

Introduction

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Guest Editors

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Introduction

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In June of 2017, the Fonds Ricoeur in Paris, in partnership with the Society for Ricoeur Studies, hosted the first summer workshop. Entitled, *Rethinking Ideology and Utopia: 30 Years Later*, the workshop coincided with the 30th anniversary of the publication of Ricoeur's *Lectures in Ideology and Utopia*, the text that corresponded with Ricoeur's course on the social imaginary conducted at the University of Chicago in 1975.

Beyond this symbolic date and looking more closely at our current political, sociological and geopolitical context, Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* continue to have relevancy. This text, while introducing new lines of thought and, during the workshop, inviting each participant to debate, continues to seduce the reader.

Contrary to the revival of interest in utopia that characterizes the present era, Ricoeur confessed in 1967—in *Plaidoyer pour l'utopie ecclésiastique*—that it seemed difficult, in the context of the seventies, to take the question of utopia seriously, because the word “utopia” seemed out of fashion. He added then that to speak of utopia—that is, to speak of a place which is another place, an elsewhere which is a nowhere—would even appear as a provocation. If, therefore, he insisted on speaking about utopia, it was essentially to think about something that did not belong to calculated expectations.

For Ricoeur, what makes the concept of utopia interesting is that it opens up a double horizon: on the one hand, that of a unified humanity, where man is considered one man, and on the other hand, that of a struggle against anonymity, against the “loss of personal significance, the loss of individual value” and for personalization. Ricoeur saw the phenomenon of utopia motivated by a “curious paradox” because it seems to aim both at the gathering of a humanity in the process of breaking up and the individualization of destinies that tend to bring uniformity.

To speak of utopia in France during the years dominated by Marxism and structuralism might also appear as a response to a certain dominant ideology—notably that of Marxism—and as a testimony to the philosopher's desire to mark a certain critical position towards Marx. It should not be forgotten, however, that the sixties, and in particular the *L'Essai sur Freud*, prepared the field for future Ricœurian reflection concerning Marx's thought and the ideological phenomenon, to the extent that Ricoeur identifies Marx as one of the three masters of suspicion along with Freud and Nietzsche. Marx's work forms part of the hermeneutics of suspicion—dear to Ricoeur—a hermeneutics that helps the consciousness to better understand even itself.

If paradox is an undeniable element of Ricœurian thought, it is found at work in both the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and *From Text to Action*, through the dual and conflictual figure of a social or cultural imaginary. This imaginary operates sometimes in the form of ideology, sometimes in the form of utopia. For Ricoeur, interest in an exploration of the intercrossing and complementary functions of ideology and utopia lies in the fact that the investigation leads to

thinking about the dialectic of these two forms of social imaginary, therefore answering some of the difficulties and enigmas represented by the philosophical problem of the imagination.

The entire effort of Ricoeurian thought about ideology and utopia consists in trying to understand “the social function of the collective imagination” by taking into account both the positive and constitutive aspects of these two “imaginative practices” and their negative and pathological aspects. To do this, Ricoeur proposes a regressive analysis of the concept of ideology alongside an analysis of the concept of utopia, intending first to distinguish three levels of depth from the concept of ideology proceeding from the most superficial to the most profound. Then, he advances to undertake an analysis of the concept of utopia by following a reverse movement from the most profound to the most superficial level. In view of this analysis, similar tensions created by the three respective functions of ideology and utopia construct a point of equilibrium at the heart of the social and culture imaginary while stressing its essentially conflictual structure.

We can then return to synthesize the parallel analyses of ideology and utopia that Ricoeur develops successively in the *Lectures*. With respect to ideology, Ricoeur takes as a point of departure the common feature of the three functions of ideology, which is the desire to constitute an interpretation of real life, and he proceeds to consider these three functions by traversing the pathological to the constituent dimensions of ideology. The levels emerge as the following:

First level: In the first stage, and regarding the development of Marxism, ideology is defined as distortion-dissimulation. Drawing on Feuerbach’s critique of religion to interpret the metaphor of the reversal of the image in a dark room, Marx establishes a link between human reality, which he defines as practice, and the representation of this reality, which he defines as ideology. As Ricoeur writes, “Thus, ideology becomes the general method by which the process of real life—praxis—is falsified by the imaginary representation that people make of it.”¹ It is therefore by taking up the Marxist critique of ideology as distortion-dissimulation that Ricoeur explains the strictly pathological dimension of ideology.

