Making Sense of the Social

Hermeneutics and Social Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper aims to rationnally reconstruct a project of social philosophy in Paul Ricœur. It argues that there is an intrinsic connection between hermeneutics and social philosophy, and that Ricœurian hermeneutics is well suited to provide the interpretative background in which both the recovery of meaningful traditions and the emancipatory interest of social philosophy can successfuly unfold.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Social Philosophy, Ricœur, Honneth, Walzer

Résumé

Cet article tente de reconstruire rationnellement le projet d'une philosophie sociale chez Ricœur. Il s'efforce de montrer qu'il y a un rapport intrinsèque entre l'herméneutique et la philosophie sociale. Dans ce cadre, il essaie aussi de démontrer que l'herméneutique Ricœurienne est bien placée pour développer les outils interprétatifs à l'aide desquels la philosophie sociale peut récupérer les traditions et mettre en avant son intérêt à l'émancipation.

Mots-clés : Herméneutique, Philosophie Sociale, Ricœur, Honneth, Walzer

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Introduction

In 1973, in his famous intervention in the Gadamer/ Habermas debate, Ricœur captured well the essence of what was at stake in the discussion between these two German philosophers. The discussion goes beyond a quarrel between two competing schools, or even two methodologies. Rather, the substantive core of this issue is to decide what is the fundamental, *original* gesture of philosophy. As Ricœur puts it, "Is this gesture an avowal of the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed under the reign of finitude? Or rather is it, in the last analysis, an act of defiance, a critical gesture, relentlessly repeated and indefinitely turned against 'false consciousness', against the distortions of human communication which conceal the permanent exercise of domination and violence?"[1]

Ricœur's aim in this debate is, as elsewhere, to produce a mediation that reformulates the subject matter, in this case, to formulate a hermeneutics which would render justice to the critique of ideology. This would lead to a comprehensive standpoint: philosophy would understand its situated character but also that in certain specific situations the already-existing symbolic order would have to be shattered in order to struggle against unjust situations. In other words, it would both seek the *truth* and be the *method* with which we would be able to discern which already-existing symbolic orders structuring real societies are actually good, and which should be the object of fierce critique. I will try to show how, within the framework of Ricœurian philosophy, this project is possible, even if it is an incredibly demanding one.

Let us grasp the paradox. Gadamerian hermeneutics aims at a rehabilitation of prejudice, authority and tradition, while Critical philosophy is a philosophy of judgment that aims at the liberation from dogma and, in a certain sense, from prejudice. Ricœur, in his very characteristic manner, states that "it is the task of philosophical reflection to eliminate deceptive antinomies."[2] He thus sketches a "critical hermeneutics"[3] that while recognizing the regional character and the specificity of both the critique of ideologies and the hermeneutics of traditions, will nonetheless strive to reconcile a reinterpretation of cultural heritages with an interest in emancipation as a practical project.

I would like to situate this debate against the backdrop of a bigger picture, so that it will be clear how a mixture of these two attitudes can bring about a new and powerful approach to social reality. The "critique of ideologies" is part of a much larger project that we can either call "Critical Theory" or "social philosophy", depending on whether the emphasis is either on the critical, post-Kantian tradition of a philosophy of judgment, or on the Hegelian-Marxist tradition of grasping the "social" element in human communities or forms of ethical life. The so-called Frankfurt School, mainly in its third generation (embodied by Axel Honneth), has precisely been

emphasizing the connection between these two projects, defending a strand of Critical Theory that would at the same time be a social philosophy.[4]

The aim of this paper is therefore to investigate what relation, if any, hermeneutics can have with what we call "social philosophy", understood as the branch of practical philosophy that deals with the description of everyday practices of living communities and with the normative project of liberation through critique. The problematic can be stated as follows: is hermeneutics an appropriate tool to understand the social world? If it is, will it also be a sufficient and sound basis to found a social philosophy in the aforementioned sense? My working hypotheses will be that 1) hermeneutics is indeed a pre-condition to social philosophy but that 2) it is in itself insufficient to fulfill all the tasks that a social philosophy sets for itself. In a nutshell, I contend that a hermeneutical methodology will be an interesting point of departure to *making sense*[5] of the social, although it is ultimately an insufficient way to radically transform social reality. As a result, all social philosophy, if it is not to become a purely constructionist and abstract project, must start with hermeneutics but, if it is to fulfill its emancipatory agenda, must go beyond it. The first section of this paper will provide a sketch of social philosophy and enumerate very briefly the elements of such a project that can be found in Ricœur's works. It will be seen that even though Ricœur never explicitly formulated the project of a social philosophy, it is possible to reconstruct a Ricœurian social philosophy through the use of theoretical elements scattered throughout his works. The second section will describe how Ricœur addresses two traditional issues of social philosophy, namely, the problematic of suffering and a diagnosis of the present time through the concept of crisis. The third section will examine the reflections of Michael Walzer[6] and Axel Honneth[7] on the three possible paths of social criticism – for Walzer: discovery, construction and interpretation – and argue that it is possible, using the philosophy of Paul Ricœur, to arrive at a comprehensive and nuanced definition of interpretation, the path chosen by both Walzer and Honneth in their social criticisms, that grounds social philosophy in hermeneutics. The final section will specify the details of this contribution of Ricœurian hermeneutics to social philosophy.

Ricœur's Contribution to Social Philosophy[8]

