

HERMENEUTICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

RICOEUR AT NINETY

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I shall organize my presentation in terms of three assertions that relate to the topic of hermeneutics and the philosophy of history in the work of Paul Ricoeur. The first of these assertions is that the philosophy of history has been an almost constant presence in Paul Ricoeur's philosophy even if it has seldom been the primary focus of this thought. This is particularly true once he had adopted the approach of following detours suggested by his earlier work rather than the systematic goal announced as the *raison d'être* of the earlier *Philosophy of the Will* project. My second claim is that the topic of philosophy of history is in an important way latently present in much of the work produced following what we can call Ricoeur's hermeneutic turn, albeit without being explicitly foregrounded. Third, and this will be the more constructive contribution of my remarks, there is a hint of something new regarding thought about the philosophy of history in Ricoeur's recent work. This may be something he himself has not really noticed, although I know from working with him over the years that one should never assume one has seen something he hasn't at least begun to reflect on, even if he has not yet devoted any really sustained public reflection to it. Let us say therefore that my third point will be addressed to a detour Ricoeur has opened but not yet followed up on, although this is a detour that once recognized as a possible path to pursue does look worth pursuing. Whether it actually leads somewhere important is a question I shall close with.

Early Indications of Concern for the Philosophy of History

In his early collection of essays, *History and Truth*, Ricoeur sets out his task as twofold: to reflect upon the possibility and conditions for a philosophical history of phil-

osophy and to seek to apply this reflection to the elaboration of what he calls a "political pedagogy" (3–4), that is, one guided by an ethical intention. Minimally, I take it this means doing something more than simply producing scholarship for its own sake about the history of philosophy, such a history must also have some application in the present. Of course, such a history must take seriously what we can call the professional historian's history, but it is further specified by a philosophical awareness whose contours are worth sketching, in that this awareness or consciousness is both cognitive and affective at the same time. It is both because it is based on a "passion for unity" where the unity in question is meant to encompass the unity of truth. As a passion, it is a regulative feeling "that all philosophies are ultimately within the same truth of being" (6), hence there is also an ontological horizon involved, even if like all horizons this one tends always to withdraw when we try to draw near to it. Still we can say that this feeling of being within truth or being can be further characterized as one of hope. This is a hope that is nourished and wagered on because of our occasional experience of the "harmony of diverse philosophical systems" (6), at the same time that we recognize that this feeling cannot be expressed by any single coherent discourse. We see here the tension of the one and the many,¹ one of the defining questions that lie at the origin of all philosophy for Ricoeur. This is a tension that I believe could be shown to run through all this thought. But to stay for the moment with the problem of a philosophical history of history, the next thing that must be said is that this undertaking has to be characterized by a certain modesty. A philosopher, according to Ricoeur, has a fundamental conviction that truth is ultimately one, but also is someone who acknowledges that it is impossible to demon-

strate this. The result for the practice of doing and teaching the history of philosophy—and I would generalize here to all kinds of historical research—is that while a critical perspective is required, this enterprise is also always guided by a kind of eschatological expectation that somehow it all comes together in the end. History of philosophy, therefore, like all history understood in the sense of the study of the past, occupies a kind of intermediary position between a subjective pole and an objective pole. The subjective pole refers to the very choice to study history and what history to study, the objective pole to the methodological assumptions that guide such inquiry. As such, what the historian produces will occupy a kind of middle ground, one that may be said to be broadly representative of human knowing in general. It will never be merely subjective, but neither can it ever claim to be simply objective. This has consequences for all work in philosophy in so far as philosophy itself is dependent upon and a part of such a history. Philosophy, too, will neither be merely subjective or simply objective. Any talk of philosophy as a whole, with a capital P, must be parasitic on this more modest understanding of what any philosopher can accomplish. Yet, in return, we can say that doing the history of philosophy only makes sense if we recognize this larger vision as the horizon that situates the history produced.

