

**PAUL RICOEUR:  
THE “GRAFT”, THE “RESIDUE” AND “MEMORY”  
TWO CONVERSATIONS WITH TAMÁS TÓTH\***

*Editorial Note*

*This text contains two interviews made by Tamás Tóth with the famous French philosopher in June 1991 and June 1996. In spite of the time period between them, the talks are closely related in their content and spirit. The texts have been published so far only in Hungarian in Magyar Filozófiai Szemle (1997/5-6), edited by the Philosophy Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Editors thank Tamás Tóth for his understanding and giving his permission to publish these texts in Philobiblon and also Professor Paul Ricoeur for authorizing the English translation.\*\**

**First conversation: Paris, 1991**

**Tamás Tóth:** Dear Professor, the lectures you held last year in Budapest and the long discussions thereafter echoed greatly among Hungarian philosophers. And I am not thinking only of the colleagues who have already known your work and have been keeping an eye on your spiritual career for years. Together with others I am trying to make your philosophical work known thoroughly by as many people in Hungary as possible. I am doing this by emphasizing what could be called the philosophy of the subject, i.e. philosophy in the sense of the Aristotelian praxis. Therefore in our interview today I would like to lay the stress on

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history and politics, ethos and the subject, important motives in your theoretical work. I am of course aware that our knowledge of ourselves as well as of history, society, culture - and you are an outstanding representative of French culture which I so much admire - is always subject to manifold mediation by signs, symbols and texts. Thorough text-analysis, the careful reading and interpretation of written texts cannot be replaced by anything, including interviews, let alone the transcription of live conversations between human subjects. The main task in studying Ricoeur works is the thorough treatment of the carefully written text of books, articles, studies. However, I think that direct relationships, personal encounters and the spoken word can also throw light on certain things...

**Paul Ricoeur:** The usage of every language is justified... each of them has its own rules and limits, but its efficiency as well, and face to face encounters and personal conversation is one of these linguistic relations...

**Tamás Tóth:** It is much needed, I think, and it is not accidental that in some of your writings you have considered conversation and, in a broader sense, dialogue, mediation and communication highly important, not only between individuals but also between different cultures.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes indeed...

**Tamás Tóth:** Let me begin with the first question. What is impressive on the first sight, perhaps mainly for the Central-European reader, is the great precision of your style, the accuracy of your argument, the unusual strictness and consistency of your philosophical thought. At the same time, you are a great life-work creator: Your articles, studies and books are closely connected and built on one another. We could say that the train of thought of each work is determined by a precise question and the work is a search for a similarly precise answer or chain of answers; however, in each case there is a "residue", some sort of "rest" or "deposit"...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I am glad that you are stressing this because I also think that all my books are "answers to a question", more precisely, I am looking for answers to unanswered questions from

the previous work. Indeed it seems that there remains some sort of deposit in each book which can later come to the surface...

**Tamás Tóth:** As a matter of fact, in each of your books we can find some residue, and the next book starts from this only to reach another remainder, another unanswered question... I will ask you therefore to explain what was the “question”, the “answer” and the “residue” in case of three books which were very important but were not quoted when this method was presented. I think of *Histoire et Vérité*, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and *Soi-même comme un autre*.

**Paul Ricoeur:** The question is interesting for me indeed because the three works belong to completely different categories. *Histoire et Vérité* is a collection of articles, so it cannot be considered a scientific work in the sense of *La métaphore vive*, let's say, or *Temps et récit* or *Soi-même comme un autre*. I will soon come back to this latter. However, I would like to make it clear at this point that there are two levels of philosophical discourse in my work. The first level, even if not popular, is not really scientific: it is represented by three volumes of articles, each of them covering a decade, broadly speaking. Thus, *Histoire et Vérité* covers the 1940s-1950s, *Le Conflit des interprétations* the period between 1950-1965 and partly the 1970s, whereas *Du Texte à l'action* the last fifteen years. These were originally published in periodicals, with few notes. We could even call this direct speech addressed to a larger audience. This is one thing. Then there are my so-called technical books, written according to the telling scheme just presented by you so sensitively. This line begins with *Philosophie de la volonté* which leads to *La symbolique du Mal*. The residue of the first was the issue of the Evil which I had not treated in *Philosophie de la volonté*. This was followed by the book about Freud which was a return to the issue of symbolism raised in *La symbolique du Mal*. I treated this issue in the larger context of archaic symbolism and prospective symbolism as I have called it. And thus the study about Freud reveals the archaic side of symbolism. Another unanswered question crops up there, as we have just said: the issue of the linguistic or semantic nature of the symbolism regarding Freud or the Evil, and this will be the topic

of *La métaphore vive*. The semantic working, that is, the meaning of the metaphor is my concern here. The next book is about narration, its title is *Temps et récit* because the unanswered question of *La métaphore vive* was the creating force of imagination (l'imaginaire). The miraculous development of the creativity of imagination can be traced in the plot of every narrative, be it a piece of literature or historical narrative written by the great historians of the past. *La métaphore vive* and *Temps et récit* are therefore twins - otherwise I wrote this in the preface of the latter, too - because one of them analyses the ability of linguistic invention within the poetic, more precisely, lyrical dimension, the other within the narrative dimension. And thus we come to *Soi-même comme un autre*. The question here is: what is the role of the individual in all this? This led me back to my starting point, Husserl's teaching, which is nothing else than the philosophy of the subject. In a word, this is the second group of my books, the group of scientific works which greatly differ from the volumes of articles. Besides these there are the university lectures. I am presently publishing one, but *Ideology and Utopia* is also such a work. It contains my lectures given at Chicago University in English and translated now in French. Of course, it is a bit strange to translate me from English into French, but these are lectures which did not have a French text or version. There are two or three such lecture notes. I have been teaching for some forty years. It's no wonder that I have left behind lots of those notes. I compare them sometimes to dead bodies left along the road. Some of them can be raised, but not all of them are worthy of it. So there are very different levels in my life's work: volumes of articles, serious books and university lectures.

**Tamás Tóth:** Nevertheless there is a significant continuity...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Continuity is the intertwining of the three genres... In any case I consider the volumes of articles very important, because they address a larger audience than scientific works in which I wrestle with myself and the authors who influenced me or questioned my ideas. This is why I give so much place, maybe too much, to spiritual confrontation and debate. My only excuse is that I do not quote everybody. I quote only those books which are

obstacles for me and which I try to change into supports (appui). To transform the obstacle into support - this is my principle. There are works which I never mention. Simply because I can do nothing with them; otherwise I quote many authors. And here I go back to the genre of articles which I like because other authors do not bind me so much: I feel freer.

**Tamás Tóth:** But can we apply the scheme of “question”, “answer” and “residue” to the three works mentioned before, *Histoire et Vérité*, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and *Soi-même comme un autre*? Although I don’t want to mix...

**Paul Ricoeur:** ...the genres...

**Tamás Tóth:** ...or levels of speech, it is my impression that there is an extremely strong inner connection between these three works.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, continuity first in the sense that these works cover three consecutive periods... *Histoire et Vérité* - I wrote these articles immediately after World War II. Many of them were published in the periodical *Esprit* and they cover the period between 1945-1970. And this is simultaneous with some of the great books, from *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* to *La symbolique du Mal* which goes back to the 1960s, as far as I can remember.

**Tamás Tóth:** I don’t know if I am right but I think that in *Histoire et Vérité* you pay great attention first to history and then to the issue of ethics, and, furthermore, to certain economic and political issues which anticipate them in a way...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, you are right... Let us consider these three implications: history, ethics as well as the economic and political problems... When I first touched these problems, I treated them from a quite specific perspective. I was teaching history of philosophy at Strasbourg University and I had to ask myself how does the history of philosophy relate to history in general. This was a delimited, collateral approach. It was also delimited because I was then dealing with the problem of proportion of subjectivity and objectivity. I did not yet know those monumental historiographic works that I could study twenty-five years later when I wrote *Temps et récit*, that is, in the 1980s. Twenty-five years separate the two and in the meantime I became acquainted

with the debate between historians and the epistemology of history. The epistemology of history does not appear in my first research and you are right when you say that those are only sketches and anticipations... But I think that postulating the relationship between ethics and politics was already considerably mature those days. Several studies deal with this... There is one entitled *Le Paradoxe du politique* which I still consider valid and in which I point out the relationship between violence and law in the structure of modern states. I must underline that I wrote this study after the occupation of Budapest. The title of that issue of *Esprit* was The Flames of Budapest. I wrote this article under the influence of the 1956 events and it was published at the beginning of 1957, when I was thinking about the political. This is therefore linked to a particular historical situation and it is really interesting that I am talking to you, a Hungarian colleague today, because this was indeed born in connection with the revolution in Budapest.

You certainly know - and I say this only in parenthesis - about the decisive effect of these events on French intellectuals. Many of them resigned from the Communist Party in 1956, many of those historians whom you have recently met...

**Tamás Tóth:** François Furet for example...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I would rather not mention names because this is about individual lives, all of which are respectable. Nevertheless we can say that this was one of the nodes of my political thought; at the same time Eric Weil and Raymond Aron and other political thinkers also deeply influenced me. Thus my thoughts on politics were more mature than my epistemologic knowledge about history. Finally, let us speak about the third dimension mentioned by you, the economic and social question... I must confess that the background was completely different, because in this issue I was moving within the debates of the French socialist movement. As early as that I had encountered a problem which has surfaced since then in France: the status of social democracy and how can market economy be combined with the intervention of the state as social regulator. Only sketches were born first, which matured after reading the works of great economic thinkers.