Recently, we have seen a rehabilitation of "social philosophy" as a specific discipline, separate both from political philosophy and sociology. For some readers, it might be surprising that it be so. What could a social philosophy be, after the emancipation of sociology from philosophy? In his *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale*, Franck Fischbach defines social philosophy as an interdisciplinary effort, drawing from the insights of the social sciences and philosophy alike.[9] It is still a branch of philosophy, different from sociology (even from theoretical sociology) in that it has a strictly conceptual (and sometimes normative and transformative) aim. As a result, the concepts stemming from social philosophy are prone to be more general and encompassing in their scope, and less precise in their empirical applications than those which are specifically sociological. Nonetheless, social philosophy puts forward concepts that can be put to the test in more refined sociological analyses. If these, in turn, transform and expand the original concept, a more enriched social philosophy will likely ensue. It can therefore be argued that social philosophy, with the help of a hermeneutical approach, might provide an interesting theoretical framework that could be taken up and further elaborated by sociologists. Fischbach further claims that the difference between classical political philosophy

and social philosophy is that the latter does not presuppose individuals as being purely autonomous and rational agents, naturally capable of providing themselves with the means of their own existence. Instead, it takes individuals to be intersubjectively constituted fragile beings of needs and feelings, capable of *social suffering*.[10] This description is not very far removed from Ricœur's own philosophical anthropology. What we find both in his early writings, mainly in *Fallible Man*[11], and in his late anthropology of *Oneself as Another*[12] and *The Course of Recognition*[13] is precisely a self that is both capable and fragile, aiming at the good life but depending on others in order to fulfill it, and even being incomplete if his or her ethical aim does not include the common good for the community. In fact, it is undisputable that Ricœur reflected a number of times on the structure of being-together (*être ensemble*), of the interweaving between the self, others and institutions. This is true in the case of his emphasis on the horizontal relationships of recognition, as well as of his personal engagement in political causes (his opposition to the war on Algeria) and his sporadic critiques of concrete institutions such as the University.

Another key feature of social philosophy, which we will also analyze below, is the tendency to use an organic metaphor to describe societies in terms of health or pathologies. Social philosophy, pursuing this medical metaphor, tends to produce diagnoses of social life.[14] Consistent with the Critical Theory tradition, Honneth sometimes examines societies in terms of the *social* pathologies that their patterns of social reproduction and organization can foster, pathologies that prevent a successful human flourishing. As we will see, Ricœurian hermeneutics can also be of help here. The identification of social pathologies is tied to the search for a cure. Another aspect found in Ricœur and social philosophers is their interest in the "good life", as Aristotle would put it. Both Honneth[15] and Fischbach[16] take the task of making explicit the criteria for the fulfillment of a socially meaningful life (what other authors might call human flourishing) as constitutive of the project of social philosophy. In so doing, social philosophers often recur to thick descriptions of social reality that are not far from Ricœur's own accounts of the embodied narrative self in intersubjective interaction. Moreover, Ricœur's *petite éthique*[17] can be seen as an effort to tackle precisely this problem: the rejection of any attempt to reduce ethical life to a strict emphasis in the normative aspect of moral rules, as well as his insistence on the constitutive capacities of human life are Ricœur's contribution to this project.

Reconstructing Ricœur's social philosophy which, to the best of my knowledge, he never tried to ground systematically[18] is an effort similar to reconstructing his Critical Theory, an effort that has been led, among others, by David Kaplan.[19] There are at least five main topics of his work that could be subsumed under the rubric "social philosophy": 1) the intervention in the Gadamer/Habermas debate and his reflections on ideology and utopia, essential to understanding both the constitutive and the critical function of the social imaginary[20]; 2) the anthropology of capacities, mainly when it intersects with Amartya Sen's capability approach in *The Course of Recognition*. This is when Ricœur's philosophical anthropology can act as a justification for social change, as a justified demand to an increase of one's own right to meaningful capabilities; 3) the elaborations on mutual recognition and the states of peace; 4) the insistence on the fragility of human action, the so-called tragic of action and the problem of suffering; 5) the early reflections of the Strasbourg period (1948-1956),[21] mainly the texts reproduced in *History and Truth*[22], where we can find an assessment of the role of the State[23], an analysis of the relationship between the categories of work and language[24], an analysis of the sociology of knowledge[25] and also an inquiry into the social bond and the different figures assumed by the "other".[26] To these main topics we could also add the comments on the

significance of the notion of "crisis" for modernity that he undertakes in his conference "La crise, un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?"[27] I cannot address all these topics here but I will venture to sum up in the next sections those that seem most important for the connection with the notion of social philosophy we are putting forward.

Ricœur on Suffering, Crisis and Engagement

There is much discussion about Ricœur's outstanding contribution to philosophy. After all, what kind of philosophy does he represent? Is it a pure philosophy of language, as it seemed to have become at some points during the 70s and 80s? Or is it something else? Could we find a philosophy of life in his works, maybe drawing from his early inspiration in Bergson? Maybe we can find a sketch of such a philosophy in *Living up to Death*[28] but at that point in time Ricœur already did not have enough strength to give these intuitions a systematic consistency. Once again, all we have are scattered elements: the influence of Spinoza, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, his insistence that Arendt was right against Heidegger in considering natality, not *Sein-zum-Tod*, the most important feature in human life and, of course, the way he tried to root his hermeneutics in ontology, striving to discover several different types of reference for language.

Nonetheless, having contributed immensely to hermeneutics, but also to the analysis of ordinary language and discourse, Ricœur is sometimes assimilated to the philosophy of language. Thus it has been recently argued by Claude Romano, in his otherwise brilliant *Au Cœur de la raison, la phénoménologie*, that Ricœurian hermeneutics does not sufficiently accommodate the pre-linguistic layers of experience and that, therefore, Ricœur is not capable of avoiding the pitfalls of linguistic idealism (much as, in Romano's reading, Gadamer).[29] It is as if this hermeneutics would rest encapsulated in language, utterly incapable of grasping its reference. For Ricœur thus, the limits of my world would be the limits of my language, and nothing more. This might be almost true – with many nuances, twists and turns – of a certain Ricœur, namely the hermeneutical version that we find in *From Text to Action*[30], with the model of the text. But it is utterly untrue in *The Rule of Metaphor*[31] and elsewhere in his works. In Ricœur, language always sprouts from reality and comes back to it; or even, as in *The Rule of Metaphor* creates a new type of reality through its creativity, thus inventing a new type of reference. Even in the *Symbolism of Evil*, which marks the beginning of Ricœur's hermeneutical turn, symbols are depicted as being rooted in the pre-linguistic. It is therefore crucial to adopt a different reading of Ricœur's work taken as a whole – these shifts and nuances on the connection between language and reality notwithstanding – if this philosophy is to be "practical" and breed a transformative potential. If a philosophy of language was all that could be found in this corpus, there could be no social philosophy, properly speaking, in Ricœur, unless we take intersubjectivity to be merely linguistically grounded. This latter feature might be true, up to a certain extent, in the Habermasian model. And it is this feature that has led Honneth's charge, arguing precisely that Habermas[32] is unable to grasp in his theory the everyday experiences of injustice and suffering that make up an important part of daily social life and motivate the experiences of social struggle and resistance.