Can we draw an analogy about how all this applies to the philosophy of history? I think we can in that the implication seems to be that all historical awareness implies this larger horizon and at least some idea of its significance. However Ricoeur wants to be Kantian here; this larger encompassing idea or meaning is regulative, not constitutive. Yet the question of the truth of history cannot be ignored and it already raises the question of authority in the sense both of who it is who does and teaches history, and of that history itself as found to be objective, as something standing over us. This is why the ethical dimension also enters into play, for the highest untruth is that of a “presumed and pretended unity” (10).² This error can take either a clerical or a political form, and Ricoeur’s next question is where philosophy stands in rela-

tion to these two poles, particularly in relation to the danger of violence that both represent.³ His answer was—and is—that, for all it achieves, philosophy is always characterized by a certain unresolved tension. On the one hand, it distrusts premature solutions, on the other, it has to produce some kind of synthesis. As usual, his question is how to put these two poles into some kind of productive dialectic, one that may be said to characterize reflection itself. This projected dialectic will seek to find a balance between affirmation and a sense of the “not yet,” but this will always be a precarious balance because questions always can be reopened, always need to be reopened, if only because history continues on. History in this sense is not only the what happened in the past, it includes the moving present that produces the history of the history book produced at a particular time and place. What is needed, therefore, is a kind of Marcelian “recuperative reflection” (13), one that recognizes its relation to and dependence on what can be called nonphilosophy. With this we reach another of the basic assumptions of Ricoeur’s thought, that philosophy has its autonomy, but not its independence.⁴ It always presupposes something beyond itself that it can never completely envelop. This is why, I believe, ontology for Ricoeur must always be acknowledged yet postponed, but that is a topic for another paper.

One of the striking things about the essays in *History and Truth* from today’s perspective and what we know of Ricoeur’s subsequent work is how much these essays are still caught up in the language of subject and object, even when these categories are presented in terms of an organizing polarity and dialectic rather than as existing independently of each other. The historian’s history is objective, but this is an objectivity linked to methodological procedures that Ricoeur will continue to attend to and explore right down to the present in his recent book on memory, history, and forgetting.⁵ But such history also is marked by subjectivity, not simply the historian’s own subjectivity, as in the choice of what problems to explore, but in the expectation that such history can be expected to help its readers “achieve a higher

level of subjectivity—not just personal subjectivity but that which is proper to mankind” (HT, 22). Historical knowledge, therefore, is never completely objective nor subjective, it lies between these poles and mediates between them.⁶ In the existential vocabulary that characterizes this early work what history, particularly philosophical history is meant to produce is meaning [*sens*] and as always in Ricoeur’s thought such meaning is linked to the possibilities of action in an intersubjective context. But he is also quick to note that this takes place through a series of approximations “wherein the solution reached at one level will be rectified by bringing the initial problem back into question” (HT, 41). This is an early indication of his own willingness to reread the history of philosophy looking for overlooked or unexplored but already present possibilities. The danger of “premature solutions” (42), however, introduces another critical note, one that seems to speak about my own concern for philosophy of history. In the essay titled, “Philosophy and the Unity of Truth,” for example, we read that “it is necessary . . . to do the history of philosophy without doing the philosophy of history” (43). Just what is being set aside here? First of all, it is the temptation to uncouple philosophy from its context, be it social, economic, or linguistic; to lift it out of time, so to speak. Second, the assumption is that the kind of philosophy of history in question is one that seeks to impose its own interpretation on the history of philosophy rather than be instructed by it. This would be philosophy of history, if you will, as a kind of imperialism “which is the contrary of the historian’s attitude” (44). The great fault here is that such philosophies of history bring an end to history, “they end history with the last philosopher of history” (ibid.), anticipating Ricoeur’s own hard won rejection of Hegel in volume 3 of *Time and Narrative*.⁷

Third such philosophies of history introduce the threat of violence: “as soon as the philosopher of history puts into perspective all the levels of truth, all cultural activities in relation to one guiding motive of history, he begins to exercise a virtual violence upon the diverging tendencies of history, even if his

intention is only to understand and not to transform history” (HT, 183). This potential for violence turns actual once such a philosophy of history is identified as the sole law governing human action on both a personal and a social level. Yet such philosophies can be fruitful in that they offer perspectives on history, so the question is whether rejecting the philosophy of history in one sense means rejecting all attempts to speak philosophically at this level.

