in "common morality". Ricoeur writes of the command to love as a corrective of, rather than a replacement for, the golden rule, which brings about a conversion from self interest to welcome.[51] He recognises that the command to love is "supraethical" (it goes beyond reason), but the whole nature of Christian ethics, or as Ricoeur prefers, " "communal ethics in a religious perspective" consists […] in the tension between unilateral love and bilateral justice, and in the interpretation of these in terms of the other."[52] The double movement of interpretation allows equivalence and reciprocity to be hidden in equivalence, thus the one who loses his life will find it, and to the one who gives, much will be given.[53]

Not only does the command to love act on the moral norm, but the ethical aim is overturned because we experience the loss of self as gain. Whereas everything we have considered up to now takes seriously the implications of the loss of self as a paralysing and negative experience, the command to love, which denies the self in favour of the other, brings positive gifts. Klemm lists the outcomes; appropriating superabundant love empowers our original disposition to the good; experience of religious power produces happiness in the now, not only the promise of happiness in the eschaton; the virtues of self-esteem, friendship and justice are both overturned, *and* intensified. [54]

The pairing of intensification and overturning reminds us that the dialectic poles of the moral imperative and the ethical aim are inseparable: you cannot have one without the other. Although the categorical imperative is overturned by command to love it is not completely

[51] Paul Ricoeur "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 300.
[52] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 301.
[53] Luke 6:38, Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 302.
[54] David E Klemm "Searching for a Heart of Gold" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 112.

negated, just as the call to conscience is not just call to moral striving but a call to bring God's abundant love in to the world. Similarly, we cannot identify only one command with the will of God; he commands both love and duty, both faith and works. However, whereas the mediation between virtue and duty results in something approximating to a middle term, namely *phronēsis*, there is no equivalent middle term in this mediation. Another description is needed, which Ricoeur himself does not provide.

Others have taken Ricoeur's prompt as a springboard for further thought and we turn now to work which takes off from Ricoeur's ambiguous conclusion. As their titles indicate, recent books by David Hall and John Wall attempt fill the lacuna left by Ricoeur's decision not to write the third volume of his *Phenomenology of the Will*, and to describe the mediating term in the tension between love and justice, as some form of *poetics*.

The Poetic Imperative

David Hall, in the introduction to *The Poetic Imperative*, suggests that his approach is *poetic* rather than *apologetic*, in that he is building on Ricoeur's philosophy and theology, not using Ricoeur as a resource to defend a particular position of orthodoxy. However, what becomes clear is that he is using Ricoeur's theological writings to "solve" the aporias in his philosophical writing – something which Ricoeur explicitly suggests should not be done.

Hall lays the foundations of his proposal by considering some of the themes I have looked at in this thesis. He notes the relationship between attestation and testimony, and Ricoeur's use of conscience as both a philosophical and a religious category. However he, wrongly in my opinion, considers that the question of "who speaks?" in the conscience can be confidently answered "God". He modifies this slightly by suggesting that testimony, which he defines as an interpretation of divine activity, calls conscience to responsibility but must also be *affirmed* by conscience at the same time. This leads him to suggest that the call of conscience is the poetic presentation of the tension between love and justice. [55] I have a number of concerns about this account of Ricoeur's writing on conscience and indeed on testimony. Firstly, it does not honour Ricoeur's ambivalence regarding the status of conscience as both an organ of reception and the locus of a voice. Secondly, it pays scant attention to Ricoeur's complex model of transmission, which is prepared to identify the voice as that of the soul, or the divine light or teacher, but is very reluctant indeed – even in his religious writing to name the voice: "God". Thirdly, it conflates the pluriformity of symbols for the Name into only two: Creator and Legislator.

However, notwithstanding these criticisms, it is worth considering how Hall then attempts to deal with the problem of autonomy within this paradigm of testimony, conscience and command.

[55] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 125.

We know that Ricoeur struggled with the problem of autonomy as it is presented by Kant. Briefly rehearsed, Kant insisted that the foundation of morality is self-regulating autonomy, and on this basis the command to love cannot be the basis of morality, precisely because it is a command. However, we also recall that, for Kant, the only truly free will is a "good will", which is not part of human experience where the will is always experienced in bondage. Kant solved this problem by positing the aid of a higher power, which the human in bondage could choose to avail himself of, and so by his own effort and divine aid to perform good acts.

The identity of the voice of the other in conscience is, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, the final aporia in *Oneself as Another*. However, if we follow Hall, and accept the possibility that the voice is the Divine voice then we then face a further problem, that is how to preserve the autonomy of the subject from rule by the Other - from heteronomy. Hall proceeds on the assumption that while heteronomy curtails the power of the subject, theonomy makes human freedom a possibility.

Ricoeur traces the relationship between law and freedom in his essay "Theonomy and/or Autonomy." [56] He draws on two biblical symbols; the giving of the law on Sinai, and the Covenant - showing how law and liberation are intimately linked in the first, and law and love are intimately linked in the second. He makes the connection between law and creation, with law as the active principle that sustains history already crafted into the cosmos before it is given to the chosen people. Hall also draws attention to the role of the prophets and the wisdom books in teaching the people the relationship between law and freedom, citing Ricoeur's comments on Job:

[56] Published in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jurgen Moltman*n, ed. by Miroslav Volf, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,, 1986), pp. 284-298. The terminology is almost certainly drawn from Tillich, although he is not cited in Ricoeur's essay. Ricoeur's understanding of theonomy as the freely adopted rule of God is very close to Tillich who writes: "Autonomy and heteronomy are rooted in theonomy, and each goes astray when their theonomous unity is broken. Theonomy does not mean the acceptance of a divine law imposed on reason by a highest authority' it means autonomous reason united with its own depth. In a theonomous situation reason actualises itself in obedience to its structural laws in the power of its own in-exhaustible ground." *Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 3 vols (London: Nisbet, 1953), pp. 92-96.

> *His questions about justice are undoubtedly left without answer. But, by repenting, though not of sin, for he is righteous, but by repenting for his supposition that existence does not make sense, Job presupposes an unexpected meaning which cannot be transcribed by speech or logos a human being may have at his disposal*.[57]

Hall argues that the wisdom literature reflects a "poetics of theonomy" which is not opposed to rational speculation but complementary to it, and that poetics *responds* to the impasses of *logos*. [58]

Taken as a whole, Hall suggests that "Biblical symbols, metaphors and narratives provide poetic resolutions to problems as diverse as the enigma of moral evil and philosophy's self-imposed silence with regard to the source of moral conscience."[59] He then reiterates the key themes in Ricoeur's work which contribute to his argument, beginning with the economy of the gift which emerges from the biblical texts in poetic narratives of productive imagination, to produce a "moral redescription of reality brought about through the interaction of the ideal of the golden rule and that of the love command."[60] Hall himself sees the context in which Ricoeur has used the economy of the gift as a pointer to the role of narrative in understanding it. As Hall puts it, "The narrative approach tells us much about the idea of the economy of the gift because of the point at which this idea entered Ricoeur's conceptual vocabulary: in his account of the theological (and primarily Christian) narrative of salvation history."[61] Hall draws on the work of Calvin O. Shrag to argue for Divine revelation in narrative, independent of metaphysics or ontology.[62] The presence of the Deity is disclosed in two fundamental modes; ethics and sacrament. Shrag makes reference to Lévinas in relation to the first, and Jean Luc Marion in connection to the second – in particular to Marion's distinction between icon and idol. In this case, "love is tied to the naming of God". The practical, that is to say

---

[57] Paul Ricoeur, "Towards the Idea of a Hermeneutic of Revelation" in Ricoeur and Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 87. Cited in Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 139.
[58] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 139.
[59] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 143.
[60] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 150.
[61] Hall, 'The Economy of the Gift: Paul Ricoeur's Poetic Redescription of Reality', 194.
[62] *God as Otherwise than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift,* Calvin O. Shrag, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University, 2002

ethical, outworking of love is a praxis tied to our understanding of the name of God as one who loves us and commands us.

Hall considers the relationship between love and justice, which, he suggests, can be conflated into a command to loving obedience, which is how Ricoeur describes theonomy.[63] Putting these things together, Hall describes the result as a "Poetic Imperative": a description of the love command which "awakens the self to its nature as part of the unfolding of creation. This awakening into self-recognition prepares the individual for openness to the other, *makes him/her capable* of love of neighbour."[64] In other words, he has conflated the categories of activity and passivity, and of summons and response. He reconnects the poetic imperative to conscience, while admitting that there is a "temptation to equate the summons-like character of the voice of conscience with the direct address from the divine which reveals the deep connections that exist between conscience and the poetic imperative structure of the love command."[65] Although he has tried to show that the call of conscience is a divine call to self-realisation which the self can freely acknowledge, he concedes the danger that it is heard as a summons to obedience.

I would not argue with the reasoning which leads David Hall through Ricoeur's writing drawing out the connections between testimony and conscience, and between love, justice and freedom. They rehearse many of the themes covered in this thesis. Where I disagree profoundly with him, is in his use of these figures, reflected in the biblical texts, to "solve" the aporias of Ricoeur's philosophical quest. It seems to me that this is precisely the kind of muddling of categories which Ricoeur himself sought to avoid. I recognise the temptation to which Hall has succumbed, but there is something too neat and too final about his conclusion, because he creates a paradigm in which theonomy becomes the culmination of human meaning. This seems to me to close down human possibility and pays insufficient attention to

[63] "In this sense, theonomy, understood as the call to a loving obedience, generates autonomy, understood as a call to responsibility. Here we touch on a delicate point, where a certain *foundational passivity* joins with an active acceptance of responsibility." Paul Ricoeur, "Theonomy and/or Autonomy" in *The Future of Theology*, ed. by Volf, p. 292.
[64] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 156.
[65] Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 157.

the realities of human fallibility, which Ricoeur understood only too well. Ricoeur resists the temptation to assume that all selves are both created and summoned : he will only concede that all selves have the capacity to receive the summons, and some selves understand themselves to have heard it.

Hall has paid insufficient to the aporia which Ricoeur provides in his own essay on theonomy. Ricoeur agrees that we can imagine theonomy in such a way that it is different from heteronomy, so that the law becomes something which is not imposed from without, but internalised, "no longer carved on tablets of stone but written on hearts of flesh. The word will remain a word of the Other, but of the Other in us."[66] However, he offers two situations in which moral autonomy seems incompatible with theonomy understood as loving obedience. The first is in the bond between freedom and law, where he returns to the Kantian problem of human capacity to act without grace. If we are, as Kant suggested, in bondage to sin, we have no capacity to freely choose, even to obey the law. Ricoeur takes this problem seriously, especially as it relates to the experiences of evil and suffering. This problem cannot simply be ignored in our quest.[67]

Ricoeur's second objection relates to the problem of universalisation. He explores the paradigm of universal good put forward by Karl Otto Apel, who proposes the possibility of shared goods, such as peace, justice and so on. But, Ricoeur asks, is there really universal good such that what is right for me is right for you, what is right for my nation is right for yours, and what is right for my faith is right for yours? If it is assumed that this good is achieved through negotiation, how do we take into consideration the capacity or ability and goodwill of the protagonists in public discussion? While we might find the desire for peace and justice a motivation to dialogue and repentance, acknowledging the times when "our justice" inflicts suffering on others, it is hard to imagine a reality in which protagonists will not eventually "succumb to the objection of 'performative contradiction.''[68]

[66] Paul Ricoeur "Theonomy and/or Autonomy" in *The Future of Theology*, ed. by Volf, p. 286.
[67] Paul Ricoeur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 249-262.
[68] Paul Ricoeur "Theonomy and/or Autonomy" p 298, citing Eric Weil.

As this thesis develops, three themes will emerge which attempt to explore in more detail the problems which I have identified in David Hall's argument. In considering Ricoeur's writing on the parables, I shall try to show how he demonstrates the importance of hope as a theological virtue, and I shall argue that the key to resolving the tension between love and justice does not lie in theonomy understood as a possibility in human experience, but in theonomy as an eschatological concept. In our exploration of tragedy we will consider the place of suffering in the search for mediation between love and justice. Finally, we will draw on the work of John Wall to suggest that Ricoeur's hermeneutic method comes full circle in his anthropology of the summoned self.

Moral Creativity

We can read David Hall's book as an attempt to mediate between love and justice by the application of theonomy: the poetic imperative. By contrast, John Wall argues that Ricoeur cannot be read as a Kantian who uses theology to mediate " between the good and the right, happiness and duty, in a theology of hope", but is rather using theology to show up the limits of philosophy. Wall argues that Ricoeur's theological ethics function to *radicalize* ordinary ethics on all three levels: the good, the right, and their mediation.[69] In his book, *Moral Creativity* Wall, takes the three dimensions of ethical life explored in *Oneself as Another* and looks at the polarity between ethics and poetics, at Ricoeur's mediating intervention, and finally at the "radical primordiality of creativity in this dimension of moral life."[70] For Wall, "moral creativity" is the radicalization, or the theological equivalent, of *phronēsis.*

Moral creativity exists within the tension of human fallibility and human capacity. We do not have creativity in the divine sense since we cannot initiate, nor can our creations achieve perfection, but we can shape things that already exist and we have the capacity to make meaning. These two things exist in tension in human experience and have equivalents in the moral dimension.

Creativity, for Wall is a reflection of the creativity of God, and not an aspect of our fallen life. Historically, poetics and ethics have been separated because in Aristotle's world they are concerned with different things: wisdom with internal goods (courage, justice); poetics with external goods (chairs, plays).[71] Aristotle's paradigm translates into a theological account in which all human creativity is concerned with the making of idols, things which take the place of God and which are a reflection of the image of humanity itself not of God. The theological version of this is that all that humans create are "idols" in which humans shape God in the

[69] John Wall, "Moral Meaning: Beyond the good and the right" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 55.
[70] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 18.
[71] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 6.

image of themselves, there is no morally good creativity which would makes icons through which God revealed Godself.[72]

Wall argues that there is a tension between the condition of being created, and the possibility of moral creativity itself. Our experience of the first leads to the possibility of the second, although he suggests that pure moral creativity is never experienced, it is only known by the experience of failing to bring it about and our yearning for it. [73]

The history of that failure, and of our yearning, is the tradition, which creates the possibility of moral creativity. Tradition, like Gadamer's concept of pre-understanding does not limit freedom but makes it possible. [74] Texts, including the biblical texts, are part of the tradition which is open to interpretation. Wall refers to Ricoeur's analogy of playing a musical score to suggest that interpretation is like the "playing" of a text – and that this is something like the interpretation of tradition. "Traditional texts are the historical scores by which we may express and deepen present self-understanding."[75] He goes on to suggest that "Ricoeur shows that traditions belong to selves under the larger rubric of poetics of the will."[76]

Wall suggests that Ricoeur stands between Barth and Tillich in his understanding of the relationship between sacred texts and selves: Barth as the proponent of the Bible's strangeness and autonomy and Tillich as the one who insists that the Bible can speak to contemporary culture in its own terms. Wall suggests that Ricoeur "incorporates a Barthian imperative of listening to sacred texts in their own disorientating right with a Tillichian insistence that sacred texts have a meaning for the reorientation of contemporary culture."[77] Wall describes this as a *poetics of religion*. Wall sees Ricoeur coming down on the side of Barth in his insistence that Biblical language preserves God's otherness through its use of multiple symbolic, mythological and poetic languages.

---

[72]Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 6.
[73] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 9.
[74] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 38.
[75] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 45.
[76] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 46.
[77] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 48.

Wall argues that Ricoeur is most like Barth when he reaches the limits of philosophical enquiry and is forced to use limit expressions. These are the occasions on which the God of the Bible refuses to let us create a coherent narrative, but disrupts our thinking and our desire to shape metanarratives.[78] We are left, as Mark Wallace has pointed out, with a "wager that the God who is named in the Bible [can] be experienced again in contemporary communities of interpretation."[79] Wall wants to take this further and suggest that we can only name God if we are summoned by God and have constructed our self-understanding as those who have been summoned. Summoned narrative identity is in relation not simply to time, but to "time's very limits" – creation, destiny and eternity. The capability for naming God will include the capability for naming primordial human freedom *beyond* the limits of experience.

Wall, correctly in my view, suggests that "Ricoeur ultimately prevents himself from pursuing the radical anthropological possibility that the ordinary creation of meaning in the world may rest on a radical creative capability that is ultimately a mystery and a paradox."[80]

Wall misses, or does not make explicit, a key point here. It is not that Ricoeur does not make this connection, he specifically rejects it, because he makes a clear distinction between Creation and human creativity. In *Freedom and Nature* Ricoeur associates creativity with freedom, and states that the freedom to create is a divine attribute not a human one, as he warns in the last words of *Freedom and Nature*, "To will is not to create."

However, so long as we understand this distinction, we can follow Wall on the next steps, because he does not in fact conflate creation and the will, but instead uses the term "poetic will", in which "poetic" has clearly come to mean something different from its meaning in Aristotelian terms. Indeed, it marks a significant turn from philosophy to hermeneutics, since we are no longer concerned with creation but with interpretation, and surely this is precisely what Ricoeur does when faced with limit experiences, just as Wall suggests.

[78] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, pp. 49-50.
[79] Wallace, *The Second Naiveté*. cited Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 50.
[80] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 53.

For Wall the possibility of a "poetic will" is demonstrated by the human capacity to make meaning. As Adam names the animals, he creates meaning in the world and in creating meaning, renders "productive" the tensions of our lives.[81] Wall summarizes;

> *Creation symbolizes not just the origin of humanity but also, in a more radically reflexive sense, the origin of humanity's capacity for self-origination.[…] At the heart of all human meaning and narration – at the very origins of human history itself – is a paradoxically human capability for re-creating our already created being-in-the-world*.[82]

I find this a very helpful understanding which connects *phronēsis,* understood in the context of narrative identity, and poetic (creative) wisdom.

Building on tradition, moral creativity arises from a series of tensions: between humanity and the Kingdom (finitude and transcendence); activity and passivity; powerlessness and power. It is directed towards a new creation, which Wall describes as a new socio-economic reality. Wall recognises that such social reconciliation can only exist mythologically, "The Kingdom of God is not an 'Idea' but an impossible possibility, symbolizing a profound tensional possibility at the heart of the mystery of human creativity itself."[83]

Wall argues that moral creativity arises out of the tension between human finitude and freedom and that it is "obscured" by any moral system that emphasises one at the expense of the other. To put this in a religious context, he contrasts Kantian concern with moral agency with Lévinas' focus on passivity, embodied in the victim. His conclusion is that "The Cartesian dualism of finitude and freedom has to be more decisively overcome. There is no moral agency

[81] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 58.
[82] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 59.
[83] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 166.

without it being realized in a particular and already given historicity, and there is no moral passivity that we are not still responsible for interpreting freely for ourselves"[84]

Wall's primary contention is that moral creativity is a religious ethic because it is rooted in a biblical originary anthropology. He finds support in Ricoeur's "threefold economy of the gift"; calling selves to faith in their own original human goodness (the self created good) ; love towards irreducible others ; and hope in an eventual universal human reconciliation. This threefold economy is reflected in the tri-partite structure of *Oneself as Another* in the movement from self-esteem to deontological respect for others to practical wisdom.[85] Wall argues that if we are capable of moral creativity we can grasp this only through religious symbolism and myth which tells of humanity's primordial possibilities.

