

In Memoriam Paul Ricoeur

"The word is my kingdom," he once wrote. This was true, of course, but there was more to the person who said this than that, much more. For those of us who knew him as a teacher, there was the professor who over the years, in many different countries, could fill a lecture hall to overflowing and whose seminars drew students from what seemed like every discipline and professional school in the university and from across the world as well. For those who were privileged to have him as a dissertation director or reader, there was the experience of having someone who read quickly, but who did so with an incredible ability to see the point and to anticipate those implications and questions we might not yet have come to. For those of us who knew him as a friend, there was always a kindly welcome, time to talk, to share news and, if possible, some new pun drawn from one of the many languages Ricoeur could work with. For those who knew him only through his texts, there was always something new to learn, something that often raised the question: why hadn't anyone thought of this before? For all of us there was, there is, a debt, one that surprisingly he thought he owed us, rather than the other way around. Perhaps the debt runs both ways, and as he liked to say, it is a debt we shall never be able completely to repay. But, I submit, it is also one that does not hinder or cancel the possibility and reality of different forms of recognition, even beyond death.

Ricoeur never wanted followers or to found a school. That people would discuss his work in order to do philosophy was something he welcomed, but he never wanted anyone simply to repeat what he had said or, worse, to call themselves Ricoeureans. Philosophy, he held, was not dead. There were many possibilities that had been overlooked, lost, forgotten, that could reopen the question in significant ways. And there was always the possibility and the hope for new meaning. This is why the history of philosophy was so important to him, and while few of us could work with it in the depth that he did, we learned from him how it might, how it should be done. Now he too is a part of that history, but certainly not simply a part of our past. For many years I would say to people that working with Paul was my ongoing liberal education. But by the time I came to it, he had always moved beyond the most recent book or article to take up new questions he had already discovered that work raised for him. Indeed, many times I saw critics or respondents at lectures or conferences pose what they saw to be a problem based on what he had just said, only to have him acknowledge it as a significant one and then go on to demonstrate that he was already two or three steps beyond that point in his own reflections, even if he hadn't as yet worked out the details to his own satisfaction.

Obviously there are problems to work out in his thought, a place for the kind of detailed scholarship and commentary that is a real part of doing philosophy. We need to know more about how his thinking developed, changed, and unfolded over the many years of his long life. There are legitimate internal questions to raise about what he said and how he said it. But more important than this, there are ideas to work with and build upon, and even to move beyond. Ricoeur's own choice was to follow an open-ended line of inquiry, one marked by many detours as he called them, once his own thought had matured and he saw the limits of his original systematic project that would prevent its ever being completed. But this means that we are left with an incredibly rich trove of material to consider and respond to. He hadn't answered every question, not even all those that he focused on. Indeed, he wanted others to think with him, if only so that he could learn from them. This was not the combative model of doing philosophy, based on the belief that an adversarial approach will best lead to truth, which so often characterizes philosophy among those of us who speak English as our native language. Yet as his work demonstrates it is productive and it does, as he said, give rise to thought. The numerous translations of his works into many different languages can serve as evidence that others recognized this as well. But as already said, to rest easy with what he leaves us is not the way to honor him. There are questions to raise and pursue. I am not sure any of us fully realize all the consequences of taking seriously what he called the fullness of language, for example. So let me suggest one: logical propositions do not exhaust the question of language or how we use it. There is more to the truth of discourse than the propositional truth. Nor, to cite another example, has hermeneutic theory yet really appropriated his re-introduction of epistemological questions to the discussion of both the theory and practice of interpretation. And then there is the early work, both on its own terms and in relation to the question of how it fits with what followed. So there is still much to learn and much to do. Call it a surplus of meaning, another of his favored expressions. But let us also not forget the person who gave us so much. He embodied that aspect of the extraordinary within the ordinary by which he so insightfully explicated religious discourse, and for that I am grateful and thankful, *reconnaissant*.

DAVID PELLAUER, *DePaul University*

February 27, 1913—Valance, France. Paul Ricoeur was inscribed into the social, spacial, temporal register by his birth certificate, son of Jules Ric-

oeur and Florentine (Favre) Ricoeur. In his first major work, *Freedom and Nature*, he says that the limits of our lives, our births and our deaths, are not events for us, but for others. The death of Paul Ricoeur is indeed a sad event for his family, his friends, his colleagues, and for philosophy itself. It is always tempting to repeat in an obituary a person's *curriculum vitae*, as if there is no difference between a death announcement and a job application. His enormous philosophical oeuvre has been and will be studied all over the world for years to come. It seems to me that this occasion calls for a description of the man, a memory of our friend, an expression of gratitude, and a loving farewell.

Paul Ricoeur was first and foremost a student and he never gave up his devotion to reading the thoughts of others, to writing about what he had learned from his predecessors, to do justice to the authors who inspired him. He was a student and a teacher, and teaching was his passion. His father was a professor of English at a lycée and Paul followed in his footsteps.

