

**Culture, Communication And Creativity:
On the Ricoeurian Oeuvre from an Inter-Subjective Point of View¹**

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*“...daß ich nur von mir zu erzählen brauche,
um auch der Zeit, der Allgemeinheit
die Zunge zu lösen”.*

Thomas Mann

*“Je n'ai qu'un moyen de sortir de moi-même:
c'est de me dépayser en autrui.
La communication est une structure
de la connaissance vraie”*

Paul Ricoeur

Studying the international literature of philosophy I have become convinced that French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has grown into one of the most productive, influential and important thinkers in contemporary culture. I am of course aware that such a statement may appear highly subjective to the reader and therefore requires justification. The formulation of philosophical value judgments – the attempt to point out the historical place of a contemporary author and to define his or her intellectual importance in the international context – may well be considered an immodest and anachronistic venture today.

Therefore I would like to start by saying that, although Paul Ricoeur is, according to my intuitive conviction, a thinker whose immense theoretical oeuvre is highly relevant to the contemporary culture, I would not dare to assume the role of doing justice and

¹ This article is a revised and much enlarged version of my previous study on Ricoeur's work, entitled “Communication and Creativity: An Unusual Review of Ricoeur's Work”, published in the volume *Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, edited by Andrzej Wiercinski, Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003, 620-641. The original article was created on the basis of Éva Zsizsmann's translation; the completions are translated and the text revised by Emese G. Czintos.

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formulating categorical judgments regarding his place in the history of modern philosophy. I only wish to present here, in an unusual review, the main features of the Ricoeurian life-work, as I see them, especially to the non-French readers who are interested in but not yet familiar with it.

I know of course that the secret of the long-lasting intellectual power of attraction of the French philosopher is that he raises substantial philosophical issues in all his oral and written manifestations – even in the personal, occasional or extemporal ones. However, in the present study we do not so much need to raise substantial philosophical issues but rather at least run through the rich international literature on Ricoeur and briefly describe the complex cultural context in which this work has developed. I will rely particularly on a very useful work¹ written by the French author Olivier Mongin and published in 1994.

However, as I will mention later on, I have also returned to some of the basic philosophical questions in my studies written in the last five years, taking into account the conclusions reached during the two-part interview conducted with Ricoeur and published in a former volume of *Philobiblon*.

1.

Let us first consider the question whether it is exaggerated to call Paul Ricoeur one of the most productive and influential thinkers of contemporary culture. I think that in the case of the theoretical oeuvre in question it is not at all exaggerated to speak about a life-work, an immense life-work at that. Since the beginning of the 1980s, several remarkable researchers called attention to the important fact that Ricoeur has not only appeared before the public with a whole series of significant philosophical works but also created a life-work in the very sense of the word; a remarkable, consistent and original life-work². Moreover,

¹ Cf. Olivier Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994.

² Cf. for example the essential study of John B. Thompson published in 1981 under the modest title *Editor's Introduction* in the volume edited and translated by him: *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press / Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1981, p.1-26 and Mongin's monograph mentioned above, *op. cit.*, p. 17-30.

Ricoeur himself also gave relevant hints to the interpretation of his work as a life-work, mainly in his texts written during the nineties¹.

With regard to the dimensions of this philosophical oeuvre, recent bibliographies signal an amazing number of publications by the philosopher, enumerating his systematic works², studies³, articles⁴, lectures⁵ and interviews¹. More and more of his works have been

¹ Cf. for example *A Response by Paul Ricoeur* written in connection with the Thompson study, *op. cit.*, p. 32-40 as well as Ricoeur's writings and interviews called "spiritual autobiography" or "self-interpretation" in the following. This problem is also discussed in Paul Ricoeur: *The 'Graft', the 'Residue' and 'Memory'. Two Conversations with Tamás Tóth*. My conversations with Paul Ricoeur in French first appeared in Hungarian translation in *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*, 1997, nr.6-7, translated by Éva Martonyi: *Paul Ricoeur: Az "oltvány", az "üledék" és az "emlékezet", Két beszélgetés Tóth Tamással*. The text was first published in English in *Philobiblon*, translated by Éva Zsizsmann. Cf. "The 'Graft', the 'Residue' and 'Memory'. Two Conversations with Tamás Tóth", in: *Philobiblon, Bulletin of the 'Lucian Blaga' Central University Library, Cluj*, vol. IV-V-VI-VII, 1999-2002, Cluj, Romania, University Press, 2002.

² I will only mention the basic works published in the eighties and nineties: *Temps et Récit*, tome 1, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. *L'ordre philosophique*, Paris 1983, and coll. *Points Essais*, Paris 1991; *Temps et Récit*, tome 2: *La Configuration dans le récit de fiction*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984, and coll. *Points Essais*, Paris 1991; *Temps et Récit*, tome 3: *Le Temps raconté*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. *L'ordre philosophique*, Paris 1985, and coll. *Points Essais*, Paris 1991; and *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990, which can be considered the summation of the life-work. However, all this does not lessen the relevance of the most recent and extremely important work of the philosopher: *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000.

³ I only mention the latest volumes: *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, Paris: Stock, 2004, *Sur la traduction*, Paris: Bayard, 2004; 1995; *Le juste 2*, Paris: Éditions Esprit 2001; *Le juste*, Paris: Éditions Esprit, see also *Du texte à l'action. Essais d'herméneutique II*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986 and *A l'école de la phénoménologie*, Paris: Vrin 1986.

⁴ Here I refer to the articles published in three thick volumes: Ricoeur, Paul, *Lectures 1, Autour du politique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991; Idem, *Lectures 2, La contrée des Philosophes*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992; Idem, *Lectures 3, Aux frontières de la philosophie*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994.

⁵ Cf. Ricoeur, Paul, "L'universel et l'historique, (transcription écourtée d'une conférence donnée par Paul Ricoeur au Collège universitaire français de Moscou le 1e avril 1996", in: *Magazine Littéraire*, No 390 septembre 2000, pp. 37-41; Ricoeur, Paul, "Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?" in: *Imaginer l'Europe*, sous la direction de Peter Koslowski, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1992 pp. 107-116; Ricoeur, Paul, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor, New

translated into several foreign languages². The body of his publications has recently been enriched by certain texts recorded and considered

York: Columbia University Press, 1986; and Ricoeur, P., *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, traduit de l'américain par Myriam Revault d'Alonnes et Joël Roman, Paris :Éditions du Seuil, 1997.

¹ Cf. for example Yvanka B. Raynova: "All That Gives Us To Think: Conversations with Paul Ricoeur", in: Andrzej Wiercinski (Editor): *Between Suspicion and Sympathy, Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003, pp. 670-696; Tamás Tóth: "The Graft, the Residue and Memory: Two Conversations with Paul Ricoeur" in: Andrzej Wiercinski (Editor): *Between Suspicion and Sympathy, Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, pp. 642-669; Paul Ricoeur: "Un parcours philosophique, propos recueillis par Francois Ewald", in: *Magazine Littéraire*, No 390, septembre 2002, pp. 20-26; "Un grand philosophe face à l'histoire, Entretien avec Paul Ricoeur", propos recueillis par Aude Lancelin, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7-13 septembre 2000, pp. 50-52; Paul Ricoeur: "Il y a de la vérité ailleurs que chez soi, Entretien avec Paul Ricoeur", propos recueillis par Frédéric Lenoir, in: *L'Express* 23/7/1998, pp. 8-11. "De la volonté à l'acte, Un entretien de Paul Ricoeur avec Carlos Olivera", in: Bouchindhomme, Christian, Rochlitz, Rainer, (sous la direction de), *'Temps et Récit' de Paul Ricoeur en débat*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, coll. Procope 1990, p. 17-36; "Interview mit Paul Ricoeur, geführt von Nikolaus Halmer", *Mesotes*, 1991/ 1, p.14-17; "Connaissance de soi et éthique de l'action. Rencontre avec Paul Ricoeur", propos recueillis par Jacques Lecomte, *Sciences Humaines*, No 63, juillet 1996, p.34-38, as well as "Az "oltvány", az "üledék" és az "emlékezet", Két beszélgetés Tóth Tamással" (The 'graft', the 'residue', and 'memory': Two conversations with Tamás Tóth), in: *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*, 1997, nr. 6-7, etc. It is worth mentioning the interview conducted by Ricoeur, this time, with a famous personality, the then Prime Minister Michel Rocard: "Justice et Marché, Entretien entre Michel Rocard et Paul Ricoeur", *Esprit*, janvier 1991, p.5-22. But there is also the book-size interview, Ricoeur's conversation with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay in 1995, Paul Ricoeur: *La critique et la conviction*, Entretien avec François Azouvi et Marc de Launay, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995, quoted in the following as *La critique et la conviction*. I would also mention here the interesting volume containing the materials of the great scientific, philosophical and ethical debate at the end of the nineties between the philosopher Paul Ricoeur and the scientist Jean-Pierre Changeux: Changeux, J.-P. / Ricoeur P.: *La nature et la règle, ce qui nous fait penser*, Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998.

² According to a statistics in 1992, Paul Ricoeur, together with Jacques Derrida Georges Duby, Gilles Deleuze, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Emmanuel Lévinas and others is among the French social scientists who are most extensively translated into foreign languages. The statistics in question mentions 116 works by Ricoeur, whereas this number was much greater in 1997. Cf. Moreau- Defarges, Philippe, *La France dans le monde au XX siècle*,

highly important by the international literature, works which may be classed as “spiritual autobiographies”¹ on the one hand, and “philosophical self-interpretations”² on the other. Moreover, the echo of this important oeuvre in international public opinion is also increasingly greater.

I am not thinking only of the general academic public, or the narrower – but very influential – public among professional philosophers. Nor do I only refer to the monographs written about Ricoeur's work – to the most important of which I will return in more or less detail later on – and the volumes analyzing his work³, or the great number of researchers (from France to the United States, and Italy to Japan) who dedicated articles or dissertations to different parts of his oeuvre, the entries about Ricoeur in lexicons of philosophy, encyclopedias and handbooks published in several languages⁴, nor the participants of various Ricoeur

Paris: Hachette, 1994, p.93; the original source is *Libération*, 8 octobre 1992, p.20.

¹ Ricoeur, Paul, *Réflexion faite: Autobiographie intellectuelle*, Paris: Éditions Esprit, 1995; the English version of this text (*Intellectual Autobiography of Paul Ricoeur*) was published in the volume entitled *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (ed. by Lewis Edwin Hahn), The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume XXII, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1995, 3-53. Ricoeur, Paul, *La critique et la conviction*.

² Cf. for example the following texts: Ricoeur, Paul, *Synthèse Panoramique* © copyright of The International Balzan Foundation; Ricoeur, P., “Narrativité, Phénoménologie et Herméneutique”, in: *L'Univers Philosophique Universelle*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989, p. 63-71; Ricoeur, P., “A Response by Paul Ricoeur”, in: John B. Thompson (ed.), *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, op. cit.; Ricoeur, P., “Réponses aux critiques”, in: Bouchindhomme, Christian, Rochlitz, Rainer, (sous la direction de), *Temps et Récit' de Paul Ricoeur en débat*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, coll. Procope 1990, p. 187-212. Lengthy passages of these works can be read as the self-interpretation of the philosopher, just like Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite* and *La Critique et la Conviction* mentioned above.

³ Cf. Andrzej Wiercinski (Editor): *Between Suspicion and Sympathy, Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium*, pp. 1-731; Hahn, Lewis Edwin, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, as well as Bouchindhomme, Christian, Rochlitz, Rainer, (sous la direction de), *Temps et Récit' de Paul Ricoeur en débat*; Jean Greisch, et Richard Kearney (sous la direction de), *Paul Ricoeur, Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1991.

⁴ Cf. for example Bernard P. Dauenhauer: “Paul Ricoeur”, In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002; Jean Greisch: Paul Ricoeur, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001;

conferences and workshops¹. I do not only think of the official recognition of Ricoeur by the international scientific community². I think as well of the wider cultural public opinion, the reading public of high-standard anthologies³, periodicals with a long tradition⁴, famous weeklies⁵ and prestigious dailies⁶ as well, of the students of famous European and American universities⁷, the regular attendants of great libraries and bookshops, in a word, of readers and intellectuals belonging to the “educated general public”.

Barasch, Jeffrey Andrew, Paul Ricoeur, in: *Dictionnaire d'Éthique et de Philosophie morale*, publié sous la direction de Monique Canto-Sperber, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001, p. 1391-1395; Peter Welsen : Paul Ricoeur, in : Julian Nida-Rümelin (Hg.) *Philosophie der Gegenwart in Einzeldarstellungen*, Alfred Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1999, p. 622-627 ; Claudia Albert: “Paul Ricoeur”, in: *Metzler Philosophenlexikon. Von den Vorsokratikern bis zu den neuen Philosophen*, herausgegeben von Bernd Lutz, Verlag J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart-Weimar, 1995, p. 739-742; *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*, edited by J. O. Urmsen and Jonathan Rée, London-New York: Routledge, 1991; *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thinkers*, edited by Alan Bullock and R. B. Woodings, London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1990 (1983); *Dictionnaire des Philosophes*, directeur de la publication: Denis Huisman, vol. 2, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984.

¹ I would like to refer to the ten-day international Ricoeur conference held in August 1988 in Cerisy-la-Salle, the proceedings of which were later published in a thick volume: Jean Greisch et Richard Kearney (sous la direction de), *Paul Ricoeur, Les métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1991.

² Cf. *Note biographique rédigée avec le concours de Thérèse Dufлот*, in: Mongin, *op. cit.*, p.13-15.

³ Cf. Roman Joël, *Chronique des idées contemporaines, Itinéraire guidé à travers 300 textes choisis*, Bréal, Rosny, 1995.

⁴ *Esprit*, for example, where Ricoeur has been publishing for decades now and in which he wrote many of his important articles later published in volumes, and *La Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, whose Editor-in-Chief he has been for many years now.

⁵ Cf. for example Aude Lancelin's article “Au coeur de Ricoeur, Portrait d'un grand philosophe”, published in the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 29 janvier – 4 février 2004; Pierre Bouretz's article, “Le bonheur selon Ricoeur. Le retour de l'éthique”, in: *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1990.

⁶ Cf. *Libération*, 19 décembre 1991.

⁷ During his long teaching career Ricoeur was Professor of Philosophy in Strasbourg, at the Sorbonne, in Nanterre, Louvain, Montréal and Chicago. He was also Dean of the University of Nanterre founded in 1960.

Moreover, it seems that the media have also discovered Ricoeur in these days, although he is a very private person. The modest, reserved but highly suggestive figure of the elderly philosopher sometimes appears on television¹. High school pupils and university students studying philosophy can now watch videotapes² with the famous philosopher's interesting commentaries on the key concepts and categories of his scientific work. And last, but not least, we can often come across Paul Ricoeur's name when browsing the Internet³.