**Tamás Tóth:** At the same time I have the feeling that these economic and social meditations lead later on not only to the respective discussions in *Soi-même comme un autre* but also to certain important interviews like the talk with Michel Rocard, moreover, to those deep analyses of Rawls' theory of justice.

**Paul Ricoeur:** I must say that I was much more naive then than later, when I was working on *Temps et récit*. But let us rather talk about *Histoire et Vérité*, my first volume of essays in which I published the meditations of a man who had been a participant in a political movement and university lecturer at the same time. My knowledge became much more complex and well-founded mainly after the years spent in the USA. But I don't even think about denying these articles which are perhaps more naive and anyway, less complex than those written by me today. Nonetheless I have many readers who liked my writings thirty years ago more than those of today because they are less difficult to understand.

**Tamás Tóth:** I am one of those who like the articles of essays in *Histoire et Vérité* very much and not because they are part of your "exoteric" and not "esoteric" philosophy but because you already raised certain important issues in them such as universality and particularity, which were then elaborated on a different level of speech...

**Paul Ricoeur:** With special regard to the theory of justice that you have just mentioned... *Universality and Historicity* was indeed written recently but the issues were evidenced before...

**Tamás Tóth:** Exactly. These issues were raised earlier and the same holds good in respect of certain world history analyses done in *Histoire et Vérité* and I am thinking principally of the article *Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales* which I like very much...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Do you know that this is the text of one of my lectures in Damascus?

**Tamás Tóth:** Really? I did not know that, though I knew that it was included in the book later, in 1961, I think. I also refer to *Le Christianisme et le sens de l'histoire* and some other texts of this part of *Histoire et vérité* called *Vérité dans la connaissance de*

*l'histoire*. I think that your later view on universality which will be developed polemically in the ninth study of *Soi-même comme un autre* can already be found in these three articles. That is, it seems that you not only raised but also answered an important question - the question of the interrelation of universality, particularity and history - moreover, this old answer given decades ago is not only note-worthy in itself but from a certain perspective it also foreshadows the answer which we can give today for the same question which takes the form of the debate of ethical universalism and political contextualism. Of course I do not want to say that the two questions and answers are the same, or that we can avoid the issue of residue here.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Basically, developing is more characteristic of my work than refuting, because there is no complete break with previous issues. I would compare this to the optics of a camera which gradually brings out details more and more clearly from an initial bigger, obscure picture. In this sense I could also compare it to a tree the branches of which are thinner at their ends and broader towards the trunk...

**Tamás Tóth:** We may come back to this later. Now, with your permission, I would like to ask you another question. I have just characterised you as a great life-work builder. At the same time I have gained another strong impression about your life-work. Namely, that your role is that of the great mediator who tries to reconcile, link and comprise certain very different problems and tendencies in a single picture or concept. I think mainly of *Soi-même comme un autre* as a grand attempt to mediate between the extremes of universalism and contextualism. Reflecting about the lessons of the extremely live and chaotic debates triggered by the issues in question, I was fascinated by the polysemy of the words “universal”, “universality” and “universalism”. This is a striking polysemy and it has also occurred to me that if we consider the present state of French spiritual life we can come across the multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary approaches of the issue which now diverge then converge...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Let us dwell on the question of polysemy which is indeed the basic issue of the debate. I think this can be essentially



expressed in three ways regarding the issue of universality. First of all, as you have also underlined, the issue of universality appears in several fields. We have to collect these branches first. Universals in logic have a different meaning than universals in the Middle Ages or in sociology where we speak about geographical or ethnic universality or universality with Kant or Hegel which is conceptual universality, either formal, in Kant's work or dialectic, in Hegel's work. Therefore the concept of universality has several faces and this is a concept which can be inconsistent in many ways exactly because it is polysemic. And we have not yet mentioned the polysemy of the antithetical concept: sometimes we have to account for the plurality of cultures within a growing universality, other times we must reconcile the variety of contents with an abstract, formal, Kantian universality. I met this problem with the American Rawls and the German Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Can we take the completely formal concept of the consensus as a basis - see the case of the Germans - and interpret local and historical conflicts this way, conflictual structures which are far away from each other in space and time? Anyway, we will have three variants. Universalism has three variants, just like contextualism: there is a geographical contextualism, a cultural contextualism and one which is linked to conceptual contents.

**Tamás Tóth:** Contextualism can therefore be national, cultural, ethnic, regional, etc.

**Paul Ricoeur:** These conceptual clarifications are extremely important in understanding some of the Central-European situations. How can we attain some kind of universalism of reflection if cultural roots are so different? No doubt this is one of the greatest problems of the end of this century and of the next century: mediation between the emergence of the universality of a conceptual plan and the various historical roots so that each of them has its founder, tradition, interpretation and even re-interpretation... Traditions are extremely long-lived...

**Tamás Tóth:** Sure... It seems that this polysemy does not only refer to "universalism" but also "contextualism", for example, and it is not accidental that the various viewpoints confronting

universalism are now called “particularism” then “contextualism” or “communitarism”.

**Paul Ricoeur:** ...“communitarism” is however mainly used in the Anglo-Saxon context...

**Tamás Tóth:** This is very important indeed and I think that although the word “communitarism” appears or recurs sometimes in Eastern and Central-European debates, characteristically we have to do with several “pairs of concepts” in the debates in this area: instead of “contextualism” or “communitarism” we often have “nationalism”.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, of course, and I think that in Western-Europe the problem has another basis, too: the pair of concepts “society”-“community”...

**Tamás Tóth:** The *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* pair of concepts, that is...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, and I say that it is this pair of concepts that appears in the American discussions after Rawls, the discussions between McIntyre, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer in the Spheres of Justice, where the pluralism of concepts is contrasted with the procedural unity of righteousness. This is the debate in America while Habermas in Germany insists on the issues of society and community... He speaks about communicational community and the boundless community of communication in the form of *Gemeinschaft*. It is not accidental that *Gemeinschaft*, the community is in the forefront, because society (*Gesellschaft*) is organised in an abstract way, in the form of Law, Constitution, various Codes, etc. Does *Gemeinschaft* always refer to the palpable, flesh and blood elements of the will to coexist, the fact that members of a community belong together and are able to live as a corps social? Otherwise, the image of the body is extremely interesting in all this...

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course, because it goes back to a version of organicism...

**Paul Ricoeur:** These ideas are otherwise very old. Let us think of Agrippa’s fable...

**Tamás Tóth:** One of Brecht's pieces revives Mennenius Agrippa's fable in a witty manner... But what you say strikes me somewhat. If I am right, you connect the concept of communicational community, debate community and arguing community in the work of Habermas and the German authors with the forms of *Gemeinschaft* analysed by Tönnies. On the one hand I think that this is a completely well-founded supposition, on the other hand, at least in my opinion, there is something paradoxical in the bringing together of these two conceptual spheres or in their actual proximity. I think that *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* with Tönnies foreshadows a distinction which is described later on as the pair of concepts of tradition and modernity. While *Gemeinschaft* is theoretically a traditional community, *Gesellschaft* is by definition a modern society. It is paradoxical therefore that *Gemeinschaft* which is a word and a concept which is linked in a sense to the traditional, appears again with Habermas who can be considered a modern, even neomodern thinker in this context, and appears precisely when he tries to redefine the concept of modernity...

**Paul Ricoeur:** You are absolutely right. There was a shift in terminology in the theoretical development from Tönnies to Habermas due to which the contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* disappeared... The issue of "tradition" was my starting point. I think that by using the word "tradition" we mix up two things (I am following Gadamer's line by saying this). We have on the one hand "Tradition", which we acknowledge as power and which had really defied the critical spirit, in other words, what Habermas and the German authors call argumentation and from which the ethics of discussion springs. This is a real antinomy. On the other hand, if we consider tradition as the totality of things told in the past, then it appears as the reserve of thinking, the source of the intellect which we can freely draw upon. "Tradition" in this sense does not work as an "authority" - and it is not accidental if I use the word "source" - because all of us draw on it; nobody starts everything from the beginning. In fact, we are indebted to the thinkers before us, to those who have spoken

before us. In this sense, I use the word “traditionalité” (traditionality) instead of “tradition” or “Tradition”... Or else, I would use the word “tradition” in the plural and speak about the “traditions” (les traditions) because there are many traditions. The *Aufklärung* itself is a tradition after all: it is enough to read Hegel where this will be the tradition as opposed to Romanticism... Therefore the *Aufklärung* becomes part of the history of traditions. Moreover, criticism is also a tradition, mainly in Europe, and nobody can live outside the history of traditions, not even those who criticize Tradition...

**Tamás Tóth:** And then we can perhaps talk about the tradition of modernity... I think that “modernity”, too, as defined or re-defined by Habermas, goes back to the *Aufklärung*...

