

Book Review

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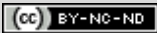
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F. J. Mootz III and G. H. Taylor, eds. *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* (New York/London: Continuum, 2011), 297 pp.

Five years ago, it was totally impossible to find a book entirely dedicated to a systematic study of the complex relations between the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur. This was quite surprising if we consider the importance of these two philosophers to the development of a hermeneutical philosophy over the last century. Fortunately, it seems that the relevance of a critical discussion on Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutics has recently become more obvious, first with the publication of Daniel Frey's book on *L'interprétation et la lecture chez Ricoeur et Gadamer* (2008), and now with this initiative of Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor to bring into conversation "Gadamerian and Ricoeurian scholars" in one volume. The result of this well-inspired idea is a book containing twelve chapters studying, from different perspectives, the agreements and disagreements between Gadamer's and Ricoeur's philosophies, not without significant convergences and divergences between the authors. The book is divided into three parts: the first one, on "History", strangely contains only one paper (by P. Christopher Smith); the second part, entitled "Engagements", includes seven chapters on central questions for a dialogue between Gadamer and Ricoeur; finally, the third part offers four "Extensions" to this conversation by testing original applications of both hermeneutics. Since it is impossible to give a detailed review of each of these chapters, I would simply like to identify some of the main issues raised by this book.

As expected, many chapters of this volume, in one way or another, insist on the hermeneutical theses, common to Gadamer and Ricoeur, on our fundamental belonging to history, tradition and community, and question the possibility of developing a critical hermeneutics in response to this belonging. The paper of P. Christopher Smith on the relations of Gadamer and Ricoeur to Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics opens the discussion by showing how these three thinkers put forward divergent views on our belonging to tradition and community. In contrast with Heidegger's imperative of a hermeneutical *Destruktion*, formulating the task to liberate the *Dasein* of a fossilized tradition and the falseness of the community, Gadamer follows something more like "hermeneutical *Konstruktion*", by describing an event of truth appearing in a dialogue with tradition and in the participation in a community. Against the idea of a solitary *Dasein*, Gadamer and Ricoeur insist on the relationships of the self with others, but in different ways: "For Ricoeur the emphasis is on the relationship of two individuals to each other. For Gadamer, on the other hand, the relationship is tripartite: individuals [...] are related to each other by a third in which they participate, the music, the game, the conversation, in which they are joined" (35). Regarding this difference of emphasis, we find a convergent analysis in David Vessey's chapter on "Paul Ricoeur's and Hans-Georg Gadamer's Diverging Reflections on Recognition" when he underwrites Gadamer's focus on the belonging of the individuals to a shared background in his criticism of I-Thou accounts of intersubjectivity.

Therefore, these analyses raise the following question: is there only a difference of emphasis between Gadamer's and Ricoeur's approaches or is there a real opposition between them? A part of the answer is given in the chapter written by Merold Westphal on "The Dialectic

of Belonging and Distanciation in Gadamer and Ricoeur." Refusing to oppose unilaterally Gadamer's belonging to Ricoeur's distanciation, Westphal's main thesis is that both hermeneutics explore the dialectic of belonging and distanciation. This means, on the one hand, that Ricoeur also assumes a strong thesis on our belonging and that this belonging is presupposed in any I-Thou relationship. On the other hand, it implies that there is some legitimate place in Gadamer's hermeneutics for distanciation, even if this moment of distanciation is underdeveloped in his work. So the answer to our question is necessarily more complex and dialectical than expected at first sight, but it doesn't exclude *a priori* the possibility of true disagreements.

