RICOEUR VERSUS TAYLOR ON LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE

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Abstract: Although Ricoeur and Taylor are often grouped together, their conceptions of language, literature, and practical reason are very different. The first half of this essay focuses on Ricoeur's theory of triple mimesis and narrative, showing how his attempt to synthesize Kant, Husserl, and structuralism results in a formalism that blocks out the ontological, hermeneutical, and historical dimensions of literature and practical reason. The second half of the essay develops Taylor's ontological conception of public imagination and illustrates the dynamics of this conception of language and interpretation by showing how literary works debate with each other over language, subjectivity, and reference. Narrative does not just order; it argues.

Keywords: language, narrative, ontology, literature, hermeneutics.

While critics usually place the narrative philosophies of Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor together, the purpose of this essay is to show how they are different and why their differences matter.[1] Despite his hermeneutic gestures, Ricoeur's problematic is grounded in his attempt to mediate Husserlian phenomenology with structuralism and Kantian formalism. As he says:

> In my analyses of narrative as well as in those of metaphor, I am fighting on two fronts: on one hand, I cannot accept the irrationalism of immediate understanding, conceived as an extension to the domain of texts of the empathy by which a subject puts himself in the place of a foreign consciousness in a situation of face-to-face intensity. . . . I am equally unable to accept a rationalistic explanation which would extend to the text the structural analysis of sign systems that are characteristic not of discourse but of language as such. . . .

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[1] Ricoeur and Taylor are frequently placed together on the issue of language and narrative. For instance, Richard Kearney says, "Ricoeur's stance on narrative identity receives support from a number of contemporary quarters—including recent works by Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre and Seyla Benhabib" (Kearney 1996, 181). See also Smith 1997, chap. 2, where Taylor and Ricoeur are put together. Neither Ricoeur nor Taylor discusses their differences. See in particular Carr et al. 1991, 174, where Taylor says, "I find myself in substantial agreement with Ricoeur insofar as I grasp the major trajectory of his thought." In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor footnotes *Time and Narrative* without comment.

> To these two one-sided attitudes, I have opposed the dialectic of under-
> standing and explanation. (Ricoeur 1983, 194)

For Taylor, these are not perspectives that need to be mediated but
subordinated to an ontological and dialogical understanding of language,
narrative, and rationality.[2] In this essay I shall first present Ricoeur's
position on crucial Taylorian issues and then give Taylor's argument.

Formalizing Emplotment in Triple Mimesis

In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur controls his invocation of hermeneutic
conceptions of interpretation through an underlying Kantianism, as we
can see in the idea of triple mimesis, which lies is at the heart of this work.
Mimesis 1 addresses the preunderstandings of "the world of action, its
meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character"
(Ricoeur 1984–88, 1: 54). Mimesis 2 examines the emplotment, which
mediates preunderstandings and readings, while mimesis 3, the reading,
addresses "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the
hearer or reader" (1984–88, 1: 71). The reader's response to the text
(mimesis 3) folds back into mimesis 1 as part of the new preunderstand-
ings in the lifeworld and thus completes the hermeneutic circle.

In mimesis 1, Ricoeur drives a wedge between narrative and experience
in the world at the same time that he freezes the historical and dialogical
character of language and literature. Ricoeur does not place the subject in
language and narrative so that inchoate narratives already inform
experience.[3] To be sure, Ricoeur acknowledges that history and fiction
"are preceded by the use of narrative in daily life" (1984–88, 2: 156).
However, "prefiguration" is a cognitive capacity that stands against the
experience of time, which in itself is "confused, unformed, and, at the
limit, mute" (1984–88, 1: 14). Thus, mimesis 1 is "a structure of human
praxis prior to the work of configuration by the historical or the fictional
narrative" (1984–88, 3: 310).

Mimesis 2, or emplotment, is not an interpretive act through which the
subject dialogues with traditions, as it is in Taylor or Gadamer. Instead,
Ricoeur develops his conception of the novel as emplotment by drawing

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[2] As Merold Westphal says, Husserl "identifies tradition with prejudice" and "the
reduction, which can now be called a historical reduction, becomes the discovery-
overthrown of historical prejudices, the dismantling of sedimented tradition" (Westphal
1992, 126). See Aylesworth 1991 for a good discussion of the difference between Ricoeur's
continuance of the epistemological tradition and Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics.

[3] See Carr 1984, 1986, 1991; and Carr et al. 1991. David Pellauer responds to Carr's
criticisms of Ricoeur. For my purposes here, what is crucial is the point he concedes at the
end of the essay, "Carr, it seems to me, is correct, when he emphasizes the importance of
narrative as part of everyday life and activities. . . . This is an aspect of narrative that
Ricoeur has not explored, again for reasons of method, since he confines himself to the
formal narrative plane and its two major forms" (Pellauer 1991, 61).

on Aristotle's *Poetics* and Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: "I cannot overemphasize the kinship between this 'grasping together' power to the configurational act and what Kant says about the operation of judging" (1984–88, 1: 66–68). Emplotment "extracts configuration from a succession" in the same way that a reflective judgment "reflects upon the work of thinking at work in the aesthetic judgment of taste and the teleological judgment applied to organic wholes" (1984–88, 1: 66). In a stroke, Ricoeur has reduced the author's engagement with worth and truth of the languages of traditions to a formal aestheticism.[4] Thus, when he says that emplotment is the "synthesis of the heterogeneous"—that is, "the diverse mediations performed by the plot: between the manifold of events and the temporal unity of the story recounted between the disparate components of the action" (Ricoeur 1992, 141)—the substantive epistemological and ontological issues that narratives engage become a merely reflexive ordering. By always looking at narrative as the emplotment of the heterogeneous, Ricoeur blocks out the way in which emplotment is always a reemployment of the narrative and symbolic shapes the subject inevitably inhabits.

