

Paul Ricoeur: Toward the Restoration of Meaning

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‘I leave off all demands and listen.’

The philosopher Karl Jaspers recalls that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both prophesied the emergence of an age of infinite reflection, an age in which everything is interpretation and ‘anything can mean something else.’¹ Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were able so to prophesy because they knew themselves as exceptions in their own day, as precursors of this age, as *figurae* or archetypes concretely anticipating what was to become the widespread experience of their race.

[444] The theologian John Dunne has similarly dubbed our time the ‘age of apprehension,’ an age in which any journey toward God must be traveled through and ultimately beyond the self.²

Philosophy for centuries has been gradually abandoning the study of the natural world around us to the physical and biological sciences, only to find itself ever more immersed in the task of interpreting human interiority.³ The human sciences, at the same time, have developed conflicting approaches and conclusions, some reductive, some holistic. It appears safe to say that, given a prolonged future for our race, we still stand at the very beginning of the process of accumulating our knowledge and deepening our understanding of the inner resources, possibilities, and limits of human existence.

The almost universal influence of various critical techniques and our growing active familiarity with them have radically affected the state of religious belief in Western society. Our growing capacity for distinguishing the different patterns of our experience and cognitional awareness has had various results. For some it has sharpened the dimension appropriate to religious faith and enabled them to relate religious experience to profane life precisely by being able to distinguish the two more clearly. For others, however, it has removed this dimension altogether and revealed religion as well as conventional moralities and non-pluralistic approaches to knowledge to be culturally determined, adolescent human traits now quickly to be disposed of in favor of more mature pursuits. Religious apologists, instead of explicating the presuppositions of faith in the terms of a commonly accepted philosophy, find themselves rigorously laying bare the very possibility and pertinence of faith for an educated and sophisticated mind. And they realize that such a propaedeutic cannot be defensive; that is, it cannot violently condemn all of the understanding reached in reductive interpretations (e.g., Freudianism), which have too often demonstrated their explanatory value in certain areas. Nor can it avoid the charge of obscurantism if it fails to face the questions posed by these seemingly destructive systems of thought.

One believing person who has attempted to immerse himself in the contemporary intellectual scene and draw from it is the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In this essay I will try to present the problematic which Ricoeur defines and to expose his treatment of our problems of interpretation and religious belief.

1 Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, trans. William Earle (New York: Noonday Press, 1968) 31.

2 See John Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

3 See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 95.

1 The Notion of Philosophy and the Problem of Symbolism

Ricoeur approaches the contemporary intellectual and religious scene not as a theologian, nor as a psychologist, but as a philosopher. His treatment of religious symbolism figures as a part of a vast philosophical undertaking concerned with the task of delineating the [445] essential structures of human existence and, more concretely, its limits and possibilities. Very roughly, we might say that the abstract structural analysis is the work of the earlier sections in his projected three-volume study of the philosophy of the will. These earlier sections are *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*⁴ and *Fallible Man*.⁵ The beginnings of a more concrete study can, again roughly, be found in *The Symbolism of Evil*⁶ and *Freud and Philosophy*.⁷ In order to understand the significance of this concrete ‘turn,’ we must investigate how Ricoeur understands the philosophical task.

Ricoeur assumes that the work of René Descartes, for whom the positing of the existence of the thinking subject is a first truth which cannot and need not be verified or deduced, marks the beginning of a new tradition in philosophy. Ricoeur finds himself standing within this tradition, for which philosophy is primarily a matter of self-knowledge, of the self-appropriation of the subject.⁸ But how is the self given up to philosophical reflection? Ricoeur maintains that the thinking subject is known only through the mediation of its expressions – ideas, actions, works, institutions, monuments. Philosophical reflection is to recover the act of existing, the I am, through reflection on the works of human beings. The I as such, as known, is not concretely given as an immediate datum of experience. Rather, knowledge of the self occurs only through a displacement of the home of meaning away from immediate consciousness, only through the understanding of the self’s objectifications in knowledge, action, and culture.

