

Articoli/3

Ricœur and counter-terror rhetoric: a calculus of negation

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This paper takes Ricœur's position that philosophy must be useful in the real world. With this core assumption, the focus is upon consideration of political languages in this age of extremes and then, briefly, of religious identities in this age of demanding recognition. Each phenomenon - political languages and religious identities - can be seen as condensed into the negative and artificially exaggerated polarities between secularism and Islamism and a powerful inductive fallacy. Moreover, academic researchers are under pressure because research is more politicised than ever before. Ricœur's writings about language and violence and secularism can help researchers to attain clarity. His early unpublished work on negation is particularly useful for analysing the ideological polarization that appears to have been effected between certain belief systems. This early work also helps to explain human tendencies towards a ubiquitous calculus of negation that must be addressed.

«A violence that speaks is already a violence trying to be right; it is a violence that places itself in the orbit of reason and that is already beginning to negate itself as violence»¹.

Here is Ricœur, in 1967, analysing with forensic, calm accuracy the way in which language can be used to express violence that is as far away from language as it could possibly be - because words do no physical injury - and yet through him we see how each human has subjugated their own private violence to the rule of law which becomes a great force of willpower that may do damage and is: «an enormous violence which elbows its way through our private violences and speaks the language of value and honour»².

I will sequence my discussion here into consideration of political languages in the age of extremes and then, briefly, of religious identities in the age of demanding recognition, and I will also consider the position of researchers in this time when research seems more politicised than ever before. I will end by attempting to demonstrate how we can use Ricœur to avoid being sucked under and drowned by these two contrary currents. I will

¹ P. Ricœur, *Violence and Language in Political and Social Essays* edited by D Stewart and J Bien, Athens (Ohio) 1976, pp. 88-101.

² *Ivi*, p. 94.

use Ricoeur's writings about language and violence and secularism and his early unpublished work on negation to analyse the polarization that appears to have been effected between secularism and Islamism.

For Ricoeur the distance between violence and language is a formally accurate truth and yet an empty one; much too often language is harnessed to the purpose of violence in politics and the only way to counter this is through non-violence, through avoiding acts that will make peace impossible, to recognise violence where it is and to practice non-violent discourse. These are moral values that he believed must be manifested in our use of language and in which language must be immersed. This is a different position from the analytic philosophy position that seeks to reduce the complexities of language into its supposedly logical components and thereby render language clear and controlled by the wished-for oneness of being that Parmenides proposed. Such oneness requires clarity and is not well served by tropes, by the negative or by dialectics, as these presume movement in meaning, of which moral meaning, as Iris Murdoch asserted in defiance of analytical philosophy, is one vital aspect;

Language itself is a moral medium; almost all uses of language convey value. This is why we are almost always morally active. Life is soaked in the moral; literature is soaked in the moral. If we attempted to describe this room our descriptions would naturally carry all sorts of values³.

Here now is Iris Murdoch asserting her conviction that we inevitably express and communicate our moral beliefs in our use of language; in her philosophy and her novels she communicated our ability for self-deception as well as our capacity for love that heals. Her views on language resemble Ricoeur's beliefs about language: the moral and ethical intent that we can communicate in the act of using language. If we add to that the passion with which it is possible for humans to pursue their personal belief system and promote it as a moral stand, as David Hume analysed, then we are faced with the need to be aware of possible abuse of language to that end. We have wallpaper language in the background of our twenty first century experience and words are also assaulting our senses perpetually through many different media. There is a consequent need for critical awareness about public use of language to disseminate values. Secular values dominate public discourse in Britain, advocating consumerism, choice, free speech and vague suspicion of religious devotion of any sort. I believe that there are economically and politically motivated currents that flow beneath the surface of such discourse, and that free market forces are driving western societies into extremes of wealth and poverty that are not conducive to tolerance and open debate. Secular belief does not need to be coterminous with such extreme phenomena, as we can see from alternative models such as humanism or certain nontheist Quaker approaches. Yet we seem to have

³ I. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, London 1997, p. 27.

chosen or at least accepted a climate of extremes in which there are renewed concerns about exclusion of certain groups, whether by poverty or race, ethnicity or belief. Rydgren et al demonstrate this clearly as manifesting itself in anti-immigration politics that often emerges from middle-ground, not extreme right parties, but then may adapt to or mutate into old European fascist affiliations and are characterised by exclusion, beliefs in superiority and ill-informed economic arguments - Rydgren 2005.

