

Fernanda Henriques and Annemie Halsema (editors)

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In *Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy*, Fernanda Henriques and Annemie Halsema collect twelve essays that explore a neglected yet prevalent topic in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: The Feminine. From the standpoint of the conflict of interpretations, there would seem to be two contrasting ways to approach this theme. On the one hand, the concept of the feminine--considered from a historical-philosophical perspective--can be integrated into the hermeneutic space of dialogue in a nonproblematic way, as just another conversational partner. On the other hand, confrontation with this largely unexplored topic might be made a hermeneutic problem in its own right, in a conscious effort of mediated dialogical integration. This volume takes the latter approach.

The book is organized into three parts, each of which conveys this mutually illuminating, non-self-sufficient clash of perspectives. Part I, "Ricoeur, Women, and Gender," comprises four essays in which the *construction* of gender identity is discussed from contrasting angles.

In the first essay, "Ricoeur, Women, and the Journey to Recognition," Morny Joy discusses three topics: the construction of narrative identity through various encounters with the otherness of the text; the confrontation between Ricoeur's thought--and Ricoeur himself--and female scholars who critique the construction of narrative identity in contexts of marginalization and oppression; and, finally, Ricoeur's later work on recognition. Ricoeur's historical indebtedness to Hegel is clear. Nevertheless, and in a way that departs slightly from the Hegelian model of recognition, Ricoeur argues for the genuine metamorphosis of the self, and this in a double sense. For one, the self "returns to himself" after a long dialogical detour, achieving self-identity only through and *upon* a series of encounters with the Other--something that applies reflexively to Ricoeur himself. Further, the Other who mediates between me and myself is respected in his/her irreplaceability. It is within this dynamic that women's studies can bear the status of a privileged interlocutor in Ricoeur's philosophy.

In "Speak to Silence and Identify Absence on Campus," Alison Scott-Baumann discusses two proposals that deal with the topic of negativity in Western philosophical thought. Scott-Baumann first draws attention to a folder worked on by Ricoeur between 1950 and 1970 (later abandoned), in which he thoroughly discusses negation in the philosophies of Hegel, Sartre, the Presocratics, and Aristotle. The chapter then relates the material in this folder to a book by Prudence Allen from 1985, which forcefully illustrated the impact of the Aristotelian model of defining the feminine on the Western cultural tradition at large. This institutional assimilation of Aristotelian thought culminated in the inclusion of works by Aristotle in the

curriculum at the University of Paris in 1255. Scott-Baumann concludes that Ricoeur's silence on the vast majority of women philosophers (with the important exception of Hannah Arendt) was partly due to the nonproblematized integration of his work into this institutionalized Aristotelian framework--a fate that he could have escaped had he not abandoned his earlier work on negation.

The next essay, by Carlos Garduño Comparán, situates Freud's 1925 hypothesis for explaining the feminine--which on his view is grounded in basic anatomical differences from which secondary symbolic formations evolve throughout an individual's life--alongside Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, according to which symbolic configurations developed in speech can overcome, or at least suspend, empirical differences. Comparán defends the view that Ricoeur's philosophy provides us with a more nuanced interpretive schema for addressing the feminine, which, among other benefits, helps to prevent moralizing stances on issues of genre.

In "Transnational Feminist Solidarities and Cosmopolitanism," Damien Tissot problematizes the notions of the universality of rights and cosmopolitanism in relation to transnational feminist struggles. Tissot's main argument--which goes against the grain of much feminist theory--is that although the claims of the universal cannot be abandoned when reflecting on and forging transnational solidarity among women, universalism ought to be critically discussed, and its role re-established, within the framework of a (Kantian-inspired) model of cosmopolitanism. Drawing inspiration mainly from *Oneself as Another* (but also from *The Just*), Tissot argues that the universal that can accommodate feminist interests is both historically and hermeneutically rooted. Following Ricoeur's threefold model for understanding universalism--as a "way of becoming," a regulative "pretension," and a paradigm of translation--Tissot argues that when the culturally rooted mark of the universal is clearly stressed, its indispensability to the development of transnational solidarity among feminists becomes apparent.