**Paul Ricoeur:** ... First I would like to say that I do not much like the word “modernity”, for two reasons. First, because it is used with several meanings. Sometimes it means the development of sciences, sometimes the development of critical thought and thus we have already two behaviours related to it. Adorno and Horkheimer have already written the criticism of *Aufklärung* as a form of reduction to instrumental reason... Therefore, if we say that modernity is nothing else than the instrumental reason, then we must be postmodern. However, if we say that modernity is nothing else than critical reason, then we not only did not come out of the modern but we have not even entered it. This is my debate with the postmodernists and postmodernity. After all I don't know what “modernity” is, because the word is polysemous and even more polysemous is “postmodernity”... Otherwise, I also have other reservations about the phrase “postmodern”: namely, that it tries to describe the present. I think that nothing is more obscure than the present in which we live. Only those coming twenty-thirty years after us will be able to tell what we really are now. And they will also have several explanations... But we are living in the obscurity of the present and we are unable to qualify this present, at least not with one word such as “postmodernity”... This is a very misguided debate; as for me, I consider it highly regrettable. If we attribute “rationality” a closed, positivist, imperialist meaning, then we follow Adorno and then modernity is really over, with the

horrors of World War II, let's say. However, if modernity is an unfinished process, an unaccomplished project, which is Habermas' point of view, then it is itself the critical spirit... If this is the case, then why do we not speak about "critical spirit" instead of "modernity"...

**Tamás Tóth:** To be honest, I am slightly embarrassed when we speak about the questions of "modernity", because I also think that in case of the proper interpretation of the term we must consider the issue of the category of "modernity" important. Moreover, it seems to me that, although you reject the use of the words "modern" and "postmodern", we can find several elements and components of this issue in your books. I mean the issues of "universality" and "particularity" which have a distinguished place in your work, too, acknowledging that you do not wish to denote them by the terms of "modernity" or "postmodernity" or treat them as questions of these...

**Paul Ricoeur:** But why would the one be more "modern" than the other? The situation is simply that - and it is useless to argue over words - I do not use these expressions precisely because of their polysemy, because they can be mixed up and they lead to confusion. This is what we call "mot-valise" in French...

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course, every language has words in which we can stuff everything just like into a bag - we also call them "mot fourre-tout". However, I guess that "neomodern" and "post-modern" thinkings are after all in inverse relationship, as a French philosopher has recently noticed it. We can accept that these terms can sometimes replace each other, but both of them still touch the issue of "universality" and "peculiarity"...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Thus we have here two concepts that can be handled and also analysed, whereas the concepts of "modern" and "postmodern" could be called "epochal concepts" (concepts *épocaux*, conceptions *épocales*). This is of course very difficult because we immediately face a problem which embarrasses the Marxists particularly, namely, the problem of the periodization of history. Let us raise the issue of epochs: when did the modern age begin and when did it end? The answer depends on the criteria... This reminds me of my visit to Barcelona: I saw Gaudi's famous

buildings which are extremely strange and which were called “modern” by Gaudi himself. He called “modern” certain works which we would rather call “postmodern”... You can see therefore the danger, the chaos brought about by words in which we get entangled if we do not go back to the real problems.... because there are real problems behind these words...

**Tamás Tóth:** Yes, and I think that the issue of “universality” and “particularity” or of “universalism” and “particularism” are such; therefore let us still remain at these questions if you agree...

**Paul Ricoeur:** All right...

**Tamás Tóth:** ... and let us go back for a while to the ambiguity of these words... Because from the mathesis universalis to universal grammars, the universal man of the Renaissance to the universalism of human rights, or the issue of the continuity of world history which you discussed in *Histoire et Vérité*, universality has several layers...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I like the way you divide the concept of universalism into layers, because it can indeed be encountered as the legal issue of human rights or a grammatical issue, that is, the universal structure of languages or as a cultural issue... Let us take an example, universal grammar, an issue raised by Chomsky in spite of the view that every language has a different structure. Chomsky started from a basic problem: translatability. In my opinion, the concept of translatability is more than a purely linguistic phenomenon: it is the guiding principle of our thought. First of all, “langage” lives in “langues” and then we are in pluralism; secondly, languages can be translated into one another. This is a presupposition of our encounter with language as such: language must be translatable. With certain semantic losses, of course, because everything cannot be transferred, but we translate. Reading the great Russian authors, I don’t think that I have lost a lot by reading Dostoevsky in French and not in Russian... Translatability is therefore the model of the concept of transition from the universal to the historical... You have just attributed me the quality of mediating and connecting and indeed, I do not wish to rest contented with the antinomy of historical or contextual universality. I am interested in transitional structures. And we have

here a good example: the translatability of languages. But I also have another example. I am very much interested in those authors who want to find some intermediary level between abstract universality and endless difference. I think of two works, one is that of the American Walzer who says that there are “spheres of justice” but their number is not infinite. He mentioned five or six of them. Consequently, there is some kind of bridled pluralism. Therefore, between the procedural unity of justice and the fragmentation of legal formations all over the world, there is some kind of intermediate level, that of the spheres of justice. I also have in mind a similar work of Boltanski and Thévenot, the French sociologists dealing with the sociology of action, who tried to decide whether the number of references in conflicts, controversial issues or self-justifications used by people is infinite. They pointed out that in the sphere of market and commerce there is a kind of self-justification which differs from that which they observed in the domestic-family sphere or the sphere of poetry and inspiration or public opinion. These latter differ from the market and commercial sphere, the industrial sphere or the sphere of citizenship - fame is at stake in their case. I think that if we could devise a typology of conflict-structures or discussion-structures, we would reach a pluralism which would be a transition and connection between the variety and scatteredness of historical experiences and the too abstract and empty unity of the procedural formalism of Rawls or, let’s say, the formalism of the open debate of Habermas. You can see therefore that I am much interested in that which was called *metaxu*, “intermediary” by the Greeks, which is between the infinitely scattered variety and the too formal, too empty, too abstract unity.

**Tamás Tóth:** This is what I had in mind when I considered you a great mediator. And it seems to me extremely interesting that you do not oversimplify matters in the meantime, you do not confine yourself to praise the golden mean...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Eclecticism is the danger. In order to avoid it, we need the clear definition of opposites and also a powerful mediating structure. And this is a real problem. The reader should

decide whether the intermediary term is as strong as the opposite terms...

**Tamás Tóth:** Yes, this is true. Therefore I do not only consider dangerous that universalism is often abstract, formal and empty, but also that the intermediary structures, on which mediation is based, also remain abstract. This does not happen in your case, of course...

**Paul Ricoeur:** The example from which we have started, namely, translatability, is very interesting... We can pronounce as an abstract principle that every language can be translated into every other language. But how does this happen in reality? Well, by actual translation, by work, therefore. Otherwise my work of translating Husserl, Gadamer or American and English authors for the Seuil Publishing House is one of my most beautiful and enriching experiences... Because wrestling with a foreign language and transferring some linguistic difference into the most complete semantic identity, is one of the greatest pleasures in life. We must do the same work of translation in case of different cultures. We must be able to spell out the other's culture in our culture. And our culture in the other's culture...

**Tamás Tóth:** Well, this reminds me of a debate I had in Budapest. One of my young colleagues wrote a very interesting dissertation about the incommensurability of paradigms...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, I see...

**Tamás Tóth:** After all, analysing the manifestations of the incommensurability of paradigms, he raised the question whether cultures and people can understand each other and if so, in what way? During this debate I remembered a sentence from one of your lectures in Budapest. You said that the examples of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy are mainly trivial examples...

**Paul Ricoeur:** They are, systematically...

**Tamás Tóth:** ... and that we should find other examples, other examples of reciprocal translatability and reciprocal understanding in this case. Because everything does not depend on whether the ethnologist thinks of the same thing as the native when he uses, for example, the word "rabbit"...



**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but we are yet on the level of words. Of course languages differ most in their vocabulary. They differ less in their syntax. And indeed they differ less in what they say textually, orally, in the language. Because we do not translate the grammar or the vocabulary but sentences. The sentence carries semantic units, and we translate semantic units. Therefore we do not translate the words but the sentences...

**Tamás Tóth:** And we translate realities, realities which are expressed...

**Paul Ricoeur:** As well as the target reference which is the basis of semanticism. Semanticism is the ability of the language to denote things. What do we translate? Not words, but sentences, relations between sentences and the referents of sentences. And this is the model that can be applied on a larger scale, to the relation between cultures. Because we could say - simplifying matters, of course - that every culture is the great ensemble of sentences uttered which form the text of our heritage. And we are the readers of these texts as linguistic resources (ressources textuelles). These can be translated from one language into the other. Let us think of Kafka who wrote in German but could be translated into Czech, Slovak, French, Hungarian...

**Tamás Tóth:** There is another interesting example. Georg Lukács wrote a major part of his philosophical works in German, although his mother tongue was undoubtedly Hungarian; moreover, he contributed to the enrichment of German philosophical terminology to such an extent that sometimes it is difficult to translate his texts back to Hungarian.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes. There are two contrasting theories about translation. I consider one of them true, the other false. False is that according to what we “rob” from the other language during translation, just like from the Egyptian tombs, that is, we gather and rob its treasures so that the plunder should become part of our language. However, the opposite of this happens. I have to raise my language to the level of the other, so that we can tell again in our language that which has been told in the other language. I repeat: I must raise my language to the level of the other. Be this one of the Polynesian languages, my extremely refined French

language must still go before this language which is generally thought simple, but which expresses things that are not simple at all. I must always consider the treasury of expressed things of higher level than my own language. There is a certain verticality, a certain “height” (hauteur), as Levinas would say, before which I must bow and from which I receive the meaning...