By turning narrative into a merely formal question, Ricoeur abstracts generic literary issues from the historical dialogue in which they were formed and makes them schematic possibilities in a Kantian sense. As Kantian schematism connects the understanding and intuition, so emplotment "engenders a mixed intelligibility between what has been called the point, theme, or thought of a story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes and changes of fortune that make up the denouement" (1984–88, 1: 68). Ricoeur historicizes schematization by making it proceed "from the sedimentation of a practice with a specific history . . . called 'traditionality." In Ricoeur's conception of tradition, the formal dimension of "traditionality" is separated from the material (the content of traditions) and the "apology for tradition" (legitimacy) (1984–88, 3: 221ff.), and these latter make no appearance in mimesis 2. By isolating mimesis 2, Ricoeur is able to speak not of a conflictual, dialogical tradition and genealogical critiques but of a "self-

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[4] Reflective judgment has generated a lot of interest recently, which I can hardly address here. I shall simply point out that reflective judgment has provided a bridge between Kant and Husserl that has come to prominence in Hannah Arendt and Rudolph Makkreel's understandings of narrative. Much of the work on reflective judgment comes from Arendt's reading of Kant, and Ricoeur himself has entered this discussion. See the section on Arendt in Ricoeur 1990, 15–66. For a critique of Arendt's view of narrative and reflective judgment that follows the same line offered here on Ricoeur, see Steele 2002. On reflective judgment in narrative, consider Makkreel 1991, 154–55, which distinguishes between the first Critique and the third Critique reading of narrative. From the point of view of the first Critique, "historians impose the structure of a story on rather formless lived events," while the latter "approach to historical narrative . . . [specifies] an already implicit formal order." A good example of someone who takes a first Critique approach to narrative is Hayden White in *Metahistory*.

structuring of tradition [that] is neither historical nor ahistorical but rather 'transhistorical,' in the sense that it runs through this history in a cumulative rather than an additive manner'' (1984–88, 2: 14).

This transhistorical formalism emerges in Ricoeur's adoption of Northrop Frye's theory of genre—myth, romance, and so on—in *The Anatomy of Criticism*. Since literature's development is divorced from its substantive issues, tradition becomes a panoply of formal possibilities that are stripped of their ethical, political, and axiological importance. Ricoeur also excludes dialogue from his conception of historical change by employing the Husserlian vocabulary of "sedimentation" and "innovation," in which the subject's arguments with historical inheritance are given no place. "This schematism, in turn, is constituted within a history that has the characteristics of a tradition. . . . A tradition is constituted by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation. To sedimentation must be referred the paradigms that constitute the typology of emplotment" (1984–88, 1: 68). Ricoeur treats the subject's background as sediment rather than as presuppositions that call for articulation, which is Taylor's approach. Moreover, by speaking of sediment, innovation, and formalized traditionality rather than reemplotment, he blocks out the role of narrative in making what Taylor calls "transitional arguments," whether individual or collective, in which alternative languages are assessed.[5]

Ricoeur rejects narrative self-understandings of a culture as part of a historical argument, in which one narrative engages the claims of previous ones; instead, he sees narrative changes as marked out with a neutral descriptive language concerned only with the question of innovation rather than negation, refutation, and retrieval. "Rule-governed deformation constitutes the axis around which the various changes of paradigm through application are changed. It is this variety of application that confers a history on the productive imagination and that in counterpoint to sedimentation, makes a narrative tradition possible" (1984–88, 1: 70). Traditions are not "cumulative" sediment unless the subject's historicity and being in language are put out of play in favor of a disengaged transcendental imagination. For Taylor, imagination is a public and social being whose historical dynamics are revealed not by rules and deformations but through historical arguments among competing self-understandings.

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[5] Ricoeur presents "traditionality" as our only recourse between "the contingency of a mere history of genres, or types . . . and an eventual logic of possible narratives that escape history [i.e., structuralism]" (1984–88, 2: 14–15). However, this conception cannot do the work he assigns it unless the substantive issues he has abstracted find their way back in. Ricoeur follows the reductive structuralist distinction between *histoire* (content of the story) and *récit* (specific narrative realization of this content). This opposition eliminates the way ideas and languages are articulated through narrative so that "content" becomes unshaped material. For a discussion of this distinction and its problems for hermeneutics, see Steele 1986.

Narrative as Ordering, not Arguing

Ricoeur's discussion of schemas is also a clue as to why he wants to make narrative always innovative; he tries to flatter schemas out of existence. In narrative, just as in metaphor, "semantic innovation can be carried back to the productive imagination and, more precisely, to the schematism of its signifying matrix" (1984–88, 1: ix). Anyone who has been to a high-school reunion or watched sitcoms knows that not all narratives are innovative, so why does Ricoeur insist on this? He needs the innovative dimension in order to make narrative an aesthetic judgment rather than a determinative judgment about truth and to keep narrative from being a constituent of our being in the world.

Thus, Ricoeur's discussion of the novel in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* is remarkably ahistorical. Despite the fact that the rise of the novel is embedded in issues of modernity itself, such as individualism, liberty, and language, issues that receive in-depth treatment in Taylor's *Hegel* and *Sources of the Self*, Ricoeur ignores all these issues in his discussions of literature. For Ricoeur, novels are just examples of how the aporias of cosmic and experienced time are mediated by plot, or are "thought experiments" in the Husserlian mold of imaginative variation: "Literature proves to consist in a vast laboratory for thought experiments in which the sources of variation encompassed by narrative identity are put to the test of narration" (Ricoeur 1992, 148). This leveling transcendental eye stands far above and apart from the self-understandings of writers and readers, who are engaged with the substantive claims made by competing narratives.

