This book is for Mary and Michael
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ABBREVIATIONS

C&C  Critique and Conviction
CI   The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics
CR   The Course of Recognition
FM   Fallible Man
FN   Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary
FP   Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation
FTA  From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II
HHS  Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences
HT   History and Truth
IT   Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning
J    The Just
LLP  The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, Library of Living Philosophers, 22
MHF  Memory, History, Forgetting
OAA  Oneself as Another
RJ   Reflections on the Just
RM   The Rule of Metaphor
SE   The Symbolism of Evil
T&N  Time and Narrative
Students may well feel perplexed encountering the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur for the first time. There is so much of it, if one is just counting the number of books and essays. Moreover, if they look at his books in chronological order they will find that Ricoeur keeps adding new topics. He even makes adjustments in how he does philosophy as he finds new problems and new challenges to what he is doing. Since many contemporary philosophers confine themselves to a single question or problem the new reader may wonder whether he really has a significant philosophical lesson to teach us. In fact, there is an overall unity to his work and a common problem or at least set of problems that runs through it. This has become clear since his death in 2005, which closed the canon, so to speak. There will not be another book, on another apparently new topic, even if he was considering one when his health began to fail for the last time. That almost all of his major published work is now available in English translation means that we can look at his work as a whole and trace themes through it, knowing where it ends. When we do that, we see not only that he had many significant things to say on a wide range of topics, but that his many books and essays do hold together as a single philosophical project, even if this project was left incomplete in the end. But he also said that such incompleteness is not necessarily a bad thing. Philosophy, he maintained, applies itself to something it cannot exhaust, so philosophical questions can always be reopened and refined. His death, in this sense, leaves us with work to do ourselves based on what he was able to accomplish. To do that, however, we must first begin to grasp what he was about as a philosopher.

This book is written to help students get started on that task. It is an introduction to the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur for those who
may not know much, if anything, about it, but who do have some commitment to philosophical inquiry. It can also serve as a contribution to understanding and better appropriating his thought for those who are already familiar with it to some degree. Because there is so much material to consider, my perspective is not critical but rather expository. One could call it a philosophical narrative, given Ricoeur's own contributions to the theory of narrative discourse. As such, it proceeds in a basically chronological fashion to present an overview of his major writings in terms of a few central themes that run through them and tie them together.

Of course, any exposition must reflect a perspective and some interpretive choices. Mine reflect decisions about what is centrally important to understanding his thought and its contribution to philosophy. Such an approach must also inevitably leave things out. Ricoeur, for example, was very knowledgeable about the writings of the major figures in history of philosophy and returned to these figures again and again both in his teaching and in his writing. But I have chosen to ignore his detailed discussions of other philosophers except insofar as they contribute to seeing how his work unfolds over time. I realize that this means there really is not sufficient discussion here of how and why the history of philosophy was important to Ricoeur – and how this contributed to his own understanding of what he is about as a philosopher. This is a question, therefore, that any serious reader of Ricoeur who decides to pursue his work further will consider. I believe what I have said about it here will be sufficient to show why this is so, but also that it was not necessary to do so in greater detail here.

Ricoeur was a philosopher who was involved in the world beyond professional philosophy to a unique degree. Scholars outside the philosophy guild across a wide variety of disciplines have perceived his work as important. Besides philosophers, it has been discussed by historians, literary critics, legal theorists and jurists, biblical exegetes and theologians, who see in it resources that can help them in their own efforts. They see that he often addresses challenges to their work that call for a response on their part, while, at the same time, they recognize how seriously he takes their fields and has incorporated them into his own project. I have not had the space to pursue these influences here or to discuss how Ricoeur is read by scholars in other fields. I do hope, however, that those coming at Ricoeur from other disciplines will find the account of his work presented
Ricoeur did present accounts of his intellectual biography several times over the years. Because all this material is available in English, I have chosen not to dwell on it here. Charles Reagan has written a convenient short biography of Ricoeur that also includes a more personal memoir of their friendship for those who wish to know more about Ricoeur's life and experiences (see Reagan 1996). He was raised by his grandparents, following the death of his mother shortly after his birth and that of his father in World War I. He lost a dear sister to tuberculosis in his youth. He himself spent five years as a prisoner of war of the Germans during World War II. During this time, with a colleague, Mikel Dufrenne, he taught philosophy to other prisoners in the camp — and did it so well that the French government agreed to grant degrees to his students following their release at war's end. His life was threatened during the Algerian War because of the stand he took against it. He was actually assaulted by a student who dumped a waste basket on his head in the aftermath of the student riots in Paris in 1968. He endured a number of vicious verbal attacks by French intellectuals who did not like what he was saying. He lost a son to suicide and saw his beloved wife die before him. In a word, he knew life can have a tragic dimension because he experienced the ups and the downs of the twentieth century. He did not seek to avoid allowing this to influence what he was about as a philosopher, even while he committed himself to its autonomy and goal of speaking truth to everyone. The many translations of his
work, in later years into more than twenty different languages, as well as the prizes and honorary degrees he received, show that he found a large audience already during his lifetime. Yet he always maintained that he would rather that people discuss his work rather than talk about him. Through this book I hope the reader will find encouragement to enter into that conversation. That would be one gift I could return to Professor Ricoeur in gratitude for all he taught me and for his friendship over the years.
Freedom and Nature was Ricoeur's doctoral dissertation. It was meant to be the opening volume of a projected three-volume philosophy of the will. In it Ricoeur presents 'something like' an eidetic phenomenology of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary in human existence. That is, his goal is to grasp these two central notions, which make freedom meaningful, in terms of something like their essence, or as conceptually as possible, beginning from a pure phenomenological description. He acknowledges that there are inherent limits to such an approach, however, because human existence is an embodied existence. This raises the problem of motivation as influencing any act said to be freely chosen. What is more, human existence is temporal. But the eidetic approach of phenomenology in seeking an intuition of essences abstracts from the unfolding of action over time, by dividing it into atemporal stages. The question arises therefore how we are to make sense of the overall unity in time of these separate stages. Finally, there is the sheer event aspect of any act of choice to consider. Something happens when we act, but a free act is not just another natural event. It is a new beginning, one that we will, that we chose. So what makes it a voluntary act for which we are responsible and not just another predetermined occurrence in the sequence of natural events? This is the underlying issue of human freedom that Ricoeur wants to address in his philosophy.