[Here, the conversation was interrupted for a while]

**Paul Ricoeur:** But let us pass on to a relevant objection, which regards the issues which in your opinion were unsatisfactorily expressed, or expressed better somewhere else. Otherwise I also admit this, attempting the critical interpretation of myself. Obviously, every philosophy remains extremely narrow even though its creator expresses it by arguing with its spiritual enemies and adversaries, as I have already mentioned. I consider myself H.G.Gadamer’s disciple in this respect. Understanding has certain limits and we are always interpreting from a certain perspective, following a certain tradition. I am only interested in issues in which I could recognize some dialectics of “explanation” and “understanding”. I think this will be a good starting point for the continuation of our conversation, because I can find this dialectics in my view on historical knowledge and also in my studies in the theory of action and historical theory. I am speaking about this in my recent volume of articles, *Du Texte à l’action*, discussing the issue of explanation and understanding and their relationship on three levels. I have pointed out that the interpretation of a text brings about the same problems as that of an action or a series of events. In both cases there is some kind of spontaneous understanding first. We get a comprehensive view of its meaning at the first reading. After that we go on to detailed analysis and explanation, with all sorts of scientific help, linguistic, syntactic and stylistic instruments in the case of a text. In the case of action, English-American philosophy gives the instruments, the “theory of action”. Action must be understood starting from a comprehensive plan, after all, just like a text. And this holds good for history as well: starting from demographic, economic, legal, etc.

explanations, we must get to the historical plan of a community valid for a certain segment of time. Therefore I think that the parallelism of the rhythm of explanation/understanding is valid in various fields, and can coordinate again all that was originally scattered. I think this is the part of my activity that you have called mediation. This does not only mean mediation between methods, but mediation between scientific fields. In my penultimate book, *Temps et récit*, I touched upon three fields which generally belong to completely different genres, namely, historiography, the history of literature and the phenomenology of time, and I tried to find common areas between them. This is therefore not only mediation between theories and methods but also mediation between scientific fields.

**Tamás Tóth:** Yes, I think this a central issue and I would like to go back to one of your endeavours which refers to the combination of different theories, more precisely, working out mediations between different theories. It seems to me that your definite effort to mediate between different theories, disciplines and fields of science springs from the recognition or conviction that there is a great need for some kind of mediation between philosophies and philosophers. Unless this is vice versa, namely, that you were prompted by the inner demand and necessity of mediating between disciplines, paradigms, fields of research and scientific theories and the endeavour to synthesize them, to look for ways linking different philosophical traditions. I am thinking that, when speaking about your philosophical position, theoretical presuppositions and choice of values you characterised your own approach as one which follows the line of reflexive philosophy, remaining at the same time within phenomenological philosophy, but representing a hermeneutic variant of this phenomenological philosophy, finally remaining a reflexive philosophy...

**Paul Ricoeur:** One of my friends called my attention to a metaphor which plays an important role in my whole life-work - this is the metaphor of the "graft". I usually say that in my thought hermeneutics grows to phenomenology as a "graft". In addition I infused hermeneutics with Anglo-Saxon philosophy as I have previously infused phenomenology with hermeneutics. When we

were talking about the use of “residues” we used a metaphor from chemistry; referring to the importance of “grafts” we now use a metaphor taken from gardening...

**Tamás Tóth:** It seems to me that you have found the basis for the penetrability of and mediation between traditional philosophy and theoretical social sciences in the Husserlian variant of phenomenology and in Dilthey’s variant of hermeneutics. In any case, you revert to this issue in various discussions, attaching great importance to the dialogue hold by philosophy with the sciences and the one hold by the sciences with philosophy.

**Paul Ricoeur:** I am glad that you underline this because it is one of my constant convictions that philosophy cannot exist on its own. All the great philosophers faced one of the great sciences: Plato had to do with geometry, Descartes with algebra, Kant with Newtonian physics, Bergson with biology, and we, at least the philosophy that I am dealing with, came into contact with social sciences, the positive social sciences as they are studied nowadays. Speaking about analytical philosophy, you have hinted at the triviality of examples referring to action. But how could we extend the range of issues regarding action? Perhaps taking the sociology of action as a basis... because there we have to do with much richer contents, because conflicts, procedures of self-justification and strategies appear... and we have to do with long actions and chains of action which can no longer be summarised in a sentence. And this is a good supplement because analytical philosophers are not interested in the ethical-political aspect of action, they are perfectly satisfied with the pragmatic structure of action-sentences in a syntactical, semantic and linguistic sense. After all, they do not interpret action but sentences expressing action. Unlike them, I say that we must analyse the text expressing action. Then we will have chains by which we can pass to a larger and much more various field of practice, be they chains which correspond to technical, strategic actions or some kind of communicative act (as our German colleagues name them). In this field, we will again come across the concept of the Greek praxis which means more than action in the analytic philosophy. Otherwise this kind of analytic

philosophy remains something that we could call a grammar of sentences expressing action (phrases d'action).

**Tamás Tóth:** And this broader interpretation of the concept of practice (based on the Aristotelian tradition) indeed encompasses moral, ethical and political practice, just like social and historical practice. I refer of course to your ideology-analyses...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, because in ideologies, social imagination goes before social action, in the form of a project (projet) being outlined on the horizon... But I could also mention another field. Narration, in my approach, is also linked to action. According to the Aristotelian concept, narration is nothing else than imitation, the mimesis of action, but a creative mimesis, because it is a way of modelling action. Consequently, we approach the field of practice from the side of narrative sources of energy or from the side of ethical and even political standards, or starting from social imagination taking the form of a projection, such as utopia or ideology. The field of practice is therefore very rich, as rich as that of theory, we could say. However I do not reject the Anglo-Saxon analytical approach either, because it offers a good basis. If I may say, the action-atoms can be found in it, nicely separated, systematized with good logic, semantics and pragmatics - just like stones on which a house can be built.

**Tamás Tóth:** However, I think that in the various fields of practice we can come across even more difficult issues than that of translatability, such as the problem of ideology and utopia. In this respect, we are in a pretty difficult historical situation, or at least this is my impression. Even if Fukuyama's view that we arrived at the end of history cannot be accepted in my opinion, we can accept that we are at the end of utopia today...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I do not believe in all this... Utopia for me means that we attain an economic order extending all over the world, which is in fact a basic form of utopia. Or let's take the example of the concept of unlimited communicational communities, which also belongs to the field of utopia, in my view. Human rights are also a form of utopia. This is about the idea that in the sphere of ethical-political universality communication will become possible for every culture. This is Kant's dream, together with everlasting

peace... And I do not think that this dream has faded... On the contrary: today it is more powerful, exactly because of the flaring up of nationalisms and ethnocentrism. Utopia has therefore a corrective role, at least: it protects thinking from being stranded in particularity. Today universality itself functions as a utopia...

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course I accept this but I think that if even famous authors give only a procedural interpretation to universality, and even justice and utopia in a sense, then these concepts and dimensions become empty after all and they lose their initial content...

**Paul Ricoeur:** And this is not accidental! I do not think that we should mix up utopia with what we call a model, the procedural model of justice, for example. This latter does not work as a utopia, but like the way of creating constitutions, like that which directs applications that is rightly called *Anwendung* by the Germans. Projection in time and historical projection is also part of utopia. Rawls' model is not a utopian model, because it formulates the idea of an unreal society in which people would forget about their place. I think that this is rather an origin-searching fiction (fiction fondatrice). This is about "original situation", and I consider the word "original" very important. In English the original situation is exactly the opposite of the eschatological horizon, because we are in the radical dimension, not the terminal one... As to me, I do not think that someone can live historical life if there is no kind of horizon in front of him...

**Tamás Tóth:** You have said that a society without utopia would be a dead society.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes. And I think that the idea of mankind living in eternal peace is a kind of utopia just like Hans Jonas' idea, according to which the Earth should be made inhabitable...

**Tamás Tóth:** But am I wrong if I think that even if such utopian concepts and projections prove to be vigorous on the level of great philosophies or important theories, they gradually lose their power and influence when faced with the realities of our age, wars and devastation...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Europe can no longer wage war in the great countries which were formerly at war for thousand years. As states have gradually forced back individual violence, reserving some forms of violence for themselves, today we can speak in a sense about state violence pushed in the background for the benefit of certain international organisations... I think that war has lost ground and in this respect development is not without results. War has lost ground, at least in certain regions of the world. We can tell that the world has accomplished something of the utopia of everlasting peace. Our task is to spread this on other parts of the world too, with the help of international institutions which are coming into being. What is utopian in this is that all this must not be accomplished by a world-state which would be simply an extension of the nation-state, but by institutions about which we do not know yet what they are like. We do not know yet anything about this political administrative form extending over the world, which is not simply the domination of a superpower. Therefore we need utopias at this point, imaginary constructions which point out the impossible and the possible, the probable and the desirable...

**Tamás Tóth:** Perhaps it is not accidental that in some respect you opposed the utopia of ethical universalism - the utopia called by Habermas and Apel the ethics of discussion for example - with the theorem of the extremely complicated nature of social reality, the opacity of the present and the conflictuality of human relations...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Let us go back to the opposition of model and utopia. We can mention it again because in this respect the Kantian project of everlasting peace is nothing else than a possible form of “concrete universalism”, which is a paradox: something universal but also concrete. Therefore this “concrete universal” can only be the product of history, by which I mean that only the great dialogue between cultures can create those institutions the form of which is yet unknown to us, but which will undoubtedly be the product of the story of those exchanges of ideas and cultural mediations that I have just mentioned. The concrete universal is therefore not the abstract, formal universal of purely transcendental thinking. These abstract universalising forms are merely means of modelling. But modelling here is not the imaginary

projection of the future; I would rather compare this projection to the eschatology of great religions such as the reconciliation of the Wolf and the Lamb recalled by the prophets of Israel. Because the concrete universal is always painted in the colours of imagination; therefore we are no longer in the field of the procedural...

