

The Aporetics of Temporality and the Poetics of the Will

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Abstract

The aporias of time that Paul Ricœur identifies in the conclusion to his three-volume *Time and Narrative* offer a fecund starting-point from which to consider how the poetics of narrativity figures in a philosophy of the will. By setting the poetics of narrativity against the aporetics of temporality, Ricœur highlights the narrative art's operative power in drawing together incidents and events in answer to time's dispersion across the present, the past, and the future. In turn, the confession of the limits of narrative opens the way to a broader consideration of the idea of the unity of history in the absence of a meta-historical plot. This idea calls for a reflection on the ethical and political imperative of making freedom a reality for all. By taking the theory of freedom's actualization as a touchstone, I argue that the vision of a reconciled humanity that for Ricœur is the intended object of the poetics of the will acquires the force of a directive idea. The capacity to refashion the real from within thus proves to be decisive for drawing out the connection between the aporetics of temporality, the poetics of narrativity, and Ricœur's philosophical anthropology.

Keywords: Hermeneutics; Time; Temporality; Poetics; Narrativity; Mimesis; Philosophical Anthropology.

Résumé

Les apories du temps que Paul Ricœur identifie dans la conclusion du troisième volume de *Temps et récit* offrent un point de départ fécond pour envisager la façon dont la poétique de la narrativité s'inscrit dans une philosophie de la volonté. En opposant la poétique de la narrativité aux apories de la temporalité, Ricœur met en lumière la puissance opératoire de l'art narratif dans sa capacité à rassembler des incidents ou des événements en réponse à la dispersion du temps à travers le présent, le passé et le futur. En retour, l'aveu des limites du récit ouvre la voie à une prise en compte plus large de l'idée de l'unité de l'histoire en l'absence d'une intrigue méta-historique. Cette idée appelle une réflexion sur l'impératif éthique et politique de faire de la liberté une réalité pour tous. En prenant comme pierre de touche la théorie de l'actualisation de la liberté, je soutiens que la vision d'une humanité réconciliée, qui est la visée de la poétique de la volonté, acquiert la force d'une idée directrice. La capacité de reconfigurer le réel de l'intérieur s'avère ainsi décisive pour élaborer une connexion entre l'aporétique de la temporalité, la poétique de la narrativité et l'anthropologie philosophique de Ricœur.

Mots-clés: Herméneutique; temps; temporalité; poétique; narrativité; mimesis; anthropologie philosophique.

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In the conclusion to his three-volume *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricœur identifies three major aporias that continue to haunt thought about time. The first aporia springs from the breach opened by speculative thought between cosmological time and phenomenological time. The second aporia, which is more radical than the first, arises from the way that the dissociation of the three temporal ecstases (the future, the past, and the present) places the notion of time as a collective singular into question. The third aporia is the most radical of the three. This aporia, Ricœur remarks, comes to light only when the effort to think about time runs up against its limit. By surging forth “at the moment when time, escaping any attempt to constitute it, reveals itself as belonging to a constituted order always presupposed by the work of constitution,”¹ this third aporia, that is, the aporia of time’s ultimate inscrutability, lays bare the hubris of a style of thinking that dares to have mastered the meaning of history and time.

Taken together, these three aporias provide critical touchstones for drawing out the place of a philosophical anthropology in a hermeneutics of our historical condition. The analyses that in *Fallible Man* Ricœur undertakes in raising the *pathétique* of human misery to the level of a rigorous discourse is the staging ground for a broader extension of this philosophical anthropology’s thematic articulation of the intermediary being that we are.² For Ricœur, the “originarily dialectical structure of human reality,”³ which stands as proof of the fact that we are always *in medias res*, calls for an analysis of the disproportion between: 1) our perspectival orientations and discourse, 2) limitations owing to our character and the ideals that rule over the task of making the life that is given to us our own, and 3) pleasure and happiness. Philosophical anthropology’s express concern with the dialectical interplay between human finitude and the transcending intention that vests the notion of being as power and act with its meaning and force consequently is antecedent to a hermeneutical consideration of our historical mode of being. From this vantage point, the triadic relation finitude – infinitude – intermediary that for Ricœur provides the proper point of access to a global perspective on human reality is the vis-à-vis of a style of thinking for which the capacity to begin something new stands as the practical riposte to speculative solutions to the aporias of time.

The poetics of narrativity that Ricœur develops in counterpoint to his investigations into the aporetics of temporality stands at the gateway to a broader reflection on the historical being that we are. By reconstructing the arc of operations through which a work raises itself above the opaque depths of suffering and action “to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting,”⁴ Ricœur shows how the mimetic activity of emplotting events confers a narrative unity on our experiences. Accordingly, he brings to the fore the place of a poetics in answer to the aporias of time. The revolution in the theory of subjectivity that he credits to the presence of a “genuine Transcendence,”⁵ I will argue, acquires a concrete foothold in the notion that mimesis demands more of the way that we think about truth than does either the classical concept of truth as adequation or Martin Heidegger’s adoption of the Greek term, *aletheia*. By

drawing out the significance of this demand, I therefore propose to search out the place of a poetics of the will that has yet to be written in a hermeneutics of our historical condition.

