THE PHILOSOPHY OF PAUL RICOEUR: METHOD AND APPLICATION; METAPHOR AND SYMBOL

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Paul Ricoeur has set before himself an enormous task which is partially completed and which he calls "The Philosophy of the Will."[1] The first division, Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary, already published, is devoted ". . . to the 'eidetics' of the will."[2] The second division, called Finitude and Guilt, is concerned with ". . . the 'empirics' of the will."[3] Two books constitute this second part, Fallible Man and The Symbolism of Evil. Each of the above published works is leading to the projected third division, which is to be a ". . . 'poetics' of the will."[4] The present study will begin at the juncture between the published and projected works of Ricoeur's project. However, a short consideration of Ricoeur's methodological procedure seems in order as a way into the specific problem of the relation of metaphor and symbol in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur.

Since Ricoeur is ultimately concerned with the construction of a philosophical anthropology, he turns to symbols and myths as a guide for his investigations. The very nature of their relationship demands some method of interpretation. Ricoeur has at his disposal the descriptive and eidetic phenomenology of Edmund Husserl on the one hand and the lessons of French and German existentialism on the other, but as David Rassmussen points out both are methodologically necessary.

The debate among phenomenologists involves the relation of the eidetic (Husserl) to the existential signification (Sartre, Heidegger). Perhaps there is no better testimony to Ricoeur's desire to bridge the various alternatives within the phenomenological movement, incorporating its best insights into his own thought, than his methodological movement from eidetic to existential description. One may conclude that neither eidetic nor existential description is adequate for a full global philosophical anthropology.

Both are necessary for a full description.[5]

Thus Ricoeur finds himself left with the option of a hermeneutic phenomenology, which incorporates both eidetic and existential description and is especially suited to the problem of the interpretation of symbols. As Ricoeur himself says,

The task of hermeneutic phenomenology is precisely to recognize the universal latent significance made manifest through the overt meanings of myth and symbol. Thus a hermeneutics must combine the attitude of trust with an attitude of suspicion, a willingness to listen to what is revealed

through the symbol and a suspicion which would protect it from being misled by its overt meanings.[6]

Paul Ricoeur has put his own personal stamp on the hermeneutic method. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics provides a means by which meaning may be recovered. Ricoeur defines hermeneutics as ". . . the theory of rules that preside over an exegesis—that is, over the interpretation of a particular text, or of a group of signs that may be viewed as a text."[7] Since Ricoeur's project boils down to the interpretation of symbols and myths and their relationship, Richard Palmer maintains that "Hermeneutics is the system by which the deeper significance is revealed beneath the manifest content."[8] Ricoeur's attempt to use the notion of hermeneutics as a means to discover the hidden meaning of symbols defines the state of the hermeneutical art. Palmer also insists on the following:

> Ricoeur attempts to encompass both the rationality of doubt and the faith of recollective interpretation in a reflective philosophy that does not retreat into abstractions or degenerate into the simple exercise of doubt, a philosophy that takes up the hermeneutical challenge in myths and symbols and reflectively thematizes the reality behind language, symbol and myth.[9]

The above quotation indicates the general schema of Ricoeur's approach to the problem of the interpretation of myths and symbols as they are found in various texts. But the application of the method to particular problems presents new difficulties.

Ricoeur utilizes the same hermeneutic strategy repeatedly as he encounters the numerous problems that develop in his total project. This strategy naturally involves the notion of the hermeneutic circle. David Rassmussen describes his own use of the hermeneutic circle in the following manner, "It begins with a problematic, it incorporates an analysis, and finally returns to that problematic by attempting to construct a solution to it."[10] As will be shown, Ricoeur utilizes the same notion of the hermeneutic circle that Rassmussen does. However, an obvious objection that one could offer to such a method is that it cannot be a legitimate form of argumentation if it ends where it begins. One major response to such an objection is that the circle should not be vicious. "Vicious" is understood to mean that no insight is gained in the circular travels from beginning, to the end, and back again. Palmer reinforces this contention by saying,

Understanding is basically a referential operation; we understand something by comparing it to something we already know. What we understand forms itself into systematic unities, or circles made up of parts. The circle as a whole defines the individual part, and the parts together form the circle.[11]

