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NARRATIVE AND ONTOLOGY:
PAUL RICOEUR’S HERMENEUTIC PHILOSOPHY AS A GUIDE TO
THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP OF THESIS AND AGREEMENT FOR THE RETENTION AND USE OF THE THESIS

I, Xavier Lakshmanan, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged. I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses.

Signature:                      Date: August 2013
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This thesis argues for a textual linguistic theology shaped in conversation with Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur’s philosophical hermeneutics can help to inform the way Christians interpret and appropriate biblical narratives without delimiting the potential of the biblical text or eroding the distinctiveness of its language. The text can be appropriated in ways that address the fundamental questions of life, so that new meanings are constantly generated from the same text. Ricoeur sees the self as linked inseparably with narrative; every interpretation of narrative is at the same time a reinterpretation of the self and of its possibilities. Such interpretation – where the reader interprets the text and the text interprets the reader – aims to open up the world of the text and to uncover the “textual” structure of existence itself. The reality that unfolds through language discloses the possibilities of existence, and in this way the text creates a future. A revised identity emerges against the horizon of that future. It is at this point that the aim of Ricoeur’s project converges with the aim of Christian discourse: namely, to give a coherent and dynamic account of the self against a horizon of hope.
DEDICATION

In love, I dedicate this thesis to my beloved wife Nissy Xavier, with gratitude for her sacrificial investment and unceasing patience throughout the course of this research and writing.
INTRODUCTION

This research looks to Paul Ricoeur and his philosophical theory as a conversation partner for a Christian theology based upon narrative. In dialogue with Ricoeur, the study will aim to offer a broad methodological framework for a textual linguistic theology in which biblical narratives are appropriated as a source of selfhood, identity, and meaning. The purpose of this thesis is not to develop the content of a textual linguistic theology, but to argue methodologically for textual linguistic theology as a way of doing Christian theology in a postmodern context.

Ricoeur’s project is an elaborate search for identity and self-understanding through the medium of texts. In his thought, the self stands inseparably linked with narrative. Identity emerges from narrative through a creative process of interpretation. This interpretive process opens up the world of the text and uncovers the “textual” form of reality itself. It also elicits from the text new possibilities of human being in the world, set against a horizon of narrative hope. The reality that comes in this way through language redescribes human existence and reorganizes the shape of life by stretching it temporally toward the future. Here a self comes to understand itself in terms of its total possibility, so that a reshaped identity emerges in the present against the horizon created by the text.
My research presupposes agreement with several theologians that contemporary Christian theology\(^1\) must look for new ways to appropriate the biblical text and to address the questions of human existence and identity. This study argues that Ricoeur’s philosophical project, consisting of his philosophical anthropology, narrative theory, hermeneutic philosophy and linguistic theories, can be an effective conversation partner with Christian theology. His philosophical project can provide insights to sharpen the methods of theological reflection. Involving Ricoeur as a dialogue partner can help theology to appropriate the biblical text in a creative, meaningful way, and to formulate a theoretical framework for understanding the relation between text and self. The result is a theology which addresses an enlarged sense of identity in the world, through narrative, ontological, linguistic, and temporal resources, all based upon dynamic interpretive processes.

Ricoeur’s aim is to understand human identity in the context of text, narrative and textual language through interpretive processes – and this aim resonates with the Christian tradition, in which identity is grounded primarily on biblical texts. My thesis argues through Ricoeur for a textual linguistic theological model that may function as a dynamic approach to theology today. This may provide human beings not only with a theoretical account of self-identity, but also with a coherent framework for viewing the role of text and language in the formation of the self. This textual linguistic

\(^1\) For a general overview of contemporary Christian theology, see Bruce L. McCormack and Kelly M. Kapic (eds.), *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).
theology, shaped in conversation with Ricoeur, offers to illuminate the way Christians appropriate the biblical narratives without delimiting the creative potential of those texts or their unique literary quality as narratives.

Context of the Research

Exploring the sources of understanding the self and its formation in a modern world, Charles Taylor points out the importance of narrative as the fundamental resource in which the self discovers, understands and interprets itself. Based on similar accounts of the priority of narrative, modern theology has made considerable shifts in its approach to the Bible. For instance, Richard Lints argues that the “translation of biblical information into an abstract theological language may take away clarity,” while Stanley J. Grenz observes that “merely quoting from scripture [cannot] bridge the gap from the first to the twentieth century”; theology needs to find a way to continue its task “apart from the appeal to propositional revelation.” Dan R. Stiver observes the contemporary situation of Christian theology and states that “when our footing constantly threatens to slip, we can welcome aid from any quarter.” Grenz further argues that these circumstances make it difficult for Christians “to employ their faith as a basis from which to make sense out of their personal identity.” This problem of identity is explored by Joseph Moore, who notes that “propositions are … entities without

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identity,”⁷ so that “we should not admit propositions into our ontology.”⁸ Or as Michelle Montague remarks, “Propositionalism must be abandoned.”⁹ Abandoning the propositional way of doing theology leads Ronald F. Thiemann to see Christian faith and practice together. He argues: “If Christianity is a practice, then the formation of Christian life becomes the central task of the Christian community.... Theology as a crucial activity within the Christian community should also serve Christian practice.”¹⁰ He further argues that “the key to an appropriate understanding of theology and practice lies in a fuller appropriation of the narrative shape of the Christian life and of Christian theorizing. Narrative is the crucial category for reuniting the theoretical and practical in the Christian community.”¹¹ Similarly, Stephen Crites argues that “Narrative alone can contain the full temporality of experience in a unity of form”;¹² and Anthony Balcomb notes that only “a narrative approach can honour the plurality and diversity of experience without compromising the reality of that to which experience refers.”¹³

Indicating the need for narrative to discover truth-values in biblical studies, Grant R. Osborne argues: “We must work with the literary as well as the historical dimensions of biblical narrative, and we must seek both historical and theological truth. They are intertwined in historical narrative and cannot

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¹¹Thiemann, “Piety, Narrative, and Christian Identity,” 149.
be separated into isolated compartments.”\(^{14}\) And George Stroup observes: “When biblical narrative falls silent, the people of God have nothing to remember, and with nothing to remember they soon forget who they are. Their untutored imaginations turn to other narratives and other gods.”\(^{15}\)

Understanding narrative as a universal property that marks the starting point of reflection, MacIntyre argues that one of the common human cultural properties is narrative. Possessing a common cultural resource means sharing basic “schemata which are at one and the same time constitutive of and normative for intelligible action by myself and are also means for my interpretations of the actions of others.”\(^{16}\) Thus the concept of narrative helps human beings to understand how they grasp their own identities. For MacIntyre, “any epistemological crisis is always a crisis in human relationships,” rooted in a disturbance of the functioning of common narratives.\(^{17}\) In the same way, Diogenes Allen argues that “who we are and how we understand life – and how we are to be understood by others – is bound up within such narratives,” so that without them “we inevitably encounter both intellectual and emotional crises.”\(^{18}\)

But in spite of the concern with narrative in contemporary Christian theology, there remains a need for a rigorous theoretical model which explains the precise relation between narrative and the self. As Stroup

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\(^{15}\) George Stroup, “Theology of Narrative or Narrative Theology: A Response to Why Narrative? Critic’s Corner, 432.


\(^{17}\) MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” 5.

suggests, the burgeoning contemporary literature on narrative theology is often haphazard and impressionistic rather than conceptually rigorous; it “continues to grow by leaps and bounds but without direction, or, more precisely, in every conceivable direction.”\(^{19}\) It is in response to this lack of coherence that I turn to the philosophical project of Paul Ricoeur as a resource and a dialogue partner for Christian theology.

Many thinkers in various disciplines have been arguing for Ricoeur’s significance in recent years. Ricoeur’s philosophical insights have been appropriated in a wide range of interdisciplinary studies. Richard Kearney states that “Ricoeur is one of the most challenging and enduring thinkers of the twentieth century,”\(^{20}\) with much to contribute to theology. David Pellauer says that Ricoeur’s work has been considered important by “philosophers …, historians, literary critics, legal theorists and jurists, biblical exegetes and theologians, who see in it resources that can help them in their own efforts.”\(^{21}\) *Reading Ricoeur* is a multi-author work that demonstrates Ricoeur’s contribution to twentieth-century theory. This work explores Ricoeur’s impact reaching to philosophy, aesthetics, humanities, hermeneutics, social studies and religious studies. After surveying Ricoeur’s works in chronological order, the authors critically engage Ricoeur with his contemporaries – thinkers such as Sartre, Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas, establishing his standing as a major twentieth-century

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\(^{19}\) George Stroup, “Theology of Narrative or Narrative Theology,” 425.
philosopher. A recent study by Chinatsu Kobayashi links Ricoeur to one of the twentieth century’s most important historians, R. G. Collingwood. In *Ricoeur across the Disciplines*, Scott Davidson shows the importance of Ricoeur’s philosophical thought not only for contemporary philosophy but also for religion, history, political theory, law, rhetoric, psychoanalysis, women studies, race studies and musicology. Ricoeur’s influence is recognized also in psychological studies. Terry D. Copper argues that Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy can help to uncover deeper symbols, images and metaphysical assumptions behind psychological investigations. He suggests that Ricoeur is an interpretive resource also for pastoral theology and counselling professionals. Exploring Ricoeur’s work, *History, Memory, Forgetting*, Asma Barlas considers the psychological process of human existence; in the event of trauma and loss of memory what one loses is an awareness of oneself and others. Ricoeur’s philosophy has also influenced political theory and sociology. Evaluating Ricoeur’s notions of political philosophy and institutions, Mathias Nebel demonstrates that Ricoeur’s thought can be an effective partner in the task of transforming unjust social structures. Exploring criminal justice with Ricoeur’s idea of the supra-juridical and supra-ethical character of pardon, Jonathan Rothchild argues that Ricoeur’s thought can provide a new way of understanding

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criminal justice in the context of religious atonement theories. Similarly, Ricoeur’s contribution extends to religion and science. Don S. Browning investigates the possibilities of reviving a religion–science conversation through dialogue based on an integration of psychological, spiritual and hermeneutical paradigms. He argues that Ricoeur’s formula of hermeneutic reason is uniquely able to create a space for such integration. Inspired by Ricoeur’s work *On Translation*, Marianne Moyaert suggests that Ricoeur’s notion of the enigma of linguistic diversity could be used as a model for inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue would also appropriate Ricoeur’s ethical position of hermeneutical hospitality for the other.

Ricoeur’s influence has been especially felt in theological and biblical studies. Brian Gregor argues that Ricoeur’s concept of phenomenological interpretation can provide a resource for a theological understanding of the self; Gregor calls this a cruciform self. Maria Duffy, exploring Ricoeur’s narrative theory of memory, considers the conceptual and methodological issues involved in theories of forgiveness and reconciliation. Her study emphasises Ricoeur’s contribution to a world broken by war and violence.

T. L. Hettema’s work *Paul Ricoeur: Politics and Religion* investigates the intersection of creative language, religion and philosophical reflection in Ricoeur’s philosophy. Hettema argues that Ricoeur opens new avenues for

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reflection on ethics, biblical studies, systematic theology, practical theology, intercultural philosophy and spirituality. In a study of philosophical atheism, Richard Kearney argues that atheist critiques of God’s existence are a necessary moment in the development of genuine faith; and Kearney suggests that Ricoeur’s view of ethical interpretation can provide a map for understanding this process.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues that Ricoeur’s philosophy “offers exegetes and theologians a way of reading the bible that is theologically and existentially fruitful in a situation marked by the extremes of historical criticism on the one hand and deconstruction on the other.” He further argues in his work on *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* that Ricoeur’s significance for theology is “much broader” than his interpretive resources for exegetes: “For the Christian theologian, Ricoeur’s most intriguing mediation, even more than his treatment of the history-fiction question, may well be the larger one between philosophy and the bible.” Thomas Andrew Bennett suggests that Ricoeur’s “language of hypothesis” can help theologians to “develop an evaluative grammar” which provides a philosophical account of the “phenomenon of textual plurivocity, the way in which texts can ‘open new worlds,’ and the real rational grounds for disputing a reading.” Boyd Blundell argues that theology can appropriate

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Ricoeur’s strategy of detour and return to explain the human self as authentically constituted within the context of the biblical narrative of the fall and a divine offer of salvation in Christ. Blundell sees Ricoeur’s religious thinking as relevant not only to theology as a specialised discipline but also to a wider discourse about human existence.\(^{38}\)

Gregory J. Laughery demonstrates Ricoeur’s importance for biblical interpretation. He argues that Ricoeur’s philosophy has the “potential capacity to debunk modernist-postmodernist perspectives of Biblical interpretation, offering us a way forward.”\(^{39}\) He develops a hermeneutic approach to the Genesis creation narratives based on Ricoeur’s account of the enigmatic relationship between time and change. Applying Ricoeur’s idea of narrative time to the creation narratives, he establishes a pattern of divine action described as sculpting in time. In this way, the biblical narratives take on the form of a founding narrative that represents a theological, historical and literary refuguration of the world for any time.\(^{40}\) Similarly, maintaining the biblical concepts of the image of God and the knowledge of good and evil as the centre of Christian anthropology, Jason P. Roberts argues that Ricoeur’s idea of the second naïveté can help to reformulate Christian anthropology in an intelligible contemporary way.\(^{41}\)

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Attempting to reconcile philosophical anthropology with theological anthropology, Michael DeLashmutt argues that human identity is always narrative identity. It can also be an eschatologically durable theological anthropology based upon Christ’s resurrection. Such a Christian theological anthropology is possible if theological reflection appropriates Ricoeur’s notions of narrative identity and narrative figurations. This is because Ricoeur’s philosophical anthropology offers a language of symbol and narrative that can redescribe the self in terms of Christian concepts of grace, faith, promise and soul.⁴²

Dan R. Stiver argues that Ricoeur “offers … an altered philosophical resource for the reconstruction of contemporary theology, a partner that self-consciously does not desire to dictate the flow of conversation as much as to help keep it going in interesting and productive ways.”⁴³ Stiver strongly supports this position in his recent work, Ricoeur and Theology. He argues that Ricoeur’s philosophy provides one of the best “stimulating and provocative dialogue partners” for contemporary Christian theology.⁴⁴ Writing on Ricoeur’s concept of “Second Naïveté,” Mark I. Wallace suggests that “a theological hermeneutic for today will profit by attending to Ricoeur’s close reading of the Bible’s multifaceted world.”⁴⁵ Hence, Wallace concludes that “what this interpretive task offers is the remarkable

⁴⁵ Mark I. Wallace, “The Second Naïveté,” Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics (Mercer: Mercer University Press, 1989), 119. He argues that Ricoeur’s “hermeneutic of the second naïveté will focus on the give-and-take between text and audience; it will maintain that Scripture is more like a lively and open ended game between its world and the world of the reader than it is a closed book whose meaning is exhausted by the standard theological lexicon.”
possibility of a second hermeneutical innocence to the claims of scripture; the hope that the mystery of the Bible can be construed as speaking again to the cultured despisers among us."  

Some theologians also observe Ricoeur’s potential not only for theological theory but also for Christian practice. John Wall argues that Ricoeur’s philosophical theory has much to contribute to religious ethics in terms of the narratological dimensions of human existence. Norbert M. Samuelson argues that Ricoeur’s “understanding of the relations of faith, love and hope suggests a unique approach to theological ethics, one that holds fresh promise for bringing together considerations of the good (teleology) and the right (deontology) around the notion of an ‘economy of the gift.’”

It should be clear then why Ivan M. Timonin concludes that Ricoeur’s philosophy is “a timely aid to theology in a time of major transition”, while Stiver concludes *Theology after Paul Ricoeur* with the statement: “Ricoeur’s philosophy is one of the most viable postmodern philosophies for theology. It raises one of the sharpest critiques of modernity while not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It retains on the far side of

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46Wallace, “The Second Naïveté,” 124-125. As Wallace concludes, what Ricoeur meant is summed up in his claim in *The Symbolism of Evil*: “by interpreting we can hear again.” See Paul Ricoeur, Emerson Buchanan (trans.), *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, 120. For Ricoeur, this happens by “putting the word to work to allow the texts that I have loved and interpreted to be a poetics of my liberation in a concern for others, in solidarity with the planet, and in discipleship to the God of the biblical message”: Paul Ricoeur, “Naming God,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979) 226.


modernity radically revised conceptions of objectivity, truth and reality.”  

Similarly, Maria Duffy notes that Ricoeur has made “striking ventures into theology and biblical studies, revealing a level of expertise rare to philosophers. He has made original contributions to exegesis and biblical hermeneutics – a trajectory that has brought reason closer to faith.”  

And Aloysius L. Cartagenas concludes that Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation encourages a radical reshaping of theology by providing a “critical reading of the whole tradition.”

But the drawback of the theological appropriations of Ricoeur lies in the tendency of theologians to just draw on isolated aspects of Ricoeur’s philosophy without considering his thought as a coherent whole. Some theologians appropriate his theories of narrative, others his theory of metaphor, yet others his interpretation theory. Vanhoozer rightly observes that theologians “have been quick to use Ricoeur’s approach and insights when convenient,” but that because the overall “theological tenor of his work is lost in studies which focus on his interpretation theory to the exclusion of the larger context of his hermeneutic philosophy, namely, his search for the meaning of human being.”

Scott Davidson identifies a similar problem in the diverse inter-disciplinary appropriations of Ricoeur. He argues that those who seek to apply Ricoeur to their respective disciplines tend to leave out the extent of Ricoeur’s own cross-disciplinary

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50Stiver, Theology After Ricoeur, 247.
53Vanhoozer, Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 3.
and inter-disciplinary work, along with its own rigorous inter-connected logical relations. This tendency in theology is exemplified in the study of David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension between Love and Justice*. In this work, Hall argues that the creative tension between love and justice is the central theme of Ricoeur’s philosophy, and Hall uses this as the interpretive key for understanding Ricoeur’s entire project.

Kenneth A. Reynhout maintains that contemporary Christian theology is poor without enough critical and theoretical resources. It lacks a model for interdisciplinary dialogue. Exploring the interpretation theory of Ricoeur, he argues for an alternative understanding of interdisciplinary theology as faith seeking understanding. According to him, an interdisciplinary theologian can borrow resources from Ricoeur to address the challenges posed by the natural sciences without surrendering Christian theological norms and commitments.

It is at this point that Dan R. Stiver’s work *Ricoeur and Theology* is outstanding among other interpretations of Ricoeur. Stiver lays the foundations for this research by demonstrating how philosophy and theology intertwine in Ricoeur’s thought. He argues for the increasing fruitfulness of Ricoeur’s philosophical project for a wide range of

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54 Davidson, *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, 73.
contemporary Christian theological debates. For him, Ricoeur is an interdisciplinary thinker who draws together existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, psychoanalysis, metaphor, narrative, political ethics and religious studies. Ricoeur’s notions of symbol, metaphor and epistemology offer much to the philosophy of religion. But Stiver insists that those who seek to appropriate Ricoeur must identify the continuing logical thread of his project – a project that is centred on and controlled by the anthropological question of human existence and identity. Even though theology has appropriated Ricoeur to some extent, Stiver argues, it has done so in an “indirect way.” Stiver recommends instead a direct appropriation: taking Ricoeur’s philosophy as a “primary guide” to theology. Such direct appropriation of Ricoeur’s thought offers an entire “framework for doing theology.”

Building on Stiver’s conclusions, my thesis is a search for such a theological framework in the philosophy of Ricoeur. My study will be guided by the internal logic of Ricoeur’s thought. I will argue that Ricoeur’s entire philosophical project – rather than any isolated aspect – should be drawn into dialogue with contemporary Christian theology. For this reason I will not follow the chronological path of Ricoeur’s publications. Rather I will pursue the internal logical path of the continuing thread of his thought – a thread that starts with narrative existence and leads to narrative identity. In this way, I will aim to offer a broad methodological framework which can contribute to a Christian way of appropriating biblical narratives as a

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58 Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, 35.
contemporary source of selfhood, identity, and meaning. Thus, in this thesis, my aim is not to construct a substantive theology, but to develop a methodological framework based on the whole structure of Ricoeur’s philosophy.

Outline

In the first chapter, using Ricoeur’s narrative theory, I shall argue that human experience can be composed into readable texts by utilising the prenarrative qualities of experience. This ultimately results in the shaping of a narrative identity of the self. In this way, it can be said that the biblical text was originally part of the divine-human experience in its revelatory context. But the event of revelation was expressed in language through a linguistic composition, which now requires an interpretive translation for each subsequent reader so that the original revelatory event will again become revelatory. As the revelation arises out of language, it finds its expression in the reader where it continues to be active and dynamic until the reader finds herself in the revelatory movement – all this is what it means, theologically, to speak of the narrative identity of the self. In short, the Bible can speak again and humans can hear again.

The second chapter argues that text as discourse offers the reader a new world of existence, and thus a new possibility of life. The text unfolds an ontologically possible world of existence in front of itself and before the
reader. Here the textual world of meaning arises out of its semiotic structures by making reference not to the factual world behind the text – neither to authorial intentions, nor to closed semiotic systems but to an ontologically possible world, which the text projects in front of itself. Here the existential world that the text shows stands between the semantic world of the text and the existential world of the reader. It is a dynamic encounter of the textual reality with the reality of the reader. The world of the text eventually explodes the world of the author and the world of the reader alike. In demolishing worlds, the text imaginatively reconstructs a new world of being and reorients the reader within it. The text discloses its world neither when it remains alone as a document, nor when the reader is critically unaware, but when the reader engages critically in the process of reading and interpreting the text. The result is a dynamic interpretation through interaction.

By exploring Ricoeur’s theory of metaphoric language, in the third chapter I shall establish that the existential life that the text shows is a life of language, while the language of life is the language of metaphor. Textual ontology is a linguistic ontology, and the language of ontology is metaphor. Here Ricoeur’s philosophy aims to penetrate into the essential structure of human existence. The linguistic orientation of existence leads the self to figure out its situation in the world; the language of metaphor functions as an epistemological tool. I will argue that human existence structurally is language, and that the language of metaphor is the language of existence. Human beings are not only hermeneutical beings but also linguistic beings, and the human way of being in the world is linguistic. Metaphor leaves open
a space in language for God to come to humans, creating fellowship through linguistic identity.

In the fourth chapter I shall demonstrate that, for Ricoeur, metaphorical language functions as the language of the real. As the language of reality, it functions as the means for the disclosure of the real; it discovers the real; it brings the real; and it redescribes the very nature of the real. The reality that comes through the language of metaphor is itself metaphorical. Here the language of metaphor provides the basis for the creation of a surplus of meaning in the text. As the surplus of meaning is created, a surplus of being also occurs. Metaphoric reference to reality makes the metaphoric disclosure of reality possible. Such metaphoric linguistic reality cannot be verified by any empirical apparatus, but it can be attested by life.

In the fifth chapter, I will explore how metaphoric reality opens existential life to new possibilities. The language-reality redescribes human life and creates new possibilities, so that the self is reoriented in time. This redescriptions of human temporality is attained through narrative hope. In narrative, passion gives rise to the redescriptions of temporality; creative imagination energizes it; and temporality reorients it in the world. Existence, for Ricoeur, is the form of this temporality. Self-knowledge is grasped as the totality of reoriented temporality and as the presence of the possible – retrospectively, prospectively and introspectively. Here, as metaphor and narrative make a pair, metaphorical redescriptions and narrative refuguration goes hand in hand, and lead to human identity.
In the last chapter, by inquiring into Ricoeur’s notion of identity, I shall demonstrate how one can form a sense of identity here and now. It will be shown that human identity, for Ricoeur, arises from the “totality” of life. Ricoeur envisages an unending process of narrative creation in the quest for self-identity. This narrativity not only brings Ricoeur’s philosophical trajectory to its climax but also brings a textual linguistic theology to closure, as the theological search for human identity culminates here. As the self grasps its possibility through textual possibility, it also interprets itself in terms of the vision of the totality that it received. In this way, the vision of totality corresponds with the vision of identity.

What I am calling “textual linguistic theology” is, therefore, an argument that Christian theology can be rooted in narrative, grounded on ontological foundations, enlarged by linguistic possibilities, reshaped by metaphoric reality, and reorganized by temporality. Such a reorientation shows that theology is inadequately expressed in propositions, but the dynamic expression of human possibilities. Theology can make sense of human existence; it can provide resources for human self-understanding; it can assist the formation of identity; and it can speak meaningfully of divine action in the world. Narrative experience can be refigured, and can be temporally reoriented as a total vision of life. Such a total vision of life consists of the self’s understanding of its complete existential possibilities here and now. And it shows that human existence is open towards eternity, a
life beyond the here and now. Only through such a total vision is identity attained in the present.
Chapter One

Narrative Textuality

In this chapter, I will explore Ricoeur’s theory of narrative. His account of narrative aims to provide human actions unity and meaning. Meaningful actions are those that can be narratively composed into readable texts. And for Ricoeur, an inseparable relation between narrative and experience can be established. He bases this relation upon the pre-narrative qualities of experience. Appropriating Ricoeur, I will argue that Scripture is the narrative composition of divine-human revelatory actions into readable text. Through interpretation, the narratively composed experience can become a revelatory event for subsequent readers. Thus all meaningful experience requires narrative composition, and narratively composed experience needs interpretive processes if it is to be translated into the present.

1.1. Narrative Quality of Experience

Narrative theorists agree on the importance of narrative in human life and culture. Nevertheless, they differ at their opinion as to the nature of this narrative role. What is the precise relationship between narrative and human experience? Is human life essentially narrative oriented? Or “Is narrative extrinsic to human experience”? Philosophical, literary and theological narrative researchers establish this vital relation between narratives and human life. Louis Mink, Hayden White, Alasdair MacIntyre, David Carr and Paul Ricoeur have explored this extensively. They hold several ideas in
common in analysing the nature of narrative. But it is interesting to observe Mink and White arguing for the extrinsic nature of the narrative form in human existence. Human experience is imposed with narrative qualities from outside. On the other hand, MacIntyre and Carr argue that narrative is an inherent property of human experience. But drawing much from both strands, Ricoeur establishes the poetic nature of narratives and the narrative quality of human experience. Nonetheless, the focal issue that each of them addresses is identical and striking. It can succinctly be stated. Do humans live out narratives in life as having been intrinsically ingrained with narrative quality? Or do they live their lives first and then extrinsically project on life a narrative quality later on?

1.1.1. Extrinsic Nature of Narrative Form

Mink and White argue that narrative structure is not substantially innate in psycho-physical human constitution. It is imposed from outside onto human life. Analysing narrative structure, Mink contends: “Stories are not lived but told.”\(^1\) Human life does not possess originally the narrative form in itself, “except as we give it that form by making it the subject of stories.”\(^2\) He suggests that human life does not consist of such narrative qualities as beginning, middle and end. Rather the starting point of a matter belongs to

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\(^2\) Mink, Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, 133.
the narrative that humans recount about themselves later. Human beings draw resources from both history and fiction to tell complex stories and to show how such stories answer issues. In this context, Richard T. Vann observes that, for Mink, the qualities of narrative structure are transferred to human life from art, nursery rhymes, and cultural myths.

In continuity with Mink, Hayden White affirms the value of narrative as a universal form of verbal representation. He argues that “the notion that sequences of real events poses the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origins in wishes, daydreams, [and] reveries.” He contends that narrative employs a code to create a certain kind of meaning. Events of any category can be emplotted in several different ways to extend meaning and articulation. Further, the closure of a story is a characteristic of narrative which does not inherently exist in any succession of events; it is imposed on the sequence of human experience.

1.1.2. Intrinsic Nature of Narrative Form

MacIntyre and Carr take the opposite perspective. They argue that narrative qualities are innately existent within the frame of human experience.

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4Mink, “History and Fiction,” 557.  
6Hayden White, “The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,” History & Theory, 23/3 (1984) 1  
8White, “Value of Narrativity,” 23.
MacIntyre perceives an inseparable relation between narrative and events that constitute human experience. He argues that stories are not mere compositions of poets, dramatists and novelists. Neither are they mere reflections of events that do not possess in them any narrative quality before one is externally imposed. “Narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration.” He illustrates this relationship through his notion of an “enacted narrative,” in which human beings live their own stories. By living, they understand their own lives in terms of the stories that they live out. Thus the narrative quality that exists innately in humans is an appropriate measure to understand the actions of others. Thus “stories are lived before they are told – except in the case of fiction.”

Accordingly, for MacIntyre the idea of intelligibility is the conceptual connection between action and narrative. McIntyre considers the concept of an action as a secondary abstraction from that of an intelligible action. Hence, for him, an action is a moment in an actual history. The idea of a history is as essential as the notion of an action. Each stands in need of the other. Anthony Rudd observes that MacIntyre’s concept of narrative is more than a mere enumeration of the sequence of events. What is central to his narrative is that it makes sense of the events it narrates. Moreover, MacIntyre extends his argument to establish the intrinsic narrative quality of

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10 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 212.
human life, which he calls “the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life.”\textsuperscript{14}

In agreement with MacIntyre\textsuperscript{15}, Carr argues that narrative “has been seen as a universal form of human expression found in folk tales, novels, films, plays, paintings, and comic strips.”\textsuperscript{16} He sets out his narrative project as a continuity of MacIntyre’s claim that “Stories are lived before they are told.” He argues that narratives “are told in being lived and lived in being told.”\textsuperscript{17} This indicates a continuity of relation between day-to-day human experience and narrative qualities.\textsuperscript{18} In Carr’s point of view, the narrative form is not extrinsically imposed upon human experience but is intrinsic in phenomena of narrative events. For him, the form of human experience is a narrative form. He points out that the beginning-middle-end structure that Mink excluded from human experience does in fact belong to human events, comprised of experiences and actions. Human beings recount narratives about such events. But even if a story is not being told about human events, the narrative structure belongs to the human makeup as such.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{14}MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 218.

\textsuperscript{15}It is apparent that Carr supports MacIntyre’s notion of narrative form. He says “it is arguable, however, that the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics of the contemporary British social philosopher and theorist Alasdair MacIntyre offers a less permissive and more promising account of narrative”: David Carr, “Moral Education at the Movies: on the cinematic treatment of morally significant story and narrative,” \textit{Journal of Moral Education} 35/3 (2006), 319.


\textsuperscript{17}David Carr, \textit{Time, Narrative, and History} (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986), 61.

\textsuperscript{18}Carr, \textit{Time, Narrative, and History}, 16.

\textsuperscript{19}Carr, \textit{Time, Narrative, and History}, 51.
Carr further argues that this narrative structure consists of standard components that make a good story. It is comprised of a central subject, a beginning, middle and end, even if humans do not know these details exactly.\(^{20}\) This argument leads him to argue that the narrative mode is essentially very close in quality to the structure of action itself, from the agent’s standpoint.\(^{21}\) Thus human actions do not receive their narrative form from the stories later told about them. Rather, whether I tell my own story or someone else does it, the action about which the story is told is already there. The story corresponds with and recounts the experience in the narrative structure. This means that the narrative draws its structure from the very action it narrates.\(^{22}\) Thus Carr is also able to demonstrate how religious and other non-literal stories can be routes to objective meaning and truth.\(^{23}\)

Though MacIntyre’s and Carr’s proposals are impressive, they have encountered serious criticisms. Hattingh and Van Veuren criticise them for extending too much importance to the concept of the narrative unity of life and its teleological nature. Such an approach seems to imply that there is no possibility for discontinuous and non-teleological stories.\(^{24}\) Bradley criticizes MacIntyre’s theory as too linear and teleological.\(^{25}\) And Piet Verhesschen observes a discrepancy in Carr’s project. Carr argues for the inherently existing narrative structure in human actions. On the other hand,


\(^{22}\) Carr, “Narrative Explanation,” 20.


he emphasises that the narrative character of our experience is not something that goes along by itself but requires constant effort. If a constant effort is required to give narrative form to human actions, is this not an indication that this structure is something that is projected from outside? If the narrative quality is intrinsically existent, why is human effort required? In addition, Verhesschen notes that MacIntyre and Carr’s notion of telling multi-stories based upon an identical series of events seems to contradict their own idea of the inherent quality of narrative form.

In an overall analysis, MacIntyre’s and Carr’s proposals are highly suggestive, and they prompt further reflection on the continuity between human life and narrative. Their own projects are unable to give a coherent account of this continuity; and at this impasse, we may turn to Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory as an alternative model of action, life, and narrative.

1.1.3. Poetic Nature of Narrative Form

Ricoeur argues for the inseparable relation between narrative and human experience. He vigorously states that a philosophical model that seeks to understand and articulate human experience meaningfully must employ a composite temporal framework. He calls this the narrative paradigm. In his

Ricoeur sets out this defence of narrative’s capacity to represent human action in time.

Ricoeur sets out a general starting point initially. He calls it a “common core presupposition.” Here time becomes human as it adopts the “manner of a narrative.” The narrative becomes meaningful as it depicts the “features of temporal experience.”

But at the close of the final volume of *Time and Narrative* He makes a decisive statement of the purpose of his narrative investigation: the “aporetics of time and the poetics of narrative correspond to each other in a sufficient way.” Accordingly, narratives signify concrete possibilities of human action and possible worlds of human existence. At the same time, Ricoeur eliminates the danger of equating life with a story from his narrative framework. He develops his theory of narrative by linking narrative’s temporal intricacies to the Aristotelian characterization of narrative as *muthos*, and *mimesis*. He translates *muthos* as “emplotment,” and the philosophy of *mimesis*, as “the imitation of an action.”

Ricoeur’s choice of the Aristotelian notion of emplotment is intentional. He seeks to capture the dynamic nature of the relationship between temporal experience and narrative. The construction of this relationship is a moment of the “arc of operations.” By means of these operations, practical

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29 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 274.
experience is comprehended.\textsuperscript{31} Henry Venema rightly observes that Ricoeur’s use of emplotment is a correlation of intimacy and necessity. This correlation lies between the narratives humans recount concerning themselves and the form of action from which stories originate and to which they return.\textsuperscript{32} For Ricoeur, this narrative composite consists of muthos and mimesis. And by using this he elaborates the intricate relation between narrative and the field of human action – a relation encapsulated in his concept of triple mimesis.\textsuperscript{33} The first mimesis is pre-figuration of the human experience. It describes the way in which human acting occurs. The second mimesis is configuration of the human field of experience. This concerns narrative emplotment, the imaginative and narrative composition of the elements prefigured. The final mimesis is refiguration of the human field of experience. It consists of the process of transforming the imaginatively composed elements into actual lived experience. This process together eventually results in narrative human identity.\textsuperscript{34}

This means that, for Ricoeur, narrative discourse is a critical moment of distanciation. A moment which is ontologically rooted in experience. At the same time it allows for the imaginative variation of what is received. Here narratives may reorganize and transform experience into more meaningful patterns. This is because he finds the ultimate importance of the relationship between narrative and human life to lie in the dynamism of the text. And text is capable of analogously transferring its identity to persons and

\textsuperscript{31}Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 15.
\textsuperscript{33}This triple mimesis will also be explored in depth in the following sections of the chapter.
\textsuperscript{34}Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 53-54.
communities. In effect, this cyclic relation between narrative and human experience permits Ricoeur to be functional. He can synthesise the opposing views on the narrative quality of human existence and to articulate the narrative composition of human experience.

1.2. Narrative Figuration of Experience

The narrative figuration of human action is the first of Ricoeur’s three mimetic moments. It describes the mode by which human action is always already prefigured with certain basic qualities. It is here that Ricoeur establishes the deep roots of narrative in the world of human acting. He argues that the narrative composition of action is rooted in a “pre-understanding of the world of action.” This means that narratives must possess pre-narrative qualities. The pre-narrative qualities of human experience are already intrinsically capable of narration. So they can be given a meaningful emplotment. The experience configured in this way will represent human actions in a standardised pattern.

Ricoeur’s concept of the pre-narrative qualities of action consists of three essential components. First, action already has certain latent “meaningful structures”; second, there are “symbolic resources” by which action is related to the semiotic order; and finally, all action has a “temporal character,” by which it is inherently related to narrative.

35 Venema, Identifying Selfhood, 95
36 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 54.
37 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 54.
1.2.1. Semantic Nature of Experience

Ricoeur constructs his concept of the semantic quality of human action. He unites the practical understanding of experience with the narrative understanding. His idea of experience consists of two inseparable aspects: first, a practical understanding of action and second, a narrative understanding of action. The semantic quality of action is the result of fusing these two elements together.

First, Ricoeur contends that plot’s capacity to imitate action presupposes certain fundamental qualities. These qualities operate in the process of “identifying action in general by means of its structural features.” By the “structural features,” he means capabilities within the semantics of action: we can ask who, how, why, with whom, against whom and so on. The way one identifies such an action and distinguishes it from mere physical movements is striking. Ricoeur argues that the emplotment discovers an anchorage within human competence. This anchorage is capable of using the “conceptual network,” which “structurally distinguishes” the field of human action from mere physical actions. This process results in a “practical understanding.” Arriving at the practical understanding of action takes place by identifying each action specifically in terms of its goals,

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38 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 54
40 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
motives, and the agents who are held responsible for the outcome of their actions.\(^{41}\) He envisages this process as providing understanding: the human agents act and suffer in situations that they did not create, and that do not belong to the “practical field.”\(^{42}\) For him, “acting makes what an agent can do” with respect to basic actions.\(^{43}\)

This idea of the pre-understanding of experience also entails that “to act is always to act with others,”\(^{44}\) through cooperation, competition or struggle. These interactive conditions re-join those ingredients of human circumstance through their assisting or obstructing characteristics. Such cooperation or competition may result as a “change in fortune towards happiness or misfortune.”\(^{45}\) For Ricoeur, this network is constitutive of the structure of the human experience. And it functions by the power of “linking [one] term to every other term of the same set.”\(^{46}\) In this way, every member of a set is connected in the network of “inter-signification.” As a member of the set, mastering this conceptual network shows the ability that can be called practical understanding.\(^{47}\)

Second, the relation between the narrative understanding of action and the practical understanding. This is “a relation of presupposition and of transformation.”\(^{48}\) Ricoeur’s notion of the conceptual network of human

\(^{41}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{42}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{43}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{44}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{45}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{46}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{47}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
\(^{48}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 55.
experience is that of a “paradigmatic order,” in which the semantics of action are placed in a framework of meaning.

