KU Leuven
Humanities and Social
Sciences Group
Institute of Philosophy

NARRATIVITY AND MNEMONICS

SELFHOOD AND MEMORY IN RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS

Kristofer Arca

Supervisor:
Prof. Luc Anckaert

Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

July 2021

Acknowledgements

To Professor Luc Anckaert for his guidance throughout all of my graduate studies, and thus, for trusting me to become the researcher and professor that I am today.

To Mr. Stein De Cuyper for his knowledge and patience, as the circumstances surrounding the completion of my doctoral studies were a little more unconventional than most cases.

To the entirety of the Higher Institute of Philosophy for allowing me the honor and privilege of completing my education at KU Leuven.

To my students at Miami Dade College, who continue to inspire me to teach to my fullest.

To Grace Torres for supporting and believing in me. I love you.

To my mother, who I carry in my memories.

Table of Contents

Introduction……………………………………………………………….1
I. Initial Description of the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory……………………………………………2
II. The Underlying Motivation and Goals for this Work…………………………………………………………………10
III. The Structure of this Dissertation……………………16

Chapter 1: Opaque Selves: In Defense of Narrative Identity in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics……………………………………………22
I. The Priority of Episodicity: Strawson's Anti-Narrativist Position……………………………………………25
II. The Demand to Be Said: From Strawson to Ricoeur……………………………………………………………34
III. The Dialectic of Emplotment: Narrative and the Mimetic Triad……………………………………………………40
IV. The Dialectic of Selfhood: Personal Identity and Narrative Identity…………………………………………………53
V. Neither Trivial Nor Pernicious: A Ricoeurian Response to Strawson……………………………………………73
Conclusion……………………………………………………………83

Chapter 2: The Hermeneutics of Memory: The Aporetic Nature of Memory……………………………………………………85
I. The Representation of the Past and the Dialectic of Memory…………………………………………………………89
1. The Representation of the Past………………90
2. The Dialectic of Memory…………………………99
3. The Representation of the Past: An Insurmountable Aporia…………………………140

II. The Subject Who Remembers: Between Personal and Collective Memory……………………………….142
1. Personal Memory: Arguments and Analysis………………………………………….145
2. Collective Memory: Arguments and Analysis…………………………………………158
3. Personal and Collective Memory: A Surmountable Aporia…………………………169

Chapter 3: Narrated Memory: The Hermeneutic Response to the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory…………………………………………………………………171
I. Narrativity as the Activity of Emplotment…………175
II. The Structure of the Aporia of Time in *Time and Narrative*……………………………………………………182
III. The Poetic Response to the Aporia of Time……………………………………………………………186
IV. Narrated Memory: Between Personal and Collective Memory………………………………………224
Conclusion……………………………………………………235

Chapter 4: The Affirmation of (A) Life: Narrative Memory and the Death of the Other…………………………………239
I. Between Ipseity and Alterity……………………………244
II. Death and Narrativity…………………………………295
Conclusion……………………………………………………328

Conclusion…………………………………………………………330
I. The Broadening and Deepening of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics…………………………………………………330
II. Limitations…………………………………………………340

Bibliography……………………………………………………350

Introduction

The recollection of where one was with regard to their life on the same day as the announcement of strict social distancing protocols in an attempt to mitigate a pandemic. The recognition of the woman who would become one's great grandmother, when looking through old family photographs. The nostalgic reminiscence of the mischief of one's youth with a group of friends. To what extent do our mnemonic capacities as humans rest on a phenomenological description of individual experience? Do they instead rest on the sociological underpinnings of our collective lives? Is one the foundation of the other, or vice versa?

These questions serve as the catalyst to the aporia to which this dissertation shall develop and respond. I have dubbed this aporia as that between personal and collective memory. It is one that emerges most forcefully within the jurisdiction of Ricoeur's later hermeneutic works—encapsulating the period of *Time and Narrative* and onward to his final works. Responding to it, then, entails weaving together the threads that connect his final contributions to philosophy.

