

RICOEUR ON HEIDEGGER

FRANCIS F. SEEBURGER

The task of determining the relationship of Ricoeur's work to Heidegger's is facilitated by Ricoeur's own endeavors towards that goal. In his publications and lectures over the last ten years, Ricoeur has frequently attempted to articulate his own understanding of how this thought relates to Heidegger's. Especially in three works—"The Critique of Subjectivity and Cogito in the Philosophy of Heidegger,"¹ first published in 1968; "The Task of Hermeneutics,"² from 1973; and the conclusion to *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*,³ published in 1976—Ricoeur attends expressly to Heidegger, thereby filling a gap which may be discerned in his earlier works from *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* to *Freud and Philosophy*.

In this paper I will use a loose adaptation of one of Ricoeur's own techniques: the technique of alternative, but interrelated "readings" which Ricoeur develops and employs most effectively in his work on Freud. I will sketch three different ways in which Ricoeur's own remarks on Heidegger may be read. These three readings correspond to three different perspectives suggested by Ricoeur's work itself, and lead to three different assessments.

I. FIRST READING: RICOEUR AS SECONDARY SOURCE

The first, most obvious way to approach Ricoeur's writings on Heidegger is that which takes the understanding of Heidegger's thought to be the primary goal, and Ricoeur's accounts to be secondary sources which may be useful means. That such an approach is legitimate is shown clearly in Ricoeur's statements of his own intentions. In the essay on subjectivity and the *Cogito*, Ricoeur writes that he seeks "to understand the scope of the well-known critique of the subject-object relation which underlies [Heidegger's] denial of the priority of the *cogito*." Closely following Heidegger's discussions in

FRANCIS F. SEEBURGER is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Denver.

¹Originally published in English in *Heidegger and the Quest for Truth*, edited by Manfred S. Frings (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968). Reprinted under the title "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject," in Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 233-235.

²Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in *Philosophy Today*, vol. XVII, 1973, pp. 112-128.

³Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

Being and Time and "The Age of the World as View" in *Holzwege*, Ricoeur wants

. . . to show that this denial implies more than a mere rejection of a notion of the ego or of self . . . On the contrary, the kind of ontology developed by Heidegger gives ground to what I shall call a *hermeneutics of the "I am,"* which is a refutation of the *cogito* conceived of as a simple epistemological principle and at the same time is an indication of a foundation of being which is necessarily spoken of as grounding the *cogito*.⁴

Then, in the later essay on "The Task of Hermeneutics," which is "intended to describe the state of the problem of hermeneutical philosophy as I perceive it and as I receive it,"⁵ Ricoeur attempts to relate Heidegger's "hermeneutics of the 'I am'" to the general hermeneutical tradition.

The short passages just cited already suggest the central features of Ricoeur's Heidegger-interpretation. There are two major moments of the interpretation: First, Ricoeur endeavors to fix the meaning of the Heideggerian text in the terms of that text itself; only then does he, second, assess the significance or potential impact of Heidegger's work for "hermeneutical philosophy" in general.⁶ For Ricoeur, the heart of Heidegger's thought is found, as already indicated, in the critique of subjectivity—a critique which dislodges the *cogito* and re-centers ontology on a foundation which is prior to, and grounds, the *cogito* itself. This Heideggerian foundation, the bedrock of "fundamental ontology," is precisely the hermeneutically circular implication between *Sein and Dasein* which Heidegger pursues in *Being and Time*.

In Ricoeur's interpretation it is this same kind of circular implication which governs, not only *Being and Time*, but also all of Heidegger's later works, giving remarkable unity to the entire *opus*. Appearances to the contrary are to be explained by the observation that in *Being and Time* Heidegger is moving "on the level of an Analytic of Dasein," while in his later philosophy he moves "on the level of the philosophy of language." For Ricoeur, ". . . the rise of Dasein as self and the rise of language as speech or discourse are *one and the same problem*,"⁷ only at two different levels.

⁴Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 223. (Ricoeur's italics)

⁵Ricoeur, *Philosophy Today*, p. 112.

⁶Thus, intentionally or not, Ricoeur abides by the methodological principle, canonized by Betti in the contemporary literature, whereby questions of "meaning" (*Sinn*) are to be kept sharply distinguished from questions of "significance" (*Bedeutung*). (This hermeneutical distinction, of course, is not to be confused with Frege's logical one.) For the principle, see e.g., Emilio Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr. 1962).

⁷Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 224. (Ricoeur's italics.)