I contend that a perfect counter-example that shows us that for Ricœur there really are pre-linguistic layers of experience (whether or not these are expressed in language is another matter) is his constant emphasis on *passivity* (both in *Freedom and Nature* and *Oneself as Another*) and suffering. His example of *Antigone* in *Oneself as Another* is precisely an illustration of this

constitutive fragility.[33] The main problem is that maybe he didn't develop this topic of suffering in a sufficient manner. Ricœur frequently described the capable human being as "the acting and suffering human being" (*l'homme agissant et souffrant*) as if to emphasize the inextricability between *agir et pâtir* in all human endeavor. The difficulty lies in the fact that there is not, to my knowledge, a typology of suffering in Ricœur, even though there are links between suffering, fragility and what we today call an ethics of care.

The lack of a typology notwithstanding, there are clearly some elements that can be drawn in what is said about human suffering that point towards an intermingling between descriptive traits (suffering is ontological) and a properly normative aspect: even though everyone suffers alone, some of the causes of this suffering might be social (e.g., an unjust institution, or an unjust political structure) and the overcoming of this suffering might very well only be possible by means of collective mobilization and resistance. This is already an effort that could be qualified as "social philosophy".

Thus in the small text *La souffrance n'est pas la douleur* (1992) Ricœur states: "I will say this much: *suffering summons us*. The paradox of the relation with the other is unveiled: on the one hand, it is I who suffer, and not the other; we cannot change places; maybe am I even "chosen" to suffer, according to the nightmare of the private Hell; on the other hand, in spite of everything, in spite of the fact that we are apart, the suffering that shows in complaint summons the other person, calls for aid."[34] Even if we cannot change places, he adds that "we still have a modest and maybe even unreasonable conviction that the world could be improved by what Jan Patocka called in his last writings the "solidarity of the shaken.""[35]

Even though Ricœur, with his characteristic modesty, puts it under the banner of a "timid hope", the truth is that these are experiences of resistance he is talking about. The "solidarity of the shaken" is none other than the effort to *resist, in spite of* suffering. Ricœur thus finishes the essay in a Spinozist tone, showing once again his knack, maybe his temptation towards a philosophy of life: "we end up finding the first meaning of suffering, that is to say, to endure, to persevere in the desire of being and the effort to exist in spite of…"[36]

This last feature is interesting because it might allow to consider suffering, even in a Ricœurian manner, as one of these dual concepts that social philosophy produces: those that, such as alienation, reification, the one-dimensional man, the master-slave dialectic, among others, have both a theoretical nature in that they are describing a given social situation and a practical import, since they are criticizing a certain situation and therefore aiming to change it. Ricœur's claim about suffering, if it is not to be understood as merely a stoic virtue, can therefore be interpreted as the unleashing power of our *conatus*, over and above the empirical reality of suffering. Even though I suffer, I am still alive. Even though I suffer, I can still resist. The limits to this approach are, in a certain way, Ricœur's emphasis that suffering is always applied to singular persons and is not, so to speak, "communicable". For Ricœur, the irreplaceability of persons is almost a dogma. This is what allows him, in a critical turn against Kant's practical philosophy in the eighth study of *Oneself as Another*, to consider that the value of persons is over and above the value of the law, in case there is a conflict of duties and the situated judgment is to decide between the bad and the worse. He thus seems to stop short of analyzing social suffering as such (except in his analysis of the victims of history, such as the victims of the gulags and concentration camps).[37] A critique of unjust institutions, for instances, is almost missing from his corpus, the exception being some reflections on the transformations of the university.[38] As a result, his conception of suffering is not as useful for social philosophy as, for instances,

Emmanuel Renault's fine conceptual analysis of social suffering in *Souffrances sociales*, Bourdieu's *La misère du monde*[39] or Cristophe Dejours *Souffrance en France*.[40] But this is only to say that his approach must be fine-tuned, not that it is entirely missing.

On the other hand, every social philosophy tries to grasp the specificity of the social situation of its own time, in order to better be able to criticize and transform it. Thus in his 1988 conference "La crise: un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?"[41] Ricœur offers a diagnosis of the present through an analysis of the concept of "crisis". This is, at the same time, an inquiry into the historicity and semantic complexity of the concept. A few years after Ricœur's death, and witnessing more than ever a situation a situation of a social crisis, this small text might be of help for our own diagnosis of the present time. Ricœur starts by analyzing several "regional" meanings of the concept of crisis. The first meaning comes from the semantic field of medicine: society is seen organically, as a body (and we have already seen how this metaphor applies to social philosophy). Like the human body, it can be pathologically affected and also eventually cured. The second model is psycho-physiological and is connected to the passage between a certain age of life and the next one, as we see in the developmental model of Erik Erikson; the third model for the crisis applies the developmental thesis to the whole of humanity. It is the "cosmopolitan" model in the words of Kant: each crisis would mark the passage of one stage of humanity to the next one. For instances, humanity being able to rid itself of its self-imposed minority, during the age of the Enlightenment. Ricœur also mentions the link between the notion of crisis and the change of paradigms in the epistemological model of Thomas Kuhn, where the progress of science is operated through revolutions, each new paradigm emerging from the ashes, so to speak, of the preceding one. Finally, he mentions the model of the economic crisis, of which we nowadays have a striking example.

Nonetheless, Ricœur poses the question of whether we can depart from the regional semantic fields of the several meanings of the concept of crisis and try to tackle it as a total social fact, to borrow the words of Marcel Mauss. His aim is therefore to grasp the significance of a "crisis of society" as a whole. The most significant feature of this crisis as a total social fact, according to Ricœur, is connected with our perception of time and the relationship between the specificity of our time and the injunction to action. That is, faced with our own times and with the political decisions we will have to face, we are confronted with the alternatives of either action or inertia: "engagement is that effort directed towards the formation of the human *future*: the crisis is thus born at the crossroads where engagement struggles with the inclination towards inertia, escape, desertion."[42] Ricœur remains ambiguous about this possibility of "totalizing", so to speak, the notion of crisis, precisely because there is no agreement among the several criteria that decide *what* causes a crisis. What we have here is a conflict of interpretations that Ricœur does not intend to completely solve or mediate.