I will begin, then, with a description of this aporia, as well as a sketch of the argumentative arch through which this work will travel in order to constitute an original contribution to the philosophical subdiscipline of hermeneutics. Upon accomplishing this, I will share with the reader the motivation that lead me to pursue Ricoeur's thinking, both in terms of how I found in Ricoeur an avenue to extend my current interest in the topic of selfhood and personal identity, and also in terms of how I found in his philosophy the opportunity to revisit one of the central questions that guided my earlier graduate studies. I shall also articulate the goals that this dissertation seeks to accomplish, that is, beyond the response to the central aporia upon which this work hinges. Finally, this introduction will conclude by laying out the structure of this work, chapter-by-chapter. I do this so that the reader can more forward confidently with me, and in doing so, assist in bringing this work to its fruition.

I. Initial Description of the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory

As stated above, this dissertation is a response to what I believe to be a significant aporia that emerges in Ricoeur's work, especially in terms of the connective tissue that unites the works that comprise the final decades of his career, *Time*

and Narrative,[1] *Oneself as Another,*[2] and *Memory, History, Forgetting*.[3] The aporia originates in one of Ricoeur's final major works, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Much like all of Ricoeur's works from *Time and Narrative* onward, the analysis of memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting* was devoted to bringing to light the aporetic nature of memory, to which hermeneutics could serve as the avenue by which to respond. There are two aporias of memory, one of which is well developed, responded to, and accounted for. The other, however, is certainly present, but the response is, in my view, unaccounted for. The first aporia of memory stems from the relationship between memory and imagination. This is the aporia to which Ricoeur dedicates the most amount of time and care where it concerns both its development and response. I shall not linger on this aporia, at least not here. I will give a greater account of this aporia in the second chapter of this work.

I will, however, illustrate the second aporia, so as to inject into both the reader and this dissertation a sense of urgency.

---

[1] Ricoeur, Paul *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol. 1 - 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
[2] Ricoeur, *Oneself As Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
[3] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

The second aporia of memory revolves around determining the authentic subject for the attribution of memories. In other words, 'to whom' ought we attribute memories? Is it the case that memory, understood at the anthropological level—that is, understood as *human* memory—belongs properly to the individual, or does it rather belong to collective entities, like a social institution, a neighborhood, a city, a nation? Stated slightly differently, can the nature of memory be disclosed purely from a phenomenological analysis, or purely from a sociological analysis? To be clear, the nature of this aporia is *not* that it is controversial as to which 'side' has the greater claim to the truth, it is that *each* side, in claiming its primacy over the other, also at the same time surreptitiously *relies* on the other. In other words, currently, no argument can be provided in order to demonstrate the priority of one over the other.

To illustrate this aporia, I would like to present a thought experiment. Suppose you have a friend named Maria.[4] You have been friends since childhood, and find that whenever the both of you spend time together, you both inevitably share childhood memories with one another. Suppose that one day, while meeting over lunch, Maria shares a memory of

[4] This dialogue is based off of the arguments that I derive in favor of both personal and collective memory in the second chapter of this dissertation, pp. 140 - 169.

helping her mother make flan—a traditional Latin American dessert—for Christmas. She loses herself in the details—recalling how her mother learned how to cook flan from Maria's great grandmother; how her mother would teach Maria that the secret to a great flan could never be found in a recipe book; why this particular dish was exclusively reserved for instances of mother-daughter bonding; and why this particular recipe—a cheese flan—was made only during Christmas time. Maria's memory is quite vivid, coherent, and meaningful—especially its emotional undertones. You cannot help but to wonder aloud as to what makes sense of these qualities.

Fortunately for everyone, Maria is a phenomenologist. As such, she responds that the intentional structure of this rememorative experience is one where the memory she is recalling is immediately given to her as *belonging* to her. She is not confused about who is the true owner of this experience; the memory is *hers*. Moreover, she also has no doubt that this is a memory that she is recalling, and not rather a fantasy. This experience is clearly *of the past*. Lastly, the coherence and meaningfulness of this particular memory stems from the nature and structure of internal time consciousness, and the vast myriad of passive syntheses that ensure that the 'stream' of consciousness is able to integrate and organize itself. Given all this, she reassures you that a

phenomenological analysis can address any and all questions concerning the way in which one experiences and understands a memory.

