

Ricœur's Affirmation of Life in this World and his Journey to Ethics

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Abstract

Although Paul Ricœur never wrote a book on acting and suffering, the essay focuses on Ricœur's engagement with this topic. It was one of Ricœur's abiding interests that consistently appeared over the years in a number of his works. Given his compassionate affirmation of life in this world, he was vitally concerned about human beings' inhumanity, in the form of inflicting unmerited suffering on their fellow beings. His distress on this issue was clearly evident. This essay is an overview of Ricœur's endeavors to try and alleviate such injustice by a commitment to an ethically grounded approach that aimed at "the good life with and for others, in just institutions."

Keywords: Fallibility/Fragility, Acting/Suffering, Victimization, Sollicitude, Recognition, Imputation/Responsibility, Homo Capax.

Résumé

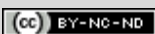
Bien que Ricœur n'ait jamais écrit un livre sur l'agir et le souffrir, cet essai porte sur son engagement concernant cette question. L'intérêt durable de Ricœur pour ce thème n'a cessé de se manifester au fil des années dans un grand nombre de ses œuvres. Compte tenu de son affirmation pleine de compassion de la vie en ce monde, il se sentait concerné au plus haut point par cette inhumanité des êtres humains qui consiste à infliger des souffrances imméritées à leurs semblables. Son désarroi sur cette question était des plus évidents. Cet article donne une vue d'ensemble de l'effort de Ricœur pour tenter d'alléger une telle injustice à travers un engagement en faveur d'une approche éthique tournée vers "la vie bonne avec et pour les autres, dans des institutions justes."

Mots-clés: faillibilité/fragilité, agir/souffrir, victimisation, sollicitude, reconnaissance, imputation/responsabilité, homo capax.

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Introduction

At a conference that was held at the Divinity School, University of Chicago, to mark his retirement from teaching in 1999, Paul Ricœur observed:

When I try to cast a retrospective glance at my work, I agree that it is – for the sake of a discourse of the second order – a personal reinterpretation offered to my readers. And I must say that it is only recently that I have felt allowed to give a name to these overarching problematics. I mean the problem of human capability, capability as the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology, or, to put it more in simple terms belonging to ordinary language, the realm of the theme expressed by the verb “I can.”¹

Ricœur's statement provides an astute insight into the many and intricate explorations and diversions that he has undertaken during his philosophical journey.² It might well appear that the above observation about “capability” has only just emerged in the most recent writings of Ricœur. Yet if one examines Ricœur's writings, beginning with the volume on the human will and its vicissitudes, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary* (1966 [1950]), there is already clear evidence of Ricœur's deep concern with human vulnerability, or fallibility, even in these early texts. The accompanying works that followed, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man* (1965 [1960]), and *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 2: *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967 [1960]), continued Ricœur's engagement with the vital issues of the human will and the related challenges arising from the ways in which fallibility has been represented.

In these early texts, there are also references to a number of significant words, such as “action” and “imputation” or “responsibility,” that will feature in Ricœur's later philosophical investigations. In writing this essay, I am unable to examine in extensive detail Ricœur's various modifications of these key concepts. My essay will provide selective moments in Ricœur's lifelong journey, drawing attention to key ideas and insights as they are developed in his work – albeit with their respective qualifications and refinements. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that intimations of Ricœur's final insights are already evident in his early writings. From the beginning, Ricœur has shared in the suffering and vulnerability of his fellow human beings. His life has been a passionate engagement to try and alleviate the injustice that has deprived many from the fullness of being.

In searching for the reasons that originally prompted Ricœur to investigate the dynamics of human existence that would lead him ultimately in the direction of ethics, an answer can be found to the question that he posed in an early essay: “[W]ho is this being for whom being is in question? Finally, the very ‘modernity’ of man indicates the vacuum which this meditation must fill: if man can lose himself or find himself in labor, in pleasures, in politics, or in culture – what is

man?"³ Such a query indicates that Ricœur was dissatisfied with the current situation and intends to probe more deeply into the dynamics of human existence.

Ricœur had discerned a "vacuum" in contemporary "modernity."⁴ At the same time, he had detected an "intimate disproportion of man with himself [...] suspended between a pole of infinitude and a pole of finitude."⁵ Ricœur also refers to this state, with due acknowledgment of Pascal, as a case of "ontological disproportion."⁶ In the following ten years, Ricœur will embark on a quest that seeks to diagnose and possibly elucidate these conditions of human finitude. Such a move, however, is not marked by appealing to a metaphysical approach but will employ an approach of "philosophical anthropology."

Yet Ricœur will not be content solely with this approach. In reading Ricœur's writings from this period, it soon becomes apparent that, at the heart of his work, there lies an abiding affection for his fellow human beings and a compassionate dedication to supporting their efforts to live a just and good life. He becomes vitally concerned with the issue of acting and suffering human beings. In undertaking this further ethical journey, however, Ricœur will also not necessarily appeal to religious tenets. Though undoubtedly informed by his own religious background, Ricœur's task will be a demanding ethical study. In following Ricœur's journey, it is edifying to become aware of his gradual explications of the ethical, as well as of the political and social environments, where he prescribes conditions that are conducive for human beings to flourish.

The Voluntary and the Involuntary

In the first volume of his study on the human will, entitled *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1966 [1950]), Ricœur undertook a phenomenological study of the free, yet bound, nature of the human will, struggling to act in resolute ways, in conformity with rational decisions. His investigations alerted him to the fact that the human will was susceptible to the vagaries of the human body – with its physical and emotional disruptions – often the result of unconscious impulses. Ricœur described this struggle as reflecting a battle between freedom and necessity. He did not conclude, however, that such human fallibility automatically led to any grievous fault of the type he would name "bad will," or even evil action. Instead, he proposed that: "The phenomenon of the voluntary and the involuntary appeared to me to be capable of accounting only for the weaknesses of being exposed to evil and capable of doing wrong, but not of actually being evil."⁷ For Ricœur, a human being, although subject to fallibility, was never determined by necessity. In sharp contrast to the travails of contingency, Ricœur concludes his first book on the human will in a manner that both accepted finitude and celebrated the wonders of life.

