

Chapter One

Introduction

But I think our question—and we understand it better after Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—is: what is man? Do we know man better than we know God? In the end, I do not know what man is. My confession to myself is that man is instituted by the word, that is, by a language which is less spoken *by* man than spoken *to* man. . . . Finally, what constitutes our answer to the apology of Necessity and resignation is the faith that man is founded, at the heart of his mythopoetic power, by a creative word. Is not The Good News the instigation of the *possibility* of man by a creative word?

—Paul Ricoeur, “The Language of Faith”

Paul Ricoeur’s publications spanned nearly six decades from the latter half of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first. His *oeuvre* crossed an unbelievable range of scholarly topics and philosophical perspectives that included existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, hermeneutic theory, theories of metaphor and symbol, narrative theory, and political philosophy. His influence on the contemporary philosophical scene is immense, even if the recognition for this influence is not as explicit as one might like. Given the breadth and texture of his career, any attempt to provide a coherent account of Ricoeur’s corpus seems folly. Nevertheless, functioning under the adage “nothing ventured, nothing gained,” this book attempts to provide such a coherent and reasonably comprehensive account.

The overarching argument of this endeavor is that Ricoeur’s religious writings offer an important context for interpreting his philosophical project. His

project (provided that there was only one project, as opposed to a multitude of them as many have argued and as Ricoeur himself frequently seemed to imply) became more theological in character as he directed attention more explicitly toward ethics at the end of his career. This theological turn was most profoundly manifest in what Ricoeur called “communal ethics in religious perspective,” at the heart of which resides a creative tension between the ideals of love and justice. This focus on the creative tension between love and justice was a late manifestation, and Ricoeur’s articulation of it was spread out among a series of seemingly disconnected and occasional articles that were usually addressed to other topics. While this dimension of his work received very little systematic attention, it is my claim that it ought to be viewed as a central feature of his overall project. This creative tension between the ideals of love and justice reaches its highest pitch and greatest level of productivity in the confrontation between the ideas of autonomy and theonomy, the centerpiece of which is the love command, particularly as this is understood by Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. The love command lends an imperative structure to the ideal of love that opens it to moral judgment in general and ideals of justice in particular. However, the imperative structure of the love command is not reducible to a moral imperative in the Kantian sense. Rather, the love command employs a poetic use of the imperative that draws its meaning from a surrounding matrix of biblical symbols, metaphors, and narratives.

There are many reasons to suggest that this creative/tensive structure of the poetic use of the imperative provides an important perspective on Ricoeur’s later writings and on his thought in general. At the level of epistemology, the structure of creative tension runs throughout Ricoeur’s philosophy. He always relied on the creative tension released by bringing together apparently incompatible positions to make his points. Creative juxtapositions of existentialism and phenomenology, reflexive philosophy and Nietzschean genealogy, and Aristotelian and Kantian ethics were among his most fruitful explorations. He argued that theology and religious discourse function in a similar way relative to philosophy: biblical symbols, metaphors, and narratives offer a sort of poetic resolution to philosophical impasses that defy speculative resolution. This notion of poetic resolution is significant for understanding how Ricoeur believed theological discourse in general *means*. Theology is figurative discourse; or, more accurately stated, biblical texts are poetic texts, that is, figurative linguistic structures that are productive as much as expressive of meaning.

This epistemological analysis opens onto an ontological one. A significant organizing theme that arose early in Ricoeur’s work was a sort of creative tension between activity and passivity that resides at the heart of human agency. This creative tension takes many forms, from the reciprocity of the voluntary and involuntary structures of will and action, to the voluntary servitude of the

will in moral fault, to the structure of summons and response in his analysis of moral conscience. This active-passive structure takes on a deepened sense when touched by theological and biblical expressions which poetically configure ideas as diverse as the origin and end of existence (creation and eschaton) and the presentation of a voice that summons the individual to responsible selfhood in the theological interpretation of moral conscience. Biblical symbols, metaphors, and narratives open dimensions of the meaning that are not accessible at the level of pure philosophical speculation.

At the level of ethics, the creative tension at the heart of Ricoeur's ontology of selfhood appears at a higher register under the aegis of responsibility. Like the theme of activity and passivity, the moral dimensions of selfhood emerged quite early in Ricoeur's thought. The problems of affective fragility and moral fault undergirded his earliest work. More importantly, however, he located a fundamentally moral dimension of capable agency in the ability to keep one's promises. What begins as an aspect of self-constancy—my capability to project initiative into the future by remaining true my word—takes on ethical and moral overtones once the idea of promising is introduced into the interpersonal world of interaction. Promising is not simply a matter of remaining true to myself but also one of keeping fidelity to another; someone expects me to follow through on my promise. Thus, selfhood is opened to a range of moral determinations that are characterized in a broad sense as responsibility. Once again, the poetic matrices of theological discourse and biblical textuality fund a deepened sense of these moral dimensions of selfhood. I previously cited the place that a theological interpretation of moral conscience played in Ricoeur's thought. To this, one can add such expressions as the covenant that establishes the relationship with a liberating God, and particularly, the love command that is constitutive of selfhood both ontologically and morally.