Firstly, the relation is one of presupposition. Narrative has a basic familiarity with terms such as “agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hospitality, cooperation, conflict, success, failure,” and so on. Narrative is about action. All narrative “structural analysis” draws from the “phenomenology of doing something.” At the same time, narrative utilises certain “discursive features that distinguish it from a simple sequence of action sentences.” These features do not belong to the conceptual network of the semantics of action. Nevertheless, these are “syntactic features,” whose function is to “engender the composing of modes of discourse worthy of being called narratives.” This is fundamentally characteristic of both historical and fictional narratives.

Consequently, it is at this point that Ricoeur establishes the relation between narrative and action. He grounds this relation in the semiotic distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic orders. In the paradigmatic order, the terminology of action is synchronic. Contrarily, the syntagmatic order of discourse entails “the irreducibly diachronic character of every
narrated story.” In this way, for Ricoeur, narrative understanding is based on two levels of understanding: familiarity with the conceptual network which constitutes the semantics of action; and familiarity with the norms of composition that govern the diachronic order of a story. Accordingly, a plot is the “literary equivalent of the syntagmatic order that narrative introduces into the practical field.” Narrative does such a thing by juxtaposing events in a temporal sequence with the whole action which constitutes the narrated story.

Understanding plot as a poetic imitation of action leads him to face the problem of the nature of imitation in relation to human action. Faced with such a challenge, Ricoeur turns to inquire into the semiotic nature of human action.

1.2.2. Semiotic Nature of Experience

Ricoeur argues that imitation, as a process that elaborates the significance of action, must possess another supplementary quality. This quality is an “aptitude for identifying,” which Ricoeur calls the “symbolic mediations of action.” He envisages this semiotic feature as governing those components of doing something, being able to do something and knowing how to do something. He uses Cassirer’s theory of symbolic forms here to develop
his philosophy of semiotics. He describes human action as “always already articulated by signs, rules and norms …, always already symbolically mediated.”

This symbolic mediation distinguishes symbols of a cultural nature that underlie action and the symbols that constitute the first signification. This paves the way for Ricoeur to speak about an “implicit or immanent symbolism, in opposition to an explicit or autonomous one.”

Human experience always comprises some meaning. Arguing against the notion that symbolism is a psychological operation determined to guide action, Ricoeur claims that the sense of an action is always incorporated into the action itself.

Analysing the transition from experience to narrative understanding, Ricoeur inserts the category of action within systems of interacting symbols. Symbols confer “an initial readability” on action and “a texture of interpretants” that make the transition to narrative possible.

He asserts that every action can always be read as text. “In so far as the symbols, understood as interpretants, provide the rules of meaning as a function of which this or that behaviour can be interpreted.” Situating actions in a framework of symbolic mediation leads Ricoeur to incorporate individual experience under a social context. He argues that meaningful actions are always “rule governed behaviour”; such cultural codes “give form, order and direction to life.”

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60Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 57
61Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 57. This aspect of first-order and second-order symbolic language will be extensively discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.
62Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 57.
63Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 58.
64Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 58. See also Venema, *Identifying Selfhood*, 99.
65Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 58.
“imminent meaning” of action.\textsuperscript{66} This means actions themselves can be interpreted in terms of descriptive norms, and indeed as prescriptive norms equivalent to the notion of a rule.\textsuperscript{67}

According to Ricoeur, understanding experience descriptively and prescriptively allows human agents to morally evaluate actions. This will confer upon actions a qualified value. Here he contends that “actions can be estimated ... according to a scale of moral preferences.”\textsuperscript{68} In this way, they receive a “relative value,” and these levels of value ascribed to human actions can also be attributed to the agents who are held responsible for their good or bad acts.\textsuperscript{69} This is an important incorporation of the ethical evaluation of actions into the semantic structure of action placed in a cultural context. This safeguards Ricoeur’s theory of narratively composed actions from the danger of being ethically neutral.\textsuperscript{70}

Consequently, Ricoeur’s argument is that the representation of human experience stands in relation to the actions which agents perform. The act of composing a synthetic narrative from heterogeneity of experiences implies the formation of prescriptive representations. This occurs through a narrative configuration, which transforms the descriptive representations of action to a prescriptive paradigm for human existence.

\textsuperscript{66}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{67}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{68}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{69}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 58.
\textsuperscript{70}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 59.
However, affirming the semantic structures and the semiotic articulation of human action poses yet another significant problem for Ricoeur. This is the problem of why human experience requires narrative composition in the first place. And what necessitates an act of narrative construction of an identifiable synthesis of action from heterogeneous components? This problem leads Ricoeur to a consideration of the syntagmatic features of human action.

1.2.3. Syntagmatic Nature of Experience

Ricoeur’s inquiry into the narrative quality of action culminates in identifying the essential temporal elements of experience to which “narrative time grafts its configurations.”\(^7^1\) The process progresses through semantic structures and semiotic mediation. His analysis of the temporal features of experience commences with a statement of the problem: the “symbolic articulations of actions are bearers of more precisely temporal elements, from which proceed more directly the very capacity of action to be narrated and perhaps the need to narrate it.”\(^7^2\)

Ricoeur develops this by stressing that the understanding of action is not only limited to a familiarity with the conceptual network of action but also extends to its “symbolic mediations.” There are temporal structures like time and temporality within action itself that seem to demand a process of

\(^7^1\)Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 59.
\(^7^2\)Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 54.
narration. The temporal features of action are already implicit in human experience.\textsuperscript{73} The actions that contain such temporal characteristics are performed in time and through time. Thus the dimension that requires narration is the time the action takes for its performance.\textsuperscript{74} It is at this point that Ricoeur posits that the inherent temporal features in action must be taken as the “inductors of narrative.”\textsuperscript{75}

What Ricoeur has established here is the narrative emplotment of experience. This takes place through a coherent juxtaposition of the semantic structures and semiotic representation of actions within a contextual framework of temporality. He stresses that action always occurs “between the temporal dimensions.”\textsuperscript{76} For him, the temporality of action is simply “this structure of within-time-ness”\textsuperscript{77} – a structure which evidently characterises any conceivable form of action. The temporality of action furnishes the connection between experience and the imaginative process of narrative composition. It is in this context that he incorporates the notion of time with its three dimensions into his narrative framework. For him, all action involves some “present experience inherited from the past” together with some “project” that is directed toward the future.\textsuperscript{78} By employing the Augustinian paradoxical structure of time, Ricoeur formulates a phenomenology of action, which consists of “a threefold present.” For him, “there is not a future time, a past time, and a present time.”\textsuperscript{79} Instead there is

\textsuperscript{73}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 60.
\textsuperscript{74}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 59.
\textsuperscript{75}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 60.
\textsuperscript{76}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 60.
\textsuperscript{77}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 60.
\textsuperscript{78}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 61.
\textsuperscript{79}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 60.
only “a threefold present, a present of future things, a present of past things, and a present of present things.” Each dimension is de-substantiated in such a way that it becomes itself temporally stretched out in a unified structure of past, present and future. Commencing an action always involves a performance in the present. Nevertheless, the present in which an initiation of action takes place is expanded by the future and the past. The time of action comprises a preceding time, which is a time of preparation for action, a pre-given context within which action is initiated. In that sense, one can speak of human action as a “story in the nascent state,” and even as a sort of “activity and a passion in search of a narrative.”

The trajectory from action to human identity thus begins with an exploration of pre-narrative qualities. For these qualities constitute one’s cultural inheritance and the wider context of the past that bears on every action. At the same time, most importantly, the narrative figuration of action brings human experience to writing and reading. This stands in relation to Gadamer’s notion of “prejudices.” Here it seems that Ricoeur’s successful fusion of syntagmatic features to juxtapose human action constructs a foundation for the temporal systematization of narrative. Ricoeur argues that it is the task of interpretive processes to reconstruct the “entire set of operations, by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and

80 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 60.
thereby change their acting.”85 This is why Ricoeur argues that “human action can be narrated” and must be narrated, because “it is always already symbolically mediated.”86 His notion of the temporal features of the practical field sets up a context that calls for narrativizing. Thus, inherent structures in human existence are the basis for narrative composition. And narratives would be “incomprehensible” if they did not “give a configuration to what was already a figure in human action.”87 In this way, Ricoeur’s notion of the pre-narrative qualities of experience in terms of its semantic, semiotic and syntagmatic features not only lays the theoretical foundation for the narrative composition of human experience,88 but also shows that such narrativity is in fact necessary.

It follows then that Ricoeur’s notion of the figuration of experience leaves open four fundamental qualities of experience which can contribute to a theological understanding of experience and narrative. First, Ricoeur affirms that experience is qualitatively narrative and demands an act of narration. Experience by its nature claims to be narrated for it is temporal. This implies that the composed narrative is the linguistic expression of a lively experience. And that narrative can be experienced before it has been composed or structured by language. Second, experience consists of semantic structures. It is meaningful, cognitive and intelligible. This indicates that the things and events that are part of one’s own experience can be figured out in order to critically understand them. What one understands here can be composed in language; narrative is the linguistic expression of

85Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 53.  
86Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 57.  
87Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 57.  
88Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 64.
temporal experience. Third, since the experience is semiotic, it has the potential to be expressed in language through a process of configurational composition. The original bearer of meaning is not the linguistic propositions but a lively temporal experience. It is this narrative experience that finds its expression in language as narrative. Finally, experience’s status of being syntagmatic makes it possible for experience to be temporal, rational and temporally mediated. Experience is temporally available and can be appropriated here and now. But the rationality of experiential narrative does not consist of legislative rationality because it is not rule-bound. Instead it is a responsive rationality because it is interaction-bound.

This narrative position is radically distinct from the experiential-expressivist model that affirms religious experience as the basic source that is later “expressed” in theological language. This narrative model can further be developed biblically and theologically. Once it is construed through theological perspective, it can provide a narrative correction to a widespread approach in theological discourse: what Lindbeck called the experiential-expressivist model. The narratives expressed in the language of the Bible had once been part of the divine–human experience before they were composed into narratives in the form of Scripture. Every revelatory event reported had happened as an experiential event both in the experience of God as the giver of revelation and in the experience of human beings as the recipients of revelation. Subsequently, symbols operated as the medium of communication. Such experience could be composed in language because it was already qualitatively temporal – implicitly “narrative” – as it was experienced. Such experience was also already semiotic so that both the

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giver could give and the recipient could receive the linguistic communication. The occurrences narrated in the Bible were themselves qualitatively narrative, which made possible their composition in language as text.

But according to the experiential expressivist model, experience offers the foundational resource for theological reflection by possessing a core awareness of the transcendent. Here experience functions as the starting point of theology and becomes the only legitimate means to theology. This is a position that Paul Tillich seeks to establish by correlating the Christian proclamation with a universal religious experience.89 David Tracy has analysed this position and provided an apologetic for it, emphasising the universal human experience and its articulation in religious language.90 A sophisticated critique of this position is found in George Lindbeck’s work on *The Nature of Doctrine*.91 He notes that here experience is first and theology appears later. Lindbeck objects that there is no evidence of this common core religious experience in history, and that, at any rate; such subjective expressions could never be verified.92 It is at this point that the narrative model of Ricoeur provides a correction to the experiential-expressivist model. The common core experience, from Ricoeur’s standpoint, would not be religious experience but a narrative quality of experience, which stands in need neither of theological reflection nor empirical verification, but instead demands a narrative configuration. In this way, the composed narrative experience can function as the fundamental

resource and starting point of theology, which can be experientially, interpretively and objectively verified. Here, neither theology nor experience comes first. But in experience, theology is lived, so that theology is itself praxis. In composition, lived theology is linguistically expressed, so that experience is itself narrative. And in theological reflection, experience that has already been narratively composed is brought again into experience as a dynamic reality to live again.

1.3. Narrative Composition of Experience

The narrative composition of human experience deals also with the imagination. Here the pre-narrative qualities of life figured out in the practical field are composed into meaningful and readable text. The poetic imitation here seeks for a configuring operation of narrative emplotment. Its vital task is to schematize a variety of pre-narrative ingredients. With reference to Aristotle, Ricoeur employs the concept emplotment as the “organization of the events.”93 His idea of systematization of the pre-narrative characteristics presupposes a fundamental grasp of the practical field which necessitates narrative configuration. For he contends that to “imitate or represent action is first to pre-understand what human acting is”; based on this pre-understanding, the “emplotment is constructed.”94 This facet is a writer’s imaginative composition of the pre-narrative human experience into a composed literary work.95 The schematization also

91Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 64.
92Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 64.
93Stiver, Theology After Ricoeur, 68.
provides a certain distancing from life, so that the world of human existence is envisaged “as if” it were different from the original. This aspect of the narrative composition is an act of the reader, seeking to construe the world of the text.\textsuperscript{96} The domain of imagination is “the kingdom of the as if”.\textsuperscript{97} With regard to the dynamism that makes this mediation a possibility, Ricoeur posits a function derived “from the dynamic character of the configuring operation.” And this mediates between the “pre-understanding” and the “post-understanding” of a given temporal action.\textsuperscript{98} This imaginative mediating function Ricoeur describes as a poetic emplotment consisting of three components. It narratively composes experience as holistic narrative, as synthetic narrative and as temporal narrative.

1.3.1. Composition of Holistic Narrative

Ricoeur maintains that experience can be composed into a holistic narrative. This process aims at providing mediation between scattered events and a story as a whole. Emplotment configures human experience consisting of such components as actions, agents and objects by providing them with meaningful representation within a holistic framework.

By submitting both historical and fictional narratives to the norms of the creative imagination of the “as if,” Ricoeur considers the composition of the narrative arc as a unified act incorporating the total narrative field. The

\textsuperscript{96}Stiver, \textit{Theology After Ricoeur}, 68.
\textsuperscript{97}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 64.
\textsuperscript{98}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 65.
merging of the two narrative fields – history and fiction – eliminates the issue of literary and historical reference. \(^\text{99}\) To be sure, “between ‘the reality of the past’ and the ‘unreality of the fiction,’ the dissymmetry is total.” \(^\text{100}\) Nevertheless, Ricoeur focuses on the way emplotment juxtaposes events into a narrative whole. He contends that “in moving away from the vocabulary of reference, I am adopting instead that of ‘application.’” \(^\text{101}\) The imaginative work of narrative composition applies equally to historiography and to fiction, in spite of their obvious differences. \(^\text{102}\) The composition of narrative emplotment “draws a meaningful story from a diversity of events or incidents” or otherwise “transforms the events or incidents into a story.” \(^\text{103}\) The mediation of the heterogeneous components into a syntactical order occurs as plot mediates between events and narrative. Consequently, emplotment transfigures a mere sequence into a configuration. Ricoeur argues that an event is more than just a “singular occurrence.” \(^\text{104}\) An event “gets its definition from its contribution to the development of the plot,” as it is organized within an intelligible whole. \(^\text{105}\) Hence, Ricoeur points out that “emplotment” is the process that mediates between particular events and a holistic narrative.

1.3.2. Composition of Synthetic Narrative

\(^\text{101}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 158.
\(^\text{102}\) Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur*, 68.
\(^\text{103}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 65.
\(^\text{104}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 65.
\(^\text{105}\) Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 65.
The composition of various events into a holistic narrative results in a paradoxical narrative unity. Ricoeur calls this a “concordant discordance.” The notion of the concordant discordance is the fundamental feature of narrative composition. For, in the process of the configuring act the synthetic nature of the “feature that constitutes the mediating function of the plot.” This discloses the holistic narrative as a construction of unity and diversity. On the one hand, as noted, Ricoeur acknowledges that narrative emplotment possesses the dynamism to construct a “synthesis from the heterogeneous,” thus “drawing a configuration out of a simple succession.” On the other hand, Ricoeur sees the concept of plot as broader than the mere succession of events. He extends “plot” to cover a whole range of heterogeneous elements, such as themes and characters. So plot is understood not in a narrow Aristotelian sense, but as something that synthesises all the disparate elements of temporal existence.

But there will always be a tension between the diversity of human situations and the central thought that holds them together in a meaningful narrative. This is the paradox of discordant concordance. Ricoeur does not want to dissolve this tension entirely, but he tries to resolve this paradox in his notion of the temporality of narrative.

106 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
107 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
1.3.3. Composition of Temporal Narrative

Ricoeur sees the narrative paradox caused by the diversity of human actions and the theme that holds them together as crucial. He shows that plot mediates these different elements. The writer “extracts a configuration from a succession,” through the narrative act of emplotment. The unity of temporality that provides the harmony of narrative is a poetic resolution rather than a speculative one. Arguing for the superiority of poetic over speculative reflection, Ricoeur claims to have discovered the resolution to the issue in the poetic act itself.

Ricoeur substantiates his point by articulating the poetic nature of plot. It is the poetic nature of the plot that holds together individual events and the wider story. It is plot that “transforms the events into a story,” such that all the disparate moments are intuitively grasped together. Even if parts of the plot are unexpected, the whole story is “followable” – that is its poetic unity. This unity also “imposes the ‘sense of an ending’ on the indefinite succession of incidents,” from which emerges a peculiar quality of time. This process of poetic emplotment revolves in a framework of integrating the episodic temporal elements with the configuring arc of the story.

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111 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
112 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
113 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
114 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
115 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
Ricoeur conceives this as an act of drawing “from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole.”

But Ricoeur recognizes that a mere composition of a story does not overcome the paradox of “distention and intention.” The resolution Ricoeur proposes lies in the “followability” of a story. A story is followable where the narrative moves toward its goal in the midst of all the different contingencies of the plot, until the story’s coherent (if surprising) conclusion. The story is “perceived as forming a whole” from this final point. Ricoeur also describes the intelligibility of the narrative as an endeavour to “understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story.” It is this poetic congruence that unifies the plot; even “discordant” elements in the plot are held together within this wider structure of “concordance.” Hence, for Ricoeur, the followability of a narrative makes the inherent paradoxes of narrative productive. It “converts the paradox into a living dialectic” so that the reader may participate in the temporality of the narrative. Bringing the narrative to a living actuality presupposes a repetition of the poetic configuration as often as the narrative is read or recounted. “Thus the

116 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 66.
117 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
118 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
119 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
120 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
121 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 68.
122 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 67.
hermeneutic circle of narrative and time never stops being reborn from the circle that the states of mimesis form."\textsuperscript{123}

Ricoeur’s idea of composing experience into narrative finds parallel positions in contemporary theological discourse even though they are delimited by their theological intent. Robert Jenson’s notion of dramatic narrative totality is important here. Jenson argues that an ordering of a story is understood by the “outcome of the narrated events”\textsuperscript{124} because it is the narrative “closure” that defines the relations of each preceding moment of the sequence.\textsuperscript{125} For Jenson, it is the narrative end that brings completeness and harmony to the whole sequence of events. Jenson thus emphasises the primacy of the future over the present, where the future provides coherence and continuity to the totality of narrative. He describes the narrative quality of the totality as an eschatological reality, just as a play is harmonized by its final act. He argues that each event in time is dependent on its future. And after the occurrence of the event, the totality of all events together “displays a coherent dramatic sense”\textsuperscript{126} – what Ricoeur would call the concordance that encompasses discordance. This coherent dramatic sense of the narrative functions as the semantic context in which the particularity of human events is interpreted.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{123}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 76.
Jenson’s idea of the “coherent dramatic sense” of the narrative is close to Ricoeur’s argument, even though Ricoeur aims not only at a semantic context as Jenson does. What Ricoeur wants is a narrative context in which experience with all its pre-narrative qualities will find its dynamic expression in language. Thus for Ricoeur, the experiential narrative configured in language means that experience with its pre-narrative characteristics is brought to language. Here narrative is experience configured in language. In this context, four consequent factors must be noted. First, the narrative quality of experience continues to be the narrative characteristic of the linguistically composed story, which provides the configured story with a narrative status. Second, the semantic structures of experience are the intrinsic and structural patterns of configured narrative, which makes the linguistic narratives meaningful. Third, the semiotic resources of experience become the linguistic resource of symbolism as a semiotic system of language in which the experience is given expression. “Symbol gives rise to thought.” Finally, the temporal features of experience become the dynamism that unifies the heterogeneous events of sequence after the manner of temporality. In its comprehensiveness, Ricoeur’s position could be seen as a correction of Jenson’s narrative totality, which emphasises only the semantic possibilities of narrative.

Further, Ricoeur’s narrative theory can take on special significance in theological discourse by providing a critical response to what George Lindbeck calls the cognitive-propositionalist model of theology. This

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128 Paul Ricoeur, Emerson Buchanan (trans.), *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 348. This philosophical maxim is of great importance in Ricoeur’s thought; it will be discussed in the third chapter below.
theological approach gives priority to the cognitive aspects of religious experience and revelation. This view maintains that biblical revelation comprises informative statements about objective reality. Lindbeck argues that this model of theology must be abandoned as intellectualist and literalist because it is based upon a mistaken assumption that it is humanly possible to express objective truth about God descriptively, exhaustively and timelessly in propositional statements.\textsuperscript{129} Lindbeck’s argument has force only if the cognitive propositionalist model represents a definite, complete and timeless truth about reality, which is impossible. But at the same time, Lindbeck cannot deny that there is a genuine cognitive element in all doctrines and narratives, which provides an adequate yet incomplete reference to reality. Without this cognitive aspect, no theological reflection whatsoever would be possible. The problem of the cognitive model is very evident here. It is at this point that Ricoeur’s notion of narrative context can correct the propositional view, since it is neither experience nor propositional statements which alone mediate reality; instead it is narrative together with its complex semantic structures, semiotic resources and temporal elements that brings reality into view. The narrative vision of reality is more inclusive and dynamic for it not only incorporates experiential-expressivist and cognitive models into itself, but also provides a wider frame within which these elements can be mutually corrective.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that Ricoeur’s notion of narrative configuration would remain incomplete if it did not account for the reconnection of the narrated experience to lived experience. The lived

\textsuperscript{129}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 92-96.
experience rose out of the world of experience into language. It distanced from life and found expression in language. So also, the composed experience must rise out of its language world to the lively world of experience again. This will make humans to live the narrative experience as their own possibility of living. This issue concerns the ways in which Ricoeur envisages a transition from the composed experience to life again as an existential human possibility. Ricoeur treats this problem in his third mimesis, which he calls refiguration. Without this crucial step, the act of composition remains an incomplete mediation of human experience.

1.4. Narrative Textuality of Experience

Ricoeur’s third Mimesis concerns the process of refiguring the composed experience into live experience. This is the process which translates the hypothetical to the existential reality. It works through the syntagmatic features and linguistic orientations. Ricoeur states that “narrative has its full meaning” only when it has passed through this process. For him, this “marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader.” This level of narrative activity consists of three components: narrative dynamism, narrative fusion, and narrative transformation. These elements together constitute the distinctive qualities that characterise the textuality of the text – and, one might say, the textuality of experience itself.

130 Stiver observes Ricoeur’s concept of refiguration replacing the term “reference,” which is a strange category for Ricoeur to use here, since he has already eliminated the vocabulary of reference. Nevertheless, Stiver argues that the term refiguration parallels Ricoeur’s earlier expression of “appropriation and application” (Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur*, 68.)

131 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 70.

132 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 71.
1.4.1. Narrative Dynamism

Ricoeur’s idea of interactive reading marks the transition from narrative composition to narrative transformation. Here the act of reading is the “final indicator of the refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot.”

This is possible because, in the stage of composition, human experience imaginatively distances from life in order to find expression in language; and because of the phenomenology of reading that takes place to reconnect the composed experience to life again. The point of intersection that Ricoeur sets out is the juncture at which the act of reading appropriates the narrative sense of the text and installs it into the context of the reader.

Ricoeur substantiates the nature of such reading by arguing that the “plot’s capacity to model experience” can be appropriated as the plot is followed by the reader. “To follow a story is to actualize it by reading it.” The reader’s appropriation of the composed narrative culminates in the act of refiguration. This refiguration in turn results in new temporal possibility. Consequently, for Ricoeur reading functions in the same way the act of narrative composition does. So that what takes place in narrative is not merely a one-way movement from author to reader, but an imaginative “joint work of the text and reader.” In the act of reading, “the receiver plays with narrative constraints, brings about gaps, takes part in the combat

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133 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 76.
134 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 76.
135 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 76.
... and enjoys the pleasure ... of the text.”\textsuperscript{136} This means it is the reader who accomplishes the work. For Ricoeur, a literary work is “a sketch” which “challenges the reader’s capacity to configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring.”\textsuperscript{137} Thus the act of narrative transformation calls for imagination on the part of the reader. Indeed, in some cases, “it is the reader, almost abandoned by the work, who carries the burden of emplotment.”\textsuperscript{138} In short, narrative composition does not culminate in the text but in the reader.

Furthermore, Ricoeur establishes that the relationship between the narrative text and the reader consists of the intersection formed by the act of reading. Receptive reading opens up the presupposition of the world of the text. The world of the text, created by every literary work, is a horizon of possible experience. Hence, Ricoeur argues that “a text is not something closed in upon itself, it is a projection of a new universe distinct from that in which we live.”\textsuperscript{139} In the act of reading, this world of the text is unfolded and becomes the textual horizon for human experience as if it were the actual world of the reader.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 77.
\textsuperscript{137}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 76.
\textsuperscript{138}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 76.
\textsuperscript{139}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 77; amending a typo in the published text.
\textsuperscript{140}In this connection, Stiver perceives Ricoeur converging with reader response theory, which posits the reader’s priority in eliciting meaning from texts. He suggests that Ricoeur is seeking a theoretical middle ground between a perspective that holds that the text is in full control and a standpoint that sees the reader as wholly in control. Certainly according to Ricoeur, a text does not have meaning without a reader reading it (Stiver, \textit{Theology After Ricoeur}, 69), even though Ricoeur gives more priority to the text itself.
Ricoeur argues that the textual horizons must become “unreal” to transfigure the “real” world of being.\textsuperscript{141} He holds that both historical narrative and fictional narrative must be located in a framework of productive imaginative norms to effectively transform human experience.\textsuperscript{142} As Stiver notes, historical narratives that stand for the reality of the past themselves involve a fictive element, which is more explicit in fictional narratives. Similarly, fictional narratives also involve a certain degree of indirect relation with the reality of the past.\textsuperscript{143} Here historical narrative is fictional and fictional narrative is realistic. In this way, Ricoeur fuses both narrative forms, in spite of their differences.

\textbf{1.4.2. Narrative Fusion}

Ricoeur perceives that the historical narrative as a work of \textit{reproductive} imagination presupposes a real past, while the fictional narrative, which is an act of \textit{productive} imagination, assumes the unreal. These two forms of narrative are closer than they appear; the “naïve concept of ‘reality’ applied to the pastness of the past calls for a systematic critique of the no less naïve concept of ‘unreality’ applied to the projections of fiction.”\textsuperscript{144} In these kinds of narrative, it is not a question either of simple “reference” or of simple “redescription.”\textsuperscript{145} Fiction is “revealing, in the sense that it brings features to light that were concealed and yet already sketched out at the heart of our

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 157.
\item Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 157-158.
\item Stiver, \textit{Theology After Ricoeur}, 69.
\item Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 158.
\item Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 158.
\end{enumerate}
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experience, our praxis.” Hence, the process of narrative refiguration cannot be understood as mere reference to reality; the process is more constructive and more imaginative than that. Historical narratives, like fiction, convey the temporality of experience. They aim to describe what was possible in the past and to think about it successively in the form of narrative.

Arguing against the historian’s assumption that their narrative compositions correspond with the order of past events, Ricoeur asserts that the conception of history is the enactment of the past. This cannot be totally subsumed under the notion of the Same. Ricoeur observes a paradox at the heart of historical reconstruction. “Historians do not know the past at all but only their own thought about the past. But history is not possible unless historians know that they re-enact an act that is not their own.” There is no way simply to eliminate the distance between the past acts and the present act of reconstruction. The “re” re-enactment always “resists the operation that seeks to wipe out temporal distance.” Yet if history is not a repetition of the Same, nor can it be understood merely as Other. There is a “negative ontology of the past” that presupposes a total unbridgeable distance between past acts and present narratives. Among contemporary historians, a rightful concern for temporal difference and distance can end

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146 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 158.
147 In this context, Vanhoozer observes Ricoeur maintaining history and fiction as two forms of narrative imagination, which redescribe human historicity. Thus history and fiction together constitute a “schematism” that describes the world of possibility for human existence, because narrative possesses the potential for displaying innumerable ways of human life (Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narratives*, 86).
149 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 144.
150 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 146.
151 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 147.
152 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 147.
up abolishing “the ideal of re-enactment,” as though the purpose of history were simply to accentuate the distance between past and present. Ricoeur observes that “the notion of difference does not do justice to what seems to be positive in the persistence of the past in the present.” What is really striking is the peculiar “correspondence between our narrative and what really happened,” even though every narrative is obviously an imaginative reconstruction.

Thus Ricoeur refuses both the Same and the Other as models for history; he turns instead to analogy. Analogy takes account of both sameness and otherness; it concerns “a resemblance between relations rather than between terms per se.” Ricoeur’s attempt, at this point, is to show that “our relation to the reality of the past has to pass successively through the filters of the Same, the Other and the Analogous.” The category of Analogy “tells us but one thing: things must have happened as they are told in a narrative such as this one.” Something of the very being of the past is actualized again in language. The mystery of historical narrative is that “between a narrative and a course of events, there is not a relation of reproduction, reduplication, or equivalence but a metaphorical relation. The reader is pointed toward the sort of figure that likens the narrated events to a narrative form that our culture has made us familiar with.”

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155 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 151-152.
156 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 151.
Consequently, Ricoeur understands narrative discourse as analogical discourse. The nature of this discourse requires the historian to maintain a dual relation: a dynamic relation to the formal constraints of plot and a relation to the “past itself,” as it is accessible in historical documents.\textsuperscript{160} Thus the task of the historian “consists in making narrative structure into a ‘model,’ an ‘icon’ of the past, capable of ‘representing’ it.”\textsuperscript{161} At the same time, “we must not … confuse the iconic value of a representation of the past with a model, in the sense of a scale model, such as a map, for there is no original with which to compare this model.”\textsuperscript{162} Rather the historical past must take on the structure of a metaphorical narrative to be envisaged as if it happened. Here, the historical past has been placed under the norms of the productive imagination – the same imagination which creates works of fiction.

Therefore, Ricoeur concludes that the dynamism of the productive imagination involves an analogical ontology in which the “being-as is both to be and not to be.”\textsuperscript{163} Historical narrative mediates the past through the analogous unity of “identity and otherness.”\textsuperscript{164} Ricoeur’s idea of narrative fusion is clearly productive for a theological understanding of biblical texts, for it renders problematic the straight forward distinction between “history” and “fiction” in biblical stories, and in the mode by which they are appropriated. This approach is close to the Barthian paradoxical understanding of the biblical narrative as a witness to God’s revelation.

\textsuperscript{160}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 152.
\textsuperscript{161}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 152.
\textsuperscript{162}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 153.
\textsuperscript{163}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 155.
\textsuperscript{164}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 155.
rather than itself revelation. For Barth, Scripture is the record of the revelation of God in the past, and as a record, it is a present witness. It is neither purely Same nor purely Other. Barth argues that God’s “revelation has already taken place” and that humans can speak and understand about it “in recollection.” Yet language cannot capture the revelatory event of God; revelation remains an occurrence in the present, itself refusing any absolute gulf between the present and the past. As a result, Barth concludes that the Bible is both the record of God’s revelation and “bears witness” – in the present – to that revelation.

Thus the role of biblical narrative is to bear witness to the original revelatory experience. The same revelation that occurred in the past continues to occur as the narrative is read and proclaimed. This opens the way to understand the question of how the configured narrative that bears witness to a past experience can be brought into the present so that it becomes again a lively experience.

1.4.3. Narrative Transfiguration

According to Ricoeur, the tropological nature of the historical past transfigures human action through receptive reading. This is to say that the analogous nature of historical narrative refigures the historical past through imagination in the act of reception. He considers this as both “revealing and

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165 Karl Barth, G. W. Bromiley (trans.), *Church Dogmatics* vol. 1/1 (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 96.
transforming.” The process of all forms of writing occurs within a wider “theory of reading.” The creation of narrative itself is grounded in the act of reading, which belongs to an “extended theory of reception” where the act of reading is the “phenomenological moment.” Ricoeur argues that “it is within such an extended theory of reading that the reversal from divergence to convergence occurs in the relation between historical narrative and fictional narrative.” He stresses that the moment of receptive reading must culminate in application. “It is only in reading that the dynamism of configuration completes its course, and it is beyond reading, in effective action, instructed by the works, handed down, that the configuration of the text is transformed into refiguration.”

This interaction between text and reader constructs the meaning of the text. Even though the rhetorical force of the text influences the reader, “another theory of reading is required … that places an emphasis on the reader’s response.” Strangely, the reader’s receptive passivity is itself her “action” in relation to the text. In the process of receptive reading, Ricoeur acknowledges that “the whole of the text can never be perceived at once and that, placing ourselves within the literary text, we travel with it as our reading progresses,” so that the narrative unfolds over time. On this level once more, there is a “discordant concordance” as the reader’s search for coherence oscillates between “a lack of determinacy” and “an excess of

166 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 158.
meaning.”\textsuperscript{174} It is not about balancing between these two, but about allowing the coherence of the text to unfurl itself as it is read over time. Understanding a text means assimilating another world into the reader’s own world. Thus the whole process of reading is oriented “teleologically” towards application.\textsuperscript{175}

Drawing from Hans Robert Jauss’s categories of “poiesis, aisthesis, and catharsis,”\textsuperscript{176} Ricoeur argues that the pleasure arising from the reception of the world of the text must go beyond the aesthetic to a cathartic experience. This “is more moral than aesthetic: new evaluations, hitherto unheard of norms, are proposed by the works, confronting or shaking current customs.”\textsuperscript{177} The cathartic experience is inseparably linked with “reader’s tendency to identify with the hero, and to allow themselves to be guided by the reliable or unreliable narrator.”\textsuperscript{178} Thus catharsis consists of this moral capacity to imaginatively transfigure the reader. In short, “aisthesis frees the reader from everyday concerns” while “catharsis sets the reader free for new evaluations of reality that will take shape in reading.”\textsuperscript{179} This effect is the key aspect of refiguration – moving the reader from the surplus of meaning produced by imagination to the evaluation of experience by the moral vision that receptive reading has produced. This implies that the reader cannot stop at the narratively composed world of the text but must move to an appropriated world of the text in which identity formation takes place through the collision of the world of the text and the life of the reader.

\textsuperscript{174}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 169.
\textsuperscript{175}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 171.
\textsuperscript{176}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 176.
\textsuperscript{177}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 176.
\textsuperscript{178}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 176.
\textsuperscript{179}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 176.
the same time, it does not mean that one must accept the world that the text offers; the reader understands what it means to live, and on that basis can accept or reject, or accept with certain modifications and changes.\textsuperscript{180}

This process, Ricoeur argues, is akin to allegory. Allegorization takes place when the interpretive process seeks to “translate the meaning of a text in its first context into another context.”\textsuperscript{181} The narrative refugation culminates in the application of the world of the text in the world of the reader through a symbolical implementation. This requires that the reader understand, explain, appropriate and actualize the transposition consisting of new evaluations and moral norms in the inter-subjective world of agents and readers. The reader is expected to identify with the sense of the text and take responsibility in the moment of initiative and action, which is caused by the cathartic effect. The cathartic moment defines who and what we are. Here narrative not only transfigures the moral possibilities of the reader but also their very subjectivity as the reader takes responsibility for actions configured by the world of the text. At this intersection, the narrative human identity emerges, which is an “identity of temporal totality rather than one of logic.”\textsuperscript{182}

Ricoeur’s position thus presupposes a whole theory of reading: a reader, the act of receptive reading, the reader’s response to the text, the pleasure arising out of reading, the reader’s appropriation of the text, the text’s act of

\textsuperscript{180}Stiver, \textit{Theology After Ricoeur}, 69.
\textsuperscript{181}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 176-177.
revealing, the text’s transformation of the reader, and the reader’s application of the meaning to her own context. Evidently, the configured narrative experience is dead, mute and meaningless without a reader and her active engagement. Ricoeur argues, for example, that the “Biblical faith” would “remain mute if it did not receive the power of speech” through the “moment of interpretation.” In sum, the narrative configuration must have an interpreter to resurrect the past experience back to life. It is here that Ricoeur’s notion confronts a dialectic tension which holds together both the reader and the world that the text projects. In this dialectic, however, the principal responsibility lies with the reader for understanding and constructing the sense of the text in community with others.

This dialectical asymmetry can be clarified by recalling the Barthian notion of God’s revelation. For Barth, the Bible’s act of speaking to humans and the event of hearing by humans presupposes a process of reading, engaging, understanding and interpreting. The biblical narrative is the basis for bringing back the past revelation to experience again in the present. Yet while Barth argues for the asymmetrical priority of the text – it is the past that speaks now – Ricoeur posits an asymmetrical priority of the reader – the past is speaking now. In both cases it is the same dialectic, but the tension pulls in opposite directions.

Ricoeur’s point is that it is not the narrative alone speaking but also the reader who speaks by entering this dynamic context of encounter and

interaction. This interactive intersection is the most important feature of narrative textuality. As the past revelation comes back to the present and opens a future through narrative mediation, experience comes back to life as living experience through narrative configuration and refiguration. It is at this point that James Foder, Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Nicholas Wolterstorff agree with Ricoeur that life as such can be conceived as narrative and that experience can be re-experienced through language. The linguistic narrative has to be interpreted by a reader in the process of reading so that the experience will come back as lively again. Consequently, Ricoeur’s position can provide a narrative correction to Bultmann’s notion of Christ’s resurrection. For him, Christ’s resurrection was an event in the experience of the first disciples. It was legitimate and intelligible for them. But for a modern scientific and existential world, it is a “mythical event” because resurrection miracle cannot be repeated or verified. But Bultmann could have narratively established his theology of resurrection without repudiating the miraculous from biblical stories. He could argue that the resurrection of Christ, which originally was a dynamic experience, was given a narrative expression through composition in which resurrection of Christ became a symbolic event in language. As an experience configured in language, it was no mere historical reference to a past event but a witness to it which makes possible the continuing experience of resurrection. Here the lively experience of resurrection turns out to be narrative experience. This narrative experience must be resurrected by interpretation and proclamation.

In this way, the very preaching of Christ along with his resurrection is recorded and that record now becomes a continuing experience of resurrection. The conclusions here would still be very close to the theological framework of Bultmann, but would not be necessary to discard any difficult elements from the biblical narratives.