**Tamás Tóth:** As though you would be expanding polysemy even more...

**Paul Ricoeur:** No. You have probably noticed that I remain faithful to what I have written in *Ideology and Utopia*: imagination is always social imagination, not abstract modelling...

But I think we must now end our discussion.

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course. Thank you very much.

## **Second conversation: Paris, June 1996**

**Tamás Tóth:** Dear Professor, during our first discussion in 1991 you provided me with extremely interesting information about your method of thinking. First you talked about the scheme of “question”, “answer” and “residue” (résidu), the importance of which can be pointed out in your whole philosophical life-work. On the other hand, you talked about works of other philosophers which were conceptual “impediments” in your spiritual career. You stressed that you did not evade “obstacles” (obstacle) but tried to turn them into “supports” (appui). You strived to return to unsolved problems (résidu) and raised certain issues again so that your thinking could gain a renewed impetus ...

**Paul Ricoeur:** True, this is what I said, this is my language...

**Tamás Tóth:** As we started from the idea that there are different chains (enchainements) of “questions”, “answers”, “impediments” and “supports” in your theoretical work, let me return now to an aspect of this which I think, for no specific reason was not given enough attention during our discussion. I would like to ask you therefore to speak about these connections, but, instead of the three books that we have discussed in 1991, let us deal now with *Temps et récit*.



**Paul Ricoeur:** Obviously, what bothered me then was that those three works form a heterogeneous series. *Histoire et Vérité* is a collection of articles, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* was written later and contains lectures given at the University of Chicago whereas *Soi-même comme un autre* is a systematising work. In my opinion, the issue of connections (of question, answer and residue) appears rather in the relation between systematic works. The three works mentioned do not form a homogeneous series of systematic works. In addition, besides the systematic works, there are other series, those of studies and lectures. However, there are two types of writing in my philosophical work: scientific debates and systematic works on the one hand, according to the schemes applied by you... There are divergent views and I am seeking my own way between or beyond them, that is, I always work with a great critical apparatus, advancing on several parallel paths, slowly marking the direction. On the other hand, there are the lectures, they are more direct, no notes, so I risk more. The style is completely different here, and the audience, too. While I wrote the systematic books for experts, harboring the illusion that I should speak to those whom I consider the best in the field and who could perhaps listen to me and understand me, in the articles and lectures I addressed a larger audience, people who were present as an audience physically, too, on my public lectures, for example. Therefore the question of conceptual chains is different in these two cases. In the essays and lectures there is always something that depends on the circumstances. I tried to create some unity by bringing them together. Unlike these, the series of systematic works - that which begins with the *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* and ends with *Soi-même comme un autre* - indeed raises the issue of the inner unity and coherence of my life-work... So in connection with these I can accept to examine the nature of the link between them, their continuity and discontinuity, as well as the issue of questions that remained unanswered in some books but were raised again in later works. Would you like me to talk about this?

**Tamás Tóth:** Certainly. But can I ask you to treat the connections and relations between works from a philosophical point of view,

rather than a chronological one, placing a well-defined issue, let's say "universality" and "particularity" to the forefront?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Shall we speak then about chains of issues rather than chains of residues? And what do you mean by "particularity"? Is it the peculiarity of human beings or the peculiarity of some human experience?

**Tamás Tóth:** Actually I was thinking both of chains of issues and chains of residues. With regard to "particularity", I mean several things... But before I would speak about this, let me return for a while to the issue of the homogeneous and heterogeneous series of works that you have just mentioned.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Of course.

**Tamás Tóth:** You say that the three series of your works, namely, the essays, public lectures and systematic works, were not written in the same style and for the same audience. I would like to remark that although the style and audience of the forenamed works are indeed completely different, their topic is very similar, sometimes the same...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, in all probability...

**Tamás Tóth:** We could say for example that in your early collection of essays, *Histoire et Vérité*, you have clearly set the peculiarity of cultures against the universality of rationalism...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Indeed... Every "milieu" is dominated by a certain universality and the debate centres mainly around national and cultural contextualism...

**Tamás Tóth:** However, we can also say that you returned to the different aspects of the issue of "universality" and "particularity" in your later systematic works, in *Soi-même comme un autre*, for example, where you make a wonderful analysis of the relation of "universalism" and "communitarism", in connection with the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Martin Walzer. I could also mention *La critique et la conviction*, your recently published work in which you return to this question...

**Paul Ricoeur:** As a matter of fact, I am concerned about it...

**Tamás Tóth:** May I ask you to make a connection...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Of course...

**Tamás Tóth:** ...between, let's say, *Histoire et Vérité* and *Soi-même comme un autre*, placing *Temps et récit* in the centre? Would you exemplify your statements with examples taken from the field of universality, so often treated in your works?

**Paul Ricoeur:** So you are interested in the relation between the peculiarity of some cultural experience and the universality of rational thought...

**Tamás Tóth:** Yes indeed... I remember for example a beautiful sentence that I read in *Histoire et Vérité*. You wrote something like "Whenever I see two islands, I imagine them together, in the same universe". Then you speak about the complex relation of modern and universal societies, on the one hand and, particular cultures, be they traditional or not. You mention the diversity of regional cultures, the possibility of their communication, transmission of their spiritual achievements to each other and their translatability, etc. Then you turn to the question of the difficulty of having a dialogue between our civilisation and another civilisation, stating that although the values of different cultures are not intransmittable, the philosophies of history known by us do not help us too much...

**Paul Ricoeur:** True...

**Tamás Tóth:** ... in the difficult task of translating, correlating and mediating. And you seem to think that we Europeans are confined to Western culture and the universalist philosophy of world history, which does not allow for mediation between cultures showing universal, peculiar or even individual features... I must confess that this argument of yours which I have recently re-read, made me think again. In my view we still do not have a detailed philosophy of history and culture which would allow us to create a fruitful dialogue with cultures and civilisations different from ours and to grasp universality in a different manner, not in an abstract and depressed way, as a collection of cultural commonplaces... I say this although your work belongs to those which have greatly contributed to advance in this direction.... Perhaps I do not formulate this question clearly enough and... maybe I insist too much on this point ...

**Paul Ricoeur:** And I would by no means like to repeat what we have already said, and discussed thoroughly... Otherwise this thesis is not a central issue in my work *Temps et récit*, although this is the most important work before *Soi-même comme un autre*, which is in fact the summing up of my philosophical career... My supposition in *Temps et récit* was that narrating something is a universal act, an action that can be considered universal... and to my great pleasure I can also prove this... I had a Chinese colleague in Chicago, a specialist of Chinese stories, who told me that in Chinese literature, too, we can find the categories of the universality of narration like “mise en intrigue”; that is, the gradual presentation of characters and personalities by the events which they bring forth or endure... In other words, they also have this duality of making a plot: the story told, on the one hand, and the characters, on the other. The universality of the act of narration is proved therefore, probably because this universality can be traced back to the question raised by time and memory, which need structuring... And the way we structure passing time which is homogeneous, cannot be other than structuring by narrative means. These narrative means have a universal nature, and I have discovered this in the spinning of the plot (mise en intrigue); on the other hand, they have a particular nature, which can be seen in the typology of narrative forms... Therefore I think that the typology of narrative forms is the intermediate step between the universality of the act of narration (acte de raconter) and the cultural singularity (individuality) of each narration (récits). We can find the cycles of narration even on the level of popular, folkloristic cultures; Andersen’s tales, the tales analysed by Propp, Grimm’s tales, Perrault’s tales, cycles which are strongly connected to local cultures...

Furthermore, there is some kind of excessive singularity in the great creations of geniuses who are in a way absolute individualities... Because there is only one Dostoevsky, and only one Shakespeare. But we come across another problem here, the paradox that the extreme form of singularity leads to the absolute form of universality. Because we cannot only say that the typology of plots isolates local cultures or cultural units (localités cultu-

relles) from one another, but that extreme singularity opens them up to one another, precisely by translatability, by their being ready for translation. We could say that the particular, the peculiar was surpassed in this case from the inside by the singular which itself became at once universal. Otherwise, we face here an enigmatic situation: it is possible that the excessive singularity of the work of art bears the greatest possibility of touching something deeply human. The singular seems to be the one that can most easily be turned into universal... And all this becomes clear in the field of narratives which is a basic thing for me...

**Tamás Tóth:** I am impressed by the similarity between what you have just said and a thought of Thomas Mann, who says something to the extent that “It is enough to narrate myself to get time and universality bespeak themselves...”

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes. But the function of the aesthetic quality lies exactly in its ability to link singularity with universality, which cannot be done by ethics and by politics still less. Probably there are insurmountable antinomies on the level of praxis: firstly, between the level of normative, universalising, Kantian imperative and secondly, between that what I call “practical wisdom”, which is linked to *phronésis* in the case of Greek tragedy writers and Aristotle, and *prudentia* in the case of Latins and the Middle Ages. But there is always some tension, moreover, distortion in the relation between universality which remains always formal, and singularity, the singular experience which tends to be arbitrary. And it is extremely difficult to find the link and define the intermediary maxims between universality which proves to be formal and empty, and singularity which is almost straying and erratic. This can be achieved in the aesthetic dimension, if at all...