If one approaches the hermeneutical circle from a strictly logical standpoint, it soon becomes evident that it rests on a logical fallacy. To solve this problem, it must be finally asserted, if not proven, that ". . . logic cannot fully account for the workings of understanding."[12] It is precisely from such a posture that Ricoeur finds his point of departure. But note that Ricoeur's hermeneutic strategy enables him to go beyond the limits imposed on understanding by traditional logic. One might refer to such articles as "Religion, Atheism, and Faith,"[13] wherein Ricoeur is able to find hope in what most would consider to be pure negation. Ricoeur says,

> If the title "The Religious Meaning of Atheism" is not nonsensical, it implies that atheism is not limited in meaning to the mere negation and destruction of religion, but that, rather, it opens up the horizon for something else, for a type of faith that might be called, in a way that we shall further elucidate a postreligious faith or a faith for a postreligious age.[14]

Here Ricoeur verges on the absolute limits of hermeneutic investigation. The problematic is religion in the face of atheism; Ricoeur analyzes both religion and atheism and returns to the problematic by constructing a solution in terms of a postreligious faith.

Without evaluating the success of his attempt, the above example at least indicates the extent of the range of problems that Ricoeur is able to deal with in applying his own particular brand of hermeneutics. Whether the method actually has the power to encompass the range that Ricoeur would have it cover is, of course, another matter that is not of present concern. Nonetheless, even if a degree of methodological doubt does emerge, it can be overlooked if the method could be reasonably applied to issues that are not quite on the fringes of the boundary between philosophy and speculation. When Ricoeur considers issues such as metaphor, symbol, and their various relations, he seems to be on firmer ground in the application of his hermeneutic methodology simply because he is, superficially speaking, on more familiar philosophical turf. Whether he is in fact on firmer ground will be considered if not determined in what follows.

It might seem curious that even though Ricoeur has dealt with the symbol repeatedly in such works as The Symbolism of Evil and Freud and Philosophy he takes up the problem of the symbol again in the preliminary stages of the third division of his project. What is Ricoeur's motivation in re-examining the symbol? First he is examining the symbol, not in relation to myth as in the previous divisions, but in relation specifically to the metaphor. Ricoeur gives additional justification for his return to the problem of symbolism in the following passage:

> In my earlier writings, especially The Symbolism of Evil and Freud and Philosophy, I directly defined hermeneutics by an object which seemed to be both as broad and as precise as possible, I mean the symbol. As regards the symbol, I defined it in turn by its semantic structure of having a double-meaning. Today I am less certain that one can attack the problem so directly without having taken linguistics into account.

Within the symbol, it now seems to me, there is some thing non-semantic as well as something semantic . . .

> if the theory of metaphor can serve as a preparatory analysis leading up to the theory of the symbol, in return the theory of the symbol will allow us to extend our theory of signification by allowing us to include within it, not only verbal double-meaning but non-verbal double-meaning as well.[15]

And in this passage, Ricoeur has once again set up his hermeneutic strategy. He has a problematic, the fact that he now believes that symbols may have a non-semantic signification. In order to indicate the boundary of semantic and non-semantic signification, Ricoeur introduces the metaphor as that ". . . which is a purely semantic structure."[16] Metaphor is described as a structure of double-meaning, an approach which Ricoeur previously applied to the symbol. With this semantic guide, Ricoeur is now able to analyze the symbol in relation to the metaphor in order to determine if the symbol contains any non-semantical significance. In this way, he will return to the problematic with a solution encountered along the way of the hermeneutic circle. In order to determine the success of such an attempt, it is now appropriate to follow out Ricoeur's line of thought to its conclusion.

After leaving the problematic, Ricoeur turns first to the theory of the metaphor. Following Monroe Beardsley, Ricoeur sees the metaphor as comparable to a literary text. In both there are literal meanings as well as figurative meanings and the interplay between the two characterize metaphor and literary works. Ricoeurs problematic demands that he discover whether this interplay in the metaphor is intrinsic or extrinsic. If it is intrinsic, then the vicissitudes of the reader, which are extrinsic matters, need not be considered in a semantical definition of literature. An intrinsic and semantic definition of literature would involve ". . . the productive and positive use of ambiguity."[17] The whole of the interplay of figurative and literal meanings that is found in literary works is seen in miniature in the metaphor. This interplay, however, is found in the very structure of the metaphor and the literary work and is therefore an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic matter.