Hence, as Barth argued, narrative bears witness to the past experience and promises a lively experience for the present through an interpretive process. Therefore, one cannot have a theology of interpretation that alone interprets experience but rather, the narrative configuration must incorporate it as an intrinsic part of the narrative process. This is the magic of the narrative experience of text. The text’s potential is characterised by its qualities: it is experiential, narrative, semantic, semiotic, syntagmatic and interpretive. Thus experience itself is narrative and interpretive, just as reading is receptive and interpretive.

At any rate, a major part of Ricoeur’s theory is aimed to show that the narratively composed experience requires reading. Narrative remains in need of interpretation. This presents a dialectic tension between the world projected by the text and the movement of interpretive reading. The next chapter investigates the dimension of application more closely: the way in which the text shows a world of existence — and makes life possible.
Chapter Two

Textual Ontology

The previous chapter explored the relation between narrative and experience. It explored Ricoeur’s account of the way human actions can be composed into texts. By reading such texts, one can discover one’s own identity through an encounter with the world of the text. This process begins by making sense of the pre-narrative qualities in human experience. It ends by recreating a fresh human identity. The dynamism that sets this activity in motion is the act of reading, which is really a whole process of understanding, explaining and appropriating the textual meaning.

In this chapter, by exploring the way Ricoeur’s interpretation theory has been formulated and applied in the context of understanding, I shall show how the narrative text projects a life. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics aims to develop a paradigm for all possible forms of understanding, culminating in existential self-understanding. This provides a framework that envisages human beings as hermeneutical beings. I shall explore this by focusing on Ricoeur’s works on interpretation theory, especially *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* and *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. 
2.1. Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Turn

Ricoeur’s idea of the receptive reading of texts results in a theory of self-understanding. At this point, there is a relationship between self-understanding and the interpretive process. Receptive reading is engaging with and interpreting the text. In this interactive situation, the text shows a possible life. This is the existential possibility of the self. The self’s understanding of its range of possibilities is its understanding of itself. This hermeneutic process occurs through a triple moment, consisting of understanding, explanation and appropriation. The reader’s construction of textual meaning and the transfiguration of it into self-understanding is an act of hermeneutic reason. Every act of receptive reading presupposes a method by which the reader will be capable of understanding, elaborating and applying the textual sense. Thus there is an inseparable relation between the act of reading and the theory of interpretation. Ricoeur states, “I read in order to understand. I attain self-understanding when I grasp the range of my possibilities.”¹ Ricoeur develops this insight when he argues that “the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently.”²

Existence comes through the sense of the text, for it is the interpreted sense of the text that determines the possible shape and limits of human existence in the world. In this way, the reading subject’s interpretation of the text leads the subject to self-understanding through a revised self-interpretation.

Ricoeur maintains that the essential facet of the interpretation of texts is their fecundity of meaning. Characteristically, Ricoeur here assigns a normative role to rich and sacred texts such as biblical literature. Rich texts, Ricoeur argues, have the potential for a multitude of meanings that can be discovered and re-employed time and again. The work of interpretation is characterised by “polysemy,” the capacity of words to have multiple meanings. Rich texts especially are latent with a plurality of meanings; but this fecundity becomes available only if a particular text is interpreted out of its original context. Ricoeur wants to make the text both semantically plural and contextually autonomous. Nevertheless, Ricoeur seeks to affirm that the understanding of context is the essential “counterpart of polysemy.”

Grasping the exchange of meanings from an author to the reader involves an act of “discerning” the textual context, and this forms the basis of interpretation. This notion of context in the process of text interpretation is not to be confused with the context of the text in terms of going behind the text in search of authorial intention. For Ricoeur, it means the discourse context of the text, the context of meaning in which the sense of the text is enclosed and out of which the textual world arises. The dynamism at work here is the principle of distanciation, disconnecting the text from its factual world to its semantic world so that it can project its world of meaning.

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3Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 44.
4Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 44.
5Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 44.
6Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 44.
7This aspect of the text will be extensively discussed in the following sections of this chapter.
Ricoeur’s idea of discerning the textual context leads him to develop his own interpretation theory. His theory involves a discourse theory of interpretation that affirms the excess of meaning in texts. Such discourse theory aims to raise the text to the status of living discourse. Ricoeur contends that a reader, while reading a text, must possess the skills to respond imaginatively to the text. The reader also needs the necessary techniques to bring the discourse into a living dialogue with the present, eventually showing the reader a way to live. Such potential, Ricoeur argues, is not found in the major traditions of modern hermeneutics. Here as elsewhere, Ricoeur’s theory evinces his immense dissatisfaction with modern hermeneutical theory, both Romantic strategies that seek to establish authorial intent and the literal meaning of the text, and structuralist strategies that ignore the author and the reader by emphasising the immanent patterns of the text. Ricoeur’s stringent critique of these hermeneutical models paves the way for his own textual theory of interpretation, with its unique notion of the autonomy of the text.

2.2. Textual Autonomy

Establishing the autonomous character of the text is at the centre of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical ambition. His goal is to “attempt to re-regionalise

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8Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 45.
9Vanhoozer observes that Ricoeur is responding to the way philosophers and literary critics have learned to view the texts that they read with suspicion and distrust: Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 87.
hermeneutics by means of the notion of the text.”11 A regional interpretation theory is one that is developed by specific literary types. But in modern hermeneutics, Ricoeur observes, attempts have been made to orient hermeneutics by a universal theory that ignores the specificity of genre. This approach tended to broaden the aim of the hermeneutical enterprise by incorporating all interpretational streams into one inclusive interpretation theory.12 Friedrich Schleiermacher adopted this direction in his hermeneutic reasoning, and his approach was developed epistemologically by Wilhelm Dilthey.

Ricoeur also notes that in modern hermeneutics “a movement of radicalisation” accompanies the movement of deregionalisation. Here hermeneutics makes a transition from epistemological concerns to ontological foundations. Ricoeur sees this culminating in an ontological movement in which “understanding ceases to appear as a simple mode of knowing in order to become a way of being and a way of relating to beings and to being.”13 Thus by this movement of radicalisation – tracing interpretation to its deepest roots – “hermeneutics becomes not only general but fundamental.”14 Martin Heidegger initiates this process, and it culminates in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Ricoeur’s critical analysis of Romantic and structuralist interpretation theories has two core objectives: first, he attempts to unfetter the text from

11Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, 44.
12Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 44.
13Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 44.
14Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 44.
those interpretive frameworks that reduced the text from its status of being a discourse; and second, he tries to mediate both hermeneutical traditions into a fresh interpretive agenda. The characteristic feature that distinguishes him from Romantic and structuralist approaches is his concern to resist the opposition between “understanding” (a key trait of human sciences) and “explanation” (a common feature of natural sciences).\textsuperscript{15} Here the integrative character of Ricoeur’s project becomes apparent, his attempt to formulate an authentically universal hermeneutic theory which traverses even the most entrenched disciplinary boundaries of modern discourse.

I will turn now to a more detailed consideration of how Ricoeur analyses these hermeneutical paradigms and tries to mediate them into his own interpretive framework which privileges the autonomy of the text.

\textbf{2.2.1. Irrationalism of Romantic Hermeneutics}

For Ricoeur, the tradition of Romantic hermeneutics maintains authorial intention as the criterion for any valid interpretation of the text.\textsuperscript{16} Ricoeur repudiates this approach and posits that “it is necessary to renounce the link between the destiny of hermeneutics and the purely psychological notion of transference into another mental life; the text must be unfolded, no longer towards its author.”\textsuperscript{17} Ricoeur’s analysis of Romantic hermeneutics begins

\textsuperscript{15}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 36.
\textsuperscript{17}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 53.
with Schleiermacher, who is commonly considered to be the father of modern theology and the founder of modern hermeneutics. According to Ricoeur, it is with Schleiermacher that “the real movement of deregionalisation begins with the attempt to extract a general problem from the activity of interpretation which is each time engaged in different texts.”

Schleiermacher’s interpretation theory consists in the interpreter rising above the particularity of the text and disclosing its general functions. Schleiermacher interprets the whole text in relation to the parts and the parts in relation to the whole. Nonetheless, Schleiermacher’s real emphasis is on uncovering “the whole internal process of an author’s way of combining thoughts,” it is here that the real meaning of the text is thought to lie. In Ricoeur’s view, Schleiermacher’s theory is thus Romantic, because it seeks to maintain “a living relation with a process of creation,” and it is critical, because it attempts to “elaborate the universally valid rules of understanding.” Thus Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic framework consists of a combination of two interpretive dimensions, the “grammatical” and the “divinatory.”

The grammatical dimension analyses a text “based on the characteristics of discourse which are common to a culture,” while the divinatory dimension is the process of psychologically intuiting the author’s mind.

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18 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 45.
19 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 45.
20 Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics, vol. 1, 188.
21 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 46.
22 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 47.
23 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 47.
24 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 47.
Against Schleiermacher, Ricoeur argues that the relation between the text and the mind of the author must be severed. He argues that this can be achieved by altering the focus of hermeneutics from the “investigation of hidden subjectivities towards the sense and reference of the work itself.” The interpretive emphasis must be on the world of the text rather than on the author’s consciousness.

Ricoeur develops his position further through his critical engagement with Dilthey. As the biographer and follower of Schleiermacher, Dilthey set out to defend the intellectual respectability of historical knowledge by asserting its scientific dimension, comparable to the natural sciences. He wanted to provide the human sciences with an epistemological methodology that would stand on equal ground with the methodologies of the natural sciences. Dilthey envisages that the natural sciences are based on an objective method that seeks to explain, while the human sciences follow an inter-subjective and empathetic approach that attempts to understand. According to Ricoeur, Dilthey’s approach has severe consequences for hermeneutics, since it has been formulated from the “naturalistic explanation” and presented in the “sphere of psychological intuition.” For Dilthey, every facet of human knowledge presupposes an original competence to “transpose oneself into the mental life of others”, humans are not fundamentally foreign to each other, because they mutually

24 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 47.
26 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 49.
29 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 49.
understand the signs of their own existence.\textsuperscript{31} This implies that “the foundation of the human sciences must be psychology.”\textsuperscript{32} The interpretation of texts relies on the study of human acting in social and historical contexts; all human relational, cultural, artistic, rational and religious structures are constructed on this foundation.\textsuperscript{33} Dilthey’s hermeneutic, therefore, is really a hermeneutic psychology, which has diverted the theory of interpretation away from the text itself.\textsuperscript{34} Scathingly, Ricoeur suggests that the real aim of Dilthey’s hermeneutics is not to determine what a text says, “but who says it.”\textsuperscript{35} But this is impossible, since it is not possible “to grasp the mental life of others.”\textsuperscript{36} Where psychology is the foundation of interpretation, the interpretation of texts will ultimately be a matter of guesswork.

For Ricoeur, therefore, it is crucial to detach the mental intention of the author from the sense of the text. This results in his notion of textual autonomy where “the text’s career escapes the finite horizon” of the author.\textsuperscript{37} What the text expresses is more important than what the author might have meant. Ricoeur maintains that the Romantic interpretive approach must be abandoned because it is not the author’s intent that needs to be unfolded, but the text with its own sense and meaning. This rejection of the Romantic theory leads him to turn to another paradigm of

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 49.
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 49.
\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 49. Ricoeur notes that this approach has been strengthened by the philosophy of Husserl, who argued that “mental life is characterised by intentionality, that is, by the property of intending an identifiable meaning.” For humans cannot understand the mental phenomenon as such but can grasp what it intends.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 50.
\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 52.
\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 51.
\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory}, 30.
interpretation, which replaced the epistemological understanding of the text with an understanding of structures.

2.2.2. Rationalism of Structuralist Hermeneutics

Schleiermacher and Dilthey addressed the epistemological issue of how one is able to understand the sense of a text. The Romantic quest attempted to answer this issue by reaching into the authorial intention through a psychological interpretive method.\(^{38}\) In other words, it endeavoured to excavate a world behind the text. If this is the fallacy of the author, structuralism might be described as “the fallacy of the absolute text.”\(^{39}\) Arguing against this paradigm, Ricoeur states that “to understand a text … is not to find a lifeless sense which is contained therein, but to unfold the possibility of being [which is] indicated by the text.”\(^{40}\)

Structuralism originated with Ferdinand de Saussure’s general linguistic theory. He argued that language must be considered in terms of its immanent structure rather than its use in speech. The constitutive structure he named as *langue* and its use in speech he called *parole*. His position makes language synchronically a sign system, which is divorced from any reference. The signs in a system simply have meaning by their relationship to other signs in the same system. Consequently, these signs can be analysed in terms of immanent semiotic structures. Here, language is reduced to a fixed object of analysis, and loses contact with its place in real speech and life.

\(^{38}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 54.
\(^{40}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 56.
Ricoeur’s critique of structuralism is driven by concerns about its rejection of the idea of continuity and discontinuity within traditions, and the possibility of changes in meaning over time. He is concerned also with structuralism’s failure to acknowledge subjectivity in the text. He argues that who says is indeed part of the structure of language, and it is meaningful (even if it is not, as in Romanticism, the sole aim of interpretation). Ricoeur criticizes Saussure’s distinction of langue and parole, drawing on Emile Benveniste’s notion that it is possible for discourse as langue to express meaning. Ricoeur argues that a pure semiotic system would not be meaningful language – it would not communicate anything – but would merely be a closed system. For Ricoeur, the primary level of language is meaningful words. As the words in a dictionary are polysemous, so the words in a language must be capable of more than one meaning. This element of language is not possible in a sign system, because the system is closed and meanings are determined by their constitutive structure. Hence, Ricoeur argues that such closed semiotic systems cannot be a sufficient condition for meaningful discourse. A basic unit of discourse consists of its grammar and the polysemy of words; normally, sentences are plural in meaning.

This criticism might be summed up with the statement that structuralism fails to understand text as discourse. A text, according to Ricoeur, is always

42Emile Benveniste, Mary Elizabeth Meek (trans.), Problems in General Linguistics (Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971).
43Ricoeur, Conflict of Interpretations, 62-78.
“said by someone to someone else about something” – to this extent, he agrees with the Romantics. The structuralist approach sees the text as an entity without an author, without a reader and without a reference. At this level of structuralist analysis of the text, Ricoeur sees the issue of the subjectivity and objectivity in terms of the speaker and the audience. The subject matter is lost because the question of sense and reference is irrelevant to the semiotic system; the system cannot account for any reference beyond itself. An elegant summary of the structuralist approach is Derrida’s remark: “There is nothing outside the text.”

Structuralism reduces the text to a sign system, like a “natural object” in a hermeneutic circle. Here there is only a subject-object relation, rather than a relation of meanings. Consequently, Ricoeur abandons the structuralist interpretive circle as “a vicious circle” which is “only the shadow on the methodological plane,” devoid of the subject matter of the text.

Such hermeneutical dissatisfaction has also been felt in contemporary theological reflection. One of the most influential studies in the field of biblical hermeneutics is Hans W. Frei’s monumental work, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*. The title itself is a description of how hermeneutical enterprises came to eclipse narrative. It is interesting to note how Frei builds

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47Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 58.
his argument. He points out that initially the direction of interpretation was that of “incorporating extra-biblical thought, experience and reality into the one real world” figured out “by the biblical story.”\textsuperscript{48} In this interpretive process, the text passed through constant alterations by adapting to novel situations and reflective patterns. Nevertheless, with the rise of biblical criticism, the sense of the text was questioned. Frei observes that there were in the eighteenth century the signals of disintegration of the “real historical world from its biblical description,”\textsuperscript{49} which resulted in a separation of thought and sensibility. The ultimate outcome of this separation was to quest for the meaning of the text in the world behind the text, culminating in “a host of endeavours” with “an enormous amount of inquiry into the factual truth or falsity of the biblical stories.”\textsuperscript{50} In other words, the fresh emphasis on the factual world behind the text moved into an empiricist interpretation theory. Frei laments the result of this hermeneutical recreation of the text, and the way in which it eclipses the real subject matter of biblical narratives. Frei’s analysis corresponds closely to Ricoeur’s critique of both Romantic and structuralist interpretive frameworks, because his emphasis demonstrates two ways in which these hermeneutic quests eclipse the biblical narrative. He argues that the “specifically realistic characteristic” of narrative was increasingly ignored, until finally “its presence … came to be denied.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{49}Frei, \textit{The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative}, 4.
\textsuperscript{50}Frei, \textit{The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative}, 5.
\textsuperscript{51}Frei, \textit{The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative}, 10.
The search for factual history behind the text eventually results in presenting a historical world which is totally different from the sense-world of the text. Frei argues that this interpretive attempt moved to “the odd situation” in which “the meaning of the stories was finally something different from the stories or depictions of themselves.”52 This situation arose because some exegetes explained that the texts are reliable or unreliable accounts, while others insisted that the narratives’ real meaning does not correspond to the historical account. At this point, the hermeneutical movement from the text to a world behind the text is complete. This new hermeneutic inquiry was hesitant to return to the text. It sought out various philosophical worldviews to discover textual sense, which resulted in the denial of the subject matter of the text. Consequently, Frei argues that this hermeneutical option “cast aside … many biblical narratives.”53 For instance, what Paul the apostle wrote to the Corinthians can have no meaning for human beings in the contemporary world; the writer’s original message, addressed to the church at Corinth in its own particular context, cannot have a further reference in different historical contexts. Thus the text becomes either obsolete or abandoned; it no longer means anything.

This issue of textual bondage has deeper implications, especially when the process of understanding the text is hermeneutically conditioned, so that the method of interpretation determines and limits the possibility of discovering meaning in the text. As Karl Barth argues in his preface to the second edition of The Epistle to the Romans, the historical-critical commentators’

52Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative, 11.
“recreation of the text” is “no commentary at all,” because they do not communicate Paul’s meaning. Barth envisages that true interpretation must possess a “creative energy,” which can emancipate the text with its subject matter through a “relentless, elastic application of the dialectical method.” For him, this creative dynamism is the communication between what is written and the reader, which revolves around the subject matter of the text. It is the subject matter itself that eradicates the distinction between then and now, releasing the text to create a new stage for the present. This process begins by interpreting the text in terms of “what can be said” within the textual possibility, which culminates in eliminating “fortuitous or incidental or merely historical conceptions … almost entirely.” In other words, for Barth, “the document seems hardly to exist as a document,” but releases the text to become “the Word” which now exposes itself – autonomously – in “the words.”

The analysis of these hermeneutical problems in modern theology helps to clarify the importance of Ricoeur’s notion of the autonomy of the text. The issue for Ricoeur is twofold. On the one hand, textual autonomy raises the question: what is the nature of the text which has been liberated to be itself, without the need for any extrinsic influences working on it? On the other hand: how does Ricoeur’s specific theory of interpretation function? The

54 Karl Barth, Edwyn C. Hoskyns (ed.), The Epistle to the Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 6-8.
55 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 7.
56 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 8.
57 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 7.
58 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 8.
59 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 8.
60 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 8.
61 Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 8.
former question concerns the inherent dynamism of the text, which becomes the prerequisite of understanding and interpretation. The latter addresses the hermeneutical theory that seeks to explicate the subject matter of the text, and the disclosure of the world of human existence through the text.

In the following section, I shall explore Ricoeur’s notion of the text, which he develops in dialogue with Gadamer. Ricoeur’s central claim here is that text is a discourse rich with meaning. In the subsequent section, I will present his method of interpretation and its development through Heidegger and Gadamer.

2.3. Textual Surplus

As I have already noted, Ricoeur is concerned with the fecundity of textual meaning. He considers the text to possess a threefold semantic autonomy. First, the semantics of the emancipated text can no longer be equated with authorial intention, for the author of the text is not here to qualify interpretation. Second, the text must be disconnected from its original context and its original audience, so that it is free and accessible to an unlimited series of readings by subsequent audiences. Third, the autonomous text cannot refer ostensively; what the text and the reader share in common is not a mere situation but a new world of existential possibilities. According to Ricoeur, this presupposition of textual

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62Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, 30.
autonomy articulates the essential dynamism of the text. This dynamism is the precondition of all understanding and interpretation.

2.3.1. Textual Dynamism

Ricoeur considers this textual dynamism as the creative energy of the text, which, on the one hand, can explode the world of the author and the world of the reader and, on the other hand, create a new world for the present reader. The explosion involves the deconstruction of the author’s then-lived world as the text disconnects from the author. It also involves the deconstruction of the reader’s now-living world which shatters as it encounters the text. But the deconstruction occurs in order to reconstruct a fresh possible world for each subsequent reader. He designates this “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation.” Ricoeur develops this idea by drawing on the French linguist Emile Benveniste, whose linguistic theory maintains that semiotics is the “basic unit of language” and that subject matter is the “basic unit of discourse.” Ricoeur formulates his theory of distanciation by emphasising both the event of language and the system of language.

In the first place, discourse is an event because it is “realized temporally” in the here and now, whereas the system of language is “virtual and outside of

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Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 133.
The system of language does not have a subject who speaks. Nevertheless, a discourse “refers back to its [original] speaker” in the oral or mental context of the discourse. Again, Ricoeur argues that the system of language “refers only to other signs” within the semiotic system, but discourse “refers to a world which it claims to describe.” In this sense, the event of language, which is the discourse, is the “advent of a world in language by means of discourse.” This entails that, for Ricoeur, language is a condition of communication, whereas discourse is the means that exchanges the full message of the discourse to subsequent readers. It can be noted at this point that the original discourse, which is expressed in writing, is brought once again into living communication to the present.

Secondly, Ricoeur argues that discourse as meaning is not “the fleeting event” that appears and disappears, but is “the meaning that endures.” By being realised in discourse, language “surpasses itself as system and realizes itself as event” whereas discourse “surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning.” Thus Ricoeur’s initial facet of the textual dynamism consists of the “distanciation of the saying in the said” in the context of discourse as speech, a dynamic transition of discourse from event to semantics.

Of course, a work is a more prolonged entity than a sentence, and, a structured work is a result of the application of a process of composition that

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65 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 133.
66 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 133.
67 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 133.
68 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 133.
70 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 134.
71 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 134.
transforms the original discourse into a linguistically oriented story. In other words, a discourse as a structured work surpasses the analysis of a sentence to the recognition of literary genres and styles. In the stage of composition, a lively discourse moves from being a language expression to a level of narratively configured text, in which discourse finds its expression in language through literary genres and styles of composition.

Ricoeur believes that literary genres and individual style “characterize discourse as a work,” and he substantiates this through the categories of production and labour. Labour is a “structure of practice” and production is the “result of a labour” which organizes language. By employing these analogies, Ricoeur stresses that the idea of structured work appears as “practical mediation between the irrationality of the event and the rationality of meaning.” The understanding of a work as an event consists in grasping “the relation between the situation and the project in the process of restructuration.” In this way, Ricoeur draws both the aspects of event and meaning together with the idea of individual style. Thus, the emerging characteristic of the textual dynamism is a dynamic transition of the discourse from the speech to writing.

Another aspect of textual dynamism is the mediation of the preceding components which occurred in speech and writing. The first facet occurs in the context of a living discourse between a speaker and a listener, and the

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74 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 137.
75 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 137.
second happens in the context of preserving the discourse in language through writing. What substantially happens to discourse when it passes from speech to inscription? Ricoeur states that the apparent result of writing is “fixation,” which preserves the event of the discourse in language. Nevertheless, the thrust of his argument is directed towards the moment of distancing the subjective experience and authorial intentions from the work itself. Consequently, Ricoeur argues that “textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies.”  

The sense of the text does not correspond with the meaning that the author of the work originally intended. Indeed, “thanks to writing, the world of the text may explode the world of the author.” For Ricoeur, this explosive nature of the text and its significance to understanding is not produced by any pre-defined methodology but is “constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as writing.”

There is, therefore, a distanciation of the discourse from itself to be itself in the context of explication, a dynamic transition of the discourse from its writer and original reader to autonomous discourse. Ricoeur also perceives the autonomous text as projecting a world which may not correspond with the world of the writer. The force of his argument is not on the world behind the text but on the world in front of the text. He argues that “to interpret is to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text” – this is the only proper sense in which one can speak of the text’s reference. The reference is the world of existence that

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76 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 139.
77 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 139.
78 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 139.
79 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 141.
the discourse opens up. Thus Ricoeur argues that there cannot be any discourse which does not relate to reality in this way.  

At this juncture, it is important to note that this theory of understanding aims to disclose a “structure of being-in-the-world,” which is the disclosure of the human possibilities, lying at the depth of the context in which one has been placed. The kernel that a theory of interpretation must expound through a text is this projected world that humans could inhabit and in which can express and experience their possibilities. This world of existential possibilities proposed by the text does not signify the linguistic world of everyday experience but denotes the “new possibilities of being-in-the-world … opened up within everyday reality,” which occurs through the “modality of power-to-be.” The emerging quality of the textual dynamism is a dynamic transition of the discourse from itself to show itself.

The final dimension of Ricoeur’s concept of textual dynamism is the claim that text as discourse is the “mediation of self-understanding.” The text as discourse is the medium through which humans understand themselves and their possibility of existence in the world. This concerns the issue of the “appropriation of the text” through interpretive apparatus into the world of the reader. Ricoeur argues that the appropriation takes place only through distancing the text from the writer, a matter of “understanding at and

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80 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 141.
81 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 142.
82 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 142.
83 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 142.
84 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 143.
85 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 143.
86 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 143.
through distance." Yet application of a text occurs also through the inherent structures of the work itself; human beings grasp themselves by understanding the “signs of humanity” expressed in the text. What we appropriate from the text, therefore, is “a proposed world” which is the “matter of the text” and the “world of the work” that the text itself “unfolds, discovers, [and] reveals.”

Thus, for Ricoeur, to grasp oneself is to “understand oneself in front of the text.” This is an act of “exposing ourselves to the text” in order for to obtain from the text “an enlarged self.” Accordingly, the self is constituted by the text, in whose presence a reader constantly finds herself “losing”; just as the world of the text explodes the world of the writer, so it may explode the world of the present reader. The world of the text, therefore, is dynamically world-destroying, world-projecting and world-constructing. It is explosive and creative. Thus distanciation is the “condition of understanding,” and the text with its “structures,” “sense,” and “reference” is the basis of self-understanding.

Ricoeur’s notion of textual dynamism has far-reaching implications for Christian theological reflection, which is fundamentally based upon text: the Scriptures. Ricoeur’s idea of the explosive and creative power of the emancipated text corresponds to Barth’s idea of the “creative energy” of

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87 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 143.
88 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 143.
89 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 143.
90 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 143.
91 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 144.
92 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 144.
interpretation. Barth’s argument is that the precise matter of the text cannot be released without applying “a creative straining of sinews,” through dialectical interpretation.⁹³ For Barth, it is the task of the interpreter to explicate everything that the text contains based upon what is said in the text, not in terms of what is lying behind the text. This implies that the text alone must speak in autonomy from its writer and original context. In this process, the writing of the text in language ceases to exist in the presence of the subject matter. It is here that living communication occurs. When the author and his world are exploded, the text takes the place of the original speaker, the result of which is the living communication of discourse to the present reader. Thus, the Bible as the uniquely structured divine discourse can speak today as if God the original speaker were still speaking.

It can further be argued that this understanding of the text is not strange in the history of biblical interpretation. It is possible to enumerate a number of biblical books and writings whose author, date and context are obscure and anonymous (most of the Psalms, for example). In such cases, how can one interpret the text without inferring into the factual world of the author and text? Taking this issue further, how can one interpret a creedal statement like Nicaea, which was formulated by a group whose intentions are largely unknown? How can one interpret the laws of the judiciary, where the intentions of the legislative assembly were unstated? The answer is that the subject matter of the text must be released to do its own work. The understanding and interpretation of the text is based upon its intrinsic

⁹³Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 8.
dynamism to be itself and to show itself in living communication to subsequent readers.

2.3.2. Text as Discourse

Ricoeur develops his notion of the richness of the text’s meaning by drawing from Gadamer and then by extending Gadamer’s ideas in a critical direction. He observes Gadamer criticising the Romantic hermeneutics in his work *Truth and Method* and focusing emphatically upon the text. For Gadamer, the notion of the text consists of the postulate that the text only possesses a subject matter, which must be interpreted. Consequently, the fusion of the horizons is not between the reader of the text and the author of the text, but between the subject matter of the text and the subsequent reader.94 Gadamer’s linguistic theory of the text recognizes “the universal linguality of human experience,”95 so that one’s sense of “belonging to a tradition or traditions” functions through a process of interpreting “the signs, works and texts.”96 Gadamer’s contention is that texts must not be repeated but must be interpreted. In the process of interpretation, there is a common ground of understanding as a result of the common human experience and tradition. This implies that there is “belongingness” to human tradition that makes the connection of horizons possible. Following this line of thought, Ricoeur argues that this “mediation by language” becomes “mediation by

95Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 62.
96Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 62.
text,” which makes the fresh communication of the text possible through the text’s subject matter; this is the “threshold” of his notion of the text.97

The act of fixing discourse by writing is the constitutive component of a text. For Ricoeur, all writing initially was speech in mental or physical form. He posits an inseparable relation existing between text and speech, which stands linked by the presupposition that “all writing is added to some anterior speech.”98 Consequently, Ricoeur maintains that speech as “the realization of language in an event of discourse”99 corresponds with text as linguistic discourse. Writing seeks merely to fix the psychologically or physically occurred discourse in writing; writing as an institution does not contribute anything to the phenomenon of discourse but it fixes the discourse to be preserved. Ricoeur further argues that a text is genuinely a text only when it is unrestricted to the original process of writing down the speech. A text becomes really a text only when the original discourse is directly written in letters. This implies that “writing takes the very place of speech.”100 Thus for Ricoeur a text is a discourse fixed in writing but the meaning of the discourse is not fixed by writing. The text, then, is a discourse occurring in different horizons. Primarily, discourse as speech takes place between a speaker and a hearer. Nevertheless, in the act of writing the original discourse, the discourse occurs between the writer and the recipients of the writing. In this horizon, the original speaker and the listener are extinct because the writer and the recipients of the writing took the place of speaker and the listener.

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98Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 146.
100Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 146.
Reflecting upon the relation of reading to writing, Ricoeur also argues that all writing “calls for a reading.”101 In the act of reading a written discourse, the reader takes the place of the writer just as the writer took the place of the speaker. Nevertheless, there is no dialogue situation here because the reader is absent in the event of writing and the writer is absent in the event of reading: “to read a book is to consider its author as already dead.”102 Hence, all that remains for the reader to read is the writer’s work. What comes to writing then is “discourse as intention-to-say”103 which is fixed by writing and which “must speak by itself.”104 Consequently, the emerging horizon is the act of the text taking the place of the speaker and writer to initiate living communication with the present reader through the act of reading.

Moreover, Ricoeur argues that the act of fixing the discourse in language adds further advantages to the text as discourse. On the one hand, writing preserves discourse to make it available for successive readings in innumerable contexts. On the other hand, through the linguistic orientation of the discourse, writing “increases its efficacy.”105 This increase of efficacy occurs since text, as discourse, is fertile and rich in terms of a “principle of plenitude.”106 A discourse expressed in language is disconnected from its original context and author, which makes the text to be autonomous and, potentially, more meaningful.

101 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 146.
102 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 147.
103 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 147.
104 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 165.
105 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 147.
Ricoeur thus argues, rather cryptically, that “a text means all that it can mean.”\textsuperscript{107} The subject matter of the discourse fixed in writing “says something about something.”\textsuperscript{108} Text as discourse fixed by language displays a structure, which is the sense of the text. This is the “what” of the text, which is intrinsic to the text. The sense of the text can be explained in terms of the structure of the text.\textsuperscript{109} Yet the text as discourse also discloses a reference of the text. Reference is the “about what” of the discourse that indicates the world opened up by the text. Thus for Ricoeur, the sense of the text is the world in the text and the reference of the text is the world in front of the text, which is distinct from the text itself. In the dynamic process of discourse, the sense of the text “fades into reference” and the reference fades into the “act of showing” the world. Thus, the task of reading is “to fulfil the reference”\textsuperscript{110} by retrieving the world of the text.\textsuperscript{111}

There is a striking – yet deeply problematic – theological parallel here in George Lindbeck’s idea of “intratextuality” or intrasemiotics.” Like Ricoeur, Lindbeck distances himself from the “extratextual” understanding of religion, and develops a cultural linguistic theory of religion and a regulative theory of doctrine. Lindbeck’s notion of “semiotic intratextuality” concerns the way of understanding Christianity as a cultural symbol

\textsuperscript{107}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 176.
\textsuperscript{108}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 148.
\textsuperscript{109}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 148.
\textsuperscript{110}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 148.
\textsuperscript{111}Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 149.
system. The normative description of theology must focus on the uses of language in religious practice; the text is the religion itself as a self-contained system of public meanings exemplified in practice. This entails that the meaning of a text is “immanent” to the text itself. The process of determining the immanent sense of the text is “by examining how the word operates within a religion and thereby shapes reality and experience.” In other words, for Lindbeck, “meaning is more fully intratextual in semiotic systems.” Here the prefix “intra” expresses the methodical strategy of constantly returning to the text as the place of Christian identity. Thus, the theological description that Lindbeck proposes involves an exercise of “the inventive and imaginative powers” to explore how a religion may be used to give new meaning.

Lindbeck’s understanding of the immanent meaning of the text does not, however, really refer to the intrinsic sense of the text; it is the “meanings immanent in the religious language of whose use the text is a paradigmatic instance.” In other words, the religion which derives its existence and form from the text in turn shapes the meaning and function of the text through its linguistic use. In this way, the hermeneutical circle that Ricoeur opposes occurs, leading the text to be imprisoned by the cultural, linguistic and religious use of it. It must further be observed that, for Lindbeck, the meaning of the text is “not something that the text reveals, discloses, implies

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or suggests”\textsuperscript{117} but it must be “what the text says in terms of the communal language of which the text is an instantiation.”\textsuperscript{118} It is not the text that directly speaks by itself, but the community that energizes the text to speak the words of the community. Thus intratextuality returns finally to the same predicament from which it is supposed to provide a solution. The text is eclipsed by the community.

Lindbeck also articulates the “world encompassing” nature of intratextuality,\textsuperscript{119} arising from the understanding of religion as a rich semiotic system capable of organizing and shaping “the whole of reality.”\textsuperscript{120} This postulate presupposes that religion provides the symbolic resources to reshape human experience. Consequently, Lindbeck argues that the authoritative religious texts evoke their own “domains of meaning.” Similarly, he claims that “a scriptural world is … able to absorb the universe”\textsuperscript{121} into itself and provide the hermeneutic framework for believers to interpret reality. It is not that believers discover their stories in the biblical narratives but that “they make the story of the bible their story.”\textsuperscript{122} More specifically, it is the religion “instantiated in scripture” which “defines being, truth, goodness and beauty.”\textsuperscript{123} This implies that, in the intratexual theological framework, it is not the text that redescribes reality but religious community that “redescribes reality within the scriptural framework.”\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{117} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 120.
\textsuperscript{118} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 120.
\textsuperscript{119} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 115.
\textsuperscript{120} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 115.
\textsuperscript{121} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 117.
\textsuperscript{122} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 118.
\textsuperscript{123} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 118.
\textsuperscript{124} Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 118.
In short, the prefix “intra” signifies the act of “drawing the world into the text”\textsuperscript{125} in such a way that it may assist Christian practice. The task of interpretation then is to extend the sense of the text “over the whole of reality” as it will be determined by the regulation of the religion.\textsuperscript{126} Here the text can be eclipsed in two ways: on the one hand, the meaning of the text is derivative of the communal linguistic system; on the other hand, the text absorbing the world into itself will eventually become the basic interpretive paradigm of the text to which it is drawn. The former means that the text is not free to show what it intrinsically possesses; the latter recalls Frei’s lament that any extra-biblical material interpolated into the text will eventually eclipse the text.

An additional dimension of Lindbeck’s intratextual theological framework is a “literary” intratextuality, which emerges out of a presupposition that most of the world religions possess their “relatively fixed cannons of writing” which they consider to be “normative instantiations of their semiotic codes.”\textsuperscript{127} Based on this assumption, Lindbeck argues that the Christian religion possesses such a normative code in scripture, which “creates its own domain of meaning.”\textsuperscript{128} He further argues that there can be “no world [which] is more real than the ones they create.”\textsuperscript{129} There is thus a constant returning to the canonical text in order to invent new possibilities of existential situation. Lindbeck sees such an invention taking place by means of an analysis of the semantic network, and by freeing the text from

\textsuperscript{125}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 118.
\textsuperscript{126}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 117.
\textsuperscript{127}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 116.
\textsuperscript{128}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 117.
\textsuperscript{129}Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine}, 117.
the possible readings of the past. At this crucial point, Lindbeck’s theory succumbs to its own greatest dangers.

If the canonical text by itself is capable of creating its own semantic world, why is an involvement of the community required in shaping meaning in the text and limiting the potential of the text? The semiotic intratextuality of Lindbeck will become obsolete if the literary intratextuality has free rein. And in any case, if the textual semantic world is capable of creating a real existential world, why must the existential world be absorbed into the text? More precisely, if the sense of the canonical text can create a new real world for human living, it can also simultaneously explode the present world of existence – that is the point of Ricoeur’s theory.

The problems in Lindbeck’s account arise from the fact that his notion of the text is not dynamically developed. There is no place in his theory for textual autonomy, nothing that makes the text free from all interpretive and communal limitations. Further, his notion of the text is confined to the written work, which is dead. It does not have the essential nature of the text as discourse, which makes the text a lively communication through distanciation. Finally, Lindbeck does not attribute any textual dynamism to the constituent nature of the text which makes the text both explosive and creative. Given this, it is no wonder Paul J. Dehart observes that both
“propositionalist” and “experiential-expressivist” models can in fact achieve all that intratextuality is supposed to achieve for Lindbeck.\(^{130}\)

It is precisely here that Ricoeur’s theory of the text proves to be a vital theological resource, since it enables a present reader to read the scripture afresh. Ricoeur’s account can reshape a theological understanding of the text, and can show us how existence is reframed through textual understanding. But is Ricoeur’s notion of the text limited to written texts alone? Can it be extended to non-textual objects?

### 2.3.3. Human Action as Text

Ricoeur makes a significant move by expanding the notion of the text to include meaningful human actions, because for him the meaningful human actions consist of identical interpretive dynamics, which can make them texts.\(^{131}\) He equates human actions with text by applying the basic aspects of his notion of the text to the fixing of human action in writing. He argues that human actions occur in the same way in which writing takes the place of an oral discourse between the speaker and the listener: “in the same way that interlocution is overcome in writing, interaction is overcome in numerous situations in which we treat action as a fixed text.”\(^{132}\) This process of fixing meaningful human actions as text takes place just like “a speech-

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\(^{131}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 203.

