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FROM CONFLICT TO CONCILIATION AND BACK AGAIN: SOME NOTES ON RICŒUR'S DIALECTIC

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the methodological use of *dialectic* in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur, arguing that at its core this philosophy is moved by the dynamics stemming from the interaction between *conflict* and *conciliation*. In sketching an alternative model to better understand Ricœur's original approach to philosophy, my rational reconstruction of his method assesses his "post-hegelian Kantism", the procedures of conflict, mediation, conciliation and dialectic and the importance of the engaged reader. I will contend that one of Ricœur's lasting contributions to philosophy is to show how one can be original while being thorough and that the enlarged perspective built by his *thinking together* successfully explains phenomena by avoiding reductionism and striving for the quest of new meaning through a process of perpetual reinterpretation.

Keywords: Ricœur, Kant, Dialectic, Conflict, Conciliation, Interpretation.

Resumo: Este artigo analisa o uso metodológico da *dialéctica* na filosofia de Paul Ricœur, defendendo que esta é fundamentalmente animada pela interacção entre o *conflito* e a *conciliação*. A reconstrução racional do método

¹ FCSH-UNL / LIF-UC. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the *Society for Ricoeur Studies Fall Conference*, which took place at the George Mason University in Arlington, Virginia, in 2009. A French, slightly modified version was presented at the Université Catholique de Louvain in December 2009, at the *Europé – Groupe de recherches en philosophie pratique*. Its aim is to express, on a first approach and in a very succinct manner, the core of the hypothesis that drives my PhD thesis. This version of the paper benefited from the invaluable remarks of Alison Scott-Bauman, Brad Deford, Eileen Brennan, Fernanda Henriques, Hélder Telo, Johann Michel, Mark Hunyadi, Nathalie Frogneux, Pamela Sue Anderson, Sebastian Purcell and Todd Mei. I owe to each of them the joy that only a good philosophical debate, in the good Ricoeurian manner, can bring.

de Ricœur que é levada a cabo neste artigo propõe um modelo alternativo àqueles que usualmente se apresentam, visando com isso tentar perceber a originalidade da abordagem filosófica do filósofo francês. Para esse efeito, analisam-se as noções de “kantismo pós-hegeliano”, conflito, mediação, conciliação e dialéctica e enfatiza-se a importância do leitor envolvido. Argumentar-se-á que uma das contribuições decisivas que Ricœur lega à filosofia é a demonstração de que se pode ser original sendo-se rigoroso e que a perspectiva alargada possibilitada pelo *penser ensemble* consegue explicar vários fenómenos ao evitar o reducionismo e proceder a uma busca do sentido – a uma reinterpretação – constante.

Palavras-chave: Ricœur, Kant, Dialéctica, Conflito, Conciliação, Interpretação.

What’s the difference between a scholar and a truly original thinker? Is it really possible to *think* something through from the start and to reach meaningful conclusions while ignoring completely the efforts made by others on the same subjects, the thoughts that have come to life – really, that have become *actual* – through the meaningful works, which add up to what we call *tradition*? Apparently, yes. Wittgenstein, for one, claimed almost never having read Kant, despite the obvious similarities between the former’s *Tractatus* and the latter’s transcendental philosophy. In European, continental tradition, philosophers often pay special attention to the history of philosophy; this carefulness often contrasts with the way analytic philosophers tend to consider the validity of arguments as such, regardless of their historicity.

Therefore, in this sense, one could, at least in continental-style philosophy, establish a distinction between 1) someone who is a *scholar*, in the sense that he is someone very familiar with the tradition and very competent in his philological remarks and 2) someone who develops a new, powerful and intelligent philosophy, disregarding almost completely the tradition. The question we have to pose ourselves though is whether this is an either-or alternative. And the answer must be: obviously not, as anyone acquainted with the specific kind of rationality represented by hermeneutics will avow. It would be fairly naïve to consider that originality as such would be a spontaneous, *ab nihilo* feature. One should not underestimate the power of hermeneutical appropriation in the making of one’s own thought. In fact, one can be a scholar *and* still fashion an independent thought; *Selbstdenken* and hermeneutics are not incompatible – in what follows I will argue that the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur is a good example of such a capacity.

I should start by saying that I am looking for a model to understand and describe what’s at stake in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur as a whole.

By uncovering it, I hope to make clear what philosophy really is, in Ricœur's own eyes – and what he can teach us about it. Designing this model will amount to undertaking a certain *rational reconstruction* of the Ricoeurian philosophy according to my own standards. I hope that is not a betrayal to Ricœur himself; I see it rather as a necessary process, whereby the reader of a philosophical work necessarily endeavors to reformulate it in some sort. In a certain sense, every reading is personal. Paul Ricœur, voracious reader and eminent scholar, had also a very personal relation towards his readings. Consequently, even though the purpose of this paper is not primarily to explain the nature of original thinking, one of its claims will be to show how it is possible to be original, yet rigorous, using the philosophical method of Paul Ricœur. There are several models used to describe his philosophy. One of the most popular is the dialogical one – Ricœur would be the philosopher of dialogue, even "*le philosophe de tous les dialogues*". This might be true, given his ability to *listen* to his contemporaries and to interact with them in meaningful ways. Nevertheless, this model has perhaps the weakness of rendering his mode of thinking too benevolent. It risks a certain forgetfulness of the tensions that are the core of his philosophy. Another model, on the other hand, puts the emphasis on the notion of conflict *qua* conflict, arguing that there is no such thing as a process of *Aufhebung* between all these contradictions and that we should respect the existence of a plurality of conflicts as such.

This poses the difficult question of the proper task of Reason in philosophy – what role, if any, do the categories of totality and unity have on our philosophy today? That is, from the postmodern movement onwards, and especially after carefully appropriating Levinassian philosophy, can Ricœur – or can any of us, for that matter – consciously strive to form a unified philosophical system without the slightest suspicion of being part of a process of dominance, of squashing Alterity with the overwhelming process of Reason? Bearing this state of affairs in mind, we should note that any search of unit in Ricoeurian philosophy is hypothetical; many interpreters have tried to find one, resorting to concepts such as action, will, imagination or hermeneutics. None of these approaches is wrong, but none is entirely correct either. I argue that there isn't any real unity in Ricœur's philosophy but rather several possible unities configured by different attractions towards *possible unities*, which can be made and remade through the process of interpretation.

