

PAUL RICOEUR: FROM PHENOMENOLOGY TO
HERMENEUTICS AND THE CREATION OF
MEANING IN LANGUAGE

Paul Ricoeur spent most of World War II as a prisoner of war in a Nazi prison camp. As a philosopher he was understandably interested in the problem of evil. Raised in a family of devout protestants, he remained a Christian throughout his life and in 1967 was appointed to succeed Paul Tillich as the John Nuveen professor of philosophical theology at the University of Chicago. While he was a student at the Sorbonne in 1934, he became friends with Gabriel Marcel; and the existentialism of Marcel and Karl Jaspers was one of the great influences on his thought. Most of his writing is secularly philosophical, but it is occasionally possible to sense threads of traditional Christian concerns motivating it.

The five years Ricoeur spent as a prisoner of war in Germany were apparently not quite as grim as one might imagine. Among his fellow prisoners were several other intellectuals including Mikel Dufrenne, with whom he organized readings and classes somehow deemed worthy of accreditation as a degree granting institution by the Vichy government. The main focus of Ricoeur's own studies during these years was the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, about whom he and Dufrenne later published a book, and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. After the war Ricoeur translated Husserl's Ideas I as part of the work on his doctorate from the Sorbonne and was soon recognized as the leading French authority on Husserl.

Ricoeur viewed Husserl's phenomenology not as a radical break with the tradition of modern Western philosophy but as the development of certain themes within the work of Descartes, Hume, Kant and Hegel. He also saw a continuity in Husserl's own repeated

reformulations of the project of phenomenology in terms of the attempt to resolve certain tensions in each version. With the Cartesian Meditations Ricoeur sees the central problem of phenomenology emerging in all its force. It is the issue of “transcendental solipsism” or the problem of the Other for a form of philosophy which attempts to find absolute certainty exclusively by analysis of the Ego or subjectivity.

The apparently insoluble paradox is this: on the one hand, the reduction of all meaning to the intentional life of the concrete *ego* implies that the other is constituted ‘in me’ and ‘from me’; on the other hand, phenomenology must account for the originality of the other’s experience, precisely insofar as it is the experience of someone other than me. (Hermeneutics 125)

The need to establish the subjectivity of the Other and the universal validity of the “world” as the world for us rather than just for me is part of what led Husserl in his later writings to turn towards a consideration of history. For Ricoeur, however, it was mainly Husserl’s own analysis of time and the way in which temporality is involved in perception that inevitably led him to see the need to incorporate history into phenomenology:

It is well known how, on the one hand, Husserl continued to develop the properly *temporal* implications of perceptual experience. He was thus led, by his own analyses, towards the historicity of human experience as a whole. In particular, it became increasingly evident that the presumptive, inadequate, unfinished character which perceptual experience acquires from its temporal structure could be applied step by step to the whole of historical experience. (Hermeneutics 119)

Ricoeur eventually saw the project of phenomenology as ultimately requiring hermeneutics, and his own work moved from what he characterized as “existential phenomenology” to “hermeneutic phenomenology.” (Hermeneutics 114)

Ricoeur’s greatest critique of Husserl is expressed by his comment that Husserl’s phenomenology is a philosophy of sense rather than a philosophy of freedom. It is his perception that Husserl is unable to do justice to the experience of freedom or choice as it is understood by existentialism that led him to formulate his own project of a phenomenology of the will. The major thesis of his doctorate was the first part of a projected three volume work on a phenomenology of the will in terms of ideas of the voluntary and the involuntary inspired by Marcel’s existentialism and the theme of the “owned body.” The first volume in this project was published as Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary. The second volume, Finitude and Culpability, was published in two parts: Fallible Man and The Symbolism of Evil. This work represented Ricoeur’s attempt to incorporate into his philosophy of the will experiences like guilt, bondage, alienation or sin, which he regarded as fundamental experiences and which he felt had not been adequately accounted for in existentialist thought:

My problem was to distinguish between finitude and guilt. I had the impression, or even the conviction, that these two terms tended to be identified in classical existentialism at the cost of both experiences, guilt becoming a particular case of finitude and for that reason beyond cure or forgiveness, and finitude, on the other hand, being affected by a diffused sense of sadness and despair through guilt. (Metaphor 315)

The third volume of the project was postponed because of the turn that Ricoeur's thinking took in his work on The Symbolism of Evil. In his attempt to "write a phenomenology of the will without abandoning the method of describing the *essential* structures of consciousness" (Hermeneutics 32) he discovered that a

gap appeared between the essential structures of the volitional consciousness – project, motive, the absolute involuntary of character, of unconscious, of life and death – and the historical or empirical condition of the human will, prisoner of the passions and prone to evil. The experience of the evil will seemed to lie on the boundaries of the 'essential' condition of willing....

The servile condition of the evil will seemed to elude an essential analysis of phenomena. So the only practicable route was that of a detour via the symbols wherein the avowal of the fault was inscribed during the great cultures of which ours is the heir: the primary symbols of stain, guilt and sin; the secondary symbols or myths of tragic blindness, of the fall of the soul, of wandering or decline; the tertiary symbols and rationalisations of the servile will or of original sin. The Symbolism of Evil thus marked the turning of Husserlian phenomenology, already extended to the problematic of fallibility, towards a hermeneutics of symbols.

(Hermeneutics 33)

Elsewhere he describes this problem as a difference between a "direct language" available for other areas of existential phenomenology and the need to use "indirect" language to get at the experience of the evil will:

...[W]hatever might be the relationship between phenomenology and existentialism in this first attempt, this kind of philosophizing did not yet raise any particular problem of language, for a direct language was thought to be available. This direct language was ordinary language in which we find words like purpose, motive, and so on. This is why I now believe there is an intersection of the philosophy of ordinary language and phenomenology at this first level.

Now the consideration of the problem of evil brought into the field of research new linguistic perplexities which did not occur earlier. These linguistic perplexities were linked to the use of symbolic language as an indirect approach to the problem of guilt. Why an indirect approach? Why symbolic language when we have to pass from a philosophy of finitude to a philosophy of guilt? This was the question that intrigued me. The fact is that we have a direct language to say purpose, motive, and ‘I can.’ But we speak of evil by means of metaphors such as estrangement, errance, burden, and bondage. Moreover, these primary symbols do not occur unless they are embedded within intricate narratives of myth which tell the story of how evil began: how at the beginning of time the gods quarreled; how the soul fell into an ugly body; or how a primitive man was tempted, trespassed a prohibition, and became an exiled rebel.

It seemed, therefore, that direct reflection on oneself could not go very far without undertaking a roundabout way, the detour of a hermeneutic of these symbols. I had to introduce a hermeneutical

dimension within the structure of reflective thought itself. In other words, I could speak of purposive action without symbolic language, but I could not speak of bad will or of evil without a hermeneutic. This was the first way in which the problem of language appeared in a kind of philosophy which was not at first a philosophy of language, but a philosophy of the will. (Metaphor 316)

After The Symbolism of Evil Ricoeur devoted himself to a thorough study of Freud for several reasons. First of all one can hardly undertake a study of guilt without giving some thought to Freudian notions of the origin and nature of guilt. More importantly, however, once he had introduced the idea of hermeneutics into his form of phenomenology, Ricoeur had to acknowledge that there are two seemingly opposite attitudes towards the task of interpretation. One which derives primarily from the tradition of scriptural exegesis has as its object the recovery of the original meaning of a text. He characterizes this as a process of recollection or revelation. The other, which he characterizes as the “exercise of suspicion” has as its objective “demystification” or the “reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness.” Freud, Marx and Nietzsche are thinkers who despite their disparate aims share this approach to interpretation.

