

Tomás Domingo Moratalla  
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

# Application: Between Hermeneutics and Education. Paul Ricoeur's Perspective

Pomiędzy hermeneutyką a edukacją.  
Perspektywa Paula Ricoeura

My aim in these pages is to highlight the possibilities of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics in the education field. This is a hermeneutical ethics that can be defined as applied ethics but obviously the key question is application. In this approach, charts are essential and this is an exploratory work intended to lead to future research and developments.

In the introduction I am going to explain some general ideas about the relation between Ricoeur's philosophy and education. The subsequent plan of the work will be:

(1) At first I introduce the structure of what can be named as Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics, which we understand as applied ethics. This is based mainly on *Oneself as Another* and some other articles collected in *Reflections on the Just*. Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics is outlined and shaped in two specific fields: law and, mainly, medical ethics, bioethics.

(2) Secondly, I briefly point out how this hermeneutical ethics, outlined as an applied ethics in the medical ethics field, can be ex-

#### KEY WORDS

hermeneutical ethics,  
application, narration,  
mimesis, Paul Ricoeur

#### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

etyka hermeneutyczna,  
zastosowanie, narracja,  
mimesis, Paul Ricoeur

SPI(18)2015  
ISSN 2450-5358  
e-ISSN 2450-5366  
DOI: 10.12775/SPI.2015.005

Articles and Dissertations

Artykuły i rozprawy



tended with the label of 'hermeneutical ethics' to other fields such as education. In a similar manner to bioethics, the main core of analysis is the 'deal of care' between physician and patient, in education this deal of care takes place between teacher and student.

(3) Thirdly, as a necessary complement of the ethical analysis of educational practice, I point out that the deal of care, the relation between teacher and student, can be afforded by the narrative dimension and this can be analysed from the Ricoeurian contributions.

My tentative conclusion will be that Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics, understood as applied ethics, is improved by this back and forth process between bioethics (medical ethics) and education. The hermeneutical ethics is an ethics for human life, understood biologically and biographically. Bioethics and education help us to apprehend that we, human beings, are a biological and biographical tangle.

With this analysis structure I adopt a similar strategy to which Ricoeur developed with respect to phenomenology. He came up with a phenomenology of will and in so doing highlighted several things: (1) if phenomenology can be extended to the practical field; and (2) if possible, which ones are the needed changes for phenomenological method itself or, better, how should they be understood. Therefore Ricoeur showed the power and limits of phenomenological method.<sup>1</sup> In our case, we consider the consistency of hermeneutical ethics.

This application of hermeneutical ethics to education is not only an extension of its action, but it also helps us to consider its method and task more precisely. Concepts such as 'deliberation', 'phronesis', 'situation judgment' or 'wise action' will be essential in this regard to understanding hermeneutical ethics. All of them revolve around the central concept of 'application'.

As I show here, the contribution of Paul Ricoeur to ethics is so relevant that any other contemporary attempt to elaborate a professional ethics in any field cannot be done without the contribution of the hermeneutical approach.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See "Méthodes et tâches d'une phénoménologie de la volonté", in P. Ricoeur, *À l'école de la phénoménologie*, Paris 2004, pp. 65–92.

<sup>2</sup> About the productivity of the hermeneutical method in education in a similar perspective as here presented, see also D. Simard, *Éducation et herméneutique. Contribution à une pédagogie de la culture*, Québec 2004.

## Ricoeur and education

At first we must say clearly that Ricoeur's philosophy is not a *philosophy of education*, but it can be affirmed that is a philosophy *for* education.<sup>3</sup> Many of the essential themes in his philosophical reflection are open to educational recuperation—a task which still remains to be done. Thus, for example, his philosophy would allow us to think about the subject (and object) of education, the experience brought into play in the educational process, the time of education, or to think generally of education as an ethical and personal event. Many of the milestones in the Ricoeurian consideration call for an educational continuation: the phenomenology of will, the hermeneutics of culture (structuralist and psychoanalytic), the relation between history and truth, the re-description of the experience (education as a re-description of experience), figuration and mimesis (education comprehended as a complex mimesis process in the sense examined in *Time and Narrative*), the question about recognition, the pedagogical relation between the I, the You and the institution, or translation as a hermeneutical-educational paradigm. There are many themes and a multitude of possibilities for reflection and educational action. Very few contemporary philosophers offer so many resources to a consideration of education.