Ricoeur wants to keep novelists out of the argument business, however, limiting them only to emplotment. "Poets . . . create plots that are held together by causal skeletons. But these . . . are not the subject of a process of argumentation. Poets restrict themselves to producing the story and explaining by narrating" (1984–88, 1: 186). Not only does this exclude the commentary about the proper understanding of their novelistic worlds offered by such well-known narrators as Balzac's and Proust's; it also ignores the argumentative dimension of narratives that are devoted primarily to "showing" rather than "telling." When an advocate of showing, such as Henry James, emplots, he is not just ordering the heterogeneous in a form, he is arguing with the narrow epistemology and moral ontology of the realistic novel, as we find in the works of Flaubert or the Goncourts. How can we separate out the formal features of Kate Chopin's *Awakening*—her use of chapters, summaries, narrative voice, and so forth—without understanding how her formal critique of the *Bildungsroman* is tied to issues of feminism and subjectivity, to women's oppression in cultural plots and language—that is, to questions of "material" and "legitimacy"—and to the conflicts of traditions? This same formalism undermines Ricoeur's concept of

narrative identity, since identity becomes the ordering of components and not an argument with other self-conceptions, which is how Taylor understands it.

Because Ricoeur follows Kant in considering a narrative text as an isolated aesthetic object, his discussion of reception, mimesis 3 (1984–88, vol. 3, chap. 7), gives center stage to Iser's and Ingarden's phenomenologies of the textual object, and they are presented as if they were merely complementing rather than truncating a dialogical hermeneutics of tradition (Jauss). Ricoeur wants to preserve the "ideality of meaning," what he calls Husserl's "'logicist' rejoinder" to historicism (Ricoeur 1976, 90): "The text—objectified and dehistoricized—becomes the necessary mediation between writer and reader" (91). "Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends" (32).[6] This is far from Taylor's idea of interpretation, in which the being of the text is not set over against us but rather calls and speaks to us because its language is imbricated with our own textual flesh.

Resisting Linguistic Ontology

Despite his appropriations of Gadamer, Ricoeur remains a methodological individualist who rejects giving ontological weight to the institutions of meaning. We see this is true not only of the chapter devoted to Hegel in volume 3 of *Time and Narrative*, where the question is whether to renounce Hegel (yes), but also in the revealing essay "Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity," in *From Text to Action*. Ricoeur objects to all holistic conceptions, which include not only Hegel's *Geist* but also finite versions of the idea of institutions of meaning: "The decisive advantage of Husserl over Hegel appears to me to lie in his uncompromising refusal to hypostatize collective entities and his tenacious will to reduce them in every instance to a network of interactions" (Ricoeur 1991, 244). To avoid such hypostatization, we must rely on "the analogy of the ego [as] the transcendental principle of all intersubjective relations" (245). For Taylor, the starting point is not with the analogies of the ego but with the institutions of meaning through and against which the self is articulated.

Husserl's methodological individualism is not the only key to how Ricoeur reduces narrative to poetics in mimesis 2, for he also appropriates structuralism to supplement his phenomenology. Working at a deeper level than schematism, structuralism can search for ahistorical

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[6] Ricoeur tries to downplay the significance of the ontological turn: "I have tried to set my analyses of the 'sense' of metaphorical statements and of that of narrative plots against the background of *Verstehen*, limited to its epistemological usage, in the tradition of Dilthey and Max Weber." This understanding of meaning, according to Ricoeur, "remains unaffected by its later development in Heidegger and Gadamer, in the sense of the subordination of the epistemological to the ontological theory of *Verstehen*" (Ricoeur 1983, 195). Taylor, like Gadamer, gives a central place to this distinction.

"structures whose manifestation would be concrete narrative configura-
tions on the surface of narrative" (1984–88, 2: 29), or it can focus on the
individual aesthetic object in order "to reconstruct the internal dynamic
of the text" (Ricoeur 1976, 18). Structuralism's aim is purely explanatory
rather than interpretive and evaluative; it provides the rules governing a
linguistic or, in this case, generic system during a particular slice of time.

Ricoeur is comfortable with structuralism precisely because its
conception of language as homogenous linguistic system offers a version
of the linguistic turn that can be made to fit with a Husserlian notion of
the ideality of meaning, "the conquest of the empire of sense" (Ricoeur
1983, 188), whereas Taylor's problematic of language does not. For
Husserl and for structuralists, meaning is clarified by procedures outside
the world rather than through dialogues in the world. Structuralism's
characterization of historical change speaks only of shifts in the system
and thus eliminates what Taylor calls "transitional arguments," by which
the cultures themselves work through changes.[7] Thus, structuralism joins
a conception of tradition as sedimentation and innovation in driving out
narrative as argument from one self-understanding to another. Structur-
alism formalizes the content, while transcendental phenomenology
formalizes time into lived and cosmic.

From Taylor's perspective, structuralism is one of modernity's
deformations of our being in language and the world, not an explanatory
system that can accompany phenomenology. For Taylor, rationality
must work through the claims of narrative and history rather than short-
circuiting dialogical reason by seeking a generative matrix of rules behind
it. Moreover, structuralism deploys a speculative system, which ignores
the sociolinguistic variety of languages in the name of a homogenizing
and dehistoricizing "langue," as Mary Louise Pratt and others have
shown.[8]

Not only does Ricoeur's formalism drive out the historical shapes of
the self; it also blocks a dialogical conception of narrative. Ricoeur
acknowledges the threat of such a conception to his idea of emplotment
when he considers the modern novel and the modern subject: "By sliding
from the mimesis of action to the mimesis of characters, then to that of
their thoughts, feelings, and language, and by crossing that final
threshold, that from monologue to dialogue, on the plane of the
narrator's as much as the characters' discourse, have we not surrepti-
tiously substituted for emplotment a radically different structuring

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[7] I discuss below what Taylor means by this term.
[8] See Pratt 1987. Bakhtin is highly critical of both structuralism and subject-centered
phenomenology. "Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics . . . have all postulated a
simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular language and have
postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monological utterance of the
individual" (Pratt 1987, 269). I am not unequivocally endorsing Bakhtin's understanding of
language and dialogue.

