

Addressing Contemporary Challenges to Hermeneutics

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Abstract

Hermeneutics encounters three current challenges: by more quantitative orientations, by stances that reject pluralism, and by criticism that the hermeneutic field is elitist and esoteric. The article offers a response through Ricœur. The hermeneutic “choice in favor of meaning” insists upon the ontological value of the human condition. It shows the insufficiency of the quantitative approach, the remaining value of pluralistic consideration of what human meaning entails, and the real world consequences of interpretation. Examples in Ricœur show how a hermeneutic choice in favor of meaning is not passive but instead reads texts with a particular orientation even when the text seems engaged in another project. The article’s final part undertakes an internal critique, raising the adequacy of Ricœur’s emphasis on meaning as an affirmation of “being.” The example of Buddhist insistence on “emptiness” is offered as one counterexample. The article concludes by arguing that in our contentious times hermeneutics confirms its contemporary vitality through its choice in favor of meaning even as it retains pluralistic consideration of what that meaning entails.

Keywords: Ricœur; Hermeneutics; Pluralism; Being; Emptiness.

Résumé

L’herméneutique est confrontée à trois défis actuels : des orientations plus quantitatives, des positions rejetant le pluralisme et une critique selon laquelle le champ herméneutique est élitiste et ésotérique. L’article propose une réponse en faisant appel à Ricœur. Le “choix (herméneutique) en faveur du sens” insiste sur la valeur ontologique de la condition humaine. Il montre l’insuffisance de l’approche quantitative, l’intérêt toujours actuel de l’approche pluraliste des implications du sens humain, et le réel impact de l’interprétation sur le monde. Chez Ricœur, un certain nombre d’exemples montrent comment un choix herméneutique en faveur du sens, loin d’être passif, permet au contraire de lire les textes avec une orientation particulière même lorsque le texte semble engagé dans un autre projet. La dernière partie de l’article entreprend une critique interne, en s’interrogeant sur la pertinence de l’accent mis par Ricœur sur le sens en tant qu’affirmation de l’“être.” L’exemple de l’insistance bouddhiste sur la “vacuité” est proposé à titre de contre-exemple. L’article conclut en soutenant qu’à notre époque controversée, l’herméneutique confirme sa vitalité contemporaine par son choix en faveur du sens, même en maintenant une approche pluraliste concernant les implications de ce sens.

Mots-clés: Ricœur; herméneutique; pluralisme; être; vacuité.

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 12, No 1 (2021), pp. 71-89

ISSN 2156-7808 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2021.531

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The field of hermeneutics seems to be retaining its vitality if measured by the continuing productivity of scholarship in the area. New book collections on hermeneutics have appeared in recent years – since 2015 we have the Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics, the Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics, and the Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics – and we also have important recent monographs such as Johann Michel’s *Homo Interpretans* and John Arthos’s *Hermeneutics After Ricœur*.¹ Yet from outside the field the value of hermeneutics faces more challenges, in at least three ways. First, hermeneutics seems to be one of those humanistic disciplines left out of the academic surge toward fields with more quantitative methods and more purported real-world effect. Second, hermeneutics’ endorsement of linguistic and cultural hospitality – of listening to and seeking to reduce the distance from the other – is viewed as normless and relativistic, while right answers are available, and the times demand them. Third, hermeneutics is criticized on its own terms as insular, academic, and esoteric, of interest only to disciplinary adherents.

In this article I frame my inquiry in Part I by analyzing these external challenges, and then in Part II I develop how Ricœur offers a response. I take as my thesis Ricœur’s following claim: “The choice in favor of meaning is thus the most general presupposition of any hermeneutics.”² Under this view, hermeneutics – at least this side of Ricœur’s hermeneutics – does not simply accept the intentions expressed by a text. It wants to listen and seek understanding but does not do so passively. Rather, interpretation is oriented to a particular perspective that seeks to locate in a text affirmative, ontological meaning even if that is not the text’s own goal or inclination. The “choice in favor of meaning” suggests a distinctive contribution of hermeneutics in contemporary interpretive debates: hermeneutics offers a very practical resource for sustenance in a world that many find to be filled with oppressive structures and institutions.³ Part III concludes the article and offers an internal critique. In the increasing and very welcome growth of North-South and East-West discussions of hermeneutics, the more assertive interpretive posture of a choice in favor of meaning needs to be particularly careful that it does not imperiously impose as normative a Northern and Western perspective – or a white, male variant – on what affirmative meaning entails. Here hermeneutics must return to its roots in listening and dialogue and be open to self-criticism.

I. External Challenges to Hermeneutics

I.1. The Academic Decline of the Humanities, including Continental Philosophy

Evidence from around the world indicates the challenges to university humanities departments, including philosophy and in particular continental philosophy, the source of future scholars in hermeneutics. The qualitative social sciences are also losing ground to quantitative analysis. In significant part, the decline comes from cuts by national and state governments and by

universities in the push for supporting student entry into STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and other quantitative, “practical” fields such as business and economics.⁴ In part the decline in the humanities comes also from students themselves, in their quest to find courses of study that they think lead to jobs.⁵ The decline in funding and support is as well due to ideological pressures. The challenges here include rising anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism as epitomized in populist movements and the complaint that the humanities lean left politically.⁶ Within philosophy, anecdotal evidence from countries such as the United States and France additionally indicates that a number of programs that had places for continental philosophers are replacing them with analytic philosophers as the continental philosophers retire. In part, analytic philosophers are seeking replacements by those of a similar philosophic orientation; in part, the goal is reputational, on the basis of prevalent norms favoring analytic approaches.⁷ As a result of these external challenges to hermeneutics more specifically and continental philosophy (and qualitative social science) more broadly, a number of younger Ricœur scholars are finding it a difficult task to obtain a permanent academic position.