The Aporetics of Temporality and the Poetics of Narrativity

Ricœur's thesis that the aporias to which thought about time gives rise call for narration brings to the fore how the capacity to draw together incidents and events in a story lies at the heart of the narrative art. Starting with a reflection on Augustine's meditation on time, Ricœur turns to Aristotle's treatise on the structure of a plot in the *Poetics* to support his claim that the correlation between the narrative act and the temporal character of our experiences is a transcultural necessity. Augustine's attention to the question of the being of time without regard for the "narrative structure of the spiritual autobiography"⁶ unfolded in his *Confessions'* first nine books, and Aristotle's focus on the narrative plot's dramatic structure to the exclusion of its temporal implications provide an initial point of access to the circular relation between the aporetics of temporality and the poetics of narrativity. The narrative refiguration of time by way of the configuring operation that draws a story from the successive presentation of incidents and events accordingly places its stamp on this circular relation's creatively productive character.

Augustine's question, "What, then, is time?,"⁷ inaugurates a type of discourse for which the present is burst asunder. According to Ricœur, Augustine's inestimable discovery was to relate the discord that haunts the experience of time to the slippage between the present of the future, the present of the past, and the present of the present. By tying the distention of the soul to this slippage within the three-fold present, Augustine's solution to the problem of time's measurement brings to the fore the discordance that emerges from the concordance of the soul's three-fold intentions. Ricœur stresses that the "more the mind makes itself *intentio*, the more it suffers *distentio*"⁸ as a result of its own activity. By contrasting time with eternity, Augustine thus sets the soul's experience in relief. The thought of eternity functions as a limiting idea "against the horizon of which the experience of the *distentio animi* receives, on the ontological level, the negative mark of a lack or a defect in being."⁹ An original nothingness – anterior to the universe's creation *ex nihilo* – consequently "strikes time with an ontological deficiency"¹⁰ that sets its seal on the difference between being and our part in it.

The confrontation between cosmological time and phenomenological time is the staging ground for a series of aporias that Ricœur draws from a number of analyses of differing conceptions of time. The "conceptually unbridgeable gap between the notion of the 'instant' in Aristotle's sense and that of the 'present' as it is understood by Augustine"¹¹ destroys any comprehensive approach that would overcome this gap theoretically or speculatively. Just as Augustine's inestimable discovery lays bare the aporia that haunts the phenomenology of time, the difficulty of conceiving time purely in terms of movement brings to the fore the aporias with which Aristotle's arguments in favor of cosmological time are entangled. Ricœur explains that, for Aristotle, the perception of time not only depends upon the perception of movement, but the mind also discovers succession in the external world before constructing it. However, conceiving time in terms of the split between the movement of which it is an aspect and the soul that discerns this movement, together with the difficulty of conceiving movement itself, succeeds only in marking out the aporias that undercut Aristotle's line of reasoning. For Ricœur, neither Aristotle nor Augustine therefore has the final

word. On the contrary, the mutual exclusion of cosmological and phenomenological accounts of time gives rise to an aporia that can be resolved only poetically through the mimetic operations for which the narrative art provides an exemplary touchstone.

Husserl's effort to constitute time brings to the fore the aporia that springs from the effort to rescind any reference to cosmological time. In contrast with, and in opposition to, Kant's thesis, Husserl intends to make lived time itself appear by voiding world time in advance. For Kant, the regularity of succession and the simultaneity of phenomenal events constitute the basis for the transcendental determination of time as the condition of the events that occur in it. According to Kant, "[t]ime is the formal *a priori* condition of all appearances whatsoever."¹² Yet, as Ricœur indicates, the temporal irreversibility of a succession of events depends upon the connection thematized by the phenomenologist between the present, the past, and the future. Conversely, the consciousness of lived time presupposes the constitution of the enduring unity of a temporal object, which Husserl proposes to derive from the constitution of the pure temporal flow. However much Husserl sought to ensure the independence of the constituting operation internal to time consciousness, the unity of the flow of time can be expressed only with the support of objective time.¹³ By attempting to derive objective time from our internal consciousness of it, Husserl on Ricœur's account inverts the relation of priority between them. Hence the enigma: "phenomenology and critical thought borrow from each other only on the condition of mutually excluding each other."¹⁴

Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology intensifies the aporias that haunt Augustine's and Husserl's thought. Far from supplanting the opposition between Augustine's and Aristotle's conceptions of time, and between Husserl's phenomenology and Kant's transcendental deduction, Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* engenders the aporias that are actively at work in it. The question of Being-a-whole offers a privileged point of access to the problem of time as governed by the highest level of authenticity vis-à-vis one's resoluteness as being-towards-death.¹⁵ Temporality, Ricœur explains, then appears as "the articulated unity of coming-toward, having-been, and making-present, which are thereby given to be thought of together."¹⁶ By carrying over the Augustinian problem of the three-fold present, the temporalization of temporality reintroduces the enigma of the *distentio animi* via the unification and diversification of the three temporal ecstases but at a higher degree of virulence. At the limit, the process of temporality's hierarchization succeeds only in pointing to time's ultimately inscrutable character. What then, Ricœur asks, do we "understand when we say that the 'most original temporalizing of temporality as such is Temporality'?"¹⁷ Nothing, he tells us, unless we are "able to link the distinction between temporal and temporalizing to the ontological difference"¹⁸ that in Augustine's meditations bears the stamp of time's deficiency in relation to its other. By itself, Ricœur adds, "the distinction between temporal-being and temporality no longer designates a phenomenon accessible to hermeneutic phenomenology as such."¹⁹

