

# The Hermeneutical Theory of Paul Ricoeur and Its Implications for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Asian Context

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## Introduction

THE PRESENT PAPER, to the best expectations of the author, is only a concise exposition of the hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur (1913—), with a special preliminary reflection on the relationship between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and inter-religious dialogue in the Asian context. In the beginning of the essay, Ricoeur's "detours" of thought are generally depicted in order that we may see the contour of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory. The second section seeks to give a succinct presentation of Ricoeur's philosophy of language. Finally a reflection on inter-religious dialogue in the Asian context is given against the backdrop of Ricoeur's thought.

## I. The Three Detours of Ricoeur's Philosophy

Interestingly, hermeneutics is not the major concern for the early Ricoeur. It is only after several "detours" of his thought that the issue of hermeneutics becomes the basic theme for Ricoeur. Mary Gerhart has aptly defined the concept of "detour" in accordance with Ricoeur's philosophy in entirety:

"Detour" is the notion by which Ricoeur emphasises the plurality of stages in the interpretative act and the distinction between immediate perception and reflective thoughts. *The Symbolism of Evil* and *Freud and Philosophy* are the amplification of this notion. Ricoeur's latest publication in hermeneutics, *Conflict of Interpretations*, together with his later studies of text-interpretation, the philosophy of ordinary language, metaphor, and action, represent a further detour as he prepares Volume III, a poetics of the will.<sup>1</sup>

Hence to describe the development of Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy as "detours" does not simply denote various stages of the evolution of his thought, it also serves as an exemplifying model for Ricoeur's understanding of human language and symbolism. The element of detour, or indirectness, to Ricoeur, is part and parcel of the way of human understanding.

### A. The Detour of Symbolism

Ricoeur himself has openly admitted his first detour into symbolism as a necessary step and logical conclusion of his study on the philosophy of will. Ricoeur published *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*, simultaneously in 1960, as the second part of the multi-volume *Philosophy of the Will*.<sup>2</sup> These two books represent a substantial departure from direct phenomenological description, which Ricoeur critically elaborated from Husserl, on the problem of will in *Freedom and Nature*.<sup>3</sup>

This was the first way in which the problem of language appeared in a kind of philosophy which was not at first a philosophy of language, but a philosophy of the will. I had been compelled by my initial subject to inquire into the structure of symbolism and myth, and this inquiry by itself led me to the more general problem of hermeneutics.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely because of the shortcomings of the phenomenological method of dealing with the structure of human fallenness that led Ricoeur to exchange for the "roundabout way" or "detour" of the hermeneutical approach in *The Symbolism of Evil*.<sup>5</sup> Human will is always a presence of intention, hence a phenomenological description is possible. On the contrary, evil or fallen will is an absence of freedom and alienation of intention, indirectly recounted through symbol and myth, and thus, these phenomena demand interpretation to capture their meaning. Therefore, as Ricoeur himself argued, "to piece the secret of the evil will, we must take the detour of a semantics and an exegesis applied to those symbols and myths in which the millinery experience of the confession of evil is deposited."<sup>6</sup>

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### B. *The Detour of Freud*

Ricoeur's hermeneutic of the symbolism of evil leads inevitably to his study of Freudian psychoanalysis which explores the unconscious, or subconscient, dimension of human symbols and signs.<sup>7</sup> The possibility of double-meaning and deception in any interpretation, or misinterpretation, forces us to utilise the "hermeneutics of suspicion," articulated by Freud, Nietzsche and Marx. The distortion of meaning in human symbols is described by Freud as irrational subconscientness, by Nietzsche as the repressed and repressive value, and by Marx as false conscientness.<sup>8</sup> But "hermeneutics of suspicion" is not skepticism. It is rather a detour of the "hermeneutics of belief," in which symbol and myth are taken as a direct restoration of meaning, to integrate the distortion of meaning by the unconscious mind. Ricoeur proposes a mediation of the two approaches in order to uncover the whole meaning of human symbolism.