2.

Let us now consider more closely the relevance of Ricoeur's life-work in the history of philosophy. I would again rely on my intuitive conviction and adopt a "subjective" perspective instead of an "objective" one. I will not rely therefore on some sort of "scientific" measure of the interpretation and evaluation of the philosophical accomplishment in question, for the very reason that I remember two early studies by Ricoeur⁴, in which he himself raised the question of the truth value of cognition in the history of philosophy – more precisely, the truth models asserting themselves in the different variants of the history of philosophy research – reaching the conclusion that most of the epistemological attempts to connect the categories of "philosophy" and "history," "history" and "truth," "truth" and "science" as well as "science" and "reason" end in aporias. (The conceptual pairs of "totality" and "singularity," "system" and "conscience" as well as "substance" and "subject" refer to such aporias.)

¹ Paul Ricoeur: *L'unique et le singulier*. (Ce texte est la transcription de l'émission "Noms de Dieu" d'Edmond Blattchen enregistrée le 10 mars 1993 et diffusée le 3 novembre 1993 sur les ondes de la Radio Télévision belge). Bruxelles: Alice Éditions, and RTBF Liège, 1999.

² Paul Ricoeur (dans la). Série: *Chercheurs de notre temps, Images à lire*, Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 1994.

³ Thus on 23 April 2004 the Google search engine found 90 600 documents on the Internet which contained the name of the French philosopher.

⁴ I refer to the following studies: "L'histoire de la philosophie et l'unité du vrai. Note sur l'histoire de la philosophie et la sociologie de la connaissance", in: Ricoeur, Paul, *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1955 (1964), p.45-65; *Histoire de la philosophie et historicité*, p.66-80. See also the *Introduction to the 1955 publication of the volume*, especially p. 9-12.

This points towards further consequences. If the attempts at understanding in the history of philosophy and the attempts at cognition in the sociology of science each come to a theoretical impasse, then it may well be that the possibilities of such an understanding and the sources of such a cognition should not be sought solely within a known system of philosophy or a sociological typology. Serious advance in this field will not likely depend on further perfection of the “objective” methods of research in the history of philosophy, but must be expected from the gradual development of the “subjective” forms of intellectual communication between different philosophies and philosophers.

Therefore, in seeking to understand the importance of a philosopher in the history of philosophy it is advisable to adopt as a starting point one of those conclusions that Ricoeur himself reached in his analyses mentioned above¹. This holds good for the case when Ricoeur himself is the philosopher we are dealing with. Understanding in the history of philosophy is for him finally an understanding through “communication,” not so much between “partial discourses” but between “whole personalities”.² Understanding in the history of philosophy is at best an “amicable understanding” (*compréhension amicale*) or a “hopeful understanding”. The latter expression refers to the fact that, in Ricoeur's view, the historian researching the history of philosophy is a philosopher who “hopes” that to a certain extent all the philosophers forming the history of philosophy participate in truth.

Thus we have to deal with a truth model that differs from the traditional one, but does not necessarily lead to a kind of “schizophrenia”. Thinking in this spirit would not mean replacing the affectedly serious “objectivism” of certain authors with the empty or unserious “subjectivity” of others. Also, this is not to say that the history of philosophy could be sensibly written in an arbitrary way, using perhaps “unscientific” methods, rejecting the methods of this specific field of science and genre in the history of ideas devised by generations of scholars, methods which in a sense are indeed “scientific”. This only means that Paul Ricoeur, unwilling to break with the “personalist” sensibility characteristic to the first phase of his work, does not only pay

¹ In the first chapter of *Paul Ricoeur*, Olivier Mongin writes about the “philosophical attitude” of the thinker. He too starts from the conclusions that he drew on Ricoeur's concept of the history of philosophy. Cf. Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 30, 33-47.

² *Ibid.*, 70-71, 55-56.

attention to the “objective” and “scientific” aspects of philosophical cognition, but also to the “subjective” and “personal” dimension.

The meaning, truth and importance of the philosophies retained by the cultural memory of humanity cannot be revealed if the historian of ideas relies only on the results of traditional histories of philosophy and sociologies of science (sometimes ending in flat chronologism, academism or dogmatism). Reflection in the history of philosophy is a specifically “historical” or “scientific” and a “theoretical” or “philosophical” task at the same time. It is a task that an important philosopher can only really solve by continuous “conversation” or “communication” with other important philosophers, even if it is advisable for him to stick to the principles and rules of modern hermeneutics, to use the discoveries of the theoretical social sciences and possibly take into account the history of the natural sciences. Ricoeur formulates this by saying that truth in the history of philosophy is “radically inter-subjective”.¹

Now, “communication” between different philosophies takes considerably different forms, in Ricoeur's view, depending on whether the historian of philosophy and a philosopher and a historian enters into a spiritual relationship with the important philosophers of the past or the present. In fact, communication with philosophies and philosophers of the past is necessarily unilateral and asymmetric. The historian of philosophy cannot enjoy the personal “presence” of a prominent character of the history of philosophy, only the series of his philosophical works, the “trace” of his intellectual career as found in his works. The historian can therefore address his questions to the life-work of the philosopher, but the life-work generally does not answer these questions. However, the case of the distinguished thinkers of today is different. The contemporary historian of philosophy can in principle always enter into intellectual communication and personal relationship with them.

Continuing the Ricoeurian line of thought and applying it to our situation, we may say that this form of “historico-philosophical communication” between the average historian of philosophy and the famous philosophers of our age², a communication which is theoretically

¹ Ibid., 71.

² When I say “famous philosophers” I simply refer to those thinkers whom contemporary professional philosophers and historians of contemporary culture consider as such. It is of course no question of formulating or reformulating some kind of consensus theory of the “truth in the history of philosophy” in connection with the work of Ricoeur or others. Of course it is not “public opinion” that is

always possible, is also necessarily asymmetrical, but not necessarily unilateral. With contemporary thinkers it is not only their spiritual “trace” that is given for the historian, but also their personal “presence”. Therefore the historian does not only interrogate the philosophical life-work but, in principle, the person who created it, the actual philosopher in question¹. This possibility entails further possibilities for the contemporary historian of philosophy. If the modern researcher is lucky enough, the contemporary philosopher answers his questions. He gives satisfactory or unsatisfactory, long or short answers, but he replies. The researcher or historian is even luckier if the contemporary philosopher does not only answer but also asks. Good or bad questions, long or short ones; he asks and sometimes asks again.

I can testify this on account of my own experience with Paul Ricoeur. Moreover, I must add that this philosopher (our contemporary, to whom we can in principle talk face to face – entering a live dialogue, a thinker who has, in spite of his age, maintained his spiritual openness and natural curiosity) does not only answer questions and ask questions in his turn, but also listens to the answers given by the researcher to his questions. And what is certainly even more important: if Ricoeur spares time for an interview with a foreign researcher, then this conversation will be an “amicable communication” and the great philosopher of culture will really consider the much younger historian of ideas a colleague and a philosopher, at least for the time of the personal encounter.

He will step out, for a moment, of the history of philosophy, without any ceremony and pomposity, lead in the guest to his study laden with books, and talk to him for hours in his gently ironic and self-ironic manner. When he talks to somebody, he talks to that person first of all and only in a second place to the microphone. He does not only listen to his own voice. He enters the game, ponders the question and also

qualified for deciding the “truth” in philosophy or the history of philosophy, and this holds good for the international public opinion of the philosophical community. Nevertheless, we are not dealing here with the final “truth” of a philosophical life-work but its actual “significance” and “impact” on contemporary culture.

¹ A good example of such philosophical communication is the book written by Erzsébet Rózsa in Hungarian about Ágnes Heller, the Hungarian philosopher also well-known in the Anglo-Saxon world, a book which contains a longer conversation with Heller. Cf. Erzsébet Rózsa, *Heller Ágnes, a fronézis filozófusa* (Ágnes Heller, the philosopher of phronesis), Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1997; idem, “Interjú Heller Ágnessel,” in *ibid.*, 247-299.

assumes spiritual risk. The famous thinker does not answer the questions of the Hungarian visitor with quotations from his widely read works but improvises his thoughts, considering the issue from a new perspective. He formulates new ideas and gives his momentary impressions without only considering the merit of the problem. Moreover, he will show that a philosopher who has ascended to great speculative heights of thinking has no need to deny his personality as a thinker, or his own personal thinking¹, for a strictly preserved individuality of thinking and carefully developed depths of substance are not mutually exclusive.

At the beginning of this unusual review I called Paul Ricoeur a significant representative of contemporary philosophy. Nevertheless, this is not the formulation of an allegedly irrevocable value judgment, considered to be absolutely true and perfectly objective. According to my history of ideas conception developed under the influence of Ricoeurian reflection, there is no theoretical absolute or philosophical truth, no favored paradigm or scientific criterion, the universal value of which would ensure compellingly objective criteria of evaluation for research in the history of philosophy. We should rather speak of an individual's value emphasis, the showing of one's true colors, the manifestation of the intellectual subjectivity and the philosophical intuition of the reviewer.

I do not deny, of course, that such a subjectivity may contain a certain contingency from the point of view of the history of ideas; it may contain characteristics of a certain national culture and also a personal bias. In the present case this is true for the very reason that this subjectivity is connected to the importance of a contemporary philosopher and of a fortunately still unfinished life-work, moreover, this philosophical life-work shows the characteristic features of French culture, a national culture which is, besides German and Hungarian culture, quite close to me. However, the main reason is that this subjectivity and intuition originates in my encounters with an elderly philosopher with a fascinating personality, and consequently it is the result of an ever so asymmetric philosophical communication with him. However, I think that I can afford such an amount of subjectivity. All the

¹ When using the expression "personal thinking," I make reference to the title of the outstanding Hungarian scientist and philosopher of science Mihály Polányi's book, originally written in English, Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). See also the Hungarian edition of the book, idem, *Személyes tudás. Úton egy posztkritikai filozófiához* (Personal knowledge. Towards a postcritical philosophy), Budapest: Atlantisz, 1994.

more so, as my admittedly subjective opinion about the international significance of the Ricoeurian oeuvre is obviously not a solitary one.

All the indications are that several other observers have a similar intuition, sharing a subjective or “intersubjective” opinion on, and approach to, the oeuvre in question. Some of them have recently reported on this in writing or speech, or at least in personal ‘conversations’ in due form. I am of course thinking of colleagues who also write in (but at least read) French, and who have shown an interest in French philosophy and French culture in general for a long time now. Yet it would seem that a relatively broad international consensus has developed among European and American philosophers, in recent years, concerning the recognition of the originality and significance of Ricoeur’s life-work¹. In any case, however, when a reviewer appears before the professional public with a slightly biased formulation, as I did before now, he (or she) obviously cannot be content with relying on the opinion of certain French or francophone authors, perhaps themselves similarly subjective and biased. He or she must allow themselves to gather information in a broader circle, taking into account the Ricoeur analyses of outstanding German and Anglo-Saxon authors.

This unusual review may well be called ‘unusual’ in the sense that it has been written in the name of “subjectivity” or “intersubjectivity” instead of “objectivity” and “normativity,” yet this would also be appropriate in the sense that, in spite of its relative brevity, it does not focus on single works by the philosopher but examines his whole “life-work,” albeit only in a rough outline. It does not so much rely on “primary” sources, but rather on “secondary” ones. This creates the appearance that the reviewer, while voicing considerable reservations about the application of certain “external” criteria of interpretation and evaluation, does not approach his topic from “within,” but seems, rather, to go round it “from the outside”.

Nevertheless, in the case of a philosophical oeuvre, it is, fortunately, less and less “unusual,” today, for a reviewer not to posit or acknowledge “external” (or, more precisely, extrinsic) criteria, which are “foreign” to the author, though “objective” in turn, and to reject, not only “political” or “ideological” but also so-called “scientific” criteria, in the name of which unconditional and irrevocable value judgments are all too easily formulated. Rather, it is more and more unusual today – and this is *not* so pleasing, I think – for a reviewer not to satisfy himself (or herself)

¹ In *Paul Ricoeur*, John B. Thompson calls Ricoeur “a philosopher in the classical sense of the word.” He considered his life-work “original and unique.”

with relying exclusively on the “inner” logic of the life-work under analysis or on his or her own “subjective” criteria of evaluation. In other words, what is 'unusual' today is exactly this: for a reviewer not to subject him or herself to a fashion for “impressionistic,” “relativistic,” or “text-centered” interpretation, but to take into account, besides the philosophical texts, the broader context of the history of ideas, the history of culture and social history, and also to draw on the substantial subjectivity of other critics.

3.

Let us start from the assessment that the contemporary history of philosophy and certain North-American and Western-European representatives of the theoretical social sciences have made a considerable attempt, in the last ten or fifteen years, at the reinterpretation and re-evaluation of Paul Ricoeur's theoretical achievement.¹ More precisely, certain English, German and French authors assumed the very difficult task of delimiting anew the place of the huge Ricoeurian oeuvre in the history of the philosophical thought of the twentieth century, while examining recent works of an author born in 1913 and still publishing regularly.

Jocelyn Benoist's study argues that Ricoeur has a “central place” in the whole of French philosophy¹. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention first of all to the important texts of the Americans Bernard P. Dauenhauer, George H. Taylor and John B. Thompson, the significant article of the Austrian Franz Prammer and the excellent books of the Germans Bernhard Waldenfels and Jens Mattern as well as the works of the French authors Olivier Mongin, Olivier Abel and François Dosse especially important from the point of view of our train of ideas².

Apart from their interest in Ricoeur's work there is no resemblance between the authors mentioned above, at least at first sight.

¹ Cf. Jocelyn Benoist, “Vingt ans de phénoménologie française,” in *Philosophie contemporaine en France*, Paris: ADPF, 1994, 39-41. Cf. also Christian Descamps, “Interrogations philosophiques contemporaines en France,” in *ibid.*, 13.

² I will discuss the important texts of the above mentioned authors at some length later on. I would like to at least mention the following interesting book, published more than three decades ago, and dedicated to Ricoeur's whole previous oeuvre: Philibert, Michel, *Ricoeur ou la liberté selon l'espérance*, Philosophes de tous les Temps, Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1971.

Waldenfels¹ for example writes mainly about the spiritual symbiosis, so relevant from a history of culture perspective, that developed between the German and French philosophy during this century². It is only natural that he dedicated a whole chapter to the work of Paul Ricoeur, namely, his late work entitled *Soi-même comme un autre* from this point of view³, as Ricoeur knew Husserlian phenomenology thoroughly and mediated it early to French culture and in spite of his serious reservations followed it in a sense until today.