\(^{132}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 203.
act” through their “sense content,” which makes possible “the inscription of the action-event.”

Ricoeur further argues that as the discourse is distanced from its original speaker, the action also becomes distanced from the actor and moves into a signifying direction, which he calls the “social dimension of action,” in which “our deeds escape us and have effects which we did not intend.” This social dimension of action leaves traces in history which “become the documents of human action” to be read again and again. This document of human actions is comprised of both written and unwritten elements which he calls “record and reputation.” In this way, for Ricoeur, history as a whole is the document of human action which is “an autonomous entity.”

Human actions thus become “institutions” in which “their meaning no longer coincides with the logical intentions of the actors,” leaving possibility for the creation of new meaning.

Ricoeur continues to demonstrate that text as a discourse fixed in writing moves beyond itself to show the world of possibility, so human actions project a world that can be appropriated by successive readers. A meaningful human action “exceeds, overcomes, transcends the social conditions of its production and … [is] re-enacted in new social

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133 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 205
134 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 203.
135 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 206.
136 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 206.
137 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 206.
138 Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 206.
contexts”; an example is the way the French Revolution has been appropriated by the subsequent generations. Human action is therefore “an open work,” which is accessible to “an indefinite range of possible readers.” The meaning of actions is not judged by the human beings of the time but by “history itself.” Like writing, human action is an open text, whose meaning is “in suspense” because it “opens up new references and receive fresh relevance” under different social conditions through “fresh interpretations” that determine the sense of the event. Thus human action becomes a quasi-text, for “it opens up a world which it bears within itself,” which consists of “a durable” and an “omni-temporal relevance.”

Again, there are important implications here for contemporary theological reflection. First, Ricoeur’s idea of action engendering multiple meanings is fruitful for considering scriptural events and actions such as the exodus, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and Pentecost. In the history of Christian thought, the crucifixion of Jesus is a clear illustration of how an action can become the object of interpretation even though at times the interpretive process eclipsed the action’s original sense. This implies that the crucifixion of Christ as an action can be a text and as a text it can have a multitude of possible meaning. At this juncture, it is worth recalling Ricoeur’s narrative arc that dynamically narrates human experience through poetic emplotment to recreate human identity and a human world of being.

\(^{139}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 208
\(^{140}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 208
\(^{141}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 208.
\(^{142}\) Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 208.
2.4. Hermeneutical Surplus

Ricoeur’s turn to hermeneutics brings him into sharp engagement with the predominant theories of text interpretation then. This also laid down the formative pathways for his interpretation theory by redefining the nature of the text. Interacting with these theories, Ricoeur observes that the fundamental issue facing the structuralist understanding of the text is not epistemological but ontological. As Ricoeur puts it, “what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding?”¹⁴³ What does it mean for a person’s existence to be principally conditioned by textual understanding? And what shall the nature of the interpretation method that helps one to have the textual understanding without eclipsing and limiting the freedom of the text? The following sections discuss these issues.

2.4.1. Hermeneutical Foundation

Ricoeur sets out to establish his theory against structuralism through an engagement with the works of Heidegger, specifically *Being and Time*. He sees in *Being and Time* Heidegger’s quest both for the meaning of being and for a being which understands being.¹⁴⁴ As a follower of Husserl, Heidegger understands phenomenology as the accurate and neutral description of the

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essence of human experience as it appears. Implementing this phenomenological method of description, he moves beyond the description of knowledge to the application of phenomenology to human existence, which he calls Dasein; he is interested in being rather than beings. Consequently, he envisages human beings as hermeneutical and the mode of human existence as interpretive. Here he initiates a shift from hermeneutics as the interpretation of texts to hermeneutics as the key to understanding human beings.145

Nevertheless, Heidegger repudiated Husserlian idealism; and besides, unlike Husserl, he was interested in history. Heidegger envisaged human existence as temporal and historical. He described this facet of human existence as a kind of project or narrative that has been continually inscribed through time. In other words, this story of human existence is being written and revised time and again in the light of human experience and temporality. This existential narrative is not an absolutely intentional project since humans have been originally placed into existence conditioned by a specific context and tradition.146 Human beings then are already with a story and an interpretation process. The interpretation of oneself is a process of rewriting the narrative whose chapters have already been written. As a result, human experience is intrinsically hermeneutical. Heidegger conceives this constant engagement with the world as one of “care.” Thus human experience is always both existential and practical.147 It was this provocative view that

145 Heidegger, Being and Time, 25.
146 Heidegger, Being and Time, 27.
147 Heidegger, Being and Time, 30.
shifted the emphasis of knowing from the epistemological to the ontological and hermeneutical – an approach that Gadamer took over and developed.

Even though Ricoeur regards Heidegger’s work as incomplete, he sees it as providing the impetus for a hermeneutic philosophy. Understanding is not merely grasping of the factual data in the text but it seeks to obtain a possibility of existence as provided by the text. But Ricoeur is dissatisfied with the Heideggerian analysis of *Dasein*. He argues that Heidegger’s analysis does not effectively address the issues of textual exegesis, for interpretation here collapses into the hermeneutical circle. Nor does Heidegger realise the implications of textual discourse and the act of fixing discourse in writing. In addition, Ricoeur observes Heidegger’s later reflections moving to emphasize “the manifestive power of language,” which affirms the superiority of “saying” over “speaking” – as though “saying” were not also a form of “speaking.” Ricoeur notes that Heidegger strictly subordinated epistemology to ontology, so that the focus of hermeneutics moves increasingly towards ontological problems. It is here that Ricoeur sees Gadamer’s importance in revising and continuing the Heideggerian tradition of hermeneutic philosophy.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer seeks to establish the meaning of truth in art and history against the scientific claims of objectivity. He resists the attempt

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149 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 58.
150 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 58.
to privatize and subjectivize the humanities that resulted in viewing the sciences as the paradigm for knowing. This trend eventually culminated in a tendency to explain art without relating it to reality. But Gadamer maintains that art can be seen as taste and it can be a means of reality for it can disclose reality. He establishes that knowledge and moral judgement are based upon practical wisdom and they cannot be verified by scientific methods. He notes the tendency of the discipline of history to envisage a historical event as an objective instance of some general law. Arguing against the tendency of the over-subjectification of art and the over-objectification of history, Gadamer proposes a via media that seeks to affirm art and history as disclosing reality in the way that Aristotle proposed. Aristotle maintained that even though science and knowledge are certain and verifiable, no general rule can determine a specific moral situation. In other words, it is possible for general rules of scientific verification to underdetermine a sound judgement without the assistance of practical wisdom. Thus Gadamer’s postulate is that knowledge is essentially based upon practical wisdom and cannot be vindicated by scientific methods.

By developing such a perspective on truth, Gadamer contributed to the formulation of a hermeneutical epistemology whose essential feature is the phenomenology of reading a text, which he describes through the analogy of the phenomenology of “play.” He argues that in the act of interpretation, there is a vital interaction between the text and the interpreter. For Gadamer, interpretation is not a process of observing at a distance as the nineteenth-

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154 Gadamer, Truth and Method, xxx.
century sciences did with the physical world. This is a dynamic process in which the text and the reader enter into an active interplay of engaging, interacting, interpreting and appropriating. He illustrates this process with a phenomenology of game playing: the player is not in control as she is fully engaged in the game, but this does not eliminate skilful performance on the part of the player. Gadamer’s point is that it is not the player who plays the game but the game that plays the player; the game transcends the players. This “primacy of the game over the players … is experienced by the players themselves.” Similar to the game of interpretation, the “matter” of the text is not under the control of the interpreter but often the text seizes the interpreter. Consequently, Gadamer argues that the meaning of a text always “goes beyond its author”; understanding is not merely “reproductive” but a “productive activity.”

Thus, according to Gadamer, interpretation is always a creative “fusion of horizons.” The process of understanding consists of a productive synthesis in which the human horizon connects with the textual horizon. Hence, Gadamer argues that in grasping a text “we understand in a different way, if we understand at all.” Here he shifts emphasis from the metaphor of games to a dramatic performance in which each performance is a new event, even though it plays the sense of the original. There is a proper original sense of the text, then, but it is accessible only through a fusion of horizons. This challenges both traditional exegesis which strives to discover

what a text meant, and traditional hermeneutics which seeks to determine what a text signifies today. Nevertheless, according to Gadamer, the event of understanding what a text meant involves a hermeneutical interplay with what it means today. The dimension of application which usually appears later in the process of interpretation is already in operation at the first level of discerning the text. This is a position that Gadamer strategically posits against the enlightenment notion of presuppositionless understanding, which he calls a “prejudice against prejudice itself.”

Gadamer envisages that in encounter, the human horizon is enlarged through understanding the textual horizon in order to reject it, accept it, or appropriate it in a new way; but all this depends on presuppositions. Eventually this process leads inevitably to some form of fusion of horizons.

Furthermore, Gadamer contends that the interpretive dynamic must be strengthened by relating it to history and tradition which ultimately shape human existence. Humans cannot escape traditions for traditions provide the primary presuppositions which enable them to understand new categories, even if at times they disable them too. Nevertheless, what is essential is to be “aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.”

Gadamer draws here on the twentieth-century linguistic emphasis that knowledge comes in linguistic structure and cannot be attained without language. Arguing against conventional views of understanding, Gadamer contends that “the way understanding occurs … is the coming-into-language

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161 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 269
of the thing itself.”^162 This process of understanding is true for both text and dialogue. Consequently, he states that the “being that can be understood is language.”^163 This implies for Gadamer that human existence and thought are irreducibly hermeneutical.

It is worth noting here the divergence of Gadamer’s metaphor of the fusion of the horizons from Lindbeck’s metaphor of intratextual absorption. While Lindbeck’s notion of absorption means that the text absorbs the existential world into itself, Gadamer neither affirms this position nor seeks to mark out a middle way between the textual and existential world. Gadamer argues that one cannot grasp the textual world without relating it to the human world of experience. The human world must be enlarged in order to understand another world. Gadamer calls this dynamic process the “miracle of understanding.”^164 Lindbeck does not critically distinguish between what must and must not be absorbed. What is really required is not absorption, as Lindbeck suggests, but a creative fusion, in which a critical judgement is made on what can be and what cannot be changed.

Lindbeck had developed his theory under the influence of the later Wittgenstein who emphasised the way terms derive their meaning from their situation in life. Wittgenstein sought to show how we understand within concrete forms of life, whereas Gadamer investigated the more demanding

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question: how we can understand across forms of life.¹⁶⁵ In other words, Wittgenstein limits the process of understanding between the horizons, while Gadamer elasticises it across the horizons.

Still, Lindbeck’s theory could become more fruitful once we have accepted Gadamer’s model. Gadamer’s concept of fusion can be supplemented by Lindbeck’s insistence that the biblical text stands as a constant challenge to human stories, extending the text into a creative modification of existence. Given the challenge, drawing resources from the hermeneutical notions of Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur formulates his own theory of interpretation, which eventually tries to modify and appropriate both of them.

2.4.2. Hermeneutical Formation

Following Gadamer’s hermeneutical lead and Heidegger’s ontological assumptions, Ricoeur begins with phenomenology, but soon turns from phenomenology to a position that goes beyond Gadamer. To start with, like Gadamer, Ricoeur argues that philosophers do not start empty-handed but with presuppositions. But Ricoeur goes beyond Gadamer by emphasising a second-order reference and a critical reflection without disconnecting himself from the first-order language to which one must return. For instance, the Bible can be considered first-order language and theology

second-order reflection, which must continually be tested against the former. In addition, drawing from Heidegger, Ricoeur strives to establish an ontological turn in hermeneutics which emphasises not only the meaning of texts but the textual being of those who use texts.\textsuperscript{166}

Thus the task of hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, is a process of an “explication of the ontological ground” of being, which must be explored “in the relation of being with the world.”\textsuperscript{167} Ricoeur moves the hermeneutical focus from the mere interpretation of texts to history and human life as a whole. He argues that humans cannot jump out of history into the past without a fusion of horizons; his philosophy as a whole tries to show that such a fusion is still possible in a postmodern context.

At the centre of Ricoeur’s system is the hermeneutical spiral. It was in 1970 that he developed his picture of a threefold spiral, consisting of pre-critical understanding, critical understanding, and post-critical understanding.\textsuperscript{168} As this hermeneutic spiral is integrally connected to Ricoeur’s concepts of metaphor and narrative, it seems to me that it is better to name the three stages of the spiral the hermeneutic \textit{figuration} of the text, the hermeneutic \textit{configuration} of the text, and the hermeneutic \textit{recreation} of the text.

The first facet of the interpretive arc, namely, the hermeneutic figuration of the text, deals with an innocent act of understanding, which Ricoeur calls

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{166} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 16-19.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 55.
\item \textsuperscript{168} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 71-88.
\end{itemize}
the “surface semantics.”169 This aspect is extended to “all social phenomena,” which are beyond “textual entities” for they are not confined to its application to semiotics but to “all kinds of signs which are analogous to linguistic signs.”170 In the background of the idea of pre-critical understanding are the continental debates dealing with the Diltheyan dichotomy of understanding emphasised by human sciences and explanation defended by natural sciences.171 The intention of Ricoeur at this level is to integrate both understanding and explanation by giving priority to holistic understanding. He argues that a first reading provides the reader with a holistic understanding of the sense and its import. Referring to E.D. Hirsch’s idea of an imaginative understanding of meaning that can be verified against scientific knowledge, Ricoeur envisages this as amounting to an initial “guess” or “wager” about the meaning. In continuity with Gadamer’s model of game playing, Ricoeur asserts that in the process of interpretation, the interpreter is not initially in control but is seized by the meaning in the text. This position leads Ricoeur to approach the text as an explosive and creative entity, full of potential.

The second aspect of the hermeneutical spiral, namely, the configuration of the text, consists of the way pre-critical understanding is pressed into critical analysis, so that the thoughts emerging from the first reading can be validated. Ricoeur sees great value in the explanatory process of verifying insights by critical methodologies. The paradigm here is “depth semantics,”

which occurs between “structural analysis and appropriation.” It is such “depth interpretation” that offers meaning to the whole process. For Dilthey, this stage is a movement from understanding to explanation. But Ricoeur sees this as a context for an analytical and critical mode of understanding: “to explain more is to understand better.”

At this point, it can be observed that Ricoeur’s notion of critical understanding aims in two directions. First, he seeks to establish a kind of textual objectivity. This becomes evident as he opposes the interpretive act of divining authorial intention, but at the same time maintaining texts and human actions as interpretive objects that open room for theories of explication. This allows the interpreter to construe the sense of the text rather than inferring the meaning of what the writer might have experienced in producing the text. Second, he seeks to validate the initial guess of pre-critical understanding. He maintains that such a validation of texts is more a “logic of probability” than “logic of empirical verification.” In other words, his argument is that validation is not verification. The former is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures of legal interpretation. It is the logic of “uncertainty” and of “qualitative probability.” Validation and objectivity express the postmodern sense of probable arguments, evidence and conclusions rather than justified proofs. In this stage of Ricoeur’s interpretive spiral, we might observe that theology functions as critical understanding and as second-order language that

173 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 220.
174 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol.1, 5.
176 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 212.
177 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 212.
provides clarification, criticism and validation for the first-order language of the bible. Consequently, theology will serve not to replace the text but to extend its clarity and intelligibility.

The final dimension of Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc is the creation of textual identity. Here, readers understand the “depth semantics” of the text and make it their own.\(^\text{178}\) It is as the text redescribes reality that the reader moves beyond the world \textit{within} the text to the imaginatively created world \textit{in front} of the text. His proposal presupposes that, all that a reader must seek to understand in a text is “something disclosed in front of it.”\(^\text{179}\) Ricoeur frequently employs the expressions “application” and “appropriation” to describe this stage. Unlike Gadamer, he contends that the appropriation of the textual sense as an existential possibility is an integral aspect of the interpretive process. The hermeneutic function and the understanding of the text is incomplete unless one grasps what the textual world signifies for existence – what Ricoeur calls the “ontological vehemence”\(^\text{180}\) of the text. Subsequently, his interpretive spiral shows how a reader can move from the pre-understanding of a text to the subjective-appropriation of it through critical explanation. He claims that modern thought has not achieved this necessary hermeneutical movement, but has gotten lost in the “desert of criticism.”\(^\text{181}\)

178Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 220.
2.4.3. Hermeneutical Function

According to Ricoeur, the text is a discourse and interpretation is the “art of discerning the discourse in the work.”\(^{182}\) In the process of this act of discerning, the focus is not on the mere discourse but on the sense of the text that “points towards a possible world.”\(^{183}\) Thus the process of interpretation must seek to understand the “world-propositions opened up by the reference of the text.”\(^{184}\) For Ricoeur, grasping a text signifies following its “movement from sense to reference.”\(^{185}\) His notion of the hermeneutic function consists of three dimensions – understanding, explanation and appropriation – which correspond to his hermeneutic spiral.

Ricoeur believes that the process of interpretation is incomplete if it culminates only in explanation. Critical examination of a work is not yet a complete interpretation. Instead, interpretation is like the “execution of a musical score; it marks the realization, the enactment of the semantic possibilities of the text.”\(^{186}\) Consequently, interpretation truly occurs only when a discourse is discerned, the sense of it is demonstrated, and meanings are appropriated by the reader. Ricoeur argues that if an interpreter deals with a text as a “worldless” entity, this is not interpretation but only explanation in terms of “structure.” Only if the interpreter lifts the “suspense

\(^{183}\)Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87.
\(^{184}\)Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87.
\(^{185}\)Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 88.
\(^{186}\)Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 159.
and fulfills the text in speech, restoring it to living communication,”¹⁸⁷ has interpretation occurred. Accordingly, there is a hermeneutic dynamism which consists of a methodical disconnection from the text and an existential engagement with its truth. Explanation demonstrates the text’s semiotic structure, and understanding follows its semantic disclosure. The subjective act of existential appropriation of the textual possibility is contingent on the objective act of structural analysis. In short, the hermeneutic function consists of understanding, explaining and appropriating the text as an existential possibility. Thus the real goal of interpretation is the dynamic process of imaginatively recreating a possible world of human existence through the figuration, configuration and refiguration of a textual world.

2.5. Ontological Surplus

2.5.1. Ontological Possibility

Ricoeur’s view of the goal of hermeneutics is peculiar to his theory. The ultimate task of hermeneutics is “to place oneself en route towards the orient of the text.”¹⁸⁸ The sense of the text corresponds to the world within the text, whereas the reference of the text is the world in front of the text, the possible imaginative world that the text shows to the reader. The

¹⁸⁷Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 152.
¹⁸⁸Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, 161.
interpretative process involves “orienting oneself” towards the projected world disclosed by the text – in other words, appropriating the text.\textsuperscript{189}

The text emancipates us from our customary way of being “by opening up a world,” creating the “new dimensions of our being-in-the-world.”\textsuperscript{190} The interpretation of a text “culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better.”\textsuperscript{191} When a reader reads a work, she reads herself. What exactly is appropriated by the reader in the act of reading is the projected world of the text, which stands between the structural analysis of the text and the self-understanding of the reading subject. Ricoeur argues that “it is by an understanding of worlds, actual and possible, opened up by language that we may arrive at better understanding of ourselves.”\textsuperscript{192} Here lies the ontological dynamism of the whole interpretive process. The success of an interpretation theory is determined by its potential to show ontological possibilities, and its capacity to textually orient the reader towards these possibilities.

So the ontological goal of hermeneutics is to demonstrate from the text an imaginatively projected world in which “I could project my ownmost possibilities.”\textsuperscript{193} In the notion of the world of the text, Ricoeur discovers the solution to issues facing both romantic and structuralist paradigms. By understanding and following the semiotics and the semantics of the text, the

\textsuperscript{189} Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory}, 88.
\textsuperscript{190} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 202.
\textsuperscript{191} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 158.
\textsuperscript{192} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 158.
\textsuperscript{193} Ricoeur, \textit{Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences}, 112.
reader enters into the world projected by the text, and, eventually, grasps herself in the light of that projected world. The autonomous text communicates productively and creates worlds of existential possibilities. Thus reading a text hermeneutically provides the reader with a possible way of being in the world.

2.5.2. Ontological Identity

Ricoeur describes the peculiar nature of the imaginatively projected world of human existence in terms of second-order reference. He argues that the second-order reference speaks about reality more than the actuality of human existence. The autonomy of the text from the burdens of ostensive reference and empirical description can release the textual energy to project meaningful worlds of human possibilities. This is an exclusively human privilege, due to writing: “Thanks to writing, man and only man has a world and not just a situation.”\(^{194}\) The projected world of the text is enriched with human values and existential possibilities. It is a moral world appropriated by moral agents. Ricoeur suggests that, “for me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood and loved.”\(^{195}\) What I read and how I respond to what is being read determines the kind of person I become. Accordingly, what we must seek to understand primarily in a discourse is a “project,” an “outline of a new way of being in the world.”\(^{196}\) The interpretive goal of discourse is

\(^{194}\) Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 36.
\(^{195}\) Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37.
\(^{196}\) Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37.
to disclose a world and reframe the ontological identity of human beings. This process enlarges and transforms the self. Consequently, the phenomenology of hermeneutical reading of text is world-explooding, world-creating and identity-shaping.

Here it is worth turning once more to the Barthian concept of world and text. Barth confesses that one must “betray what is – behind,” which is the “historical content”\(^{197}\) in order to gain access to the “strange, new world, the world of God.”\(^{198}\) This is the world within the text, what Ricoeur calls the semiotic world of discourse. Barth proposes that there are “many and true and beautiful possibilities”\(^{199}\) in the text. These textual possibilities are attained as humans enter God’s world through the text. And the result is that a “new world projects itself into our old ordinary world.”\(^{200}\) We gain access to the “world of the Word of God.”\(^{201}\)

Like Ricoeur, Barth thinks that understanding the world within the text will also disclose to the reader a new world. Entry into the semantic world of the text explodes the factual world behind the text and projects an ontological possibility on to the world of the reader, which eventually is exploded as well. This Barthian picture of the dynamism of reading and interpretation corresponds to Ricoeur’s textual dynamism. But in Ricoeur, the concept of the textual world projected in front of the text is tied to his understanding of


\(^{198}\) Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 33.

\(^{199}\) Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 35.

\(^{200}\) Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 37.

\(^{201}\) Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 43.
language: the text shows a life; that life is a life of language; and the language of life is a language of metaphor. That will be the theme of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

The Language of Life: Metaphor

My chapter on textual ontology explored how the text shows a world to the reader, and how this world is appropriated through interpretation. In this chapter, I shall explore the nature of the existence that becomes available through texts. By exploring Ricoeur’s concept of metaphor, I will show how metaphorical language functions as an epistemological tool. I will explore Ricoeur’s claim that human existence fundamentally and structurally is linguistic and that the language of metaphor is the language of existence.

3.1. Metaphoric Mediation

It was in 1967 that Ricoeur published his monumental work *Symbolism of Evil*, which methodically and provocatively analysed the problem of evil. Even though *The Symbolism of Evil* addressed the nature of myth and its symbolic status in language, Ricoeur soon saw that treating myths and symbols alone in the field of interpretation is inadequate. The crucial issue which emerged was the problem of the dual meanings that occur in language. The interpretive process faces the challenge of literal and metaphorical meanings of any given text. Ricoeur deals with this issue in his major work *The Rule of Metaphor*, in which he explores the phenomenon of the semantic innovation in metaphorical discourse.
When he turned to a theory of metaphorical discourse, Ricoeur noticed that linguists, literary critics and philosophers of language represented different trends in metaphor studies. The linguists emphasised the notion of deviance, in a word-oriented metaphorical theory that ultimately belongs to the domain of rhetoric. The literary critics maintained a poetic notion of metaphor in which the central focus is placed upon sentences, in an approach that belongs to the domain of semantics. For the philosophy of language, the main concern shifts from the rhetoric and semantic theories of metaphor to a theory of meaning which is essentially an ontological and epistemological concern; this approach belongs to the domain of hermeneutics.¹ Faced with such diverse accounts of metaphor, Ricoeur’s aim is to synthesise all three strands into a single theory of metaphorical discourse. *The Rule of Metaphor* consists of eight studies that together constitute a progressive exploration of the concept of metaphor with reference to rhetoric, semantic and hermeneutic theories. The aim of this synthesis is to trace the “progression from word to sentence and from sentence to discourse.”² This analysis of metaphorical language leads eventually to an account of the linguistic nature of existence itself.

3.1.1. Metaphor as a Rhetorical Mechanism

Ricoeur grounds his understanding of metaphor on a critical appropriation of the Aristotelian theory of metaphor, as developed in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle develops the “seeing-as” facet of metaphor, that is, the notion that metaphor permits human beings to envisage familiar things in creative ways. And in the *Poetics*, he develops the notion of “mimesis.” For Aristotle, mimesis does not signify imitation but representation. The distinction at this point is significant because, on the one hand, the imitation per se concerns the way things appear, and on the other hand it deals with the imitation of some action. Thus mimesis involves *muthos* or plot, which is not a mere juxtaposition of human action but a structured representation of it.³

What Ricoeur takes from the Aristotelian theory is awareness that “no discourse ever suspends our belonging to the world.”⁴ Language is connected somehow to the structures of being; that is how Ricoeur accounts for “the truth of imagination, poetry’s power to make contact with being as such.”⁵ Metaphor possesses the potential to render concrete and immediate language of action. This is the ontological function of metaphorical language. In this context, Ricoeur states that the “lively expression” of metaphor is language that “expresses existence as alive.”⁶

⁴ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 43.
⁵ Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 43.
Shifting from the domain of rhetoric to the semantic domain, Ricoeur considers the importance of tropes. The notion of tropes is conventionally based upon the concept of the semantic *lacuna*, a gap in a sentence that the author wants to fill in. Such gaps are usually filled by the deviant term. The deviant term is an improper or alien term borrowed from a sphere of discourse that is totally different. The improper term fills in the gap by replacing the absent term in the statement. If the alien term is employed deliberately, then it constitutes a trope proper. If it is used to fill a gap in the author’s terminology, then it constitutes *catachresis*, an improper use of words. Drawing on Pierre Fontanier’s theory of tropes, Ricoeur notes that, for Fontanier, tropes depend on some relationship between the substituted figurative term and the absent term. Such a relationship “brings together two objects each of which constitutes an absolutely separate whole.”\(^7\) The relations of correlation and connection designate relations of “exclusion” and “inclusion” for in both cases, “one object is designated by the name of another.”\(^8\) And the process of characterization and qualification does not occur only through words but through sentences. For they function within a sentence that connects not just two ideas but also two words, namely, “one term taken non-metaphorically, which acts as a support and the other taken metaphorically, which fulfils the function of characterization.”\(^9\) In contrast to other kinds of tropes, metaphor takes “far greater territory” in discourse, involving not only nouns and names but also the “adjective, participle, verb and all species of words.”\(^10\)

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\(^7\)Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 56.
\(^8\)Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 57.
\(^9\)Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 57.
\(^10\)Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 57.
Ricoeur’s analysis of Fontanier’s theory of tropes opens the way for the conclusion that metaphorical language does not belong to the symmetrical categories of correlation and connection. Metaphor can be related to kinds of terms which other tropes cannot. Ricoeur thinks that emancipating metaphor from its servitude to word theory will make available for analysis the full range of metaphorical use in language, while also making intelligible the particular way of “seeing as” which metaphor entails.

Ricoeur draws deeply on the theories of Aristotle and Fontanier, but he argues that their understanding of metaphor restricted the essential nature and function of metaphor because they were content merely to categorize metaphor. Ricoeur wants to go further, and to seek an existential interpretation of the way metaphor creates meaning.

3.1.2. Metaphor as a Semantic Mechanism

Ricoeur’s transition from the rhetorical domain to the semantic domain leads him to investigate the sentence as a unit of meaning. He sets out to explore the role of the sentence as the “carrier of complete and finished meaning” in the production of metaphor.11 His concern here is not merely metaphorical words, but what he calls a “metaphorical statement.”12

Ricoeur engages with I. A. Richards, the British literary theorist, by analysing his work on *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. In this book, Richards

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attacks the view that words possess proper meaning in themselves. It is, Richards argues, the sentence that carries meaning. His theory is a contextual one in which the reader or listener must assume the responsibility to infer the meaning of a word every time it appears with reference to the particular context in which it is employed. The definitions that dictionaries provide for terms are not themselves units of meaning, but only function as rough guides to the possible field of discourse to which each word belongs.\textsuperscript{13} Meaning does not emerge from dictionaries but from the interplay of words with one another in the context of discourse. Richards sees metaphor as an important example of the way meaning emerges from a sentence. He argues that metaphor holds together within one simple meaning two components drawn from two different contexts of discourse; in the interaction of these two contexts, meaning spontaneously emerges.\textsuperscript{14} Richards designates the underlying idea of such a sentence as its tenor and the image as the vehicle. In the case of a metaphoric statement, only a contemplation of the complete sentence in terms of its tenor and vehicle together can evoke meaning.

Ricoeur shares Richards’ concern for the sentence as the basic unit of meaning. But he criticises Richards’ theory for failing to distinguish between literal and metaphorical meaning. He argues that if the criterion of metaphor consists in its potential for expressing both non-metaphorical and metaphorical meaning at once, then it does not have any distinctiveness, inasmuch as literal reading can do the same thing. He also notes that


\textsuperscript{14}Richards, \textit{The Philosophy of Rhetoric}, 3.
Richards’ theory does not account for cases of metaphor in which there are shared characteristics between tenor and vehicle. And Ricoeur particularly wants to go beyond Richards’ theory by seeking to address the “ontological status of metaphor,” that is, the question of the relation between metaphors and reality.\textsuperscript{15}

The second theorist Ricoeur critically appropriates is the American philosopher Max Black. In his major work, \textit{Models and Metaphors}, Black describes metaphor as a complete sentence comprised of both metaphorical and non-metaphorical components.\textsuperscript{16} For instance, in the sentence, “the chairman ploughed through the discussion,” “ploughed” is metaphorical and the rest of the sentence is non-metaphorical. He replaces Richards’ notion of tenor and vehicle by his precise ideas of “focus” and “frame” to signify the metaphorical and non-metaphorical in a given sentence. In agreement with Richards, he recognizes that meaning emerges as a spontaneous outflow of the interaction between focus and frame.\textsuperscript{17} By employing the notions of focus and frame, Black seeks to describe how metaphors give rise to meaning. Metaphors are possible, Black argues, because of the “system of associated common places”\textsuperscript{18} shared by any specific social group. The reader’s perspective is shaped by a whole array of common characteristics, and this is the resource which metaphor utilises.

\textsuperscript{15}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 83.
\textsuperscript{17}Black, \textit{Models and Metaphors}, 27.
\textsuperscript{18}Black, \textit{Models and Metaphors}, 27.
Again, Ricoeur observes the limitations of this proposal, especially the fact that it only works with established images and metaphors. The theory does not show how new metaphors can be invented. Moreover, Ricoeur observes that there are simultaneous alterations that take place both in focus and frame once a metaphor is established. For example, once the metaphor “man is a wolf” is established, one can no longer see the wolf independent of the man; it is as though its very nature has changed as a result of the metaphoric connection. There is a kind of surplus here; the metaphor means more – and produces more – than what it says.

Ricoeur’s analysis of semantic approaches to metaphor shows that metaphorical language cannot be understood purely at the level of the individual word or even the sentence. It is necessary instead to consider metaphor within a much wider field of language, understanding, and existence.

3.2. Metaphoric Language

Ricoeur’s goal in his analysis of metaphor is to understand a human relation to language; he is not concerned just with the functioning of words, but with the connection between words and things, and with the wider horizon of human life and possibility. Literature as a medium of life: that is what ultimately interests him. Metaphor is exemplary because of the way it seems to enlarge the borders of meaning beyond all established limits. “The power
[of language] to create new contextual meanings seems to be truly limitless ... No speaker ever completely exhausts the connotative possibilities of words.”¹⁹ Ricoeur envisages human beings as constantly engaged in the process of inventing such figures in language, not only to expand language but also to expand their experience of the world.

Ricoeur’s approach here is similar to that of Gerhard Ebeling, who argues that human existence is fully conditioned by the characteristics of language. For Ebeling, “Existence is conveyed, formed and embodied in language itself.”²⁰ This means for him that the primary way of understanding is not to grasp either individual words or linguistic structures, but to understand human existence and its possibility through language. It is for just this reason that Ricoeur explores figurative language – because such language discloses the way in which human life itself is essentially figurative.

3.2.1. Symbols: Cognitive Origin

Ricoeur is convinced that descriptive language is incapable of exhaustively expressing the conditions of human life. This assumption is reflected in the conclusion of his Fallible Man, where he asserts that human life is constantly lived in a mode of tension between the poles of finite and infinite. Human existence always consists of a sense of fault and fallibility. This experience cannot fully be expressed by means of the language of

¹⁹Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor, 95.
Ricoeur’s argument for symbolic language as the fundamental instrument to express the human condition has important implications for theological discourse, as Pierre Grelot argues in his work *The Language of Symbolism: Biblical Theology, Semantics and Exegesis*. Grelot explores the issue of how human beings can meaningfully describe a God who is totally other. He argues that the concrete characterizations of science and abstract conceptualizations of speculative philosophy through their prosaic language cannot provide sufficient language to express the divine and human dimensions of existence. The Bible employs a symbolic language which is derived from the very human condition that is itself comprised of figurative, relational, imaginative and mythical dimensions.  

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2Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.
Grelot further argues that the language of symbolism in which both the Old and New Testaments are written can intelligibly communicate without any descriptive characterizations such as scientific language deploys. Understanding the Bible as a divine–human literary work, filled with supernatural and temporal persons, events and communications, means interpreters must go beyond the mere process of grasping its dates, historical contexts, authors and literary genres. The interpreter must understand its language in its entirety to understand the reality it communicates. The symbolic language employed in the Bible is not a preliminary step towards clearer communication; it is the *most* expressive language for the subject matter it presents. The Bible’s symbolic language, Grelot notes, is “deeply rooted in the experience of this world and of the history.”

The only thing Grelot’s analysis lacks is an account of the process by which symbolic language becomes part of a wider reflective discourse; that is the question Ricoeur tries to address in *The Symbolism of Evil*. He begins by noting how the biblical physical symbols such as “stain” and “defilement” paved the way for the development of ethical symbols like “sin” and “guilt.” In this process, the original symbols are not replaced by non-figurative concepts; the original symbols continue to exist latently and implicitly in the later terms. What Ricoeur is trying to account for here is “the gift of meaning from the symbol” to discourse; his own philosophy is an attempt to

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remain faithful to that gift. Second-order language – the language of theology or speculation – remains immersed in, and shaped by, symbol.

Ricoeur adopts Kant’s philosophical formula: “The symbol gives rise to thought.” Exegeting this aphorism, Ricoeur affirms that “the symbol gives.” It is the symbol that functions as the source from which reflection arises. To this extent, all texts are symbolic in their deepest foundations. “Symbols are already in the element of speech.” In language, therefore, symbols are “ultimately inexhaustible and ineradicable.” The symbol not only operates as the originating source, but also gives “something to think.” What symbol gives is “occasion for thought.” The primary symbolic language must be introduced directly into the realm of reflection; “beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again.” Criticism might first lead away from symbol towards reflection; but it has to return to symbol in the end.

But how does symbol give rise to thinking? Ricoeur asserts that “an interpretation theory that respects the original enigma of the symbols” can resolve the issue if it “lets itself be taught by them.” It is necessary to have an interpretive procedure that respects the symbolic nature of language.

27 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 348.
29 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 348
31 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 12.
33 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 349.
34 Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 349.
In theology, Gerhard Ebeling has argued that the primary symbols of revelation do not require interpretation as such. It is not the symbol but the human condition which is obscure and mute and stands in need of illumination. According to Ebeling, the word itself has its own interpretive capacity – its capacity to interpret experience. An understanding of symbols is to be attained not by asking what they contain but by what they effect, what they set in motion and disclose. It is not experience that interprets symbols, but symbols that enable experience.

In the same way, Ricoeur sees reflective language informed by symbolic language as occurring through a hermeneutic that aims at self-understanding. Hermeneutics leads from the symbol to ontology. How are the immediacy of the symbol and the mediation of thought held together? It is faithfulness to the symbol that holds them together. Interpretation does not lead away from the symbol; rather, “by interpreting we can hear again.” Thus for Ricoeur, philosophy is really the epistemology of symbols.

Hence Ricoeur defines symbols and interpretation each through the other: “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.” In the interpretive process the symbol’s “gift of meaning” and the emergence of understanding are “knotted together.” In this knot, “the symbol gives and criticism interprets.” Here there is both a “willingness to suspect” and a “willingness to listen.” Ricoeur supports this dialectic of symbol and understanding with the Augustinian paradox that “we must understand in order to believe, but we must believe in order to understand.” This is not a vicious circle but “a living and stimulating circle” in which the process of interpretation and the symbol continually return to one another. It is only through this circular relation that “the symbol gives rise to thought.”

It is possible then both to “listen to symbols” and to attain “autonomous thought” through symbols: each depends on the other. Understood in this way, criticism is “no longer reductive but restorative.” In short, the philosophical reflection informed by symbolic language is “concrete reflection” that unites the world of human existence and the conceptual world based on the symbolic linguistic world.

Ricoeur has thus tried to clarify the distinction between primary and secondary language in texts, particularly in sacred texts. The primary symbolic language is the one that is originally fixed in language. The

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41 Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 27.
secondary language is the one that arises from symbol and articulates the form of life to which symbol gives rise. Speculative reflection of any kind is contingent on the fecundity of symbols, which arise in the field of human faith and experience. Reflection appears on the scene much later, as the “transcendental deduction of symbols,” and thus as an articulation of the “structures of existence.”

This leads to Ricoeur’s concept of the “surplus of meaning” in symbols. Symbolic language is characterized by polysemy at the level of words, ambiguity at the level of the sentence, and plurality at the level of discourse. This means symbolic language can neither be reduced to the literal, nor can it be exhausted, but it must be continually interpreted and reinterpreted. In this way, the boundless meaning of the symbol gives rise to understanding of the structures of human existence. Thus for Ricoeur, the speculative reflection in the process of the quest for identity does not emerge from the subjective dimensions of human experience but must be attained by way of a hermeneutical reflection.