Although Wall occasionally criticises Ricoeur for not moving taking his philosophical enquiry beyond the limits, he respects Ricoeur's methodology and his work retains the tensions between dialectic poles rather than reaching for premature synthesis. In this way, Wall can be read as something of prologue for the next two chapters of this thesis.

[84] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 172.
[85] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 181.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Comic Promise of the Parables

In the previous chapter I suggested that both philosophically and theologically we have reached the limit of Ricoeur's dialectic method with regard to our exploration of his "little ethic". It is now time to return to the biblical texts to consider what a hermeneutic exploration might offer the related themes of narrative, anthropology and ethics. The conceit of this chapter and the next is to apply Aristotle's theories of comedy and tragedy to some biblical texts and to consider whether they offer insights into the nature of the summoned self and the wisdom it seeks.

This chapter considers the parables as examples of the comic genre. This is not without precedent, Dan Otto Via has considered the structure of the parables as both comedy and tragedy, but I hope to take this study further to show how an understanding of comic genre relates to Ricoeur's logic of superabundance, which in turn can enhance our understanding of the parables and offer some explanation of their subversive force. [1] In his writing on the biblical texts, Ricoeur has stressed the importance of genre as a means of production. The thesis of this chapter is that comedy produces hope: its nature is to end with an upturn in fortunes; its theme is the triumph of hope over experience. It is this link between the genre of the parable and the Christian virtue of hope that we shall explore in this chapter.

We noted in the previous chapter how Ricoeur commented on the impossibility of locating the basic normative content of love as a Christian virtue.[2] By contrast, he was able to state that the most specific of the Christian virtues is hope, because of the proclamation of the resurrection.[3] Peter Kenny has suggested that Ricoeur's stress on hope is closely tied to his reading of Kant,

---

[1] Dan Otto Via, *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 79-96. Dan Otto Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). Dan Otto Via, *The revelation of God and/as human reception : in the New Testament* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

[2] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 315ff.

[3] *Memory, Narrativity, Self*, ed. by Junker-Kenny and Kenny, p. 100. I am grateful to Mike Harrison for introducing me to the tradition of the *Risus Paschalis* in 15th Century Bavaria, where the preacher would come down from the pulpit on Easter day to tell jokes and sing songs – making a laughing stock of the forces that put Jesus in the tomb.

which stresses the need for regeneration by grace because of human frailty and sin. I will argue that Ricoeur privileges hope, not because of his emphasis on evil and sin, but because it enables him to join both philosophical and theological ideas in a coherent fashion. We will see the influence not only of Kant, but also of Hegel, on Ricoeur's eschatology.

Comedy

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle describes three genres of drama; tragedy, comedy and epic. In the next chapter I shall examine the extensive literature on tragedy, and tragedy and the gospels, in detail. There is considerably less literature to consider both on the nature of comedy and on the place of comedy in the gospels. The literature reveals a complex family of ideas which ought to prevent us from oversimplifying the genre by restricting our understanding of comedy either to the formal schema of a tale ending in good fortune, or to the nature of a joke - anything that makes us laugh.

Whereas we have a classical definition of tragedy, Aristotle's treatise on comedy is missing. Perhaps this is appropriate since one of the truisms about comedy is that things are no longer funny if you have to explain them. In Cicero's *De Oratore*, one of the participants in the discussion of the comic notes that everyone "who tried to teach anything like a theory or art of this matter proved themselves so conspicuously silly that their very silliness is the only laughable thing about them."[4] The problem of describing comedy is taken so seriously that at the conclusion of *The Name of the Rose,* Umberto Eco's novel about the chaos caused by the rediscovery of the treatise, the author engineers a fire which destroys not only the only remaining copy of Aristotle's work but the monastery library in which the whole corpus of classical learning has been preserved.

[4] Cited by David Galbraith, "Theories of Comedy" in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. by Alexander Leggatt, Cambridge Companions to Literature, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

However, both in the introduction to *Poetics*, and in other works, Aristotle provides some clues to help us. He considers that the purpose of all drama is to engender feelings in us which will result in some kind of catharsis or change of heart, from which we will acquire a greater knowledge about the world or ourselves. Tragedy is concerned with the downfall of a great man, brought about by a reversal of fortunes from order to chaos – from good fortune to bad, which elicits fear and pity in us. By contrast, comedy is concerned with morally or socially inferior persons, who experience a reversal from chaos to order – from bad fortune to good – which they have not deserved.[5] Aristotle explains that the opposite of pity is indignation, "grieving over undeserved good fortune".[6] Both tragedy and comedy enable us to gain wisdom, as we ask "what has the tragic protagonist done to deserve this?" and "has the comic protagonist deserved his good fortune or not?"

Without the full text of Aristotle's treatise on comedy, we have to rely on the evidence of contemporary examples to get a flavour of the genre. Greek comedies include elements of satire and ridicule, particularly of the poorer and more ignorant sections of society. In the plays of Aristophanes we find exaggerated obscenity and buffoonery alongside caustic critique of social convention. This sub-genre of comedy, in which social norms are turned upside-down, is given a romantic twist in later Greek plays when the desires of young lovers are frequently thwarted by older, authority figures. All these examples support a theory of comedy prevailing right through to the philosopher Hobbes which assumes that we laugh when we feel superior to others. This is the basis of all "insider" humour and of nationalist jokes in which the outsider becomes the butt of the humour.[7]

Comic form was developed from the Greek template by the Commedia dell arte of the Italian Renaissance and by Shakespeare; Northrop Frye characterised the new form of comedy as the

[5] Aristotle, *Poetics*, pp. 8-9. §3.3 and 3.4
[6] Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. by H.C. Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 165. §2.9
[7] We might note that some kinds of humour just as some readings of parables, depend on the reader or listener belonging to a privileged group. Allegorical readings of the parables rely on the reader making a series of exchanges which usually depend on a single interpretive key proceeding from a single, privileged view point. As we shall see, "insider" readings are neither creative nor charitable.

overthrow of convention and order, related to the archetypal patterns of death and resurrection, and the overcoming of winter by spring.[8] Susanne Langer, writing like Frye from a structuralist perspective, described the form of comedy as "upset and recovery" in which the battles of human life are trivialised, and the characters experience a temporary triumph over the trials of the surrounding world.[9] A third structuralist perspective is given by Mikhail Bakhtin, in his celebration of the carnivalesque in the works of Rabelais, where he draws attention to the grotesque and anarchic character of life which enables the struggling poor to smile through the tears.[10]

Aristotle did not draw a clear parallel between the role of catharsis in tragedy and in comedy. One has to wait until the modern era for this aspect to be considered with any seriousness. In *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious,* Freud offers a theory of comedy which suggests that all manner of slips, jokes and word play are expressions of repressed feelings of attraction or revulsion, finding a way through our social taboos.[11] Laughter meets our need to purge ourselves of deeply ingrained repressed nervous energy – whether that repressed energy is fear, anger, or desire.

This brief survey reminds us that humour takes many forms, not all of them charitable. We laugh when others are mocked, ridiculed or made to look foolish. Screech, in his book *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* suggests that this is the laughter described in the gospels, both during the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. It is only turned on its head by subsequent events.[12]

The most charitable form of laughter is the laughter of recognition: when we see ourselves or the human condition represented. Simon Critchley suggests that this is why good comedy has

[8] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism.* P.163-185.
[9] Susanne Katherina Langer, *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key.* (London, 1953).
[10] M. M. Bakhtin and Helene Iswolsky, *Rabelais and his World*, MIT (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968).
[11] Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relationship with the Unconscious*, trans. by Joyce Crick (London: Penguin, 2002). The theme has been expanded in Dana Sutton, *The Catharsis of Comedy* (Lanham, MD: Rowmann and Littlefield, 1994).
[12] M.A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

an impersonal dimension; our laughter has a different character depending on whether Everyman behaves foolishly, or the current Chancellor of the Exchequer makes an idiot of himself. Similarly, when we take a step back from our situation and look at it with disinterested curiosity, many things suddenly appear ridiculous. Critchley describes jokes as "acts of 'everyday anamnesis' that remind us what we already know in a new way." [13] The comedian acts as one who comes from another world and is trying to make sense of the senselessness of ours. One consequence of this is that we recognise the extent to which our behaviour is rule bound, habitual or rigid. This accounts too for the place of repetition in comedy, as Henri Bergson characterises it – the "jack in the box" principle – where a character repeatedly returns to attempt to finish a sentence, or bounces back from an injury only to be injured again in the same way.[14]

The overriding theme is our false sense of control. We are foolish if we forget that we both have, and are, bodies. Although we have them, we have limited control over them, and when we forget this we are reminded, because we slip on banana skins and blush with shame.

Critchley develops his own theory of humour, building in particular on a later work by Freud - a short essay "Der Humor" - suggesting that when we laugh at ourselves we are laughing at our childlike ideal-ego which has completely unrealistic hopes and expectations, from the perspective of our super-ego, which really knows what is good for us. Critchley suggests that we should pay attention to the difference between *jokes* - where others are the target - and *humour*- in which we recognise our own foolishness- and between our reactions, characterised by laughter in the first instance and smiling in the second.[15] Citing an essay by Plessner, he calls smiling "the mind's mime", a moment of internal expression in which one assumes a certain distance from one's current situation and is able to rise above it.

[13] Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, ed. by Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney, Thinking in Action (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 98.
[14] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesley Bereton and Fred Rothwell (Rockville, Maryland: ARC Manor, 2008), p. 38.
[15] Critchley, *On Humour*, pp. 93-111.

W.H. Auden relates our human capacity for laughter to our capacity for prayer. In particular, he describes the laughter of carnival, the time when all seriousness is put aside, when social divisions are suspended – or even reversed- so that boys become bishops or dress up as women. The physicality of the human body is celebrated in feasting and wine, and ridiculed in the wearing of grotesque masks and costumes. Carnival is followed by Lent: a reminder as Auden says that you can only parody what you admire, and that, in its medieval and religious expression, carnival is very close to worship. In both laughter and prayer we are all equal, and equally aware of our creatureliness.[16] Critchley concludes:

> *A smile is the mark of the eccentricity of the human situation: between beasts and angels, between being and having, between the physical and the metaphysical. We are thoroughly material beings that are unable to be that materiality. Such is the curse of reflection, but such also is the source of our dignity. Humour is the daily bread of that dignity.*[17]

I cannot help feeling that this is a description of the human condition that Ricoeur would recognise, even if he did not consider the contribution of humour to our dignity, but preferred to show how tragedy highlights our false sense of control and reminds us of the contingency of human life.

In truth, there is a fine division between tragedy and comedy. They share aesthetic and dramatic characteristics: for example in the use of exaggeration and the grotesque; and the presence of human error or frailty – in particular self-ignorance, vanity and shame. Both contain elements of reversal and recognition. But, whereas tragedy shows us the inexorable, unpreventable movement towards destruction, comedy relies on the unexpected upturn of events; so the little tramp flattened by life – or a steamroller - picks himself up, dusts himself down and carries on; the lost brother is found; the ancient couple conceive a son in extreme old age.

[16] W.H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 471-472.
[17] Critchley, *On Humour*, p. 109.

Our reaction to the misfortunes of others occurs on a continuum of empathy. When we feel detached, whether from the man slipping in the street, or the victim of violence, we can react to the event as slapstick and so laugh. But if the man who slips is a friend, and the victim of violence a member of the family, then the event is no laughing matter. The consequences of our human frailty may also range from the trivial to the life-threatening. The blackest comedy reminds us that even life-threatening outcomes arise from ridiculous situations, as Shakespeare and Kafka portrayed in the "comedies" of *The Merchant of Venice* or Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis.*[18] Our response is shaped not only by the genre we believe we are encountering, but the response of the community around us.

We now turn to Ricoeur's view of the parables, before considering whether the characteristics of comedy add anything to our understanding of the genre.

[18] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*, 2000, T&T Clark.

Ricoeur and the Parables

As we have seen, Ricoeur's view was that the genre of the biblical texts is inherent to revelation, and so in approaching the parables his primary concern is to identify the characteristics of the genre. Following Norman Perrin, he recognises the variety and richness of the texts which belong to a single family, including eschatological and hyperbolic sayings, which he associates with the economy of the gift.[19] Joachim Jeremias has pointed out that the Hebrew term *māshāl* which only roughly corresponds to the Greek *parabolē*, embraces parable, allegory, story, riddle, proverb, example, symbol and other forms.[20] The nature of the family resemblance is a complex one, and one must perhaps be careful not to conflate genres so that they lose their specific characteristics. Thiselton considers the task "a fundamental and indispensable part of hermeneutics" and draws on the work of Waismann, and the model of Wittengstein's language games, to show how family resemblances are created.[21] Looking at the example of various games; card games, ball games, team games, a child playing alone; we can see connections and threads, overlapping characteristics, but we may not be able to formulate a single set of rules within which all games can be categorised. Such a model, applied to language, allows language to be creative, to expand and to introduce new horizons of meaning, but does not allow meaning to expand arbitrarily. Similarly, Thiselton "tentatively proposes" that the parables could be understood as "open-ended applications that reflect family resemblances rather than closed generalisations."[22]

As we shall see, Ricoeur tries to discover the family resemblances which will help us not only to identify the nature of the genre, but to understand its effect. He wrote three papers on the parables between 1974 and 1981. The first two are essentially structuralist in approach, where Ricoeur's primary concern is to prevent any gap appearing between the inner structure of the

[19] Paul Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process', *Semeia,* 41975), 101.
[20] Anthony C. Thiselton, "The Varied Herneutical Dynamics of Parables and Reader-Response Theory" in Anthony C Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays of Anthony Thiselton*, ed. by John R Hinnells, Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 399.
[21] Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, p. 401.
[22] Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, pp. 431-433.

parable and its existential reference. [23] He agrees with the historical critical commentators, such as Jeremias and Jülicher, that parables are not allegories and that they should be located in the everyday life world of first century Palestine. However, neither are parables "example stories" nor illustrations of a point that could have been made without loss in non-figurative language, as Jülicher concludes.[24] Because Jülicher conflates metaphor and allegory, and then denies the metaphorical nature of parables, Ricoeur, as we might expect, complains that Jülicher is "mistaken about what a metaphor does and mistaken about what a parable does."[25]

Ricoeur wants to show not only that parables make an existential claim on their readers, (which is more dramatic and insistent that the banality of a "teaching point"), but also to demonstrate *how* the genre of parable effects this claim. At first the literary approach of Dan Otto Via seems to offer a helpful analysis. [26] Ricoeur notes Via's distinction between comic and tragic plot movement in the parables and the decisive function of the central act of recognition in the narrative, but he argues that Via has paid insufficient attention to the deep plot structures of the parables: the relationship between cause and effect, and indeed the relationship between characters. Via fails to notice that our main concern in reading the parables is not "And then" but "Why?".[27]

Ricoeur suggests that the deep plot structure of the parables might be explored in a similar manner to that used by Vladimir Propp to categorise Russian folk and fairy tales. In order to do this we would have to consider the roles and functions of characters appearing in the parables. The binary principle of pairs of characters in opposition; Father vs. Son, King vs. Steward, and Lord vs. Servant, fits the parables, but the question of plot is unresolved in this

[23] "Listening to the Parables of Jesus"*Criterion* 13 (1974):18-22, reproduced in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, pp. 239-246. Paul Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', *Semeia,* 4.1975). And "The Bible and the Imagination" included in *The Bible as a Document of the University,* in 1981, in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 144-166.
[24] A point made repeatedly by Robert W. Funk, *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 1-80.
[25] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 91.
[26] Via, *The Parables*.
[27] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 37-38.

analysis.[28] There is also the question of whether these are profane or sacred stories? Ricoeur contrasts the "essential profaneness" of the world of parables, their ordinary workaday world, with the "sacred" character of the world of manifested religion. In parables, symbolism is not bound to nature, rather "the parable is a fictive tale with a symbolic function."[29] However, he recognises that parables do have a mythic dimension, for example in the use of archetypal figures; kings, shepherds and fathers; the use of proverbial forms; "the first shall be last" and their language of "call" and "election".[30] The cast list of which includes both profane and archetypal figures leads Ricoeur to consider that parables are examples both of manifestation and proclamation – both natural and revealed limit expressions.

Although initially Ricoeur sets aside the relationship between character and plot he argues that a purely structuralist reading of the parables is inherently flawed, drawing on his critique of Barthes and Lévi-Strauss to show: firstly that structuralism confines language within a system with no external referents and secondly that it removes temporal direction (and thus ultimately, ethical force) from narratives so that the system becomes closed and is therefore unable to make existential claims on its readers.[31]

In the end, Ricoeur rejects both literary and structuralist approaches to genre. For Ricoeur, genre is a "means of production" similar to grammar, which generates a particular kind of thing. It is not merely a style, displaying particular tropes or ornaments, nor is it a taxonomy.

[28] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 47-48.
[29] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 58.
[30] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 67.
[31] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 63. It should be noted that there is extensive literature contrasting "open" and "closed" readings of texts . Norman Perrin writes at length about "tensive" symbols, discussing Fuchs, Linnemann, Wilder, Funk and Crossan, and Amos Wilder engages in a similar discussion. Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (London: SCM, 1964), Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the language of the Kingdom : symbol and metaphor in New Testament interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 107-193. Umberto Eco and J. Lotman, *The Role of the Reader* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 8-11.

Ricoeur writes:

> *Literary genres fulfil several functions as concerns communication: first, they provide a common ground of understanding and of interpretation, thanks to the contrast between the traditional character of the 'genre' and the novelty of the message. Second, they preserve the message from distortion, thanks to the autonomy of the form as regards speaker and hearer. This explains why Jeremias could claim that the parables contain the sayings of Jesus more surely than any other mode of discourse. Third, the 'form' secures the survival of the meaning after the disappearance of its* Sitz im Leben *and in that way starts the process of 'decontexturalization ' which opens the message to fresh interpretation according to new contexts of discourse and of life. In this sense the 'form' not only establishes communication thanks to its common character, but it preserves the message from distortion that to the circumspection which it imposes upon the work of art, and it opens it to the history of its interpretation.*[32]

Ricoeur rejects structuralism insofar as it denies any connection with the historical origins of the text and when it reduces the text to a code without qualities of its own. However, he never completely loses his interest in it as a hermeneutic method, arguing that when structuralism allows us to return from deep structures to surface structures, it enhances our understanding of the text. He concludes, " A structural analysis is complete *only* when it gives *more* meaning to the 'plot' than does the first naïve reading."[33] For Ricoeur, this meaning is revealed when the structure of the parables is related to the structure of their narrative setting in the gospels.