To complete his analysis of the metaphor, Ricoeur turns to the history of the metaphor. From a historical point of view the metaphor has been understood in a different light than that in which Ricoeur presently see it. But he, nonetheless, examines the older views of metaphor to indicate what revisions must take place for the metaphor to be more accurately described. Ricoeur schematizes the features of the metaphor that have remained constant in the history of rhetoric in the following manner:

> (1) Metaphor is a trope, a figure of discourse that concerns denomination.
>
> (2) It represents the extension of the meaning of a name through deviation from the literal meaning of words.
>
> (3) The reason for this deviation is resemblance.
>
> (4) The function of resemblance is to ground the substitution of the figurative meaning of a word in place of the literal meaning, which could have been used in the same place.
>
> (5) Hence the substituted signification does not represent any semantic innovation. We can translate a metaphor, i.e., replace the literal meaning for which the figurative word is a substitute. In effect substitution plus restitution equals zero.
>
> (6) Since it does not represent a semantic innovation, a metaphor does not furnish any new information about reality. This is why is can be counted as one of the emotive functions of discourse.[18]

In order to make a case for his understanding of the metaphor Ricoeur finds it necessary to reject the above constants for various reasons. Thus in order to place metaphor within the domain of semantics, he finds it necessary to reject (1) because he maintains that the metaphor is not concentrated in a figure of speech. It is rather something that finds its significance in the context of the whole of the sentence or utterance. In other words, a metaphor always involves at least two terms and between these two terms there exists a certain tension that is essential if an utterance is to be called a metaphor. The rejection of (1) leads to a second thesis. The tension found in a metaphor is more than a tension between terms, it is, in fact, a tension between two interpretations of the utterance as a whole. As Ricoeur says, "The metaphorical interpretation presupposes a literal interpretation which self-destructs in a significant contradiction."[19] The tension created by the juxtaposition of terms within an utterance make possible meaningful interpretations which are not literal interpretations.

Ricoeur also asserts that it is necessary to revise the third of the six propositions of rhetoric. He does not want to abandon resemblance, but, rather, he wants to clarify certain misconceptions concerning resemblance. It is not that the terms within a metaphorical utterance have resemblance. Rather it is that they resemble one another in some novel way. As Ricoeur notes, "When Shakespeare speaks of time as a beggar, he teaches us to see time as . . ., to see time like a beggar."[20] Thus, the creative aspect of metaphor is that a metaphor brings together terms that would not have been thought to have any resemblance, but, in fact, do in their metaphorical juxtaposition.

Again, metaphor cannot be a simple matter of substitution. Classical rhetoric considered metaphor to be a matter of substitution because it dealt only with dead metaphors; metaphors whose tension had been relaxed. A metaphor dies when the inventiveness and creative spontaneity of the utterance slackens through use. An example of a dead metaphor would be "the ship of state." This metaphor, like all dead metaphors, becomes a part of the lexicon of the terms involved and thereby contributes to the growth of the number of meanings that these terms acquire through time and use. However, as long as the tension remains, it is a live metaphor and as such it cannot be simply replaced by substitution; that can only happen to dead metaphors.

Ricoeur offers two conclusions concerning metaphor and these conclusions in turn revise propositions (5) and (6) of the classical rhetoricians. First, metaphors cannot be translated ". . . because they create their meaning."[21] They may, of course, be paraphrased, but the paraphrase cannot exhaust the meaning expressed by the tension of the metaphor. Second, a metaphor is not simply ornamental; it finally brings forth new information concerning reality. Thus Ricoeur finishes his analysis of the first pole of opposition along with hermeneutic circle. But now he moves to the pole opposite the metaphor, namely the symbol.

Ricoeur's transition to an analysis of the symbol is not a leap but is rather a gentle passage. He justifies his strategy of beginning with the metaphor and then moving to the symbol in the following:

> The advantage of taking up the problem of double meaning in terms of metaphors rather than symbols is twofold. First, metaphor has been the object of long and detailed study by rhetoricians; second, the renewal of this investigation by semantics, which takes up the structural problems left unresolved by rhetoric, is limited to those linguistic factors that give a homogeneous linguistic constitution to the phenomenon in question.[22]

Thus Ricoeur shows why metaphor is fairly easy to consider as compared to the more difficult problem of symbols, which cover the broadest range of human endeavors including the symbolism occuring in such diverse areas as psychoanalysis, poetics, and the history of religions. Because of this range any direct access to their double-meaning, structure is difficult to discover. Also, there is a second difficulty with symbols that one does not encounter in an analysis of metaphor. Whereas metaphor is found only in the discourse of a linguistic universe. Ricoeur maintains that symbols add another universe of discourse, that of a non-linguistic order. That is to say, the linguistic order to symbols always points beyond itself to a non-linguistic order. For example, ". . . psychoanalysis links its symbols to hidden psychic conflicts."[23] Because of the non-linguistic aspect of symbols, Ricoeur is led ". . . to clarify them in the light of the theory of metaphor,"[24] according to the following methodological strategy:

> It is first possible to identify the semantic kernel characteristic of every symbol, . . . on the basis of the structure of meaning operative in metaphorical utterances. Second, the metaphorical functioning of language will allow us to isolate the non-linguistic stratum of symbols . . . through a method of contrast. Finally, in return, this new understanding of symbols will give rise to further developments in the theory of metaphor, which would otherwise remain concealed.

Once again, Ricoeur's hermeneutic procedure is laid out for the reader.

Ricoeur then demonstrates the relation of the metaphor and the symbol which occurs at the linguistic level of the symbol. As has been previously shown, the metaphor is creative in such a way that it exhibits a "surplus of meaning." The surplus is derived from the tension in the metaphor itself. The same is true for the symbol as well. The "surplus of meaning" of the symbol is found in the secondary signification that is derived from the literal interpretation which results in a symbolic interpretation. This secondary signification is what distinguishes the symbol from allegories. The conceptual structure of the allegory can be eliminated once it has been understood, but the symbol is not a symbol unless it retains its literal as well as conceptual significations; in other words, its surplus of meaning.

The symbol is again related to metaphor through a consideration of resemblances. One will remember that the metaphor succeeds in bringing together an unlikely pair into a tense but solid union, that is if it is a successful metaphor. The same may be said of symbols, but it is a matter ". . . of assimilation rather than apprehension: the symbol assimilates rather than apprehends a resemblance."[26] Because of this difference, the boundaries between the various resemblances are clouded. But it is this very factor that makes symbols so challenging as an object for interpretation. Thus, in

relating the metaphor to the symbol, Ricoeur has indicated the linguistic order of the symbol. The boundary line which indicates the nonsemantic order of the symbol is thereby staked out. It is this territory that Ricoeur next explores.

"The non-semantic moment of a symbol" is perhaps best described as that toward which the semantic moment is directed. Again the example of psychoanalysis points to something which is hidden but is finally revealed, if at all, through the symbol. Ricoeur has said elsewhere concerning religious symbols that

> The fullness (of religious symbols) consists in the fact that the second meaning somehow dwells in the first meaning . . . symbols are bound to and bound by. On the one hand, the sacred is bound to its primary, literal, sensible meanings; this is what constitutes the opacity of symbols. On the other hand, the literal meaning is bound by the symbolic meaning that resides in it; this is what I have called the revealing power of symbols, which gives them their force in spite of their opacity.[27]

It seems strange to assert that the poetic language of the symbol is bound. In the first place, poetic language is free. It is free from the constraints of ordinary usage, and "In an extreme form we might even say that the poetic project is one of destroying the world as we ordinarily take it for granted, just as Husserl made the destruction of our world the basis of the phenomenological reduction."[28] But, on the other hand, poetic language is bound by the new world of its creation. So there is a balance, in so far as the poet is freed by the destruction of the ordinary world he is bound by the world that he creates.

There is even a greater bondage in religious symbols. They find their expression in the great religious myths and are bound to the very order of the natural world and the sacred cosmos. But this relation is surely nonsemantic and is pointed to by such symbols as the cross. This bondage has its roots in the pre-reflective and, if it is ever spoken of, this bondage must be in symbolic terms as it speaks ". . . of something other than speech even if it implies the power of speaking."[29] This aspect of the symbol, its rootedness in the structure of the sacred cosmos, describes precisely the difference between the metaphor and the symbol. Ricoeur says, "Metaphor occurs in the already purified universe of the logos, while the symbol hesitates on the dividing line between bios and logos. It testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life. It is born where force and form collide."[30] Thus, Ricoeur, to this point, has made a path from metaphor to symbol as linguistic and non-linguistic. But in order to complete the hermeneutic circle he must find his way back to the metaphor. In order to facilitate this return Ricoeur introduces a new problematic. He reviews the life of a metaphor and follows its progress from an innovative event, to a triviality and finally, to its death. On the other side, the symbol seems to