Theology has not always grasped this important point about the relation between symbol and understanding. The Barthian characterization of the interpretive process as “saying the same thing in other words” represents a collapse into the vicious hermeneutical circle. This happens wherever the

50Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 357.
52Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, 30.
concern is not with the richness of the symbolic text but with the process of translating the text into a different linguistic framework – as in the case of Bultmann’s theology. According to Ricoeur, human beings cannot understand themselves immediately but must read themselves through symbols. Thought must never detach itself from symbolic language as its own originating source.

Nevertheless, the maxim that the symbol “requires an interpretation” poses another important problem. Interpretation is necessary to the extent that it discovers and releases the resources of symbol. Just like the textual dynamism that emancipates and distances the text, Ricoeur envisages a symbolic dynamism that sets the interpretive process in motion. Just as symbol provides occasion for speculative reflection, it also “gives life” to the interpretation.\(^\text{54}\) It is symbol that animates hermeneutics.\(^\text{55}\)

So if there “exists nowhere a symbolic language without hermeneutics,”\(^\text{56}\) similarly it is also true, in reverse, that there is no hermeneutics without symbolic language. If the text is not symbolic, no hermeneutic is required. If the text is plain, no interpretation is necessary. The history of Christian thought attests to the diversity of concepts and ideas that spring from the same biblical text – even where that text is believed to be plain, with one intended meaning. This shows that the text possesses the potential for a multiplicity of meanings. Would it be possible to have different perspectives

\(^{54}\)Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 352.

\(^{55}\)Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, 27.

\(^{56}\)Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, 350.
if the text did not possess the potential for such differences? One who works on clay to shape a pot will never succeed if the clay does not have the clay-ness in it to produce a pot. Similarly, the diversity of readings of biblical symbols attests to the fecundity of the symbols themselves.

Ricoeur thus positions interpretation as an intermediary between symbol and reflection. This opens the way for further inquiry into the nature of hermeneutics and its relation to symbols.

3.2.2. Metaphor: The Interpretive Key to Reflection

Ricoeur maintains that metaphor is the interpretive key that unlocks the process of interpretation. This means that, on the one hand, metaphor operates as part of the symbolic language that activates the interpretive process and, on the other hand, that it functions as part of this hermeneutical process that it has set in motion. This becomes evident in Ricoeur’s differentiation of metaphor from symbols while still affirming that both belong to the same category of language. In his work *Interpretation Theory*, he envisages metaphor as the linguistic literary phenomenon which “occurs in the already purified universe of the logos.” But a symbol involves enormous non-linguistic dimensions that lie hidden in the “primordial rootedness of discourse in life.” Metaphor lies in the realm of discourse, whereas symbol lies at the foundations of that discourse. So Ricoeur holds

that both symbol and metaphor possess similar characteristics that make them closely related within a single process.

It is, Ricoeur thinks, the proximity between metaphor and symbol that makes interpretation possible. By its connection to symbolic language, metaphor “vivifies a constituted language”\textsuperscript{59} and brings the symbolic dimensions of language back into discourse. On the other hand, by being distinct from symbol, metaphor operates in association with interpretive method and “forces conceptual thought to think more.”\textsuperscript{60} In this dynamic process, metaphor mediates between symbol and interpretation. It pushes reflection toward more reflection by introducing “the spark of imagination into a ‘thinking more’ at the conceptual level.” This imaginative spark is the “soul of interpretation.”\textsuperscript{61} Accordingly, in association with the symbol, metaphor keeps interpretation in contact with its symbolic resources, and so keeps the interpretive process in motion.

At this point, Ricoeur’s theory stands in opposition to the conventional understanding of the relation between meaning and reality. Ricoeur follows Heidegger’s epistemological lead. In theology, Eberhard Jüngel is similarly influenced by Heidegger, so that Jüngel understands language as a “thinking after” which follows reality.\textsuperscript{62} On the one hand, Jüngel argues against a conventional view of language as a semiotic system representing reality by

\textsuperscript{59}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 303.
\textsuperscript{60}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 303.
\textsuperscript{61}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 303.
\textsuperscript{62}Eberhard Jungel, Darrel L. Guder (trans.), \textit{God as the Mystery of the World} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 163.
way of a correspondence theory of truth. According to Jüngel, this view separates thought and reality, so that reflection is limited to the meaning of words. Consequently, language is not open to possibilities of referring to a reality beyond itself. Thus the language that is supposed to be an opening onto human existence falls into the danger of limiting human possibilities by remaining caught in the subject-object split. Jüngel argues that this would not be the case if reflection were released to generate new meanings in relation to existential structures of life and reality. Jüngel maintains that language cannot make the world objective because “all language, in its essence, is metaphorical” – even though people employ certain terms in literal ways. The metaphorical nature of language consists of its capacity to bring new meanings in any context of discourse. The thought that seeks after reality evokes the presence of language. Presenting reality in words is not objectifying because, in the process of writing, words describe some part of reality and obscure the other. In this way, both language and reality are “evident and hidden, explicit and tacit” at the same time. Thus Jüngel argues that the dynamic interaction between existence and metaphorical language can generate reflective thought, extending understanding in new directions. Such a process of thought brings new aspects of existence to present reality. The process of “thinking after” is responsiveness to reality that creates existential possibilities.

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63 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 161.
64 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 161.
65 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 160.
66 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 160.
67 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 163.
Accordingly, for Jüngel, thought must always “thinks after” being; human beings must distinguish themselves from the object of their reflection in order to “relate to that object critically and form concepts about it.”\(^68\) This is the intersection at which the dynamic function of faith is set in motion, just as, in Ricoeur’s view, the dialectic of understanding involves a constant circle from belief to understanding and back again.\(^69\) So Jüngel’s “thinking after” is also a “thinking with faith,”\(^70\) in which one’s thoughts are released to be “responsive to an antecedent reality.”\(^71\) This happens in a context of theological language that involves the production of concepts about God that respond to the mystery of God’s being. Such thoughts are affected by faith when faith too is a response to antecedent reality. Consequently, Jüngel argues that God is the source of knowledge about himself because he provides the impetus towards thinking about himself – just as, for Ricoeur, symbol provides the impetus for the emergence of discourse. To this extent, “all theological language is ... metaphorical,”\(^72\) at least in its deepest foundations, and the development of concepts remains rooted in metaphor and in antecedent reality. Jüngel envisages the analogy of relation as existing within the nature of God serving as the vehicle of God’s event self-disclosure, God’s becoming-real to humans. This event of God’s becoming occurs within the context of God’s triune relational life, the infinite source of revelation and discourse.

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\(^68\) Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 163.

\(^69\) Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351.

\(^70\) Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 219.

\(^71\) Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 219.

\(^72\) Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 155.
Jüngel’s work represents one of the most rigorous accounts of metaphor in modern theology. Yet Ricoeur’s theory goes even further, in formulating a metaphorical theory of predication. Ricoeur defines this as “a work on language consisting in the attribution to logical subjects ... predicates that are incompossible [sic] with them.”

This description of metaphor undercuts the view of prosaic language that seeks only to secure the lexical meaning of words. Ricoeur wants to “destroy” the apparent consistency and semantic relevance of mere descriptive language. It deconstructs such language in order to reconstruct language theory within a wider frame. At the level of the sentence, metaphor predicates by bringing a new pertinence, and at the level of the word it names by renaming in a way that is contrary to the lexical code. In this way, again, metaphor is seen to function between the word and the sentence, by dynamically connecting the lexical, syntactic and the semantic levels of discourse.

In Ricoeur’s view, the peculiar significance of metaphor neither lies in the “semantic clash,” nor in the juxtaposition of the literal and figurative meanings but in the “solution of the enigma” that it places before the listener or reader of a text. The solution that metaphor presents to the reader is its dynamism by which it leads the reader to begin a process of interpretation. At the same time, interpretation itself is intrinsic to the realization of metaphor. This makes metaphor itself dynamic: it connects the word to the context of the whole sentence and reconnects to the context of the discourse in which the whole sentence is placed. Hence, it is this

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73Ricoeur, The Rule of Metaphor, 214.
metaphorical dynamism that is the most vital in any language, since it is this that makes discourse alive, and that activates the process of interpretation and reflection.

What interests Ricoeur, then, is the liveliness of metaphors, and particularly the way newly invented metaphors can force the process of thinking in new directions and create new possibilities of life. The metaphor’s work of interpretation in the dynamic process of understanding a metaphor is itself part of the knowledge arrived at. Hence, metaphor is a linguistic context in which the objectivity of the existential world meets the subjectivity of the interpreter.

3.2.3. Narrative: The Dynamic Pair of Metaphor

Ricoeur’s monumental work on *Time and Narrative* should be seen as a progressive development of his earlier work on the function of language and metaphor. As metaphorical discourse surpasses the rhetorical domain to that of semantics, Ricoeur’s reflections on language are stretched now to the domain of narrative – that is, to the level of the entire literary work within which those smaller units of meaning are embedded. At this complex level, the focus of discourse shifts from single sentences to a wider system of meaning that cannot be reduced to its smaller units. Once this is accepted, Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor has become the sum and substance of the
hermeneutic procedure as such. Metaphor is the key that unlocks not only the word or the sentence, but the literary work as a whole.

Establishing an inseparable relationship between metaphor and extended narrative works, Ricoeur argues that metaphor can serve as a guide to understanding the immanent structures of the work.\textsuperscript{76} And from the perspective of an interpretation of the reference of discourse – its “intentional orientation towards a world and the reflexive orientation towards a self”\textsuperscript{77} – metaphor likewise becomes the interpretive key to understanding the work considered as a whole, and to understanding its relation to existence. Thus Ricoeur presents his hypothesis of the relation of metaphor and narrative as a movement that proceeds “from metaphor to text” at the level of the explication of meaning, and then “from text to metaphor” at the level of the interpretation of reference.\textsuperscript{78} This is the shape of Ricoeur’s reflective process as he moves from metaphorical discourse to that of narrative without destroying their relation, and with a determination to return to it as a regulative interpretive procedure. In short, metaphor is both the interpretive key to itself and a miniature text that must be interpreted by itself, while narrative is an interpretive procedure that addresses the issue of extended literary works in association with metaphors.

In this process, Ricoeur envisages identical dynamics of metaphor in narrative and narrative in metaphor. He maintains that like symbols and metaphors, narratives are irreducible to descriptive language for they seek to

\textsuperscript{76}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 171.
\textsuperscript{77}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 171.
\textsuperscript{78}Ricoeur, \textit{The Rule of Metaphor}, 171.
represent things that cannot be communicated by any other means. Narratives are creations of the imagination which convey meanings that refer to particular human realities – realities inaccessible to the language of scientific formulation and verification.

Ricoeur places narrative in a speculative framework just as he did with symbols and metaphors. Thus he describes the narrative function as the dynamism of holding together the tension that arises out of a text comprised of symbolic language. This is an important tension that Ricoeur addresses in *The Symbolism of Evil*. On the one hand, it is a tension of concordance, and, on the other hand, a tension of discordance as it is experienced in day-to-day life. This narrative tension is the dynamism that interweaves fiction and history by the process of a mimetic configuration through imagination, resulting in an uncovering of patterns of reference to reality. The intricate “criss-crossing processes” of narrative – making history to be fictitious and fiction to be historic – is the same procedure that integrates discordant dimensions of temporal experience into a coherent narrative frame.\footnote{Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (trans.), *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246. This aspect of narrative has been extensively discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.}

Consequently, it can be argued, as Ricoeur states, that both narrative and metaphor are similar categories of the language of human existence, within a context of discourse that aims at human possibility. The two “form a pair” and have to be “conceived together.”\footnote{Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (trans.), *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), ix.} Metaphor strives to create
resemblances between discordant things, whereas narrative seeks to create temporal unity from the diversity of acts and events. Ricoeur argues that this “synthesis of the heterogeneous” is what draws “narrative close to metaphor.” In this way, in both narrative and metaphor, there is a dynamic process of creating meaning through the work of imagination. Both narrative and metaphor equally create meanings and juxtapose them in a context in which formerly there was only irrationality and disorder.

Further, the phenomenon of similarity between narrative and metaphor goes even deeper than the semantic innovation. It lies also at the level of reference, and in the capacity for redescription of human existence. Thus for Ricoeur, a literary work is a linguistic compound that consists of symbolism as the originating source, metaphor as the interpretive trigger and narrative as the partner of metaphor and the frame within which all the other elements are unified. As a whole, there is a single procedure of metaphorical linguistic discourse. We must turn next to the means through which such a literary work is related to existence, and the way in which existence is shaped by narrative.

3.3. Metaphoric Existence

Ricoeur’s theory of metaphorical language, comprising symbolism, metaphorical dynamism and narrative, is not just confined to semantic

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81 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, ix.
innovation but also to the problem of human self-understanding. According to Ricoeur, the living language of metaphor can tell human beings certain things about themselves and about the way in which they live (or, more importantly, might live) in the world. For this to happen, the language of metaphor must extend beyond itself to the cosmic, oneiric and poetic dimensions of human existence – those primordial dimensions of existence that are touched by the power of symbolic language. Even at these deepest levels, “man remains language through and though.”

Ebeling has made a theological contribution towards linguistic identity, in a way that moves towards the kind of theoretical model that Ricoeur proposes. Ebeling argues that the language through which God encounters humans not only criticises human existence but also sustains it, because human beings are incapable of escaping the current condition of fallen existence. Here, the fundamental function of the biblical text, which is a narrative conveying certain possibilities of existence, does not consist in getting itself interpreted – as though our interpretive descriptions of the biblical narrative were more important than the narrative itself. Rather its value lies in its address to humans within the conditions of their time and context, in a way that interprets their understanding of themselves, questions them radically and offers them a fresh understanding of themselves. For Ebeling this occurs in the language process, which in turn evokes a peculiar method of its own according to the particular circumstances within which communication has occurred. Ebeling’s expression “word event” in this

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context refers to the experience of the text speaking afresh to humans in a way that opens their existence toward an unanticipated future. This is not a process in which human beings figure out for themselves what the text says, by translating it into prosaic language. Rather in this living “word event,” reality itself is dynamic, vital, and charged with potential to create new human possibilities – especially the possibility of faith. As a result of language bringing humans to an encounter with reality, that reality finds tangible expression within the sphere of human existence.84

Jüngel’s notion of the language-event moves even deeper into questions of human existence and the self. What interests Jüngel is the shaping of human existence and identity through language. Following Heidegger, he states that if a world is not linguistic, “man would exist in it, but he would not be truly human.”85 It is language that makes God’s reality existentially realized. In this process, God “addresses us; we respond in faith; and then we generate thoughts about God.”86 Jüngel’s linguistic understanding of reality as “thinking after” faith shows the way a theory of metaphor in theology can open into a richer theological understanding of the dynamism – both the responsiveness and the creativity – of human existence. On the one hand, Jüngel’s analysis establishes an inseparable connection between human existence, reality and language. As God’s event is a language-event, human existence is language and it is a linguistic reality – or rather, a linguistic possibility. God’s revelatory event becomes a relationship that shapes human identity.

84Ebeling, Word and Faith, 18-20.
85Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 161.
86Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 155.
Jüngel also argues that in the language-event, God encounters human beings as word so that humans ecstatically experience God’s being. In revelation, God makes himself objective in such a way that he will be accessible to human experience. Thus for Jüngel, it is not essential to develop an understanding of God first so that one can subsequently believe in God. Rather, in both faith in God and reflection about God, God’s existence and his act of disclosure must come first.  

So instead of maintaining a process of theological thinking which is predetermined, Jüngel proposes a process of thinking that seeks to regulate theological reason within the frame of God’s own activity. God is the reality beneath experience, just as metaphor is beneath discourse. Unless theological thinking begins at this source, Jüngel says, God goes his way and human reflection does not touch God.

Moreover, Jüngel’s idea of the metaphorical mediation of the knowledge of the world, human existence and the self helps to clarify the distinctiveness of Ricoeur’s linguistic theory. Jüngel argues that human beings’ understanding of themselves is both “cosmomorphic” and “anthropomorphic”; that is, a person understands herself as she perceives herself in the objects of the external world of existence. What one perceives and intends to see are the realities that can only be grasped metaphorically. By means of the psychological mechanism of projection, the self seeks to understand its own characteristics through identifying them in the qualities

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87 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 154.
88 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 160.
of objects that exists in the external world. For instance, a person’s quality of being physically strong can be projected and understood in terms of the quality of iron. According to Jüngel, this function of language comprises two dynamic operations. First, human beings discover a possibility of existence through language based upon the objective world. Second, by means of projection, they bring much more than themselves into the process of reflection, and come to realise that the projecting self is not free and isolated from the world. Thus the world that language expresses is none other than the projected world framed according to imaginative associations and connections. Even though human beings assess every reality of their existence by means of their experience and language, they themselves, including their understanding, are conditioned by this system of poetic projection and its interpretation of the objective world beyond the self. As a result, human existence has no autonomous position to assess the world objectively. All language is metaphorical and originates from the dynamic relation that humans have with the world. This means the semantic dimension of language differs with individuals and groups according to their experiences and environments. Since language, which constitutes human existence, is structured metaphorically, the world of human existence comes to perception in a fresh way with fresh possibilities as such language is appropriated through interpretation. Paradoxically, by merely designating what humans already know, descriptive prosaic language is dead in terms of its functional value to human existence. It is metaphor that lives and that makes life lively.

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89 Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 259.
80 Eberhard Jüngel, Darrel L Guder (trans.), *God as the Ground of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 353.
Jüngel’s notion of this metaphoric nature of language might sound abstract, but it is, like Ricoeur’s theory, really a way of describing what happens when we read sacred texts – the most meaning-creating texts for most human beings throughout history. What happens when we read biblical texts? The language of scripture has the function of communicating God to human beings and providing them with possibilities of existence through exposure to God’s reality. In these texts, God’s revelation is conveyed through the language of anthropomorphic and cosmomorphic expressions – expressions drawn from human and cosmic objects. When the texts want to speak of God’s being, existence, nature and identity, they characteristically employ not theological concepts but language taken from the world of human existence and of the world of objects. Thus we read of God’s eyes, hands, feet, finger, mind, wisdom, back, and so on; together with expressions such as fire, cloud, water, rock, dove, shepherd, lamb, bread, wine, and so on. God’s self-understanding of his own being is an inscrutable mystery as far as human beings are concerned. Nevertheless, the revealed reality of God’s being makes contact with human experience through the poetic and symbolic language of images drawn from human existence and its objective environment in the world.

We begin with ordinary language, therefore, and end up with God. As Jüngel argued, God has projected his mysterious self upon the objects of human existence so that he could become a relational partner. God’s being enters the world of human existence through language. In Jüngel’s terms, God comes to speech. This revelatory linguistic event of God is, for Christian theology, the paradigm for understanding not only how and why
human beings read texts, but also for understanding human existence itself as an existence that realizes itself through language, especially the language of metaphor. To paraphrase Heidegger’s famous remark: for God, metaphor is the gate to existence; for humanity, metaphor is the house of being.

The text is narrative experience. The narrative text shows a life. The life that
the text shows is a life of language. The language of life is the language of
metaphor. As much as it is the language of existence, it also is the language
of reality. In this chapter, I shall explore how Ricoeur’s concept of
metaphorical language functions as the language of the real, so that reality
itself is understood as metaphoric. As the language of reality, metaphor
functions as the means of the disclosure of the real; it discovers the real; it
brings the real; and it redescribes the very nature of the real. The reality that
comes through the language of metaphor is itself metaphorical. My focus
will thus be on the dynamic ways in which Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor
aims to open up the dimension of the possible.

4.1. Metaphorical Innovation of Meaning

The world of language is “meaning-giving.”¹ The concept of the
metaphorical innovation of meaning deals with Ricoeur’s notion of the
surplus of meaning in metaphorical language. He confines the textual
meaning neither to the authorial intent nor to a prosaic meaning because for
him such language is devoid of creative meaning. Rather, Ricoeur maintains

¹Magada King, Heidegger’s Philosophy: A Guide to his Basic Thought (Oxford: Blackwell,
1964), 7.
that metaphor is semantically rich; it “means all that it can mean.” He embraces metaphor as disclosing the essential nature of the language of human life. The metaphoric nature of language is the “touchstone of the cognitive value of literary works.”

The value of metaphor has been challenged in modernity. Thomas Hobbes repudiated the cognitive value of metaphoric language, arguing that the language of metaphor is deceptive and its sense is misleading. Hobbes held to this position because he saw in metaphorical language a capacity to generate strange meanings, so that the original meaning is unstable. John Locke contended that the figurative application of terms in language had been invented in order to “insinuate wrong ideas” and thereby to “mislead judgement.” In the twentieth century, Bertrand Russell argued against the cognitive value of figurative statements used in literature, poetry and art. His analysis of linguistic description aims to show that it is possible to disintegrate narratives into simple component statements, which can be verified empirically through the means of observation, reason and logic. Metaphor may have a legitimate function of communicating feelings and experiences, but it has no proper cognitive role. For scientific inquiry, discussion of the truth or falsity of figurative language would be senseless. Russell argues that reflection on such expressions is meaningless. However, such an approach to the cognitive value of metaphorical language

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has changed in the latter half of the twentieth century. The notion of metaphorical meaning in language gained philosophical significance as it came to be recognized as a central feature of some theories of language, especially because of its importance in epistemology and metaphysics.\(^7\) Ricoeur’s own theory of metaphor forms part of this wider recent retrieval of the cognitive importance of metaphorical language.

### 4.1.1. Metaphoric Basis of Meaning

What some see as the danger of metaphor, Ricoeur sees as its strength. In language, the “power to create new contextual meanings seems to be truly limitless.”\(^8\) A process of interpretation can never fully exhaust the possibilities of words.\(^9\) Words have meaning exclusively in the context of sentences, and only in “combination with other words.”\(^10\) Words are the carriers of meaning, but this does not mean that the words can have meaning independently, nor does it indicate that there is meaning fixed in words. They operate as the vehicle for meaning in association with other words. In every act of speech there is a process of selection, organization and association of words.

\(^10\)Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 112.
Further, Ricoeur notes that there is the “phenomenon of polysemy”\textsuperscript{11} in language, and that this is the primary “characteristic of meaning.”\textsuperscript{12} Polysemy is the dynamism that makes language capable of multiple meanings. The vagueness of metaphoric language is the chaotic, “indefinite, and imprecise” nature of the language that requires discrimination on the basis of its context.\textsuperscript{13} Ricoeur argues that most words in human language consist of this characteristic of vagueness.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, Janet Martin Soskice argues that the dynamism of metaphor lies in its vagueness and variability; “the vagueness of metaphorical terms ... is just what makes them indispensable.”\textsuperscript{15}

Another characteristic of meaning in metaphoric language is the “phenomenon of synonymy,” which concerns the “overlapping of semantic fields.”\textsuperscript{16} Words are not only different from one another but also intrude on each other. Here Ricoeur is not far from Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance,” according to which complex concepts can only be grasped as a network of overlapping similarities.\textsuperscript{17} Ricoeur argues that the characteristic of polysemy in language is the inverse of synonymy: not that only are there numerous names for one sense, but also “several senses for one name.”\textsuperscript{18} Thus the central dynamic of descriptive semantics is

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 113.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 113.
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 113.
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 113.
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 114.
\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor}, 114.
\end{flushright}
polysemy, with its “lexical ambiguity.”¹⁹ Ricoeur sees the characteristics of polysemy and synonymy as the attributes of language without which language would not operate. Without these two characteristics, language would multiply indefinitely and would become as diverse as human existence itself. ²⁰ Human beings need a lexical system which is “economical, flexible and sensitive” to context in expressing the structures of human existence. ²¹

The theory of metaphoric language that Ricoeur proposes concerns not just individual words, but wider linguistic units such as complete sentences and literary works. Here metaphor is not a misplaced lexical entity but metaphorical discourse in which something is said to someone about something. Such discourse comprises a dimension of metaphorical sense, a dimension of metaphorical reference and a dimension of metaphorical address. Taken as a whole, the metaphoric linguistic discourse is a “creative process of giving form to both the human mind and the world” through the linguistic innovation of meaning. ²² But how is it that metaphoric language is able to create new meaning in language, and to say something new to the reader?

¹⁹Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 115.
²⁰Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 115.
²¹Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 115.
4.1.2. Metaphoric Creation of Meaning

According to Ricoeur, metaphor gives rise to new meaning through a dynamic process of tension and interaction within the structural levels of language. In this process, metaphor produces fresh “innovations” that appear suddenly in the act of “immediate appreciation.” But even though the emergence of meaning is sudden and innovative, there are structural explanations for how such changes in meaning occur.

The phenomenon that allows the change of meaning in language is the quality of the lexical system for both the “vague character of meaning” and the “cumulative capability” of language. For Ricoeur, while the vague character of the word causes the polysemy of the word, the cumulative character of language “opens language to innovation” because it is capable of acquiring a new meaning without losing the original one. Metaphorical language has a sort of “double vision.” Polysemy makes the innovation of meaning possible and maintains the quality of openness in the texture of the word. This texture makes the word capable of accumulating multiple meanings.

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21 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 116.
22 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 116.
23 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 116.
24 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 116.
Ricoeur argues that the place of metaphor in discourse theory is in between “the sentence and the word” and in between “predication and naming.”

This process of tension and interaction occurs at different levels – tension within a sentence, tension between literal and metaphoric meaning and tension between the “is” and the “is not” of the metaphor. The former two deal with the metaphorical innovation of meaning, while the latter, which is discussed in the following section, functions as the route to metaphorical reference and reality.

The first dynamic of tension and interaction, which I will call compositional predication, takes place at the level of sentence and in between “tenor” and “vehicle” or “frame” and “focus.” For Ricoeur, the focus is a word and the frame is a sentence in which the word is positioned in a dynamic association. Here, the metaphoric statement has a focus – a word – whose meaning is in the process of changing and the change of meaning of the particular word has the frame – a complete sentence – whose meaning is in tension.

Ricoeur’ idea of this tension and interaction in language arises out of a “semantic impertinence,” recognition of the “split sense” in which the meaning of the prosaic language is intentionally repudiated in order to imaginatively create new metaphorical meaning.

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27 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 125.
29 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 133.
For instance, the biblical statement “The Lord is my shepherd” could be considered as a metaphorical statement in which the expressions that belong to different domains of discourse are brought together in a dynamic association in the process of creating meaning. The word “shepherd,” which belongs to the human-animal realm of discourse, is juxtaposed with the word “Lord,” which belongs to the divine-human field of discourse. The new meaning emerges out of the tension and interaction that arises out of the encounter between the expressions brought together from divergent fields of discourse. The human addressee in the discourse is the distinctive component that safeguards the metaphor against the danger of substitution, which Ricoeur opposes. He points out that “one must adopt the point of view of the hearer ... and treat the novelty of an emerging meaning as his work within the very act of hearing” 32 in order to escape the error of substitution.

Thus, for Ricoeur, metaphor within a frame of linguistic discourse draws two distinct and distant categories near and creates a resemblance by making a deliberate category mistake. The emerging tension is the new connection that operates as a route to new meaning. Through the metaphorical integration, there is sense where before there was only nonsense. As a result, Ricoeur argues that the metaphorical nature of language designates the process in which “we grasp kinship, break the distance between remote ideas, [and] build similarities on dissimilarities.” 33 Indeed, this leads Ricoeur to posit a psychological mechanism that consists of

32 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 98.
33 Ricoeur, “Creativity of Language,” 132.
“association by resemblance and contiguity” – a mechanism that regulates the semantic innovations through the principle of association. Meaning emerges only when a word is placed in association with another in an order either of “resemblance” or of “contiguity.” It is association that determines sense and that allows new meanings to emerge.

Ricoeur’s theory here has important implications for theological discourse, since the Bible and theology cannot escape the metaphorical dimension of language. Janet Martin Soskice argues that linguistic meaning cannot be created at the literal level of language. A reader perceives the meaning at the literal level and then moves on to the imaginative creation of metaphorical meaning based upon the context of speech from which the meaning has been inferred. In religious language, either we understand certain sentences as metaphor or we do not understand them at all. She also argues that maintaining the metaphorical status of biblical and theological language can emancipate the Bible and theology from metaphysical confusions that created centuries of theological debate.

4.1.3. Metaphoric Invention of Meaning

The second dynamic in the process of semantic innovation consists in considering a metaphorical statement as literally absurd; I will call this the

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34Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 117.
35Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 85-90.
36Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 85.
37Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 90.
predicative absurdity. This tension occurs between two interpretations: “between a literal ... that perishes at the hands of semantic impertinence and metaphorical ... whose sense emerges through non-sense.” Ricoeur maintains that the absurd sense of a language is a precondition in the process of inventing new meaning. He argues that metaphor functions by “confusing the established logical boundaries for the sake of detecting new similarities which previous characterization prevented our noticing.” The metaphorical creation of meaning is a search for those aspects of discourse – those resemblances and associations – that have been excluded from fixing in language. Ricoeur asserts that this metaphoric dynamism is “indefinitely extending the battlefront of the expressed at the expense of the unexpressed.”

Eberhard Jüngel argues for this position in theology, observing that in the process of writing, words describe some part of reality and obscure the other. In this way, both language and reality are alike because both are “evident and hidden, explicit and tacit” at the same time. Thus Jüngel argues for a certain fit between the structure of existence and the structure of metaphorical language. Ricoeur’s account of metaphor, like Jüngel’s, should challenge any theological position that maintains the primacy of prosaic language, or any perspective that argues for a fixed single meaning in the biblical text. Language cannot fix the fullness of discourse in writing; this

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38Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 247.
40Ricoeur, “The Creativity of Language,” 123.
extends also to biblical revelation. The non-fixed dimensions of discourse must be metaphorically and imaginatively recreated.

In light of Jüngel’s analysis, a theologian has access only to part of the divine-human discourse in the Bible, which has been fixed in language. The other part of the discourse is obscure and not captured by the logical characterization of language; this needs to be invented and recreated in the context of narrative linguistic discourse. This creative process can encourage theological discourse to press beyond mere propositional repetitions toward a dynamic presentation of the real through the language of metaphor. For Ricoeur, the metaphorical meaning arises out of the ruins of the literal, and this metaphorical sense gives rise to metaphorical reference. In this process of tension and innovation, the “theory of tension” functions as the “constant guiding thread” that extends the “referential relationship of the metaphorical statement to reality.”

4.2. Metaphorical Innovation of Reality

The dynamic ways in which metaphoric language connects to reality are striking. It was Wittgenstein who famously stated that “our language determines our view of reality, because we see things through it.” Ricoeur argues that as the language of metaphor imaginatively opens up the metaphoric invention of the semantic field, it also opens up a “dimension of

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42 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 247.
reality.” He claims that the “reference of metaphorical utterance brings being [the real] as actuality and potentiality into play.” This claim implies a fourfold postulate in relation to metaphorical language and linguistic reality: first, metaphor refers to reality and captures it; second, it brings the reality and presents it before human eyes; third, it describes the reality in relation to its actuality; and finally, it redescribes the reality in terms of its potentiality. The first three constitute the metaphorical innovation of reality, which is discussed in this section; the last concerns the metaphorical redescription of reality, which is discussed in the following section.

4.2.1. Metaphoric Reference to Reality

Ricoeur’s first postulate is that metaphorical language refers to reality. How does language refer to the real? The opening of the field of the real occurs in Ricoeur’s understanding through what he calls the “ontological vehemence” of language. As I have noted, a metaphoric sentence can express both “it is” and “it is not” at once. Ricoeur argues that the notion of “it was” and “it was not” at the same time, contains “in nuce all that can be said about metaphorical truth.” He feels that incorporating the “is not” within the ontological vehemence of (metaphorical) ‘is’ is doing justice to the notion of metaphorical reality. It is here that the connection between language and the real emerges. The real is no longer a being but the “being-
as,” which signifies “being and not being” at once. It is at this point, as Sallie McFague argues, that metaphorical language proves the most appropriate for doing theology because theological language seeks to describe an indescribable reality in human language, a reality whose structure consists of “is” and “is not.”

Ricoeur locates this tension of metaphoric language in the copula of the verb “to be,” which he considers to be the vital component of metaphorical statements. He argues that the metaphorical “is” can simultaneously express both “is not” and “is like.” For Ricoeur, this is the most important tension, for it is the route that reconnects language to metaphorical reality. The tension in the copula is relational and re-descriptional. He argues that the tension that affects the copula in its relational function also affects it in its existential function, which is the “key to the notion of metaphorical truth.” This characteristic of language not only describes the real as it is but also redescribes it as it can possibly be. He suggests that the “is not” of the metaphorical “is” must neither be underestimated nor be overemphasised because the overemphasis of the “is not” can distort the potential of the metaphorical “is.” In all this, Ricoeur is cautiously trying to maintain a balance between both extremes so that he can preserve the tensional quality of metaphor. And crucially, he argues that if the language of metaphor refers to reality then “tension must be introduced into metaphorically

50 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 306.
52 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 7.
53 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 248.
affirmed being.” The “is” and “is not” tension is characteristic not just of language, but of reality.

In Ricoeur’s thought, the importance of metaphoric language lies in its capacity for the surplus of meaning that gives shape to a surplus of being. Drawing from Gottlob Frege’s concept of sense and reference in prosaic language, Ricoeur argues for sense and reference in the metaphorical language. The positivist view eliminated reference from language, claiming – though this can never be proved – that language consists of only linguistic sense and does not rise up out of itself to refer to a reality beyond itself. Arguing against this position, Ricoeur states that his aim “is to do away with this restriction of reference to scientific statements” and to establish that language has a dimension of reference, which lies not primarily in scientific propositions but in metaphor.

Similar criticisms of the strictures of positivism can be observed in both theological and scientific theory. Gerhard Ebeling criticises the pursuit of a purely descriptive language, asserting that all that remains in such language is the “empty words” which cannot produce any meaning. Positivism, he argues, culminates in a “complete collapse of language” so that “we threaten to die of language poisoning.” Critically engaging with scientific models,

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54Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 247.
56Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 221
57Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 6.
Thomas Khun argues that revolution in scientific research often resulted in replacing the conventionally accepted metaphors by newly innovated ones that further led the scientific process into new dimensions of truth. In the words of Ricoeur, it is the “dead” metaphors that have been replaced by the “live” ones. Kuhn argues that the paradigm shifts that occurred from the conventional notions of Newtonian physics to the law of relativity can be construed as a paradigmatic shift in metaphors. Kuhn regards Einstein as a poetic scientist who invented innumerable new metaphors in order to discover more about the realities of the universe\(^{60}\) – further support of Ricoeur’s claim that metaphor uncovers the structure of the real.

A similar approach is developed in Fernand Hallyn’s work, *The Poetic Structure of the World: Copernicus and Kepler*. Here Hallyn treats the heliocentric revolution of Copernicus and Kepler not simply as the history of science but as events embedded in a wider field of images, symbols, metaphors, texts and practices. He argues that the scientific imagination is not fundamentally different from the poetic imagination.\(^{61}\) Such an attitude to metaphorical language is evident in the writing of Michael Polanyi. In his work *Meaning*, he describes his concept of language, art religion and society. He establishes meaning as essentially founded upon the imaginative and creative faculties of human beings. He argues that the basis of meaning is human creative imagination aided by symbolic languages. By means of creative imagination, metaphorical language in poetry, art, myth and religion can synthesise heterogeneous elements of human life into integrated


meaningful whole. Such symbolic integration of human life is not foreign to the modes of scientific knowledge. He believes that such understanding of knowledge may reform the conventional understanding of knowledge in science.  

In Ricoeur’s view, “every sense calls for reference.”  

Metaphorically expanding the semantic field pushes the “threshold” from the sense to the reference of discourse, so that it is proper to speak of “metaphorical truth.” Where western thought has understood reality in terms of either a correspondence or a coherence theory of truth, Ricoeur argues that a fresh way of grasping reality is needed, in terms of a concept of being which allows for the capacity of metaphor to create a correspondence between “being-as” and “seeing-as.” This is Ricoeur’s own attempt in the concluding sections of his Rule of Metaphor, where he tries to connect the metaphoric expansion of language to the ontological expansion of being. He envisages the potential of metaphoric language that is manifest in the process of semantic innovation as being equally dynamic in the innovation of reality itself. Accordingly, the reality that language refers to has something in itself corresponding to metaphorical tension, so that metaphor uncovers a dynamic “being-related to being.”

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63 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 221.
64 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 216.
65 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 247.
66 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 304.
Consequently, the notion of reality that Ricoeur is concerned about and the reality that language refers to consists of a tension between actuality and possibility. This, in some sense, delimits Ricoeur’s concept of truth even though his notion of truth arises out of existential demarcations to limitless dimensions of life through the possibility of reality. It is at this point that a Bultmannian correction of Ricoeur’s notion of reality seems to be fruitful for a theological concept of reality. Bultmann’s idea of reality consists of both other-worldly and this-worldly dimensions: both metaphysical and existential. He insists that the primary task of theology consists in speaking of God and speaking of human being at the same time.67 This entails that the theological vision of reality must incorporate both God and humans in its view of truth and must address both of them at once. “Every assertion about God is simultaneously an assertion about man and vice versa.” 68 What Bultmann stresses here is that a theological discourse about God must be inseparably linked with the discourse about humans, for each of them is made sense in terms of the other. In this way, Ricoeur’s idea of metaphoric expansion of language, which relates to the ontological expansion of being, can also become dynamism for the expansion of concrete human existence.

Thus Ricoeur’s notion of metaphoric reference to reality can stretch to relate to both God and human existence. Here language absolutely captures reality and communicates it to humans while also communicating humans to reality, so that a tension occurs which results in a creative understanding of reality itself.

4.2.2. Metaphoric Disclosure of Reality

According to Ricoeur, metaphorical language not only refers to the real but also *brings the real* and “sets [it] before the eyes.” He argues that every discourse of language brings “something ... to language.” The something that comes through language is the real, which is linguistically presented before the human eyes. Ricoeur draws on Aristotle’s notion that a “good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar.” Accordingly, Ricoeur sees metaphor not only as a creative construction but also as a realistic seeing. He maintains that it is the “gift of genius” and the “skill of the geometer” at the same time. For Ricoeur, the idea of “seeing as” is the basis for the verbal orientation of the creative imagination. He employs the Kantian philosophical maxim that imaging does not merely create a picture of something but produces a likeness. Ricoeur sees this as the revelatory function of metaphor.