In the final section of *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, there is a chapter that is entitled: "The Way of Consent." It is here that Ricœur examines what he describes as "the virulent form of dualism of freedom and necessity."⁸ In this context, the aging body that is weakened and close to death is aligned with necessity. He also admits that: "At birth, all necessity is prior to any actual 'I' which reflects on itself." As such, this observation would imply that birth "is not available to consciousness."⁹ Yet Ricœur refuses to accept such a stark separation. Instead, he expands his discussion on the topic of birth, which, at that time, was not a topic favored by philosophers. He declares: "My birth is the beginning of my life: in it I was placed, once and for all, into the world, and placed in being before I was able to posit anything voluntarily."¹⁰ Nevertheless, for Ricœur,

this state has definite positive implications. He appreciates birth as indicating a process of coming to consciousness – a process of beginning to be free. He declares: “I have always begun to live when I say ‘I am’.”¹¹ Ricoeur confirms that we can indeed consent to life and consequently need not be determined by necessity. In fact, for Ricoeur, this consent to life will render all subsequent choices possible.

In keeping with this proclamation, Ricoeur then turns his attention to another important aspect of human existence. In his concluding remarks, Ricoeur declares what can only be appreciated as a paean to life in this world. He states: “Thus I do not say that ‘this is the best of all possible worlds’ but that this unique world, uniquely for me, this incomparable world is good with a goodness which itself knows no degrees, with a goodness which is the *yes* of being.”¹² This affirmation of life will be reconfirmed in an interview towards the end of his life, where Ricoeur reminisces about his writing of this assertion in the concluding section of *The Voluntary and Involuntary*. He states: “I had not wanted to be crushed by the problem of death; I wanted in this way to give its rightful place to the theme of birth.”¹³ In this same book of interviews, Ricoeur enlarges on these ideas, situating them into a more contemporary context: “I, therefore, project not an after-death but a death that would be an ultimate affirmation of life. My own experience of the end of life is nourished by this deepest wish to make the act of dying an act of life [...]. What is important is to be living up until the moment of death.”¹⁴ Such a sentiment imbues much of Ricoeur’s work, although he was only too well acquainted with the fragility and vulnerability that affect human existence. He will again bear witness with another strong affirmation of life in one of his last interviews, where he was again reflecting on his writing the final section of *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*:

For there is, after all, and since the beginning of my work sixty years ago, the idea of mortality which traverses everything through and through. At the time, I was welcoming this. [...] I would not say joyously, but I had concluded my book [*The Voluntary and the Involuntary*] with the idea of assenting to finitude. I was an avid reader of Rilke and I ended with the verse: “*Hier sein ist herrlich*: ‘being here is sumptuous, wonderful, magical.’ Now, in my old age with the proximity of death, I repeat again: *Hier sein ist herrlich*.”¹⁵

Despite his own condition of finitude, in his ninety-third year, Ricoeur still consented to life, confirming the wonder of human existence.

The Influence of Hannah Arendt

At this stage of examining Ricoeur’s work, it would seem appropriate to introduce Hannah Arendt, who was to have a strong influence on his work. They met during the late 1960s at the University of Chicago. Her work, especially *The Human Condition* (1959), with its innovative concepts such as natality, human fragility, acting and suffering, the distinction between “who” and “what,” and finally, promising and forgiving, will feature in Ricoeur’s subsequent work. While he does not date his initial reading of the first French edition of *The Human Condition* (*Condition de l’homme moderne*, 1983), Ricoeur describes his reaction when he encountered the term “natality,” a neologism that Arendt introduced in her book: “I came across, with a certain amazement, the exclamation of Hannah Arendt, as someone who was Jewish, quoting the Gospels which

themselves quote Isaiah 9:6: 'A child has been born unto us.' For her, too, birth signifies more than death. This is what wishing to remain living until death means."¹⁶

Arendt herself appreciates natality not simply in relation to birth but also as an intrinsic element in human activity. Inherent in her own affirmation of life is the understanding that "men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin."¹⁷ For Arendt, the beginning that is inherent in birth intimates that each newborn has the capacity to start something anew, "that is, of acting."¹⁸ A figurative depiction of natality implies a second more conscious mode of birth that initiates action.¹⁹ Natality thus designates the possibility of constant initiatives in thought and deed in the world. Ricœur immediately recognized Arendt as a kindred spirit, as one who also affirmed life in this world. He remarked: "For her too, birth signifies more than death. This is what wishing to remain living until death means."²⁰ Ricœur thus acknowledged Arendt's work as deeply committed to a project of constant renewal and reform of this world in the mode of natality.

Arendt had adapted the term "natality" from the work of Augustine, on whom she wrote her *Masterarbeit*, entitled *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* (1929).²¹ She expanded Augustine's understanding of life, however, from its particular religious setting, to align it with her vision of human beings acting together for the common good of this world. For Arendt, "To act, in its most general sense, means to take the initiative, to begin [...] to set something in motion."²² The simplicity of this statement is beguiling, but it has far-reaching implications. This is because action, specifically communal activity, is at the heart of Arendt's vision of politics. Her position is that human beings, in relationship with others, can thus act in ways that allow them to realize the fullness of human freedom. At the same time, natality, in concert with action, interrupts what Arendt views as the order of necessity – "the inexorable daily course of life" that follows "the law of mortality."²³

Ricœur viewed Arendt's work as supporting his own position that the human predicament need not be immediately associated with necessity. He also identified Arendt's approach as a form of philosophical anthropology. In affirming his appreciation of Arendt's activist position, he stated: "Action, connected with speech, reveals man as an agent, i.e., the one who initiates change in the world."²⁴ He also approved of her emphasis on plurality, i.e., that ideally human beings could act together to effect changes in the world. It is quite evident, then, that Arendt and Ricœur both agreed on a diagnosis of human existence that was affirmative. Nonetheless, they both remained guarded in their assessments of the overall human condition. This was because they were both cognizant of the grievous harm that human beings could inflict on one another. They would, nonetheless, also allow that forgiveness and promising were reparable human actions – they activated a form of natality that could help to rehabilitate a shattered human situation.

What needs to be emphasized, however, is that the background informing Arendt's position on action was quite different from that of Ricœur. Her ideal was the Greek *polis*, with its evocation of freedom, that is, of free political action.²⁵ As such, it provided a safeguard against unpredictability. This demanding communal activity characterized for Arendt the life of a genuine *polis* – a public space for all concerned people. She re-envisioned this contemporary *polis* as distinct from the limited version of ancient Greece, which excluded females and slaves. For Arendt, such a model of existence marked natality as being both an ontological and a political category.

Arendt commented: "Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality and not mortality may be the central category of the political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought."²⁶ This is because the guiding impetus of Arendt's work with its connection to natality and action was also intended to prevent totalitarian regimes, such as the German Nazi regime responsible for the Shoah and Soviet Russia, which she had examined in detail in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. These two disasters had denied human beings their freedom and obliterated their identities. At the same time, political institutions and morals had also easily been subverted, if not utterly destroyed.

One of the results of Arendt's assessment of these devastating events was her depiction of human beings not only as actors but also as sufferers: "Because the actor always moves among and in relation to other human beings, he is never merely a doer, but always at the same time a sufferer."²⁷ This declaration provided a key insight into Arendt's compassion for her fellow creatures.