By insisting that the narrative emplotment of incidents and events resolves the aporias of time in a poetic rather than a theoretical or speculative mode, Ricœur highlights how the configurating operation draws together episodes, incidents, and events into an intelligible whole. The emplotment of incidents and events, which makes a story from them, bears out the kinship between this configurating operation and the Kantian concept of productive imagination as "schematizing a synthetic operation."²⁰ By drawing a meaning from the story as a whole, the reader

or listener completes the work of transforming the aporias stemming from the confrontation between conflicting conceptions of time into a dynamic dialectic each time she follows the thread of the plot. On the one hand, discrete incidents and events that follow one another in succession comprise the story's episodic dimension. On the other hand, each incident contributes to the development of the plot only to the extent that its significance is integrated into the meaning of the story as a whole. The play that contributes to the pleasure of the text reflects and resolves in a poetic mode the aporia stemming from the representation of time as an infinite series of instantaneous "now" points and the phenomenological conception of the experience of time for which the "now" is pregnant with past and future. As the "narrative *matrix*"²¹ that integrates incidents, events, episodes, and the like, the plot draws together heterogeneous elements. By extracting a figure from the succession of incidents and events, the act of emplotment constitutes the poetic solution to the Augustinian paradox of the *distentio animi*. Hence, for Ricœur, the "fact that the story can be followed [thus] converts the paradox [of distention and intention] into a living dialectic."²²

The three aporias that Ricœur identifies in his summary rereading of the course of his analyses in *Time and Narrative* mark out the trajectory of a progression for which the adequacy of the poetics of narrativity is the touchstone. With regard to the first aporia, which Ricœur remarks is opened by the breach between phenomenological time and cosmological time, the response provided by the poetics of narrative is the least vague. The mimetic activity that he attributes to the narrative art invents a "third-time constructed over the very fracture"²³ that his analyses of the aporetics of temporality bring to light. The narrative identity of the protagonist in a story answers the question "Who?" by constructing a bridge between characteristic traits that we recognize as relatively enduring attributes, which Ricœur places under the term *idem* identity, and the protagonist's self-constancy or *ipse* identity, the model for which is keeping one's word.²⁴ Narrative identity acquires its broadest extension when applied not only to an individual but also to the historical communities of which we are a part and to which we belong. Hence, just as we recognize ourselves in the stories we tell, narrative constructions of "official" histories that legitimate the victors' claims to the right to rule through deploying the compact between remembering and forgetting strategically distort and disfigure the identities of individuals, groups, and populations subjugated to another's will.

This compact takes on its fuller significance in light of the second aporia, to which, Ricœur explains, the dissociation of the three temporal ecstases gives rise "despite the unavoidable notion of time conceived as a collective singular."²⁵ The question of a temporal totality, he notes, reaches its apogee with Heidegger who, having hierarchized the levels of temporality (within-time-ness, historicity, temporality), raises the problem of temporalization as making possible the unity of the three temporal ecstases, "coming towards, having-been, and making present."²⁶ The dehiscence of these ecstases undermines this unity from within, thereby returning, as it were, to the Augustinian paradox of the *distentio animi*. What, then, Ricœur asks, constitutes time as a collective singular? For him, the poetics of narrative stands as a riposte to this second aporia by resolutely refusing to accede to the hubris of a style of thinking that dares to master history or time by elevating itself to the level of the absolute. By opposing time's totalization in the eternal present with the imperfect mediation between the horizon of a past that has already been surpassed and that of a future that is already taking shape – expressly thematized by the metahistorical categories of thought, "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" – Ricœur concedes that the response provided by the narrative art to this second aporia is less adequate than it is to the first. By the same token, he

reminds us that the “reply of narrativity to the aporias of time consists less in resolving these aporias than in putting them to work.”²⁷

The theory of the poetics of narrativity that Ricœur sets against the aporetics of temporality consequently attains its highest degree of acuity at the point where it approaches its limits. From this vantage point, the third aporia, the aporia of time’s ultimate inscrutability, proves to be the most illustrative in circumscribing the domain of the theory of the poetics of narrativity’s validity. The limits that the poetics of narrativity encounters both when it exhausts its resources and when it gives way to other genres of discourse that in their own ways give voice to experiences of time put to the test Ricœur’s thesis that “time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal experience.”²⁸ When, through multiplying our experiences of eternity through staking out the borderlines between time and its other, fiction runs up against its internal limit, time once again envelops narrative through its quasi-remythicization. The marks of the archaisms that Ricœur emphasizes figure among the conceptions of time that guide his reflections, and the hermeticisms that impose themselves on various ways of thinking about time by putting “time in the position of an always already presupposed ground”²⁹ are ciphers of the limits of the narrative art. Ricœur stresses that the most cumbersome question of his entire enterprise in *Time and Narrative* is whether time’s ultimate unrepresentability “still has a parallel on the side of narrativity.”³⁰ Accordingly, he asks: “What sense is there in refiguring the inscrutable?”³¹ For him, the secret of the narrative art’s reply to the aporia of time’s inscrutability consequently lies with the way that this art’s power to refigure time overflows itself into other poetic genres that speak of time and the other of time.

