

Introduction — Ricœur and the Question of Religion

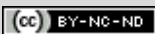
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Introduction — Ricoeur and the Question of Religion

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In 2021, a new collection of articles and lectures by Ricoeur relating to religion spanning five decades was published in French,¹ as well as Daniel Frey's comprehensive study, *La Religion dans la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur*.² These ventures indicate that it is time to give renewed attention to the role of religion and of its specification in biblical monotheism in the philosopher's work. Ricoeur's insistence on keeping the two realms separate has been expressed in a range of terms, such as the difference between "critique" and "conviction," as "agnostic... suspension," and even as "controlled schizophrenia."³ An issue dedicated to the theme of religion was last published in ERRS ten years ago, edited by Yasuhiko Sugimura.⁴ Which new angles can be identified since then on how its relationship to philosophy is analysed and its significance for his work assessed? It is an area in which the "complexity and tension that dominate his whole work manifest themselves most explicitly," as Yasuhiko Sugimura judges in his assessment of Frey's study, printed in the Review section of this issue.⁵ The treatment of religion thus acquires a paradigmatic value for the way in which conflicts in thinking are approached and methods in competition are specified and related to each other.

The four main contributions selected for the present issue investigate long-standing themes from distinct perspectives. They discuss recent research and draw new connections on how the interacting counterparts, "reason," and "religion," are identified in a philosophy that considers itself a reflection on the experience of life which is always antecedent to thinking.

The topics debated reach from the question of what understanding of biblical texts can be grasped from Ricoeur's essays on biblical hermeneutics, to how critiques of religion are reconstructed in their premises and in their ongoing challenge, to how religious symbols such as the original goodness of creation have given rise to conceptual and practical self-understandings. All of these factors shape the public sphere already through the heuristic sensitivity inherent in their views of self and world that co-exist and interact in pluralist democracies.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *La Religion pour penser. Écrits et conférences 5*, ed. D. Frey (Paris: Seuil, 2021). Cf. the review by David Le-Duc Tiaha, "Une note de lecture du cinquième volume des *Écrits et conférences* de Ricoeur. Pour un dialogue apaisé entre philosophie et religion," *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, 13/1 (2022), 168-183.

² Daniel Frey, *La Religion dans la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: Hermann, 2021).

³ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York/Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1998). *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 24. *Critique and Conviction*, 2.

⁴ Cf. *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricoeur Studies*, 3/2 (2012), "Philosophy and Religion," guest ed. Yasuhiko Sugimura.

⁵ Yasuhiko Sugimura, "Recension, Daniel Frey, *La Religion dans la philosophie de Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: Hermann, 2021)," in this volume.

The first article offers a dialogue by the author of the most recent in-depth analysis, Daniel Frey, of how the theme of religion develops in the different periods of Ricoeur's work, with the reviewer of his 2021 book. Frey's article, "La Religion dans l'œuvre de Ricoeur. Dialogue avec Yasuhiko Sugimura," provides differentiated responses to the key questions and ongoing disputes raised by his reviewer. Thus, Ricoeur's theory decisions regarding appropriate starting-points are highlighted from different angles: identifying the Bible with its genres as belonging to the "poetic" realm of texts, the insistence on breaking down systematic theological conceptions of God by relating them back to the plurality of biblical types of naming God, or the rejection of "religion" as a general overarching label in favour of enquiries into religious traditions in their historically founded specificity. Among the debates treated in Frey's response and Sugimura's review are: which understandings of philosophy and reason are set in relation with biblical and theological thinking? Should Ricoeur's biblical hermeneutics be read as implying that these texts constitute a poetics which is merely located at the level of meaning, or do they also pose a truth claim in relation to reality? If the symbolic understandings of world given in them have shaped views of the human person, her agency and responsibility, how should the ongoing presence of different religions in the public realm be conceived? Ricoeur opts for a "laïcité de confrontation" in the civic sphere, in order to enable the different secular and religious traditions which he identifies as "cofoundational"⁶ to renew their cores in relation to contemporary challenges. His concern is to make the most of each starting point, recognized as "étroit" (narrow),⁷ but clear and definite, for a productive dialogue.

