

Paul Ricœur's Philosophy of Education and its Relevance for our Scientific-Technological Civilization

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Abstract

Inspired by the report, *Reimagining our Futures Together. A New Social Contract for Education*, which warns that humanity and planet Earth are under threat, but acknowledges that education has the power to bring about profound change, this article makes the case for giving careful consideration both to Paul Ricœur's reflections on humanity and human capacities, and to his comments on "true education" and the educational value of poetic thought. To get a sense of where scientific-technological civilization is headed, it draws on the work of Allen Buchanan and Dominique Janicaud. It then examines Ricœur's account of the essential characteristics of education and his thoughts on the roles of families and teachers. It argues that Ricœur's proposal for the cultivation of an "ethical consciousness" offers greater protection for humanity in an uncertain future than Janicaud and Buchanan's proposals for "ethical vigilance" and rules-based protective measures.

Keywords: Education; Pedagogy; Paul Ricœur; Dominique Janicaud; Allen Buchanan; Metaphor; Poetic Thought; Biomedical Enhancement; Futures of Education

Résumé

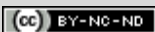
Inspiré du rapport « Repenser nos futurs ensemble. Un nouveau contrat social pour l'éducation » – qui nous met en garde contre la menace qui pèse sur l'humanité et sur notre planète tout en reconnaissant que l'éducation a le pouvoir d'apporter des changements profonds –, cet article plaide en faveur d'une prise en compte attentive des réflexions de Paul Ricœur sur l'humanité et les capacités humaines, ainsi que de ses commentaires sur l'« éducation véritable » et la valeur éducative de la pensée poétique. Il s'appuie sur les travaux d'Allen Buchanan et de Dominique Janicaud pour comprendre la direction que prend la civilisation scientifique et technologique. Il examine ensuite l'analyse des caractéristiques essentielles de l'éducation que propose Ricœur ainsi que ses réflexions sur le rôle des familles et des enseignants. Il soutient enfin que la proposition ricœurienne d'une formation de la « conscience éthique » est susceptible d'offrir une meilleure protection à l'humanité dans un avenir incertain que les appels à la « vigilance éthique » et à l'établissement de mesures de protection fondées sur des règles formulées par Janicaud et Buchanan.

Mots-clés: éducation ; pédagogie ; Paul Ricœur ; Dominique Janicaud ; Allen Buchanan ; métaphore ; pensée poétique ; amélioration biomédicale ; avenir de l'éducation

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Paul Ricœur's Philosophy of Education and Its Relevance for Our Scientific-Technological Civilization

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In 2019, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established the International Commission on the Futures of Education. In 2021, following a consultation process involving over a million people from right across the world, the Commission published its report under the title, *Reimagining our Futures Together. A New Social Contract for Education*. The Commission also provided a short summary of that report. Here are its opening lines:

Our humanity and planet Earth are under threat. The pandemic has only served to prove our fragility and our interconnectedness. Now urgent action, taken together, is needed to change course and reimagine our futures. This report by the International Commission on the Futures of Education acknowledges the power of education to bring about profound change.¹

There is nothing unusual in ascribing a transformative power to education. John Dewey, whose influence on educational theory and practice has been profound, wrote about a plan to refashion schools into engines of social progress. Equally inspiring but more learner-centred philosophers of education have written about the power of education to transform lives. What is unusual about the UNESCO Futures of Education's report is its focus on where humanity and planet Earth are now headed. The authors of that report insist that we need "to change course and reimagine our futures." They will go on to explain that what their report is offering is not a manual or blueprint for change, but rather certain visions, principles and proposals that others are invited to translate and contextualize for themselves and their communities.

Paul Ricœur has been described as "a remarkable thinker who was a devoted friend of UNESCO" and someone who "made a significant contribution to the Organization's work on philosophical reflection about the role of values and ethics in education, culture and science."² That description can be found on the UNESCO website, more specifically on a page advertising, within the framework of the 2013 World Philosophy Day celebration, an international round table on the Ethics of Knowledge designed to pay tribute to him. His contributions to the work of UNESCO include an introduction to a book on cultures and time published in 1975;³ a contribution to a

¹ See the report online: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707>.

² See online: <https://en.unesco.org/events/round-table-paul-ricoeur-ethics-knowledge>.

³ Paul Ricœur et al., *Les cultures et le temps. Études préparées pour l'Unesco* (Paris : Payot/Presses de l'Unesco, 1975).

volume entitled, *Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences* in 1978;⁴ an introduction to a book entitled, *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights* published in 1986;⁵ a commissioned article entitled, “Coming to Terms with Time” published in 1991;⁶ and contributions to conferences, including *Raisonances. Journée de la philosophie, UNESCO 2002*.⁷ It is not difficult, then, to imagine him having something important to say about UNESCO’s most recent report on the Futures of Education and the role that education could play in helping humanity change course and reimagine its futures. More productively perhaps, it is not difficult to imagine *his work* having something to contribute to the debate opened up by that report. However, before I specify what that contribution might be it would be important to get a clear picture of where our scientific-technological civilization is headed, the perceived dangers and prevailing attitudes. Two useful resources in that regard are Allen Buchanan’s *Better Than Human: The Promise and Perils of Biomedical Enhancement* and Dominique Janicaud’s *On the Human Condition* or to use its original French title, *L’homme va-t-il dépasser l’humain ?*