### C. *The Detour of Philosophy of Language*

Paul Ricoeur's detours into phenomenology (*Freedom and Nature*) symbolism (*The Symbolism of Evil*), and psychoanalysis (*Freud and Philosophy*) basically represent the early stage of his thought. Thereafter, Ricoeur's journey into the philosophy of language and theory of interpretation is represented by the publication of two important works: *Conflict of Interpretations* (1969, ET 1974)<sup>9</sup> and *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975, ET 1977).<sup>10</sup> Both books are collections of essays. The major concern for Ricoeur in *Conflict of Interpretations* is to argue for the legitimacy and validity of the theory of interpretation amidst various historical and philosophical developments of hermeneutics, while *The Rule of Metaphor* stands for Ricoeur's effort to revive and reinterpret the concept of metaphor in the arena of conflict of interpretations.

Ricoeur, in speaking of the development of his philosophy of language at this later period, recounted the "linguistic turn" of his thought in terms of four sources of influence:

First, my reflection on the structure of psychoanalytic theory; secondly, the important change in the philosophical scene, at least in France, where structuralism was beginning to replace existentialism and even phenomenology; thirdly, my continuing interest in the problem raised by religious language, and more specifically, by the so-called theologies of the Word in the post-Bultmannian school; and finally, my increasing interest in the British and American school of ordinary language philosophy, in which I saw a way both of renewing phenomenology and of replying to the excesses of structuralism.<sup>11</sup>

These four schools of thought: psychoanalysis, structuralism, theologies of the Word and linguistic philosophy, have accounted for the basic reasons that move Ricoeur beyond his early hermeneutics of the symbol to later hermeneutics of texts and philosophy of language in general. Ricoeur's latest publication, the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*,<sup>12</sup> represents a further detour as he prepares the final volume of his philosophy of will, a poetics of the will.

## II. Ricoeur's Philosophy of Language

Ricoeur's philosophy of language can be examined from several perspectives: historically, we can follow his thought from Schleiermacher, Dilthey, through Husserl, to Heidegger and Gadamer. Philosophically, we can examine his ideas of explanation and understanding, distanciation and appropriation. One can even study Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory from a theological perspective, such as his innovative idea of the world of text and his idea of theological hermeneutics in relation to general hermeneutics. The following is only a brief description of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory through the study of his three fundamental concepts: discourse, text and metaphor.

### A. *The Concept of Discourse*

Ricoeur defines the category of discourse, first and foremost, in response to the Saussurian distinction of *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech or discourse). Ricoeur does not equate discourse with Saussure's idea of *parole* because structuralism, to Ricoeur, presupposes a close and finite linguistic system, which can easily result in the emphasis of *langue* to the expense of *parole*. This in turn is described by Ricoeur as "the ellipse of discourse."<sup>13</sup> For *langue* as the synchronic system is usually deemed more fundamental than the transient and contingent diachronic *parole*.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the first move of Ricoeur's theory of discourse is "to rectify this epistemological weakness of *parole*" by re-emphasising the referential power of discourse.

On the other hand, Ricoeur's understanding of discourse can be taken as a revisitation and revision of the Romantistic tradition of hermeneutics, represented by Schleiermacher and Dilthey, which exalt the priority of the speaker's and author's intention by embracing its renowned motto as "to understand the author better than himself." Against this "psychologising conception of hermeneutics,"<sup>15</sup> Ricoeur holds that the task of hermeneutics is to understand:

Not the intention of the author, which is supposed to be hidden behind the text; not the historical situation common to the author

and his original readers; not the expectations or feelings of these original readers; not even their understanding of themselves as historical and cultural phenomena. What has to be appropriated is *the meaning of the text itself*, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text.<sup>16</sup>

It is meaning, not the subjective intention or speech-event, that the hermeneut eventually comes to wrestle and understand. Meaning and event are in a dialectical relationship. "Discourse is the event of language" because discourse is the actualisation of language that makes meaning possible. But it is meaning that transcribes and transcends any particular speech-event.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, we can readily accept the axiom of Ricoeur: "If all discourse is actualised as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning."<sup>18</sup> Discourse is actualised as event, understood as meaning.<sup>19</sup>