The meaning of these objectifications or works, however, is not immediately evident, nor is it univocal. Our self-expressions are capable of being variously interpreted. A privileged instance of this susceptibility to different interpretations is found in language. At [446] least at the stage which his own thought had reached when he wrote his work on Freud, Ricoeur distinguished between those linguistic expressions which admit of only one interpretation and

4 Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

5 Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Regnery, 1965).

6 Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1969). *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* form vol. 2 of Ricoeur’s philosophy of the will. Vol. 3 on the poetics of the will is as yet unfinished.

7 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

8 ‘I assume here that the positing of the self is the first truth for the philosopher placed within the broad tradition of modern philosophy that begins with Descartes and is developed in Kant, Fichte, and the reflective stream of European philosophy. For this tradition, which we shall consider as a whole before setting its main representatives in opposition to one another, the positing of the self is a truth which posits itself; it can be neither verified nor deduced; it is at once the positing of a being and of an act; the positing of an existence and of an operation of thought: I am, I think; to exist, for me, is to think; I exist inasmuch as I think.’ *Ibid.* 43.

thus are univocal and those which contain a double meaning and thus, in this sense, are equivocal or, better, plurivocal.⁹ The latter field he designates as the realm of symbolism.

If philosophy is the work of recovering in its concrete fullness the I at the heart of the *Cogito*, and if this retrieval can be accomplished only through the mediation of our self-expressions, philosophy must have recourse to symbols; that is, it must take as a distinct field of reflection the whole area of such expressions embracing multiple levels of meaning, and radically the area of symbolic language. Philosophy must thus become a matter of interpretation. 'I have decided to define, i.e., limit, the notions of symbol and interpretation through one another. Thus a symbol is a double-meaning linguistic expression that requires an interpretation, and interpretation is a work of understanding that aims at deciphering symbols.'¹⁰

2 The Conflict of Interpretations

The plurivocal nature of symbols consists in a relation of meaning to meaning. 'Symbols occur when language produces signs of composite degree in which the meaning, not satisfied with designating some one thing, designates another meaning attainable only in and through the first intentionality.'¹¹ Such double-meaning expressions are found in the hierophanies which are the object of study for the phenomenology of religion, in dreams, and in poetic images. Yet the power of symbolism, which may be rooted somewhere beyond or behind human language (e.g., in the cosmos itself or in the human psychic constitution), appears as such in speech. The task of interpretation is to reveal the richness or overdetermination of symbols and to demonstrate that symbols play a true role in discourse. The manifest meaning of a symbol points beyond itself to a second, latent meaning by a movement which thought can follow but never dominate. For example, the symbols figuring in any of the great religions enable the phenomenologist of religion to be drawn toward a given religion's conception of the sacred and its relation to humankind. Much of the work of a scholar such as Mircea Eliade is a matter of moving with the symbols and being drawn by them to a universe structured in a [447] particular way and to a God or gods relating in a certain manner to the world as human beings experience it. It is the predominance of certain symbolic types, for example, which enables Eliade to distinguish religions of the 'eternal return' from religions of historically oriented 'faith.'¹² Thus the primary meaning moves us to a latent, symbolized meaning and intentionally assimilates us or draws us on to that second meaning. This process of assimilation is identified by Ricoeur as 'intentional analogy.'

As thinking becomes more concrete, it also becomes more dependent on symbols and thus more hermeneutical. Thus we may speak of a hermeneutic turn in Ricoeur's thought as he moves beyond the abstract analyses of the structures of human existence to an attempt to read human experience through a study of human expressions.¹³ Such hermeneutic phenomenology

9 Ricoeur's later development has moved in the direction of acknowledging all language as symbolic. See Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

10 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 9.

11 Ibid. 16.

12 Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1959). See especially chapter 4.