It is true that Ricoeurian scholarship, and our philosopher himself, have always been aware of the dichotomies that pervade his hermeneutical attitude. These can be put in several different (yet similar) ways, such as between critique and conviction or, as Andrew Wiercinski puts it, between

sympathy and suspicion². My claim is that we can find yet another of those revealing dichotomies that permeate Ricœur's work: between conflict and conciliation. This is, or so this paper will argue, what makes the core of his philosophical dialectic, which is simultaneously inspired in Hegel but cautious enough to decline to follow him all the way through to the complete mediation. Hegel is, as Husserl and Kant, one of these key-figures that appear throughout the entire *corpus* of Ricoeurian writings but to whom Ricœur never fully pledges allegiance. In some passages he agrees with Hegel, in others he uses Hegelian philosophy cautiously, and we can find still other ones in which Hegel is disavowed completely. This happens, firstly, because the French philosopher proceeds, or so I will contend, by analyzing philosophical problems as such. He doesn't really want to pay allegiance to any single philosopher or trend, even if he recognizes his debt toward others. As a matter of fact, recognizing the breadth and the diversity of his philosophy, Ricœur tried, from the 1980's onwards, to understand the coherence of his works and the traditions he was indebted to. He identified the three main philosophical movements that had granted him a solid formation, and that formed his background:

“J’aimerais caractériser la tradition philosophique dont je me réclame par trois traits: elle est dans la ligne d’une philosophie *réflexive*; elle demeure dans la mouvance de la *phénoménologie* husserlienne; elle veut être une variante *herméneutique* de cette phénoménologie.” (“De l’interprétation”, in *Du texte à l’action*, p. 25).

However, this acknowledgement doesn't prevent Ricœur from thinking philosophical problems as such. This is evident in the way he was moved by the specific problems addressed in each of his books:

“Je tiens d’ailleurs beaucoup à cette idée que la philosophie s’adresse à des problèmes déterminés, à des embarras de pensée bien cernés.” (*La critique et la conviction*, p. 125)

This means he seldom thinks massive questions (such as *what is metaphysics?*), preferring instead to deal with specific problems – metaphor, narrative, recognition, and so on. In doing so, he thinks *within* tradition in order to be able to go *beyond* tradition – which is a specific kind of dialectic (between tradition and innovation), well expressed both in *La métaphore vive* and in *Temps et Récit*. This is, of course, easier to state as a necessary methodological procedure than to achieve. What is

² Cf. *Between Sympathy and Suspicion: Ricoeur's unstable equilibrium*.

at stake is the correct articulation between the procedure of probing the “things themselves” such as we are confronted with them and the “historical element”, that is, the long list of approaches that other philosophers used to try to understand these same phenomena and that constitute, so to speak, the “history” of that problem. When stubbornly wanting to think absolutely alone – *l’originalité à tout prix* – one could end up being severely limited by blind spots produced by vicious and reified modes of thinking.

We should also add, for the sake of the analysis of this problem that a completely detached viewpoint is, as far as we know, impossible. There is no “view from nowhere” as there is no absolute originality. Every philosophy departs from daily life and at some point eventually tries to come back to it, albeit with a radically different perspective. Tradition too often has its ways of coming back at us, since many problems have been significantly dealt with before us, even if we ignore it. And there is also what we could call a “tradition of originality”, that is to say, a tradition of philosophers, writers and artists who have strived and still strive to be creative, opposed to a “tradition of tradition”, which would be a philosophical conservatism of some sort.

On the other hand, trying to put forward a philosophy that would be nothing more than a reflection of almost everything of what has been said and done before would amount, at best, to some sort of Encyclopedia, but never to answering the philosophical problems with which we must deal. So we must always face the difficult decision of choosing the best course – and to be prone to the possibility of error. The desirable capacity would be the one of using the historical as a point of departure, using it to eliminate the blind spots of one’s own thinking but also to be able to depart from it in some way, overcoming the aporias that are likely to strike any theoretical effort at some point. Are we close to achieving it? Was Ricœur himself a model of this mode of thinking? I will argue that this is indeed the case, assuming the specific form of the interaction between conflict and conciliation, as the rest of the article will try to show.

But there is an additional element that has to be taken into account. If every philosophical problem (except the radically new ones, which are only possible at certain times, responding to certain events) has a history, which is largely constituted by the intellectual efforts of other people, the paths that one’s philosophy assumes have a history too, one that might be full of detours, setbacks and conversions. These metamorphoses of Philosophy are also one of the possibilities of the advent of something *new*. This novelty might be able, in turn, to proceed to the reinterpretation of the whole – that is, every new theoretical turn can be decisive to understand – even in narrative terms – the whole process. So it is not innocuous to

the correct understanding of all this problematic that we find in Ricœur the permanent reinterpretation of old positions that were once his own. I will try to explain this feature of his philosophy in what follows. But let us start by explaining the main concepts.

If we were given the task of choosing, among the bewildering array of concepts that appear in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur, the ones that are given more emphasis throughout his books and that are successful in summing up his major contributions as a philosopher, the notion of conflict would certainly be one of them. Even philosophers who paid little attention to his works probably heard about the *Conflict of Interpretations*. The origin of this idea, or at least of this way of putting it, is the chapter called “dialectic” in *De l’interprétation*, where Ricœur opposes two different methods of the quest for meaning – the archaeological, Freudian model, and the teleological, Hegelian model (where the truth of each figure is to be found on the next one). This is where Ricœur really starts practicing dialectic, as the promotion of a third position, always respectful of the two departing poles of the antithetic, but longing to overcome them through the dialectical movement; we will further explain this process below.

What is at stake in this mature phase of his philosophy (these are all articles from the 1960’s) is, on a first approach, the possibility of an immediate and transparent access to one’s conscience – a problem that would follow him for almost three decades up until *Soi-même comme un autre*. Ricœur places Freud as one of the “masters of suspicion” – an expression which would become famous – alongside Marx and Nietzsche.

“Le philosophe formé à l’école de Descartes sait que les choses sont douteuses, qu’elles ne sont pas telles qu’elles apparaissent ; mais il ne doute pas que la conscience ne soit telle qu’elle s’apparaît à elle-même ; en elle, sens et conscience du sens coïncident ; depuis Marx, Nietzsche et Freud nous en doutons. Après le doute sur la chose, nous sommes entrés dans le doute sur la conscience. ” (*De l’interprétation*, p. 43)

According to Ricœur, it is obvious that we really can’t say that these three philosophers have similar projects – even though the expression *école du soupçon* is sometimes used, it is a rather equivocal designation; evidently, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have substantial theoretical assertions which are radically different, if we consider what they propose. Nevertheless, if we consider what they *reject*, maybe we can start to unveil a common characteristic. This is what Ricœur posits: the three of them reject the existence of an all-encompassing conscience, of a subject which is, so to speak, *master of himself*. They all propose a different alternative: a dichotomy between two levels of meaning: one that is patent (shown)

and another one, which is latent (hidden). The first level of meaning, the one which is immediately perceived conscientiously is nothing more than an illusion produced by hidden means. Hence Nietzsche's genealogy of morals and Marx's critique of ideologies can join Freud's analyses of our unconscious structures in pointing to the means of production of that hidden, *truer* meaning. Thus what they really institute is an *exegesis* of meaning. Since it can not be immediately apprehended, it must be sought after; some sort of *science of interpretation* must be established. And here we have one of the major contributions to the hermeneutical turn, both in Ricœur's work and in philosophy altogether. From now on, meaning is not to be grasped immediately and taken at its *prima facie* value – instead, we must *decipher its expressions*:

“(...) chercher le sens, désormais, ce n'est plus épeler la conscience du sens mais en *déchiffrer les expressions*.” (idem, p. 44)

We can now understand the similarity between these three projects. They are all set up to be a certain sort of *hermeneutical demystification*. What is clear to Ricœur, however, is that this is certainly not the only type of hermeneutic that is possible. His later works from the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's would further discuss the origin of hermeneutics and its multiple forms in theology and philosophy, with a special emphasis on the works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Gadamer and Heidegger – not to mention the ambiguous relation that Ricœur kept with structuralism. Already in *De l'interprétation* he understood that we could oppose to this hermeneutics of suspicion a different alternative: hermeneutics as a recollection of meaning, which he found in the works pertaining to the phenomenology of religion of authors such as Mircea Eliade and G. van der Leeuw. What Ricœur sets out to defend is the possibility of faith, and also of morality, *in spite of* the Nietzschean attack. He wants to arrive at a *postcritical* faith. A faith – and, we can also add, a possibility of ethics and morality – which have survived the test to its origin. In this early book, the opposite of suspicion is faith; on *Soi-même comme un autre*, the opposite of suspicion will be *attestation*, the cornerstone of the late Ricœur's philosophy.

In terms of its methodology, the hermeneutics of suspicion can also have an opposite. When our aim is to demystify by appealing to the beginning of a certain process, we have to go back and dig deep. So, it is at the same time a backward movement and some sort of *archeological excavation*, if we can use such a metaphor. In stark contrast with this, Ricœur wants to prove that another sort of hermeneutics is possible, one with a radically different movement, methodology and aim.

Hermeneutical demystification proceeds by means of reduction: we often find it expressed in formulae such as “morality is *nothing more* than...” or “reason is *nothing but*...”; the master of suspicion is there to prevent us from being fooled by false idols. He does this by eliminating the false meaning and pointing to the real cause, the real (even if one-dimensional) meaning.

So what’s the alternative hermeneutics Ricœur wants to put forward? In *De l’interprétation*, he is focused on what he calls *amplifying hermeneutics*. This kind of hermeneutics doesn’t reduce the second meaning to the first one – instead, it proceeds *teleologically* – gradually unfolding meaning step by step. Each new step brings us a truer, larger meaning, which comprises what has been shown up until that point but goes beyond it. What Ricœur has in mind, as is easily understood, is Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Each new figure bears the truth of the previous one. What if the true meaning of a certain phenomenon can’t really be grasped archeologically but teleologically? What if we were to realize that we should let it follow its theoretical course before trying to completely grasp it? To the hermeneutics of suspicion we find opposed the hermeneutics of the recollection of meaning; to archaeological hermeneutics, teleological hermeneutics. Conflict has thus made its appearance and is being given its due importance by Ricœur himself. Even so, if we put ourselves in the viewpoint of the external observer, the one who can see the whole of Ricœur’s philosophical development throughout time and the way it unfolds, even in a narrative sense, we are, with the publication of *De l’interprétation* and *Le conflit des interprétations* already *medias in res*. What has yet to be proven is the relevance of this notion way beyond this specific period of the 1960’s.

An important and extensive debate has taken place in order to determine what are we to make of the conceptual figure of conflict in the context of Ricoeurian philosophy as a whole. If it is true that it was only with the hermeneutic turn of his works that the French philosopher granted the notion of conflict its utmost importance, one could perhaps say that the clash between opposing theoretical forces has always, somehow or another, been characteristic of his way of thinking:

“Je suis reconnaissant d’avoir été dès le début sollicité par des forces contraires et des fidélités opposées.” (Cf. *Auto compréhension et histoire*, p. 1)

Already in *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, his first autonomous philosophical project, he asserts that the true connection between these phenomenological realities is shown to us by the revealing force of

conflict.³ Later, the hermeneutical phase of Ricœur's production brought us the reflections upon symbols and their inherent *overdetermination*, which is explained by the clash of different interpretations, as we've seen. The point is: symbols are never simple. They have multiple layers of meaning and in them the different hermeneutic styles struggle to impose their own interpretation.

“Les vrais symboles sont gros de toutes les herméneutiques.” (*Le conflit des interpretations*, p. 27)

Consequently, if we can characterize a certain thought in terms of its movement, that is to say, by the way in which the forces that inhabit it interact with each other and form a specific shape, we could definitely say that Ricœur's thought is moved by the dynamics of antithesis. It is, at least up to a certain point, an antithetic. Also, given that the appearance of specific conflicts within this philosophy is not sporadic but almost systematic – in a methodological sense – one should even describe this dynamics as *conflictuality*, in a productive kind of way. One of the merits of this approach is that it helps to find the limits to certain kinds of explanation. For instances, to pretend that genealogical critique would completely deplete the possibility of meaning carried forth by ethics, would be to take reductionism too far.

We should also add that there are different kinds of conflicts scattered throughout Ricœur's works and that there isn't any single universal hermeneutical key to understand them all in their particularities. Instead, they must be analyzed one by one. This doesn't prevent us, however, to establish a certain typology. There are, for example, simple conflicts (the ones between two different theories, as in archaeological versus teleological hermeneutics) and complex conflicts, with multiple poles of conflictuality – this happens whenever more than two theories confront each other. And something else changes according to the specificity of the conflict too, which is Ricœur's approach to it. How does he deal with the appearance of conflicts?

We might pose ourselves the following question: should we be happy with the mere opposition of different theories? Is this all that our philosopher has to offer us? Well, of course not. If it were so, he wouldn't escape the charges of eclecticism brought upon him by some of his critics. And if we are to shed some light upon the philosophy of Paul Ricœur we have to understand simultaneously 1) what his initial intentions were, what he aimed to do at the start of his philosophical career and how these

³ «De proche en proche les rapports de l'involontaire au volontaire se révèlent sous le signe du conflit.» *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, p. 21

intentions shifted as time went by, but also 2) what were the specific methodological procedures he used throughout his works. In order to do this, we'll have to take into consideration the dialectical other of conflict, that is, *conciliation*, and to show how this notion fits into his philosophy.

Initially, the French philosopher didn't avoid posing specific ontological questions without previously conducting an anthropological investigation⁴. In his readings of the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, he diagnoses a certain sort of paradox; this philosophy has two centres (*foyers*): Existence and Transcendence. The former is characterized by liberty and the latter by its connection to Being as such. There is a certain tension between the two of them; one could even say a conflict. However the claim of our philosopher is that what is separated in thought can only be secretly reconciled.⁵ This reconciliation is really ontological. It is the way in which the young Ricœur (in this occasion, together with Mikel Dufrenne) thinks the connection between religious faith, existence and philosophy. It is some sort of *being reconciled* (that is perceived by the human heart) which, according to Ricœur and Dufrenne, would be the solution to Jasper's philosophy. So, according to this, no matter how fragmentary a thought may be, the one who expresses it is to have a glimpse, through *contemplation*⁶, of the inner reconciliation provided by religion⁷.