On the other hand, Thompson's basic study⁴ tries to reveal the system of connections between French philosophy as a Continental European philosophy and English-American thought. In view of this context it is only natural that he tries to reconstruct the gradual development of Ricoeur's thought from phenomenology to hermeneutics and especially his line of thought stretching from the philosophy of the will to the philosophy of language. He also deals with the French philosopher's debate with Freudism and structuralism, the development of Ricoeur's thought within hermeneutic thought itself and his discovery that it is necessary to expand the application of the text paradigm and the theory of interpretation to the field of different theoretical social sciences⁵.

Regarding Mattern's instructive book⁶, I would reconstruct its conceptual starting point as follows: we should consider Ricoeur the most important hermeneutic thinker besides Gadamer. We may say at the same time that the French philosopher distinguished himself with the elaboration of a completely autonomous and highly original conceptual position in the history of modern hermeneutics. The recognition of the conflictual nature of every human thought and every theoretical interpretation is one of the fundamental personal and intellectual

¹ Waldenfels, Bernhard, *Deutsch-französische Gedankengänge*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995, see also the parts entitled *Paul Ricoeur*.

² Cf. especially the chapters *Schatten der Aufklärung. Zur Französischen Philosophie im 20. Jahrhundert* (p. 17-30) and *Zeitgenössische Philosophie diesseits und jenseits des Rheins* (p. 31-50) in Waldenfels' book.

³ Waldenfels, Bernhard, *Paul Ricoeur - Das Selbst im Schatten des Anderen*, *op. cit.*, p. 284-301.

⁴ Thompson, John B., (edited, translated and introduced by), Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, *op. cit.*

⁵ Thompson, *Editor's Introduction*; Ricoeur's "answer" published in this volume shows the importance of the questions raised in the study.

⁶ Mattern Jens: *Paul Ricoeur zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius, 1996.

experiences of Ricoeur's life. The depth and originality of his hermeneutic philosophy partly springs from this recognition. It is hermeneutics which is the main coverage of the discursive, critical and mainly creative feature of philosophising in his oeuvre. Ricoeur's philosophical thought is reality-sensitive and problem-oriented in this sense.

That is, it searches for answers to the basic questions and concrete problems raised by historical, social and human reality. It does not satisfy itself with the researcher's attitude characteristic to the modern history of French but also German philosophical thought. Thus Ricoeur is not content with continually rereading classical works and writing witty comments on their margins, or the continuous recapitulation and reinterpretation of the Western-European tradition. Still, he is obviously aware of the fact that the triumph of the opposite extreme – a total “loss of memory” of philosophy, or the development of a historically and culturally “memoryless” thinking – would also bear serious risks. So he thinks that philosophical thought can by no means end in the analysis of his own story, or the raising of strictly philosophical questions. It must turn towards the real world, find new objects and themes and search for answers to new problems (relevant from a human, social and historical point of view). According to Jens Mattern it is “language”, besides the hermeneutics of the self (*Hermeneutik des Selbst*), language, the central and creative part of our thinking (continually recreating man and the world) that appears as the basic theme of Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy.

Let us consider now Taylor's study¹. His interest evidently lies in the French philosopher's work entitled *Ideology and Utopia* written in English and presented at an American university, a work which obviously also contains Hungarian references². It was first published in book form in the United States in 1986 and it was Taylor who helped publish it. This book (translated from English into French only recently, strangely

¹ Cf. Taylor, George H., *Editor's Introduction*, in: Ricoeur, P., *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. by George H. Taylor, New York: Columbia University Press 1986, p. IX-XXXVI, as well as the introduction written by the same author to the 1997 French edition (different from the previous one).

² Ricoeur, Paul: *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. On Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim see chap. 10. “Mannheim”, *ibid.*, p. 159-180; and chap. 16. “Mannheim”, *ibid.*, p. 269-284; on Hungarian philosopher and literary theoretician George Lukács cf. *ibid.*, p. 57-58, 68-69.

enough, and finally published in France in 1997¹) is rightly considered a great author's important work in political philosophy, according to Taylor and the famous Seuil Publishing House, but also in my opinion.

It does not apply a historical approach but analyses ideology and utopia from a strictly conceptual point of view. I consider Taylor's introductions and forewords interesting because, unlike Waldenfels, Thompson and several other outstanding authors, he does not analyse Paul Ricoeur's oeuvre from the perspective of the phenomenological and hermeneutic debates but rather starts from the history of the problematics of ideology and utopia. Moreover, the American researcher does not so much aim at interpreting Ricoeur's life-work within the two ever so important trends, phenomenologic and hermeneutic philosophy, but he throws light on the place and role of political philosophy (and, partly, the philosophy of language also relevant from this point of view) in the Ricoeurian oeuvre.

The basic relevance of the question of phenomenology and hermeneutics placed in the forefront by Mattern, Waldenfels, Thompson and others is of course incontestable. It is strengthened by the works of Prammer, Abel and Mongin which differ from each other in content and length; Taylor's aforementioned articles do not contest it either. At the same time, there is also something else in common in the conception of Prammer, Abel and Mongin which makes them akin to Taylor. Namely, that all three of them attempt an overview of the life-work from different perspectives, focusing on the anthropological and ethical aspects as well as on political philosophic, moral philosophic and legal philosophic aspects. Moreover, I risk the supposition that there is some resemblance not only between these four but all the six Ricoeur researchers mentioned above.

My point is that all of them essentially "think in life-works", that is, they approach parts and periods of the oeuvre from its totality. This is how they approach the important role of philosophy of history and social philosophy in the influential work of the mature and the elderly philosopher. Furthermore, apart from their interpretation of the oeuvre as a whole, all of them consider highly relevant, although for various reasons, the late synthesis in Ricoeurian philosophy in the eighties, with the great thinker's *Soi-même comme un autre* as its truly classical representation. (Thompson is an exception in this respect, for chronological reasons: his interpretation of the Ricoeurian oeuvre was

¹ Ricoeur, P., *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, traduit de l'américain par Myriam Revault d'Alonnes et Joël Roman, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997.

written years before the appearance of this work in 1990.) However, Jeffrey Andrew Barash also belongs to this line: in his interesting analysis¹, dedicated to Ricoeur's moral philosophical oeuvre he calls attention to the fact that the French philosopher's work of six decades has relevant ethical and moral philosophical implications that can be reconstructed mainly on the basis of *Soi-même comme un autre*. He claims that Ricoeur's work proceeds from phenomenology to the philosophy of language, from hermeneutics to political philosophy and philosophy of law.

Similarly, we find a very sensitive, both differentiating and synthesising approach of Ricoeur's multifaceted philosophy in Bernard P. Dauenhauer's publications². Although the American author thinks that Ricoeur is undoubtedly one of the most distinguished philosophers of the 20th century, he calls to our attention that in a certain sense the studies of the French thinker show a "limited character". By this he means that Ricoeur has always proudly claimed that he proposes no "grand theory", but as a philosopher he rather deals with "particular issues". Nevertheless, Dauenhauer underlines that one finds a unity in Ricoeur's investigations of human activity, history, time and language. In other words, these investigations belong to the conceptual universe that the French theoretician himself consistently called "philosophical anthropology".

According to Dauenhauer, if we have a closer look at Ricoeur's political thought we may say that it is integral to his philosophical anthropology³. Otherwise Dauenhauer analyses the political dimension of the Ricoeurian oeuvre from the perspective of "promise and risk". Therefore one of the main intentions of his study is to show that "Ricoeur's political thought both springs from and fills out his overall philosophical anthropology. It both gives flesh to his studies of action, history, and time and provides evidence in support of his claims in these

1 Barash, Jeffrey Andrew.: "Paul Ricoeur", In: *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale*, p. 1391-1395.

2 Bernard P. Dauenhauer: Paul Ricoeur, *The Promise And Risk of Politics*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Lanham/Boulder/New York/Oxford, 1998; see also the American author's new and most interesting study on the French philosopher: Bernard P. Dauenhauer: "Paul Ricoeur", In: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2002.

³ But the American author completes his statement as follows: "Furthermore from the outset, Ricoeur has conceived of his reflections as a form of involvement in the City. His political thought is obviously integral to this involvement". Dauenhauer, *op. cit.*, p. 1-3.

studies”. We may therefore say that the political philosophy of the French theoretician is the crucial dimension of his philosophical anthropology. Indeed, the American researcher examines a whole series of prominent and politically relevant topics continually present in the Ricoeurian oeuvre, usually placing them in an anthropological context.¹

Therefore, according to Dauenhauer, “most of Ricoeur’s philosophical writings, and certainly inclusive of his political writings, belong to a large-scale, multifaceted philosophical anthropology”². However, he also calls attention to the important fact³ that during the development of his anthropological conception the French philosopher “has made a major methodological shift” a few decades ago. While his writings before 1960 are in the tradition of the so-called “existential phenomenology” – also showing several completely original traits within this tradition – Ricoeur undoubtedly reached the conclusion that the proper study of human reality seems to require the combination of “phenomenological description” and “hermeneutic interpretation”.⁴ In other words, Ricoeur came to see the “centrality of language” to every facet of philosophy as early as the beginning of the 1960s, including political philosophy.

However, we must point out that although in this period of his career Ricoeur’s philosophical thinking “became, as it has remained, thoroughly hermeneutical”, his political thinking remained deeply rooted in his philosophical anthropology.⁵ As to hermeneutics, its representatives are convinced, according to Dauenhauer⁶ that “whatever is intelligible is accessible to us in and through language and all deployments of language call for interpretation”. This is why Ricoeur himself underlines that “there is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols and texts”⁷. Nevertheless the American author considers that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic or linguistic turn “did not require him to disavow the basic results of his earlier investigations. It did, however, lead him not only to revisit them but also to see more clearly their implications”⁸.

¹ *ibid.*, p. 13-14.

² *ibid.*, p. 13.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Dauenhauer. *The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 14

⁶ Dauenhauer. “Paul Ricoeur”, *ibid.*

⁷ Quoted by Dauenhauer, *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

Finally, I would like to state that in my opinion Bernard P. Dauenhauer is right in underlining that from a history of ideas perspective there are certain theoretical continuities and discontinuities concerning basic anthropological and hermeneutic as well as ethical and political issues in Ricoeur's philosophical oeuvre, acting simultaneously. Therefore I consider Dauenhauer's methodological position successful: he does not only clearly differentiate between but also connects the "hermeneutic" and "prehermeneutic" stages or variants of Ricoeur's anthropology in his nice essay written in 2002 for the Stanford Encyclopaedia, however, he examines and discusses the most important topics of the distinguished French philosopher's anthropological thought in the context of hermeneutic anthropology. Among these topics are "discourse and action", "temporality of action", "narrativity, identity and time", "memory and history" and last but not least, the issue of "ethics" and "politics".

Moreover, in his book published in 1998 Dauenhauer also calls to our attention that it was the acknowledgement of Ricoeur's hermeneutic turn that led him to shift his account of the French philosopher's oeuvre and especially his political thinking "from following a chronological path to a topical path"¹. I would like to stress nevertheless, although I consider the American author's strategy of interpretation utterly fruitful, in my opinion the Ricoeurian oeuvre also allows for the application of different analytical methods. Thus, in the past years there have been interpreters of Ricoeur who have drawn attention on the importance of chronological points of view. Certain French and Austrian authors for example seem to have consciously returned in their history of ideas analyses to the more traditional forms of a diachronic approach, without neglecting however the indisputable advantages of a synchronic, or even thematic approach.

So Franz Prammer takes on the task of drawing the line of career of the elderly philosopher and diachronically studying his life-work². He searches for the basic intention of Ricoeur's philosophy and the central conceptual motives and theoretical categories. In this search Prammer brings our attention, correctly I think, to the key role of "philosophical anthropology", "practical philosophy", "ethics" and "ontology", among others, in his oeuvre. Olivier Abel aims at reconstructing Ricoeur's view on "practical philosophy" or, more precisely, "practical wisdom" (*sagesse*

¹ Dauenhauer, *The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 14-15.

² Prammer, Franz, "Paul Ricoeur - eine Einführung in seine Philosophie", in: *Mesotes*, 1991/1.

pratique), starting from the legal philosophical views of the elderly philosopher. He focuses on his highly concrete, precise and long range analyses¹ of the “right”, the “just” (*le juste*) and “justice”, touching the issue of “individuals” and “institutions”.

As for François Dosse, in his outstanding book² he undertakes the task of writing Ricoeur’s intellectual biography (*biographie intellectuelle*). In this book of almost 800 pages – which he entitled *Paul Ricoeur. Le sens d’une vie* – the French historian of ideas naturally means to do more than define the deeper “sense” of a great thinker’s life, which would be a great endeavor as it were; he also intends to outline the main “directions” of Ricoeur’s theoretical development. (This differentiation comes naturally from the fact that the French word *sens* has a at least twofold meaning). For this purpose Dosse systematically connects the viewpoints of a *diachronic* and a *synchronic* approach. By the former, he attempts at exhibiting the Ricoeurian oeuvre’s *internal coherence*. By the latter, he intends to reconstruct the *intellectual context* of the broader periods of intellectual history which served as a framework for Ricoeur’s important writings.

During his long life and career as a thinker, Ricoeur has had to meet many challenges beside those of the most influential (if not ruling) intellectual trends of French, German, or Anglo-Saxon intellectual life. At the same time, he has had to face the serious social, political, and public life challenges of his time. Therefore Ricoeur as a philosopher and a thinker, according to Dosse, is in all likelihood one of the great witnesses of 20th century French history, and at the same time one of the active partakers and most engaged personalities of French public life. Of course, Dosse never speaks of Ricoeur’s “engagement” in the sense in which this expression was understood in the 1950’s or 1960’s; that is, never as “party-spirited”, politically biased, or ideologically committed. But, on the contrary, he calls attention to the fact that Ricoeur has always been very cautious about the one-sidedness of doctrinal thinking; that is, for example, about the solution of complicated theoretical or practical problems on a simplifying “black or white”, “yes or no” basis. Instead, he has always strived for a more differentiated approach to these

¹ Abel, Olivier, *Paul Ricoeur - La promesse et la Règle*, Paris: Éditions Michalon, 1996.

² François Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur, Le sens d’une vie*, Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 1997.

problems. Thus, in a 1999 lecture¹, based on the rich material of his quoted book published in 1997, Dosse brings to the fore two equally important sides of Paul Ricoeur's personal development.

Firstly, he presents the development of the thinker's philosophy, which he calls *parcours philosophique*. Here he discusses how Ricoeur confronted significant theoretical trends of his age, such as existentialism, phenomenology, or structuralism, or even Freudism, pragmatism, or hermeneutics – to mention but those most important for his work. It is highly notable in this respect, that Ricoeur has always strived for openness and tolerance in his contributions to theoretical debates. That is, he has always urged for raising anew significant questions, and never for finding final answers, and in the while he has always proved to be a man of dialogue, synthesis, and mediation.