13 This is the approach through which Ihde (see above, note 9) studies Ricoeur.

differs from the neutral analyses of his earlier works and of most other phenomenology in that it intrinsically points beyond itself by means of a ‘wager’ which shatters the descriptive neutrality of most phenomenological work. ‘I wager that I shall have a better understanding of man and the bond between the being of man and the being of all beings if I follow the indication of symbolic thought.’¹⁴ This wager is acknowledged again in *Freud and Philosophy*, with specific reference to the phenomenology of religion. The latter is secretly animated by an intention, a series of philosophical decisions which lie hidden even within its apparent neutrality, a rational faith which employs a phenomenological hermeneutics as an instrument for achieving the restoration of meaning which he refers to as a ‘second naivete.’ Thus the implicit intention of this hermeneutic phenomenology is ‘an expectancy of a new Word, of a new tidings of the Word.’¹⁵

It is in *The Symbolism of Evil* that Ricoeur begins his attempt to read the constitution of symbolic language by deciphering expression, language, and text. This work also places the horizon for the dialectical conflict he will later attempt to mediate in *Freud and Philosophy*, the nature of which we have yet to examine. This horizon is the problem of the unity of human language. It is this horizon that makes phenomenology a matter of interpretation or hermeneutic, because of the insistence on understanding human experience by understanding human expressions in symbol and myth. The latter rescue human feeling from silence and confusion. But such interpretation remains phenomenological; it does not attempt to reach behind the symbols for underlying [448] determinants but rather attempts to follow them forward, to follow their indications. ‘Symbols alone give what they say.’¹⁶ ‘The symbol gives rise to thought.’¹⁷ To interpret symbols phenomenologically is to reenact them in sympathetic imagination, not through an immediate belief but through the recovery of the intentionality of the symbol. To reenact a myth through an immediate belief would be to accept the myth as explanatory or etiological. To reenact it by sympathetically immersing oneself in its implicit intentionality, however, is to accept it as exploratory, as interpretative of us, our destiny, and our place in the cosmos.¹⁸ It is to accept mystery. It is to ‘elevate the symbols to the rank of existential concepts.’¹⁹ This is not to say that the cosmic significance which the symbol intends is actually given in the symbol. If this were the case, the symbol would cease to be a symbol. Symbols are intentions without fulfilments. (This limitation will be extremely important when we discuss the more concrete reflection on religious symbols which begins from their dialectical unity-in-tension. This will be clarified in the next section.)

The phenomenology of religion may proceed either by analyzing the inherent structures of symbols and myths, or by relating them to one another either in an evolutionary perspective or by showing relations of transposition. An example of the latter is the way in which Ricoeur shows, in the last chapter of *The Symbolism of Evil*, the relations of opposition and identity between the Adamic myth and the other myths of evil. In either case three philosophical decisions are made: first, the accent is put on the object of investigation; second, a certain

14 Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* 355.

15 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 31.

16 Ibid.

17 Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* 347; *Freud and Philosophy* 38.

18 See Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* 5.

19 Ibid. 357.

fullness of symbol is emphasized; third, the intention is that one may ‘finally greet the revealing power of the primal word.’²⁰

Regarding the first decision, namely, placing the emphasis on the object of investigation, the phenomenology of religion aims at disengaging the object in myth, ritual, and belief rather than discovering psychological and sociological determinants of religious behavior. The second decision, that is, emphasizing the fullness of symbol, is based on a rational faith that symbols point beyond themselves to a second meaning, giving what they say. This implies that I who interpret am bound up in the relation of immediate meaning to latent meaning, that I participate in what is announced to me through the symbol. Thus the third decision, that is, the intention to greet the revealing power of the primal word, manifests a new desire to be addressed and renders the phenomenology of religion a preparation for the revelation of meaning.²¹

[449] Several recent and very influential schools of thought, however, forcibly impress upon us that there is a second kind of relationship which may exist between manifest and latent meaning. The manifest meaning may stand in a relationship not of intentional analogy, but of ‘cunning distortion’ to the latent meaning, that is, a relationship of dissimulation, mystification, and illusion. In the case of Freud, for example, the primary meaning of a symbol is a dissimulation of basic, unsurpassable desire or instinct. The task of psychoanalytic interpretation is, not the discovery of a further reality beyond the symbol, a reality toward which the symbol draws us by its own movement, but rather the reduction of the illusion effected in consciousness by the manifest meaning of such an expression. Religious symbols which would lead a phenomenologist of religion to a particular religion’s concept of the sacred would be, for psychoanalysis, but another manifestation of the ‘universal obsessional neurosis of mankind’ known as religion.

