

Human Finitude and Transcendence

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Abstract

While taking for granted that the predicate of a proposition is deemed the most intelligible, the following proposal draws attention to three statements and then suggests (4) that freedom is the basic dynamism of finitude provided that finitude ceases to be identified, and thus confused, with limitation. The three statements are: (1) Human is fragile; (2) Human is fallible; (3) Human is finite.

1. Human is Fragile

This is the emphasis made by Yves Ledure (1920-2012) in *Transcendances : Essai sur Dieu et le corps* (1989). Ledure's endeavor sets up a new distribution within the human relational realm with reference to a precise goal; this requires uncover a hidden dimension of corporality whose ending is objectified in term of transcendence. What is at stake is at once a conquest over the immanence and distortions of human history, over doubt, over the mortal absolute---a conquest that the divine is---and a personal effort toward immortality, plenitude of life, self-permanence i.e. eternalizing as the most basic desire of human corporality. The overall relevance of this desire is constant in Ledure's book. All through his argument, the reflection goes from what life generally is to the singular living being characterized by an extreme fragility which sets it apart in the universe. The human as such is the place for revelation and the encounter with the divine. Thus the transcendent cuts across each and every human existence and the whole history of humankind. There is no other historical figure of the transcendent being than the human being as a whole. God's incarnation is an extraordinary assumption of human being; and yet it takes place at the expense of a fragilizing of the divine. God's incarnation should be understood literally: in Jesus of Nazareth the divine takes on corporality along with its rules and constraints, and in Jesus' humanity the meeting point of history and the transcendent is achieved. Jesus' story is not only the expectation of full personal accomplishment; it is full realization of life itself. Yet this personal accomplishment remains something historical and as such constantly longed for. Here, transcendence is not merely rational, it is historical; in other words it is in keeping with human personal becoming, and such becoming is the reason why transcendence is never total transparency even in Jesus of Nazareth.

God's incarnation is **kenosis**: in Jesus the divine strips itself of transcendence. Jesus is just a human being, in everything similar to a human being. Such is the enigmatic figure of God's incarnation Ledure calls the fragility of the divine. The visibility of transcendence is away; only the divine naming remains---'Lord,' an indication of transcendence. The only figure---however obscure---of the transcendent is human history. In it the divine completely empties itself to the point that human history seems to be stripped of all transcendence and to be the exclusive arena of human activity. More than any other before, our present era experiences this. As long as human beings were subjected to natural determinism, this subordination was deemed a spontaneous and immediate expression of transcendence. However, with the growing human control over nature this kind of supply mean has disappeared and nowadays, God's incarnation is total: it leaves history autonomous, and human beings control over their destiny. At the core of such human density the incarnated transcendent is active, though not as some external, alienating force. God's incarnation forces us to figure out the transcendent as part of human interiority, which is its greatest accomplishment since it raises corporality up to the dimensions of the absolute.

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The gnostic readings and the docetic interpretation of God's incarnation attest to the difficulty of acknowledging that the human body is capable of being the transcending God. Of course, Christian ontotheology does overshadow such capacity. And yet the incarnation of the transcending God entails the accomplishment of anthropology and thus becomes the secret of anthropology. By putting God's incarnation at the center of its discourse, Christianity resumes what is latent in today's anthropologies: human self-affirmation. But more than that, because it gives something ultimate to human self-affirmation and opens up a future which corporality alone---on account of death---cannot hope for. For Ledure, the task consists in deciphering the positive core of transcendence as a call for human freedom and a way toward self-accomplishment. This is not just pure possibility, i.e. a reality stripped of itself. On the contrary, freedom as a choice does away with tyrannical immediacy and opens up a promising future; it does not in any way end up in some sort of fair pocket, i.e. in hopeless idealism content with the management of a present situation stripped of any future perspective.