Second Level: The philosopher establishes a link between domination and rhetoric within the concept of ideology ““Wherever there is power,” writes Ricoeur, “there is a claim of legitimacy. And where there is a claim of legitimacy, there is recourse to the rhetoric of public discourse for the purpose of persuasion.”² It is precisely when it is put at the service of the process of legitimizing authority that it becomes an ideology. With this second level, which Ricoeur considers the pivotal function of ideology, the concept of ideology is characterized by the notion of domination and not by distortion-dissimulation.

Third Level: This is the deepest level of the ideological phenomenon. Here, ideology propagates the conviction that the identity of a given community relies on its founding events, and this community becomes the base of collective memory. For Ricoeur, it is precisely at this complex level that the ideological phenomenon takes on the positive function of integration, through both the continuous and stable image that a group gives itself and the constitution of its narrative identity. It remains, however, that interpreting founding events by commemorating them may open the door to stereotypical rationale. When convention, ritualization, and oversimplification mix with belief, ideology becomes “an artificial and authoritarian grid of reading.” For Ricoeur, this is because the pathological slope of ideology is always present; it needs the critical pole of utopia to create distance. Therefore, continuing his parallel analysis and

addressing the functional structure of utopia, Ricoeur takes as a point of departure the central idea of a “nowhere” characteristic of utopian thought.

First level: In tension with the integrative function of ideology, the nature of the utopian phenomenon resides mainly in its capacity to free the imagination from any representation of the present reality and to project us towards “an elsewhere which is also a nowhere.” Every utopia wants to propose an alternative society and therefore puts the real into question. For Ricoeur, the fundamental function of utopias is thus to undermine the social order in all its forms from within.

Second Level: The second function of the utopian phenomenon is therefore based on the way in which a utopia exercises power at the familial, economic, social and political levels. This leads Ricoeur to consider utopias as imaginative variations of power.

Third level: The third function of a utopia is then placed in parallel with the first function of ideology: just as, in its pathological form, ideology operates as a distortion of reality, utopia substitutes a logic of action with a dreamy, unrealistic logic. And it is at this level where the pathological dimension of a utopia appears, to the degree that a utopic vision is regarded as a schizophrenic attitude toward society.

In our opinion, the richness of the dialectic of ideology and utopia materializes—as Ricoeur thinks through the complexity of levels—in its constitution as a valuable tool for analyzing our contemporary climate in its social, political, ethical, economic, and religious aspects. We express with concern how the pathological function of ideology is most palpable today. Regrettably, the claim to be the only power, in fact the only legitimate power, that can shape the world according to its own interests and tastes—in a way that is more and more assumed—becomes the major political trend for the first military and economic power in the world. Observing daily titles in the media confirms that Habermas’s assertion in *Technique and Science* (1973) regarding “ideology” is still valid today. Our daily life is contaminated by the ideological character of an economic and military power which imposes its reality and its vision of the world. A powerfully ideological reality because, as Ricoeur writes, “a single function, the function of manipulation and utilitarian control, replaces all the other functions of communication, ethical appreciation, and metaphysical and religious mediation.”³ Faced with this control of ideology, we feel more than ever the need to imagine an alternative world. And this world is thinkable only thanks to the utopia that is the possibility of imagining an “elsewhere” or an “another way of being.”

With this perspective, the four contributions of this thematic issue together extend and revisit the Ricoeurian conception of the dialectic of ideology and utopia in original ways. In his article entitled “*Plaidoyer pour l’utopie ecclésiastique: l’utopie de l’humanité comme une et présente en chacun*,” Paolo Furia strives to show how the utopia of humanity, as a totality and a singularity, ushers us into Ricoeur’s philosophical horizon. To this end, he begins by confronting two usages of the notion of utopia: the dreamy, crazy notion of utopia, which has its roots in the sixties and the thoughtful utopia of the following decade. Furia investigates the various militant texts published in *Plaidoyer pour L’Utopie Ecclesiastique*, a valuable “extra-philosophic” source which reflects the social reality in which Ricoeur campaigned in the sixties, namely that of the French Protestant communities which followed a wave of movements beginning in May 1968.