Ricoeur proposes that the distinctive feature of the parables is their metaphoric character, but not in the sense that would be understood by either the historical critical writers, or by literary structuralists. As we know, Ricoeur's theory of metaphor relies on the claim that metaphors are semantic innovations *and* that they have a referential dimension – they redefine reality.

[32] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 71.
[33] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 71.

Metaphors, as far as Ricoeur is concerned, are neither allegories nor tropes, they can neither be translated nor discarded. Rather, "metaphor is that strategy of discourse by which language divests itself of its ordinary descriptive function in order to serve its extraordinary function of re-description."[34] This re-description is likened to a scientific model, which Mary Hesse has called an instrument of redescription, and Ricoeur redefines as "a heurististic fiction" which redefines reality."[35]

He recognises that a new description of metaphor will be needed in the case of the parables, which are narratives and not single sentences. The problem is to identify a tension between two terms, in figurative stories. In particular he wants to do this without categorising one term as "real" and the other as "metaphorical" or imaginary. Parables must emerge as neither mythic stories which tell truths about the real world, nor as stories set in the real world which use imaginary events as teaching tools, since "If in the parable [...] we have 'imaginary gardens with real toads in them' then the garden may be imaginary but all the toads are real, then the 'tension' has to be placed elsewhere, say between imaginary and real gardens."[36]

Ricoeur begins by characterising the parables as stories set in the real, immediate and ordinary world. However, the stories break the bounds of narrative convention, both in their plots and in their internal grammar. The horizons of our expectations are broken by the extravagant outcomes of the stories, which end in either catastrophe or remarkable good luck.

Ricoeur suggests that the clue to this breaking apart of expectations, this collision of form and content, is signalled by the use of the expression "the Kingdom of God" which in itself transgresses the narrative form. It does this by the simple expedient of unsettling sentence structure, "the Kingdom of God is not what the parables tell about, but what happens in parables".[37] The expression the Kingdom of God, Ricoeur suggests, breaks open the narrative by referring to a horizon beyond narrative limits. The Kingdom of God is not a political project

[34] Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process', 88.
[35] Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process', 85.
[36] Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process', 94. The reference to imaginary toads refers to a poem by Marianne Moore.
[37] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 165.

or a dead expression of Utopia, but is rather a horizon of expectation, mobilizing our deepest puzzlement around evil, suffering and captivity. It is also a signal that we are on sacred ground. It is this tension between the here and there, the now and not yet, the ordinary and the extraordinary, which Ricoeur identifies as the metaphoric characteristic of the parables.

Ricoeur's writing about parables is mainly limited to a period when his thinking on metaphor had not extended to the fully developed description of poetics, or of narrative identity which would occupy him in the years ahead. We therefore have to rely on others to consider how the parables contribute to the world the bible invites us to inhabit and to our narrative identity.

David Parris applies Ricoeur's writings on *mimēsis* to the reading of the parables.[38] Parris adopts an Aristotelian definition of *mimēsis* as a creative event or action, narrated through plot. He summarises, "Something is created or brought into being in the presentation that did not exist before and does not require a correspondence with a pre-existing state of affairs. This allows the author to portray and the audience to perceive new possibilities for the understanding of what is being represented."[39] Applying Ricoeur's model of *mimēsis* to the parables, Parris suggests that the shared world of Jesus and his audience constitutes their pre-understanding, $mimēsis_1$, they are drawn into the world of the parable, $mimēsis_3$, and only then challenged by the world revealed in the parable, $mimēsis_2$. Parris suggests that this reorientation is not a once for all pre-existing correlation or imitation, but a creative, open space of recognition.

Ricoeur argues that the disclosive potential of a metaphor (and by extension, suggests Parris, a parable) is the result of the tension between the vehicle of the metaphor (its literal meaning) and its tenor (its figurative meaning).[40] Thus, argues Parris, when the tenor of a parable is explained, as for example in the parable of the sower, the tension between the vehicle and

[38] D.P. Parris, 'Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* 25, no. 1 (2002).
[39] Parris, 'Imitating the Parables', 43.
[40] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, pp. 21-23.

tenor is dissipated, the responsibility for resolving the tension is removed from the reader, and the disclosive potential of the parable is reduced.[41]

The mimetic representation moves from recognition to openness and back again, but may become more fixed as we become familiar with the explanations given in the tradition, as our pre-understandings change. Parris' description shows how it may be legitimate for some parables to be interpreted allegorically (for example if we apply the resources of the Old Testament to the parable of the vineyard). He summarises, "These classifications are not stable but will shift depending on whether they read the parable in a reflective or projective manner, which, in turn, is related to shifts in the reader's pre-understanding."[42]

In his own work, having established something of the dynamic of the parables, Ricoeur turns, in a later paper, to ask what we can learn from the parables about God - to question the "theology" of the parables. Here Ricoeur is more interested in the impact of the parables than on their reference. He restates his case regarding the language of the parables, which "allow no translation in conceptual language" – that is to say that no parable can speak of God in a propositional way. Ricoeur also stresses the relationship between the parables, "The parables make sense together. They constitute a network of intersignification."[43] This allows him to state that the parables must be read in the light of each other, and that because at times they appear to contradict one another or to say contradictory things about God (who is both generous and judgemental for example) that "they say more than any rational theology."[44] The function of the parables is not to provide propositional theological statements, but neither, Ricoeur argues, are they a source of practical or moral theology: to assume this would be to reduce them to trivial advice or moral platitudes. Yet, he agrees, it is possible "to put in practice the parables."[45]

[41] Parris, 'Imitating the Parables', 48.
[42] Parris, 'Imitating the Parables', 49.
[43] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 242.
[44] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 243.
[45] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 243.

When Ricoeur asks, "How do the parables teach?" the answer is through paradox and hyperbole which reorientates us by disorientating us. In drawing this theme out, he considers how paradox and hyperbole are applied to the existential decision making demanded by the parable, as it is seen in the parables which Jeremias groups under the titles "The Imminence of Catastrophe" and "It may be too late". Ricoeur suggests that these parables are paradoxical because in our experience there is always another chance and hyperbolic because they exaggerate the experience of this unique event, this one off decision so that it is seen as momentous (whereas in fact the bridesmaids simply went to buy more oil….).[46] Ricoeur concludes this essay, "the poetic power of the parable is in the power of the Event […] And it is in the heart of our imagination that we let the Event happen, before we may convert our heart and tighten our will." [47]

As I've suggested, Ricoeur proposes that the family to which parables belong has two characteristics; the first is their metaphorical nature, the second their reference to the Kingdom of God. By pointing to the Kingdom of God, the parables tell us that they are religious discourse, but because of their metaphoric nature they bring together three elements; narrative, metaphor and qualifier, so that Ricoeur suggests that "the ultimate referent of parabolic (proverbial, proclamatory) language is human experience centred around *limit-experience*."[48] In other words, the parables are not simply about the Kingdom of God, but about our existential response to an encounter with the Kingdom. In elaborating our understanding of this phrase, Ricoeur is concerned to show how it makes an existential claim on us. Following Dodd, Ricoeur begins by pointing out that "the parables are radically profane stories" and that they appeal not to the religious or spiritual but that "it is the profane man, the secular man who is summoned" because of the ordinary, mundane settings of the parables. [49] While the settings draw in the listener, the situations are not the place to look for the sense of the parable; rather we must look to the *plot*, the structure of the drama. Here is Ricoeur's riposte to structuralism, as he tries to show *how* plot, *how* genre, makes existential claims on the reader.

---

[46] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart. p. 244
[47] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, pp. 244-245.
[48] Ricoeur, 'The Narrative Form', 34.
[49] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 240.

Following Heidgegger, Ricoeur uses the parable of the treasure in the field as a model which has three critical moments: the finding, the selling and the buying. In the finding of the treasure Ricoeur suggests we are thrown into a novel situation, an Event, which signals a new opportunity. This is followed by two further critical points which might be described in terms of reversal and decision. By analysing the parable in this way, Ricoeur is able to make a connection between parable and existential decision, here described in terms of "conversion."[50] He describes the linked sequence in the following terms; "First, encountering the Event, then changing one's heart, then doing accordingly […] the Kingdom of God is compared to the chain of these three acts."[51]

The use of Event,(note Ricoeur's capitalisation), points to the existential dynamic of our encounter with the parable as well as the interna dynamic of the parable, leading Ricoeur to comment, "the Event comes as a gift."[52] For Ricoeur, it seems, the Event in the language-event comes about in the process of interpretation, which is our interaction with the gift. We can trace the increasing complexity of this movement in biblical hermeneutics, through Heidegger, Gadamer and Fuchs, through Robert Funk.[53] Ricoeur cites Funk in his *Semeia* article, but does not make reference to Fuchs who comments, "The language of Jesus singles out the individual and grabs him deep down."[54] When this occurs, Fuchs calls it a "language event".[55] A parable, Fuchs argues, is the way of love, because it prepares a place of meeting, by enticing the hearer into its world, "The hearer is drawn over to God's side and learns to see everything with God's eyes."[56] We can see how Fuchs has taken the underlying view of language from Heidegger: language creates worlds; and from Gadamer the fusing of the two horizons, the one seen from the world of the reader and the one created by the author; Fuchs brings these two ideas

[50] We should note that this is a very rare use of the term by Ricoeur and emphasises the drama of the claim which he sees the parables having on the reader.
[51] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 241.
[52] *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, p. 241.
[53] Robert Walter Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
[54] Ernst Fuchs and Andrew tr. Scobie, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, Studies in Biblical theology (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 35.
[55] Fuchs and Scobie, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 196-212.
[56] Fuchs and Scobie, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, p. 135.

together to describe the world of the parables as the world which Jesus creates and into which he draws his readers. The reader does not remain outside, in an analytical or critical mode, but enters the world of the parable, he is drawn into the world and then finds himself exposed to its truth – which challenges his former viewpoint. This reversal leads Funk to suggest that the word of God is not interpreted, but interprets.[57]

Ricoeur stops short of describing the *nature* of the existential claim made by the text on the reader. The parables open up an act of imagination, which displays the figures of authentic existence and invites us to participate in what we interpret.[58] For Ricoeur this process cannot be understood as a single event, for the process of interpretation is always circular, or spiral. His ambition is always to show how it is possible for interpretation to change us, even when that change is a change in our understanding of ourselves: the change from believing that we are autonomous free beings to understanding that we are creatures who are summoned by the one who loves us. In the parables these upturns are the result of God's unexpected generosity, the economy of the gift. As anyone who has ever preached on the parables will be aware, they often create in the listener that very sense of indignation with which Aristotle characterises comedy. How dare the vineyard owner reward every worker in the same way? Why did the father reward his prodigal son and not the one who remained at home? This response has the underlying subtext: surely God will reward his faithful servants more than those who have spent half their lives ignoring him?

[57] Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God*, p. 12.
[58] "Listening to the Parables of Jesus" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart. p.245 "The specificity of language" *Semeia* 4 (1975) p. 144 "The Bible and the Imagination" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 166.

The parables as a comic form

As we know, Ricoeur is concerned to indentify the genre of the parables because he is convinced that genre is inherent to the nature of revelation. The culmination of his biblical hermeneutics is the proposal that what is revealed, in the family of the parables particularly, is the possibility that we might inhabit the Kingdom of God. In taking this idea further I would like to suggest two things; firstly that the genre of the parables may include some characteristics of comedy and secondly, that if this is so, our response will have characteristics which are consistent with our response to comedy. Comedy, like any genre, is characterised by its structure (or plots) and by the characters portrayed within it. We have identified, in the broadest terms, the structure of comedy as one of movement from upset to retrieval.

We have already noted that Dan Otto Via described parables as having both upward and downward trajectories which he equated with the comic and tragic forms.[59] In *Kerygma and Comedy*, written after his work on the parables, he takes a more detailed look at the structure of Greek comedy in relation to Paul's theology and the Gospel of Mark. His work is based on Francis Cornford's analysis of Aristophanes, and not on the writings of Aristotle, and proposes a scheme based on a fertility rite in which the old king is replaced by a new king. The drama begins with the struggle between hero (agonist) and antagonist, which the hero wins. It is followed by a sacrificial offering and a feast. Finally the hero leads a victory procession, enters a marriage and experiences a resurrection.[60] Via first shows how Paul's letter to the Romans reflects these themes, as he describes the old world ruled by boastful wisdom overthrown by the new kingdom of Christ, and considers the parallels between the binary opposition of old and new in Paul's opposition of letter or law and spirit, works and faith. Via claims that Paul was able to communicate new and radical truths because the comic genre provided a point of contact for his audience.[61]

[59] His discussion of the comic parables, "in the broad sense of a plot that moves upward toward the well-being of the protagonist and his inclusion in a desirable society" covers the parable of the worker in the vineyard (Mtt 20:1-16), the parable of the unjust steward (Lk 16:1-9) and the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). Via, *The Parables*, pp. 145-176, 145.
[60] Via, *Kerygma and Comedy*, p. 45.
[61] Via, *Kerygma and Comedy*, p. 56.

When he turns to the Gospel of Mark, Via stops short of claiming that the genre of the gospel is that of comedy. He concedes that we must accept that comedy is powerless to deal with death and that the death of Christ is a reality, even if faith perceives that there is something beyond the death, namely resurrection. However, there must be a way to address the hiatus between the death and the resurrection of Christ. Via's solution is to suggest that gospel is really tragic-comedy, a sub-genre which particularly in its "modern" form confronts us with uncertainty, especially with regard to identity. Via considers that the gospel exhibits patterns commensurate with Karl Guthke's description of modern tragicomedy: a character who is fit for tragedy but displays comic qualities, such as a concern for the needs of the body, eating, sitting and walking; a discrepancy between the perception of the world held by the main character and the perception of those around him – usually, as for example with Don Quixote, the main character holds the illusions while those around him have the accurate view, but in the case of Jesus, the positions are reversed; the use of irony, which brings the protagonist to a tragic death, but culminates in defeat for his opponents: and conflict between intention and fulfilment, in which once more appearances seem to defy reality, but are reversed.[62]

Via provides a structural analysis of Mark's gospel which shows how it contains elements of comedy and tragedy and its trajectory can be directed both to the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, he takes a particular view of the resurrection which he reads as a symbol transcending the historical event. The resurrection, he argues, is continued in the faith of the church in the experience of the risen Lord among believers and encountered in preaching. Via argues that there is a close relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom, indeed that Jesus is "both the vehicle and instrument of that act of God which alone can deliver man from himself. Therefore in communicating himself to men he communicates to them the kingdom."[63]

In many ways Via reiterates the point that Ricoeur has made, that the narrative of Jesus in which the parables are embedded is a narrative with a comic trajectory. He rightly considers

[62] Via, *Kerygma and Comedy*, pp. 100-101. Citing Karl S. Guthke *Modern Tragicomedy* (New York: Random House, 1966)
[63] Via, *Kerygma and Comedy*, p. 134.

the problem of chronology not only as it affects the gospel writer who knows "what happened next", but also as it affects the reader engaged with the more complex theological question of realised eschatology. While not dismissing Via's suggestion that we should appreciate the gospels as tragicomic, I want to consider their comic character in more detail here.

Via is, as we have seen, interested primarily in comic structure. He pays no attention to the place of comic *character* in the gospels. Yet Ricoeur could say that the parables are profane and stresses the ordinariness of their settings and characters. Indeed the parables are concerned with simple, physical things like fields, seeds, sheep, weddings and lamps. They are easily translated into the everyday life of listeners in very different worlds, there are dozens of versions of the parable of the good Samaritan which transplant the man "who went up to Jericho" from the hills of Judea to the back streets of Harlem, or the tube train full of football fans, and myriad other localities. The protagonists of the parables are often people with values we recognise; they are hardworking, they exist within social networks, and yet, when their values are challenged, our values are also challenged and we are able to see them for the foolish individuals they are. As Buechner says, "… parables can be read as jokes about God in the sense that what they are essentially about is the outlandishness of God who does impossible things with impossible people, and I believe that the comedy of them is not just a device for making the truth that they contain go down easy but that the truth that they contain can itself be thought of as comic."[64] It is a truth about the preposterousness of man and the preposterousness of God. The preposterousness of man who would rather earn God's approval by hard work and serious intellectual endeavour than receive it as a free gift; the preposterousness of God who is prepared to lavish gifts on men and women despite their stupidity, fragility and ingratitude. I would argue that, particularly in the context of preaching, reading the parables as comedy enables us to enter their world, to be surprised, and so to be challenged by the discovery that our values are not God's values.[65]

[64] Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, p. 66.
[65] Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*.

Hope and Eschatology

If we read the parables as comic stories, in which we recognise our own stupidity and lack of gratitude and are surprised by God's generosity, what impact will they have on us? Ricoeur suggests, though he never explicitly explains how, the parables make an existential claim on their readers. The claim, which can be understood as an Event, requires a decision. Is this Ricoeur's account of the conversion event? This seems extremely unlikely.

Yet, everything that Ricoeur has written about narrative suggests that we learn from stories and that they shape us in particular ways. Particular genres are productive of particular kinds of wisdom. As we will see in the next chapter, tragedy produces tragic wisdom which acts as an emotional corrective to *phronēsis*, reminding us of the contingent and fragile nature of human wisdom. The writer Stephen Denning has done extensive work on the power of storytelling and he proposes that parables are stories which transmit values. His work is descriptive rather than analytical, so he does not attempt to explain how this is the case, but his suggestion can be productive when combined with Ricoeur's suggestion that the parables open up a new world which we might inhabit.

Denning's argument is that parables embody a conflict of values which force the reader to question his or her own values. Using Ricoeur's terms, we might suggest that the parables challenge our sense of justice or fairness, because they so often describe a resolution based on the economy of love or extravagance. There is a conflict in us between the value of justice and the value of love. It does not seem to me to be unreasonable to equate Denning's use of the language of values with Ricoeur's use of the language of the virtues. However, I am not sure that the clash between these values or virtues leads to a privileging of one over the other, in which we realise that we have valued justice more than love, while God does the reverse. Rather that a new virtue is presented as a possibility, and that new virtue is hope.

There are two advantages of suggesting that hope is the virtue embodied in the parables; the first is Ricoeur's comment about its normative Christian content; the second that we can demonstrate how hope is practised in life situations, that is to say embodied in narrative identity.

Ricoeur reflects on hope in two essays written at around the same time, "Freedom in the Light of Hope" and "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems".[66] In both essays he is concerned to show that hope is a religious category – a limit experience – that makes sense in philosophical terms, which he does by reference to Kant. However, more than one critic has suggested that Ricoeur's reading of Kant has led him to overlook the underlying religious character of his theme and Peter Kenny suggests that it is necessary for Ricoeur to focus on hope, because of his concern with the problem of sin.[67] Certainly, Ricoeur concurs with Kant that sin and evil cannot be overcome without divine assistance.