However, there are certain common traits of the crisis that Ricœur is diagnosing. One of these is the fact that it is a crisis of values and criteria for judging human action: thus the scarcity of convictions and involvement, both at the religious and the political level, in modern times.[43] Ultimately, to consider the crisis as a total social fact would be tantamount to assuming that modernity is the time of the never-ending crisis, because it is the process whereby the whole society is in perpetual mutation. Ricœur does not claim to know that this is in fact the case. Nonetheless, his wager is that there is still room, amidst the turmoil of the crisis, for finding a point of orientation in the renewal of the traditions of the past.[44] This ongoing emphasis in the centrality and usefulness of tradition puts Ricœur in an interesting position among social critics.

It is precisely because the conflict of interpretations is not fully solved, because some level of hermeneutic tension between different values or social groups is maintained, that the possibility of value pluralism is preserved. Because there is no absolute, objective table of values, a creative reinvention of existing traditions seems to be, for Ricœur, the best possible compass to guide us through times of crisis. This is, it could be argued, a pluralism without relativism, whereby each value would at the same time be hermeneutically anchored in its past tradition, but open both to new and creative interpretations of itself and to the dialogue with other values and cultures. This might be a sketch of the Ricœurian solution to the crisis of values of the modern time. But in order to see exactly how this process of interpretation works in social philosophy, we will have to see how it can provide a model for social criticism.

Interpretation as a Model for Social Criticism

The analyses of the last two sections of this paper have shown that some elements of a social philosophy can be found in Ricœur's corpus, even if they are not explicitly assumed and systematically developed as a "social philosophy". What remains to be proven is that such a philosophy needs, or at least gains in insight if it uses hermeneutics as its starting point. After discussing the benefits of taking interpretation as the privileged method for critical theory – or, in this case, for what we are calling social philosophy – I will then proceed to show how Ricœur's hermeneutical toolbox can contribute to a comprehensive social philosophy.

Ricœur's reflection on the crisis places us once again at the heart of the connection between hermeneutics and critique. Ricœur's mediation in the Gadamer / Habermas debate consists in showing us that the hermeneutics of tradition reminds the critique of ideology that human beings can project their emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the basis of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage. "If we had no experience of communication," Ricœur asks, "however restricted and mutilated it was, how could we wish it to prevail for all men and at all institutional levels of the social nexus? It seems to me that critique can neither be the first instance nor the last." Furthermore, adds Ricœur, "Distortions can be criticized only in the name of a *consensus* which we cannot anticipate merely emptily, in the manner of a regulative idea, unless that idea is exemplified; and one of the very places of exemplification of the ideal of communication is precisely our capacity to overcome cultural distance in the interpretation of works received from the past. He who is unable to reinterpret his past may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest in emancipation."[45]

This is precisely one of the points in which Ricœurian "critical hermeneutics" has a meaningful intersection with Axel Honneth's Critical Theory: the Marxist-Hegelian conception of immanent critique. This type of critique is not inherently normative, in the sense that what we are dealing with are not abstract ideals, the best sets of norms or practices imagined under a veil of ignorance or something of the sort, regardless of the concrete set of practices and norms already existing in concrete societies and communities. For this strand of Critical Theory, rules do not appear out of nowhere. There is no "view from above" or even liberal "neutrality". Instead, societies are taken as they are, and their contradictions are exploited in a way that makes possible that they are at the same time understood and overcome. This critique has, it can be argued, a twofold objective. First, it aims at detecting the main traditions that make up the ethical lives of communities; it is an investigation into the *Sittlichkeiten* of peoples. Thus, the norms that are pertinent to this sort of investigation are the rules that already are in some way institutionalized,

if not in formal law, at least in the current everyday practices of intersubjective interaction. What becomes important is to understand why rules and practices that already have a certain degree of normative stability in a given community (for instance, that we should grant recognition to other human beings or that huge degrees of income inequality should be avoided) are not always followed. Why, for instance, do we condone practices of exploitation? The second feature of this critique, and this is the reason why it is precisely *critical,* is that it envisages a process of demystification, a critique of ideologies understood, not in a Ricœurian but more in a Marxist sense, as opposed to reality (not necessarily, in this version, as opposed to science). However, there are also some differences in the way the several authors that adhere to this kind of critique envisage it. In order to understand them, I will now focus both on Michael Walzer's notion of interpretation in *Interpretation and Social Criticism* and in Axel Honneth's version of this kind of critique, which he calls "reconstructive critique". I will therefore interpret both Walzer and Honneth's interpretation of Walzer, in order to finally propose my own claims, largely drawn from Ricœur.

In his article "Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of "Critique" in the Frankfurt School", reproduced in the book *Pathologies of Reason*, Honneth starts by analyzing the typology of social criticisms proposed by Michael Walzer in his *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Walzer distinguishes these types of social criticism according to the procedures used to identify the underlying norms and assumptions of a given society and to undertake social criticism. For Walzer, there are three main "paths in moral philosophy": discovery, invention and interpretation. Discovery refers to the social and critical approaches that appeal to an experience of religious or cognitive clarity in order to advance a socially closed realm of generally binding values. This is, in short, a kind of Platonism. Invention is the type of approach that starts by looking for a generally valid procedure and then tries to apply these norms to already existing societies. Finally, interpretation is to be understood as the hermeneutic dimension of the creative disclosure of existing cultural values and ideals.

Walzer illustrates this alternative by means of an analogy. Discovery resembles the work of the executive: to find, proclaim and then enforce the law. Invention is legislative: it is the work of "representative men and women, who stand for us all because they could be any one of us."[46] Finally, interpretation is to be understood as a judgment, the work of the judicial branch of government. Walzer's description of these three alternative paths does not intend to be exhaustive. In a way, he is only sketching ideal-types, useful to roughly understand the most important characteristics of what he takes to be the more common approaches of social criticism. Nonetheless, far from limiting himself to a merely descriptive approach, he forcefully makes the case for the choice of one these criticisms. For Walzer, "the claim of interpretation is simply this: that neither discovery nor invention is necessary because we already possess what they pretend to provide."[47]