principle, which is dialogue itself?'' (1984–88, 2: 96–97). Dialogism, however, is not only a feature of the modern novel but also a problematic for understanding our being in language. Emplotment itself is dialogical, for the novelist or the selves of everyday life are not just configuring a manifold but also engaging the languages of literary traditions and society. Dialogism moves us from an understanding of mimesis as the imitation of action to an understanding of language as the medium of subject and object. Hence, for Bakhtin (and Taylor) literature is a mode of reflection that ''reveals not only the reality of a given language but also, as it were, its potential, its ideal limits and its total meaning conceived as a whole, its truth together with its limitations.''[9] Dialogism is not just about multiple voices but also about the multiplicity of languages, as Bakhtin shows in *The Dialogic Imagination*. (Parodies of public discourse or other literary works are perhaps the most obvious example.) Ricoeur's presentation would have had to be quite different if he had started with Bakhtin's definition of the novel as ''a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and diversity of individual voices, artistically organized'' (Bakhtin 1981, 262) rather than with Augustine on lived time and Aristotle and Kant on plot.

Inescapable Frameworks

Turning now to Taylor, we find that his understanding of language and narrative is developed from a very different ontology, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the opening part of *Sources of the Self*. In this section, Taylor redescribes contemporary self-understandings so as to discredit the premises of individualism, proceduralism, and formalism that inform the current practices of social science, philosophy, and literature.[10] Even though Taylor does not aim directly at Ricoeur, Ricoeur does share in many of the assumptions under critique.

Taylor takes on modernity's assumptions by making a transcendental argument. Such arguments ''start from some feature of our experience they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or the subject's position in the world. They make this move by regressive arguments, to the effect that the stronger conclusion must be so if the

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[9] Bakhtin 1981, 356. One does not require Bakhtin's or Taylor's view of language to bring literature into practical reason. See, for example, Martha Nussbaum's analysis of Dickens' *Hard Times* as a critique of the language of utilitarianism (Nussbaum 1995, chap. 2).

[10] Habermas describes well the procedural rationality Taylor attacks. ''Both modern empirical science and autonomous morality place their confidence solely in the rationality of their own approaches and their procedures—namely, in the method of scientific knowledge or in the abstract point of view under which moral insights are possible'' (Habermas 1983, 35).

indubitable fact about experience is possible'' (Taylor 1995, 20). The pervasive ''bewitchment'' that informs much of our disengaged moral and epistemological thinking is that we can live without evaluative frameworks. To Taylor, ''Doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons through which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include strong qualitative discriminations'' (Taylor 1989, 27).

Doesn't this kind of transcendental argument make a dangerously ethnocentric move in which one's own cultural assumptions are generalized as the necessary assumptions of all cultures—including the cultures in one's own past? What about the simple anthropological point that Taylor's assumptions about such ideas as ''the self'' are Western and not universal?[11] Isn't this precisely the problem with Heidegger's transcendental anthropology in *Being and Time*, in which the diverse historical practices of the West disappear behind the anguish of modernity that has lost touch with Being?

Taylor argues that transcendental investigation produces just the opposite effect—if we do it properly.[12] In seeking out the transcendental background that subtends our first-order speech, Taylor does not seek to give rules of validity but wishes to present the presuppositions and horizons of the possible that cradle our sentences. If we enter a debate only with our position and those of others arrayed as individual positions, we miss points of similarity and difference that appear when we articulate backgrounds to our positions and the horizon of the possible that surrounds our individuated philosophical stances. When we see our present position as a possible outcome of a constellation of conditions that underpin it, then we have opened our own resources of debate: ''Ethnocentrism . . . is also a consequence of collapsing the distinction between the transcendental conditions and the actual content of a culture'' (Taylor 1989, 40). Therefore, the common perception of Taylor as a ''communitarian'' is mistaken. He is not advocating community but is instead articulating the ontological commitments of historical, linguistic beings. The effect of this ontology is not to narrow the space of argument by rooting reason in tradition but to open the space of reasons by giving language and culture a place.

In other words, there are no brute facts or values; nor are there singular statements of position. The articulation of a particular position on, say, the nature of autonomy, secularism, or negotiation in public life depends upon large-scale assumptions about language, subjectivity, or

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[11] Quentin Skinner, for instance, accuses Taylor of ''reckless a priorism,'' for *Sources* ''assumes all societies have a strong sense of self'' (Skinner 1994, 137).

[12] Transcendental argument can be used to close down the space of argument and reinforce ethnocentrism, as we see in Stanley Fish's well-known antitheory polemic and Rorty's postmodern liberalism.

historicity and the historical arguments.[13] Thus, transcendental conditions are not formal but descriptive and historical—that is, how do you (individually and collectively) articulate yourself as a historico-linguistic being? The history will involve not only developing the lines of argument that led to the current position but also making intelligible the discarded strands—as, for example, in positivism. Spelling these out will widen the argumentative space of discussion, though it will not necessarily lead to more agreement.

Evaluative Frameworks and the Subject of Judgment

These qualitative discriminations, what Taylor calls "strong evaluations," are not mere wishes but second-order desires that are mediated by cultural values that we respect, admire, despise, and so on: "Whereas for the simple weigher what is at stake is the desirability of difference consummations, those defined by his de facto desires, for the strong evaluator reflection also examines the different possible modes of being of the agent" (Taylor 1985a, 25). These modes of being require that Taylor's phenomenology breaks with the Husserlian ideality and objectivity of meaning attained by the transcendental subject, for Taylorian interpretations, unlike phenomenological descriptions, cannot be objectified, disarticulated from the historical and moral questions of who we are. "Now these articulations are not simply descriptions, if we mean by this characterization of a fully independent object," but are "attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated. But this kind of formulation or reformulation does not leave its object unchanged. To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or hold important in a certain way" (Taylor 1985a, 36). Since language and narratives are inhabited and not just explicit acts of retrospective fabrication, "our self-interpretations are partly constitutive of our experience," such that "certain modes of experience are not possible without certain self-descriptions" (37). In this way, Taylor abandons the Husserlian concern with the purification of consciousness in order to explore language's constitutive dimension in "the moral ontology which articulates these intuitions" (Taylor 1989, 8). This articulation is made in dialogue with and against other moral languages and narratives of the past and the present.