In contemporary theology, Eberhard Jüngel has similarly argued for metaphor as the bearer of reality. He argues that metaphoric sense in language “speaks being,” linguistically disclosing certain facets of the real that humans have not previously grasped. In this way, the function of metaphoric language is not to represent reality but to bear reality and bring it to human perception. He maintains that words in language operate just

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69 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 211.
70 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 304.
73 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 211.
like sacraments for they function as a “sign of the presence of the thing.” Here Jüngel sees language playing a dual role: it designates the subject of its speech and at the same time it brings the subject to language. Thus words function as the vehicle for effecting new meaning, for effecting the reality and for revealing the presence of the real. Consequently, the language of metaphor is an occurrence which brings a thing into language so that it is discovered afresh. In Ricoeur’s terms, “language brings about the advent of man as speaking subject.”

Ricoeur’s notion of the metaphoric disclosure of reality has important implications for theological discourse, if it is true that language is a bearer of the real. After all, a theological theory of reality cannot just operate with mundane reality but also with the supramundane reality of God. The language which is capable of expressing the unconventional and the extraordinary is the language that can bring God to discourse. As Jüngel puts it, “God is a meaningful word only in the context of metaphorical discourse.” Here metaphor functions as a vehicle for God’s coming and at the same time operates as a medium for expressing that coming. The theological language of metaphor moves reality toward possibility by bringing a new horizon of meaning to reality. From mundane reality arises the eschatological vision of new existence.

74 Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 309.
75 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 304.
76 Eberhard Jüngel, J.B. Webster (trans.), Theological Essays (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 58.
77 Jüngel, Theological Essays, 66-67.
Mary Gerhart and Allen Russel have argued for a theory of understanding based upon Ricoeur’s notion of metaphoric discourse. They argue that the metaphoric process can push both scientific and religious understanding toward new meanings. Metaphoric innovation can reconnect language to reality. Soskice also argues that theologians and philosophers of religion have failed to see the role that metaphor plays in their conceptual models. Like Ricoeur, Soskice concludes that metaphorical language is “referential” and “reality depicting”; the theologian “can reasonably take his talk of God, bound as it is within a wheel of images, as … reality depicting.” This insight into the realism of metaphors ought to be foundational for any theological theory of language, as well as for the interpretation of biblical texts. Metaphor brings reality.

4.2.3. Metaphoric Status of Reality

The idea of the disclosure of reality through metaphor raises questions about the exact status of such reality. According to Ricoeur, the reality that the language of metaphor brings and sets before human vision is the “being-as,” which consists of both “being” and “not being.” The emergence of this being and not being occurs by the productive energy of metaphoric language to “represent things as in a state of activity.” Metaphor has the dynamism that can represent “everything as moving and living” and thereby make the

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80 Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 141.
real dynamic and active. In this way metaphor preserves and develops the “heuristic power wielded by fiction.”\textsuperscript{82} Ricoeur argues that the ontological energy of metaphor presents the real actively, as “things in act.”\textsuperscript{83} The reality that the language brings is in a state of “blossoming of appearance” in which the real is active; it is in the process of becoming. For Ricoeur, then, following Heidegger, the task of discourse is to participate in the process of “generating what grows.”\textsuperscript{84}

Ricoeur’s account of the active nature of reality might be understood theologically in terms of Ebeling’s notion of the real. He maintains that in the dynamic process of word-event, reality occurs through the linguistic text, and this reality speaks to humans in unexpected ways. It might turn out to be contrary to the ordinary sense of a particular text. He insists that by pressing on to new meanings, one can come into contact with the mystery of the reality. In this linguistic context, the reality that comes is effective, charged with energy to bring the real to human acceptance. The language that he envisages here could be oral or enacted, as in J. L. Austin’s concept of “speech acts” in which the speaker does something in the very act of saying something.\textsuperscript{85} For Ebeling, language creates a context of encounter with reality through the word-event. Being finds its concrete expression whenever the word-event occurs.\textsuperscript{86} This is important in theological discourse, since the divine reality – by definition – cannot be brought under the control of language. All human attempts to grasp God’s reality will in

\textsuperscript{82}Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 6.
\textsuperscript{83}Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 308.
\textsuperscript{84}Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 309.
fact lead to something other than God. Yet a Christian view of revelation means that God is able to speak about God. God speaks about divine reality in the language-event. As God speaks, he comes, and in this occurrence makes his reality known.\(^{87}\) This is the substance of Eberhard Jüngel’s claim that God, as the one who speaks, is the one who comes.\(^{88}\) This notion of reality – grounded partly in Heidegger’s understanding of being as appearance – can play an important part in theological reflection. For it can overcome the sharp distinction of transcendence and immanence made by the metaphysical fracturing of God’s essence from his existence. From Ricoeur’s standpoint, God could be understood as fully present (immanent) and absent (transcendent) in the same language-event; the coming reality is both revealed and hidden at the same time.

Ricoeur’s notion of metaphorical reality also affirms that the reality that occurs in language is always a becoming and a blossoming. Reality is multi-faceted and multidimensional. The real shows itself in myriads of ways. This does not, however, imply an ontological pluralism. Instead, reality is viewed here as one with a multi-faceted appearance, because that one reality is constantly becoming and occurring. It is the same reality that encounters humans, even if human understanding of the reality is new every time and in every encounter. This means human beings limited by time and space can capture glimpses of reality from different experiences, contexts and relations. A combination of the myriads of glimpses of reality will extend an account of the complete reality in terms of its actuality, while leaving room

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\(^{87}\) Jüngel, *God as the Ground of the World*, 344.

\(^{88}\) Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 217
for the possibility of new and surprising appearances. Here both experienced reality and anticipated experience of reality are held together in a tension of presence and absence, hiding and revealing.

For theology, this account nullifies the claim that the reality in its revealed form is absolute and static. Influenced heavily by the past, the theological enterprise has often been content with repetitions of what has been grasped and discussed in the past. It is no wonder Ebeling has identified the crisis of Christian theology as “boredom with language, boredom with words.”

Reality is lively, and it appears in lively language. Further, Ricoeur’s account undercuts the assumption that any Christian or sect is considered to be the custodian of reality; complete the understanding of reality lies with no one human being, since reality is always disclosing itself in new ways.

Ricoeur’s notion of language bringing reality operates in harmony with his understanding of the text. The world within the text, which is the semantic world, projects a world in front of the text, which is the referential world before the reader, who comes to the text with her own existential world. The world within the text for Ricoeur is the sense innovated from the text. The world in front of the text is the referential world that the sense of the text shows to the reader by linguistic reference. The world in front of the text, which is the real that the language of metaphor brings, stands just before the eyes of the reader as an encounter, ready to expand the world of the reader. A theology of encounter could adopt Ricoeur’s position here, if the

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revelation of the real occurring in language is also understood as bringing the real to humans in dynamic encounter. The revealed real encounters the existential real in a personal way, culminating in a dynamic relationship. In this way, the distance between the coming reality and the encountering reader is overcome.

Ricoeur works out the elimination of the distance between the real and the reader through incorporating the cognitive value of feeling into the appropriation of the real. He argues that feeling functions as a cognitive tool just as metaphor does. Both “seeing as” and “feeling” are important in the process of appropriating the semantic innovations of metaphor. Ricoeur argues that one must feel the reality that the language has brought. Fundamentally, feeling overcomes distance just as metaphor does. He affirms that “to feel ... is to make ours what has been put at a distance by thought in its objectifying phase.” Accordingly, feeling, like metaphor, functions epistemologically and eradicates the existential distance between the knower and the known.

4.3. Metaphorical Redescription of Reality

How does the language of metaphor redescribe reality? Soskice maintains that metaphor “simply describes” and is “always descriptive.” She believes that based upon the described actual reality one can redescribe

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91 Soskice, Metaphor and Religious Language, 89.

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reality in terms of the possibility of reality. Nevertheless, Ricoeur sees the
dynamism of metaphorical language operating primarily in the dimension of
the redescription of reality. He argues that metaphoric language “redescribes
reality by the roundabout route of heuristic fiction.”92 As noted, logical
positivists believe that all non-prosaic language is emotive – it refers to the
subjective mental process of the poet rather than to an actual world – and
literary critics have re-established this epistemological prejudice by
differentiating literature from other types of discourse. Such approaches
suggest that the reference of language points to itself rather than to a world.
But understanding the essence of language in terms of metaphoric
dynamism, Ricoeur remarks that “metaphor is the rhetorical process” in
which “discourse unleashes the power ... to redescribe reality.”93 The energy
that sets the redescription of the reality in motion is the reference of
metaphor.94 Ricoeur argues that prosaic language can only describe
actuality, excluding possibility, which is fundamental for human existence.
For Ricoeur, the language of metaphor innovates new meaning and new
being in language while the metaphoric being creates new possibilities of
being. This is what he calls the ontological function of metaphorical
discourse in which “every dormant potentiality of existence appears as
blossoming forth, every latent capacity for action as actualized.”95

Accordingly, the reality described by metaphor challenges the ordinary way
of understanding the real by “shattering and increasing our language.”96

92Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 247.
93Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 7.
94Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 6.
95Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 43.
96Ricoeur, “Creativity of Language,” 133.
Similarly, biblical interpreters like David Funk and Ernst Fuchs have argued that in the parabolic language of Jesus, the conventional existential world that “holds human beings in bondage” is “shattered” and a new path is opened up for a “new vision of reality.” This occurs when the “metaphor shatters the conventional predication in the interest of a new vision ... a fresh experience of reality.” This new vision of reality becomes a new possibility for existence. By using parabolic language as the method of teaching, Jesus accessed the world of his listeners and established a common understanding with them. Based upon that common understanding, he “extends and transforms the horizons of the world in such a way that the reality is grasped differently ... because the world has become a new world.”

In Ricoeur’s view, the world that metaphoric language refers to is more profound – more “real” – than the empirical world in which being is confined to actuality rather than possibility. Metaphoric language enlarges the real beyond the empirical process of verification, and it enlarges the human understanding of the world by expanding the real. In this dynamic process, the relationship between the world and the real can be clearly identified. Even though the metaphoric and linguistic process of deconstruction initially disintegrates language and its objects from their relationship, the language–world relation is secured at a higher level. For Ricoeur, the way metaphorical utterance captures its meaning is out of the ruins of literal sense; so also, it achieves its reference amid the ruins of its

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This entails that the literal sense gives way to the metaphorical sense and the metaphorical sense gives rise to the metaphorical reference. Similarly, the literal reference gives way to metaphorical reference and the metaphorical reference gives rise to metaphorical reality.

Thus deconstructing the literal sets the metaphorical dynamism in motion to refer to the real in a different way. Here metaphor is a strategy of discourse in which “language divests itself of its function of direct description” and reaches its “mythical level where its function of discovery is set free” to redescribe reality. Here, the (possible) reality that comes in language redescribes the (actual) reality that exists. Ricoeur assumes that metaphorical language has operational value similar to scientific models for it possesses a heuristic dynamism of describing and redescribing realities beyond normal descriptive possibility. Taking the same lead, Mary Hesse argues that scientific inquiry originates and continues its quest for meaning and reality by means of metaphorical imagination. The quest for truth through mathematical language is limited. After analysing scientific models and metaphors, Hesse argues that philosophers of science in the field of scientific investigation seek to discover the real by constructing metaphoric and linguistic models as poets do. Hesse maintains that rationality in any field of inquiry consists of a constant adjustment of human language to the world of human existence. Metaphor operates as one of the primary means

100 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 221.
101 Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 147.
to that attainment. In the same way, for Ricoeur, both metaphors and scientific models are imaginative representations of reality. He asserts that both poetic language and scientific models aim at a “reality more real than the appearances.” Hence, for him, the innovation of heuristic metaphors and models is the gateway to the innovation and redescription of the real because the mystery of metaphorical discourse is that “what it creates, it discovers; and what it finds, it invents.”

Ricoeur’s notion of metaphorical reality can be further clarified through his understanding of textual worlds. As stated earlier, the textual semantic world projects a referential world, which is the real, in front of the textual world and in front of the existential world of the reader. This occurs as an explosive entity whose presence is active as a speaker to the reader and passive as the object of the reader’s reading. Here the metaphorically innovated real stands in between the semantic world of the text and the existential world of the reader – and both are metaphorical in nature. Similarly, there is a human agent who stands between as the active reader of the text and as the passive listener to the text, whose being is likewise metaphorical in nature. All these agents are connected by the electrical circuit of metaphorical language.

Jüngel understands this sensitive connection through metaphor as the dynamism of the address in a linguistic event. He acknowledges both the

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104 Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 239.
deconstructive and constructive possibilities of metaphor. In the linguistic address, short-circuit occurs “through interruption.” Human understanding of the existential world advances only as the reality of the world succeeds in interrupting the status quo of human perception. The explosive potential of metaphoric language lies in its capability to confront humans to reconsider their vision of existence.105 Similarly, Jüngel stresses that the human beings who have been addressed by the linguistic reality are “pulled into the word-event” of language. As part of the constructive process, the real that language brings draws human beings into itself through the power of the linguistic address to show the real world of existential possibilities.106 The culmination of such drawing is not the absorption of the existential world into the real (as a theologian like George Lindbeck claims) but the capacity of the individual to have a direct encounter with the real, which ultimately remoulds the reader and provides her with a new vision of existence. Here the success of the language of metaphor is its capacity to effect a direct application of reality as an immediate experience in which a new dimension of existence is charted out; actual reality is surpassed by a new possibility of reality.107 The world of the real that the language of metaphor brings expands the existential world, reconstructing a world of new possibilities.

Ricoeur believes that the existing reality that metaphor redescrives is the one that “corresponds to other possibilities of existence.”108 Metaphor invents the human condition and recreates its possibilities. The recreated world of existence is much more than an empirical reality because it brings

105Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 306.
106Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 10-11.
107Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World, 290.
108Ricoeur, Rule of Metaphor, 229.
actuality and possibility into creative collision. In this way, metaphorical reality through the metaphorical language becomes a habitable world of existence, constructed out of the ruins of the actual.\textsuperscript{109} This is the fundamental drive that leads Sallie McFague to link metaphor with the human passion for the possible. She argues that metaphor is “human movement; without it, we would not be what we are,” because all dreams, revolutions in science, theorizations and artistic works are different human attempts to figure and refigure the world.\textsuperscript{110}

4.4. Metaphorical Attestation of Reality

The crucial issue facing Ricoeur’s concept of metaphorical reality is the question of its truthfulness. The problem of verifying metaphorical meaning and reality against the subjectivity of creative imagination is an especially important concern for theology. How can one know if what metaphor creates is true? Ricoeur maintains that there are criteria which can attest the truthfulness of any innovated meaning. The fundamental criterion in this regard is an existential verification. One can reflect whether the metaphorical meaning makes one’s own experience of the world more intelligible. As McFague notes, metaphors do not show human beings the life as actually lived, but they show life as it could be lived.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{109}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 245.
\textsuperscript{110}Sallie McFague, \textit{Speaking in Parables} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 58, 64.
\textsuperscript{111}McFague, \textit{Speaking in Parables}. 

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Gadamer influentially addresses the issue of verification in terms of experience. He argues in *Truth and Method* that he is concerned about the “modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.”¹¹² This means that, for him, truth cannot be verified by any method because the meaning of language goes beyond the limits of methodological analysis. The truth of language transcends the range of “methodical knowledge.”¹¹³ Gadamer’s aim in *Truth and Method* is not to present an “elaborate system of rules” but a philosophical description of how understanding occurs¹¹⁴ – for instance, through the ontological disclosure of works of art. Following Gadamer, Ricoeur constructs his theory of knowledge as an ontological epistemology of “attestation.”¹¹⁵ His theory of attestation is a mediation between Descartes’ concept of the “wounded cogito” and Nietzsche’s notion of the “humiliated cogito.”¹¹⁶ Ricoeur’s idea of attestation “belongs to the grammar of I believe-in,” which “links up with testimony.”¹¹⁷ His principle of existential verification consists of a testimonial attestation of metaphorical truth that involves both conviction and rationality. He argues – again, in opposition to the positivists – that this is the only “sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim.”¹¹⁸ Fundamentally Ricoeur’s concept of attestation is existential; it is the “attestation of the self” which can be described as the “assurance of being oneself.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.
¹¹⁷Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.
¹¹⁸Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 21.
¹¹⁹Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 22.
Accordingly, Ricoeur consistently argues that human claims to reality can never be established by a methodical verification but are affirmed by hope and trust, which locates the ontological epistemology within an eschatological frame of reflection rather than within a narrow empirical frame. Human beings can never grasp reality as God does, but can only hope that they will be justified in their claims to truth in the future.¹²⁰ In the meantime, we ought to be “cautious about our beliefs,” epistemologically “critical and not committed.”¹²¹

The authority of testimony, Ricoeur says, is an authority that “remains in suspense.”¹²² After all, what testimony confers is not actuality but “our most personal possibilities.”¹²³ There is admittedly a “quasi-empirical”¹²⁴ dimension to testimony, in which a witness offers a testimony and claims to have experienced some reality. This characteristic presupposes that all meaning is hypothetical. Ricoeur argues that in the context of communication, a testimony has a dual relation in which one testifies and the other hears what is testified. It is by testifying that one understands the reality experienced, and by hearing that one believes or disbelieves what is communicated. The possibility of hearing partially and initially validates the probable presence of the reality that comes in language as a speaking subject. Ricoeur’s notion of quasi-empirical status of reality operates in

¹²⁰Paul Ricoeur, Charles A. Kelbley (trans), History and Truth (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1965), 54-55.
¹²³Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 122.
¹²⁴Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 123.
harmony with his idea of a text within the context of receptive reading. Nevertheless, this is a subjective claim that needs further attestation.

Thus a further facet of testimonial validation consists of a “quasi-juridical” dimension in which the testimony of the witness is submitted to a process of trial in order for her testimony to be analysed. This involves a moment of critical reflection. Ricoeur argues that this trial is not a methodical operation but a “non-technical,” argumentative and an interpretive judgement based upon the “logic of testimony” assessed by the “logic of argumentation” through the “criteria of probability.” Similarly, in theology Wolfhart Pannenberg argues that all claims to truth made in the “experiential immediacy” must be verified at the interpretive level of reflection with “reference to the unity of all our experience” of the real. For him, “coherence provides the final criterion of truth.” It is at the reflective stage of analysis that “theology is concerned with the truth of the Christian faith” because it is here that “all claims of truth are to be judged.” But Ricoeur goes beyond Pannenberg’s coherence theory of truth by adding a third level of existential verification, which makes the truth claims affirmed in the reflective process pushed toward existential possibility.

A final aspect of Ricoeur’s theory of testimonial validation of reality is a “quasi-martyrial” dimension. Here the witness runs the risk of falsity and

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125 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 128.
126 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 128.
128 Pannenberg, An Introduction to Systematic Theology, 6
deception. A witness must sustain her conviction even though her commitment cannot prove the truthfulness of her claims. Accordingly, the “test of conviction becomes the price of life.”

Here arises the crucial importance of “appropriation.” We can live again meaningfully and live up to death sincerely in order to die for the reality that we live by. For Ricoeur the “martyr is not an argument, even less a proof. It is a test, a limit situation.”

In light of this martyrial dimension, testimony does not designate an act of testifying speech but it is the very “action itself” for it attests “outside” of the testifier to her inmost being, which is her conviction of reality. This implies that it is an ultimate existential attestation of reality by a life and death situation in which the intensity of the witness’s engagement determines the veracity of the faithful witness.

Moreover, Ricoeur does not delimit his notion of the existential verification of metaphorical truth to the confines of ordinary linguistic structures. He envisages that the concept of testimony transcends its customary use in prosaic language. In the context of sacred writing, the testimony of the testifier does not belong to the witness but “proceeds from an absolute initiative as to its origin and content.” The testifier is a sent one with a testimony about someone else. It is Yahweh who sends and it is he who is witnessed to in the testimony. In this way, for Ricoeur, God is the primary witness who provides testimony and confirms that testimony in human hearts.

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129 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 129.
130 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 129.
131 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 130.
132 Ricoeur, Essays in Biblical Interpretation, 131.
Ricoeur envisages all three dimensions of testimony operating within the context of biblical revelation. The empirical dimension functions as the basis for the endless interpretative process: a “hermeneutic without testimony is condemned,” just as interpretation without symbolic language is obsolete. Further, the juridical moment sets in motion a process of evaluation and judgement. This is a dynamic process of the judgement of “things seen and things said” as a chain of interpretive analysis and assessment. Lastly, Ricoeur argues that the martyrrial dimension of testimony partially attests the truth of reality in terms of its follower’s commitment to it. He views this through an interpretive “circle of manifestation and suffering.” For instance, the testimony of Christ is his works, which are self-manifesting, but the testimony of a disciple is his persistent suffering for the truth of the reality that he believes. Thus for Ricoeur, “the martyr proves nothing,” yet at the same time “a truth which is not strong enough to lead a man to sacrifice lacks proof.” As a result, the hermeneutic of testimony is “absolute-relative” and existential verification of the real is a “question of our whole life.” Such a hermeneutic is existential in the fullest sense of the word.

Ricoeur’s concept of existential verification thus stands inseparably linked with his notion of the semantic surplus in metaphor. His theory of attestation

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cannot escape the challenges of conflict of interpretations. But truth can be attested in life through the process of appropriation. It takes place not in terms of theoretical measures but in terms of real possibilities of life: Can we hear again? Can we think again? And can we live again? These existential questions attest the truthfulness of testimony to the real. In this dynamic process, lived human experience sets the narrative hermeneutical arc in motion.

Also, existential life will be tested by the configured narrative texts which first gave rise to it. In this way, not only does an existential validation of truth occur, but what is possible in the future is simultaneously described in terms of what was possible in the past through the process of creative imagination and critical reflection. But what is the nature of such a life which is formed by metaphoric reality and lived for that reality in truthful witness, even to the point of death? I will investigate this dimension of temporal existence in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

Realistic Temporality

Reality is linguistic and metaphorical. The language of reality is metaphor. Metaphor re-describes human life. This chapter explores how Ricoeur’s idea of the real redescribes human life. By inquiring into his concepts of creative imagination and narrative hope, I shall demonstrate how the real redescribes existence and opens fresh possibilities. I will explore the extent and the limit of this newly possible life, along with its importance for self-understanding here and now. One understands oneself as one understands the total possibility of being. The discovery of human life in this way is a constant pursuit of possibility through self-knowledge.

5.1. Hope: The Basis of Realistic Temporality

Ricoeur is a postmodern “philosopher of hope.”[139] The notion of hope is the key to his whole anthropological enterprise. The force that stimulates his entire reflective thought is the “passion for the possible,”[140] which in essence is hope filled with promises for human life. He conceives this passion as an intense human drive for the “existential possibilities of man’s being.”[141] He labels these possibilities as the “fundamental possibilities” and

“structures” of human beings. Ricoeur’s concept of hope consists of a “passion” that motivates humans to strive for a possible life; it consists of an “energy,” which is the creative imagination that figures out a new existential structure as a human possibility; and it involves a component of “time,” that connects the imaginative world into an existentially possible world. This implies that all passionate humans can be presented “as acting and all things as in act.” This is where “dormant potentiality of existence appears as blossoming forth” and “every latent capacity for action as actualized.” At this point, it is important to analyse Ricoeur’s notion of passion, in order to understand his concept of the fundamental structures of human existence that linguistic reality presupposes.

5.1.1. Realistic Passion: The Originating Source of Temporality

According to Ricoeur, the passion for the possible is the source that gives rise to human temporality through a reflective process on human existence. Human existence fundamentally consists of this passion. Following Kierkegaard, he affirms that passion is the very soul of human existence. This implies that the passion for the possible is a passion to exist and an aim for the fresh possibilities of life. Such a human passion to rise out of actuality to possibility is constituted by a will to be, a desire to be and an effort to be. The volition to exist involves a steadfast human choice to live in accordance with the vision of the real; the desire to exist indicates a

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motivation that is a desire behind willing; and finally, the effort to exist consists of a readiness to act upon the existential paths projected by the textual linguistic reality.

Ricoeur maintains that the striving for what is humanly possible is fundamental to the human makeup. Human beings originally possess this quality of being that is capable of overcoming threatening situations of life. Ricoeur’s notion of existentialism is therefore affirmative rather than negative. This is saying “yes” to life rather than “no.” One says yes to life when one understands that there is hope and meaning in life and this hope releases the passion to strive for the possible. Or one says no to life when there is no room for any hope and meaning but only nothingness and vanity in the movement of life. Ricoeur’s passion for the possible as an optimistic perspective on human life poses a challenge to Sartre’s pessimistic notion of human existence. Sartre maintained human existence as “illusory,” “absurd” and a “useless passion” which has “no reason.” He conceived human beings as creatures irritated and embarrassed, having no reason to exist.

Ricoeur’s philosophy of passion is a philosophy of desire based upon the human faculty of affection, and Sartre’s notion of the negation of life as useless passion is also based upon the same faculty. Here Ricoeur’s position may be clarified if it is contrasted with the Buddhist philosophy of desire. As a realist, the Buddha’s reflective process begins with the sight of human

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144 Jean-Paul Sartre, Hazel E. Barnes (trans.), *Being and Nothingness* (London: Methuen and Co LTD, 1966), xvi.
145 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, xvi.
sufferings, old age and the reality of death. Even though he sees life as full of miseries, he is not a pessimist but a realist who looks beyond the here and now sufferings of life to a possibility of life without suffering. He maintains that metaphysical speculations are futile in dealing with human miseries. He argues that the existence of human suffering is a common human phenomenon but the cause for the suffering lies in human desire and passion. Consequently, the eradication of human suffering lies in the extermination of desires, which are the cause of all suffering. But the weakness of the Buddhist philosophy of desire lies in the unending and contradictory process of desiring to annihilate all desires. Human motivation, which is a desire behind a desire, becomes a never ending entangling force that in itself is a lifelong suffering for the sake of eradicating suffering. Thus the attempt to destroy desire becomes an inexorable law of bondage and suffering.  

Unlike the Buddhist doctrine of passion, Ricoeur’s view tries to incorporate all possible aspects of human desire. Ricoeur severely criticised Sartre’s pessimistic outlook along with the existentialist overemphasis on negative aspects of existence as the fundamental human affect. As against the existentialist emphasis on anxiety, Ricoeur argues for the importance of joy as a way to life. He argues for an affirmative relationship to human existence and being over against feelings of anxiety and despair. He discovers the passion to exist by trusting that existence is meaningful and

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life is worth living.\textsuperscript{147} He argues that the meaning of life is an “object of faith,” based upon which “life presents itself in the form of a task.”\textsuperscript{148} He maintains that hope speaks into the absurd and forces one to “look for a meaning” where there is nothingness and meaninglessness. Contrasting Christian belief with existentialism, he writes: “ambiguity is the last word for existentialism; for Christianity it is real, it is lived, but it is the next to last word.”\textsuperscript{149} This aspect of Ricoeur’s philosophy provides a significant contribution to a theology of hope. Ricoeur calls his optimistic position a “philosophical style,” which proposes a “style of ‘yes’ and not a style of ‘no,’” so that philosophical reflection itself must be characterised “by joy and not by anguish.”\textsuperscript{150}

Accordingly, Ricoeur’s identification of volitional, motivational and actional components as belonging to the fundamental structure of human existence is really an articulation of hope in the midst of a human condition of suffering and anxiety. It is by hope that humans overcome the nothingness of life to discover the possible in the midst of the ruins of life. “Hope speaks from the depths of the descent into the absurd.”\textsuperscript{151} For Ricoeur, the human passion for the possible can be empty if it is considered as mere imaginative longing; a person can be passionate about all sorts of things without those things being true. But what makes Ricoeur’s idea promising is his combination of passion with volitional and actional aspects

\textsuperscript{147} Paul Ricoeur, Charles A. Kelbley (Tran.), \textit{History and Truth} (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).
\textsuperscript{148} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 95.
\textsuperscript{149} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 95.
\textsuperscript{150} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 305.
\textsuperscript{151} Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 95.
of life, which ultimately makes passion an integral part of the human project.

The theological promise of Ricoeur’s notion of hope becomes clear when it is considered in light of Thomas Aquinas’ theology of hope. Aquinas argues that the “object of hope is a future good, arduous but possible to obtain.”152 This means that hope can only exist in a subject who seeks to pursue something. For Aquinas, hope involves a strong passion, which is distinct from ordinary desire. Ordinary desire looks for receiving any good offered because it is prompted by a human faculty that likes pleasure and shrinks from pain. But hope as a strong passion seeks to attain a difficult good, for it is ready to face opposition and challenges. Hope for Aquinas consists also of an element of “future good,” which makes the subject of the pursuit to rise out of the present good towards the future. This implies that in a hope project, a subject moves from the here and now to the not yet possible as her own good. Further, hope is directed towards a “possible good.” An aimless passion can desire something regardless of whether it is attainable. But a strong passion of hope is delighted by a good that can be secured.153

Like Ricoeur’s optimistic philosophy of hope, Aquinas’ theology of hope moves beyond the trajectories of fear and anxiety because the object of hope is good; it rises out of the present structures of life because its good is in the future; it surpasses ordinary passion because its attainment of the good is

difficult; and it moves beyond despair because its attainment is a possibility. The point to be observed in both frames of thinking is that the human subject remains a possibility; the subject fundamentally is a category of the not yet. “It does not yet appear what we shall become.”  

Ricoeur addresses the issue of perceiving what is humanly possible in two ways. In his early writings, particularly in Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary, he envisages human existential possibilities on the basis of the essential structures of human will. Here he analyses the phenomenology of volition in order to understand the nature of human beings and the possibilities of willing. He sets out the process in terms of the project-creating quality of the will. But realizing that the subjective nature of the will is not open to objective observation, he moves in his later writings towards understanding human existence through the poetic mediation of symbols, metaphors and narratives. It is important for this study to consider the concepts of will and possibility in light of both early and later writings taken together.

Ricoeur argues that the passion for the possible does not merely involve a “logical possibility”; nor a “physical eventuality” that expresses an order of things harmonious with the world of existence; nor a “biological virtuality,” some common natural tendency of life. Instead, he affirms that the possible is “the capacity of the realization of the project inasmuch as it is within my

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154 John 3:12.
Thus the passion for the humanly possible becomes existentially evident in the project-creating quality of volition. The most significant quality of a project is “its reference to future,” even though this lies in a willing in the present. For Ricoeur, one’s possibilities lie within the volitional power of the self, and are not contingent on the external factors of existence. A project not only “opens up possibilities in the world” but also opens up “new possibilities in myself and reveals me to myself as a possibility of acting.” It is at this juncture that the passion for the possible emerges as a fundamental aspect of human self-understanding because a person understands herself when she understands her own possibilities: “my power-to-be manifests itself in my power to do.”

Ricoeur’s idea of basing one’s possibilities on the project-forming abilities of the self and his notion of the project revealing the self to itself may mislead one to misconstrue his existentialism as atheistic. But Ricoeur’s existentialism is not atheistic, as Sartre’s is. Ricoeur argues that the

158 Ricoeur, Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 69.
159 Ricoeur, Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, 69.
160 Ricoeur bases his notion of existentialism upon the work of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers. Against the Cartesian attempt to prove existence through a process of thinking, they argued that existence is not something that can be proved but is a pre-given gift from God. God who is eternal and who is not part of temporal existence cannot exist to experience existence; it is only human beings who can experience, appropriate and appreciate existence. As a result, it is a human task of life to interpret and make sense of
dialectic of life is existence and eternity, contrary to Sartre’s dialectic of existence and nothingness. For Ricoeur, existence signifies the choice to live and not to commit suicide. It is only human beings who are endowed with such a gift of choosing to live – so life is worth living.

5.1.2. Realistic Imagination: The Energizing Source of Temporality

Both Ricoeur’s and Aquinas’s accounts of hope are fundamentally based upon human will and human being. But the point at which Aquinas falls short is in not setting out the means to attain the possible good; after all, volition by itself cannot determine the nature of the good, and cannot specify a project for the future. It is at this point that Ricoeur adds the category of creative imagination as the energizing source of volition. He calls this the “creative imagination of the possible.”

Ricoeur sees creative imagination as the “power of the possible and the disposition for being in a radical renewal.” He adopts the concept of creative imagination from the Kantian philosophy of imagination. It was Kant who first set out the map that Ricoeur follows throughout his philosophical enterprise. Kant sought to investigate the issue: what is such experience of existence. But it was Sartre who provided an alternative materialistic basis for existentialism which moved it in an atheistic direction. For him, the dialectic of existence is not existence and eternity but existence and nothing. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* vol. 1 (London: The Harvill Press, 1950). See also Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being* vol. 2 (London: The Harvill Press, 1951). See also H. J. Blackham, *Six Existentialist Thinkers* (Evanston: Harper & Row, 1959), 43-65.

161 Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 408.

162 Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, 408.
human? For him, this issue consists of three questions: “what can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?” Ricoeur sees the issue “what may I hope” as setting the agenda for a philosophy of religion and requiring a response not from speculative reason but from the creative imagination. Having taken Kant’s philosophy of creative imagination along with his theory of symbols, Ricoeur gives them a linguistic grounding by developing a theory of narrative hope.

Ricoeur sees human existence as figurative and imaginative. He argues that “our existence is not literal, but figurative”; “it is the temporal surpassing of that which is actually given towards a possible horizon always to come.” We are creative beings through and through. Human beings are created in God’s image, and this gives them a quality of creativity, the ability to form images of their own existence. Thus the image of human beings is not “just the portrait of man” but the “sum and total of the ways in which man projects his vision on things.” Ricoeur sees poetry as the “art of conjuring up the world as created.” It is poetic imagination that refigures the world as an existential possibility.

Ricoeur’s notion of creative imagination is rooted in the most basic human activities and experiences, which reach the ontological and metaphysical depth of human existence. It reaches the ontological depth of human life

since, he argues, the “mediating role of imagination is forever at work in lived reality.”\textsuperscript{168} At the same time, creative imagination consists of a metaphysical operation; it is the creative imagination which functions as the “instituting and constituting of what is humanly possible.”\textsuperscript{169} By imagining human possibilities, “man acts as the prophet of his own existence”; Ricoeur calls this “redemption through imagination.”\textsuperscript{170} So the salvific quality of creative imagination can change human existence. By changing their imagination, human beings can refigure their existence. Ultimately, what we imagine is the sum and substance of our existential possibility. Creative imagination is the actualization of the passion for the possible.

Ricoeur’s notion of creative imagination as the source of what is humanly possible can find an important place in theological discourse about God, humans and existence. Norvene Vest, in his work \textit{Re-visioning Theology: A Mythic Approach to Religion}, argues that epistemological, ontological and axiological issues are inseparably liked with the issues of creative imagination. Creative imagination has a “central role” not only in the way the “divine-human connection is understood” but in “rites and worship as well.”\textsuperscript{171} The essential role of imagination that Vest proposes consists in “envisioning and planning for new possibilities”;\textsuperscript{172} he argues that this is a process of “exploring how to live into relationship with the inherently

\textsuperscript{169}Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 127.
\textsuperscript{170}Ricoeur, \textit{History and Truth}, 127.
\textsuperscript{172}Vest, \textit{Re-visioning Theology}, 25.
unknowable holy.”173 Similarly, Richard Kearney analyses such terms as yester, phantasia, eikasia and Einbildungskraft. Kearney states that in different ways they all refer to the human “power to convert absence into presence, actuality into possibility, what-is into something-other-than-it-is.”174 He argues that the biblical narratives explore the power of creative imagination; in particular the creation narratives provide an imaginative account of human origins and development.175 The human potential to see things as other than they are is the fundamental basis of the choice that Adam and Eve made in eating from the forbidden tree.176 The ability of Adam and Eve is to exercise creative imagination, the “power to anticipate the future by projecting a horizon of imaginary possibilities.”177 Kearney suggests that God intentionally created Adam and Eve in his own image, knowing that the first humans might make use of their “creative image-ability,” which is the image of God, to supplant God in the order of creation.178

John Milbank has also recently highlighted the role of imagination in theology. He envisages creative imagination as the way human beings “create their own world and are in turn shaped by this world.”179 He argues that there is no “intrinsic limit” to human capability to change and transform

173 Vest, Re-visioning Theology, 25.
175 Here he does not refer to the role of creative imagination in the composition of the creation narratives but his focus in on the nature of the events recounted in the narratives.
176 Kearney, Poetics of Imaging, 4.
178 Kearney, The Wake of Imagination, 16.
the “physical world for good or ill.”\textsuperscript{180} When there are “no present physical realities,” to the extent that everything is out of joint and meaningless, the mind is “capable of projecting its shadowy sensations,” which gives rise to the “fictions that we believe” and the “fictions that we inhabit.”\textsuperscript{181} Theology and philosophy cannot escape the role of creative imagination in their respective forms of discourse; Milbank proposes that theology must recognize the “imaginary perspectives of literature” and the “imaginative perspectives of human history” as vital components of faith.\textsuperscript{182} Here Milbank sees imagination only in terms of its religious function, whereas Ricoeur seeks to ground creative imagination in the temporal structures of the self so that the imaginatively created world can be brought to an existentially possible structure of being in the world.

5.1.3. Realistic Time: The Orienting Source of Temporality

According to Ricoeur, therefore, realistic hope functions as the passion that motivates humans to strive for what is possible in the world. The world that exists only in imagination cannot have any existential value because it is an “open-ended, incomplete and imperfect mediation.”\textsuperscript{183} It must be brought into a dynamic connection with human life; the imaginative world must be translated into the real human world of existence. This for Ricoeur is possible because the essential nature of imagination is its “power to contact

\textsuperscript{180} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, 329.
\textsuperscript{181} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, 331.
\textsuperscript{182} Milbank, \textit{The Future of Love}, 334.
\textsuperscript{183} Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Trans.), \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 207.
with being as such.”\textsuperscript{184} “The effort of thinking” which is the work of creative imagination is completed in a “refiguration of temporal experience.”\textsuperscript{185} This is what Ricoeur attempts in the \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, with his paradoxical propositions. The first proposition appears at the closing words of the first study of the \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, where he states that “lively expression is that which expresses existence as alive.”\textsuperscript{186} Lively language is the language of existence, for it helps humans to make sense of the world. Existence is language through and through. The second postulate appears in the last study of the \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, where Ricoeur repeats this proposition in a different way to indicate something quite different. He remarks: “lively expression is that which expresses \textit{experience} as alive.”\textsuperscript{187} What Ricoeur envisages here is a new experience via language and its expression of reality. He argues that “if the notion of temporal experience is to be worthy of its name,” one must bring the imaginatively recreated world to the “phenomenology of time-consciousness”\textsuperscript{188} in a radical relation. This is what he calls a “new thinking and new language”\textsuperscript{189} of life, which is the language of creative imagination linked with time. A fresh experience arises from the dialectic of the past and the future, bringing forth a new experiential world of possibilities.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{184}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 43.
\textsuperscript{185}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 3.
\textsuperscript{186}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 43.
\textsuperscript{187}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 309.
\textsuperscript{188}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{189}Ricoeur, \textit{Rule of Metaphor}, 311.
\textsuperscript{190}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 207. This notion of the converging of past and future into the present has particular significance in the philosophy of Ricoeur if taken in the context of a philosophy of the totality of existence. I will discuss this in the later part of this chapter, under the heading Realistic Identity.
Consequently, it is the time component that makes what is imaginatively possible into what is existentially and experientially possible. The imaginative possibilities are fundamentally structured into human experience by the element of time that reorganizes human possibility and orients it towards the future. For Ricoeur, time is the only quality common to every object of experience. To be in time is a condition without which experience is impossible.