The inductive fallacy

In public discourse in Britain the debates about secularism have shifted from a general loss of religion into an assertive anti-religious tendency which resonates with a focus upon Islam as the most visible religion in Britain today – Islam is perceived to be a threat and therefore serves as the summative version of all that is bad about religion; we see this in the anti-Islamic pronouncements of Hawkins, Hitchens and Harris, that are calculated to please secularists. By such means the secularism debate becomes anti-terrorist and therefore by association anti-Muslim. No-one wishes to die through carelessness, so close attention is paid by many citizens to the sentiments expressed in daily newspapers about such alienating phenomena as honour killings and the risk of sharia law being imposed upon Britain⁴. These populist sources are mirrored in other forms of documentation such as the UK government's Prevent agenda, a counter-terror policy that lays out its target as Islam:

Osama bin Laden may be dead, but the threat from al Qaida-inspired terrorism is not (...). We will use smart engagement to take on extremist ideas alongside a ruthless determination to find and punish those who promote or take to violence⁵.

Britain is not alone: the counter terror agenda has spread across Europe. This political stain has spilt over into the public domain, which is saturated in media (and academic) rhetoric about radicalisation, security, terrorism, migration and multiculturalism, and the perceived connections between these phenomena, even though it is the case that most acts of terror in Europe are committed by white European separatist movements. To all of this it is implied that secular life - secularised Christianity or Judaism perhaps - is the antidote. Islamism is presented as the negative to secularism, and the definition developed by Simcox et al for the Henry Jackson Society includes imposition of sharia law, Islam as a holistic socio-political system, the necessity of uniting Muslims worldwide into political bloc that will develop a caliphate in which God is sovereign. Using this definition, Simcox

⁴ Discussion with Islamic scholars would clarify two factors: the impossibility of imposing sharia law into a Muslim minority country and the understanding of sharia law as non-violent, non-extremist.

⁵ HM Government, *Prevent Strategy*, pp. 1- 2. www.official-documents.gov.uk

et al - 2011 - describe the terrorists they analyse as committing IBOs, i.e. 'Islamism' related offences.

Against this backdrop of negative commentary the perceived threat of Islam can be whipped up to an almost McCarthy-like fever pitch, in which British Islamophobia becomes justifiable by virtue of the need to protect citizens from the 'Islamist threat'. This form of Islamophobia is not seen as racism, because it is believed to be a justified opinion, based on facts about real and present danger to the lives of British citizens: «Al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda inspired terrorism remains the biggest threat to the UK's national security»⁶.

Wodak (2013) has identified this mechanism within the resurgence of European right wing populisms. I perceive such positions to be racist because I believe that such a statement as the above – about Al-Qaeda is a gross exaggeration, and also a deliberately calculated one. Official UK approaches to Islam and Muslims are committing the 'inductive fallacy' logic argument of hasty generalisation. When a sample of evidence is small, it is very unwise indeed to try and draw generalizable conclusions. It is not possible to extrapolate to the general population of British Muslims from the very small sample of terrorists who are Muslims. However, this does not stop generalisations being made and one major mechanism that greatly facilitates such generalisation is the phenomenon of radicalisation; it is widely asserted that many British Muslims would become terrorists if they were radicalised and, moreover, that they are at imminent risk of radicalisation. There are many initiatives that have been created to analyse, address and resolve this perceived risk, and official policy rests upon it. Even against the secularist grain, faith institutions are seen to be useful after all as it is considered that they can help with counter –radicalisation: «They [faith institutions] can lead the challenge to an ideology that purports to provide theological justification for terrorism. (...) They can provide more specific and direct support to those who are being groomed to terrorism»⁷.