There were many things that set Paul Ricoeur apart from others. He was an orphan; his mother died when he was six months old and his father was killed in the Battle of the Marne in 1915. He was raised by his paternal grandparents as a practicing and devout Protestant. He was a brilliant student and turned to philosophy at a young age. At first he feared philosophy, thinking it a threat to his religious beliefs. His mentor, Roland Dalbiez, told him that when you fear something you must go straight toward it. Throughout his life, Paul studied philosophy, theology, biblical interpretation, and the history of religions. These interests informed one another, without him ever substituting one for the other. Philosophy is based on reasoned argument and revelation has no place there. But that does not mean that there was no place for revelation, just a different place.

He went to Paris to prepare for the *Agrégation*, a competitive examination for a position as a teacher in a lycée. He was second in this examination and began his teaching career in a series of lycées. In 1939, he was called to military service in a Regiment in Brittany and awaited the impending war. When the war broke out in 1940, he was serving north of the Marne when he was captured by the Germans and sent to a prisoner of war camp in Pomerania. The experiences in the camp have been recounted by others in detail. During the whole five years he was there he was tormented with the thought that it was the fault of the socialists and pacifists that France was totally unprepared for war and that French weakness invited the German attack. He was also very bothered that his wife, Simone, was left to fend for herself and their three children, and there was nothing he could do to help.

His first university-level teaching came after the war at Collège

Cevanol in Chambon-sur-lignon, a Quaker school made famous by their fearless protection of Jews during the purges in France. Later he was called to the University of Strasbourg, where he began his prolific writing career and earned his Doctorat d'État (Doctorate of the State). By the time he was called to the Sorbonne in 1956, he had already gained a reputation in phenomenology and in the history of philosophy. By the mid-1960s he was at the peak of his popularity with students and was beginning to be known in the United States, Belgium, Germany, and England.

But the 1960s also brought his most bitter disappointments. He was vilified by the followers of Jacques Lacan. They accused him of neglecting Lacan and of stealing Lacan's ideas. Lacan himself was incensed that Ricoeur would not become his philosophical ally. Most of all, they thought that a philosopher had no right to write and lecture about Freud. During the same period, he left the Sorbonne to teach at a new branch of the University of Paris at Nanterre. What he thought would be a happy beginning of a new university soon became a hell on earth. He was elected *doyen* (president) and then was betrayed by his friends and abandoned by his colleagues. He resigned shortly after a three-day pitched battle between the police and leftist students left the new university buildings in ruins.

Paul told his friends many times that teaching in Belgium and the United States saved his life. He was saddened at the state of affairs in the French universities and began a self-exile in the United States. He held the prestigious John Nuveen chair in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, succeeding Paul Tillich. He also taught in the Philosophy Department and the Committee on Social Thought, founded by Hannah Arendt. For twenty years Ricoeur was absent from the French intellectual scene and virtually unknown to a whole generation of young intellectuals.

In the 1990s, he returned to the French scene with the publication in rapid succession of *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*. Following this, his articles were republished in three volumes and he wrote and published articles on justice (*Le Juste*), his intellectual autobiography (*Réflexions faites*), and his magisterial treatise, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Without a doubt, he became once again a leading figure among French intellectuals.

But the 1990s, as glorious as they were, also brought him the tragedy of his wife, Simone's death. She had been a childhood friend, his cherished wife, extraordinary mother to their five children, traveling companion, hostess to their countless friends who came to the house, some to stay for days. As all of his friends know, he suffered her death greatly and the magnificent book on memory, history, and forgetfulness was his

work of mourning, and he dedicated the book to her.

In the very twilight of his years he was still intellectually active. He wrote his last book, *The Course of Recognition*, and continued to give invited lectures in Spain, Italy, and Germany. Even in his last months he received his friends for afternoon visits and delighted in reading the newspaper and discussing current events. He lived at his home in Châtenay-Malabry and died in his own bed. On May 20, 2005 Paul Ricoeur left us, but he lives on in his work and especially in the generations of students who were touched by his kindness, his rigor, and his generosity to his philosophical predecessors.

Paul and Simone Ricoeur were very fortunate to have many friends all over the world, and to the very end Paul's friends visited him in Paris. But above all his friends was Catherine Goldenstein. She was a friend of the Ricoeurs from the Protestant temple of Châtenay-Malabry. Beginning in the early 1990s, she would come in the afternoon to take tea with the Ricoeurs. She was a devoted companion to Simone and aided Paul immensely during the period of Simone's decline and death. She was an extraordinary friend who encouraged Paul during his bereavement. She helped him with his correspondence, making appointments for his friends' visits, and in managing the household. In the last few years of his life, Catherine supervised his medical appointments and treatments and visited him daily. I know from Paul himself that without Catherine Goldenstein and her husband, Jean-Pierre, he would have died many years sooner. All of us who were friends of Paul's and loved and admired him owe her a debt of gratitude.