### Levels for a philosophy of education

Ricoeur offers possibilities to think about the ends of education, its sense, its place in society and history, but he also offers resources for concrete educational activity. Talking about 'application' is not only something theoretical, an interpretative framework, but it also means practice. Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics help us to think of education at a general level, at the foundations of educational activity, offering goals and orientation and with applications to concrete educational practice.

---

<sup>3</sup> There are few published works about education in Ricoeur. It can be highlighted *Paul Ricoeur et la question éducative*, eds. A. Kerlan, D. Simard, Lyon 2011.



Therefore, navigating through these two levels of analysis (foundations and goals of education, and educational resources) is complex and simultaneously very valuable. The great end of education should be, as we have seen, political (because in this field the subject can develop his/her capacities and form himself/herself as an ethical subject), it is an education for citizenship, taking into account that to be a citizen is to be human, the goal is to form the I (*Bildung*) in a complex and problematic world.

When talking about the philosophy of education it is not usual to make reference to Ricoeur, neither to his philosophy in general nor his hermeneutical conception in particular. Nonetheless, few philosophers have so much to offer to education. There are many access points from Ricoeur's philosophy to education and sometimes the most important part is not the specific contributions, but the orientations and perspectives he opens. Dealing with such a tough and important question as education, orientation and perspective are crucial.

Without going into details—this is a task for a subsequent work—I would dare to say that each of his works holds essential elements for an educational program. That is, in each one of his works he offers an educational (hermeneutical) perspective. Consider, for example, his latest works such as *The Rule of Metaphor*, *Time and Narrative*, where concepts such as metaphor, narration, imagination, identity or recognition appear. Any of them could be used for a philosophy of hermeneutical education, necessary and indispensable for a complex society as ours.

We cannot say that there is a philosophy of education in Ricoeur but there is a philosophy *for* education. A philosophy that, from its hermeneutical roots, offers many resources (distinctions, accurate terms, suggestions, etc.) in order to think the great essential themes that structure all kinds of philosophy of education: the relation between life and reason, between life and culture, or the question about the integration of culture in life (thinking about culture as a part of life). But besides these great orientations, in his texts we can find proposals for specific and instant action. On the other side, despite saying that there is no explicit philosophy of education in Ricoeur, there is a good ensemble of superb texts addressed directly to the educational question, most motivated by specific educational problems (for example, the university reform in France in the 1960s, or

the hard question about religion in school).<sup>4</sup> All this leads us to think that Ricoeur is the greatest philosopher from 20<sup>th</sup> century that, without a philosophy of education, promotes, articulates and nourishes it.

### The goal of education

The work *Oneself as Another* can be considered the most important by Paul Ricoeur, at least from the perspective of practical philosophy. From this work it is possible to configure some basic contents for education, for an ethical education, or at least, in other words, which are the great goals of education can be outlined.

The great task of education is to allow other people to be themselves, to carry out their identities and to develop their capacities. To educate is to make someone 'flourish', to build up their capacities. If education is so defined, the centrality of the Ricoeurian proposal is unquestionable. His refined hermeneutics of oneself determines the paths where the goals of education could and should follow.

The task of education is, therefore, a work in favour of the growth of autonomy, of the autonomous subject.<sup>5</sup> It implies, as I have said before, the development of the capacities that define us. In the ranking of these capacities, the one that perhaps directs any other, the maximum capacity, the highest end of education, is the capacity for responsibility. The responsible subject implies and requires a subject who is able to make decisions, to act, to narrate, etc. That is, the objective of education is responsibility (the responsible subject), this