My central claim that theology and religion are important to Ricoeur's philosophical project as a whole entails four basic presuppositions that may be open for debate. For reference, I list them in ascending order of importance. First, I argue that Ricoeur's *oeuvre* can in fact be reasonably and responsibly interpreted as a single coherent project. While his ideas evolved and moved in a number of different and new directions over the course of fifty years, there were several general concerns that guided and continued to direct his thought. Second, Ricoeur never completely left the phenomenological method that was centrally important to his early thought. While his project took a decidedly linguistic and hermeneutical turn, the structure of phenomenological method continued to work beneath this turn. Third, Ricoeur's project is fundamentally a philosophical anthropology; his concerns ultimately lay in the question of the identity of self-reflective agency, whether through the lens of reflexive philosophy, existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalytic theory, or narrative. Finally,

and perhaps the most disputed assumption, is that a closer relationship existed between Ricoeur's philosophical explorations and his religious thought than he typically admitted. While he outlined a number of points of approach between philosophical and theological discourse, his overall tendency was to hold the two at arms length from one another. My claim focuses on the possibility that several fundamentally religious themes are located throughout Ricoeur's thought, and that the influence of these themes becomes most pronounced at the level of ethical concern. I will expand on these presuppositions in situating my interpretation.

Situated Reading

Among other things, this book is intended as a *critical constructive interpretation* of Ricoeur's *oeuvre* with particular emphasis on uncovering the importance of his theological explorations for interpreting his philosophical project as a whole. I am not interested only in what Ricoeur wrote, but in what his writings tell us about what it means to be human. His philosophy can be viewed as a singular project which is centrally concerned with this question of human meaning. Having said this, it should be noted that I am not attempting to offer the *one true account* of Ricoeur's corpus. By placing this limit on the project, it may seem that I am hedging my bets, if not resorting to blatant cowardice. However, I believe this is not the case for several reasons.

First, the scope of Ricoeur's thought is so vast and so varied that the one true account, if there is such a thing, may remain forever elusive. This limiting factor is compounded by Ricoeur's continued evasion in offering self-appraisal of his work; this is particularly the case with regard to the effect of religious sentiment on his philosophical project. For example, in an interview Ricoeur claimed the following:

I am very committed to the autonomy of philosophy and I think that in none of my works do I use any arguments borrowed from the domain of Jewish and Christian biblical writings. . . . But if someone says, "Yes, but if you weren't Christian, if you did not recognize yourself as belonging to the movement of biblical literature, you would not have been interested in the problem of evil or, perhaps, in the poetic aspect in the broadest sense, or the creative aspect of human thought." Well, to this objection, I make all the concessions one wants by saying that no one knows where the ideas which organize oneself philosophically come from. . . . Certainly, a reader could be much more sensitive than I am to the secret religious motivation in my work.

What I claim, what I argue forcefully, is that this motivation is always put in parentheses in order to allow the formation of philosophical arguments which are aimed at all rational beings capable of discussion, no matter what their position on the question of religion.¹

Ricoeur claimed again and again that the author is not the best interpreter of his/her work, nor the best judge of its motivation or significance. This may seem as if he gives the reader *carte blanche* to interpret the text however s/he sees fit and in the interests of any ideological stance s/he wishes to advance. Once again, I believe this is not the case; Ricoeur would most certainly argue that there are more or less adequate interpretations, more or less *responsible* readings of any text, his own no less than others.

The question of adequate, responsible interpretation raises a second justification for the limits I place on my project. Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy was profoundly influenced by the criticism of romanticist hermeneutics advanced by Hans Georg Gadamer. Ricoeur himself became one of the most outspoken advocates of the need to move hermeneutical enquiry away from the search for authorial intention. Thus, the creative potential for meaning resides not in the search for the authorial genius "behind" the text, or in the attempt to know the author better than s/he knows him/herself, as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey would have argued. The creative potential for meaning is opened by the engagement of the reader with the text, the *sense* of the text, and the *world* that the text presents "in front of" itself. That is to say, the text is an autonomous source of meaning, which is constantly open to new engagements, new interpretations, and *new appropriations of meaning*.

