Introduction

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Paul Ricoeur is one of the most original and provocative philosophers writing today. He is best known for his work in philosophy of language, psychology, historiography, social science method, literary theory, and religious studies. At a time when the usefulness of disciplinary boundaries is being questioned, Ricoeur's prodigious oeuvre is animated by a spirit of interdisciplinary interrogation that generates original insights into many of the most challenging intellectual and cultural issues we currently face. His wide-ranging studies bridge modes of inquiry that have long existed in isolation from one another, making his work field-encompassing without lacking depth, rigorously argued without being hegemonistic.

Ricoeur is a philosopher of conversation and mediation. He embodies the Socratic dictum that truth is a dialogic event as he seeks maieutically to bring forth a variety of possible perspectives on the questions under discussion. His charitable interpretations of diverse positions reflect a wide and generous philosophical style that allows him to uncover the often hidden middle ground between the factions that characterize contemporary intellectual life. But his attempts at rapprochement never purchase mediation at the price of ignoring important differences. Rather, Ricoeur's aim is patiently to track the topography of a particular debate in order to articulate a via media (often unseen by the disputants) by which one can negotiate the questions at hand. Truth—or better, deeper insight into hitherto unforeseen possibilities—emerges as a result of this careful tracking process. Truth happens in the space opened up in the conversation between newly found dialogue partners—whether those dialogue partners be human interrogators, literary texts, works of art, or cultural artifacts.

"Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again." 1 In spite of (or to spite?) the death of God and the demystification of the cosmos, Ricoeur's dialogic thought echoes with a longing for spiritual values and forces once felt by primordial peoples but now forgotten in a technological age. An authentic response to the question Who am I? is founded, in part, on a recovery of the sacred by taking up residence in the worlds of

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mythopoetic literature, such as the Bible. Ricoeur well knows that a simple return path back to the powers of traditional religions is no longer tenable. But his writing is characterized, nevertheless, by a fragile hope that in the borderlands beyond calculative reason there might be a world of transcendent possibilities (mediated through the text) that can refigure and remake the world of the reader. The recovery of the power of myth and symbol is possible only through a self-critical, always revisable, and never certain hermeneutical wager. By risking this wager, the interpreter advances, even perhaps realizes, the task of becoming an integrated self. The first naiveté of primordial openness to religious symbolism has long been lost to modern people, but a second naiveté of belief founded on the traces of the sacred in the world of the text is possible.

In the first half of this introduction I offer a chronological reading of Ricoeur's intellectual biography with special reference to his work in religious studies. In the second half I conclude with comments concerning the scope and rationale of this anthology. I unify my exposition around a distinctively Ricoeurian thesis: the journey to selfhood is made possible by the subject's willingness to receive new ways of being through its interactions with the text-worlds of literature, myth, and religion.

**Intellectual Biography**

**Early Development**

Paul Ricoeur was born in Valence, France, on February 27, 1913, and raised by his grandparents in Brittany in the minority tradition of the Protestant Huguenots. He graduated with the Agrégation de Philosophie from the Sorbonne in 1935 and attended seminars conducted by Gabriel Marcel. From 1940 to 1945 he was interned in a German POW camp, where he was allowed to study German philosophy and theology, including the works of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Barth. After the war he taught the history of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg (1948–57) and returned to the Sorbonne to occupy the chair of metaphysics (1956–1967). He was active in the Parisian socialist movement and the promotion of social democracy against the threat of market-driven capitalism. He wrote numerous articles for France's left-wing Christian journals—in particular, *Esprit* and *Le Christianisme social*—on the power of religious socialism to engender community and solidarity and overcome the alienation of modern urban life. In the 1940s and 1950s he became especially well known for

his writings in existential phenomenology and as both a translator of and commentator upon Husserl's thought. In these early studies Ricoeur argues for Husserl's methodologically controlled reflection in the Logical Investigations as a more rigorous extension of Marcel's existentialism. He agrees with Husserl that the value of phenomenological method lies in its description of consciousness to be a consciousness of something, a moving outside of oneself to the object or phenomenon intended. He avers, however, that Husserl's later work replaces the description of phenomena given to consciousness with the elevation of the transcendental ego's powers of unmediated perception of the world. Because all understanding is determined by one's historically situated presuppositions concerning the external world, Ricoeur maintains that Husserl's idealizing tendencies must be resisted by a philosophy that grafts the hermeneutics of signs and symbols onto the trunk of the phenomenological description of intentional objects.

This movement toward a "hermeneutical phenomenology" is anticipated in the second installment of a tripartite series by Ricoeur on the philosophy of the will. The first part consists of the volume Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary (1950; Eng. trans. 1966), in which Ricoeur utilizes phenomenological method to describe the volitional and nonvolitional structures of the will. The second part consists of two separate books, Fallible Man (1960; Eng. trans. 1965) and The Symbolism of Evil (1960; Eng. trans. 1967), and the third part, now permanently suspended, was intended to be a poetics of the will. Although this third volume is technically in abeyance, the goal of this book—to develop a hermeneutical philosophical anthropology beyond the confines of phenomenology—has been realized by Ricoeur's subsequent writings, especially his most recent Oneself as Another (1990; Eng. trans. 1992). His many "detours," as he calls them, since the 1950s into psychoanalysis, structuralism, analytic philosophy, social theory, discourse analysis, narratology, and deconstruction have left him uninterested in formally completing the projected poetics of the will. The value of these detours, however, is that they have enabled Ricoeur to articulate a more complicated discordant-concordant understanding of human being than was available to him at the time he had projected finishing his trilogy.

All his early writings on the structure of the will make the same claim: human beings are tethered between freedom and nature, between the self-

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transcending powers of the imagination and the always limiting character of perspectival, fragmented experience. The possibility of an undivided self, the task of becoming a “whole soul,” begins with reflective analysis on these two poles. Through this analysis, a self in possession of itself is “won” by a fragile mediation of the consciousness of freedom and the brokenness of unfulfilled desire. Selfhood is a task to be performed, not a given that awaits passive reception by the subject.

Fallible Man maintains that the always already disproportion between freedom and finitude is the constitutional weakness that makes evil possible. Content with an exposition of the limit-concept of fallibility, this study does not push forward to an analysis of the concrete manifestations of fault in the human condition. This further analysis is deployed in The Symbolism of Evil, the companion volume to Fallible Man, where the turn is accomplished from a phenomenological (eidetic) description of the faulted disproportion in human being to an interpretation (hermeneutic) of symbols and myths concerning actual evil. “First of all, my investigation into the Symbolism of Evil, which followed upon the Voluntary and the Involuntary and Fallible Man, carried me to the heart of the hermeneutical tradition. For in the case of evil there is no direct concept but, to begin with, symbols, narratives, myths, instead.” In The Symbolism of Evil Ricoeur takes up his central question, “What is the meaning of human being?” by submerging his analysis in the opaque worlds of story and symbol. The problem of noncoincidence with oneself is again manifest, but now in a mythological register: to be human is to be estranged from oneself because all humans, though destined for fulfillment, are inevitably captive to an “adversary” greater than themselves. The bitter irony of this predicament is most effectively symbolized by the myth of Adam’s fall. Though the story is putatively about historical origins, it functions as an etiological myth about a cosmic battle between good and evil already anterior to Adam’s decision. Adam is figured as alternately responsible for his own free decision and yet in bondage to an evil power outside of himself. Thus as both free and determined, human beings, like Adam, are “responsible and captive, or rather . . . responsible for being captive.”

The Symbolism of Evil brings religious studies to the threshold of a new methodology as a hermeneutical, rather than a strictly philosophical or dogmatic, discipline. Religious studies is a public inquiry into the meaning of symbolic discourses, not a rationalist justification of religious beliefs or a confessionalist defense of traditional doctrines. Ricoeur argues for the premier value of mythopoetic forms of expression, rather than purely philo-


sophical or theological modes of discourse, for understanding the meaning of human being in a world charged with the presence and absence of the sacred. The relative superiority of myth over philosophy—or "fiction" over "reason"—is manifest in the power of religious creation stories to uncover the structural disparity in human beings between their fractured nature and their destinies as integrated selves. This disparity can be imagined only indirectly on the basis of mythical imagery; it cannot be studied directly through a rationalist analysis of human history and culture. The myths of the Hebrews and Greeks concerning primordial chaos, primeval fall, original defilement, exile from paradise, tragic fate, and the servile will contain a surplus of meaning hostile to modes of intellectual inquiry that a priori deny to myths and symbols any truth-value concerning the nature of the human condition. The point is not that religious symbolism is irrational or unamenable to philosophical inquiry, but that the rationality of the symbol is available only to the theorist who values the efficacy of mythical literatures.