WHY DOES HE START WITH THIS QUESTION?

A major assumption of Ricoeur's thought is that while philosophy has its autonomy, it is always dependent on something that precedes
it, which it never fully absorbs or exhausts. Philosophy does have its autonomy in that it chooses its starting point, the question from which it begins. But this question already is situated and motivated by something problematic outside of – and prior to – all philosophy: the non-philosophical or perhaps life, being, or reality. Philosophy arises therefore in response to this non-philosophical reality that precedes it, seeking to make it intelligible in ways that are adequate to what is at issue concerning our experience of it. This idea of an autonomy without independence for philosophy runs throughout Ricoeur’s work, setting limits to what philosophy can achieve without ever denigrating or denying its achievements. Ricoeur’s is an understanding of philosophy, therefore, that implies that philosophical questions are always capable of being reopened, and also that there may be unrealized resources in earlier philosophers’ works that can be taken up and developed further. This is one reason why he will reject all talk about an end of philosophy in the sense of philosophy having exhausted itself. It also accounts for the tension between continuity and discontinuity that runs through his later constructive formulations, particularly his theory of narrative discourse but also his ‘little ethics’ and his philosophical anthropology of the capable human being.

We need also to note that there are a number of assumptions and influences operative in the way Ricoeur poses his initial philosophical question and project. These can be taken as sources of his thought without taking away from the originality of his starting point. First, drawing on the philosophies of Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, Ricoeur sees that the subject-object model that has characterized philosophical thinking since Descartes is problematic. It does not finally make sense of our experience of ourselves, others, or the world we live and act in. This subject–object model presents itself as a theory of knowledge, but Ricoeur sees that it is based on what really is a metaphysical model in which a subject is related to an object through being conscious of that object and representing this object to itself as subject. This model is metaphysical because it presupposes that the subject and the object in question, or the two of them in relation to each other, are and must be real. Descartes’ famous discovery of the cogito – our lived experience of our inability to deny our own existence – thus involves both epistemological and metaphysical aspects. The epistemological aspect is seen in that fact that in the cogito I know something for certain, that I exist, hence
some knowledge is possible and therefore, according to Descartes, we can establish a basis for recognizing what else can count as knowledge: anything equivalent to the self-evidence of the cogito or derivable from it. Furthermore, since we experience our existence as real, this experience presents an initial example of what reality must mean for us. But because Descartes first formulated this as the discovery of an epistemological model, he did not really develop its metaphysical side. His philosophy sought to account for the very possibility of knowledge, over against the threat of scepticism, by ‘showing’ us such knowledge. When something is known in this way, because it cannot be doubted, and hence is certain, then it can rightly be said to be the object of knowledge and hence known ‘objectively’. Yet at the same time, this known object is always an object for a knowing subject, the one who performs and experiences the cogito. In this sense, for the Cartesian model there is no objectivity without subjectivity, no objective knowledge without subjectivity, without some knowing subject to whom it is known. Correspondingly, there is apparently no objectivity without subjectivity, a point that Ricoeur will take very seriously in formulating his own philosophical method. However, he also sees that this subject is as yet no one in particular; it is anyone at all insofar as that person is a knower. Paradoxically, because it is no one, it can also be everyone; hence it is both everyone and no one, at a price that has to be considered.

Two further problems set the framework for Ricoeur’s initial philosophical question. The Cartesian subject knows itself; at least it knows itself as existing, because as long as it thinks, it cannot doubt its own existence. But if what a subject knows is always an object, there is a problem about its knowledge of itself. Does it know itself as an object, and hence no longer as a subject? Or is there another kind of knowing, which we might call subjective knowing, which is also a kind of knowledge, but not objective knowledge? Secondly, there is a question of how one subject knows another subject. When he discovered the cogito, Descartes already puzzled over this question. How can we recognize another human mind, since all we see are objects standing over against us however intelligent their behaviour may seem to us? These problems raised by this Cartesian model continued to be a major topic for Ricoeur, to the point that in the end he came to see the model as ‘broken’ and in need of reformulation as the problem of selfhood, the selfhood of a capable human being.
Another factor influencing Ricoeur to pose his initial question as he does was Kierkegaard and what we label as existentialism. As Kierkegaard forcefully argued, given Descartes’ model, the subject is not and can never be an object, for the very subject–object model divides the two into separate categories at the same time that it relates them through what Descartes called consciousness, particularly that specific form of consciousness we call knowing. For Kierkegaard, and for existentialism in general, this leads to a major problem. The model calls for a subject, but the subject as already stated is no one in particular. It is me only in the abstract sense that I can be, am a knower. But this seems to leave something important out, whatever it is that makes me, me – and you, you and not someone else. Yet, at the same time, without such subjectivity, can I really say that I am me, that I exist? This is another reason why, in the long run, Ricoeur will propose that what is at issue is the nature of the self, where this self is more an agent than a knower, but an agent who has a specific identity and who is responsible for his or her actions.