Once again, however, the notion of textual autonomy does not give the reader *carte blanche* to bend interpretation in any direction s/he wishes. Rather, the text is a *structure* that guides interpretation and imposes its own limits on the scope of legitimate interpretation. If the movement away from romanticist hermeneutics has consigned scholars to the realm of the conflict of interpretations, the conflicts are not unadjudicable, even if adjudication is always tentative and never final; the structure of the text itself allows one to argue the merits of more or less adequate interpretations, more or less responsible appropriations, more or less *convincing* readings. My desire in this book is to offer an adequate, responsible, and reasonably comprehensive interpretation of Ricoeur's thought. My intent is to be guided by his writings, though not uncritically, in articulating the relationship between his hermeneutical philosophy of the self, that is, philosophical anthropology, and his theological interests, particularly regarding the problem of evil, biblical configurations of creation and redemption, and the commandment to love one's neighbor.

As I previously claimed, my interpretation is situated around four basic presuppositions about Ricoeur's philosophy. The first three of these presuppositions principally concern the philosophical reception and interpretation of Ricoeur's work. The fourth focuses specifically on the theological dimensions of his work. Thus, I will situate my reading under separate headings.

Philosophical Orientations

My first assertion is that Ricoeur's writings can be interpreted as a single, coherent collection that spans from his early phenomenological orientation to the work he completed at the end of his life. In this vein, Charles E. Reagan, citing a private conversation with Ricoeur, stated:

I recently asked Paul Ricoeur if we would ever see the promised *Poetics of the Will*. . . . He told me that either there would be no *poetics* of the will, or that his work on metaphor and narrative constituted it. Then he asked me, "Do you hold me to completing a plan I made when I was a very young man, some thirty-five years ago?" The whole of Ricoeur's work is more the result of the twistings and turning's of a journey than the completion of an architectonic drafted many years ago. At the end of each of his major works, he lists the unanswered questions, the unsolved problems, the new directions which will occupy him in the next work. This does not mean that there are not certain themes which are fairly constant in his work.²

These themes, around which Ricoeur's thought cohered, are in many respects the basis of the three remaining presuppositions that orient my interpretation. Before moving on to discuss these other presuppositions, however, I want to pause and note a possible point of disagreement with Reagan's assessment concerning Ricoeur's original architectonic and proposal for a *poetics of the will*: I suggest that Ricoeur did not abandon the notion of a poetics of the will, but rather, that this project is an exceedingly complex one that has of itself introduced the twistings and turnings of a journey into his work.

My second presupposition is that Ricoeur never completely left the phenomenological method that governed his initial systematic works. Ricoeur long held a connection between phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology serves to direct hermeneutics to the question of meaning in general and away from the mind of the author; by the same token, hermeneutics serves to "liberate" phenomenology from an idealistic epistemology. But my interpretation seeks to do more than situate Ricoeur within the trajectory that leads from Husserl to Gadamer; in orienting this interpretation, I am placing myself in league with a group of commentators on Ricoeur, most notably Don

Ihde, who argued that Ricoeur pushed phenomenology itself into the realm of hermeneutics. Ihde argues:

Ricoeur's application of phenomenology to language or his transformation of phenomenology into hermeneutics finds its justification in a need to elaborate concepts *indirectly* and *dialectically* rather than directly and univocally. Out of the whole range of linguistic "sciences," Ricoeur chooses to address himself to a certain set of symbolic structures (and myths) by which man may better understand himself. This indirect route via symbol and through interpretation constitutes the opening to a hermeneutic phenomenology.³

Therefore, Ricoeur's overall project should be viewed as a *hermeneutic phenomenology*; by this I mean, a philosophical exploration of the *interpretive encounter with phenomena*. This encounter is interpretive because objects of perception, thought, etc., rise to meaning in linguistic and cultural expressions that *mean* more than they *say* and, therefore, demand interpretation.

Once again, however, I wish to pause and note a slight divergence between my understanding of Ricoeur's project and Ihde's. He tends to divide Ricoeur's project into two broad orientations: structural phenomenology, indebted to Husserl, and hermeneutic phenomenology, beginning, generally speaking, with the analysis of symbols in *The Symbolism of Evil*. I, on the other hand, want to hang on to Ricoeur's own threefold division of *eidetics*, *empirics*, and *poetics* of the will. This is a divergence more than a dispute; I think the difference in divisions is a matter of different emphasis on the degree to which the "structural" orientation of Husserl's method remains a key aspect of Ricoeur's hermeneutical expansion of phenomenology. A hermeneutics of figurative discourse is inextricably tied to Ricoeur's account of the structure of the will.