Ricoeur’s book Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation is an awe inspiring example of Ricoeur’s analytical and interpretive powers. He approaches the entire body of Freud’s work in an attempt to analyze its structure and the evolution of Freud’s thought. His interest is obviously in the philosophical implications of Freud’s concepts rather than their clinical application, and he begins by establishing the structural relationships of the main themes and concepts in Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The

book itself is an excellent example of the approach to the interpretation of texts which would subsequently become a major theme in Ricoeur's writings. Following him on the journey of his engagement with Freud is perhaps the best way to grasp what is entailed in

“distanciation” and “appropriation,” the two seemingly opposed dimensions of the interpretive process which Ricoeur was later concerned to combine through a kind of dialectical description. In the first part of the book, which he labels “analytic,” the reader is pulled back from any previous involvement he may have had with Freudian theory and provided with a perspective which seems positively Olympian in its ability to grasp the relationships among the bewildering diversity of often alien or even bizarre concepts with which Freud organized the data of his clinical observations. In the second portion of the book, labeled “dialectic,” Ricoeur mines the philosophical implications of all this in a way that clearly reveals the passion which motivated him to embark on the journey. There is a great deal at stake for Ricoeur and to the extent that the reader can keep up with him one tastes the true meaning of the appropriation which Ricoeur describes as “the process by which the revelation of new modes of being – or, if you prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger, new ‘forms of life’ – *gives* the subject new capacities for knowing himself.” (Hermeneutics 192)

To appropriate is to make what was alien become one's own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be. So I exchange the *me, master* of itself, for the *self, disciple* of the text. (Hermeneutics 113)

Ricoeur has adopted Gadamer's idea of appropriation. Gadamer defined it by reference to Heidegger's idea of human being as "being-in-the-world" and elaborated on it through the notion of "play" as an indication of the way in which one's being is engaged in the act of interpretation. He opposed it to the kind of distancing involved in the ideal of objectivity on which the natural sciences are based. Ricoeur attempts to further elaborate on the idea of appropriation by showing that the process of interpretation also involves a form of detached analysis and that to do full justice to the hermeneutical process one must somehow incorporate both appropriation and distanciation. Whether Gadamer's concept requires this kind of elaboration or correction may be debatable, but both clearly see the existential import of interpreting a text. It seems to me to coincide with what I sensed in my excitement as an undergraduate when I concluded that a true intellectual is someone whose life is at stake every time he opens a book. It has its roots in the Romantic notion of education as the development of the self and the liberal arts ideal of broadening one's horizons. Ricoeur also adopts Gadamer's idea of the "fusion of horizons" in his attempt to describe the outcome of an encounter with a text.

Ultimately Ricoeur reconciles the hermeneutic of suspicion and the hermeneutic of recollection by means of his concept of distanciation and appropriation as two faces of the hermeneutic process. He also uses the same means to mediate the debate between Gadamer and Habermas regarding the critique of ideology. At the conclusion of his study of Freud, however, he was still working his way towards a more general philosophy of hermeneutics from a standpoint which limited hermeneutics to the interpretation of symbols or double meaning in expressions.

In retrospect he saw four things which led him to shift his focus from existentialism to language. In addition to the concerns with symbolism both in his phenomenology of the will and his interpretation of Freud, he was influenced by three other factors. One was the change in the philosophical milieu in which he lived and worked in France. Structuralism and semiotics based on Saussurian linguistics had come to replace existentialism and presented Ricoeur with a challenge on two fronts. First of all the analysis of language as a self-contained system which referred to nothing beyond itself posed a problem for phenomenology as Ricoeur understood and practiced it. Phenomenology only makes sense if the language used to explicate experience refers to something. For Ricoeur discourse is someone saying something *to* someone *about* something. Another consequence of structuralism is that the self is dethroned.

This new model of philosophizing came from linguistics; more precisely, it was an effort to extend to semantics and to all semiological disciplines the model which had succeeded in phonology. Inasmuch as there are signs in human life, the structural model was to be utilized. As you know, this structural model relies mostly on the affirmation that language, before being a process or an event, is a system, and that this system is not established at the level of the speaker's consciousness, but at a lower level, that of a kind of structural unconscious. Structuralism as a philosophy draws radical consequences from this epistemological model which directly affect the presuppositions of existentialism. First of all, the primacy of subjectivity which was so strongly emphasized by existentialism is overthrown by the displacement of analysis from the level

of the subject's intentions to the level of linguistic and semiotic structures.

(Metaphor 318f)

In order to preserve the validity of what he knew as existential phenomenology, Ricoeur had to respond to structuralism with a philosophy of language.

Another impetus for his interest in language was a trend in theology towards a focus on the nature and function of religious language in what he labels "post-Bultmannian" schools of theology.

Bultmann had imposed two fundamental limitations upon the theory of religious language. On the one hand, myth was taken to be the opposite of Kerygma. In that way, demythologization became the central problem and this prevented grasping the question of religious language as a unique problem. On the other hand, understanding had to be opposed to objectification in a manner similar to the opposition between *Verstehen* and *Erklären* inherited from Dilthey. Thus Biblical theology remained trapped in the perplexities of romanticist hermeneutics. The recognition of this led post-Bultmannian exegetes and theologians to subordinate the problem of demythologizing and the problem of existential interpretation to the broader problem of the 'linguisticity' of human experience which makes possible both the emergence of texts and the response of interpretation to this emergence. The polarity between myth and Kerygma, on the one hand, and between interpretation and explanation, on the other hand, appeared to be only partial solutions to the more general question of how religious language functions. (Metaphor 320)

Finally Ricoeur's teaching positions in the United States resulted in a confrontation with the tradition of Anglo-American philosophy of ordinary language. Partially because he felt he needed to be conversant with this tradition if he wanted to propose an alternate view of language, much of Ricoeur's writing in the 70's is addressed to and couched in terms of this tradition as well as Anglo-American traditions of literary criticism. Ricoeur found in an expanded concept of the text his key to a general philosophy of hermeneutics or interpretation which rescues the idea of the self by having it acquired in the process of the interpretation of texts.

At this point I cannot refrain from a personal note concerning my own response to Ricoeur. My introduction to philosophy was via philosophy of religion and existentialism. My first impression of Anglo-American linguistic philosophy was that it was a totally arid landscape completely irrelevant to the proper concerns of philosophy. Over the years, however, I began to see that language was a major philosophical issue. This was primarily the result of three things: exposure to Heidegger's later writings, following Norman O. Brown's journey from Life Against Death to Love's Body, and reading a certain amount of Buddhist thought. I was actively looking for a better way to understand language and its relationship to understanding or wisdom when I discovered Gadamer and Ricoeur. The idea that Ricoeur had moved from a form of existentialism still in touch with Christian values to a philosophy focused on language, interpretation and the function of metaphor in the creation of meaning made me hope that in him I would find a completely sympathetic mentor. The fact that he had turned to Freud in a way that seemed to parallel Brown made me all the more anxious to read him. His book on Freud lived up to my hopes, but I found myself very disappointed when I began

reading his later works on interpretation and hermeneutics. I felt as though he had been kidnapped by linguistic philosophy and sent on a forced retreat in the desert. He may have returned the better for it. It provided him with the tools and the confidence to criticize Derrida and Heidegger, but I find it necessary to dig very deep to find anything of sustenance in most of his discussions about the interpretation of texts.