2. Human Is Fallible

Fallible Man is the title of the first part of Paul Ricoeur's (1913-2005) *Finitude and Guilt*, the second volume (1960; 1986) of his *Philosophy of Will*. As Walter J. Lowe reminds, *Fallible Man* "is not concerned with the concrete manifestation of fault, whatever its form may be [the notion of fault was elided in the first volume of *Philosophy of the Will* devoted to *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*], but rather with that in humans which permits fault to arise: fallibility."² The word 'fault' should be taken in the geological sense: a break, a rift, a tearing. Ricoeur frequently uses the words *faillie* (break, breach, fault), which is akin to *faillibilité*, as well as *écart* (gap, di-gression), *fêlure* (rift), *déchirement* (a tearing, torn) to describe human being's existential condition. The same sense is provided by the verb 'to err' (in the sense of wandering, going astray, deviating), which is retained in *aberrant* and *error*. Ricoeur's book, therefore, is concerned with that which allows for the possibility of a 'rift' in human beings, what enables them to 'err,' to become divided against themselves and thereby to become the 'flawed' creatures.³ According to Ricoeur, «fragility is not merely the 'locus,' the point of insertion of evil, nor even the 'origin' starting from which human being falls: it is the 'capacity' for evil. To say that human being is fallible is to say that the limitation peculiar to a being who does not coincide with himself is the primordial weakness from which evil arises.»⁴ What Ricoeur calls 'disproportion,' or 'discord,' (e.g. pp. 75 & 141) is a constant issue in *Fallible Man*; it comes time and again in all kinds of contexts. His goal is to work out an «anthropology of fallibility» (p. 82) in three steps. The first two steps deal with transcendental imagination whose work is «to take the thing and the person for reflective references.» (p. 81) the second step still remaining «quite formal, having escaped a transcendental formalism only to enter upon a practical formalism, that of the idea of the person.» (p. 69) The third step pertains to the 'heart', the *Gemüt*, feeling. Ricoeur's argumentation is sketched as follows:

In advancing step by step from consciousness in general to self-consciousness and then to feeling, or, in other words, from the theoretical to the practical to the affective, philosophical anthropology progresses to a heightened sense of inwardness and more fragility. The moment of fragility of consciousness in general is, we recall, the transcendental imagination, a blind spot of knowledge transcending itself intentionally in its correlate, the thing. Consequently the synthesis of speech and appearance is a synthesis in the thing itself, or rather in the objectivity of the thing. The second moment of fragility is that of respect. It corresponds to the project of the self or the person. But the paradoxical, disproportionate constitution of respect is transcended intentionally in the representation of the person, which is still a kind of objective or objectival synthesis. The 'heart,' the restless heart, would be the fragile moment *par excellence*. All the disproportion that we have seen culminate in the disproportion of happiness and character would be interiorized in the heart. But the question is whether a philosophy of the 'heart' is possible. It must be a philosophy which does not relapse into the *pathétique*, but which is foregrounded in the level of reason which is not satisfied with the pure and the radical, but which demands the total, the concrete. The direction in which we must look is shown to us by the very movement of the preceding reflection. That reflection is made up of a reduction of the *pathétique*. But that *pathétique* is not devoid of all thematic structure; it was not utterly alien to the sphere of speech for it even has a language proper to it, that of myth and rhetoric.

² W.J. Lowe, "Introduction," in P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, p. xxxv. – See bibliography.

³ W.J. Lowe, *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.

⁴ P. Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 146. – If not specified otherwise, all page indications in the text refer to this book.

Therefore, if that pathos is already mythos, that is, speech, it must be possible to reconstruct it in the dimension of philosophic discourse. Now, this mythos bespeaks the primordial crucifixion that is the misery of the intermediate being. A merely transcendental reflection of the thing does not fully restore that theme, nor does the practical reflection on the person. If a philosophy of feeling is possible, it is feeling that should express the fragility of the intermediate being that we are. In other words, what is at stake in philosophy of feeling is the very gap between the purely transcendental exegesis of 'disproportion' and the lived experience of 'misery.' The two questions are connected, the question of method and the question of substance: the question of the possibility of a philosophy of feeling and that of a completion of the meditation on 'disproportion' in the dimension of feeling. We must resolve these two questions together. (pp. 82-83) The «locus and the node of disproportion» (p. 91) is situated between sensuous desire and reason. This 'between' called *θυμός* by Plato «constitutes the human feeling *par excellence*» and allows for «an understanding of the whole of human fragility.» (p. 92) Ricoeur's «working hypothesis» presented right at the beginning of his essay (pp. 1-6) is then summarized later on in the following statement: «Man's humanity is the discrepancy in levels, that initial polarity, that divergence of affective tension between the extremities of which is placed the 'heart'.» (p. 92) According to Ricoeur, human disproportion or *discordis* to be understood as «the polarity within the human being of the finite and the infinite [...]. Human specific weakness and essential fallibility are ultimately sought within this structure of mediation between the pole of finitude and the pole of infinitude.» (p. xlv) The «global character» of human disproportion plays a central role in Ricoeur's «attempt at totalization» of the various facets of finitude.