My paper is divided into four parts. The first part discusses Allen Buchanan’s views on the targeted enhancement of human capacities, including the capacity for moral obligation. It contrasts Buchanan and Ricœur’s approaches to answering the question, What is a human being? And it explains why, unlike Buchanan, Ricœur would have had grave concerns about the biomedical enhancement of human capacities. Noting that Dominique Janicaud also believes that our civilization is moving inexorably toward the widespread use of biomedical enhancement techniques, the second part examines Janicaud’s recommendations for a return to humanism and the adoption of a Nietzsche-inspired approach to developing the psychological and moral potential of human beings. The third part focuses on common fears around biomedical neuroenhancement and discusses Buchanan and Janicaud’s suggestions for how to address them. The fourth part examines Ricœur’s account of the essential characteristics of education and his thoughts on the roles of families and teachers. It argues that Ricœur’s proposal for the cultivation of an “ethical consciousness” offers greater protection for humanity in an uncertain future than Janicaud and Buchanan’s proposals for “ethical vigilance” and other rules based protective measures. In this way, it offers a first indication of how Ricœur’s work can contribute to the emerging discussion on the futures of education.

I. Allen Buchanan on the Targeted Enhancement of Human Capacities

Allen Buchanan is confident that at some point in the future the targeted enhancement of human cognitive and affective abilities, through the use of science and technology, is going to become commonplace. As he remarks in *Better Than Human: The Promise and Perils of Biomedical Enhancement*: “It’s too late to ‘just say no’ to biomedical enhancements: They’re already here and

⁴ Paul Ricœur, “Philosophy,” in Jacques Havet (ed.), *Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences*, Part 2, vol. 2 *Legal Science, Philosophy* (UNESCO Digital Library, 1978).

⁵ Alwin Diemer et al., *Philosophical Foundation of Human Rights* (Paris: Presses de l’Unesco, 1986).

⁶ Paul Ricœur, “Coming to Terms with Time,” *The UNESCO Courier. A Window Upon the World*, vol. XLIV/4 (1991), 11-5.

⁷ See online: <https://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/document-1501>.

more are on the way.”⁸ He is not alarmed at that prospect, far from it. Indeed, following the conventions of Anglo-American philosophy, Buchanan examines the case for and against biomedical neuroenhancement, arguing at one point that we may actually need to agree to neuroenhancement of that type in order to ensure that future generations can enjoy the same level of well-being that our generation has managed to achieve.

Buchanan's definitions of “enhancement” and “cognitive enhancements” look to their purpose or end. He takes up that perspective on enhancement and cognitive enhancements because he wants to distinguish them from therapy and cognitive therapies, respectively. He knows that there is a danger of confusion here given that cognitive enhancements and cognitive therapies are sometimes effected in exactly the same way. Here, then, is how he defines “enhancement” and “cognitive enhancements”:

An enhancement is an intervention –a human action of any kind– that improves some capacity (or characteristic) that normal human beings ordinarily have or, more radically, that produces a new one. Cognitive enhancements increase normal cognitive capacities. Cognitive capacities include memory (of which there are several kinds), attention, reasoning, and what psychologists call “executive function,” the ability of the mind to monitor, direct, and coordinate various mental operations.⁹

What we learn from those lines is that enhancements are carried out on normal human beings, not on human beings who are deemed to have a disorder of some kind. Further, the enhancement or intervention is meant either to improve some capacity or characteristic that a human of that type would ordinarily have or, at the extreme, to produce a brand new capacity. Cognitive capacities like memory, attention, and reasoning are considered ideal candidates for enhancement. The above quotation does not offer any examples of enhancements that improve cognitive functioning, but there is no shortage of examples in the book. Among the many examples of cognitive enhancements that Buchanan lists are the agrarian revolution, institutions, literacy, numeracy, computers, and the Internet. Here is what he has to say about literacy on that very point:

Literacy is a fantastic cognitive enhancement. Being able to read and write greatly enhances what the human brain can do: Events and experiences can be recorded, and the record can be transmitted across vast distances and through the ages. We can make firm commitments in writing, avoiding some of the disagreements that would occur if we merely made oral pledges. We develop complex and enriching forms of discourse that wouldn't otherwise be possible. Each generation can build on the knowledge of previous ones, rather than having to start from scratch or depend on the vagaries of oral transmission.¹⁰

Buchanan is surely right that literacy represents an advance on our having to rely solely on the spoken word when it comes to: (1) recording events and experiences for posterity; (2)

⁸ Allen Buchanan, *Better Than Human. The Promise and Perils of Biomedical Enhancement* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

⁹ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 5.

¹⁰ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 9.

contracting to do things with others; (3) developing complex and enriching forms of discourse; and (4) building an intergenerational store of knowledge. As it happens, he is also very insightful about the positive impact that the Internet has had on the cognitive capacities of our generation. However, as the title of his book indicates, Buchanan is much more sharply focused on biomedical enhancements than he is on any other type of cognitive enhancement.

