Paul Ricoeur and the future of the humanities

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INTRODUCTION

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In the realm of the humanities, Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) is widely viewed as one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. He published an impressive and comprehensive *oeuvre* that made an impact on almost all areas of the humanities. By combining the resources and insights of phenomenology and hermeneutics, he developed new perspectives on the text, on metaphor, on narrative, and on personal identity that pervaded theology, history, linguistics, psychoanalysis, ethics, (philosophical) anthropology, cognitive sciences, and so on.

In light of his centennial in 2013, the question arises whether his theories have a future and can be extended to capture new phenomena studied in the humanities: What is the impact and meaning of the *oeuvre* of Paul Ricoeur for the humanities? In particular, one may develop this question as follows: Which of Ricoeur's major contributions can be expected to remain relevant for the humanities? In what way can we relate Ricoeur's *oeuvre* to ideas and methods of other philosophers and scientists? Does Ricoeur's paradigm of the text still provide a relevant framework for thinking about the basic questions that concern the humanities today? If so, how can we bring Ricoeur's perspective in a fruitful tension or dialogue with other, competing paradigms?

Clearly, these are questions that cannot be fully addressed in only one issue. Nevertheless, partial answers can be given. One way to address the importance of Ricoeur's work for the future of the humanities is to consider the changing place of the humanities within the university as a whole. This will be the focus of the first article in this issue. The second article directs the attention to the crucial role that attestation plays in Ricoeur's anthropology. Attestation, it is argued, is a concept that deserves to be rethought in conceptions of the self today, which is one of the basic concepts in the humanities. In the third article, it is argued that the crises of historiography and cognitive science can be explained by looking closely at Ricoeur's analysis of 'the trace'; thus a confrontation between hermeneutics and the paradigm of neuroscience is explored. The fourth article discusses the importance of Ricoeur's early reflections in *L'homme faillible* for an ethics of care; thus it is shown how his hermeneutics can be applied to ethical practices today. The final article shows how the issue of 'difficult forgiveness' forces Ricoeur to connect his philosophical and his theological *oeuvre* with each other. Here it is shown how important theology is for Ricoeur's thought as a whole as well as for the humanities and its future.

In the first article of this issue, *Paul Ricoeur and the re(con)figuration of the humanities in the twenty-first century*, John Arthos examines how Ricoeur's account of moral agency offers a new perspective on the role of the humanities within the university as a whole. Arthos focuses on the dialectic between a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of trust. This dialectic guides Ricoeur's hermeneutics from the outset of its development in the 1960s. This double hermeneutics carries forward the critical impulse that academic bureaucracies try to repress in answer to their corporate masters, while at the same time recognizing the value of reformist impulses that will generate strategic alignments and substantive benefits. In this article, Arthos identifies at which points

Ricoeur engages the tensions that lie at the heart of the double hermeneutic and determines whether he was successful in doing so. Furthermore, he traces Ricoeur's view of ethical responsibility in the academic politics of the 1960s and maps this view onto the academic politics of today. The article concludes that Ricoeur's particular value on this subject lies in the courage with which he dared to place unfashionable reformist possibilities in an honest and productive dialogue with the radical suspicion of hegemonic structures.

In *On the Way to Attestation: Trust and Suspicion in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics*, Gert-Jan van der Heiden furthers Arthos' examination of the dialectic of trust and suspicion. Yet, Van der Heiden does so in light of the philosophical anthropological question of selfhood. Many of Ricoeur's concepts have already found their way into different branches of the humanities. However, there is at least one fundamental concept that still has to be fully deployed, namely the concept of attestation. In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur asks what kind of being the human self is. How can it act, speak and be responsible? And how does it come to understand itself in this way? In response to these questions, Ricoeur offers us the concept of attestation. Although it is not expressly present in his work before the 1980s, this concept is nevertheless prefigured and inspired by the important dialectic of trust and suspicion. Attestation is one of the decisive final names Ricoeur gives to this dialectic. In this article, van der Heiden explores how the concept of attestation and its prefiguration in the dialectic of trust and suspicion are developed in Ricoeur's work in relation to his early reflections on Husserl's concept of the ego and to Heidegger's accounts of truth and attestation.

In the third article *Hermeneutical Crisis as Rethinking the Humanities: The Question of the Trace – Traces of the Past, Cortical Traces*, Paul Marinescu approaches the question of the humanities through its crises. He focuses on the crisis of historiography as well as the crisis of cognitive science. These two crises are analogous since they are both induced by the illusive nature of the notion 'trace'. By reinterpreting Ricoeur's analysis of the trace in *Temps et récit*, Marinescu shows that this notion underlies the aporias that Ricoeur has identified in historiography. Subsequently, he makes clear that the trace can also account for the crisis in cognitive science, as can be gathered from *Ce qui nous fait penser. La nature et la règle*, Ricoeur's dialogue with the neurobiologist Changeux. As such, the trace proves to be a common referent for both historiography and cognitive science. This opens the way for a dialogue in which the neurobiological approach to memory can be brought together with its phenomenological equivalent.

In *Philosophical Anthropology Against Objectification*, Petruschka Schaafsma reconsiders Ricoeur's early philosophical anthropology as developed in *L'homme faillible*. She does so by probing its force in a debate concerning human nature in the contemporary ethics of care. This debate shows similarities with the intentions behind Ricoeur's project. Both these endeavors stem from dissatisfaction with the existing philosophical conceptions of human nature, in particular with their objectifying and fixing character. In this article, Schaafsma examines whether Ricoeur's philosophical approach may be of value for the practical approach of an ethics of care. Hence, this article analyses three aspects of Ricoeur's approach akin to the ethics of care: (1) his conception of a 'passion for the possible' lays the groundwork for a critique of objectification; (2) his methodological reflections help to flesh out the relation between philosophy and the pre-philosophical; and (3) his notion of 'fragility' offers a way to criticize and complement the existing conceptions of human nature. Together these three aspects pose the question whether anthropology in the 'weak' sense can sufficiently account for the risk of objectification in

an ethics of care. In highlighting the importance of this question, the article reveals the relevance of Ricoeur's approach for philosophical reflections that are practice-oriented.

In the final contribution *Salvation and Creation: On the Role of Forgiveness in the Completion of Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy*, Paul van Tongeren turns to the importance of theology in Ricoeur's thought. He focuses on the Epilogue to Ricoeur's *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, which deals with 'difficult forgiveness'. Van Tongeren suggests that this epilogue can be conceived as the completion of Ricoeur's *oeuvre*. Here Ricoeur finally presents the 'poetics' that was already announced in his first book. He kept postponing this poetics, because of his attempt to keep his theological and his philosophical *oeuvre* separate from each other. In this way, he tried to ensure that his philosophy remained comprehensible to readers who did not share his Christian conviction. In his interpretation of forgiveness, however, Ricoeur can no longer maintain this separation. The inclusion of his religious conviction becomes less problematic because in the course of his *oeuvre*, the notion of (the goodness of) creation has become more central in his religious conviction, rather than the notion of redemption (and evil), which was more important in his earlier work.

The articles assembled here thus offer several perspectives on a re-implementation of Ricoeur's ideas in various disciplines. Together they show how fruitful Ricoeur's work still is for present-day humanities.

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