<sup>4</sup> See his: "Comment respecter l'enfant?", *Foi-Éducation* 1948, vol. 18, no. 5, pp. 6–11; "Le Protestantisme et la question scolaire", *Foi-Éducation* 1954, vol. 24, no. 27, pp. 48–59; "État, Nation, École", *Foi-Éducation* 1953, vol. 23, no. 23, pp. 54–57; "La parole est mon royaume", *Esprit* 1955, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 192–205; "Faire l'Université", *Esprit* 1964, vol. 32, no. 5–6, pp. 1162–1172 (in: *Lectures 1. Autour du Politique*, Paris 1991, pp. 369–380); "Rebâtir l'Université", *Le Monde*, July 9–10, 11, and 12 (in three parts), 1968 (as "Réforme et révolution dans l'Université", in: *Lectures 1. Autour du Politique*, Paris 1991, pp. 380–397); "L'avenir de l'Université" (1970), in: *L'enseignement supérieur: bilans et prospective*, Montréal 1971, pp. 61–78; *Tâches de l'éducateur politique* (1964), in: *Lectures 1. Autour du Politique*, Paris 1991, pp. 241–257; "Interview", in: *Éduquer à quoi bon? Ce qu'en disent philosophes, anthropologues et pédagogues*, Paris 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See T. Domingo Moratalla, "Educar para la autonomía: ética y ciudadanía en perspectiva hermenéutica", in: *Ensino de Filosofia: propostas e reflexões*, ed. C. Brondani, Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul, Chapecó 2015.



means in Ricoeur's proposal the care of oneself, of the other and of the institution. This goal of education, at the same time, directs some of the essential contents; a program that can be perfectly ordered from Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics. What to teach? The training of self-esteem, solicitude for the other, and the sense of justice—form the ethical basis—the autonomy, respect and values of a normative universe—form the moral basis—and the search for the convenient action, the *phronesis*, the deliberation about oneself, about the other ones, and about the world of institutions, because the estimative and normative complexity finds intricacies, paradoxes and difficulties, and the practical moment, the application, becomes necessary.

### Hermeneutical ethics, bioethics and education

#### Hermeneutical ethics and bioethics

The hermeneutical ethics of Paul Ricoeur finds its most clear expression in chapters 7, 8 and 9 of *Oneself as Another* which Ricoeur referred to as his small ethics. It is clear that his hermeneutical ethics come across its key moment in the third study dedicated to practical wisdom, the moment of application.

The first level is the one of “ethics”, in the sense Ricoeur gives to this term, that he defines from the optative, from the teleological; ethics has to do with the wish and aspiration to happiness. In a dazzling turn of phrase Ricoeur says that ethics is the desire for a good life, with and for others in fair institutions. But we need to take into account the second level, the “moral” one, that has an influence in the normative and deontological aspect, characterized by the pursuit of universality, the coordination of good life projects, facing the always possible risk of violence, it demands sifting through the moral, through the normative. But the normative moment has to be applied in the concrete life, something which is not easy. This third normative moment is the one of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. After the theoretical building in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur applied this framework of hermeneutical ethics to different fields such as law and medical ethics. Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics becomes an applied ethics and in these fields, mainly in medical ethics, it has meant the clarification of levels and even substantial rewriting.

In an especially significant study, “From the Moral to the Ethical and to Ethics”, included in *Reflections on the Just*, Ricoeur examines the structure of hermeneutical ethics as it was presented in *Oneself as Another*. He proposes something more than a clarification and less than a retraction. The correction he proposes is a double one. First he gives more importance and strength to the link between moral experience and the moral subject, that is the person in its power. In other words, Ricoeur is now centred on the notions of capacity, power (and powerless) that define human beings as capable, agents and sufferers. The structure of ethics, the structure of moral experience drawn by that, can be derived from a reading of that capacity. Ethics is for Ricoeur an ethics of capacities, which is very important to the educational field.

Secondly, the other correction affects the order (priority and subordination) of different levels. Ricoeur admits that perhaps he was too in debt to the history of ethics, departing from the teleological, going through the deontological, and then to the level of practical wisdom. Now, re-reading critically, he rebuilds moral philosophy in another way (and the moral experience it expresses). The central axis, the starting point, is the experience of obligation (or the deontological level): “the conjunction between the position of oneself author of his/her choices and the recognition of a rule that compels”.<sup>6</sup> From this point, that is the Kantian idea of autonomy (the oneself and the norm), ethics unfolds in two parts: a ‘fundamental ethics’ (anthropology, a quest for roots, sources, etc.) and a ‘bouquet of regional ethics’, that is a prior ethics and posterior ethics; a ‘flow up’ ethics (referred mainly to teleological) and ‘flow down’ ethics (referred mainly to prudential, application, applied ethics).

Bioethics is comprehended through the third moment of practical wisdom, the moment of decision, and application.<sup>7</sup> Now it is clearly defined as a ‘regional ethics’ (we would say applied ethics). Bioethics as regional ethics reaches clarification and meaning by going through the triple level from the applied to the fundamental, crossing obligation, or in the previous terminology, going from the prudential to the teleological, crossing the deontological.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, Chicago 2007.