According to Walzer, the moralities we discover or invent actually turn out to be remarkably close to those *we already have*. Usually, what we do when we engage in a discussion on morality is to use already-existing moral concepts and intuitions. Accordingly, social criticism is more likely to draw a thick description of moral norms and social realities, rather than discovering them somewhere or inventing them altogether. What constitutes the moral life of a given society or group within it? Its historic ideals, public rhetoric, foundational texts, ceremonies and rituals. Walzer states that "it's not only what people do but how they explain and justify what they do, the stories they tell, the principles they invoke, that constitute a moral culture."[48]

And what is striking is that these are not mere facts that could be rendered by a purely descriptivist or positivistic approach. This is not to say that the best morality is the one that already exists, or that the social critic should be equated with a policeman of morality or a moral conservative. Rather, these "moral facts", adds Walzer, have to be "read, rendered, construed, glossed, elucidated, and not merely described.[49] Thus, such a "moral fact" can be justified or not according to what we make of it, to the interpretation we offer of it. The social critic will sometimes confirm and sometimes challenge received opinion. Moral life is, we could say in Ricœurian terms, subject to a "conflict of interpretations."[50]

The corollary to this condition of social criticism is that we do not actually need a critical distance from our own particularities and values in order to exercise social criticism. Walzer forcefully argues that detachment, far from being a prerequisite for criticism, can be an impediment. He defends the need for a type of "connected critic" that argues "from the inside". We do not need to step back from society as a whole. Only from unjust power structures, like those that lead to domination. That is, we do not need to let go of our own convictions and values when engaging in social criticism. Once again, this is very close to what Ricœur calls the dialectic between critique and conviction.[51] And it is clear that the kind of critique that Walzer is defending is akin to what is called, in the tradition of critical social theory, *immanent critique*, in the sense we have seen above. Thus Walzer is explicitly using a hermeneutical approach while, at the same time, developing an immanent critique of society. Curiously, the paradigmatic example of a connected critic given in the third chapter of the short book we're following is the *prophet*, the one that criticizes his own social reality, his own tradition, through an implicit act of interpretation. Our societies don't seem to have an overabundance of – at least credible – prophets; but we could argue that such a form of "connected critics" can be found in politically engaged activists or journalists. In what concerns the latter, probably in its purest form the connected critic is not to be found in professional journalism, but rather in the new forms of communication made possible by the Internet, such as blogging and micro-blogging – these are the critics that are not necessarily tied to power structures, that are not on the payroll of capitalist enterprises like professional journalists have to be. As such, they are less prone to be caught up in conflicts of interest – thereby being able to exercise their critical ability more freely – while at the same time benefiting from the radically democratic possibilities granted by cyberspace.

Let us now turn to Honneth's reading of these three paths of moral philosophy and social criticism. Honneth does not consider the procedure of "discovery" as being philosophically relevant, so he chooses to focus on the procedures of invention and interpretation, but choosing to rename them respectively as "construction" and "reconstruction". He also adds to the bundle the Nietzschean genealogical approach to social criticism which aims at, as is well known, finding the root of a certain value in order to expose it as contingent and sometimes even tied to practices of power and domination – an approach that we often see associated with the methodology of Michel Foucault. What Honneth says about this approach is curious: "this kind of procedure of genealogical exposure always requires an additional step to normatively justify why social discipline or political repression should represent a moral evil in the first place. In this sense, genealogy is in a certain sense a parasitical critical procedure, since it lived by presupposing a normative justification that it does not itself try to give."[52] In a nutshell, Honneth's distinction consists in dropping the possibility of discovery (recurring to "authority" is not philosophically relevant) and distinguishing between constructivist, reconstructivist and genealogical social criticism. According to him, the specificity of the Frankfurt School's kind of

critical theory is an hybrid sort of social criticism, that draws both from Hegel's progress towards rationality and Nietzsche's genealogical critique.

Here's how the claim is presented. The distinction between the constructivist and the reconstructivist approaches is easy to follow, from what has been said above. Constructivist critique has been the most common in the last few decades, largely stemming from John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. This results in a purely normative political philosophy, and it is not the path chosen by Honneth or Walzer. The most significant way in which reconstructive critique is distinguished from what Walzer calls interpretation is that the context-bound critique is to be connected with a context-transcending notion of rationality. The reason for adding this element, so the claim goes, is that "the moral principles that are contingently available in the value horizon of a given society initially lack any guarantee that they are in a certain way valid for its members."[53] Thus to the hermeneutical recovery of a certain morality we must add a left-Hegelian premise: at each new level of social reproduction, reason must present itself in a more developed form. Thus, in each society, the immanent ideals chosen must be those that represent the most developed form of social rationalization. If a given society has available, among its guiding ideals, an ideal that can be shown to embody a higher form of rationalization or, to borrow a better concept, a more developed stage of moral progress, we have found the yardstick that we can use to criticize and transform reality.

Honneth insists that this procedure is not purely hermeneutical, but he remains elusive on the way we should understand the interaction between the identification of the implicit norms guiding societies and the expression of rationalization. That is: how do we distinguish, among the many and probably conflicting already-existing values of a given society, which ones embody the higher-rationalization principle? Nonetheless, he hints at the way we should put the immanent ideals to the test: not in what concerns their teleological tendency towards a higher degree of rationalization, but rather by operating their genealogy. He explains that the critique should be complemented by a "genealogical proviso", which means the following: given that a moral norm does not as such prescribe out of itself how it should be socially applied, its content can be transformed as a result of imperceptible shifts of meaning, so that, in the end, it might lose its justification. This means that we must study the real context of application of moral norms. In each case, we must understand if the social norm that we are supposed to apply still is justified or not, whether or not it has been misappropriated and now serves unjustified purposes. If a value or a norm has "lost its way", if even the value-content of rationality can be used to "justify" horrendous behavior like what we have seen in Germany during the Nazi regime, then, the normative kernel of every value is never foolproof; as such, it must always be submitted to the genealogical test, to see whether or not it still holds as a morally defensible principle.

With the Honnethian definition of reconstructive social criticism, understood as this hybrid between the hermeneutical recovery of immanent values and norms, and the teleological tendency towards rationality, we come closer to understanding how hermeneutics and a project of social philosophy might be intrinsically connected. The striving towards a progressive rationalization points toward the goal of emancipation inherent in all critical theory; and the way immanent values are recovered is always to be rooted in a hermeneutical procedure, even if we presuppose its left-Hegelian complement.