**Tamás Tóth:** We could say therefore that the possibility of mediating between universality and particularity can mostly be found in art, in the aesthetic dimension...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, and I think of this because I have just re-read Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode*. The complete French translation has just been done and I am writing a review on it. I think that Gadamer short-circuits the relation between aesthetic thought and the Socratic or Platonic dialogue. Otherwise, the experience of

the beautiful singularises and universalises at the same time in the aesthetic reflexion. Gadamer makes this link through the concept of “game”, which is an interesting thought; this “game” appears in the form of playfulness (forme ludique) on the level of aesthetics, and in the form of “serious game”(jeu sérieux) in the Platonic dialogues. Nevertheless it is the same thing, first, the question-answer game in philosophy and, secondly, playing with the possibility of opening human experience, in aesthetics...

All this is very interesting in Gadamer’s *Wahrheit und Methode*. It was extremely instructive for me to re-read this book thirty years after its publication in 1961, because I did not read it in the same way today... Thirty years ago Gadamer was captivated by Dilthey’s debate about the *Geisteswissenschaft*, which we could translate as arts or humanities, and the real issue was concealed by this fruitless debate. While neo-Kantians said that there are time-less questions and only the answers are linked to time and are therefore historical, historicism stated that it is the historical nature of answers that produces the illusion of the universality of questions. Gadamer remained captive of this debate to the extent that he placed this debate about the humanities between the philosophy of aesthetics and the theory of philosophical dialogue. The concept of “game” is accompanied in both cases by the concept of “belonging” (co-appartenance). In fact, the effect appears in the work of art – preceding the Kantian judgement which is a reflective aesthetic judgement and stated from the point of view of subjectivity – in the impact that the work in creation has upon its creator.

I give the example of Cézanne that was placed by Merleau-Ponty above everything. Why does Cézanne paint the Mountain of Sainte-Victoire again and again? As though the artistic presentations and representations could not exhaust the striving of the mountain as a natural creation and natural rarity (monument de la nature) to manifest itself... This is about an unpaid debt: we can talk about the singularity of the work of art and that only the series of works of art, a multitude of representations of the Sainte-Victoire Mountain can take aim at the surplus which is probably

nothing else than the universality of some human experience, the sacrality of a natural wonder...

**Tamás Tóth:** ...which is somehow unattainable for the artist...

**Paul Ricoeur:**...which is unattainable for the artist, but we could also say that this gradually moves away from him, as he tries to approach it by the multiplication of works. As though we would become more and more sensitive to this wonder of nature, which cannot be compared well with works of art, more and more sensitive to the inaccessibility of the sacrality of nature... Then this is something else than universality, this is simply the ontological saturation of natural creations which cannot be exhausted by artistic representations. This is about “belonging” (coapparence), the “belonging” of the playful game of the work of art and the inaccessibility of its model, moreover, it is not enough to say “model”, but I would call it the “original”, in the real meaning of the word “origin”...

**Tamás Tóth:** So we can talk about the singularity of the model and the multitude of approaches...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Then we can also talk about its pendant, its equivalent, in an ontology of the language which would adopt the Socratic dialogue for a model. Most of the Socratic dialogues do not reach the denouement; as the multiplication of Cézanne’s paintings pushes the “object that must be painted” further and further away; the “thing that must be told” becomes more and more distant by the multitude of dialogic approaches. I note that it is at this point that Gadamer draws away from his master, Heidegger, whom he can thank for everything. I have just read his self-criticism published in 1985, in which, looking back to his life-work, he says: First I had let myself be locked up in the *Geisteswissenschaft* debate, although Heidegger taught me to look further towards the Greeks. But then, he adds, I have drawn away from him as well while reading the Greeks because Heidegger forced on me some model of Platonism, which he called metaphysics. However, metaphysics must be destroyed if it locks us up...

The idea of destroying metaphysics comes exactly from the limited reading of Platonism, the opposition of “intelligible”

and “sensible”, epistémé and doxa, various binary systems... whereas if we open the dialogue again, we can observe that there is no Platonism and Plato himself is permanently Plato’s critic. Let us remember the famous theory of ideas in which they try to lock him! This theory is dealt with again and again, moreover, it is also refuted in the last dialogues, then on a conceptual level and especially in Philebus, which is the top of Plato’s self-criticism, together with Parmenides. Otherwise, all this lessens considerably the overestimated opposition between Plato and Aristotle. As though Plato would deal with intelligibility above us, while Aristotle with the empirical description of nature. After all, the Aristotelian phronésis, as elaborated in the Nicomachean Ethics, the sixth book of it, is quite close to the dialogic movement of Platonic dialogues.

**Tamás Tóth:** Thank you very much for this beautiful train of thought. I am a bit upset, though, because I must return to a question which irritated you during our first discussion: it is the issue of “modernity” and “tradition”...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes... Strangely enough I realise that these terms bother me even today... There are few terms that upset me so much... But this is due to my American experience! I mention America because “modern” and “postmodern” have been on the U.S. top lists for a few years now... And this is unbearable... Of course, everybody has his prejudices. I dislike everything that is “postmodern”, and every term that begins with “post-” is really repugnant... This tendency can otherwise be felt today in Germany, too: everything has become “post-”... They are speaking about our living in a “postindustrial” society...

**Tamás Tóth:** After Daniel Bell’s famous book...

**Paul Ricoeur:** You know, I am most surprised when they state that there is no philosophy of history after Kant and Hegel, or, even worse, after Spengler, etc, and then every “post” philosophy, admittedly or not, appears as some kind of philosophy of history, more precisely, some inferior form of it, because they start from the assumption that we must place everything in time. They suggest that in the beginning there were the modern ideas, then came the postmodern ones... As for me, I think that the opacity and



obscurity of the present (*obscurité du présent*) is the most important counter-argument in this debate... I am convinced of this. When looking back, after a longer time, and read again with all my experience the debates of the 1950s and 1960s, I am dumbfounded at the illusions we had... If I think for example of Sartre writing that "... Marxism is the unsurpassable spiritual horizon of our thought..."! Now this is almost unbelievable... This holds good for my friends, too, Emmanuel Mounier for example, who lived in the vicinity and wrote a booklet about personalism. He stated that there are three living philosophies: existentialism, Marxism and personalism. Now, these three philosophies, if not quite extinct, are by no means the most lively... I think we make a great mistake when we try to describe our age, the present...

**Tamás Tóth:** I agree... But I guess there are postmodernist philosophers who think almost the same way...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I do not say that I am the only one who can be right! Not at all... And this is why I never use the words "modernity" and "postmodernity", "modernization" and "postmodernization" and only when someone urges me do I explain why not...

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course I accept the arguments in criticising the shallowness of some theories of "modernity", "postmodernity", "modernization" and "postmodernization". However, I think that this issue can also be approached in the way Hegel, Max Weber or Jürgen Habermas, Alain Touraine or Ágnes Heller did, in some of their books. I consider extremely interesting Alain Touraine's book, *Critique de la Modernité*...

**Paul Ricoeur:** In this case "modernity" refers to a shorter historical period, such as the present, doesn't it? Or is it the 18th century? Because I often hear that the modern age is in fact the 18th century, therefore modernity is nothing else than the Enlightenment, the *Aufklärung*.

**Tamás Tóth:** Modernity is often used for the Enlightenment, but sometimes it means the Industrial Revolution in England and the political revolution that broke out in France. We can consider the 1789 French Revolution the cradle of modernity, from a political point of view, at least.

**Paul Ricoeur:** But then why do we use the so much ambiguous term of “modernity” which denotes opposites, pointing to everything and also the opposite of everything (désigne des contraires)...?

**Tamás Tóth:** This is true, but an extremely interesting philosophical problem seems to occur, because modernising processes are not only in the industry or politics but there are other such processes too. Therefore we can talk about social tendencies which are converging and diverging, similar and opposing at the same time and which finally meet in modernity as a point of junction. In this sense it is not completely absurd to say that modernity is the horizon of our age that cannot be exceeded... I think that such a conception of modernity helped Hegel and Weber to...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but I think we must say that if on the one side there is Hegel and Max Weber, and our age is on the other side, than the Frankfurt school is in between... because we have Horkheimer and Adorno’s criticism after all... And to an extent we are living in the spirit of this... Because they were those who pointed out, and probably rightly, the tendency of the instrumentalisation of reason... that is, the illusions and lies in connection with rationality, a rationality whose instrumental side hides behind freeing or, rather, emancipating tendencies...

**Tamás Tóth:** This is so much true that it arises exactly from the reasons mentioned by you, that is, the basic ambiguity of the concepts in question, that many authors who use these terms, are referring to the philosophies and social theories of “modernity” and “modernization” with some critical reservations... Otherwise, my suspicion is that this is why the critical concept and alternative issue of “postmodernity” and “postmodernization” have been introduced by most of the theorists committed to modernity and also those who criticise it...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes...

**Tamás Tóth:** In my opinion we have to do with the polysemy of concepts and the variety of theories not only in the case of “universalism” but also in the case of “modernity” and “post-

modernity”, and as for me, I consider really interesting only a few of these theories...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes... But then the question arises, why do we need the comprehensive characterisation of the period or epoch in which we live? It seems to me more interesting to deal with real problems... and without asking the question whether they are about “modern” issues or not... Let’s take an example... I am again concerned with a question which I completely ignored in *Temps et récit*. And this is the issue of “memory” (mémoire)...