"The symbol gives rise to thought, and thought returns to the symbol."^6 Ricoeur defines the symbol as a multiple-meaning expression characterized by a hidden logic of double reference. Symbols are like signs in that they intend something beyond themselves. But whereas the sign possesses a relatively obvious and conventional set of denotations, the symbol's meanings are polysemic, difficult to discern, and virtually inexhaustible in depth. Ricoeur uses the example of the symbol "defilement" to make this point. "Defilement" is a double-meaning expression in which the clear, literal meaning stands for the state of physical uncleanliness, while the opaque, figurative meaning "points beyond itself to something that is like a stain or spot,"^7 as when one refers to ritual impurity or moral evil as a "stain" or "blemish" on one's character. Because the symbol possesses a figurative reference, it demands interpretation in a way that the transparent sign does not.

Ricoeur maintains that human beings enter consciousness as prior denizens of a world of symbols and myths. Figurative language first interprets us before we interpret it. Since there are no "shortcuts" to selfhood, only when the subject traverses a hermeneutical "long route" through the revealing power of the symbol can she or he enlarge and empower a fuller and more satisfying understanding of the self. This route follows a path from the loss of original belief in the sacred to a critical recovery of the power of myth in a world empty of meaning and hope. "Does that mean that we could go back to a primitive naivété? Not at all. In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can

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6. Ibid., 347-57.
7. Ibid., 15.
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no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naïveté in and through criticism. In short, it is by interpreting that we can hear again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbol’s gift of meaning and the endeavor to understand by deciphering are knotted together.” A critical consciousness needs the complement of a mature openness to the symbolic world; a hermeneutic of suspicion operates in productive tension with a hermeneutic of restoration. In this dialectic the voice of the sacred can be heard again, not in the mode of a precritical naïveté but by an interpretive gesture, a second naïveté, that wagers on the power of myth and symbol to elucidate the nature of human being.

The Hermeneutical Turn

In 1967 Ricoeur left the Sorbonne and joined the faculty of the University of Paris at Nanterre, where he was later appointed dean in 1969. At Nanterre he was instrumental in mediating the conflicts between faculty and students over the cries for reform in the French university system during the Paris uprisings of 1968. He did collaborative work with Emmanuel Levinas and was one of Jacques Derrida’s teachers. At this time he also became a permanent faculty member of the University of Chicago with appointments in the Divinity School, the Department of Philosophy, and the Committee on Social Thought. He resigned from Nanterre in 1980 and continues as professor emeritus at Chicago.

further theories of the imagination and the text beyond his earlier concern with myth and symbol.

These studies begin with a detour through psychoanalysis over the question of whether a restorative hermeneutics is possible after Freud's reconstruction of the human as a source of conflicted desires and unresolved forces. Earlier Ricoeur had written that the subject can construct a new identity through its commerce with self-generated figures of the imagination. The subject can experience "redemption through imagination" because in "imagining his possibilities, man can act as a prophet of his own existence." But now Ricoeur follows Freud's description of the imagination, or consciousness, as a projection of unconscious distortions and impulses, or false consciousness. The subject who thinks and feels and dreams is a "wounded cogito" riddled with illusions of freedom and self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, Freud's location of the origins of the subject in false consciousness must be positioned against a similar projection of symbols and figures of a new humanity. In the dialectical spirit of his aborted poetics of the will, Ricoeur contends that an archaeology of the decentered subject should stand in tension with a teleology of the fulfilled subject that takes seriously, though not literally, childhood dreams, works of art, and religious symbols as lived possibilities for a transformative future. In spite of its overdetermined origins, the imagination can activate these possibilities and offer the broken subject new modes of being in the world.

Ricoeur's work from this period makes three points concerning the relationship between philosophical inquiry and religious faith. First, authentic faith emerges by way of its circuitous travels through a sustained hermeneutics of suspicion. What a Marx or a Nietzsche or a Freud offers the believing community is a panoply of iconoclastic devices for smashing the idols of belief naively unaware of its origins in certain systemic distortions—be those distortions economic, philosophical, or psychodynamic. But "to smash the idols is also to let the symbols speak." In the tension between iconoclasm and belief—or distanciation and appropriation, as Ricoeur sometimes puts it—the believer's presuppositions are productively challenged even as the critic's assumptions are put to the test. Since the acid bath of criticism is mutually purifying for both modes of inquiry, neither the critic nor the believer emerges unscathed from this dialectical encounter. "The faith of the believer cannot emerge intact from this confrontation, but neither can the Freudian conception of reality." The burden of faith is to

evoke a refined passion for the possible by way of an excavation of the distortions at the base of its origins.

Second, the metaphorical imagination is an ally for the understanding and articulation of faith. In its essence, faith is a living out of the figures of hope unleashed by the imagination. Glossing Kant, Ricoeur argues for the power of the productive imagination to “schematize” novel relationships between the data of experience and the figures of the imagination even though both realms of understanding seem initially unrelated to one another. The imagination generates new metaphors for synthesizing disparate aspects of reality that burst conventional assumptions about the nature of things. Figurative discourses **suspend** first-order references to literal objects and events in order to **liberate** second-order references to a more basic and nonliteral world of unimagined possibilities. The role of the living metaphor is to juxtapose two dissimilar forms of articulation in order to bring to language dimensions and values of reality that have been previously hidden by straightforward, descriptive discourse. “[M]etaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality.”13 “Lamb” and “God,” for example, are two distinct terms that resist combination. But the union of both terms in the metaphor “lamb of God” sets free a new understanding of the divine life—as bloody and innocent salvation-bringer—hitherto unavailable to the interpreter apart from this metaphorical innovation.

Third, the power of the text to disclose new possibilities offers the reader an expanded view of the world and a deeper capacity for selfhood. “It is the text, with its universal power of world disclosure, which gives a self to the ego.”14 On this point Ricoeur’s lively dialogue with his critics comes to the fore. As he counters some analytic philosophers’ arguments against the truth-value of poetic texts, he also disagrees with certain literary theorists’ contention that such texts operate within a self-enclosed, private universe that makes no purchase on everyday experience. His point is that the vast majority of poetic texts do refer to the world, though not the world accessible to thoroughgoing positivism and aestheticism, but the world now refigured under the tutelage of the imaginary and the possible. Poetic language does intend reality—it is not a language unto itself divorced from any referential function—but its power of reference is the power to set forth novel **ontologies** that disorient readers in order to reorient them by way of an ever-expanding vision of the whole.

In theological parlance, Ricoeur maintains that a variety of nonreligious and religious fictions (including the Bible) are potentially revelatory—not

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in the sense that they are *deposits* of divinely inspired truths but because they faithfully *enact* a productive clash, and sometimes a fusion, between their world and the world of the reader. Ricoeur understands *revelation* in performative, not propositional, terms: it is an event of new meaning between text and interpreter, rather than a body of received doctrines under the control of a particular magisterium. He refers to the disclosive power of figurative (including sacred) texts as an "areligious sense of revelation" just insofar as any poetic text—by virtue of its powers of metaphorical reference—can become a world that I inhabit and within which I project my innermost possibilities. The world of the text can figure the identity of the sacred and reveal dimensions of the human condition as such for any reader who risks her own self-understanding in the process.\(^{15}\)

Ricoeur’s analysis of the referential function of literary works is an extension and correction of the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Heidegger maintains that works of art reveal the character of reality by disclosing to the observer the "world" depicted in the art work. Vincent van Gogh’s paintings of peasant shoes, for example—with their separated soles, frayed threads, and protruding nails—distill the very essence of working-class life in late nineteenth-century France. “The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings.”\(^{16}\) Aesthetic objects offer direct access to the nature of Being. With some qualifications Gadamer agrees with Heidegger’s thesis concerning the truth of art; he further specifies its application in terms of a “fusion of horizons” between the world of the reader and the world of the text.\(^{17}\) Understanding occurs in the to-and-fro dialogue between text and interpreter whenever the interpreter is willing to be put into question by the text and risk openness to the world of possibilities the text projects.

