

Introduction

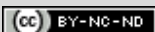
Olivier Abel

Institut Protestant de Théologie

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 11, No 2 (2020), pp. 6-11

ISSN 2156-7808 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2020.529

<http://ricoeur.pitt.edu>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

Introduction

Olivier Abel

Institut Protestant de Théologie, Fonds Ricoeur

Over the span of the last 10 years, since the first publication of the journal and the opening of the Fonds Ricoeur to the public, we have aimed to jointly interrogate one of the great Ricoeurian questions, the question of time. From the incisive essays of *History and Truth* to the ample *Memory, History, Forgetting*,¹ including the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, the theme of time has been one of the primary axes of Ricoeur's work. Thus, the question of time has been a main interest of the "intellectual collective" who contribute to the journal.

By 1951, Ricoeur had already expanded the concepts of growth and decline by recognizing the plurality of all time. Ricoeur writes,

[A] civilization does not advance *en masse* nor does it stagnate in every respect. It has several schemata [...] The tide does not rise at the same time on all the shores of a nation's life [...] [I]n advance of the whole of history, we cannot draw up the balance-sheet; we would have to be out of plays to make the final tally; the game would have to be finished [...] In order to guard against fanaticism, it is helpful not only to multiply explanatory outlooks, but also to maintain, from a practical point of view, the sense of the discontinuity of problems.²

Time is therefore one of the aporias that never ceases to permeate and influence Ricoeur's work, like the ideas of "evil" or the "self." It is striking that the texts gathered in this issue of the journal circulate, in one way or another, around these aporias, or around the relation of aporia to poetics. In his contribution, Roger Savage emphasizes that the poetics of narrative are not fully responsive to the aporias of temporality, which open and close *Time and Narrative III*. They refer to Ricoeur's much older project of a *Poetics of the Will*. The powers of narration would then be one, among others, of the possible forms of this poetics of the will. Roger Savage shows that this poetics finds its practical roots in the historical field as a result of our freedom and capacity to initiate something new. It is here that Savage poses, as a horizon of this poetics, the question of the unity of history, despite the delegitimization of "grand narratives." The utopia of a reconciled humanity, if it cannot claim to take the place of a storyline of meta-historical plots, is perhaps a reminder of what he calls "the ethical and political imperative to make freedom a reality for all." This is a very important suggestion, to which we will return, because it maintains, in the face of narrated time, the temporality of the ethical imperative.

The relationship of the aporetic to the poetic is in fact one of the possible ways of understanding in Ricoeur's work the graft of hermeneutics onto phenomenology. But there are other means of understanding because with Ricoeur it is always more "complicated." In "L'originaire et la question-en-retour dans la *Krisis* de Husserl," Ricoeur sums up long seminar sessions at the Husserl Archives around the "paradoxes which are attached to the search for an ultimate foundation," and which held to this temporal aporia: "The so-called given is never given

again. Philosophy is not the repetition of the originary.”³ The *Lebenswelt* is only reached indirectly, by the *Rückfrage* (Derrida translated it as “question-en-retour” [“question-in-return”], while Ricœur preferred “questionnement à rebours” [“questioning in reverse”]). Ricœur wrote: “we move in two worlds: the given world, which is the limit and the ground of the other, and a world of symbols and rules, a grid through which the world has already been interpreted when we begin to think.”⁴ In this text and in others, we see Ricœur in debate not only with Husserl but also with Lévinas and Derrida.

But very often, on the theme of time, it is with Heidegger that the discussion is the closest, as the text of Samuel Lelièvre offers readers here in detail. Since *Fallible Man*, Ricœur, reading Kant, confronts the Heideggerian claim of digging under a “hidden art” and of finding in the schematism the root of original temporality.⁵ But Lelièvre reveals to what extent the publication of the *Black Notebooks* and the rest of Heidegger’s *Complete Work* proves the depth of Heidegger’s connection to National Socialism, thus shifting our point of view on the work of the philosopher. Samuel Lelièvre thus shows how Ricœur’s reservations towards an enterprise less intended to solve epistemological questions and also critical and political ones than to “dissolve”⁶ them were in a way prophetic. These reservations are fully evident in Ricœur’s lengthy discussion of Heidegger’s “authentic temporality,” a discussion conducted to deal with the diversity of lived time as well as the strictly epistemological and historical questions that Heidegger had rejected. It seems to me that this important research calls for expanding the “Ricœurian conversation” not only to Benjamin and Arendt but also to others who help us escape the Heideggerian orb, such as Bergson and Bachelard, Deleuze, or Jean-François Lyotard.⁷

Returning to Ricœur’s text on Husserl’s *Krisis* reveals that what Ricœur says about the world in this text, he says in similar terms about time, almost simultaneously, in his beautiful introduction to the 1977 UNESCO collection on *Time and the Philosophies*,⁸ which I would like to make a focus of this introduction for its programmatic nature and use as a guideline.