In *History and Truth*, Ricoeur’s own response to this refusal was to proffer at least a certain hint of a different kind of philosophy of history. This would be one that called for the recognition of the paradox that lies in the very project of doing and teaching the history of philosophy. This is a living paradox, one whose expression is meant to capture the very reality of human understanding; in that in this earlier work the question was what it means to understand any philosophy. In light of Ricoeur’s later turn to a more explicit hermeneutical perspective, we may say, I believe, that what is at issue here is a kind of understanding without certainty that characterizes all historical (and hermeneutical) knowledge. That is, historical knowledge and understanding are not to be denied or reduced to something they are not. Rather they are intelligible, yet always extendable and revisable, which is why a question can always be reopened.⁸

It is the question of the one and the many that intrudes again here in that what is at issue is how to reconcile the singularity of any philosopher’s work with the presumed unity of philosophical truth that underlies the history of philosophy. This is a question that can be extended to the question of the meaning of history in general. That is, it is a question of how to reconcile the singularity of reported historical events with the presumed oneness of history itself. In the language of the narrative theory of *Time and Narrative*, this is analogous to the question of understanding how the plot of a narrative “configures” the episodes of any tale into a meaningful whole. If we were to try to express this in a different way in terms of the polarities that define dialectic for Ricoeur, we could say that it is a question of finding a dialectic

that can embrace the incommensurability of philosophical systems and the idea of philosophy as a whole.⁹ Ricoeur's own early answer to this dilemma, briefly stated, was to suggest that an overly abstract idea of truth had to be linked to that of an inquiry or search. The question of truth is thus to be conceived of in terms of an open-ended task, one that is itself situated between a personal situation and an encompassing ontological horizon in relation to our seeking to live meaningfully and morally within this dialectic.¹⁰ Ricoeur's effort has been to take what this dialectic conveys seriously in the sense of thinking it through without losing history, something a focus on either singular events (or philosophies) or on all-encompassing wholes leads to. In his own words, such a destruction of history must itself be understood as revealing history, and if anything could be said at this point about a workable philosophy of history it was that it reveals just this point: the history of philosophy reveals "the fundamental characteristic of all history, showing it to be both a matter of structure and multiple events" (HT, 75). Yet something more needs to be said, or at least there is room for something else to be said, because the history of philosophy, like all history, always moves toward discourse. The question will be therefore to find that mode of discourse that can avoid speaking of absolute singularities and of universal history. I believe a proposed response to this question can be discerned in some of Ricoeur's most recent work, with the notion of exemplarity.

Philosophy of History After the Hermeneutical Turn

Before turning to that, however, let us briefly consider my second claim that something like the philosophy of history is implicitly, and even sometimes explicitly present in Ricoeur's work following what I am calling his hermeneutical turn. To simplify we can say that this turn begins with *The Symbolism of Evil*. In particular, what we need to concentrate on here is the call at the end of that work to begin again from "the fullness of language."¹¹ This work begins, of course, not directly with language but with

the problem of how philosophy can take up something that is expressed in symbolic language, where this language is to be understood in relation to the symbols it refers to. As these symbols are brought to language, they find expression in those narratives we call myths. So the impetus to make a hermeneutical turn, one that focuses on problems of language in general, is already implied in this work. A key point worth noting here is that this turn to language will not confine itself to questions about language resembling logical propositions and argument forms, or that at least can be reduced to such forms. In this sense, Ricoeur's philosophy of language is fundamentally different from what we in this country know as analytic philosophy. Given the commitment to the "fullness of language," including language that resists or even refuses reduction to propositional form, Ricoeur's is a philosophy that goes beyond what such analytic techniques have been able or are able to accomplish, but again that is a topic for another paper.

