

**Scott Davidson, ed.** *A Companion to Ricoeur's Freedom and Nature*. Lexington Books 2018. 233 pp. \$100.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781498578882); \$95.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781498578899).

Paul Ricoeur was a prolific author. His contributions to philosophy, hermeneutical theology, literary theory, psychoanalysis, ethics, political theory, and so on, span thousands of pages. This may be why some of his earlier work—and his dense but amazingly rich dissertation *Freedom and Nature* in particular—has not gotten the readership it would clearly merit. Scott Davidson's *A Companion to Ricoeur's Freedom and Nature* aims to fill that gap and provide some instruction to lead more scholars to be more knowledgeable of Ricoeur's crucially important early text that introduces many themes of his later work.

Besides Davidson's introduction to *Freedom and Nature* and to the *Companion*, the work includes twelve scholarly essays. The authors of these chapters range from more established Ricoeur scholars such as Davidson, Jean-Luc Amalric, and Johann Michel to younger scholars in the field of Ricoeur studies. As for the contents of the work, Davidson has divided the *Companion to Ricoeur's Freedom and Nature* into three main divisions: historical influences, key themes, and new trajectories.

### *Historical Influences*

The single most important, and the most difficult, challenge that the *Companion* faces is locating the work as the inaugural work of the attempted *Philosophy of the Will* in its own intellectual and historical context. *Freedom and Nature* constitutes a major dissertation that, in France of the 1950s, had to be complemented with a minor dissertation relating to the history of philosophy. As Davidson acknowledges, Ricoeur's minor thesis was his translation of Husserl's *Ideas*. In short, these two texts by Ricoeur—both the major and the minor thesis—should be read as relating to each other. It is important to note that Ricoeur concluded his publishing career by working on the manuscript for *The Course of Recognition* at the Husserl Archives in Freiburg.

'Historical Influences' nevertheless sets aside the Husserlian aspect of Ricoeur's work that can also be said to be critical of this intellectual trajectory. Marc-Antoine Vallée's essay on Merleau-Ponty's influence on Ricoeur's thought and Jean-Luc Amalric's essay on Ricoeur's relation to the French reflexive tradition represented by Jean Nabert, are crucially important contributions for understanding *Freedom and Nature* as well as Ricoeur's subsequent texts. There is a good reason, however, Ricoeur in the end 'distances himself from Merleau-Ponty' as Vallée puts it himself (14), and equally good reasons for Amalric's repeated remark that Ricoeur's application of Nabert's philosophy of the act became more explicit in the 1960s (in *Fallible Man* but also in *Freud and Philosophy*).

The challenge of digging even deeper into the background of Ricoeur's thought is not only indicated by Ricoeur's reference to eidetic analysis, but also by the dedication Ricoeur gives in *Freedom and Nature*. The work was addressed to Marcel: 'à monsieur Gabriel Marcel, hommage respectueux.' Moreover, Ricoeur states openly in the text that 'meditation on Gabriel Marcel's work lies at the basis of the analyses in this book.' (15)

Besides the two essays on Merleau-Ponty and Nabert, the *Companion* also includes two essays that explore Ricoeur's early affinity with Ravaisson (by Jakub Čapek) and, perhaps slightly surprisingly, with Thomas Aquinas (by Michael Sohn). The two essays map out so far untouched areas of possible intellectual connections; an essay on Kierkegaard would also have been interesting

in this regard. Through the two essays, which can perhaps be considered to portray more thematic or contextual rather than argumentative affinity or influence, the still much needed work of connecting Ricoeur with more and less obvious contributors to his thought becomes apparent.

### *Key Themes*

The ultimate theme of Ricoeur's work, in accordance with its name, is the simultaneous and reciprocal presence of the voluntary and the involuntary. As such, Ricoeur's project also has a solid Kantian basis—it can be read as an extension of Kant's third antinomy by way of exploring freedom (or spontaneity) and necessity (or causality) through 1) motives and decision, 2) movement and action, and 3) condition and consent (to one's character, to the unconscious, and, ultimately, to life).

The five essays that constitute the division focusing on the key themes of *Freedom and Nature* make this antinomial duality or the paradox of the will evident, but also provide further material for scholarship to consider. Rather than being overviews or analyses of the named key themes, the essays are more specialized and clearly tie in with specific research questions that presumably relate to each contributor's research agenda.