While Ricoeur consistently appropriates these insights into the truth-value of art and the dynamics of horizon-fusion, he enters a caveat against a certain romanticist bias against *explanation* in the German hermeneutical tradition from Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey to Heidegger and Gadamer. This tradition has labored against the importation of reductionist methods from nonhumanistic disciplines for the understanding of literary texts and other works of art. While this prohibition has rightly preserved the truth-bearing integrity of creative works, it has wrongly insulated the interpretation of these works from a full and critical evaluation of their origins and interactions with structures of domination and

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oppression. Ricoeur has learned from Jürgen Habermas that a pure conversational model for textual understanding is not enough in the face of the systematic distortions that undermine open dialogue and understanding. Here again Ricoeur articulates the need for both rehabilitative and critical interpretive gestures: no text is free from ideological distortion, and a romantic hermeneutic that blunts the uncovering of such bias is dangerously short-sighted.\(^\text{18}\) In order for a fusion between text-world and the reader's world to be efficacious, no critical explanatory device should be excluded from the interpretation process as long as that device does not in principle deny the ontological potential of the work in question. Ricoeur's consistent motto, succinctly expressed in his recent work, is "[T]o explain more is to understand better."\(^\text{19}\) Though mindful of the hermeneutical tradition's truth-claims concerning aesthetic media, Ricoeur replaces their "short route" of direct access to Being with his "long detours" of successive methodological requirements for understanding works of art.

The Recovery of Narrative

I have suggested that *The Symbolism of Evil* (as well as other works from the 1950s and early 1960s) inaugurates an expansion beyond the analysis of the structure of the divided will so characteristic of Ricoeur's immediate postwar writings: a hermeneutic of opaque symbols is now grafted onto the phenomenological method. Likewise, *The Rule of Metaphor* marks a shift from Ricoeur's earlier depth readings of myth and symbol to a general interpretation theory that presses a variety of reductive hermeneutics into the service of a more complicated philosophical anthropology. "Today I should be less inclined to limit hermeneutics to the discovery of hidden meanings in symbolic language and would prefer to link hermeneutics to the more general problem of written language and texts."\(^\text{20}\) Ricoeur's writings from the 1980s to the present signify still a third stage in his itinerary: the challenge of narratology and deconstruction. The current major texts include *Time and Narrative* (3 vols., 1983–85; Eng. trans. 1984–88), *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), and *Oneself as Another* (1990; Eng. trans. 1992). He has also authored papers that have been collected as *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (1980), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), *From Text to Action* (1986; Eng. trans. 1991), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and


Imagination (1991), and Lectures (3 vols., 1991–1994). With these recent works in mind a distinctive pattern can be traced in Ricoeur’s oeuvre. His thought has followed a trajectory from his initial analysis of the bad will and the power of symbolic language to a comprehensive hermeneutical model now complemented by an emerging theory concerning the role of narrative in the formation of subjectivity.

“[T]ime becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.”21 The importance of narrative in understanding human temporality is the leitmotif of Ricoeur’s recent thought. His previous work had spoken to the power of myths, symbols, and other figurative discourses in the mediation of consciousness; his current work argues that the desire to be, the task of existence, is inseparable from the scripting of an individual story that gathers together the untold and sometimes repressed narrative fragments constitutive of personal identity. Everyone needs a story to live by in order to make sense of the pastiche of one’s life. Without a narrative a person’s life is merely a random sequence of unrelated events: birth and death are inscrutable, temporality is a terror and a burden, and suffering and loss remain mute and unintelligible.

Ricoeur’s use of narrative as a solution to the problem of identity is founded on the dialectic between history and fiction analyzed in Time and Narrative. While he recognizes the differences between history and fiction, he argues that both forms of writing are united by their common reference to the fundamentally historical and temporal character of human existence. One may think of history and fiction as presenting opposing referential claims: history intends a lawlike description of past events, while fiction refers to the unrealities of the imagination that bear little relationship to everyday life. Ricoeur rejects this dichotomy and argues instead that “in spite of the evident differences in the way that history and fiction are related to ‘reality’—in whatever sense of the word—they refer nonetheless, each in its own way, to the same fundamental feature of our individual and social existence. This feature is characterized in very different philosophies by the term ‘historicity,’ which signifies the fundamental and radical fact that we make history, that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings.”22 He continues that history and fiction share a common narrative structure with a shared reference to the field of human action. The concept of plot—or rather “emplotment,” as he prefers—is the linking idea that holds together both forms of writing. Emplotment is the art

21. Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 1:3.
of “eliciting a pattern from a succession”; it is the ability to configure episodic and unrelated temporal events into a meaningful totality. The plot sets up a sequence of events and characters, whether real or imaginary, in a certain directed movement under the control of a particular point of view. 

Emplotment is a historical or literary text’s capacity to set forth a story that combines the *givens* of contingent historical existence with the *possibilities* of a meaningful interpretation of the whole.

Ricoeur’s thesis concerning the role of emplotment as the underlying principle of both history and fiction challenges some fundamental assumptions. First, history contains more “fiction” than a positivist model of history would allow. Insofar as history is a form of *writing* that seeks coherence in the chaos of real events, and not simply a disconnected recounting of these events, history, like fiction, is governed by a wide variety of different aesthetic strategies for organizing past events into a narrative whole. “In other words, history is both a literary *artefact* (and in this sense a fiction) and a representation of *reality*.24 Historical events are recounted in many different forms—from relatively objective annals and chronicles to full-fledged narratives and highly embellished stories—all of which, by definition, emplot what is recounted according to a certain viewpoint as to the proper configuration, or “meaning,” of the events in question.

Second, as history is, in a manner of speaking, “fictional,” so fiction is more “real” than is often recognized. Fictional narratives on the order of a novel or play have the capacity to redescribe features of human historicity by bracketing ordinary descriptions of reality. The aim of an imaginative text is the creative imitation of human action—even as the purpose of metaphor, as we saw above, is to redescribe the actual world in terms of possibility. Yet while narrative fiction’s mimetic capacities are creative—they do not offer slavish copies of the ordinary world—they remain historically rooted in the common world of human action. Ricoeur paradoxically writes that “because history is tied to the contingent it misses the essential, whereas poetry, not being the slave of the real event, can address itself directly to the universal, i.e., to what a certain kind of person would likely or necessarily say or do.”25 Narrative fictions do have a certain truth-value by virtue of their claim to *assert* something about reality—even if this assertion is on the order of an imaginative variation on the possibilities of everyday existence. Thus both history and fiction (as ideal types) share a


common narrative interest in describing what reality is (so history) or in redescribing what reality is like (so fiction) to the end that our being-in-time and being-in-history might be rendered meaningful.

Analogously, Ricoeur maintains in Oneself as Another that the construction of a life-story is necessary to give shape and meaning to one’s existence. Storytelling helps make sense of the disparate parts of one’s experience. Each life is a medley of inchoate events waiting to be told in a comprehensive format; each life is an incipient story waiting to be rendered intelligible by a narrator. In scripting a life-story as one’s own, a self is born in possession of a refigured identity. To write a life, or to tell a life, is to wager that an exegesis of the self’s untold story will pay rich dividends in one’s quest for authenticity and integrity.

According to Ricoeur, the solution to the problem of personal identity rests in the distinction between identity as sameness (or idem-identity) and identity as selfhood (or ipse-identity). Idem signifies identity as self-subsisting permanence and uninterrupted continuity over the span of one’s life. Ipse stands for the struggle to faithfully interpret one’s life by a subject that is continually refiguring itself through the stories it appropriates as its own. In the first case, identity is a fait accompli; in the second, a hermeneutical process with no a priori resolution. Generally, however, the notion of identity is used equivocatively, or with primary reference to identity as sameness, with the result that the self is understood foundationally in terms of the Cartesian cogito, a fixed substratum that perdures over time.26 This entitative notion of the self generates both historicist and physicalist criticisms, neither of which is finally satisfactory according to Ricoeur. Some anticogito thinkers (for example, Michel Foucault) contend that insofar as there is no nonverbal core self, then the subject is nothing other than the sum total of the discourses practiced by its particular culture. Similarly, some analytic philosophers (for example, Derek Parfit), who also criticize Cartesian essentialism, argue that the subject is reducible (without remainder) to its brain states and bodily functions. Ricoeur rejects all three options—foundationalist, historicist, and physicalist—in favor of a narrative hermeneutic of the subject. The self, as neither a fixed entity, cultural cipher, nor biochemical remainder cobbles together its identity by constructing a life-story that uses the resources of various narrative fragments. In the narrative interpretation of a life both history and fiction are borrowed from; and since the references of both genres crisscross the plane of human historicity, a life mediated by stories is a “fictive history, or if one prefers, an historic fiction.”27 We have seen that because narrative fic-

27. Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 114.
tions are imitations of human action, they can be relied upon as paradigms for answering the question, Who am I? The "who" who asks this question must take the long route to selfhood through the "vast laboratory of thought experiments" available to the subject in cultural stories and symbols.  