Because he is making a transcendental claim, he argues that moderns who claim to dispense with evaluative frameworks—for example, Kantians and utilitarians—are in fact strong evaluators who misdescribe themselves. Benthamites appeal to nonutilitarian goods, such as "the love of mankind" or the relief of suffering (Taylor 1989, 331), while for Kant,

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[13] In "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" Taylor says, "Our whole notion of negotiation is bound up, for instance, with the distinct identity of the parties, with the willed nature of the relation; it is a very contractual notion" (Taylor 1985c, 32).

"rational agency is the constitutive good," because such agency "alone has dignity, brings with it an awe which empowers morality" (Taylor 1989, 94). Thus, Taylor does not "take modern society at the face value of its own dominant theories, as heading for runaway atomism or wholesale break-up"; instead, he selectively retrieves certain modern values through redescriptions that show how they are "less based on disengaged freedom and atomism than we realize" (Taylor 1985b, 29).[14]

The moral languages of strong evaluations are not merely invented or chosen from nowhere; they come from the cultural histories and institutions of meaning that always already shape desire. "The meanings and norms implicit in these practices are not just in the minds of the actors but are out there in the practices themselves. . . . These must be the common property of the society before there can be any question of anyone entering a negotiation or not" (Taylor 1985b, 36). Unlike Ricoeur, who characterizes the subject's being in the institutions of meaning as concerning internalized individual capacities (mimesis 1), Taylor gives language and narrative a prepredicative hold on us so that our being is bound up with them. We cannot perspicuously describe our being in the world without giving ontological acknowledgment to these institutions.

The ontological overlapping of the subject with institutions not only blurs the boundaries of subject and object, it requires a distinctive mode of argument that is missing from Ricoeur's philosophy. In Taylor's view, the task of reason is not to follow or reconstruct the formalized rules of practices in order to make rationality stand outside the perspectives in dispute (Ricoeur's structuralist side), for "there cannot be such considerations" (Taylor 1989, 73). Nor is it reason's task to perform an *epoche* on natural consciousness or to investigate the schematized sediment of tradition (Ricoeur's phenomenological side). Instead, one begins reasoning by trying "to articulate a framework, to spell out what is it that we presuppose when we make a judgment that a certain form of life is worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement" (Taylor 1989, 26). Speakers are not thought of as rule instantiators who are the objects of the theoretical stance, which is at the heart of the structuralist position. Taylor does not seek to balance third-person explanatory theory against individualist phenomenology; instead, he offers a conception of practice, including narrative practice, that enables first-order speech to interrogate the webs of belief in a more fundamental way than does the disengaged reconstruction of rules.[15] The process of interrogation, whether first-order or second-order, never pretends to the

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[14] Taylor makes this statement in distinguishing himself from Alasdair MacIntyre.

[15] Taylor, like Gadamer, does not isolate the speculative pursuits of philosophy from everyday speech. "Even in the everyday speech there is an element of speculative reflection," since this happens any time "words do not reflect being but express a relation to the whole of being" (Gadamer 1994, 469). Every utterance is an event of language that touches ontological, normative, and epistemological issues simultaneously.

kind of impossible and mystifying separation from evaluative languages that the structuralist explainer sets out.

Taylor is working out the subject's relationships to institutions of meaning in order to offer "a third possibility" between "an extra-human ontic foundation for the good on the one hand, and the pure subjectivism of arbitrarily conferred significance on the other" (Taylor 1989, 342). This possibility does not decide in advance our relationship to the medium of meanings in which we swim. Nonetheless, it does not make us relativist, for our language or schemes can be ranked, "and ranked because they permit us to grasp, or prevent us from grasping, features of reality, including causal features, which we recognize as independent of us" (Taylor 1994, 220). Taylor does not ground the superiority of a particular language by saying that it has finally latched onto the external world but by appealing to an idea of best account so that our affirmation of goods "is inseparable from our best-self-interpretation" (Taylor 1989, 342).

Articulation

Taylor opposes historical, evaluative articulation to the disengaged moral and epistemological theories that dominate contemporary self-under-standings. Practical reason involves a historical excavation, in which we "transfer what has sunk to the level of an organizing principle for present practices and hence beyond examination into a view for which there can be reasons either for or against" (Taylor 1984, 28). Hence, Taylor wants to begin reasoning by reopening the assumptions of modernity and displaying the complex, conflicted historical inheritance that lies behind current usage. This means reasoning about the interpretive history of how we came to be who we are today, evaluating the transitions from one set of common meanings to another.[16] Such evaluations can take various forms, from "escaping from given social forms"—we could call this the Foucaultian response—to the recovery of lost practices—we could call this the Gadamerian dimension (Taylor 1984, 39). His point in retelling the story of modernity in *Sources of the Self* is to show how historical consciousness is concerned with articulatory critique and retrieval in relationship to our predecessors, not a Hegelian *Errinerung*, in which remembrance is internalized. Taylor begins *Sources* by urging us to abandon languages that have been morally, historically, and ontologi-cally stripped down by the assumptions of modernity.