Michael A. Johnson's essay 'The Paradox of Attention' explores the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary by relating Ricoeur's theory of attention back to the Cartesian and Husserlian traditions and, very importantly, to Marcel's phenomenology. Confirming that Ricoeur's reading of Aquinas follows specifically from Laporte's 'new reading of *Thomas-Descartes-Malebranche* tradition on attention' (80), Johnson explicates how Ricoeur's attempt at extending a phenomenological theory of attention from perception to the realm of the whole cogito is a move inspired by Husserl's *Ideas I*, but one that also distances itself from both traditions in its siding with Marcel's philosophy.

Nicely following Johnson's essay, Johann Michel's focus on 'the decision paradox' explicates Ricoeur's notable observation that all voluntary action has its necessary counterpart and background in involuntary motivations. The question of the self is thereby to be resolved in the realm of making a choice; a description of this choice that amounts to a decision is integral and essential in a phenomenological exploration of the self. More specifically, Michel summarizes the paradox of decision in a formula 'I remain present in the decision despite being "outside of myself," despite being absorbed in the project-to-be-done' (112).

According to Ricoeur, authentic projects need to be executed, or transformed into action, so that they really become the signs of the acting self. However, there needs to be a complementing analysis that sheds light on this additional challenge of dissecting the levels of the voluntary and the involuntary. Eftichis Pirovolakis's essay dives deeper into the question of moving and effort by relating Ricoeur's discussion to Maine de Biran. Using Derrida's reading of Ricoeur as his aide (Derrida was Ricoeur's assistant in the early 1960s), Pirovolakis's criticism is that in spite of referring to Biran's philosophy of effort and action, Ricoeur remains at the side of intentional attention, thereby verging toward transcendental subjectivism.

In turn, Grégori Jean's essay 'On Habit' reads Ricoeur's discussion of habit in the context of Ravaisson's work by that same name. As such Jean's text complements, if not overlaps with, Čapek's contribution. Jean's text is illuminating in its thesis that *Freedom and Nature* not only follows but also founds an ontologically open and even grounding phenomenology. An extended attention on Ravaisson in this context will perhaps be balanced by scholarship's subsequent publications by exploring Ricoeur's affinity with Marcel's 'creative fidelity.'

In order to point out the depth and inescapability of the involuntary, Davidson's essay analyzes the experienced necessity of one's personal character, the unconscious, and life. As Davidson's

essay makes evident, Ricoeur presents these three as the involuntary counterpoints to the fundamental structure of the voluntary or the cogito. The essay also sums up Ricoeur's philosophy of pathos that serves as a thematic grounding for the subsequent work (specifically for *Fallible Man*) as well as for Ricoeur's later repeated summary of the cogito as a living, acting, and suffering self.

### *New Trajectories*

The division 'new trajectories,' consisting of three essays, asserts the continued importance of Ricoeur's early work by providing some interpretive possibilities. Natalie Depraz proposes that Ricoeur's early phenomenology leads him to a path that set aside the eidetic aim and introduces, in turn, a descriptive 'experiential' aim—ultimately leading him to seek further resources from hermeneutics. In spite of initially drawing from Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, Ricoeur's phenomenology is more open to experience as empirical (instead of the invariable eidetic structures of experience Husserl was keen to expose). Depraz's thesis is that Ricoeur incorporates a path of thought that leads him to accept empirical psychology—transformed from naturalist to introspective—as a part of his phenomenological pursuit.

Geoffrey Dierckxsens's essay then ties *Freedom and Nature* to both analytic philosophy of mind and empirical science in that, according to Dierckxsens, the work has its specific focus in 'embodied cognition' and consciousness in a manner that can be likened to enactivism (whose anti-representationalist thesis concerns mentality as environmentally and socio-culturally situated, engaged, embodied, and constructed). Whereas, Ricoeur's philosophical analysis of imagination may prove to be helpful for those pursuing enactivism, applying enactivism can in turn help relate Ricoeur's work to those philosophical questions and pursuits more properly esteemed in the analytic trait of western philosophy (an opening Ricoeur himself provides in *What Makes Us Think?*, Princeton University Press 2000).

To further question the analytic and continental divide, Adam J. Graves's essay brings Ricoeur's early work in contact with that of P.F. Strawson. Such move, according to Graves, exposes the metaphysical assumptions imbedded in Ricoeur's phenomenology, while at the same time shedding light on Strawson's own assumptions that Graves calls 'narrative.' In doing so, Graves's essay moves heavily in the direction of *Oneself as Another*, thereby opening avenues for relating Ricoeur's dissertation to his later work.

Overall, the *Companion to Ricoeur's Freedom and Nature* is a much needed and welcome contribution that helps in understanding the richness of Ricoeur's early thought and also its formative role for virtually all of his subsequent work. It is to be hoped that Davidson's projected companions to *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil* will shed light on those more explored and better known texts in a similar manner.

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