At the time of his encounter with the first edition of *The Human Condition* (1961) and her observations on natality, action [*agir*] and affirmation of life, Ricœur did not engage in great detail with other aspects of her work, such as suffering [*pâtir; souffrir, subir*]. In 1983, however, he returned to a more comprehensive engagement with her work when he wrote the *Preface* to the second French paperback edition of her work (1983). This preface was also published in English as an article entitled: "Action, Story and History: On Re-reading *The Human Condition*." It is in connection with Ricœur's re-reading of Arendt that he would henceforth begin to incorporate the notion of suffering as a vital element in his work. It is Ricœur's acknowledgment of human beings as both acting and suffering, and his obvious sorrow and abhorrence at the atrocities committed in the twentieth century, that would mark a major turning point in his later work. It instigated a journey that would effect a marked change in the direction of his thought and work. Before examining this major modification in Ricœur's approach more carefully, there are certain aspects of Ricœur's work in the intervening years (from approximately 1965 to 1983) that need to be addressed.

The Case of Fallible Man

In a retrospective article, "Philosophy of Will and Action" (1978 [1967]), Ricœur provides a succinct overview of what he believes he has accomplished in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. He states that a phenomenology of volition, located within the ambit of a Husserlian eidetic phenomenology, must attempt to analyse "acts," "aims," and "intentions."²⁸ He understands that such an analysis, involving perception and intentionality, illustrates a person's own capacity to interact consciously with things in the world. In this endeavour, Ricœur was especially focussed on action from a theoretical perspective and introduced terms that would become pivotal in his later development of ethics. He also extended his terms of reference, stating that, in this process, "every intention, in the strong sense of the word is attention, and every attention reveals 'I can' at the heart of the 'I think'."²⁹ With this statement, Ricœur could be viewed as indicating capability as an important element of phenomenology as he understood it at the time.

Ricœur also enhanced his understanding of the term "voluntary" by declaring: "In making up my mind, I impute to myself the action, that is, I place it in relation to myself such that, from now on, this action represents me in the world."³⁰ As a result of these amendments, if one were to

ask: “Who did this?” Ricœur acknowledges that he would hold himself ready to respond: “[I]t is I who did this, *ego sum qui feci*.”³¹ In this way, he affirms taking responsibility for the origin of his act.³² Although there will be passing references to “capability” and “imputation”/“responsibility”³³ in certain later texts, it will be many years before Ricœur will be sufficiently prepared to incorporate these key terms as foundational concepts in the delineation of his ethical project, beginning with *Oneself as Another* (1992).

It was in *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man* (1965 [1960]) that Ricœur undertook an empirical phenomenological study of human fallibility. Ricœur begins his study with a question: “What is meant by calling man fallible?”³⁴ Echoing certain of his conclusions in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricœur states that, while the possibility of moral evil is inherent in man’s constitution, it is not inevitable. He then further clarifies his position: “Fallibility is *only* the possibility of evil: it indicates the region and structure of the reality that, through its point of least resistance, offers a locus to evil.”³⁵ As mentioned earlier, Ricœur also named this inclination with Pascal’s term of “disproportion,” i.e., a non-coincidence of a person with his or her being.³⁶ This is a graphic acknowledgment of a human being’s asymmetry with him or herself, wavering between finitude and infinitude. In his sympathetic depiction of fallibility, it is patently clear that Ricœur has a deep affinity with his fellow fragile human beings and that evil must not be confused with finitude. Ricœur remained adamant that human beings are not predisposed to evil, and it is obvious that he does not want to portray them negatively nor indict them with accusations of bad will and guilt/culpability that entail retribution. As yet, however, Ricœur has not acquired the requisite philosophical skills to defend vigorously his own position of a human being’s relation to evil. There were further issues to pursue.

The Symbolism of Evil

Ricœur also introduces his second volume of *Finitude and Guilt: The Symbolism of Evil* (1969 [1960]) with a question. Ostensibly, it was to be a book where Ricœur was to pursue the problem that he nominates in the opening sentence: “How shall we make the transition from the possibility of evil in man to its reality, from fallibility to fault?”³⁷ Yet this book took on a life of its own when Ricœur introduced hermeneutics to help account for what he termed “linguistic perplexities” of figurative language.³⁸ One consequence of this initiative was that Ricœur moved beyond the basic reflective method he had adapted from Husserl. With this move, Ricœur established an innovative approach in connection with the human beings’ reflexive self-understanding of cultural constructions. At the same time, he introduced an approach to help decipher the meanings of figurative language, in order to assist its integration within his project of an empirics of the will. This would involve a process where: “Starting from the symbols, [the purpose is] to elaborate existential concepts – that is to say, not only structures of reflection but structures of existence, insofar as existence is the being of man.”³⁹

Ricœur was puzzled by the way that humanity’s state of disproportion was depicted by the indirect or double language of symbols and myths. He was further troubled when he detected that: “[T]he *myths* of fall, chaos, exile, and divine blinding, all of which are directly accessible to the history of religions, could not be inserted in their unrefined state into philosophic discourse.”⁴⁰ Ricœur raised a further issue that helped to clarify the crux of the issue: “Why symbolic language

when we have to pass from a philosophy of finitude to a philosophy of guilt?"⁴¹ In response, Ricœur determined that a thorough inquiry of such multivalent use of language was required, including the symbols such as guilt, defilement, stain, wandering, captivity, in addition to myth.⁴² He was committed to find a way of untangling the intricate and baffling linguistic puzzles that defied explanation.

Perhaps the most notable of Ricœur's discoveries during his explorations in thinking and reflection was that human consciousness arrived at knowledge by way of interpretation rather than by intuition or rational apprehension. "[T]here is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts; in the last resort understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms."⁴³ This revolutionary insight would have important implications for not only human beings' understanding of symbolic knowledge but also of their self-understanding as mediated in creative ways. Ricœur even recommends his readers to follow his explorations in the last chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil: "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought,"* where the instructions for the new forms of philosophical discourse can be discovered.⁴⁴ This enquiry would lead Ricœur into unexplored territory.

Although there was much talk of structure, function, and constricted levels in Ricœur's essays featured in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (1974 [1969]), it is his call to revel in the fullness of language near the end of "The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought" that sets the tone for human beings to experiment with language rather than be held in static confinement. Ricœur declared: "[T]he task of the philosopher, guided by symbols, would be to break out of the enchanted enclosure of consciousness of oneself to end the prerogative of self-reflection."⁴⁵ This was indeed a call to action.