That seems to settle all matters. Or does it? I neglected to mention that, while Maria is a phenomenologist, you are a sociologist. After a careful pause, you respond that you disagree. The coherency and meaningfulness of Maria's memory is due, not to a phenomenological account, but to a sociological one. The memory is Maria's, to be sure, but it is also her mother's; and had human living not been fundamentally intersubjective, deeply organized into an established social order involving a large network of concepts and relationships—i.e. "family", "mother", "daughter", "holidays", etc.—and permeated by language, this memory, and those like it, could never be formed or shared. Further, how could internal time consciousness, all by itself, grasp the significance of this flan—a cultural artifact with a rich social history—only being cooked around Christmas time—a specific holiday with religious connotations, the significance of which is the product of cultural belonging?[5] These two things—the flan and the holiday—are highly symbolic in nature. Is it not the case that

[5] One may even be tempted to go a step further and note that Maria's name is a further extension of this cultural belongingness, as its roots in Christianity are quite obvious.

their underlying symbolic significance exceeds the boundaries of the rudimentary intentional structure of perceptual experience? It is clear to you that sociology can better address these pesky questions concerning the way one experiences and understands memory. In fact, you eloquently say, one might go one step further and add: The trouble with phenomenology is that while it claims to offer, on the grounds of disclosing the intentional structure of perception and perceptual experience, the most primary source from which all propositional thought can be understood and derived, it fails to consider that its analyses are only made possible by recognizing the greater fundamental truths found in the sociological sciences. Phenomenology rests on sociology.

Maria pauses. You do have a point. However, after some thought, she retorts that the same argumentative structure you have used against phenomenology—that *x* presupposes and rests on *y*—can be used against sociology. Is it not the case that sociology presupposes and, therefore, rests on phenomenology? The symbolic networks that organize humanity's social lives cannot exist by themselves. A society without any social agents is a dead one. Society requires agents of action, and is made possible by them. If so, do we not need to understand 'who' these beings are? If we should understand these beings, would it not be the case that an

analysis of them would be incomplete *without* a phenomenological one? Further, why should this analysis not elucidate upon a set of the most foundational kinds of experience—perception, imagination, memory? After all, sociology is not the condition of possibility of these sorts of experiences; it requires that social beings are capable of them in the first place. It seems that before sociology can become an issue, phenomenology must first prevail. Thus, sociology presupposes and rests on phenomenology.

You pause. She does have a point. However, after some thought, you begin again. The discussion continues. You both go on to counter each other's position while clarifying your own. It is to no avail. By the end of the discussion, the only thing that can be agreed upon is that it seems both sides—phenomenology and sociology—mutually assert their primacy over the other, while at the same time implicitly borrow from the conceptual apparatuses of the other. There goes a perfectly good lunch.

My hope is that the above is illustrative of the fundamental structure of the aporia concerning the attribution of memory as Ricoeur presents it in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In attempting to be the ground through which memory can be understood, both phenomenology and sociology rely on each other, at the same time that they exclude one another. The product is a rather vicious circle.

My dissertation, then, is a response to this aporia. The thesis that guides this dissertation is that the *underlying structure* of this aporia is similar to that of the aporia between phenomenological and cosmological time in *Time and Narrative*. Thus, if the two aporias share the same structure, then they must also share the same method to which a response may be formulated. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur responded to the aporia of time by combining both, well, time and narrative. As he argued, the result was a 'third' conception of time, which took the traits of both the phenomenological and cosmological conceptions, while also becoming its own distinct category: historical time.

This dissertation shall culminate in similar fashion. In order to respond to the aporia between personal and collective memory, I shall combine narrative (identity) and memory in order to develop a 'third' conception of memory: narrative memory. Accomplishing this will require doing what I had set out to do from the beginning, discovering the connective tissue that unites Ricoeur's later works—from *Time and Narrative* to *Memory, History, Forgetting* and beyond. The development, articulation, and application of this concept is the original contribution that my dissertation makes both to scholarship on Ricoeur's hermeneutics, as well as to the discipline of philosophy at large.