Secondly, Dosse brings attention to the thinker's involvement in public life, which he calls *parcours d'engagement*. By this, he refers to the fact that Ricoeur should be considered in all likelihood one of the prominent personalities of French public life for the whole period from the beginning of the second World War until the end of the Millenium. What is more, a personality of public life deeply engaged with certain social, political, and also moral, cultural, and spiritual values. But also a personality of public life who, despite his engagement, has never become the representative of any dogmatism. This is well illustrated by Ricoeur's role in the history of the journal *Esprit* and the circle of intellectuals behind it, or as a professor and theoretician of great American and French universities; or, even better, by his partaking in the ardent legal, ethical, and political debates of the 1980's and 1990's.

At all events, the importance of the aforementioned books of François Dosse and Bernard P. Dauenhauer is significantly raised by the fact that these authors could follow the main events in Ricoeur's theoretical and philosophical activity until 1997 and 1998, the appearance of their own works. Their analyses thus embrace a period at least three or four years longer than Olivier Mongin's book, which was written under the direct influence of Ricoeur's *opus magnum*, *Soi-même comme un autre*, and was published already in February 1994. Now, these chronological relations, which may seem completely incidental, in my opinion have a certain theoretical relevance. I mean two things.

¹ François Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur L'agir dans la modernité, 13 mars 1999*, [www.erf-auteuil.org /conferences/ paul-ricoeur.html](http://www.erf-auteuil.org/conferences/paul-ricoeur.html) - 35k -

Firstly, that in these three or four years the Ricoeurian oeuvre was enriched with a number of important philosophical, ethical and political articles and studies, published by the elderly thinker; and in 1995 the author's new volume, *Le juste*, was published, which analyzes serious questions of legal, social, and moral philosophy. In addition, there are the interviews, raising and answering substantial theoretical questions, given for important cultural journals, and intellectual historians from France and abroad; as well as the philosopher's lectures of a great impact both at home and abroad. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the elderly thinker, having a huge moral and intellectual authority, has taken part and stand in several important public debates, and that his approaches, always brilliant, and suggestively phrased, have usually had a great impact on French intellectual public opinion. It is easily understandable thus, that Dosse's and Dauenhauer's outstanding books – because of chronological reasons – could mirror much more of this considerable, almost perplexing theoretical richness than Mongin's equally important book.

Secondly, I wish to call attention on a further, and in my opinion especially important problem. Namely, the extraordinary originality and almost unbelievable creativity of Ricoeurian thinking. Since it is on this account that Paul Ricoeur, who was born in 1913, proved capable, even in his books published in his old age, in 2000, 2001, and 2004, of not only deeply revising his ethical and moral-philosophical conceptions, even yielding new recognitions. But, by the broad analysis of the problematics of “memory” and “forgetting”, as well as “recognition” (*reconnaissance*) and “translation” (*traduction*), he also proved able to start a new period in his own philosophical development. Nor is it farfetched to speak about the renewal of Ricoeurian philosophy and its clearly visible new period since 1990 because of the following reasons.

The French philosopher's great theoretical synthesis, *Soi-même comme un autre*, published in 1990, cannot only be interpreted as a sort of culmination of all his previous intellectual development. But at the same time as the starting point of a new, interesting section in his development, and also of two sequences of his important theoretical works. The first sequence in my opinion starts directly from *Soi-même comme un autre*, published in 1990, and continues with the volumes *Le Juste I* in 1995, and *Le Juste II* in 2001. The other sequence, as I see it, starts from the *L'histoire, la mémoire et l'oubli* published in 2000, and continues with the volumes *Sur la traduction* and *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, both of which appeared at the beginning of 2004. It is easy to see thus that, on the account of the aforementioned chronological

reasons, the analyses of neither Mongin, nor Dosse and Dauenhauer could have mirrored much of the theoretical complexity and philosophical results of this late phase of the Ricoeurian oeuvre.

Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that in writing this unusual review I relied first of all, indirectly at least, on Olivier Mongin's monograph¹. It is in his work that I see the clearest attempt to interpret the Ricoeurian life-work in a new way. Although I consider Mongin's monograph outstanding from several points of view, I will have to content myself with focusing on two aspects only. Mongin does not content himself with drawing Paul Ricoeur's intellectual portrait and objectively presenting the different periods of his philosophical career. Rather, he undertakes the task of reconstructing this huge philosophical oeuvre as a whole. The accomplishment of this task was probably rendered easier by the fact that Mongin wrote his monograph at a relatively late moment of the philosopher's career, and that he did not so much rely on the diachronic ordering of the life-work but on a retrospective approach and thematic ordering.

The emphasis on thematic criteria and contents allow him to interpret a later work of Paul Ricoeur's – *Soi-même comme un autre*, a large-scale ethical, political and philosophical attempt at synthesis published in 1990 – as the summation of the philosophical oeuvre, as the main work of the philosopher. If somebody considers particularly significant this ethical and ontological work, which also deals with cultural, social, political and legal questions, then this has certain consequences for the ordering of a monograph. The “practical philosophy” of the thinker, this significant recurrent motif of Ricoeurian thought which has at times been overshadowed in the international literature, is then viewed as the central point of the oeuvre. The criteria of this original and ambitious “practical philosophy” (conceived in an Aristotelian spirit, we could say) seem productive enough to become starting points in the interpretation and re-interpretation of the earlier works.

Mongin's book is also very illuminating for the following reason: it reveals that although Paul Ricoeur's philosophical work stirred great interest in France – and also Western Europe in general and in North America – since the beginning of the fifties, there were also fierce debates around it and around the person of the philosopher, beginning in the mid-sixties. Looking back from the last years of the last century or the first years of the new century, the vectors of these debates seem to be

¹ Cf. Olivier Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*.

rather complex; too complex for us to separate their participants according to relatively simple criteria into different groups, such as the fashionable philosophical trends of the time, or the criteria of linguistic, cultural or national belonging. Fortunately Mongin's work belongs to those publications which help us, either directly or indirectly, to find our way among these complex issues. François Dosse's Ricoeur biography, which was published in 1997, also offers valuable information analysis in this respect.

In my opinion there is no question, for example, of the representatives of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy receiving the works of Ricoeur with less interest than the representatives of Continental philosophy. Indeed, for the past fifteen years the reverse has been true: Anglo-Saxon authors have clearly discovered the depth, originality and importance of Ricoeur's phenomenological and hermeneutic, linguistic and political work much earlier than their Continental colleagues¹. Also, we cannot say that francophone authors have always been enthusiastic supporters of Ricoeur's philosophy or that American, German, Belgian or Italian authors have been hostile. On the contrary: certain Belgian and Italian authors did a lot to make Ricoeur's work known, whereas the greatest opposition towards his philosophy has developed precisely in his own country².

This opposition took the form of serious conflicts, two or three times during his career. I am thinking of his abortive debates with French Freudianism and structuralism, and especially of the fierce polemics connected with the philosopher's activities in 1968, when he was Dean of the University of Nanterre. Apart from these openly methodological, ideological and political conflicts, there have also been other forms of opposition: certain intellectual reservations could be felt for a long time. Therefore Mongin is right, when speaking about the "late recognition"³ of the philosopher.

¹ This is particularly clear in the case of John B. Thompson, who stresses that Ricoeur is the leading philosopher of postwar France. According to the American author we might say that Ricoeur is "much more than a philosopher," at least if we start from the generally accepted meaning of this term in the English-speaking world. In his opinion, Ricoeur is "a philosopher in the classical sense." Thompson, *Paul Ricoeur*, 1-2.

² Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 14-22; François Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur, Le sens d'une vie* Paris: Éditions de la Découverte, 1997, 7-12.

³ Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 17-21.

It is true that, today, Paul Ricoeur enjoys general recognition and wields great authority in French intellectual life: he is one of its leading figures since the middle of the eighties, since his great “return” to French culture¹. It is only proper to ask the question: how did it happen that so great a thinker as Ricoeur was forced into “intellectual exile” for fifteen years, or at least became marginal in his own culture and “unobservedly withdrew” from the intellectual public life of his country, a free, democratic country that is so proud of its culture? How is it possible that Ricoeur, who is sometimes considered – together with such thinkers as Deleuze, Lévinas, and Serres – one of the great “exiles of French culture,”² only got even with those who had pushed him into the background in the 1980s and 1990s?

Mongin, who offers an interesting overview in one of his earlier books about the changes in French cultural public life in the period between 1976-1993, gives a sensitive answer to this question³. On account of this answer I think that the conflicts were deep and long-lasting because they sprang from several sources. The waverings and inconsistencies of a part of French, and mainly Parisian, intellectuals, the divisive intellectual fashions and ideological passions, as well as the admirable consistency and gentle intransigency of the Ricoeurian philosophy, the work of an autonomous thinker and an independent spirit, were all part of it. Let us now examine these “reservations” and “conflicts”.

4.

We must go back for a moment to the beginnings of Ricoeur's philosophy. Olivier Mongin and Thérèse Dufлот draw attention to the fact that the general spiritual orientation of the young thinker at the start of his career was characterized by pacifism and social sensibility, Protestant

¹ Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 565-573, 602-608.

² Jean-Claude Guillebaud, “Le grand retour,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (6-12 février 1992): 10. According to the author of this article the intellectual importance of Paul Ricoeur and the other thinkers mentioned above is not any less than that of Sartre, Althusser or Foucault; their temporary pushing Ricoeur into the background was probably brought about by advocates of the “ideology of the day before yesterday.”

³ Olivier Mongin, *Le nouveau paysage intellectuel français (1976-1993)*, Paris: La Découverte, 1994. Cf. also idem, *Paul Ricoeur*, 14-15, 17, 20-22.

commitment and socialist beliefs¹. With regard to the main directions of his philosophical orientation, the starting point was his deep interest in a specifically French trend, namely, reflexive philosophy. However, the influence of a non-French trend, “German phenomenology,” soon became determinative in his work². In any case, we could say that Ricoeur played a main role (along with Lévinas, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre) in the introduction of this important trend of German philosophy into French intellectual life, and in the founding of a “French phenomenology”.

Therefore, even though the monograph mentioned above does not directly call our attention to it, the spiritual and political options of the young Ricoeur were more or less “marginal” from the start, and his intellectual choices bore in themselves, and from the outset, the possibility of certain “misunderstandings” and “conflicts” in France, a country where public opinion was greatly indebted to the principles of Republicanism and atheism (laicism) at that time, attaching great importance to the preservation of national and cultural characteristics or idiosyncrasies, and favoring – in the persons of its leftist representatives – Communist rather than Socialist principles.

In addition, the young philosopher favored authors such as Gabriel Marcel and Paul Mounier, as well as Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers and Merleau-Ponty during his formation, authors who belonged in one way or another to the sphere of influence of phenomenology, or the three philosophical directions – existentialism, personalism, and Marxism – which had a decisive role to play in the spiritual life of postwar France³. These “isms” soon entered the debate and began to compete, soon joined by structuralism⁴, which also started in France and gained ground at the

¹ Ibid., 13-14, 17, 20, 27, 29.

² Ibid., 25-29. According to certain contemporary historians of ideas, however, it would probably be more pertinent to speak about the influence of different German thinkers or “schools of philosophy” on French thought, because French intellectuals of that period obviously owe a lot to Hegel's philosophy of spirit, Husserl's methodology, as well as Heidegger's ontology. Cf. Christian Descamps, *Les idées contemporaines en France*, Paris: Bordas, 1986, 6-7.

³ Cf. Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*, 21-52; idem, *La Critique et la conviction*, 9-66, 107-176. On the history of French philosophy and intellectual life see Dominique Janicaud, “France, Rendre à nouveau raison?” In Raymond Klibansky and David Pears, ed., *La philosophie en Europe*, Paris: Gallimard, 1993, 156-193.

⁴ Chiss, Jean-Louis, Izard, Michel et Puech, Christian.: “Structuralisme”, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001.

turn of the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s, structuralism itself experienced a decline and the so-called post-structuralism¹ came to the fore, the representatives of which criticized structuralism together with the other trends. It is no wonder then that Ricoeur, mentioned by the handbooks published in the 1960s mainly as a philosopher inspired by the ideas of phenomenology² and existentialism³ and considered by international public opinion, beginning with the 1970s, first of all as a phenomenologist and a hermeneuticist⁴, soon found himself in the field of these tensions and disputes.

This is further complicated by the fact that Mounier, the founder of personalism⁵, tried to work out a synthesis between Christianity and socialism but also Marxism and existentialism, yet on a different level of thought. Similarly, another important philosopher, i.e., Merleau-Ponty, who, for certain historians of philosophy, is considered mainly an existentialist, while for others he is mainly a phenomenologist, made an attempt to reconcile phenomenology, existentialism, and, fleetingly, also Marxism – a rather bizarre attempt, according to our present conception. Moreover, in his dispute with Sartre, who was also an existentialist, Merleau-Ponty seems to have come close to structuralism as well. On the other hand, the borders along which structuralism itself turned against the other important “isms” and trends of French (and then European) spiritual life have themselves been guarded less than well, thus resulting in further complications.

¹ A sharp debate with the so-called neo-structuralism or post-structuralism was formulated by, e.g. Jürgen Habermas in his book *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: 12 Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985.

² Barbaras, R. et Greisch, J.: “Phénoménologie”, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001.

³ Cf. For example the entry on Ricoeur in Julia, Didier, *Dictionnaire de la philosophie*, Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1964, p. 270; and Wahl, Jean: “Philosophies de l’existence”, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001.

⁴ Greisch, Jean: “Paul Ricoeur”, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001; Dupuy, Bernard: “Herméneutique”, in: *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, © Encyclopaedia Universalis France. 2001.

⁵ Cf. Jean-Marie Domenach, “Emmanuel Mounier,” in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, CD-Rom, Version 7, (© Encyclopaedia Universalis France, 2001). On Mounier’s role in Ricoeur’s intellectual development see for example Dauenhauer, B. P.: *Paul Ricoeur, The Promise and Risk of Politics*, 6-18.

It is well-known that the structuralists showed an obvious affinity with certain views and conceptual models of de Saussure, Freud and Marx, for example. At the same time, certain famous French followers of these three epochal persons, e.g., the semiologist Roland Barthes, the psychoanalytic Jacques Lacan, the epistemologist Michel Foucault, or the philosopher Louis Althusser, have drawn so much on the system of thought of structuralism that they could in fact be considered structuralist authors. Moreover, Barthes really *is* one of the main representatives of structuralism, though only after the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. All this shows that the philosophical and political, scientific and ideological, as well as the individual and social psychological fronts evolving in the cultural life of postwar France were so complex that it is almost impossible to group a distinguished thinker under the banner of one single school, even from a “bird's eye view”.