Buchanan defines “biomedical cognitive enhancement” as follows: “A biomedical enhancement uses biotechnology to cause an improvement of an existing capacity by acting directly on the body (including the brain).”¹¹ There are, he maintains, many different modes of biomedical enhancement, some of which have already been used successfully in humans whilst others have been used successfully only in laboratory animals. They include:

... drugs; selecting which embryos to implant in the uterus by screening them for genes that are likely to result in better than normal capacities; implanting genetically altered tissue into the body or brain; genetically engineering human embryos (fertilized egg cells) or gametes (sperm or egg cells); and technologies that connect computers directly to the brain.¹²

Buchanan observes that cognitive enhancement, through the use of drugs, is now a feature of everyday life for some students. They use Ritalin, a drug that psychiatrists prescribe to treat attention deficit disorder or ADD, even though they do not have the condition; and they do so because they find that it helps them to study more efficiently. Other drugs developed to treat Alzheimer’s dementia and narcolepsy “have been shown to improve thinking in people who are not cognitively impaired.”¹³ We can expect that those drugs too will have been used by certain groups of people –perhaps army personnel on dangerous missions– who want to enhance their normal capacity to remember, to reason, to pay attention, etc. With regard to on-going research in the area of genetic engineering, Buchanan remarks that there have already been “successful gene changes in laboratory animals,” like mice, the composition of whose DNA is surprisingly close to that of humans.¹⁴ And what that tells us, he suggests, is that in the future human beings will “be able to change their physical, cognitive and emotional capacities by deliberately modifying their genes.”¹⁵ Indeed, he is convinced that at some point in the future it will be possible to use a pharmaceutical or some other biomedical intervention to enhance “existing capacities for impulse control, sympathy, altruism, or moral obligation.”¹⁶

Darwin’s theory of evolution is an important reference point for Buchanan’s reflections on human beings and their development to date. Thus, he draws on Darwin for support when thinking about nature and its limitations. As he points out, Darwin thought that nature was not any kind of “master engineer” but was rather something that could be described as both “bloody

¹¹ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 5.

¹² Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 6.

¹³ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 3.

¹⁴ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 4.

¹⁵ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 4.

¹⁶ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 77.

and inept."¹⁷ Buchanan thinks that Darwin was right about that, but he wants to go further. The violence and ineptitude of nature prompt him to suggest that human beings could probably do a better job managing human evolution than nature has done. He concedes that for a successful outcome it would be important that (1) all interventions are "informed by the best scientific knowledge of how that process works"; and (2) negative unintended consequences are kept to a minimum through the use of "risk reduction rules of thumb" along the lines of John Rawls' "counting principles."¹⁸ Buchanan does not offer any general comments on the human condition nor does he examine individual structures of human experience like finitude, embodiment, and freedom. As far as he is concerned, the human species is and always has been a work in progress, and the day will come when, with or without human intervention, the human evolves into the post-human, whatever that might turn out to be.

Paul Ricœur takes a very different approach to answering the question: What is a human being? As he clarifies in "Humans as the Subject Matter of Philosophy," a paper that he presented at the World Congress of Philosophy in 1988, his approach to answering that question is closely modelled on Kant's. As he explains, "With Kant, I assume that the question: What is a human? far from constituting the first question that philosophy is able to raise, comes at the end of a series of prior questions such as: What can I know? What must I do? What am I allowed to hope?"¹⁹ However, he points out that "these three Kantian questions are not the only ones that can introduce the decisive question: What is a human?"²⁰ The following questions will work just as well: "Who speaks?", "Who acts?", "Who recounts?", and "Who takes responsibility for their actions?" He has already raised that series of prior questions in the Gifford Lectures. He will raise them again in *Oneself as Another*.²¹ It is the answer to the fourth and final of Ricœur's series of prior questions that is most revealing when it comes to distinguishing his understanding of a human being from that of Darwin and those like Buchanan, but also John Dewey and Richard Rorty, who take inspiration from him. *Oneself as Another* comprises ten studies. And to understand how Ricœur answers the question: Who takes responsibility for their actions? you need to pay careful attention to what he writes in the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Studies, but particularly in the Eighth.

In the Seventh Study, Ricœur talks about certain human capacities being worthy of esteem, and humanity holding itself worthy of self-esteem because it has such capacities. Those capacities are "capacities such as the initiative of acting, choice on the basis of reasons, estimating and evaluating the goals of action."²² Ricœur returns in the Eighth Study to that idea of humanity esteeming itself on the basis of its admirable capacities. He wants to show that whilst Kant's deontological conception of morality ultimately splits from Aristotle's teleological conception of

¹⁷ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 26.

¹⁸ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 95.

¹⁹ Paul Ricœur, "Humans as the Subject Matter of Philosophy," in Peter T. Kemp and David Rasmussen (eds), *The Narrative Path. The Later Works of Paul Ricœur* (Cambridge/London: The MIT Press, 1989), 89.

²⁰ Ricœur, "Humans as the Subject Matter of Philosophy," 89.

²¹ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²² Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 204.

ethics, it remains tied to it in certain respects. Thus, when Kant talks about respect, he means “self-esteem under the reign of the law.”²³ And when he introduces the idea of a good will, he is encapsulating the capacities in virtue of which humanity considers itself to be worthy of respect. Ricœur comments that “one can pair the Kantian concept of will with the power of positing a beginning in the course of things, of determining oneself through reasons, a power which, as we have stated, is the object of self-esteem.”²⁴ Now what all of that tells us about Ricœur’s approach to answering the question: What is a human being? is that he has little or no interest in the idea of human beings as a species with the potential for further evolution. He would prefer to pursue the ideas that humanity has capacities deemed worthy and humanity considers itself worthy of self-esteem in virtue of having such capacities.