This position doesn't last long in Ricœur's approach to philosophy⁸. Even his works on religion and the philosophy of religion evolve in radical

⁴ Which is not the case in his latter works, such as *Soi-même comme un autre*, where ontology is postponed to the last study – this is a consequence of the big, albeit always incomplete mediations that constitute the famous *voie longue*.

⁵ “Ce qui pour la pensée est séparé n'est-il pas d'une certaine façon réconcilié ? [...] peut-être qu'une philosophie définitivement déchirée est impossible et que le paradoxe a toujours pour toile de fond une *union* et une participation, de l'ordre de l'action et de l'ordre du sentiment ; » cf. p. 379 *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence*. For a fuller account, cf. the whole section « La déchirure et la conciliation » (p. 379-393)

⁶ The word of God becomes the real mediation between Existence and Transcendence. In what concerns *contemplation*, Ricoeur and Dufrenne say that this concept has the same role in Jasper's philosophy as *Aufhebung* has in Hegel's system. Cf. p. 384 *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence*.

⁷ This has an intimate connection to the notion of mystery, such as it appears on the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. Cf. *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers. Philosophie du Mystère et Philosophie du Paradoxe*.

⁸ Even if it is still affirmed on *Le volontaire et l'involontaire* (« Cette étude du volontaire et de l'involontaire est une contribution limitée à un dessein plus vaste qui serait l'apaisement d'une ontologie paradoxale dans une ontologie réconciliée », p. 22) where he tries to operate a conciliation between the existentialist philosophies of Jaspers and Marcel and the eidetic method of Husserl.

different ways from this one⁹ as he becomes ever more prudent about the distinction between the domains of philosophy and religion. Honestly, I do not think he wanted to be considered a Christian philosopher¹⁰. He was a philosopher, and then he was Christian. But I do not think he really wanted to prove, in his later works, the reconciliation of being, nor the existence of God, which are given to him as a certainty only through his faith. We can find the essential of his position in the article “Un philosophe protestant: Pierre Thévenaz” where Ricoeur, when talking about Thévenaz, is really summing up what would become his own later position:

“La foi, la foi dans la Croix du Christ, telle qu’il la comprend et la vit dans un contexte ecclésial et dogmatique protestant, ne le condamne pas à la non-philosophie : elle le rend au contraire à l’autonomie de la réflexion. Mais cette liberté de philosopher à quoi il est remis par sa foi, il ne la dépense pas non plus à accorder, à harmoniser les énoncés de sa philosophie à ceux de sa foi : la philosophie, selon lui, n’a pas la charge de parler *sur* Dieu, encore moins du point de vue de Dieu ; on verra même qu’elle atteint son authenticité quand elle avoue son impuissance, mieux, son renoncement à devenir philosophie du divin, philosophie divine. A une philosophie *divine* il opposera constamment une philosophie responsable *devant Dieu*, une philosophie où Dieu n’est plus l’objet suprême de la philosophie, mais où il est impliqué à titre de pôle d’appel et de réponse de l’acte philosophique lui-même.”¹¹

⁹ For a comprehensive study on this subject and on the several ways religion and philosophy were important for Ricoeur, cf. Gilbert Vincent – *La religion de Ricoeur*.

¹⁰ This is yet another contentious debate among Ricoeur scholars; there are many writings where philosophy and religious studies really overlap in Ricoeur. Cf. for example, “La règle d’or en question” in *Lectures 3*, a remarkable essay where he tries to mediate between the Kantian categorical imperative and the golden rule. However, I think that the seriousness of the philosophical work led Ricoeur to really take up philosophical questions as such – and therefore the divide between *critique* and *conviction* – faith being decisively a matter of conviction. This must be the reason why, even though the initial version of *Soi-même comme un autre* (that is to say, the Gifford Lectures) initially ended up in two theological studies (now published in the latest version of *Amour et Justice*), Ricoeur decided to replace them for his *petite éthique* (studies VII to IX), followed by the tenth study “Vers quelle ontologie”, where he finally declares himself to be philosophically agnostic. “Je n’ai pas repris ces deux conférences dans *Soi-même comme un autre*, afin de rester fidèle au pacte ancien en vertu duquel les sources non philosophiques de mes convictions ne seraient pas mêlées aux arguments de mon discours philosophique.” (Cf. *Réflexion faite*, pp. 78-79) This does not, of course, mean that we can’t draw philosophical conclusions from his religious works and *vice-versa*; however, I think we should think these domains as being as autonomous as possible in Ricoeur’s thought.

¹¹ Cf. *Lectures 3*, p. 246.

I would like to emphasize that Ricœur stresses, from the beginning, the importance of *autonomy*. This is not, as a careful reading of his analyses of Kantian moral philosophy would show (in texts as *Soi-même comme un autre* and “Une obéissance aimante” in *Lectures 3*) an absolute autonomy because in the context of Ricoeurian philosophy the autonomy of the subject is always confronted with the injunction coming from the other (that reveals a certain passivity at our core) and also because the acting subject is prone to interpret and transform himself by the act of reading, which reveals our openness to actively appropriate different modes of life that have been there before us, but which we can actively imitate in our own way. This is, for instances, the Christian mode of life – not necessarily the Christian mode of thinking, at least when doing philosophy. And this theory of reading, to which we will pay further attention in this article, doesn’t prevent us to think a possible appropriation of other modes of life: the stoic or the epicurean mode of life, the theoretical mode of life expressed on the famous practice of contemplation, or the *vita activa* that is so magnificently promoted by Hannah Arendt on *The Human Condition*. Either way, something Ricœur never lacked was *Redlichkeit*; he always assumed his Christian tradition and practices, without wanting to impose them in any way whatsoever – fact that renders some critiques, as Badiou’s infamous charge that “tout comme Descartes, Ricœur s’avance masqué”¹² – a charge that amounts to radically turning the philosophy of suspicion against Ricœur himself – utterly unfair.¹³ However, it is precisely because these kinds of charges have been put forth that we should, in my opinion, take the philosophical works of Paul Ricœur as being strictly philosophical.

Nevertheless, if our philosopher indeed drops the kind of religious reconciliation that, as we saw, he wanted to apply at the start of his career to the works of Jaspers, he assumes, I will argue, a different kind of figure of *conciliation*. It becomes, in my opinion, a certain methodological

¹² Cf. “Le sujet supposé chrétien de Paul Ricœur”, p. 20.