Part II of the volume--"Ricoeur in Dialogue"--comprises five essays, which set Ricoeur's work in dialogue with various feminist thinkers.

At stake in Annemie Halsema's "The Accountable Ipse: The Ethical Self in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics and Butler's Poststructuralism" is a discussion of two extremely nuanced ways of undermining the autonomous agent of Kantian morality. Whereas Ricoeur's ethical self is mediated by culture, Judith Butler's accountable self is formed by the normative social-cultural order. Butler draws heavily on Foucault's idea of *assujettissement*, and she is wary of the dangers inherent in the normative constitution of subjectivity. Balancing both models for understanding the accountable ipse in ethics is a dialogue, found in both Ricoeur and Butler, with the thought of Levinas. From Levinas, both thinkers draw the insight that ethics grounds itself in the self's openness to the Other. Halsema argues that, important differences notwithstanding, Ricoeur and Butler hold that the accountable ipse, *qua* moral subject, doesn't precede the moral law but instead constitutes itself alongside the norm for action, which takes shape only via direct exposure to the Other.

In "Paul Ricoeur and Judith Butler on the Reference and the Renewal of Discourses," Marjolaine Deschênes also begins by comparing Butler's and Ricoeur's philosophical projects, with a view to eliciting criteria that any emancipatory feminist theory of discourse must fulfil. Her main point is that Butler's stance on the subject of discourse, which for Butler is an antirealist social construct, prevents her from holding a robust view on women's

emancipation from the very forms of male domination she denounces. Ricoeur, by contrast, subscribes to a form of external realism of meaning, in which referential ties are never severed. In aligning this view with a poetics of action, he provides discourse with a more structured emancipatory power. The chapter closes by drawing a bridge between Ricoeur's and Butler's ideas on the constitution of discourse and its subject, through consideration of their respective views on the *renewal of discourse*, both of which are needed in the project of modeling nonoppressive modes of language appropriation.

In "Reshaping Justice: Between Nancy Fraser's Feminist Philosophy and Paul Ricoeur's Philosophical Anthropology," Gonçalo Marcelo tackles the dilemma of forging a theory and a praxis of justice that go beyond the merely procedural by leaving space within the theoretical framework for the specific features of concrete human cases involving the demand for justice. In this effort to develop an inclusive notion of justice, Marcelo positions Nancy Fraser and the late Ricoeur as his main interlocutors. Intertwining Fraser's three-dimensional theory of justice (mainly developed in *Scales of Justice* and written with the aim of critically articulating thick normative descriptions of social meanings and providing an account of fair resource distribution) and Ricoeur's hermeneutic model for identifying the subject of rights, Marcelo presents a value-laden interpretation of today's main societal challenges and transnational injustices, in which the historical and the fundamental are not drawn apart.

Annlaug Bjørnsnøs's "Inspiring New Feminist Perspectives: Reading Paul Ricoeur with Simone de Beauvoir" discusses neglected similarities between the ethical projects of the two French philosophers and their respective impact on feminist issues. She starts out from a set of reflections presented by a group of young feminist philosophers in a 2010 issue of *Hypatia*, which outlined a research and action programme for feminism today. She then proceeds to draw a comparison between the philosophies of Beauvoir and Ricoeur that answers these demands. Bjørnsnøs is interested in establishing the autonomy of Beauvoir's philosophical project against the Sartrean theory of the subject and shows that, especially in ethics, affinities between her project and Ricoeur's are easy to trace. It is her contention that issues of concern to feminism, such as the performative power of language and literature, freedom and situatedness, and the ethical dimension of our being-with-others, bring Beauvoir's philosophy into close contact with the poetics of action developed by Paul Ricoeur, and that precisely those affinities provide hints of *praxical* answers to the young feminists' queries.