I will label this emphasis on the uniqueness, the singularity of individual existence – what Ricoeur will subsequently call our selfhood – the existential thread in Ricoeur’s philosophy. The three twentieth-century thinkers already mentioned, Marcel, Heidegger and Jaspers, all influence how he takes up this existential critique of Descartes and questions the subject–object model. For Marcel, the subject, the existing individual, is always incarnate. But this leads to the puzzle that we say both that I have a body and that I am a body. How are we to account for the unity of the I and its lived body? Marcel tried to make sense of this through a practice of concrete reflection, which he sought to illustrate dramatically through writing plays as well as philosophy. For Ricoeur, this unity of the incarnate subject is most evident in human action, hence his concern for the question of freedom.

For Heidegger, at least in Being and Time, Dasein, which names the existence each one of us is, has to be understood as existing as being-in-the-world rather than as a subject who objectifies over against itself what the world contains from a position itself not located inside this world. Hence Dasein has to be described in terms of a model or structure of finite, worldly existence rather than simply as some form of purely subjective existence that stands over against the world and even outside it. Heidegger’s critique was also
directed against those versions of philosophical idealism where all objects and even the world itself, understood as another object, exist somehow only 'within' the subject or as constituted by the subject, as in neo-Kantianism. But he also held that neither can Dasein be explained as ultimately something objective, as merely one more thing among many, with subjectivity playing no part, for how then could this be known since there is no knower? Therefore Heidegger held that both subjectivity and objectivity themselves have to be understood hermeneutically through an interpretation derived from this more fundamental being-in-the-world. It is this version of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein that Ricoeur most valued and holds onto throughout his own work.

Ricoeur's first published book, written with Mikel Dufrenne, was on Jaspers, whose work Marcel had encouraged him to consider. Jaspers' philosophy of *Existenz*, another way of naming human existence, still makes use of the subject–object model, yet at the same time tries to get beyond it through a method he calls 'transcending thinking'. That is, if we apply the subject–object model to what Jaspers calls limit situations such as death, suffering and guilt, his claim is that these experiences somehow point beyond or transcend themselves, or at least they suggest a kind of lived experience that goes beyond the subject–object model. This experience is revelatory of the limits of the subject–object model and yet itself is never adequate to what lies beyond it and encompasses it. Jaspers names this encompassing other Transcendence, a term Ricoeur appropriates from him. In fact, the most important thing Ricoeur does take from Jaspers is the question how it might be possible to think such Transcendence, although Ricoeur is more willing than was Jaspers to relate it to the idea of God as found in Judaism and Christianity. We can say therefore that in his early work, and even all through its subsequent development, Ricoeur is looking for a philosophical approach to such Transcendence starting from its relation to human freedom and action. One of his fundamental philosophical goals, as with Jaspers, is to make sense of Transcendence without turning it into an object or a subject in a way that collapses us back into the subject–object model.

Another influence on Ricoeur's early project of a philosophy of the will is Immanuel Kant's presentation of the antinomy of freedom and causality, or as we might say today, of freedom and determinism. According to Kant, if we are truly free, we must be able
to act in such a way as to spontaneously initiate a course of events; we must be able to do something for the first time that would not otherwise have occurred. But science says that in nature every thing has a cause, hence there seems to be no room for such freedom. Ricoeur refuses to understand this antinomy as a strict either/or, where one thesis must be true and the other false. In his own interpretation of Kant, Ricoeur will hold that Kant draws on two different languages in the way he formulates this antinomy, one that speaks of our lived experience of ourselves as free, the other which corresponds to a scientific language that presupposes an understanding of causality that leaves no room for freedom. We are unable to reduce these two languages to just one of them. To do so would be again to limit ourselves to talk either of subjectivity or objectivity, as though either could exist independently. Neither, however, do we have a way simply to leap beyond these two ways of speaking, not even given the progress being made today in what is now called cognitive science.3

We can see from all this why Ricoeur called his initial project Freedom and Nature, echoing the Kantian problem. Ricoeur's innovation in dealing with it is that rather than phrasing the basic problem in terms of freedom and determinism, he does so in terms of what he will characterize as the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary sides of our lived experience.

This brings us to the final figure we need to take notice of in listing some of the major influences on Ricoeur's approach to a philosophy of the will. This is Edmund Husserl, the founder of modern phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy. Ricoeur had translated one of Husserl's most important texts into French while a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II. Husserl, who was originally educated to be a mathematician, was a systematic thinker, a very systematic thinker. When he turned to philosophy, he claimed to have discovered in phenomenology a method for doing philosophy in such a way as to resolve all its questions. Husserl's emphasis on the importance of method in philosophy was what first attracted Ricoeur to his work, as a way of moving beyond Marcel's less systematic, more impressionistic way of taking up philosophical problems. Ricoeur also recognized that Husserl had been able to modify Descartes' subject–object model in an important way by seeing that it really presupposes three, not just two, terms. Our consciousness is always consciousness of something; hence it is necessary to attend to how our consciousness 'intends' its object. In effect, Descartes'
model should really be seen as a ‘subject intends an object’ Husserl added that, given this revised model, the phenomenologist’s task is to describe things as they appear within it, without taking into account any assumption about whether these appearances – or phenomena – actually exist or not. Just describe the phenomena as they appear to our awareness of them. To make this rigorously descriptive approach possible, Husserl introduced the idea of a reduction or bracketing of the question of actual existence. This reduction – or actually a series of reductions – was meant to leave us finally with only the essence of the phenomena in question. Simply describe things as they appear was Husserl’s watchword, but also realize that how they appear (in the sense of how they are intended) can vary and also needs description. An example can be helpful here. A visually perceived object appears differently from thought about an ideal, mathematical one. We never see more than three sides of a cube at one time, but we can think it as a six-sided object. In both instances we have a cube, once as a perceived cube, once as a conceptualized one. Thus, as in this example, for phenomenology both the intended object and the intention directed toward it can be identified and described. More importantly, they always appear in relation to one another, so while phenomenologists may concentrate on one or the other component of intentional consciousness, in the end they have to acknowledge their mutual dependence and include it in their accounts.