<sup>7</sup> About the importance of bioethics in Ricoeur’s deliberative and hermeneutical ethics see the different collaborations collected in T. Domingo Moratalla, A. Domingo Moratalla (eds.), *Bioética y hermenéutica. La ética deliberativa de Paul Ricoeur, Papers of International Congress, Valencia (Spain), February 2013*, Valencia 2014.



The three levels are the basis for Ricoeur’s hermeneutical ethics and it is illustrated in the bioethics field. Bioethics is a regional ethics, an applied ethics, and at the same time is the paradigm for other regional ethics. Hermeneutical ethics is defined, therefore, from bioethics.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand the structure of this hermeneutical bioethics see charts 1 and 2. The charts are very important because the structure of this ethical system can be transposed to other fields like education. This is the main thesis I am defending in this work.

Chart 1.  
Bioethical level  
(medical ethics)

<b>PRUDENTIAL LEVEL</b> <i>Practical wisdom</i>	<b>DEONTOLOGICAL LEVEL</b> <i>Normative ethics</i>	<b>REFLEXIVE LEVEL</b> <i>Foundation ethics</i>
Attention to particular situations	Critical function	Legitimation function
<b>Deal of care</b> <b>“Core of medical ethics”</b> – Basement of confidence – Relation between patient-physician	<b>“Medical contract”</b> – Universalisation – Connection – Arbitrate conflicts	<b>Metaphysical and anthropological foundation</b>
<b>Precepts:</b> – No-replacement of one person for another – Indivisibility (integrality) – Self-esteem	<b>Norms:</b> – Medical secret – Right of the patient to know the truth – Informed consent	Conceptions of health, illness, suffering, welfare...
↓	↓	↓
<b>FRAGILITY</b>		
<i>Suspicion/mistrust</i> (from patient to physical and vice versa)	Conflict among the epistemological, therapeutical and political projects	<i>Pluralism of convictions</i> (diversity of “sources” of morality). Research about “overlapping consensus” and “reasonable disagreements”

<sup>8</sup> For a wider development of this thesis see T. Domingo Moratalla, “Bioética y hermenéutica. La aportación de Paul Ricoeur a la bioética”, *Veritas*, 2007, vol. 2, no. 17, pp. 281–312. Available at: <[http://www.fondsriceur.fr/uploads/medias/espace\\_chercheurs/bioetica.pdf](http://www.fondsriceur.fr/uploads/medias/espace_chercheurs/bioetica.pdf)>.



	<b>THERAPEUTICAL PROJECT</b>	
<b>EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROJECT</b>	<b>Deal of care</b> “Core of medical ethics”	<b>SOCIOPOLITICAL PROJECT</b>
Ensemble of sciences and medical knowledges	– Based on confidence – Relation physician-patient (concrete medical act)	Public policies
<b>Curiosity</b> Aim of wisdom	<b>Solicitude</b> Struggle against illness	<b>General interest</b> Common good

**Chart 2.**  
The core of bioethics in context

From bioethics to education.  
New protagonists of the deal of care

My thesis is that we can apply Ricoeur’s analysis of bioethics to educational practice. The conceptual network previously developed allows us to adequately consider the most important problems in educational practice. To do this from this Ricoeurian proposal it is much better than from other pedagogical theories. See now the explanatory conceptual network in charts 3 and 4:

<b>PRUDENTIAL LEVEL</b> <i>Practical wisdom</i>	<b>DEONTOLOGICAL LEVEL</b> <i>Normative ethics</i>	<b>REFLEXIVE LEVEL</b> <i>Foundation ethics</i>
Attention to particular situations	Critical function	Legitimation function
<b>Deal of care</b> “Core of educational act” – Basement of confidence – Relation between student-teacher	<b>“Educational Contract”</b> – Universalisation – Connection – Arbitrate conflicts	<b>Metaphysical and anthropological Foundation</b>