Reasoning means digging into the wounds and the damaged languages that underwrite current practices and listening to the challenges of others

[16] Taylor makes it clear that he is not offering a causal explanation: "What I am doing has to be seen as distinct from historical explanation, and yet relevant to it" (Taylor 1989, 202). Whereas the causal explanation asks "what brought modern identity about" (202), the interpretive "involves giving an account of the new identity which makes clear what is appeal was. What drew people to it? Indeed, what draws them to it today?" (203).

against whom we have defined ourselves. Thus, "the articulation of modern understandings of the good has to be a historical enterprise . . . The very fact of this self-definition in relation to the past induces us to re-examine this past and the way it has been assimilated or repudiated" (Taylor 1989, 103). Background is the ambiguous historical and cultural medium through which we live that we can never stand over against or take as given.

Narrative as Argument

This account of the historicity and ontology of everyday consciousness gives narrative greater philosophical importance than does Ricoeur's formalism. Narrative is a transcendental condition of intelligibility—"another basic condition of making sense of ourselves [is] that we grasp our lives as narratives" (Taylor 1989, 47)—because it is needed to capture the historicity of experience and the shape of practical reason. Although in isolation Taylor's statements sound very similar to Ricoeur's, Taylor's idea of the relationship of narrative to the self is not about formal emplotment but about the vindication of one's self-understanding vis-à-vis others in what is at the heart of practical reason, transitional argument. Here Taylor drives home the connection between narrative and practical reason: "We are convinced that a certain view is superior because we have lived a transition which we understand as error-reducing. . . . I see that I was confused about the relation of resentment and love. . . . But this doesn't mean that we don't or can't argue. . . . Arguing here is contesting between interpretations of what I have been living" (Taylor 1989, 72). Because we are always already embedded in language and narrative, the textual flesh of interpretive beings, vindicating an argument means urging someone to revise the languages through which he or she lives. "You will only convince me by changing my reading of moral experience, and in particular my reading of my life story, of the transitions I have lived through—or perhaps refused to live through" (Taylor 1989, 73). These transitions can be of various kinds—society that lives through a transition from a hierarchical to an egalitarian relationship, an anthropologist who enriches her concept of the family by living in a different culture, an individual who goes from a shallow to a deeper understanding of love or resentment, a community that repudiates certain vocabularies of race or gender, a philosopher who abandons one problematic for another. Such a conception of narrative also works for the dynamics of literary history, in which texts argue with each other. Narrative is not a matter of "extracting configuration from succession" but a substantive argumentative shape that cannot be broken down into components.[17]

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[17] Another way of saying this is that Ricoeur focuses on narrative's role in temporality, which he tries to isolate from content: "By treating the temporal quality of experience as the common reference of both history and fiction, I make of fiction, history, and time, one single problem" (Ricoeur 1983, 176). For Taylor, the common reference of history and fiction comes from the institutions of meaning.

Thus, narrative forms an indispensable component of Taylor's idea of practical reason: "A reasoning in transitions . . . aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. It is concerned, covertly or openly, implicitly or explicitly, with comparative propositions" (Taylor 1989, 72). Taylor's transitional arguments are to be distinguished from Hegel's transitional dialectics between stages of Spirit. Although I can hardly give such a vast subject its due here, I want to mention three points. For Taylor, these transitions are matters of deliberation by historical actors, in which past transitional arguments and causal factors are assessed; they are not dialectical contradictions marked out from the perspective of the Absolute. Second, transitional change is about loss, retrieval, repudiation, and contingency, not just progression and incorporation. Lastly, there are multiple competing currents in the institutions of meaning at any given time, which the richness of *Sources of the Self* makes clear.

This idea of practical reason informs the way Taylor brings philosophical and literary history together in *Sources of the Self*. Taylor's understanding of our being in language means that the boundary between philosophy and literature is opened up because the question of truth is not just about imitation of action—which produces a gap between fiction and nonfiction—but also the truth of languages. In other words, Taylor follows Gadamer in attacking the Kantian "subjectivization of aesthetics," in which literature is split off from history, truth, and morality.[18] For Taylor, this Kantian legacy is part of the damage done to reason that he hopes to rectify with his historical understanding of language, literature, and practical reason. Every utterance is an event of language that touches ontological, normative, and epistemological issues simultaneously. The speaker's relationship to public imagination is not just that of rule instantiator. Instead, speakers can interrogate the web of belief through first-order speech.[19] This interrogation is neither theoretical nor observational; it emerges whenever we feel a tug on the threads of language. Hence art, like philosophy, is one of the means for articulating the social imaginary through which we inhabit the lifeworld and make our backgrounds explicit. Thus, says Taylor at the end of *Sources of the Self*, "We delude ourselves if we think a philosophical or critical language

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[18] Gadamer 1994, 42–99. A discussion of Ricoeur and Taylor on the Kantian legacy of the right and the good would take this essay in a new direction. For Taylor's hermeneutic critique of moral proceduralism, see "The Motivation Behind the Proceduralist Ethics," where he says: "The procedural theory is an illusion because it rests upon a substantive vision of the good" (Taylor 1993, 358).

[19] It is interesting to note that in his new book *La mémoire, l'histoire et l'oubli*, Ricoeur gives new importance to the speculative in history. The epistemological work of explanation opens onto "a second-order reflection on the conditions of possibility of this discourse, a reflection destined to occupy the play of a speculative philosophy of history" (Ricoeur 2000, 373).

is somehow more hard-edged and more free from personal index than that of poets or novelists'' (Taylor 1989, 512).

This is not to say I agree with Taylor's canon or with his emphasis on "epiphantic poetry" over prose. What I am emphasizing is the new space of deliberation that he opens up, not how he fills it in. By the same token, literature can be "wrong" in the same way that philosophical problematics can be wrong. Literary works are not merely aesthetic objects; they make claims and receive them. But this does not mean that argument is abandoned for ineffable disclosure, it means that the understanding of argument is expanded to include literary texts. Opening the boundary between philosophy and literature does not necessarily lead to Heideggerian or Derridean conclusions, as Ricoeur fears. Instead, we can read poets and novelists as involved in an argument about the adequacy of languages and problematics, just as philosophers are.