Many of Husserl’s own phenomenological descriptions were devoted to examples drawn from visual perception, given his interest in resolving what he took to be the pressing questions in the theory of knowledge. However, there is also the question of the status of the subject pole in his model, at least in the sense of whether it too is something that can be described. Husserl himself took it as a transcendental subject, something more like a point source from which intentional consciousness radiates, leading him to characterize his phenomenology as a form of transcendental idealism. Ricoeur was unwilling to accept this interpretation of phenomenology given his own commitment to understanding human existence as embodied existence in the world. What he does take from Husserl therefore is the understanding of phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy based on a descriptive method, one that seeks to begin by not making assumptions about whether the things described really exist or not, even though for Ricoeur it is beyond
question that there is always a sense of a larger, more complex reality operative at the limits of what is described, what we have called non-philosophical Transcendence beyond the subject–object model.

**RICOEUR’S PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY**

In his own proposed systematic project, Ricoeur seeks to apply this descriptive approach to human action rather than to perception, Husserl’s major concern. This is the phenomenology that he presents in *Freedom and Nature*, which he wrote as his doctoral dissertation. What such a revised phenomenology discovers, he claims, are meanings or the basic principles governing the intelligibility of our lived experience, meanings that allow us to make sense of human action in terms of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary in our lived experience. The voluntary and the involuntary have to be considered as reciprocal because otherwise neither phenomenon is really intelligible. In a purely objective world, one without freedom, there would be nothing to understand, because there would be no one to understand it, no subjectivity. But pure subjectivity without objectivity is also unintelligible if we consider human action, because this subjectivity would not exist in a world beyond itself or be able to act at all since the voluntary can reveal itself only by means of and in relation to the involuntary. This is why we have to consider them together.

Beyond their reciprocity, Ricoeur further holds that philosophy has to weight the voluntary over the involuntary, again for a reason that traces back at least to Descartes if not to Augustine before him. One of the striking things about Descartes’ cogito argument is that the subject is aware of itself; it knows that it knows, that it thinks. Ricoeur, too, stands in this reflexive tradition that emphasizes self-awareness and with it our self-knowledge besides our knowledge of the world, even while admitting that such self-knowledge is always dependent on our knowledge of the world. He will modify this reflexive tradition, however, by holding that we never have direct or immediate knowledge of ourselves. We know ourselves only indirectly in terms of the objective world and our actions in it.

Why does Ricoeur say that he will begin from an attempt at pure description of the phenomena in question? Because his goal is understanding more than explanation. It is the meaning of the phenomena
relating to the voluntary and the involuntary and their implications for human self-understanding and responsible action that he is seeking. In keeping with the Cartesian and the phenomenological model, such meaning is always meaning for someone, for a subject. This is why Ricoeur’s own phenomenological descriptions will always give the most weight to the voluntary aspect of the voluntary-involuntary pair. The very idea of the involuntary, it will turn out, is dependent upon its being considered in relation to voluntary action. Otherwise we end up trying to conceive of something beyond our experience that is unnamable. If we can in fact call it the involuntary, it is because we already presuppose our lived experience of what Ricoeur calls the voluntary. As he puts it, ‘If the so-called elements of mental life are not intelligible in themselves, we can find no meaning in a purported primitive automatic behavior from which voluntary spontaneity could be derived by secondary complication, flexibility or correction’ (FN, 5–6).

Pure description of the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary also requires setting out of play any pathological forms of the phenomena in question. This is why Ricoeur will leave the question of evil, in the sense of a misuse of our freedom, for a projected second volume of his project. Similarly, whatever it is that responds to the problem of evil, what, following Jaspers, Ricoeur calls Transcendence, has to be left for a proposed third volume, one that was meant to follow the introduction of the problem of evil into the discussion of the general problem of freedom and nature. But, as we shall see, this volume was never written.

Finally, Ricoeur already notes that such attempted pure description will leave something out, ‘a residuum’, whose consequences will have to be considered. In a way, this residuum is also what the empirical sciences deal with. This is why Ricoeur’s attempted phenomenology is attentive to empirical psychology as he knew it at the time. His claim is that ‘vestiges of a phenomenology’ (FN, 13) can be found in it through what he will call a diagnostic approach to its data.

