Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies

ERRS

Hermeneutics of the Self

Scott Davidson and Johann Michel, co-editors

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to present the inaugural issue of *Etudes Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* (ERRS). Some of the texts collected here were presented at the international conference (with over one hundred presenters overall) that was held in Lisbon in July 2010 and organized by Gonçalo Marcelo. The call for papers for our first issue, however, sought to be much more inclusive and was addressed to the international community of Ricœur scholars which has now taken root in Europe, North America, Latin America, and many other parts of the world. Although this "community" is not a cloister withdrawn into a rigid orthodoxy, it still recognizes itself to be within the intellectual heritage handed down by our thinker. ERRS thus seeks to be anything but a hagiographical journal, and it is not simply a pedagogical or didactic tool, either. Instead, it is an open space for critical study that provides a place for original and unpublished work on Ricœur and Ricœurian studies. In addition to a group of texts focusing on a specific theme that will constitute the skeleton of each issue, ERRS will also have space, under the rubric of "Varia," for contributions on any issues pertaining to Ricœur's thought. Due to imperfect mastery of the journal's two official languages on the part of some specialists and out of a spirit of equity to them, we also plan to publish special issues in other languages in the future.

Introduction

It is only due to a short cut or an abuse of language that the hermeneutics of the self is sometimes identified with a spontaneous act of interpreting oneself. Strictly speaking, the hermeneutics of the self refers to the theory or philosophy of interpretive understanding of the self. Even if this expression is first set forward, in Ricœur's writing, with the publication of *Oneself as Another*, its original gesture can also be found long before the official "grafting" of hermeneutics onto phenomenology, that is to say, from the earliest works by Ricœur on French reflexive philosophy, most notably, those on Jean Nabert. But, on a second level, the expression resonates clearly with Heideggerian terminology. To speak hermeneutically about the self, an expression tied to the hermeneutics of existence, is to explicitly situate oneself within an ontological tradition that places understanding and interpretation at the heart of the beings who we are. Yet, on a third level, the Heideggerian sources of this expression do not mean that Ricœur shares all the tenets and results of the ontological "revolution" of hermeneutics. Our author does not share, with the Heideggerian movement, the correlative rejection of methodological and epistemological hermeneutics which would be reduced to "alienating distantiation." Ricœur himself always refused to take "the short road" of understanding the self in favor of a continually renewed attention to further "mediations."

This is not the place to delve into all of the details concerning the "long road" of hermeneutics, constructed out of a continual contact with the human sciences, that Ricœur continually traveled from the 1960s up to his final work. From the hermeneutics of existence in *Conflict of Interpretations* to the hermeneutics of the self in *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur distinguishes

himself by a twofold rejection – on the one hand, he rejects the self-positing of immediate consciousness or of a sovereign ego, and on the other hand, the pure and simple dissolution of the subject. There is also an affirmation that goes along with that rejection: the self can be constructed through a long and patient interpretation of what does not belong to it, of what it will perhaps never be able to posses entirely, of an outside that can be in itself, and of a strangeness in the form of the other or the stranger.

There is also a shift of focus in this movement from one hermeneutics to the other. The first hermeneutics of the self, developed in the 1960s, is conceived in terms of an "apprenticeship of signs," to borrow the words of Bernard Stevens. The care of the self is the care of a being who is understood through the interpretation of signs, symbols, narratives, actions and institutions that are outside of it, as an "objective spirit." The second hermeneutics of the self, such as it is articulated especially in *Oneself as Another*, is conceived both as an attestation of the self and as an injunction coming from the other. The care of the self is thereby converted into an ethical and moral concern for the other. This, according to the formula adopted there, is developed through "living with and for others in just institutions." Perhaps here the expression "the hermeneutics of the self" becomes paradoxical: it is introduced into Ricœur's text at the very moment that it is not so much a question of offering a new theory of the interpretive understanding of the self but of constructing a "little ethics" in which the concern for the other seems to have overtaken the concern for oneself.