Accordingly, every project is oriented towards the future. Ricoeur does not see the reference to the future as an act but rather as a “fundamental situation” that makes the project possible. His point here is the capacity of humans to meaningfully organize and orient imagined existence into real human experience. The imaginative world has “its full meaning when it is restored to the time of action”;\textsuperscript{191} the imagined world becomes the world of real temporal existence. So neither narrative nor human experience escapes the rule of the phenomenology of time. Conversely, the time component does not escape the rule of narrative and temporal experience of human existence. This is because in relation to narrative and human experience, the “destiny of a prefigured time ... becomes a refigured time through the mediation of a configured time.”\textsuperscript{192} In this way, Ricoeur represents time figuratively.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{191}Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (trans.), \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 70.
\textsuperscript{192}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 1, 54.
\textsuperscript{193}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 55.
In the dynamic process of experiencing the imaginative world, Ricoeur observes an emerging relation between time and narrative, which he considers to be the “most decisive” relation.194 This relation affirms “the fictive experience of time” that occurs in the process of expressing the temporality of experience and of inhabiting the imaginatively projected world.195 The “fictive experience” points to the world’s status as something that remains “imaginary.”196 The “mediating role of imagination” through time is always part of any experienced reality – for “there is no lived reality, no human or social reality, which is not already represented in some sense.”197 Consequently, there occurs a circular relation between temporality and language, experience and imagination.

As we have seen repeatedly, Ricoeur’s ultimate philosophical concern is the temporal character of human experience. This concern culminates in his consideration of the mediations of narrativity, textuality, metaphorical language and metaphorical reality. There is no vicious interpretive circle here, but the creative circle of discovery and invention, rooted in time.

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5.2. Existence: The Form of Realistic Temporality

The primary concern of Ricoeur’s philosophical project is to understand human temporality: the temporal character of human nature and experience in the world. The quest commences by making sense of human experience and ends by discovering a possible human way of being in the world. Such a life of possibility is attained through narrative, textual, linguistic and realistic mediations. Narrative provides for the composition of experience by making sense of it. The text as the composed experience shows a life through interpretation. Language figures out the nature of that life and thus brings about reality. The reality that comes through language redescribes the already available life through creative imagination and time. Here the actuality of being is constantly redescribed by the metaphorically innovated reality. The actual structure of human existence paves the way for the possible structure of being – the “more than actuality” of human beings. For Ricoeur, it is possibility rather than actuality that is the fundamental structure of being. Thus the possibility of human temporality is fundamentally contingent on the hope that consists of human’s determinate passion for the possible as its originating source; creative imagination as its energizing source; and time as its orienting source. In this way, Ricoeur views human temporality as a constant possibility rather than an actuality. Human being is a possibility.
5.2.1. Realistic Being: A Constant Possibility

According to Ricoeur, this possibility is an existential structure of being. Humans are in the process of becoming. Ricoeur’s notion of possibility as an existential temporal structure is in harmony with the Aristotelian remark that being can be articulated in many ways. But it challenges the traditional western philosophical position that maintained human being as a stable essence. For Ricoeur, such an essentialist view leaves no room open for hope and possibility. Here, the never-ending human passion for what is possible is negated, and life is consigned to nothingness and despair.

Ricoeur largely follows Heidegger’s analysis of this conventional philosophy of human nature as a stable essence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that conventional philosophy depersonalizes the human being as a thing, an object and a substance identical with entities in the order of nature. Contrarily, Heidegger considers the notion of human possibility as the principal category of his anthropological philosophy. He argues that the question of human being is not “something that we can simply compute by adding together those kinds of being which body, soul and spirit respectively possess.” Rather, “*Dasein* is constantly more than it factually is.”

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itself in terms of possibility.”\textsuperscript{202} As Dasein projects its possibilities, it “throws before itself the possibility as possibility.”\textsuperscript{203} In this way, a human being is a being ahead of itself, and “Dasein arranges its being.”\textsuperscript{204} For Heidegger, then, the existential possibility of being is a fundamental possibility, which is determined only through existence itself. Human possibility is a constant process and a progress. As humans exist they also become, and as they become they also exist. Accordingly, Heidegger’s task in \textit{Being and Time} was to demonstrate the fundamental structure of being as temporal possibility.\textsuperscript{205} In this dynamic process, the external world of human existence participates in “manifest being,” and one’s being is disclosed to oneself in return. As a human being strives for the possible, he can “stand out from the world of entities and become aware of his being and of his responsibility for his being.”\textsuperscript{206} This means, in the first place, that human beings are conscious of their possibilities and they can choose between these possibilities. Secondly, it means a person must voluntarily choose herself and win herself by embracing the possibilities which are truly hers. Failing to do so implies that she is losing herself in the world of entities.\textsuperscript{207} Thus for Heidegger, the essence of human being is not a permanently given substantial entity but rather one that is constantly chosen by the human will. As a result, “higher than actuality, stands possibility.”\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{202}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 185.  
\textsuperscript{203}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 185.  
\textsuperscript{204}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 185.  
\textsuperscript{205}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 38.  
\textsuperscript{206}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 38.  
\textsuperscript{207}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 68.  
\textsuperscript{208}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 62.
This is what Ricoeur calls “the response of a being thrown into the world who finds his way about by projecting into his own most possibilities.”  

This position – that possibility is an existential structure of human being – has been developed in Christian theology by the German theologian Eberhard Jüngel, whose theology was likewise deeply indebted to Heidegger. He understands the temporal nature and the structure of being as active, potential, purposive and interactive. He argues that being consists of no permanently fixed essences and substances even though it is grounded in the actual existential order of events in the world. Being is formed through action and constituted by interaction. Jüngel identifies four aspects of being. First, being is absolutely free because it cannot be fully grasped and objectively demonstrated at any point of time as an object with permanently installed qualities; no definition can ever provide an exhaustive description of being, because anything occurring in time is yet another disclosure of the same being in the process of its possibilities. Second, it is revelatory because it is autonomous in its operation and it can unfold itself fresh in any point of time; being is always new, constantly impermanent and momentary. Third, it is event: being is being only when it transpires in action. This means that the constant becoming of being takes place through events and actions. Finally, being is potential because being is not only taking place in events; it is what is embryonic in its potential that eventually comes-to-be in events and actions. This aspect of being places it under the

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not yet category of life and makes it to transcend actual experience. Being, therefore, is the inestimable energy to be.\textsuperscript{211}

Similarly, John Macquarrie’s theological appropriation of the notion of possibility as the fundamental structure of being gives an example of the ways by which a contemporary theological discourse may appropriate Ricoeur’s philosophy. Macquarrie succinctly summarises the existentialist argument concerning human possibility in his early work \textit{An Existentialist Theology}. He remarks: “man is possibility. He is always more than he is; his being is never complete at any given movement. He therefore has no essence as an object has.”\textsuperscript{212} Macquarrie later developed this position methodically in his systematic theological framework.

Macquarrie understands existential structures of being in terms of freedom, which signifies for him a “primordial openness,” by which humans can enter the world of possibilities.\textsuperscript{213} He maintains that “freedom is nothing at all” in the active sense of the expression. But passively taken, it is “absence of constraints”. It is an “open space” which is “not yet filled up.” It is an “empty horizon where nothing blocks the way.”\textsuperscript{214} According to him, creativity is the fundamental way of using this freedom. Such an exercise of freedom becomes evident both in the human capacity to adapt the environment to itself and in the potential to shape humanity to be itself.

\textsuperscript{211}Eberhard Jüngel, Darrel L. Guder (trans.), \textit{God as the Mystery of the World} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 28, 114, 358, 374.
\textsuperscript{212}John Macquarrie, \textit{An Existentialist Theology} (London: SCM, 1960), 32.
\textsuperscript{214}Macquarrie, \textit{In Search of Humanity}, 11, 13.
Consequently, human being is the “continuing process of creativity and development which flows from that freedom,” by which the human being “extends” itself and “becomes more” in encountering the openness of freedom.\footnote{Macquarrie, \textit{In Search of Humanity}, 26, 32.} Here the horizons of human existence are pushed back through the reality of temporality. Macquarrie argues that the impact of temporality provides the “perspective within which priorities can be set and the various events and possibilities of life seen in their relationships as part of a sense-giving whole.”\footnote{Macquarrie, \textit{In Search of Humanity}, 238.} He affirms this dynamic process as the way of forming a human life into a coherent shape.\footnote{Macquarrie, \textit{In Search of Humanity}, 43.}

Macquarrie’s idea of freedom as unbridled openness may seem like sheer chaos. He overcomes this problem by linking his concept of freedom with notions of directedness and unity. He asserts that human freedom as openness without any constrains must be directed by a self, which is dynamic and has very indefinite edges. The self is indefinite in the sense that it is constantly projecting itself into its possibilities. In this way, the “self is always more than it is” for it “keeps spilling over.”\footnote{Macquarrie, \textit{In Search of Humanity}, 44.} Yet the same dynamic self consists also of conscience and commitment. It involves conscience, because the self is constantly projecting the possibilities and recognising the projected possibilities as its own. And it involves commitment, which gives direction to the self. Here commitment is the projection of the whole being into the future – just as Ricoeur’s idea of a “project” proposes. At this juncture, Macquarrie argues that “commitments give shape to the raw material out of which character and personhood are to
be built and they give direction to our constructive energies."219 One’s commitment must surpass one’s own self by moving the self into stable relations with others. “The more a human pledges himself and engages himself beyond himself, the more fully he is established as a truly personal being.”220 This relation between freedom and form is what one finds in a nutshell in Ricoeur’s Freedom and Nature, where he seeks to construct a philosophy of the will in which the will projects possibilities and strives to appropriate them as its own being.

Ricoeur’s notion of being as a continuous possibility might also lead one to wonder about the challenges of life’s impermanency. Perhaps the most radical account of the impermanency of life is in the tradition of Buddhism, which understands the world as a succession of transient phenomena; change is the stuff of reality. But Buddhist tradition distinguishes between impermanence and momentariness: things are impermanent and consciousness is momentary. Thus there is no soul. The human mind is a stream of cognitions consisting of ideas and thoughts, which arise at one moment and vanish at the other. The self is nothing but a series of successive mental and bodily processes, which are impermanent but momentary. Thus existence is a composition of impermanent and momentary possibility.221

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219 Macquarrie, In Search of Humanity, 143.
220 Macquarrie, In Search of Humanity, 144.
But if there is no permanent soul, how can one explain the continuity of a person’s life through its different stages of childhood, youth and old age? If the human mind is a confluence of ideas and thoughts that originate at one point of time and disappear at another, how do humans remember, recall and recognize people, places, entities, events, objects and even themselves? And for the same reason, the category of hope is evacuated from Buddhist philosophy. Distinctions between the lived experience, living experience and anticipated experience are impossible. Can an impermanent and momentary being hope for something that lies ahead of itself, since process, purpose, and goals are irrelevant for momentariness? Is a meaningful existence possible without memory, recall and recognition? These are issues which Buddhism was unable to address because it did not incorporate an account of the permanent self into its philosophical framework. By contrast, Ricoeur’s account of the dynamism of existence is tempered by his holistic view of existence as a stable structure of being – a structure involving the self and its volitional relations with the world. In contrast to Buddhism – or to any nihilistic existentialism – Ricoeur aims to establish the paradox of the permanence and impermanence of the self.

5.2.2. Realistic Existence: A Radical Conflict

Ricoeur claims that existence is human being. All that exists is human being. Anything that can be said to exist must have a conscious life of will – volition is the fundamental structure of being. His position becomes

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evident in *Freedom and Nature*, a book which, as a philosophy of the will, is also a phenomenology\(^{223}\) of the willing subject. Ricoeur’s task in *Freedom and Nature* is twofold. On the one hand, he wants to establish the fundamental essence of human being against the traditional philosophical view that affirmed humans as a stable essence. He states that we must be “constantly on guard against any Platonizing interpretation of essences.”\(^{224}\) On the other hand, he seeks to provide a phenomenological description of the fundamental possibilities of human willing as the most basic structures of human existence. All that exists and can exist is human being, which is a “synthesis of the voluntary and the involuntary.”\(^{225}\) He argues that it is the “radical paradox of human freedom” as an essential existential structure that “gives rise to being and moves from the possible to being.”\(^{226}\) As a human being endowed with this freedom, “I transform this world which situates me and engenders me after the flesh. I give rise to being within and without myself by my choice.”\(^{227}\) Here the choice is a “paradox of initiative and reciprocity,”\(^{228}\) which constitutes the freedom of existence.

Ricoeur affirms this notion of existence as voluntary and involuntary based upon the Heideggerian distinction between world and existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger identifies the distinctive way of human being in the

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\(^{223}\) Phenomenology is a methodical procedure that aims at explaining the experience of a conscious subject. It seeks to elucidate the acts, which are the intentions and the objects, which are the intentional correlates of a consciousness. Phenomenology’s task is to explain the intentions and the intentional correlates without questioning the reality of their existence.


\(^{226}\) Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 482.


\(^{228}\) Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 483.
world as existence. For him, the “substance of man is existence.” At the closing remarks of the first part of *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the fundamental structure of human being as one of Care by identifying the human being’s ontological characteristics of “possibilities,” “facticity” and “fallenness.” He affirms that “Dasein’s Being as Care” consists of the threefold structure of Care: first, *Dasein* is “ahead of itself,” which is its quality of possibility; second, *Dasein* is “already in the world,” which is facticity; finally, it is “alongside other entities,” which is its fallenness. In this way, it is only human beings who care about their existence and its meaning; so they alone exist.

Consequently, Heidegger argues that human being is not one of the many things existing in the world but the only reality that understands that it exists. He states that man’s “understanding of being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s being.” Thus, the human being’s distinctiveness is that it is ontological. Heidegger’s designation of man as *Existenz* distinguishes human being from other entities. He argues that “whereas mountains, stars, tables and so on ... participate in being or manifest being, man not only is [like other objects] but has his being disclosed to himself. He exists.” And human existence is always characterised by mimesis, possibility and temporality. Accordingly, *Dasein* is not a mere subject but always occurs in a world in which its being takes on the definite character given within its possible way of being. This world is given along with being

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229 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 255.
233 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 70.
itself. It is not an objectified world in which human lives spatially like other impersonal entities but it is a way of being.

Following Heidegger’s ontological notion of existence, Ricoeur establishes his concept of human being as the paradoxical structure of existence, in contradiction to the certainty of the Cartesian cogito. His analysis extends the Cartesian cogito to a personal body. Ricoeur conceives that the Cartesian cogito, which employs a methodical procedure of suspicion, cannot transform the world of human existence. As against the Cartesian affirmation “I think therefore I exist,” Ricoeur maintains that humans as the existential structure of being can be redescribed and refigured time and again, in confrontation with language. This occurs only when a reflective process “intersects” with the world. But the Cartesian concept of cogito acknowledges the impact of the corporeal body upon the mental processes and actions. As a result, it brings the external reality of the world into the internal mental world. Ricoeur argues that the “ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness,” which the Cartesian cogito makes. He insists that it must “abandon its wish to posit itself” in order to break the vicious circle of the “self’s constant return to itself.”

234 Descartes constructs his notion of cogito based upon his hermeneutic of suspicion. His methodical procedure approaches the existential world and its reality with a sceptical outlook, suspecting everything that could be perceived. Such an approach leads him to doubt the reality of his own world of existence even to the point that a world really exists at all. Nevertheless, he affirms that he cannot suspect that he is thinking. Consequently, he argues that he must exist and must be an existing being in order to think. Hence, he posits that “I think, hence I am.” See Albert G. A. Balz, Descartes and the Modern Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 103.
Ricoeur argues that by breaking from the “sterile circle” of the “self’s constant return to itself,” one can make an entry from the world of objective entities to the world of existence. The Cartesian understanding of a person involves a soul as the subjective existence and a body as the objective existence. But by eliminating the distinction between soul and body, Ricoeur argues that the existence of the soul is impossible without the existence of a body, since the temporality of the soul cannot exist except through embodiment. He states that the “presence of the body” is the “quality of existence.” In this way, he unites the subjective aspect of the soul and the objective aspect of body as integral parts of the single existence. The way of achieving such a state of existence requires that “I must participate actively in my incarnation as a mystery.” It is a mystery because it is a possibility. Participation in one’s own incarnation means thinking about oneself in terms of possessing a body. It also means that one must understand that the process of thinking is controlled by the body. At this point, Ricoeur seeks to restore the “original concord of vague consciousness with its body and its world.”

Ricoeur further views existence as a dialectic of voluntary and involuntary. The essence of such dialectic is “reciprocity.” The reciprocity of the voluntary and the involuntary occurs in a dynamic way. In the voluntary facet of existence, a human being is the active controller of herself by means of intelligent choices and volitional qualities, while in the involuntary

dimension of existence the thinking being is subjected to the inevitable temporal conditions of existence. In the former, one has active control of oneself whereas in the latter, there are things that surpass one’s own control. Ricoeur sees this as a constant conflict between the conscious and the unconscious, the voluntary and the involuntary. Thus his hermeneutic anthropology is constantly concerned about addressing the ontological struggle of existence. This is a constant conflict of human being, within the structure of existence. It is a conflict within the creative process of figuring out one’s own possibilities between freedom and contingency, between will and passions, and between good and evil. The intersection between voluntary and involuntary is the locus where existence shows itself. A self identifies and chooses its life by struggling through the conscious and unconscious tensions of the will and passions.

Ricoeur maintains that Husserl did not understand the nature of voluntary and involuntary. Unlike Husserl, Ricoeur acknowledges the mind-body relations, their mutual functions and their radical distinctiveness. He argues that there is a single will and many passions. Based upon the Husserlian notion that consciousness is the awareness of certain things, he affirms that all willing is willing to act. He describes the voluntary as a kind of act that consists of the triple components of “choice,” “motion,” and “consent.” Hence: “To say I will means first ‘I decide,’ second, ‘I move my body,’ third ‘I consent.” When one decides something, the object of that person’s volition is a project to be enacted. This is “a project I form ... to be

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244 Ricoeur, Freedom and Nature, 6.
done by me in accord with my abilities.” Further, Ricoeur maintains that the three dimensions of the voluntary constantly confront three dimensions of the involuntary. First, one’s decision, which is part of the voluntary, stands inseparably linked not only with the project to be acted but also with the “motives that justify it.” There are involuntary reasons behind every decision, reasons which Ricoeur labels “motivation.” Second, a person’s movement in response to the decision is controlled not exclusively by the voluntary but also by the involuntary. This indicates that every choice carried out in action is accomplished by the control of mind and the sub-consciously existing habitual patterns of acting. Though there are other ways of doing something, one chooses the means of action from the psychologically existing patterns of behaviour. Finally, by a person’s consent, she gives herself to something other than herself and over which she has no control: Ricoeur calls this necessity. In sum, the voluntary choice is confronted by involuntary motivations; the voluntary physical movement is tempered by involuntary movements; and the voluntary consent is confronted by involuntary contingency.

Ricoeur’s concern here is not the nature of the holistic unity of human existence but the way the human body makes existence possible. His point seems to be simply that consciousness is not the quality of the body, although it is found existing in the material body. An existence based upon the Cartesian cogito (subjective existence) is not possible without the presence of a body (objective existence). It is also clear that, for Ricoeur, the objective existence is not possible without the union of the subjective existence. This leads him to unite subjective and objective existence together in a holistic theory of existence.

Ricoeur’s notion of existence as a constant conflict of voluntary and involuntary also presupposes the possibility of dual results. The attainment of a projected existence is possible only if a person chooses herself and surpasses herself by embracing the possibility. Here one must rise out of actuality to the possible by an act of will, as Nietzsche emphasized. But if a person fails to choose herself in this way, she loses the possibility of her own existence in the midst of other entities. This marks one of Ricoeur’s important appropriations of Heidegger: the distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence. In Being and Time, Heidegger distinguishes between “authentic existence” and “inauthentic existence.” For him, authentic existence means that one must envisage the world in terms of possibilities, and one must recognize a responsibility to choose those possibilities. Contrarily, in inauthentic existence, Dasein is absorbed in the immediate concerns of this world. Here one envisages oneself merely as one of the entities in the actual world, repudiating the responsibility to create one’s own world of possibility. Heidegger sees such inauthentic existence as
a continuous “alienation and self-entangling of Dasein from its genuine possibilities.”

Accordingly, not only there is a distinction between existence and world, but also a distinction between two modes of existence. This notion of existence has had a remarkable impact on theological discourse through the work of Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann affirms that reality is twofold: on the one hand, it involves the world, which consists of the actual entities of nature; and on the other hand, it incorporates the reality of human beings, the radical possibility to become. Only existence consists of possibility and freedom. Bultmann also argues that the New Testament indicates two possible ways of existence in the world. One is an authentic existence, which corresponds to the biblical concept of faith in God. Here an individual takes responsibility to choose the possibility of being in Christ. Christ made this authentic life possible and available through the kerygma. In contrast, inauthentic existence is characterized by an individual’s conformity to the patterns of this world. By ignoring the possibilities of new life in Christ, one remains trapped in the world of actuality.

It seems in this context that Ricoeur’s analysis of human existence as a holistic – if conflicted – unity of voluntary and involuntary provides a corrective to the accounts of Heidegger and Bultmann. It can provide a correction to them not only in terms of a theological understanding of

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existence as redeemed life, as Bultmann affirms, but also as a constant reciprocity of authentic and inauthentic within the single subject. For Heidegger, the distinction lies between two different kinds of subject: the existence of the conscious subjects that see life in terms of their possibilities and the other conscious subjects that exist along with unconscious entities of the order of nature. But for Ricoeur, the authentic and the inauthentic distinction lies within the subject itself. It is not a constant conflict between two different subjects, but an inner conflict within one subject – within one authentic existence.

This can be further developed through the Pauline lament in Romans 7:15-19. Paul articulates his inner conflict: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate ... For I know that nothing good dwells within me ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” Through a dialectic exposition of this passage, Barth argues that no mode of human existence is “competent” or authentic; there is only a perpetual “conflict between the spirit and flesh.”

Human existence is a state in which “I stand betwixt and between, dragged hither by my desires” and “thither by my inability.” This is not an opposition between an authentic subject and another inauthentic subject: “I am intolerably both at once.” Arguing against the interpretation of this text as a portrayal of Paul’s situation before conversion, Barth contends that here “Paul describes his

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253 Barth, *Romans*, 261.
254 Barth, *Romans*, 265.
past, present and future existence.” According to Barth, Paul’s description aims at a human being whose existence is “broken into two.” Thus Paul is “thrust into a dualism which contradicts itself” forever. Like Paul and Barth, Ricoeur’s notion of authentic existence consists of authentic and inauthentic existence at once, as conflicting constituents of a single subject.

But if human being is a constant becoming-in-conflict, how can a person whose being is in the process of becoming understand her own existence in the temporal world? Is it human self-understanding that leads to the possibility of human identity? Ricoeur answers this question in the affirmative. In his view, one must overcome the limit that mortality places upon existence. He sees mortality not merely as a limit but as an existential dynamism, a structure that enables the attainment of self-understanding.

5.2.3. Realistic Mortality: Temporal-Eternal Circularity

It is in the second part of Being and Time that Heidegger addresses the issue of one’s grasping of oneself as the unity of human being in terms of its “being-a-whole.” Heidegger affirms that one gains the understanding of one’s own authentic possibilities as one grasps the totality of Dasein’s existence. Here the existential interpretation of death has a unifying function. Heidegger argues that death, as a reality that stands before a human being, is the ultimate and certain possibility. It is the “possibility of

255 Barth, Romans, 270.
256 Barth, Romans, 270.
no longer being-able-to-be-there."²⁵⁷ One must appropriate this ultimate possibility as one’s own highest possibility. This means Dasein must constantly anticipate mortality and recognize the intrinsic limit of mortality upon existence – which means understanding the “possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all.”²⁵⁸

So self-understanding is important for Heidegger because the notion of the wholeness of being emerges from this awareness of the ultimate human possibility of mortality. One can grasp one’s own existence in its totality only from the standpoint of its end. Mortality is an inevitable possibility of being and this is a possibility that one cannot share with others. Thus, Heidegger’s understanding of authentic existence, which provides a person with self-understanding and identity must be grasped by viewing the beginning of a being from its end. The totality of existence stands marked by one’s own birth and death. Hence Heidegger’s notion of authentic existence is characterised by a (rather hopeless) sense of anticipation, a “Being-toward-death” and a sense of “resoluteness.” Here the totality of existence emerges out of an “anticipatory resoluteness” which “projects itself not upon random possibilities” but upon the “uttermost possibility” of being, which is the finality of human existence.²⁵⁹ This sense of the importance of the totality of human existence as a way of understanding existence leads Heidegger to reinterpret the notion of existence in terms of temporality in the later part of Being and Time. He argues that Dasein can be “ahead of itself” because of its “ontological future”; it can “already be in

²⁵⁷ Heidegger, Being and Time, 294.
²⁵⁸ Heidegger, Being and Time, 307.
²⁵⁹ Heidegger, Being and Time, 349-450.
the world” because of its “ontological past”; and it can be “alongside entities” because of its “ontological present.”

It is on the basis of this Heideggerian understanding of the totality of existence as providing human self-understanding that Ricoeur begins his analysis of mortality not as the intrinsic limit to authentic human existence but as a temporal-eternal circularity: a passage that mediates temporality into eternity and eternity into temporality. Even though he draws on Heidegger’s idea of totality, Ricoeur does not see Heidegger’s analysis of mortality as satisfactory, since, he argues, Heidegger does not have any room for the possibility of hope. And hope, for Ricoeur, is the basis for all that is humanly possible. As a result, Ricoeur first establishes a realistic understanding of human mortality in terms of hope and then moves to constructing a philosophy of totality as a means to human self-understanding and identity through the medium of narrativity. Here hope becomes more hopeful; human possibility becomes more possible; mortality becomes immortal; temporality becomes eternally temporal; and existence becomes unlimited.

Ricoeur argues that authentic existence is not merely oscillating between birth and death. The totality that brings self-understanding is not marked between the event of being born and passing away; it must be understood in terms of a never-ending circularity of birth and death. He argues that “to be born is to ascend from death to life and to die is to descend from life to

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260 Heidegger, Being and Time, 383-385.
The event of being born presupposes the event of death, and the event of death implies the event of being born. When a baby is born into the existential world, she is also dying from the world of her mother’s womb. And as she is being born into a particular phase of life, she is also dying to the previous phase of life. So also, when a person dies from the existential world of her being, she is dying from here to be born in another phase of life. Ricoeur sees this circularity occurring in the existential world of human being. “The soul of the sleeping wakes and the soul of the waking sleeps.” Here he suggests that the soul and the body have “inverse possibilities, which conceal each other.” The soul is the witness of the existential possibilities of the other world, which are concealed while human beings are awake in this life, but such realistic possibilities are “revealed in dreams, ecstasies, love and death.”

Consequently, Ricoeur argues that the circularity of life and death and their “inverted values” provide the “body-tomb a fullness of meaning.” This circularity makes human existence an “eternal relapse” in which existence is “propagating itself from one life to the other: from a life to a death, and from a death to a life.” For Ricoeur, the soul is not temporal but “it comes from elsewhere,” and it is not human and mortal but “divine.” In the present life, it runs an “occult existence,” which is the existence of an “exiled being that longs for its liberation” because it is imprisoned by a

266 Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 286.
mortal body.²⁶⁸ He even suggests that human beings must not be described as mortals but as gods, and that true wisdom consists in “recognizing oneself as divine.”²⁶⁹ Thus, he is aiming to demolish the “ontic difference” between gods who kept “immortality for themselves” and human beings who are consigned to mortality.²⁷⁰

But Ricoeur does not understand this “divinity of the soul” in the usual religious sense. This “divinity” is the soul’s “capacity for its survival,” its existential “way to being surpassed” beyond mortality.²⁷¹ The divine soul is a soul that can “escape from the alterations of life and death, which is the “wheel of birth and rebirth.”²⁷² He maintains that it is a “new understanding of the self,” in which the human soul as the “counterpale of the life-death pair, outlasts the time of repetition.”²⁷³ This imaginative cycle of life and death suggests a sort of “carrying forward of the self beyond” itself.²⁷⁴ In this way, the “soul of man is immortal,” to the extent that its existence is not trapped between birth and death but occurs in a cycle of existential possibility. In this possibility, “I am an immortal god, and no longer a mortal.”²⁷⁵ This is the similar thread of argument that Ricoeur develops in his last work Living Up To Death. Here, he analyses the subject of mortality not only from the perspective of one’s own death but also from the viewpoint of one’s experience of witnessing another’s dying. He argues that

²⁶⁸ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 287.
²⁶⁹ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 287.
²⁷⁰ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 288.
²⁷¹ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 288.
²⁷² Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 289.
²⁷³ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 289.
²⁷⁴ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 289.
²⁷⁵ Ricoeur, Symbolism of Evil, 304.
the notion of life beyond mortality originated in the consciousness of one’s own mortality posthumously resonating in the survivors.  

Ricoeur’s notion of circularity beyond temporality is close to Jürgen Moltmann’s theological account of the soul and mortality. In his work *In the End – The Beginning*, Moltmann argues that the life from mortality to immortality is the “sphere of knowledge that sustains existence” beyond temporality.  

He maintains that the human soul is immortal: so it cannot die, neither can mortality kill it. The soul cannot die because it was not born. For Moltmann, then, “the soul’s after death is also its life before birth for its eternal life is beyond the birth and death of life.”  

Moltmann’s notion of immortality operates in a theistic way. He argues that mortal human beings are immortal and their perishable life remains imperishable only through God. “We experience our life as temporal and mortal. But as God experiences it our life is eternally immortal.” Moltmann illustrates this through what he calls “The Golgotha Catastrophe.”  

As the divine logos, Jesus is with God and truly God; but he dies from his original state of being to be born in this existential world, a world that, as historical and temporal, cannot contain his eternity. Similarly, on the cross he dies from this existential world to be born into the spiritual world of God, which is eternal. Here is the circularity of life and death. Moltmann sees this as an “eschatological event,” in which “God’s future has acquired potency over

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277 Moltmann, Margaret Kohl (trans.), *In the End – The Beginning* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 102.
278 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 104.
279 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 104.
280 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 45.
Consequently, Moltmann argues that a human being can “look beyond the grave and death into the future of God.” The eternality of life and the immortality of the soul do not merely express the “length of life in terms of time” but an eternal quality of life. A “fulfilled moment,” Moltmann says, “is like an atom of eternity.” Immortality is a possibility of existence. It is in this way that temporality enters into eternality and that immortality exists under the conditions of mortality.

Like Ricoeur, Moltmann’s attempt of mediating eternity to temporality and stretching temporality to eternity can be further clarified if this idea of eternal-temporal circularity is construed through the concepts of time and eternity in Barth and Augustine. Barth maintains that eternity breaks into temporality in the form of God’s revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus Jesus Christ’s temporal being with humans as the revelation of God is the “temporal presence” of God’s eternity. The revelation of God operates as the means of mediating eternity to temporality which Barth understands as “the Word became time.” In this way, eternity reorganizes temporality as incarnation brings eternity to temporal experience. In contrast, Augustine stresses an eschatological notion of time in which temporality stretches to eternity. He sees this as a frame of reflection in which his faith is directed toward eternity, by which temporality ultimately enters into the eternity of

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281 Moltmann, In the End – The Beginning, 47.
282 Moltmann, In the End – The Beginning, 130.
283 Moltmann, In the End – The Beginning, 153.
284 Moltmann, In the End – The Beginning, 153.
286 Barth, Church Dogmatics vol. 1: 13-15, 51.
Both these viewpoints — Barth and Augustine — can be brought together into one paradigm of Ricoeur’s eternal-temporal circularity.

In one sense, the analyses of Ricoeur and Moltmann nullify the possibility of any understanding of the self in terms of Heideggerian self-understanding, since mortality is no longer a limit to existence but a circular passage that opens more possibility by connecting existence to eternity. In Heidegger’s terms, the human capacity for immortality means that no totality of existence can ever be achieved. The total attainment of self-understanding seems impossible if existence is unlimited. Besides, although the existential possibility is limitless, the temporal-eternal and eternal-temporal circularity is not dynamic and regulative but is merely connected through mortality. The totality of self-understanding is possible only if the circularity is made dynamic and functional in the sense that eternity flow into temporality and temporality enters into eternity without interruption. It is at this point that Ricoeur insists that humans must “call upon the experience to surpass itself by moving in the direction of eternity”\(^\text{288}\) to attain total understanding of existence. This idea of self-understanding will be explored in the next section.


\(^{288}\) Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1, 22.
5.3. Self-Understanding: The Totality of Realistic Temporality

The sense of the impossibility of attaining an understanding of the totality of existence dissatisfies the theologian Paul Tillich. He maintains that God alone is the ultimate Being and the “Ground Being.” Tillich characterizes the world of temporality and human existence as an absence of wholeness. For him, existence signifies “standing out of non-being.” The actual world of existence is existentially split, since human existence is in no way one with the being in totality. Tillich argues that God, as “Being itself,” is God because nothing else is in the same way as God in perfection, holism, and wholeness of being. Thus, Tillich describes existence in terms of a relative dualism of being in which the divine being is in a state of totality and wholeness and the human being is in a state of neither totality nor perfection. Authentic human existence becomes complete only by entering into and drawing from the wholeness of the total being, the “ground of being.”

This is why Ricoeur and Moltmann insist that human being and temporality must enter into the divine being and eternity, and divine being and eternity must break into human being and temporal existence by overcoming the limit of mortality. As Ricoeur puts it, the “theme of distension and intention acquires ... the mediation on eternity and time as intensification” of the mind, constantly stretching backward and forward through attention. This

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291 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 30.
will also make the temporal-eternal and eternal-temporal circularity dynamic and functional in the sense that eternity may freely flow into temporality and temporality may enter eternity without obstruction.

5.3.1. Realistic Temporality: Eternality of Temporality

Ricoeur affirms that temporality contains eternality in its very order of existence and that temporality inherently refers beyond itself to eternity. It refers both to the eternity lying behind and the eternity lying in front of temporal existence. For him, the argument that time “no longer refers to eternity” shows the “ontological deficiency characteristic of human time,” while also “deepening” temporality. This makes temporality much more than temporal: it becomes temporally eternal.

Theologically, it is Moltmann who argues that the human soul itself is an indication of eternality in temporality. He argues that Christian hope leads human beings to the Kingdom of God that comes from God to be on earth. Both the Kingdom and the human soul are the “angels who belong to heaven” but reside on earth under temporal conditions. Human beings have come from the earth and belong to earth and “do so in both time and eternity.” As heaven is open for temporal human beings, so also the temporal is open for the eternal. Thus the Kingdom “lives with the earth and

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292 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 5.
293 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 30.
it is only on earth that human beings can seek the Kingdom of God.” In short, eternality is contained in temporality.

The prime example for this is the person of Jesus Christ: God in the form of a human being. As a divine being, he is God who inhabits eternity. He not only broke into humanity, which is part of temporality, but also accommodated himself to be contained by a human existence, comprised by a human soul and a corporeal body. He continues in the same way forever. Thus the temporal body-and-soul of Jesus contained the eternal Logos and the divine-human union of the person of Jesus existed in the temporal world. And it might be added that there is nothing under temporal conditions in which there is no eternality dwelling. No wonder Moltmann exclaimed: “Then in all created beings, the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily.” Eternity breaking in and residing in temporality makes temporality more than itself. As Ricoeur puts it: “temporality possessing eternality deepens temporality and time.”

5.3.2. Realistic Eternity: Temporalness of Eternity

Ricoeur not only affirms that eternality exists within temporality but he also argues that eternity possesses temporality as its essential component. By reintroducing his mediation on eternity, he presents an “intensification of

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298 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 30.
the experience of time."²⁹⁹ Ricoeur argues that “time is in the soul” and the soul is eternal. Therefore, time exists in eternity. Analysing the biblical creation narratives, he argues that faith in the cosmic entities as created through the divine Word implies that God did not create things in the same way that an artist creates from pre-existing things. It was not in the universe that God created because until creation there was no place called “universe.” This is the substance of creatio ex nihilo. Here the “original nothingness,” which is eternal in its nature and being, does not exclude God’s being but “strikes time with an ontological deficiency” because creation begins and ends.³⁰⁰ The God who is eternal begins to create and ends his act of creation. How could a God whose being is eternal have ever begun to create if time and temporality had not been present in him? God’s capability of beginning and ending the work of creation, which are the essential components of temporality, indicates that temporality was intrinsically present in God and eternity. This also explains how God could have had the temporal potential for temporal things that he created. As Ricoeur asks: “how can a temporal creature be made in and through the eternal word?”³⁰¹ For him, this is impossible if the potential of temporality was not already latent in eternity. Hence, “Eternity, in this sense, is no less a source of enigmas than is time.”³⁰² And as God is the beginning and ending within himself, he is capable of participating in the eternal-temporal and temporal-eternal circularity.

²⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 1, 5.
³⁰⁰ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 1, 24.
³⁰¹ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 1, 24.
³⁰² Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 1, 24.
Again, Ricoeur’s view here is close to Moltmann’s theological account of the possibility of temporality in eternity. Moltmann affirms the future of eternity even though he is aware of the various theological traditions that distinguished between time and eternity, the time of this world and the time of the other world. He sees the time of this world as chronological time and the time of the other world as “aeonic time,” and argues that in the structure of aeonic time, one can see the “cycles of time,” which are a “reflection of eternity.” This is a “circle” that has no beginning and no end. Eternal life means one uninterruptedly participating in the eternity of God. Moltmann argues that since this human participation in divine eternity brings human corporeal life “eternal livingness,” then the “time of this eternity is no longer irreversible time.” Rather, it is the “reversible time of the circling movement which sets life permanently in the mode of duration.” In this way one can speak of a life that lasts forever, of timeless time, and of a beginning without ending.