### B. *The World of the Text*

The concept of text is a natural and logical extension of the concept of discourse. For Ricoeur maintains that "if we succeed in showing that a written text is a form of discourse, under the condition of inscription, then the conditions of the possibility of discourse are also of those of text."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, all the dialectical polarities found in the notion of discourse, such as semiotics and semantics, event and meaning, are being actualised and magnified in the world of the text. Discourse is both sign and sense, event and meaning. Thus once understood, the dialectical polarities of discourse give rise to its referential power in the extralinguistic reality.

Discourse has not merely one sort of reference but two, it is related to an extralinguistic reality, to the world or a world; and it refers equally to its own speaker, by means of specific procedures which function only in the sentence and hence in discourse.<sup>21</sup>

This reference to an extralinguistic reality is more often described by Ricoeur as "the world of text." Concerning Ricoeur's crucial idea of the world of the text, one can best understand it through the recitation of his own clarification:

The sense of a text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world, thanks to the non-ostensive reference of the text. Understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation. It seeks to grasp the world-propositions opened up by the

reference of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore the sense of the text lies neither "behind" the text, which may be deemed as what the historians do, though not always the case; nor "in" or "of" the text, which may be deemed as the role of the formalist critics, but "in front of" the text, which represents a creative understanding of the text in interaction with the present and the future context of the interpreter. The world "in front of" the text is the "possible" world opened by the text. It is not the reality but our apprehension of the reality and projection of its possibilities. Ricoeur even compares his "world of the text" to Husserl's *Lebenswelt* and Heidegger's *Da-sein*,<sup>23</sup> which refers to one's existence in the world.

### C. *The Rule of Metaphor*

If text is the inscription of discourse, then metaphor is the creation and change of meaning within the dynamics of discourse. Discourse is the common ground for both text and metaphor.<sup>24</sup> *The Rule of Metaphor*, developed out of a seminar course given at the University of Toronto in 1971, is the definitive work concerning Ricoeur's important theory of metaphor.<sup>25</sup> This book, composed of eight studies, from a historical and philosophical perspective, wrestle through the history of metaphorical theory, starting from Aristotle down to I.A. Richard, Max Black and Monroe Beardsley.

The principal function of metaphor, according to Ricoeur, is to explain the creative process that gives rise to new meaning and the opening up of the world of the text mentioned above. How is new and manifold meaning (the polysemy of meaning) possible within human linguistic activity? This is the central concern of Ricoeur that leads him to the study of metaphor. The traditional substitution theory of metaphor, according to the classical rhetoric, denies metaphor of any cognitive function and ascribes to it an emotive or decorative role. By contrast, Ricoeur, with utmost originality, argues for the cognitive value of metaphor and suggests that the power of metaphor to create new meaning lies in the ability of metaphor to enable a human to see a resemblance previously unnoticed and unfound. It thus echoes Aristotle's assertion that good metaphor arises from the capacity to have an eye for resemblances.<sup>26</sup>

Concerning the significance of Ricoeur's concept of metaphor, Morny Joy has rightly elaborated that:

Ricoeur's provocative thesis [on metaphor] is that with the appear-

ance of a "live metaphor" a new experience comes to language. This experience then has certain repercussions for the reader of the text, the hermeneutical subject, who is part of this experience. For Ricoeur, the final referent of a metaphorical expression is then not so much the novel meaning encapsulated in the expression but the impact of this expression on a person's worldview. It is in this connection that Ricoeur will say that a living metaphor has the capacity to change the world.<sup>27</sup>

Hence metaphor as the phenomenon of semantic innovation serves the purpose of Ricoeur to account for the emergence of meaning within human discourse. The experience of new meaning is at the same time a disclosure of new reality. Therefore in the last chapter of *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur even concludes that "the possibility of speculative discourse lies in the semantic dynamism of metaphorical expression."<sup>28</sup> The language of ontology and onto-theology, as a consequence, begins their evocative capacity by metaphorical utterance.