In the end, what he discovers is that all attempts to articulate fully the relation between the voluntary and involuntary become ‘stymied in an invincible confusion’ (FN, 13) that we can call a mystery (following Marcel) or a paradox (following Jaspers). Indeed, ‘there is no system of nature and freedom’ (FN, 19, original emphasis). This is important because philosophies based on the cogito tend to think of
it as positing itself, but according to Ricoeur this means ignoring the lived body by treating it as one object among others, and not as something given as soon as we begin to think. Therefore something more than phenomenological description will be required to make sense of the relation of freedom and nature; in fact, to deal with this, something more than a simple change of method will be required. As Ricoeur can already put it here: ‘the Ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile circle of the self’s constant return to itself’ (FN, 14). This critique of the self-positing ego will be a thread that runs throughout Ricoeur’s subsequent philosophy.

A final point that needs to be noted here is what Ricoeur says about the limits of philosophy as a pure conceptual system, another thread that runs through his work, and leads to his critique of Hegel’s philosophy as tempting but ultimately not acceptable. As he can already put it in this early work: concepts ‘are indications of a lived experience in which we are submerged more than signs of mastery which our intelligence exercises over our human condition’ (FN, 17, original emphasis). Yet at the same time, he will hold that ‘it is the task of philosophy to clarify existence itself by use of concepts’ (ibid.). This is what he is proposing to do in this first volume of this proposed three-volume study.

MAKING SENSE OF HUMAN ACTION

Ricoeur’s first step is to consider deciding in distinction from voluntary motion. What separates them is not a temporal but a conceptual interval. What we decide upon is a project, although this project also needs to be put to the test of whether it can be or is carried out. In this sense, deciding is a capacity, a notion that will play a much wider role in Ricoeur’s late work where he will move beyond the question of freedom to consider the self as the capable human being in a much broader sense, albeit one still closely linked to the question of action. For what makes an action voluntary and characterizes any decision, is that it includes an intention ‘that could be affirmed after the fact as a potential project of a postponed action’ (FN, 41). What is fundamentally at stake here therefore is the claim that the project might not be carried out, but in any case it ‘appears to be within the power of its author’ As such, a decision can be
conceived of as both a thought (of what is to be done) and a judgement (to do it). A decision, therefore, is like an event in the sense that it comes down to taking a position – so be it! It is not a whim or a command, but is the act of someone, hence a personal act. ‘Hence its existential import is considerable: it is I who project and do something in projecting or doing something’ (FN, 48). Next, a decision looks to, projects a future. This means that it is characterized by a certain expectation, not so much of the yet to come as of the future perfect, of what will have come. As such the future and time in general – is a condition of action, even though our attempt to describe the voluntary slices it into different, timeless moments.

Finally, as already stated, a decision is a capability. Here Ricoeur adopts the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that our most basic lived experience is that of a lived conviction that ‘I can’ This way of speaking not only expresses this capability; it links it to something more basic than itself. Even at this most basic level, though, Ricoeur notes that there is a reflexive aspect to every decision: I make up my own mind to do something. This is not something I observe, but something I do, hence it stands at the limit of the subject–object model, although it carries within itself ‘a vague awareness of the subject pole’ (FN, 60), which is why we can reflect upon it. One way we do this is through language. We can think and say, ‘it is I who... At the same time, we can also see that not all decisions need to be explicitly reflected upon or brought to language, although we may do that after the fact when we realize what we have done.

This phenomenology of deciding leads next to the question of motivation. ‘There are no decisions without motives’ (FN, 66). The obvious question is whether such motives are causes. Ricoeur holds that in terms of their basic meaning they are not. Causes can be known and understood prior to their effects. This is not true for motives. That is, a motive only makes sense, only has a meaning in relation to a decision. We cannot even begin to talk about a motive apart from some decision, and any decision makes possible questions about its possible motives. Hence their relation is reciprocal. As Ricoeur puts it, a motive ‘determines the will only as the will determines itself’ (FN, 67). Motives, therefore, operate more on the level of meaning than of natural causes. They can thus be said to provide a basis for, a way to justify, to legitimate decisions. Ricoeur’s conclusion is that all that we can say if the question is ‘are motives at all like causes?’ is that they incline without compelling.
A second aspect of the phenomenology of motives has to do with their relation to values. That is, there is an implicit sense of evaluation in any motive. One conclusion Ricoeur draws here is that values first appear to us as possible motives for decisions. This suggests that there is an ethical dimension always implicit in or bordering on human action, although Ricoeur does not develop this point in depth at this time. Instead, he moves on to say that the major point here is that willing as deciding is never a pure act on our part: 'I do my acts to the extent to which I accept reasons for them' (FN, 78). Hence, there is always also a receptive moment in all voluntary action, something we often express through metaphors: we open ourselves to or close ourselves off from; we turn toward, adopt, adhere to. Again, these are all things we can think and talk about, particularly when they are marked by a feeling of responsibility, something emphasized whenever we say that something is my act.7

Ricoeur is now ready to introduce the involuntary in terms of my body as 'the most basic source' of my motives and as revealing 'a primordial stratum of motives: the organic values' (FN, 85). His claim is that the involuntary is 'for the will' and the will 'is by reason of the involuntary' What he means is that while the higher cannot be explained by the lower, there is also always something opaque about the bodily involuntary that will resist pure description and even language because experience always involves more than cognitive understanding. The best we can do is to wager that we can make sense of what is at issue here through use of the already mentioned diagnostic relation between objective knowledge of the body and our lived experience.