Astonished at the paradox of seeing gathered in the same work the analytical concern about the “conceptual minimum” and the meditative concern about the “spiritual maximum,” Ricœur argues that the necessity of this paradox lies in “a fundamental feature of our experience of time, namely, that time is never lived directly, that it is never a mute, immediate lived experience but one that is always structured by symbolic systems of varying complexity. Some of these systems come logically and chronologically first and are immanent in different cultures; others are built upon the first through reflexion at a second degree, through philosophies, religions and popular wisdom” (13). He adds two pages later, speaking about the experience of time: “It is because it is opaque that it can be expressed only in symbolic systems whose cultural articulation is unavoidably manifold, divergent, even contradictory” (15). And he continues in a truly hermeneutic way: “Cultural groups as studied by anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists are structured by norms, rules, representations, beliefs which form a matrix through which each culture interprets its own existence. No society, as such, directly and immediately confronts its own lived experience, but ‘reads’ it in the light of its particular cultural codes” (17).⁹

The text by Jonathan Martineau, which proposes an original hermeneutic of the aporias themselves, is actually very well situated in the wake of such concerns. Indeed, Martineau shows that conceptions of time in Aristotle and Saint Augustine, both certainly important for the Western tradition, can only be fully understood in their particular contexts where they probe profoundly

different questions. Aristotle describes a time “which unites humans and the world,” while Saint Augustine subordinates time “to a divine transcendence.” Martineau’s essay is a very precise development of the two authors whom, oddly, Ricœur connects to one another. Martineau points out to what extent Ricœur’s reading of them is anachronistic and reductive to what he needs for generating dialogue. Attentive to social time, Martineau suggests that the aporia of which Ricœur speaks is itself a product of the temporal regime characteristic of modern time, both “anchored in market practices” and grasped through questions explored by Husserl, Bergson or Heidegger, which were not the same questions as those of Aristotle or Augustine.

Let us go further with the UNESCO text. Ricœur, again picking up sessions from his seminar at the Husserl Archives, points out the importance of narration among the various strategies of cultures to face time: “no culture can refer back to its own conception of time without having resort to the vital ‘narrative’ activity which, linguistically, is expressed in an immense variety of stories” (18). The collapse of “grand narratives” is not the end of narrative activity. And narration is not limited to the duality of historiographic narrative and fiction, because he then enumerates the diversity of forms: myths, marvelous tales, legends and popular stories, epics and tragedies, chronicles, annals, historiographical stories, fictitious stories, naturalist novels, etc. Narration leads to the universality of the narrative genre: “is there any culture that has no stories?” (18). Thus, human narrators seek to make intelligible the inconstancy of human things based on the diversity of codes and symbolic systems that organize their experience. “Nowhere, in actual fact, do we find societies wholly uniform in their attitude to time; variation occurs not only between but inside cultures” (20).

It seems to me that here we are touching on the constitutive paradox of the power to say “we,” not in the abolition of a shift in temporalities but in their differences, and in the very lag in the shift of generations. This is the whole question of time as a “collective singular” addressed here by Jean-Paul Nicolai’s essay about the intractable aporia of the uniqueness of time. Nicolai shows the tension in Ricœur between his fundamentally plural anthropology and his refusal to abandon human unity, at least as a limiting idea. How can we think of a common history that would be woven from each other’s stories and yet have a shared horizon of time? How do we base what Ricœur elsewhere calls “narrative hospitality” on the only intersubjective credit given to the testimony of others? Nicolai tackles this question around the Heideggerian concept of a common destiny (reread with Dastur) and around Koselleck’s horizon of expectation and space of experience (in discussion with Löwith). His primary idea is that learning together “plays a key role, and, more than ontology, it is appropriate to speak of collective ontogeny.” The foundation of a community capable of saying “we” is to be found in “this effort today to make it work tomorrow.”

Returning to our thematic text of 1977, it is moreover at this point that Ricœur sketches, echoing one of the Latin American authors in the UNESCO volume, a typology of specifically political temporalities. In any event, we know neither of a universal or homogeneous time nor of a pre-symbolic time, which would be an uninterpreted, un-symbolized time. “To use Wittgenstein’s terms, language games and forms of life are in continual correspondence” (20). This is followed by a long detour on the presentation of the various authors of the UNESCO volume where each of the configurations of time presented not only exposes a possible form of life but also reveals a critical deconstruction of all the others. We must accept the hermeneutic finitude of our access to this conversation, which “has hardly begun.”¹⁰ That approach, among others of the European tradition,

represented here by a text of Gadamer, insists on the finitude of existence and opposes “a limit to any ambition which aims at subsuming our many perspectives on time into a discipline which would itself transcend time. This limitation on knowledge, become the knowledge of limits, is perhaps the West’s reply [...] to the East. [...]” (30).¹¹