I.2. The Challenge to Hermeneutics as Pluralistic

The virtues of social and political pluralism – represented perhaps prototypically by the hermeneutic task of listening, openness, and hospitality – are today facing vigorous attacks around the globe from assertions of more authoritative (and often authoritarian) truths, of right ways of thinking. If a generation ago Rawls (and, in response, Ricœur) offered a framework for thinking about procedures for accommodating and negotiating between divergent belief systems, today the critique is levied that Rawls’s pluralism itself in fact is not simply procedural but defends a normative stance, a “truth” about social life. In turn, critics claim the right to argue for and pursue a different social “truth,” here again one more assertive of a specific and anti-pluralistic truth. Consistent with my larger themes, it seems essential here to consider this challenge in light of the interaction of hermeneutics with the real world, not just as a debate internal to philosophy and its developments. For attentive observers, evidence of these political and social trends seems plentiful, so I offer just a few illustrative examples. During a recent online talk on Rawls in Hong Kong, none of the participants turned on their laptop cameras, apparently to avoid detection.⁸ Former Attorney General in the U.S. Trump Administration, William Barr, gave a noted speech at the University of Notre Dame in 2019, where he argued that “religion promote[s] the moral discipline and virtue needed to support free government” by “giv[ing] us the right rules to live by.” Reasoning from the “guidance of natural law,” we can “discern standards of right and wrong that exist independent of human will.”⁹ This is not a stance open to pluralistic, hermeneutic dialogue. In his 2017 acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Kazuo Ishiguro acknowledged that in 2016 political events around the world “forced [him] to acknowledge that the unstoppable advance of liberal-humanist values I’d taken for granted since childhood may have been an illusion.”¹⁰ In my subsequent response to these challenges and the rise of authoritarianism, I will go on to agree that pluralism and the concomitant hermeneutic values of listening, dialogue, and inclusion need to be defended as normative values, although that is not my principal goal here.

I.3. The Critique of Hermeneutics as Esoteric and Insular

A third external challenge to hermeneutics extends the broader critique of it being elitist, of being abstruse, esoteric, and out of touch.¹¹ For evidence, consider a survey I undertook of *New*

York Times references to the term “hermeneutics” since the newspaper’s founding.¹² One might anticipate a more favorable estimation in a newspaper for more educated readers. It is true that in the approximately 240 articles mentioning hermeneutics over the years, a number were quite favorable, including in the obituaries for Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricœur.¹³ There were also about 25 respectful articles on religious or biblical hermeneutics, about 10 on legal hermeneutics, and another 10 on the hermeneutics of suspicion.¹⁴ It was fun to witness several positive usages of the term applied to the context of popular culture, such as the hermeneutics of Star Wars, Batman, and James Bond, and the hermeneutics of fashion trends and of holiday gift wrapping.¹⁵ In a quite lovely evocation, an anonymous author referenced the hermeneutic depth of her friends.¹⁶

Yet by contrast, quite striking were the 60 or so articles sharply criticizing the employment of the term “hermeneutics,” whether in articles by *Times* reporters or columnists or in articles – such as book reviews – by scholars or experts. Articles criticized the term as “faddish,” “contorted and abstruse,” “tedious,” “chloroform in four syllables,” and “fashion-conscious.”¹⁷ Several articles noted with glee how the journal *Social Text* published an article by physicist Alan Sokal entitled “Transformative *Hermeneutics* of Quantum Gravity” (emphasis added), not knowing that Sokal wrote it as a spoof of postmodernist claims about science.¹⁸ In a subsequent interview, Sokal noted his pleasant surprise at the positive reaction to the piece, suggesting that it may have shown to lay readers that academic authors might be using “highfalutin language that didn’t mean anything.”¹⁹ Several other articles quoted Susan Sontag’s famous lines at the end of her essay, “Against Interpretation” – note the title – that “[i]n place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”²⁰ In this view, hermeneutics, like the stereotype of art history, is so busy engaging in close and detailed analysis that it loses sight of the meaning and affect expressed by the object with which it is engaged. Ricœur, I will argue, wants to vivify meaning, but Sontag’s challenge well signifies the critique of hermeneutics. To sum in one word, I was especially taken in one article by the critique of hermeneutics as *meretricious*: showy, ornate pretense.²¹

II. Ricœur’s Response: Hermeneutics as a Choice in Favor of Meaning

II.1. Ontological Vehemence

How does Ricœur help us to respond to these external challenges to hermeneutics? As I have anticipated, I take as my leading guide Ricœur’s statement: “The choice in favor of meaning is thus the most general presupposition of any hermeneutics.”²² In so doing, I set aside what are likely for most of Ricœur’s readers their prevailing sense of his orientation as directed toward eliciting, with hospitality and generosity, the world of the work, whatever that world may be. Instead, I want to concentrate on Ricœur’s hermeneutic reflections where his ambition is more overtly ontological. Many readers may recognize this stance as at work in *Freud and Philosophy*, but I shall contend that it is a thread that persists across his corpus. I shall argue that in these texts Ricœur’s hermeneutics implicitly accepts the challenge posed by other stances both that their frameworks assert certain substantive truths and that hermeneutics does as well, truths that it is willing to pursue. While hermeneutics strenuously endorses the posture of listening, here it is not passive in doing so but proceeds with a certain orientation, with a search for an ontological meaning that an author or text may not intend to say. In this way, hermeneutics also responds to

the critique of obscurantism in that it tries to unveil meaning rather than elaborate the forms of explanation in which the text may understand itself to be engaged.

The meaning of “meaning” is notoriously difficult to explicate,²³ but in the present context I take it in the sense of an affirmation of being. The affirmation may be of an other with whom I am in dialogue or a sense of human capacity and capability.²⁴ I want to attend a larger category, the affirmation of ontological being, in which the affirmation of an other may be a subcategory. Ricœur extends the Heideggerian vocabulary of being-there to such terms as “ontological vehemence.”²⁵ Ricœur repeatedly asserts that “ontological vehemence” insists “on preventing language from closing up on itself.”²⁶ Even in language that does not appear to be referential, “language expresses being.”²⁷ These expressions offer “ontological commitment,” an “affirmative vehemence” where “language go[es] beyond itself.”²⁸ Language is “always already thrown beyond itself by its ontological vehemence.”²⁹ Ricœur writes of an opening in language “that allows some aspect of Being to appear.”³⁰ I would argue that ontological vehemence places emphasis within the hermeneutic elaboration of the world in front of the text³¹ on this world’s ontological valences. The claim is that Ricœur’s driving attention to ontological vehemence guides his hermeneutics as a whole. As he writes in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, “The whole of textual hermeneutics is [...] placed under the theme of the increase in being applied to the work of art.”³² We hear echoes of themes that predominate in earlier Ricœur, such as on the “Joy of Yes” that is available in the midst of the finite.³³ Ricœur’s promotion of ontological meaning seems a vital salve in contemporary times that can otherwise overwhelm, confine, and reduce.³⁴

I do not take Ricœur’s own definition of hermeneutic meaning as final but open to discussion and dispute. As I address more directly in Part III, Ricœur’s definitions may be challenged by applications beyond their European origins to, for example, African and Asian contexts. While in the present part I restrict myself to Ricœur’s examples, I do so as a placeholder for a larger, ongoing discussion of what hermeneutic meaning entails, a question to which I return.