Ricoeur's own presentation of the internal interpretation of Heidegger is so lucid and concise that further paraphrase would be superfluous here. Instead, the sketch already given provides sufficient background for turning to a brief consideration of Ricoeur's assessment of Heidegger's significance for "hermeneutical philosophy." According to Ricoeur, that significance is two-fold. First, by dislocating the *cogito* in favor of a foundation in the circular implication between Dasein and being, Heidegger accomplishes a general shift of hermeneutics from the "epistemological" focus of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, to a broader and more fundamental "ontological" focus. In "The Task of Hermeneutics," Ricoeur entitles the sections in which he explores the development of the tradition of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher through Dilthey, "From Regional Hermeneutics to General Hermeneutics." In extension and contrast, his title for the movement which goes from Heidegger to Gadamer is "From Epistemology to Ontology." With Heidegger, a new question becomes central for hermeneutics: "Instead of asking 'how do we know?', the question will be 'what is the mode of being of that being who only exists through understanding?'"⁸

Second, Heidegger's significance is also that "This first inversion [epistemology to ontology] calls for a second," which liberates the problem of "interpretation" and "understanding" from the heretofore too-confining traditional context of "the problem of other minds."⁹ Ricoeur points out how important it is that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, does not directly address the question of understanding in Chapter IV of Division One, the chapter devoted to the exposition of the "who" of Being-in-the-world as being-with (*Mitsein*), being-one's self, and the "they." Rather, the question of understanding is thematically raised in the famous third chapter "The Worldhood of the World."¹⁰ Understanding and interpretation necessarily belong to being-in-the world as such and in all its modes, not merely the modes of being with others. "In making understanding 'worldly,'" as Ricoeur writes, "Heidegger depsychologizes it"¹¹; and the impact of this second "inversion" is that it provides the ground for the extension of the hermeneutic problem to new dimensions, until, with Gadamer, it can even lay claim to a "universal" scope.

Such, in outline, is Ricoeur's interpretation of Heidegger. How is it to be judged? What are the prospects opened by this "first read-

⁸Ricoeur, *Philosophy Today*, p. 120.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

¹¹Ricoeur, *Philosophy Today*, p. 122.

ing?" More precisely, since the goal presupposed in such a reading is to gain insight into Heidegger through Ricoeur, what does Ricoeur's interpretation contribute to the understanding of Heidegger? In short, the answer is that Ricoeur's interpretation is both one of the earliest, and one of the most lucid and forceful, attempts directed towards the English-speaking philosophical community to counter-act two prevalent misunderstandings of Heidegger's work. The first, less stubborn misconception is that Heidegger belongs to the camp of the "existentialists"—a misconception fostered (sometimes, no doubt, unintentionally) by such early efforts to introduce Heidegger to America as those of William Barrett and John Wild. Ricoeur himself points to the importance of his work in combatting these "so-called existentialist interpretations of Heidegger that have especially flourished in the Anglo-Saxon world." Against such interpretations, Ricoeur writes:

They have taken the analyses of care, anxiety, being-toward-death in the sense of a refined existential psychology. They do not notice that these analyses belong to a meditation on the "worldhood of the world" and that they essentially are aimed at destroying the claim of a knowing subject to be the measure of objectivity.¹²

The second misconception concerns Heidegger's famous "*Kehre*," the "turn" from *Being and Time* to the later works. Against the tendency of interpretation which achieves its most famous radical expression in Löwith's treatment of the *Kehre* as a complete *Umkehr* (a reversal, an about-face, in Heidegger's entire enterprise)¹³ and takes a milder form in Richardson's distinction between "Heidegger I" and "Heidegger II,"¹⁴ Ricoeur, as seen above, recognizes that there is only one Heidegger, whose essential insight and essential problem have remained "one and the same."

Regardless of what the subsequent readings may disclose, this "first reading" shows that Ricoeur has made an important contribution to the general understanding of Heidegger, at least within "the Anglo-Saxon world." This contribution provides the basis for both the second and third readings.

II. SECOND READING: RICOEUR AS SYMPATHETIC CRITIC

It is so clear that his interpretation of Heidegger is strongly sympathetic, that Ricoeur himself, in "The Task of Hermeneutics," after

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³Karl Löwith, *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960).

¹⁴William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

giving an account of Heidegger's position, formulates an obvious question. "At this point one will no doubt ask: Why do we not stop here and simply proclaim ourselves Heideggerian?"¹⁵ The answer to this question will make it possible to isolate Ricoeur, the critic of Heidegger, from Ricoeur, the Heideggerian exegete.