II. The Underlying Motivation and Goals for This Work

As stated in the opening paragraph, I shall state what motivated the 'hermeneutic turn' in my own work, both in light of my current philosophical interests on selfhood, as well as that of my past work on the Jewish dialogical tradition. From there, I shall also articulate two further goals that I seek to accomplish through this dissertation, namely the 'broadening' and 'deepening' of Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

1. The genesis of this dissertation stemmed from the desire to embark on a path of inquiry, with the goal of uncovering and articulating the threefold relationship between narrativity, selfhood, and memory in the phenomenological hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. I attribute my interest in Ricoeur's work to two complementary state of affairs. The first is that of my reading of Dan Zahavi's more recent phenomenological works on the nature of selfhood, especially *Subjectivity and Selfhood*.[6] In this text, Zahavi develops and defends what he calls a non-substantialist position on the existence of the self. His position is that selfhood is part of the very structure of the first-person perspective, and that this particular *kind* of selfhood is not the sort that can be found in the annals of the philosophical tradition. The self, for Zahavi, is not an ontologically distinct

---

[6] Zahavi, Dan, *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005. See especially pp. 115 – 132.

entity that stands apart from experience, guaranteeing any experience's coherency. Rather, it is a pre-thematic part of experience, which makes possible the subject's ownership of their experiences. Every experience that one can live through—i.e. perceiving a sunset, imagining a day at the beach, remembering a past family vacation, desiring a slice of pizza, etc.—is 'always already' *given* to the subject as *belonging* to the subject. Each experience is 'mine', because there is something-it-is-like-*for-me* to live through any said experience.

Nevertheless, by Zahavi's own admission, his fundamental position may be able to testify *that* it is meaningful to speak of something like a self—or to speak of *being* a self—but it does not say much about 'who' this self is. This struck me as an important limitation. After all, I do not think it is controversial to suggest that the 'who' question concerning oneself is one of the most important questions one can ask about being a self. In order to sketch out a possible way to overcome this limitation, Zahavi makes explicit reference to the understanding of narrative identity formulated by Paul Ricoeur. Yet, while Ricoeur is mentioned, the manner in which Ricoeur's hermeneutics might be able to *extend* Zahavi's study on selfhood is never made explicitly clear; his invocation of Ricoeur tends to be left as a possible avenue for research that never fully comes into fruition. One way, then,

to 'read' my initial interest in Ricoeur—and the relationship between narrativity, selfhood, and memory within his hermeneutic project—is out of a desire to see how his hermeneutics can help extend contemporary research on the robust topic of selfhood.

2. My interest in Ricoeur has a second, and deeper, philosophical origin. It stems from rethinking my MA and MPhil graduate work done at KU Leuven on 20th century Jewish existential dialogical philosophy—specifically the works of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas. As the 'dialogical' component of this tradition attests, the line of thinking that each of these figures pursued was that of placing the intersubjective relationship between oneself and another at the forefront of their philosophical investigations.[7] The underlying understanding of subjectivity developed by each of these thinkers prioritized the way in which one can 'become' a person through the confrontation with the alterity of the other. The commonality of this theme betrays the diversity of positions each figure represents on this theme. During my MA and MPhil studies, a

---

[7] See my MA and MPhil theses: "Facing the Thou: The Confrontation Between Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas." Master's Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008; and "The Invitation to Listen: The Question of Freedom and Responsibility in the Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig." MPhil Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009.

large part of my work was devoted to arguing that the position of Levinas (and to an extent, Rosenzweig), which maintained the 'absolute' separation between sameness and alterity, was the more originary position—especially when compared to that of Martin Buber, whose own position emphasized the mutual and reciprocal becoming between an 'I' and a 'Thou'. In other words, Buber maintained that one comes into oneself through the relationship with the other, but for Levinas, the asymmetry of the face-to-face relation implies an ethical dimension where one has *already* stepped into their subjectivity, their 'interiority', and it is this very subjectivity that is interrogated by the alterity of the other.