My third presupposition is that Ricoeur's project is most adequately thought of as a *philosophical anthropology*. This is certainly the least disputed of my presuppositions, and I will not treat it at length here. Suffice it to say, Ricoeur's project has always been concerned about the nature of the self, and more particularly, with the capable self. Ricoeur's accounts modified and deepened with the introduction of different perspectives and methods, but the emphasis on human capability remained the constant in his thought. However, the emphasis on human *capability* raised another set of issues that became progressively more important in Ricoeur's corpus: those of ethics and morality. For this reason, Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology must also be recognized as a *moral anthropology*. The ethical and moral questions surrounding the issue of selfhood will become the central concern of the second half of this book. In addressing the last of my presuppositions I turn directly to theological issues.

Theological Issues

My final assertion was at one time disputed, but has become progressively less so. I argue that it is possible to locate a much deeper connection between Ricoeur's philosophical writings and his religious and theological writings than he himself typically assigned. I am by no means alone in my interest in Ricoeur's religious thought. In fact, few other philosophers have garnered as much attention from theologians and scholars of religion as Ricoeur has. And the various engagements with the religious and theological dimensions of Ricoeur's thought have yielded various conclusions. I want to begin by surveying a portion of the field of religious and theological approaches to Ricoeur's thought before I situate my own reading.

Few scholars of religion or theologians have taken interest in Ricoeur's early phenomenological works, unlike philosophers, who have been especially interested in the place of this work in Ricoeur's corpus. While mention is made of these works in nearly all treatments from the perspective of religion and theology, few make it a central issue.⁴ For obvious reasons, Ricoeur's later work on symbol, metaphor, and narrative tend to be the principal interest of religious and theological treatments. This is somewhat unfortunate, however, because Ricoeur's later turn to the hermeneutics of symbols and metaphors, and to narrative theory are of a piece with his early presentation of a poetics of the will, as I hope to show over the course of the proceeding studies. Additionally, it is not always clear whether theological appropriations of Ricoeur seek to advance a theological understanding of Ricoeur's ideas or use Ricoeur to advance a separate position that is more or less consonant with his ideas. Dan Stiver, for instance, seems less interested in articulating Ricoeur's positions than in reforming a vision of Ricoeur that can be appropriated in the service of defending contemporary evangelical Christianity.⁵ John Wall adopts the structure of Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* to explore the idea of a human creative moral capacity, but does little to tie this structure to the rest of Ricoeur's *oeuvre*.⁶ Others attempt to remain closer to Ricoeur's own ideas; my own project follows in the steps of these latter approaches.

Religious and theological treatments can be divided, without too much oversimplification, into two primary camps. On the one side are positions that are interested in Ricoeur for purposes of Christian apology. That is to say, these perspectives see Ricoeur's work as possessing valuable resources for exploring a specifically Christian identity and for defending an "orthodox" view of Christianity in what they label the postmodern situation.⁷ On the other side are positions that explore Ricoeur's work for the poetic and redescriptive opportunities that he presents for the study of religion and theology in a context that is not exclusively Christian.⁸ One is tempted to label these two camps conservative/evangelical and liberal/progressive, but this *would* be an oversimplification.

Rather, I will call these two approaches to Ricoeur's religious and theological thought the *apologetic* and the *poetic*, respectively.

An abiding interest among apologetic appropriations of Ricoeur's thought is his relation to what has often been called the New Yale Theology, indebted to the theology of Karl Barth and represented by contemporary figures Hans Frei and George Lindbeck.⁹ While Frei has criticized Ricoeur for making the Biblical narrative subservient to philosophical speculation, many apologists argue that Ricoeur's thought need not be interpreted so.¹⁰ However, while these thinkers appear to believe that Ricoeur's ideas can be redeemed, they criticize Ricoeur himself for taking a too poetic approach and/or for relying too much upon philosophy at the expense of a more robust account of distinctly Christian sensibilities. For instance, Kevin VanHoozer complains that Ricoeur's metaphorical treatment of the resurrection, as well as other aspects of Christian doctrine, does not sufficiently account for the Christian understanding of the new being initiated by the Christ event: "It would appear that for Ricoeur, the resurrection power is more a matter of metaphorical than historical reference. It is the metaphor—an event of discourse rather than history—that saves by redirecting our imagination and refiguring our existence."¹¹ As such, Ricoeur presents the resurrection as a poetic event that reveals an existing, though hidden, possibility for new life, rather than the historical event that makes new life a novel ontological possibility. James Fodor questions the relative priority that Ricoeur gives philosophy over theology:

Are hermeneutical or methodological questions capable of being displayed independently of the particular texts in question or are they internal to the practices of biblical exegesis, commentary, exposition, and proclamation? That is, in what sense does describing the Bible as a poetic, metaphorical text significantly illuminate its function as the Word of God? Indeed, if the Bible is just one more instance of a poetic text, perhaps even the most central text in the Western world, how might a Ricoeurian hermeneutic account for its specificity, especially its distinctive truth claims?¹²

In all cases, the concern is whether or not Ricoeur's reliance upon philosophical hermeneutics and characterization of the Bible as a species of poetic text effaces Christian distinctiveness and biblical authority. This line of questioning has real teeth; Ricoeur clearly wanted to preserve the distinctiveness of the Bible, even as he described it as a species of poetic text and compared its re-descriptive capacities to those of literary fiction. But the real question is whether such claims to distinctiveness are warranted given the general shape of Ricoeur's thought.