There is a risk that the enhancement of human capacities through the use of biomedical interventions, as outlined by Buchanan, could lead to the erosion of humanity’s self-esteem if, that is, biomedical interventions come to be used as substitutes for the capacities that form the very ground of that self-esteem. For that reason alone, Ricœur would have had grave concerns about the biomedical enhancement of human capacities, and we should not expect to find anything in his work that could be compared with Buchanan’s assessment of the opportunities and the dangers associated with an enhancement of that type. But Ricœur would certainly have been interested in Buchanan’s thoughts on the non-biomedical enhancement of human capacities, and we can expect to find material in his work that would allow us to make comparisons there. As we have seen, Buchanan makes passing reference to education and the way it enhances human capacities when he comments on the enormous benefits of literacy. In that connection, he also mentions numeracy, computer skills, and institutions.

Dominique Janicaud is another philosopher who believes that humanity is moving inexorably toward the widespread use of biomedical enhancement techniques. However, his assessment is very different from Buchanan’s. Worried, as Ricœur would have been, that biomedical enhancements will become substitutes for our freedom, he recommends that we adopt both a “precautionary” humanism and a Nietzsche-inspired approach to developing the psychological and moral potential of human beings.

II. Dominique Janicaud on Being Between the Inhuman and the Superhuman

In the Preface to *On the Human Condition*, Janicaud remarks that “There is now an unprecedented uncertainty about human identity.”²⁵ And that uncertainty could grow “especially if, at some point in the future, genuine biotechnological mutations were to transform ‘the human race’ to the point of rendering it unrecognizable, biologically, technically, culturally.”²⁶ To show

²³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 214.

²⁴ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 206.

²⁵ Dominique Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, trans. Eileen Brennan (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 1.

what he means, he describes what happens to the hero of Frederick Pohl's science fiction novel *Man Plus*, Roger Torraway, and the reactions of one of Torraway's co-workers. As Janicaud recalls certain details of the plot, Torraway is an astronaut who has been selected to travel to Mars.²⁷ To prepare for that mission he undergoes a series of surgical operations and implantations that completely transform his brain and his senses, but also his muscle structure and his skin. At the end of the transformation process, Torraway is perfectly adapted for conditions on the 'red planet,' but he no longer has anything that could be described as a human face; he has lost all the feelings and behaviours that would allow him to express himself as a sexual being; and he is now fully assisted and controlled by a battery of computers. Indeed, the changes are so significant that the Mars bound astronaut acquires a new name: the Cyborg. The new name is meant to capture the idea that he has become a "mixed being." That is to say, he is now at one and the same time a human being and a robot. At one point, Janicaud raises a question about the ethics of using the human body as a host or "platform" for technologies that are designed only to enhance performance.²⁸ He thinks that that question was very much on Pohl's mind when he suggested that one particular astronaut became very uncomfortable when he was told that "Colonel Roger Torraway, [is a] human being ... As human as you are, except for some improvements."²⁹ As Janicaud observes, it is the human body that gives humanity its "age-old configuration"; and in the case of the Cyborg that body has been changed almost beyond recognition.

Janicaud found his example of a technologically enhanced human being in a science fiction novel. He never considers the Cyborg to be anything other than a mythical figure. Indeed, at one point in the book, he suggests that the myth of the Cyborg tells us more about our aspirations –and our fears– than it does about the actual form of a technologically "readjusted" humanity. As he notes, it tells us that we aspire to immortality, invulnerability and a sovereign intelligence, aspirations that are as old as humanity itself. That said he believes that the Cyborg indicates the direction of research already begun. Writing in 2002 and looking to the future, he conjectures that bioengineering and nanotechnologies, combined with advances in a miniaturised computing, will eventually allow for the development of extremely robust, almost immortal "human specimens" that are endowed with a prodigious memory, an extremely quick and strategic intelligence, and a heightened sensory palette.³⁰ Indeed, he is convinced that our technological-scientific civilisation is moving in that direction, that it aims at that type of goal.

However, Janicaud is worried that biomedical neuroenhancement could lead to forms of "the inhuman" never seen before. The danger is that enhanced capabilities in physical strength, memory, and reasoning, etc. will allow humans to perpetrate the type of acts that take inhumanity to a whole new level of depravity. The notion of "the inhuman" is the most Kantian of the ideas that we find in Janicaud's work. He talks about inhuman acts such as rape, torture, and sadistic murder resulting in the very humanity of the perpetrator degenerating "as if seized by a sort of regressive fever."³¹ He accepts that some acts are so wicked that people are inclined to doubt that

²⁷ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 30-1.

²⁸ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 31

²⁹ Quoted in Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 31.

³⁰ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 33.