Ricœurian hermeneutics as a starting point for social philosophy

From what was said above it is evident that I am following Walzer and Honneth in their choice of "interpretation" or "reconstruction" as the best path for social critique. I argue that Honneth's model of a reconstructive critique – with its blend of rationalization and genealogy – provides a sound basis for social philosophy but that we should adopt the notion of hermeneutics as the larger category within which we can discern a reconstructive critique among other types of critique. My last claim is that in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur we find important elements to undertake such a complex project.

In 1965, in *Freud and Philosophy*,[54] Ricœur explicitly describes hermeneutics as a constitutive conflict between two opposed types of interpretation: hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics as recollection of meaning. The depiction of these alternative hermeneutics comes very close to the kind of critique that Honneth identifies as being characteristic of Critical Theory. As a result, even if Ricœur didn't explicitly apply this dialectics to the social world (at least not in these terms), nothing prevents us from doing it, while at the same time using some of the other elements that his hermeneutical toolbox provides us.I will mention, in a schematic manner, three of them below:

First, his hermeneutics of the self, mainly its emphasis on the narrative identity of *ipseities* provides us with a solid grounding of intersubjective identity. This hermeneutics is able to navigate between the Scylla of the total elimination of moral agents in the anonymous interplay of social structures and power relations, and the Charybdis of metaphysical, reified identities. It is able to describe, in the web of interconnected notions pertaining to human action, the motives and desires that can act as causes in the achievement of a life plan. When applied to collective identities, these notions both render justice to the existence and pertinence of social struggles – because, against a reductionist methodological individualism, they are able to attest the existence of these meaningful social identities – and limit their identity claims. Because identity is narrative and is thus able to accommodate *change* in its core, never will a Ricœurian type of social hermeneutics admit the possibility of violence in the name of identity politics. It can thus be argued that even though Honneth, for instances, offers us thick descriptions of intersubjective identities, he stops short of fully developing a hermeneutics of the self and that this development is an important feature for social philosophy put forth by Ricœur.

Second, the reflections on the social imaginary, namely the analyses of the interconnected notions of *ideology* and *utopia* are of the utmost importance for this project. Ideology, in its constitutive sense, legitimates the social order. Thus we could claim that in this non-pejorative Ricœurian sense, every *Sittlichkeit* is ideological, in that the values and practices it puts forward find both a theoretical ground and a justification in the web of interconnected moral values and principles that make up its symbolic order. However, every ideology can also have a negative sense, in which not only an unjust social order is justified but can also be perceived to be inevitable, absolute. This is of course impossible in the normative theoretical framework of Ricœurian hermeneutics, precisely because of the changing narrative identity that unfolds through history – but it must be criticized if it comes to have an empirical reality. Ricœur envisages a dialectical interplay between creative utopias, products of productive imagination, that need to be put to critical use in the discovery of other possible social realities, and the constitutive function of sound ideologies. Without ideology there would be no social order. But without utopia every social order would become reified, even the unjust ones. As we can see, it is

this dialectical interplay between ideology and utopia that puts societies in motion and can, in a way, set the theoretical grounds for social change. Understood in this way, we could argue that the making of good utopias could be the yardstick we are looking for, in order to evaluate the existing moral practices. This would not be a constructivist enterprise, because utopias can not be *escapist*. They do not need to have recourse to totally foreign values and principles. They might draw their constitutive values from already-existing symbolic orders and just show how they are not fully realized, and how they should be so. They might pick, in the conflict of moral symbolic values, the values that they find a certain society is most desperately in need in order to transform itself. Thus we can argue that Critical Theory operates in such a way. The project of a Critical Social Theory appears to be justified by the positing of such immanent social ideals as rationalization and emancipation. It is thus, in this specific sense, a project animated by a guiding utopia, as was without any doubt, Marx's project. The hermeneutical process could therefore serve as a guide in the case-by-case evaluation of existing social orders and the way in which the right values could be chosen and enforced. Moreover, this is Ricœur's contribution to the diagnosis of *social pathologies*. Just as there are good ideologies and good utopias, there are also pathological forms of ideology and utopia. Developing a social hermeneutics capable of distinguishing good ideologies and utopias from perverse, pathological ones, and sensitive to the contexts of application of their guiding values, is something that Ricœur seems to have tried to start, but this project must be further developed and carried out in its details. Ultimately, even if Walzer correctly understands and depicts the role of tradition in social criticism his depiction stops short of understand the way in which new values might need to replace the old ones. In this, the coupling of ideology and utopia helps us to understand which traditions can count as valid and which need to be substituted and replaced by new ones, and this is another valuable Ricœurian contribution to the project we are presenting here.

Third, this all amounts to the dialectics between *tradition* and *innovation*, between *belonging* and *distantiation*. Ricœurian hermeneutics encompasses all these nuances. On the one hand, it is very attentive to history and to the way in which personal and collective identities unfold historically. This avoids the reductionism of a purely synchronic or functionalist approach. On the other hand, its emphasis on the unpredictability of human action and on the need for a constant renewal of the process of interpretation makes Ricœur a forceful advocate of social change. Everyone belongs to a certain tradition; trying to constitute a new social order *ab nihilo* surely amounts to disaster or Terror. However, the function of distantiation is there to ensure that our belonging to a certain tradition, our choice of a certain value can not be so strict as to blind us to its possible alternatives, to make us look the other way when it is sure that the application of a certain value is taking the wrong turn. This distantiation is never absolute. I can never put my entire corpus of beliefs in *epoche*, as Descartes pretended to be doing in his *Meditations*. In a way, every good social critic always remains, at least up to a certain point, a connected critic, in Walzer's words. But one must be, at critical turning points of social change, distant enough of the constitutive ideological values of his or her society to be able to propose a better alternative. That is, one must be able to distance himself or herself from a certain symbolic order – or from certain values in that symbolic order, or at least from certain bad interpretations of those values, leading to unjust social practices – but never from the interest in the improvement of one's society, of one's symbolic order, taken as a whole.