In the final chapter of part II, "Hermeneutics of *A Subtlety*: Paul Ricoeur, Kara Walker, and Intersectional Hermeneutics," Scott Davidson and Maria del Guadalupe Davidson put Ricoeur's long detour through hermeneutics into dialogue with artist Kara Walker's 2014 installation of a sphinx-like sculpture with the features of a black woman and a massive covering of white sugar (exhibited at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn). The essay emphasizes the need for Ricoeur's long detour in hermeneutics when it comes to appreciating why it is that modern spectators react to Walker's statue with unself-conscious historical biases, including racial biases. The authors argue, furthermore, that to interpret Walker's installation without falling prey to stereotypical responses, what is required is the critical intertwining of Ricoeur's hermeneutics and intersectionality, drawn in such a way that both views are mutually transformed in an effort to better grasp the "saturated meanings" of a modern cultural product that is as puzzling for viewers as *A Subtlety* is.

Part III of the volume considers a series of connections between Ricoeur's work and feminist theology.

In "Ricoeur in Dialogue with Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Hermeneutic Hospitality in Contemporary Practice," Pamela Sue Anderson develops an exhaustive comparison of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and contemporary feminist philosophy of religion. In particular, Anderson explores the potential for increased self-understanding on the part of both Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics and feminist explorations of the gendered body that emerges from a retrospective critical examination of the presuppositions underlying the two traditions. Furthermore, and applying the conceptual tool of hermeneutic hospitality, Anderson claims that creating an intersection between Ricoeur's view of the "capable subject" and, for example, feminist interpretations of biblical and tragic myths might better equip the philosopher interested in both views to enter debates on forms of oppression based on religion, race, sex, and gender.

In "Paul Ricoeur, Mary Daly, Attestation, and Feminine Religious Symbols," Stephanie Arel addresses the common interest, present in both Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Mary Daly's feminist theology, in the power of symbols to unsettle straightforward reference. Drawing on Ricoeur's reading of cultural symbols as fundamentally nonstatic, Arel contends that, at the level of the ontological self-transformation induced by the symbolic, Ricoeur's views map onto Daly's when the latter insists that women *dis-cover* themselves apart from patriarchal enforcements of meaning. The article ends with a further intertwining of Ricoeur's and Daly's thought with regard to the significance each philosopher attributes to the Other: as the witness to self-attestation and as partner in the illusion-dispelling proposed by the Labrys symbol in Daly's work.

The final essay, "The Contribution of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics to a Feminist Perspective on Postcolonial Theology," by Fernanda Henriques and Teresa Toldy, develops a rapprochement between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and postcolonial feminist theology. Drawing on work by sociologists and both Western and non-Western theologians, one of the authors' aims is to show that missionary and evangelical work undertaken by Europeans over the centuries contributed to the imposition on non-European peoples of a set of Eurocentric models for understanding humanity and divinity, which were presented as neutral starting points for analysis. Echoing Boaventura Sousa Santos, they set this paradigm in opposition to an "ecology of knowledges"--a model very much akin to Ricoeur's conflict of interpretations. As they argue, a Ricoeurian theoretical framework, with a special emphasis on the nonconflictual core of the conflict of interpretations, can help feminist postcolonial theologians to address historical injustices in two ways. Insisting that interpretations are always partial, Ricoeur legitimizes and motivates a dialogue among different traditions that fosters their self-understanding. To the extent that he abandons a monological view of human reason without giving up on reason as our best means of resolving conflict, his hermeneutical approach allows the Other--be that Other a feminist postcolonial theologian or any other interlocutor--to remain other throughout the entire conversation with hermeneutics.

*Feminist Explorations of Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy* gathers contributions from both world-renowned scholars of Ricoeur's thought and leading feminist thinkers. It is a provocative and ambitious book that both locates in Ricoeur's philosophical project voices not commonly associated with his work and demonstrates their significance. Halsema and Henriques provide Ricoeur scholars and philosophy students in general with a multi-perspective view on how far the conflict of interpretations can go without losing sight of the central tenets of Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutics. Though not a book I would recommend to the uninitiated in philosophy and its history, it will certainly provide those with a philosophical background

with a subtler grasp of topics and arguments the neutrality of which is often, wrongly, taken for granted.