Clearly there is a risk to Britain of terrorism. I do not deny that. Nor do I condone any acts of terror. Clearly however, there is also a need to analyse the terms as defined in this debate. In his book *The Islamophobia Industry* Lean demonstrates the calculated nature of much of this hasty generalisation; in other words it is not due to ignorance or to evidence but to conviction, and as Lean argues, this is unrelated to fact. Moreover I will show later, from my own research the detrimental effects of such a calculus of negation.

⁶ R. Simcox, H. Stuart, H. Ahmed and D. Murray, *Islamist terrorism. The British Connections*, London 2011.

⁷ HM Government, p. 80.

How can Ricœur's work be used to understand phenomena that he only partially predicted?

Ricœur did not engage with Islamic philosophy or culture at all deeply, although he supported his Algerian friends, opposed the civil war between France and Algeria and sought critically to understand the shortcomings of France's *laïcité*, as discussed in *Critique and Conviction*. Ricœur's philosophy demonstrates the problems created by the lack of clarity about secularism and the counter terror policy for the future of Europe. His life's work demonstrates his ability to provide support at various different levels: he worked actively to critique and challenge nationalistic ideas about identity and citizenship, in his paper *Being a stranger*. He also provided forms of debate that can be used as the basis for ethical pedagogy such as his model of translation for accommodating the 'other', in his three lectures *On Translation* and he developed a model of dialectical thought that can incorporate the insurmountable differences between faith and secularism. Ricœur's work on 'the other', in *Oneself as Another* provide me as an academic researcher and also a practicing research project leader with the intellectual arguments to challenge current discourses and offer alternatives.

Political languages in the Age of Extremes

The word 'terrorism' has become much used by western democracies. The current UK definition of terrorism is given in the Terrorism Act 2000. In summary this defines terrorism as an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people; causes serious damage to property; or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system. The use or threat must be designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause⁸. It is interesting to consider that this definition is so wide as to feasibly encompass most acts of aggression, including that which is legitimated and perpetrated by a nation state.

Noam Chomsky describes a trend as starting in the 1980s in America whereby terrorism is only used to refer to enemies of the nation state and never to acts committed by the nation state itself. He has written extensively on language and politics and, while detailing the acts of terror committed by nation states such as USA and Israel, he defines a sort of terrorism that he calls «retail terror», small scale warfare like car bombings that can also be used by big nation states as well as small terrorist groups⁹.

At a European level, Wodak has used critical discourse analysis to demonstrate how Haider, former Leader of the populist Austrian Freedom Party, mounted verbal attacks on prominent Jewish figures using Anti-Semitic allusions, in the form of jokes, word play and appeal to Jewish

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 108.

⁹ N. Chomsky, *International Terrorism. Image and reality*, in *Western State Terrorism*, edited by A. George, London 1991.

stereotypes¹⁰. He most particularly applied such linguistic devices to issues about the characteristics of real Austrians, and contrasted that with Jewishness. This racist use of language was neither censured nor censored.

In his 1967 essay *Violence and Language*, Ricœur invites us to accept that language and violence should be separate, must be separate and yet are capable of moving into each other's territory: when language discusses its violent potential that may bring possibilities of solving problems or it may simply cause further difficulties. The language of the Prevent Strategy documentation is measured and reasonable, with appeal to rational support by referenced use of research documents, and Ricœur understood this process of naming. Muslims are named as terrorists, actual and potential:

It is through the subtle art of denomination that the common will conquers our wills; by harmonising our private languages in a common fable of glory, it seduces our wills as well and expresses their violence, just as the juice of a fruit is expressed by squeezing¹¹.