Far from abolishing the significance of the poetics of narrativity’s replies to the aporia engendered by the confrontation between cosmological and phenomenological conceptions of time, to the aporia of the oneness of time, or to the aporia of time’s ultimate inscrutability, Ricœur’s eulogy to narrative by way of a meditation on its internal and external limits only further ratifies how the aporias of time confound the claim on the part of some allegedly sovereign subject to posit itself as the master of meaning. Nothing, Ricœur tells us, “obliges us to pass from the notion of narrative identity to that of the idea of the unity of history, then to the confession of the limits of narrative in the face of the mystery of time that envelops us.”³² But then nothing compels us to renounce the idea of a history for which humanity considered as a collective singular would be its subject, along with this idea’s ethical and political implications. As I will explain in the next section, by taking account of the intermediacy of human being, the hermeneutics of our historical condition reprises, as it were, the return movement from the confession of the limits of narrative to the quest on the part of individuals, groups, and historical communities for their own identities. For this hermeneutics, a philosophical anthropology for which human being is always *in medias res* is the gateway to a broader reflection on the place of a *poetics* in a philosophy of the will that has yet to be written.

Philosophical Anthropology and the Hermeneutics of our Historical Condition

The philosophy of fallibility that Ricœur sets out in *Fallible Man* provides a distinctive vantage point from which to draw out the connection between the poetics of narrativity, the aporetics of temporality, and philosophical anthropology’s thematic concern with being as power

and act. For a philosophical anthropology that takes as its touchstone the disproportion between: 1) one's perspective and the truth-intention of discourse, 2) character and the practical totality adumbrated by the idea of the person, and 3) vital desires and happiness, the medial terms that for Ricœur bridge between the poles of finitude and infinitude are the privileged anchorages of the abilities we exercise as capable human beings. The operative roles of the schematizing power of imagination, the idea of respect, and the "living transition from βίος [*bios*] (life) to λόγος [*logos*]"³³ within the human heart (θυμός [*thumos*]) ground the notion of being as power and act in the transcending intention that at each of the three stages of his analysis in *Fallible Man* Ricœur counterposes to the disproportion inhering in the originally dialectal structure of human reality. According to Ricœur, we therefore catch sight of this originally dialectical structure only by starting with the "antinomy of the limited and the unlimited."³⁴ The transcending intention that makes human being intermediary between the poles of finitude and infinitude consequently founds the link between a *poetics* for which the narrative art is a cipher and a philosophy of the will for which the aporetics of temporality lays bare the conceit of a sovereign consciousness that dares to proclaim itself to be the master of meaning.

By beginning with a transcendental reflection on the power of knowing, Ricœur sets in motion a series of analyses that lead step by step from an analysis of the structure of consciousness to a meditation on our affective fragility. At the first stage of analysis, the *I* of *I think* takes the form of objectivity projected onto the world and things in it as the "synthesis of the sayable and the perceptible."³⁵ The unity of consciousness is accessible to reflection only by way of the synthesis of sensibility and understanding brought about by the transcendental imagination. The power of imagination reveals itself only on the thing as the condition of possibility for the unity of perception and meaning. Consciousness thus makes possible the structure of objectivity through projecting the syntheses of sensibility and meaning onto the object.

The *I* of *I think*, however, falls short of the idea of the person as *for* herself. Consequently, the second stage of Ricœur's analysis brings to the fore the idea of respect as the medial term between the finitude of one's character, which for Ricœur is the sum of different aspects owing to our incarnation as flesh, and the quest for happiness.³⁶ Respect, Ricœur tells us, reconciles the "finitude of desire and the infinitude of reason and happiness 'in' me and 'in' others [...] by making possible the very idea of a human being that is like the ideal mediation of practical reason and sensibility."³⁷ The practical requirement of making the life that is given to us our own consequently has as its vis-à-vis the imperative to treat ourselves and others not as a means but as an end, thereby conferring on each the task of living a life that merits narrating in a manner that is acceptable to us.

At the third stage of the analysis Ricœur undertakes in *Fallible Man*, philosophical anthropology's effort to raise the *pathétique* of human misery to the level of a rigorous discourse sets the conflict within the human heart in relief. Torn between vital demands that terminate in pleasure and spiritual desires that end in happiness, the heart, Ricœur explains, constitutes the fragile moment *par excellence* of the intermediary being that we are. The correlation between knowing and feeling highlights feeling's role in revealing the *élans* of our being through uniting the structure of consciousness with our manner of inhering in the world. Feeling's intentional structure, Ricœur tells us, is extraordinary in this regard in that feeling "designates qualities felt *on* things, *on* persons, *on* the world"³⁸ at the same time that it manifests the way in which we are inwardly affected by them. The reciprocal genesis of feeling and knowing, which eludes both a

transcendental critique of the power of knowing and a reflection on the idea of the person, thus acquires its fullest articulation in the way that feeling manifests “a relation to the world that constantly restores our complicity with it.”³⁹