¹³ The accusation reads as follows: “(...) ce que Ricœur tente en réalité d’obtenir par les moyens sophistiqués de l’analyse conceptuelle n’est rien moins qu’une victoire. La victoire de la vision chrétienne sur le sujet historique contre celle qui aujourd’hui s’impose de plus en plus et qui est de provenance principalement juive, mais pas uniquement.” (Idem, p. 19) Badiou is accusing Ricœur in the context of *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli*; the dispute stems mainly from the controversial last chapter, on the possibility of forgiveness. However, the role of Badiou as a master of suspicion in what concerns Ricoeur’s alleged motivations could cast a shadow upon the whole work of our philosopher – would it not be the careful distinction between the philosophical and the religious domain in his works. For a reply to Badiou’s charges, see Olivier Abel, “L’indépassable dissensus”.

approach that is connected to the emergence of meaning that we analyzed before. If we consider the theorization of conflict in the domain of an interpretation theory, the consequence is that there isn't any universal hermeneutics. What we do have is a multitude of theories that apparently concern the same phenomena, but that read those phenomena in entirely different ways. If one theory is to be completely right, the other should be, *eo ipso*, completely wrong. Unless it is possible to think them *together*. I stress the importance of this *thinking together* because it is this that helps us avoid the one-dimensionality of thinking – the much-lauded dialogue that the French author always professed. This really is one of the consequences of the overdetermination of symbols. Through symbols themselves, we can envisage the conciliation of the different kinds of hermeneutics. Or, if not a true conciliation, because this is not, as we shall see, always the case – at least the promotion of a *third* position. What does this mean, if not a forced juxtaposition? In what measure does Ricœur's thought escape eclecticism? It does so, because his effort is double. If, on the one hand, he tries to participate in the theoretical debates of his time – and in doing this, he shows that a reflexive effort is always situated, always inserted on a specific culture; the authors and the constellations of theories that appear on his body of work are the reflections of the cultural and philosophical world in which he lived – on the other hand he only cited the authors and theories he considered *useful, pertinent* to the development of the philosophical argument he was aiming at:

“C'est souvent dans les restes du sujet précédent que j'ai vu l'urgence d'un autre thème. Cela est vrai de mon rapport à la psychanalyse, puisque c'est véritablement de la *Symbolique du mal* que procède l'*Essai sur Freud*. Ayant adopté une ligne qui était en gros celle de la phénoménologie de la religion, proche d'Eliade, j'avais bien le sentiment que, chez Freud, Nietzsche et Marx, il y avait une pensée adverse avec laquelle je devais m'expliquer.” (*La critique et la conviction* p. 119)

As we can easily infer from the quote above, Ricœur did this because his philosophical effort (his personal convictions notwithstanding) was sincere. No matter how convinced he might be of the correctness of a specific point of view, he couldn't take it for granted without putting it to the test, that is to say, without confronting it with the panoply of different interpretations of the same phenomena. This was, for him, one of the roles of philosophical critique. It was, in a certain sense, a way to pay tribute to the force of each argument he used and to the intelligence of its adversaries. I think we could speak here, *mutatis mutandis*, of some sort

of *enlarged thinking* (*erweiterte Denkart*), in the sense it is given to it by Kant¹⁴.

If we extrapolate this theoretical framework to the entirety of Ricœur's works, what we find is a philosophy that is fragmentary but that proceeds by thoroughly mediating the conflicts that take place within it and *rethinking them together*. So, the creative procedures of Ricœur's method do not stop at an antithetic, but produce a certain *dialectic*, even if it is to be a very different from the most famous of dialectics, the Hegelian one. Indeed, this dialectic does not produce a synthesis, but endless passages from one pole to another. These passages or mediations are, in my opinion, Ricœur's own hypotheses of conciliation between theories that are totally different but that gain in insight if they come together and explain successfully what is at stake on each of the many philosophical domains upon which Ricœur conducted his investigations. To explain this procedure, always rigorous and fertile, he sometimes used the metaphor of *arbitrage*. This methodological constraint was taken very seriously:

¹⁴ I owe the analyses of this Kantian notion to the brilliant articles of Mário Jorge de Carvalho. Cf. "Problemas de desconfinamento de perspectiva" and especially "O egoísmo lógico e a sua superação." Many other aspects of my approach to philosophy have been influenced by his analyses of Aristotle, Heidegger, Kant and Plato. The aforementioned papers articulate the connection between the notion of "logical egoism" in Kant and the way to try to escape from it – by resorting to the principles of *aufgeklärte Denkart*, *erweiterte Denkart* and *konsequente Denkart*. The notion of enlarged thinking has to do, precisely, with avoiding the unjustified exclusion of alternative perspectives. The consideration of these alternative viewpoints does not, by any means, imply a lack of autonomy in the making of one's judgment. What it aims, precisely, is to eliminate the vicious creation of blind spots in one's consideration of a given problem, in one's formation of a correct judgment. Furthermore, what is at stake at this point of Kant's philosophy is not even exclusively the fact that the perspective is coming from someone other than me – what matters is the plausibility of that perspective. The fact that it comes, so to speak, "from outside", that is, that it has been produced elsewhere than in my own reflection upon things, is not the most important characteristic of this process. Rather, it is as a plausible possibility for my own viewpoint that I must consider it. Thus, *mutatis mutandis*, Ricœur's preoccupation with appropriating *other* perspectives. He goes to read Freud not because he's eclectic, not because he doesn't have one single philosophy and is obliged to make a puzzle out of other philosophies. Rather, he goes there because he feels that he has to confront himself with that perspective, in order to try to really understand what he's talking about. I should add that I am by no means implying that Ricœur is able to fulfil all the prerogatives of a successful enlarged thinking in the Kantian manner – but I am implying that his project and his methodology had similarities with such a formal project and that he tried, by his modest means, to fulfil as much as humanly possible a project of that sort, in his own dialectical way.

“Au fond, une chose me préoccupait vraiment: la consistance de mon discours; pour moi, il s’agissait avant tout de résoudre mes propres contradictions, les tensions entre les influences diverses; mon problème était toujours de savoir si je construisais de fausses fenêtres, si ce que je faisais n’était pas qu’un compromis, ou si c’était réellement la promotion d’une position tierce, capable de tenir la route.” (p. 118 *La critique et la conviction*)

In this passage, we can already have a glimpse at what he meant by the procedure of conciliation – a rigorous and alternative philosophical solution to the aporias presented by the opposing poles shown by conflict. This introduces another significant step towards the comprehension of Ricœur’s methodology. He wants to build real philosophical alternatives to the problems he is faced with. Here, he says that he does not want his philosophical positions to amount to nothing more than “compromises”. However, we should stress that this is true only for the pure theoretical core of his philosophical method – not in his practical philosophy. This article does not concern that important dimension of Ricœur’s production, I will have to leave a thorough explanation of it for a later work, but this much I can advance: in purely theoretical terms, he sometimes adopts a somewhat constructivist position, that is, some of the conflicts he analyses are only in conflict *within* his enlarged method. He makes antithetic forces clash, in order to show that the best approach goes beyond that clash. Having said this, some of the confrontations taking place at a theoretical level on his books are there because they must be there, if Ricœur is to successfully prove his point. So, there is a certain degree of constructivism in his theoretical method.