To give some concreteness to these claims and to clarify the way that Taylor's problematic is not tied to his canon, his religious affirmations, or his emphasis on epiphantic poetry, I shall analyze a story that is about the transformative experience of reemploting one's life, Susan Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers." In doing so, I shall be claiming that this tale supports a Taylorian phenomenology of everyday life against a Ricoeurian approach. Glaspell employs an offstage narrator who makes available the interpretive experience of the characters, experience that is always already informed by vulnerable narratives. These movements, rather than the author's or implied author's emplotment, will be the focus of my analysis. Moreover, my Taylorian reading brings out the philosophical importance of literature that Ricoeur's formalism could not.

The story begins when Mrs. Hale is called from her work in the kitchen to join her husband as well as Mr. Peters (the sheriff) and his wife. Mrs. Hale, the center of focalization, learns that Mr. Wright, the husband of an old friend, has been killed. The sheriff suspects that Mrs. Hale's friend Minnie has strangled her husband. The group proceeds to the Wrights' home, where it splits up. The men go to the barn to look for evidence that can establish a motive for Minnie, while the women wait in the kitchen. The men call Minnie "mad," and at this point the women can articulate no other reading of the violent act of which she is suspected. While sitting in the kitchen, however, they encounter Minnie's "text"—botched stitching of a quilt, dirty towels—and discover the systematic psychological torture to which her husband subjected her, a torture that culminated in the strangulation of Minnie's double, her pet bird. In the process of understanding the plot of her life, they become afraid and resist, because they sense that to comprehend the language and texture of her story will require losing the stories in which they are already embedded. To emplot Minnie's story means that they can no longer remain who they are. Application accompanies the understanding and explanation of emplotment, rather than remaining sequestered in

mimesis 3. Reading her story forces them to confront the sexism of their marriages and their culture. They discover that Minnie's husband was not just "a cruel man" but also a typical one, and that Minnie's response differs only in degree and not in kind from the ones that they have had but held back.

The offstage narrator shows their complex hermeneutic interaction with the text—sometimes it grabs them and sometimes they push it away—which is rarely made explicit in their consciousness or in dialogue. Narrative is not merely a retrospective closure that takes place after events but an ongoing part of the phenomenology of daily life. Ultimately, they are so transformed by their reading, they have so shed and shifted the languages of self-constitution, that they betray their husbands and conceal evidence. To understand these changes of identity, we need a Taylorian conception of a narrative and transitional argument, not a philosophy that reduces narrative arguments to mere poetics. "Narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle" (Ricoeur 1984–88, 3: 248).

Defenders of Ricoeur might point out that Taylor's philosophy has precisely the same dangers as Heidegger's "short route"—that is, it cuts off philosophy from the social sciences and leads to an oppressive aesthetic politics. First, Taylor does not cut off philosophy from social science, only from the schools of social science that misunderstand the hold of theory on practice. His approach is very compatible with a sociology of institutions, for instance.[20] Second, Taylor's problematic gives a place to the competing ontological claims that preoccupy contemporary political philosophy, from Judith Butler to William Connolly.[21] Opening up ontological questions does not necessarily lead to Heideggerain conclusions, and Taylor comes to a conclusion about the relationship of language and philosophy to literature that is strikingly different from Heidegger's. For Taylor, the modern subject's being in language is not divided between authenticity and idle talk, which we find in *Being and Time*, or between privileged moments and the sea of forgetfulness that we find in the later meditations on poetry.[22] Heidegger's rejection of the languages of the novel is connected to his deep critique of modernity, a critique that Taylor does not fully share despite his sympathy with Heidegger's critique of subjectivism. Taylor

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[20] See, for instance, the sociologist Craig Calhoun's (1991) review essay of *Sources of the Self.*

[21] See White 2000. The book includes chapters on Butler, Connolly, Taylor, and George Kateb.

[22] See Bruns 1993, where he emphasizes how Ricoeur's conception of language and interpretation ignores the challenge that Heidegger's understanding of poetry poses to philosophy. My focus is on how Ricoeur resists prose as well, but this will mean not coming to Ricoeur from a Heideggerian formulation of the *Sprachlichkeit* thesis.

gives a place to the moral concerns of everyday life that Heidegger dismisses.

Taylor thus openly embraces Bakhtin both for his philosophical problematic of intersubjective dialogical holism and for his sympathetic reading of modernity and art that goes with this problematic. Indeed, Bakhtin's conception of language and dialogism helps overcome the twin dangers of holism for which Hegel is notorious: reduction to an objective spirit and the triumph of the third-person perspective over that of the participants. For Bakhtin, the languages of the novel and society flow in and out of each, so that there is no separate aesthetic sphere, and these languages have enriched as well as reified the modern world. An author's interpretive judgment is displayed by the way a text places itself in relationship to these languages. In any case, Bakhtin and Taylor show how we can give an account of the modern subject's being in language that is not reduced to an account of instrumental reason or *Seinsvergessenheit*.[23]

Nonetheless, the politics of Taylor's reading of modernity has been criticized for its uncritical celebration of the West, as if subjectivism and relativism were its only problems.[24] While I agree with some of these criticisms, I do not think they touch the philosophical approach, only the particular readings. The dangers of Taylor's "short route" are not overcome by going to Ricoeur's marriage of Husserlian phenomenological formalism, structuralist linguistics, and sociology.[25] What makes Taylor's hermeneutic circle so short is not that he ignores the social sciences but that he does not include multiple voices of the West and its others, and that he does not let enough of the losses of the Western traditions appear. To challenge these accounts, we need to bring in these perspectives and not move to a dialectic between philosophical formalism and social scientific research that blocks out ontological issues. Moreover, Taylor's problematic can hear and respond to the challenges from inside and outside the West in a way that Ricoeur's cannot precisely because Taylor makes the language of one's historical identity vulnerable in a way that Ricoeur does not.