Thus, returning to Ricoeur, I am not entirely convinced that the outstanding complexity of this philosopher's huge life-work can be grasped in one if we no longer consider him simply an “existentialist” or a “personalist,” as has been customary, but, instead, as a “phenomenologist” or a “hermeneuticist”. Undoubtedly, it is much easier to rank the author in question among the international trends of phenomenology or hermeneutics, rather than classifying him according to any other principle¹. Nevertheless, I think that Paul Ricoeur would be difficult to group into one (and *only* one) important intellectual trend – or two, and *only* two, for that matter. Such a grouping would entail an overemphasis on the coherence of his life-work and an underestimate of its complexities in certain cases.

However, we can also detect an ordering principle in French intellectual life between the 1950s and the 1970s, a twofold ordering principle in fact, by which the different structuralist pursuits and the personalist, existentialist and Marxist trends opposing them can be brought to a common denominator, albeit only in a forced manner and resulting in oversimplifications and often also in sterile disputes. This double ordering principle uses a pair of concepts: “humanism” and “anti-humanism”.²

¹ Cf. for example the publications of Bernard P. Dauenhauer, Jens Mattern, Bernhard Waldenfels, Jean Greisch, Richard Kearney, and John B. Thompson.

² Cf. the following entries in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*: Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, “La philosophie française contemporaine”; Saul Karsz and François Matheron, “Louis Althusser”; cf. also Gérard Legrand, *Vocabulaire*

The modern attitude of humanism that was dominant at the turn of the century gradually pluralized in France, taking the form of various “humanisms,” such as Marxist, existentialist, socialist and personalist, whereas within French existentialism and the so-called Western Marxism there developed, in tandem, a trend expressly calling itself “humanist” in the postwar years. Furthermore, the various structuralist pursuits often acted in the interests of a self-consistent theoretical “anti-humanism”. That is, while the former insisted on the methodological principle that the Subject, History, Experience and Reason must play a central role in all philosophy, the latter renounced attaching any theoretical relevance at all to these entities. Thus, while the former opposition between “humanists” and “anti-humanists” seems rather anachronistic today, this old polemic still has some importance in the history of ideas.

It is true that in one of his texts, Paul Ricoeur speaks with considerable irony himself, when looking back to the fratricidal war of the late personalists, existentialists and Marxists, that is, the former “humanists”.¹ It is also true that Ricoeur learned a lot from the views of at least some of the former “anti-humanists,” more precisely, the former structuralists. (It is here sufficient to refer to the work of certain less famous, but still very important authors writing in the field of linguistic structuralism, such as E. Benveniste and A. J. Greimas²) However, this does not change the fact that it was the radical rejection of the perspectives of Reason, Experience, Subject and History, as well as the announcement of the program of anti-humanism in the works of the main representatives of French structuralism, e.g., Althusser, Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, with which Ricoeur disagreed³.

Once more, however, this is further complicated by another issue. As Professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1957, having arrived in Paris from the University of Strasbourg, Ricoeur faced a serious theoretical challenge that he could not, nor wanted to, evade. He accepted

Bordas de la Philosophie, Paris: Bordas, 1986, 160-161; cf. Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 17-18, 20-21.

¹ This formulation by Paul Ricoeur, also quoted in Mongin, *ibid.*, 27, which calls the three former trends “*curieux trépied hexagonal*” – comparing them to a “three-legged chair,” a very “strange” formation which can only come into being within the context of French culture, within the boundaries of the French “hexagon” – is itself rather strange, at first sight. Ricoeur’s irony becomes clear when we realize that the French expression “*trépied*” also refers to Apollo’s “prophetic chair,” from which he “speaks in an inspired manner.”

² Cf. Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 365-371.

³ Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 53-59; Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 343-364.

the challenge by developing his own standpoint, publishing a series of sensational articles in the rapidly changing cultural life of the French capital, then true to its reputation of always being open to new trends¹. French intellectuals worshipped Husserl and Heidegger in the forties and the fifties, while Freud and de Saussure only became their idols later, in the fifties and the sixties. The triumph of phenomenology² was soon eclipsed by the popularity of psychoanalysis³ and structuralism⁴. Of course, Paul Ricoeur was not inclined to follow the Parisian fashions unreservedly. His conceptions were too strongly rooted in phenomenology for this to happen; obviously he could not, and also did not want to, give up on his commitment to the phenomenological tradition just from one day to another⁵.

We must also take into account the following⁶: after Ricoeur, as Professor at the University of Strasbourg, had thoroughly studied the works of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, and had plunged himself into the vast tradition of "Western philosophy," his interests gradually turned away from the questions then engaging the attention of the representatives of the existentialist line of "French phenomenology," such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. His own exacting aim had already been outlined: the creation of a philosophy of the will. However, in the Parisian intellectual climate at the end of the fifties, he had to acknowledge that psychoanalysis and structuralism offered radical solutions to several problems, which he himself had encountered earlier, during his research concerning the philosophy of the will and in his meditations. The issues of "Symbolism," "Guilt," and "Subject," for example.

As already mentioned, all this prompted the philosopher to accept the challenge of structuralism and psychoanalysis and, once more, to delineate his own positions within French intellectual life⁷. There is a

¹ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965, and idem, *Le Conflit des interprétations, Essais sur l'herméneutique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969. See also Thompson, *Paul Ricoeur*, 3-4, 6-10.

² Greisch, Jean: "Phénoménologie", in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*.

³ Dosse, *op. cit.*, p. 321-342.

⁴ *ibid.*, 321-342; see also Wunenburger, *op. cit.*; Greisch, *op. cit.*; Chiss - Izard - Puech, *op. cit.*; Janicaud, *op. cit.*

⁵ In writing about Ricoeur's relationship to phenomenology and phenomenologists I am much indebted to Mongin's work cited, especially p. 25-31. Cf. also Greisch, Jean: *op. cit.*

⁶ Here I follow Thompson's interpretation in his *Paul Ricoeur*, 2-3, 6-10.

⁷ Cf. Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 321-371.

relevant fact that we must bear in mind here. If we consider the issue of Ricoeur's answer to the challenge of structuralism, we will gain the impression that his answer embarrassed the French structuralists at least as much as the initial challenge had embarrassed the French phenomenologists. Perhaps it embarrassed them even more, though it is clear, in retrospect and on account of his intellectual disposition, that Ricoeur was not so much looking for confrontation as for consensus, when he faced the works of Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Althusser. He was in search of his own intellectual direction and thus strove for a constructive debate rather than a fierce polemic, for the actual answering of real questions instead of a frontal attack (or counter-attack). Accordingly, he looked for a serious consideration of common problems and found the positive assertion of his opinion unavoidable.

Beside his openness toward one or two newly discovered philosophical paradigms, he was also open towards several important disciplines in the social sciences, and was ready to integrate some of their categories and theories into his own thinking¹. It is all the more surprising that his books, written at that time, only met with irritation and long, offended silences on the part of Lacan, Althusser, and those of their circle². Similarly, even Lévi-Strauss's controversy with Ricoeur was, presumably, one-sided; it proved to be fruitful only for the latter.

I therefore think that, if the great dialogue that could in fact have evolved between "French structuralism" and "French phenomenology" in the sixties and seventies had not come into being later, or had remained barren after all, the responsibility for missing this great opportunity does not rest with Ricoeur. I call this a great opportunity, because the fruitful dialogue between phenomenology and structuralism could in all probability have rendered French thinking more productive and could have helped it in developing its traditionally strong Western-European positions. Reality shows us a different picture, however. Olivier Mongin was probably right when he stated that Ricoeur, as a philosopher, has never renounced the working out and productively "cross-fertilizing" of his ontological and anthropological, as well as his logical and phenomenological views (in the sense given to these terms by Jean

¹ It is easy to prove that, during his whole career as a philosopher, Paul Ricoeur paid special attention to the social sciences. Cf. my "The 'Graft', the 'Residue', and 'Memory': Two Conversations with Paul Ricoeur," in *Philobiblon*, *op. cit.*

² Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 20, 53-58; Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 332-364.

Hyppolite)¹, while French philosophers as a scientific community broke with phenomenology *tout court*.

Continuing this line of thought, I would like to add that, as a result of this break, most French philosophers (a rather forceful, relatively integrated scientific community playing an important role in philosophy on an international level) excepting Ricoeur, deprived themselves – but not only themselves – of the possibility of applying a productive method and elucidating certain important issues. As there was no real debate, neither the structuralists, nor the phenomenologists, existentialists or Marxists could win the debate, and so the unsolved problems worsened. Moreover, they all have lost Paul Ricoeur, who had a tremendous international career in the 1970s and 1980s. I must however admit that my subjective impression – that it was not Paul Ricoeur who suffered a spiritual loss and a loss of prestige during his “intellectual exile” in the seventies, but the whole of French philosophy – seems evident only in retrospect.

At the beginning, the discreet departure of the philosopher, gradually distancing himself from French debates and Parisian universities remained almost unobserved². The influential intellectual circles occupied themselves with completely different matters than the departure of a single, even if distinguished, thinker. In the French intellectual life of the period between 1957 and 1977, a constellation formed³, the brightest stars of which were Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser, Foucault and Barthes. Sartre was still present (although mainly as a public personality situated “left” of official Marxism), and the ascent of Derrida had begun. With regard to the most important trends of the period, structuralism, Marxism and existentialism intertwined in countless combinations and were complementary to each other. In the case of Sartre, we can speak of existentialist Marxism or Marxist existentialism, while Althusser is the representative of structuralist Marxism or Marxist structuralism.

In any case, if we browse the thoroughly compiled philosophical chronology or genealogy in the 1977 issue of *Magazine Littéraire*, for

¹ Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 28-31.

² *Ibid.*, 14, 17-22; Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 517-526.

³ The September 1977 special issue of *Magazine Littéraire* offers an interesting survey of this period.

Cf. Jocelyn Benoist, “Vingt ans de philosophie en France.” *Magazine Littéraire* (septembre 1977): 127- 128.

example¹ (which enumerates 25 authors considered important at that time), we will probably be surprised: the French media in the year in question already echo the names of the so-called “new philosophers,” while Paul Ricoeur is simply *missing* from the family tree of the French philosophers of that period. It is true that other distinguished phenomenologists were also missing, Emmanuel Lévinas, for example, who became famous later on. The panorama mentioned above suggests that the history of French phenomenology ended with the death of Merleau-Ponty in 1961.

The situation was in fact more complicated than this. It is true that most structuralist and Marxist authors radically broke with phenomenology, which they considered the out-dated philosophy of “humanism” and “idealism”. It is also true that, even though the history of French (and especially German) phenomenology did not definitively end in the sixties, the development of this philosophy, the evolution of its rich traditions had indeed stopped, for a time, in France. But it is also true some contemporary historians of ideas emphatically call our attention to it – that some French authors took up again the thread of German, even if not French phenomenology. In the eighties, French phenomenology as a phenomenology of subjectivity became the determining pursuit of contemporary thought in the francophone world, with the appearance of an outstanding new generation of philosophers².

I would like to mention a further double aspect of this issue. On the one hand, we must underline the important role of Lévinas and Ricoeur in the renaissance of French phenomenology in the seventies and mainly the eighties: these thinkers had a significant impact back in the fifties and sixties but were almost forced out to intellectual exile later on. Their prominent role is otherwise readily acknowledged by recent studies in the history of ideas³. On the other hand, my former remark that Ricoeur's withdrawal or distancing himself did not only have a negative

¹ Ibid., 66-67.

² See Eric Alliez, “De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie,” in *Philosophie contemporaine en France*, 53-131; Benoist, “Vingt ans de philosophie en France,” 29-51; Descamps, *Les idées philosophiques contemporaines en France*, 11-16. The main representatives of this new generation, Jean-Luc Nancy, Marc Richir, Jean-Luc Marion, Didier Franck, and Jean François Courtine continue to have a critical dialogue with Heidegger's philosophy.

³ Cf. Benoist, “Vingt ans de philosophie en France,” 39-41; Alliez, “De l'impossibilité de la phénoménologie,” 77-79; Descamps, *Les idées philosophiques contemporaines en France*, 13.

effect on Lacanians, Althusserians, and other contemporary structuralists, but also on the whole of French philosophy, seems still valid, and can be extended to phenomenologists themselves.

By oversimplifying, we could say that Paul Ricoeur, who left his country around 1970 as the leading representative of French phenomenology, returned in 1985 not so much as a phenomenologist but as a hermeneuticist, even as the leading figure of international hermeneutic research. However, someone could object: Ricoeur went beyond phenomenology towards hermeneutics in the course of these fifteen years, passing hermeneutics as well and approaching instead the epistemology of the social sciences on the one hand, and the ontology of human being on the other. Moreover, he did this without radically breaking with either phenomenology or hermeneutics. This is completely true; the statement corresponds to certain thoughts in Ricoeur's self-interpretation¹.

Yet Ricoeur, having started out from the so-called reflexive philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology, had certainly found his intellectual horizon much broadened by his encounter with the German hermeneutic tradition and the analytic problematic of Anglo-Saxon philosophy. He started, as early as the seventies, on an intellectual journey that remained inaccessible to French phenomenologists for a long time. Some of them followed him on this road some twenty years later, in the nineties. The aforementioned analyses, which survey the French philosophy of the eighties and nineties, call attention to this new phenomenon when they speak about a "theological turn" or an "analytical" and "logical" orientation of French phenomenology.

The development of this specific advantage was also determined by the otherwise dis-advantageous circumstance that, at the outbreak of the Western-European student movements in 1968-1969, Ricoeur was Dean at the University of Nanterre, the center of these events in France. In this capacity, he stood in the crossfire of the often unjust attacks from students and professors, considered "new leftists" by many, who were partly inspired by the structuralist Marxism of Althusser. Moreover, he was forced to experience in a direct way the cynicism of political power. All this led to the dramatic moment when he resigned as Dean and continued his activity as Professor, not so much in the francophone but in the anglophone world, mainly at great American universities². It is worth mentioning that the problematic of Western European and North

¹ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "A Response," 32-40.

² Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 14-15, 85-88; Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 461-488, 527-548.

American universities has always interested Ricoeur as a professor and as a philosopher, so much so that he dedicated several important texts to this issue, both before and after the Nanterre chapter¹.

In the quarter of a century after 1970 Ricoeur's career as a philosopher thus literally became a world career, and the philosopher could finally occupy his due place in the "three-cornered conversation" (*conversation triangulaire*)² between the famous representatives and important trends of French, German and American philosophy that he had initiated long before. It seems to me (at least the French expression *triangulaire* suggests it) that Ricoeur's aim was not simply the development of a "three-way dialogue," a kind of self-contained "philosophical triologue," but also the use of a certain "method of triangulation," or the adoption of French, German and American "points of triangulation" or reference which could help a simultaneously analytical and synthesizing modern thinker with the philosophical mapping of important theoretical problems within contemporary European and American culture.