The very aspects of Ricoeur's thought that the apologists find so troubling are what those in the poetic camp find of such value in his thought. David Klemm and William Schweiker point to the multiplicity of perspectives, and to Ricoeur's critical hermeneutics of the biblical texts in particular, as the most salient aspect of his thought:

In some of the writings in which he interprets the biblical word, Ricoeur critically appropriates the Word of God theologies that dominated dogmatic and ecclesial theological reflection earlier this century; in other such writings, he appears to approach more current forms of narrative theology. . . . That we have always already been "spoken to" means for Ricoeur that we do not have cognitive clarity concerning who or what the human being is, since to be human is in part to be constituted by what is spoken to us. Moreover, the hermeneutics of text and the various explanatory methods an interpreter uses in examining religious symbols and myths do not exhaust the possible import of these discursive forms for understanding the human condition. In fact, they provoke further detours of interpretation on the way to understanding the truth of the ambiguity we are. That truth, it seems, is bound up in the Word spoken to us.¹³

Richard Kearney speaks approvingly of Ricoeur's insistence that belief pass through the critical gaze of philosophical criticism. In Kearney's estimation, this critical gaze is necessarily entailed in Ricoeur's presentation of biblical myths as a species of poetry: "In maintaining a poetical fidelity to the great (and small) myths of tradition, we retain a questioning attitude. Without fidelity we become disinterested spectators of a cultural void; without questioning we become slaves to prejudice. If myth is to remain true to its promise, it must pass through the detour of critical enlightenment."¹⁴

My approach will fall squarely within the camp that finds the most promise in exploring the poetic possibilities of Ricoeur's religious and theological writings. Not only do I find apologetic appropriations of Ricoeur's work suspect, I argue that they attempt to place restraints upon those dimensions of his thought that offer the most potential for human liberation in light of the biblical texts. Indeed, I agree with David Klemm's assessment that it is important "to remove the constriction Ricoeur places on religious discourse." The point is not to defend the uniqueness of the Bible, but to explore what it reveals about the human condition. "Religious discourse," Klemm continues, "in the nature of the case is not merely biblical discourse, but any instance of language, which drives thinking and experiencing to the limits by means of limit expressions."¹⁵ Thus, the criticisms of apologists such as VanHoozer and Fodor, that

Ricoeur was unable to coherently articulate the uniqueness of the Bible, are correct. But then again, his attempts to privilege the Bible, to defend its distinctiveness and unique authority, went against the more hopeful possibilities for describing new life that his thought offered.

So, to lay out my final presupposition again, I assert that there is a close connection between Ricoeur's philosophical writings and his religious and theological ones. Not only this, but his religious views offer an important interpretive key to understanding his *oeuvre* as a whole. There are, dispersed throughout Ricoeur's writings, points of approach between philosophy and theology; the problem of moral evil was among the foremost of these. Within these points of approach, philosophy comes upon speculative impasses that it cannot resolve, though philosophy can advance "approximations" of religious meanings and experiences. In this sense, philosophy opens theological claims to the possibility of rational speculation, though philosophy cannot cross the divide that separates it from religious witness.

I do not wish to question this divide; I have no desire to collapse philosophy into theology, or vice versa. However, I do want to argue that Ricoeur's religious and theological writings offer an important interpretive key to the overall coherence of his thought. One need not go so far as to claim that there is "a secret religious motivation" in his writings. Ricoeur was certainly not a theologian, but he was, by admission, a careful listener to the Christian witness. I argue that these commitments answer to the philosophical impasses that he went to such lengths to highlight; theological discourse and biblical texts, considered as species of poetic configuration, offer figurative resolutions to the impasses encountered within philosophy, even if one recognizes, as I believe one must, the difference between theology and philosophy.

This "poetic crossing" becomes most apparent at the level of moral deliberation. I pointed to the idea of a poetic use of the imperative that Ricoeur derived from the biblical configuration of the love command. This imperative nature of the love command arose from his treatment of the ideas of Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. On Rosenzweig's account, the love command, conceived as a direct address from the divine to the individual soul, is the grounding for all other commandments, all laws, and all ethical orientations. In this sense, the love command serves a function within Rosenzweig's thought similar to Kant's proposal of the categorical imperative. Yet Ricoeur argued that the imperative structure of the love command cannot be reduced to a simple moral imperative. Rather, the love command derives its very meaning from the poetic dimensions of the biblical texts that surround it. I intend to expand on this notion with the proposal of a *poetic imperative*, which draws together the key themes that concern the relationship between love and justice. Briefly put, I will explore Ricoeur's ideas in this arena along a trajectory that leads from the

competing logics of equivalence and superabundance, through the confrontation between the golden rule and the love command, to the tension between autonomy and theonomy. This trajectory is explored in more detail below.