These two possibilities thus give rise to conflicting styles of interpretation, the polar extremes of which Ricoeur calls ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion’ and ‘the hermeneutics of recovery.’ If philosophy’s task, the concrete understanding of the I at the heart of the *Cogito* through the mediation of our self-expressions, is to be possible at all, then the philosopher must not only have recourse to hermeneutics – since many of these expressions are symbolic – but must also settle the question of whether this hermeneutic conflict can be resolved. Is one’s only choice to be an option between these two styles, an option seemingly arbitrary and thus perhaps itself determined not by the exigencies of disinterested inquiry or rigorous method but by the unconscious determinants of one’s own psychic makeup? Or are there resources available to philosophic reflection itself which will enable a resolution or mediation of the internal variance within the field of interpretation? Is the alternative of conflicting styles definitive or provisional, real or illusory? Can philosophy discover, within the storehouse of resources properly its own, a means of resolving this tension? If not, the odds would seem to lie with the hermeneutics of suspicion, since either option in itself would appear arbitrary and thus itself an expression of unsurpassable instinct. The task of interpretation, and thus of the philosopher who recognizes the necessity of interpretation for the fulfilment of the reflective task, would be iconoclastic, purely and simply. The philosopher would thus ‘purify discourse of its

20 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 32.

21 Ibid.

excrescences, liquidate the idols, go from drunkenness to sobriety, realize our state of poverty once and for all.²²

On the other hand, if the conflict can be mediated, the hermeneutics of suspicion would still remain but would be taken up into the task of [450] recovery, which would then become, not a parallel task, exclusive of and opposed to that of demystification, but inclusive of the latter. The philosopher would then ‘use the most “nihilistic,” destructive, iconoclastic movement so as to let speak what once, what each time, was said, when meaning appeared anew, when meaning was at its fullest.’²³ The full act of recovery would thus be effected, not through a mere phenomenology of symbol, as in the phenomenology of religion, but by philosophical reflection in its fullest sense and in reliance upon a process of rigorous dialectic, which would include extreme iconoclasm as a moment in the restoration of meaning.

The latter possibility is favored by Ricoeur. By way of an overview of what will be exposed more fully in the remainder of this paper, we can make the following statements:

(1) With respect to symbolism and interpretation in general, Ricoeur finds the possibility of including the hermeneutics of suspicion within the hermeneutics of recovery to be grounded objectively in the unity of the symbol.

(2) As a philosophical act, it will be grounded subjectively in the essential role of dialectic within philosophical reflection. The task of philosophical reflection demands interpretation. But the hermeneutic war itself demands that reflection become also dialectic.

(3) The religious and profane spheres of meaning are to be sharply differentiated, but the interpretive, dialectical, and reflective tasks imposed by each will be analogous.

(4) With respect to the area of symbolism specifically and uniquely designated religious, the possibility of the mediation of the conflict is grounded objectively in the ambiguity of the unified sacred symbol (e.g., the eschatological symbols of Judaism and Christianity).

(5) With respect to the same area, this possibility is grounded subjectively in the dialectical process called for by such ambiguity, a process analogous to the dialectic demanded in the interpretation of profane symbolism. Thus the reflective thinker concerned with reopening a possibility of being addressed by the kerygmatic Word will take a cue from the philosopher concerned with the dialectical mediation of the hermeneutic conflict in general. The religious thinker must distinguish the expressions with which he or she is concerned from those other cultural symbols which occupy the philosopher, but the process of interpreting the symbols of faith is analogous to the philosopher’s process. Ultimately the religious thinker must move beyond the phenomenology of religion to a more inclusive, more complex, more dialectical mode of reflection. This process will ground both the validity of the phenomenology of religion and the viability of its implicit intention of hearing a new tidings of the Word. At the same [451] time, however, it will incorporate the equally valid intention of demystifying hermeneutics, that of establishing the rootedness of manifest religious symbolism in the darkness of life and nature which surrounds the light of conscious awareness.