Thereby one should keep in mind that totality is not just the addition of «everything human—ideas, beliefs, values, signs, works, tools, institutions.» (p. 67) Yet the question remains: «How should I pass from the idea of a sum to that of a whole? Man's function, insofar as it is distinct from the sum of his partial intentions, would elude me if I could not connect the movement of the whole to the very project of reason, which is that in me which *demands the totality*.» (p. 66) This does not mean that the idea of totality would be «merely a rule for theoretical thought. It dwells in the human will and in this way becomes the source of the most extreme 'disproportion': that which preys on human *action* and strains it between the finitude of character and the infinitude of happiness.» (p. 67) Finitude is «*my point of view*.» (pp. 20-21) The overall relevance of «finite perspective» as a theme (p. 61) in Ricoeur's approach leads to the relation of human finitude and limitation up to the point of **deducing finitude from the limited point of view taken naturally**. Walter J. Lowepointedly describes Ricoeur's «regressive analysis» (p. 21) or «regressive route» (p. 23) in his introduction to *Fallible Man* by saying: «I do not know my finitude by a simple act of introspection, looking within myself. Rather I begin by noting that a given object presents only one side of itself: it is on this basis that I realize that I see things from a specific, limited point of view and am, in this sense, finite.» (p. xvi)

3. Human is Finite

Dissociating himself from what he calls «The *Pathétique* of 'Misery',» (pp. 6-15) Ricoeur starts by analyzing «Finite Perspective» (pp. 18-24) and «Infinite Verb» (pp. 24-37), and he puts Descartes' «theme of finite-infinite» at the basis of his analysis of human fallibility. By doing so, he dissociates himself from what he considers the contemporary tendency to make finitude «the global characteristic»—as he calls it—of human reality. He adds: To be sure, none of the philosophers of finitude has a simple and non-dialectical concept of finitude; all of them speak in one sense or another of the transcendence of human being. Conversely, Descartes, having announced an ontology of the finite-infinite, continues to call the created human being finite with respect to the divine infinitude. Consequently it is unwarranted to exaggerate the difference between the philosophies of finitude and a philosophy that starts straightway with the paradox of finite-infinite human being. But the difference is not trivial even when it is reduced to one of accent or tone. The question is whether human transcendence is merely transcendence *of* finitude or whether the converse is not something of equal importance: as will be seen, human being appears to be no less discourse than perspective, no less a demand for totality than a limited nature, no less love than desire. The interpretation of the paradox beginning with finitude does not seem to us to have any privilege over the opposed interpretation. According to the latter, human being is infinitude, and finitude is a sign that points to the *restricted* nature of this infinitude; conversely, infinitude is a sign of the *transcending* of finitude. Human being is no less destined to unlimited rationality, to totality, and beatitude than limited to a perspective, consigned to death, and riveted to desire. Our working hypothesis concerning the paradox of the finite-infinite implies that we must speak of infinitude as much as of human finitude.