The Move from Text to Action

There were still a number of intricate issues that awaited Ricœur. While he still proclaimed his loyalty to "a sort of phenomenology,"⁴⁶ he expressed his discomfort about what he termed certain "linguistic perplexities," i.e., another term for the indirect language of symbols that he explored above. He also became aware that the opacity of symbols was not just a phenomenon that was related simply to the representations of evil, but it was evident in "the entire intentional life of the subject."⁴⁷ In addition, in his reading of Freud, Ricœur discovered what he described as "a sort of residue, inaccessible to analysis and to the phenomenological method: infantile, archaic, pathological culpability."⁴⁸ These discoveries were to launch him in a number of other directions that would realign his views in remarkable ways.

Ricœur relates how, after his work on *The Symbolism of Evil*, he became involved in "external polemics and internal wars during the late 1960's."⁴⁹ This statement indicated his engagement with the rise of structuralism in France and its associated fields of semantics and semiotics.⁵⁰ Of primary interest to Ricœur were the distinct types of meaning that could be deciphered from their models and structures of analyses. This movement's questioning of the notion of the self also led to what Ricœur named "the wounded cogito."⁵¹ In addition, Ricœur was attracted by aspects of analytic philosophy with which he had come into contact in the United States. Finally, there were also repercussions from his book on Freud that required attention. Ricœur did not entirely abandon his interest in human action and agency, but for a time they were

to take a less-prominent role in his deliberations, insofar as his focus changed to the issues of interpretation of the text itself.

This move on Ricœur's part from phenomenology to textual analysis was something of a surprise. After hermeneutics and his acceptance of the mediatory role of texts, Ricœur's linguistic turn to word, discourse, and text seemed to some as an aberration, even a regression.⁵² Ricœur justified this new orientation by stating that he wanted to become more competent in linguistic problems.⁵³

One approach that interested Ricœur was analytic philosophy, particularly action theory, of the Anglo-Saxon variety, even though he regarded it as a rival of phenomenology and hermeneutics. He observed: "It was mainly in the philosophy of ordinary language that I found the most reliable support. In particular the distinction between pragmatics and semantics of speech acts begun by Austin and pursued by Searle, opened the way for a fruitful analysis."⁵⁴ Another area involves his attempts in combining analyses of action theory with a hermeneutics of human action when he taught courses on semantics at Louvain University from 1971 to 1979.⁵⁵

Ricœur remained reluctant, however, to sanction a text simply as an abstract object of analysis. He was not inclined to abandon his view that a text could exert influence on ways of being in the world. This intervention extended the range of possibilities beyond literalist limitations and dogmatic definitions to explorations of ways of being otherwise. This openness allowed for modes of human intervention. At the same time, Ricœur also introduced the matter of acting and suffering into this rich mixture: "[A]mid the things that are said there are people, acting and suffering; what is more, discourses are themselves actions; this is why the mimetic bond – in the most active sense of the word *mimetic* – between the act of saying (and of reading) and effective action is never severed."⁵⁶ Ricœur made sure that, whatever findings were disclosed by action theory and discourse, respect and responsibility needed to be bestowed on human beings who experience both acting and suffering. In this way, Ricœur affirmed that textual or linguistic precision should not necessarily be sought at the cost of human exclusion.

Ricœur's work on Freud also helped to deepen and enrich his insights into the human condition. He admits that "It was obviously the theme of guilt that first led me to Freud's domain."⁵⁷ In addition, Ricœur regards his encounter with Freud as of utmost importance in that: "Reading Freud led me far beyond the limits of this confrontation inherited from my earlier philosophy of the will [...]. My reading and interpretation of Freud no longer had as the prime objective the resolution of this antinomy."⁵⁸ Finally, Ricœur reiterates in one of his interviews with Azouvi and de Launay that Freud had helped him to move beyond "the archaic and obsessive mode of culpability, which has been replaced in my work by the question of suffering, of excessive suffering that overwhelms the world."⁵⁹ Ricœur allows that he is deeply concerned with the problem of suffering, especially the disproportionate and unmerited suffering that confounds humankind.

Acting and Suffering

In the last twenty years of his life, Ricœur continued to express his growing dismay at the undiminished amount of violence that human beings continued to inflict on one another. For Ricœur, this was a manifestation of suffering in the form of unjustified harm perpetrated on

innocent people.⁶⁰ As a result, he began to move away from simply theoretical discussions of philosophical problematics to struggle with pronounced ethical and practical issues. It was in an interview in 1988 with Charles Reagan, who was questioning him about the Gifford Lectures (1985–86) that Ricoeur revealed that he was somewhat dissatisfied with certain aspects of his work. He replied: “[I]t is the place of suffering in human experience.”⁶¹ As if by way of explanation, Ricoeur admitted what was on his mind:

I keep saying that in stories, in history, in narrative of all kinds we have to do with acting and suffering people. In fact, all my work is about acting, but not about suffering. I try to cast at least a glance in that direction through ethics because it is an access to the problems of ethics by saying that by my action I entertain a process of victimization which keeps going on through history.⁶²

In responding to Reagan's further inquiry as to what his future project would be after completing his trilogy of *Time and Narrative* (1982–88), he made a dramatic statement: “I must say that in my previous work there is very little about ethics and politics.”⁶³ Ricoeur then continued, justifying the change to which he would henceforth devote much attention:

It is this speculative problem of action and passion but also the problem of victimization – the whole story of this cruel century, the twentieth century – and all of the suffering imposed on the Third World by the rich, affluent countries, by colonialism. There is a history of victims that keeps accompanying or reduplicating the history of the victors. But the history I try to revive has a strong ethical debt to the victims.⁶⁴

This declaration indicates Ricoeur's firm commitment to attend to this untoward and seemingly endemic human predicament.

In other writings from this time, Ricoeur lamented the inability of abstract philosophical reasoning, or even of speculative explorations, to provide conclusive answers to the problem of evil and suffering in the world. While he still conceded that the different religions could provide support and sustenance for the suffering of humanity, he remained anguished that they could not eradicate the problem of either the origin of suffering or of its prevention. While Ricoeur did acknowledge the necessity of mourning that inevitably accompanies an awareness of such manifestations of unprovoked violence, that witness to humanity's ongoing inhumanity, he understood his public task as distinct. Ricoeur began to propose interventions that could help to alleviate the cause of human suffering insofar as its origins lay within the behavior of human beings themselves.