In the vast domain of practical philosophy, however, he is not and can not be constructivist. Every time he is dealing with the structure and necessity of action, of *l’homme agissant et souffrant*, he does not construct the conflicts: he just can not escape them. All he can do is to deal with them, to cope with human suffering and the inescapability of action. In that case, the solutions he brings to the practical problems he is faced with – be it on the domains of applied ethics, struggles pertaining to recognition or historical problems dealing with memory and forgetting – what he tries to do is to *solve* problems. He is not so much worried about enlarging his perspective as he is striving for peace, charity or overabundance. In this specific context, he uses the notion of *compromis* on a very different sense, stemming from the works of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. In fact, to be able to reach an agreement by means of a compromise is one of the ways Ricœur proposes when analyzing

the domain of social action.¹⁵ Bearing this distinction in mind – compromise on the Boltanski and Thévenot sense is applicable to the sphere of social action, compromise on the pure theoretical level is a false alternative leading to abandon one’s principles and should be carefully avoided – we can return to the main point occupying us here: Ricœur’s methodology.

One of the most interesting points, though, is that our philosopher himself admits that the mediations taking place in his philosophy are fragile and provisional, that is, that we can always deny the legitimacy of establishing such and such particular theoretical connection and reformulate the whole approach to a certain theoretical domain. He often uses expressions such as “méditations toujours fragiles et provisoires”, or “le style de médiation incomplète entre positions rivales”.¹⁶ This is the reason why in his later works, Paul Ricœur constantly invites the reader to re-read his whole enterprises with different hermeneutical keys¹⁷. Furthermore, this was also very important to the appearance of new meaning in his readings of his own works. The conclusion of *Temps et Récit*, written several months after the writing of the third volume, draws new insights into the whole work, only possible through this continual act of reinterpretation of previous writings – this being the richness of philosophy, especially on the great works that become classics. In them, nothing is poor or easily identifiable, nothing

¹⁵ On the appearance of the notion of *compromis*, which will be several times discussed on the later works of Paul Ricœur, such as *Le juste*, and *Parcours de la reconnaissance*, see the work of Boltanski and Thévenot *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*. Cf. also, for an apology of this notion, the interview “Pour une éthique du compromis”.

¹⁶ Cf. p. 15 *Amour et Justice* “Une manière de se frayer la voie entre ces deux extrêmes est de prendre pour guide d’une pensée méditante la dialectique entre amour et justice. Par dialectique, j’entends ici, d’une part, la reconnaissance de la disproportion initiale entre les deux termes et, d’autre part, la recherche de médiations entre les deux extrêmes, – médiations, disons-le tout de suite, toujours fragiles et provisoires.”, and also « J’ose croire en effet que mon style propre de médiation incomplète entre positions rivales exprime une contrainte issue de l’histoire même de cette problématique philosophique considérée sur la longue durée. Nous appartenons tous, à mon avis, à l’ère posthégélienne de la pensée et menons tous, à notre façon, le difficile travail de deuil à l’égard du système. Ce travail de deuil se marque par l’alternance entre ce que Karl Jaspers appelait une systémativité sans synthèse finale et un mode de pensée délibérément fragmentaire. Je me comprends moi-même comme relevant plutôt du second style et comme ne satisfaisant au premier qu’à travers le second. Je parlerai pour caractériser l’époque de longue durée qui nous enveloppe et nous déborde de *systémativité brisée* (comme il m’est arrivé de parler pour moi-même de *Cogito blessé*.” *Auto-compréhension et histoire*, p. 2)

¹⁷ Cf., for instances, The tenth study of *Soi-même comme un autre*;

objective, in a positivistic sense. Everything is prone to the happiness of the quest for new meaning. So, the varied solutions of conciliation between different theories aren't but possibilities of meaning that the philosopher puts forward but that are never complete, nor completely right. They invite the judgment of the reader and their eventual reformulation. This is particularly evident in the famous analyses on narrative in *Temps et Récit*.

“Le moment où la littérature atteint son efficience la plus haute est peut-être celui où elle met le lecteur dans la situation de recevoir une solution pour laquelle il doit lui-même trouver les questions appropriées, celles qui constituent le problème esthétique et moral posé par l'œuvre.” (cf. *Temps et Récit* t. III, p. 254)

On this passage, Ricoeur is subscribing to H. R. Jauss's position¹⁸. I think that we can apply this notion to the reading of philosophical texts as well. The capacity to answer the right questions is at the beginning of any philosophical effort, but also at the beginning of the revision of any text or theory. One of the factors we have to take into account is the following: we won't ever arrive at the formulation of a complete system. Incompleteness (*inachèvement*) is inevitable in doing philosophy, as in any other human effort, or at least, any other theoretical effort. Ricoeur was very much aware of this. But the creation of meaning, and the perpetual deciphering of the phenomena that make us think (like symbols – “le symbole donne à penser”) do not stop when a philosophical work is written. Indeed, they are also the offspring of readers. Which is why reading and discussing the vast opus of this major philosopher is such a fertile task.

This brings us to the point where we can see the emergence of conflict once again. If the task of the philosopher is to think *critically*, in the sense that critique assumed from Kant up until the latter developments of Frankfurt's critical theory, then a little bit of *suspicion*¹⁹ is always an

¹⁸ Cf. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

¹⁹ Ricoeur talks explicitly about the responsibility of the reader, especially in the case of those narratives in which the narrator is not trustworthy. Cf. *Temps et Récit volume III* pp. 236-238. This stance of engaged, vigilant reading can be transposed, *mutatis mutandis*, to philosophy, engaging the philosopher in the exercise of critique. I thank Allison Scott-Bauman for having suggested the introduction of the notion of suspicion in the dialectical model of conflict and conciliation I am sketching. Cf. *Ricoeur and the hermeneutics of suspicion*. When I say “a little bit of suspicion” I am not, obviously, wanting to cast a shadow over the intentions of an author, as Badiou seems to be doing with Ricoeur. That is to say that suspicion should not be extreme – we should not forget the dialectic between sympathy and suspicion, as Wiercinski puts it.

important part of a hermeneutical reading. For Ricœur, it is in the act of reading that a work finds its completeness – works are meant to be read and so it is *through* the reader that the circle of *mimesis* achieves its full meaning, when the reading refigures the experience of the reader. However, even if this presupposes a certain fusion of horizons [*Horizonsverschmelzung*] in the Gadamerian sense, even if the world created by the literary work intersects the world of the reader, *the intersection isn't always smooth*. To actively interpret a text means to *think along with him*, “actively probing what seem weaknesses or unclarities, asking continually whether a philosopher was entitled to the claims he makes, imagining how a position could respond to objections rather than those posed in the text.”²⁰

In my opinion, this is what Ricœur is doing, all the time. It shows that the hermeneutical act of appropriation must go through the exercise of critique, of confronting oneself with the actual philosophical problems, in the way explained above. It corresponds, roughly, to the learning of philosophy *ex principis*²¹ (as opposed to *ex datis*, in Kant's famous distinction) and to the courage of *sapere aude* amidst the “hermeneutical age of reason”, to quote Jean Greisch's famous title. It is this phenomenon, I think, that transforms tradition into innovation. It corresponds to yet another way in which we can express a “posthegelian Kantism” – exercising *Selbstdenken* through dialectics. Ricœur's awkward way of designating his philosophy, posthegelian Kantism, deserves some attention:

“Le kantisme que je veux maintenant développer est, paradoxalement, plus à faire qu'à répéter ; ce serait quelque chose comme un kantisme post-hégélien (...) chronologiquement, Hegel vient après Kant ; mais nous, lecteurs tardifs, nous allons de l'un à l'autre ; en nous quelque chose de Hegel a vaincu quelque chose de Kant ; mais quelque chose de Kant a vaincu Hegel, parce que nous sommes aussi radicalement post-hégéliens que nous sommes post-kantiens. A mon avis, c'est cet échange qui structure encore le discours philosophique d'aujourd'hui. C'est pourquoi la tâche est de les penser toujours mieux, en les pensant ensemble, l'un contre l'autre et l'un par l'autre. Même si nous commençons à penser autre chose, ce « mieux penser Kant et Hegel » appartient, d'une manière ou de l'autre, à ce « penser autrement que Kant et Hegel ».” (cf. “La liberté selon l'espérance” in *Le conflit des interprétations*, pp. 402-3)

²⁰ Robert Pippin, *Hegel's practical philosophy*, p. 33. In this passage, Pippin is talking about Kant's methodology, saying that this was the best way to read a philosophical text – it comes very close to Ricœur's own method.

²¹ Cf. “Die Architektonik der reinen Vernunft”, *KrV* B864.

In some way, this passage contains many of the features I have been emphasizing on this paper. We have the notion of *thinking together* (*penser ensemble*), the emphasis on the active building of one's own philosophy: "un kantisme plus à faire qu'à répéter", the specific movement of his dialectic: "nous allons de l'un à l'autre", the tendency towards some sort of progress on one's own effort of thinking: "la tâche est de les penser toujours mieux" and also the different ways conflicts can unfold: "l'un contre l'autre" and/or "l'un par l'autre". Also, and decisively: the mark of originality and of the newness brought about by the specific procedures of conciliation: "ce penser autrement que Kant et Hegel". Where we find Kant and Hegel, we could have Aristotle and Kant (in the *petite éthique* of *Soi-même comme un autre*), Gadamer and Habermas or many, many others, on the several different conflicts Ricoeur mediated throughout his long career.

How is Ricoeur's dialectic different from the Hegelian dialectic? They both express a certain method, whereby form and content cannot be entirely separated. They both include the negative moment. Without it, their philosophy wouldn't be productive. The great difference remains in the possibility of forming a system where Reason acts as the great unifier, or, briefly put, the possibility of absolute knowledge. This is impossible in Ricoeur, as it is impossible in most contemporary philosophy. One of the ways of putting it is the following: Ricoeur's dialectic is a "dialectique à synthèse ajournée" as he says in *Histoire et vérité*. The possibility of absolute knowledge, such as we find it in the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, or in the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* is totally rejected. Ricoeur's Kantism forces him to reject any *Selbst-Darstellung* of the Absolute²². He is Kantian precisely because he accepts the limits of human reasoning. This philosophy is a philosophy of finitude, of limits. But it is also, at the same time – a philosophy of effort, of action and capability.

"L'homme c'est la joie du oui dans la tristesse du fini." (*L'homme faillible*, p. 156)

Admitting it, owning up to it, means renouncing Hegel. Realizing that even if we are Hegel's offspring, we are not Hegelians *tout court*. After all, we do not think like Hegel, but *after* Hegel²³. If we were to find a

²² Cf. "Le statut de la Vorstellung dans la philosophie hégélienne de la religion", in *Lectures 3*.

²³ Cf. The chapter "Renoncer à Hegel" in *Temps et Récit* t. 3 (pp. 282-99) To think after Hegel means to interpret his writings, doing the same thing so many interpreters, from Bruno Bauer and Karl Marx up until Honneth and Pippin have been doing, even if we renounce the system. It also implies a certain "travail de deuil", for when we can't be Hegelians anymore, we have the deep sense of loss – and so, all Hegelian insights must be reworked, which is what Honneth and Ricoeur did with recognition.

process of *Aufhebung* in Ricoeur, it would have to be entirely provisional²⁴. In fact, I am almost inclined to say that in many moments of his philosophy, Ricoeur's starting point really *is* the negative moment. He goes from conflict to conciliation. But then, when suggesting the different hermeneutical keys that are able to unleash other possibilities of meaning contained in his own works, he is reintroducing conflict in the well-arranged conciliations he had previously put forth. Hence the title of this paper – from conflict to conciliation and back again. Ricoeur's dialectic does have conflict as its starting and ending points. Conflict puts us back in touch with the real philosophical problems. It shows us how far we – or, better yet, the provisional conciliations we've put forth – are from grasping the complete meaning of the phenomena we want to grasp. The production of new conflicts and new conciliations is the process whereby his philosophy grows in scope, helping to solve theoretical and practical problems along the way. In this effort, he could and should be helped by the engaged reader, so that his thought can and will remain actual.

I will venture to try to provisionally sum up all these methodological procedures we have been talking about. Reading assumes a particular position in Ricoeur's methodology. He was a scholar, as much as an original thinker. His works are nourished by reading – reading of his own philosophy, reading of the ancients, the moderns and of his contemporary peers, with the goal of developing a *thinking together* or an *enlarged thinking*. This thorough act of reading – whereby we train our perspective, we put it to the test by confronting it with other possibilities, and which led Ricoeur to his hermeneutical theories and to the many antithetical allegiances to different ways of thinking – led him to develop a theory of conflict. At this core theoretical level, he was both *detectivist* (he *found* conflicts) and *constructivist* (he set up some conflicts as a means of enriching his enlarged thinking). So, the conflict was probably his starting point. We must say that he dealt differently with the several conflicts he analyzed. In the case of archaeological versus teleological thinking, he seems to have chosen a side – his words reveal well his preference for amplifying hermeneutics. Thus, in that case, there isn't really a "third" position. Rather, there are two different positions, and Ricoeur seems to prefer one to the other. Something entirely different takes place in the conflict between explaining and understanding. When Ricoeur states the primacy of understanding over explaining, but affirms the need of hermeneutics to make the long detour on the realm of human sciences –

²⁴ Johann Michel talks about a "broken hegelianism" (*hegélianisme brisé*) to characterize this form of relation to Hegel.

expliquer plus c'est comprendre mieux (Du texte à l'action, p. 22) – he really is producing a third, enlarged position, which brings a solution (really, a conciliation) to the aforementioned conflict.