However, whether Levinas's position was indeed the more originary one—this is precisely what I had begun to question towards the conclusion of my MPhil studies. Credit here must go to my supervisor, Professor Anckaert, whose work on the philosophical heritage between Levinas and Rosenzweig[8] helped me see the limitations of Levinas's position—limitations that are sketched out, I should add, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. To this end, it became pertinent to me to find a figure who could perhaps iterate the position of mutuality and reciprocity initially proposed by Buber, but with a greater degree of rigorousness in argumentation. In

---

[8] Anckaert, Luc, *A Critique of Infinity*: *Rosenzweig and Levinas.* Leuven: Peeters, 2006.

this regard, the work laid out by Ricoeur in the three volumes of *Time and Narrative* as well as *Oneself as Another* offer themselves as a vantage point through which to rethink my original position. Thus, my initial interest in Ricoeur can also be 'read' as a way of returning to a prior scene of philosophical address, in order to see what my come from unsettling the ground upon which I once stood. In this way, my present work on Ricoeur can be contextualized both in terms as an inevitable outcome of my previous thinking, as well as inevitable outcome of where my interests are leading me.

3. Apart from the development, articulation, and application of the concept of narrative memory, this dissertation has two subgoals, each representing the final strokes through which I wish to 'depict' this work. The first is to broaden the scope of Ricoeur's hermeneutics by placing him into contact with his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. As a philosopher, Ricoeur made a strident effort to place himself and his work in dialogue with virtually the entire history of philosophy. If this dissertation is going to extend the reach of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, it is imperative that it follows Ricoeur down this path, in order to develop the most rigorous arguments possible in defense of the thesis being proposed.

As such, the reader can expect that this dissertation will endeavor to demonstrate the philosophical heritage between Ricoeur and Husserl, as well as his other contemporary phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Sartre, and Levinas. The reader can also expect to see the extent to which Ricoeur's account of narrative identity is able to address the more recent challenges to the position represented here by Galen Strawson. Lastly, as stated during the beginning of this chapter, the work of Zahavi runs through the entirety of this dissertation.

4. Finally, beyond serving to extend or broaden the reach of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, this dissertation shall also deepen it. This final goal shall merit the least amount of time to articulate. The very nature of this dissertation is such that it will require me to recontextualize Ricoeur's later works, and the positions he articulates through those works. Doing this in combination with the central topics of this dissertation—narrativity, selfhood, memory—implies that, at some point, this work will move beyond the confines of a hermeneutic analysis of texts; it will embark upon the 'return path' towards a hermeneutics of selfhood and subjectivity. In doing so, it will thereby seek to articulate the way in which Ricoeur's philosophical work contributes to our philosophical anthropology. Thus, in developing, articulating, and applying the concept of narrative memory,

in broadening and deepening the scope of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, this dissertation will ultimately shed light on the nature that underlies our existential condition.

III. The Structure of This Dissertation

Besides this introduction and the concluding chapter, this dissertation is organized into four chapters. Each chapter shall, in its own way, realize the two goals of both 'broadening' and 'deepening' Ricoeur's hermeneutics, while also building towards the development, articulation, and application of the concept of narrative memory, which will respond to the aporia between personal and collective memory.

The first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates the lasting contributions Ricoeur's understanding of selfhood has for contemporary philosophical discussions. Given the place of Ricoeur's understanding of selfhood in the broader constellation of what has come to be known as the narrative theory of identity, I begin the first chapter by looking at one of the more serious critics of narrative conceptions of selfhood—that of Galen Strawson. Through an overview of his broader objections to narrative identity, I synthesize five arguments against narrative conceptions of the self. My underlying thesis is that none of these arguments succeed in adequately undermining Ricoeur's narrative conception of selfhood. In order to demonstrate this, I develop his narrative

conception by connecting his understanding of narrativity—as it is presented in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*—to that of the dialectical relationship of *idem- and ipse-*identity that he develops in *Oneself as Another*. Finally, I conclude the chapter by responding directly to each of the five arguments. The final argument is, in my view, the most problematic for Ricoeur. To respond to it, I invoke the duty towards having fidelity to the past, which plays a prominent role in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In this way, the first chapter of this dissertation sets the stage for the work that lies ahead. It develops Ricoeur's understanding of selfhood in light of several objections, and then transitions towards the topic of memory, wherein we will discover its underlying aporias.