Ricoeur realized that, to complete this task, he would need to introduce ethics. He observed that such an ethical project would initially involve a return to his early mentors. As he stated in his “Intellectual Autobiography”: “By taking into account the primordial suffering which appears to be inseparable from human action, I returned to the lessons from my first masters on limit-situations [Jaspers] and embodiment [Marcel], as well as my former investigation on the absolute involuntary.”⁶⁵ Ricoeur, however, would deepen his own awareness much more profoundly than these previous and less activist positions. Nonetheless, Ricoeur did acknowledge that his own

previous work on human fallibility contained the seeds of his later work. He describes his attempt to include both dimensions:

It is at this point that the distinction to which I am most attracted – that between, on the one hand, fragility, vulnerability, fallibility – in short, finitude – and, on the other, the historical effectiveness of evil already present – constitutes the primary resistance that I oppose to the temptation of mastery that thought claims to achieve, before considering any project of liberation, and this is so as early as the work of delimiting and identifying the problem of evil.⁶⁶

In making this statement, Ricœur confirms his early vital engagement with the notions of both fragility and fallibility as aspects of finitude.

Yet, over the course of his work in investigating instances of suffering, a noticeable distinction between the earlier form of “fallibility”/“fragility” began to appear. It is noticeable that in the intervening years Ricœur had not returned to develop any further evaluations on fallibility. His new appreciation of fragility, however, reflected Ricœur’s own changed awareness. It is a subtle but significant shift that is indicative of his move back to the public domain, i.e., “from text to action.”⁶⁷

In *Fallible Man*, Ricœur’s use of the term “fallibility” had been virtually co-extensive with “fragility,” that witnessed to a weakness or intrinsic fault in humanity. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, Ricœur began to employ the word “frailty” or “fragility,” together with “vulnerability,” as indicative of the undiminished suffering in the world. Rather than undertake a search to determine the factual fault or failing that can lead to destructive behavior, the question changed radically for Ricœur. It became: “What shall we do with this fragile being, what shall we do for her or him? We are directed towards a future of a being in need of help to survive and to grow.”⁶⁸ This rhetorical question encapsulates the impetus that informed Ricœur’s turn to ethics. It seems appropriate to undertake a comparison of Ricœur’s changed understanding of fragility so as to measure how his ethical turn has modified his definition of frailty. Initially, in *Fallible Man*, Ricœur had declared:

If the capacity to fail consists in the fragility of the mediation that man effects in the object, in his idea of humanity, and in his own heart, the question arises concerning the sense in which this fragility is a capacity to fail. What capacity is this? Weakness makes evil possible in several senses that may be classified in an increasing order of complexity from the occasion to the origin, and from the origin to this capacity.⁶⁹

In this context, fragility can be understood as being aligned with fault, fear, and fallibility as representative of finitude. It not only denoted a susceptibility to failure but also the locus of a tendency that could allow evil to occur. In contrast, the second account has a very different description:

The vulnerability that stands in counterpoint to responsibility can be summed up in the difficulty that everyone has in inscribing his or her action and behavior into a symbolic order and in the impossibility a number of our contemporaries have in comprehending the meaning and necessity of this inscription, principally those whom our socio-political order

excludes. If we have been able to see in this capacity something that we presume every human being is capable of as human, now it is in terms of incapacity that we have to speak of the corresponding fragility.⁷⁰

This later instance portrays fragility as an incapacity to act, which is evident when people in contemporary society are excluded or prevented by institutions or socio-cultural forces from exercising their appropriate capacities. Such an incapacity to act is not a weakness arising from a personal debility but a form of human vulnerability where it is external agents who inflict harm. There has been a distinct movement in the meaning of fragility away from that of personal failing to imposed unjust actions or prohibitions of a detrimental nature.

Ricœur's Ethical Project

It is in *Oneself as Another* (1992) and a number of related essays that Ricœur expands and clarifies his ideas about an active, ethical self. He began to move towards this ethically grounded approach so as to be able to address specific cases where people were deprived, both personally and politically, of their rights to exercise their capabilities. Ricœur defines the orientation of his ethical intention as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions."⁷¹ Ricœur had become aware, however, that, in the interest of justice, he needed to delineate yet another manner of portraying the self – that of *homo capax*, or the capable human being, which he regards as the cornerstone of philosophical anthropology.⁷² He undertakes a phenomenological description of *homo capax*, describing the capabilities that he considers as indispensable to the constitution of human well-being. These can be described by four verbs: "I can speak, I can do things, I can tell a story, and I can be imputed, an action can be imputed to me as its true author."⁷³

In a short article entitled, "A Response by Paul Ricœur" (1997), Ricœur then qualified his previous work and set the agenda for his future explorations in ethics and justice:

I would like to underscore my emphasis, since *Oneself as Another*, on the importance of the idea of *homo capax* as integrating a wide conceptual field. With this theme I have tried to bring together those diverse capacities and incapacities that make human beings acting and suffering beings. If the notions of *poiesis* and *praxis* were given ample development in my earlier work, those of being acted upon and of suffering were less so. This disequilibrium is apparent in my treatment of the four modes of what I call our power to act that together make up the underlying structure of *Oneself as Another*.⁷⁴

In this same article, Ricœur also presents a form of *Apologia*, where he assesses how successful he has been, in addition to his lapses, by introducing the model of *homo capax* as the nexus of his philosophical task. This is a lengthy statement but is included here as it presents Ricœur's agenda in a cogent and unique manner that is not found in any of his other works.

At a first level, that of language, I think I do a good job of showing the necessity to return from the logical structure of the proposition or statement, dealt with by semantics, to the act of utterance, which is taken up by pragmatics, and from there to the utterer's ability to speak. However, I did not emphasize enough our difficulty, even our incapacity to bring to

language the emotional, often traumatic experience that psychoanalysis attempts to liberate. Similarly, on the second level, that of ordinary action and its intervention in the course of events, I had no difficulty in returning from the objective structures of action (whose 'readability' I had earlier pointed to by assimilating them to something like a text) to the ability to act of which the agent is certain and concerning which s/he is confident. In this sense, the capacity to designate myself as the author of my acts gets added to the general level of our ability to speak. But I left unclear the face of impotence that goes with this ability, owing not only to those infirmities of every sort that may affect the human body as the organ of action, but also to the interference of outside powers capable of diminishing, hindering, or preventing our use of our abilities. In this regard, the sufferings that humans inflict on one another weigh heavily in the scale of our abilities and inabilities within the sphere of ordinary action. I would say the same thing about my analysis of the relations between our affirmation of personal or collective identity and what I have called the narrative function. The distinction I proposed between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity only reinforces our capacity to tell about things and to tell about ourselves, and thereby to answer the question: Who am I? But the employment of this capacity does not always just happen smoothly, as is indicated by the inability of many survivors of extermination camps to bring their wounded memories to expression in narrative. Finally, the fourth category, that of imputability, which governs the transition from the first descriptive studies to the three chapters devoted to my "little ethics," also calls for a significant complement concerning the difficulty of many of our contemporaries to recognize themselves not just as the authors of their acts, but as accountable for the consequences of these acts, especially when they do harm to others – that is, finally, when they add to the world's suffering. We can speak in this regard of an incapacity to enter a symbolic order, including beyond motivating impulses, structuring prohibitions. This incapacity has as its effect an inability to discern or derive the morally significant aspect of action in relation to some norm. These incapacities, which affect the imputability of human action, today pose serious problems for educators, judges, and political leaders inasmuch as they diminish what we can call our aptitude for citizenship. (Ricoeur, 1997: xxxix–xl)

Ricoeur will now begin to chart a path that will help to alleviate the omissions and the problems that he has identified. This exacting enterprise can be described as an act of compassion on Ricoeur's part as he attempts to rectify the abuses and injuries that he has diagnosed in humanity's harsh treatment of their fellow human beings.