II.2. The Framing of Interpretation as Critical

My larger thesis is that Ricœur locates ontological vehemence as an act of hermeneutic intentionality, in an oriented way he reads texts. If Ricœur’s hermeneutics offers a recourse to ontology, this is not simply a revivification of Heideggerian hermeneutics, because Ricœur combines this ontology with an epistemological argument, a method for interpretation.³⁵ As I have suggested and now want to elaborate, my argument is that these examples in Ricœur particularly come to light when he engages in interpretation that proceeds against the apparent intention of the text.

Often but not always, these examples appear when in Ricœur’s own vocabulary he engages in “violence” to the text being discussed. I choose not to use this vocabulary myself, but I offer my rationales for doing so through investigating the different ways Ricœur distinguishes violence in language.³⁶ First and foremost, I will not use the vocabulary of interpretive “violence,” because it weakens and dilutes the horror of actual, physical or mental violence committed against an individual or group. This is a distinctive category and especially notable in contexts of violence that is based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other forms of group orientation.³⁷

Second, internal to language, a claimed “violence” in interpretation is of a different order than the use of language as a political or ideological threat. In an article entitled precisely “Violence

and Language,”³⁸ Ricœur begins by opposing language and violence. Building on Eric Weil, he distinguishes between violence and the aims of language as discourse: the latter is an appeal to reasoned argumentation, an attempt to channel dispute by means other than violence (89-90).³⁹ Yet within this article, Ricœur recognizes that language and violence are not simply opposed. Political violence rests not just on force but on the manipulative use of language. “[T]he tyrant prefers the services of the sophist to those of the executioner [...] Hitler rules through Goebbels” (93). In an interview years later, Ricœur returns to the Goebbels example and argues that violence can be not simply the act of one who strikes another but of the one who speaks: the most violent dictators speak. Political violence has a need for language.⁴⁰ In the early pages of *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricœur refines the juxtaposition between discourse and violence in an analysis of rhetoric and what differentiates persuasion from threat, “from the subtlest forms of violence” (11). Ricœur wants to revivify for investigation the “deep-seated conflict between reason and violence” that the history of rhetoric subsequent to the classical Greek period has negated in the focus on rhetorical classification (12). Ricœur contributes to showing the significance as a hermeneutic topic of the interrelation of political violence with language, but that is a subject distinguishable from any more general claim concerning the “violence” of interpretation.

A third reason not to conflate “violence” and interpretation must address critiques that interpretation itself is a “violent” act. Here, drawing upon Heidegger, Ricœur at several points references the notion that *all* interpretation is violent.⁴¹ More modestly, we may understand this claim to rest on the perspectivity of interpretation: the inevitable role of reader refiguration, for example,⁴² or the inextricable way that a text “is always read according to some hermeneutical rule.” We do not read with a naked eye.⁴³ Every great interpretation is not a replication of an original but a debate with the text.⁴⁴ The “violence of interpretation” is not ended by but may be “compensated for by the inherent receptiveness of an attentive reading.”⁴⁵ More broadly, some have argued that the violence of interpretation is an inherent malevolence in Western philosophy that necessarily participates in a will to power, the drive to bring phenomena within conceptual control.⁴⁶ Perhaps not surprisingly, Ricœur’s own analysis at this broader level is more modulated. At the same time that language seeks to disclose being, it also does “violence” because language entails “enclosure in the finitude of language”; it delimits and contains.⁴⁷ Paradoxically, at the “furthest point of non-violence,” when the poet abandons oneself and “surrenders to uncovered Being,” this is also the moment of “violent particularity,” because the openness also involves a capture. The poet “forces things to speak.”⁴⁸ Rather than retain the vocabulary of “violence” here, we might say that we evidence both the value and the limitation of even a well-intentioned hermeneutic: it can disclose but also distort.

A final reason to separate interpretation from “violence” is that the suggestion of doing “violence” to a text might seem to indicate that the text has a correct, foundational meaning that the interpreter is arguing against.⁴⁹ Ricœur’s well-known emphasis on the semantic autonomy of the text rejects this supposition.⁵⁰ Textual meaning is not equivalent to authorial intent. The structure of the text may make available more or different meaning than an author contemplates. A text’s semantic autonomy helpfully underscores that the interpretation whose implications we are pursuing rests more on the logic available in the text – on what in *Time and Narrative* Ricœur calls its configuration⁵¹ – rather than on its refiguration – on what the reader takes away from or appropriates from the text – although configuration and refiguration are interrelated. At a few points, Ricœur notably indicates that an interpreter does *not* engage in violence to the text if the

interpreter deciphers meaning, again even if that meaning is not one that an initial reading would detect.⁵² An interpretation is legitimate and not “violent” if it is an interpretation of the structure and logic of the text and is not by contrast an “irruption of the subjectivity of the exegete.”⁵³ Ultimately, it seems that Ricœur’s vocabulary of doing “violence” to a text is more of a rhetorical strategy to recognize that the interpretation works against the text’s apparent intentions, but that the meaning derived is nevertheless available and legitimate.

It is the hermeneutic emphasis on allowing being to speak, even if delimited by language, that I want to apprehend in stressing Ricœur’s thesis that hermeneutics offers a choice in favor of meaning. The favoring of meaning seems a vital and essential gift that hermeneutics offers the contemporary world. Yet a final step in the interpretive framework I am exploring remains. In Ricœur’s claim that hermeneutics is a choice in favor of meaning, I want to turn to the implications resulting from it being a choice. Hermeneutics looks for meaning – for the appearance of being – even when that is not a direction that the text on its own wants to take. Ricœur here engages in a form of *critical* understanding, a critical hermeneutics. The critique is not drawn from elsewhere – say from moments of explanation drawn from the social sciences – but is a critical endeavor, a critical perspective, on its own terms. Although it is open to the other, critical hermeneutics is an oriented and directed form of interpretation. It ultimately seeks to extract the availability of ontological meaning from the other. In this sense, critical hermeneutics itself asserts an interpretive perspective in its approach to the other. It applies an interpretive sieve that sifts through the other’s statements to uncover the flecks of what it considers positive ontological meaning.

II.3. Choices in Favor of Meaning

In turning to explore examples of Ricœur’s pursuit of ontological meaning, I will set aside the vocabulary of “violence” and instead use the shorthand vocabulary of Ricœur’s interpretations cutting against the text, in the sense that it acts against the customary or usual understanding of the text’s intentions, including by the text’s author.