**Tamás Tóth:** Then, we should regard this as the residue, the ‘remainder’ of the forenamed book, shouldn’t we? It is very important for me to make this clear.

**Paul Ricoeur:** I realise with surprise that the word “memory” does not appear in my work, *Temps et récit*. As though I would have overlooked it. Whereas when I read Aristotle who speaks about the “mnémé” and the “anamnésis” in *Parva naturalia*, then one can find everything in that... Then why should I not link this with Locke’s theory on memory, or Bergson, and then I am not interested in what century or epoch were they living in, but what they said. Or let us take another example, of which I cannot easily talk, but which can be used in this debate... Let us think of Heidegger’s relation to pre-Socratics. He says that we already have problems with Plato and thus we must go back to the pre-Socratics. But they suddenly start speaking in his work like Hölderlin, and Hölderlin speaks like the pre-Socratics... In this respect we are faced with such a... “deconstruction”, we could say, of every periodisation, that the concept of “modern” and “postmodern”, well, is somewhat... Otherwise I think that Heidegger does not use this pair of concepts.

**Tamás Tóth:** Probably not, but “deconstruction” is already a post-modern concept...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Well...

**Tamás Tóth:** You used the term “deconstruction” which is a post-modern concept...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Shall we say then that Heidegger is a postmodern thinker?

**Tamás Tóth:** Well, there have been cases in point in international literature...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Because Heidegger has already used this term around 1920...

**Tamás Tóth:** And which is the term in German?

**Paul Ricoeur:** *Destruktion*, sometimes *Umbau*, but most often the former... Otherwise I have come across this question in Gadamer's biographical writings; he was a pupil of Heidegger... When Heidegger arrived in Tübingen, he created confusion... he was like a Martian among stiff-collared professors, as though he would have come from the mountains, from a ski-run... And he introduced the concept of *Destruktion* by which he meant the destruction of metaphysics... He called metaphysics - and I think Gadamer was right in this respect - the scholastic transformation of the sharpest ideas... Heidegger did not mean therefore the "liquidation" of metaphysics but he referred to finding the hiding problems under the skin of metaphysics... Later on this "destruction" became "deconstruction", like...

**Tamás Tóth:** In the case of Derrida...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Exactly, but Derrida does not use this to say farewell to philosophy. He wanted to understand the philologists better and he read their works with an amazing thoroughness. It is only his American pupils who think that if metaphysics is dead, it has no sense any more...

**Tamás Tóth:** As for me, I certainly wouldn't hasten the death of metaphysics... But let us go back to the remark you have just made, namely, that we should deal with real problems instead of naming our age this or that. Well, I would say that we can distinguish between the modernism of certain authors which is indeed a bit vulgar and the high level, more critical modernism of others. I borrow the term "vulgar modernism", slightly modified, from Habermas, who speaks about the existence of a *Vulgärmoderne*...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, yes...

**Tamás Tóth:** I think that most of the theories invented mainly after the 1950s by some American authors belong to the vulgar theories of modernization and modernity. However, let's take Habermas, Derrida, Lyotard, Touraine and Ágnes Heller, who

speaking about the modern and the postmodern in a high-level, philosophical way. They use these expressions to refer to the antinomies of “rationality” and “evolution”, “market” and “democracy” or they use them in connection with the criticism of the so-called “grand narratives” (grands récits). Anyway, in my view, these authors began to analyse certain problems - quite real problems - which belong to the concept of “modernism”. Indeed it is not the use of the term “modernity” that is important. Hegel and Weber actually do not use it. This is rather about tendencies that can be analysed critically, and which we consider to belong to the field of “modernity” for the sake of simplicity... Thus, many of them speak about the “end” of classical philosophies of history and also of histories of philosophy which are mostly teleological and teleonomical like that of Hegel...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but you see... this is a very difficult question... Let us take the concept of the “grand narrative”... This is an ambiguous concept because what is common between, let’s say, the Biblical vision, the millenarian views and Kant’s pragmatic history? All this is so heterogeneous that I really don’t know what is the link between them. Biblical visions, as the rabbis and the Early Church arranged them, seemingly take the form of a grand narrative, beginning with the Creation and ending with the Apocalypse. But we already know today that all this is a literary arrangement, a later construction, and important is what the Prophets say, the Psalms and the Book of Job... All these have not much to do with each other, apart from their being bound together... And Joachim Fiore tried to give a comprehensive, uniform view of millenarian visions. Probably no one would think of calling the arrangement of Biblical stories from the Creation to the Apocalypse “modern” or “modernist”, unless in a very abstract and highly uncertain literary sense, referring to the fact that these stories take the literary form of great narratives... But all this is so, well, formal...

**Tamás Tóth:** But there are the binary structures, the various pairs of concepts, that are so often used to characterise modern thought... However, the concept of binary oppositions is also used by some postmodern critics of modernity...

**Paul Ricoeur:** But Hegel thinks in terms of triple unity, so I don't know who...

**Tamás Tóth:** Of course, but we also have these binary structures which we could call “beautiful dichotomies” (beaux binarismes) in your language.

**Paul Ricoeur:** Such as the dichotomy of “reason” and “superstition”, for example...

**Tamás Tóth:** Or the conceptual dichotomies of “determinism” and “indeterminism”, “progress” and “decline”, “subjectivity” and “objectivity”.

**Paul Ricoeur:** ...Yes... and in this sense we can speak about a new dichotomy in the case of the “modern” and the “postmodern”.

**Tamás Tóth:** True, but I think Ágnes Heller is still right when she says that “postmodernism” does not necessarily denote a state or point of view which is or points beyond “modernism” ... We view modernity together with its paradoxes, aporias and dramatic consequences today...

**Paul Ricoeur:** One thing is for sure, and it is that we will never invent better aporias than the Platonic aporias...

**Tamás Tóth:** Anyway, we can say that certain postmodern views remain within the framework of modernity, but they set up essential critical criteria regarding it...

**Paul Ricoeur:** All right, but then why should we draw so different things under the heading “modernism”? ... Let us take the example of Spinoza, the philosopher who mostly resists every attempt to be classified. What kind of a thinker is then Spinoza? The representative of metaphysics? And what is the relation between Spinoza... and his contemporaries, for example, Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz? What shall we do with Spinoza? Can we consider him a modern thinker?

**Tamás Tóth:** Now I really don't know... But maybe we can consider him modern in a sense...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Really? And he thinks that he is eternal!

**Tamás Tóth:** I might be wrong but I think that the conception of the Cartesian subject can be considered the beginning of modernity, at least in this circumscribed area of the history of philosophy...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I like the classifications which break with chronology and periodisation because every periodisation is problematic... This is what Charles Taylor did in *Sources of the Self*, following certain trends in the history of philosophy. “Inwardness” was one of the trends, which I would rather call “inner-oriented view”. This trend begins with certain aspects of Plato, continues with Augustine’s inner master and Descartes’ cogito, but we must not forget Locke with his teachings about the memory of the individual... But where should we place Kant? On the other hand, I am most embarrassed by the fact that the history of philosophy is full of singularities (*foisonnement des singularités*). Of course, these co-assortments and grand narratives, etc. are comforting by seemingly making order. And then the postmodernists destroyed this order. So, I am a little afraid that we will no longer have common categories... But of course we can try to follow another trend, the one which is characterised by the attention to “everyday life” and which leads to the empirism and utilitarianism of the 19th century. Or, from another point of view, this is the method of expression which leads to German Romanticism, and ecology today... But all these cannot be labelled and ranked under the concept of grand narratives...

**Tamás Tóth:** No indeed, but these views mentioned by you are considered by many as going beyond the great narratives or at least trying to surpass them...

**Paul Ricoeur:** But then the general pursuit is not to go with the great narratives... Let us take the example of German Romanticism... German Romanticism which is so little known in France and to which French Romanticism cannot be compared... As I have already said, I am confused mainly by singularity... And this is more conspicuous when great thinkers appear sometimes in bunches (*paquets*) in the history of philosophy... For example, there is Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Democritus within a very short period of time, then there comes another group, the one of Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz. Then there is the German idealism, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel. This is astonishing because they appear within a short period of time and still they do not form a series...

**Tamás Tóth:** Exactly. But then this supposed continuity, homogeneity and progressivity of history which is so often mentioned by some, or the supposed teleology of the spiritual, cultural and philosophical development doesn't exist either...

**Paul Ricoeur:** I can see no progress at all... The Cartesian thinkers are not better than Platonists... It is not progress but the surprising simultaneity of the appearance of this concentrated spiritual creativity that is striking. I am thinking about the year 1799, for example: Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel were writing in the same period. This was a year when all of them were creating... When Kant writes the *Metaphysics of Morals*... I would almost say that it is impossible to write a history of philosophy other than anecdotal and chronological, a history of philosophy which is nothing else than a chronology in which one philosophy came after the other... Moreover, this would appear more modest...

**Tamás Tóth:** As though the philosophical spirit would speak with hesitation...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but Hegel appears as an exception. He is the only one who really tries to make order. This was his order, of course... But if we take the example of Descartes or Kant, they both began by saying "before me there was chaos, I am starting from zero". This is exactly how *Treatise on Method* begins: We have nothing to do with this Medieval nonsense. Kant said much the same: Philosophy was a failure until now. Right! Let's begin at the beginning. Neither of them tries to classify himself. On the contrary. It is their strong conviction that they had broken with everything... And this probably holds good for Hobbes too...