What must concern us here is to recall how Ricoeur's explorations of language following his hermeneutical turn leads over time to a focus on the use of language. This focus helps to situate him in relation to many other movements in recent philosophy. Against structuralism, he emphasizes a linguistics of *parole* over that, which following Saussure, limits itself to *langue*, and to a reading of the nature of the sign and the problem of reference in terms of that limitation. Contrary to these closed understandings of language, which conclude that we cannot get outside language, or beyond language, Ricoeur has always maintained that the discourse he considers is to be identified with those uses of language where someone says something to someone about something. To understand discourse therefore means taking into account a speaker, an audience and a process of communication, a message, and a referent. Against analytic philosophy, it means that in attending to the full range of discourse Ricoeur has been willing to consider uses of language that cannot be expressed propositionally. These include such well-known speech acts as commands and promises, but more impor-

tantly for our topic, it leads him to consider what rhetoric knows as figurative language, in particular metaphorical language. Here we find uses of language, at least in the case of live metaphors, that differ fundamentally from those uses of language that can be expressed in terms of propositions of the form S is P. Metaphor, according to Ricoeur, says S is and is not P, yet is intelligible in that when understood such metaphor calls for a readjustment of our semantic fields. Again, let us note that this interpretation of metaphor runs toward an ontological horizon in that live metaphor can be said to “re-describe reality.”¹² Metaphor, to put it another way, is indicative of a use of language that is “semantically innovative.” That is, it says something new, for the first time. As such, understanding metaphor and what it tells us about figurative language in general can help us better to understand the possibility of new meaning, where this meaning as stemming from discourse has a referential dimension—Ricoeur sometimes calls it a referential or ontological vehemence—that goes beyond any closed understanding of language.

It may seem as if nothing about the philosophy of history is apparent at this level, but I want to suggest that there is something already operative here that can carry us in that direction. This is the metaphoric process at work in some forms of discourse. Many theorists have conceived of metaphor as a decorative use of language, where an unusual term is substituted for a literal one, so that a literal rephrasing is always possible of what is said figuratively. Ricoeur, of course, argues that this is an error. Live metaphor as an instance of discourse operates at the level of the sentence, not of individual words. It depends on predication, more particularly it depends on odd predication that make no sense in terms of the established lexicon when a live metaphor first appears. When understood such metaphors are understood because they call for a change in this lexicon, which is why so many theories have thought metaphor really is a question of isolated words. Live metaphors do affect the lexicon. They may even become dead metaphors and literal. But discourse is not limited simply to

the level of the sentence any more than metaphor is. Just as we recognize that there are extended metaphors, so too we must acknowledge and take seriously the case of extended forms of discourse; discourse that goes beyond the occurrence of a single sentence. Again we might note in passing that there is something important here for a general philosophy of language or of hermeneutics in that the techniques that apply to sentences, taken as reducible to individual propositions, may not apply at the level of extended discourse, at least in the case of extended discourse that is not reducible to a mere logical conjunction of individual propositions. Ultimately what is at stake here is the question of the truth of such extended discourse if it is not equivalent to a logical conjunction of the truth values of its individual sentences. What I am building on here is the premise that such instances of extended discourse that are not reducible in this way are instances in which something like the metaphorical process is operative. Like a live metaphor, they are capable of re-describing reality.

But just as there are different kinds of discourse at the level of the sentence—propositions, performatives, questions, metaphors—so too there are different kinds of extended discourse, and two of the questions Ricoeur’s work since *The Symbolism of Evil* has put before us are those of identifying such different forms of extended discourse and of grasping them in terms of their specificity. His own contribution in this regard has been to consider a number of such forms of extended discourse. One example of this work is his discussion of the various forms of what he has called originary religious language, or the language of faith as found in the Bible.¹³ I shall not concentrate on this work but do want to note in passing that it is important because, besides enumerating kinds of discourse—hymnic, legislative, wisdom, narrative, eschatological, parabolic, and so on found in the Bible—this work also begins to consider the question of the interactions among forms of extended discourse. Much more could be done here in that Ricoeur has confined himself to noting such interactions in terms of such figures as

intersection, embedding, overlapping, and interweaving, without addressing what these figurative expressions mean in a systematic fashion.