At one point when I was reading one of Ricoeur's discussions of appropriation and distancing as equal partners in the hermeneutics process I recalled the phrase "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." It occurred to me that the authors of the Book of Common Prayer may have understood the hermeneutic process as well as Ricoeur and that all of the distinctions and conceptual niceties of semantics and the philosophy of language really did nothing to enhance my appreciation for the way in which a text can alter who I am or the way I live. Much of Ricoeur's writing about texts and interpretation seems to me to be a struggle to drag traditional linguistic philosophy up to the starting point for what any sensitive reader regards as a genuine encounter with a text or work of art. Perhaps I would find his theological writings more enlightening.

This is not to say I find nothing of interest in Ricoeur's later writings. I am certainly intrigued by what he has to say about narrative discourse as a form of understanding, and there are numerous points at which his discussion of interpretation either clarifies something for me or suggests new ways of looking at things. What seems most fruitful for me with Ricoeur is to latch onto those moments and dig into them rather than attempt to paint a systematic overview of his thought.

Much of what Ricoeur says in his commentary on Husserl is lost for me in the labyrinth of Husserl's arcane schema. There is one point, however, at which Ricoeur seems to me to put his finger on the heart of Husserl.

What Husserl calls "ontological explication" (*ontologische Explication*) consists in an unfolding of strata of sense (nature, animality, psyche, culture, personality), the superimposition of which constitutes "the world as constituted sense." This unfolding represents quite well what we have called the movement toward the concrete, that is to say, the movement toward the world of man. But his successive reading of strata of sense remains static for as long as these constituted senses are not attached to the different steps in the constitution of the ego: the primordial ego, the alien ego, and the community of monads. The progressive and synthetic movement toward the concrete thus remains firmly subordinated to the regressive and analytic movement toward the original and the radical.

"Explication," thus is held midway between a philosophy of construction and a philosophy of description. Against Hegelianism and its successors and against all "metaphysical construction," Husserl maintains that phenomenology does not "create" but instead "discovers" This is the hyperempirical side of phenomenology. Explication is an explication of experience.

Phenomenological explication does nothing else – and this can never be emphasized too much – but explicate the sense that the world has for all of

us prior to all philosophy and which manifestly our experience gives to it. This sense can be analyzed by philosophy, but never modified by it. And in each actual experience it is surrounded – for essential reasons and not because of our weakness with horizons in need of clarification (Cartesian Meditations, p. 177:14-22)

But on the other hand, by linking explication in his way with the clarification of horizons, phenomenology seeks to go beyond the static description which would make it a simple geography of sense-strata, a descriptive stratigraphy of experience. For the transferring operations from the ego toward the Other, then toward objective nature, finally toward history – as we have seen – realize a progressive constitution, a gradual composition, finally a “universal genesis,” of what we live through naively as “life-world.” (Husserl: An Analysis 140f)

Ricoeur is mainly concerned here with the way in which Husserl wriggles out of the idealism/realism dichotomy. What Ricoeur sees in Husserl is a maintenance of “tension” between two seemingly opposed tendencies in his thought and the balancing act involved in staying on the tight wire between them. I have a suspicion that Ricoeur reads Husserl in this way because he himself is so given to resolving oppositions in conceptual schemes with this kind of dialectic of “tension.” After encountering this method in Ricoeur’s writings a few times, I began to feel that it was satisfying him more than me. The real point here, however, is that it does seem to me that the idea of “explication” is central to phenomenology and not at all immediately clear.

Phenomenology explicates the sense that the world “has” and that our experience “gives it.” In attempting to follow this part of my mind is still snagged on the naïve notion of the world as simply the physical environment. I have to remind myself that the purely physical environment is an abstraction from the “world” in which I live and that “brute” physicality has no “sense” or “meaning” of the sort that my “world” has. Even though the world seems completely meaningless or absurd at times, it “seems” that way because I expect and look for meaning in it. The idea of the “life-world” appears fairly late in the development of Husserl’s thought; but it is surely implicit in his idea of experience, and it is not unique to him. Dilthey’s idea of “lived experience,” which seems to be emphasizing the active involvement implied by “living” as part of what might otherwise be assumed to be “passive” experience, can probably be interpreted in terms of a “life-world.” At any event there is “sense” in experience and philosophy can “analyze” it. The sense is there and apparently apprehended in some, perhaps pre-conscious, way which begs to be ‘clarified.’ At the same time the meaningful world is somehow “constituted” by the “ego.” (The tree would fall silently if there were no one there to hear it.) Experience has “horizons” to be clarified, and explication responds to this task on several levels. Explication is the process of “unfolding” the sense of the world.

Even in the naïve experience of the life-world “prior to all philosophy” there is some kind of explication of sense in the use of language. Husserl does not seem to address the “linguistic” aspect of all experience, although Ricoeur’s description of the successive “strata” of sense would seem to imply an extrapolation of this stratification all the way “down” to “naïve” participation in the world. There is perhaps a suggestion in

Husserl that “sense” or “meaning” is somehow there even without being articulated in any way, but what truly interests Husserl is the “philosophical” explication of sense which occurs only when one brackets the everyday world in meditation. It presupposes normal experience and the availability of language for clarifying the horizons surrounding experience.

It is possible to view the process of explication as a linguistic exercise. Certainly in reading phenomenology one often has the feeling that ideas or concepts which one formerly grasped in some intuitive, almost non-verbal, manner are being “unpacked” into verbal descriptions or elaborations on the meaning of the concept. It feels like a process akin to looking a word up in the dictionary when one recognizes how it is used but cannot define it explicitly. Obviously Husserl did not conceive of language as a closed, purely self-referential system. He was attempting to revive philosophy by returning to the “things themselves,” and it made no sense to question whether language “refers to something.” Language is the articulation of experience, the explication of the sense which the world has because it is constituted by the ego.

Ricoeur occasionally describes phenomenology as the explication of the “structure” of mind or ego. Husserl also talked about the world as a “structure of meaning.” (Crisis 168) My mind resorts to spatial metaphors to imagine how language or concepts “structure” experience or reveal the structure of experience. In his analysis of Freud Ricoeur uses the idea of a “screen” as the boundary between the interior world of the psyche and the exterior world of reality. In Freudian terms the screen is a protective boundary, but it is also suggestive of a rear projection screen which makes visible and interpretable an image which would otherwise not be so. The image of units

of meaning connected into a structure or framework which is somehow embedded in a field of experience to give it shape and substance comes to mind as a representation of the mystery of language. Ultimately I do not think language can be explained. One always ends up begging the question. Even commentaries on the Greek concept of Logos beg the question, and it may be that what I want to call “begging the question” is in fact part of the dynamic way in which language lives through metaphor and the creation of meaning.