Is there a religious subtext to this argument? Ricoeur says "no" in the interest of preserving the autonomy and integrity of both philosophy and theology: just as he does not want Oneself as Another to be accused of cryptotheology, he does not want theology founded on biblical faith to ground itself on any cryptophilosophy. With this "conflict of the faculties" proviso stated, however, he then teases the reader, as he often does, by going on to adumbrate what a theology of the narrative self would look like given his thesis. In the manner of Levinas, for example, he suggests that such a theology would articulate the ways in which the self is summoned by the other (be it the divine or human other) to realize its desire to be by responding to the voice of the other. The call of the human other, the neighbor, for justice and compassion secures the ethical and political aspects of forging a narrative identity. This prescriptive dimension of selfhood brings to light one of the many valences of the book's title: my self is constituted by the other who calls me to responsibility.

In analyzing how the self hears and responds to this call, however, a theology of the refigured self should not take false refuge in any putative metaphysical certainties concerning the nature of the "self" who is addressed. Rather, such a theology would rely on the fragile testimonies to divine graciousness within the biblical literatures and eschew the pseudo-security provided by attempts to prove the reality of God, or found the self, on the basis of some onto-theological amalgam. "The dependence of the self on a word that strips it of its glory, all the while comforting its courage to be, delivers biblical faith from the temptation, which I am here calling cryptophilosophical, of taking over the henceforth vacant role of ultimate foundation." Thus the theology briefly sketched out in Oneself as Another is a theology of the summoned self—the self that relies on the self-divesting word of the other in order to repossess itself by following the "true fictions" biblical faith offers to the reader-disciple.

The role of figurative texts in the formation of human subjectivity is the unifying theme that underlies Ricoeur's writing. In this vein, he envisions religious studies as a hermeneutical inquiry into the imaginative potential of myth, symbol, and story to aid our efforts to exist with integrity. Religious

28. Ibid., 148.
29. For the role of the other in identity formation, see Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969). Ricoeur's use of Levinas is developed in Oneself as Another, 188–90 and 335–56.
30. Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 25.
traditions use ontologically potent language and imagery to illuminate all that ultimately concerns human beings—our questions about life’s meaning, our confrontations with death, our struggles to be at home in the universe. Our individual and corporate worlds remain underdeveloped and impoverished because we no longer have a public symbolic language that speaks both to the brokenness and the intimations of transcendence in our lives. Through hermeneutics of reduction and retrieval, Ricoeur shows how the world’s cultural classics (including the Bible) can expansively figure rich and full projections of another way of being in the world that liberates what is essential by suggesting what is possible.

Outline of This Anthology

The essays collected in this volume comprise the most comprehensive overview of Ricoeur’s writings in religion. Most of these essays have not been previously anthologized in a volume devoted to Ricoeur’s work. While perhaps a few of the essays will be familiar to readers, the bulk of this collection is not well known in the English-speaking world. David Pellauer has translated many of the essays included here expressly for this volume. The anthology consists of writings from 1970 to the present; except in Part Two, the essays in each section are arranged in chronological order. Though the collection focuses on the religious aspects of Ricoeur’s recent thought, it also serves as an introduction to many of his other interests because his religious writings are always situated in close relation to the wide variety of general philosophical topics that occupy his inquiries. These collected essays constitute a rich and diverse body of thought that complements Ricoeur’s writings in a variety of other fields, including philosophy, psychology, literary criticism, and historiography. As such this collection fills a lacuna in Ricoeur scholarship in particular, and contemporary religious and philosophical thought in general, by surveying the full range of Ricoeur’s recent religious writings in chronological and thematic fashion. This approach allows the reader to trace the development of his thought from his midcareer use of discourse analysis for understanding religious language, to his subsequent concern with the role of narrative in the study of biblical genres, to his more recent inquiries into models of personal identity and the relevance of continental philosophers such as Rosenzweig and Levinas to the contemporary task of theological reflection.

To speak of “development” in Ricoeur’s thought is to speak of extensions of, rather than fundamental breaks with, the themes and concerns of his previous writings. I have suggested one such recurrent emphasis in his overall philosophical project: the power of religious language to metamorphize the world of the reader by opening up new possibilities
of being-in-the-world. What is distinctive about his specifically religious writings is the regional application of this theme to the role of scriptural discourses—including narratives, laws, prophecies, wisdom writings, and hymns—as occasions for challenging the reader to alternative forms of existence.

In this vein, the particular genre that Ricoeur returns to again and again in these essays is biblical narrative by way of his studies of narratology in general. Yet he uses and understands narrative differently from the way many theologians use and understand narrative in the contemporary setting. His concern is to show how the stories of the Bible are not one-dimensional exercises in concordance and triumph but rather multivalent points of intersection for a variety of discourses and their contrasting theological itineraries. He demonstrates how much of the Bible's narrative and nonnarrative material speaks as readily to the ambiguity and futility of existence as it does to the providence of God within covenant and history. Ricoeur's use of—and caution against—narrative for theological reflection places him on the fringes of the camp of narrative theology per se, if by that phrase we mean the privileging of biblical narrative as the means to redescribing “reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories.” Ricoeur is wary of assigning final priority to any one particular construal of reality because all forms of literary discourse (and not only biblical narrative discourse) can potentially refigure one's experience and offer new possibilities for understanding. Any genred text that works figurative variations on reality by proposing an imaginative “world” that the reader might inhabit can be said to be “revealed.” While the biblical stories are a medium of revelation, they are a species of a wider revelatory function that can be participated in by any text (biblical or otherwise) that unleashes novel alternatives for the reader.

Part One

The first part consists of Ricoeur's general explorations into the nature of religion. He uses methodological tools from history of religions and literary criticism to analyze the articulations of religious belief through symbol and discourse. While he does not go so far as to argue that religion is a sui generis phenomenon, he does maintain that religious beliefs have their own integrity and should not be reduced to explanatory schemas that fail to account for the self-understandings of religious communities. To facilitate the understanding of religion “on its own terms” Ricoeur argues, in a manner similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein, that just insofar as religious be-

lief and experience are primarily expressed through various discourses, the study of religion should begin with analyzing these modes of articulation. "[W]hatever ultimately may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language, it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression."\(^\text{32}\)

In one of the articles collected here, "Philosophy and Religious Language," Ricoeur shows how different modes of signification—symbols, myths, narratives, metaphors, and models—generate a surplus of meaning in the study of religious texts. These literary forms of articulation are not simply taxonomic devices for categorizing discourse but rather the means by which theological meaning is produced. These forms are not merely "decorative [with] an emotional value but no informative value."\(^\text{33}\) Modes of discourse, then, are more than just classificatory codes or ornamental trappings because the \textit{content} of religious discourse is determined by the literary \textit{forms} employed to mediate particular theological understandings. The scriptural figuration of the divine life, for example, is radically problematized by attention to the mixed genres employed by the biblical writers. "Throughout these discourses, God appears differently each time: sometimes as the hero of the saving act, sometimes as wrathful and compassionate, sometimes as the one to whom one can speak in a relation of an I-Thou type, or sometimes as the one whom I meet only in a cosmic order that ignores me."\(^\text{34}\) The advantage of using discourse analysis for understanding religious texts is that it renders more complicated and heterogeneous the interpretation of biblical faith. In this approach the Bible emerges as an asymmetrical intertext of oppositional genres—genres that alternately complement and conflict with one another—rather than a stable book unified by a particular discourse or singular perspective.

While discourse analysis aids the interpretation of biblical literature, comparative history of religions enables a broader understanding of religious phenomena that includes textual as well as nontextual modes of experience. In "Manifestation and Proclamation" and "The 'Sacred' Text and the Community," Ricoeur takes up the dialectic between the phenomenology of the sacred and the hermeneutic of the word in world spirituality. Primordial religious communities are founded on numinous, preverbal experiences of the sacred in nature and the cosmos, while latter-day, book-centered traditions are formed by belief in an intratribal deity and subscription to a body of iconoclastic teachings. In manifestation communities, religious truth and meaning are universally rooted in the

\(^{32}\) Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," below, 35.


\(^{34}\) Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," below, 41.
correspondences between agricultural cycles and divine power, while in proclamation traditions truth and meaning are authoritatively defined by revealed texts that warn against any manifestation of the Wholly Other through nature and the image.