As previously noted, it may be familiar to readers of Ricœur that his interpretation in *Freud and Philosophy* cuts against Freud’s intentions. Yet it seems much less customary to sense that Ricœur’s hermeneutics cuts against the texts he interprets in a quite enduring fashion. Elaboration of these examples supports the larger theory of Ricœur’s choice in favor of meaning. Ricœur is quite overt at a number of junctures that his interpretation cuts against the text. I will more quickly delineate a few and then turn to more extensive elaboration of a couple other examples. In the opening chapter of *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur allows that he is cutting against the text of Augustine in initially separating the analysis of time apart from Augustine’s ultimate focus on the relation between eternity and time.⁵⁴ Ricœur finds some justification for this isolation of time in Augustine himself and anticipates redress of the imbalance when returning at a later point to the question of eternity. But Ricœur’s own question is the ontological implication of time – we are caught within narrative – and this question orients his interpretation of Augustine. In his “Intellectual Autobiography,” Ricœur returns to his interpretation of Augustine and Aristotle in *Time and Narrative* and indicates that his readings cut against both. On Aristotle he claims that his interpretation did not do harm to the Aristotelian analysis but instead offered “justice to it beyond the presumed intention of the author.”⁵⁵

In the eighth study in *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur raises the question whether he has cut against the Kantian text when he finds available within Kant's focus on universality the intuition in the Golden Rule, "inherent in solicitude, of genuine otherness at the root of the plurality of persons."⁵⁶ The inquiry is "ontological,"⁵⁷ and Ricœur finds elements in Kant's analysis that Kant does not pursue. There is a "discordance"⁵⁸ in Kant's text that Ricœur wants to explore; there is a recovery of human meaning. In reading Kant, Ricœur goes further than Kant himself would allow in this text, although Kant elsewhere endorses the claim of persons as ends in themselves.⁵⁹

In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Ricœur allows that his readings of Marx and Weber do seem to cut against their texts.⁶⁰ By emphasizing the possibilities of real human praxis in the face of the role of economic structures and the alienation of labor,⁶¹ Ricœur contends that he has succeeded in reading Marx's text better; his interpretation "recognizes a dimension of the text."⁶²

Worthy of more detailed elaboration, perhaps the most dramatic example of Ricœur cutting against the text occurs in his interpretation of Weber. Ricœur develops his theory of legitimation, an element of his larger theory of ideology, on the basis of appraisal of the following Weber statement. In analyzing the motives that individuals have for adherence to the state's authority, Weber writes: "[C]ustom, personal advantage, purely affectual or ideal motives of solidarity do not form a sufficiently reliable basis for a given domination. *In addition* there is normally a further element, the *belief* in legitimacy" (emphasis added).⁶³ We must appreciate Ricœur's response to Weber's insertion of "in addition." Legitimacy is not established by the factors Weber addressed but only by the addition of belief. What is striking to Ricœur about Weber's statement is that the notion of addition is mentioned here, mentioned again in the next paragraph,⁶⁴ and then completely dropped. While Weber returns at several points to mention the citizenry's *belief* in legitimacy, he never discusses this theme. Instead, Weber focuses completely on the political authority's *claim* to legitimacy. Ricœur's entire theory of legitimacy as a form of ideology is built on the "empty space" in Weber's theory for the role of belief.⁶⁵

What is remarkable methodologically is that Ricœur's theory is built upon an *absence* that he finds in Weber. While hermeneutics gives attention to the meaning that the other is expressing in discourse or text, at the same time, Ricœur explicitly notes that his hermeneutic methodology is oriented.⁶⁶ It may extract kinds of meaning that the author does not attend. Hermeneutics in this sense can be "deconstructive," if not in Derrida's way of showing the limitations or failures of a text to offer meaning or presence,⁶⁷ then in unpacking the text and taking it in a direction it does not want to go, in showing that the text offers a meaning that it does not accept as its own. Ricœur is fully aware that he takes this hermeneutic posture toward Weber. He has "compelled" Weber "to say what he did not want to say."⁶⁸ In his analysis of Weber, Ricœur "read between the lines" and found something that was "not in the text" in the sense of something that Weber intended.⁶⁹ Ricœur recognized a dimension of the text that Weber as author did not.⁷⁰ "[T]here must be something more in the belief than can be rationally understood in terms of interests, whether emotional, customary, or rational."⁷¹ Although the specific context of discussion is political legitimacy, the larger context lies in the realm of philosophical anthropology, of the positive possibilities of what it means to be human.

As already suggested, perhaps prototypical of an interpretation cutting against the text is Ricœur's book on Freud. Ricœur poses whether he has engaged in "overinterpretation" of Freud.⁷² Ricœur argues that if Freud's work contains an "explicit and thematized" archeology of the

unconscious, it can do so only on the basis of a relation on its own “by the dialectical nature of its concepts, to an implicit and unthematized teleology.” He seeks to show that this teleology exists *within* Freud’s texts even if not explicitly.⁷³ The Freudian economics of the unconscious, Ricœur maintains, must be paired with “the unique task of the process of becoming conscious, which defines the finality of analysis,” even though the challenge to become an I is “irreducible” to the Freudian economics.⁷⁴ Ricœur acknowledges his interpretation is in “opposition” to the express Freudian model.⁷⁵ But the task of becoming an I is an “unspoken” element in Freud’s doctrine, part of “operative, unthematized concepts.”⁷⁶ A teleology responds to the Freudian archeology because in becoming I, the subject “must mediate self-consciousness through spirit or mind.”⁷⁷ The seeming dialectic between archeology and teleology ends, in Ricœur’s view, in a “symbolic understanding that would grasp the indivisible unity of its archeology and teleology in the very origin of speech.”⁷⁸ Ricœur contends that his elaboration of a teleology of consciousness internal to Freud’s psychoanalytic reduction of consciousness generates in fact “a better reading of Freud.”⁷⁹ But Ricœur acknowledges that he mines Freud for an orientation that is not the one that Freud wants to take. Ricœur’s interpretation goes against Freud’s intentions.

My claim, then, is that Ricœur’s unexpected readings – ones that seem to cut against the text – reflect an interpretive ethos manifest throughout his corpus. He drives to uncover meaning – meaning of positive ontological purpose – in his readings. In his work on Freud, he terms this effort one to recollect or restore meaning.⁸⁰ In his later work on metaphor and imagination, he seeks to locate poetic spaces for the manifestation of new meaning. As we know, as in our discussion of Freud, these efforts are the product not of evasion of the hermeneutics of suspicion but of working through the challenges of suspicion to determine the positive meanings available nonetheless. To return to my opening quotation of Ricœur, his hermeneutics makes a choice in favor of meaning.⁸¹ In our contentious and often dispiriting times, the availability of this hermeneutic search for meaning seems worthy of attention, elaboration, and contemporary application.