These conflicts are still very formal, almost schematic. Nevertheless, on the realm of human action, conflicts might be complex, have multiple centres and no solution in sight. Mediation, conciliation and dialectic are all methodological procedures at the theoretical level – to which we should add compromise at the practical level. They all point to possible solutions. From what has been said up until now, I hope it remains clear that Paul Ricoeur does not dream of a pacified philosophy, which would be rid of all its tensions. Nor does conciliation mean that the conflicts have been neutralised, as if all positions were equivalent. The dialectic between conflict and conciliation is not to be understood as a formal mechanism, which would annul by juxtaposition any given theoretical positions in opposition. Rather, it is the complex intricacy of the several different positions (with completely unforeseeable results) that gives rise to the provisional conciliations. These are able to shed light on some phenomena – human action, interpretation, the nature of human will or of power – at some given point of one's intellectual development. One of the conflicting parties might conquer the other one, proving its validity. Or they might both be shown to be insufficient. But they always contribute to the enlargement of the perspective.

Mediation is the passage of one of the poles in conflict to another. The French philosopher uses it all the time – imagination is the mediation between us and reality, ethics makes the transition between the philosophy of action and ontology, the moral rule mediates the innocent desire of the good life and “critical solicitude” and so on. The famous *voie longue*, the long detour, is the best example of this procedure. It is the operation of building bridges, establishing connections, which Paul Ricoeur was doing all the time – the biographical fact that he taught both in Europe and in Chicago, introducing phenomenology to American students and analytical philosophy to European students is an interesting piece of evidence that also helps us understand his will to connect different realities.

As for conciliation, it is the understanding of the fact that the multiple poles can cohabit with one another; it is the understanding of the phenomena of overdetermination. Conciliation is the real *conditio sine qua non* of the thinking together in the Ricoeurian sense – or so I am arguing. Briefly put: conciliation is the *and* rather than the either/or. It is a plurality without a totality. Never a relativism – all is interpretation, as Nietzsche would put; simply, some interpretations are better than others, and serious methodological procedures are there to help us distinguish just that. Of all these procedures, dialectics is the most encompassing one. In fact, all

the interaction between the different poles of attraction is dialectical – with the aforementioned limitations: incompleteness, no synthesis, perpetual reformulation. When successful, dialectics produces the new position, the new meaning. It is the perpetual loop between attractions and repulsions, distancing and appropriation, which is nourished by reading and that strives for originality.

If we try to organize all these procedures in a somewhat schematic manner – with all the limitations such a presentation has – we find that there is a first conflict and then a first tentative conciliation, which is responsible for the appearance of meaning. This moment is, in any philosopher, the development of a theory. The arrival of the second conflict is tantamount to critique. The introduction of conflict has the same function of philosophical critique. We could compare the moment a tentative conciliation is put forward to the moment a theory is made, or a paradigm, in the Kuhnian sense, imposes itself. The conflict's second coming would then amount to the moment of *crisis*. This crisis poses questions that the preceding theory (or conciliation) can not answer. Thus the preceding theory must be put into question and philosophy can evolve. I do not by any means want to imply that Ricoeurian methodology can be a model to understand the way evolutions or paradigm shifts occur in philosophy. Instead, it's the other way around: the Kuhnian perspective might help us understand, *mutatis mutandis*, the dialectic of conflict and conciliation and the appearance of meaning in this rich and complex philosophy.

I can't explain here the genesis of the notion of philosophical critique nor fully develop all its implications. In Kant, the notion of critique stems from the limitation of the faculties, namely Reason – what is at stake is the limitation of *a priori* knowledge to the carefully circumscribed area of concepts whose objects are given in experience. This notion of immanent critique is going to suffer several metamorphoses in the works of Hegel, Marx, Adorno and Honneth, especially when applied to the analyses of the social world and the struggle for emancipation. I will leave aside, for the moment being, the task of rightly explaining the implications of this development and I will concentrate on the double aspect that can be present in the task of critique²⁵.

²⁵ I thank Eileen Brennan for pointing out to me the twofold aspect of Kantian critique, for granting me access to her unpublished PhD thesis and for encouraging me to find a positive aspect in Ricoeur's critique. The Kantian twofold critique (with both negative and positive aspects) and its influence on both Husserl and Heidegger, is analyzed on Chapter One "The Historical Origins of Phenomenological *Destruction*", especially on section 1.3: "The methodological concept of *Kritik*".

In the Preface to the second edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* Kant tells us that critique is twofold: it is first and foremost a negative procedure, as it is aimed to show us the limits of a given faculty – the case being, in *KrV*, the limits of speculative reason. As we know, it is an internal critique, as the limits are discovered *from within* and its result is a restriction. However, Kant also points out that insofar as critique removes an obstacle – here, the illegitimate use of speculative reason – it thus has also a positive sense.²⁶ This positive sense is made possible by the elimination of what was in excess. Once we get rid of it, Reason ceases to dwell and a more rigorous philosophy can then sprout. One of the main consequences, in Kant's philosophy, is that his investigations in practical reason can then take place. The question could therefore be asked: is critique, in the Ricoeurian manner, also twofold? Does it also have a positive aspect?

I will argue that it does but, curiously enough, in a different sense from the one we just found in Kant. Here, I am equating critique with conflict. In a way, conflict also points to limits. But, if I understand it correctly, what it shows is the limits of... reductionism. We can neither entirely explain the phenomenon of conscience phenomenologically, nor explain it away with psychoanalysis. We can not explain away faith, nor ethics, with genealogical critique. So, in some way, what Ricoeurian critique does is to show the limits of theory – or at least the limits of certain theories – to unleash the possibilities of phenomena. Positive critique, in Ricoeur, is this: showing the richness of life and trying to grasp it theoretically. This is the reason why he seldom uses destructive critique. His politeness and openness lead him to always balance deconstruction with re-construction.²⁷ Ultimately, I think that it is a compelling and open philosophy, open to its others, whoever they are.

The final word of this paper goes to the readers. Is there a Ricoeurian way of reading? How should we read his works? This also poses the question of the status we are to grant to his works. I mentioned before that these are works without a single unifying principle, without a unity but that point to multiple directions, in search of possible unities. This means that the Ricoeurian corpus is simultaneously closed and open. Closed because Ricoeur died in 2005 and even though he wrote almost until the end of his life²⁸ the prolific production of his works has now ceased.

²⁶ Cf. *KrV* B XXIV – B XXV.

²⁷ On this point, see Johann Michel, "Herméneutique et déconstruction", p. 215.

²⁸ We can read some of the fragments he wrote on this period in *Vivant jusqu'à la mort*. Some of these fragments show a remarkable spiritual force even in ailing physical conditions and are very interesting from an existential point of view.

But, on the other hand, the reading and reinterpretation of his works is still a work in progress, now that the Fonds Ricœur opens its doors and grants access to the archives where several important material is gathered. This material, composed of courses, lectures, conferences and other texts can contribute to have a better insight of his intellectual development. The ways in which Ricœur can influence today's philosophy are yet to be explored and remade.

So, how should we read his works? In the same way he read the works of other philosophers – with respect, but no devotion. Being thankful for the possibility of learning immensely from his analyses, but actually probing the several provisional conciliations he puts forth in his philosophy, following his theoretical leads and constantly setting philosophy in motion through perpetual reinterpretation. By doing so, we will be paying homage to Ricœur and, by the same token, learning to better understand ourselves and the world we live in.

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