This leads to the dissertation's second chapter, where I will articulate what memory properly *is* within Ricoeur's hermeneutics, with an eye towards developing *both* the aporia between memory and imagination, as well as the aporia between personal and collective memory. Within the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur looks at different dimensions of 'the mnemonic' and develops them into four different polarities—i.e. reflexivity and worldliness, habit and memory, evocation and search, and retention and representation. Despite this, he does not articulate how each distinct polarity relates with the others. Therefore, beyond

developing the aporias of memory, I also suggest a way of 're-reading'—and thus, better understanding—Ricoeur's various polarities of memory that more cohesively brings them together. More concretely, in the second chapter, I begin by first giving an account of the first aporia of memory (i.e. memory and imagination), and from there, show how the various polarities of memory spring from, relate to, and deepen the other—while also allowing the aporia between memory and imagination new opportunities to express itself. Finally, I return to the first polarity of reflexivity and worldliness and develop the second aporia of memory—i.e. between personal and collective memory.

Having developed the two aporias of memory, this dissertation's third chapter is dedicated to responding to the second aporia. As I have stated, the thesis that guides my argumentation is that the structure of the aporia between personal and collective memory is similar to the aporia between phenomenological time and cosmological time, which became the central problematic in *Time and Narrative*, and which required the conjunction between time, on the one hand, and narrative, on the other. Thus, because of the structural similarity between the two aporias, if narrativity was able to respond to the aporia of time, then it can also respond to the aporia of memory. To illustrate this structural link, I return to *Time and Narrative* to reconstruct the aporia,

demonstrate the narrative response to it, and from there interweave this response with the concept of narrative identity developed in *Oneself as Another*, and the concept of the 'happy memory' developed in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. The result is what I am calling 'narrated memory', and it constitutes what I think is human memory, proper: testimony to the creative capacity we have with regard to our ability to unearth greater meaning from our (personal and social) past, that simultaneously discloses our projection towards the future, and our openness to existence.

Finally, in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I utilize the concept of narrative memory and apply it to an existential issue—i.e. witnessing and surviving the death of the other, that is, of a friend, of a loved one. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how the concept of narrative memory can be utilized beyond its original confines—that is, beyond being the response to the aporia between personal and collective memory. Moreover, it presents a unique opportunity to, on the one hand, unite several of the underlying themes that will occur and reoccur throughout this dissertation—subjectivity, selfhood, intersubjectivity, narrativity, memory, etc.—while also allowing, on the other hand, for an opening to delve more deeply into unmasking, not just an important component of Ricoeur's philosophy of death, but of an issue virtually each and every one of us must live through—what

it means to survive the death of a loved one, and what role memory and narrativity have to play in overcoming the struggle that this entails.

On a more personal note, one of the underlying driving forces for the final chapter—and to be sure, for this dissertation in its entirety—is what I perceive to be a hermeneutic circle between existence and philosophical reflection and analysis. Existence calls us into question, and demands that we reflect on it, and on ourselves, more deeply, in order to better understand the 'why' of our life—a 'why' that we are ultimately responsible for fostering and for living through. Addressing this question more fully requires the rigor of philosophical reflection, as well as the virtues that it extols—humility in the face of one's own ignorance, the courage to act upon this humility, and the respect for the interlocutors that will ignite, that will support, that will challenge, and that will nourish the growth in intellectual maturity that lies at the end of the path forged by philosophical reflection. Much like Rosenzweig before me, it demands to be said that the conclusion to this path is that of an opening back—perhaps not so much to 'existence as such', but to human living.[9]

---

[9] Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. Translated by Barbara E. Galli, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, p. 447. The concluding passage of Rosenzweig's *Star of*