The domain peculiar to the symbolism of faith has not been immune from the attacks of the demystifiers. Nor must the religious thinker regard these attacks either as ultimately destructive intentions to be warded off or avoided at all costs, or as embarrassing revelations disclosing the ever-narrowing scope of his or her legitimate field of investigation and reflection. Rather, they can be assumed as invitations to appropriate the tension which expresses our

²² Ibid. 27.

²³ Ibid.

modernity, to move beyond an anachronistic mode of reflection and expression constantly plagued by the temptation to obscurantism, to open the possibility to oneself and one's contemporaries for a post-critical encounter with the event of human speech which God has, for faith, become. The religious thinker can release the possibility for the twice-born person of modernity to hear the language of a call in which 'I leave off all demands and listen.'²⁴

3 Dialectic and the Concrete Unity of Symbols

The hermeneutic task cannot remain at a phenomenological level, because of the mighty invasion into contemporary thought of the hermeneutics of suspicion. This conflicting style of interpretation reverses the three decisions made by the phenomenologist of religion. The focus of concern becomes, not the object, but the underlying determinants of human expression and behavior. The latent meaning behind human expression is not to be discovered by a movement forward from the expression but by a movement back to the realms of unsurpassable instinctual desire (as in Freud) or economic determination (as in Marx) lying behind and determining the mendacious deliverances of consciousness.²⁵ The intention of the phenomenology of religion to be spoken to anew by the Wholly Other is reversed in such descriptions of religion as 'the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind' or 'the opium of the people.' Such a stance, at face value, is radically opposed to the non-dialectical restoration of meaning characteristic of the phenomenology of religion. Any attempt at mediation of this controversy must be dialectical. Ultimately, as most dialectic, it must resolve not only differences in standpoint and correlative content but also differences in the underlying decisions which determine one's standpoint. Such dialectic [452] thus will prepare the philosopher or reflective religious thinker to effect another decision which will give him or her a more inclusive standpoint. If such dialectic is possible, then the radical doubt of the hermeneutics of suspicion may prove to be beneficial and even indispensable for mature, post-critical religious belief. Whereas reflection, the recovery of the I at the heart of the 'I think,' had to have recourse to interpretation, the hermeneutic war can be arbitrated only by a return to an expanded, dialectical, reflective critique of interpretations. While such reflection is expanded it is also more concrete, for it penetrates more profoundly into the effort to exist and the desire to be which reflection must appropriate through human expressions.

The key to such concrete reflection is found in the unity of the symbol. Our symbols reveal a concrete unity-in-tension in which the two apparently diverging lines of interpretation actually intersect. The tension which characterizes our modernity is the awareness of the unity-in-tension found in our symbols. For us to be able to think in accord with symbols, to follow their indications, we must subject them to a dialectic, discovering the intersection of diverging interpretations. Then we can return to the attitude of listening, to 'the fullness of speech simply heard and understood.'²⁶

The tension localized in the mixed texture of concrete symbols is a tension of archeology and teleology. The hermeneutics of suspicion is archeological in intention. Freudian

24 Ibid. 551.

25 It cannot be denied that this is a gross oversimplification of Marx. However, it is only under this rubric that Ricoeur mentions Marx in this discussion. While he groups Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche together under the heading of the hermeneutics of suspicion, it is only Freud whom he here studies in detail.

26 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 496.

psychoanalysis, for example, provides us with an archeology of the subject. It displaces meaning away from immediate consciousness, not ahead toward a fuller meaning analogically bound to the meaning revealed in naive awareness, but behind, toward the unconscious. It is this meaning which Freudian discourse captures in interpretation, the meaning of our ultimately unknowable instincts as these are designated in our psychic lives by the ideas and the affects that represent them – for example, by dreams and neuroses, by ideals and illusions. Freud's analyses reveal the archaic, ever prior, ultimately timeless character of desire and instinct. We are drawn backward, by a detemporalizing agency, to a destiny in reverse. The muteness of such desire can be spoken only through mechanistic energy metaphors. Philosophical reflection learns from Freudian analysis that knowledge is rooted in desire and effort, and that an epistemology which studies our representations as correlative to the represented objects, no matter how 'critical' such an epistemology may be, must be supplemented by an exegesis of the desires and instincts which conscious intentionality deceptively hides from our view. It is because such desire not only is hidden but also interferes with intelligent inquiry that truth is, not a given, but a task.