For a philosophical anthropology for which the notion of being as power and act is decisive, the capacity to refashion the real through works, words, deeds, and acts that open new paths proves to be a critical touchstone. The transcending intention that in Ricœur’s analyses reveals the meanings of the “third” terms between sensibility and the understanding, between character and the totality demanded by reason, and between pleasure and happiness is the cipher of the power to surpass the real from within. A meditation on the intermediacy of human being consequently opens a vast field of inquiry in which the demand for justice and the quest for freedom figure. When, in his closing remarks in the third volume of *Time and Narrative* Ricœur insists that the acknowledgment of the limits of narrative calls for the “idea of the unity of history,”⁴⁰ he emphasizes that while the progression from one aporia and one poetic reply to another is free, the “reverse order [...] is binding.”⁴¹ In pursuing this return movement from the aporia of time’s inscrutability to the one arising from the confrontation between cosmological time and phenomenological time to its end, he points out that reaffirming the limits of validity of historical consciousness leads back to the search on the part of individuals as much as that of the communities to which they belong for their narrative identities, as I noted previously. It is only within this search for one’s own narrative identity, he tells us, that the poetics of temporality and the poetics of narrativity sufficiently correspond. We could therefore ask whether the sufficiency of this correspondence itself depends on the capacities that we exercise in quest of the identities that we claim as our own. For Ricœur, these capacities – the capacity to speak, to act with others to shape the course of the world’s affairs, to remember, to tell one’s own story, to hold oneself to account for one’s actions, and to receive the injunctions that commend themselves to us through exemplary expressions of the good, the right, and the just – are inscribed in the human condition. By bringing about the mediations for which the aporetics of temporality call through our words, works, deeds, and acts, we insert ourselves in the world under the aegis of a *poetics* for which the power to surpass the real from within is the sign.

How, then, do the three aporias that, taken in reverse order, Ricœur attributes to time’s ultimate unrepresentability, to the impossibility of time’s totalization, and to the confrontation between cosmological and phenomenological conceptions of time bear on the way that we think about history and the time of history? As regards the third aporia, narrative’s refiguration of time’s ultimate unrepresentability attests to the limit situation that shatters the pretense of a sovereign consciousness’s self-foundational claim. The first aporia is antecedent to the third, inasmuch as the confrontation between cosmological concepts of time and phenomenological ones provides a first indication of an order of time that escapes our every attempt to constitute it. The second aporia, the aporia of the oneness of time, opens the way to a consideration of the ethical and political implications of the task of preserving the tension between a past that has already been surpassed and a future that has yet to be made. If, in granting a certain privilege to this aporia I tie the hermeneutics of our historical condition to the event in thinking that for Ricœur the loss of the Hegelian philosophy of history’s credibility brought about, I also mean to emphasize how the return movement prompted by the hermeneutical reaffirmation of historical consciousness places the question of reason, freedom, and truth on stage.

The question of reason, freedom, and truth's historical conjunction acquires a heightened degree of acuity in the context of a meditation on our intermediary condition. The "acceptation of being as act and as power [...] in keeping with a philosophical anthropology of the capable human being"⁴² foregrounds the distinctively temporal character of our historical mode of being in this regard. Ricœur remarks that, like Heidegger and Augustine, Reinhardt Koselleck expressly thematizes the dynamic relation between the future, the past, and the present. The permanent ethical and political implications of the metacategories of historical thought, "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation," which Koselleck draws from the *topoi* of modernity, renew the thought about history and the time of history by drawing out the link between history's temporalization and the process of freedom's actualization.⁴³ Ricœur reminds us that Hegel's philosophy of history seems at first "to consecrate the irreducibly temporal character of Reason itself"⁴⁴ by assigning the work of the negative to this process. Yet, the declaration that freedom's self-realization is Reason's ultimate end subordinates this work of the negative to Spirit's allegedly necessary plan. For Ricœur, Hegel's originality in attributing history's temporalization to the work of the negative ultimately gives way to the principle of this system of thought's own development. Hence, from the vantage point from which Hegel speaks, the idea of freedom is one that is conferred on the unity of history by the philosopher who believes he "has thought through the conditions that make freedom both rational and real in the spirit's process of self-realization."⁴⁵

If in the end, for Hegel, "meaningful history [...] is that of Spirit,"⁴⁶ as Ricœur maintains, the problematic of history's temporalization reasserts itself with redoubled force. Ricœur points out that while Hegel refers to *Geschichtlichkeit* only in two contexts, the problem he raises for his interpreters and successors concerns the tension between history and truth. For the speculative philosopher, the authority of the philosophical act of faith that the "whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development"⁴⁷ is consubstantial with the authority of the system's self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*). The cunning of reason is the "apologetic doublet"⁴⁸ of this philosophical credo. In accordance with this act of faith, the "equation between history and truth"⁴⁹ gives rise to a secular religion. An ontology of our historical condition, which Ricœur remarks he prefers to that of an "ontology of historicity,"⁵⁰ breaks with Hegel's speculative solution to the problem of history and truth by interrogating the temporal relation between them. This temporal relation draws its meaning from the way that reason's inscription in history through initiatives taken by historical actors is concomitant with the present's temporalizing force. The imperfect mediations that Ricœur opposes to Hegel's system are borne out by the ways that these initiatives preserve the tensions between historical actors' spaces of experiences and the horizons of their expectations. For the hermeneutics of our historical condition as for the hermeneutics of historical consciousness, the question – the problem – of reason and truth therefore takes on its historically concrete specificity only in those instances when, confronted with a moral, ethical, social, or political crisis or dilemma, the agents of the acts that produce the events shaping the course of the world's affairs take a stand.