Ricoeur’s understanding of phenomenology enables him to reject as limited the view of language espoused by structuralism. He is very clear about the fact that words and propositions refer to reality and not just to other words and propositions. He sees value in the analysis of the structure of language and a great deal of own his writing is essentially the analysis of the internal consistency of a particular conceptual schema, but he never lets go of the idea that discourse is something someone says *to* someone *about* something. Part of his interest in linguistic philosophy is the need to find a view of language that preserves its referential nature in order to evade the philosophical implications of structuralism.

Explication is based on intuition, which is described in terms of “seeing.” Ricoeur elaborates on this as one of the main theses of Husserl’s project of returning to foundations via phenomenology:

The foundation in principle is of the order of intuition; to found is to see. The [1930 ‘Nachwort’ to the Ideen] thereby confirms the priority, asserted by the sixth Logical Investigation, of intentional fulfillment as opposed to any philosophy of deduction or construction...

The key concept in this respect is that of an *Erfahrungsfeld* [field of experience]. The strangeness of phenomenology lies entirely therein: from the outset, the principle is a 'field' and the first truth an 'experience'. In contrast to all 'speculative constructions', every question of principle is resolved through vision. I just spoke of strangeness: for is it not astonishing that in spite of (and thanks to) the critique of empiricism, experience in the strict empirical sense is surpassed only in an 'experience'? (Hermeneutics 103)

"Intentional fulfillment" is the how Husserl attempts to conceptualize the way meaning is both "in" the world and "constituted" by the ego. (To my mind this conjures up again a kind of spatial metaphor in which something creates a space which is filled by something else and that the two are locked together – almost as though the world is plugged into the ego. I do not know whether other people's minds are as dependent on spatial metaphors for abstract concepts as mine is. I often suspect that mathematicians are able to think in non-spatial ways I cannot grasp.) Ricoeur ultimately thinks that Husserl foundered at this point, falling into his own form of idealism.

Husserl perceived the coincidence of intuition and explication, although he failed to draw all its consequences. All phenomenology is an explication of evidence and an evidence of explication. An evidence which is explicated, an explication which unfolds evidence: such is the phenomenological experience. It is in this sense that phenomenology can be realized only as hermeneutics. (Hermeneutics 128)

In order to turn phenomenology into hermeneutical phenomenology Ricoeur suggests shifting the focus from the subject to the world and the key to this shift is the paradigm of a “text.” One way Ricoeur approaches this is through a review of the evolution of the idea of hermeneutics and the reaction against historicism.

To explain a text was essentially to consider it as the expression of certain socio-cultural needs and as a response to certain perplexities localized in space and time. In contrast to this trend, which was subsequently called ‘historicism’, an alternative tendency arose, stemming from Frege and from the Husserl of the Logical Investigations. According to these thinkers, meaning (they were interested in the meaning of a proposition rather than that of a text) is not an idea which someone has in mind; it is not a mental content but an ideal object which can be identified and reidentified, by different individuals in different periods, as being one and the same object. By ideality, they understood that the meaning of a proposition is neither a physical nor a mental reality. (Hermeneutics 184)

He sees a parallel to this logical theory in the emergence of New Criticism in the mid-20th century, and he sees that “the recognition of the specificity of the literary object” and the “objectification of meaning” in the text can provide the basis for a new understanding of a dialectic of explanation and understanding. (Hermeneutics 185) He elaborates in detail how a text can open up a world to the reader and how the “appropriation” of this world is not simply an empathetic understanding of what the writer’s intentions were in creating the text.

Hermeneutics can be defined no longer as an inquiry into the psychological intentions which are hidden beneath the text, but rather as the explication of the being-in-the-world displayed by the text. What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities....

What is the consequence for Husserlian idealism of the hermeneutical focus on the matter of the text? Essentially this: the phenomenology which arose with the discovery of the universal character of intentionality has not remained faithful to its own discovery, namely that the meaning of consciousness lies outside of itself. The idealist theory of the constitution of meaning in consciousness has thus culminated in the hypostasis of subjectivity. The price of this hypostasis is indicated by the above-mentioned difficulties in the 'parallelism' between phenomenology and psychology. Such difficulties attest that phenomenology is always in danger of reducing itself to a transcendental subjectivism. The radical way of putting an end to this constantly recurring confusion is to shift the axis of interpretation from the problem of subjectivity to that of the world. That is what the theory of the text attempts to do, by subordinating the question of the author's intention to that of the matter of the text. (Hermeneutics 112)

In all honesty I have to say that Ricoeur's focus on the text strikes me as a neat trick in his attempt to solve the problem of "transcendental solipsism" with which he felt Husserl saddled phenomenology. Since I instinctively recoil from any conceptual system

which has painted itself into the corner of having to explain the existence of others, I do not share Ricoeur's enthusiasm for the detour through linguistic philosophy to reach a point where he can say something interesting about the way in which metaphors create meaning. As I indicated earlier the payoff of his theory of interpretation is a description of the existential dimensions of an encounter with art which should to my mind just be assumed as a starting point for any exploration of the enigmas of existence. No doubt I do Ricoeur a disservice in skipping ahead to the good parts, but I am going to save for a rainy day the pleasures of Austin or Searle as well as Ricoeur's review of the classical tradition of rhetoric based on Aristotle. For a refreshing English no-nonsense approach to language, I prefer Owen Barfield, whom Ricoeur places in a romantic tradition of literary criticism stemming from Schelling, Coleridge and Bergson.

Before I jump to the consideration of metaphor and philosophical discourse which is the culmination of Ricoeur's study of metaphor, there are a few other odd points which I would like to touch on briefly. One is a vague feeling that Ricoeur's writing is often motivated by a desire to put a "positive spin" on existentialism and to resist any modern philosophical or literary attempt to devalue subjectivity or the self. As much as he attempts to stand on the shoulders of English philosophers of ordinary language, his attitude towards hermeneutics seems to me to be much more aligned with Romanticism and the focus on the cultivation of individuality and selfhood. It seems to me that he uses the notion of the "objectification of meaning" in texts and non-verbal cultural artifacts as a means of rescuing the self from the attacks of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, structuralism or post-modernism. The ultimate goal is still self-understanding in all its Socratic glory and depth even if it cannot be obtained by pure intuitive meditation.

In contrast to the tradition of the *cogito* and the pretension of the subject to know itself by immediate intuition, it must be said that we understand ourselves only by the long detour of the signs of humanity deposited in cultural works. What would we know of love and hate, of moral feelings and, in general, of all that we call the *self*, if these had not been brought to language and articulated by literature? (Hermeneutics 143)

In short, in hermeneutical reflection – or in reflective hermeneutics – the constitution of the *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of *meaning*. (Hermeneutics 159)

It seems clear to me that Ricoeur's religious faith is what made him sympathetic to the strain of existentialism derived from Kierkegaard, and he has little use for any philosophy which disregards or devalues the element of choice in its understanding of life. He sees in phenomenology a way to avoid the excesses of existentialism, which can be seen to lead beyond relativism to the completely arbitrary and amoral exercise of choice.