Towards an Ethical Ontology

In the Seventh Study of *Oneself as Another*, "The Self and the Ethical Aim,"⁷⁵ Ricoeur proposes a definite teleological direction toward justice that constitutes the core of his ethics. This becomes apparent in his adaptation of Aristotle's fundamental ethical intention of "living well" when he describes his own ethical position as "aiming at the 'good life' with and for others, in just institutions."⁷⁶ The emphasis on "just institutions" highlights Ricoeur's difference from Aristotle. In addition to capability and imputability, Ricoeur names solicitude, recognition, and self-esteem as part of his project and essential elements in this ethical movement.

As a necessary element in this process, Ricœur's understanding of solicitude plays an important role. Ricœur proposes that solicitude, which he appreciates as a form of "benevolent spontaneity" needs to be encouraged. In support of this task, he also acknowledges solicitude as an intrinsic feature of a human being's make-up. It would involve an openness to another that can challenge, even change, a person's own attitudes and actions. This is a major refinement that urges human beings to no longer operate solely from what Ricœur regards as a self-referential position. It also appears that Ricœur's intention in this regard is to shape philosophy to be equally responsive. Ricœur offers an original insight as part of a recommendation. "Solicitude assumes that, counter to all cultural pessimism, I pay credit to the sources of goodwill – what the Anglo-Saxon philosophers of the eighteenth century always tried to affirm in opposition to Hobbes, i.e., that man is not simply a wolf to man, and that pity exists."⁷⁷

Self-esteem is another central term where Ricœur intensifies his criticism of self-pre-occupation. Given that the word "self-esteem" could easily be associated with solipsistic pre-occupations, perhaps a necessary first step is to clarify the meaning Ricœur attributes to it. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur states: "The self – i.e., the "who of action" – does not merely consist in the self-designation of humans as the owners and authors of their deeds; i.e., "To say self is not to say myself."⁷⁸ Ricœur introduces this strategic move. "I cannot have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. "As myself" means that you too are capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluating the ends of your actions, and, having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem."⁷⁹ Ricœur thus understands that self-esteem, as a self-reflexive exercise, cannot only foster self-evaluation of one's motive and desires, but also can help to inculcate solicitude, as well as respect for, the other. This, in turn, helps to pave the way to recognition and ultimately justice within his overarching teleological framework. An essential part of this ethical orientation is Ricœur's hope that such an itinerary can redress the asymmetry that exists between human beings and that the good life in a just society can actually exist.

Ricœur's own response to this hope is palpable in *Oneself as Another* (1992), where he introduced the notion of recognition. In addition, he began to develop what he terms his "little ethics" in the mode of an ethical ontology. It is in one of his final works published in English, *The Course of Recognition* (2005), that Ricœur gives perhaps the most compact overview of his version of recognition as he develops the ideas he first presented in *Oneself as Another*.

The dynamic I could call a -'course' of recognition becomes apparent – I mean the passage from recognition – identification, where the thinking subject claims to master meaning, to mutual recognition, where the subject places him- or herself under the tutelage of a relationship of reciprocity, in passing through self-recognition in a variety of capacities that modulate one's ability to act, one's agency.⁸⁰

In Ricœur's view, recognition is not a simple comparative exercise. His proposition implies that mutual recognition is not merely giving an account of myself to myself. Nor is it simply the fact that I am similar to others, and thus accord them comparable privileges to those I attribute to myself. Instead, I am ethically accountable to others. It is an extremely radical claim. For what Ricœur implies is that one cannot become aware of one's own identity unless this complex inter-relationship of mutual recognition takes place. This implies that one is ultimately oneself only

inasmuch as one is at the same time other; hence, the title of his book. In this way, recognition thus involves a sense of identification with others in the uniqueness of their worth, i.e., their “irreplaceability.” Ricœur thus demonstrates clearly that any examination of issues of acting and suffering are not to be undertaken without an acute awareness of each person’s ineluctable involvement with other human beings. His aim is to encourage a mode of self-reflection that does not proclaim one’s own rights and entitlements, as it so often occurs, with consequent detrimental effects. This, in turn, helps to pave the way to refining the process of recognition and ultimately justice within an overarching teleological framework. The final steps in this are found in the amendments that Ricœur makes to his “little ethics,” that had appeared in *Oneself as Another*.⁸¹

There are a number of intricate movements in the maneuvers that come into play as Ricœur attempts to clear the way to include both justice and the good within in his teleological framework. It is, however, mainly in his later revisions on this topic in *The Just* (2000); “Ethics and Human Capability” (2002); *The Course of Recognition* (2005); and *Reflections on the Just* (2007) that Ricœur puts the finishing touches to what has been an extensive exercise. In Ricœur’s view, it is the incursion of violence into an ordered existence intent on the good life that demands that the teleological must engage with the deontological.⁸² It is the concept of “imputability” or “responsibility” – nominated earlier by Ricœur as one of the core capabilities of *homo capax* – that Ricœur suggests as a type of catalyst that will allow such a transition to occur. It was in *The Just* that Ricœur first observed: “The two ideas of capacity and imputability [...] take on a new aspect when they are brought together [...] under the aegis of a teleological approach to the idea of the just.”⁸³

What had also become obvious to Ricœur is that to move from intersubjective relations as evident in recognition into the realm of ethics and justice, he needed to introduce imputation/responsibility into his planned synthesis. He declares: “Imputability will be the link between the descriptive and the prescriptive parts of my work.”⁸⁴ The plan would then be to interweave imputability with self-esteem, with its emphasis on solicitude, for his endeavor to be successful. While Ricœur has applied his critical self-reflexivity as a requisite measure in his studies of both hermeneutics and narrative, there has not been a form of critique that applied moral categories. As Ricœur observed, it was mainly concerned with issues of philosophical anthropology.⁸⁵