Interpretational Structure

Once again, the thesis I am arguing is that Paul Ricoeur's religious and theological writings provide important perspective on his philosophical project as a whole, and I have gone to some lengths to outline what is entailed in this claim. The book is composed of four analytic chapters, which are organized by a threefold organization that runs throughout. In chapter 6, I conclude with the constructive proposal for a poetic imperative and the novel features that this idea introduces into our understandings of Ricoeur's work. This threefold organization is composed of the interconnected categories of *basic structure*, *configuration*, and *experience*, and is intended as a sort of revised phenomenological analysis. I characterize this structure as a revised phenomenological analysis in order to encompass both the analytical rigor and the influence of Husserl's phenomenology in Ricoeur's early thought, and the linguistic and hermeneutical orientation that Ricoeur lent to phenomenology. These interrelated levels of analysis organize the progression of each of the four main chapters.

Chapter 2 addresses the topic of *human agency*. Unlike other philosophical perspectives that have exerted a profound influence on contemporary thought on the nature of the self, for example, Descartes and Hegel, Ricoeur's central anthropological category was not reason or mind, but will. In this sense, he was an heir to Nietzsche's critique of a self-founding, transparent rational faculty. However, while Ricoeur was in fundamental sympathy with the suspicion of transparent rationality, he was unwilling to follow Nietzsche in dissolving selfhood into pure will-to-power. If selfhood is displayed in the exercise of will, that is, in action, selves are *capable* agents because they can reflect upon and choose different courses of action.

I address the basic structure of agency in terms of *capability*. I unfold this idea through Ricoeur's understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the voluntary and involuntary structures of will and action. On this account, human action is not pure spontaneity; rather, the voluntary is receptive to involuntary structures, which make volition itself possible. That is to say, capability is both limited and empowered by involuntary structures in the face of which capability is passive and receptive. The analysis of agency enters another stage in the attempt to configure the *identity* of the agent. Like capability, the notion of identity is not simple and univocal, but composed of a relationship. Identity is characterized by a dual designation of *idem*, or sameness, which encompasses the dispositions and characteristics that allow one to identify indi-

viduals as remaining the same over time, and *ipse*, or selfhood, through which agency displays itself beyond the confines of sameness. Identity is irreducible to one or the other of these designations, but exists, rather, at the intersection of both. At a final level of analysis, I address the experience of agency in terms of *attestation*. I believe that this designation of *experience* is faithful to Ricoeur's definition of attestation as the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering. I address the character of attestation through Ricoeur's understanding of initiative as it is traversed by various forms of passivity.

Chapter 3 takes up the issue of what I call *meaning* or, more accurately, meaningful existence. A sort of conceptual bridge spans this analysis and the preceding one: the recognition that human agents are beings who reflect on their existence. The structure of agency is revealed in a capability that is configured as identity and attested to in the experience of acting and suffering. In the analyses that composed the topic of agency, it was possible to bracket the question of the self-reflective meaning of agency in the interest of offering a conceptually clear and rigorous account. In moving to the question of meaningful existence, therefore, I remove this first set of brackets in order to explore the manner in which selves *make sense* of themselves as agents.

Meaning becomes a problem by virtue of the fact that human existence is a "thrown" temporal project, that is, the self *finds* itself in an existence for which it is responsible. In more Ricoeurian terms, selfhood is a task that is lived in the mode of possibility. This account of selfhood as a task aimed at possibility introduces two closely related notions into the problematic of meaningful existence: temporality and potentiality. First, human existence is a temporal phenomenon. This idea is hardly earth-shattering; all existence is temporal. Yet, human existence is temporal in a distinct way; humans "wrestle" with time in the attempt to make sense of themselves. How does one experience time? How is it that one can account for an identity, whether one's own or another's, that remains the same despite change over time? These and other questions are avoided so long as one remains within the realm of pure structures. Once the question of meaning moves to the fore, so does the problem of temporality. Second, the problematic of meaning introduces the question of potentiality; Ricoeur characterized selfhood as a task, as a reality that humans are on the way toward. Of course, humans are already selves, that is, capable agents with identities to which they attest. But the *meaning* of selfhood is never finally fixed; self-reflection, in its profoundest dimension, is directed toward future possibilities that represent potential meanings for my existence. In the attempt to account for this deeply temporal character of human existence, Ricoeur turned to the configuring capacities of narrative, and this dimension of his work is a central component of this chapter.