III. Internal Critique

Some of the considerable sources of hope in the continued flourishing of hermeneutics lie in its exploration in non-Western/non-Northern cultures and in its invocation in cross-cultural dialogue.⁸² Within Ricœur studies, particularly auspicious are Cristal Huang’s creation of a Ricœur Research Center in Taiwan, which undertakes East-West conversation,⁸³ and Ernst Wolff’s 2021 publication of *Lire Ricœur depuis la périphérie: Décolonisation, modernité, herméneutique*, which develops an intercultural hermeneutics that interrelates Ricœur with African thought.⁸⁴ The cross-cultural conversation in hermeneutics is, of course, not new. Heidegger’s “A Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer,” which dates to the early 1950’s, is well known.⁸⁵ For present purposes, as we shall see, it is of interest that Ricœur himself referenced the Buddha or Buddhism around 50 times.⁸⁶ In this part I want to raise the question whether Ricœur’s own hermeneutics needs to be responsible for reconsideration in the light of a challenge coming from a non-Western hermeneutic, that of Buddhism. If throughout we have advocated, through Ricœur, for a more assertive form of hermeneutics that is a choice in favor of meaning, we may need to reassess Ricœur’s characterization of what that choice in favor of meaning means.

Here we return to the description, mentioned in Part I, of Ricœur's hermeneutic choice in favor of meaning as a form of "ontological vehemence." In question is the nature of this vehemence as an affirmation of "being," that is, of being as having a positive ontological character. Ontological vehemence seems a predisposition throughout Ricœur's corpus. It is described perhaps most graphically in his early work, building on Nabert, on "*affirmation originaire*"; this is variously translated as "originary affirmation," "originating affirmation," "primordial affirmation," or "primary affirmation." In *Fallible Man*, Ricœur describes this originary affirmation as in part "the vehemence of the Yes, which has for a correlate the 'is' that is signified – or to be more precise, supra-signified – by the Verb."⁸⁷ Originary affirmation is affirmation of being: "Being is here affirmation, yes, joy."⁸⁸ In Ricœur's famous line, noted earlier, originary affirmation is the "Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite."⁸⁹ In his essay on "Negativity and Primary Affirmation," Ricœur argues "that in every contestation of the real..., an affirmation of being is included."⁹⁰

In contrast, it seems that the Buddhist notion of "emptiness" contests the unambiguity of an affirmation of being. I simply quote what appear to be representative passages:

At all times and everywhere one-sided affirmation and negation have been rejected as erroneous, in favour of some "non-dual" reality which is free from both being and non-being.⁹¹

The finite, one-sided, partial nature of affirmative propositions is rejected not in order then to be replaced with just another proposition [...], but with an eye to transcending and eliminating all affirmation, which is but a hidden form of self-assertion [...]. Emptiness [...] is not taught to make a theory, but to get rid of theories altogether.⁹²

"Emptiness" can reveal the true nature of reality only when it is used to eliminate the search for some ultimate, absolute "being." Then, in order that it is not crystallized into an absolute being itself, "emptiness" loses its own designations as the revelatory means.⁹³

Buddhism seeks to overcome the dualism between being and non-being. It rejects simple affirmation of being. It would be interesting to compare Ricœur's attention to the pre-objective,⁹⁴ that which exists prior to the division between subject and object, as open to the Buddhist orientation toward overcoming dualism, but that is not a direction that Ricœur himself took.

In his own work, Ricœur expresses the sentiment that "imagination and sympathy" have sometimes taken him "to the edge of Buddhism."⁹⁵ Ricœur especially considers Buddhism in thinking about the nature of selfhood. In examining the work of Derek Parfit in *Oneself as Another*, for example, Ricœur finds Parfit's challenges to the notion of selfhood to be a form of "quasi Buddhism": we should be less concerned with self, aging, and death. Ricœur endorses these concerns, but he is willing to go only so far and considers the critique as "a crisis *within* selfhood."⁹⁶ In a separate discussion elsewhere of Parfit that also references Buddhism, Ricœur agrees that the critique should lead to a renunciation of "sameness," but "the self does not thereby disappear."⁹⁷ Ricœur finds some credibility in the claim that Derrida's critique of logocentrism bears resemblance to the Buddhist notion of nothingness, but he reads the "emptiness" that we must traverse not as an ontological consideration and rather as a commentary on the need to abandon "our pretension to be the centre."⁹⁸ To my knowledge, the Ricœur text closest to consideration of Buddhist emptiness as an ontological judgment is one where he acknowledges that Buddhism might assist his treatment of "attestation," which "can conceal within itself resistance to 'detachment.'"⁹⁹ Yet

because this consideration arises in *Living Up to Death*, where Ricœur is contemplating his own mortality, again the focus seems to be on the nature of selfhood, not ontology. Throughout his corpus, Ricœur seems to manifest ontological vehemence and affirmation of being.

In the laudable development of exchanges between hermeneutics and Buddhist thought, including secondary literature on Ricœur, attention often seems oriented toward the parallel endorsement by both perspectives of a relational ontology: how we each are inextricably interrelated with one another both horizontally in any present time and vertically over time, for instance, in the literal and substantive dependence of our person on our parents. Nicholas Davey discusses how the Buddhist concept of emptiness exhibits being as that “relational complex which is all things,” arguing the same of Gadamerian hermeneutics.¹⁰⁰ In his keynote address at the 2020 Leuven Ricœur Conference, Yasuhiko Sugimura argues similarly, comparing relationality in Ricœur’s hermeneutics to his own Kyoto School of Buddhist philosophy.¹⁰¹ For Sugimura, the Buddhist notion that I am nothing – which Ricœur finds in Western texts such as Musil’s *Man without Qualities* – is the basis by which the self becomes available to others.¹⁰² My hesitation here is that, as Sugimura notes, Ricœur insists that to say “I am nothing” would have no meaning unless attributed to an enduring “I.”¹⁰³ The radical challenge that Buddhism offers to hermeneutic ontological vehemence is well represented in Sugimura’s concluding paragraphs where he discusses lineage in the Kyoto School that insists on a form of absolute nothingness that is an unending movement between being and nothingness. Being does not predominate, as in Ricœur.¹⁰⁴

The point is not to assess the validity of Ricœur’s ontological vehemence but to suggest that the hermeneutic choice in favor of meaning must remain open to conversation about what that meaning encompasses. Along these lines, the later vocabulary of Ricœur is somewhat more accommodating to this conversation, in that his vocabulary appears to change from “originary affirmation” to “attestation.” Attestation, Ricœur writes, is “less demanding than the certainty belonging to the ultimate foundation.” It is a form of “belief,”¹⁰⁵ a “credence without any guarantee” but also a “trust greater than any suspicion.”¹⁰⁶ As belief, an attestation may be difficult to dislodge, but it is not accepted simply as fact.¹⁰⁷

IV. Conclusion

I urge, then, that in addition to the general value of hermeneutics as unfolding the world of a text, it also should be endorsed more specifically as a choice in favor of meaning. The hermeneutic focus on meaning redresses the external critiques of the field: hermeneutics demonstrates its vitality, relevance, and real-world import in the face of the broader external turn to more quantitative forms of analysis and explanation; it defends pluralistic interpretation – including on the nature of ontological meaning – against the rise in more rigid, authoritative, and often authoritarian “right answers;” and it resists elitism and obscurantism in offering the more public value of attention to what meaning may entail.