**Tamá Tóth:** We could say that the attempt of creating a comprehensive history of philosophy appeared only with Hegel in the 19th century.

**Paul Ricoeur:** But then Hegel is the only such author. It is surprising for me that a few years after his death in 1831, he is already completely forgotten. Schelling buried him... But then Schelling does not even try to cope with the philosophy of history...

**Tamás Tóth:** Hegel is then the only really classical character in this globalising, totalising, even teleological way of thinking



within the history of philosophy and even the philosophy of history?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, I think so. And it is interesting that the achievement of the Enlightenment is also more modest from Hegel's point of view. Otherwise the question arises, how could we balance between the possibility of summing up everything that came before us and the attempt to sketch a horizon, within a comprehensive conception of history of philosophy. In my opinion the idea of progress does not play a role with Hegel, as he thinks that history was accomplished and came to an end with him in a sense. Kant had a better intuition that history goes on after him, because so many of the requirements established by him have not yet been fulfilled. The democratic state had not come into being, there had been no...

**Tamás Tóth:** Still, my impression is that Hegel also has the idea of gradual progress, the feature of every universalist philosophy, only in his case this very long process once came to its term...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes... And the end of the process is the system itself! At the same time, my strongly Hegelian friends, Labarrière, Mounier or others tell me that I interpret Hegel wrongly and I should read again the chapter about absolute knowledge and I would realise that there is nothing in it... Otherwise it is only eight pages after one thousand pages, and it is nothing else than referring back to the beginning. The whole is simply moving on a circular path! But this reminds me of the end of the Book of Job, which says: "My servant, Job, has spoken of me what is right." What does this mean? It means that we must begin again the whole discussion. All right... I think that circular systems of thought are more interesting than the linear ones. Only in a sense, of course. The inquisitive intellect...

**Tamás Tóth:** Then we are at the debate of "progress" and "decline", as in Spengler's case...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, this is the typical case of the "grand narrative", the grand narrative which is indeed... childish. As though someone would speak about the "greatness and decline" of something, as the ancients did... And then this is no longer based on a biological model but on an organicist one; and organicism is

the simplest of all forms of plot (intrigue)...Otherwise I was amused, while writing *Temps et récit*, by the fact that in spite of his anti-event (anti-événementielle) conception of history-writing Braudel tells the story of the birth, greatness and decline of the Mediterranean... The Mediterranean Sea is the main character of his work and the book does not end with the death of Philip II but the Mediterranean ceasing to be a political world-centre. The political centre of the world shifted to the Atlantic Ocean. Another hero appeared. However, we have a third hero today, the Pacific Ocean. We can imagine such a “great narrative”, all the more so because man I believe always needs to place himself in some system of reference. At the same time, we must treat these narrations with a deep irony...

**Tamás Tóth:** Thinking again of your theory of “vivid metaphors” (métaphore vive), it seems to me that certain metaphors would be of help in clearing up these difficult questions. As we are talking about the pair of concepts “progress” and “decline” and, in a more general sense, the issue of grand narratives (grands récits), let me mention Agnes Heller, whose work I appreciate...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, yes...

**Tamás Tóth:** ...and who wrote a book, together with Ferenc Fehér, in which she mentions the “pendulum of modernity”. I consider this a really creative metaphor. It describes the phenomena of modern history, society and culture more powerfully and precisely than the “grand narratives” which simply conceive these as the resultants of the processes of “Progress” or “Decline”, while, moreover, they consider these processes cumulative and linear in themselves and interpret them mainly in a deterministic and teleonomic way... The metaphor of the pendulum, the supposition of a pendular motion, seems to me more convincing than that of a linear, continuous motion...

**Paul Ricoeur:** By the way, when did modernity start in your opinion?

**Tamás Tóth:** Roughly in the 18th century. But some say that in a sense modernity started in the 16th century, or the Renaissance...

**Paul Ricoeur:** ...moreover, in the 12th century...

**Tamás Tóth:** ...yes of course, there are authors who speak about the 12th century Renaissance... And there are some who seem to discover the pre-forms of modernity in the bureaucratic rationalism and technical development characteristic to the Roman Empire...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Although Rome soon lost much of its power... I often refer to the “Biblical model” which was used by Lyotard, too, and I think that the whole contemporary exegesis contradicts him in this respect. The decisive thing here is the end of the prophecy (*la fin de la prophétie*) and the closure of the canon (*la clôture du canon*) which is only followed by the commentaries of the Jews and the Christians. On the Jewish side there is the Misna, the Talmud, etc, on the Christian side there are the Fathers of the Church... Otherwise there is a parallelism in the way St Augustine and before him, Tertullianus related (*se situent*) to that what came to an end. And that what came to an end is behind us and at the same time tells us where we are. This is why we can never be (*se placer*) only inside it or only outside it. And this breaks the “grand narrative”...

**Tamás Tóth:** I venture the remark that many postmodernist authors would agree with what you say about “grand narratives”...

**Paul Ricoeur:** So much better, so much better! I am referring to the results of scientific Bible-interpretation...

**Tamás Tóth:** One of the most important results of the postmodernists was exactly that they subjected the “grand narratives” as such to sharp criticism, moreover, they predicted their “end”...

**Paul Ricoeur:** The expression “grand narrative” means in fact “modern narrative”... And there is only one really modern narrative, namely, the one about “Progress”...

**Tamás Tóth:** Besides “Progress” I would place “Reason”, “Democracy” and in fact the issue of “Europe” as well with the “grand narratives” of the Modern Age. The classical history of European mankind was obviously written by Hegel; his world history was positively a European-centred history. But later on, Paul Valéry and Husserl go back to the idea to represent European history as world history and the phenomenon of universality as a European phenomenon. Europe appears as the crowning of the history of mankind...

**Paul Ricoeur:** True, but Husserl thought that Europe does not exist yet and the European idea needs yet to be realised. But what sort of “narrative” (récit) is that which is not yet finished? A “narrative” the end of which is unknown is in fact not a “narrative”, but a story in process...

**Tamás Tóth:** Valéry, even before Husserl, thought that we reached the end of European history...

**Paul Ricoeur:** He said that now we know that every civilisation is mortal...

**Tamás Tóth:** But this means at the same time that European civilisation is mortal and Valéry said this exactly at the end of World War I... And Husserl himself also relies on the European idea...

**Paul Ricoeur:** In Husserl’s view Europe is a task, *eine Aufgabe*, that is, it would be an illusion to think that it is already reality... The difference is that while other civilisations do not have an idea about themselves, European civilisation has and this is the European idea...

**Tamás Tóth:** Is this not about Europe being just an *Aufgabe*, a task, but one that has been formulated in an ominous moment of the deep crisis of our continent?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Certainly, but most interesting is that Husserl was unable to think of this crisis in political terms. He interpreted it simply as the conflict between objectivism and transcendentalism. The whole *Krisis* is based on this idea. The real hero of the story is Newton... and by no means Bismarck...

**Tamás Tóth:** Then this is still somehow a “grand narrative”, isn’t it?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Rather there are two “narratives” which cross each other... Otherwise I really don’t know why some people always use the category of “narrative”. Narrativity has its own strict rules; we need a plot and characters. It seems that they misuse the concept of “narrative”. However, by the way Europe in 1945 raised completely different problems. The question was how can we survive such a destruction and what can be built on the ruins.

**Tamás Tóth:** Some say that after the World War, in the swing of rebuilding and reuniting Europe, nobody thought over the European idea...

**Paul Ricoeur:** Fortunately, because Europe must rather be constructed than thought about!

**Tamás Tóth:** But can something that was not thought about be carried out?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Well, this happens all the time! Let's take the example of BSE. Our task today is to stop the English from leaving Europe, without making too many concessions, of course. All this is highly problematic... And what will we do when the Americans retreat from Bosnia at the end of the year? These are the real problems... Or shall we support the entrance of the Polish in the European Union knowing that if the Polish are accepted, the Ukrainians must also be accepted? And the Russians? What shall we do with the Russians? These are indeed real problems! And for some problems we do not know the solution! But this is all right. The idea, the thought will be initiated... but, we have thoughts, ideas, and views only about something that has already run a course. We can roughly think about communism because in the meantime it has come to the end of the road leading from the first Russian revolution to the Berlin Wall. I think Hegel is right. We can present in a nuanced way only a period that has come to an end. Communism is one of those rare cases where we witnessed something that lasted a century coming to an end.

**Tamás Tóth:** Then was communism in its manner some kind of "grand narrative" too?

**Paul Ricoeur:** Yes, but a false and invented narrative, because it considered itself the heir of the French Revolution although there was no precedent to the victory of revolution in a country which was Stalin's great idea. Otherwise, to establish a correspondence between the universalism of the Revolution and the geography of Russia, now this is an unbelievable... delusion, just as it is unbelievable that once so many of us in the West believed in it... Even then, I can deem myself lucky, for I've never been a communist myself.

**Tamáslts Tóth:** Dear Professor, let me say thank you for your patience. I believe that the thoughts that you set forth during our discussion will greatly contribute to bringing your life-work closer to even more Hungarian readers. I must confess that now I am a little proud of initiating this conversation. And knowing you, I am sure you do not take it amiss that sometimes I... well, I prompted you to spell out all this...

**Paul Ricoeur:** You know, I probably needed to be snatched from my lonely ponderings, because the challenge inherent in your questions... in good questions, forced these good answers from me...