remain forever alive. Of course, it goes through changes, but it does not die. But this assertion seems a contradiction since ". . . if we were to hold fast to our criteria for a metaphor, symbols must be dead metaphors. If not, what makes the difference?"[31] Well, it appears that metaphors have a certain functionality that bridges the gap of temporality between the metaphor and the symbol. A metaphor demands another metaphor and then another. In this manner a whole network of metaphors is evoked. "Thus within the Hebraic tradition God is called King, Father, Husband, Lord, Shepherd, and Judge."[32] The root metaphor has the power to brings these diverse and partial metaphors found in experience into a unity while at the same time providing a potentiality for unlimited interpretation. There are, as well, as certain metaphors that Philip Wheelwright calls "archetypes" such as Christianity that have the power to infiltrate the whole of cultural communities. So the metaphor approaches the symbol in two ways, through the expansion of its seemingly limited temporality and through its cultural extension.

Metaphor also has a third extension that points to a relation between it and the symbol. Max Black has indicated ". . . that a model has the same structure of sense as a metaphor, but it constitutes the deferential dimension of the metaphor."[33] Black's distinction means that a metaphor and a model have the same epistemological role. That is, they enable one to see the same reality in a different light. This new vision emerges because of a shift in the language used to describe phenomena. The model and the metaphor constitute "heuristic fictions" that facilitate the discovery of new connections and relations. Taking metaphor further, one is then able to redescribe reality in such a way that new truths are made evident. Is it not true that "time is a beggar" once the tension was created between seemingly non-related terms? It is the revelatory aspect of the metaphor that places it ever closer to the symbol. At every turn, the metaphor reveals through language something new about reality by redescribing it or indicating what it "is like." Thus a network of metaphors, like the symbol, reveals something about reality that was formerly hidden from view.

Ricoeur concludes his hermeneutic travels in typical fashion by saying that "On the one side, there is more in metaphor than in the symbol; on the other side, there is more in the symbol than in the metaphor."[34] Ricoeur's conclusion brings to mind the entire course of his initial problematic. He begins with the metaphor and discovers through analysis that it is essentially a semantic phenomenon. This semantic moment corresponds to the semantic moment of the symbol so Ricoeur is able to clarify this first moment of the symbol through the metaphor. At the same time, analysis reveals the difference between the metaphor and the symbol, but, again, through an understanding of metaphor. Where metaphor leaves off, the second moment, the non-semantic moment of the symbol, begins. After

Ricoeur has shown that the symbol has a revealing power that is only pointed to on the linguistic level, he faces the methodological problem of how to complete the hermeneutic circle. In this case, a return to the metaphor is demanded. He facilitates this return by demonstrating that the symbol and the metaphor are not so different as was first indicated. He does this by closing the temporal difference between them, by indicating the similarity of their cultural range, and by demonstrating that they both have revelatory powers. The hermeneutic circle is thus closed, and Ricoeur has shown that two seemingly independent aspects of linguistic and cultural experience function in similar and overlapping fashions.

In sum, it can be seen that Ricoeur has developed a singular and broad ranging hermeneutics that will apply to the farthest reaches of human experience. After settling on a method, he does not waver in its application. Of course, the breadth of his method allows for a great deal of freedom in what will be considered permissible, so its application is not entirely rigorous. Nevertheless, Ricoeur's use of his method in an analysis of metaphor and symbol, regardless of its cost in rigor, is not without the reward of insight. Through Ricoeur's work a new dimension has been added not only to the interpretation of metaphor and symbol, but to general interpretation theory as well.

NOTES

1. Paul Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary, translated by Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 3.
2. Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature, p. xi.
3. Paul Ricoeur, Fallible Man, translated by Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), p. x.
4. Ricoeur, Fallible Man, p. x.
5. David M. Rassmussen, Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 37.
6. Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature, p. xxxi.
7. Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, translated by Dennis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 8.
8. Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 44.
9. Palmer, Hermeneutics, pp. 44-45.
10. Rassmussen, p. 5.
11. Palmer, Hermeneutics, p. 87.
12. Palmer, Hermeneutics, p. 87.
13. Paul Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations, edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 440-467.
14. Ricoeur, The Conflict, p. 440.
15. Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 45-46.
16. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 46.
17. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 47.

18. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 48.
19. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 50.
20. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 51.
21. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 52.
22. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 53.
23. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 54.
24. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 54.
25. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 54.
26. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 56.
27. Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, pp. 30-31.
28. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 59.
29. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 60-61.
30. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 59.
31. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 64.
32. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 64.
33. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 66.
34. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, p. 68.