The contributions that map out the thematic portion of this issue do not aim to cover all of the facets of the hermeneutics of the self in an exhaustive manner. The two "moments" of the Ricœurian hermeneutics evoked above, however, do appear clearly in this collection of articles. And the coherence of this issue is supported by the way in which each article refers to the next one, without ever leading to a simple restatement of it.

The first pair of articles begins with two texts devoted to the relation between Ricœur's journey through psychoanalysis and the crafting of the hermeneutics of the self. The originality of Michel Dupuis's contribution, "Empathy as a Hermeneutic Tool of the Self," consists of not starting classically with Ricœur's book on Freud but from his reflection on Heinz Kohut's self psychology. This reflection, which might initially seem to be secondary, is instead shown to be one of the key sources for the construction of the hermeneutics of the self. Vinicio Busacchi, in his article "Between Narration and Action: Hermeneutics and the Therapeutic Reconstruction of Identity," returns to the Freudian movement in order to show the essential steps that it plays in Ricœur's reflection on the self. It provides a theory of reflection as reappropriation, a theory of narration as the construction and reconstruction of identity, and a theory of recognition as the pathway to emancipation. The interest of Busacchi's thesis consists especially in showing to what extent the appropriation of Freudianism by Ricœurian hermeneutics can contribute, in turn, to a renewal of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

The second pair of contributions focus more explicitly on the "second moment" of the hermeneutics of the self – the ethical-moral moment, if you will – as it is developed primarily in *Oneself as Another*. Marc-Antoine Vallée, in "What Kind of Being is the Self?," sets out to show the ontological underpinnings of the hermeneutics of the self. He reconstructs one key part of the ontological architecture of *Oneself as Another*, on the basis of one of the Aristotelian categories of being – the category of being as relation. Ricœur himself does not explore this category, even though it turns out to be important for keeping the ethical and moral moments of the hermeneutics of the self together. Instead of providing an ontological reconstruction, René Thun

pays close attention to the affective dimension of moral conscience in order to show that it is an unthought aspect of Ricœur's hermeneutics of the self. Although Ricœur gives an important place to the various experiences of passivity in *Oneself as Another*, Thun shows that he does not truly thematize one of the specific affective modalities of moral conscience – the feeling of shame.

The last pair of texts provides a direct confrontation between the Ricœurian hermeneutics of the self with one of its concurrent enterprises, that is, the hermeneutics of the subject that appeared in Michel Foucault's courses at the Collège de France in the 1980s. Each of these contributions, in their own ways, seeks to construct a philosophical dialogue between the two thinkers. Annie Barthélémy, in "Hermeneutic Crossings: An Imaginary Conversation between Ricœur and Foucault," does not minimize the differences between the two authors' "philosophical sites," but she also insists on the crossing or interpellation of the two hermeneutics, with regard to the constitution of the subject, freedom and the status of ethics. In his contribution "Michel Foucault and Paul Ricœur: Toward a Possible Dialogue," Simon Castonguay takes a slightly different approach. He shows that Foucault, although laying out an archeology of the hermeneutics of the subject in a historicized way, does not truly thematize the role of understanding and interpretation. To ward off this blind spot in Foucault's theory, the author seeks a relay and mediation with the Ricœurian hermeneutics of the self, conceived as a specific ontology of understanding.

Preceding the book review of the recent publication of Ricœur's *Ecrits et Conferences II: Herméneutique*, this issue ends with a contribution from Anna Borisenkova, "Narrative Refiguration of Social Events: Paul Ricœur's Contribution to Rethinking the Social," that focuses on Ricœur's use of narrative as a solution to the problem of the event. Against an impersonal conception of the event, the author shows both the justification and limits of a narrative basis of the event, especially for its heuristic use in the social sciences.

We would like to express our gratitude to all of those who have worked behind the scenes on the construction of this first issue, notably the members of our Editorial Board who reviewed paper submissions and the staff of the University Library System at the University of Pittsburgh who have provided a tremendous amount of technical support. We would especially like to thank George Taylor for his tireless commitment to this venture.

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