The open question behind religious contributions to public debate, namely the standing of religion after its critique, is the subject of the following two articles. The issue of the type of presence it may occupy in the pluralist civic sphere receives a new edge by Ricoeur's recognition of critiques of religion as necessary exercises. The third article, "Freud, Moïse et la religion. Une lecture de Paul Ricoeur" by Azadeh Thiriez-Arjangi, enquires into his treatment of the role of Moses in Freud's critique of religion, and provides a test case in two respects: for the problem of how philosophy engages with approaches in the human sciences with their distinct methods, and with the conclusions drawn by Freud for classifying religion. Is it a neurotic aberration and escape mechanism, or an irreducible element of human conscious life, with a fraught history but not discountable as such? The third article, "Paul Ricoeur and the Idea of Second Naivety. Origins, Analogues, Applications," by Áron Buzási moves the much-quoted "second naivety," originally set in relation to religious traditions, into the wider framework of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, exploring parallels in his use of "critique" as a stage that is both necessary and penultimate. Extending the term "detour" from first-order symbols and narratives to the critical methods of the social sciences, important dialogue partners, such as psychoanalysis, Marxist ideology critique and structuralism/poststructuralism are used as examples for having come through the acid tests provided by the "masters of suspicion" and regaining a "second naivety." "Critique" is not the final stage but a new occasion for further initiatives after profound questioning.

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 105, 247.

⁷ Cf. Daniel Frey in his conclusion on this point of Ricoeur's critique of Karl Jaspers, in "La Religion dans l'œuvre de Ricoeur. Dialogue avec Yasuhiko Sugimura," in this volume.

The fourth article, “Translation, Compromise, Forgiveness: Exploring the Role of Original Goodness in an Ethics of Capability,” by Amy Daughton, investigates the encounter of religion and philosophy through the symbol of “creation” within biblical monotheism. This symbol gives rise to thought in an anthropology and ethics of capability. Its contours are explored in three activities relevant for intersubjective recognition: translation between languages and cultures, “compromise” in negotiating the different segments or “cities” distinguished in Luc Boltanski’s and Laurent Thévenot’s sociological analysis, and forgiveness as a personal initiative facing memories of violence. The ability to draw on symbols like the Genesis account of creation for sustaining an ethics of recognition illustrates the significance of such ongoing social imaginaries for debates in the European public sphere.

Questions for further enquiry arise both from the evolving course of Ricoeur’s position and from contemporary stances towards religion and within each tradition. Defenders of reason and of religion are encouraged to avail of their own specific sources. Their heritage can help “disarm” the adversaries and remind them that they will find in their respective traditions dialogical resources.”⁸ In view of the histories of violence into which the individual religions have been enlisted, that they have fuelled, utilised, or proved unable to stop, Ricoeur calls them to account for their betrayed and “unkept promises.”⁹ By identifying religion with the “hope” both of good action not failing, and of the evildoer’s freedom being restored to new agency, Ricoeur sides with Kant and elaborates the central role of the imagination. It provides the capacity to envisage a world, opening it up for action by creating a connection to the self. By shifting the emphasis to the need and ability to “inhabit” a strange world, religion and reason are no longer set up as being at loggerheads but as equally involved in furnishing concrete conditions of agency. Social science analyses of economic, social and technological factors are not complete without a philosophical account of the sources that mediate a productive, symbolically constituted relationship to the world and to others. “Religion” is therefore not a marginal theme, only relevant for cohorts of actual believers, but a lens into the conscious and practical life of humans. The task is to keep in balance three insights: First, while religion offers relevant mediations, it is, secondly, not reducible to other human pursuits. Thirdly, the plurality of traditions through which we know religion in the singular cannot be derived from reason. Not deducible in their historical foundations, they constitute realisations of what is possible, encouraging – at their best – agency for a solidaric open future.

Finally, thanks are due to those whose work supported the completion of this issue: Ernst Wolff and Jean-Luc Amalric as the journal editors, the peer reviewers who responded to their invitation and contributed insightful evaluations, the editorial secretary as well as those who sent in their articles in response to the Call for Papers. Such exchanges are sites of learning before the finished product appears. Thanks for the precision and perceptiveness.

⁸ Gilbert Vincent, *La Religion de Ricoeur* (Paris: Les Éditions de l’Atelier, 2008), 147.

⁹ Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, 105.