**Chart 3.**  
Educational practice level



<b>Precepts:</b> – No-replacement of one person for another – Indivisibility (integrality) – Self-esteem	<b>Norms:</b> – Professional secret – Right of the student to know the truth – Informed consent (?)	Conceptions of education, <i>Bildung</i> , knowledge, autonomy...
↓	↓	↓
<b>FRAGILITY</b>		
<i>Suspicion/mistrust</i> (from student to teacher and vice versa)	<i>Conflict</i> among the epistemological, pedagogical and political projects	<i>Pluralism of convictions</i> (diversity of “sources” of morality). Research about “overlapping consensus” and “reasonable disagreements”

**Chart 4.**  
The core of educational practice in context

	<b>PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT</b>	
<b>EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROJECT</b>	<b>Deal of care</b>	<b>SOCIOPOLITICAL PROJECT</b>
	<b>“Core of educational act”</b>	
Ensemble of sciences and knowledges	– Based on confidence – Relation teacher-student (concrete educational act)	Public policies
<b>Curiosity</b> Aim of wisdom	<b>Solicitude</b> Struggle against ignorance, for autonomy	<b>General interest</b> Common good

Explanation of charts:

1. Level: PRUDENTIAL LEVEL

Ricoeur starts his analysis of the levels of bioethical judgment by focusing on what he calls the ‘heart of medical ethics’, analogously it can be said that the ‘heart of educational practice’ is the relation between teacher and student. In this relation a deal of care also takes place, a relation of care and solicitude. This ‘educational deal’ is based on confidence between the student and the teacher. Also there

is a relation of exchange of expectations here, the student hopes to learn (and to pass the exams) and the teacher hopes that the student take advantage of the resources he/she makes available to him/her. It is no longer the 'struggle against suffering' (care and cure) but against another kind of suffering: ignorance (that is also a 'diminishing of capacity').

In the same way as in the deal of care in medical ethics, in the relation between physician and patient, some precepts are at work but it also happens in the educational field: irreplaceability (the teacher has to pay precise attention to each one of the students), indivisibility (the student not only has intelligence, he/she also has feelings, motivation, etc., we educate the whole person) and the educational goal is also achieved thanks to the student's esteem, that it will be a driving force for change and learning; to reach this self-esteem (critically) can be, as I have said before, the great objective for education.

This level of the educational act is the specific level of attention to circumstances and to particular situations. The classroom is where a specific teacher has some particular students in hand. This is the prudential level, the field of application which is more concrete and specific. Ricoeur repeats in his texts about education that any reflection about it cannot neither forget this moment, nor that the great mainstay of medical ethics is the relation between physician and student.

## 2. Level: DEONTOLOGICAL

But it is necessary, as it happens in medical ethics, to go to the deontological level, the level of normative ethics that will perform a critical function. The 'educational deal' transforms into the 'educational contract'. The purpose of this level, the level of contract, is to guarantee the universalization of attention to the students, for example, or to connect with other elements which are more academic, or with other teachers; this is also the most bureaucratic level, etc. This is the moment to search for regulated ways to mediate in the conflicts that arise in the daily practice of teaching.

Also this level has some basic rules, corresponding with those of the prudential level. It is possible, as in medical ethics, to talk about 'professional secret' (privacy about marks, recommendations, etc.), also about the right to information (in this case the student's learning) or, why not, about 'informed consent', understood as the



agreement with the teacher's proposal about the academic course, the subject, the type of evaluation, the teaching methods, etc.

### 3. Level: REFLEXIVE LEVEL

The same as in medical ethics, the educational activity has metaphysical and anthropological foundations that sometimes are needed to be explicit. This is not the level of rules, nor of basic norms, but the concepts about education, training or wisdom itself. This level is the level of 'fundamental ethics'.

The three levels that constitute educational action are also typified by fragility:

(1) In the first level: suspicion and mistrust of the student to the teacher who is seen as an opponent whose aim is to annoy and bother him/her; the teacher to the student, who is seen as someone against whom one has to fight because he/she is not making enough effort.

(2) In the third level: fragility also because the plurality of educational or anthropological concepts, or ideals about wisdom.

(3) And the greatest fragility comes from the second level, because in it converges the epistemic, educational and political projects that are together in educational action, in the concrete educational act. Ricoeur also focused in this conflict of projects about the medical ethics.