Words can be used to avoid verbal violence and thereby perpetuate the real violence that the language describes; when we speak of terrorists we are giving ourselves the view that they are a category that is not like us and we are also legitimising our hatred/violent actions. Ashley makes the point that on the battlefield we can label with ethnic, racial and nationalist slurs. We kill in war with exploding, poisoning and burning; and we use euphemisms to make the language less violent: take out, wipe out and toast. In the public sphere Ashley believes language tends to be more ideological and political – I believe that is another problem with to-day's discourse; it is becoming the battle discourse as described by Ashley, considered justifiable because of the «war on terror».

Religious identities in the Age of Demanding Recognition

Religious identities are being used in many ways to demand recognition, to deny recognition and to construct new legislative frameworks that may in fact increase the likelihood of discrimination by amplifying differences rather than demonstrating similarities. In 2001 Weller et al found that in Britain Muslims faced more discrimination on grounds of religion, belief and ethnicity and a complex combination of all three. Modood determined that socially and legally the approach to equality is currently still based upon individual human rights, broadly therefore positioned within the classical liberal political tradition, rather than group rights and concerns (Modood 2007). At this time Mayer found increased and subtle forms of anti-Semitic behaviour and language, using also social conscience issues, like the Israeli

¹⁰ R. Wodak, *The Sage Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, edited by B. Johnstone and P. Ker-swil, Los Angeles 2011, p.369.

¹¹ P. Ricœur, *Violence and Language*, in *Political and social essays by Paul Ricœur*, Athens (Ohio), edited by D. Stewart and J. Bien, translated by D. Stewart et al., 1974, p.94.

role in the Middle East. By 2013 Weller and his team, reviewing their analysis of discrimination ten years on, found significant levels of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, although new laws seemed to provide some protection to new religious groups like druids.

In his last book, *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur considers Axel Honneth's proposal that recognition is a necessary component of respect and culture. Ricœur expresses concern that this search for recognition can lead to a condition akin to Hegel's 'unhappy consciousness'. In other words, if the demand for affective, juridical and social recognition takes a militant and conflictual form, then a sort of unhappy consciousness can ensue: «as either an incurable sense of victimisation or the indefatigable postulation of unattainable ideals»¹².

It is difficult to know whether this is a significant factor in the debate in UK, but it is clear that majority groups feel negative about what they perceive to be minority privileges. It is also clear that aspects of Ricœur's concerns are shown in the distortion created by focusing upon a particular minority group in the perceived interests of national security, as in Europe with the case of Muslims.

Ricœur's struggle with the negative

I believe that these confusions can be partially resolved by deploying Ricœur's early work on negation, which is new work that I am researching at the Fonds Ricœur: taken together with his work on the violence of language this will demonstrate some of the mechanisms for 'othering' that are at play in the prevalent attitudes towards Muslims, the resurgence of anti-Semitism and the right wing and anti-immigration extremisms that are resurgent in Europe.

Ricœur worked through several confusing yet simple, robust and surprisingly long lived models of negation. He was determined to resolve the difficulties caused by many different meanings attributed to the idea of the negative; is 'negation' nothingness and if so, is that nihilism or is that Plotinus' idea of an exquisite apophatic way to God through not knowing? Is the negative a sense of loss or lack or deprivation or even sin as postulated by certain religious debates around the dangers of desire? Is negation even an existential state of mind that can be seen in Sartre's work or, more positively, in Ricœur's own search for the capacity to deal with our own internal and personal shortcomings, our inability to be at one with ourselves?

It is clear from his unpublished papers in the Fonds Ricœur that he wanted to develop a philosophy of negation and gave it up only after twenty years or so of lecturing upon the subject (c.1952-68). He was convinced that the negative cannot be squeezed out like the juice of a lemon; it is integral to our being, as we can never be comfortably at one with ourselves. He also wanted very much to use the negative differently from Hegel. Whereas

¹² P. Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, translated by David Pellauer, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2005, p. 218.