Mimesis, Truth, and the Poetics of the Will

By suggesting that the conjunction of reason and truth acquires its historical specificity in those situations when, in response to challenges and crises, agents take the initiative to act, I want to draw out the implications of Ricœur's claim regarding mimesis for history's temporalization. Previously, I indicated how the event in thinking brought about by the Hegelian philosophy of history's loss of credibility renews the thought about history and the time of history by setting in relief the temporalizing force of initiatives that reply to exigencies and demands of the situations in which historical actors are caught up. The productive imagination's operative role is a distinctive feature that sets Ricœur's theory of mimesis apart from both the classical conception of truth as adequation and Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosive (*aletheia*). I therefore propose now to draw out how this theory is key to a thematic articulation of the relation between history's temporalization, reason's inscription in history, and the exemplary value of moral and political acts.

The idea that a theory of mimesis that figures in a poetics of narrativity offers a privileged point of access for accounting for the temporalizing force of initiatives attesting to the capacity to begin something new finds its initial support in the kinship between, on the one hand, literary fictions, musical works, works of art, and the like that reply in singularly fitting ways to a question, problem, or difficulty as the novelist, composer, or artist apprehended it and, on the other, exemplary moral and political acts. Aesthetic experience's lateral transposition onto the planes of ethics and politics highlights the conjunction of the work or the act's singularity and exemplarity, which Ricœur stresses operates within the sphere of reflective judgment. Within this sphere, he explains, "communicability does not lie in applying a rule to a case but in the fact that it is the case that summons its rule."⁵¹ By the same token, "[j]ust as taste would have nothing to judge without the creative genius, the spectator of the [French] Revolution would have nothing to admire without the audacity of the revolutionary."⁵² Hannah Arendt reminds us that this capacity for beginning something new inheres in the human condition owing to the fact of our birth. Action, she therefore maintains, "is the actualization of the human condition of natality."⁵³ The ability to respond to exigencies in ways that are appropriate to the demands of the situation is a mark of the reach of the transcending intention that in the three stages of Ricœur's analysis of the disproportion inhering in the originally dialectical structure of human reality places its stamp on our intermediary condition. For a philosophical anthropology for which the notion of human being as power and act is a thematic focus, this ability is the spring of history's temporalization in accordance with the moral, ethical, and political motives, ideals, and imperatives that inform our reasons for acting.

Reason's inscription in history, we could therefore say, owes its force to our capacity to respond to demands and exigencies in singularly fitting ways. When, finding herself in a situation for which there is no predetermined solution, the agent responds in a way that we recognize as the most appropriate alternative, the agent invents as much as discovers the rule to which her act gives expression. Aristotle tells us that *phronesis* is a virtue that cannot be taught. Ricœur accordingly remarks that the tie Aristotle establishes between *phronesis* and *phronimos* ("the man of *phronesis*"⁵⁴) is meaningful only if this person "of wise judgment determines at the same time the rule and the case, by grasping the situation in its singularity."⁵⁵ The exemplary value of this rule is wholly commensurate with the singularly appropriate character of the act expressing it. Inasmuch as this

act produces an event that contributes to shaping the course of human affairs, the agent's response to the challenge or crisis as she apprehends it inscribes itself in the process of history's temporalization.

By attributing this process to the actions of agents who, faced with a moral or political dilemma, problem, or challenge, take a stand, I want to highlight the relation between the artist's power of invention, the agent's exercise of judgment, and the force of the present. Earlier, I indicated how, for Ricœur, the aporia of the oneness of time calls for a way of thinking about history and the time of history that finds support in the metahistorical categories, "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation." By accounting for variations in styles and manners of temporalizing history, these metahistorical categories thematize the imperfect mediations that Ricœur opposes to the Hegelian temptation. The thought of the Enlightenment has a privileged place only insofar as the three topoi of modernity (the belief in a future without precedent, the belief in accelerated changes for the better, and the belief in our power to master history⁵⁶) illuminate the tension between a space of experience that can be traversed in multiple ways and a horizon of as yet unfulfilled aspirations, expectations, and demands. Through preserving this tension, actions that address the demands of the situations calling for them vest the present with its temporalizing force. Works that refashion the real as a result of the artist's ability to give expression to an idea, feeling, or thought have as their vis-à-vis actions that affect the course of events in accordance with the agent's capacity to respond to a moral or political predicament in an exemplary way. This capacity – this power – to make a new beginning in the midst of a history to which we belong is thus the condition of our ability to surpass the given order of existence from within.

By asking whether Hegel "destroyed the spring of action,"⁵⁷ Ricœur sets in relief the connection between this capacity for surpassing or transcending the real from within and the theory of the process of freedom's actualization. This theory, Ricœur tells us, falls to the task of a philosophy of the will that has yet to be written.⁵⁸ Unlike a philosophy for which the owl of Minerva is the totem, where only reminiscence and recapitulation remain, such a philosophy of the will would set out "the theory of the actualization of freedom within the historical reality of humankind."⁵⁹ Identifying reason as an "infinite force [...] that produces the circumstances for its own realization"⁶⁰ voids the dimension of unfulfilled demands that move us to act. Apart from this dimension, which Ricœur sets against that of fulfilled accomplishments, the concept of freedom's actualization would be an empty construct. Furthermore, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the reality of evil prevents us from equating "our partial experiences of fulfilled achievements [...] with the whole field of human action."⁶¹ For a philosophy of the will that belongs to the future, the aporia of the oneness of time thus draws the question of the unity of history, together with the theory of the process of freedom's actualization, into the orbit of a hermeneutical reflection on the historical being that we are.