In the concrete educational act, three projects converge (Chart 4):

(1) The epistemic project: the educational activity seen from this project is focus on the knowledges, science or traditions to take into account in classroom. The teacher also teaches a subject with a history which can be the objective of research and personal growth. The driving force for this level is curiosity and desire to improve and learn. Sometimes the teacher betrays his/her own subject. For example, the philosophy teacher can feel that his/her explanation about Plato in a secondary level classroom is a betrayal to Plato, to philosophy and to his/her commitment to the truth. He/she lives in fact a complex, tough situation, therefore fragile.

(2) The political project: the educational activity belongs to a socio-political project in which the general interest beyond the interest of one subject, of the teachers or the students takes precedence. This project frequently comes into conflict with the other two.

(3) The educational project: this is the crucial project that structures all the educational effort. It is precisely the deal of care, the

heart of the educational practice, whose rationale is solicitude, the fight for a growth in autonomy and responsibility.

I think it is possible to draw a parallel between the field of medical ethics and that of education. It is not forced and clarifies much in respect to educational practice. As is often the case with Ricoeur's philosophy, it perhaps does not solve the problems but rather helps to formulate them more suitably. It clarifies educational practice and, at the same time, allows a better understanding of the force and power of Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics.

### From education to narration

The medical practice (and its ethics) and the educational practice (and its ethics) are so important and its interests match because both, each one from a different point of view, address the essential elements of human beings. Human beings are a complex mixture of biology and biography; we are biological life and biographical life (as José Ortega y Gasset claimed). Now medical practice is focused on the biological dimension, without forgetting the biographical, and educational practice focuses on the biographical dimension, acknowledging the biological.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics provide important resources to develop a biographical perspective about education. He makes this through the narrative dimension: narration focused in the biographical, time-framed element. And the educational activity can thus be conceived as a narrative activity.<sup>9</sup> The narrative dimension developed by Ricoeur allow us to go into greater depth and detail with regards the relation between teachers and students, that is, the deal of care. The deal of care can be understood from Ricoeur's theory of narrativity.

Ricoeur analyses the activity of stories from a particular interpretation of Aristotelian 'mimesis'. The word 'mimesis' does not mean a simple copy of nature in the *Poetics* of Aristotle. Its singular meaning goes back to the etymology of the word 'mythos'. According to Ricoeur's interpretation, mimesis means here the construction

<sup>9</sup> Widely explained in: T. Domingo Moratalla, P. Mella, "Notas para pensar la educación en términos narrativos", *Cuadernos de Pedagogía Universitaria* 2008, vol. 5, no. 10, pp. 5–9.



of the plot. The construction of the plot postulates the triumph of concordance over discordance that always goes with life experience. Therefore human experiences are structurally narrative; they are concatenations of actions displayed over time, where it has redefined our position in the world, because they cause new understandings of what has happened in our lives. In order to explain the way in which we build our identity or subjectivity through time, Ricoeur talks about a triple mimesis:

(1) Mimesis I (pre-figuration): Previous understandings and experiences the reader and the author of the text have about human action as a course along the time, which are expressed through shared cultural symbols.

(2) Mimesis II (configuration): it is about the literary building of the plot, through a story temporally developed about the story of a life.

(3) Mimesis III (refiguration): the application of the story to life, building a new world or a new horizon of meaning.

The 'educational act', the specific lesson, or a one-year course, can be studied as a process of configuration (mimesis II) acting on some previous experiences (mimesis I) and causing a change, a transformation in the own world (mimesis III). This mimesis made by the educational act works on the three main characters of educational activity: the student, the teacher and the subject.

The educational activity (mimesis II, the specific lesson, the course) changes the life (of student, teacher, even the subject!) and transforms it. The student comes to class with his/her history, his/her motivations, his/her life; also the teacher comes to class with his/her worries, previous experiences, life... it is mimesis I; 'before' the class, before the specific educational act (mimesis II). After that, the objective is to cause a transformation in the student (in the class, in the course), to make himself/herself different, to change his/her life, to produce a transformation, an appropriation, an application. The teacher also transforms narration and life through the same process, and the subject is also transformed. The teacher is responsible for this transformation process; it is a translation process. The teacher is a translator. Translation is also a very interesting category to take into account in the teacher's task, in the explanation of the educational act, and in every applied ethics.