For Ricoeur, hope is manifested in the whole of the economy of creation, incarnation and redemption. In this view he was deeply influenced by Jurgen Moltmann, writing in the tradition of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer.[68] In *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Schweitzer had argued that the heart of Jesus' teaching was the Kingdom of God. Moltmann then set out to show what impact this claim has on the whole of theology. He argued that theology could not separate the manifestation of the *logos* from the promise of things to come. Picking up a theme from Martin Buber, he shows how the God of the Exodus experience is a God of promise, in contrast to the idols of competing "epiphany" (manifestation) religions. God is also a God of history: history not centred on the present, but directed towards fulfilment in the future. Moltmann considers how we should understand the resurrection in this light, not

[66] Published in French in 1969, and then in Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 398-418. Published in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Association* in 1970 and then in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 203-216.
[67] See e.g. Patrick Bourgeois "The Limits of Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Existence" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Hahn, p. 562. *Memory, Narrativity, Self*, ed. by Junker-Kenny and Kenny, p. 101.
[68] Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967).

as the fulfilment of a promise now, but as an event which opens up a new future, reinstating the promise of new life for all, and confirming it.[69] He writes:

> *Presumption is a premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Despair is the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what we hope for from God. Both forms of hopelessness, by anticipating the fulfilment, or by giving up hope, cancel the wayfaring character of hope. They rebel against the patience in which hope trusts in the God of promise.*[70]

Moltmann goes further, by suggesting, in contradistinction to Barth, that the coming of the Kingdom will not consist merely of the unveiling of the kingship of Christ, but rather in a new act which will bring about the universal fulfilment of Christ's redeeming and saving acts. As Moltmann "dares to speak about the future of the resurrection of Jesus Christ", Ricoeur concludes that the task of a theology of hope is to liberate the kerygma from a false perception limiting incarnation to a single manifestation of the eternal being.[71] In considering Moltmann's account, Ricoeur wrote:

> *Now I am not a theologian, but a philosopher. It is not my task to say to what extent it is true to say that the main category of Christianity is promise rather than presence, that God is the "one who comes" rather than "the one who is." I do not claim that this hermeneutic of the resurrection alone is valid and orthodox. I only say that, more than any other, it gives rise to thought.*[72]

Ricoeur's first thought is that hope is irrational, but it has, in Kierkegaard's term, an "absurd logic" which can help us in considering the relationship between St Paul's eschatology and anthropology. Paul is trying to understand the existential significance of the cross and the resurrection, which seems to point in two directions at once: the death of the old humanity, and

[69] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 205. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 172-197.
[70] Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, p. 23.
[71] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 205. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, pp. 228-229.
[72] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 205.

the rebirth of the new one. In the Epistle to the Romans we find Paul drawing a parallel between Adam and Jesus, which "provides a rhetorical framework for the new logic of hope that breaks through the logic of sin." Ricoeur cites the passage from Romans:

> *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ abounded for many….If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*[73]

On the one hand, there is the logic of equivalence, where sin leads to death, on the other the logic of hope which is the logic of increase and the logic of superabundance. The absurd logic somehow relates, the "not yet" and the "much more ", it holds in tension the logic of abundance with the logic of existence and the reality of sin and death, crime and punishment. We are, in St Paul's terms, both enslaved and free, both dead and alive. For Ricoeur, again drawing on Kierkegarard, "hope makes of freedom the passion for the possible against the sad meditation on the irrevocable."[74]

Ricoeur goes on to show how "hope" might be an intelligible category in philosophical terms. We should not make the mistake of thinking that he is saying that hope *answers* a philosophical question, but rather see it as a decision of faith, a wager and a risk. The purpose of the remainder of his essay is not to discuss the theological concept *per se*, but to examine its intelligibility within the bounds of reason, which he does in an extended mediation between Hegel and Kant.

Ricoeur considers the three questions Kant asks, "What can we know? What must we do? What may we hope?" He suggests that we have to decide between Hegelian "absolute knowledge" and hope: we cannot have both. In which case, we must confront Kant's

[73] Romans 5:16-17
[74] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 206.

"transcendental illusion" and recognise that we cannot know or understand the thought of the unconditional (the cause of all causes, the absolute source which is equivalent to Hegel's absolute knowledge). The first question is turned on its head and becomes "What cannot we know?" When we know this, Ricoeur argues, we are cured from the illusion that places humanity in the centre of the universe in the place of the transcendental first cause, what we might call the "anthropological illusion." [75]

The second focus is on action, in which Ricoeur reflects on our inability to act in such a way that we can be happy, and restates Kant's argument concerning the place of divine assistance in regenerating the will.

In answering the final question, "What may we hope?" Ricoeur considers that it is the task of religion to describe the condition of possibility for this regeneration, "without alienating freedom either to a magical conception of grace and salvation or to an authoritarian organization in the religious community."[76] He is asking for a description of regeneration, or resurrection, which does not depend on the "short cut" of grace coming like a thunderbolt, nor on obedience to a human institution. We might say that neither Luther nor Aquinas will do.

He concludes that the problem of hope is intelligible both to philosophy and theology as their respective closing points or horizons; that the task of theology is to relate the preaching of hope to all fields of human experience, as the anticipation through history of the resurrection of all the dead; that hope is irrational in asserting the law of superabundance – but this is the superabundance of sense over non-sense; that philosophically this pattern is closer to Kant than Hegel and reminds us that hope cannot be overcome by absolute knowledge, however while hope opens up what knowledge claims to close, philosophy must remain within the limits of reason alone. "In this self-restraint abide both the responsibility and the modesty of philosophy."[77]

[75] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 213.
[76] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 215.
[77] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 215-216.

One characteristic of hope is that it arises from a proper sense of human fallibility, from a proper humility, and yet it opens up the imagination to the possibility of regeneration. It allows the possibility of freedom, and the potential to act in good and loving ways, despite human frailty.

For Ricoeur hope is "the creative imagination of the possible."– it is a gift like faith and love, an opening of selves to their primordial possibilities not just for themselves, but in the future they might share with others. Hope reveals the human possibilities for "new creation" as explored by both Paul and Augustine. Hope does not, of course, reveal the vision or set the goal, but orientates the self. However, it also gives the idea of a task to be accomplished, Wall notes that such a 'vision' cannot be contained within only sacred or any other kind of texts, but must also be interpreted and appropriated into selves' own renewed practices.[78] Finally, Ricoeur writes:

> *Hope says: the world is not the final home of freedom; I consent as much as possible, but hope to be delivered of the terrible and at the end of time to enjoy a new body and a new nature granted to freedom.*[79]

When the parables are read as comic stories they engage our human sensibilities and remind us of our human frailty. They surprise us and challenge our value system. They open up the possibility that we may inhabit the Kingdom and so create an existential challenge to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and look forward. The choice is literally life or death, and as Vanhoozer recognises the invitation exists in a context of freedom, where gift generates an obligation, "not of law, but of love." The economy of the gift "generates a whole person response, not simply a response of an obedient will."[80]

[78] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 155. Citing Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 293-302.
[79] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 480.
[80] Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosphy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 127.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Tragic Wisdom

Ricoeur's interest in tragedy goes back to his earliest explorations of myth in *The Symbolism of Evil*, and makes a striking re-appearance in *Oneself as Another* where it irrupts into the philosophical enquiry, as "the shock capable of awakening our mistrust with respect not only to the illusions of the heart but also to the illusions born of the hubris of practical reasoning itself."[1] The interlude, entitled "Tragic Action" serves to reconnect us with the limit experience of suffering and with our own fragility, while undermining any precipitous closure in the development of our moral and ethical programme.

We shall follow Ricoeur in considering tragedy in relation to the biblical texts, beginning with the book of Job, then turning to the parables as tragic tropes before placing them in the context of the Jesus narrative. We shall see how tragedy acts in the philosophical sphere as a corrective to overconfidence in human wisdom, and how it can recall us to dependency on God's grace at work in the summoned life.

Tragedy

Our understanding of Aristotle's poetics is built principally on his description of tragedy, in particular on his insistence on the relationship between character and action, and on the primacy of plots. The tragic plot is one in which the central characters experience reversals in life in situations often revealed by the recognition of the true identity of another protagonist. Tragic drama plays out events which evoke fear and pity: suffering, destruction and pain, often arising within close relationships.

Tragedy has always had the power to evoke philosophical speculation. Edith Hall describes it as "an enquiry into the reasons why humans suffer" and reflects that the dramatic form grew up alongside Socratic philosophy in a period when Greeks were beginning to question their

[1] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 241.

own customs and value systems in the light of their encounters with other civilised peoples who did not share their ways of doing things.[2] For the Greeks, the reasons for suffering included making poor choices, the contingent results of well-meaning actions, or evil acts perpetrated by others. Hall suggests that the reality of human limitation lies behind the problem of suffering, especially when it is experienced as a lack of knowledge or the holding of an erroneous belief.[3] Tragedy is a description not just of suffering, but of *reflection* on suffering. As a category it relies on the assumption that suffering has meaning and that it is dependent on laws of cause and effect. Tragedy involves the recognition of the causes of suffering, even if that is only the recognition of the condition of being human.[4]

Hall's description raises all kinds of questions about human agency, divine intervention and fate. While it is important not to over individualise or psychologise the motivation of the heroes of Greek tragic drama, we should be clear that, for Aristotle at least, the central character must be responsible for their own error, for otherwise we will not experience the fear and pity that characterise our response to the best tragedy. As we shall see, the relationship between fate or bondage and freedom is a complex one. Tragedy must imply both the freedom to act and a sense of inevitable drive towards destruction. It is only in the later development of tragedy, particularly in the plays of Shakespeare and subsequently in the nineteenth century novel, that the self-destruction of the hero is exclusively associated with his own fatal flaw, so that the dynamic of the work focuses on the *hubris* of the hero and his *catharsis* or learning through suffering, rather than on the response of the audience or chorus.

The development of the tragic genre alerts us to the ambiguity with which the terms "tragedy" and "tragic" are used, not only floating between descriptive and normative definitions of literary or dramatic works, but also referring to real life events and world views. Miguel de

[2] Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 156,173.
[3] Hall, *Greek Tragedy*, pp. 175-176.
[4] We might suggest that Hall takes a "classic" view of suffering, which can be contrasted with the post modern view held, for example, by Cheryl Exum, who complains that Aristotle's insistence on rationality denies "the essence of tragedy, its representation of the irrational" J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 2.

Unamuno writes of "the tragic vision" as a sense of life, while Susanne Langer speaks of life's "tragic rhythm" and Karl Jaspers of its "tragic atmosphere" or "tragic mood".[5] Terry Eagleton suggests that we should understand the tragic in terms of Wittgenstein's "family resemblances", a term which we have already suggested is characteristic of comedy.[6] Some commentators are concerned about the distinction between literary forms and life, but we should not be surprised to find no trace of this in Ricoeur's thought. A personal narrative may borrow from the genres of tragedy or comedy to shape and define its character for it is bound to take on some plotting device or form.

Eagleton is correct, in my view, when he accuses Ricoeur of being a "full blooded essentialist" when it comes to tragedy. [7] It is clear, in *Symbolism of Evil*, where Ricoeur writes: "It is by grasping the essence [of tragedy] in its Greek phenomena that we can understand all other tragedy as analogous to Greek tragedy."[8] What is revealed in Ricoeur's choice is both that tragedy is a phenomenon available in perception - and thus open to philosophical enquiry in the manner of Merleau-Ponty, and a reflection on limit experiences such as guilt, suffering and death – which place it in category of theological speculation in the manner of Jaspers.[9] We might also note Gadamer's insistence on the place of the spectator in the tragic. He draws attention to the fact that Aristotle's definition includes the effect of tragedy, which for Gadamer implies a certain closed circle of meaning – analogous to fate and demanding acceptance, an insight into the nature of being which we all share.[10] Eagleton recognises the trace of Ricoeur's interest in structuralism in his approach to tragedy, which he sees like all genres as far more than descriptive, since for him it generates particular patterns of meaning. As we shall state repeatedly throughout this chapter, the inexpressible, unintelligible and inexplicable is given meaning (not comprehensibility) in *mimēsis*: through the spectacle of drama and the shaping of narrative it is brought within our perceptual grasp.

---

[5] Cited Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 5.
[6] Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 8.
[7] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, p. 3.
[8] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 211.
[9] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 211-212.
[10] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 129-133.

Tragedy and Philosophy

The enlightenment period saw a flourishing of philosophical commentary on tragedy (Hegel, Schelling, Schlegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche), and an interest in the tragic hero as the embodiment of the noble individual struggling with the chaotic and irrational in life experienced as suffering. For Hegel, in particular, there is desire to "make sense" of suffering through determined rational thought and to see suffering as ennobling precisely because it renders the irrational meaningful.

Hegel rationalised tragedy, with particular reference to *Antigone*, as the suffering arising from a conflict of goods. In this drama King Creon places duty to the city above familial bonds and refuses to allow Antigone, his future daughter in law, to bury her brother Polynices within the city walls because he died a traitor to the city state. By contrast, Antigone sees only the responsibilities of familial loyalty as truly virtuous: so she buries her brother. The refusal of either party to yield ends tragically in the further deaths of Antigone and of the King's son, Haemon.

Only in retrospect, Hegel argues, can we see that other outcomes would have been possible, concluding that the lesson of *Antigone* is the need for harmonisation, for civic structures which attend to private needs, and for a synthesis that rises above contradiction. Eagleton observes that "Sophoclean Fate becomes Hegelian Reason. 'Mere' pity and terror are outweighed by an exultant knowledge of eternal justice."[11] Similarly Martha Nussbaum complains that Hegel pays insufficient attention to the anguished cry of the chorus, bemoaning the terrible power of unconstrained contingency.[12]

As we will see, Ricoeur is attentive both to Hegel's understanding of tragedy, and to the cry of pain which evokes pity and terror. In Chapter Five, I argued that the limits of the ethical quest are experienced in the encounter with the Other, but we by-passed Ricoeur's own exploration

[11] Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, p. 43.
[12] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 78.

of the limits of philosophical speculation encountered in the tragic. At the conclusion of his meditation on ethics and morality Ricoeur will not countenance a third agency, third term or synthesis between virtue and duty, but he acknowledges that the dialectic tension gives rise to "practical wisdom" or *phronēsis*.

At this point in the book he inserts the "interlude" headed "Tragic Action."[13] This interlude represents not only a detour in Ricoeur's thinking, but the intrusion of his personal life into his philosophical reflection, reflecting the impact of the suicide of his son Olivier in the days following the delivery of the Gifford Lectures, on which *Oneself as Another* is based.

The interlude serves to restore a sense of struggle to the problem of moral judgement, and draws on Hegel's view of *Antigone* to demonstrate how a single minded view of the good results in conflict not progress. Ricoeur's view of Hegel is ambivalent. On the one hand he follows the Hegelian view that the tragedy of *Antigone* arises from the problem of conflicting goods, in particular as the good is limited by the human character of institutions and he appears to adopt Hegel's view that we should seek ways through the conflict arising from conflicting goods. [14] On the other hand, he stresses that drama exists to provoke and purify the emotions, and to evoke not only fear and pity but doubt. Tragic spectacle goes far beyond didactic intention, yet finally he admits, "tragedy teaches us".[15]

It would be wrong to assume that Ricoeur means what Hegel means when he says that tragedy teaches. There is, undoubtedly, something of Hegel's retrospective reflection in Ricoeur's view, but Ricoeur is not searching for a harmonising synthesis. His appeal to "practical wisdom" must be understood in the light of "tragic wisdom" which teaches us the limits of human institutions, culture and rationality. Ricoeur remains troubled by the reality of suffering, and considers that Hegel overlooks its scandal by defusing it into the abstract life of the Spirit. Ricoeur protests against silencing suffering with the "substitution of reconciliation."[16] All we

[13] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 241.
[14] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 245.
[15] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 243.
[16] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 256.

can do is to "deliberate well" in the knowledge that our deliberations will never be good enough. He writes:

> *One of the functions of tragedy in relation to ethics is to create a gap between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. By refusing to contribute a 'solution' to the conflicts made insoluble by fiction, tragedy, after having disorientated the gaze, condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best responds to tragic wisdom.*[17]

The tragic wisdom evoked by the spectacle is followed by practical wisdom emerging from reflection. This is particularly apparent in *Antigone*, which as Martha Nussbaum points out, is a tragedy much concerned with practical deliberation, in which the term *phronēma* occurs six times.[18] The play does not end with the death of Antigone, but with the arrival of the blind priest Teiresias, who exhorts the protagonists to "deliberate well" over the events that have passed, leaving the chorus to lament that wisdom (*phronēsis*) only comes to the old.

For Ricoeur the chorus' "final word is of depressing modesty -

> *' Our happiness depends on wisdom [*to phronein*] all the way.*
> *The Gods must have their due.*
> *Great words by men of pride bring greater blows upon them.*
> *So wisdom [*to phronein*] comes [is taught,* edidaxan*] to the old.' '*"[19]

Ricoeur argues that while tragic wisdom refuses to contribute a solution, it encourages a response: a move from catharsis to conviction. The incapacity of the hero in the moment of moral conflict is replaced by a conviction that action is possible.

[17] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 247.
[18] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, p. 51 endnote p 436.
[19] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 246.

John Wall, in developing Ricoeur's ideas, argues that the tragedy of *Antigone* arises not simply from the clash of convictions but the inability of the protagonists to *create new meaning* from their situation. We, the audience, are left to do that. He suggests that "True practical wisdom involves not just receiving given narratives from the past, but also actively and creatively refiguring them in response to the tensions, fragility, conflicts and incommensurabilities of the present."[20] In particular, he argues, practical wisdom must be attentive to the blindness and contingency of the self and the community. He concludes;

> *The only solution available to us merely finite and limited creatures is to become ever more profoundly capable of creating new narratives of the good in relation to one another. This capability for poetic self-formation is both passive and active at once: receptive to the finitude of the situation at hand and inventive of its ever more inclusive possible meaning.*[21]

In *Oneself as Another,* Ricoeur goes on to consider how human institutions contribute to moral conflict, and how increasingly just institutions can be achieved. The trajectory of his thought reflects his sense that there is no individual narrative except that shaped by collective experience. We shall return to this theme later in this chapter, however, for the moment, I want to consider the relationship between tragedy and theodicy in Ricoeur's own writing.

[20] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 75.
[21] Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 76.