I close with three implications of this analysis for hermeneutics. First, consistent with Ricœur, hermeneutics more clearly interrelates an epistemology of interpretation with its concentration on ontological meaning.¹⁰⁸ Hermeneutics becomes a mode of knowledge; it provides an analytic framework; it views texts through an interpretive grid that searches out clues of

meaning. Second, as a “choice” in favor of meaning, hermeneutics cannot take for granted but must argue for the priority of its orientation over against other methodological choices – whether of understanding (*e.g.*, the hermeneutics of suspicion) or of explanation – that do not accept the hermeneutic choice. Hermeneutics cannot simply contend that it is foundational as a matter of our being-there in the world, and that this contention ends all arguments. Others will and do disagree. Third and correlatively, hermeneutics must undertake a wager in favor of its approach and show its merits in actuality. It must face its contemporary challenges and challengers and prove itself. It must, perhaps paradoxically, take a more insistent stance in favor of welcoming and engaging in pluralistic dialogue all the while trying to draw out what meaning may encompass. In our contentious times, hermeneutics must undertake and has the ability to undertake the task of seeking meaning across the discordant, a most meritorious contribution worth our attention and effort.

- ¹ Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017); Johann Michael, *Homo Interpretans: Towards a Transformation of Hermeneutics*, trans. David Pellauer (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019); John Arthos, *Hermeneutics After Ricœur* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). As apparent from their titles, both the Michel and Arthos books themselves seek to rethink contemporary hermeneutics.
- ² Paul Ricœur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 38 (emphasis added).
- ³ This analysis draws upon and extends an argument begun in some paragraphs in a prior essay. See George H. Taylor, "Practical Hermeneutics: The Legal Text and Beyond," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 48/3 (2017), 257-74. I have also benefited from comments raised during discussion of an earlier draft at the online Leuven Ricœur Conference 2020, November 21.
- ⁴ Representative articles, listed in reverse chronological order, include: "A Profoundly Unfair [State] Bill Would Withhold Bright Futures [Scholarship] Aid Based on College Majors," *Orlando Sentinel* [editorial], February 26, 2021; [Ian Marshman and Frank Larkins, "The \[Australian\] Government is Making 'Job-Ready' Degrees Cheaper for Students..."](#), *The Conversation*, June 23, 2020; Elizabeth Redden, "In Brazil, a Hostility to Academe," *Inside Higher Ed*, May 6, 2019 (proposals for defunding philosophy and sociology departments to focus on practical, fields such as engineering and medicine); Patricia Cohen, "A Rising Call [in various U.S. States] to Promote STEM Education and Cut Liberal Arts Funding," *New York Times*, February 21, 2016; Suvendrini Kakuchi, "[Japanese] Government Softens Stance on Humanities After Uproar," *University World News*, January 22, 2016 (noting continuation of governmental emphasis on and funding of science over humanities and social sciences courses); Ella Delany, "Humanities Studies Under Strain Around the Globe," *New York Times*, December 1, 2013.
- ⁵ Heather Long, "The World's Top Economists Just Made the Case for Why We Still Need English Majors," *Washington Post*, October 19, 2019: "A great migration is happening on U.S. college campuses. Ever since the fall of 2008, a lot of students have walked out of English and humanities lectures and into STEM classes, especially computer science and engineering. English majors are down more than a quarter (25.5 percent) since the Great Recession... Ask any college student or professor why this big shift... is happening and they will probably tell you it's about jobs." The article goes on to argue that English majors are still needed to help populate the rising field of narrative economics.
- ⁶ See, e.g., Redden, "In Brazil, a Hostility to Academe."
- ⁷ The *Leiter Reports* examination of the 2020-21 job market in North American philosophy indicates that for tenure-track positions, only 1.2% were advertised specifically within continental philosophy. Brian Leiter comments, "19th- and 20th-century Continental philosophy continues to be outrageously neglected, despite it being one of the most fertile periods in the history of philosophy, hugely

influential across all the humanities and social sciences.” While other statistics within the survey indicate potential opportunities for continental philosophers – such as positions open in specialty or those in value theory – the opportunities in actual hiring practice seem limited (online: [https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/advice_for_academic_job_seekers/.](https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/advice_for_academic_job_seekers/))

- ⁸ Vivian Wang, “As Hong Kong Law Goes After ‘Black Sheep,’ Fear Clouds Universities,” *New York Times*, November 7, 2020.
- ⁹ William P. Barr, “Attorney General William P. Barr Delivers Remarks to the Law School and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame,” October 11, 2019 (online: [https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics.](https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-william-p-barr-delivers-remarks-law-school-and-de-nicola-center-ethics))
- ¹⁰ Kazuo Ishiguro, “Nobel Lecture” [Nobel Laureate in Literature 2017] (online: [https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/ishiguro-lecture_en.pdf.](https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/ishiguro-lecture_en.pdf))
- ¹¹ A perhaps converse critique, more tied to the 1970’s and 1980’s, when the popularity of hermeneutics was more pervasive is that the invocation of hermeneutics is so broad – everyone says that they are engaged in hermeneutics – that the term becomes meaningless. Ricœur himself notes this critique, speaking of the “danger of hermeneutics [...] the danger of a certain banalization, something like what happened in the past with existentialism. Thirty years ago, everything was existentialism. Now, everything that isn’t positivism tends to become hermeneutics.” (“Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 303-4). Ricœur’s statement came in a 1987 conference. As Ricœur’s work evidences, a more sophisticated analysis would show the pervasiveness of hermeneutics as an interpretive act.
- ¹² It would of course be of interest to compare references to hermeneutics in other prominent newspapers internationally, such as *Le Monde*.
- ¹³ Edward B. Fiske, “Martin Heidegger, a Philosopher who Affected Many Fields, Dies,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1976; Stuart Lavietes, “Hans-Georg Gadamer, 102, who Questioned Fixed Truths,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2002; Margalit Fox, “Paul Ricœur, 92, Wide-Ranging French Philosopher, is Dead,” *New York Times*, May 24, 2005.
- ¹⁴ Given the space that would be required to provide these citations, I do not reference them individually. Interested readers can use the relevant keywords to search the *New York Times* or contact me for citations.
- ¹⁵ Jennifer Senior, “In John Green’s ‘Turtles All the Way Down’ a Teenager’s Mind is at War with Itself,” *New York Times*, October 10, 2017 (Star Wars); Jennifer Senior, “Review: ‘The Caped Crusader’ [by Glen Weldon] and Batman’s Reach Beyond — Gasp! — Comic Book Lore,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2016; A.O. Scott, “In ‘Quantum of Solace,’ James Bond Evolves as a Tragic Figure,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2008; Liesl Schillinger, “English Leather,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1998 (fashion);