The full recognition of this polarity is essential to the elaboration of the concepts of intermediacy, disproportion, and fallibility, the interconnections of which we have indicated in moving from the last to the first of these concepts, (pp.3-4) i.e. from human finitude to infinitude, from perspective, desire, limited nature and death, to discourse, demand for totality, love and beatitude. For Ricoeur, planet earth remains what it has been for so long: a place for corruption, limited movements and death, a place for great sub-lunar cemeteries, «the dark spot on the clear jacket of the sky,»⁵ which encourages at best a kind of private property on fascinating mysteries. Actually, it provides the humiliation of all human beings, compared to a supra-terrestrial space practically out of reach for them. Ricoeur's promise of «unlimited rationality» to which human being «is no less destined» is indeed a meager consolation. No wonder when he speaks in the conclusion of *Fallible Man* of «la tristesse du fini»---«the sadness of the finite.» (pp. 138 to 140) Sadness is for him an «excellent word» referring to «a negative lying deeper than all language.» (p. 140) Following Spinoza, Ricoeur defines sadness as «a passion by which the soul moves to a lesser perfection.» He adds: Besides the sadness that expresses the intermittent character of my effort to exist, there is a ground of sadness that may be called the sadness of the finite. This sadness is nourished by all the primitive experiences that, to express themselves, have recourse to negation: lack, loss, dread, regret, deception, dispersion, and irrevocability of duration. Negation is so obviously mixed in with them that we can indeed hold this experience of finitude for one of the roots of negation. (p. 139) The analyses «proposed under the heading of pure description» (p. xli) in the first volume of *Philosophy of Will* were, as Ricoeur says in the «Preface» to *Fallible Man*, necessary to put Fault and the whole experience of human evil [in parentheses] so as to delimit the field of pure description. In thus bracketing the domain of fault, I sketched the neutral sphere of human being's most fundamental possibilities, or, as it were, the undifferentiated keyboard upon which the guilty as well as the innocent human being might play. Straightway that purely descriptive neutrality endowed all the analyses with a deliberately chosen, abstract turn. The present work [namely *Fallible Man*] intends to do away with this purely descriptive abstraction by reintroducing what was bracketed. Now, to take away the abstraction, or to remove the parentheses, is not to draw the consequences or apply the conclusions of pure description. It is to disclose a new thematic structure that calls for new working hypotheses and a new method of approach. (p. xli)

When in the conclusion of *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur---despite the firm intention to work out new hypotheses and a new method of approach---talks about «la tristesse du fini», he indicates that he has left **in no way** the domain of the «pure description» of «the neutral sphere of human being's most fundamental possibilities», since such a description in the first volume of *Philosophy of Will* ends up **also** with reference to a threefold «tristesse» (translated as «sorrow»): «the sorrow of finitude» (pp. 447-48), which refers to «la tristesse du fini», then «the sorrow of formlessness» (pp. 448-450), and «the sorrow of contingency» (pp. 450-56) followed by a section on «experience of contingency and the idea of death.» (pp. 456-63) To a large extent, human finitude is taken for granted not only in the philosophy of religion, but also in Christian theology with the exception of the theology of creation that emphasizes the creature character of human being. And yet even there, Karl Rahner states, one hates created reality because it is not that which is upon itself unconditioned. One calls it the relative, the contingent, that which is related to God and can thus be determined only negatively as mere limitation of the infinite being as such, which alone counts. And one forgets that precisely that conditioned reality is loved unconditionally by the unconditioned and has for that reason a relevance that makes out of it more than just a provisory reality vanishing before God; one forgets that the created unconditioned forbids us to appreciate it only negatively.⁶ One may add that human finitude is often practically ignored in the various approaches to the notion of revelation, with a few exceptions including Karl Rahner.⁷ Breaking the spell of totality and the magic of the infinite goes along with the breach of finitude qua limitation. To confuse finitude with limitation may indeed be well intentioned. However, to break with such a confusion brings human being back to transcendence as one's proper enabling,⁸ according to which limitation consists precisely in having no limitation. **A self-proclaimed finitude breaks with limitation and not transcendence as such.** Human being is finite.

⁵Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären II: Makrosphärologie – Globen*. Frankfurt-Main: Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 420.

⁶Quoted in Jacynthe Tremblay, *Finitude et devenir: Fondements philosophiques du concept de révélation chez Karl Rahner* [series "Héritage et Projet," 47]. Montreal: Fides Publ., 1992, p. 319, note 37.

⁷ See J. Tremblay, *Finitude et devenir*, 1992, 539 p.

⁸ Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992, p. 11.

Human finitude is kept alert---not in check---through transcendence; human finitude is the casket (*écrin*)---not the screen (*écran*)---of transcendence. The illusion that is ours pertains less to the true import of knowledge than to the tendency to reify knowledge and to forget that the forms of thinking go further than what is just 'given.' To read divine transcendence into human finitude reminds us that a god who does not become human only enjoys at best a transcendence akin to the transcendence of ideas; it reminds us also that the important thing consists in knowing what one says, which is less obvious than one may believe, especially when – as Ricoeur does – «a vague, formless transcendence» is chastized because it would be viewed only as «a simple field of appearance», not as «an intelligible order» (p. 44) under «a totalizing consideration» (p. 48) for which finitude can only be limitation.