Tragedy and the Bible: Job

Tragedy, for Ricoeur, inhabits that territory of myth and symbolism which exists at the limits of speculation. It is a religious category. Its eruption in the text of *Oneself as Another* is a reminder that the human condition cannot be reduced to a "simple modality of choice and deliberation."[22] Tragic spectacle demands interpretation, but hesitation is required - lest we mistake interpretation for speculation when what is demanded is a response in the form of attestation or testimony based on the wager of belief. Ricoeur insists that we must "protect the symbolic power residing in the tragic myth."[23]

In the concluding chapters of *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur explores the relationship between tragedy and the biblical texts. Initially, he had suggested that the Adamic myth - the myth of the Fall - is predicated on the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. It is clearly "anti-tragic" since man has no-one to blame for his misfortune but himself.[24] The Adamic myth depends on an ethical view of God by which, "History is a tribunal, pleasures and pains are retribution, God himself is judge. At the same time human experience assumes a penal character."[25]

However, a closer examination reveals tragic dimensions to the myth: firstly, the serpent is *already* present in Eden and *already* evil, suggesting that the Creator is somehow complicit in the Fall. Secondly, although Adam committed the sin all humanity has "inherited" the fault for which we are not individually responsible. This leads to the experience of being bound by sin and of being both master and slave to oneself: the experience of self-division.[26] Ricoeur suggests that the evil for which I assume responsibility serves to make manifest the evil for which I cannot take responsibility, but in which I nevertheless participate.[27]

---

[22] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 242.
[23] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 212.
[24] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 311.
[25] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 314.
[26] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 311-312.
[27] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 314.

Ricoeur takes a 'progressive view' of myth and broadly concludes that the Old Testament retains this ethical view of God until the tradition is shattered from within by the book of Job. Although often classified as one of the books of Wisdom, the book of Job subverts or problematises many of the assumptions of Wisdom literature.[28] At first it does not seem unreasonable to view Job as an exemplar of human wisdom. His description, as "a man of Uz", implies that he was not from the land or people of Israel, so his sagacity can be interpreted as 'general' or natural wisdom, existing apart from any special revelation. Similarly, the prologue implies that the rewards that Job has reaped are the rewards due to any virtuous man. The challenge arises when Job experiences suffering which he has not 'deserved' and which tests his faith. Two kinds of interrogation follow: The interrogation of Job by his friends, and the interrogation of God by Job.[29]

The book of Job concludes with a series of chapters whose status is disputed by form critics, but Ricoeur reads the narrative as a whole and draws parallels between the book and Greek tragedy, suggesting that God's "answer" to Job is to show him the terrible beauty of creation beyond measure - which really has nothing to do with Job. "Suffering is not explained, ethically or otherwise; but the contemplation of the whole initiates a movement which must be completed practically by the surrender of the claim […] As in tragedy, the final theophany has explained nothing to him, but it has changed his view."[30]

The God revealed in the book of Job is like the gods of tragedy, both inscrutable and terrible. After his encounter Job cannot explain suffering, but he is wiser. Ricoeur considers the possibility that the message is that the purpose of suffering is to beget wisdom.[31] It is wisdom which results in a practical movement not only to desist from challenging God, or demanding retribution, but also to pick up the threads of life. Job does not return to a re-enactment of his

[28] Katharine J. Dell, *Get Wisdom, Get Insight: An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Literature* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2000).
[29] David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, ed. by Daniel W. Hardy, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 93.
[30] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 321.
[31] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 319.

earlier happiness, but to a chastened re-enacting of his present un-happiness.[32] This is not the foolishness of the "happy ever after" ending as sometimes portrayed, nor the reward for Job's patience, but rather a demonstration of Job's capacity to return to the ordinary things of life after his trauma, trusting in God in the knowledge of the world's contingency.[33]

Ricoeur suggests that the portrayal of the God of tragedy in the book of Job protects biblical theology from the "platitudes of ethical monotheism" which limit God to the roles of Legislator and Judge.[34]

Tragedy in Postmodernity

Ricoeur's writing on tragedy in *The Symbolism of Evil* can have a somewhat old fashioned feel about it, influenced as he was by Mercia Eliade and the whole anthropology of religions school.[35] It could be suggested that he is over-confident in assuming a shared reading or experience of the great cultural myths and our capacity to appropriate them, and in *The Symbolism of Evil* he hardly engages with the postmodern critique of tragedy which stresses the protagonists experience of alienation, the multiplicity of viewpoints, and the incapacity of characters to narrate or make meaning for themselves.

In the post-war years when the holocaust threw long shadows over philosophy and poetry alike, there was a reluctance to address the suffering – as if nothing could adequately represent the horror of history – and a desire to make sense of what occurred. The task of philosophy becomes that of dealing with the failure of modernism and the loss of confidence in all manner of heroic narratives. George Steiner argues that tragedy is dead, because like all myth it relies on a shared set of values. Terry Eagleton suggests that at the very least a new definition of

[32] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 322.
[33] Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 116. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 119.
[34] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 322.
[35] Although in his later writing he values the multiplicity of the names of God and describes them working together, rather than emerging in chronological development. See in particular, Paul Ricoeur "Naming God" in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 217-235. It would be fair to say that Ricoeur reads the book of Job through the eyes of Greek tragedy and this inevitably blinds him in certain respects, particularly to the darker comic moments in Job.

tragedy is required: one which is attentive to the experience of the many and understands the possibility of a tragic condition which is neither heroic nor inspirational, nor limited to single actions or events.

In *The Death of Tragedy* Steiner laments the loss of the form in both art and philosophy. [36] His argument is predicated on three key claims; first that the normative form of tragedy, "Absolute Tragedy" depends on the possibility that human life is meaningless and that if this is the case the only proper response is oblivion; secondly, that there can be no tragedy without a shared world view with its attendant mythological, symbolic and mythic reference.[37] Thirdly, that this mythology must include powers, gods or fates which are both inescapable and irrational, since tragedy is in essence an "enacted testing of theodicy."[38] For Steiner, classic Greek drama is the defining version of tragedy: it depicts unjust suffering and ends in the oblivion of the hero, reflecting a view of life which is out of human control.

Steiner places Greek tragedy and biblical narrative in stark opposition, baldly stating that "Tragedy is alien to the Judaic sense of the world" because he claims that the Old Testament shows that "the ways of God are just". [39] Clearly, as our discussion of Job has shown, this is not the only interpretation of Hebrew texts. Steiner also states: "Christianity is an anti-tragic vision of the world" because suffering is only ever momentary, the passion of Christ eventually reveals God's love, and oblivion is never a reality for the Christian because it is never too late for forgiveness.[40]

Steiner yearns to recapture the rhetorical power of tragic drama to awaken our feelings of pathos and horror, arguing that in the modern era representation of the human condition has become banal because we refuse to face oblivion and have replaced the tragic with sentimentality, false optimism and bathos. Steiner rejects most modern art as inadequate to the

[36] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).
[37] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 292.
[38] George Steiner, 'A Note on Absolute Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 4, no. 2 (1990), 153.
[39] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 4.
[40] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 333-334.

task of representing the human condition, though in his later writing he expresses admiration for the work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett's inchoate screaming mouth is the only sort of response which does not trivialise the twentieth century's "carnival of bestiality."[41]

Steiner's work, while highly influential, has been criticised on a number of counts, not least his somewhat simplistic view of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Increasingly, his opinion that tragedy is defined by complete closure has been rejected, and attention has been drawn to the importance of the audience (to some extent replacing the role of the chorus) in the ongoing task of interpretation which characterises all mythic and symbolic forms. Tragedy is drama observed by people who will walk away from it. The hero is dead, but the tragedy lives on. No art is without a narrative dimension and perhaps this is what the works of Beckett help us to appreciate. Sutherland describes this powerfully in an article on Christianity and Tragedy.

> *Theologically the most significant point about tragic drama is that is written and performed at all […] For human beings the tragic in human life is not the last word about human life. If it were why write, why perform, why watch and listen? The creative acts of reflection, structuring, writing and presenting are a denial of the ultimate definition of the human condition by tragic event….They are a form of engagement, of wrestling and of refusal.*[42]

Narrative form contextualises the single cry of anguish within the pattern of life. It echoes the way in which we make sense of our lives while allowing us to enter the experience which is, in reality, hidden: the experience of our own oblivion.

As I have indicated, there is a complexity of views on the tragic which we now bring to bear on the experience of humanity and the narrative of Jesus. Whereas Adorno could conceive of no poetry after Auschwitz, and Steiner complains that the human cry has become banal, the

[41] Steiner, 'A Note on Absolute Tragedy', 151.
[42] Stewart Sutherland, 'Christianity and Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 4, no. 2 (1990), 167.

reality is that fifty years after the end of the Second World War we realise that the holocaust was not the final act of human depravity or suffering. While we may have lost our confidence in human institutions, we cannot live without them, and human identity – which seemed stripped down to an existential minimum, clings to more than mere presence in the world despite its tenuous grasp on meaning.

The Tragic Condition of Humanity

Contemporary theologians have explored the extent to which human life is "tragic" and then asked how Jesus lived an authentically tragic human life. The tragic dimension of human existence is recognised in its open-endedness (in contradistinction from Steiner's definition of tragedy as ending in utter closure), its thrownness, and its sense of abandonment. Jesus' humanity is explored through the characteristic qualities of postmodern anthropology: uncertainty, risk and alienation.

The experience of uncertainty is explored by Robert S. Gall, in an article written in 1993, in which he suggests that true tragedy never offers closure. Citing Norman Berlin, he observes,"tragedy raises a question mark."[43] Gall links this sense of questioning, of not knowing, to Heidegger's *thrownness* of Being: the sense in which we are presented possibilities and choices which must cancel each other out. Cordelia must choose between honesty and her father's love, she cannot have both. This world of choice inevitably demands loss. For Ricoeur, tragedy is implicated in anthropology as the loss which is inevitable in the realisation of freedom. Because it is not possible to enjoy both intense friendship and universal solidarity, because we cannot experience self-awareness without recognising the division between desire and morality; freedom must be experienced as loss.[44] Gall suggests that we rebel against this reality by imagining a world in which there is a single narrative, a comprehensible mythology or a knowable whole. He identifies religion as offering a single narrative and calls instead for a

[43] R.S. Gall, 'Toward a Tragic Theology: the piety of thought in Heidegger and Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 7, no. 1 (1993), 16.
[44] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 312.

"Tragic Theology" which recognises the truth and remains in a state between absolute coherence and absolute incoherence.

> *The religious thinking inspired by Heidegger and tragedy would call for us to abide in a state of divinely inspired doubt in which assertions of God/gods and affirmations of faith are recognized for their failure to submit to the complex nature of being and darkness of the world.*[45]

Uncertainty leads inevitably to risk and the possibility of loss, a trope given substance in the reflections of Donald MacKinnon who argued that our propensity to read the Jesus narrative from the resurrection backward has led us to pay insufficient attention both to the risk Jesus was taking, and to the price the world has paid for his choice: to devalue "the sheer waste, the reality of Christ's failure."[46] In particular, MacKinnon draws attention the consequence of Christ's freely made decision to die at the hand of the Jews which resulted in centuries of anti-Semitic violence culminating eventually in the holocaust - whether or not Jesus knew the consequences of his choice, he took the risk and acted to challenge the temple authorities. MacKinnon sees moral courage in this choice to act, and suggests that, for us, scrupulosity may lead to moral failure.

The theme of alienation and Jesus' solidarity with the human experience of separation from God is explored in the work of Hans Urs Von Balthasar. Jesus experiences complete solidarity with his lost brothers and sisters at the moment of abandonment on the cross. For Von Balthasar this solidarity is taken to the point where it is shared even with those who are entirely cast away from the presence of God and Christ experiences complete separation from his Father alongside the damned in Hell.[47]

---

[45] Gall, 'Toward a Tragic Theology: the piety of thought in Heidegger and Tragedy', 28.
[46] DM Mackinnon, *The Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 103.
[47] Hans Urs von Balthasar and Aidan Nichols, *Mysterium Paschale : the mystery of Easter*, Ressourcement: retrieval & renewal in Catholic thought (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

Christ's tragedy arises from his identification with the tragedy of human life characterised by disconnection, discontinuity and fragmentation. Sutherland insists that God in Christ participates in *Being* with all its connotations of choice, of risk and loss, together with its reality of suffering. Tragedy is characterised by the failure to achieve reconciliation. And, Sutherland argues, *if* this is a valid vision of life it *cannot* be reconciled with traditional Christian theodicy, by which he means something close to Ricoeur's "ethical theology". Our view of salvation must be reformulated to focus not on the empty grave, but on the closed one, and not on the resurrection but on the cross, on the uncertainty which lives in hope but not in confidence. [48]

[48] Sutherland, 'Christianity and Tragedy', 166.

The Parables as a Tragic Form

In the previous chapter we observed how some parables can be read as a comic form, in which the profane character of ordinary life is transformed by the extravagance and hyperbole of God's generosity. We've also seen how the intertextual relationship between the Jesus narrative and the parables and sayings is signified by the phrase; "the kingdom of God is like…" which disrupts grammatical convention to open up a new world of possibility, so that "the Kingdom of God is not what parables tell about, but what happens in parables".[49]

The parables show us not only the shocking generosity and extravagance of God, but also the surprising violence of the world. We cannot fail to be horrified by the behaviour of the vineyard workers who murder their employer's son, or shaken by the rapid expulsion of the wedding guest who has arrived for the party wearing the wrong clothes.[50] The ordinariness of human experience, which draws us in to the comic parables, may unsettle us in the tragic parables. It is possible that the parables which describe such summary justice alert us to a question: does God really work like this? Dan Otto Via suggests that just as the comic parables portray the experience of the resurrection life, the tragic parables display its opposite - the consequences of rejecting the invitation.[51] They prepare us to understand that the summary justice exacted on Jesus could not have been the consequence of divine will but only of human vindictiveness.

The tragic parables in particular, draw power from the equivalence that we recognise between the shape of the parabolic stories and the trajectory of the narrative in which they are embedded. We recognise that both the parables and the Jesus narrative work against our initial expectations. Just as we cannot believe that the husbandmen will murder the vineyard owner's son, the disciples could not believe that the Messiah will suffer and die. In this sequence, we

[49] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 165.
[50] Via lists the tragic parables as: The parable of the talents (Mtt 25:14-30), the parable of the ten maidens (Mtt 25:1-13), the parable of the wedding garment (Mtt 22:11-14), the parable of the wicked tenants (Mk 12:1-9) and the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mtt 18:23-35). Via, *The Parables*.
[51] Via, *The Parables*, p. 205.

recognise the relationship not only between Jesus and the vineyard owner's son, but also between ourselves and the first hearers of the word.

Ricoeur draws heavily on the work of Greimas, Marin and Almeida to show how the structure of the parables achieves this effect. He describes how, in both the parable of the wicked husbandmen and the parable of the sower, the relationship between death and new life is expressed in the relationship between the diminishing and death of one figure, and the rise and new life of another. In the first, the dead son's body is sent back to his father instead of the fruits of the vineyard – they are presented as equivalents. In the second the death of the seed leads to an abundance of fruit. Ricoeur suggests that we see similar equivalence or isomorphism in the encompassing narrative: while the body of Jesus moves towards torture and eventual death, people begin to recognise who he truly is and his ministry bears ever more fruit. Ricoeur concludes, "The encompassing narrative and the embedded narratives seem to say together that the life of the world occurs through the death of the body."[52] The two narratives penetrate each other, so that we come to understand the parables as emblematic of the trajectory of the life of Jesus and to see the death of Jesus as offering the possibility of new life.

This idea is not original to Ricoeur; we find it in the writings of Robert Funk, Leander Keck and Sallie McFague. Each repeats that "Jesus is the parable of God."[53] Not only does Jesus communicate the Kingdom through parables, but his life is an enacted parable in which the poetic world of the Kingdom is realised.[54] The paradigmatic goal of the parables is not to teach or impart concepts about the Kingdom, but to make it possible for people to respond to the Kingdom by inhabiting it, by incorporating its narrative into their own life narratives.

---

[52] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 163.
[53] Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 78. "Jesus concentrated on parabolic speech because he himself was a parabolic referent of the kingdom of God."Leander Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 244.
[54] A point first made by Origen who referred to Jesus as the *auto-basileia* in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, *Patrologia Graeca XIII* (Paris: Biblothecae Caleri Universe, 1862), p. 1197.

Ricoeur suggests that Jesus represents a new and unique figure in the cycle of myth. While Adam represented the justly exiled sinner; a figure we might find mirrored in the *culpable* tragic heroes Creon, or Macbeth, and Job represented the innocent victim; the figure mirrored in Oedipus or Cordelia, both are implicated in the relationship between actors and subjects, oppressors and victims, existing in mutually dependent or interdependent relationships. Ricoeur suggests that a third figure is needed: one who can overcome the contradiction between culpability and innocence, between freedom and captivity, and can act to redeem the evil that is committed. This is the figure of the "suffering servant", the figure of the Christ. Whereas in the juridical and penal view of life guilt has to provide the reason for suffering, the suffering of the innocent breaks the schema of retribution. This, says Ricoeur, is why the tragedy of the "suffering servant" is beyond the Greek tragedy of the hero.[55]

Christ and Tragedy

Ricoeur reminds us that Christ is not complicit in his own suffering, except in so far as he identifies with humanity. In his self-emptying he becomes vulnerable and takes on the tragedy of human existence. Similarly, Christ is not complicit in the suffering of others, but in so far as he identifies with humanity he becomes responsible for suffering. What is unique is that this identification enables him to redeem suffering, perhaps to redeem tragedy – though we must be careful not to descend to a kind of banal negation of suffering here. It is God's identification with the tragic as Christ takes it unto himself that ensures that tragedy does not have the last word.

Before we are tempted to further speculation on the suffering of Christ, perhaps we should remain with the spectacle for a period. It may be timely to remember that prior to the flowering of Greek tragedy as enacted theodicy it existed as a form of Dionysian ritual with close associations to ritual sacrifice, including the killing of the *pharmakos*, the slave or prisoner kept for this specific purpose. Christopher Booker provides an elegant summary;

[55] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 323-325.

> *One of the subtler clues to the meaning of the tragic pattern lies in the origins of the word 'tragedy' itself, coming as it does from the Greek ,* τραγως *'goat'. It is derived from the ancient ritual practice of the 'scapegoat', whereby a goat or some other creature could be sacrificed to restore health to the community. The animal (or human) scapegoat was regarded as symbolically carrying the sins of the tribe; with the idea that, in its death, those sins were purged and the tribe brought back to wholeness. The pattern this re-enacted was precisely that we see at the end of a tragedy, where a whole community has been cast into shadow by the darkness emanating from the central figure. The removal of that source of darkness brings the community back in to the light.*[56]

The connection between the sacrifice of the scapegoat and the death of Jesus has been extensively explored by René Girard.[57] Girard stresses that the effectiveness of sacrificial substitution depends on its ability to conceal the displacement on which the act is based, while never losing sight of the original object or ceasing to be aware of the act of transference from that object to the surrogate victim.[58] We must both know that the victim is innocent and not know this at the same time. We must know the identity of the victim and not know at the same time. In making a connection between the sacrificial victim and the tragic hero we must not lose sight of the fact that both are acting as representatives of the community.