As he turns to the personal and interpersonal level, Ricœur also intends, in the cause of justice, to undertake a more demanding task of including an explicit connection to the good in all such exercises of intersubjectivity, be they personal or collective. It is fascinating to read Ricœur building a case for his revisions. He first describes his understanding of capability as the “basic concept of philosophical anthropology.”⁸⁶ However, against this background, Ricœur adds a qualification that: “Imputability had to be put at the threshold of ethics and at the ending point of the anthropological phenomenology. Therefore, I see the whole problematic of ethics as an exploration of one specific capability, the moral or ethical capability.”⁸⁷

In this structure, it is then self-esteem that provides the basic, if not foundational, step in this direction, while imputation will supply the needed bonding. Ricœur then explicates his program for undertaking this move, “Under the three headings of philosophy of language, philosophy of action, and philosophy of narrative theory, I was able with the term *imputability* to reach the threshold between theoretical anthropology and ethics. [...] And it is with the last stage,

imputability, that the structuring function of the concept of capability came to mind."⁸⁸ "Therefore, I see the concept of capability as having not only a structuring function but a cumulative function."⁸⁹

This "structuring and cumulative function" can be detected when Ricœur moves to incorporate what he terms "the field of moral feelings."⁹⁰ From Ricœur's perspective, these include, in addition to Kant's sole nomination of respect, moral feelings such as shame, courage, admiration, enthusiasm, veneration, and indignation.⁹¹ All of these moral feelings are intertwined with the dignity of a moral subject. These additions all call for a reprise of Aristotle's and Kant's views on these most significant matters.

To this end, Ricœur will also introduce a revised understanding of a Kantian idea of norm, which he describes as needing "to establish reciprocity wherever there is a lack of reciprocity."⁹² This encounter between aim and norm, the good and the obligatory, ethics and morality, is not proposed by Ricœur in order to establish the superiority of one over the other. It is introduced, in his customary mediatory manner, to help demarcate his own ethical position where both are intrinsic and mutually enriching components.⁹³ He will, nonetheless, conclude by stating that, although the two positions are not mutually exclusive, ethics does take primacy over morality.⁹⁴ Yet this exploration should not be taken as simply a re-articulation by Ricœur of the basic positions of Kant (deontological) and Aristotle (teleological) and the interminable debate as to their respective merits. His purpose is to raise anew the question of the definition of norms and the role they should play in the indispensable dialogue that takes place *en route* to formulating contemporary proposals of defining justice where ethics and morality constructively interact.

This undertaking is in keeping with Ricœur's vision of his overall project that he first invoked in 1992, but which has since undergone numerous emendations. Ricœur queries: "[W]hether, in order to treat human action as a fundamental mode of being, hermeneutics can stand on the authority of the resources of past ontologies that could be, as it were, reawakened, liberated, regenerated at its contact."⁹⁵ He realizes that such a project is not without difficulties, even pitfalls. Yet he believes that such an attempt is crucial. For what is at the heart of his project is the attempt to reconfigure the conception of a capable self as a human being who can respond to the injustices of the present era. This involves continuously posing the question as to what can be accepted today as binding in the efforts to establish justice in a world so fraught with violence. As if to encourage further efforts in this direction, Ricœur will respond to his own question in his final major publication, *The Course of Recognition* (2005). He also returns to the subject of imputability/responsibility, as if to give it one final tweak. This observation is, in one sense, a type of commentary on his own work and its revisions, and also a nod toward what tasks still remain to be faced. He remarks: "It is left to phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy to take up the question left hanging [...] about the self-designation attaching to the idea of imputability as an aptitude for imputation. The passage from the classical idea of imputability to the more recent one of responsibility opens new horizons."⁹⁶ Ricœur is well aware that this task will be both daunting and necessary.

Conclusion

This paper has been a study in the work of Paul Ricœur that engages with one of his most passionate involvements with the issue of human action and suffering. Ricœur has been faithful to his own independent vision as he has painstakingly carved out an innovative approach to hermeneutics and phenomenology. At the same time, Ricœur has been attentive to other contemporary challenges that have been brought to bear on the nature of the modern self and subjectivity. Finally, he has striven to develop an ethical orientation that is mindful of others, in their dispossessed and suffering states, without a complete abnegation of one's own identity or responsibility. In these explorations, the dream of total mediation, as well as the notion of a transparent self, have been replaced by a more fragile and chastened notion of human identity. This still allows for forms of human action that promote a teleologically ordered, yet morally qualified, ideal of justice, toward which capable human beings are enabled to direct their actions for the betterment of life in this world.

- 1 Paul Ricœur, "Ethics and Human Capability," presentation at farewell conference in Chicago, 1999. Published in *Paul Ricœur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, 280.
- 2 Sections of this paper have been previously published in the journal *Symposium* (Canadian Society for Continental Philosophy; Spring, 2016); reprinted with permission of the publisher.
- 3 Paul Ricœur, "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur: An Anthology of his Work*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart; trans. Daniel O'Connor (Boston, Beacon Press, 1978), 20.
- 4 Ricœur, "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology," 20.
- 5 Ricœur, "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology," 20.
- 6 Ricœur, "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology," 31-2.
- 7 Ricœur in Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Peru, IL, Open Court, 1995), 15.
- 8 Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary*, transl. Erazim Kohák (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1966 [1950]), 444.
- 9 Ricœur, *The Voluntary and Involuntary*, 433.
- 10 Ricœur, *The Voluntary and Involuntary*, 433.
- 11 Ricœur, *The Voluntary and Involuntary*, 441.
- 12 Ricœur, *The Voluntary and Involuntary*, 475.
- 13 Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 93. Ricœur then links this affirmation to ethics, which will be a crucial aspect of his later work: "The level of life, as human life, is also that of desire; and hence it is the first level of ethics. In *Oneself as Another*, I defend the idea that, before the morality of norms, there is an ethics of the wish to live well," 93-4.
- 14 Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 156. This declaration anticipates the ideas in his posthumously published book: *Living up to Death*.
- 15 Ricœur interview in Sorin Antohi, "Memory, History, Forgiveness: A Dialogue between Paul Ricœur and Sorin Antohi," 20.
- 16 Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 157. See also, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 223.
- 17 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 222. Arendt adds a further judgment in relation to the creation of human beings. She stresses that "Male and female He created *them*" (*The Human Condition*, 10).
- 18 Arendt describes "Natality, in concert with action," as a "miracle" in that it interrupts what she views as the order of necessity – "the inexorable daily course of life" that follows the law of mortality (*The Human Condition*, 222).
- 19 As Arendt describes it: "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our physical appearance" (*The Human Condition*, 157).
- 20 Elaborating on Arendt's advocacy of natality, Ricœur remarks: "Must this not be understood as a discreet yet stubborn protest addressed to the Heideggerian philosophy of being-toward-death? Should we not see action as 'an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but to begin'?" (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, 489).
- 21 Arendt subsequently revised her thesis in the late fifties and sixties in America. This revised version was published in English as *Love and Saint Augustine*.