The problematic to which the idea of the unity of history gives rise in the wake of the discreditation and delegitimation of "grand" historical narratives has an antecedent in the revolution in the theory of subjectivity that in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur opposes to the hubris of a sovereign consciousness in this regard. Like the confession of the limits of narrative, which by calling for this idea also illuminates its ethical and political implications, this revolution in the theory of subjectivity compels us to disavow the anthropological illusion that haunts the subject's

self-foundational claim. By centering the world of objects on the Cogito, the first Copernican revolution marks the beginning of philosophy.⁶² Under the aegis of this first revolution, the reversal of perspective that Ricœur maintains renders the involuntary intelligible sets the relation between the voluntary and the involuntary in relief. The second Copernican revolution shatters the conceit that “puts humankind at the center and transforms it into a new absolute.”⁶³ Displacing the “center of reference from subjectivity to Transcendence”⁶⁴ under the aegis of the second revolution thereby introduces a poetic dimension into the philosophy of the will for which the vision of a reconciled humanity is the intended object.

Should we then attribute the idea of the unity of history to the vision that for a poetics of the will draws its radically new dimension from the limit concept of Transcendence? As a limit concept, Transcendence breaks the hold of the anthropological illusion by setting in relief how, as a “*motivated freedom* [...] receptive to [vital, cultural, and spiritual] values”⁶⁵ rooted first in our experiences of our own body and then in our cultural inheritances, this distinctively human freedom is incarnate in works, words, deeds, and acts that break new paths for thinking, feeling, and acting. This contingent, incarnate freedom does not posit itself as absolute. Rather, for human beings, transcending or surpassing the real from within through works, words, deeds, and acts that refashion our manner of inhering in the world forges the tie between this incarnate freedom and reason’s inscription in the process of history’s temporalization. The idea of the unity of history for which the vision of a reconciled humanity offers a guide is therefore possible only as a directive ideal. If, as Ricœur insists, every expectation regarding rights, liberties, freedoms, and opportunities is one that must be a hope for humanity as a whole, humanity can be regarded as one species only “insofar as it has one history, and, reciprocally, that for there to be such a history, humanity as a whole must be its subject as a collective singular.”⁶⁶ Since there is “no plot of all plots capable of equaling the idea of one humanity and one history”⁶⁷ this history, which has yet to be made, is therefore one in which humanity’s destination can be apprehended only through the diversity of destinies to which different groups and historical communities lay claim.⁶⁸

Could we then say that reason’s inscription in history, which I attributed previously to the capacity to reply to the demands of a situation in a singularly appropriate way and which we could now say is the cipher of a freedom that is human and not divine, still stands as the riposte to the Hegelian conception of the principle of Spirit’s self-realization? For Ricœur, this principle is the “temporal equivalent of the cunning of reason.”⁶⁹ He accordingly stresses that for us, the “claim to reduce the appearance of freedom to discourse,”⁷⁰ as Hegel does, seems exorbitant. This claim appears to be untenable after Hegel “because the ‘crisis’ that has occurred at the level of a deeper-lying history affects the very relation of freedom and truth.”⁷¹ In light of the failure of the Hegelian system to enclose human practice within the philosophical recapitulation of Spirit’s self-actualizing movement, a hermeneutics attentive to our historical condition consequently opens an “interpretation of all the signs that attest that the ground of being is an act, an interpretation that no [philosophical] knowledge can recapitulate”⁷² without remainder.

The notion that mimesis demands more of the way that we think about truth proves to be decisive in this regard. When previously I suggested in passing that Ricœur’s theory of mimesis has a place in accounting for history’s temporalization, I outlined how the capacity for surpassing the real from within acquires its concrete specificity in works, words, deeds, and acts that augment the field of our experiences. As I indicated then, the fittingness of a work is the spring of the truth

to which the work lays claim. As such, the work's efficacy in renewing the real in accordance with the rule exemplified by it is the source of its worlding power. Aesthetic experience's lateral transposition onto the planes of ethics and politics brings to the fore the analogous significance of individual acts. In the case of the act, the course of action set in motion in answer to exigencies and demands bears the stamp of the act's temporalizing force. Ricœur's theory of the poetics of narrativity highlights how the creative impulse acquires its express articulation in the mimetic operations for which the narrative art's anchorages in the practical field of our experiences (which Ricœur describes as *mimesis*₁ or prefiguration) are the condition of a narrative's temporal configuration (*mimesis*₂), which in turn refigures the practical field of our experiences (*mimesis*₃). This creative impulse has an analogue in the "miracle" that Arendt maintains inheres in every initiative that brings something new into the world.⁷³ Hence, just as the poetics of narrativity embraces the productive imagination's operative power, the notion that *mimesis* demands more of our thinking than either the concept of truth as adequation or the Heideggerian conception of *aletheia* has its vis-à-vis in a theory of action for which the problematic of history's temporalization in the absence of a meta-historical plot is the touchstone.⁷⁴