Equally important are the distinctive temporalities characteristic of the two types. This is the difference between backward-looking archaic time as repetitive of the original cosmogony, and forward-oriented historical time as the progressive anticipation of a better future. Ricoeur argues that if these two notions of time are bifurcated into ideal types, then the one is aesthetic, generic, cyclical, and nature-bound while the other is ethical, particular, interruptive, and history-based. Lest this opposition harden into a false dichotomy, however, Ricoeur avers that biblical religion is actually a recombination of both temporalities: it oscillates between the celebration of “cyclical” festivals and seasons and the testimony of the word in “linear” history. One of the themes, then, of Part One is the need for biblical religion continually to combine the clarifying precision of the word in history and the cyclical modalities of the sacred in nature. Moreover, unless proclamation traditions reactualize the rootedness of all life in sacred patterns and symbols, these traditions will be empty of the power and mystery that primordial people experienced in their recurring encounters with the numinous. “In truth, without the support and renewing power of the sacred cosmos and the sacredness of vital nature, the word itself becomes abstract and cerebral.”

These initial articles highlight Ricoeur’s intensive debate with Mircea Eliade on the question of the phenomenology of comparative religions. Ricoeur was a colleague of Eliade’s at the University of Chicago Divinity School until Eliade’s death in 1984. While Ricoeur is greatly indebted to Eliade for his perspicacious studies of primordial traditions, he questions his lack of attention to the primacy of proclamation in religions founded on a revealed scripture. “In Christianity there is a polarity of proclamation and manifestation, which Mircea Eliade does not recognize in his homogeneous concept of manifestation, epiphany, and so forth... I think there is something specific in the Hebraic and Christian traditions that gives a kind of privilege to the word.” Ricoeur borrows from Eliade (as well as from Rudolph Otto and others) the notion that the universe is charged with the power of the sacred; the universe signifies the numinous through symbols and myths rooted in the depth structures of reality itself. But he takes issue with the deployment of Eliadean analysis at the expense of an equally powerful hermeneutic of the capacity of scriptural texts to open up new dimensions of reality that often challenge the established patterns of

the sacred universe. While canonical texts need the sustenance of primordial symbolism, the power of such texts cannot be sufficiently accounted for by a comparative phenomenology inattentive to the distinctiveness of word-based religious traditions.

Part Two

The three essays selected for this part represent Ricoeur’s close readings of the important works about religion by Kant, Rosenzweig, and Levinas. These essays are not freestanding position papers by Ricoeur but rather critical engagements with different philosophical approaches to religion according to their major practitioners. Ricoeur’s own constructive position on various questions is painstakingly worked out by way of expositing each thinker’s approach and usually is explicitly delineated only toward the end of each essay.

The essay on Kant forms a natural pair with an earlier essay on Hegel. The two articles give alternative answers to the question of whether the proper aim of philosophy of religion is to secure the idea of God as a speculative concept free of figurative thought, or whether its aim is to avoid speculative theorizing in order to enable the practical realization of human freedom. For Hegel, the inner dynamism of thought concerning the figures and symbols of religion leads to a sublation (Aufhebung) of such figures in pure conceptual thought where Spirit is self-conscious to itself. For Kant, on the other hand, the final absorption of figurative religious thought into speculation is not the dialectical realization of reason’s inner directionality but rather a transcendental illusion that should be vigorously resisted. Such an illusion is a violation of the boundaries of reason within the confines of conceptually mediated sense experience. Insofar as Ricoeur upholds the integrity of figurative modes of religious discourse against attempts to translate such discourse into a speculative metalanguage, his sympathies lie more with Kant’s philosophy of limits than with Hegel’s system of absolute knowledge. 37

In the essay on Hegel, Ricoeur’s purpose is to examine both the evolution of the role of figurative thinking (Vorstellung) in Hegel’s religious thought and to establish whether such thinking is finally dissolved into conceptual thought (Begriff) devoid of pictorial imagery. In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel puts the stress on the inadequacy of religious Vorstellung to apprehend its subject matter; for this reason religious picture-thinking must endure a continual process of self-realization until it reaches its final

consummation in conceptual thought. Prior to its final realization, this dy­
namic inner process reaches its religious climax in Christianity just insofar as Christ is the perfect symbol of the self-consciousness of Spirit in and through its other. But because thought about this symbol remains rooted in historical imagery, it is only partially aware of the meaning of the Spirit in and for itself, and so it must be sublated by conceptual thought.

Ricoeur argues, however, that in spite of Hegel’s generally negative eval­
uation of religious Vorstellung in the Phenomenology, figurative thinking carries a more positive valence in Hegel’s later Berlin Lectures on the Phi­
losophy of Religion. The reason for this change is that the subject matter of the Vorstellung in question changes: the focus on biblical and christologi­
cal imagery in the earlier work gives way to a valorization of the doctrine of the Trinity in the later work as a more adequate (albeit religious) form of speculation about Spirit. The idea of the Trinity—the interrelationship of Father, Son, and Spirit in and for each—discloses the dynamic nature of reality itself. Thus in the Berlin Lectures this idea mediates between the inadequacy of religious pictorial thinking and the superiority of concep­
tual thought. “Between the trinitarian expression of Christian thought and the high dialectic of conceptual thinking there is a homology that exceeds the shortcomings of pictorial thinking.” Ricoeur ends the essay by argu­
ing for the importance of conceptual rigor in philosophy of religion, but without disparaging (as Hegel often does, and especially in the Phenom­
emenology) the narrative and figurative dimensions of religious discourses that have founded communities of faith and hope. As Hegel seems to call for at the end of his Berlin Lectures, Ricoeur says that only when philosophy is nourished by the figurative ideals of a culture’s sacred texts can it fulfill its destiny as a medium for insight and understanding.

In the essay on Kant included here, Ricoeur maintains that Kant’s phil­
osophy of religion is a hermeneutic of symbols exercised outside the parameters of his critical philosophy. The reason for the exteriority of reli­
gion to philosophy stems from the problem of the “bound will,” a problem that is not approachable on the basis of the methodology in the three Cri­
tiques. Kant argues that while an originary disposition to evil is basic to the human condition, this disposition can only be indirectly “thought” by interrogating the figures and myths of religious belief; it cannot be directly “known” as an element of objective knowledge and experience.

Ricoeur’s analysis of Kant’s fundamental anthropology in Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone hews to the line of Ricoeur’s own discus­
sion of the innately faulted character of human volition in his earlier poetics of the will. Humans suffer from the loss of free will—from a propensity to evil even though the actual performance of evil is a result of free choice

38. Ibid., 85.
rather than “original sin.” Evil, then, is our predilection but also our responsibility; we are both victimized by it and culpable for it. “We might say, supporting Kant, that he has identified what is so upsetting in the confession of evil—I do not say the experience of evil—namely, the following paradox: in each instance, we do evil; but evil was already there.... [Kant] caught sight of the paradox of something that has always been there and yet for which we ourselves are responsible.”39 Kant’s response to this paradox is drawn from what Ricoeur aptly calls the “dramaturgy” of biblical Christology where Christ, as the supreme archetype of a person who fully lives the moral law, is pictured as victorious over a cosmically evil antagonist. The value of this archetype lies in its ability to figure the will (and thereby liberate it from its predisposition to evil), not in its reference to the life of the historical Jesus. In this sense we should say that the origin of the Christ symbol is not in a historical event but in the figurative powers of the moral imagination. The archetype is generated by a “schematism of hope” in which the rational concept of a will no longer bound by evil inclinations is rendered intelligible and applicable to experience by the concrete example of an individual who singularly embodies the autonomy of a rational will. Again, however, Ricoeur is quick to underscore that this archetype in Kant is a figure of the imagination and not an extension of objective knowledge into the inner workings of Reality itself (contra Hegel). “The archetype of a humanity well pleasing to God can be admitted only as a practical ideal, not as a reflective moment of the absolute itself.”40

Kant frankly admits that the origin of evil is inscrutable and that only the infusion of supernatural grace (figured by the Christ symbol) can free the bad will. While Kant insists on the importance of these two affirmations for liberating the will, he does not try to reconcile them to his earlier critical philosophy. By the same token, such confessionalist statements do not contradict the critical philosophy since they clearly fall outside the boundaries of critical reason. Ricoeur concludes that Kant’s adroit use of a variety of religious figures (Vorstellung) to interrogate the nature of human volition is the key to the success of his project. Whereas Hegel argues that Vorstellung in religion is inadequate to the concept of pure Spirit, Kant maintains that the more limited task of interpreting the rich imagery of religious faith has potential for enabling the practical realization of human freedom. Ricoeur argues that this is the burden that should be carried by all philosophy of religion: the explication of figures of hope as a response to the avowal of radical evil.