While Ricoeur seeks a middle ground between the "exalted subject" (Descartes) and the "humiliated subject" (Nietzsche) through "attestation" (Ricoeur 1992, 16), Taylor sees the cogito as a false starting point.[26]

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[23] See, for example, Taylor 1991 and 1994 for references to Bakhtin.

[24] See Shklar 1991 and Skinner 1994.

[25] When Ricoeur looks to enrich transcendental phenomenology, he turns to Weberian social science, not to literature: "Husserl and Weber have to be thought together, interpretive sociology filling this transcendental void with empirical data" (Ricoeur 1991, 240).

[26] "As credence without any guarantee, but also as trust greater than any suspicion, the hermeneutics of the self claims to hold itself at an equal distance from the cogito exalted by Descartes and from the cogito that Nietzsche proclaimed forfeit" (Ricoeur 1992, 23).

The question Nietzsche poses is not to the cogito but to the languages of the tradition. Taylor's ontological formulation of our being in language enables him to engage Nietzsche and Foucault since both sides accept a constitutive understanding of our being in language, even if they characterize it differently.[27] Unlike the third-person perspective, explanatory accounts of structuralism that give the rules that produce surface structure, genealogy challenges the surface language on its own turf and urges revision or abandonment of some of these languages. "When Nietzsche wants to launch his out and out attack on morality, he does this by offering an account of the transition to it, the rise of slave morality. 'Genealogy' is the name for this kind of probing. . . . Genealogy goes to the heart of the logic of practical reasoning. A hypergood can only be defended through a certain reading of its genesis" (Taylor 1989, 72–73). Thus, Taylor can say that Nietzsche's attack on the procedural ethic argument "resembles [his own] critique, because [they] both want to show that this modern philosophy has moral motives, instead of being uniquely determined by epistemic ones" (99).[28]

To show how Taylor's language of tradition can work with genealogy, I shall discuss a literary example that employs both dimensions of storytelling, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.[29] Ellison's work shows how practical reason makes us interrogate the medium of language and use interpretive judgment to decide whether to emplot narratively or genealogically.

First, Ellison's text is not simply an "innovation" but an argument with Richard Wright's understanding of philosophical anthropology (Wright's naturalism), of democracy, of the resources of African American traditions and their relationships to canonical texts of American and European culture. Ellison's point is not to add to our "narrative schemas" but to repudiate debilitating self-understandings and advance an idea of democratic interpretation. Ellison offers a genealogical critique of the vocabulary of race by showing how "black" functions in American culture in the racial inscriptions that infect the imaginations of all races. Failure to live up to "democratic ideals has

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[27] I am referring to the genealogical Foucault rather than the Foucault of *The Order of Things*, who employs the problematic of the episteme.

[28] Taylor criticizes Foucault for leveling transitional arguments and remaining agnostic about historical change so that we are never "in a position to affirm that one view was a gain over another: for all connections, transitions are between incommensurables" (1985d, 382). When Ricoeur addresses the connection between his work and Foucault's, he turns the rupture of the episteme into a dialectic: "The passage from one episteme to another comes close to the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation" (1984–88, 3: 219).

[29] See Steele 1997, chapter 5, for a further discussion of how hermeneutics and genealogy can work together in Ellison's texts.

compelled the white American, figuratively, to force the Negro down into the deeper level of his consciousness, into the inner world, where reason and madness mingle with hope and memory and endlessly give birth to nightmare and to dream'' (Ellison 1972, 99). In his novel, Ellison shows how the black protagonist, not just the white community, has internalized such self-understandings. Ellison's novel is a first-person retrospective account, in which the narrator must both depict and peel away the languages of his past selves.

Rather than beginning the tale with his younger self, the narrator opens with a prologue that is filled with literary and cultural allusions and is told in a perplexing, taunting style. The reader's novelistic categories take a jolt, and we are made aware of the importance of both the act of writing (emplotting) itself and the site from which the hero's experience is remembered and retrieved, not simply transcribed. The novel is about the search for a site for telling the story. The theme of invisibility is as much about the text-reader relationship as it is about the relationships within the novelistic world. Ellison's relentless stripping away of the Invisible Man's sense of reality is a critique of the referential languages available at the time. What he does—and genealogists often do not—is tell how he changed from the subject who internalized this system to the agent who could "slip the yoke" of the system and tell a genealogical story. Narrative accompanies genealogy by making explicit the transitions in ideas and identities. What hermeneutics and genealogy share is a concern for what we are embedded in, and Ellison's narrative shows how these two can work together. On the one hand, he retrieves aspects of African American, European, and American traditions; on the other hand, he does a genealogy of the oppressiveness of traditions that we inhabit and shows how language constructs experience.

It is worth noting that this account of *Invisible Man* brings out striking parallels to *Sources of the Self*, which also begins by leveraging a redescription of the languages of modernity. The redescription does not aim at particular features of experience but urges wholesale changes in the way we understand subjectivity, language, history, and so on. Like Ellison's prologue, the opening of *Sources* offers a site of narration that the rest of the book tells us how to attain. Both stories involve historical transitions, gains, and losses that must be assessed.

Ricoeur's formalism never lets these ontological aspects of our being in language appear as problems of interpretive judgment or practical reason. I do not wish to deny the great achievement of Ricoeur's work on narrative but wish instead to expose the costs of his particular transcendental approach woven from Kant and Husserl, costs that his generous and tireless efforts at mediation often hide. Although few other philosophers have devoted themselves to reconciling disputes as Ricoeur has, his marriages are always performed in the courthouse of Husserlian

phenomenology, in which language and literature make their entrance down the aisles of transcendental subjectivity.

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