Naturally, this meant that Ricoeur continued and also significantly deepened the critical adoption of the various traditions of German philosophy, especially the heritage of Kant and Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, Dilthey and Gadamer; moreover, his horizon also encompassed the work of Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. I would like to underline that Ricoeur's elaboration of the rich hermeneutic tradition of German philosophy proved to be extremely important in the development of his thought later on. However, we must note the following: while the critical acquisition and creative rethinking of German philosophy by Ricoeur has been completely successful and is, in my opinion, one of the remarkable events of twentieth century European culture, the critical acquisition and creative re-thinking of Ricoeur by German philosophy started rather belatedly and met with immense difficulties for a long time.

This interesting paradox in the history of ideas has several reasons, as Jens Mattern points out³. On the one hand, we should consider Ricoeur the most important hermeneutic thinker of the century beside Gadamer. We may say that the French philosopher distinguished himself with the elaboration of a completely autonomous and highly original

¹ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "Faire l'Université," (1964), and "Réforme et révolution dans l'Université," (1968), in idem, *Lectures 1, Autour du politique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991, 368-379, 380-397.

² Cf. Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 15.

³ Jens Mattern, *Paul Ricoeur zur Einführung*, Hamburg: Junius, 1996, 10-13.

conceptual position in the history of modern hermeneutics. In this sense, Ricoeur's philosophical thought is highly reality-sensitive and problem-oriented. On the other hand, we fairly need to acknowledge that modern hermeneutics in Germany has often been considered – mainly, but not only by post-modernists – as a synonym for traditionalism and conservatism. The hermeneutic thought of Gadamer, and even of Ricoeur, has therefore not always had a great power of attraction for those critical intellectuals who wanted to leave behind the well-trodden paths of German academic philosophizing.

However, the real turning point or advance was provided by Ricoeur's discovery of, and thorough engagement with, the rich material of Anglo-Saxon philosophy, as well as his really fruitful dialogue with the English-speaking world. This means Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy, various analytic theories of language and action on the one hand, and Anglo-Saxon political and moral philosophies, various theories of contract, law, justice and equity, on the other hand, the work of Rawls and Walzer being the most prominent in this sphere. In addition, the specific style familiar to the French theoretician, described by him as the "asceticism of argument," perfectly suited the very precise style of English and American authors, just as theirs suited his style. Still, as John B. Thompson points out, his books have not had an immediately favorable reception in the English-speaking world¹.

Of course, at the turn of the seventies and eighties, a series of theoretical problems thoroughly analyzed by Ricoeur, such as language and meaning, action and interpretation, as well as the question of subjectivity, came to the forefront in various fields of American social sciences. Philosophers, linguists and literary historians were interested mostly in these questions – but so were also sociologists, historians and social anthropologists. At the same time, two problems hindered research into, and a resolution of, such problems in the Anglo-Saxon world. On the one hand, authors writing in English still respected the boundaries set up between traditional disciplines too much, and on the other hand they had (and nursed) serious reservations concerning the great traditions of Continental European thought. Nevertheless, Thompson was convinced that "increasing familiarity with Paul Ricoeur's work will help to surpass these difficulties".

As a matter of fact, everything has turned out as Thompson expected, and Ricoeur today is "one of those rare modern thinkers who surpass the division between European and English-American

¹ Thompson, *Paul Ricoeur*, 1-2.

philosophy,” as another researcher has rightly pointed out¹. We may even add that Ricoeur belongs to that rare breed of Continental thinkers who received all the recognition and admiration from the English-American philosophical public opinion – and even more – that the representatives of their own country and culture did not give them for a long time.

5.

But let us briefly return to the issue of classifying Paul Ricoeur within the history of philosophy. In a simplified manner we could say that Ricoeur's philosophy cannot be definitively grouped with any trend, or, in other words, that it escapes any “ism”. Therefore I consider Olivier Mongin's approach convincing: he tried to view Ricoeur's life-work in the light of his great synthesis, *Soi-même comme un autre*, and to interpret it retrospectively² without overestimating the expressly “phenomenological phase” or the very important “hermeneutic dimension”. More precisely, Mongin lays great stress on the fact that Ricoeur has always firmly denied a “radical break” with phenomenological philosophy as such, while expressly acknowledging that hermeneutic thinking has for a long time been playing a “central role” in his life-work. Nevertheless, Ricoeurian thought (also in Mongin's interpretation) is certainly not confined to a consistent use of the creative perspectives offered by phenomenology or hermeneutics.

If this is so – and it certainly is – then Ricoeur's work as a whole can also not be reduced to these otherwise important dimensions. It is obvious, and other authors too have made reference to this³, that Ricoeur has a special place within phenomenology *and* hermeneutics, i.e., within these comprehensive trends, which cover a very large spectrum, from a theoretical point of view. This realization was facilitated by the fact that Ricoeur himself greatly contributed to the conceptual processing of the history of both traditions, and gradually worked out his own conception

¹ Richard Kearney, who wrote an entry on Ricoeur in *The Concise Encyclopedia* and was, together with Jean Greisch, a leading figure at the Ricoeur symposium (1989) mentioned above.

² Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 18, 31, 164-168. *Soi-même comme un autre* is considered central to Ricoeur's life-work and also the most important contribution to the development of contemporary moral Philosophy by Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “Paul Ricoeur,” in *Dictionnaire d'éthique et de philosophie morale*, 1391-1395.

³ Dauenhauer, *The Promise and Risk of Politics*, 14-15; Dosse, *Le sens d'une vie*, 136-143, 394-417; Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 58-66.

in a clear and detailed fashion¹. (He also took a stand in the great hermeneutic debate between Gadamer and Habermas, carefully avoiding any sort of one-sidedness².) It is perhaps not far-fetched to say that the specificity of Ricoeur's thinking is due mainly to his highly original establishment of a connection between phenomenological and hermeneutic questioning and its furtherance within a highly relevant and very modern issue, i.e., the philosophy of language. All this allowed him to develop the category of "narrative identity" and to profess a kind of "*phénoménologie herméneutique du soi*"³.

It is no less obvious – and this concerns mainly "German" and "French" phenomenology – that the issue (also in Mongin's view⁴) lies as follows: although Ricoeur clearly sees the "historical embedding" of Husserlian phenomenology and is conscious of its "methodological contradictions," and, moreover, although he accepts the criticism levelled by French structuralism at "Husserlian idealism," he is convinced, after all, that the phenomeno-logical questioning is productive insofar as it allows for the discovery of the outlines of the "issue at stake". Therefore, Mongin says, it is no wonder that, though Ricoeur does not only acknowledge but also weighs the criticism by the various representatives of French structuralism and epistemology, modern scepticism and nihilism of the philosophy of Husserl and Hegel, he is reluctant to break with the whole of the Husserlian and Hegelian heritage. In other words, Ricoeur is unwilling to withdraw to the extremes of an "ontology without ethics" (Heidegger), an "ethics without ontology" (Lévinas), or a purely epistemological discourse⁵.

This means at the same time that Ricoeur strongly rejects the idea that philosophy can and must create an "epistemological caesura" (Althusser)⁶, which would once and for all mark the division between

¹ Ricoeur, *Réflexion faite*, 55-61.

² Paul Ricoeur, *Du texte à l'action, Essais d'herméneutique II*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986. Confer principally with the chapter "Herméneutique et critique des idéologies", p. 367-416.

³ Mattern, *Paul Ricoeur zur Einführung*, 183-210; Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 63-174, 180-183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18, 21-23, 25-30.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27, 193-201.

⁶ Ricoeur has elsewhere clearly put forth his opinion on various aspects of Althusser's work. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *L'idéologie et l'utopie*, trans. Myriam Revault d'Alonnes and Joël Roman, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997, 149-213; *idem*, "Science et idéologie," in *idem*, *Du texte à l'action*, 303-331. See also Dosse, *Le sens d'une vie*, 356-364 and Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 115-120.

“general concepts” and “everyday thought,” “doxa” and “episteme,” “understanding” and “explanation,” “science” and “ideology,” while arguing in favor of the need for a “philosophical anthropology” or a “practical philosophy,” which would have the connecting of different fields of human experience and their comprehensive view as its task. In other words, and as far as I can see, the basic idea of Mongin's monograph is that the originality of Ricoeur's philosophy¹ – in an abstract sense and among other things – lies in the fact that this great thinker has consistently adhered to certain basic convictions, which he developed early and kept alive during his long career. He was unwilling to give up the thought of the hard won autonomy of philosophical discourse, among other things. He was unwilling to abandon the principle according to which philosophical thinking is compelled to presuppose the existence of a human subject capable of producing and conferring meaning².

Finally, I would like to make reference to the fact that an important shift of paradigm took place in French intellectual life, and not only in the fifties (as mentioned above), but also at the end of the seventies. It became clear, as Marcel Gauchet and others, looking back from the end of the eighties, emphatically call to our attention³, that the spell cast by structuralism broke, that its influence rapidly decreased and that the structuralist period was over. Also, the vacant throne of structuralism in French intellectual life at the end of the seventies was obviously not to be filled by any of its old rivals, Marxism, existentialism or personalism, but most probably by liberalism and individualism. Regarding structuralist Marxism, for example, Didier Eribon points out that the oeuvre of Louis Althusser, one of the most influential French philosophers of the sixties and seventies (and, said or unsaid, one of Ricoeur's rivals, at least in the intellectual public's opinion), was suddenly removed from the agenda, lost all its former attraction and became practically unreadable when the new leftist ideologies lost ground and Marxism collapsed⁴.

¹ Ibid., 21.

² Ibid., 137-144; Mattern, *Paul Ricoeur zur Einführung*, 183-211.

³ Maurice Gauchet, “Changement de paradigme en sciences sociales?” *Le Débat* 50 (mai-août 1988): 165-170; idem, “Totalitarisme, libéralisme, individualisme.” Ibid., 185-189. See also Wunenburger, “La philosophie française contemporaine,” 1-6; Descamps, *Les idées philosophiques contemporaines en France*, 15-21; Janicaud, “France, Rendre à nouveau raison?” 156-175.

⁴ Cf. Didier Eribon's article, written on the death of Louis Althusser, “Les stigmates de l'Histoire.” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (1-7 novembre 1990). Looking

This is due to the fact that the intellectual public opinion of the seventies and eighties reinstated the categories of “Subject” and “History,” “Identity” and “Continuity,” “Conscience” and “Reflection,” and gave back their rights to the disciplines connected with them. This did not only anticipate the possibility that Ricoeur and Lévinas, Deleuze and Serres, the great personalities of French philosophy in spiritual exile, could once again occupy their due place in the cultural public life of their country¹. It also anticipates that the joy we felt since the beginning or middle of the eighties at the return of these thinkers from their spiritual exile will not remain undisturbed, especially in the case of Ricoeur. In this respect I entirely share Olivier Mongin's fears.

To all appearances, and although the last ten or fifteen years have finally brought late recognition to the aged philosopher, and the honor he deserved², certain “reservations” and “misunderstandings” connected with his work and person still survive in French public opinion. For example, it seems that although Paul Ricoeur has always been preoccupied by the great philosophical questions arising in the context of French culture (and, in a broader sense, in Continental European culture) – questions, which he tried to answer, especially in his three-cornered dialogue with outstanding representatives of German and Anglo-Saxon culture – some French philosophers still cannot find a place for him in the panorama representing the current state of French culture.

I do not only refer to the fact that in 1990, the name of Paul Ricoeur, one of the leading French cultural philosophers of the century, still did not always appear on the list of leading French cultural philosophers³. I refer in particular to the fact that, while American historians of ideas, for example, clearly consider Ricoeur a “great” and a “classical” philosopher⁴ (or an “all-around” philosopher, for that matter), precisely in the European sense of the word ‘classical,’ certain French and German authors, as well as certain representatives of intellectual

back on Althusser's work, Karsz and Matheron write in a similar manner.

¹ Guillebaud, *Le grand retour*, 10-11; Mongin, *Paul Ricoeur*, 17-21.

² This is clearly formulated by Jean Greisch and Richard Kearney in “Présentation,” in Paul Ricoeur, *Les Métamorphoses de la raison herméneutique*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1991, 9. Cf. Jean Greisch's opinion on Ricoeur's international appreciation in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*.

³ Jean-Paul Enthoven, “L'état des lieux.” *La pensée aujourd'hui*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Collection dossiers 2 (1990): 51-53.

⁴ Cf. Dauenhauer, *The Promise and Risk of Politics*, I; Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago; La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1995), vii; Thompson, *Paul Ricoeur*, 25-26.

public opinion still misunderstand him, considering him simply and solely a “believer” or “humanist,” a “pedagogue” or “professor,” a theoretician of “tradition” or the “community,” his philosophical style too “esoteric” and his methodological attitude too “ecumenical”.

That these various reservations are indeed “misunderstandings,” can hardly be doubted. Olivier Mongin’s interesting comments support this view: while relying on various writings of Ricoeur’s, he also attempts to “correct” them¹. In any case, the negative reactions in connection with Ricoeur’s philosophy noticeably, and most often, take the form of misunderstandings and insinuations rather than open criticism or accurate counter-arguments. Therefore it is worth mentioning the volume of studies edited by Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz, a book which explores the issues raised in Ricoeur’s three-volume work, *Temps et récit*². As well as expressly acknowledging Ricoeur’s greatness as a thinker and his historical importance, they are highly critical³.

It is only proper therefore to speak about Ricoeur’s great return to French philosophy. François Dosse speaks of “*consécration*” or “ultimate recognition,” certainly not without foundation⁴. Nevertheless, we must be conscious that this was far from being simply a triumphal progress. Its not having been so, was all the more reason for the shift of paradigm in French spiritual life at the turn of the seventies and eighties to be a very complex process. From Ricoeur’s point of view, it may be considered to have been a new theoretical challenge, which the already world-famous scholar and philosopher tried to answer in a careful and detailed manner, as always. This process was complex in that “structuralism,” hegemonic from a theoretical as well as methodological point of view, was replaced in later years by the aforementioned “liberalism” and “individualism” on the one hand, and on the other by the conglomerate of certain trends or pursuits that are often in conflict with each other, trends that are mostly designated as “poststructuralism” or “post-modernism” in international literature⁵.

¹ Cf. Mongin, Paul Ricoeur, 17-21, 28-29.

² Bouchindhomme, Christian, Rochlitz, Rainer, (sous la direction de), *Temps et Récit’ de Paul Ricoeur en débat*.

³ Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz, “Avant-propos des traducteurs,” in Jürgen Habermas, *Le discours philosophique de la modernité, Douze conférences*, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, 10-14.