4. Finitude and Freedom

Ricoeur takes as the starting point of his reflection on human fallibility what he calls «the conditions of possibility of the objectivity of the thing.» (p. 47) Here he readily acknowledges that the «nexus of things especially lacks the presence of persons with whom we work, fight, and communicate, and who stand forth on the horizon of things, on the setting of pragmatic and valorized objects, as other poles of subjectivity, apprehension, valorization, and action.» (pp. 47-48) And yet he suggests a «striking resemblance» between the 'synthesis' of reason and existence (p. 72)---or reason and finitude (p. 74)---that the person is on the one hand, and the synthesis of the object (p. 72) on the other hand, with the only difference that the synthesis in which the form of the person is constituted is deemed «fragile», whereas the synthesis in which the thing's form is constituted is deemed «hidden» (p. 79). However, the possibility of the synthesis in the object «is in no way an experience capable of being dramatized; the consciousness of whose province it belongs is by no means self-consciousness, but the formal unity of the object, a project of the world.» (pp. 106-7) According to Ricoeur, «most often we treat ourselves as objects. Working and social life require this objectification; our very freedom depends on these social regularities which give us a routine existence.» (p. 101)

«Inasmuch as the most important obstacles and dangers of life come from intersubjective reality», «the insertion of another person among the consumable objects toward which the sensible appetite is directed constitutes a turn that is singularly more decisive than the insertion of an obstacle and danger between desire and pleasure, or between repulsion and pain.» (p. 109) «The encountering of another person is what breaks the finite, cyclic pattern of the sensible appetite.» (p. 111) «In imagining another state of affairs or another kingdom, I perceive the possible, and in the possible, the essential. The understanding of a passion as bad requires the understanding of the primordial by the imagination of another empirical modality, by exemplification in an innocent kingdom.» (p. 112) Ricoeur lets himself «be guided by the constitution of objectivity for which feeling is the counterpart through interiorization» (p. 122) with regard to what he calls «the context of having» (pp. 114-6), «the context of power» (pp. 116-120), and «the quest for esteem» and «reciprocity» (pp. 120-4).

Having - «Mine and yours, by mutually excluding each other, differentiate the I and the you through their spheres of belonging. Strictly speaking, the multiplicity of subjects is not a numerical multiplicity. Each *ego* retains a fringe of spiritual indifferentiation which makes communication possible and which makes the other my like. But the mutual exclusion, begun by the body insofar as it is a separate and occupied spatiality, is continued by mutual expropriation; the attachment of the body changes character through the interference of the attachment to the 'mine.' If I hold to my house because of my body, the relation to my body becomes, in turn, dependent on the economic relation to things that nourish it, clothe it, and protect it. Being established and settled completes incarnation and transforms it through and through. Moreover, the relation of appropriation invades the region of the mind step by step: I can be in a relation of appropriation with my thoughts (I have my ideas about that, I say). Straightway the mutual expropriation moves from the body to the mind and carries to completion even into their very inwardness the breach between the I and the you.» (pp. 114-5) However, «it should be possible to draw a dividing line that cuts not between being and having, but between unjust having and a just possession that would distinguish among human beings without mutually excluding them. And even if all innocence had to be denied to private appropriation, the relation between human being and having would still be reaffirmed on the level of a 'We.' Through the mediation of the 'we' and the 'our,' the 'I' would again join itself to a 'mine.' Thus, imaginative variation encounters a limit that bears witness to the resistance of an essence: I cannot imagine the I without the mine, or human being without having.» (p. 115)

Power –«[...] I could not understand power as evil if I could not imagine an innocent destination of power by comparison to which it is Fallen. I can conceive of an authority which would propose to educate the individual to freedom, which would be a power without violence; in short, I can imagine the difference between power and violence; the utopia of a Kingdom of God, a City of God, an empire of minds or a kingdom of ends, implies such an imagination of non-violent power. This imagination liberates the essence; and this essence governs all efforts to transform power into an education to freedom. Through this highly meaningful goal I 'endow' history, in fact, with a meaning.» (p. 120)