³¹ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 20.

they were perpetrated by a human being. But he wonders at their naivete. How could they not know that the sight of blood spilled in a massacre excites sadistic murderers? How could they not know that the cries and groans of victims make those murderers crueller still? He thinks that instead of doubting that a human being could do anything so terrible, we need to face up to the fact that there are human beings who surrender to evil for the sake of evil, and in doing so open themselves up to a devastating regression in their status as human beings. He is convinced that there is in fact no limit to inhumanity. Indeed, at one point in his commentary on Pohl's *Man Plus* he expresses surprise that the Cyborg, who becomes very destructive at one point, is not "more monstrous."³²

Janicaud turns to "the teachings of Pascal" for guidance when he wants to dramatize a human being's relationship to good and evil. Pascal famously described human beings as positioned mid-way between an angel and a beast. Janicaud takes up that idea and updates it so that human beings are seen to be positioned mid-way between "the inhuman" and "the superhuman." When he talks about "the superhuman," he is of course drawing on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, more particularly on *Human All Too Human*. He starts his reflection on "the superhuman" by quoting some very famous lines from that book: "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?"³³ Adapting and updating what Nietzsche's Zarathustra is teaching, he describes "the superhuman" as "a void in which the future [of humanity] gapes open" and is given to the will of human beings so that they can decide what their future will be.³⁴ However, Janicaud's reflections on what it means to be a human being extend beyond adopting and updating Pascal's idea that a human is a balancing act between an angel and a beast. They also extend to revisiting the great debate between the anti-humanist Martin Heidegger and the humanist Jean-Paul Sartre. Janicaud accepts that adopting a humanist stance –something he is going to recommend– is not uncontroversial. Indeed, he notes that even Sartre had issues with that form of humanism that simply declares that human beings are "magnificent." But he asks: "How can we not be humanist before the horror of the extermination camps, before the madness of terrorist attacks on innocent people?" He thinks that to prevent the resurgence of inhumanity in a future where biomedical enhancement techniques are widely available and widely used, we need to have what he terms a "precautionary" humanism. However, he concedes that if we are to give Heidegger's powerful critique of humanism the consideration that it is due, we will also have to be cautious about making man the measure of all things.

Humanism serves several purposes in *On the Human Condition*. Not only does it help Janicaud to answer the question: "What is a human being?" and to identify some kind of preventative measure against regression to the level of the inhuman, it also gives him a more or less ready-made account of freedom that he soon puts to good use. Following Jean-Paul Sartre, Janicaud observes that we human beings live lives that have a *finite* duration, and we do so not only in an *embodied* state but also in a *conscious* one. We also know what it means to be *free* and to be *responsible* for the choices we make between good and evil. When Janicaud comments on what

³² Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 34.

³³ Quoted in Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 46.

³⁴ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 47.

it means for human beings to be free, he stays very close to the famous thesis of Jean-Paul Sartre, maintaining that the extent of human freedom is simply "unfathomable." Sartre is an important reference for Janicaud here because Sartre's focus, like that of Janicaud, is on the freedom that humans have to define who they are.

Janicaud uses this idea of an unplumbed human freedom to great effect when, at the end of the book, he returns to consider "the superhuman." As already mentioned, "the superhuman" is his updated version of Pascal's angel, one of two directions in which human beings are pulled, the other direction being the inhuman or as Pascal would have it, the beast. Focusing now on Nietzsche's idea of "the call" of the Superman, he links responses to that call with the exercise of freedom. He declares that a "humanity that stopped wondering about itself would cease to be free."³⁵ And so he urges human beings everywhere to open their minds to other human possibilities provided that those possibilities are not "regressive."

However, Janicaud admits to being disheartened by what he has seen to date in terms of visions of the future. He observes that human beings now dream of a future where they will have "a titanic power, increased physical and intellectual capacities, and an indefinitely prolonged life in comfort and good health," but he wonders whether that would really be a better life than the one we currently have.³⁶ Where, he asks, is the idealism or "higher motive" in all of this? Who has given any thought to the psychological and moral progress of human beings? He warns that we are now heading in the direction of "enormous powers for a humanity (without art, religion or philosophy) which has lost every reason to live apart from its own preservation."³⁷ For him, answering the call of the Superman has nothing to do with any of this. It is, rather, all about exploring "the great space" of the psychological and moral potential of human beings, something that can be done, he says, only with the help of philosophical and poetic thought.

He does not comment directly on the role that families, schools, and cultural contexts might play in developing the psychological and moral potential of human beings, although it is clear that they would have some role to play if only when it comes to equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary for a fruitful engagement with philosophy and poetics. His only direct comment on "the family, school, humanistic culture" links them with "conventional systems of control and sanction" under the heading: "the 'classic' means of defence," and recognizes their shared powerlessness against "the new forms of violence that are produced by the technician-civilization and spread by the media (all sorts of terrorism, gratuitous violence, mass psychological release, sadomasochism and perversions broadcast by the internet, cinema, television, video, etc.)"³⁸ How prescient he was! Janicaud's comment on the powerlessness of the family and school, etc. in the face of certain new forms of violence brings us back to the inhuman. His recommendations for dealing with this and other forms of the inhuman include a "precautionary" humanism and an "ethical vigilance."

³⁵ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 57.

³⁶ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 48.

³⁷ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 49.

³⁸ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 55.

III. Addressing the Fears around Biomedical Neuroenhancement

Although Janicaud is very concerned that biomedical neuroenhancement will eventually lead to the creation of forms of inhumanity never seen before, he is determined to do all he can to ensure that the debate on biomedical neuroenhancement is measured. He begins by examining the language people use to express their fears about what biomedical neuroenhancement could mean for them and for the human beings in general. He wants to demonstrate that poorly chosen terms can get in the way of seeing things for what they really are. He focuses in particular on the word “monster,” which he notes can be used in two very different senses: (1) the sense in which biologists and members of the medical profession use the term; and (2) the sense in which the general public use it when referring to someone who has committed a heinous act.