CHARLES REAGAN, *Kansas State University*

First Gadamer, now Ricoeur. Shortly after Ricoeur's death in the early morning of May 20, I received a letter of condolences from my good friend Jean Grondin, who remarked on how we were witnessing "la fin d'une grande génération." How true, and how sad. As we lesser mortals might say, *Sic transit gloria mundi*. All of the great names of Continental philosophy are passing away. Ricoeur's disappearance from the philosophical scene is especially painful for me, for it means that, first with Gadamer, and now with Ricoeur, my two great teachers and mentors are no more. Ricoeur was for me not only a teacher, but also a colleague and a friend. It was he who shepherded me through my doctoral work, who "rescued" me from the French provinces by persuading the Ministry of National Education to appoint me to a regular teaching position at the University of Paris (no mean feat, since foreigners like myself were bar-

red by French law at that time from occupying such positions), who encouraged me to publish my thesis on Merleau-Ponty and helped me to obtain a subvention for this (and, contrary to his usual custom in such matters, wrote a preface for it), and who continued to be a source of generous and energetic support in my subsequent career. How I would like to be able just one more time to pay him a visit at his home in Châtenay-Malabry outside Paris and to converse at length over dinner on our mutual projects, as well as on all manner of other things. (Those who know Ricoeur only through his writings cannot, unfortunately, know the great sense of humor he had and how he liked to crack jokes when among friends.) That, alas, will never again be possible. That is yet another of life's possibilities that are henceforth and forever foreclosed. The death of those to whom we were close is always a little death for ourselves, and so in mourning Ricoeur's passing I also mourn my own impending fate. To paraphrase an author whom Ricoeur knew well and who died a tragic death by deportation at the hands of the Nazis, Paul-Louis Landsberg: The community I had with this person is now irrevocably broken, but since this community was to a degree myself, I experience this death within my own being.

Although I can now no longer look to Ricoeur for personal encouragement and support, I shall never cease to admire the scholar and philosopher he was. As a scholar, Ricoeur was endowed with a true Protestant work ethic and was a voracious yet careful reader. Notwithstanding his many responsibilities and professional duties, he sustained a regimen of writing and publishing that never ceased to amaze me. Ricoeur was a driven man with an all-consuming passion for seeking out the truth, proceeding always in this regard in a dialectical-dialogical manner, working out his own thought by means of an attentive but always critical (in the good sense of the term) consideration of the position of others, even those with whom he disagreed profoundly. He was a man of great civility, tolerance, and openness (he even sought to strike up a dialogue with analytic philosophers). He eschewed any kind of facile syncretism, however, and was a decidedly original thinker who was always guided by his own inner lights. As a philosopher, he was uncompromising in his adherence to a strictly rational approach to issues, steering clear of any kind of groundless metaphysical speculation. He was in this respect a true phenomenologist, one who to the end remained faithful to Husserl's legacy and to the idea of phenomenology as a resolutely transcendental inquiry into our own lived experience—which is to say, into subjectivity itself. The self that engages in self-reflection in the pursuit of self-understanding was always Ricoeur's chief preoccupation.

Ricoeur was not, of course, "just" a philosopher. He was also a deeply committed Christian and an active member of the Reformed Church of

France, and his writings on biblical-religious matters were indeed quite voluminous. Striking a proper balance between philosophy and religion, without letting one "corrupt" the other, is no easy task, but Ricoeur managed to pull this off quite successfully, and this is perhaps what I admired the most about him. It called for an immense amount of effort and self-discipline on his part, as is attested by his remarks in the series of interviews conducted in the mid-1990s and published under the title *Critique and Conviction*—a title that perfectly reflects the essential two-sidedness of Ricoeur's life and work. Ricoeur knew quite well that, as Pascal said, the heart has its reasons that reason knows not.

If there are any two words that best sum up the fundamental concerns that run throughout Ricoeur's long and highly prolific career they are *sens et existence* (this was in fact the title that Ricoeur himself suggested for the *Festschrift* I published in his honor on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday). "The vocation of philosophy," Ricoeur once said, "is to clarify, by means of concepts, existence itself." This phrase sums up perfectly Ricoeur's life-long philosophical commitment which was itself of a dual nature: a commitment, on the one hand, to the kind of conceptual, methodical rigor he admired so much in Husserl and other great systematic thinkers and, on the other hand, the existential concerns and motivations he shared with (the very unsystematic) Gabriel Marcel.

These two concerns were the twin hallmarks of all of his thinking. It was Ricoeur's fundamental philosophical belief that our lived experience of things, our existence as incarnate subjects, contains a "surplus of meaning," a meaning that "demands to be said," and that as a consequence the hermeneutical task of philosophy is that of bringing our existence, our being-in-the-world, to the proper expression of its own meaning. That meaning can prevail over unmeaning, *non-sens*, and that freedom can prevail over unfreedom—this "postulate of meaningfulness," as Ricoeur referred to it—is what he staked his own life on. It was a humble belief that did not have cognitive presumptions to being anything other than what it in fact was: a kind of eschatological *hope*. It was, in any event, the great wager that he steadfastly maintained to the very end.

Rest now in peace, mon cher Ricoeur.

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