More important for our purposes is what he says in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*. At a first level, in light of what I have been saying, this work has to be read as an exploration of one kind of extended discourse, narrative discourse. Along the way, many fascinating and important topics are opened, among them the relation between narrative and human action; between narrative discourse and our understanding of time, both cosmic time and lived, existential time; the question of reading and appropriating narratives; and also the question of identity both on an individual and a social level, where such identity is a narrative identity, a topic that leads directly to the argument to be found in *Oneself as Another*.¹⁴ But as readers of that work will recognize, narrative discourse encompasses historical as well as fictional narrative. Indeed, these two may be said to interweave in the sense that historians make use of the techniques developed by writers of fiction in writing history, and fiction writers presupposes something like a historical world and history-like actors and time in telling their tales, even when these stories focus on the most inward experiences of a character as in much modern fiction.

So a first important result that brings us closer to questions about a possible contemporary philosophy of history are to be found in this work, which I am arguing follows a trajectory leading back to the earlier work on metaphor and before that to Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn to a consideration of the fullness of language and its existential implications.¹⁵ Yet as already stated, in this same work Ricoeur thought it necessary to "renounce Hegel" as representing a philosophy that was not adequate to what *Time and Narrative* has to say about the nature of narrative discourse, particularly historical discourse. And, of course, one of the central theses of *Time and Narrative* is that while historians may stretch the boundaries of historical discourse, such discourse always maintains some continuity with narrative and its temporally tense concordant discordance. So

while this text may be read as affirming the nature and importance of historical discourse, and while it begins to indicate some of the implications of this discourse for making sense of how human beings make time, their own actions and identity meaningful, it really doesn't try to move directly to reflection of a contemporary philosophy of history. It doesn't even begin to take a detour in that direction.

One mistake here would be to take this as indicating that Ricoeur is largely concerned in this work simply with the epistemology of history in the sense not of a general theory of epistemology but of a critical reflection on how the historian's discipline actually functions in producing its contribution to knowledge. The discussion of recent work in philosophy of history in his essay "Philosophies critiques de l'histoire: Recherche, explication, écriture"¹⁶ may also suggest this kind of reading. There he again points out that recent philosophy of history has broken with the speculative approach of a Hegel, Marx, or Spengler to become, broadly speaking, critical in the sense of a critical reflection on historians' practice. Ricoeur sees this as happening in three ways. The first one concentrates on how historical knowledge depends on a use of documents as the source of its knowledge. The second takes up the problem of writing history, and the third emphasizes the problem of written history. While these three different emphases can be seen as having developed in succession, Ricoeur argues that in fact the later emphases have not eliminated the earlier ones. Instead, each new development should be seen as both enriching what had preceded it at the same time that it deepens what he has come to see as the problematic aspect of what is at stake in any reflection on the epistemology of history, namely, the reality of the past. Thus once again the epistemological question leads to the boundaries of an ontological question.

This question of the reality of the past is taken up at great length in *Memory, History, Forgetting* in terms a number of interrelated organizing themes: the status of the memory image of the past, the role of testimony as bearing witness to the occurrence of mem-

ory, the continuities and discontinuities between memory and history, and as the title conveys, the nature and place of forgetting. Again here, the extended discussion of recent developments in the practice of history beyond the *Annales* paradigm and what in this work, drawing on Michel de Certeau, Ricoeur calls the historiographical operation may lead one to overemphasize a strictly epistemological reading. But as Ricoeur is quick to point out in this work, that is not what he means to do.¹⁷ He says instead that his efforts in this most recent work are not simply a matter of inquiry into the epistemology of history, but rather lead to something like an ontological hermeneutical reflection on our historical condition. For my purposes here this is a much wider topic than what I would like to begin to consider as a more workable the philosophy of history. This hermeneutics of the human condition represents something like the condition of possibility of such a philosophy, and thus could serve as an entrance into our discussion of this topic, but I want to work in the other direction. That is, I think it is possible to take one other development in Ricoeur's recent work as one that can be taken up as indicating a new perspective on philosophy of history, in the sense of a reworked philosophy of history; I mean, a philosophy of history that accepts the premise that a speculative approach in the manner of a Hegel, Marx, or Spengler is no longer possible. But this need not mean that such a philosophy is not possible in another form. And this reworked or reconstructed philosophy-I'm not sure how to name it at this point-will be one that does relate to the larger ontological question of our historical condition. Today, however, I want to concentrate on just a first step toward capturing what we can of such a philosophy, and to do so in such a way that it does open onto this larger ontological question. So let us turn to that development.