Timothy Jack Ward, "Currents; Wrap Artists Give Gifts their Due," *New York Times*, December 8, 1994 (gift wrapping).

- ¹⁶ "Private Lives," *New York Times*, January 19, 1977.
- ¹⁷ Tadzio Koelb, "This Debut is a Jail Novel, but Funny," *New York Times*, May 21, 2019 ("faddish"); Alessandra Stanley, "Meet the Host: Defying the Rules," *New York Times*, September 7, 2014 ("contorted and abstruse"); Dave Itzkoff and Laura Sinagra, "Music Chronicle," *New York Times*, June 4, 2006 ("tedious"); Russell Baker, "Note from the Gas Works," *New York Times*, September 16, 1995 ("chloroform in four syllables"); Richard Sennett, "Clio and the Doctors," *New York Times*, October 20, 1974 ("fashion-conscious").
- ¹⁸ See, e.g., Edward Rothstein, "When Wry Hits your Pi from a Real Sneaky Guy," *New York Times*, May 26, 1996.
- ¹⁹ Joseph P. Fried, "Following Up," *New York Times*, May 9, 2004.
- ²⁰ See, e.g., A.O. Scott, "How Susan Sontag Taught Me to Think," *New York Times*, October 8, 2019, quoting Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966).
- ²¹ Leo Marx, "The Puritan Origins of the American Self," *New York Times*, February 1, 1976.
- ²² Ricœur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 38 (emphasis added).
- ²³ See, e.g., Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" in *Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 215-71.
- ²⁴ See, e.g., Paul Ricœur and Richard Kearney, "On Life Stories," in Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), 167 (quoting Ricœur on "the hidden truth of our operative acts").
- ²⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 462-63.
- ²⁶ Ricœur, "On Interpretation," in *From Text to Action*, 19-20.
- ²⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 301.
- ²⁸ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 249.
- ²⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 48.
- ³⁰ Paul Ricœur, "Violence and Language," in *Political and Social Essay*, ed. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), 94-5.

- ³¹ See, e.g., Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 81.
- ³² Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 566, note 81.
- ³³ Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), 215.
- ³⁴ For an effort to show the positive real-world implications of hermeneutics in practice, see the Hermeneutics in Real Life project (www.hinrl.org), of which I am a member of the organizing group.
- ³⁵ I return to this point in the Conclusion.
- ³⁶ Here and at later points, my analysis is assisted by evaluating Ricœur's usage as revealed in a search of his corpus through Digital Ricœur (www.digitalRicœur.org).
- ³⁷ See, e.g., Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). I thank Michael Deckard for the reference and for the larger discussion of this point. Ricœur does seem attentive to the concerns being raised. See, e.g., Ricœur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 295: "There are morals because there is violence, which is itself multiform: physical coercion, psychic seduction, intimidation, extortion, exploitation, manipulation, to say nothing of the nightmare that makes violence the situation of all communication by undercutting any confidence in language"; Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 259: "If we were to remove the suffering inflicted by people on other people, we would see what remained of suffering in the world, but to tell the truth, we have no idea of what this would be, to such an extent does human violence impregnate suffering."
- ³⁸ Ricœur, "Violence and Language." Subsequent references appear in the text.
- ³⁹ The appeal to discourse as an alternative to violence is then similar to Ricœur's invocation of the legal system as also an alternative to violence. Ricœur returns to Weil's juxtaposition between discourse and violence years later in *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 2) (trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 28). In this context, Ricœur appeals to discourse as having the assumption of concordance, which leads Ricœur's theory of narrative to privilege concordance in the tension between concordance and discordance.
- ⁴⁰ Paul Ricœur, "For an Ethics of Compromise," in *Philosophy, Ethics and Politics*, ed. Catherine Goldenstein, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 84.
- ⁴¹ See, e.g., Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 115; Paul Ricœur and Yip Hing-Wah, "Interview with Paul Ricœur," in Yip Hing-Wah, *What Metaphysics of Morality in View?* (Leuven: Catholic University of Leuven, 2002), 233 (quoting Ricœur).
- ⁴² Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 70-87.
- ⁴³ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 115.

- ⁴⁴ Paul Ricœur, "Le 'Marx' de Michel Henry," in *Lectures*, Vol. 2, *La contrée des philosophes* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 267.
- ⁴⁵ Paul Ricœur, "From Metaphysics to Moral Philosophy," trans. David Pellauer, *Philosophy Today* vol. 40/4 (1996), 458, note 1.
- ⁴⁶ See Marc-Antoine Vallée, "Understanding: A Violent Aim?," in Paul Fairfield and Saulius Geniusas (eds), *Relational Hermeneutics: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 149-51 (offering, while not accepting, the orientations of Derrida and Vattimo).
- ⁴⁷ Paul Ricœur, "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 233. See also "Structure, Word, Event," trans. Robert Sweeney, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 96: when "words capture some aspects of being," they do so "by a kind of violence that delimits the very thing that the word opens up and uncovers."
- ⁴⁸ Ricœur, "Violence and Language," 95. It is the aim of Vallée's article to emphasize this hermeneutic role of openness to being, of letting being be. His examples are Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor. He does not mention Ricœur.
- ⁴⁹ I thank Steve Mailloux for discussion of this point.
- ⁵⁰ Ricœur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *From Text to Action*, 298.
- ⁵¹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 64-70.
- ⁵² Paul Ricœur, "Préface à *L'œuvre et l'imaginaire* de R. Celis," in *Lectures*, Vol. 2, 460; Paul Ricœur, "The Bible and the Imagination," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 147-48.
- ⁵³ Paul Ricœur, "On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1-2:4a," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 142-43.
- ⁵⁴ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, 5.
- ⁵⁵ Paul Ricœur, "Intellectual Autobiography," in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.) *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 42-3.
- ⁵⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 225.
- ⁵⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 226.
- ⁵⁸ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 226.
- ⁵⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 225.
- ⁶⁰ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 214.
- ⁶¹ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 102.
- ⁶² Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 214.
- ⁶³ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 200 (emphasis added).