⁴ Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur*, 591, 602-608.

⁵ Cf. for example Bouchindhomme and Rochlitz, “Avant-propos des traducteurs,” i-vii.

Of course, Ricoeur for one had not wanted to renounce the great heritage of phenomenology and hermeneutics from one day to another. Also, he was obviously reluctant to discard the great theoretical questions of ontology and anthropology, ethics and politics from his philosophical inquiries. Hence an unreserved adherence to any of the “radical changes of paradigm” in French intellectual life of the last couple of decades would not have provided him with a real philosophical *modus vivendi*. In other words: in the fifties, the philosopher – who was then still at the beginning of his career – recognized that a guarantee of successfully answering the theoretical challenges of the period could not lie in a radical move from “humanism” to “anti-humanism,” from “existentialism” to “structuralism,” but would lie, rather, in the development of his own theoretical direction.

The mature, and later the aged philosopher, arrived at the same conclusion at the turn of the seventies and eighties, namely, that for him the solution would certainly lie in proceeding along his own theoretical line, instead of attempting a determined 'stepping over,' let us say, from “structuralism” to “poststructuralism,” from “postmodernism” to “neomodernism”. However, this lonely decision placed Ricoeur in a perilous situation, from the point of view of the history of ideas, no less twenty years ago than it did forty years ago: he found himself on the barricades, as far as different ideological fights were concerned, which moreover were changing day by day.

6.

Critics say that the representatives of poststructuralist and postmodernist trends are characterized by a strong “skepticism,” “relativism” and “nihilism,” in opposition to the similarly powerful “rationalism,” “scientism,” “moralism” and “universalism” represented by their enemies, the so-called “neo-modernists”. It was to be expected that Ricoeur would not wish to agree with the exaggerations of any of them. French debates on these issues have at times been so fierce that some German and American authors considered it necessary to intervene.

Bernhard Waldenfels calls our attention to the fact that, on the German side, Jürgen Habermas himself intervened in this theoretical debate centered around the French poststructuralists and postmodernists¹.

¹ Bernhard Waldenfels, *Deutsch-französische Gedankengänge*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995, 12, 17, and especially 36-40.

He presented his ideas in *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*¹, in the three chapters dedicated mainly to the work of Derrida, Foucault and Bataille, the tone of which is highly critical in some places. This is why I would like to note emphatically that the criticism written by Habermas does not in any way refer to Ricoeur's philosophy². Waldenfels's formulations clearly show that, knowing the suppleness of the views of these French authors (and the complexity of the fronts dividing them from, and connecting them to, each other), he considers Habermas's inevitably *virtuoso* analyses a bit too formal and sketchy for his liking³. Not to mention other German authors (Rainer Rochlitz, for example), who further simplify the criteria of evaluation and sometimes apply them with a touch of pedantry.

As for Anglo-Saxon authors, it is perhaps enough to mention Alan Sokal, the American physicist. In a study written in 1996, and in an essay written together with Jean Bricmont, he submits the work of some leading representatives of French poststructuralism and postmodernism to a devastating (or seemingly devastating) critique⁴. The famous personalities criticized there are Lacan, Deleuze, Kristeva, Baudrillard, Virilio, etc., and the criticism he dishes out was written from the

¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: 12 Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985.

² This is certainly not to say that it is impossible to find significant theoretical differences between Paul Ricoeur's and Jürgen Habermas' philosophical work. I myself have called attention to some of such differences in a recently published article, written in German. Cf. Tamás Tóth, "Die Diskussion über Verfassungspatriotismus im kontinentaleuropäischen Kontext", in Gerhard Göhler, Matthias Iser, Ina Kerner (Hrsg.), *Verfassungspatriotismus und nationale Identität. Ein deutsch-ungarisch-tschechisch-polnischer Dialog* (Berlin, 13.-16. Juni 2002), Veröffentlicht am Otto-Suhr-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin und am Lehrstuhl für Philosophie der Universität Miskolc, Berlin und Miskolc 2003, S. 111-198. Publicationes Universitatis Miskolciensis, Sectio Philosophica, Tomus VIII. – Fasciculus 2.

³ On the various "misunderstandings" and "communicational difficulties" between Habermas and Lyotard, Habermas and Derrida, or in a wider sense between German and French philosophers, interesting analyses can be found not only in Bernhard Waldenfels' book, but also Manfred Frank's. Cf., e.g. Manfred Frank, *Die Grenzen der Verständigung*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998; or Mönninger, M.: "Missverständnisse. Aber aus tiefem Herzen", *Die Zeit* 4/2003; [Http://www.zeit.de/2003/04/Elysee-Vertr..](http://www.zeit.de/2003/04/Elysee-Vertr..)

⁴ See the interview recorded by Philippe Boulet-Gercourt with Alan Sokal, as well as Gilles Anquetil's note in the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* (25 septembre - 1 octobre 1997).

perspective of the philosophy of science. I would like to emphasize here too, that Alan Sokal's criticism does not refer to the philosophy of Ricoeur, while the criticism as formulated in some of the writings in the book edited by Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz does refer to it.

From among these critical criteria I will mention only the following. Although Paul Ricoeur, at least according to the opinion of the authors mentioned above, is not emphatically “modern,” nor emphatically “anti-modern,” his philosophy raises many of the important questions of modernity. Yet Ricoeur's philosophy does not, after all, formulate any theory of a functionally differentiated modernity, either explicitly or implicitly. Moreover, the aforementioned authors consider Ricoeur's relation to modernity highly problematic. So much so that Rainer Rochlitz, a German author who has lately started writing mainly in French, thinks he can detect not only “syncretism,” “traditionalism” and (Western) “ethnocentrism” in the oeuvre in question, but also reproaches Ricoeur with a “triple refusal of modernity in the name of tradition”¹. He claims that there are three aspects of Ricoeur's philosophy which show that it cannot cope with modernity: these are the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic spheres. In other words, according to these authors Ricoeur cannot help but reject or refuse the universality of reason and the universality of morals, or recognize the disruptive tendencies of modern art. According to this logic, the real or alleged weaknesses in Ricoeur's philosophy are also connected with the statement that the thinker remains within the framework of “phenomenologic and hermeneutic tradition”.

Indeed, the important philosophical issue of modernity cannot simply be avoided. But I am convinced that there is no sign of such an attempt in Paul Ricoeur's oeuvre². It is true that the French philosopher has not set out to develop some explicit theory of a functionally differentiated modernity, as other distinguished, internationally acknowledged philosophers – such as the German Jürgen Habermas³ or

¹ Rainer Rochlitz, “Proposition de sens et tradition: l'innovation sémantique selon Paul Ricoeur,” in Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz, eds., *Temps et Récit en débat*, 139-161.

² This opinion seems to be supported by the line of thought of Dosse's following lecture: François Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur L'agir dans la modernité*, conférence donnée le 13 mars 1999, www.erf-auteuil.org/_conferences/paul-ricoeur.html - 35k -

³ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der moderne*; Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne – ein unvollendetes Projekt*, Philosophisch-politische

the Hungarian Ágnes Heller¹ – have done. But why would he? This does not mean that Ricoeur's philosophy could not cope with “modernity,” or that he would ever have refused it in three ways, in the name of some allegedly unified and conservative “tradition”. On the contrary, my discussions with Paul Ricoeur have convinced me – and reading one of his latest books² has only strengthened my impression – that he has deeply thought through the questions of modernity, just like Heller and Habermas have done, only starting from a completely different philosophical viewpoint and in accordance with his own habit of mind and specific cognitive aims.

So I think that, perhaps by exaggerating a little, we could make the following reply: strange as it may be, it seems that the rather high level Franco-German analyses of Rainer Rochlitz and Christian Bouchindhomme in 1986 were trying to answer an absurd question, i.e., what is “missing” from Ricoeur's life-work, before he could become the “French Habermas”? Incidentally, it seems to me somewhat strange that the analysis in question does not raise the similarly absurd question of what is “missing” from the work of Habermas, who has latterly shown great interest in French culture, so that he could finally become the “German Ricoeur”. Nevertheless, the value of the volume in question is much increased, in my opinion, by the circumstance that it does not only contain the interesting and problematic analysis of Ricoeur by a few French and German authors, but also the witty, independent and, in my opinion, convincing answer given by the old philosopher to his younger critics³.

Let us stay with German philosophy a moment longer. In *Das Erbe Europas*⁴, Hans-Georg Gadamer called his readers's attention to the realities concerning the characteristics of “European culture,” i.e., that we should not only focus on the various processes of differentiation and modernization which were developing in the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), where philosophy, religion, art and science traditionally converge, but more specifically on those that were developing in the natural and the social sciences as such. He encouraged his readers to do

Aufsätze, Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1992.

¹ Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity*, Malden - Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, , 1999.

² Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000, especially 400-413.

³ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, “Réponses,” in *ibid.*, 187-212.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Das Erbe Europas*: Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1989.

away with the illusion of a seemingly absolute, almost monolithic cultural unity in Western Europe, and to differentiate in a sensitive way between the Western and Eastern regions of the Continent (from the point of view of modern cultural history). In his view, the creation of Europe's real cultural unity would only be possible (or even come about) by taking fully into account the regional, religious, linguistic and national differences within this Continent, and by building on the various ecumenical movements – 'ecumenical' in the broad sense – that have been active throughout its history. A necessary condition for the development of cultural unity in Europe would be to see it as a "communicational community," and to develop the various forms of "dialogic understanding" which emerge from hermeneutic thinking¹.

Paul Ricoeur has a similar approach. In *Histoire et vérité* namely in his study entitled "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales"² he bears witness to this, as do my conversations with him, which took place in 1991, 1996, and 2003, respectively³. Unlike Gadamer, however, the French philosopher also deals with the difficulties that beset attempts at dialoguing between different Continental civilisations and/or national cultures. He acknowledges that, although the transmission of the values dear to different cultures is not theoretically impossible, but in practice our difficult task of understanding, communication and mediation is insufficiently helped along by the philosophies of history known by us. Clearly Ricoeur thinks that we Europeans are closed in on ourselves, both within Western culture and a universalist philosophy of world history, and that this philosophy does not allow for the mediation between cultures to be everything at once, i.e., universal, particular, or singular.

I think that here we stand face to face with an important problem, one whose acknowledgement in Ricoeur's study, written all of forty years ago, should enable us to see our way in a clearer light⁴. This

¹ Philippe Ivernel, the French translator and interpreter of Gadamer's *Das Erbe Europas* also drew attention to this. Cf. Philippe Ivernel, "Préface," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *L'héritage de l'Europe*, Paris: Bibliothèque Rivages, 1996.

² Paul Ricoeur, "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales," in *Histoire et vérité*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1964, 286–300.

³ In connection with the issues raised in that study, see also my "The 'Graft', the 'Residue', and 'Memory': Two Conversations with Paul Ricoeur," published in the latest number of *Philobiblon*.

⁴ Ricoeur offers a most interesting analysis on the concept of world history as perceived by modern "universalism" or "particularism" (or, in a different terminology, "communitarism"), in his aforementioned 1996 lecture, "L'universel et l'historique", published in the September 2000 issue of the *Magazine Littéraire*

problem is all the more serious as the processes of cultural globalization, and above all of European integration, have led to the development of a serious dilemma, which could be stated – in simplified manner – as follows.

There are many groupings in today's Europe, human communities with different cultural identities. A great number of these close themselves to others in an imagined universalism, others shut themselves in, concerning others, because of their real particularity. Hence the phenomenon that Karl-Heinz Bohrer wittily called “Europrovincialism” is rather accentuated at the periphery of the Continent, but exists also in the center, the core countries of the European Union¹. Thus there is a need to develop the “dialogue between cultures” and to concentrate on a common attempt of developing a “culture of dialogue” on a large scale. Instead, the reality is that most often there is no real dialogue in Europe today, or else it is quickly interrupted; the attempts at communication between cultures, understanding one another's mentality, or mediating between different conceptions, usually end in failure. “The barriers are up,” as far as human, cultural and philosophical understanding² within, or mainly between and around certain communicational communities are concerned. They seem to be insurmountable. Yet it also appears to be the case, in the last few years, that these problems of communication and non-communication, as well as of incommunicability, caught the attention of several outstanding European intellectuals.

7.

For some years now, one may speak about the mass-phenomenon of “the Renaissance of philosophy” in the Western part of the Continent.³ The explanation of this curious phenomenon can be found on

(p. 37-41.)

¹ Karl-Heinz Bohrer, “Europrovinzialismus,” *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* (November 1991): 1059-1068.

² M. Frank, *Die Grenzen der Verständigung*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998.

³ I closely analyzed this problem for example in my following publications: Tóth T.: “Az ezredforduló filozófiájáról – metafizológiai szemszögből”. (On the philosophy of the turn of the millennium – in a meta-philosophical approach) In.: Loboczy János, ed.: *Párbeszédben a világ sorsával: Filozófia a globalizálódó világban* (Dialoguing with the Destiny of the World: Philosophy in the Globalizing World), Eger: EKF Linceum Kiadó, 2001. 218-246.; Tóth T.: *Az európai filozófia harmadik ezredfordulója* (The Third Millennium Turn of

the one hand in the fact that contemporary modern societies and developed civilizations have visibly come to a crisis; they have lost their way or direction. On the other hand, the renewal of philosophy at the turn of the millennium in a broader sense was made possible by the fact that the educated public today consists of generations the members of which, living in a civilization in crisis, want to “find a meaning for their lives”.

The question rises however: What should we understand about “philosophy” in this context? And what about its “great return”? It is self-evident of course that philosophy during its history has always been a cultural phenomenon with many faces and aspects. It awaits further clarifications, however, to find out which is (or rather how is) the “philosophy” on the “rebirth” of which there is so much discussion today, with regard to its theoretical content, disciplinary character, and cultural historical status. Or, for that matter, who are the “philosophers” whose “return” is often reported on the front covers of cultural magazines?

As to the first question, the phenomenon of the renaissance of philosophy at the turn of the millennium becomes closely connected to the rebirth of the need and interest in “practical philosophy” or “practical wisdom” on the one hand, and on the other hand with the fact that the “world concept of philosophy” (*Weltbegriff der Philosophie*) seems to have gained ground again in contemporary theoretical discourse. In this latter sense philosophy is not only the abstract science of the problems of certain professional philosopher’ interests, not only a theoretical discipline which formulates its results in a special terminology or language only understandable for a small number of professionals, and incomprehensible for outsiders. Rather, this kind of philosophy treats questions which are for “everybody’s interest” and uses a language which “everybody understands”.

As for the second question, when one speaks today about the great return of Western philosophers, one actually means very few of them. Some classics of the history of philosophy, some outstanding personalities of present-day philosophy, and most of all of intellectuals of authority often presented by different media. For it seems that the Western educated public is interested more in the words of a philosopher creating an authentic “life-work” than in a so-called “system-creating” philosopher; that is, the ideas of philosophers who created some sort of “personal philosophy”.