Ricoeur says that understanding a story is to see how life arises (mimesis I), it is not life (mimesis II) and, nevertheless it is capable of changing life (mimesis III). I say it is the same in education. It begins from life (mimesis I, of the student, the subject, the teacher), it is not life (we are in class!) and, nevertheless, it changes life, has an influence on life. Therefore, education can be understood as a process of mimesis in the daily life of people involved directly in the education act. It is a complex human process where knowledge itself transforms if we consider thinking as an open process throughout time, not as the simple repetition of established knowledge.

Education is a process of growing, of humanization; therefore we can understand it as narration. Education as a narrative act is also a dynamic process, not a static one; the stories we tell, and the stories teachers tell and their subjects, are useless if those who are listening are not also involved. In fact, following Ricoeur, we could say that stories themselves need readers/receivers. We need students! They are who save our stories and ourselves, teachers, as narrators. The narrative education is focused on the student as the key to education. The student is the 'narrative being' (with an unfinished history, as with all of us!) who listen to stories in the class with which he/she makes his/her story. The teacher is the one who takes part in this process by offering stories-narrations, being he/she himself/herself a living narration-story.

The educational process has to be seen as an interweaving of stories (student, teacher, subject...), unfinished stories or stories that, if finished, are narrated in another way, and gain a new sense. Therefore, to see education as a narrative process is to see it as a process of the emergence of senses, innovation, creativity, imagination or, using Hannah Arendt's word, as a 'birth'. To educate narratively is to offer births (of students, of ideas-stories... and of ourselves, the teachers!).

The student in our class is not 'given from the beginning', he/she is acquired, is constructed in the educational act. The educational act is a narrative act because it helps to configure the discordant experiences of our students. Narration gets to see education as a global dynamic process; it is not something closed down. It is not possible then to think about education as the transfer of knowledge to the students, where the teacher, who is loaded with all the knowledge, fills them as if they were simply an empty receptacle, and they try to assimilate knowledge. We discover that the students are not a 'tabula



rasa' (a blank sheet of paper), nor do teachers control, as many think, knowledge given forever.

## Conclusion

This narrative analysis of educational practice could also be applied to medical ethics and to understand it as a narrative activity. The hermeneutical bioethics Ricoeur has drawn deserves to be completed with the resources of narration Ricoeur himself has developed, as I have outlined concerning education. It is an open task and one which deserves to be done. But, as a suggestion, is not a struggle against suffering and illness and the pursuit of health and happiness, the plot of a great novel? And is this not our novel, of all of us? Human life, biological and biographical, with suffering and joy, is a story searching for a narration. Medical ethics and educational ethics can learn reciprocally and be complementary. They are two fields where we can see the power of hermeneutical ethics and its crucial idea of 'application'.

I will summarize briefly what I have presented along these pages: I have explained the consistency, relevance and power of Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics (understand as an applied ethics) when it extends from the bioethical field to the educational field. From Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics a good description of educational action can be achieved, thus we confirm, as he did with respect to Husserl's phenomenology, how hermeneutical ethics extends, strengthens, and legitimises.

I have written about the 'effect Ricoeur' in many fields.<sup>10</sup> With the expression 'effect Ricoeur' I refer to the positive results derived from a consideration of the proposals and orientations of his philosophy. It has been so in social sciences and in theological reflection, and it begins in the field of medical ethics (bioethics), politics and literary studies. I think education can make good use of this 'effect Ricoeur'. The main goal of these pages is just to begin to think of education through the concepts this French philosopher offers, and to begin to make good use of the 'effect Ricoeur' in the educational field.

---

<sup>10</sup> See T. Domingo Moratalla, "El «efecto Ricoeur» en bioética. La pequeña bioética de Paul Ricoeur (hacia una bioética hermenéutica)", in: *Bioética y hermenéutica. La ética deliberativa de Paul Ricoeur (Papers of International Congress, Valencia (Spain), february 2013)*, eds. T. Domingo Moratalla, A. Domingo Moratalla, Valencia 2014, pp. 158–167.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Domingo Moratalla T., “Bioética y hermenéutica. La aportación de Paul Ricoeur a la bioética”, *Veritas*, 2007, vol. 2, no. 17. Available at: <[http://www.fondsriceur.fr/uploads/medias/espace\\_chercheurs/bioetica.pdf](http://www.fondsriceur.fr/uploads/medias/espace_chercheurs/bioetica.pdf)>.

