

Paul Ricœur in Dialogue with Theology and Religious Studies

Introduction

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Patrik Fridlund is docent (reader) in philosophy of religion at Lund University, Sweden. He was awarded the Fonds Ricœur Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2009/2010, and he was a member of the research unit Dialogue et conversion at Institut de science et de théologie des religions, Catholic University of Paris 2009-2013. His main research interests are plurality of religions, human rights and religion, religion and politics, and philosophical questions about subjectivity, informed by readings of Derrida and Lévinas. His works include Mobile Performances. Linguistic Undecidability as Possibility and Problem in the Theology of Religions (2011), and numerous articles in English, French, and Swedish. He is co-editor of Plural Voices. Intradisciplinary Perspectives on Interreligious Issues (2009) and deputy director responsible for international relations of the open access review Logoi.ph. He has been teaching courses in religious studies, philosophy of religion, ethics, political philosophy and human right studies at Lund University, Kristianstad University College and Jönköping University College, and invited as lecturer to universities in Canada, China and France.

Constantly on the move between the various genres and disciplines of the human and social sciences, the French philosopher and phenomenologist Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) sorts among the most distinguished philosophers of the past century. His massive bibliography – encompassing such disparate areas as history, anthropology, linguistics, political science and psychoanalysis – forms an invaluable source of theoretical reflexion, roughly centered on the nature of man. While this alone qualifies Ricœur as a uniquely relevant thinker for theologians, his relevance is augmented further by the implications of his personal background as a Protestant and his teaching positions at the Theological Faculty of Strasbourg, the Protestant Faculty of Theology of Paris, and at Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Moreover, in a number of fields, Ricœur's philosophy is of *direct* relevance to theology and religious studies. Topics such as the textual interpretation, the role, function and character of narratives, historicist accounts of tradition, memory etc. (bearing implications on the nature of truth and fiction), inquiries into identity, discussions on evil and on the relation between religion and politics are but a few examples.

This is (with some minor modifications) the way we introduced the international one-day conference *Paul Ricœur in Dialogue with Theology and Religious Studies* in September 2013. It was indeed a pleasure for me to organise this event together with doctoral student Per Lind, as project assistant, and Professor Samuel Byrskog and late Professor Catharina Stenqvist as senior advisors, in an organisational committee. With the mention of Catharina Stenqvist, I feel a brief paus is in order. Catharina was Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Lund University since 2001, and many have profited from the supremely generous and hospitable spirit of her research seminar. She was a strong supporter of this Ricœur conference, giving it her blessing from the get-go. A few months after the conference, she was diagnosed with cancer. Within another four months, in May 2014, she passed away before turning 64. It is indeed a great loss. While an upcoming special issue of STK will be officially dedicated to her memory, this takes nothing away from the fact that the current issue is literally, and unavoidably, made in her remembrance.

The one-day event *Paul Ricœur in Dialogue with Theology and Religious Studies* was a moment of commemorating the French philosopher who should have been 100 years old in 2013. It was a time for remembering, but also looking forward. In particular, it was a moment of sharing, discussing, listening to and criticising different readings of Ricœur's *œuvre*. It was also a moment of academic friendship. The conference was hosted by the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, and made possible by a generous financial support from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation). This special issue of *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift/STK* (*Swedish Theological Quarterly*) is however not a conference report and it is not an example of what is sometimes called conference proceedings. The procedure has been a different one this time. The speakers at the conference were invited to write something on the topic of the conference and related to what they had presented. As a guest editor of this special issue, I am very happy that so many responded positively to this call. Both *STK* and I are proud to present an international collection of essays on Paul Ricœur with relevance to academic studies of religion. Although the authors read Ricœur from different angles, they have at least one thing in common; they are all well read in Ricœur's philosophy.