### III. An Unscientific Postscript: A Reflection on Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Asian Context

In the vast collection of his writings, Ricoeur does not always directly address the subject of inter-religious dialogue,<sup>29</sup> but his thought is not irrelevant to any discussion thereof. I wish to correlate the essay to this problem and provide some reflections which at this early stage, of course, are only very preliminary and experimental.

To engage Ricoeur's philosophy in inter-religious dialogue in the context of Asian and Chinese culture, of course, is not an easy task, but it is not totally impossible.<sup>30</sup> The possibility of this thought project is guaranteed and necessitated by the persistent interest in hermeneutical theory, evidenced especially by Gadamer and Ricoeur. Secondly, this thought project has, as a matter of fact, already been practised by numerous comparativists. Buddhological scholars have utilised some of Ricoeur's thought in discussing the possibility of a "Buddhist hermeneutics."<sup>31</sup> In spite of these developments, the relevance of Ricoeur's hermeneutical thought in inter-religious dialogue is still largely unnoticed and underdeveloped.<sup>32</sup>

In the following, I would like to reflect on the relevance of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, based on this introductory study, to the inter-religious dialogue, with special reference to the dialogue between Chinese Confucianism and Christian tradition in the Asian context. I would like to suggest two concepts, that both provide the necessity and possibility for

us to correlate Ricoeur's hermeneutics with inter-religious dialogue. These two entry points of correlation are language and ethics. The first reflection on language is developed from the above analysis, while the second reflection related to ethics is projected from the development of Ricoeur's later philosophy of ethics.

#### A. Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Thought and Inter-Religious Dialogue

The problem of language which is at the centre of Ricoeur's hermeneutical thought, as shown above is his various detours of thought. Ricoeur's detour of symbolism and psychoanalysis, finally arrives at his genuine philosophy of language which consists of the concept of discourse, the world of the text, and the rule of metaphor, powerfully illuminate our understanding of the path of language and its capability in creating meaning.

The contribution of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory to the modern "linguistic turn" lies in his methodical and programmatic formulation of viable explanatory methods. His analysis of the creation of meaning, through the interplays of semiotics and semantics, sense and reference, understanding and explanation, provides a solid foundation for the common discourse of inter-religious quest. For Ricoeur, "religious faith is a kind of discourse."<sup>33</sup> This is not a reductionist's claim to limit religion to linguistic level only. On the contrary, Ricoeur's identification of religious faith with different modes of discourse, when taken together, opens up an infinite range of interpretations. This conflict of interpretations is in turn resolved by Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory, which results in the creation of the surplus of meaning in front of the text. Hence to examine the truth-claim of different religious traditions is to study the discourse of their religious truth.

If one accepts the relatedness of religious experience to discourse, then it is logical to affirm, along with Tracy, that inter-religious dialogue has to be carried out through the detour of language.

Insofar as hermeneutics since Gadamer is grounded in the category of conversation and dialogue, and so far as hermeneutics is fashioned to relate experience directly to language, hermeneutics proves a fruitful philosophical tradition for all concerned with the meaning and import of all serious dialogue and the direct (that is, through language) character of all the "experiences" available for interpretations.<sup>34</sup>

By employing some of Ricoeur's insights, one can begin to explore the particular hermeneutics of each religious tradition, that is the interpretation of discourse of truth.

A hermeneutical comparative study of religious traditions concentrates on *how* these traditions read and use their religious scripture, for example, the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Bible, and their religious classics like the Confucian *Analecets*, while a direct comparison of religious ideas and concepts concerns more with the *what* of religious belief, such as Christian agape and Buddhist compassion.<sup>35</sup> It is doubtless impossible to separate the *how* from the *what*, but on the other hand, since the study of religious ideas often is to study the religious texts where the ideas reside, it is logical to argue that even a direct conceptual comparison has to go through the indirect way of hermeneutical comparative study.