Hegel resolved the negative within his dialectic, Ricœur wanted to retain the negative as a live force, a constant reminder that we are at odds with ourselves and with the world and that we can use negative formulations to challenge yet never fully resolve our problems. It seems to me that his linguistic turn thereafter provided a partial solution to his attempts to deal with Hegel, which I discuss in my book *Ricœur and the negation of happiness*¹³. If we go back over the major figures that interested Ricœur in his search to understand negation, they are the thinkers who developed philosophies that are basically dualist. I wish to explore this a little here, although Ricœur apparently did not classify them as I am about to do¹⁴. Parmenides sought to argue that there is no 'not-ness', and believed in a unitary monist model, although in order to argue this, he had to deny that there could be anything we do not know about. By using denial he demonstrated the need for the very negative impulse that he sought to refute. Plotinus and Spinoza also argued that all is one (although Spinoza is difficult to categorise). Heraclitus argued for a both/and model of conflict and growth, unresolved dualism. Aristotle developed a dualist, either/or model. The dualist either/or model is the most popular, also adopted by Kant, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and by most of us, although some would deny it. Deleuze attempted to develop a more/less model, but was also a monist. Derrida challenged the oppositional but conceded that we think in binary ways¹⁵.

I believe we can conclude by drawing on Ricœur, that there are three major attributes of the negative: firstly, negation is an integration of two related phenomena: in order to adopt binary arguments, we adopt a theoretical position, which I examine through Ricœur's early work on negation. The second related phenomenon is an existential attitude, which I illustrate in my book with practical examples and parables. We must act and affirm our existence by asserting and attesting to our capacity to achieve something useful, good or beautiful.

The second attribute of the negative is based on our desire to think dualistically, to create binaries, like positive/negative, male/female, good/evil and us/ Muslim. Yet we can only hope to understand ourselves fully by trying to understand the other, whom we have identified as very different from us, which Ricœur developed in later work. I seek to address some of the others whom we negate and about whom we should, I believe, think more clearly and through whom we can understand ourselves better: women, children, the old, Eastern philosophy, Islam. If we do this we may be more contented in the long term, yet it is problematic as it involves accepting the existence of negative issues of many different sorts that we cannot resolve and would prefer to ignore. It is very difficult to decentre oneself, to 'unself,'

¹³ A. Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the negation of happiness* London, New York 2013.

¹⁴ At intervals, during cataloguing and sorting, new materials by Ricœur upon negation are being found in the archives, which require a research team.

¹⁵ See A. Scott-Baumann and C. Norris, *Derrida and Indian Thought; Prospects for an East-West Dialogue*, in «Consciousness, Literature and the Arts», V(2), 2004.

as Murdoch expresses it, especially if it requires abandoning a deeply held conviction, however unfounded or inaccurate our conviction may be.

Thirdly there are both active and passive aspects of negation: Ricoeur takes from Aristotle's analysis of human experience the two main forms of negation as he saw them – willed or suffered¹⁶. Willing is an active force, and can be an act of negation. Suffering is negativity, a negative state of mind or a received passive act such as the suffering of the elderly in a hospital. How can we acknowledge the limits to our actions, limits that may necessitate passivity? I want to go further than Ricoeur on this and ask whether we can tell the difference between willing and suffering... if we cannot always tell the difference, then we may mistake one for the other and believe ourselves to be suffering a phenomenon that we have in fact willed, as we see with Hegel's bad consciousness and Sartre's bad faith. This may then have unintended consequences, as I will show with the complexities of my own research into Muslim communities.

Counter terror agendas and academic practice. How will you know when they lie to you?