Domingo Moratalla T., “El «efecto Ricoeur» en bioética. La pequeña bioética de Paul Ricoeur (hacia una bioética hermenéutica)”, in: *Bioética y hermenéutica. La ética deliberativa de Paul Ricoeur (Papers of International Congress, Valencia (Spain), february 2013)*, eds. T. Domingo Moratalla, A. Domingo Moratalla, Editorial Hermes, Valencia 2014.

Domingo Moratalla T., “Educar para la autonomía: ética y ciudadanía en perspectiva hermenéutica”, in: *Ensino de Filosofia: propostas e reflexões*, ed. C. Brondani, Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul, Chapecó 2015.

Domingo Moratalla T., Domingo Moratalla A. (eds.), *Bioética y hermenéutica. La ética deliberativa de Paul Ricoeur, Papers of International Congress, Valencia (Spain), February 2013*, Editorial Hermes, Valencia 2014.

Domingo Moratalla T., Mella P., “Notas para pensar la educación en términos narrativos”, *Cuadernos de Pedagogía Universitaria* 2008, vol. 5, no. 10.

Kerlan A., Simard D. (eds.), *Paul Ricoeur et la question éducative*, Presses de l'Université Laval/École Normale supérieure de Lyon, Lyon 2011.

Ricoeur P., “Comment respecter l'enfant?”, *Foi-Éducation* 1948, vol. 18, no. 5.

Ricoeur P., “État, Nation, École”, *Foi-Éducation* 1953, vol. 23, no. 23.

Ricoeur P., “Le Protestantisme et la question scolaire”, *Foi-Éducation* 1954, vol. 24, no. 27.

Ricoeur P., “La parole est mon royaume”, *Esprit* 1955, vol. 23, no. 2.

Ricoeur P., “Faire l'Université”, *Esprit* 1964, vol. 32, no. 5–6.

Ricoeur P., “Rebâtir l'Université”, *Le Monde*, July 9–10, 11, and 12 (in three parts), 1968.

Ricoeur P., “L'avenir de l'Université” (1970), in: *L'enseignement supérieur: bilans et prospective*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montréal 1971.

Ricoeur P., “Tâches de l'éducateur politique” (1964), in: *Lectures 1. Autour du Politique*, Seuil, Paris 1991.

Ricoeur P., “Interview”, in: *Éduquer à quoi bon? Ce qu'en disent philosophes, anthropologues et pédagogues*, ed. A. Hocquard, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1996.

Ricoeur P., *À l'école de la phénoménologie*, Vrin, Paris 2004.

Ricoeur P., *Reflections on the Just*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2007.

Simard D., *Éducation et herméneutique. Contribution à une pédagogie de la culture*, Presses de l'Université Laval, Québec 2004.



## Streszczenie

W powyższym artykule zostały przedstawione możliwości płynące z zastosowania etyki hermeneutycznej na polu edukacji. W szczególności pragnę wykorzystać etyczne podejście właściwe dla hermeneutyki Paula Ricoeura, jakie zaprezentował on w „O sobie samym jako innym”. Kolejno rozwijam następujące kwestie: (1) szkicowo opisuję strukturę hermeneutycznej etyki Ricoeura; (2) wyjaśniam – w sposób rozszerzony – jej zastosowanie opracowane przez Ricoeura do etyki medycznej; (3) przedstawiam, jak owa etyka hermeneutyczna może być wykorzystana w dziedzinie edukacji. W ten sposób poprzez teorię Paula Ricoeura ukaże się nam możliwość zastosowania etyki w edukacji. Naświetlona zostanie również kluczowa kwestia tego zagadnienia, czyli definicja samego pojęcia „zastosowanie” (*Anwendung*).

## Summary

In this article I would like to express the possibilities resulting of the application of hermeneutical ethics to the education field. Specifically I adopt the perspective of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics as it is presented mainly in *Oneself as Another*. I proceed as next: (1) first, I briefly describe the structure of Ricoeur's hermeneutical ethics; (2) after that I explain the application to medical ethics drafted by Ricoeur which I develop and expand, and (3) finally, I present how this hermeneutical ethics can be applied to the education field. Then we will be ready to expose an applied ethics for education through Paul Ricoeur's theory. It will be evident that the key question is what defines the idea of “application” (*Anwendung*) itself.

### ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

Prof. Tomás Domingo Moratalla  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain  
tdmoratalla@gmail.com