

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur dies at 92: Studied how people overcome doubts by drawing on spiritual heritage

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French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, an influential thinker on both sides of the Atlantic, died May 20 at home in Chatenay-Malabry near Paris after a months-long illness. Ricoeur was 92.

Raised in a devoutly Protestant home after he was orphaned in World War I, Ricoeur survived years of German imprisonment during World War II to complete studies and to teach at the University of Strasbourg and the Sorbonne as well as hold faculty positions at the University of Chicago, Columbia and Yale, among other posts.

Known for his work in phenomenology—the study of how perceptions of events shape a person’s reality—Ricoeur sought to examine how people could overcome weaknesses and doubts by drawing on their spiritual heritage. “Not only did he write explicitly on Christian themes,” noted Bruce Ellis Benson of Wheaton College, “but his faith was an underlying influence on his writings.”

Last November, Ricoeur and historian Jaroslav Pelikan of the U.S. shared the Library of Congress’s second John W. Kluge Prize for Lifetime Achievement in the Human Sciences—a \$1 million prize honoring achievement in fields not encompassed by Nobel Prizes.

The year before, Ricoeur received the Paul VI Prize from Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. He also received the Croix de Guerre and the Academie Française’s Grand Prize of Philosophy in addition to numerous honorary doctorates.

“In the face of tragedies of our era,” said French president Jacques Chirac in a statement, “Paul Ricoeur never stopped proclaiming with determination the need for

dialogue and the respect of others.” Ricoeur expressed opposition to the French war in Algeria in the 1950s and to the 1992-1995 Bosnian conflict.

His 20 books included *The Rule of Metaphor*, the three-volume *Time and Narrative* and a two-volume set on the philosophy of the will titled *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*.