Esteem and Reciprocity - «The quest for reciprocity [...] is not satisfied by the interhuman relations in the context of having, which are relations of mutual exclusions, nor by the relation in the context of power, which are asymmetrical, hierarchical relations, and therefore non-reciprocal ones. This is why the constitution of the *Self* pursued beyond the economic and political spheres in the realm of interpersonal relations. It is there that I pursue the aim of being esteemed, approved, and recognized. My existence for myself is dependent on this constitution in another's opinion.» (p. 121) «Up to now we have made it our policy to let ourselves be guided by the constitution of objectivity for which feeling is the counterpart through interiorization. What is the objectivity here that follows up the objectivity of economic 'goods' in the quest for having and the objectivity of political institutions in the quest for power? It seems that there is no longer any objectivity at all.» (p. 122) Here, Ricoeur adopts what he calls «a reflection of a Kantian style»--as follows : esteem «involves a representation, the representation of an end that is not merely an 'end to be realized,' but an 'end existing by itself.' The person as represented is just this. Now, this representation has a status of objectivity insofar as the worth of this end is not merely *for us*, but in *itself*. The opposition between the representation of an end in itself and that of a means for us is of itself constitutive of a dimension of objectivity. Not to be able to utilize another person is to encounter objectivity as a limit of my arbitrariness. Objectivity consists in that I cannot use another merely as a means, nor utilize persons like things. [...] Kant gives the name of humanity to this objectivity. The proper object of esteem is the idea of human being in my person and in the person of another. I expect another person to convey the image of my humanity to me, to esteem me by making my humanity known to me. **This fragile reflection of myself in another's opinion has the consistency of an object; it conceals the objectivity of an existing end that draws a limit to any pretension to make use of me. It is in and through this objectivity that I can be recognized.**» (pp.122-3; emphasis mine) «Cultural objectivity is the very relation of human beings to human beings represented in the idea of humanity; only cultural testimonies endow it with the density of things, in the form of monuments existing in the world : but these things are 'works.' It is this formal and material objectivity of the idea of human being that engenders an affectivity to its measure : the cycle of the feelings of esteem.» (pp. 123-4) «Because the relation to self is an interiorized relation to another, opinion and belief are the core of it; worth is neither seen nor known but believed. I believe that I am worth something in the eyes of another who approves my existence; in the extreme case, this other is myself. Insofar as I am affected by it, this belief, this credence, this trust, constitutes the very feeling of my worth.» (p. 124) «Nothing is more fragile, nothing is easier to wound than an existence that is at the mercy of a belief; and one can understand how the 'feeling of inferiority' could serve as a clue to the genesis of neuroses.» (p. 125)

According to Ricoeur, feelings not ruled by the belonging to 'Ideas' or the belonging to a 'We' «are essentially formless, moods, *Stimmungen*, or, as someone has termed them, atmospheric feelings. [...] It might be said that the unconditioned, which is thought but not known by means of objective determinations, is experienced in a modality of feeling that is equally formless. If being is 'beyond essence,' if it is horizon, it is understandable that feelings that most radically interiorize the supreme intention of reason might themselves be beyond form. 'Moods' alone can manifest the coincidence of the transcendent, in accordance with intellectual determinations, and the inward, in accordance with the order of existential movement. The height of the feeling of belonging to being ought to be the feeling in which what is most detached from our vital depth--what is absolute, in the strong sense of the word--becomes the heart of our heart. But then one cannot name it; one can merely call it the Unconditioned that is demanded by the reason and whose inwardness is manifested by feeling.» (pp. 105-6) Let us conclude these long quotations by the following words. For Ricoeur, «Human being is the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite.» (p.140) «If the human being is capable of Joy, of Joy in and through anguish, that is the radical principle of all 'disproportion' in the dimension of feeling and the source of human being's *affective fragility*.» (p.106) «With feeling, the polemical duality of subjectivity replies to the solid synthesis of objectivity.» (p.107) «The object is synthesis; the self is conflict.» (p. 126)