[453] But Freud's very pursuit of the truth concerning the mute darkness of desire, the image of his performance and of his own acceptance of truth as a task for him as scientist and analyst, itself should be enough to lead the philosopher to ask whether our effort to be does not reveal a further vector, a direction forward toward a goal, a second displacement of meaning away from naive awareness, but in a teleological direction. The inconsistency between Freud's account and his performance leads one to suspect suspicion. The philosopher places the concept of archeology in dialectical opposition to that of teleology. When one does so, one's reflection becomes concrete. One will discover this dialectical opposition in our symbols, myths, and rituals, and when one does so one will realize that the hermeneutic war can be resolved. The reflective thinker, instructed by the demystifying archeology of Freudian reduction and by the progressive synthesis of the forward movement of our effort to exist, returns to the spoken word and hears it, not irrationally and precritically, but as one twice-born, with an informed naivete.²⁷ Symbols coordinate in a concrete unity-in-tension two functions previously assumed to be opposed to one another: they repeat our childhood and the childhood of our race, but they also serve to explore our adult life.²⁸ Authentic symbols are regressive-progressive, archeological-teleological. Their intentional structure unifies the functions of concealing and showing, disguising and revealing. While they conceal the aims of our instincts, they disclose the process of self-consciousness.

Disguise, reveal; conceal, show; these two functions are no longer external to one another; they express the two sides of a single symbolic function ... Advancement of meaning occurs only in the sphere of the projections of desire, of the derivatives of the unconscious, of the revivals of archaism ... The opposed hermeneutics disjoin and decompose what concrete reflection recomposes through a return to speech simply heard and understood.²⁹

27 Ibid.

28 For a detailed presentation of a corroborating theory from a Jungian perspective see Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

29 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 497.

4 The Uniqueness of Sacred Symbolism and the Death of the Religious Object

Ricoeur does not allow that his method of philosophical reflection will give us more than a frontier view of the domain of religious symbolism. In a somewhat Barthian manner he insists that even the very existence of a problematic of faith exceeds the resources of philosophical reflection. Such a problematic occurs in another dimension, that of call, kerygma, word addressed to me.

But the movement of faith toward understanding is a movement of the interpretation of events of speech, and thus must encounter a dialectic of reflection. God can be recognized by us only in the interpretation of the event of human speech which God has become. To believe is to listen to the call, but to hear this call we must interpret the message. Thus, in Anselmian fashion, we must believe in order to understand, and understand in order to believe.

God thus becomes discernible in and through a dialectic of archeology and teleology. As radical origin, God becomes discernible in the question of my archeology, and as ultimate goal in the question of my teleology.³⁰ Philosophical reflection itself can never assume creation and eschatology, as acts of the divine, to be any more than the horizon of its explorations of archeology and teleology. They are not fixed possessions of reflective thought, as Hegel tried to maintain. Philosophical reflection can never become absolute knowledge. The reason for this lies in the very fact which gives rise to the problematic of faith, the fact of evil. Evil will never be dissolved in dialectic. As such, it is unsurpassable, inscrutable.

The problematic of faith thus shows God to be discernible in a third way, a way not pointed to specifically by the dialectic of reflection but rather by the impossibility of the progress of reflection to the point of absolute knowledge. God becomes discernible in the question of evil, together with and in the symbols of reconciliation and deliverance, which qualify the manner in which eschatology is the horizon of the question of my teleology and of the teleology of the figures of the human spirit in the works of culture.