Similarly, in writing about the best kind of tragedy, Aristotle tells us that the victim should be killed by someone to whom they are tied by bonds of affection and loyalty, without the assassin knowing the truth of the victim's identity. When the victim's identity is discovered, the experience of catharsis is heightened by the surprise and horror of the situation.

---

[56] Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, p. 191.

[57] This is not uncontested theology, and it should be acknowledged that Girard's theory of atonement is criticised for lacking Biblical substance, and for depending on a false anthropology of sacrifice. However, in this case I think it can be argued that Girard draws attention to Christ's role as victim and the similar tropes found in the biblical narrative and Greek tragedy even if we do not follow his mimetic theory in its entirety.

[58] René Girard, "Sacrifice as Sacral Violence and Substitution" in René Girard and J. G. Williams, *The Girard Reader*, A Crossroad Herder book. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996)., p. 75

Aristotle lists the ways in which the victim may be finally recognised: by an aspect of their physical appearance such as a scar; by the repetition of a familiar gesture; or when the hero calls to mind something said in the past.[59] The resurrection accounts present each of these tropes of recognition, indicating that, in the terms of Greek tragedy, we should identify Jesus not as the hero but the victim. His death is not the result of his own frailty, hubris or sin, but the result of the frailty, hubris and sin of the rest of humanity. The community made him a scapegoat and killed him. Only after his resurrection did they realise the true identity of the man they had killed. Jesus the victim, the former friend, is recognised by his scarred hands, in the familiar action of breaking bread, and when the meaning of his death is expounded in the scriptures on the road to Emmaus.[60]

I want to suggest that we are in the grips of something Aristotelian here, of a tragedy in which the victim is complicit, but not responsible. The clue to this lies, once again, in understanding the role of sacrifice. The Greeks sacrificed in order to appease the gods and if we were to assume that the death of Jesus was this kind of sacrifice we would indeed be enthralled by a terrible theodicy: how could such a sacrifice be justified? But if, as Girard insists, God has nothing to do with sacrifice then it is a purely human institution. God does not desire violence. The rituals of sacrifice are an expression of human sin, violence and rivalry. Jesus does not sin, but human sin is transferred on to him through the scapegoating mechanism. He dies in order that there should be no more sacrifice, not in obedience to "an absurd sacrificial order."[61]

I am aware of only one extensive reference to Girard by Ricoeur, in a paper written in 2001 which remained unpublished in English until 2010.[62] In this paper Ricoeur gives an account of Girard's mimetic theory which he finds "strong" concerning the moment of the display of religious violence. However, he finds a missing link in Girard's account of mimetic rivalry,

[59] Aristotle, *Poetics*. part XVI
[60] John 20:24-28, Luke 24:30-31, Luke 24:32
[61] René Girard, "The Nonsacrificial Death of Christ" in Girard and Williams, *The Girard reader*, p. 187.
[62] Paul Ricoeur, "Religious Belief: The Difficult Path of the Religious" translated by Boyd Blundell in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 27-40.

asking, " Over *what* is there mimetic rivalry in religion?"[63] Ricoeur's speculation on this topic contributes to the later argument of this chapter. He suggests that mimetic rivalry in the religious sphere competes over the "creative source of the release of goodness" and that violence arises from "the pretension to monopolize the source, to appropriate it in rivalry with other recipients of the source's fundamental generosity."[64] This rivalry exists because the religious never exists except in religion, which like all cultural artefacts - language, culture, political science – is subject to the inexorable law of plurality, dispersion and confusion.

Ricoeur associates this creative source with Schelling's "groundless ground", but stresses more its overflowing inexhaustibility. It is an abundant source, characterised by the economy of gift. In trying to contain the source, religious communities are driven not only to exclude people, but, perhaps worse, to "compel them to come in."[65] These themes are tied together in a few notes on the death of Jesus reproduced in *Living Up To Death*, where Ricoeur reflects that the death of Jesus, the suffering servant, is a death for others, but is not "dubious sacrificial theology in terms of a substituted victim."[66] Rather, Jesus gives his life as an act of service, "tied to the gift of life, destiny and obedience at one time."[67]

[63] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 34.
[64] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 35.
[65] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 35-36.
[66] Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, p. 53.
[67] Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, p. 54.

Tragedy, the Divine Economy and the Gift of Pardon

In the previous chapter I suggested that the virtue which arises from the comic parables is the virtue of hope. Here, I offer the possibility that the virtue which flows from the tragic narrative of Jesus is the virtue of forgiveness. Perhaps we can even go so far as to say that this is the redemptive character of the action expressed by the third figure, the "suffering servant". It is forgiveness that breaks the cycle of violence, exemplifying the unconditional love of God in Jesus.

Ricoeur explored the theme of forgiveness in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Although he was concerned primarily in this book with practical, historical and political issues, he comments that emphasis on the place of forgiveness in history has obscured the difficulty of true forgiveness. He considers the gap between the "height" and "depth" of the protagonists: between the request for forgiveness from the offender or aggressor and the offer of forgiveness from the victim. When we ignore the distance between them, Ricoeur argues, we too quickly assimilate forgiveness into an exchange economy defined by reciprocity, where forgiveness is conditional on a display of contrition, or indeed the contrition dependent on the expectation of forgiveness.[68]

By contrast, Ricoeur considers forgiveness as a free gift, given without expectation of return, and recognises the complete asymmetry between the one who gives and the one who receives. The death of Jesus, which might have been misunderstood as the outcome of divine justice, turns out to be an act of divine love. However, we must be careful not to repeat the error of which we accused others in a previous chapter. Ricoeur does not imply that the metaethical character of love tied to the economy of the gift is a denial of either common morality or practical wisdom.[69] It may be helpful to bear this in mind as we consider what he says about the relationship between the logic of equivalence, which informs our structures of justice and morality, and the logic of abundance, expressed in divine grace.

[68] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 478-479.
[69] See Ch 6 above, and Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 25.

In his essay, "The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God*"* Ricoeur contrasts human logic with divine logic.[70] Human logic is the logic of equivalence, associated in the writing of St Paul with sin, law and death. Divine logic is the logic of justification, grace and life. It is the logic of abundance we have already recognised in the parables, the eschatological sayings and proverbs. The contrast between them is found not only in the writings of Paul, but later in Augustine and Luther.

As I suggested in Chapter Six, it can be tempting to associate justice and wisdom with Old Testament values, or even natural law, and to presume that the teaching of Jesus supersedes them. While Ricoeur makes no reference to Sanders' reappraisal of the Pauline letters,[71] he is too biblically astute to read Romans in such a simplistic way. Ricoeur stresses the inter-relationship between the golden rule and the love command, and Jesus himself tells us that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. The divine economy does not offer a new rule, Ricoeur suggests, but rather a pattern of behaviour, which helps us to avoid the scrupulosity and desire for vengeance which can mar our system of justice. The logic of God is the "how much more" than justice to which Paul so often refers: "How much more the grace of God and the gift conferred by the grace of one man Jesus Christ have abounded."[72]

Forgiveness which is not dependent on reciprocity is an expression of love beyond the bounds of justice; indeed it may be the characteristic embodiment of Christian love which Ricoeur could not identify. Although the radical commandment to love your enemy unconditionally is an "impossible commandment", it matches the height of the spirit of forgiveness. Most importantly it unties the bonds which paralyse the guilty and restore the capacity for action.

[70]Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 279-283.
[71] See for example, Sanders, E. P., *Paul, the law, and the Jewish people* (London: SCM Press, 1985)
[72] "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many." Romans 5:15, NRSV

Ricoeur writes:

> *Under the sign of forgiveness, the guilty person is to be considered capable of something other than his offenses and his faults. He is held to be restored to his capacity for acting, and action restored to its capacity for continuing. […] finally this restored capacity is enlisted by promising as it projects action towards the future. The formula for this liberating word, reduced to the bareness of its actions, would be: you are better than your actions*.[73]

For Ricoeur, when speculation fails – or reaches a moment of paralysing doubt - the response must be action. He argues that only action will "render the aporia productive" because it is "the continuation in another plane of thought's interminable work."[74] To act is to fight against evil, to stand against the forces of nihilism. Ricoeur knows that action does not preclude suffering, but stresses the importance of suffering in the confident knowledge that God has nothing to do with it. He suggests that this position is arrived at through the work of mourning, understood in Freudian terms as the work needed to achieve a detachment from loss that enables us to make new commitments. Ricoeur envisages a cathartic process, whereby the experience of guilt and blame is distinguished from religious feelings, lament turns to complaint and then to the recognition that God is not the cause of suffering.[75]

Ricoeur recognises that there is a danger that this route returns the victim to a place of self-accusation or self-destruction, but remains sharply focussed on the need to renounce the desire to be spared suffering, or the desire to avoid death. "To love God for nought is to escape completely the cycle of retribution to which the lamentation still remains captive, so long as the victim bemoans the injustice of his or her fate."[76]

---

[73] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 493.
[74] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 258.
[75] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, pp. 260-261. This is recognisably the same movement as described as the cycle of the myths in *The Symbolism of Evil.*
[76] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 261.

Forgiveness and Community: Walking away…

Up to this point, my focus has been on the narrative of Jesus and its relationship to tragedy which reveals the economy of gift revealed in the significant gift of pardon or forgiveness. Forgiveness is not only a virtue learned and practiced by individuals, but also by communities. Ricoeur refers in his writings to the experience of South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation process, but also to the trend in the latter part of the twentieth century for governments to seek forgiveness for the aggressive behaviour of their national predecessors, to seek atonement for slavery and other colonial misdemeanours.

It is a cliché to refer to the church as a community of the forgiven, but I want to finish by considering what we learn about narrative identity as members of that community. The narrative dimension and the impropriety of speculation in the face of the tragic both act to deny real closure at the end of the drama. For Ricoeur tragedy contains within itself a movement towards the end of the tragic.[77] However, it is only through our participation in suffering that we realise this. It is only when we join the chorus to express our pity and fear as participants in the myth that we come to full understanding. "In truth, salvation, in the tragic vision, is not outside the tragic, but within it […] suffering for the sake of understanding."[78] The tragic spectacle has the power to purify, not the victim, but the audience given voice by the chorus, "One must become a member of the chorus in order to yield himself to the feelings which are specifically those of tragic reconciliation."[79] The reconciliation of which Ricoeur writes is not the reconciliation of forgiveness or resolution, but only that of acceptance, of temporarily "washing away the stains of defilement", and "calming the conscience."[80]

In Chapter Three I suggested that communal narratives offer a narrative identity to those who find it hard to articulate their own lives. But for the communal narrative to be an ethical one, it must offer the promise of the good life to those who lack narrative capacity: to the vulnerable

[77] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 227-228.
[78] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 229.
[79] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 231.
[80] Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 230.

and the powerless. To quote Helen Buss, it must answer the problem for the one who cannot ask "Who am I?" but only "How can I become a person, that *notwithstanding* my disempowerment and disability, you can count on me to enable others?"[81]

The tragic narrative gives a particular role to the victim and recognises their importance in the life of the community. The Jesus story affirms that this world is not disconnected from the world of suffering, but transforms suffering. Tragedy affirms the fallen, fallible nature of humanity, it does not let us ignore or deny our failure, but it does allow us to walk away from it, albeit as sadder but wiser people. Narrative does not lose its importance in the shaping of identity, but gains an ethical dimension when it offers a place to those who do not exhibit narrative competence.

This tragic sensibility offers a world which can be inhabited – it is a world in which people survive suffering and are capable of acting. Through the communal narrative individuals have new worlds placed before them, but the autonomy of the individual to choose whether to inhabit this world is preserved. While poetics affirms the redeemed nature of humanity, it does not let us ignore our creatureliness or dependence on God, but it helps us to see these gifts as affirmative, generously given so that we have the resources to behave as moral creatures within the constraints of our human frailty.

[81] Buss, Helen M. "Antigone, Psyche and the Ethics of Female Selfhood" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall, p. 71.

CHAPTER NINE: Conclusions

> *Sin and grace, absence and presence, tragedy and comedy, they divide the world between them and where they meet head on, the Gospel happens.*[1]

Ricoeur spent seventy years exploring the nature of selfhood within the dialectic space between Cartesian confidence and Nietzschean despair. By the very nature of his methodology, he was destined never to solve the problem but he remained determined to keep the tension between dialectic poles from breaking for as long as possible. He never shied away from the mysteries of life and courageously faced the limits of philosophical enquiry. When he turned from what can be known, to what remains a mystery, Ricoeur demonstrates both honesty and humility, for him, faith is never more than a risk or a wager.

Some of his critics have found his lack of religious certainty frustrating, whereas I find, in his hermeneutic theology, a methodology which celebrates the richness of human creativity and the joy of religious response while never denying the reality of human fallibility or fault. Perhaps for this reason, he is a philosopher and theologian who offers a great deal to Anglicans desiring to tread the *Via Media*: approaching scripture with the utmost seriousness but offering resources which can equally be valuable in interpreting liturgical and sacramental responses to God.

Ricoeur's paradigm of narrative identity has been widely accepted in a variety of fields and provides a robust account which can contribute to pastoral theology.[2] His "little ethic" demonstrates that duty and virtue must contribute to the search for the good life, and we have seen how a parallel trajectory might exist within the natural theology or commonsense wisdom

[1] Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, p. 71.
[2] Heather Walton Elaine Graham, Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005), pp. 63-67. Richard Worsley, 'Narratives and Lively Metaphors: Hermeneutics as a way of listening', *in preparation,* 2011), Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 566-575.

of the biblical texts. But we have also seen how there is a mystery at the heart of selfhood where the inner voice has a quality of otherness, the source of which we cannot identify within the limits of reason alone. If we tentatively wager that the inner voice is illuminated by the divine, or participates in the Christ, it is not at all clear what impact this has on ethical or moral behaviour. Ricoeur argues that we are in the realm of metaethics where love belongs to the economy of gift and the naming of God.[3] The richness of these symbols demands interpretation rather than speculation and I have suggested that in order to interpret them we return to the biblical texts from which these symbols are drawn.

These texts offer us a view of fallible and capable men and women in accounts of tragic wisdom and comic hope. In the story of Job and the parables of descent, the limits of human wisdom are revealed. We are not in control of our lives and our restless yearning after the good life, wealth, security and justice are undermined when we encounter the all encompassing good, richness and justice of God on whom we depend for our very being. In the parables of ascent and the hyperbolic sayings and teaching about the Kingdom we are offered the possibility of a renewed future in which we can participate despite our human limitations and we are enabled to see those limitations as comic foolishness – which can at the very least raise a wry smile.

Tragic and comic dimensions of human life are united in the person of Christ, who redeems the tragic cost of human fault through his capacity for forgiveness and reveals the comic possibility of human capability in the Kingdom. The "Christic Symbol" of "the man pleasing to God who gives his life for his friends" is both the tragic victim of human fallibility and the expression of God's super-abundant love.[4] The wisdom of Christ is not only expressed in his teaching: interpretation of the law which astounds the teachers in the temple, and interpretation of the prophets which amazes the disciples on the road to Emmaus, but in praxis. In his life, Jesus prepares the way for a new wisdom "beyond its previous conceptions" in the breaking of his body and the breaking of bread. In his actions, Jesus demonstrates the new wisdom, which

[3] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 25.
[4] Paul Ricoeur, "Religious Belief: The Difficult Path of the Religious" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 29.

will be embodied in the praxis which defines the church: "In community life, and in relation to the risen Jesus, in continuity with the wisdom seen in the life and death of Jesus."[5]

Incorporation into this life is a gradual process. There is no Ricoeurian account of conversion offering a conventional theological description of grace or the action of the Spirit. Although he writes about the existential challenge we encounter in biblical texts, it seems to me to be clear that for Ricoeur this is not a single experience, but a repeated encounter inviting us to confirm our preparedness to risk our lives on this possibility at every turn. The constant dimension is not tied to human experience, but to the limit expression which orientates religious identity. Both forgiveness and hope are phenomena in human experience which are open to interpretation and have both natural and supernatural dimensions. Both are tied to the eschatological symbol of the Kingdom. In the dialectic between capability and fallibility, eschatology offers a restored capacity to fallen humanity which occasionally erupts into the present, tied up with the possibility of pardon which affirms that despite our disability, past wrongdoing or indifference we are capable of something better. Hope and forgiveness enable people to act creatively in pursuit of the good life despite the limitations of human selfhood. Thus, tied to the naming of God they are given a metaethical dimension realised in contingent human lives as moral creativity.

In taking each of these steps we ought to be mindful of the need for a proper hermeneutic of suspicion and some critical responses have been offered along the way.

[5] Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 37.

Living in Two Worlds: The Believing Greek

Human life is always lived in dialectical tension and Ricoeur's philosophy and theology repeatedly show both that the dialectic is necessary and that the poles cannot be conflated or synthesised this side of the eschaton. Ricoeur describes the Christian as the "third man" who is neither Jew nor Greek, but a "believing Greek" who mediates philosophical reflection with attention to the scriptures.[6] This mediation is grounded in the hermeneutic task, interpreting the word which for Ricoeur constitutes existence as we understand it. [7] The advantage of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is that they allow us to inhabit both worlds and ought to help to avoid an "insider" mentality of uncritical acceptance. We ought briefly to consider the implications of this dialectic for the relationship between philosophy and theology in Ricoeur's thought. Although there are many theologians who attempt to read Ricoeur as a neo-Barthian, I do not find this a satisfactory approach. Firstly, because Ricoeur is always willing to show that faith is reasonable and can be subject to hermeneutic practices including suspicion, explanation and critique. Secondly, because he does not really employ a "two worlds" moral theology, although it can sometimes appear to be the case. Rather, he is a mediator in all things, and despite his stated desire to keep the two fields of study distinct, as we have seen in this thesis there are concepts which migrate – particularly from philosophy to theology.

Schweiker carefully reminds us that "A mediating theology notes that God and Christian claims about God are not the same."[8] Schweiker's description of mediating theology suggests that it mediates between the two distinct activities: believing and thinking, and specifically between thinking about the human effort to be and faith in the living God. He sees this as "an

---

[6] *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, ed. by Scott Davidson, (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 52.

[7] He wrote, "In the end, I do not know what man is. My confession to myself is that man is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken by man than spoken to man. Finally, what constitutes our answer to the apology of Necessity and resignation is the faith that man is founded, at the heart of his mythicopoetic power, by a creative word. Is not The Good News the instigation of the possibility of man by a creative word?"Paul Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. by Reagan and Stewart, pp. 237-238.