The Idea of the Exemplary and a Renewed Philosophy of History

The development I have in mind is the idea of the exemplary. This is a notion that appears more than once in passing in some of

Ricoeur's most recent work. However, to the best of my knowledge, it is developed at some length in only one place, and that is an unusual one in the sense that the essay in question on the face of it has little to do with either this idea nor the philosophy of history. I am referring to the brief essay in *The Just Judgment According to Hannah Arendt*.¹⁸ The title suggests that this essay is about Arendt's work. Its opening paragraph announces the goal of examining Arendt's thesis "that it would be possible to extract from the Kantian corpus, under the heading of the philosophy of history, a theory of *political judgment* that would satisfy the criteria applied to aesthetic judgment in the third Critique, the *Critique of Judgment*" (94). So it turns out that the text is more about Kant than it is about Arendt. In fact, Ricoeur wants to propose an alternate reading of Kant's political philosophy than that suggested by Arendt, "one that will remain under the aegis of reflective judgment but not exclusively in terms of its aesthetic use" (94-95). The reading of Kant on judgment that follows is a fascinating one. It confirms again Ricoeur's strength not just in interpreting the history of philosophy, but also in applying it in new ways. He points out, for example, that Kant introduced an innovation in how the tradition thought of judgment, substituting the idea of subsumption for that of attribution or predication, and then went on in the third Critique to introduce a split into this idea of subsumption. Whereas the first Critique had spoken of a determinative judgment that confers the truth value of objectivity on experience, the third Critique inverts this, presenting at least the hypothesis of cases where one "seeks" an appropriate rule under which to place a singular experience. In this case, the judgment does not determine any universal objectivity, it only "takes into account the procedures the mind follows in the operation of subsumption" (95) in what is now called a reflective judgment. This judgment which relates to what pleases us stands in relation to a teleological judgment in that the natural order is thought of in terms of some finality. It is this idea of finality that gives order to the experience in question, for

“order affects us in that it pleases us” (95). Hence this teleological judgment calls for an aesthetic judgment as the first component of reflective judgment. What is important here, as Ricoeur emphasizes, is making sense of the connection between the pleasure we take in order and its teleological structure. Without this connection, we would fall either on the one side back into psychologism, or on the other into naturalism.

The next step is to see how for Kant this judgment calls for communication. This is what assures “universality” in a sense still to be determined. Ricoeur doesn’t pursue this point, but if I can suggest an analogy from his hermeneutical theory that may be applicable here, we might say that just as a text is given to anyone who can read, so too a reflective judgment is meant to be communicated to anyone who can appropriate it through an act of interpretation. As suggested earlier, this is a kind of knowledge without certainty since, if we continue to follow Kant here, we are dealing with something that can “please without a concept, that is, without any objectifying intention and without any claim to truth” (97). I would question the latter claim in that it depends on a tacit limiting of the possibility of truth to objective knowledge, narrowly defined. However if the point about the communicability of reflective judgment is correct, it does suggest the possibility of transposing this discussion beyond the aesthetic context in which Kant presented it. This is what Ricoeur sees Arendt attempting in her *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*.¹⁹ This project is complicated with reference to Kant because he also speaks of an idea of finality with no end in characterizing the kind of pleasure that is at stake in the example of pleasure he is working from. This is a finality that characterizes living beings, particularly in the case of their action. Yet as we have seen it also somehow claims universality, if only because it is communicable. As such it must be universalizable in a different way than are what Kant sees as objective representations or the practical maxims of the will. It does not apply in the latter case because it is a finality that is neither sought nor intended. Hence it is a universality, Ricoeur

suggests, that depends on a “communicability that does not result from some antecedent universality” (98). Communicability, to put it another way, in this case institutes universality. And it does so through the presence of the exemplary; in Kant’s case, the exemplarity of the beautiful.