The first way Ricoeur seeks to do this is through a discussion of need and pleasure. In the most abstract sense need relates to a living organism's need to appropriate and assimilate things, say food, in order to exist. Thus needs should not be reduced to just an inner sensation. They refer to something other than myself, and thus have a kind of intentional relation to something other than themselves, at the same time that they are experienced as referring to something that I lack. This experienced lack is also characterized by an impetus, a drive to remove it. This is why some needs can be experienced as painful and why any need can overlap with the question of motives for action. But as such, needs are also something I can resist or even reject. 'Though I am not the master of need in the sense of lack, I can reject it as a reason for action' (FN, 93). To cite an
example, I can choose whether to eat if food is available; I do not choose whether to be hungry. Needs thus are not just one motive among others; they especially connect us to our embodied existence.

What is noteworthy here, especially for later developments in Ricoeur’s philosophy, is that when needs connect with possible motives, we can represent them to ourselves in terms of particular objects. This raises the question of the role of the imagination. This topic occurs again and again in Ricoeur’s philosophy, although he never published a specific work dealing with it. Here, though, we can say that imagination provides another link to time in that through our imagination we can anticipate something that might be ‘as something currently absent at the basis of the world’ (FN, 97).

Imagination thus links up with the affective dimension connected with the basic idea of a project, and many if not all of our projects carry an affective overtone of some concern. At the same time, a door is opened to the possible limit case of becoming fascinated with our concern to the point of being ensnared by it, something that will become important when the question of evil comes on the scene. Here, however, the discussion of imagination stays closer to the level of something like pure knowledge.

Pleasure as something we both can anticipate and imagine is also worth considering, if only because it indicates something about the nature of desire beyond the level of basic needs. ‘Desire is the present experience of need as a lack and as urge, extended by the representation of the absent object and by anticipation of pleasure’ (FN, 101). What is interesting here is again the reference to the future. The pleasure I experience is as much something I anticipate as something I currently feel. This is because pleasure is tied to the idea of value. ‘To anticipate a pleasure means to be ready to say, “this is good”’ (FN, 102). But here again we may deceive ourselves, yielding to the temptation or fascination that goes beyond or misconstrues our actual needs or good. But to pursue this at this point would be to go beyond the brackets imposed by the attempt at pure description. All Ricoeur can say at this point is that pleasure in relation to the imagination may be an invitation to the fault. Instead of pursuing this possibility, however, he next offers some more general comments on how motives and values relate to the organic level of our lives. For example, pain is not the opposite of pleasure, but something heterogeneous with it. Similarly, what is difficult, and thus not always pleasantable, may have a positive value in the way that it relates to a freely
chosen action. Finally, we must say that what we find in relation to organic life is a plurality of values, some of which are discordant with others. Hence there is something ambiguous about organic life that will resist all our attempts to make complete sense of it – for example, by trying to organize such discordant values into a single hierarchy.

One important conclusion here is that as affectivity ‘bodily existence transcends the intelligibility claimed by the essences of the cogito’ (FN, 120). Therefore any attempt to think of a simple will to live as ultimately constitutive of our lives will always run into difficulties, if only because even the organic values we consider are themselves subject to change over time and place. ‘Life, at least on the human level, is a complex, unresolved situation, an unresolved problem whose terms are neither clear nor consistent’ (ibid.). In other words, what the phenomenology of the voluntary and involuntary tells us is why we have to make choices not how we make them. We make them because we are both subject and object, without being able to reconcile these two ways of being completely. Beyond this, we also have to recognize that such choices are situated with regard to time and place and will have to be understood in ways that acknowledge this.

Returning to the side of the voluntary, and in order to deepen this description of decisions, Ricoeur turns next to what he calls the history of decision making as a movement from hesitation to actual choice. There is something dramatic about this history. ‘Existence moves forward only through the double movement of corporeal spontaneity and voluntary control. This process has two aspects: it is both undergone and carried out’ (FN, 136). Here is where we find the tension between continuity and discontinuity already referred to above. The ‘let it be so’ of choice introduces a discontinuity into this history, where our hesitation had already suggested a capacity for such a choice, and where the choice made cuts off the hesitation at the same time that it fulfils it. Many factors are at play here: the kind of confusion that comes from bodily existence, the values that may be in play, the realization of our finitude indicated by our mortality, the attention we may pay to all these factors. Ricoeur’s working hypothesis is that ‘the power of stopping the debate is none other than the power of conducting it and that this control over the succession’ is what we mean by our ability to pay attention to it and determine it as some outcome (FN, 149). Again, imagination may
play a role here, and there is no reason to think that this is necessarily a completely rational process, although the process may involve deliberation. Its conclusion in any case is a decision, even when it is one not to decide.

Decisions can be a source of novelty. 'The event of choice always permits two readings: on the one hand, it is tied to the preceding examination whose end or, more exactly, resolution it is; on the other hand, it genuinely inaugurates the project as a simple intention of future action' (FN, 164). Paradoxically, it is our attending to the process of reaching a decision that resolves this process by identifying it. This is why we can never fully reconcile the two readings just referred to. We can see this once we recognize that, on the one side, hesitation plays with different possibilities and reasons for acting, yet these reasons only become operative once our choice is made, without that choice being able to be conceived of as completely unmotivated. Therefore there is good reason to introduce a certain indetermination into our definition of freedom, although this should not be thought of as an indetermination of indifference. The problem is how we are to make sense of the claim that to decide and to choose and to be undetermined are one and the same thing. This is where the eidetic tips over into the existential and calls for a different approach, one that Ricoeur announced at the time as a poetics of the will which could only come after passing through the problem of the fault, of evil. All he will say about it at this point is that if something like an ontology, a theory of the nature of ultimate reality, is operative here, it is a regional one, not one that can claim to be universally exhaustive.