The essay on Rosenzweig and that on Levinas can also be read in association with each other. In the Rosenzweig essay, Ricoeur’s basic interest is

40. Ibid., 85.
in the meaning of the rhetorical figures that underpin Rosenzweig’s philosophy of Judaism in *The Star of Redemption*. For Ricoeur the book’s central figure is the six-pointed Star of David. This figure generates a wide range of significations: its upward triangle stands for God at its peak with the world and humanity at its lower angles, while its downward triangle connects the modalities of creation, revelation, and redemption—the central themes that form the structure of the book’s first and second parts. But the star is also a figure of the face, both the face of humanity and the face of God. (Here Ricoeur notes in French the affinity between *figure*, or form, and *visage*, or face.) Insofar as the “physiognomy” of the six-pointed star can be understood analogically in relation to a “face” with forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, and so on, and insofar as the face makes an absolute demand on one’s ethical obligations, Ricoeur regards the figure/face of the star in Rosenzweig as the master trope for understanding both the interhuman as well as the God-human relationship.

Ricoeur argues that the centrality of the figure of the star in Rosenzweig positions Rosenzweig’s project closer to Levinas than Hegel. Ricoeur reads the *Star* as an extended metaphor where *figuration* (rather than *speculation*, as in Hegel) is privileged as the primary medium for philosophical insight. “It might even be more fruitful to compare the tie between figure and speculation for Rosenzweig to the relation of *Vorstellung* (representation) and *Begriff* (concept) for Hegel. We might then see that the relation is something quite other than what Hegel meant. With Rosenzweig we would have a speculation that is metaphorical throughout, a metaphorics that is speculative throughout.”

In the register of a sustained “metaphorics,” Ricoeur highlights two concepts that tie together Rosenzweig’s and Levinas’s thought: the epiphany of the face and the criticism of totality. On the one hand, both thinkers maintain that the other’s face generates within the subject a compelling sense of responsibility for the other’s welfare; on the other, they criticize the penchant of Western philosophers for subordinating all experience to absolute reason. Ricoeur concludes by noting, however, that while Levinas appears successful at escaping the sirens of totalizing philosophy, it is less clear whether Rosenzweig, with his facility for system building as demonstrated by the architectonic elegance of the *Star*, has completely abandoned the all-encompassing idealism he purports to have disavowed.

In the final essay of this section, Ricoeur considers the notion of “testimony” in Levinas’s thought in relation to the themes of height and exteriority in Heidegger, Jean Nabert, and Levinas. He argues that a “reading together” of these three thinkers shows an increasing reliance on the dimensions of height and exteriority culminating in Levinas’s philosophy of the other. At first glance Heidegger seems to assign importance to these

41. Ricoeur, “The ‘Figure’ in Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*,” below, 97.
two elements. The subject is never coincident with itself and must rely on a voice “beyond itself” in order to be itself; but this is the voice of conscience within the subject and is not finally exterior to the subject. Likewise, Heidegger’s reference to the value of others exterior to oneself is ultimately subsumed by the notion of the uncanny and the pernicious effects of being in relation to the “they.” Ricoeur criticizes Heidegger’s philosophy as characterized by an “exteriority without otherness [that] corresponds to this height without transcendence.”

Nabert fares better than Heidegger in Ricoeur’s analysis because Nabert argues for a self-divested subject who testifies to the absolute beyond itself and who can recover its own dignity and identity only by means of this exterior testimony. Ricoeur then analyzes Levinas’s full turn to the transcendence and alterity of the other in relation to the subject. For Levinas, subjectivity consists in existing through the other and for the other. To take responsibility for the other, even hostage oneself to the other, is the vocation of true selfhood. In the end, however, Ricoeur returns to Nabert’s philosophy of consciousness as a needed counterpart to Levinas’s thoroughgoing stress on responsibility for the other. Ricoeur avers that self-identity is not merely a result of one’s response to the call of the other; it is also what must be presupposed for the call to be heard and understood in the first place.

Part Three

Even though Parts Three and Four announce two sometimes unrelated topics—exegesis and theology—both of these sections form a coherent whole in Ricoeur’s development of a biblically informed theology. I have divided the parts for heuristic purposes, but the interests of each part constitute the dual foci of a single ellipse. For Ricoeur the disciplines of biblical interpretation and theological reflection operate within the same gravitational space: the complementary and contrasting genres of Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Theology, first and foremost, is a hermeneutical exercise at work upon the multiple modes of discourse within the Bible. Closer to exegesis than philosophy, theology is a nonspeculative interpretation of the founding discourses of Jewish and Christian faith without the benefit of any rational foundation upon which to base such an enterprise. The temptation of theology has always been to ignore its rootedness in the originary—albeit provincial—languages of biblical religion in favor of a more philosophical orientation. As rational thought-about-God, theology would then be able to justify itself as an independent exercise in reason and argument and go beyond its provenance in the peculiar imagery and language of religious

faith. Ricoeur, however, rejects this homology between theology and philosophy and argues instead for the reinvigoration of theological discourse on the basis of biblical hermeneutics. Theology, then, is *biblical theology*—but not in the sense that that phrase is often understood with reference to neoorthodox thought, as we will see below.

Part 3 brings together Ricoeur’s various exegetical writings. The four essays that have been selected are examples of his theory of biblical hermeneutics as well as case studies of his actual readings of biblical texts. Though a philosopher, Ricoeur seeks to avoid theory-heavy methods of biblical reading in favor of a text-immanent approach that projects possibilities of meaning occasioned by the texts themselves. “The question is rather whether there is, before the philosophical-theological interpretation, an interpretation that would not be an interpretation *of* the text or an interpretation *about* the text, but an interpretation *in* the text and *through* the text.”\(^{43}\) This intrinsic approach is governed by sensitivity to the traditions of interpretation already at work within the texts under consideration. The Bible for Ricoeur is a multilayered mass of disparate literary traditions; a successful hermeneutic plumbs the depths of these textual strata and brings to light dimensions of sedimented meaning previously hidden and opaque. He alternately refers to this excavation process as a “depth semantics,”\(^{44}\) a “semiotics of texts,”\(^{45}\) or a “synchronic reading [that] complete[s] the diachronic approach of the historical-critical method.”\(^{46}\) Whatever the status of the recounted events in the Bible as historical occurrences, these events now enjoy a textual existence at some remove from their antecedent origins. Their meaning is now a product of their inscription within a network of texts that alternately support and displace one another in an intertextual whole. Whatever their original *Sitz-im-Leben*, it is now the mediation of these events through the *Sitz-im-Wort* of various literary genres that constitutes their present-day significance. Historical criticism can helpfully reconstruct the probable historical “occasions” that generated later literary traditions, but only a synchronic study of the interanimating conjunctions and dislocations between various modes of discourse can explain the complexities of meaning within the Bible.

In conversation with both structuralist (Vladimir Propp) and formalist (A.-J. Greimas) analysts, Ricoeur’s semiotic approach considers the codes and oppositions that govern the transformations at work in the biblical texts. In “On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1—2:4a,” he isolates the theme of *separation* as the literary convention that structures the opening creation hymn into a series of dynamic oppositions: order and chaos, night and

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44. Ibid.
day, plants and animals. This approach sets up a nature-centered rather than human-centered reading of the Genesis story. Such an interpretation clashes with the historical approach of the neoorthodox biblical theology movement (inspired by thinkers such as Karl Barth and Gerhard von Rad) that subordinated the creation account to the role of a prologue within the overall narrative space of the Hexateuch. Apropos to this *Heilsgeschichte* orientation, the creation of humankind is the crowning high point of the creation story. Ricoeur disagrees with the neoorthodox approach, however, and argues instead for a literary interpretation of the Priestly creation story that construes the story as an ecological text. Thus Genesis 1 is best read as a nonanthropocentric ordering of all life-forms into a cosmic biosphere that precedes and envelops the salvation-history account of the Yahwist redactors.