All this discussion also leads to a second question: is there a place for a critical instance in hermeneutics, and if so, where can we find it? Here the division between the scholars is obvious. Some pretend that a critical principle is lacking in Gadamer's hermeneutics and, as a consequence, that we should pay more attention to Ricoeur's thinking on this issue. This is the case, among others, for Andreea Deciu Ritivoi in her study of the concept of tradition in Gadamer and Ricoeur. Her main goal is to promote the emancipative resources in Ricoeur's philosophy in order to respond to the criticisms of Habermas and Foucault and to edify hermeneutics as a "project of liberation." To reach this goal, she wants to offer "a revised conception of tradition" (68), making use of the dialectical tensions described by Ricoeur between tradition and distanciation and between ideology and utopia. By contrast, other authors like Francis J. Mootz III maintain that nothing is lacking in Gadamer if we take a closer look at his hermeneutics. Mootz's contribution to this volume is precisely to argue that "the rhetorical dimension of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics provides the basis for the development of critical hermeneutics" (89). And Mootz wants to show that this critical moment offers a more radical and fruitful approach for social critique than Ricoeur's dialectic between understanding and explanation. According to him, the problem with Ricoeur is that he gives too much credit to structuralism and, like Habermas, underestimates the critical resources inherent to dialogue and rhetoric. More precisely: "Ricoeur's mediation failed because he sought a philosophical answer to the role of explanation rather than seeking a rhetorical account of the distanciating features of dialogue" (91).

This interrogation on the best approach for critical hermeneutics is undoubtedly at the heart of other contributions to this volume. This is the case of George Taylor's paper on "Understanding as Metaphoric, Not a Fusion of Horizons", defending the relevance of Ricoeur's metaphorical model of understanding against Gadamer's account. His argument is that "Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizon [*sic*] mistakenly claims the availability of an underlying commonality, while Ricoeur correctly emphasizes the notion of understanding as metaphoric – the creation of similarity across difference" (104). But the issue, here again, is to establish whether we have a real opposition or only a difference of emphasis. On the one hand, Ricoeur himself sometime uses Gadamer's metaphor to describe the event of understanding and, on the other hand, there is no possibility of a fusion of horizons without the presupposition of a difference between the horizons. Taylor's aim is precisely to distinguish these two accounts of understanding without covering over what they share. In a similar way, Bernard P. Dauenhauer also takes note of considerable agreements and some crucial differences between Gadamer and Ricoeur, in his paper on the usefulness of Ricoeur's work on translation to promote a "responsible political practice" based on an ethics of hospitality. According to Dauenhauer, we find in Ricoeur a stronger sense of our failures to understand each other, that are not only avoidable problems, like Gadamer seems to think, but "constant features of all human life" (184). This substantial

difference constitutes the background of Dauenhauer's argument about the fruitfulness of Ricoeur's model of translation for practical philosophy. His argument about failures is reinforced by David H. Fisher's chapter on tragedy and practical *phronesis* in *Oneself as Another* arguing that "phronetic wisdom" always has to deal with an unavoidable tragic dimension.

The book also contains papers challenging the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur on specific issues or from horizons more distant to their work. In this way, John Arthos asks the question: "why is there no explicit narrative theory in Gadamer anything like what came to occupy a central role in Ricoeur's hermeneutics?" (119). Is there something like a *muthos* in Gadamer? From another perspective, Louise D. Derksen and Annemie Halsema question the contribution and the limits of a hermeneutical view of health and embodiment for feminist theory in a paper entitled "Understanding the Body: The Relevance of Gadamer's and Ricoeur's View of the Body for Feminist Theory". In the next chapter entitled "Things Hermeneutics," David M. Kaplan sheds light on the possibility to apply Gadamer's and Ricoeur's ideas in the field of a new constructivist philosophy of technology. Finally, Kathleen Wright discusses some theses of Richard E. Palmer and Benjamin A. Elman on the connections between Gadamer's hermeneutics and New Confucianism.

To summarize, this volume represents an excellent contribution to a critical debate on the legacy of Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutics. It contains penetrating analysis and stimulating perspectives on the complex relations between the two hermeneutics, raising crucial issues regarding, among others, the possibility of a critical hermeneutics. Nevertheless, it is a little bit surprising to find in such a book a paper on Gadamer and New Confucianism – interesting in itself, but not really in touch with a conversation between Gadamer and Ricoeur – while there is no chapter specifically dedicated to the central theses of Gadamer and Ricoeur on our fundamental belonging to language, the essential metaphoricity of language or the connections between language and experience. A closer look at these key theses should now be given.

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