Ricoeur's major reservation is that the ontologizing and universalizing of general hermeneutics into a Heideggerian "fundamental" hermeneutics does not, according to him, overcome the Diltheyan "aporia" between "understanding" (*Verstehen*) and "explanation" (*Erklären*). Rather, in Heidegger this aporia is even strengthened and, from being a dichotomy within epistemology, becomes a divorce between epistemology and ontology in general. The step back from the *cogito*, subjectivity, and epistemology into the question of being and the circle of *Sein* and *Dasein* does not solve the traditional epistemological problems; it dissolves them. The result is that philosophy isolates itself from the sciences. The dialogue between philosophy and the human sciences which was decisive for Dilthey is broken, and philosophy is "left with only itself."

More specifically, the difficulty which Ricoeur discerns in Heidegger is a structural incapacity, within a fundamental hermeneutics, to negotiate the movement of return from an ontological to a *critical perspective*. Heidegger has taught us that there is no understanding without "presuppositions," that any interpretation is grounded in a structure of anticipation of meaning, a "fore-structure" examined in *Being and Time*. Furthermore, Heidegger himself, Ricoeur notes, poses in principle "the distinction between anticipation according to the things themselves and an anticipation which only comes from fancies and popular conceptions." "But," Ricoeur goes on to ask, "how can Heidegger go any further when he immediately declares that 'the ontological presuppositions of historiological knowledge transcend in principle the idea of rigor held in the most exact sciences,' and he then avoids the question of the rigor proper to the historical sciences themselves?"¹⁶

In short Ricoeur's objection is that Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics leaves no room for the development of questions of method *vis-a-vis* the human sciences. From Heideggerian ontology no *methodology* can be derived. Locked in his isolation, Heidegger can have nothing to say to the sciences. From Ricoeur's perspective, such a situation is dangerous and detrimental both to the human sciences and to philosophy. Accordingly, he sees it as the task of contemporary

¹⁵Ricoeur, *Philosophy Today*, p. 124.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 125.

hermeneutics to overcome this situation and reestablish concrete dialogue and debate between the two fields.

Ricoeur's own work towards this goal achieves its most systematic expression to date in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, where Ricoeur attempts to integrate three heretofore independent currents within twentieth century thought: the development of linguistics from Saussure through structuralism to contemporary work such as Chomsky's; the continuation, primarily by Betti and Hirsch, of the Schleiermacher-Dilthey tradition of hermeneutics; and the "fundamental hermeneutics" of Heidegger and, more recently, Gadamer. It is no accident that Ricoeur does not directly address the last-named development (Heidegger) until the conclusion to the work. Ricoeur's position is that the depsychologized, universalized, and "worldly" dimensions of the hermeneutical field cannot be revealed and scrutinized through any sudden step back, any leap or *Satz* into the abyss of being, but only at the end of a long preparation. Only after the general structures of language in both discourse and the written text have been secured, and only after an appropriate methodological insight has been gained by overcoming the aporia between explanation and understanding, can hermeneutics as the "appropriation" of a "world" be guarded against "fancies and popular conceptions." However, once this has been done, Ricoeur embraces the implications of Heidegger's fundamental hermeneutics, and praises the "universal power of world disclosure"¹⁷ which he finds to be the ultimate gift of the text.

To assess the Ricoeur of this "second reading" one must first go back and ask what goal has been silently presupposed throughout the reading; or, to put the same question from a different perspective, what is the goal which the Ricoeur of the second reading himself presupposes in his remarks on Heidegger? Ricoeur's criticism shows clearly that the goal is nothing less than a general rigorous science of interpretation which will include within its scope not only the exegetical disciplines (e.g., literary and scriptural criticism), but also the whole of the "human sciences." Ricoeur has reservations about Heidegger precisely to the extent that the latter's work does not clearly enough progress towards this goal, but even threatens to subvert the entire enterprise by isolating philosophy from science.

Ricoeur's criticism is grounded on a solid, sympathetic interpretation of Heidegger (my "first reading") and is basically unassailable. That is, insofar as the goal of "hermeneutical philosophy" is the sort

¹⁷Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 95.

of dialogal, dialectical, philosophical reintegration, transformation, and extension which Ricoeur has sketched in *Interpretation Theory*, to that extent only a reconstituted, de-“romanticized” Heidegger can have anything (which may, of course, be a great deal) significant to contribute. The question remains, however: how far is Ricoeur’s goal the same as Heidegger’s, and how far, accordingly, do Ricoeur’s objections go towards the heart of Heidegger’s work? The final reading will sketch the answer to that question.

III. THIRD READING: DISTANCE-IN-NEARNESS

The first two readings have looked at Heidegger from Ricoeur’s perspective. This third reading is an attempt to look at Ricoeur from one perspective opened by Heidegger: the perspective of the possibility of post-philosophical (i.e., for Heidegger, post-metaphysical) thought. The most striking alteration which this change in perspective introduces is that now it is Ricoeur, rather than Heidegger, who can be seen to remain on this side of the domain of “critical” questions.