Once again, I address the configuration of meaningful existence through three related levels of analysis that I label *understanding*, *possibility*, and *affirmation*.

I designate the structural aspect of meaningful existence as understanding in order to encompass both the phenomenological character of meaning and the hermeneutical dimension that Ricoeur introduced. On this account, understanding is wrought out of the active-receptive synthesis in imagination of the appearance of objects, actions, and inherited ideas.

Reflection on existence within a world does not yet signal *self*-reflection, however. The meaning of one's own existence remains only a possibility in the recognition of a meaningful world. An adequate account of self-reflection requires another level of analysis: the configuration of meaningful existence in *possibility*. Here, Ricoeur's reflections of the function of narrative in self-understanding move center stage. Narration becomes a centrally important factor in this movement by virtue of the "fusion of horizons" that takes place between the world of experience that a reader brings to a text and the world of possible meanings that the text presents to the reader.

However, this reflection on one's own possibility marks a place where reflection on the meaning of one's existence departs from narrative emplotment. If it can be claimed that meaningful existence is lived in the mode of possibility, and I believe that one must claim this in light of the projected task of selfhood, then the question of meaningful existence shifts from the imaginative variations opened by narrative to the ontological character of selfhood as *actuality* and *potentiality*. In light of this problem, Ricoeur suggested that the meaning of selfhood takes shape against a "ground of being at once actual and potential." The introduction of the notion of an ontological ground of being against which human possibility comes to light is extremely beneficial for my attempt to show the connections between Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology and his theological writings because, I will argue, it represents a philosophical approximation of the idea of God. At the final level of analysis of this chapter, which I label *affirmation* of the experience of meaningful existence, I introduce Ricoeur's philosophical writings to a set of theological ideas as they are construed biblically by a hermeneutics of testimony.

Chapter 4 takes up the issue of ethics proper in Ricoeur's writings via the idea of *practical experience*. The conceptual bridge that leads from the configuration of meaningful existence to practical experience is what I have labeled public life. By the term *public life* I mean to encompass, once again in fidelity to Ricoeur's thought, the fact that human existence is lived with others within the context of institutions, that is, shared languages, social-cultural mores, political and economic structures, etc.. With the introduction of public life, the reality of other persons, or more accurately expressed, the recognition of a general experience of otherness, enters the experience of selfhood. Indeed, Ricoeur claimed that otherness is the phenomenological correspondent to the experience of passivity that is a guiding theme of the project. However, in all cases, the experi-

ence of otherness is not ancillary to the experience of selfhood; rather, the experience of otherness is instrumental in the understanding and constitution of selfhood.

As with the preceding two, this chapter is governed by the threefold organization of structure, configuration, and experience. I label the three analyses that compose this exploration of practical experience *responsibility*, *ethics*, and *witness*. My examination of the basic structure of responsibility diverges somewhat from Ricoeur's own explicit statements on the idea, though I do not believe that this divergence signals a fundamental disagreement. Ricoeur himself discussed the notion of responsibility in a rather narrow sense of *holding oneself responsible* for one's actions. This narrow focus by no means exhausts the meaning of moral responsibility; Ricoeur introduced two other terms in order to fill out the topic of moral obligation: *imputation* and *solicitude*. In offering an expanded account of the idea of responsibility, I make a distinction between responsibility *for* actions and responsibility *to* persons. This distinction places the ideas of imputation and solicitude both under the umbrella of responsibility and, in so doing, gives both a less abstract and more ethically robust sense.

What does this account of responsibility as the structure of practical experience entail for practical action? Here, I move to a second level of analysis: the configuration of practical experience in terms of *ethics*. Ricoeur's most explicit formulation of ethics entailed a threefold movement that (1) places a priority on an ethical aim for the good life, which (2) necessitates the imposition of norms of obligation due to the possibility of violence, and which, in turn, (3) demands recourse to the aim due to the impasses that arise within the formation of norms of obligation themselves. The first two movements are the focus of this section of the chapter; the third is the focus of the final section. Though given priority status, a teleological orientation toward the good life, in an Aristotelian mode, is not of itself adequate, in Ricoeur's estimation, for a complete determination of ethicomoral judgment. The aim must be buttressed by a deontological moment, in a Kantian vein, within which all particular aims are subjected to a test moral obligation.