The Idea of "sense" is the restraining discipline of Husserlian phenomenology. This is why his intentional analysis of "sense" is not an existential analysis of the "project." The "wonder," for Husserl, is precisely the fact that through the flowing and potential there can be a "sense" at all. (Husserl: An Analysis 99)

Phenomenology preserves meaning in the world and can be made to make that meaning universally available through its combination with hermeneutics. It may also allow room for the discovery of something worthy of the name "sacred."

One example of Ricoeur's ability to put a positive spin on existentialism is his comment on finitude as "belonging."

The ideal of scientificity, construed by Husserlian idealism as ultimate justification, encounters its fundamental limit in the ontological condition of understanding.

This ontological condition can be expressed as finitude. This is not, however, the concept that I shall regard as primary; for it designates, in negative terms, an entirely positive condition which would be better expressed by the concept of belonging. The latter directly designates the unsurpassable condition of any enterprise of justification and foundation, namely that it is always preceded by a relation which supports it.

(Hermeneutics 105)

Just as he had wanted to disentangle finitude from the definition of guilt, he wants to recast the inevitable limitations of any individual's perspective in understanding anything as a "belonging" which makes the individual who he is, supports his efforts at understanding, even makes it possible for him to understand. What Gadamer refers to as "prejudice" (in a way that surely becomes even more problematic in translation), Ricoeur paints as an involvement in the supporting nexus which enables each person to be human.

The second tangential point that I want to touch on before examining Ricoeur's concept of metaphor is the concept of rhetoric and the way in which my appreciation of what it really connotes was altered by reading Gadamer. Ricoeur devotes a fair amount of effort to a review and analysis of Aristotle's concept of rhetoric and the classical tradition which emanated from it, but nothing he says had the impact on me that

Gadamer's allusions to it did. Previously I had what might be considered a naïve or popular conception of rhetoric as the form of discourse which is concerned purely with persuasion and which had all the pejorative connotations of political demagoguery and advertising technique. Rhetoric implied an appeal to the "baser" aspects of human nature as compared to rational argument which appealed to the higher or nobler faculties. It was not a particularly live issue for me – until I spent some time reading Richard Rorty.

Rorty's pragmatism suggests that all debate or even all human discourse is "rhetorical." The idea that all moral and political debate is ultimately just a shouting match or a conflict of propaganda campaigns left me uncomfortable. I looked for ways in which Rorty's own "arguments" betrayed their own propagandistic underpinnings, and I struggled to find something other than an *ad hominem* refutation of what he was saying. One of the things that encouraged me to look at philosophical hermeneutics was the sense that Rorty's attempts to incorporate Gadamer's ideas into his own scheme were really just a misreading of Gadamer in an attempt to co-opt him.

At some point in reading Truth and Method it dawned on me that rhetoric could be understood as an appeal to the "whole person" rather than just his cerebral cortex. Gadamer's description of the process of appropriation that occurs in the encounter with art made me realize that one's passionate nature is not "base" and that the "rhetorical" devices used by poetry and fiction (as well as their correlates in the non-verbal arts) are the means of communicating in depth. What Ricoeur is so fond of calling the possibilities for being-in-the-world are "displayed" by texts through the use of rhetoric. In other words language and communication involve much more than words or "units of meaning" combined in some form of pseudo-algebra.

As an example of why I find the issue of metaphors in philosophical discourse so urgent, I would like to cite a typical comment from Ricoeur.

That consciousness is outside of itself, that it is *towards meaning* before meaning is for it and, above all, before consciousness is *for itself*: is this not what the central discovery of phenomenology implies? (Hermeneutics 115)

Phenomenologists are very fond of asking how it is that something can be possible. For instance, how is it possible for consciousness or anything else to be “outside of itself?” This is clearly a spatial metaphor used to convey the most abstract and non-spatial of ideas. I would even venture to suggest that the notion of “intention” or “intentionality” so crucial to phenomenology is ultimately a spatial metaphor. Reading Heidegger may have made me feel that I had lost my grasp of the meaning of even the simplest of words, but reading Norman O. Brown convinced me that all language begins as metaphor and that all hell breaks loose when metaphors are taken literally. Any philosophy of language must deal with the function of metaphor, and I was delighted to discover that Ricoeur had devoted a whole book to The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language.

The key to Ricoeur’s analysis of metaphor is his idea of “modes of discourse.” The goal of his analysis is to demonstrate that poetic discourse and speculative discourse (i.e. philosophy) are separate even though there may be a place where they “intersect.”

...[M]etaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality. By linking fiction and redescription in this way, we restore the full depth of meaning to

Aristotle's discovery in the *Poetics*, which was that the *poiêsis* of language arises out of the connection between *muthos* and *mimêsis*.

From this conjunction of fiction and redescription I conclude that the 'place' of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the name, nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*. The metaphorical 'is' at once signifies both 'is not' and 'is like.' If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally 'tensive' sense of the word 'truth.'

The incursion into the problematic of reality and truth demands that the philosophy implicit in the theory of metaphorical reference be elucidated. The eighth and last Study, "Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse,' is a response to that demand.

This Study is essentially a plea for the plurality of modes of discourse and for the independence of philosophical discourse in relation to the propositions of sense and reference of poetic discourse. No philosophy proceeds directly from poetry: this is shown through what appears to be the most difficult case, that of Aristotelian and medieval analogy. Nor does any philosophy proceed indirectly from poetry, even under the cover of the 'dead' metaphor in which the collusion between meta-physical and meta-phorical, denounced by Heidegger, could take place. The discourse that attempts to *recover* the ontology implicit in the metaphorical statement is a different discourse. (Metaphor 7)

Underlying his theory of metaphor is what he describes as the question “concerning the collective unity of modes of discourse as modes of use, such as poetic discourse, scientific discourse, religious discourse, speculative discourse, and so on.” (Metaphor 257f) A mode of discourse is defined by its “semantic aim.” What Ricoeur means by “discourse” is based on a distinction between semiotics and semantics and is rooted in his concern to preserve the referential nature of language.

The third implication of the distinction between semiotics and semantics that concerns us here is the following: grounded on the predicative act, what is intended by discourse [*l'intenté*] points to an extra-linguistic reality which is its referent. Whereas the sign points back only to other signs immanent within a system, discourse is about things. Sign differs from sign, discourse refers to the world. Difference is semiotic, reference is semantic... (Metaphor 216)

Discourse is a “speech act” which is “interlocutionary,” i.e. it is addressed to someone. It is a “predicative act” in which the smallest linguistic unit is the sentence. Discourse occurs when words are combined into sentences. A text is “a complex entity of discourse whose characteristics do not reduce to those of the unit of discourse, or the sentence.” (Metaphor 219) This kind of seemingly pedantic classification leaves me cold until I get to the final stage in the painstaking construction of the conceptual edifice erected on top of these distinctions. When Ricoeur reaches the point where he criticizes Heidegger and Derrida based on his idea of the separation of speculative and poetic modes of discourse, I find myself stopping to wonder whether he has really moved

beyond them or has simply put up enough of a smoke screen to satisfy his own needs and his own considerable intellectual finesse.