Theologically, it can also be argued that it is this transitory and earthly life which is going to be translated to eternal and celestial life. The raising of the corporeal into the eternal also affirms the possibility of eternity accommodating temporality into itself. Christ’s temporality was transformed into eternal temporality when he ascended to glory, just as he was transformed from eternal to temporal in the incarnation. Eternity is temporal and temporality is eternal. At the same time, eternity and

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303 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 159.
304 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 159.
305 Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning*, 160.
temporality remain distinct: temporality is qualitatively eternal and quantitatively temporal, governed by a temporal pattern. Eternity is qualitatively temporal and quantitatively eternal, ruled by God’s eternal time. As a result, human temporality is eternally temporal and temporally eternal. Here the circularity is dynamic and functional. The human possibility that gives rise to self-understanding is temporal-eternal and eternal-temporal.

But still, at this point, human self-understanding of a totality seems impossible as a present reality. It cannot be grasped as a present reality as long as the limit placed upon human understanding by the temporal nature of time – time as past and future – is not resolved.

5.3.3. Realistic Totality: Temporal-Eternal Totality

By maintaining human temporality as eternal and divine eternity as temporal, Ricoeur affirms that human self-understanding as a temporal-eternal totality is a present possibility. A totality of human self-understanding and the possibility of identity are attainable here and now. Identity is existentially and ontologically available for human life, even though the totality involves eternity. As a contrast, here, it is beneficial to bring Wolfhart Pannenberg’s eschatological understanding of totality into the discussion. Pannenberg maintains an eschatological notion of the totality of human existence by emphasizing the primacy of the future. The totality is
at the end of all temporal processes and historical consummations; the totality of the true nature of human existence is disclosed and understood at the end.\textsuperscript{309} Here totality as the basis of human self-understanding is possible only at the eschatological end of everything that exists – just as, for Heidegger, the totality is possible only from the vantage point of death.

Pannenberg’s notion is eschatological because he argues that the “totality of existence is possible only from the standpoint of its future.”\textsuperscript{310} The “future and possible wholeness belong together”\textsuperscript{311} and the future of objects determines their true nature. Here, the future dimension of time has primacy over the past and the present. The past and the present make sense only because of the future. Thus the total understanding of the true nature of human being and existence is “determined by its future.”\textsuperscript{312} Accordingly, human self-understanding and identity are “not yet completely present in the process of time.”\textsuperscript{313} Rather, “everything that exists is what it is only as the anticipation of its future” and “it is what it is always in anticipation of its end and from its end.”\textsuperscript{314} As a result, for Pannenberg, “the totality of our lives is hidden from us ... because our future is still ahead of us.”\textsuperscript{315} So the totality, which is supposed to be a basis for human identity, lies in an inaccessible future. Thus Pannenberg concludes that the total understanding of human existence is decided by the future of God’s eternity, which is

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\textsuperscript{310} Pannenberg, \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God}, 78.
\textsuperscript{311} Pannenberg, \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God}, 86.
\textsuperscript{312} Pannenberg, \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God}, 87.
\textsuperscript{313} Pannenberg, \textit{Metaphysics and the Idea of God}, 104.
\end{footnotesize}
unattainable here and now because everything that exists receives from God “its true and definitive identity” only at the end of its existence.\textsuperscript{316} This clearly indicates that human self-understanding as a totality cannot be attained in this life. One must wait until the end of everything to truly understand oneself and to form a reliable sense of identity. But self-understanding and self-identity are necessary components of meaningful life here and now, rather than in the eternal world. It is in exactly this way that theology – with its fixation on the future – often fails to provide a meaningful account of human existence here and now.

However, the advantage of Pannenberg’s proposal is his attempt to connect temporality to God’s eternity by eradicating the ultimate limit that mortality places upon human existence as maintained by Heidegger. By doing this, he provides a theological correction to the Heideggerian notion of mortality as the most authentic possibility from which humans must achieve self-understanding and identity. To this extent, Pannenberg and Ricoeur agree. Nevertheless, Pannenberg’s theology of eschatological totality fails in two ways. First, his concept of totality seems to be moving in the same direction as Heidegger, in the sense that it is future-oriented and anticipatory. Heidegger maintained that one must be in constant anticipation of mortality. As one exists here and now, one must stand at the end point in order to understand oneself from that point. Pannenberg has simply moved Heidegger’s point from death to God’s eternity: he has kept the Heideggerian system intact, but what Heidegger called “death” he calls “eternal life.” Second, by making totality an end-event, only attainable after

\textsuperscript{316}Pannenberg, \textit{Systematic Theology} vol. 3, 603.
temporality and history, Pannenberg’s concept of theological totality fails to address the issue of human self-understanding and identity as essential constituents of meaningful human existence here and now. It is at this juncture that Ricoeur’s notion of the temporal-eternal totality proves to be fruitful for theological reflection. For in Ricoeur’s view, the totality is not an inaccessible metaphysical idea, but a means to real self-understanding and identity.

As temporality consists of eternality and eternity consists of temporality, Ricoeur argues that in eternity there is no past and future but only the present, which determines both past and future. Unlike Pannenberg’s future-orientation, Ricoeur emphasizes the primacy of the present over the past and the future. Summarizing Augustine’s view of time, he argues that eternity is “forever still” in contrast to things that are “never still.” This stillness lies in the fact that “in eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present.” This is where Ricoeur’s concept of a “threefold present,” in which totality is a result of a convergence, must be compared “neither with past nor future” but with a temporal-eternal present. He contends that no action takes place in the past, neither in the future, but every action is performed in the present. Hence, the present is the only time of action, and so resembles the nature of eternity here and now.

317 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative vol. 1, 30.
318 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative vol. 1, 25.
319 Ricoeur, Time and Narrative vol. 1, 25.
Ricoeur borrows his phenomenological notion of time from Augustine’s theory of time, which was also later developed by Husserl and Heidegger. Augustine’s concept of time consists of a paradoxical notion. He argues that time comprised of past, present and future does not exist because it cannot exist. The past does not exist because it is already gone and it is not happening now. The future does not exist because it has not yet happened and it is not yet here. The present does not exist because it does not last; it is a vanishing point that is always slipping away towards the past and the future. Most importantly, the present time lacks extension. As soon as one expresses the term “now,” it has already gone into the past. It is an infinitely and inaccessibly small point. Thus, for Augustine, the present does not exist; time never exists in the strict sense. Yet, paradoxically, we are always aware that there really is some indefinable thing called “past,” “present” and “future.”

Ricoeur offers his proposal of the threefold present of time as a psychological-philosophical solution to the Augustinian paradox. Unlike Augustine, Ricoeur argues that time exists: it exists in the human mind. The past exists as human memory and history. The future exists as human anticipation and projects. The present exists as human attention and consciousness. Here the past and the future exist in the present; and only if the present exists, then the past and the future exist. This is one of the reasons why Ricoeur mediated temporality to eternity through mortality rather than disconnecting it from eternity by death. Death never stops the

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320 Augustine, Henry Chadwick (trans.), Confessions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Book XI.
possibility of the present. Accordingly, the human mind must stretch in order to comprehend the past and the future within the domain of the present. It is at this point that Ricoeur overcomes the Augustinian problem of the present lacking extension. Ricoeur posits a continuous stretching of the present by the memory of the past and the expectation of the future. Thus the present, which is attention, consists of a combination of the past and the future. In this combination, memory is the recollection of what was possible in the past and anticipation is the expectation of what will be possible in the future. The present is the container of them all. As a result, Ricoeur can speak of the present of the past, the present of the future, and the present of the present.  

Ricoeur argues that this is a “total mediation,” a “network of inter-weaving of perspectives” in which the “expectation of the future,” “the reception of the past,” and “the experience of the present” are merged together into a totality where “reason in history and its reality would coincide” in the present. For him, there is “dialectic of the past and the future and their exchanges in the present.” Here Ricoeur is pulling the past and the future into the point at which the “present reduces to presence.” So the present projects and reflects what was humanly possible and what is going to be humanly possible. It is the mirror in which one sees human possibility stretched out through time. It is this total possibility that unfolds who and what a person totally is. In this way, the present is the presence of the past, of the future and of the present.

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321 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, 60.  
322 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, 207.  
324 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, 208.
Here Ricoeur is pushing the past to the future by organizing it under the category of “becoming a being affected”\textsuperscript{325} and pushing the future to the past by making the present a “time of initiative.”\textsuperscript{326} Thus, for Ricoeur, the past consists of future, the future consists of the past, and the present consists of both past and future. The present – by becoming no present but the presence of past and future – can have totality of being, not only in the sense of temporal totality but also in terms of the temporal-eternal and eternal-temporal totality. This totality is precisely what is present in the present. The totality, which is comprised of what was always possible and what will be always possible, directly occurs in the individual whose mental process of attention is the container of the presence of the totality. This means that the totality comes to the human being, and the totality that comes is the self-understanding and the self-identity of the person. This is why Ricoeur claims: “I attain self-understanding when I grasp the range of my possibilities.”\textsuperscript{327}

Therefore Ricoeur argues that the understanding of the present as the presence of the totality “bridges the abyss that opens up between eternal verbum and the temporal vox.”\textsuperscript{328} Crucially, the understanding of totality and the attainment of self-understanding are really a question of understanding the “relations between eternity and time.”\textsuperscript{329} Moreover, Ricoeur’ notion of totality as self-understanding is both concordant and discordant. It is concordant in the sense that temporality is eternal and discordant.

\textsuperscript{325}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 3, 207.
\textsuperscript{326}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 3, 208. This concept of Ricoeur has extensively been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{327}Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory}, 37.
\textsuperscript{328}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 1, 29.
\textsuperscript{329}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 1, 5.
eternity is temporal as circularity. At the same time it gives an account of
the discordance that exists between temporal and eternal, between creatures
and God, because the eternality that exists in temporality is limited and
regulated by temporality. Similarly, the temporality that exists in eternity is
also limited and regulated by eternity. Thus totality is a paradox of
temporal-eternal and eternal-temporal self-understanding that shapes human
identity.

In this way, hope provides a basis for realistic temporality through its
constituents: passion seeks to find what is humanly possible; creative
imagination strengthens it; and the dimensions of time reorient it in the
world. And existence offers a structural form to realistic temporality: being
stands as a constant possibility; existence remains as a radical conflict
within the subject; and death paves the way beyond temporal possibilities to
eternal possibilities. Self-knowledge functions as the total possibility of
temporality. Temporality and eternality are mediated to the present,
providing a self with an understanding of its own total possibility, which
eventually results in forming that person’s self-identity. As the self
understands itself in terms of its possibilities, it also interprets itself anew.
Self-interpretation arises from, and returns to, self-identity. Temporal
totality gives rise to identity.
Chapter Six

Conclusion: Temporal Identity

The vision of total possibility provides self-understanding. As the self understands itself through its possibilities, it also reads itself and its possibilities. By exploring Ricoeur’s concept of identity in this final chapter, I shall demonstrate how one can form a sense of identity based upon self-understanding and shall describe what such an identity looks like. I will show how temporal identity arises from the notion of “totality,” and how, for Ricoeur, a good life is a life worthy of being narratively composed. This narrative activity is an unending process; identity is never finished. Finally, I will argue that textual linguistic theology culminates here, in the concept of an unending search for human identity.

6.1. Temporal Identity: Narrative Ethics

Ricoeur maintains that identity arises out of the “temporal totality,” which is the basis of self-knowledge. This temporal totality does not merely signify a complete vision of what is temporally possible for human life, but, as seen in the last chapter, it is a vision of the totality of possibility that can be attained here and now. This happens when the present becomes the presence of the total human possibility. For Ricoeur, identity consists of one’s grasping and being able to tell of her life as a whole. Here, identity is considered to be a total life – a life which can be retold. This is why Ricoeur
argues that human identity emerges as an “identity of temporal totality rather than one of logic.”\(^1\) Identity as a temporal totality signifies a narrative of total life. Here the self informed by the presence of the totality is not “egoistical” and “narcissistic” but is simply the “self of self-knowledge,” and the “fruit of an examined life.” Life itself is “purged” and “clarified” by the “cathartic effects of the narratives.”\(^2\)

The fundamental process that gives rise to the formation of identity is a process of receptive reading and interpretation. Here the function of interpretation is not only reading literary works but also reading lives as texts. As reading and interpretive process are keys to understanding, self-reading and self-interpreting are essential to self-identity. In this way, it is “within the framework of the struggle between the text and the reader”\(^3\) that the sense of identity emerges.

Drawing from Hans Robert Jauss’s categories of *poiesis*, *aisthesis*, and *catharsis*,\(^4\) Ricoeur argues that the aesthetic pleasure arising from the reception of the totality must go beyond the aesthetic experience to a cathartic experience, which is “more moral than aesthetic.” It is here that “new evaluations, hitherto unheard of norms, are proposed by the works, confronting or shaking current customs.”\(^5\) The cathartic experience is

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\(^2\)Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Trans.), *Time and Narrative* vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 247.
\(^3\)Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen Blamey (trans.), *Ourselves as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 162.
\(^4\)Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 176.
\(^5\)Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 176.
inseparably linked with “reader’s tendency to identify with the hero, and to allow themselves to be guided by the reliable or unreliable narrator.” Thus catharsis consists of this moral capacity to imaginatively transfigure the reader. This is the key aspect of the refiguration that moves the reader from self-understanding produced by imagination to the evaluation of experience by the moral proposals that receptive reading has produced. This implies for Ricoeur that the reader cannot stop at narrative understanding, but must move to an appropriated world in which identity formation takes place. Here the reader is expected to identify with the sense of the text, and to take responsibility in the moment of initiative and action, which is caused by the cathartic effect. The cathartic moment defines one’s identity. This implies that the narrative refiguration transfigures not only the moral dimensions of the reader but also her very subjectivity, as she comes to take responsibility for actions configured by the world of the text.

Consequently, Ricoeur argues, the subject appears “as both a reader and a writer of his own life.” The question, “who am I actually?,” must be answered by telling the “story of a life” that designates a name of the agent of the action. The story thus narrates the action of a particular subject. Answering the issue of “who” by telling the story of a life inevitably raises questions like “who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is telling his or her story”? Thus understanding one’s identity by means of story entails

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7Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 176.
8Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 246.
9Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 139.
11Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 169.
grasping the cohesion of one’s life, though in a way that includes “change [and] mutability within the cohesion of one lifetime.” This is what Ricoeur calls the “narrative interpretation of identity,” which gives rise to the “narrative unity of life.” Here the idea of gathering together one’s life in the form of a narrative becomes the basis of ethics.

Such ethical identity is the outcome of the retrospective, introspective and prospective dimensions of narrative. The subject of moral action emerges by “looking backward in the direction of the practical field and ahead in the direction of the ethical field.” Ricoeur argues that “there is no ethically neutral narrative”; rather literature operates as a “vast laboratory” in which narrativity serves as a “propaedeutic to ethics.” Ultimately, the human narrative of life can make sense only ethically, since “ethical considerations are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating.” The story produces a moral valuation of the world within which the reader becomes incorporated.

The real point of Ricoeur’s project is evident in the preceding analysis. He maintains that temporal identity is a story of total life, which arises from the self’s grasping of its total possibility of existence. Identity is narrative in quality, in form, and in structure. But by connecting narrative with ethics, Ricoeur provides narrativity with a new significance; the very act of

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14Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 139.
15Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 115.
16Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 115.
17Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 114.
narration produces the moral vision of a good life. It is here that he argues for the “primacy of ethics over morality.”\(^\text{18}\) Moral philosophy as a science of the rules of human behaviour might describe an action good or bad; whereas Ricoeur is concerned about ethics in terms of virtues of life that address the issue of what it means to be a good person in relation to others and the world.

By giving primacy to ethics over morality, Ricoeur comes into sharp contrast with the Kantian approach to morality, in which individual actions are said to be guided by a universal law. Ricoeur draws his notion of ethics from the Aristotelian Nicomachean ethics, in which Aristotle argues that “ethics concerns itself with the good life”\(^\text{19}\) and consists of “all the activities of human life.”\(^\text{20}\) For Aristotle a good life “requires completeness in virtue as well as a complete life time”,\(^\text{21}\) he stresses the vision of the total life. It is the ethics of time and experience as against the morality of duty that Ricoeur employs in *Time and Narrative*. In the context of his analysis of Kant, he argues that Aristotle gave more careful attention than Kant to the “specific structure of practical order,” especially through his reflective process of *phronesis*.\(^\text{22}\)

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\(^{18}\)Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 171.

\(^{19}\)Peter Martyr Vermigli, Joseph C. McLelland (ed.), *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* vol. 9 (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2006), xxiii.

\(^{20}\)Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* vol. 9, xvii.

\(^{21}\)Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* vol. 9, 264.

Ricoeur’s notion of narrative ethics also stands in contrast to Emmanuel Levinas’ claim that “ethics is first philosophy.”\textsuperscript{23} Levinas – another student of Heidegger – posits the “face-to-face relation” as “the most primordial datum in human experience.”\textsuperscript{24} A self truly becomes a self only when it moves out of its “pre-reflective consciousness” in response to another self. As it moves to the other, the self does not seek to project anything on to the other but simply carries out its responsibility. Thus the identity of the self is ultimately the care of other selves.\textsuperscript{25} Here, an ethical stance arises from an absolute moral duty.

In contrast, Ricoeur sees the good life in Aristotelian terms. A good life is life as a totality, life composed into narrative. Here one can see a repeat of Ricoeur’s view of narrative activity, for it is at this point that the “narrative healthy circle” is set in motion in an unending way, such that it never stops “interpreting in terms of each other the temporal form inherent in experience and the narrative structure.”\textsuperscript{26} It prefigures meaningful human experience to be configured and refigured through narrativity; this is what makes human existence intelligible and fresh every time it occurs. In this way, the question of the self and its identity – with its many “reshufflings” – has reached its goal through the “analytic,” “phenomenological” and “hermeneutical” processes.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24}Levinas, \textit{Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings}, 161.
\textsuperscript{25}Emmanuel Levinas, Sean Hand (ed.), \textit{The Levinas Reader} (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 75-86.
\textsuperscript{26}Paul Ricoeur, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Trans.), \textit{Time and Narrative} vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 76.
\textsuperscript{27}Ricoeur, \textit{Oneself as Another}, 113.
Ricoeur's notion of ethics and identity has important implications for a Christian theology of life and identity. Like Ricoeur, theologians have attempted to appropriate Aristotle's idea of life and ethics. For instance, a recent Christian proponent of Aristotle's concept of the good life is Stanley Hauerwas, especially in his work *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*. Hauerwas borrows Aristotle's concept of virtue. But Ricoeur's interpretation is a fuller appropriation of Aristotle's ethics, including Aristotle's understanding of the importance of grasping life in its totality. By providing a critical commentary on Aristotle, Hauerwas appropriates Aristotelian ethics into his theological vision of the good life. He argues for the importance of virtues as the heart of Christian ethics, and provides a distinctively Christian account of the Aristotelian idea of virtues in conversation with modern and secular approaches. He maintains that Aristotle is “more right than wrong about most things having to do with living virtuously,” because for Aristotle ethics is not a mere theory of morality, as for Kant, but is a method of inquiry that “shapes skills necessary for those who would live well.” He contends that the Aristotelian model of life stands in sharp contrast with theoretical paradigms of morality in modernity that commence their discourse from “nowhere”; Aristotle begins from “somewhere,” locating a vision of life in the perspective of narrative and teleology. Hauerwas acknowledges that such a perspective of life is crucial to Christians who believe that God is their creator and sustainer. Even though Hauerwas appropriates Aristotle’s concept of living well in his account of Christian living, he laments Aristotle’s notion of “full life” as the basis for good life. Aristotle argues that a good life consisting of happiness “requires completeness in virtue as

well as a complete life time.” Hauerwas does not seem to appreciate the importance of Aristotle’s idea of completeness; for Hauerwas, the end of one’s life merely “confirms the way they have lived.” Here, Hauerwas seems to be taking the eschatological lead that Heidegger and Pannenberg have taken, which has been extensively discussed in the preceding chapter; this leads him to eliminate one of the most important concepts from the Aristotelian theory. It is precisely here that Ricoeur’s appropriation of Aristotle can provide a clarification to the difficulty faced by any Christian virtue ethics that tries to retain Aristotle’s virtues while discarding his conception of life. Ricoeur sees temporal identity as arising from the vision of total life through the narrative unity of life. Because a story of life as described by Ricoeur never ends with death, a narrative of life can be understood as an eternal-temporal and temporal-eternal circularity in which the presence of the totality occurs as a reality here and now, while the story endlessly continues.

Moreover, it is also important to note that Ricoeur’s notion of human identity not only contributes to a Christian theology of life but might also prove suggestive for thinking about Christian mission: a good and worthy life is a living letter composed, read and interpreted by others. It was Paul who said: “You yourself are our letter, written in your hearts, read and recognized by all people; and you clearly show yourself a letter of Christ, composed by our ministry, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living

29 Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* vol. 9, 264.
30 Hauerwas, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 4.
God.”

Paul’s focal point is the “letters of commendation” that establishes the “credibility” of the “identity and credentials of the bearer.” The Corinthians’ life is considered to be the “test of valid ministry.” The Corinthians’ “changed lives” as a whole function as a document read and interpreted by all. The authority of this living composition is established by giving a reference to God. So, human life can be itself a text, a narrative, a living composition.

It follows then that the narrative of life moves not only into the direction of commendation in terms of bearing witness but most importantly in the direction of mission. As a life of narrative is a living composition, so also it is a missional text that reflects the redemptive life. It was Luke who emphasised Jesus’ promise, “you will be my witnesses.” This phrase does not only signify the believers’ act of bearing witness through proclamation but also indicates that the Christians life itself is a witness: Christians are the authorized representatives and representations of Jesus Christ and his ministry. “Jesus calls the apostles to be the nucleus of the servant community” both in terms of bearing and being witnesses; witness involves not only verbal testimony but also a living “demonstration of spiritual and moral transformation arising from personal commitment to the risen Lord.” Ricoeur’s ethics of temporal identity resonates here with the heart.

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31Bible: 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.
of Christian living as a missional vision of life: a meaningful life which can be read and interpreted by others as a living document.

6.2. Temporal Identity: A Synthetic Identity of Life

Ricoeur identifies several characteristics of temporal identity as integral parts of the identity of total life. First, temporal identity is narrative identity. As discussed in the preceding section, for Ricoeur the self’s identity is impossible without recourse to narration. The self is a life that finds itself by looking beyond the self, for the “self seeks its identity in narrative.”

Ricoeur unites the subjective and objective aspects of the self together through narrative mediation; his analysis of this in Oneself as Another moves beyond his understanding of the self in the earlier works, Freedom and Nature and Time and Narrative. In this later analysis, he argues that the notion of the temporality of the self must provide space for discontinuity and continuity of the self. Discontinuity because the self is subject to change, which takes place in terms of corporeality, experiences, character and personality. But, at the same time, there is continuity because humans are capable of speaking about such change as the same persons over time, even though they have changed considerably. The thing that impresses Ricoeur is this dimension of continuity in discontinuity. The authenticity of such continuity, which also consists of radical discontinuity as its counterpart, cannot be understood without a narrative continuity of life in

37 Ricoeur, Oneself As another, 115.
terms of the narrative unity of life.\textsuperscript{38} As Ricoeur puts it: “the story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful and fictive stories a subject tells about himself or herself. This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told.”\textsuperscript{39} What Ricoeur holds as important is the continuity of a person in time, a “principle of permanence in time.”\textsuperscript{40} He argues that this is how we view photographs of ourselves from earlier periods of life; we perceive the continuity even though this consists of an “ordered series of small changes” that in reality “threaten resemblance without destroying it.”\textsuperscript{41}

The sum of this narrative activity has been demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis. Here I have argued that all divine and human experience is narrative in quality. Narrative produces a distance from the world of experience to a linguistic composition through imaginative configuration. Here the experience comes to language – it becomes a lively experience – through narrativity and it can distance itself again from the narrative through the interpretive process of refiguration. Thus experience comes back to human life to shape and form a sense of narrative identity by providing a vision of the total life, which ultimately is a vision of the identity of the self.

Second, \textit{temporal identity is ontological identity}. Ricoeur argues that the text unfolds a world of possible existence, which is an orientation of the self.

\textsuperscript{38}Ricoeur, \textit{Oneself as Another}, 118.
\textsuperscript{39}Ricoeur, \textit{Time and Narrative}, vol. 3, 246.
\textsuperscript{40}Ricoeur, \textit{Oneself as Another}, 117.
\textsuperscript{41}Ricoeur, \textit{Oneself as Another}, 117.
towards its being in the world. His notion of ontological identity emerges from the intersection at which the world of the text encounters the world of the reader by “confronting or shaking current customs.”  

He argues that “reading appears by turns as an interruption in the [current] course of action and as a new impetus to action … result[ing] directly from its functions of confrontation and connection between the imaginary world of the text and the actual world of readers.”  

An analogous relation is made between the identity of the text and that of readers. This is a context in which the productive imagination of the text is applied to life, which initiates action. Narrative transfiguration reaches its culmination with the initiation of action through the acting subject’s choice and action, which becomes an integral part of the production of one’s ontological identity. Here Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity becomes an ontological possibility only by the reader’s willingness to appropriate new ways of being through interactions with the world of the text.  

A dynamic transition from the world of imaginary possibility of being that the text shows to the genuine moment of identity formation occurs at the act of initiation which begins at the “provocation to be and act differently … [which] is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand.”  

This is the act of “allowing oneself to be appropriated by the figurative possibilities imagined by the … texts that the task of becoming a full self is most adequately performed.”  

Thus identity is not an abstract concept, but is a practical part of being in the world. Identity is existential and ontological.

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42 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 179.
43 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 179.
45 Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 249.
This has been substantiated in the second chapter of this thesis. Ricoeur describes the peculiar nature of the imaginatively projected world of human existence in terms of second-order reference. He argues that the second-order reference speaks about reality more than the actuality of human existence. The autonomy of the text from the burdens of ostensive reference and empirical description can release the textual energy to project meaningful worlds of human possibilities. This is an exclusively human privilege, due to writing: “Thanks to writing, man and only man has a world and not just a situation.”\textsuperscript{47} Here Ricoeur sees the projected world of the text as enriched with human values and existential possibilities. It is a moral world appropriated by an individual. This leads him to state that, “for me, the world is the ensemble of references opened up by every kind of text, descriptive or poetic, that I have read, understood and loved.”\textsuperscript{48} What I read and how I respond to what is being read determines the kind of person I become. Thus what one must seek to understand primarily in a discourse is a “project,” an “outline of a new way of being in the world.”\textsuperscript{49} The interpretive goal of discourse is to disclose a world and reframe the ontological identity of human beings. This process enlarges and transforms the self.

Third, \textit{temporal identity is linguistic identity}. Ricoeur not only maintains that narrative is fundamental to selfhood but also that language is central; he places the human self within the context of language and describes human

\textsuperscript{47}Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning} (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 36.
\textsuperscript{48}Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory}, 37.
\textsuperscript{49}Ricoeur, \textit{Interpretation Theory}, 37.
identity linguistically through a “hermeneutics of the self.” His original turn to language itself evidences his recognition of the value of language as the means of self’s identity in language. He envisages language as the common phenomenon in which the self finds its expression. In this way, he maintains that the human being “is language through and through.”

Not only are human beings “language through and through,” but language itself, for Ricoeur, is “figurative through and through.” This fundamental nature of language as the means of divine and human existence and identity has been analysed in the third chapter of this thesis. Here I have argued that the ontology of being that the text unfolds is ontology of language, and that the ontological language of life is metaphor. This entails that human existence fundamentally and structurally is language, and that the language of metaphor is the only language of existence. Human beings are not only hermeneutical beings but also linguistic beings, and the way of being in the world inevitably is a linguistic way.

Fourth, temporal identity is realistic identity. As identity consists of a narrative of life, it also refers to a personal life, about which the story is being told. For Ricoeur, personal identity must be established by way of establishing self-constancy in life and it must be articulated only in the temporal dimensions of human existence. He conceives character as the

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50Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 4.
52Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 12.
53Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 114.
basis for self-constancy and freedom as the realization of that character. Character “designates the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized;” it is character that allows us to recognise persons. Nevertheless, as a person develops over a period of time, there is a puzzling relationship between continuity and discontinuity. Persons change corporeally, morally and temperamentally. But at the same time, they continue to be the same persons. Ricoeur argues that the ways in which one changes reflect an identity of sameness expressed in *ipse*; and one’s continuous bearing of the same proper name to speak about the same subject is an identity of sameness understood as *idem*.

Consequently, in order for a person to have a complete personhood she must have both qualities of identity, which Ricoeur sees converging in character. Accordingly, character consists of a dual disposition. First, it involves habit that “gives a history to character” and functions as a means by which a person can be identified. Second, it is comprised of a “set of acquired identifications” by which the “other enters into the compositions of the same.” Self-constancy understood in terms of character involves other persons than the self. The dynamic transition from *idem* to *ipse* is the transition from what I am to who I am through a narrative mediation. This implies that Ricoeur’s personal identity is not purely personal but interpersonal; it is realistic because it must be imaginatively, linguistically and narratively innovated, redescribed and oriented in the world of existence of other beings.

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54 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 121.
55 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 165.
56 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 121.
57 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 121.
This is what I have argued for in the fourth chapter. As language constitutes human being and existence, that language of life is figurative. As much as the language of metaphor is the language of divine and human life, so also it is the language of reality. As it is the language of reality, it shapes the very nature of reality and mediates it. The reality mediated through language must be innovated, and that innovated reality in turn redescribes existential being. I have argued that by means of new meanings and innovated reality, metaphorical language ontologically opens up the field of the possible in order to expand the real and re-describe the real as an existential possibility of being.

Lastly, temporal identity is holistic identity. It is holistic in the sense that it encompasses all that is ethical and moral. Identity as a narrative of life arises out of the vision of the total possibility of being. In the same way, identity involves all that concerns the self: particularly other selves. The way in which personal identity breaks out of being personal to be interpersonal is an indication that Ricoeur’s notion of ethics is not only ethical but also moral. He argues that narrative identity gives rise to moral identity as the self makes itself responsible to other selves; the self-constancy of identity is what makes such responsibility possible. Here the narrative imagination of the self is “dialectic of ownership and disposition of care and of care-freeness, of self-affirmation and of self-effacement.”58

The narrative moral life does not merely aim at an isolated good life for the self but a good and worthy life with others, within the context of institutional and communal justice. So “oneself as another” moves in the

58Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, 168.
direction of *all selves as oneself* and *oneself as all selves*: a holistic, egalitarian, good and blessed communal life.

By making this move, Ricoeur seeks to resolve the difficulty between the “is” of ethics and the “ought” of morality. He sees ethics as the teleological context that aims for what is required for a life, and morality as the deontological context that seeks for right. Here ethics concerns what is important for life. Whereas, morality aims for what is right. One is what a situation is and the other is what a situation ought to be. This is a context of what is actual and what is ideal. Thus he places the deontological within the structure of the teleological, in which right as the norm of what ought to do is interpolated into the good that seeks what is required for a good life. This is why Ricoeur feels it necessary “to submit the ethical claim to the test of the norm.”59 Such a holistic approach to human identity further leads Ricoeur to incorporate the social or institutional self into the framework of oneself as another, which raises the issue of justice in the social context. Identity is radically inclusive and holistic, for it involves the social self in terms of self, other selves, bodies, language, enemies, friends, human possibilities, institutions, and jurisdictions. At the same time, Ricoeur’s position of holistic identity provides a prospect of living together, in which the personal desire to live well is constantly challenged by the social imperative of living well together.

59Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 203.
It follows then that the self must have a vision of the totality of itself - its existential possibilities. This is only possible by attaining the total vision of the human possibility in terms of the temporal-eternal possibility of being and identity. This has been discussed in the fifth chapter. Here the metaphorically innovated reality redescribes existential human reality and reorganizes human temporality through creative imagination, fundamentally based upon narrative hope. I have demonstrated that, for Ricoeur, the self seeks to understand itself as a constant possibility involving its temporal and eternal possibilities of being. Thus it attains its self-understanding by means of grasping its total possibilities. By interpreting self-knowledge, the self moves into making a good life again. In this way, life becomes narrative because a person creates her narrative as she lives her narrative in terms of other narratives of other selves. Thus, identity is socially and communally holistic.

6.3. Textual Linguistic Theology: A Summary

If theology today is to take up Ricoeur’s insights, it will need to be a textual linguistic theology. Such a theological approach will be narrative, ontological, linguistic, realistic, temporal, and oriented towards identity.

First, as has been discussed in my first chapter, textual linguistic theology is narrative, for it establishes the narrative textuality of divine and human experience, constructed within the framework of a “mimetic arc” of
narrative representation. All meaningful human experience consists of narrative. And such narrative experience distances from the field of human action by extending it into an imaginative configuration to the formation of human stories. It begins by making sense of the human field of experience in order to compose experience into narrative texts. These constructed stories can be interpreted in terms of a fresh ontology. Thus the interpretive circle returns to the practical field of human experience, and to fresh questions of human identity.

The dynamism that sets this narrative recreation in motion is the phenomenology of receptive reading. Ricoeur summarizes the process thus: the “narrative is part of life before being exiled from life in writing; it returns to life along the multiple paths of appropriation and at the price of unavoidable tensions.” Theologically appropriating Ricoeur, I have argued that all reality, both divine and human, is experience, and that this experience can be narratively composed through the prenarrative qualities of experience. Even the biblical narratives were originally part of divine–human experience in its revelatory event, and were only later narrated in language. The textuality of the text is a narrative that makes experience meaningful. Narrative is essentially always narrative experience.

Second, *textual linguistic theology is ontological*, as my second chapter has argued. By analysing the way Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy of the text has been formulated in the context of interpretation, I have shown that

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60Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 163.
human beings are hermeneutical beings and that the human way of being in the world is inevitably hermeneutical. Ricoeur’s textual hermeneutics aims to develop a paradigm for all possible forms of understanding, especially human self-understanding. In a context of interpretive engagement between the text and the reader through the medium of receptive reading, the text unfolds a possible world of existence to the reader. This is an imaginative world of the text shown in front of the text for the reader to encounter and appropriate critically. This ontological world projected by the text is the surplus of being that arises from the textual surplus of meaning through the hermeneutical surplus of appropriation. Here the textual dynamism of distanciation functions as a creative energy that keeps the text autonomous by liberating and preserving it from the irrationalism of romanticism and the rationalism of structuralist interpretive paradigms. Hence, the narrative experience as the textuality of the text provides human beings with a dynamic ontology.

Third, *textual linguistic theology is linguistic*. By exploring Ricoeur’s theory of language in terms of his notion of metaphor (chapter three), I have established that the narrative ontology that the text shows to the reader through interpretive interaction is a linguistic world of existence. The life that the text projects, is ultimately language, and this language of life is metaphorical. Existence is formed, made sense of and made possible only by the language of metaphor. In this way, the metaphorical language functions epistemologically in the process of figuring out the nature of being in the world. Metaphoric language shapes both divine and human existence. Human beings are not only hermeneutical beings but also linguistic beings.
and the human way of being in the world is inevitably linguistic. In this way, textual linguistic theology tries to articulate the very essence of human existence through the language of metaphor. If this is correct, then the neglect of metaphor in contemporary theology is really a neglect of the texture of human existence.

Fourth, textual linguistic theology is realistic. As human being is language and the language of life is metaphor, my fourth chapter demonstrated that the language of metaphor functions as the language of the real. The real that comes through this language is metaphoric. Here, metaphor creates a surplus of meaning in the text and sets in motion a dynamic process of innovating the metaphoric linguistic reality. The linguistic reality that comes through the metaphor in turn redescribes the existential reality towards fresh orientation. Here the metaphorical language not only functions as an epistemological tool in the process of inventing new meaning in language but also, by means of these new meanings, discovers the real and shapes the very nature of reality. Thus the language of metaphor ontologically opens up the field of the possible in order to expand the real and re-describe it as an existential possibility time and again. This approach emancipates theology from its notorious repetition of concepts from the past. Instead, theology is understood as an ever-fresh endeavour: a creative project energized by the language of metaphor.

Fifth, textual linguistic theology is temporal, since it realistically considers human temporality. As I have argued in my fifth chapter, the reality that
comes through the language of metaphor redescribes and reorganizes human temporality by providing a realistic vision of human possibility. Here the metaphorically and linguistically innovated reality redescribes human reality and reorganizes human temporality through creative imagination. Through the linguistic discourse, the metaphoric reality functions to establish another world which corresponds to other possibilities of existence than the actual ones. These newly refigured possibilities are the most deeply human, as they are reoriented through time. Just as metaphor and narrative make a pair within discourse, metaphorical redescription and narrative refiguration go hand in hand. As they redescribe reality so also they reorganize reality in new ways. Hence, the discovery of human life is a constant pursuit which makes the vicious interpretive circle to be creative and inventive, a path to human self-understanding. The self understands itself by means of grasping its possibilities. The vision of the total possibility is available to humans as the presence of the totality that gives rise to self-understanding; and this self-understanding itself is constantly refined.

Lastly, *textual linguistic theology is oriented towards identity*, for it provides resources for forming a sense of human identity in the world. In the early section of this chapter, I have discussed the means by which an individual is led to the formation of moral identity. Human identity arises out of the vision of the totality of the self, which is the self’s self-knowledge. Here as the self understands itself by means of it grasping its possibility, it also interprets itself in terms of the vision of the totality that it has received. This self-interpretation of the self culminates in the formation of moral identity. Here the vision of the total life provides the basis for
evolving self-understanding, while self-understanding lays the foundation for continuing self-interpretation. The self is both the knower and the known; the self reads and interprets itself – and is read and interpreted by others – as if a written text. So the vision of totality corresponds with the vision of identity.

This narrative activity of prefiguring, configuring and refiguring is an unending process of narrativity. It is, ultimately, just the narrativity of life itself: the path by which human life becomes existential, meaningful, and good. This narrativity not only brings Ricoeur’s narrative theory to its culmination but also marks the ultimate purpose of textual linguistic theology. The task of theology must concern the meaning of human life, and it must aim finally at an account of the formation of a good life – a life unfolding in the presence of the divine goodness.


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