These symbols of creation, eschatology, and redemption stand today in the same need of a demystifying hermeneutics as do the symbols of culture and ethics, and the dreams, fantasies, and ideals of the individual subject. The phenomenology of religion must enter into a dialectical relationship with the psychoanalysis of religion and other forms of reductive interpretation, and this for the sake of the very authenticity of faith. For the human spirit tends, through a misconception of what it means to know,³¹ to reabsorb transcendence in immanence, to transform horizon into an object which we possess and use, and to create idols rather than be content with signs of the sacred. Thus a naive metaphysics, for all its protestations to the contrary, can appear to know more about what God is than about what God is not, and religion can treat the sacred as a new sphere of objects, institutions, and powers alongside those of the economic, political, and cultural [455] spheres. Religion becomes the reification and alienation of faith, vulnerable to the blows of a hermeneutics of suspicion, whether the latter be a process of demythologization from within religion or of demystification from without. In either case, the aim is the death of the metaphysical and religious 'object.'

30 Compare the discussions in the last two chapters of John Dunne, *A Search for God in Time and Memory*. See above, note 2.

31 At this point I am moving beyond Ricoeur, who locates the problem simply in our objectifying tendencies, to Bernard Lonergan, who maintains that the problem is that we misconceive what objectivity is. See below, Conclusion.

Such a cultural movement, as exemplified in Freudianism, is necessary if we are to hear and read the signs of the approach of the Wholly Other. We are faced with a never-ending task of distinguishing between faith and religion – faith in the Wholly Other which draws near and belief in the religious object. The task is very difficult and demanding, mainly because it calls for such a merciless exegesis of our own reference to the sacred. Do we allow religious symbols to point to the horizon of transcendence and to do only this, or do we make them an idolatrous reality purely immanent to our culture and thus render them ineffective?

5 Conclusion

The task demanded by Ricoeur is particularly difficult, I believe, for one committed to the possibility of authentic sacramentality, who must at the same time admit that many of the ritual practices within his or her own community reflect indeed at least a ‘universal obsessional neurosis of mankind’ if not a demonic objectifying of the sacred. To speak at least of the tradition which is my own, sacramental religions are prone to the tendency to reify the sacred and capitulate to our idolizing tendencies. The combat over the sacred will necessarily be heated, it would seem, in those religious communities where, because of an insistence on sacramentality, the ambiguity of the sacred is pronounced.

The task set by Ricoeur is very demanding in another realm too, namely, that of creating a sufficiently nuanced relationship between faith and culture, religious communities and public life, authentic religion and profane institutions. Particularly in this area there is a strong tendency to objectify and use the sacred for the pursuit of goals which are not connected with the problematic of faith. ‘The idols must die so that symbols may live.’³²

The psychoanalysis of religion can be one of the roads toward the death of the religious object. It can aid us in charging the affective dynamism of religious belief to the point where the latter becomes, [456] not simply the consolation of the child in us, but the adult power of loving in the face of hatred and death. It can help us discern that kerygmatic faith excludes a narrowly ‘moral’ God and a penal Christology.³³ It forces us to acknowledge that every symbol of the sacred is also and at the same time a revival of an infantile and archaic symbol, and thus to admit the ambiguity of all religious symbolism and religious experience. It can aid us in moving toward the suspension of the ethical point of view, moving beyond an ethics of righteousness, losing the immediate consolation of our own narcissism. It can purify the hermeneutics of faith to the point where the latter becomes unambiguously the symbolic exploration of ultimate relationships, of the language of a call in which ‘I leave off all demands and listen.’³⁴ It is indeed true that the faith of the believer cannot emerge intact from such a confrontation.³⁵ On the other hand, Ricoeur seems to provide a solid basis for claiming that, despite the supposed origin of religious symbols in instinctual impulses, their present meaning cannot be exhausted by presenting their archeology. ‘The question here is not whether a given

32 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 531.

33 That theology is capable of such discernment apparently drawing almost exclusively upon its own resources is clear from Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1964) 486-593.

34 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy* 551.