The advantage of a hermeneutical comparative study over a direct conceptual comparison is that it can provide a more programmatic and wholistic view of the project. Thus it can avoid some of the fallacies of the earlier "comparative religions" approach whereby scholars sometimes carry out their conceptual comparison in spite of the important differences in linguistic strategies and hermeneutical principles.

It is impossible in so short a space to account fully the relationship of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and inter-religious dialogue. What I endeavor to do here is merely to argue for the possibility and need for launching the exploration in this particular direction.

#### B. Ricoeur's Ethical Thought and Inter-Religious Dialogue

In view of Ricoeur's prolific writings on the problem of text and action, and the idea of selfhood in more recent years, it is not unlikely that one can speak of a "later Ricoeur" who is more ethical and praxis orientated, in contrast to an "earlier Ricoeur" who is more hermeneutically orientated. Of course it is a mistake to understand this contrast as a real one, because given the understanding of the relatedness between text and action, the ethical thought of "later Ricoeur" is in fact a logical development of his earlier hermeneutical thought.<sup>36</sup>

If Ricoeur's hermeneutical ideas can positively contribute to the inter-religious dialogue, then his ethical philosophy will definitely prove to be more rewarding to comparative projects, especially the inter-religious dialogue between Western Christianity and the many Asian ethical religions, of which Confucianism is a major example of this "ethical humanism" as described by Julia Ching in her dialogue with Hans Küng.<sup>37</sup> The "ethical turn" of Ricoeur provides much more insights for direct correlative study, thus is very promising to become rich resources for any comparativists who are interested in the study of cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

According to Tracy, general criteria for inter-religious dialogue are being painfully aware by many comparativists as both inadequate and necessary. Based on his Jamesian reinterpretation, Tracy argues for the first need of genuine conversation as the criteria of possibility guided by modern hermeneutics, and the second need of rational coherence as the cognitive criteria, and the third need to consider pragmatic consequences as the ethical-social-political criteria.<sup>38</sup> It is exactly because of these ethical-political criteria of dialogue that calls for our special attention to Ricoeur's ethical thought.

The "ethical turn" of Ricoeur's thought necessarily demands a sequel to this paper which only concentrates on his earlier hermeneutical thought. But I would like to highlight here the interesting and highly fascinating possibility of a Christian-Confucian dialogue by borrowing insights from Tracy and Ricoeur.

Tracy illustrates how the concept of the self could serve as a test case for Christian-Buddhist dialogue. He confesses how for every Christian theologian, the first encounter with the Buddhist doctrine of ultimate emptiness (*sunyata*) of reality and self is always an experience akin to the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*.<sup>39</sup> The seeming dissolution of the self in Buddhist texts appears to be in sharp contrast to the Western Christian notion of self as substance. It therefore becomes a challenge and, to Tracy, even as "live options" for Christian theologians to rethink and to reconstruct the Christian notions of self and subject.

It is only after this sudden awareness that Ricoeur's reconstruction of self as *ipse*, rather than self as *idem*, reveals its significance to our discussion.<sup>40</sup> Ricoeur reconstructs the Western idea of personal identity, not based on the idea of sameness, but on the dynamic and dialogical concept of selfhood. This retrieval of dynamic selfhood, perhaps, will change some perspectives of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue of the concept of self. It also will definitely bring enormous possibilities to the Christian-Confucian dialogue because this dynamic formulation of the Western self bears closest affinity to the Confucian relational and reciprocal notion of self. Professor Tu Wei-Ming of Harvard University has aptly described the Confucian anthropology as "selfhood as creative transformation"<sup>41</sup> and interesting comparisons can be made as we discover their differences-in-similarities. The juxtaposition of Ricoeur with Tu certainly can be a viable and significant project for further exploration in the Christian-Confucian dialogue.

