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Christina M. Gschwandtner (Ed.), 'Paul Ricœur, Philosophical Hermeneutics, and the Question of Revelation'

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Christina M. Gschwandtner (Ed.). *Paul Ricoeur, Philosophical Hermeneutics, and the Question of Revelation*. Lexington Books 2024. 302 pp. \$110.00 USD (Hardcover 9781666937282); \$45.00 USD (eBook 9781666937299).

Within European intellectual traditions, the question of revelation has not solely been a theological one. From Thomas Aquinas to Hume, through Kant to German Idealism, there has been a distinctly philosophical reflection on the conditions and nature of revelation. Furthermore, within the emergence of French phenomenology in the last half-century, the question of revelation has received a direct treatment in the work of philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Yves Lacoste. One should, of course, also hasten to add Paul Ricoeur's name to this list, for he too participated in many of the discussions and debates central to this movement. At first glance, then, one might assume that it is Ricoeur's participation in this movement and, thus, his own contribution to a philosophical study of revelation that is the occasion for a collection of essays dedicated to Paul Ricoeur, philosophical hermeneutics, and the question of revelation.

However, the reader who approaches this volume with this assumption in mind will be disappointed. In fact, of the volume's eleven chapters (including the editor's Introduction), none takes up Ricoeur's understanding of revelation in relation to the development of French phenomenology of religion from Levinas to Lacoste. As a result, there is no direct discussion of the wider philosophical issues at stake in this movement's treatment of revelation, issues that would have connected the volume to larger metaphysical and epistemological questions animated by the notion of revelation as it has been discussed from Aquinas to Heidegger. On the face of it, this surely marks a missed opportunity, particularly given the editor's own previous and distinguished analyses of precisely this philosophical movement and its wider philosophical horizon.

Nevertheless, the collection remains important even in its more limited scope. Indeed, in describing the idea of revelation as it moves ambiguously within the boundaries of Ricoeur's project, the collection offers readers of Ricoeur an opportunity to assess his philosophy from the perspective of this notion. This goal takes seriously two important facts about Ricoeur's work. First, Ricoeur comes to the question of revelation from within a set of problems and issues that arise naturally within his own philosophical project. Second, where his own account touches on and even takes up themes and concepts employed by his French interlocutors, his proposals are framed in ways that offer a revisioning of some of the phenomenological assumptions on which they rely. So, for those readers who are looking for a treatment of Ricoeur's relationship to the



likes of Levinas and Marion, this remains an important collection, especially because the connection is more indirect than direct.

That the book is published in the series ‘Studies in the Thought of Ricoeur’ makes it obvious that there is another group of readers to be mentioned here: those interested in Ricoeur’s philosophy on its own. Here, too, this collection provides an important resource. In fact, by taking the question of revelation as its point of reference, the volume bears witness to how Ricoeur’s work can be read from three different standpoints. For some of the authors represented here, Ricoeur’s thought is oriented strictly to a philosophical anthropology; for others it is best conceived as fundamentally open to a philosophy of religion animated by the desire to describe the experience of transcendence; finally, for others, Ricoeur’s thought is best understood when read in dialogue with theology. What is intriguing about *all* the chapters is that they present the question of revelation as a question central to Ricoeur’s philosophy, however that question and that philosophy is understood. For this reason, they offer readers of Ricoeur an opportunity to rethink the stakes of his project.

Gschwandtner opens the Introduction arguing that reading Ricoeur on revelation requires us to ask two questions: first, what the idea of revelation means in Ricoeur’s work and, second, how Ricoeur’s philosophical reflections might allow the question of revelation to be asked more broadly (1-2). While each of the following chapters take up one or the other of these questions, they tend to favour the first. No matter which way they tend, however, each chapter bears witness to an issue central to the first question. This issue emerges early in the Introduction. Relying on a distinction drawn in *The Symbolism of Evil* between the manner in which symbols or myths are *revealing* more so than *revealed*, she suggests that, for Ricoeur, such symbols and myths “are revelatory of the human condition and of human relation with the transcendent” (3). She states, further, that this “constitutes both a widening and a sort of reversal of the notion of revelation: revelation in a philosophical sense is not first of all concerned with the divine, but instead with dimensions of the human condition” (3). Here is the issue: does Ricoeur’s work affect a widening of revelation that is also a reversal, or does it bring about only a widening? In other words, does Ricoeur’s understanding of revelation function to articulate general anthropological structures, such that what is revealed is something about the human condition, or does it articulate something unique about those anthropological structures when they come to light in an experience of transcendence? As the following chapters make clear, how one answers this question will influence how one understands