European Philosophy), in : Nyíri, Kristóf (Szerk.): *Filozófia az ezredfordulón* (Philosophy of the Turn of the Millennium), Áron Kiadó, Budapest, 2000, 257-282.

A good example thereof in France is the strong press campaign, timed exactly for the turn of the millennium, which was openly aimed at preparing the “great return” of the famous philosopher and publicist Jean-Paul Sartre. It should be kept in mind however, that such media campaigns, although most times quite effective, may sometimes end with half-success or even failure. That is, cultural marketing seems not to be always omnipotent. For example, if one should rightfully speak about the “great return” of an important thinker from a “spiritual exile” in the peculiar context of French philosophy, then in my view this thinker would rather be Ricoeur than Sartre. However, the “Ricoeur-renaissance” of our times, started a couple of years ago, and only now completing, has not been supported by any campaign or strategy, but it can be perceived as the resultant of spontaneous processes of intellectual history. Even if the direction and results of these processes – the intellectual gratification offered by the country’s cultural public opinion to the elderly philosopher – would correspond to the history of philosophical sense of justice of many of us. The following important circumstance, emphasized also by François Dosse completes this fact.

The interest of at least a part of French public opinion has recently returned to the great and small questions of human life, modern society, and postmodern (or even globalizing, but at the same time defragmenting) culture. At the same time however, in the person of Paul Ricoeur, such a significant thinker has come to the fore who is almost predestined, by his attractive human personality and entire philosophical attitude, to be a central figure of contemporary philosophical renaissance in the eyes of the representatives of public opinion. This is so because the pivotal questions of the elderly thinker’s work, always very open, patient, and ready for a mutually enriching dialogue, can rightly claim the interest of intellectuals. Such are for example the questions of human activity, social justice and political freedom, scientific knowledge and moral conviction, and of course communication between cultures.

As a matter of fact, the great questions of modern European history and historiography, as they affect the modern European individual and his narrative identity or collective memory, are today also at the center of Paul Ricoeur’s interest¹. He pays special attention to the complicated interrelations of the economic, political and ethical spheres

¹ Cf. Bernard T. Dauenhauer, “Paul Ricoeur”, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Bernard T. Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*; François Dosse, “Un philosophe dans la cite”, In: Dosse, *Le sens d’une vie*, 699-770.

of modern societies, and studies the always necessary distinctions and demarcations that should be drawn between these spheres. Also, he studies “the importance of preserving the mutual independence of politics and religion while acknowledging their mutual relevance in concrete life,”¹ according to Dauenhauer. Moreover, the French philosopher does not only approach the historically, socially and culturally multifaceted entities of modernity in a differentiated manner, but also those of tradition.

This is highlighted by an extremely interesting circumstance: while historical understanding, mediation between cultures and the issue of reconciliation and communication between certain European nations has been in the center of the philosopher's attention for decades now, he has recently developed three closely connected conceptual models, in fact paradigms built one upon the other², in order to help with a practical solution to these problems. These are the “*modèle de la traduction*,” the “*modèle de l'échange des mémoires*,” and the “*modèle du pardon*”. The first one, the model of translation, is based on an important principle in Ricoeurian hermeneutic philosophy – the principle of universal translatability³ – presented by the French philosopher in various contexts⁴.

Let us now briefly discuss the role of the model and paradigm of “translation” in Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical thinking. I wish to stress from the very beginning that, according to the philosopher’s differentiated analyses, the “model of translation” presents a twofold, while the “paradigm of translation” a at least threefold nature. In the first case there is a clear division between the problem of translation “from one language to another” (*traduction d'une langue dans une autre*), and

¹ Dauenhauer, *The Promise and Risk of Politics*, 14.

² Paul Ricoeur, “Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?” in Peter Koslowski (sous la direction de Paul Ricoeur), *Imaginer L'Europe, Le marché européen comme tâche culturelle et économique*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992, 107-116; Paul Ricoeur, “Welches neues Ethos für Europa?” in: Peter Koslowski (Herausgeber): *Europa imaginieren, Der europäische Binnenmarkt als kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Aufgabe*, Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 1992, 108-122.

³ I have recently investigated such issues in more detail, see Tamás Tóth, “A fordíthatóság modellje és a történelmi megértés esélyei,” (The model of translatability and the chances of historical understanding), *Világosság, Konferenciaszám, Esemény, jel, történelmi jel 4-5-6-7* (2002): 52— 62.

⁴ Cf. Ricoeur, “Quel éthos nouveau pour l'Europe?” 107-109; Tóth, “The ‘Graft’, the ‘Residue’ and ‘Memory’ ”; see also Paul Ricoeur, “Le paradigme de la traduction,” in idem, *Le Juste 2*, Paris: Éditions Esprit, 2001, 125-142.

the problem of translation “from one culture to another” (*traduction de culture à culture*).¹ In the second case, a third particular type completes the previous two, and this could be called “translation from a language to the same language”. Yet perhaps this third type is better described, and less deviant from the French, as a “translation within the same linguistic community” (*traduction à l’intérieur de la même communauté langagière*).² Finally, in his 1998 lecture Ricoeur poses, among others, the problem of “re-translation” (*retraduction*)³; this meaning in fact a new translation of a significant text from one language to another. Of the works outstanding from the perspective of the dialogue between European cultures, and which have repeatedly been translated into various European languages – always with the hope that the new translation would not only be “different”, but also “better”, “more perfect” than the previous one –, Ricoeur brings up as examples the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare; and in philosophy, Plato, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

The questions come naturally: What is the basis of Paul Ricoeur’s conviction that the model of “translation” – that is, from one language to another – which he has put forward corresponds to that entirely particular linguistic-political *status quo* which is prevalent all over today’s Europe? And how should one understand his statement that supporting and privileging “translation” – as a form of basic cultural activity – may have a beneficial effect on the unfolding of the process of European integration? Well, in my opinion the answer is⁴ that Ricoeur considers modern Europe (unlike America, for instance) primarily a multilingual and multicultural continent, characterized in a linguistic-

¹ Ricoeur, P.: “Quel éthos nouveau pour l’Europe?”, 108-109.

² Ricoeur, P.: “Le paradigme de la traduction”, 136-137.

³ Ibid., 134.

⁴ In connection with these questions, cf. with some of my previous studies, Tóth T.: “A fordíthatóság modellje és a történelmi megértés esélyei”, 52-62; Tóth T.: “Miért nem állnak szóba egymással a diskurzusok?” (Why don’t discourses talk to each other?) In: Loboczky János (ed.) *Filozófiai diskurzusok* (Philosophical discourses), Az Egerben 2002. június 6-7.-én megrendezett tudományos konferencia előadásai (Proceedings of the Conference organized in Eger, on June 6-7, 2002), Eger: EFK Liceum Kiadó, 2003, 296-313.; Tóth T.: “Cultures, frontières et identités d’Europe”, *ibid.*; Tóth T.: “Az európai identitás kérdőjelei...” (Questionmarks of European identity), *ibid.*; cf. also Tóth T.: “Communication and creativity, an unusual review of Paul Ricoeur’s work”, in: Andrzej Wiercinski (ed.) *Between Suspicion and Sympathy*, Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003, 620-641.

“translation”, or in a wider sense the strategy of the “dialogue” and “communication” between European languages and cultures.¹

On an institutional level this model and strategy implies, first of all, the introduction of the education of two foreign languages in all European countries. The evident goal of this project would be to raise the interest of the people of Europe for languages which do not play a decisive role in the field of international communication. Furthermore, on a cultural and spiritual level this strategy suggests Europeans that the “spirit of translation” (*esprit de la traduction*) is worth being extended not only to the relationship of various languages, but also to that of various cultures, thus, amongst others, to cultural meanings and contents (*contenu de sens*) mediated by translation and re-translation.

In Ricoeur’s view this does and will require a special category of “translators” and “interpreters” who, due to favorable circumstances, possess the extremely rare ability of “cultural bilingualism” (or in extraordinary situations even “cultural trilingualism”). These educated people can do more than merely ‘translate from one language to another’, in the customary meaning of the word; they are also able to transfer spiritual values and contents created in the context of one particular culture into the mental universe of a different culture. They do this in such a way that they most carefully observe the “customs” and “traditions” characteristic for this other culture, as well as the “values” and “meanings” which are based on them. To put it differently, we may also say that in their work of translation they would make extended use of all those basic beliefs, important convictions and major certainties which serve as necessary pinpoints (*repère de sens*) for all human communities who try to find some linguistically mediated cultural “meaning” in history and society.

The idea that human language, as well as the individual, collective, and in a wider sense social use of language is culturally determined and conditioned has been stated by several outstanding representatives of modern philosophy and history of ideas. The line of such authors – with no attempt to completeness – extends from Wilhelm von Humboldt to Ortega y Gasset, from George Lukács to Károly Kerényi, from Hans-Georg Gadamer to Paul Ricoeur. Some of them also pointed to the boundaries of religious, literary, or philosophical translations, which mainly focused on the dictionary meaning of words – and as such, could possibly be called “semantic”; moreover, they argued

¹ Ricoeur, P.: “Quel éthos nouveau pour l’Europe?”, 108.

for the acceptance of the terms of a so-called “cultural translation”, in order to eliminate the obvious deficiencies of the “semantic translation”.¹

I consider however that there are several significant differences between thinkers concerned about such questions. As an example, there is a difference between rather pessimistic vs. rather optimistic judgments of the chances of those translators who try, again and again, to match the terms of the semantic translation with the terms of the cultural translation. These attempts obviously aim at an ever more complete and authentic transmission of values and meanings to those who are willing to take part in the hopefully always renewing – though often discontinued – cultural and spiritual dialogue between human communities. Suffice it to mention that, while in Ricoeur’s case, as we have seen, one can rightfully speak of the principle of “universal translatability”, at least in the richly differentiated meaning of the word, in Ortega y Gasset’s case² – with a bit of exaggeration – one should speak about the principle of “universal intranslatability”. I certainly cannot undertake here the task of a more detailed analysis of this topic. I would still like to mention though that the latest book of the French philosopher, a slim little volume, published at the beginning of 2004, bears the title *Sur la traduction*.

By way of conclusion, I would briefly refer to Paul Ricoeur’s ideas about a “good rhetoric”, set forth on several occasions, and clearly related to the aforementioned problems.³ In Ricoeur’s view, a most important task of the ardent political debates taking place in the public life of modern European and American democratic societies is the creation of such a “political language” which would further the even temporary attenuation of conflicts, or would strengthen the elements of

¹ One may run across the terms of “semantic translation” and “cultural translation” in contemporary literature and media language as well. But, to the best of my memory, these terms do not occur in the works of the aforementioned authors. However, we may repeatedly meet in their works the language- and cultural philosophical problem underlying this terminology.

² Ortega y Gasset, J., “A fordítás nyomorúsága és nagyszerűsége” (The misery and splendour of translation), in Ortega y Gasset, J., *Hajótöröttek könyve: Esszék* (The book of the shipwrecked: Essays), translated by Dezső Csejtei és László Scholz, Budapest: Nagyvilág, 2000, 127-158.

³ I have in mind, first of all, some of Ricoeur’s articles published in the volumes *Lectures 1*, *Lectures 2*, and *Le juste 2*; and also the important texts of the *La métaphore vive* and the *Du texte à l’action*. I have also analyzed in some detail the problem of rhetoric and its role in Ricoeur’s work in one of my latest articles, cf. Tóth Tamás, “Lehetséges-e ‘jó’ retorika?” (Is “good” rhetoric possible?), In *Világosság*, April 2004.

consensus. These debates, under the circumstances of a representative democracy, are mainly centered around the problems of “good life” and “good government”¹ – that is, the questions of the main goals and basic values of modern politics which strongly influence citizens’ everyday life and sharply divide public opinion. And, as experience shows, they will never be irrevocably ended, either by the help of arguments considered strictly scientific, or by statements meant as manipulative, such as empty sophisms.

To put it differently, I would say that the natural context of the philosophical discourse, according to Paul Ricoeur, is not *theory*, nor *sophistics*, but *rhetoric*. It should be stressed however, that the French philosopher understands the concept of rhetoric not in the spirit of Plato, Descartes, or Kant, but rather in that of Aristotle. That is, he does *not* expect any of the traditional or modern representatives of the “rhetoric discourse” to account for the requirements of absolute truth of either Descartes’ theory of evidences, or Plato’s theory of ideas – which, in his opinion, are impossible to meet, at least in the field of ethics, and jurisprudence. Instead, he advises them: in these fields, namely the domain of applied philosophy, they should strive for expressing arguments as *verisimilar* (or plausible) as possible, and making them accepted by rhetorical tools in a democratic debate in the spirit of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*²; that is, they should strive for persuading their partner.

The arguments and statements of the rhetorical discourse, in Ricoeur’s conception, cannot be regarded as certainly “true” or certainly “false”; that is, they cannot be clearly defined either by the category of *episteme* or that of *doxa*. But, as long as they can still be included into the category of *doxazein*, and thus as long as we may validly regard these arguments and statements *verisimilar* (*vraisemblable*) or plausible – and we cannot expect more than that, especially in the case of the political discourse –, by Ricoeur’s expectations we have all the basis we need to speak about the creation of a *good rhetoric*, as he himself outlined it.

Nevertheless, all this does not much change the fact that the basic formula of Ricoeur’s philosophy is relatively easy and that his

¹ Cf. Barash, J. A.: “Paul Ricoeur”, in *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*, 1391-1395; Dosse, *Le sens d’une vie*, 699-738.

² Gutenberg, for instance, also reports about similar attempts in his entry on “Rhetorische Kommunikation”, in *Metzler Lexikon Sprache: Rhetorische Kommunikation*, S. 1 ff. Digitale Bibliothek Band 34: Metzler Lexikon Sprache, S. 8055 (vgl. MLSpr, S. 583 ff.) (c) J.B. Metzler Verlag.

philosophy can therefore be clearly formulated. Its astonishing complexity only reveals itself in the details. In my opinion, Paul Ricoeur is a thinker who is indeed one of the *classical* representatives and promoters of the Continental European tradition, and who did not create a closed theoretical system but an open, yet still consistent, immense and original philosophical oeuvre. He did not bow to those in power, did not court the all-powerful media for their favors, and was not eager to follow the changing fashions held dear by Parisian intellectuals or the radical shifts of paradigm in French culture. Paul Ricoeur has always followed his own theoretical path and this is perhaps why he seems to occupy the middle ground, a mediating position between the extremes of critical and academic thinking. All his works seem to suggest that a thinker must think, for he will never run short of questions to be answered.