This dialectic of belonging to tradition and of distancing oneself from it, in order to innovate and bring about social change puts us at the heart of Ricœur's adhesion to Critical

Theory. However, this Critical Theory can never be anything other than hermeneutical. He goes so far as to state the inner connection between hermeneutics and liberation, establishing an analogy between their mutual dependence and Kant's description of the connection between concepts and intuitions: "Hermeneutics without a project of liberation is blind, but a project of emancipation without historical experience is empty."[55] This is almost necessarily so, if we consider that even the project of liberation through social critique is rooted in a certain ideal: that of emancipation, and that, paradoxically enough, there is also a tradition of emancipation largely stemming both from the Enlightenment and the Marxist-Hegelian tradition. As such, even this ideal should be put to the hermeneutical, genealogical test. What are the different forms this ideal has assumed? Is, for instance, its symbiosis with the notion of autonomy the best way of depicting it? Thus a critical hermeneutics, if it is to succeed, must be able to fulfill all the tasks we have been describing up until now: recognition of the historical character of existing societies, identification of the core values that make up their symbolic orders, evaluation of the fairness of these orders, genealogy of their values and verification of the right application of each value in the existing social order (as well as the significant shifts of meaning that the value has undergone in its evolution) and finally, when confronted with unambiguous unjust social orders, formulation of sharp critiques able to bring about better symbolic orders that could foster societies that would be fairer and more decent.This is a tremendously demanding task. But if a critical hermeneutics were to fulfill, even partially, these tasks, it would make the transformative interest of social philosophy much more viable, because "immanent critique" would be provided with the necessary tools to really make explicit the immanent sense it is trying to grasp.

Conclusion

Having claimed that there are scattered elements of a social philosophy in Ricœur, that the project of social philosophy gains in insight if it uses a hermeneutical approach, and that we can also find in Ricœur some of the hermeneutical tools to help us ground social philosophy, let me now offer a few concluding remarks.

By insisting on the recovery of tradition, Ricœurian hermeneutics can serve as a useful tool in the first step of reconstructive critique, that is, of properly identifying the implicit norms that guide each community. And since it also insists on the creativity of interpretation and on the need to have a strong component of innovation, it can understand precisely how different sets of rules and practices evolve and need to keep evolving, if they are to meaningfully accommodate the ethical aims of historically evolving communities.

Furthermore, because it also wants to encompass an element of an hermeneutics of suspicion, it is also well suited to conduct a depth hermeneutics inspired, for instances, by psychoanalysis and the critique of ideologies in order to uncover the hidden motivations of agents and to try to apply the genealogical proviso Honneth is calling for. We can therefore say that hermeneutics really is important for making sense of the social. The real problem is that it is not necessarily, in and of itself, a sufficient tool to radically change it, which brings us back to Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach, on the necessity for philosophy to change the world, not only interpret it. This is not to say that changing the social symbolic order does not change society. It does, and in a meaningful way. By providing this comprehensive framework for social philosophy, hermeneutics really is making clear for social philosophy the sorts of goals and values it must aim at and strive for, and thus adding to the quasi-transcendental practical

standpoint of the struggle for emancipation, the self-clarification of the historical traditions that *make sense* to us, and this is no small undertaking. But praxis must walk alongside theory. The practice of transformation calls for more than just interpretation. It is just a *terminus a quo* whose *terminus ad quem* might be the partial fulfilling of a very specific ought, the *utopian ought*, as George Taylor recently called it.[56] That is, going from interpretation to action, to social praxis.

[1] Paul Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge/Paris: Cambridge University Press/ Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1961), 63.

[2] Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 100.

[3] One of the main problems that we can pose to this theory is precisely the following: how critical can hermeneutics be, and what are the conditions for the social critic to engage in this kind of critique? John B. Thompson has dealt with this problem in detail, precisely in the connection between Ricœur, Habermas and ordinary language philosophy. See John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricœur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). A second problem, somewhat derived from the first one, can be stated in the following terms: Can someone belong to a certain community of traditions (to be hermeneutically engaged) and at the same time have a critical relationship towards it? Is distance necessary for social critique to take place? I will venture to provide an answer to these questions, with the help of Michael Walzer and Ricœur, in the next sections of this paper.

[4] See Axel Honneth "Pathologien des Sozialen: Tradition und Aktualität der Sozialphilosophie," in *Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000).

[5] It should be stated that I am not assuming a distinction between sense and meaning. "Making sense of the social" is thus to be understood as "grasping the meaning" of the social. But, as we shall see later with the help of Walzer and Honneth, this will not be tantamount to "discovering" the meaning of the social or to "making it" in the sense of a purely constructivist approach. Rather, in a hermeneutic fashion, "making sense" of the social will assume a pre-existing reality, made up of persons, intersubjective relationships, traditions, norms and persons that will be the "raw material" for the interpretation put forward by the hermeneutical method. This method will elaborate on this data and render it in a conceptual and linguistic fashion.

[6] See Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[7] See Axel Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of "Critique" in the Frankfurt School," in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[8] This topic is largely unexplored in Ricoeurian studies. To my knowledge, the only paper hinting at this possibility – moreover, in a critical manner, hinting more towards the absence of a real social philosophy in Ricœur – is Alain Loute's "Philosophie Sociale et Reconnaissance mutuelle chez Paul Ricœur," in *Affectivité, imaginaire, création sociale*, eds. Raphaël Gély et Laurent Van Eynde (Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 2010).

[9] See Franck Fischbach, *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2009).

[10] "En lieu et place d'un individu rationnel et isolé, elle part d'un individu relationnellement constitué et compris comme étant d'abord et avant tout un être naturel, c'est-à-dire un être de besoins. Dans sa considération de l'individu, et par opposition à la philosophie politique, la philosophie sociale commence toujours par réinjecter de la naturalité et de la concrétude: en tant qu'être naturel, un

individu est notamment pour elle un être toujours d'abord affecté. C'est donc un être de sentiments, mais c'est aussi un être qui fait toujours d'abord l'expérience de sa propre dépendance essentielle à l'égard des autres, et donc un être qui se rapporte aux autres d'abord sur le mode du besoin. Être naturel, être affecté, être de besoins, être en relation de dépendance aux autres: tous ces aspects nous indiquent que l'homme de la philosophie sociale est aussi, et essentiellement, un être vulnérable et un être capable de souffrances, et particulièrement de souffrances qui ont la particularité de pouvoir venir à lui depuis la société" (Fischbach, Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale, 50).

[11] See Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, trans. C. A. Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965).