[8] William Schweiker, "Ricoeur and Theology" in *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, ed. by Davidson, p. 48.

act of reconciliation grounded in an originary assurance of acceptance by God in Christ made present in the Spirit that transforms what Ricoeur calls the human attestation of the self and an originary affirmation of being."[9] However, it is questionable whether Schweiker's description is adequate and allows Ricoeur to locate originary affirmation in the world of secular philosophy *and* in the faith world characterised by summons or reconciliation, while keeping a proper dialectic tension between them. Other mediating theologians cited by Schweiker; Schleiermacher, Tillich, Rahner and Tracy, are quicker to locate originary affirmation in divine self-affirmation. Tillich, for example, follows Spinoza in describing self-affirmation as "The power whereby each particular thing, and consequently man, preserves his being in the power of God."[10] We have seen how reluctant Ricoeur is to follow Spinoza in identifying the ground of being with God. As always, when considering the relationship between Ricoeur's faith and his philosophical enquiry we need to be very wary of the difference between dialectic tension and mediation, conflation, or synthesis.

[9] *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, ed. by Davidson, pp. 50-51.
[10] Spinoza cited Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 33.

The Self: Fallible and Capable, Sinful and Redeemed

If we return to the image of the man looking at himself in the shaving mirror, what has Ricoeur taught us? That we are both *idem* and *ipse,* constant and changing, with lives held together and given meaning by narrative threads. As characters in narratives we both act and suffer, since statements and actions imply others, and so we discover that narratives and lives have moral implications. Being longs for self-esteem which is tried through the medium of attestation and this is not only a personal quest but a communal one, shaped by cultural narratives in which we collectively seek the good life moderated by duty and moral norms.

This confident account is moderated by the dialectic between freedom and constraint. Selves are limited by bodily constraints, by unconscious desires and internalised forces, by temporality and by capacity. Selves are limited by cultural, structural and political forces. All these things constrain the ability to narrate freely and, if we accept Ricoeur's premise that narrative identity is *the* nature of human being, to reach our full potential as humans. This account of human existence can be seen as a mediation between capability and fallibility, and to deny this results in the evil lie of premature synthesis.

For the religious person, capability and fallibility are experienced as freedom and sin. Impotence is experienced in all aspects of life, summed up in the phenomenon of the bad or captive will, in which the self feels "bound" by itself, these are the experiences which religion addresses through the symbols of evil and guilt.[11] However, the dark side of human existence is only one aspect of the "religious problematic" which also address us through experiences of abundance. Ricoeur constantly balances Kant's phrases, "predisposition to good" and "propensity to evil" by restating the claim, made first in *Fallible Man*, that "radical as this evil is, it will never by as originary as the destination of the good."[12] The Kantian architectonic, which in *Oneself as Another* moved from the individual, to the other, to the community, is

[11] Paul Ricoeur, "Religious Belief: The Difficult Path of the Religious" Published in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 27-40.
[12] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 29.

reflected in an articulation of religious phenomena, from symbol to testimony to community which results in religious belief understood as belonging to a community of practice. Through symbol, testimony and community, the core of goodness is delivered from the bonds that hold it captive.[13]

These phenomena; symbol, testimony and community, provide the motivation which enables the autonomous self to obey moral rules. This is where religion addresses the "delicate junction" between freedom and constraint, between "predisposition to good" and "propensity to evil". Such motivation is provided through "religious" concepts such as shame, indignations, the sublime, admiration, veneration and so on. Ricoeur suggests that the "courage to be" – that is acting in spite of the experience of bondage, and acting according to the known good - is a religious impulse which he connects to the supraethical value of love.

Community plays a positive role in the development of narrative identity by revealing the true nature of self-affirmation. If we take Ricoeur's approach, the development of narrative identity is a project which is necessary to human being, but in encountering the summons of the divine confidence in this project is undermined because it is revealed to be not entirely under our own control or free will. Ricoeur agrees with Tillich that self-affirmation is not an isolated act of the ego, but participation in a universal act. Self-affirmation is not affirmation of the self, but of selves or the Self, and its narrative is never purely personal. When selves are summoned, whether prophets or saints, they participate in the universal story which is, in this case, the divine story. They become constituted by that which they have interpreted, to use Ricoeur's terms. However, in contrast perhaps to Rahner's paradigm which suggests that all participation in goodness is founded in Christ, albeit anonymously, Ricoeur implies that in our world this sharing in the narrative, or reflection of the face of the divine, is only partial.

[13] *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 30.

Its fullness is only found in Christ, the symbolic expression of the fully human, fully divine, individual. It is a paradoxical act in which one is accepted by that which transcends the individual, the experience of the acceptance of the unacceptable, of the transforming communion with the divine.[14]

[14] Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, p. 161.

Two Economies

Let us then turn from the kind of individuals who live in two worlds, to the nature of those worlds: to the economies of scarcity and the economy of abundance or gift. These economies are reflected in the parables and in the narrative of Jesus. Tragedy operates on the assumption that we live in an economy of scarcity, that there are insufficient goods and that our incapacity to allocate them justly leads to conflict and suffering. The parables often begin with a situation that looks like the same economy of scarcity, not enough food, jobs or status, but Jesus shows how in the Kingdom the economy is one of abundance, there is more than enough for everyone – the challenge for those who hear is firstly to believe, and secondly to behave as it is was true, i.e. in a spirit of generosity not competition.

Such parallel economies can be seen at work in the contrast between the stories which embody Aristotelian virtue and those embodying Christian virtue. Sam Wells suggests that the nature of heroic stories is that they are located in the world of limited resources, where conflicts inevitably arise – whether over the land, the girl, or the crown. In such economies, the victory brings its reward. But the tales of the saints are located in the economy of gift because love, joy and peace are not constrained by scarcity, and the reward which is sought is not earned by the saint but a gift of God's graceful generosity. He points out that while heroes often make the decisive intervention in a moment of crisis, saints are often invisible – they are on the periphery of stories that are really about God. The story of the hero is told in order to celebrate his or her qualities, achievements or bravery. By contrast the story of the saint is told only to celebrate faith. The saints expect to fail by the world's standards because such failure unites them with the narrative of Jesus, integrating them into the cycle of repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration that Christians call "the new creation". While the hero stands alone against the world, the saints are never alone but are part of the community of the faithful.[15]

[15] Wells, *Improvisation*, pp. 43-44.

Gift and the Kingdom

In the body of this thesis I have considered Ricoeur's account of the economy of gift somewhat uncritically, but it ought to be placed in the context of recent critique, particularly in the work of John Milbank.[16] Very briefly, Milbank argues that most accounts which equate life in the Spirit, grace, reconciliation or faith as gift, result in a passive weakened anthropology. It has been argued that he sets up the heroes of the reformation as the straw men in his argument, but we should note that he is equally dismissive of Jean Luc Marion in this regard.[17] Milbank's solution is to suggest that there is a mutual gift giving at the heart of the Trinity, in which we participate. The economy of gift thus becomes a three way movement, in which love is given to us by God and we are bound to give it to our fellow creatures. This creates an exchange which is not reciprocal and which respects the asymmetry of the relationship between God and creation, but restores human capacity for active response. Milbank's use of the language of participation, drawing on Newman's theology of grace, restores dynamic movement to human participants by locating it within the divine life.

The root of the problem lies in our understanding of the relationship between justification, the key event seen by the reformers as God's once and for all acceptance of the individual, and sanctification, the transformative journey towards saintliness. As I've suggested in this thesis, despite Ricoeur's protestant roots (and repeated attempts to colonise his thought by neo-Barthians and others from the American reform traditions), his approach to the question of conversion and discipleship is much more nuanced, and I would suggest, quite sympathetic to an Irenean theology of sanctification because of his insistence on human autonomy and thus on continuing freedom to respond.

Wall suggests that when Ricoeur uses the language of gift he is describing the introduction of a possibility or capacity which must be given meaning by human activity. "Although we *receive*

[16] John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic', *Modern Theology,* 11, no. 1 (1995).
[17] For a critical response, see for example, J. Todd Billings, 'John Milbank's Theology of the "Gift" and Calvin's Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison.', *Modern Theology,* 21, no. 1 (2005).

this gift through the passivity of faith, the gift itself received is nothing more than our own freedom *to give* – in this a case to give meaning to our own fallen existences." [18] While it may seem as if Ricoeur agrees in part with Barth's conception of the "Wholly Otherness of God" he insists that the meaning of the divine gift is ultimately given by the human. Wall suggests that Ricoeur may be moving towards a conception of faith within a movement of grace i.e. a relationship between something which is given and something which is a response freely made. [19] "Ricoeur is in a sense taking up a classical notion of grace as something that in being received also obliges the receiver to fulfil overflowingly in the world."[20] This is reinforced by Ricoeur's sense of mutual obligation within the unity of creation, "A Franciscan knowledge of necessity: I am "with" necessity "among creatures."[21]

As we might expect, there is little evidence of Ricoeur addressing the specific doctrinal questions inherent in this problem. However, he makes the link between gift and service, not only as shown between creatures, but specifically within the Christian tradition. Writing, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Ricoeur makes the link between death-rebirth in the other and service as gift of life, expressed in the Eucharist. In the Last Supper, the death of Jesus and the sharing of gifts are united, "In the sharing of the meal that joins the man of death to the multitude of survivors reunited in the ecclesia."[22]

This final reflection helps us to address a further aporia which is whether we should understand summoned *selfhood* as a gift or a project. When Ricoeur suggests that selfhood has to be located in the category of symbol, inhabiting the liminal territory between *bios* and *logos* he offers us the possibility that it is *both* a gift and a project. In both instances, the self is not a given good, but rather "the symbol of a promised good" in which the themes of originary affirmation (creation, torah, salvation and hope) are embodied. [23] Christian virtue ethics

[18] Wall, *Moral Creativity,* p. 89
[19] Wall, *Moral Creativity,* p. 31
[20] Wall, *Moral Creativity,* p. 117
[21] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 481.
[22] Ricoeur, *Living Up To Death*, p. 55.
[23] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 59.William Schweiker, "Imagination, Violence and Hope: A Theological Response to Ricoeur's Moral Philosophy" in Klemm and Schweiker, *Meaning in Texts and Actions*, p. 217.

assume that we strive towards a good, the realisation of which must to some extent depend on human desire and will through the practice of good habits. Barth is suspicious of virtue for this reason and argues that *agape* is inextricably linked with faith as a *new* action appropriating the single act of God's grace. Repetition is dependent on grace which is "new every morning" and not on growth or development to which the person themselves contributes.[24] It is possible that Ricoeur's positive view of virtue ethics is partly tied to his early pietistic upbringing, but more likely that he takes a more nuanced view of the will which sees both resistance to and acceptance of the gift of grace or goodness as actions lying within human capacity.

The next challenge to this account is offered by those whose capacity is limited such that they cannot narrate for themselves.

[24] Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 207-256.

Community and the Responsibility to Narrate

I highlighted in an earlier chapter some of the problems which arise from Ricoeur's account of narrative identity. The problem associated with incompetent narrators is both a secular and a religious problem, as we have seen that the capacity to narrate is both a condition of selfhood and a condition for the summoned self. The inability to shape or communicate narrative identity may have serious outcomes. Holstein and Gubrium reflect, "This is not merely a playful exercise. In certain societies, our own included, the self is a widely recognized, if not deadly serious, set of language games."[25] Our ability to play this game can make the difference between being imprisoned or free, sectioned under the mental health act or living at home, in work or unemployed, baptised or not. Indeed, if, as Ricoeur suggests, we accept that narrative is a condition of selfhood, then we may ask what the consequences of this proposal are for those who are unable to narrate an identity. [26]

In church praxis there is an expectation that particular narratives contribute to a Christian identity whose milestones are then marked in rites of baptism, marriage and ordination. This expectation is challenged when we are faced with individuals who cannot easily narrate their life stories or faith journeys. In my own pastoral practice I have been challenged for example by a middle aged lady seeking baptism who was quite unable to narrate her life story and could only relate a series of chaotic episodes, failed relationships and interrupted attempts to make sense of her surroundings; and by bereaved families struggling to form a narrative from the life of a deceased relative, who instead offering a series of events without any sense of cause or effect. The challenge for the practitioner in this case, is to co-create a narrative which not only does justice to the reality of the lived experience but relates it to the wider Christian narrative. This can be seen either as an act of inappropriate colonisation or as an act of hospitality. It is a process fraught with difficulty, but one which is absolutely necessary within Ricoeur's paradigm if those who cannot narrate are to be included among those considered as "selves". For Ricoeur it is matter of recognising that people in these vulnerable categories have had their

[25] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live By*, p. 70.
[26] McCarthy, *Dennett and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self.*

capacity prevented or restricted and it is capacity which demands dignity, he says: "Capacity, or potency retains the status of a task, a promise, a solicitation towards which one can attest by responding to their 'right' to liberty and recognition, their *appetitus* for expression, their *conatus* towards a good life."[27] The importance of collective narrative is that it attributes selfhood to the incompetent narrator and places them within the ethical framework of the community. This process acts to prevent the communal ethic becoming purely utilitarian in its treatment of individuals.

We should approach the shaping of communal narratives and the process of engaging others in them with great sensitivity to the ethical consequences. On a positive note, the existence of communal narratives gives voice to those who might not otherwise have a voice, not only those who are incompetent but those who have become victims and no longer have a voice. All the caveats that pertain to the inclusion of individuals in communal narratives ought to be applied to the forming of those communal narratives themselves, not only as they reflect our understanding of the past, but as our shared social imagination projects its possibilities into the future.

Ricoeur stresses the community's role in recognising the cause of suffering, learning from it, and responding to it, not only as represented in classical tragedy, but also in the events of history.[28] Recognising that participation in all that makes up community, culture and society enables the best kind of moral creativity, Ricoeur's Hegelian inclination seems to posit a collective movement towards a good society, although such a society is clearly an eschatological goal rather than a political project. So long as we recognise that utopia is a limit expression, literally "no place", it can open up alternative ways of life to us. [29] However, Ricoeur offers no real regulative framework or structure of discernment to help us to apply a

[27] Paul Ricoeur, "A colloquio con Ricoeur" in Fabrizio Turoldo, *Verita de metodo:Indagini su Paul Ricoeur,* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2000) cited Richard Kearney, "Capable Man, Capable God" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, p. 52.
[28] For example in his Interlude on Tragedy in Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 241-249. And discussion of collective guilt in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 471-478.
[29] Paul Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia" in Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, pp. 308-324.

hermeneutic of suspicion to these utopian visions. We struggle to distinguish between distorted mirages and visions of the Kingdom.

Although in his general hermeneutics Ricoeur draws attention to the Masters of Suspicion who remind us that we are constrained by biology, the unconscious and culture, his approach is open to the criticism that he pays insufficient attention to the power relationships at work when we are dealing with shared narratives, and in particular the biblical texts. He would not, unlike Kristeva, use the language of "appropriation" when discussing the way in which the gospels draw on and interpret older Jewish texts for example.[30] Rather, Ricoeur generally assumes benign and ethical readers in hospitable dialogue with non violent texts. While paying due attention to the problems of difference, he rejects the position taken by Lyotard, who insists that one protagonist inevitably devours the other, by forcing them to adopt is or her own language game or language structure.

It is the community which survives that tells the tale and the narrative that shapes community identity. We can recognise this in the importance of the holocaust narrative to Jewish identity, as much as the tale of the Hillsborough stadium disaster to the Liverpool football fan, or role played in shared suffering retold as part of family identity. The difficulty with this paradigm is that it is the survivors - we might even say victors - who contribute to the narrative process and distort the moral outlook of cultures. They are only limited by the presence of the other, the subaltern, the tellers of counter-narratives.

Both Martha Nussbaum and Helen Buss have drawn attention to the lack of a feminist perspective on the role of the victim in Ricoeur's work.[31] They tend to focus on the structures which have victimised Antigone, and indeed tragedy reveals that there is a limit to our ability to be heard in some situations; Antigone is silent even before her death in the face of a patriarchal system in which she has no voice. She is not only a victim of the system, but it robs

[30] Julia Kristeva and Toril Moi, *The Kristeva reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Michael Worton and Judith Still, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990).
[31] Helen M. Buss, "Antigone, Psyche, and the Ethics of Female Selfhood" and Martha C. Nussbaum, "Ricoeur on Tragedy" in *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. by Wall, Schweiker and Hall.

her of any public means, or linguistic capacity, to challenge it. Having visited Chicago in the last few years, I found it extraordinary that Ricoeur, who lived there for a considerable time, never felt it necessary to comment on the racism and segregation which is, still now, bound into the fabric of the city. Only on his return to France, in the later part of the 1990's did he begin to reflect on the problems of multiculturalism and religious conflict. His analysis is, as we would expect, careful. Ricoeur will not exchange the utopia of universal truth for radical relativism, insofar as we must always stand somewhere, because we can embrace other perspectives in a process which is analogous to translation. Although at times Ricoeur is close to Habermas, who at least posits the possibility of shared or negotiated language, Ricoeur is increasingly interested in the problems of translation and recognises that there is always loss when one moves from one language to another. Although there is no universal language, we can learn to be bi-lingual and some may even become polyglots. At least by these means we can learn to hear one another's stories within the community. [32]

A contrasting view is offered by John Wall, who carefully points out that victims are not necessarily constrained so much by their lack of freedom as by their blindness and complicity in unjust systems. He suggests that when the audience recognises Antigone's complicity in the social norms which bind her, we recognize our own complicity and are convicted of our own inhumanity. As Wall says, "Our sense of cathartic possibility rests at least in part on being able to identify with Antigone's failed human attempt to assert herself."[33] A paradigm which describes the inevitability of tragedy in the face of conflicting goods depends on the protagonists being aware of the goods at stake, but does not comment on the scenario where goods, such as the equality of women or slaves, are simply invisible to the protagonists. As David Pellauer has pointed out, we cannot always predict where moral conflicts will arise and we may be blind to moral injustice which will be starkly apparent in another age as the category of those included among the "equal" expands.

[32] Paul Ricoeur, "Religious Belief: The Difficult Path of the Religious" in *A Passion for the Possible*, ed. by Treanor and Venema, pp. 27-40.
[33] Wall, *Moral Creativity,* p. 144

Of course, the distinction between moral blindness and self-deception is a subtle one. The human capacity for self-deception includes the deception that we are immune from suffering. Freud teaches us that we find all kinds of ways of avoiding, repressing or projecting our suffering, but that this does not make it go away. Hauerwas reminds us that we may deceive ourselves in the stories we tell, whether consciously or unconsciously, individually or collectively – using the case of Albert Speer and the Nazi regime as an example. Speer is interesting because he was a man of some morality and integrity: initially blind to the cruelty of the regime he served faithfully he was eventually undeceived and acknowledged his culpability in the genocide of six million Jews.[34] Hauerwas defines sin in terms of following the wrong narrative, of failing to recognise our status as creatures and of behaving instead as creators of history.