Through an analysis of these largely neglected texts, Furia sheds an interesting light on the political dimension and the paradoxical character of the concept of utopia as a target of achievement for humanity in its universality and its singularity, all while he expands on and develops Ricoeur's work. Furia is interested in both the development of the specific reception of Marxism in Ricoeur's intellectual program and in the early Ricœurian reflections on the question of recognition, which anticipate the grand thesis that Ricoeur develops much later in the *Course for Recognition*.

In the second contribution, Gonçalo Marcelo's "Critique of Ideologies, Critique of Utopias" offers a reading "from the point of view of criticism" of the dialectic of ideology and utopia as it is addressed in Ricoeur's social philosophy. The author first explores the possible influence Ricoeur's philosophy had on political and social philosophy as well as on critical theory. Marcelo finds answers to his investigation scattered throughout Ricoeur's various works, *From Text to Action*, *History and Truth*, *The Course of Recognition*, and *Lecture I: The Political* and especially *Ideology and Utopia*. The article then shows the role of criticism in the context of Ricoeur's philosophy, describing the presence of several types, functions, and objects of criticism and emphasizing its importance in the context of its relationship to critical theory: genealogical, normative, and reconstructive. Even while pointing out certain unresolved problems in the Ricœurian approach to the question of ideology and utopia, Marcelo emphasizes the decisive contributions of the Ricœurian conception of criticism applied to the social imaginary.

The third contribution in this edition focuses on the difficulties associated with understanding Ricoeur's concept of utopia while stressing the value of his dialectical conception of the social imaginary in the tension between ideology and utopia. Elzbieta Lubelska is struck by the fact that in the contemporary context anti-utopias prevail over utopias themselves, and she sets out to find an explanation. In her essay entitled "La temporalisation de l'utopie vers la fin du XVIIIe siècle: ce que cela change pour l'imaginaire social," she emphasizes the ambiguity of the Ricœurian concept of utopia and comes to contest the distinction between "literary utopias" and "practical utopias". Lubelska's thesis shows that the idea that a utopia can be conceived as feasible from its written state depends on a conception of history that only appears in the second half of the 18th century. From this angle, she attempts to reconstruct Ricoeur's complex position regarding Reinhart Koselleck's meta-historical categories of horizons of expectation and space of experience.

In the final essay, *L'utopie: du réel au possible*, Luz Ascarte shows that the concept of utopia proceeds from a reconstruction of Ricoeur's philosophy of imagination, where his method is related to phenomenology. The first two points of her argument focus on the confrontation in the respective analyses of Ricoeur and Mannheim on utopia. The author is interested successively in the convergence between the two philosophers concerning the status of utopia as a deviant attitude compared with reality and with Ricoeur's critique of Mannheim's sociology in the contestable privilege it gives to the reality of fiction. At the end of her reflection, Ascarte underlines the importance of genetic phenomenology in rethinking the social imaginary and insists more generally on the place of phenomenology in Ricoeur's philosophy of the imagination.

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- ¹ “L’idéologie devient ainsi le procédé général par lequel le processus de la vie réelle—la *praxis*—est falsifié par la représentation imaginaire que les hommes s’en font.” Trans to English: Stephanie Arel from Ricœur, Paul, *Du texte à l’action, Essais d’herméneutique II*, Paris, éd. Seuil, 1986, p. 420.
- ² “Là où il y a du pouvoir, écrit Ricoeur, il y a une revendication de légitimité. Et là où il y a une revendication de légitimité, il y a recours à la rhétorique du discours public dans un but de persuasion.” Trans to English: Eileen Brennan from Ricœur, Paul, *Du texte à l’action, Essais d’herméneutique II*, Paris, éd. Seuil, 1986, p. 423.
- ³ “Une seule fonction, la fonction de manipulation et le contrôle utilitaire, remplace toutes les autres fonctions de la communication, d’appréciation éthique, de médiation métaphysique et religieuse.” Trans to English: Eileen Brennan from *Du texte à l’action*, p. 426.