There are various perspectives represented among these contributions, ranging from broad discussions to rather specific analyses. There is also an ambition to take a step forward and extend Ricœur's thinking. This is so in particular with respect to a dialogue that never actually took place, but could have taken place, namely a dialogue

with feminist philosophy of religion. As much as there is a variety of perspectives thematically, there is also a variety regarding the contributors. Some are more trained in philosophy, others in theology, and they come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds—from Sweden, Denmark and Finland, but also from England, France and Italy. In this sense this issue of *STK* is indeed international. One immediate implication of this diversity is that most contributions are written in English by non-native speakers. Some are inclined to follow the standard of American English, some the standard of British English. In the Ricœurian spirit of hospitality and dialogue, this may be seen not as a problem but as an expression of variety and human richness. This is a fundamental aspect of Ricœur's thinking, elegantly touched upon by Pamela Sue Anderson in her article: "Ricœurian hermeneutics can help women and men to make sense of themselves, to understand their own cognitive and conative abilities, and to achieve greater self-awareness through dialogue across difference."

Themes

As Bengt Kristensson Ugglå points out in his article, Ricœur navigated a changing intellectual landscape in the French context, while also traversing the demarcation lines of "Continental" and "Anglo-American" philosophy, as well as those between various ontologies, epistemologies and academic disciplines. One might therefore well ask what resources he drew from, and moreover – as have been asked by many – what was his identity as a philosopher? These are not simple, inconsequential questions. What is at stake is whether Ricœur was, after all, a theologian in disguise. Admittedly, this may be regarded a ridiculous and petty question. It reflects, however, the general issue of the respective natures of theology and philosophy, and by implication, their possible relationship. Given the religious and theological issues present in Ricœur, such as religious language, the church as an idea, and the significance of Creation, it is only to be expected that this question surfaces in this context.

The collection of articles starts with a short text by the Danish philosopher **Peter Kemp**, "Paul Ricœur on Theology. His Legacy from Karl Jaspers". In this text, Kemp starts with the claim that Ricœur distanced himself from theology. The problem that Ricœur saw with theology and religious rhetoric, according to Kemp, was that theologians generally fail to reflect on religious language. Hence, unable to take a step back, they are not aware of what they are doing. On this point, Kemp says, Ricœur is strongly influenced by Karl Jaspers and his distrust in theology. A consequence of Ricœur's opposition or distance to theology, along with his identifying of

Søren Kierkegaard as a theologian, was that he made very little use of Kierkegaard in his philosophical writing, although Kierkegaard would have been a natural dialogue partner in other respects. Interestingly enough, Kemp continues, in spite of this distance to theology Ricœur admired the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. What he admired in Barth was not the Christocentric theology. What he learnt from Barth was that what in theology is called “dogmatic” – in Ricœur’s own words – “consists in a conceptual and discursive arrangement of the sermon that connects a word considered as fundamental with a circumstantial judgment focusing on the present and the future of confessional communities”. According to Kemp, Ricœur did not intend to reinvent theology as some kind of new philosophy. Much as he distrusted theology, Ricœur wanted to give it a place in its own right, as a way of understanding the world different from that of philosophy; as a poetic plane different from any other level of discourse. In this spirit, Ricœur read the Bible, and entered into dialogue with biblical exegesis.

Precisely the issue of the relationship between philosophy and theology forms a starting point for the second article, **Bengt Kristensson Uggla**’s contribution entitled “Ricœur and/or Theology”. As theologian and philosopher, Kristensson Uggla is well placed to address the challenge posed by Ricœur concerning the identity of philosophy and theology. A strong trait in philosophy is its critical approach; that is to say, critical thinking. Kristensson Uggla argues that in Ricœur this *critique* takes the form of a tradition rooted in biblical thinking. What does this imply concerning Ricœur’s identity, Kristensson Uggla asks. Similarly, when Ricœur moved from Paris, where he was known as a philosopher, to assume a position at the Divinity school in Chicago, this was also an interdisciplinary move. Theologians in North America started reading Ricœur. Does this double reception of Ricœur mean that he had a double life? One life as philosopher, and another one as a Christian in the fashion of Karl Barth, that is to say a life rooted in Christocentric faith, and seeing “the real human” through Jesus, as a prism? No, Kristensson Uggla affirms, Ricœur saw the two domains as separate, and yet intervoven. One example of the use Ricœur saw of religious ideas in philosophy, Kristensson Uggla maintains, was his affirmation of Creation (albeit without links to any specific theological content). In this way, Ricœur is able to decentre the human subject in making human beings become recipients of life and meaning in a dialectic process. Furthermore, Kristensson Uggla suggests, much like Kemp, that there is an anti-speculative dimension in Ricœur. This is why Ricœur neglects dogmatics, and this is why systematic theology is absent in Ricœur’s thinking, *in spite of* his treatment of religious and theological issue, and his religiously coloured terminology. Biblical exegesis is a clear excep-

tion. Kristensson Uggla observes, in agreement with Kemp, that it appears to be the only theological discipline with which Ricœur enters into dialogue.