This end of of the 1977 text echoes many other Ricœur texts, such as the one on “Freedom in the Light of Hope” (1968), where the theme of radical evil is linked to a pathology of hope that is precisely the lie and violence in the work of totalization. And if hope, renouncing knowing and effectuating the beyond, brings about a true conversion in the here and now, it places us among discontinuous time, if not disproportionate time,¹² and by its very plurality demonstrates finitude. Here we find the patient work of deconstruction that completes *Time and Narrative III*, not only by renouncing Hegel (it is a mourning that brings much with it), but also by showing the limits of narrative identity itself, limits that refer us to other forms of temporality, that is to say to other forms of expression, other literary genres, and other forms of the self. The bifurcation between the narrative genre and the lyrical genre already exists, but there is also, of course, the prescriptive genre of the moral imperative, the legislative and legal genres,¹³ and the prophetic and sapiential genres. It seems to me that this is what prepares the almost twin work of the Gifford Lectures and *Thinking Biblically*, extending the idea that the forms of language and life never cease to correspond, to be invented, and to deposit in traditions.

To conclude, in my own text I wished to resume this line of thought under the idea that the forms of expression of time, of ways of holding it or of making it fluent, of giving rhythm to it and enjoying it, define styles that are forms of life, in the sense of Marielle Macé’s work. She wrote: “It is a matter of trying, in the style of Ricœur, what he and others after him proposed with narrative: to derive an anthropological, moral, political concept from a literary notion.”¹⁴ This project is fair, and brilliant, but I wanted to show that we must not reduce Ricœur to narrated time and narrative identity, even if these were at one point his main project. If we agree to integrate into the philosophical field his studies of biblical literature – which exist as a polar contrast to his studies on the tragic in particular – and this is his goal, it is necessary to place this work among the others: the very old one on prophetic time and the responsive self, the one on metaphors and hymns, the one on the various forms of prescriptive ethics, etc. Far from any irenics that is falsely reconciling, and even in their intertextual intersection, his work has never ceased to intensify the conflict of temporalities. And his passion for the plurality of literary genres, for styles of tradition, is a passion for the plurality of styles of time.

- ¹ In *Memory, History and Forgetting*, the historical condition of being mortal but having been born is resumed between a memory that knows melancholy, mourning, and the separation between what is and what has been, and an oblivion that reserves in what “has been” promises of what might be. This work, which has already been extensively analyzed in previous issues of *Étude Ricœurienne/Ricœur Studies*, has been given less consideration this time.
- ² Paul Ricœur, “Christianity and the Meaning of History,” *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 88, 95, 96.
- ³ Paul Ricœur, “L’originnaire et la question-en-retour dans la *Krisis* de Husserl,” in *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1980), republished in Paul Ricœur, *À l’école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), 291. In Husserl as in Marx, Ricœur observed that the function of ontology (*Lebenswelt* in Husserl) is first of all to destroy the pretension of consciousness to stand as the origin and master of meaning.
- ⁴ Ricœur, “L’originnaire et la question-en-retour dans la *Krisis* de Husserl,” 295.
- ⁵ See Jean-Luc Amalric, *Paul Ricœur, l’imagination vive, une genèse de la philosophie Ricœurienne de l’imagination* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), 172-3.
- ⁶ Paul Ricœur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 10.
- ⁷ As I attempted to do briefly in my own text.
- ⁸ Paul Ricœur, “Introduction,” in *Time and the Philosophies*, ed. H. Aguessy *et al.* (Paris: Unesco, 1977), 13-30, follows another introduction he wrote for an initial volume published by UNESCO in 1975 on *Cultures and Time*. We know that Ricœur worked considerably for UNESCO (which houses important archives), and this context of the plurality of cultures is important.
- ⁹ He had just referred to Clifford Geertz regarding these symbolic structures of our experience of time, who presents them as sometimes “models of” (reflections-expressions, ideological) and as sometimes “models for” (directives for change, utopian).
- ¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures,” *History and Truth*, 283.
- ¹¹ On Ricœur’s invocation of the “knowledge of limits,” at the Fonds Ricœur, in the margin of Ricœur’s copy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, we find this pun: “Limiter, c’est militer” [“to limit is to militate,” that is, to be involved in a fight].

- ¹² In *History and Truth*, Ricœur distinguished, for example, technical and cumulative time from the dramatic time of cultures, which are so difficult to translate one to the other at the level of the grammars of time.
- ¹³ And within the latter, between the brief time of the judicial sanction and the extended time of rehabilitation. See Paul Ricœur, "Sanction, Rehabilitation, Pardon," *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 133-45.
- ¹⁴ Marielle Macé, *Styles, Critique de nos formes de vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 20. Throughout Ricœur's work, there are a number of touchstones for a philosophy of style, sometimes in the sense of Gilles-Gaston Granger's stylistic analysis of works, and sometimes in the Kantian sense of a schematism that would be somehow externalized in language, in the sensitive capacities that language opens up in us. (This was the subject of my 1983 thesis.)