Now the question is whether all this can be extended beyond the framework Kant gives it, particularly when we take into account what he has to say about the role of the sublime and of genius in the third Critique. Arendt was interested in the possibility of an extension to the political sphere, I am raising the question whether it suggests a new way of thinking of how we might do philosophy of history today.

Ricoeur sees Arendt’s project as a kind of wager, one that thought it “finally more profitable to attempt to disengage a conception of political judgment from the theory of the judgment of taste than to bind this conception to the theory of teleological judgment *via* a philosophy of history” (101). Yet as he points out the ties between teleological judgment and philosophy of history are more immediately perceptible in Kant’s work, “if only because Kant did write out his philosophy of history” (101), but not his political philosophy, even if this philosophy of history was meant to provide the context for such a philosophy at least in that it specified the task “assigned to the human species as regards natural finality” (101). This task is something that both calls for and makes sense of what Kant called a cosmopolitan point of view. In other words, Ricoeur reads Kant’s own philosophy of history as attempting to lay out the conditions that would allow for the transition from a natural teleology to world citizenship, “from *cosmos* to *polis*” (101). Ricoeur thus argues against Arendt that any extension of aesthetic judgment ought not to be dissociated from the philosophy of history and he suggests that in the idea of writing history there is at least something like a place for pursuing this extension of reflective judgment.

Something like a regulative idea is at stake here, but it is an idea that is conveyed through narrative, through something like a history, one that nourishes the “hope finally

that after many reformative revolutions, a universal cosmopolitan condition, which Nature has as her ultimate purpose, will come into being as the womb wherein all the original capacities of the human race can develop."²⁰ As such the regulative idea carries the possibility of becoming a directive one. As directive, however, it is not the idea of some necessity, but in a very Ricoeurian language, it is marked by a "note of hope" (102).

Ricoeur does not see such an idea as inconsistent with the human plurality that plays such an important role in Arendt's thought. In terms of a more narrative perspective, this notion of plurality accords well with the idea of a plurality of partial histories that it is up to politics to attempt to unify. It does so at least in part through the related idea of communicability, more specifically, through that communicability that is meant to make possible a life together that is constitutive of a political community. Yet we need to acknowledge also that political judgment is also always particular. But this particularity is not nondescript, it is *exemplary*. And here we have the notion that I find so fascinating and so suggestive of a new possibility of thinking in terms of a philosophy of history. The question, of course, is whether it works in any useful way.

Let me conclude by noting what Ricoeur has to say about this notion as a way of suggesting that it may be worth pursuing further.

In the first place, the exemplary in the sense at issue depends on a retrospective point of view. This is the point of view of spectators of history, not of its actors. "It is for such a spectator that the significance of certain remarkable events of the past engenders a seed of hope, over against the melancholy a nonreflective sentiment might nourish" (104). Secondly, it is for such a spectator that the events of the past take on meaning. Ricoeur's cites as an example that of Kant's own reflections in *The Conflict of the Faculties* on the French Revolution. Despite the Terror, Kant says, this revolution "nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm."²¹ As we can see, consistent

with Kant's perspective, there is an element of disinterestedness as well as of communicability involved. Disinterestedness here, however, does not equate with pure objectivity, it must have a subjective aspect as well in that it can border on enthusiasm. What sums all this up best is that it involves an "operation of reflection," something like the "broadened way of thinking" proposed in Section 40 of the *Critique of Judgment*. Ricoeur sees this way of thinking as one that involves the imagination and that invites us "to think from the perspective of everyone else" (105).