As an academic researcher who also at times works on government funded projects, I am reminded of Foucault when he argues that we cannot separate the pursuit of knowledge, the epistemic, from the political. Everything is dangerous - not necessarily bad – ethico-political difficulties focus upon deciding which the major danger is. This can take us right back to the Pre-Socratics and to the tension, partially exaggerated by Hegel, between Heraclitus and Parmenides. Heraclitus ostensibly arguing that chaos is necessary for growth, and Parmenides arguing, ostensibly, for unity, and against negation and contradiction. What good can these ideas do us when faced by a government seeking re-election, which is the constant state of British governments as they only have a five year term?

«Our consultations with Muslim communities», said Prime Minister Tony Blair in a speech to the House of Commons in autumn 2007, «emphasise the importance of the training of imams». He continued: «The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will be announcing an independent review to examine, with the communities, how to build the capacity of Islamic seminaries, learning from other faith communities as well as from experience overseas».

Shortly afterwards the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) set up an advisory group to steer the review to which the Prime Minister had referred. Terms of reference were drawn up and I was invited to lead the research, for which we produced a final report

¹⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Evanstone 1965, and he returns to the agent and patient as well in P. Ricoeur, *The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political*, in *Paul Ricoeur and the Task of Political Philosophy*, edited by G. S. Johnson and D. R. Stiver, Plymouth (U.K.) 2013, pp. 13-24.

in 2010¹⁷. I undertook this research because various Muslim colleagues asked me to do it. These are the questions we sought answers for:

- What are the principal leadership roles in Muslim communities, and what therefore are the principal training and development needs? (chapter 2)
- What kinds of training and professional development opportunities are currently provided? (chapter 3)
- What kinds of training should be provided in the future and how could they be achieved?? (chapter 5)

The research was funded by the government's *Prevent* strategy, which was the subject of a cross-party parliamentary report in 2010. This was the 2010 *Preventing Violent Extremism* report, chaired by Dr Starkey, on governmental counter-terror policies, which suggested that the so-called *Prevent* agenda could render more likely the radicalisation of British Muslim citizens towards the very terrorist agendas that it was designed to tackle.

I believe our research was predicated upon a different sort of assertion; that within Britain there are demands for better, more inclusive understanding of Islam and the West. Internationally there are major changes afoot in the Arab world and it is likely that these changes will have a significant impact on British Muslims, many of whom hold loyalties to the *umma* (the world wide Muslim community) as well as their allegiances to Britain. It is difficult to predict what form this impact will take, but all the more necessary to ensure that proper channels for inter-community and interfaith dialogue and debate are open: there is already considerable debate about secularism and Islam within pluralist societies like Britain, and such debate often polarises the secular and the Islamic as mutually exclusive and antithetical to each other, in the manner of Huntington's theory of the clash of civilisations. In fact, I suggest that compatibility is more appropriate: changes in the Muslim and the Arab world will create emerging markets, increase competitiveness among Western powers for these new markets and require trade activity generated with Britain that is underpinned by understandings of Islam. However, the reality of *this* research project seemed different.

Government advisors, who were researchers, were brought in to critique our research proposal, in which we proposed to achieve the following:

- gaining unprecedented access to *dar ul ulooms* (Muslim seminaries) ; 28 visited.

¹⁷ Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) funded *review of Muslim faith leader training in the UK* (Mukadam et al 2010). The research set out to explore various models for the training of Islamic scholars in the UK, and ways and means through which existing facilities may be acknowledged, contextualised and enhanced as part of pluralist British society. The report was submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, in October 2010 and is available here www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1734121.pdf

- training community researchers i.e. trusted locals who were trained already as research data gatherers , to do some of the data collection regarding faith leader training

- leaving the research field perhaps no better than we found it, but certainly no worse, i.e. being considerate and not inflammatory, yet being honest and constructively critical in discussion where necessary.