This Kantian moment within the overall drift of the good life gives rise to a set of fundamental philosophical impasses within moral judgment, which necessitate a return to the teleological dimension of the good life. Ricoeur argued, therefore, for the need to return to the concern for the good life, which I address in the final section of this chapter under the heading of *witness*. Nevertheless, this return to the ethical aim is neither a simple return nor a disavowal of the deontological moment; rather, the moment of moral judgment gives the quest for the good life a critical edge and a perspective on the possibilities of violence. Ricoeur called this critical return to judgment conviction, which directs moral judgment to specific situations characterized by fidelity to others.

The philosophical articulation of conviction and fidelity goes some way toward articulating practical experience. However, philosophical speculation does not do complete justice to experience; philosophy points to a value within specific situations that draws attention, but the shape of this value remains somewhat undetermined. Likewise, philosophy comes up short in addressing experience of moral conflict and tragedy, which hound convictions. The attempt to provide an adequate account of practical experience opens onto the concerns of theological ethics. Thus, the conceptual bridge that leads from practical experience to the next level of theological ethics, the topic of chapter 5, is precisely the recognition of moral value despite moral conflict and the experience of tragedy. Ricoeur's own convictions were shaped by the Christian witness; in pointing to this fact, I am not imposing Christian claims into his thought. Rather, I am attempting to introduce his own claims about this witness as an interpretive key to his philosophical project as a whole.

I address Ricoeur's theological and ethical concerns under the category of *conscience*. But why conscience? I adopt this term for two reasons. First, he defined conscience as the capacity to relate oneself to an instance qualified by the distinction of good and evil, that is, qualified by moral values. Second, Ricoeur offered several important and potent investigations of the theological meaning of conscience. In this sense, conscience represents a natural point of entrance into theological claims.

My exploration of Ricoeur's theological perspective follows the same threefold organization that functions throughout the rest of the project. At the level of basic structures, I address the creative tension between a *logic of equivalence* and a *logic of superabundance*. The first outlines the basic sentiment at the heart of the concern for justice; equivalence is the logic upon which notions of equality and reciprocity are built. The logic of superabundance, the paradigmatic example of which is the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew, in many ways calls into question the reciprocity grounded in equivalence. It does not contradict equivalence, but forces one to redefine it in terms that do not succumb to a sort of reactive reciprocity (do unto others as they do unto you) or an equally perverse instrumental reciprocity (I do this so you will do that).

This corrective relationship between equivalence and superabundance becomes more manifest at the second level of the configuring orientations of the golden rule and the love command. The golden rule functions along the lines of a formalization of the ideal of reciprocity which governs justice. In many ways, the love command opposes this ideal with a demand to forgo reciprocity in the interest of the other; that is to say, the love command introduces into our relations with others a fundamental generosity that seeks the good of the other, in many cases over the good of the self. Once again, however, the tension between

the golden rule and the love command does not signal contradiction, but rather a mutual implication that offers a deeper understanding of both.

The final level of analysis addresses the ideas of autonomy and theonomy. In many respects, this level of analysis represents the greatest point of tension between the ideals of love and justice by virtue of the fact that ethical theory since Kant has placed the possibility of moral discernment in the existence of a self-sufficient autonomous will. The idea of theonomy seems to introduce a dimension of heteronomy into morality that contradicts his moral foundation of autonomy. However, Ricoeur sought to disarm this conflict by conceiving theonomy in such a way that it did not rule out, but rather empowered, freedom. The notion of the poetic imperative enters at this level of analysis.

In chapter 6, I offer concluding reflections on the overall character of the idea of the poetic imperative and what this idea introduces into Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology. I will begin by addressing an idea that arose in Ricoeur's discussion of the logic of superabundance: the notion of an "economy of the gift." This idea is exceedingly ambiguous due to an intuitive urge to pose "economy" and "gift" as contradictory concepts. Indeed, Jacques Derrida played on this intuition, positing economy and gift not just as contradictories, but as "impossible others," ideas that cancel each other out, yet cannot be thought without each other. Derrida, among others, will be a principal dialogue partner in the attempt to uncover what Ricoeur might have meant by economy of the gift. The exploration of this idea will give some purchase on the relationship that Ricoeur sought to establish between love and justice.

It is important to emphasize that the relationship between the ideals of love and justice is, on Ricoeur's accounting, a creative tension and not a static opposition. They do not cancel each other out; rather, the establishment of a relationship offers the possibility of a mutual reinterpretation that yields a deeper understanding of both love and justice. While the generosity demanded by the love command turns justice, conceived in terms of the golden rule, away from its perversion into retribution and utility, the abiding demand that justice be done assures that the generosity of love does not devolve into self-denigration and self-negation. My concluding reflections on the idea of the poetic imperative are more exploratory in nature. At issue is the manner in which love can be imperative, that is, how it can serve as a foundation for action, and capable of redescribing reality in the sense that Ricoeur speaks of poetry. My hope will be to open future lines of enquiry.