Ricoeur's philosophy. Importantly, there is no consensus on this question among the contributing authors. Some tend toward a more strictly anthropological reading while others take up a variably stronger or weaker religious reading open to the transcendent. Even among those who read Ricoeur from a theological perspective, there is some diversity between those who see his thought as a strictly philosophical conversation partner and those who perceive a more openly theological intent.

If the collection points to the question of how we ought to read Ricoeur's work, it also covers important Ricoeurian issues correlative with the notion of revelation. Central here are the questions of truth, reason, language, and selfhood. The essay by Gonçalo Marcelo gives the best general account of the interplay of these key philosophical ideas, with a unique and important discussion of the status of reason and its connection to truth. The question of truth also features prominently in the contributions of Frey and Wenzel. Finally, the connection between language and selfhood is the subject of the contributions of Kish and Underwood. Here would have been the place for a more sustained engagement with the rootedness of Ricoeur's own connection to the philosophical tradition. Given the issues at stake, this is particularly the case with Ricoeur's relation to Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger.

In conclusion, I want to highlight the two chapters that I take to be the most philosophically interesting and compelling. In chapter 5, "The Poetics of Forgiveness at the Limit of Ricoeur's Thought", Sónia de Silva Monteiro takes up the question of revelation in Ricoeur's work by looking to his reflections on forgiveness in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. The chapter argues that the experience of forgiveness leads to a reflection on limit or boundary situations in which human agency alone is not sufficient to account for the nature of the event in question: forgiveness in the face of evil. That is to say: "The act of forgiving . . . takes place between human capacity and givenness, understood as something beyond capability, 'from above,' but also as something which does not exclude human agency. . . . In short, forgiveness happens at the interstices of givenness and possibility" (126). What makes this article so compelling is the way the author shows how a 'difficult forgiveness' is embedded within the same logic of superabundance and the economy of the gift that was called upon by the poetic language of biblical texts. Thus, across Ricoeur's project, the author clarifies the scope of the widening at stake in Ricoeur's unique employment of the notion of revelation. What we have here is an excellent example of how, in Ricoeur's work, the concept of revelation is one notion within a wider field of concepts dedicated to naming a logic and

economy expressed within but not reducible to the structures of human agency and selfhood. As such, it is a primary example of the proximity of Ricoeur's thought to that of Levinas and Marion where, precisely, that proximity calls for a displacement of their conceptual networks.

Likewise, in Stephanie Arel's chapter, "The Discourse of Revelation: Ricoeur's Hermeneutics Untangles Trauma, Dependence, and Love", there is a careful analysis of overlooked aspects of Ricoeur's notion of revelation that is specified and deepened by its relationship to questions of alterity and recognition. The first thing to note about Arel's treatment is that she is the only contributor to recognize the crucial role of Ricoeur's essays in *Thinking Biblically*. As a result, she develops the important relationship between revelation and love that surfaces in his other writings on religion. Moreover, Arel's discussion of the centrality of Rosenzweig's thought for Ricoeur's reflections in *Thinking Biblically* also serves as one of the rare occasions in the volume in which Ricoeur's important engagement with Jewish is acknowledged. By approaching Ricoeur's treatment of revelation from the perspective of trauma theory, Arel is able to focus on the importance of the relationship between heteronomy and autonomy at stake in Ricoeur's notion of revelation. As a result, she too is able to locate the particular notion of revelation in reference to the economy of the gift and its logic of superabundance in order to understand it in its place within Ricoeur's philosophical project. For both Arel and Monteiro, Ricoeur's work is a philosophy open to an experience of transcendence figured at the heart of human agency and selfhood.

Overall, the collection makes an important contribution to Ricoeur scholarship. It is well-edited and many of the chapters contain a wealth of research in their endnotes. It will be very useful for those with a working knowledge of Ricoeur's work. Its multifaceted approach to the question of revelation in Ricoeur's thought mirrors Ricoeur's own polyphonic and polysemic understanding of the concept itself.

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