With reference to (1) above, Janicaud notes that when biologists and members of the medical profession talk about monsters, they mean a human being or non-human animal that displays “maximal divergence with regard to normality.”³⁹ Importantly, “monster” in that sense *does not* entail a value judgement. Janicaud uses a rather well-known novel to show his readers why they need not be afraid of those who display “maximal divergence with regard to normality” and beyond that, why it is wrong to ostracize humans who fit that description. I say more about that below. With reference to (2) above, he repeats what Hannah Arendt said about the incautious use of the term “monster” to describe Adolph Eichmann during the time that he was standing trial for war crimes. She warned that the hysteria generated by portraying Eichmann as a monster threatened to undermine the cause of justice; and she reminded the public that torturers, murderers and rapists are simply *ordinary human beings* who have forgotten their moral obligations to the human community. The lesson for those who are fearful that science and technology will produce “moral monsters” should be clear. If scientific and technological experimentation allow people to degenerate to levels of inhumanity never seen before, those people must still be held accountable for their actions. But the better course is to guard against that sort of thing happening in the first place by referring every research proposal to an ethics committee with a robust commitment to humanism.

Janicaud uses a well-known novel to explain why people have no reason to fear monsters in the sense of those who display “maximal divergence with regard to normality.” The novel in question is Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus*.⁴⁰ Shelly’s re-working of the ancient myth focuses on one particular detail –that Prometheus created human beings from clay– and she has her protagonist Dr Frankenstein draw on the resources of modern science to create a monster. As Shelly tells the story, Frankenstein’s experiment appears at first to have been a success, but before long the monster escapes from the laboratory and later carries out a series of gruesome killings. The scientist quickly realizes what he is dealing with, makes a huge effort to stop the monster from wreaking havoc, but eventually has to accept defeat. Not surprisingly, he comes to regret ever having undertaken the project.

Janicaud interprets the story in a slightly unusual but nonetheless interesting way. He maintains that the most valuable thing that Mary Shelley’s updated myth of Prometheus has to

³⁹ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 20.

⁴⁰ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 23.

offer is a profound insight into human psychology, which captures (1) the way ordinary people react to those who diverge the most from what is considered normal for human beings; and (2) the way those who fit into the latter category are likely to respond to the negative reactions of others. With reference to (1) above, Janicaud observes that the dialogue between Frankenstein and the monster shows that the monster is indistinguishable from a human being, at least with regard his intellectual, emotional and moral capacities. Of course, the monster does not look like a normal human being; he is physically repellent. Realising that normal human beings find his appearance quite shocking the monster initially does his best to evoke sympathy in others. Yet, the negative reaction to his appearance continues unabated; he is "shunned and hated by all mankind," a situation that pushes him toward an intolerable solitude. With reference to (2) above, Janicaud notes that the dialogue between Frankenstein and the monster also shows that the hatred that the normal humans showed toward the monster and the ill-treatment he suffered at their hands gave him an unshakeable thirst for vengeance. Janicaud may have decided to retell Shelly's story for prudential reasons. He may want to warn us about the dangers of ostracizing physically powerful "human specimens," to use one of his own phrases. But equally, he may want us to see how quickly things get out of hand when we overreact. On Janicaud's view, an irrational fear led the other humans to behave badly toward the monster; then because he had been made so miserable by their treatment of him the monster's thoughts turned to vengeance.

Similarly, Buchanan acknowledges that many people are fearful that the biomedical enhancement of the normal cognitive and affective capacities of humans will prove disastrous for our species. However, as far as he is concerned, there is nothing irrational about that fear; the use of biomedical enhancement techniques does carry certain risks. Referencing the myth of Prometheus, which he interprets in a more conventional manner, Buchanan says that the ancient Greeks were right to warn against the danger of hubris, that is, "over-weaning pride or being unjustifiably confident in our ability—in this case our ability to control our technologies."⁴¹ Nonetheless, he remains convinced that the risks associated with biomedical enhancements can be kept to a minimum. I have already noted in that regard his suggestion that the safest way for our species to manage our own evolution is to ensure that (1) all interventions are "informed by the best scientific knowledge of how that process works"; and (2) negative unintended consequences are kept to a minimum through the use of "risk reduction rules of thumb" along the lines of John Rawls' "counting principles."

IV. Ricœur on Fear and the Production of an "Ethical Consciousness"

There are some remarkable passages in *The Symbolism of Evil* where Ricœur talks about fear. He comments that "It is not the *immediate* abolition but the *mediate* sublimation of fear, with a view to its *final* extenuation, which is the soul of all true education."⁴² The idea is that education is essentially a matter of channelling into a productive output the fears that learners bring to the learning situation. To take one of the examples offered by Marguerite Léna, who comments on Ricœur's text, very young children are often afraid to take a risk and try their hand at a skill like

⁴¹ Buchanan, *Better Than Human*, 13.