In his article “Paul Ricœur’s Interpretation of the Stories of Creation in Chapters 1-11 of Genesis”, the Finnish theologian **Harri Meronen** approaches one of the topics mentioned by Kristensson Uggla, namely Ricœur’s understanding of Creation. Furthermore, Meronen appears to confirm Kristensson Uggla’s claim that Ricœur was inclined to draw upon the biblical tradition in his thinking. In his reading of Ricœur, Meronen explores how Ricœur finds meaning in the Creation stories. Basing himself in particular on Ricœur’s *Penser la Bible* (1998), co-written with Old Testament exegete André LaCocque, Meronen focuses on two particular strata: “the beginning time” and “the decreation of evil”. Regarding the former, Meronen points to how Ricœur finds a distinction between origin and beginning, and his employment of the tension between continuity and discontinuity. Regarding the latter, Meronen unpacks Ricœur’s understanding of evil. Evil is something present from the very beginning, as something internal to Creation. At the same time, the human desire to transgress has the character of a sudden event. It is something that happens inexplicably, as a desire to transgress *all* limits. The conclusion for Ricœur, Meronen claims, is that evil is not substantial, but adjective. The human being is also – and very fundamentally – good, along with the rest of Creation. Moreover, Meronen suggests, the Fall, this interruption of “evil” and the sudden desire to transgress, brings some good and positive consequences on Ricœur’s account, such as death as an end to suffering, knowledge of good and evil, and the emergence of human responsibility.

According to Kristensson Uggla, Ricœur finds a philosophical resource in the biblical myths of creation such that these myths allow for a saying of “yes” to existence, and a situating of the human subject as a receiver of meaning, of life. This positive force, this “yes” is a theme in the article “Paul Ricœur and the Poetics of the Gift” by the Italian philosopher **Annalisa Caputo**. What does it mean to say that love is poetry, Caputo asks. She unpacks her answers from Ricœur: Love speaks. Love itself gives a recommendation: to love! It is about seeing beauty in things and in other people. In other words, it is not necessarily a particular person you should love, the imperative is *that you love*. It is about sheer love. In this pure love, Caputo explains, there is a certain asymmetry. In love, there may be nothing coming back. There might be nothing in return. On the other hand there is potential for a surprise. In this sense, Caputo says, poetics of love is something *different*. It is not like ordinary daily prose. It is rather ever more, and ever other, than normality. It is praise. It is also

something other than the logic of justice. Love pushes human beings to give more. In love the human is hyper-ethical without expecting anything in return. Caputo stresses at the same time that love is a response, it does not come from nowhere. Love is a response to a previous surabundance that precedes love. Thus, Caputo continues, the act of love is always a response, but without a "first giver". Caputo puts Ricœur's poetics of love in relation to his philosophy without an Absolute. If there is an overabundance of the Absolute, that is to say a God of hope, of love, and a God of creation, this is only possible to express in poetry, in symbols. In such surabundance, as "recipients of a gift", Caputo suggests, human beings cannot be seen as self-centred and self-based subjects. Hence human philosophy cannot be absolute.