Decisions, then, do not make up the whole of voluntary action; they are just one aspect of them. They have to be put to the test of being carried out if the power of decision is itself a capacity to set things in motion. Again, Ricoeur's phenomenological approach will try to isolate this phenomenon as much as possible in order to capture something like its essence. Most acts are done as soon as we think of them, but action can also be delayed. But if a project is never attempted there is something mistaken about calling it action. In this sense, there is a basic value operative in action in that willed acts refer to something that ought-to-be. But as stated, 'moving and deciding can be distinguished only in abstraction: the project anticipates the action and the action tests the project' (FN, 202). A basic insight here is that this level again brings the body into play,
along with perhaps the imagination, but it is the body as an organ of action more than itself being the end of action that is in question. What is at stake is something like what we can call effort, both as regards trying to carry through on our decision by means of our body, and even in representing this to ourselves as something desirable: 'I cannot represent the content of the value to myself unless I master the movement of the body and the movement of the idea. The first function takes place in the register of practical representation, the second constitutes the original relation of willing to reality which is acting strictly speaking' (FN, 204, original emphasis).

This is obviously not easy to describe and Ricoeur considers a number of different phenomena in trying to explicate it. Many of them present themselves as obstacles to description as much as they advance its progress. For example, that actions are events tends to emphasize the present moment of their occurrence as much as the process that is the setting into motion of our decisions. There is a mixture of happening and doing at play here. Secondly, there is the question of whether we can make sense of the object of acting in terms of the phenomenological idea of intentionality. That is, what is at issue is not just that I intend to do something in the sense of willing it, but also in the sense that in willing it, I refer to something, my project or act, which we can identify and name. This intended 'object' is not always clearly given; certainly it does not appear in the same way as does an object of perception or even of knowledge; in fact, it comes close to evoking something like a non-representative consciousness, one that Ricoeur tries to capture by calling this intended object the 'pragma' of acting. That this term is not very satisfactory is evident from the fact that it disappears from his later work, but the problem is a real one and is connected to the notion of consciousness as somehow involving representations, a problem that will continue to show up in Ricoeur's later work, until he finally concludes that it is not a helpful way to approach things after all and simply needs to be abandoned.10

The body is the organ of our acting more than it is its object. How, then, do we make sense of our experience of moving our body? This must be, first of all, a capacity we possess, hence something potential. But it is also a capacity we come to recognize through using it. In this sense, 'capacities are at the same time residues of action and promises of action' (FN, 215). A striking case here is that these capacities are not something we have to think of in order to use
them, although we can reflect upon them. To put it another way, they are not things that we observe, unlike objects of perception. Here, Ricoeur again sees something that resists any reduction to disembodied consciousness. ‘Cartesian dualism cannot be overcome as long as we assign thought (project, idea, motive, image, etc.) to subjectivity and movement to objectivity.’ The question therefore is how to reintroduce the body into the cogito ‘as a whole and to recover the fundamental certitude of being incarnate, of being in a corporeal situation’ (FN, 217). This is a question that will involve language, a language where thought and movement would be homogeneous categories.

Here the idea of a diagnostic approach comes into play. Applying it to both Gestalt and Behaviourist psychology, Ricoeur argues that they both end up trying to objectify the ego in just the way he is arguing finally cannot be done. Yet they do suggest a helpful way of thinking about voluntary motion and embodiment as a ‘dramatic’ relationship in that they show that ‘every voluntary hold on the body repossesses the body’s involuntary usage’ (FN, 227). By this, Ricoeur means that voluntary motion is not simply given; it is something we learn to do through something like a dialogue with our body. He seeks to confirm this by considering three relevant examples: preformed skills, emotions and habits.

Preformed skills (such as our ability to stand upright) refer to something prior to reflexes but neither are they instincts. Rather they refer to ‘a primitive pattern of behavior of our body in relation to perceived objects’ (FN, 232). They regulate movement but do not produce it. Next, emotions presuppose a more or less implicit motivation that precedes and sustains them. As such they give an added physical aspect to already conscious ends, one that points to a nascent movement. Hence they are more basic than acquired habits. Ricoeur further suggests that we can identify what he calls basic emotional attitudes such as wonder or shock, or joy and sorrow, which can be elaborated by our affective imagination and culminate in desire, thereby ‘echoing and amplifying in the body a rapid, implicit value judgment’ (FN, 256). As such, the phenomenology of emotions suggests that ‘for the idea of a spontaneity of consciousness we have to substitute the idea of a “passion” of the soul from the fact of the body’ (FN, 275) wherever there is a possible action. This, in turn, implies that ‘willing only moves on the condition of being moved’ (FN, 276). Consciousness, therefore, can already be seen to have the
capability to bind itself, in the sense of making itself the prisoner of imaginary evils, or even of what is really nothing at all, something we call vanity. At the same time, emotions are not mere reflexes; they are partly subject to our giving them meaning and responding to them, which is already a kind of wisdom.

*Habits* like emotions represent an alteration of our intentions. They have been learned or acquired and relate to how we act. As learned, they build on our preformed skills, not our reflexes, and have use-values. Furthermore, they have a specific kind of spontaneity associated with them indicated by our familiar gestures and even customary thoughts. We can say that they give a form to our sources of action, but they are not precisely willed, although we can make an effort to change them. At one extreme, they become automatic, tending to reduce our willing to zero; at the other, they enable action in that they give it a form or pattern through which to express itself. Combined with preformed skills and emotions, habits help us make sense of what it means to put our decisions into motion, something we again see takes *effort*.