Redemption reads: "To walk humbly with your God—nothing more is asked for here than a wholly present trust. But trust is a great word. It is the seed from which faith, hope, and love grow, and the fruit that ripens from it. I tis the easiest of all and just for that reason the hardest. It dares every moment to say Truly to Truth. To walk humbly with your God—the words are above the gate, the gate that leads out from the mysterious, wonderful illumination of the of the divine sanctuary where no man can remain alive. But whither do the wings of the gate open? You do not know? INTO LIFE." In my MPhil thesis, I noted that much has been written about the relationship between the first sentence of *The Star* ("From Death.") and its final sentence ("Into life."). I shall pause here, then, to note that the final chapter of this dissertation follows a similar trajectory—from death to life. In this way, this dissertation can be seen as the concluding chapter to the work that began at the start of my graduate studies at KU Leuven. For my MPhil thesis, see Arca, Kris. "The Invitation to Listen: The Question of Freedom and Responsibility in the Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig." MPhil Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009. It is an MPhil thesis, though, so do not go into it with expectations that are *too* high.

Chapter 1

Opaque Selves: In Defense of Narrative Identity in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics[1]

Without question, *Time and Narrative* marked an important philosophical turn in Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology.[2] The task of a hermeneutic philosophical anthropology required moving beyond unlocking the meaning-potential of sentence-level discourse, and towards that of longer chains of sentences—i.e. narratives, minimally construed. Ricoeur's 'wager', as Kearney might phrase it, was singular: not only do the tropes offered by narrative understanding disclose something about human living that

---

[1] A revised version of this chapter was published in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*: Arca, Kris. "Opaque Selves: A Ricoeurian Response to Galen Strawson's Anti-Narrative Arguments." In *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2018), pp. 70 – 89. DOI 10.595/errs.2018.387. I would like to thank the editors and peer reviewers at the *Études Ricoeuriennes* for seeing the potential that this chapter had for publication, and for the encouraging feedback that it received.

[2] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol. 1 - 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

goes beyond the confines of descriptive language, narrativity itself reconfigures time, such that human existence within time becomes possible in the first place.[3]

Though Ricoeur is known as a philosopher who makes small, careful moves—a revisionary more than a revolutionary, as has often been stated—the conclusion of *Time and Narrative* left several avenues open for future philosophical reflection. One such avenue—one that has become influential in academia today, and one that I would like to defend from a uniquely Ricoeurian perspective—is the role that narratives have in shaping one's identity, if not fully constituting it. Many figures, such as, Charles Taylor, Jerry Bruner, Daniel Dennett, Marya Schechtman, and Daniel Hutto, from disciplines as diverse as psychology, cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind, have arrived at Ricoeur's fundamental insight:

> The self of self knowledge is the fruit of an examined life, to recall Socrates' phrase in the *Apology*. And an examined life is, in large part, one purged, one clarified by the cathartic effects of the narratives, be they historical or fictional, conveyed by our culture.[4]

---

[3] Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

[4] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 3, p. 247.*

Recently, narrative conceptions of identity have come to face greater critical scrutiny. To this end, the work of Galen Strawson has been particularly instructive. From Strawson's perspective, narrative theories of identity are, at best, trivial, and, at worst, pernicious.[5] Given Ricoeur's death in 2005, he was never able to critically respond to Strawson's critique. I would like to offer a Ricoeurian response to Galen Strawson's anti-narrative arguments. First, I will synthesize five arguments against narrative theories of identity, as laid out by Strawson.[6] Second, I will begin to develop Ricoeur's response to the Strawsonian position by indicating the points of discontinuity between Strawson's account of narrativity and Ricoeur's. This will require, third, to connect this notion of narrative to the dialectic of idem- and ipse-identity that he

---

[5] Schechtman, Marya. "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View." In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 155-79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[6] While the first two of the arguments that I will develop are particular to Strawson's own views on selfhood, the rest of the anti-narrative arguments that I will develop can also be seen as an expression of criticism and skepticism towards narrative identity that other philosophers, such as E. Olson, K. Witt, and even J. Drummond have expressed elsewhere. See Olson, E. and K. Witt, 2019, 'Narrative and Persistence', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 49: 419–434, as well as Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, Mortality,* p. xiv.

later establishes in *Oneself as Another*. I will conclude, then, by demonstrating how Ricoeur's own narrative theory would address each of Strawson's arguments. Ultimately, the dialogical confrontation with Strawson will allow for a more nuanced understanding of narrative identity in Ricouer's philosophical hermeneutics.