We were asked how we would know when Muslims were lying to us, which seemed to be based on the premise that they would lie to us. This is a most serious demand, as all experienced researchers believe they should enter the research field without prejudice, to collect data, and that they must triangulate their data collection to ensure accuracy.¹⁸ My responses to questions about lying were considered inadequate, and it was clear that we were viewed negatively, we were part of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that, like an ideological position, is well-nigh impossible to challenge successfully. The research was deeply problematic in every way; due to the intense politicisation of the field through media coverage about imams and Muslims, we were viewed with great suspicion by imams and Muslim teachers and also by the civil servants who commissioned us. We must consider Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth with their Critical Terrorism Studies, who draw attention to the risk of academics being seen as spies, engaged in counter terrorist activities.

Our conclusions and recommendations to the government included the following suggestions:

Universities and other institutions of higher education should consider, in consultation with local, regional and national Muslim organisations:

- developing bridging curricula that necessitate and facilitate comparisons between ‘Western’, pluralist curricula and Islamic higher education

- developing a three-year honours degree in Islamic Studies and Sciences which would build on, and not be narrowly dependent on, the traditional *Shia* and *Sunni* theological syllabi

- developing a two-year foundation degree, perhaps employment-based, in applied, practical theology

- re-orienting Islamic Studies programmes at first degree and postgraduate level to make them more relevant for women and men who wish to undertake faith leadership responsibilities as teachers, chaplains, scholars

¹⁸ Triangulation involves collecting data from different data sources e.g. Interviews, observations and written records already in existence. Comparison and contrast of such varied data will facilitate understanding of discrepancies and inaccuracies in any one data source.

Our recommendations were not implemented by the commissioning government, New Labour, or by the new government, which was the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition and had not commissioned the work. The research provided anecdotal and evidence-based data of some of the hindrances that are keeping such activity to a minimum. Our findings also demonstrate the lack of higher education opportunities that are available for Muslims (and others) who wish to enhance both their understanding of Islam and their effectiveness as British citizens (*Mukadam et al* 2010: CLG funded). We have fortunately received further funding to disseminate our findings, and this follow-on project now necessitates sharing our findings with the academic community of British universities, the Muslim colleges, other religious representatives, interfaith experts and members of civil society. Such an approach necessitates working with academics from both Muslim institutions and universities to identify and develop understandings of the road blocks that prevent partnerships, and to also explore ways to dismantle these roadblocks¹⁹. Interim findings of this follow-on dissemination project confirm the existence of a category error: counter-terror personnel from the Prevent team are attending our workshops to represent the government; for me this is a category error based on the hasty generalisations made about British Muslims, using the inductive fallacy that evidence from small samples can be extrapolated to a population. Muslim activity on campus is thereby assumed to have the characteristics of radicalisation and terrorism, not ambitions to attaining higher education.

The calculus of negation

Humans tend to calculate reality in terms of positive/negative dualist patterns and in an age of extremes these binaries become more exaggerated and more dangerous, both within political language and in the desperate search for religious recognition. By contrast, humans also think about unity, about being the same as each other: humans constantly seek *identity*, sameness, in the sense of sameness with self as argued by Parmenides. I show in my book *Ricoeur and the negation of happiness* how Ricoeur returned after twenty years of studying negation, to welcome Kant's early essay about negative magnitudes, in which he shows us how the positive and the negative should be seen as equally strong and potent and 'good'²⁰. This can be developed to show how Ricoeur transformed the other person (whom Plato saw as negative because incomprehensible) into the post-Kantian, post-Hegelian negative that *balances* the so-called positive: vibrant and facing up to its own dualist fallacies, such as Jew versus the majority or Muslim versus the majority. My research on Ricoeur and the negative demonstrates to me how important it is to take into account these negative

¹⁹ <http://www.derby.ac.uk/collaborative-partnerships-project>

²⁰ Kant E 1763 'Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy' in *1755-1770 Theoretical Philosophy* trans David Walford in collab with R Meerbote Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

aspects of human nature and gives me the strength to work with negative government agendas in order to celebrate difference and try to function usefully within a 'liberal democracy' in which all citizens should have equal rights and equal access to education.