Except on pages 101 and 120 quoted above, there are but a few allusions to freedom in *Fallible Man*. In the end of the «Preface», Ricoeur refers to the «grandeur» and the «limitation» of what he calls «an ethical vision of the world.» (p. xlix) In such a vision---and this is its «grandeur»---«not only is it true that freedom is the ground of evil, but the avowal of evil is also the condition of the consciousness of freedom. For in this avowal one can detect the delicate connection of the past and the future, of the self and its acts, of non-being and pure action in the very core of freedom.» As to its «limitation», it is «already signified in the ambiguous structure of the myth of the fall : by positing evil, freedom is the victim of an Other.» (p. xlix) In chapter two on «The transcendental synthesis» (pp. 17-45), the summary of the argumentation at the end of the section on «Infinite verb» (pp. 24-37) includes the following considerations: The transcendence of speech centered upon the verb, and the verb revealed its soul of affirmation. In moving the accent from signification in general (which was understood rather in the sense of 'noun') onto the verb, we move it also from the truth-intention to the freedom-intention. Here again the correlation between assent and a specific moment of speech prevents the separation of the two problematics of truth and freedom. The verb supra-signifies : that means that it signifies primarily as a noun and is built on the primary intention of signifying. Thereby our freedom of affirming---insofar as it is tied to the verb ---is rooted in the soil of noun-meanings. Moreover, [...] the verb binds human affirmation to the truth-intention in a twofold way. The verb considered as a declaration of being is the reference to the present time, and the reference to the subject is the verb as relational. The two dimensions of truth, existential and relational, are thus implied in the verb. Accordingly, if freedom of judgment lies in the act of affirmation, if the intentional correlate of affirmation is the verb, and if the verb aims at the truth, then freedom and truth form the noesis-noema pair [see Husserl] that is constitutive of human affirmation. (pp. 36-37)

These are the only explicit references to freedom in *Fallible Man*. Is it so because human finitude is understood by Ricoeur as limitation? Let us examine this issue by referring to the usual approach to human rights and freedom still inspired from the 1789 declaration of human rights, article 4. You have rights---others also do! You are free---others also are! The rights of others can interfere with my own rights and make their implementation more difficult and potentially impossible to achieve. The freedom of others is usually seen as a limitation of, and a virtual and even real threat to, my own freedom. Considering others as a threat goes along with individualism, subjectivism and instrumentality, and ultimately a loss of freedom. Not to be taken for granted, let alone to be just defended or even imposed, my own freedom is enabled only through my actual engaging in the realization of the freedom of others. The latter is not a limitation; it is not a virtual threat to my own freedom; it is its condition of possibility. I can be free only if I care for the freedom of others. Freedom emerges from the core of finitude itself. The mutual conditioning of personal freedom goes not from finitude as limitation (dependency) to the infinite, but from finitude to otherness.

Conclusion

Speaking may indeed be frightening because never enough is being said, even though what is said is always too much. To know why one says 'finitude' is to know why one no longer wishes to put the emphasis on 'infinite' (according to Ricoeur, a word «more expressive than meaningful» [p. 12]), on 'absolute,' 'limitation,' 'immanence,' 'fallibility,' or 'fragility.' The issue does not consist in merely incorporating the term 'finitude' into one's vocabulary while keeping the mindset intact or untouched; rather it is to put into question one's own habits of thinking. To say that human being is so finite that one no longer knows what human being is - this is really to say nothing at all. This is so because **human finitude--like meaning--is not a theme of understanding, but the condition of possibility of being human.** I need to understand human finitude otherwise than as limitation and together with transcendence in order to understand transcendence otherwise than as mere super-imposition. Nowadays, philosophy allegedly reaches the peak of its art when it makes plain how to word things in case it would have something to say. Referring to finitude in direct relation to transcendence means that we are condemned, as it were, to creativity, namely to inquire into what remains to be done when nothing can be said. This is both the necessary and impossible task of religious thought. Creative people are those who prevent themselves from sinking into noxious routine. Even the absence of creativity has to be thought of in view of a new intimacy with what is deemed obvious.

Only a finite being can be a transcendent being. This point of departure is not just a matter of choosing a new «accent or tone», to borrow once again from Ricoeur (p. 3, quoted above # 3). The movement from and return to it might provide that the dwelling place in a wider world for human being does end neither in bitter disenchantment nor dull surfriding.

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