35 Ibid.

religious symbol is genetically a psychological projection, but rather whether, irrespective of its being such a projection, what it expresses analogically discloses a genuine aspect of reality.³⁶

Finally, in a critical vein, it seems to me that three questions must be posed to Ricoeur concerning his procedure and his conclusions. These questions are posed from the standpoint of one who maintains that Bernard Lonergan's cognitional analysis³⁷ provides us with an invariant structure of human consciousness; that his theory of objectivity is correct (a theory missed by all of phenomenology to date, I believe); and that his later studies on meaning enable us to raise a question as to whether understanding, rather than language, ought to be the area where all philosophical (and theological) investigations cut across one another. These questions are by no means meant to minimize the critical significance of Ricoeur's work for philosophy and theology. Rather, they raise the possibility of a further intersubjective approximation to truth by comparing Ricoeur's problematic with that of Lonergan.

First, granted the validity of the transcendental method, that is, of deducing a priori conditions for various domains of human experience, [457] does not this method become truly transcendental only when the self-evident necessity and universality of certain a priori structures of human consciousness are found? I am not referring here to certain logical laws,³⁸ such as the principles of contradiction or sufficient reason, but to the possibility of arriving at a pattern and structure of human awareness which is in principle not subject to revision. This, I would maintain, Lonergan has done with invincible forcefulness in arriving at the 'levels' of experience, understanding, judgment, and decision.³⁹

Secondly, must we say that our only knowledge of transcendence is symbolic, that every attempt to know the transcendent realm in another way is inevitably idolatrous? Here Ricoeur displays a perceptualist notion of objectivity, according to which objectivity is achieved as a result of doing something analogous to 'taking a look.' Objectivity is a correlate of conceptualization for Ricoeur. But if objectivity is rather a function of judgment (e.g., the judgment 'God is'), can we not say that God is an object of non-symbolic knowing that is not idolatrous?

Finally, what is the normative status of linguistic usage for philosophy? Is not meaning at least logically prior to language, and are not its structures independent of the contingencies of actual language? Is not actual language a vehicle of meaning rather than its logical presupposition?⁴⁰ Is not meaning a matter for understanding more radically than for language? Does not the emphasis on understanding provide philosophy with a starting point that transcends dependence on actual usage?

36 Stuart C. Hackett, 'Philosophical Objectivity and Existential Involvement in the Methodology of Paul Ricoeur,' *International Philosophical Quarterly* 9 (March, 1969) 31.

37 See Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

38 Hackett would like to move this objection in this direction. To do so, I believe, is to miss the point really demanded in response to Ricoeur's insistence that reflective philosophy itself is so culturally relative that no objective certainty can be had regarding its deliverances about the constitution of the self.

39 See Lonergan, *Insight*, chapters 11 and 18.

40 This is the most cogent of the objections raised by Hackett. See p. 36 of the article referred to above in note 36. Lonergan has dealt masterfully with the question in *Method in Theology* 254-57.

To repeat, these questions are not aimed against the basic thrust of Ricoeur's effort. His intention is noble, his conception of what it entails accurate, his achievement admirable. We should eagerly await the realization of his promise that there is more to come. At the same time, too, I believe we can find in Ricoeur's thought significant pointers to areas in which Lonergan's work on theological method is in need of expansion and development. I am referring particularly to the area of symbolic consciousness. In fact, the second naivete which Ricoeur's philosophy demonstrates to be both possible and desirable indicates, I believe, the region of a fourth conversion necessary for the foundations of theology, beyond the intellectual, moral, and religious conversions specified by Lonergan. This fourth conversion I would name [458] 'psychic.' As a result of it, one's theological categories, positions, and system can be highly symbolic in nature; a 'poetics of the will,' such as that envisaged by Ricoeur, would be a genuine part of systematic theology as such.

Ricoeur seems to imply that philosophy is capable of effecting such a second immediacy by drawing upon its own resources. This I question. Philosophy by itself is not therapeutic in nature. Rather, through its work of disengaging transcendental structures, it can indicate the possibility of such a 'conversion.' This is precisely what Ricoeur has done. I take his work as a significant contribution to the delineation of the foundations of theology and thus to theological method as a whole.