What, then, can we say about a poetics that figures in a philosophy of the will belonging to the future? If, as I have suggested, this poetics acquires its practical anchorages in the historical field through our capacity to begin something new, our ability to respond to exigencies and demands in singularly appropriate ways is the spring of the process of freedom's actualization. The vision of a reconciled humanity that for Ricœur is the intended object of the poetics of the will acquires the force of a directive idea only in light of the problematic of history's temporalization. In view of the aporia to which the loss of the Hegelian philosophy of history's credibility gives rise, acts that reply to problems, difficulties, and crises in exemplary ways acquire their true value in advancing the reign of the good, the right, and the just. However much the theory of the process of freedom's actualization remains to be written, reason's inscription in history through works, words, deeds, and acts by way of which we also inscribe ourselves in the world stands as a living testament to an aspiration predicated on the idea of humanity. So long as this idea gives direction to the vision that for a philosophical anthropology of fragile yet capable human beings is the object of the poetics of the will, this aspiration for the good, the right, and the just lies at the heart of the challenge and the task of making freedom a reality for all.

- ¹ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 261.
- ² Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).
- ³ Paul Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology: Writings and Lectures, Volume 3*, ed. Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 3.
- ⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 53.
- ⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 486.
- ⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 4.
- ⁷ Saint Bishop of Hippo Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 264.
- ⁸ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 21. Ricœur points out that “the three temporal intentions are separate from one another to the extent that the intentional activity has as its counterpart the passivity engendered by this very activity [...]. It is not only these three acts that do not coincide, but also the activity and passivity which oppose one another, to say nothing of the discordance between the two passivities, the one related to expectation, the other to memory. Therefore, the more the mind makes itself *intentio*, the more it suffers *distentio*” (20-1).
- ⁹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 26.
- ¹⁰ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 24.
- ¹¹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 19.
- ¹² Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan and Co., 1929), 77; cited in Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 47.
- ¹³ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 40; see Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 114.
- ¹⁴ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 57.
- ¹⁵ See Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 63-4.
- ¹⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 70.
- ¹⁷ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 270.
- ¹⁸ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 270.
- ¹⁹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 270.
- ²⁰ Paul Ricœur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978), 147; original in italics.

- ²¹ Paul Ricœur, *A Ricœur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 105.
- ²² Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
- ²³ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 244.
- ²⁴ See Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113-68.
- ²⁵ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 250.
- ²⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 255.
- ²⁷ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 261.
- ²⁸ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52; original in italics.
- ²⁹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 261.
- ³⁰ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 270.
- ³¹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 270.
- ³² Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 274.
- ³³ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 81-2.
- ³⁴ Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 3.
- ³⁵ Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 10.
- ³⁶ For a discussion of the aspects of finitude that Ricœur places under the notion of character, see Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 49-50.
- ³⁷ Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 14.
- ³⁸ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 84.
- ³⁹ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 85.
- ⁴⁰ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 274.
- ⁴¹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 274.
- ⁴² Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 345.
- ⁴³ See Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 247-88; see also Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 210-6.
- ⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 199.
- ⁴⁵ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 194.

- ⁴⁶ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 371.
- ⁴⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11; see Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 469.
- ⁴⁸ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 202.
- ⁴⁹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 199.
- ⁵⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 353. Ricœur's preference for an ontology of our historical condition is due in part to the "recoil-effect of the existentiell on the existential" (Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 67), which bears on Heidegger's analysis of temporality, historicity, and within-time-ness. For Ricœur, resoluteness in being-towards-death bears the stamp of an ethical configuration borne out by the structure of Care as the "supreme test of authenticity" (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 67). Ricœur accordingly asks whether Heidegger's analysis is bound over to a personal conception of authenticity "on a level where it competes with other existentiell conceptions, those of Pascal or Kierkegaard – or that of Sartre – to say nothing of that of Augustine" (*Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 67).
- ⁵¹ Paul Ricœur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 183.
- ⁵² Paul Ricœur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 107.
- ⁵³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 178.
- ⁵⁴ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 174.
- ⁵⁵ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 175.
- ⁵⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, 212.
- ⁵⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer, ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 210.
- ⁵⁸ Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 210.
- ⁵⁹ Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 210.
- ⁶⁰ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 194.
- ⁶¹ Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 211.
- ⁶² Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 471.
- ⁶³ Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 213.
- ⁶⁴ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 472.
- ⁶⁵ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, 484.
- ⁶⁶ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 215.

⁶⁷ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 259.

⁶⁸ See Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, 138. That the destination of humanity can be understood only through the plurality of destinies to which diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic groups lay claim redoubles the force of the aporia stemming from the loss of the credibility of the Hegelian philosophy of history. Ricœur reminds us that cultural works, works of art, literature, and more generally “works of mind, insofar as they not merely mirror an environment and an epoch but search out man’s possibilities, are the true ‘objects’ that manifest the abstract universality of the idea of humanity through their concrete universality” (123). Only cultural testimonies, he therefore says, endow the relation between oneself, another, and others with its material density. The idea that the unity of a destination could be understood only through the plurality of destinies of diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic groups accordingly brings to the fore the tie between the capacity for surpassing from within the history or histories of which we are a part and the way that reason’s inscription in history owes its force to the ability to reply to the demands of a situation in a singularly appropriate way.

⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 200.

⁷⁰ Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 147.

⁷¹ Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 147.

⁷² Ricœur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 148.

⁷³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177-8. For a fuller account of these mimetic operations, see Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 52-87.

⁷⁴ See Ricœur, *A Ricœur Reader*, 153.