At stake in this recovery of the syntactical patterns that govern the song of creation in Genesis is the preservation of the integrity of nonnarrative sensibilities vis-à-vis the overall narrative shape of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. While narrative constitutes the “most visible framework” for biblical understanding, it is always balanced by its deep connections with other modes of articulation. In “Biblical Time” Ricoeur argues that the biblical message may appear to be moderated by an extended and coherent unilinearity; in fact, however, progressive time is consistently fractured by nonlinear modes of scriptural temporality. Indeed, the biblical time line of a sometimes facile covenantal history is continuously interrupted by the ethical demands of legal discourse, the radically open and eschatological character of prophetic discourse, the cyclical and immemorial nature of wisdom writings, and so forth. The same point is made in this section’s other essays. Ricoeur demonstrates in his reading of the Synoptic parables of the wicked husbandmen and the sower and the seed in “The Bible and the Imagination,” and in his hermeneutic of the Gospel of Mark in “Interpretive Narrative,” that the promise of a historical master story to explain all experience is a chimera. Both the parables and Mark’s Gospel function as cautionary tales against naive trust in the power of narrative emplotment to render intelligible the aporetic nature of experience. This collection of Ricoeur’s essays concerning the theory and practice of biblical hermeneutics reflects both stability and change in his exegetical work over the past twenty-five years. All these works are characterized by the use of literary analysis over and against the regnant forms of historical criticism practiced then and now. But the most recent piece, entitled “Interpretive Narrative,” reflects the progression in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics from structuralism (so characteristic of his Genesis exegesis) to poststructuralism (especially through his current use of the work of Frank Kermode and

47. Ibid., 179.
John Dominic Crossan). Now not only does narrative create meaning in recombinations with other modes of discourse, but, moreover, in its cross-pollinations with the counternarrative stress on secrecy and futility, it also subverts straight-ahead literary and theological coherence by obfuscating what it purports to elucidate. "Is it not the case that we must say that the narrative not so much elucidates things as obscures them in the sense that its manner of narratively interpreting the kerygma is to reinforce the enigmatic aspect of the events themselves?" \( ^{48} \) In a postmodern culture, the pathos and promise of a Ricoeurian depth semiotics are its ability to bring to light the darkness and opacity that shadow even our most prized sacred stories.

Part Four

The essays in this section bring together Ricoeur's theological writings with reference to his literary analysis of the Bible's disparate modes of discourse. The irony of this collection is that while Ricoeur is well known for his theological writings, he has always been uncomfortable with being labeled a theologian. The reason for this discomfort is his suspicion that theologians (as well as philosophers) often fall prey to the tendency to homogenize the Bible's semantic polyphony by way of articulating a body of speculative concepts divorced from the originary discourses of Jewish and Christian Scripture. Two of the essays in this section—"Naming God" and "Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties"—stress how attention to biblical genre diversity is necessary for a multifaceted understanding of the divine life. Again the focus falls on the confluence of narrative and nonnarrative discourses, but now with reference to an enriched understanding of God. Before God is defined in univocal terms as Being under the control of a particular metaphysical system, Ricoeur maintains that God is first "named" polyphonically in the medley of diverse biblical genres. "The naming of God, in the originary expressions of faith, is not simple but multiple. It is not a single tone, but polyphonic. The originary expressions of faith are complex forms of discourse as diverse as narratives, prophecies, laws, proverbs, prayers, hymns, liturgical formulas, and wisdom writings. As a whole, these forms of discourse name God. But they do so in various ways." \( ^{49} \) Reflection alongside, not away from, this polyphony should be the presupposition and telos of all theological work.

The use of discourse analysis sensitizes thought about God to the zones of indeterminacy and irruptions of radical discontinuity within the texts that first "name" God for the believing community. Unfortunately, how-

\( ^{48} \) Ricoeur, "Interpretive Narrative," below, 199.

\( ^{49} \) Ricoeur, "Naming God," below, 224.
ever, theology often proceeds as if the salvation-history paradigm it has created—that is, the enclosure of all reality within the creation and eschaton of biblical history—is exhaustive of the full meaning of the Scriptures. While the Bible can be read as a seamless exercise in narrative coherence, an extended “Christian pattern,” such an interpretation ignores the Bible's fête du sens (festival of meaning) by suppressing the disjunctions that contradict the seeming unity of the all-encompassing plot.50 “[T]his ‘Christian pattern’ tends to abolish the peripeties, dangers, failures, and horrors of history for the sake of a consoling overview provided by the providential schema of this grandiose narrative. Concordance finally conquers discordance.”51 Ricoeur’s point, as we saw in his papers in Part Three, is that there is more than narrative coherence at work in the biblical naming of God—or, better, that it is only as narrative is interanimated by its cross-fertilizations with other modes of discourse that it can effectively make meaning.

This recurrent emphasis on the interplay between narrative and non-narrative echoes a theme that appears almost as an aside at the conclusion of Ricoeur’s multivolume Time and Narrative. The book’s working thesis concerning the potential of narrative to humanize time is problematized by a final reflection on the temporality of wisdom discourse. The sapiential literature of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations challenges the totalizing impulses of narrative literatures that purport to emplot all experience on a time line with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Wisdom contends that life in media res is riddled with such brokenness and “vanity” that it can never be subsumed under the hegemony of the supreme plot—even the plot of the Deuteronomistic History. In the contest between narrative and wisdom, new possibilities of being-in-time are unleashed that question easy resolutions of the problem of existence according to the symmetry of the master story. We need stories in order to make sense of temporal existence, but stories unaided by the tonic of wisdom degenerate into simplifying life’s insoluble ambiguities. Wisdom is attuned to the fragility and suffering of existence in a way that narrative is not. “It is not for narrative to deplore the brevity of life, the conflict between love and death, the vastness of a universe that pays no attention to our lament.”52 Without wisdom, narrative inevitably drifts toward a triumphalism insensitive to the power of time to rewrite one’s personal plots—and even destroy the putative narrative coherence of one’s life.

The two essays on hope and evil in this section make a similar point.

52. Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, 3:273.
Both essays take their point of departure in the failure of Hegel’s dialectic to subsume negativity under the optimism of absolute knowledge. Anachronistically, Ricoeur highlights the value of Kant’s attempt to break open Hegel’s closed system by arguing for Kant’s extension of thought beyond the limits of what can be known with rational certitude. It is not possible to know with finality whether one’s hopes are ultimately illusory or in fact grounded in a final resolution of life’s aporias, but the wager of religious hope (without the benefit of final certainty) can nevertheless be satisfying for the one who suffers the vagaries of aporetic existence. Correspondingly, this tack spells new directions for the question of theodicy; Ricoeur proposes a practical response to the problem of evil, rather than a theoretical solution. While the “false clarity of an apparently rational explanation”\(^\text{53}\) for unmerited suffering and evil is the standard approach to theodicy, Ricoeur argues that only an affective or performative confrontation of evil is adequate to the problem. Returning again to the power of sapiential literature he argues that wisdom is the right source for a theodicy in the mode of feelings and catharsis. Thus a theology in a practical register—consisting of mourning, complaint against God, and the exercise of faith in spite of evil—is the best hope for the sufferer who has moved beyond the pseudosecurity of onto-theological optimism and speculation.

In “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation,” Ricoeur again takes up the question of selfhood that underpins the bulk of his philosophical writing. This essay is the companion piece to the unpublished paper entitled “The Self in the Mirror of Scripture,” which is not included here.\(^\text{54}\) Together these two pieces were part of Ricoeur’s Gifford Lectures of 1986 that formed the basis of *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur says that he has not included these essays in the larger volume because he wants to preserve the autonomy and integrity of two related, but distinctive, modes of discourse: theology and philosophy. Thus the “Summoned Subject” essay and its unpublished counterpart provide a revealing angle of vision into the religious import of the larger project of *Oneself as Another*.

The connection between *Oneself as Another* and the essay included here is most obvious in the final chapter of *Oneself as Another*, “What Ontology in View?” In this chapter Ricoeur identifies conscience as the place where selfhood is constituted: in the interior voice of obligation each person is called into responsibility for oneself and the other. Conscience is a formal feature of existence; it is the generic capacity to discriminate between competing values in one’s relations to others. In the “Summoned Subject” this

\(^{53}\) Ricoeur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” below, 254.

\(^{54}\) See also the related essay, “Pastoral Praxeology, Hermeneutics, and Identity,” below, which examines the problem of self-identity in the context of practical theology.
moral capacity is examined through the different registries of the prophetic vocation in the Scriptures. The prophet is the model of the “mandated subject” who works for the health of the community by responding to the call to withdraw from the community in order to be sent back to the same. Ricoeur continues that the power of conscience has other theological implications as well. Indeed, conscience is now valorized as the contact point between the word of God and human beings. “Conscience is thus the anthropological presupposition without which ‘justification by faith’ would remain an event marked by radical extrinsice. In this sense, conscience becomes the organ of the reception of the kerygma, in a perspective that remains profoundly Pauline.”