[12] See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[13] See Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[14] On the way sociology can be seen to provide diagnosis that can be borrowed and further developed by philosophy, and on the way this can be connected with Ricœur's philosophy, see Gilbert Vincent: "Au fond, on a envie de dire des analyses sociologiques ce que Ricœur a pu dire des sciences humaines, psychologiques avant tout, dans sa thèse: elles ont, pour le philosophe, valeur de *diagnostic*; elles permettent de mieux connaître la nature des différents obstacles que rencontrent, sur le chemin de leur réalisation éthique et politique d'eux-mêmes, des sujets (collectifs y compris) "capables", mais dont la capacité n'est pas suffisamment définie à partir d'un simple renversement des nombreuses incapacités qu'on réussit à diagnostiquer, s'il est vrai que, pas plus en sociologie qu'en médecine, le "normal" n'est connaissable à partir du seul pathologique" in "Anthropologie philosophique et sociologie" (173).

[15] Honneth, "Pathologien des Sozialen,"13.

[16] Fischbach, *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale*, 10.

[17] Comprising the seventh, eigth and ninth studies of *Oneself as Another*.

[18] Alain Loute, in the abovementioned article, mentions this difficulty: what is lacking in Ricœur is sufficient account of the "we" that could further develop the analyses of the self, other(s) and institutions. He also emphasizes that Ricœur seldom or never reflects upon the social conditions of possibility of the relationship of recognition, that is, the social performativity of the states of peace as a symbol of recognition (Cf. Loute, pp. 146-147). These are some of the gaps that must be filled in order for us to be able to sketch a social philosophy from the works of Paul Ricœur.

[19] See David M. Kaplan, *Ricœur's Critical Theory* (New York, SUNY, 2003).

[20] See Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and also *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.

[21] On the contributions of Ricœur's philosophy to social analysis, mainly in the Strasbourg period, see Gilbert Vincent, "Anthropologie philosophique et sociologie: Ricœur et l'analyse des phénomènes sociaux," *Revue des Sciences Sociales* 40 (2008): 162-182.

[22] See Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth*, trans. C. A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).

[23] See Ricœur, "State and Violence," in *History and Truth*.

[24] See Ricœur, "Work and the Word," in *History and Truth*.

[25] See Ricœur, "Note in the History of Philosophy and the Sociology of Knowledge," in *History and Truth*.

[26] See Ricœur, "The Socius and the Neighbour," in *History and Truth*.

[27] See Paul Ricœur, "La crise, un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?" (1988). Paper available on-line at www.fondsricoeur.fr

[28] See Paul Ricœur, *Living Up to Death*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[29] See Claude Romano, *Au coeur de la raison: la phénoménologie* (Paris, Gallimard, 2010); especially chapter XXII, "La phénoménologie en tant qu'herméneutique."

[30] See Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. K. Blamey and J. B. Thompson (London: Athlone Press, 1991).

[31] See *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. R. Czerny, K. McLaughlin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

[32] See Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT press, 1991).

[33] See the ninth study of Ricœur's *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[34] "Je dirai ceci: la souffrance appelle. Le paradoxe du rapport à autrui est là, mis à nu: d'un côté, c'est moi qui souffre et pas l'autre nos places sont insubstituables; peut-être même suis-je 'choisi' pour souffrir, selon le fantasme de l'enfer personnel; de l'autre côté, malgré tout, en dépit de la séparation, la souffrance exhalée dans la plainte est appel à l'autre, demande d'aide" (4; my translation) (Text available on-line at www.fondsricoeur.fr).

[35] "Demeure, comme une timide espérance, la conviction risquée, et peut-être insensée, que le monde pourrait être amélioré par ce que Jan Patocka appelait dans ses derniers écrits la 'solidarité des ébranlés'…" (4; my translation).

[36] "On retrouve pour finir le sens premier du souffrir, à savoir endurer, c'est-à-dire persévérer dans le désir d'être et 'effort pour exister en dépit de…" (4; my translation).

[37] See Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[38] See Paul Ricœur, "Réforme et révolution dans l'université," in *Lectures 1* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 380-397.

[39] See *La misére du monde*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

[40] See Christophe Dejours, *Souffrance en France* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

[41] See Paul Ricœur, "La crise, un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?" (1988). Paper available on-line at www.fondsricoeur.fr

[42] "L'engagement est cet effort dirigé vers la formation de l'avenir humain: la crise naît ainsi au carrefour où l'engagement est en lutte avec la tendance à l'inertie, à la fuite, à la désertion" (Ricœur, "La crise," 12; my translation).

[43] "Dès lors, ce qui paraît le mieux caractériser la crise de notre époque, c'est, d'une part, l'absence de consensus dans une société divisée entre tradition, modernité et postmodernité; c'est ensuite, et plus gravement, le recul général des convictions et de la capacité d'engagement que ce recul entraîne" (Ricœur, "La crise," 16).

[44] "Mon propre pari et mon propre espoir sont que, en dépit de l'absence de consensus et de conviction forte dans notre société pluraliste, une chance inédite est ouverte au renouvellement des héritages du passé" (Ricœur, "La crise," 16).

[45] Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideologies," 97.

[46] See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 19.

[47] See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 19.

[48] See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 29.

[49] See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 29.

[50] In what concerns the similarities between Walzer's depiction of this web of moral notions and Ricoeurian hermeneutics, it is striking to see that Walzer seems to accept a certain version of the model of the text, not necessarily as applied to action, but to morality: "moral interpretation will sometimes confirm and sometimes challenge received opinion. And if we disagree with either the confirmation or the challenge, there is nothing to do but to go back to the "text", the values, principles, codes, and conventions that constitute the moral world – and to the "readers" of the text. The readers, I suppose, are the effective authority: we hold up our interpretations for their approval. But the matter is not closed if they do not approve. For readers are also rereaders who change their minds, and the population of readers also changes. We can always renew the argument" (Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 30).

[51] See Paul Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. K Blamey (London: Polity Press, 1998).

[52] See Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of "Critique" in the Frankfurt School," in *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 48.

[53] Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso," 50.

[54] See Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. D. Savage (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1970).

[55] See Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 236-7.

[56] George Taylor, "Delineations in Ricœur's Concept of Utopia," unpublished paper delivered at the *International Conference on Ricœur Studies: New Perspectives on Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences and Practical Philosophy* (September 16, 2011 in Moscow, Russia).