Ricœur distanced himself from theology. Yet he reflected on religious language, and many religious and theological concepts are clearly present in his philosophical *œuvre*. The French philosopher **Olivier Abel**, in his article "Paul Ricœur and the Language of the Church Community", brings to our attention some short and unpublished texts by Ricœur on the topic of the idea of a church. According to Abel, Ricœur is one of the very few contemporary philosophers who has been thinking about the church in this way. It is indeed interesting, Abel says, to see what a philosopher thinks on this topic on the eve of *mai -68*. One central aspect is the "confessing community" and the meaning thereof. In Abel's reading of Ricœur, there is a dialectic between religion and faith that is highly interesting. The "confessing community" is necessary, because the "we" is indispensable. The "confessing community" is aroused by the word, the living word (*parole*). Only a linguistic community is capable of generating and supporting such living word. Thus this word is always in need of a vehicle or a structure. Hence, faith needs religion. This community in which there is a shared language, and a communality, is moreover a pluralistic community, in Ricœur's view. According to Abel, Ricœur claims that in the church community, a plurality of linguistic genres stand in relation to a plurality of forms. As early as in the formation of canon, discordance is overcome and accepted – not eliminated. On Abel's reading of Ricœur, there is therefore a diversity of discourses within the confessing community, inside the canon. There are narrations, prophecies, and laws. Abel points out that Ricœur concludes that truth is always a specific truth. Specific truth is thus contrasted to speculative, theoretical or philosophical truth. The confessing community, the church, is marked by the practice of what Ricœur calls "linguistic hospitality". In Abel's paper, the role of *utopia* is also thematised: in Ricœur, the church has a mission to challenge the actual society. In this way, the church can be said to explore possibilities while simultaneously resisting abuses.

As was stated in the very beginning of this introduction, Ricœur was constantly in dialogue with various philosophical schools, and with many disciplines outside philosophy. However, there is one field left unexplored by Ricœur, and that is the dialogue with feminist philosophy. Oxford philosopher of religion **Pamela Sue Anderson** wants to remedy that. In her article “Ricœur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Hermeneutic Hospitality in Contemporary Practice”, Anderson argues that Ricœurian thinking forms an excellent partner for feminist thought; but also that we need to help it be so. As Ricœur never applied phenomenology of hermeneutics to issues of gender or sexual difference, we need to imagine a dialogue between feminist philosophy of religion and Ricœur. It would be a dialogue, Anderson suggests, based on Ricœur’s critical hermeneutics of suspicion and his restorative hermeneutics of faith. One of the strong points in Ricœur’s philosophical project, Anderson claims, was his commitment to understanding human life. He was not interested in simply winning an argument. In consequence, Ricœur not only accepted but indeed cherished conflicts of interpretation. According to him, we must refrain from ideas of absolute knowledge, and do our hermeneutical homework. Anderson affirms that a training in hermeneutics is useful for a dialogue between feminism and masculinism in philosophy. When Anderson stages this dialogue, she situates it in the debates about embodiment and capability. Is human capability gender neutral? Is this how the capable woman reaches confidence in her ability to understand herself philosophically? Anderson refers to critical readings of Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur on *le corps propre*, “the lived body”, as a male-neutral body, possibly a transhistorical disembodied subject. In other words, Anderson argues, there are claims of gender-neutrality in phenomenology, which still presuppose a male body. This gendering is an injustice, Anderson continues, as well as a loss to philosophy which damages and obscures human capability. Therefore, Anderson concludes, it is important to uncover and identify the role of gender in philosophical texts.

Contributors

Professor **Olivier Abel** is a former student and friend of Paul Ricœur. After teaching in Istanbul, he became Professor of Philosophy and Ethics at the Faculté Protestante de Théologie, first in Paris 1984-2013, and then in Montpellier from 2014. Abel is President of the *Conseil scientifique* of the Fonds Ricœur. He is the author of *Le pardon* (1991), *Paul Ricœur, la promesse et la règle* (1996), *L'éthique interrogative* (2000), *La conversation* (2006), and *Paul Ricœur, Jacques Ellul, Jean Carbonnier, Pierre Chaunu: Dialogues* (2012), among other works. His research features pre-

dominantly political and ethical philosophy (particularly themes like *courage*, *alliance*, and *forgiveness*) with a second thematic focused on anthropological topics (particularly hermeneutics of questioning and generations, anthropology of habit and inhabiting), and a third one dedicated to the relationship between Protestantism and political modernity (Calvin, Milton, Bayle, Rousseau, etc).