Effort, first of all, has a sensory aspect, although we only really become aware of this through reflection. Ordinary actions are things we just do, but sometimes we encounter resistance either from our body or from the world that we can focus our consciousness on. In such cases the body is no longer a docile organ of action and we no longer experience ourselves as a simple unity, an experience that in extreme cases can turn into something like vertigo. Yet we can encounter resistance to our projects only because we can say yes to them. This is why there is a kind of joy in acting when it succeeds, when our voluntary initiative carries over into what we can call a motor intentionality that connects our lived body and our acts as put into motion. This motor intentionality is transitive; it does not terminate in the body but reaches out to the world in a way that differs from seeing or hearing. In both cases, though, the world is experienced as there for us. This ‘there for us’ of the world Ricoeur says is a *mystery* in the sense intended by Gabriel Marcel, who distinguishes between a problem, which is something to be solved and that can be solved, and a mystery which is something that can only be acknowledged and marvelled at. This is why Ricoeur will always maintain that something is given to us and that the problem of the truth of reality cannot be answered solely through a consideration of our will or our reflective consciousness.
Once we reach the stage of *movement* a new factor emerges that Ricoeur calls *consent*: ‘consenting is the act of the will which acquiesces to a necessity’ (FN, 341). He considers it in term of three forms of the involuntary that move us from something like a relative to an absolute involuntary: character, the unconscious, and life itself. As such, consent is not just a judgement; it is a constitutive part of human freedom given the reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary. It involves a form of patience before what we cannot change, but also puts the stamp of effectiveness on what we can do, thereby legitimating our choices. In a striking phrase, Ricoeur says that ‘consent is the asymptotic progress of freedom towards necessity’ (FN, 346), reuniting us with nature. This is not easy to make sense of given the subject–object model. How can these two terms be reunited? How can we finally say that there is no incompatibility between them? Or that all forms of freedom finally agree with one another? This is what a philosophy of the voluntary and involuntary seeks to resolve, even if it itself does so only asymptotically. That is, this philosophy can get closer and closer to such a resolution, but Ricoeur does not think it can ever attain it given our finite, embodied human existence in a world we did not make. This is why conciliation will always be incomplete, if only because there is an inherent ambiguity in the idea of necessity, one that points to both a condition of our existence and its limit. Still, Ricoeur maintains, ‘the yes of consent is always won from the no’ and this cannot be denied by attempts to objectify everything (FN, 354).

This, however, is a victory for reflection, but not yet one for existence. More needs to be said about the negative moment through which freedom and necessity negate each other. Unlike Sartre, Ricoeur refuses to consider freedom to be the sole source of negation ‘as if freedom were brought about by nothingness, by the very act in which it breaks away from the blind innocence of life’ (FN, 445). Rather negation has to be seen as both positive and negative. It is injurious in that it appears as an active negation of freedom, positive in that it is freedom’s response to the ‘no’ of necessity. After all, ‘freedom is the possibility of not accepting myself’ (ibid.) and philosophy has also to make sense of this. This question of determining who I am, my self, will become a constant theme of Ricoeur’s philosophy, in the sense that negation is something we can hope to overcome. To fill out this claim, Ricoeur here considers our experience of necessity in terms of three moments. The first such moment is what he calls ‘the sorrow
of finitude’ We suffer from our finitude when we realize that we represent only one perspective on the world and values. Similarly, we can suffer from having to make choices, which not only emphasize our particularity but also remove us from other possibilities. With this comes the second moment, the ‘sorrow of formlessness’ There is something about us that we do not choose yet that affects us, something we can try to give form to by calling it the unconscious, ‘the spontaneous power of unrecognized tendencies’ in us (FN, 449). Finally, there is the ‘sorrow of contingency’ I did not choose to come into existence, to live. As Heidegger says, we are ‘thrown’ into existence and into the world, and with it into a space and time that extends between birth and death. But, unlike Heidegger, Ricoeur does not define existence in terms of its being toward death. Yes, death represents ‘an irrecusable necessity’, but ‘this necessity cannot be deduced from any characteristic of existence. Contingency tells me only that I am not a necessary being whose contradiction would imply a self-contradiction; it allows me to conclude at most that I can not-be one day, that I can die – for what must begin can end – but not that I must die’ (FN, 458, original emphasis). Once the idea that I will die is gained, however, the sorrow, and perhaps also the anticipation, increases. Yet freedom responds to this ‘no’ of our existential condition with the ‘no’ of refusal.

This is most clearly seen in its most exaggerated forms: a wish for totality, for complete self-transparency, and in our desire to say that we in fact posit ourselves in positing our consciousness. But ‘any ideal derivation of consciousness is a refusal of its concrete condition’ (FN, 465, original emphasis) – freedom’s no, in other words, can turn into a form of vanity. Ricoeur’s conclusion is that consent is not a way of refusing necessity but rather of transcending it, particularly as regards evil, through a poetic response rooted in hope. Ricoeur considers two opposed, imperfect forms of alleged consent here to give some content to this idea of hope: one is Stoicism, which is an effort at detachment rather than conciliation; the other Ricoeur calls Orphism or the hyperbolic consent represented by Nietzsche and much of Rilke’s poetry, a kind of dancing over the abyss. Hope lies between these polar extremes of exile and confusion and sustains us in that it allows us to hope that we at least are on the way to conciliation.

Ricoeur’s conclusion to this first of his projected three volumes therefore is that there is ultimately something radically paradoxical