- ²² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 157.
- ²³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 221-2.
- ²⁴ Quoted from "Action, Story and History: On Re-Reading *The Human Condition*," 65, an English translation of Ricœur's "Préface" to the French edition of Arendt's *Condition de l'homme moderne*, tr. française G. Fradier, 5-32].
- ²⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27-32.
- ²⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 11.
- ²⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 169.
- ²⁸ Ricœur, "Philosophy of Will and Action," 67.
- ²⁹ Ricœur, "Philosophy of Will and Action," 67.
- ³⁰ Ricœur, "Philosophy of Will and Action," 69.
- ³¹ Ricœur, "Philosophy of Will and Action," 69.
- ³² Ricœur, "Philosophy of Will and Action," 69.
- ³³ Ricœur provides his understanding of these terms: "Imputation and responsibility are synonyms, the only difference being that it is actions which are *imputed* to someone and it is persons that are held *responsible* for actions and their consequences" ("The Human Being as the Subject Matter of Philosophy," 101, note 3).
- ³⁴ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man*, 133.
- ³⁵ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man*, 143.
- ³⁶ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man*, 4.
- ³⁷ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *The Symbolism of Evil*, 3.
- ³⁸ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 316.
- ³⁹ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 2: *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356-7.
- ⁴⁰ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man*, xlii.
- ⁴¹ Ricœur, "Appendix: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language," 87.
- ⁴² Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 2: *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.
- ⁴³ Ricœur, "On Interpretation," in *From Text to Action*, 15.
- ⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 2: *The Symbolism of Evil*, 247-57.
- ⁴⁵ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 2: *The Symbolism of Evil*, 356.
- ⁴⁶ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 36.
- ⁴⁷ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 16.
- ⁴⁸ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 29.
- ⁴⁹ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 17.
- ⁵⁰ I have omitted detailing Ricœur's various activities in connection with Saussure's structuralism, Benveniste's semiotics, Greimas's semantics, and Frege's model of sense and reference.
- ⁵¹ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 23.
- ⁵² Ricœur supplied an intriguing answer to such objections. He replies: "Looking back on it I can explain it this way: one can first of all see in this interest [in action] the resurgence under another name of the problem that was my first field of enquiry, the will, with the important difference, however, that the will was defined primarily by its intention – which I formerly termed the project, – and the action by

its accomplishment, hence its insertion in the course of events and its public manifestation of co-operation and competition. In this sense, action expresses more than will." ("Philosophy of Will and Action" in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*).

⁵³ Ricœur, "Appendix: From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language," 319.

⁵⁴ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 32. Nevertheless, Ricœur had the following criticism: "[A]nalytic philosophy is not interested in the ethical-political aspect of action, and they are perfectly satisfied with the pragmatic structure of action-sentences in a syntactical, semantic, and linguistic sense. After all, they do not interpret action, but rather sentences expressing action. Unlike them I say that we must analyze the text expressing action." (Tóth interview in Wierciński, 653).

⁵⁵ In retrospect, Ricœur admitted that, though helpful, these linguistic additions would not find adequate expression for quite some time. "The exploration of the resources of analytic philosophy for a theory of human action, and the effort made in the 1970's to integrate the semantic pragmatics of the discourse of action as a necessary mediation of self-understanding, were to find a provisional conclusion only 15 years later in the chapters dealing with the acting subject in *Oneself as Another*" (Hahn, 33). They would only reach fruition on Ricœur's own terms – when he included them in the development of his carefully argued ethical project.

⁵⁶ Ricœur, "Preface," *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, xiv.

⁵⁷ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 19.

⁵⁸ Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 191.

⁵⁹ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 29.

⁶⁰ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 113. At this time, Ricœur preferred to use the term "suffering" instead of "evil." Though this interview took place in 1988, it was not published until 1996.

⁶¹ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 113.

⁶² Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 113.

⁶³ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 114.

⁶⁴ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 114.

⁶⁵ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 49.

⁶⁶ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 473.

⁶⁷ Reagan, *Paul Ricœur: His Life and Work*, 37. Ricœur refers to the "dynamism that was to tear me out of what I have called my fascination with writing and the becoming-text of discourse, and propel me from the text to action" (Ricœur in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, 37).

⁶⁸ Ricœur, "Fragility and Responsibility," 16.

⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Finitude and Guilt*, vol. 1: *Fallible Man*, 141.

⁷⁰ Ricœur, "Autonomy and Vulnerability," *Reflections on the Just*, 85-6. In "Fragility and Responsibility" Ricœur clarified that he regarded "imputation" as an outmoded term and that he would use the term "responsibility" instead. It is interesting, however, that Ricœur still will use the term "imputation" in numerous articles and books.

⁷¹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

⁷² Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 280.

⁷³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 280.

- ⁷⁴ Ricœur, "A Response by Paul Ricœur," xxxix.
- ⁷⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 169-202.
- ⁷⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.
- ⁷⁷ Ricœur in *Critique and Conviction*, 159.
- ⁷⁸ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 180.
- ⁷⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 193.
- ⁸⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 248.
- ⁸¹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 169-296.
- ⁸² Ricœur, *The Just*, xvii.
- ⁸³ Ricœur, *The Just*, xvi.
- ⁸⁴ Ricœur, "Ethics and Human Capability," 280.
- ⁸⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 118.
- ⁸⁶ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 282.
- ⁸⁷ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 285.
- ⁸⁸ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 280.
- ⁸⁹ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 280.
- ⁹⁰ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 287.
- ⁹¹ Ricœur, *Ethics and Human Capability: A Response*, 287.
- ⁹² Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 225.
- ⁹³ Ricœur acknowledges: "We have too much emphasized the distinction and even the opposition between the deontological and the teleological. I think that this opposition is not implied by the basic texts themselves. It is more or less a construction of the tradition. And, in this sense, I would say that if there is something to deconstruct in 'moral philosophy,' it is precisely that this quickly stated opposition between the deontological and the teleological" ("Ethics and Human Capability," 287).
- ⁹⁴ Ricœur would go so far as to propose that: "A teleological concept governs the whole attempt of a so-called deontological ethics" ("Ethics and Human Capability," 287). He bases this resolution on the "first proposition in *The Foundation of the Metaphysics of Morals* is based on the fact that nothing can be conceived as higher under the sky and in reality at large than a good will." (*Ibid.*)
- ⁹⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 20.
- ⁹⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, 107.