He also recognizes some potential problems, which is one reason I suggested that we think of what is said here as indicating a new detour worth further exploration. The first of these problems is the question how to tie this retrospective vision to the teleological perspective of reflective judgment. What is required here is to show that exemplarity can serve "as a handhold, if not a proof, for hope" (106). And he suggests that this will require something like an educated public: "Only educated opinion is capable of joining, in the perception of events, the meaning we can assign to reflective judgment *and* the value of the sign, the symptom, hope draws upon when it turns from retrospection to expectation" (107).

A second problem is, as the example of the French Revolution suggests, the question of violence in history. Hence we must not simply "hypostatize the judgment of the spectator" (108). What needs yet to be worked out is some account that can link the prospective dimension of this revised philosophy of history with a necessary critical distance. Obviously, this requires something like critical reflection on both the individual and the social-political levels. If reflection and retrospection are bound together in too univocal a fashion we run the risk of not allowing past events "to be able to appear as filled with promises, hence filled with the future" (108), but the future is always in some way still open. If I were to put this in the vocabulary of Reinhart Koselleck, which Ricoeur likes to draw upon, we may say that a philosophy of history based on the idea of the exemplary has to show how this idea con-

tributes to constituting the space of experience we call the past in relation to the horizon of expectation that is our future, all the while holding upon the present as the time of initiative.

So let me end with the suggestion of what is called for is a philosophy of history that

resonates with Ricoeur's earlier talk of freedom in the light of hope. It is a critical philosophy, but also a prophetic one. We must remember however that prophecy means judging the present as much as it means predicting the future.

ENDNOTES

1. See Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 9, 56.
2. Ricoeur's later writings on ideology are relevant here. For example, "Can There Be a Scientific Concept of Ideology?" in *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences: A Dialogue*, ed. Joseph Bien (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 44–59; "Ideology and Ideology Critique," *Phenomenology and Marxism*, ed. B. Waldenfels et al. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 134–64; *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
3. See also *History and Truth*, 95, 166.
4. Gary Madison, "Ricoeur et la non-philosophie," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 29 (1973): 227–41.
5. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 2004).
6. Let me note in passing how much the first essay in *History and Truth*, "Objectivity and Subjectivity in History," which dates from 1953, anticipates Ricoeur's later reflections on the conditions of historical practice, narrative, the interplay of explanation and understanding at work there, and even the role of the imagination and of appropriation in dealing with the knowledge produced in this way.
7. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 207–40, "Should We Renounce Hegel?" This rejection is already anticipated in *History and Truth* (66).
8. Specifically in the case of history, later generations always are in a position to know more than did the generations preceding them about the consequences of what went before, if only because there will always be new consequences to consider, even allowing for a notion of diminishing returns as time unfolds.
9. See also Ricoeur's discussion of the notion of a philosophical system in "Irrationality and the Plurality of Philosophical Systems," *Dialectica* 39 (1985):297–319.
10. "The search for truth, it seems, is characterized by being stretched, so to speak, between two poles: a personal situation, and a certain intention with respect to being" *History and Truth*, 50). The historian always "stops with a type of intermediate understanding" (*ibid.*, 65).
11. Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 349.
12. Ricoeur says something about this ontological horizon in the tenth study of his *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).
13. See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 5 (1975): 14–33; "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 27–148; "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading (Genesis 22 and Luke 15)*, ed. F. Bovon and G. Rouiller, trans. D. J. Miller (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 321–39; "Naming God," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979): 215–28; "The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God," *Criterion* 18 (Summer 1979): 4–6; "The Bible and the Imagination," *The Bible as a Document of the University*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 49–75; *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995; and André LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

14. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
15. *Oneself as Another*, and his two collections of essays entitled *The Just* add an explicitly ethical dimension to all this. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); *Le Juste II* (Paris: Seuil, 2001).
16. Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophies critiques de l'histoire: Recherche, explication, écriture," in *Philosophical Problems Today*, vol. 1 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 139–201.
17. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 274.
18. *The Just*, 94–108.
19. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
20. This is the eighth thesis from Kant's "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View."

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