Somehow modes of discourse create semantic “spaces” which are separate but which intersect. Interpretation turns out to be “a mode of discourse that functions at the intersection of two domains, metaphorical and speculative.” (Metaphor 303)

Taking the notion of discursiveness as such as our theme, I should like to plead for a relative pluralism of forms and levels of discourse. Without going as far as the notion, suggested by Wittgenstein, of a radical heterogeneity of language games – which would exclude the very cases of interaction with which the closing part of this Study will be concerned – it is important to recognize in principle the *discontinuity* that assures the autonomy of speculative discourse. (Metaphor 257f)

He wants separate “domains” of discourse but he wants them to be able to “interact.” Otherwise all would be lost, or at least the validity of speculative discourse (aka philosophy) would be lost. In his commentary on Heidegger’s later philosophy Ricoeur is concerned whether “speculative discourse threatens to merge with poetry.” (Metaphor 310) He finds a way to accept Heidegger only up to a point.

It will be objected that this way of reading Heidegger takes into account neither his wish to break with metaphysics, nor the ‘leap’ outside its circle that poeticizing thought demands.

It is here, I admit that I regret the position assumed by Heidegger. (Metaphor 311)

Ricoeur pinpoints what he sees as “vengefulness” and a “will to power” in Heidegger’s later writings and waxes positively lyrical in his puncturing of Heidegger’s conception of his own thought. Ricoeur concludes by rejecting any claim by Heidegger to have put “an end to the history of being” (Metaphor 312) and describes the ambiguity of Heidegger in a telling way.

The price of this claim is the inescapable ambiguity of the later works, divided between the logic of their continuity with speculative thought and the logic of their break with metaphysics. The first logic places *Ereignis* and the *es gibt* in the lineage of a mode of thought that unceasingly rectifies itself, unceasingly searches for a *saying* more appropriate than ordinary *speech*, a *saying* that would be a *showing* and a *letting-be*; a mode of thought, finally, which could never leave discourse behind. The second logic leads to a series of erasures and repeals that cast thought into the void, reducing it to hermeticism and affectedness, carrying etymological games back to the mystification of ‘primitive sense.’ Above all, this second logic invites us to sever discourse from its propositional character, forgetting Hegel’s lesson in regard to speculative propositions, which do not cease to be propositions. This philosophy gives new life in this way to the seductions of the unarticulated and the unexpressed, even to a kind of despair of language resembling that found in the next to last proposition in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus. (Metaphor 313)

I am not a student of Wittgenstein so I looked up the last propositions of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus:

6.54

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

7.1

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

I do not necessarily hear “despair of language” in this conclusion. I am much more inclined to hear a Western equivalent of “If you can only rid ourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything.” (The Chun Chow Record of the Zen Master Huang Po §6).

Those who hasten towards it dare not enter, fearing to hurtle down through the void with nothing to cling to or to stay their fall. So they look to the brink and retreat. This refers to all those who seek such a goal through cognition. (The Chun Chow Record of the Zen Master Huang Po §4).

I shall not press this too hard, but it does seem to me that Wittgenstein’s ladder metaphor can be taken as an indication of both the power and the limits of language. The ladder serves a function up to a point. There is the possibility that certain desirable forms of awareness can be achieved by pushing language to its limits and letting go. Ricoeur of course has another mode of discourse in his back pocket: religious discourse,

which is presumably as distinct from speculative or poetic discourse as it is from scientific discourse; but the real issue here is his desire to defend the validity of systematic conceptual thought against any claim that it is just an empty language game based on dead metaphors or naïve notions of the nature of language.

It is not at all clear to me how discourse can be “severed” from its propositional character. I admit that attempts to read some of Heidegger’s later philosophy, especially his Contributions to Philosophy, leave me wondering why it is necessary for him to invent his own language; but it had never occurred to me that his “discourse” no longer consisted of “propositions.” I assume Ricoeur is using the term “discourse” here to mean “speculative discourse,” and that this is another way of saying the Heidegger’s discourse seems to be “poetic” rather than “speculative.” (Even poetic discourse is propositional in Ricoeur’s scheme so far as I can tell.) The description of “a series of erasures and repeals that cast thought into the void” reminds me more of the experience of reading Derrida than Heidegger. (Ricoeur has at this point already rejected the notion of metaphor put forward by Derrida in “White Mythology.”) I am inclined to feel his phrase is an accurate description of the power (and value) of Derrida’s writings. Whether one values this experience is of course a matter of whether one can believe that thought needs to be cast into the void. I sense that Ricoeur fears the consequences of casting thought into the void. Rather than feeling the exhilaration that comes with sensing the creative power of thought completely liberated from the constraints of “prejudice,” I suspect he senses the moral vertigo that can accompany this state. Perhaps with good reason he fears a type of behavior associated with “the seductions of the unarticulated and the unexpressed.” He almost seems to be suggesting that this aspect of the “poetical

thought” of Heidegger is comparable in some way to the Fascist bombast about blood, soil and honor. Plenty of others have discounted Heidegger’s “vatic utterances” and looked for their connection to his Nazi sympathies. Ricoeur, to his credit, sees great value even in Heidegger’s poeticized thinking, but he sees a dangerous tendency in it, perhaps because it can be too easily misunderstood or lends itself to inappropriate interpretation.

At the very least Ricoeur seems in some strange way to be expressing a profound distrust of the power of poetry. If philosophy which lapses into poetical discourse “gives new life in this way to the seductions of the unarticulated and the unexpressed,” what does this say about poetry? Is poetry harmless because it is restricted to the concrete or incidental and does not spawn entire systems of belief? More importantly what exactly happens when one is seduced by the unarticulated? Obviously Ricoeur believes that speculative thought leads to ever-increasing self-awareness and clarity in a way that poetry may not. There is an implicit suggestion in his discussion of the need for maintaining a discontinuity between speculative and poetic discourse that poetic discourse must be explicated by speculative thought in order for its full value to be realized. Speculative thought attempts “to *recover* the ontology” implicit in poetic discourse. The question may be what is gained by recovering that ontology. It almost seems as though poetry functions to remind us of the need to think systematically rather than that the dead-ends of speculative thought point to the need for poetry. (Ricoeur is after all a philosopher rather than a poet. The training of his mind in the French educational system jumps out at me when I come across a paragraph in his analysis of Freud beginning with “The corollaries of this second theorem are as follows.” (Freud

379)) The relationship between speculative discourse and metaphorical discourse becomes clearer when he describes the task of interpretation. The essential feature of metaphor is split meaning. It refers to more than one thing simultaneously.

Interpretation is the work of concepts. It cannot help but be a work of elucidation, in the Husserlian sense of the word, and consequently a struggle for univocity. Whereas the metaphorical utterance leaves the second sense in suspension, while its reference continues to have no direct presentation, interpretation is necessarily a rationalization that at its limit eliminates the experience that comes to language through the metaphorical process. Doubtless it is only in reductive interpretation that rationalization culminates in clearing away the symbolic base....

It must be granted that these reductive interpretations are consistent with the semantic aim characteristic of the speculative order. Every interpretation aims at relocating the semantic outline sketched by metaphorical utterance inside an available horizon of understanding that can be mastered conceptually. But the destruction of the metaphorical by the conceptual in rationalizing interpretations is not the only outcome of the interaction between different modalities of discourse. One can imagine a hermeneutic style where interpretation would conform both to the notion of concept and to that of the constitutive intention of the experience seeking to be expressed in the metaphorical mode.