⁴² Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 44.

reading, writing or calculating. But given that acquiring centuries-old skills like these is an important step on the child's journey to being able to "demonstrate" their humanity,⁴³ a way will have to be found to manage the children's fears. Ricœur's advice is not to eliminate those fears immediately but mediately. That is to say, by the intervention of an intermediary agent or means. Echoing that advice, Léna urges teachers not to try to eliminate fear, but rather to transform it, through "the power of love," into the feeling that it is safe to take a risk in class. She explains that when a child is "truly loved" they will feel that it is safe to risk getting something wrong; they may even go on to seek out opportunities for risk-taking and develop a taste for it.⁴⁴ The ultimate objective is for the learner to gradually take full possession of their own humanity. Léna is picking up here on another idea that Ricœur introduces in the passage. He writes, "Before casting out fear, love transforms and transposes it."⁴⁵

Ricœur had great respect for Léna, a former doctoral student of his, and he felt that she had correctly interpreted what he says in *The Symbolism of Evil* about "the soul of all true education."⁴⁶ Here is an abridged version of the relevant passages:

It is not the *immediate* abolition but the *mediate* sublimation of fear, with a view to its final extenuation, which is the soul of all true education. Fear remains an indispensable element in all forms of education, familial, scholastic, civic, as well as in the protection of society against the infraction of citizens. The project of an education which would dispense with prohibition and punishment, and so with fear, is undoubtedly not only chimerical but harmful. Much is learned through fear and obedience—including the liberty which is inaccessible to fear. There are steps that cannot be dispensed with without harm...the abolition of fear could only be the *horizon*, and so to speak, the *eschatological future* of human morality. Before casting out fear, love transforms and transposes it. A conscience that is militant and not yet triumphant does not cease to discover ever sharper fears.⁴⁷

Léna explains that what Paul Ricœur is doing here is calling to mind "the educative function of fear" as well as "the spiritual transfiguration" to which it leads. However, she wants to make a distinction between fears with educational value and those without, describing the latter as fears that suffocate and paralyze. She thinks that educators should arouse fears with educational value, and cure those that have none. She talks about the fears that very young children have when they look upon the faces of strangers or find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. She also speaks with tenderness about children who are frightened at the prospect of starting school. Those and other fears of that type can always be allayed, she says, through the power of love.

Ricœur and Léna use Ricœur's ideas on the connection between fear and education for very different purposes. Ricœur, building on work he did some years earlier in "Objectivity and

⁴³ Marguerite Léna, *L'esprit de l'éducation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991).

⁴⁴ Léna, *L'esprit de l'éducation* 110.

⁴⁵ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 45.

⁴⁶ Jean Greisch drew my attention to Marguerite Léna's work in education and told me about Ricœur's holding it in high regard when we met in Paris in 2013.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 44-5.

Subjectivity in History,"⁴⁸ wants to describe the formation of an "ethical consciousness," whereas Léna wants to develop a philosophy of Catholic education. In "Objectivity and Subjectivity in History," Ricœur comments on various forms of subjectivity and how they are produced. He observes that "the historian's craft *educates* his subjectivity. History makes the historian as much as the historian makes history. Or, to be more precise, the historian's craft makes history and the historian."⁴⁹ For Ricœur, education is a process whose end product is a particular kind of subjectivity. Curiously, he makes no mention of a flesh and blood educator, although that should not be taken to mean that the account of education that he is offering in "Objectivity and Subjectivity in History" is significantly different from the account he will offer some years later. As already mentioned, when he talks about "the mediate sublimation of fear" in *The Symbolism of Evil*, he means the sublimation of fear by the intervention of either an intermediary agent *or some other means*.

Ricœur had already written about a form of education that does not involve teaching in "Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher."⁵⁰ Reflecting on the significance of Mounier's life and work, he focuses attention on Mounier's teaching, noting that he first taught "university philosophy" to "a public composed of students, professors and, in general, adult education."⁵¹ He explains that Mounier then broke with teaching and "assumed responsibility for a movement that was embodied in a Review" called *Esprit*.⁵² He comments that it was only when he experienced a "rupture with teaching" that Mounier really began to *educate* others. Recognizing Mounier's enormous contribution to education in France, he adds, "I would venture to say that Emmanuel Mounier, like Péguy, was the *pedagogue* and *educator* of a generation."⁵³ By the time he came to write the passage on education in *The Symbolism of Evil* that inspired Léna Ricœur had, then, already figured out what the education of subjectivity looks like and the different ways in which "the mediate sublimation of fear" can be achieved, that is, either with or without a teacher.

I want to look now at the second line from the above quoted passage from *The Symbolism of Evil*: "Fear remains an indispensable element in all forms of education, familial, scholastic, civic, as well of the protection of society against the infractions of citizens."⁵⁴ That comment allows us to make a comparison between Ricœur's thoughts on the family and those of Janicaud. As already mentioned, Janicaud describes the family as one of the "conventional systems of control and sanction," alongside the school and humanistic culture. And like them, he says, it finds that it is powerless against "the new forms of violence that are produced by the technician-civilization and spread by the media (all sorts of terrorism, gratuitous violence, mass psychological release, sadomasochism and perversions broadcast by the internet, cinema, television, video, etc.)"⁵⁵ Ricœur, who belonged to a generation that had been told about –if they had not witnessed first-

⁴⁸ Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 21-40.

⁴⁹ Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 31.

⁵⁰ Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 133-61.

⁵¹ Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 134.

⁵² Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 134.

⁵³ Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 135.

⁵⁴ Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 44-5.

⁵⁵ Janicaud, *On the Human Condition*, 55.

hand– inhuman acts of violence perpetrated in concentration camps and prisoner of war camps, had a very different sense of the power of the family. He believed that as long as it did not eliminate fear but channelled it into the production of an “ethical consciousness,” it would continue to serve one of its most important functions.