Without conscience, the voice that summons the self to its responsibilities falls on deaf ears. In Ricoeur’s earlier writings the imagination played the role of a sort of *praeparatio evangelica* for the reception of the divine word. While not denying this previous emphasis, the focus is now on the subject’s moral capacity to select which figures of the imagination best enable the subject’s care and concern for the other. The work of imagination and the testimony of conscience together empower the subject to appropriate the command to take responsibility for the other’s welfare.

The emphasis on the summoned self marks a return to—and extension beyond—Ricoeur’s formative anthropological concerns in his unfinished trilogy on the will, but the stress now falls on the specific language of conscience rather than on the structures of volition in general. Perhaps we could say that his Gifford Lectures now complete his earlier poetics of the will. Again as before, the human as moral agent is both *free* and *determined*: free to exercise the autonomy of conscience but delimited since the subject is able to do so only within the confines of the symbolic matrixes that dispose the subject prior to entering consciousness. The resumption of the dialectic between freedom and finitude, so critical to Ricoeur’s earlier trilogy, as well as the more recent analysis of conscience, reflects the lifelong impact of Levinas on Ricoeur’s thought. For Levinas authentic selfhood is constituted by the self’s response to its being summoned—indeed, determined—by the call of the other. “But responsibility for another comes from what is prior to my freedom…. It does not allow me to constitute myself as an *I think*, substantial like a stone, or, like a heart of stone, existing in and for oneself.”

While Ricoeur makes clear his disagreements with Levinas in “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony” and the final chapter of *Oneself as Another*, he agrees with Levinas that the recovery of

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55. Ricoeur, “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Narratives of the Prophetic Vocation,” below, 272, and “The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God,” below.

56. See, for example, Ricoeur, “Toward a Narrative Theology,” below.

the phenomenon of moral agency as care for another is the fundamental task in the journey toward selfhood. Without the assurance of an ultimate foundation (religious or otherwise) upon which to found oneself, the self, summoned by the divine entreaty mediated by conscience, wagers that fidelity to this entreaty will open out to a future of expansive possibilities for itself and others.

**Part Five**

The essays in this final section consist of sermons and writings in moral theology; they represent the practical extension of Ricoeur's religious thought into the areas of theological ethics, interreligious dialogue, and pastoral care. As with his other writings, these occasional pieces set out a countermetaphysical approach to religious thought and praxis grounded in the diversity of biblical discourses. Ricoeur argues that theological ethics must begin with the complicated—even contradictory—expressions of virtue and morality within a religious tradition's founding texts before it turns to a conceptual analysis of the meaning of these expressions. He criticizes analytic moral philosophers—from Gene Outka to John Rawls—for systematically "leveling off" the oddities and discontinuities within the Bible's ethical teachings in order to iterate coherent philosophical theories of the good. His point is that general theoretical approaches to ethics both (1) ignore biblical polysemy and (2) offer solutions to the aporetics of moral philosophy that are insensitive to the practical difficulties of crafting an ethical existence. As we saw in the previous sections, Ricoeur is consistently wary of overarching theological systems that operate independently from their base in the primary documents of religious faith because such systems are ultimately false to the fractured character of human experience.

Two of the essays collected here ("Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule" and "Love and Justice") and one of the sermons ("The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God") analyze the biblical aporia between the extravagant commandment of Jesus to love one's enemies and give to the other whatever is asked for, and the rule of reciprocal justice that seeks to balance the other's needs against the subject's own welfare. Understood oppositionally, the gospel command to love the enemy is extravagant, unilateral, asymmetric, and excessively other-directed, while the biblical ideal of justice is rule-governed, bilateral, reciprocal, and thoughtfully self-reflexive. Ricoeur, however, argues against allowing this polarity to harden into an absolute antinomy and suggests instead the need for an "unstable equilibrium" between the nonutilitarian demand to love at all

58. Ricoeur, "Love and Justice," below, 324.
costs and the practical efficacy of adjudicating competing interests in societies governed by the rule of law. This mediation allows for a mutual interpretation of each enterprise in the light of the other, so that the impossible command to practice pure altruism can be re-integrated, but never subsumed, into the reciprocal codes of social justice and penal law that order modern life.

The biblical teaching that forms the background of this dialectic between love and justice is that all human beings are codependent members of an originary and ongoing creation that is nurturing and benevolent. Drawing from the Reformed tradition the idea of a power over all greater than ourselves, Ricoeur maintains that the goodness of creation under divine governance teaches us to be good to one another. “[W]e set in the foremost place the sense of our radical dependence on a power that precedes us, envelops us, and supports us…. Each of us is not left face-to-face with another human being, as the principle of morality taken in isolation seems to imply. Rather nature is between us, around us—not just as something to exploit but as an object of solicitude, respect, and admiration. The sense of our radical dependence on a higher power thus may be reflected in a love for the creature.”

Ricoeur’s creation-centered approach to the tension between love and justice harks back to his earlier ecological exegesis of Gen. 1:1—2:4a. Creation precedes law, and practitioners of the law are reminded that the divine legislation is a gift like the creation itself. Understanding the gifted character of biblical obligation ensures that the performance of justice will not degenerate into calculative self-interest, on the one hand, and that the commandment to love the enemy will not slide into allowing oneself to become a victim of the other, on the other hand.

Two of the shorter pieces in this section, “Whoever Loses Their Life for My Sake Will Find It” and “The Memory of Suffering,” reprise the role of wisdom discourse to illuminate the nature of the human condition. The first essay uses a wisdom interpretation of the gospel paradox that losing one’s life is tantamount to finding one’s life. The paradox teaches humility and warns against the pride of false security, even the security of religious knowledge, as a foundation for discipleship. Ricoeur says the gospel paradox only makes sense as an invitation to give up one’s trust in God as the guarantor of absolute knowledge and instead trust in the weakness of the cross as the key to a meaningful existence.

The question of trust without security is a theme in the second essay as well. This paper was first delivered in Chicago to commemorate the Holocaust on Yom Ha-Shoah, 1989; it reads as a pastoral response to the wisdom theodicy adumbrated in “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology” and the discussion of victimage in chapter 9 of *Time and Nar-

Ricoeur suggests that retelling the stories of the victims of the Shoah is a moral duty that gives a voice to those who were denied their voices. This retelling should avoid, however, the temptation of an explanatory system that would try to make theological sense out of the death camps. While the Bible does offer a theodicy of retribution in which the victims, because of their faithlessness, are held responsible for the violence inflicted upon them, Ricoeur argues instead for a wisdom theodicy of lamentation and anger where the perennial cries of Why me? and How long? are seen as the most adequate responses to unmitigated evil. "Whereas the theory of retribution makes victims and murderers equally guilty, the lamentation reveals the murderers as murderers and victims as victims. Then we may remember the victims for what they are: namely, the bearers of a lamentation that no explanation is able to mitigate."^60

The link between punishment and sin in a retribution theodicy animates a monstrous logic that holds victims and victimizers together as responsible for the Shoah. As we saw in Part Four, Ricoeur offers the alternative of a theodicy of complaint, nourished by biblical wisdom, as the most promising response to events that crush the human spirit and defy final explanation.

The essays in this volume demonstrate the value of Ricoeur's wager on the power of the founding myths and discourses of Western culture to enable the task of existence. In particular, Ricoeur's religious writings suggest that a contrapuntal reading of Judaism's and Christianity's originary scriptural texts offers the best hope for attuning oneself to the different, sometimes irreconcilable, "worlds" one might inhabit in the journey toward selfhood. Nuanced readings of these texts enable one to become an apprentice to the various forms of identity-formation within the Bible that can empower the move from being a nomad without hope to a storyteller of one's own life. This journey to selfhood demands that one compose several autobiographical plots and counterplots, in conversation with different literary genres, in order to make sense of the origin and destiny of one's personal odyssey. While narrative discourse offers the reader the promise of a stable and seamless self emplotted by the Bible's master stories, non-narrative biblical discourse reminds one that the scripturally refigured self can never escape the aporias and discordances of daily existence. We are readers and writers of our own lives, subjects and authors of our own biographies, and our solace is in being able to weave, with freedom and imagination, our fragmented selves into the wider cloth of the biblical tapestry.

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60. Ricoeur, "The Memory of Suffering," below, 291.