Interpretation is then a mode of discourse that functions at the intersection of two domains, metaphorical and speculative. It is a

composite discourse, therefore, and as such cannot but feel the opposite pull of two rival demands. On the one side, interpretation seeks the clarity of the concept; on the other, it hopes to preserve the dynamism of meaning that the concept holds and pins down. (Metaphor 303)

I am tempted to seize on the phrase “can be mastered conceptually” as the key to the satisfactions of speculative discourse and to confess that I fear delusions of mastery perhaps even more than I do the seduction of the unarticulated. At least Ricoeur recognizes that rationalization “at its limit eliminates the experience that comes to language through the metaphorical process.” I am inclined to think that this is the point at which the ladder should be cast aside rather than the point at which one should develop a dialectical scheme involving tension between polarities as a means of having one’s cake and eating it too.

But does this discontinuity of semantic modalities imply that the conceptual order abolishes or destroys the metaphorical order. My inclination is to see the universe of discourse as a universe kept in motion by an interplay of attractions and repulsions that ceaselessly promote the interaction and intersection of domains whose organizing nuclei are off-centered in relation to one another; and still this interplay never comes to rest in an absolute knowledge that would subsume the tensions.

(Metaphor 302)

Something in my mind does not find Ricoeur’s spatial metaphors of “domains of discourse” all that satisfying. I am surely being unfair to him for my own reasons, but the more he seems to be engaging in a systematic conceptual organization on a global level

rather than elucidation at the immediate and concrete level, the less nourishment I derive from him. What really is the value in having an elaborate conceptual scheme in which all the parts are carefully interrelated if the process has eliminated the experience that came to language in the metaphorical process? One has taken an experience and substituted a mental construct that no longer evokes the experience. Phenomenological elucidation seems to me to be a very different process. It is more like restoring the experience to the weakened or dead metaphor.

Ricoeur turns to Kant and the power of creative imagination to drive thought beyond the limits of its concepts for a way of explaining this intersection of speculative and metaphorical discourse.

This is the situation Kant considers in the celebrated paragraph 49 of the Critique of the Faculty of Judgment. He calls ‘the spirit (*Geist*) in an aesthetic sense, ‘the life-giving principle of mind (*Gemut*).’ The metaphor of life comes to the fore at this point in the argument because the *game* in which imagination and understanding engage assumes a task assigned by the Ideas of reason to which no concept is equal. But where the understanding fails, imagination still has the power of ‘presenting’ (*Darstellung*) the Idea. It is this ‘presentation’ of the Idea by the imagination that forces conceptual thought to *think more*. Creative imagination is nothing other than this demand put to conceptual thought. This sheds light on our own notion of living metaphor. Metaphor is living not only to the extent that it vivifies a constituted language. Metaphor is living by virtue of the fact that it introduces the spark of imagination into a

‘thinking more’ at the conceptual level. This struggle to ‘think more,’ guided by the ‘vivifying principle,’ is the ‘soul’ of interpretation.

(Metaphor 303)

I balked at the suggestion that interpretation is the work of concepts. In my experience the kind of interpretation that seems the most illuminating often involves explicit metaphors as well as concepts. The best commentaries on a good poem, novel, play, painting or piece of music surely involve “metaphorical discourse.” The fact that I particularly value Norman Brown’s “interpretation” of Freud is an indication of my preference for metaphor over concept. Brown would, I assume, be subject to the same critique from Ricoeur as Derrida even though his style is very different:

No things, but an iridescence in the void. Meaning is a continuous creation, out of nothing, and returning to nothingness. If it is not evanescent it is not alive. Everything is symbolic, is transitory, is unstable. The consolidation of meaning makes idols; established meanings have turned to stone. (Love’s Body 247)

The dead letter. The dead metaphor. It is only dead metaphors that are taken literally, that take us in (the black magic). Language is always an old testament, to be made new; rules, to be broken; dead metaphor, to be made alive; literal meaning, to be made symbolical; oldness of letter to be made new by the spirit. The creator spirit stands in the grave, in the midden heap, the dunghill of culture (as in Finnegans Wake); breaking the seal of familiarity; breaking the cake of custom; rolling the stone from the sepulcher; giving the dead metaphor new life. (Love’s Body 207)

Ricoeur has his own theory of the dead metaphor. He views the death of a metaphor as part of the natural process of the growth of a language.

By a dead metaphor, I mean such expressions as “the foot of a chair” or “a mountain.” Live metaphors are metaphors of invention within which the response to the discordance in the sentence is a new extension of meaning, although it is certainly true that such inventive metaphors tend to become dead metaphors through repetition. In such cases, the extended meaning becomes part of our lexicon and contributes to the polysemy of the words in question whose everyday meanings are thereby augmented. There are no live metaphors in a dictionary. (Interpretation 52)

A metaphor like “the foot of a chair” hardly does justice to the issue. Ricoeur is well aware that philosophical concepts are ultimately based on metaphors. He cites Hegel’s Aesthetics as the source behind Derrida’s reflections on metaphor in philosophy, but he parts company with Derrida in the interpretation of this idea.

[Hegel’s Aesthetics] begins by stating that philosophical concepts are initially sensible meanings transposed to the spiritual order; and it adds that the establishment of a properly abstract meaning is bound up with the effacement of what is metaphorical in the initial meaning and thus with the disappearance of this meaning, which, once proper, has become improper. Now, Hegel employs the term *Aufhebung* to describe this ‘raising’ of sensible and worn away meaning into the spiritual meaning, which has become the proper expression. Where Hegel saw an innovation of meaning, Derrida sees only the wearing away of metaphor and a drift

towards idealization resulting from the dissimulation of this metaphorical origin. (Metaphor 286)

Ricoeur sees this as one aspect of Derrida's overall project of deconstruction.

Indeed the movement of elevation and absorption or 'raising' by which worn-out metaphor is concealed in the figure of the concept is not just some fact of language. It is the pre-eminent philosophical gesture that, in a 'metaphysical' orientation, sights the invisible beyond the visible, the intelligible beyond the sensible, after having first separated them.

(Metaphor 287)

Ricoeur counters Derrida with the charge that Derrida's ideas of the power of dead metaphors in philosophical discourse is based on a misconception of the nature of words. It involves the implication that words have a "proper" meaning in the sense of "primitive, natural, original meaning in themselves" (Metaphor 290) rather than simply in the sense of usual or customary meaning. As a result metaphors which have been adopted as part of the lexicon are not being used improperly or figuratively in a way that conceals their "proper" meaning. I am sure that many of the distinctions Ricoeur makes in his argument with Derrida are lost on me, but what is clear is his conclusion:

Therefore, speaking of metaphor in philosophy, we must draw a line boldly between the relatively banal case of an 'extended' use of the words of ordinary language in response to a deficiency in naming and the case – to my mind singularly more interesting – where philosophical discourse deliberately has recourse to living metaphor in order to draw out new

meanings from some semantic impertinence and to bring to light new aspects of reality by means of semantic innovation. (Metaphor 291)

Working backwards from his subsequent concerns about Heidegger's poeticization of speculative discourse to this discussion of the role of metaphors in philosophy, it is refreshing (although a little surprising) to see that metaphorical discourse has an important place inside philosophical discourse. Metaphors enable discourse to "draw out new meanings" and to "bring to light new aspects of reality." Ricoeur nicely interprets the strained etymology in Heidegger as well as Plato and Hegel as an example of the creation of meaning by means of what is essentially metaphorical discourse.