I believe that Ricoeur would argue that as creatures we are the creators of history even though we are limited in what we can shape. It is as if all human culture is a kind of bricolage reimagining and reshaping meaning from all that is gifted to us in the world. Human narratives, whether or not they take their meaning from the divine narrative, are only ever partial realisations of the divine economy. However, this recognition ought to show us that we are not passive puppets in God's story, but characters in our own stories which sometimes reflect our encounter with the One Who Calls. Ricoeur's mediating theology attempts to reflect a mediating God, who is hospitable to his creation and in turn participates in the hospitality of its materiality.

By insisting on the relationship between suffering and acting Ricoeur pays proper attention to the moral problem of passivity. Wisdom is never merely reflection but is always integrated into praxis. The therapeutic power of stories can be understood in Freudian terms as a means of reliving an event which creates a cathartic moment, or in Aristotelian terms as a source of tragic wisdom. Ricoeur offers not only a therapeutic reading but an ethical one which promotes

[34] Stanley Hauerwas with David B. Burrell, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*" in Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 82-98.

not only healing but action. In a discussion with Richard Kearney, Ricoeur agreed, "Yes, 'all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.'" But he went on to insist that narratives do more than help us endure, they are part of the process of mourning, which enables us to link suffering to acting, or sorrow to *praxis*.[35]

The Mirror, the Book and the Church

We learn from Heidegger and St Paul that we can never truly see ourselves as we are in this life. The mirror will always distort the image and give us only a glimpse of ourselves. Perhaps the metaphor "the self in the mirror of the scriptures" serves to draw our attention to the limits of our understanding. However, in the rich process of interpretation, the self reveals its dependence on narrative for identity and the scriptures reveal their unique referent and their relationship to the Word who not only summons us but constitutes us.

As we have seen, texts only exist as they are realised by readers. In the case of the biblical texts, we have criticised Ricoeur for his lack of interest in their performance in worship, and perhaps in worship as a phenomenon *per se*. He is, as we have seen, highly suspicious of emotive or mystical language, and one suspects that he was interested in the written word almost to the exclusion of any other artistic medium.

For this reason alone, there has been a bias in this thesis away from questions of ecclesiology despite the obvious importance of the character of the community for the realisation of the identity of summoned selves. As Ricoeur has shown, ethical behaviour depends not only on teleological goals and duty to moral norms, but also on just societies. I am conscious that many questions remain unanswered about the nature of the just church, the community which performs scripture in both its worshipping and serving life. The character of that performance is summed up by Sam Wells: "Performance does justice to the embodied, communal way in

[35] Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur*, p. 160. Ricoeur is quoting from Hannnah Arendt in *The Human Condition.*

which the church tries to involve itself in the life enjoined by the Scripture while remaining faithful to the character of God that emerges from the biblical witness."[36]

In truth, the church must also be recognised as fallible and capable, attempting to shape its own narrative as a summoned community. It needs to continue to listen to the parables of Jesus, laughing at its own foolishness and confident in God's promised future.

> *The comedy of God's saving the most unlikely people when they least expect it, the joke in which God laughs with man and man with God […] this is what King Lear glimpses at the end of his tragic life when the world has done its worst, he says to the daughter he loves,*
>
> *Come, let's away to prison*
> *We two alone…*
> *So we'll live*
> *And pray, and sing, and tell old tales and laugh…* [37]

[36] Wells, *Improvisation*, p. 62. This approach is also found in Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), Frances M. Young, *The Art of Performance : Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (Warton Longman and Todd, 1990). And in many of the essays included in *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley, (London and Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2008).
[37] Shakespeare, *King Lear* Act V, Scene III, lines 8-12 cited Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, p. 72.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, Pamela Sue, *Ricoeur and Kant: Philosophy of the Will* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993)

Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. by H.C. Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin, 1991)

---, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996)

Atherton, John, *Public Theology for Changing Times* (London: SPCK, 2000)

Auden, W.H., *Forewords and Afterwords* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1973)

Audi, R, and N Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997)

The Whole and Divided Self: The Bible and Theological Anthropology, ed. by Aune, David E., and John McCarthy, (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1997)

Austin, J L, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962)

Bakhtin, M. M., and Helene Iswolsky, *Rabelais and his World*, MIT (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968)

Balthasar, Hans Urs von, and Aidan Nichols, *Mysterium Paschal : The Mystery of Easter*, Ressourcement: retrieval & renewal in Catholic thought (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990)

Bauckham, Richard, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans 2006)

Bergson, Henri, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, 1900, trans. by Cloudesley Bereton and Fred Rothwell (Rockville, Maryland: ARC Manor, 2008)

Bergson, Henri, Nancy Margaret Paul, and W. Scott Palmer, *Matter and Memory* (New York: London : Zone ; Distributed by MIT Press, 1988)

Biggar, Nigel, 'God in Public Debate', *Studies in Christian Ethics,* 19, no. 1 (2006), pp. 9-19

Billings, J. Todd, 'John Milbank's Theology of the "Gift" and Calvin's Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison.', *Modern Theology,* 21, no. 1 (2005), pp. 87-105

Blundell, Boyd, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010)

Booker, Christopher, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004)

Booth, Wayne, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 1961, Second edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)

Briggs, Richard S., *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001)

Buechner, Frederick, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977)

Bultmann, R., *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner, 1951)

Caird, Edward, *The Evolution of Religion* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Sons, 1893)

Carr, David, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986)

Chapin, Jonathan, *Talking God : The Legitimacy of Religious Public Reasoning* (London, Theos, 2008)

Charvet, Stella Rose, *Words that Change Minds: Mastering the Language of Influence* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendal/Hunt, 1995)

Childs, Brevard S., *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1960)

Cohen, Richard A., *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy: Interpretation after Lévinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Cohen, Richard A., and J. Marsh, *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002)

Colllingwood, R.G., *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946)

Critchley, Simon, *On Humour*, Thinking in Action (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2002)

Dauenhauer, Bernard P., *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998)

Ricoeur Across the Disciplines, ed. by Davidson, Scott, (London and New York: Continuum, 2010)

Dell, Katharine J., *Get Wisdom, Get Insight : An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Literature* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2000)

Denning, Stephen, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling: Mastering the Art and Discipline of Business Narrative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Imprint, 2005)

---, *The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organisations* (Woburn, M.A.: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005)

Dufrenne, Mikel, and Paul Ricoeur, *Karl Jaspers et la Philosophie de l'Existence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1947)

Eagleton, Terry, *Sweet Violence: the Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)

Eco, Umberto, and J. Lotman, *The Role of the Reader* (London: Hutchinson, 1981)

Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005)

Eliade, Mircea, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1948, trans. by R. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958)

Exum, J. Cheryl, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Ford, David F., *Self and Salvation : Being Transformed* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

---, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Frei, Hans W., *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven,: Yale University Press, 1974)

Freud, Sigmund, *The Joke and Its Relationship with the Unconscious*, trans. by Joyce Crick (London: Penguin, 2002)

Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism; Four Essays* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 1957)

---, *The Great Code : The Bible and Literature*, 1st edn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982)

Fuchs, Ernst, and Andrew tr Scobie, *Studies of the Historical Jesus*, Studies in Biblical theology (London: SCM Press, 1964)

Funk, Robert W., *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982)

Funk, Robert Walter, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God : The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975)

Gall, R.S., 'Toward a Tragic Theology: the piety of thought in Heidegger and Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 7, no. 1 (1993), pp. 13-32

Genette, Gerard, *Narrative Discourse : An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980)

2000 Years and Beyond: Faith, Identity and the 'Common Era'. ed. by Gifford, Paul, and others, (London
New York: Routledge, 2003)

Girard, René, and J. G. Williams, *The Girard Reader*, A Crossroad Herder book. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996)

Gottwald, Norman, *The Tribes of Yaweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (London: SCM, 1979)

Grabes, Herbert, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982)

Greimas, Algirdas Julien, *On Meaning : Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ed. by Hahn, Lewis Edwin, The library of living philosophers v. 22, (Chicago: Open Court, 1995)

Hall, Edith, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Hall, W David, 'The Economy of the Gift: Paul Ricoeur's Poetic Redescription of Reality', *Literature and Theology,* 20, no. 2 (2006), pp. 189-204

Hall, W. David, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative : The Creative Tension between Love and Justice*, SUNY series in theology and continental thought (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007)

Harrington, Daniel J., and James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Oxford: Sheed and Ward for Rowman and Littlefield 2002)

Hauerwas, Stanley, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977)

---, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981)

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, Arnold V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay, *Phenomenology of spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977)

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. by John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (New York,: Harper, 1962)

Holmer, Paul L., *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978)

Holstein, James A., and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Hopewell, James F., *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987)

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*, 1931 (London: Penguin, 1955)

Ingarden, Roman, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. by Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)

---, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and the Theory of Literature*, trans. by George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978)

James, Simon, *The Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (London: British Museum Press, 1999)

Jauss, Hans Robert, *Aestheic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. by Michael Shaw (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)

Jensen, Alexander S., *Theological Hermeneutics*, SCM Core Texts (London and Canterbury: SCM, 2007)

Joy, Morny, *Context and Contestation: Paul Ricoeur and Narrative* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997)

Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur, ed. by Junker-Kenny, Maureen, and Peter Kenny, (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2004)

Kant, Emmanuel, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964)

Kearney, Richard, *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: New York University Press, 1995)

---, *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001)

---, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters : Interpreting Otherness* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003)

---, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2004)

Keck, Leander, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971)

Keenan, J.F., 'Proposing Cardinal Virtues', *Theological Studies,* 56 (1995), pp. 709-729

Kelsey, David H., *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975)

Kemp, T. Peter, and David M. Rasmussen, *The Narrative Path : The Later Works of Paul Ricoeur*, 1st MIT Press edn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989)

Kermode, Frank, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966)

Klemm, David E., *The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur : A Constructive Analysis* (Lewisburg, London: Bucknell University Press, Associated University Presses, 1983)

Klemm, David E., and William Schweiker, *Meanings in Texts and Actions : Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, Studies in religion and culture (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993)

Kristeva, Julia, and Toril Moi, *The Kristeva reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986)

LaCocque, André, and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Langer, Susanne Katherina, *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key.* (London, 1953)

Lash, Nicholas, *Theology on the way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986)

Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy, ed. by Leggatt, Alexander, Cambridge Companions to Literature, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Lévinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity; An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne studies. Philosophical series, (Pittsburgh,: Duquesne University Press, 1969)

---, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1998)

Lévinas, Emmanuel, and Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell readers (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, MA, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989)

Lindbeck, George A., *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984)

MacIntyre, Alasdair C., *After Virtue :A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981)

Mackinnon, DM, *The Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968)

MacNamara, Vincent, *Faith and Ethics: Recent Roman Catholicism* (Dublin, Washington: Gill and MacMillan, Georgetown University Press, 1985)

Mann, Thomas, *The Magic Mountain*, 1924, trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Secker and Warburg, 1927)

Mauss, Marcel, and W. D. Halls, *The gift : the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, 1967, Routledge classics, Paperback edn (London: Routledge, 2002)

McCarthy, Joan, *Dennett and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self*, Contemporary Studies in Philosophy and the Human Sciences (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2007)

McFague, Sallie, *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975)

Mealey, A.M., *The Identity of Christian Morality* (Ashgate Publishing, 2008)

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1962)

What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry, ed. by Mike Graves, David J. Shlafer, (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2008)

Milbank, John, 'Can a Gift be Given: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic', *Modern Theology,* 11, no. 1 (1995), pp. 119-161

Moltmann, Jurgen, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, 1965, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967)

Mongin, Olivier, *Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984)

Nussbaum, Martha, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Green Tragedy and Philosophy*, 1986, Revised edn (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Origen Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, *Patrologia Graeca XIII* ed. J-P. Migne, (Paris: Biblothecae Caleri Universe, 1862),

Orwell, George, *Ninety Eighty-four* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949)

Outka, Gene, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972)

Pannenberg, Wolfhart, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Systematic theology Vol 2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994)

Parris, D.P, 'Imitating the Parables: Allegory, Narrative and the Role of Mimesis', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* 25, no. 1 (2002), pp. 33

Pellauer, David, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Guides for the perplexed (London ; New York: Continuum, 2007)

Perrin, Norman, *Jesus and the language of the Kingdom : symbol and metaphor in New Testament interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976)

Polkinghorne, Donald, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, SUNY Series in Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988)

Propp, V. I. A., *Morphology of the Folktale*, Publications of the American Folklore Society. Bibliographical and special series v. 9, 2d edn (Austin,: University of Texas Press, 1968)

Proust, Marcel, *Remembrance of Things Past*, 1913-1927, trans. by Terence Kilmartin and Andreas Mayer C.K. Scott-Moncrief, 3 vols (New York: Random House, 1981)

Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971)

The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work, ed. by Reagan, Charles E, and David Stewart, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978)

Reagan, Charles E., *Paul Ricoeur : His Life and his Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Ricoeur, Paul, *Fallible Man*, L'Homme faillible, 1960, Paris: Editions Montaigne, trans. by Charles A. Kebley (Chicago,: Regnery, 1965)

---, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary*, *Le Volontaire et l'involuntaire*, 1950, Aubier Editions Montaigne, trans. by Erazim V. Kohak, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.,: Northwestern University Press, 1966)

---, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. by Emerson Buchanan, Religious perspectives, v. 17, 1st edn (New York,: Harper & Row, 1967)

---, *Freud and Philosophy; An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. by Denis Savage, The Terry Lectures (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970)

---, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, *Conflit des interprétations: Essais d'herméneutique,* 1969, Editions du Seuil, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy, English edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974)

---, 'The Metaphorical Process', *Semeia,* 4 (1975), pp. 75-106

---, 'The Narrative Form', *Semeia,* 4. (1975), pp. 37-74

---, 'The Specificity of Religious Language', *Semeia,* 4 (1975), pp. 107-145

---, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976)

---, *The Rule of Metaphor : Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, La Metaphor Vivre, 1975, Editions du Seuil, trans. by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London: Routledge, 1977)

---, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. by John B. Thompson (Cambridge ; New York, Paris: Cambridge University Press ;Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1981)

---, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, *Temps et Recit*, 1983, Editions du Seuil, trans. by Kathleen McLaughin and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984)

---, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, *Temps et Recit, Vol 2*, 1984, Editions du Seuil, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985)

---, *Time and Narrative Volume 3*, *Temps et Recit Vol 3,* 1985, Editions du Seuil, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, English edn, 3 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988)

---, *From Text to Action*, Du texte a l'action: Essais d'hermeneutique II, 1986, Editions du Seuil, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy, English edn (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991)

---, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

---, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. by David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995)

---, *Critique and Conviction : Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, La Critique et la Conviction, 1995, Calmann-Levy, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)

---, *The Just*, Le Juste, Editions Espirit, 1995, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

---, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

---, *The Course of Recognition*, Parcours de la Reconnaissance, Editions Stock, 2004, trans. by David Pellauer, Institute for Human Sciences Vienna lecture series, English edn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005)

---, *Reflections on The Just*, Le Juste 2, Editions Espirit, 2001, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

---, *Living Up To Death*, Vivant jusqu'a la mort suivi de Fragments, Editions du Seuil, 2007, trans. by David Pellauer, English edn (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009)

Ricoeur, Paul, and Richard Kearney, *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, Philosophy & Social Criticism (London, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996)

Ricoeur, Paul, and Lewis Seymour Mudge, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1981)

Sabbagh, Karl, *Remembering Our Childhood: How Memory Betrays Us* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Sanders, E. P., *Paul, the law, and the Jewish people* (London: SCM Press, 1985)

Scott-Baumann, Alison, *Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy (London and New York: Continuum, 2009)

Screech, M.A., *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (London: Penguin Books, 1997)

Searle, John R, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)

Steiner, George, 'A Note on Absolute Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 4, no. 2 (1990), pp. 147-156

---, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961)

Stiver, Dan R., *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 1st edn (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001)

Strauss, David Friedrich, *The life of Jesus critically examined*, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet* , 1836, trans. by George Eliot, Lives of Jesus series (London: SCM, 1973)

Strawson, P.F, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1957)

Sutherland, Stewart, 'Christianity and Tragedy', *Literature and Theology,* 4, no. 2 (1990), pp. 157-168

Sutton, Dana, *The Catharsis of Comedy* (Lanham, MD: Rowmann and Littlefield, 1994)

Thiselton, Anthony C, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays of Anthony Thiselton*, Ashgate Contemporary Thinkers on Religion: Collected Works (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006)

Thiselton, Anthony C., *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992)

---, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michegan, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, Carlisle, 2000)

---, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007)

---, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan
Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2009)

Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, 3 vols (London: Nisbet, 1953)

---, *The Courage to Be*, 1952, Nisbet and Co, The Fontana Library of Theology and Philosophy (London: Collins, 1962)

Topping, Richard R., *Revelation, Scripture and Church : Theological Hermeneutic Thought of James Barr, Paul Ricoeur and Hans Frei*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical studies (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007)

Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981)

Treanor, Brian, *Aspects of Alterity : Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate*, Perspectives in continental philosophy, 1st edn (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006)

A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur, ed. by Treanor, Brian, and Henry Isaac Venema, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Vanhoozer, Kevin J., *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur : A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Vessey, David, 'The Polysemy of Otherness: On Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* ', in *Ipseity and Alterity: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intersubjectivity*, ed. by Shaun Gallagher, (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen, 2002).

Via, Dan Otto, *The Parables : Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967)

---, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structuralist Approach to Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975)

---, *The revelation of God and/as human reception : in the New Testament* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997)

The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jurgen Moltmann, ed. by Volf, Miroslav, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans,, 1986)

Vygotsky, Lev Semenovich, *Thought and language*, Studies in communication (Massachusetts Institute of Technology;Wiley, 1962)

Wall, John, *Moral Creativity : Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility*, AAR Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought, ed. by Wall, John, William Schweiker, and W. David Hall, (New York: Routledge, 2002)

Wallace, Mark I., *The Second Naiveté : Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology*, Studies in American biblical hermeneutics 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990)

Ward, Keith, *Ethics and Christianity*, Muirhead Library of Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970)

Ward, Timothy, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Warner, Martin, *The Bible as Rhetoric : Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*, Warwick Studies in Philosophy and Literature (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990)

Wells, Samuel, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004)

---, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006)

Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture, ed. by Wells, Samuel, and Sarah Coakley, (London and Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2008)

Westermann, Claus, *What does the Old Testament say about God?*, Sprunt Lectures (London: SPCK, 1979)

Wilder, Amos, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (London: SCM, 1964)

Williams, Bernard, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

Williams, Rowan, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* 2000, T&T Clark

---, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell 2000)

Wolterstorff, Nicholas P., *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs Dalloway* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925)

Worsley, Richard, 'Narratives and Lively Metaphors: Hermeneutics as a way of listening', article in preparation, (2011).

Intertextuality: Theories and Practices, ed. by Worton, Michael, and Judith Still, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990)

Young, Frances M., *The Art of Performance : Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (Warton Longman and Todd, 1990)

Young, Frances M., and David Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988)