It is my hope, as well as my belief, that a comparative study of Confucian and Christian tradition from the hermeneutical and ethical

perspective of major thinkers, such as Ricoeur and Tracy, can serve as one more example of the "many others" who do theology in ways very different, even conflictually other, from [the] white, male, middle class, and academic reflections.... They bespeak critiques, suspicions, and retrievals of the Christian theological heritage which..... [we] need to hear."<sup>42</sup>

### Notes

1. Mary Gerhart, "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory as Resource for Theological Reflection," *The Thomist* 39/3, pp. 498-99.
2. *Fallible Man* [Trans. by C. Kelbley], (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 1986); *The Symbolism of Evil* [Trans. by E. Buchanan], (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). The original French editions were both published in 1960.
3. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* [Trans. by E. V. Kohak], (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966). Originally published in French in 1950.
4. Ricoeur, "From Existentialism to the Philosophy of Language" in *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977) p. 316. Originally published in *Criterion* 10/3 (Spring, 1971).
5. "Why an indirect approach? Why symbolic language when we have to pass from a philosophy of finitude to a philosophy of guilt? This was the question that intrigued me. The fact is that we have a direct language to say purpose, motive, and 'I can,' but we speak of evil by means of metaphors such as estrangement, errance, burden, and bondage" — Ricoeur, *Philosophy of Language*, p. 316.
6. Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in by Lewis S. Mudge ed.), *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 106.
7. "The claim of psychoanalysis to explain symbols and myths as fruits of unconscious representation, as distorted expressions of the relation between libidinal impulses and the repressive structure of the super-ego, compelled me to enlarge my first concept of hermeneutics beyond a mere semantic analysis of double meaning expressions" — Ricoeur, *The Philosophy of Language*, pp. 317-8.
8. Ricoeur, *Philosophy of Language*, pp. 317-8; "The Idea of Revelation," p. 106.
9. *Conflict of Interpretations: Essays on Hermeneutics*, ed. by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
10. *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977).
11. Ricoeur, *Philosophy of Language*, p. 317.
12. *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. Trans. by K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-88).
13. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 4.
14. "This rapid survey of the main dichotomies established by Saussure is sufficient to show why linguistics could make progress under the condition of bracketing the message for the sake of the code, the event for the sake of the system, the intention for the sake of the structure, and the arbitrariness of the act for the systematicity combinations within synchronic systems" — Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 3.
15. Furthermore Ricoeur points out Romanicist's hermeneutics has "a great influ-

ence on Christian theology. It nourished the theologies of the Word-Event for which the event par excellence is a speech event, and this speech event is the Kerygma, the preaching of the Gospel. The meaning of the original event testifies to itself in the present event by which we apply it to ourselves in the act of faith" — Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 22.

16. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 92.

17. "My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experience, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public" — Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 16.

18. "All discourse is produced as an event; as such, it is the counterpart of language understood as code or system. Discourse qua event has a fleeting existence: it appears and disappears. But at the same time — and herein lies the paradox — it can be identified and re-identified as the same. The 'sameness' is what we call, in a broad sense, its meaning. All discourse, we shall say, is realised as event but understood as meaning" — Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," in J.B. Thompson (ed.), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 167. Cf. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 12.

19. Ricoeur's concept of meaning is further complicated by his introduction of the distinction of sense and reference, articulated from the thought of Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), pioneer of German linguistic philosophy. This dialectics of sense and reference is very similar to that between semiotics and semantics, for sense is present at the system of signs and reference is the exteriority of meaning that relates to the reality, or more precisely, the world of text.

20. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 23.

21. Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," p. 168.

22. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, pp. 87-88. Another good illustration of Ricoeur's idea of the world of the text is found in Mary Gerhart's transcription of Ricoeur's answer from faculty conference tape, University of Chicago, 1971: "[The idea of the world] is a minimal concept of the world... World is nothing more than the ontological counterpart of the reference.... [It is] the referent of the spoken reference, and not a Platonic reduplication of the ideal meaning fixed in the text" — Mary Gerhart, "Paul Ricoeur's Notion of 'Diagnostics': Its Function in the Literary Interpretation," *Journal of Religion*, 56/2 (1976), pp. 152-53.