The idea of an “ethical consciousness” is an interesting one. It can be contrasted with Janicaud’s plea for “ethical vigilance” and Buchanan’s call for the use of “risk reduction rules of thumb,” both designed, as we have seen, to prevent the inhumanity made possible through ‘advances’ in science and technology. One could argue that to be effective, the measures proposed by Janicaud and Buchanan would need all those making decisions about biomedical interventions to always appreciate the importance of those ethical safeguards and to never fail to use them, even if using them came at a high cost to them personally. And that is simply not realistic, at least not in the world as we know it. Significantly, worries of that type do not arise with regard to Ricœur’s proposals. From the start, Ricœur focuses attention on the subjectivity, or consciousness, of the decision-maker and agent. Getting that right is key. He believes that a decision-maker and agent must have an “ethical consciousness” in the way a historian has a historian’s consciousness. Seeing issues through an ethical lens must become second nature to them. It could be argued that humanity would not face the dangers that Janicaud writes about if every human being had the “ethical consciousness” that Ricœur talks about in *The Symbolism of Evil*. People with a consciousness of that type would not entertain the thought of using science and technology in ways that would put humanity in danger. But this is where a new worry takes hold. It is not the case that all humans have had their fears channelled into an “ethical consciousness” through some mediator. It is not the case that all humans have experienced the transforming power of education. In such circumstances, it makes sense to talk about additional preventative or precautionary measures. But how much better it would be for all of us if “true education,” in Ricœur’s sense, were something that everyone could have.

I want to return now to Janicaud and what he says about answering the call of the Superman, which he explains is all about exploring “the great space” of the psychological and moral potential of human beings, something that can be done, he says, only with the help of philosophical and poetic thought. Janicaud offers some indication of how philosophical thought could be of help when he turns to philosophers like Sartre and Heidegger to help him answer the question: What is a human being? His debt to Nietzsche also serves as an example. However, he says very little about how poetical thought could help with the exploration of the above mentioned “great space” of human psychological and moral potential. It is tempting to suggest that the answer lies in a work like Ricœur’s *The Rule of Metaphor*, which shows, at least in principle, how poetic thought can play a role in developing the psychological and moral potential of human beings, but also how an engagement with poetic thought can lead to further growth.⁵⁶ However, that would be to twist Ricœur’s words into a shape that they were never meant to have. Ricœur’s answer to the question: What is a human being? tells us all we need to know about his attitude to the Superhuman. He would not have any interest in human potential of that order. He is interested in human potential as it was described by Aristotle and Kant. For him, existing human capacities are

⁵⁶ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor* [1978], trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

already so impressive that having such capacities allows us to hold ourselves worthy of self-esteem. But that is not to say that they can be left to lie dormant. We must strive to realise our moral and psychological potential through active engagement with forms of thought such as poetic thought.

To conclude, I will briefly outline what Ricœur says in *The Rule of Metaphor* first about engaging with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and then about engaging with his *Poetics* that is relevant to the claims I have been making. There is a key moment in *The Rule of Metaphor*'s first study where Ricœur reflects on what is being suggested by something Aristotle says about how metaphors work. He notes that Aristotle's explanation for how metaphors work draws on the idea of "categorical transgression, understood as a deviation in relation to a pre-existing logical order, as a dis-ordering in a scheme of classification."⁵⁷ And the thing that makes that transition interesting, he observes, is that "it creates meaning; as it is put in the *Rhetoric*, metaphor 'conveys *learning and knowledge* through the medium of the *genus*' (1410 b 13)."⁵⁸ Ricœur continues: "What is being suggested, then, is this: should we not say that metaphor destroys an order only to invent a new one; and the category-mistake is nothing but the complement of a *logic of discovery*?"⁵⁹ Yves Hersant expresses it well when he remarks that what Ricœur is doing here and elsewhere in the text is, "finding ways of thinking about emergent meaning events."⁶⁰ In other words, he is finding ways of capturing the experience of learning something new, a moment in a very much longer human developmental process.

When Ricœur turns to consider what Aristotle says about metaphor in the *Poetics*, he does so in the context of a discussion on the meaning of *mimêsis*. He notes that it was Aristotle's view that "There is *mimêsis* only where there is a 'making [*faire*].'"⁶¹ Acknowledging that *mimêsis* is usually translated as "imitation," he exclaims that "Now this is quite a strange brand of imitation, which composes and constructs the very thing it imitates!"⁶² He then makes two comments on "this function of ordering." The second comment is the one that I am interested in: "... it is this ordering function that explains why the pleasure that imitation gives us would be a variety of the pleasure that man finds in *learning*. What pleases us in the poem is the sort of clarification, of total transparency, that the tragic composition achieves."⁶³ It is significant that Ricœur is drawing attention to the connection between learning and pleasure. We know that if an activity is pleasurable, we are going to want to do more of it. Thus, one positive experience of learning will lead to another, allowing us to continue to explore our human potential, perhaps for a lifetime.

I mentioned at the outset that it was the recently published report of the Futures of Education Commission that inspired me to write this paper. They have warned that "Our humanity and planet Earth are under threat." But they have also acknowledged "the power of

⁵⁷ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 22.

⁵⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 22 [my italics].

⁵⁹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 22 [my italics].

⁶⁰ Quoted in François Dosse, *Paul Ricœur. Un philosophe dans son siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), 124.

⁶¹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 38.

⁶² Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 38.

⁶³ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 39 [my italics].

education to bring about profound change.” I believe that they will find in Ricœur a philosopher who not only cares deeply for humanity, but also has ideas for “true education” and its transformative power that are well worth considering.

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