- ⁶⁴ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 200.
- ⁶⁵ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 200.
- ⁶⁶ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 202.
- ⁶⁷ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- ⁶⁸ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 214-15.
- ⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 202.
- ⁷⁰ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 214.
- ⁷¹ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 201.
- ⁷² Paul Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1970), 473.
- ⁷³ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 460-61.
- ⁷⁴ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 492.
- ⁷⁵ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 483.
- ⁷⁶ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 492.
- ⁷⁷ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 459.
- ⁷⁸ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 342-43. Early in this text, Ricœur writes similarly of “the profound unity of the demystifying and the remythicizing of discourse” (54).
- ⁷⁹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 473.
- ⁸⁰ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 28.
- ⁸¹ Ricœur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *From Text to Action*, 38.
- ⁸² For example, the following texts were published between 2016-2020: Stanley Uche Anozie, *Hans-Georg Gadamer and African Hermeneutic Philosophy* (Chisinau: Generis Publishing, 2020); Ravi Prakash Arya, *Indic Studies and Western Hermeneutics* (Rohtak: Indian Foundation for Vedic Science, 2017); David Chai. “Thinking Through Words: The Existential Hermeneutics of Zhuangzi and Heidegger,” in Fairfield and Geniusas (eds), *Relational Hermeneutics*, 205-19; Nicholas Davey, “‘The Turning Word’: Relational Hermeneutics and Aspects of Buddhist Thought,” in Fairfield and Geniusas (eds), *Relational Hermeneutics*, 177-92; Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler, Johannes W. Hofmeyr and Klaus Fiedler, *African Feminist Hermeneutics: An Evangelical Reflection* (Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2016); Chun-Chieh Huang, *Mencian Hermeneutics: A History of Interpretations in China* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2018); Kai Marchal, “Hermeneutics: Non-Western Approaches,” in *Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics*, 286-303; Elizabeth Mburu, *African Hermeneutics* (Bukuru: HippoBooks, 2019); Eric S.

Nelson, "Confucian Relational Hermeneutics, the Emotions, and Ethical Life," in *Relational Hermeneutics*, 193-204; Sarada Thallam, *Rajam Krishnan and Indian Feminist Hermeneutics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); Ching-I Tu, *Interpretation and Intellectual Change: Chinese Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017); Upolu Lumā Vaai and Aisake Casimira, *Relational Hermeneutics: Decolonising the Mindset and the Pacific Itulagi* (Suva: University of the South Pacific Press and Pacific Theological College, 2017).

⁸³ <http://myweb.scu.edu.tw/~Ricœur.center/>.

⁸⁴ Ernst Wolff, *Lire Ricœur depuis la périphérie: décolonisation, modernité, herméneutique* (Bruxelles: Éditions de l'université de Bruxelles, 2021).

⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language Between a Japanese and an Inquirer," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 1-54. For the date of the origin of the dialogue, see 199.

⁸⁶ This citation again comes from a search on the Digital Ricœur website.

⁸⁷ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 208.

⁸⁸ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 210.

⁸⁹ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 215.

⁹⁰ Ricœur, "Negativity and Primary Affirmation," in *History and Truth*, 322. As can occur in considering Ricœur's thought, it may be relevant here to consider whether originary affirmation interrelates with Ricœur's religious sensibilities. In his writings on religion, Ricœur discusses "the sense of originary creation" and "the goodness of creation." ("Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 299). He relates the "economy of the gift," an important concept elsewhere in his thinking, to the "originary giving of existence," quoting Genesis 1 on how "'God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good'" (1:31) ("Love and Justice," in *Figuring the Sacred*, 324-25). More particularly, he writes that "original affirmation is enclosed in the discourse of predicates of the divine" ("The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in Lewis S. Mudge (ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 151.

⁹¹ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 219-20.

⁹² Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India*, 243.

⁹³ Frederick J. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1967), 86.

⁹⁴ See, e.g., Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 306.

⁹⁵ Paul Ricœur, "Religious Belief: The Difficult Path of the Religious," in Brian Treanor and Henry Isaac Venema (eds), *A Passion for the Possible: Thinking with Paul Ricœur* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 38. The specific context of the quotation is interreligious sympathy, but as suggested in

Ricœur's other reflections on Buddhism, which the text goes on to pursue, the sentiment seems generalizable particularly in Ricœur's treatment of the nature of selfhood.

- ⁹⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 138.
- ⁹⁷ Ricœur, "Pastoral Praxeology," 313.
- ⁹⁸ Paul Ricœur, "The Creativity of Language," in Mario J. Valdés (ed.), *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 473.
- ⁹⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Living Up to Death*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 49. This passage is also cited by Yasuhiko Sugimura in a conference presentation I mention in the text in the next paragraph: "'Je ne suis rien.' Le degré zéro de l'ipséité ricœurienne," Leuven Ricœur Conference 2020, Nov. 21, online: <https://soundcloud.com/fondsRicœur/yasuhiko-sugimura-university-of-kyoto?in=fondsRicœur/sets/Ricœur-2020-Ricœur-as-world> (unpublished).
- ¹⁰⁰ Davey, "'The Turning Word': Relational Hermeneutics and Aspects of Buddhist Thought," 179-80.
- ¹⁰¹ Sugimura, "'Je ne suis rien.'"
- ¹⁰² Sugimura, "'Je ne suis rien.'"
- ¹⁰³ Sugimura, "'Je ne suis rien'" quoting Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 166.
- ¹⁰⁴ In the course of a conclusion challenging Ricœur's grant of priority, exemplified in originary affirmation, to being over nothingness, Bernard Stevens offers a brief analogue to the Buddhist notion of emptiness. Bernard Stevens, *L'apprentissage des signes: lecture de Paul Ricœur* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 296. To my knowledge, this is the one prior commentary on Ricœur that offers this comparison.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 23.
- ¹⁰⁷ This change in vocabulary also seems more consistent with a hermeneutic approach where interpretation goes all the way down.
- ¹⁰⁸ See Paul Ricœur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 7: considering "what happens to an epistemology of interpretation... when it is touched, animated, and, we might say, inspired by an ontology of understanding."