Pamela Sue Anderson is Professor of Modern European Philosophy of Religion, University of Oxford; Fellow in Philosophy, Regent's Park College, Oxford. She received her doctorate from the University of Oxford in 1989 and an honorary doctorate from Lund University in 2009. Anderson has published numerous essays in twentieth-century European philosophy, since completing her Oxford DPhil: part of which was published in *Ricœur and Kant* (1993). Her other books include *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: the Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (1998); *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Readings*, co-edited with Beverley Clack (2004); *New Topics in Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Contestations and Transcendence Incarnate* (2010); *Re-visioning Gender in Philosophy of Religion: Reason, Love and Epistemic Locatedness* (2012). She is a Guest Editor of *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions*, special issue on Feminist Philosophy of Religion (June 2014); she is also Guest Editor of *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture* special issue on 'Re-visioning Ricœur and Kristeva' (October 2014). A forthcoming work is entitled *In Dialogue with Michèle Le Doeuff*.

Annalisa Caputo is Researcher with National Scientific Qualification as Associate Professor in Theoretical Philosophy and Aesthetics at the University of Bari, Italy. She is currently in charge of a BA course in *Languages of Philosophy* at the University of Bari, and Visiting Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the School of Theology of Apulia. She has written a monograph on Paul Ricœur (*Io e tu: una dialettica fragile e spezzata. Percorsi con Paul Ricœur* [2009]), and various articles (available in English is "A Second Copernican Revolution. Phenomenology of the Mutuality and Poetics of the Gift in the last Ricœur", 231-256 in *On the Proper Use of Phenomenology – Paul Ricœur Centenary* [2013]). Among her research interests are the thinking of Nietzsche and Heidegger. She has published several books on them, and also an international Heidegger-Bibliography, *Vent'anni di ricezione heideggeriana (1979-1999). Una bibliografia* (2001). She leads a research-team promoting philosophical and artistical culture and experimental teaching at the High School, following the method "Philosophia ludens" (learning philosophy through games).

Peter Kemp is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Aarhus, Campus Copenhagen, and Executive Director for the Centre for Ethics and Law, Copenhagen. He was President of the XXIIInd World Congress of Philosophy, Seoul, 2008. Major works include: *Théorie de l'engagement I-II* (1973), *Das Unersetzliche. Eine Technologie-Ethik* (1992), *La mundialización de la ética* (2007), *Sagesse pratique de Paul Ricœur* (2010), *Citizen of the World* (2011).

Professor **Bengt Kristensson Ugglå** lives in Stockholm, Sweden, and is holder of the Amos Anderson Chair of Philosophy, Culture, and Management at the Swedish-speaking University in Finland, Åbo Akademi University. His doctoral thesis from Lund University 1994 explored the communicative resources in Paul Ricœur's philosophical project from the 30s to the early 90s. He was appointed Associate Professor (Docent) in Studies in Life and World Views at Uppsala University in 1995. Kristensson Ugglå has published books, articles, translations, introductions and contributions to anthologies in connection with Ricœur's philosophy, mainly in Scandinavian languages. He has also extensively developed and implemented a cross-disciplinary hermeneutics in a wide range of areas. Two examples of books available in English are *Ricœur, Hermeneutics and Globalization* (2010), and *Trust and Organizations: Confidence Across Borders* (2013) – together with Marta Reuter and Filip Wijkström.

Harri Meronen is currently writing his doctoral work on Paul Ricœur's biblical interpretations. From 2009 to 2012 he worked in the Research Project of Theological Hermeneutics at the University of Helsinki. In 1994 he graduated in fine arts painting and environmental arts from the Art-school MAA (Maharishi Art Academy) in Helsinki, and in 2008 from the University of Helsinki with a Master in Theology. Meronen is also a pastor of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. He has published an article on Ricœur's interpretation of Psalm 22 in the Finnish theological review *Teologinen aikakauskirja/Teologisk tidskrift* 6, 2010 (pp. 556-571): Harri Meronen, "Psalmi johon Jesus pukeutuu sisältäpäin: Paul Ricœurin tulkinta psalmista 22". ("Insights into the Psalm Quoted by Jesus: Paul Ricœur's Interpretation of Psalm 22").