Ricoeur insists, however, that there is a difference between a philosopher's metaphor and a poet's metaphor and cites an essay by Heidegger as an example of the way in which poetic discourse and philosophical discourse can be juxtaposed without confusing them. [Ironically the title of this essay, Auf der Erfahrung des Denkens, was translated into English as The Thinker as Poet rather than the more literal From the Experience of Thinking. The translator describes it as a "thinking poem." (Poetry, Language, Thought xii)] Ricoeur reads Heidegger as confirming that "thinking is not poeticizing," but he is sufficiently aware that his reading may be eccentric to embark on the critique mentioned earlier.

At the end of his study of Freud Ricoeur outlines a way in which psychoanalytic theory can coexist with religious faith. One thing which makes this viable is the recognition of a "mytho-poetic function" of language:

Through these questions the Freudian hermeneutics can be related to another hermeneutics, a hermeneutics that deals with the mytho-poetic

function and regards myths not as fables, i.e. stories that are false, unreal, illusory, but rather as the symbolic exploration of our relationship to beings and to Being. What carries this mytho-poetic function is another power of language, a power that is no longer the demand of desire, demand for protection, demand for providence, but a call in which I leave off all demands and listen. (Freud 551)

Because Ricoeur has equated philosophy with speculative discourse, which he conceives in terms of structures of concepts, philosophy does not have room for what Heidegger calls “thinking.” Speculative discourse is based on something very similar to the “model” at the base of scientific discourse. It is a construction of concepts in which relationships may be “dialectical” rather than deductive, but which functions in a way parallel to scientific theory. It does not, of course, spawn empirically verifiable hypotheses, but it is subject to rigorous demands for internal consistency and logic of some sort. One way in which the meaning of concepts and relationships is clarified is by comparing two different conceptual frameworks. Ricoeur, for instance, resorts to a review of Hegel’s The Phenomenology of Spirit in order to clarify Freud’s theory of sublimation and to reveal how it contains within it the seeds of a teleology. Ricoeur’s command of concepts and of the history of philosophy is impressive to say the least, and the fact that I find some of his conceptual schemes unsatisfying may be simply an indication that I cannot keep up with him. Nonetheless I feel there is a fascination with conceptual pyrotechnics which distracts from more basic issues. Ricoeur is well aware that concepts require metaphorical thinking to breathe life into them. He allows for this in several ways, but his tendency to feel that speculative discourses fulfill the promise of

metaphorical discourse seems to be based on a concept of poetic discourse as perhaps charming, playful, delightful, exploratory but frustratingly equivocal and perhaps even irresponsible. The poet is free to play with meanings, to conjure up complex structures of meaning which cannot and need not be reduced to clear ideas. Poetry is free from the demands of Reason, but ultimately the demands of Reason must be met or at least responded to as well as humanly possible. His idea of the elucidation of poetic thinking seems to be the complete opposite of the view Heidegger expressed in one of his essays on Hölderlin:

Whatever an elucidation can or cannot do, this is always true of it: in order that what has been composed purely into a poem may stand forth a little clearer, the elucidating speech must each time shatter itself and what it had attempted to do. For the sake of preserving what has been put into the poem, the elucidation of the poem must strive to make itself superfluous. The last, but also the most difficult step of every interpretation, consists in its disappearing, along with its elucidation, before the pure presence of the poem. The poem, which then stands in its own right, itself throws light on the other poems. This explains why in rereading the poems we think that we had understood them in this way all along. It is well for us to believe this. (Elucidations 22)

Ricoeur's thought is not all "speculative discourse" however, and his idea of access to the sacred via symbols in culture and language seems to put him into a realm occupied by Heidegger and Norman Brown. His idea of the "Wholly Other which draws near" and of a power of language which "listens" rather than being an expression of

human desire both seem very similar to themes in Heidegger. His notion of the way in which symbols inevitably turn into idols seems to parallel much of what Brown says as well as what Heidegger says about the need for hermeneutical phenomenology.

The sacred can be the meaningful bearer of what we described as the structure of horizon peculiar to the Wholly Other which draws near, or it can be the idolatrous reality to which we assign a separate place in our culture, thus giving rise to religious alienation. The ambiguity is inevitable; for if the Wholly Other draws near, it does so in the signs of the sacred; but symbols soon turn into idols. Thus the cultural object of our human sphere is split in two, half becoming profane, the other half sacred... (Freud 531)

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud, however, is his suggestive commentary on the role of transference in psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is the work of becoming conscious, and this work consists of dialogue in the context of an existential engagement with another. The analyst's interpretation of the material presented by the patient is powerless without the involvement that constitutes the phenomenon of transference. Thinking about the meaning of one's behavior, even understanding one's behavior by itself does not have the same effect as reliving and working through a formative relationship to an authoritative other. The relationship with the analyst becomes more than a model or a paradigm of the formative relationships; it is in some very real sense a repetition of the experience. This has all kinds of implications for an understanding of the self or the ego and the process by which it acquires consciousness and is in some way liberated by the acquisition of this new consciousness.

The formation of the ego and the process by which the instincts of the id become conscious in the ego in psychoanalytic theory are tied to the idea of parricide. When one realizes that the “parent” against whom one must rebel in order to become an autonomous individual is not just one’s biological parent but the entire culture which is imbibed via the language and rituals one learns, it becomes clear that hermeneutical understanding is much more than a scholarly technique for explicating or appreciating works of literature. The appropriation of meaning in culture is the acquisition of one’s true humanity. Ricoeur as a philosopher seems to follow Husserl’s lead in his idea of the infinite demands of Reason and the task of becoming human. Whether as a theologian he views the interpretation of a particular class of symbols as fundamentally different from the interpretation of the rest of culture is unclear to me. Religious symbols provide access to something different from other cultural works.

I am not unaware of the fragility of this relationship, *in a philosophy of reflection*, between the figures of spirit and the symbols of the sacred.

From the viewpoint of the philosophy of reflection, which is a philosophy of immanence, the symbols of the sacred appear only as cultural factors mixed in with the figures of spirit. But at the same time these symbols designate the impact on culture of a reality that the movement of culture does not contain; they speak of the Wholly Other, of the Wholly Other than all of history; in this way they exercise an attraction and a call upon the entire series of the figures of culture. This is the sense in which I spoke of a prophecy or an eschatology. (Freud 529)

The interpretation of symbols of the sacred is a hermeneutical process involving language, but perhaps it is a separate form of discourse with its own semantic aims. Obviously I am betraying here my fear that Ricoeur has built unnecessary walls in the conceptual structure by which he gives witness to his own experience.

The question remains whether anything can be said about the way in which language creates or reveals meaning by metaphorical discourse and whether “univocal” discourse can ever awaken one from the dream state into which we are born.