For Ricoeur a “critical” question is one which moves within the area of *method* as the technique for adjudicating between competing claims by establishing evidence and deciding in terms of the ideal distinction between the “correct” and “incorrect.” Thus, to give the most important example, Ricoeur replaces Dilthey’s *dichotomy* of understanding and explanation with a *dialectic* between the two; and, in *Interpretation Theory* he proposes (borrowing approvingly from Hirsch) “the balance between the genius of guessing and the scientific character of validation” as “a modern presentation” of this dialectic. He is concerned to show that, while the procedure of “validation” of a guess is not identical to “empirical verification” of natural-scientific hypotheses, it is nevertheless just as legitimately “scientific.”

As concerns the procedure for validation by which we test our guesses, I agree with E. D. Hirsch that they are closer to a logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification. To show that an interpretation is more probable in the light of what we know is something other than showing that a conclusion is true. So in the relevant sense, validation is not verification. It is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedure used in legal interpretation, a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability. It follows from this understanding of validation that we may give an acceptable sense to the opposition between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* without conceding anything to the alleged Romanticist dogma of the in-

effability of the individual. The method of converging indices, which characterizes the logic of subjective probability, provides a firm basis for a science of the individual, which may rightly be called a science. And since a text is a quasi-individual, the validation of an interpretation applied to it may be said to give a scientific knowledge of the text.¹⁸

Only within the domain of science and method can Ricoeur find room for "critical" questions, and he is suspicious of whatever has no place within that domain. He is, therefore, properly suspicious of Heidegger's thought, where all respect may be given to the "way," but where there is no "method," and where "nothing can be proved, but many things shown."¹⁹

Heidegger does assiduously avoid the fundamental "critical" questions to which Ricoeur addresses much of his work. He who would have either insight into the methodology of the human sciences, or a principled critique of that methodology, should not look to Heidegger. On the other hand, what Heidegger's work does do, is to open a dimension between science and philosophy which is "critical" in a new sense: That work provides an insight into a critical constellation of the sciences, modern technology, and thought. Viewed from this perspective, if Heidegger "avoids the question of the rigor proper to the historical sciences themselves," it is because he would call the entirety of those sciences and their rigor into question—not in the name of an alternative science with an alternative method, but in order to reveal how questionable is the status of these sciences in relation to the needs of the present.

It is in this sense, and not in that which is at issue for Ricoeur, that Heidegger's thought is critical, while Ricoeur's is not. From the perspective opened by Heidegger, Ricoeur's work remains part of the critical situation, and therefore cannot provide understanding of what has come to pass with the emergence of modern science in the service of the spirit of technology. For example, within the horizon of Ricoeur's work, questions of the proper scientific approach to the interpretation of the text arise and seek resolution, but the question of whether such an approach is the most fundamental, let alone the only one, remains unasked.

Ricoeur mediates between science, on the one hand, and the wealth of oneiric, artistic, and religious symbolism, on the other. He thereby presupposes that the relationship between the two is *dialectical* in nature. Heidegger, however, who repeatedly insists that

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁹Heidegger, "Vorwort" to *Identität und Differenz*; Pfulligen, Günther Neske, 1957.

science does not *think*, sees the relationship as a critical one—a battle between what science represents and what finds voice in art (above all, poetry). Finally, Ricoeur is closer to Kant, Hegel, and German Idealism in general than he is to Heidegger; and if (in accordance with one of Heidegger's favorite lines from Hölderlin) poet and thinker "dwell near to one another on mountains most distant," then one would have to say that Ricoeur and Heidegger might share the same mountain, but they dwell ranges apart.

CONCLUSION

The three "readings" of Ricoeur on Heidegger are not mutually exclusive. It is not necessary to choose between them; all three should be retained. By the first reading, Ricoeur makes an important contribution to the assimilation of Heidegger by Anglo-American philosophy. By the second reading, he makes both an important positive, and an important negative contribution to scientific hermeneutics defined as "the theory of the operation of the understanding in its relations to the interpretation of texts."²⁰ Positively his own work contributes to building such a theory. Negatively, in his criticism of Heidegger (and Gadamer) he guards against the wild-goose chase of seeking such a theory in "fundamental hermeneutics." Finally, by the third reading, the distance between Ricoeur and Heidegger allows clearer insight, not only into the works of each, but beyond that, into the "things themselves," or, to use a Heideggerian locution, "what *is* today."

²⁰Ricoeur offers this as a "working-definition" of hermeneutics in *Philosophy Today*, p. 112.

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