23. Ricoeur, *Philosophy and Religious Language*, p. 79.

24. "Our first task will be to find a common ground for the theory of text and for that of metaphor. This common ground already has a name — discourse" — Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," p. 169.

25. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto, 1977). Besides cf.: Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling" in Sheldon Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), pp. 141-157; *Interpretation Theory* (Fort Worth, 1976): Chapter 3, "Metaphor and Symbol," pp. 45-69; "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1981).

26. Ricoeur, "Metaphorical Process of Cognition, Imagination and Feeling," p. 142; *Interpretation Theory*, p. 51.

27. Morny Joy, "Derrida and Ricoeur: A Case of Mistaken Identity (and Difference)," *Journal of Religion*, 68/4 (1988), p. 521.
28. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 259.
29. Ricoeur's article on "myth" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* is an exceptional excellent comparative study on myths in the context of different cultures. For an example of the ready relevance of Ricoeur's thought to inter-religious study, cf. his two essays on "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 287-334. Ricoeur also frequently referred and relied on Mircea Eliade in his direct study on world religious traditions.
30. It is not surprising that Ricoeur as an internationally renowned thinker has attracted wide attention in China. The following works of Ricoeur have already been translated into Chinese and received wide discussion: *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, translated and published in Chinese by Huibei People's Press in 1987; *Major Trends in Philosophy* has been translated and published in Chinese by the Chinese Commercial Press in 1988.
31. For an appropriation of Ricoeur's thought in the study of Buddhist hermeneutics, cf. Donald Lopez (ed.), *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), esp. Robert A.F. Thurman, "Vajra Hermeneutics," pp. 119-148. Professor Tracy was a major respondent at this conference and several authors explicitly acknowledged and interacted with his criticism.
32. Thus in any rate, Tracy's *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peters Press, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), is a rare success. For review, see J.A. DiNoia, O.P., "Teaching Differences," *Journal of Religion*, 73/1 (1993), pp. 61-68.
33. Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," *Journal of Religion*, 54/1 (1974), p. 71.
34. Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, pp. 40-41.
35. A good attempt of this direct comparative study of ideas is Lee Yearly, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990). For review, see Anthony Yu, "Of Apples and Oranges..." *Journal of Religion*, 73/1 (1993), pp. 69-74.
36. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991); *Self as an Other* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For studies of Ricoeur's ethical thought, see T. Peter Kemp and D. Rasmussen (eds.), *The Narrative Path: The Later Works of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989), and the recent publication of D.E. Klemm and W. Schweiker (eds.), *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993). For the most recent and succinct account of Ricoeur's ethical idea of selfhood, cf. his Amnesty Lecture at Oxford, "Self as IPSE," in Barbara Johnson (ed.), *Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 104-119.
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## Possibilities for Theology in the Postmodern Era

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THAT WE ARE LIVING in the postmodern era is a fact upon which virtually all scholars of human thought and culture are agreed. While there is considerable disagreement concerning just what the postmodern is, there seems to be a general feeling that the postmodern describes "the world that has not yet discovered how to define itself in terms of what *is*, but only in terms of what it has *just-now-ceased-to-be*."<sup>1</sup> There is "the sense of *irrevocable* loss and *incurable* fault."<sup>2</sup> A sense of loss results from the failure to complete the Enlightenment project, and a sense of guilt arises from the attempts by the West to exercise cultural, economic, and political hegemony over the rest of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Sociologists and other behavioural scientists generally refer to this condition as postmodernity. Philosophers, literary critics, architects and others who reflect upon the social condition of postmodernity have given rise to a movement loosely referred to as postmodernism. Theologians often use the terms interchangeably, but no matter which term is used there is the idea that modern theology with its Enlightenment assumptions has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is apparent that the Enlightenment project will never be completed, for already the seeds of modernity that were so carefully sown have grown into untamed plants that are threatening to engulf modernity itself. At the same time the

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