I. The Priority of Episodicity: Galen Strawson's Anti-Narrativist Position

I will begin by making three moves. First, I will unpack some of the basic philosophical positions on which Strawson hinges his critique. Second, I will develop his definition of narrativity—i.e. what is it that 'counts' as a narrative theory of identity. Lastly, I will synthesize five arguments against narrative theories, to which I will later formulate a Ricoeurian response.

1. Strawson makes a distinction between two possible theses one can hold with regard to narrativity.[7] The first is the "psychological Narrativity thesis", which Strawson takes to arise from an empirical observation on the way human beings naturally experience their own lives.[8] Namely, "human beings typically see or live or experience their lives

---

[7] Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio* XVII, No. 4 (2004): 428 – 452.
[8] Ibid., p. 428.

as a narrative story of some sort".[9] The second is the "ethical Narrativity thesis", which makes a normative claim on one's relationship to narrativity.[10] Regardless of the psychological thesis's truth-value, a human being *ought* to conceive of herself narratively; doing so is "essential to a well lived life, to true or full personhood".[11] The relationship between these two theses is nuanced. It is logically possible for someone to affirm the truth of both, to assert that only—and any—one of the two is true, while the other is false, or to maintain that both are false.[12] Maintaining the falsity of both is Strawson's position.

In order to refute both the psychological and ethical theses, Strawson draws upon another distinction: that of diachronicity and episodicity.[13] This distinction rests on the observation that there are two ways in which one can experience oneself—or perhaps more aptly, one's self. One's self-experience can be diachronic; i.e. "one naturally figures oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further past) and will be there in the (further) future".[14] However, one's self-experience may be episodic in nature,

---

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p. 429.
[11] Ibid., p. 428.
[12] Ibid., p. 429.
[13] Ibid., p. 430.
[14] Ibid.

which, at least initially, is simply the negation of diachronic self-experience. As such, "one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future".[15] At this initial stage, Strawson places the diachronic style and the episodic style on an axis—one can be either more diachronic or more episodic, and one's styling may change over time. Further, the distinction between the two styles is not entirely absolute.[16] It is possible, using Strawson's own examples, for an episodic to identify with, say, a memory of a long past embarrassment, or feel nausea over the (increasingly less temporally distant) reality of death.[17] Likewise, a diachronic may fail to make an apperceptive or appropriative link with a past moment or experience. Here, Strawson offers his oft used example of Henry James, who, while recognizing that he is the same person who wrote a literary masterpiece in the past, simply cannot identify his current self with his past self.[18] We may also refer to Davenport's example of Morgan Freeman's character, Ellis Boyd, in the *Shawshank*

---

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 431
[18] Ibid., p. 429.

Redemption, who equally cannot recognize himself, the elderly Boyd, with the young man who committed murder.[19]

Earlier, I indicated that the distinction between diachronicity and episodicity would create an opening for Strawson's critique of narrative identity (via the refutation of both the psychological and ethical thesis). The basis for this lies in his assertion that the episodic style is as equally true as, if not more preferable than, the diachronic style. Here, Strawson lays down his now well-known metaphysical position for transient, short-term selves.[20] Strawson's position rests on two positions.[21] First, there is a clear difference between taking oneself as a whole—that is, as a human being who has lived such and such a life, etc.—and taking oneself to be "an inner mental entity, a self that coincides with every conscious lived experience".[22] When talking of the self in the sense of a mental presence (and nothing more), Strawson employs words like I*, my*, you*,

---

[19] Davenport, John. *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard.* New York: Routledge, 2012.

[20] Zahavi, Dan. "The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications." In *Self, No Self? Perspecttives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, edited by Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, 56-78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[21] Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality,* p. 20.

[22] Strawson, "Against Narrativity", p.433.

etc. Second, it does not follow that I*, taken only as an inner mental entity, am the *same* entity that was present in the past, or will be the same in the future.[23] In other words, it is metaphysically possible, according to Strawson, that I*, who am doing whatever I* am doing now, am not identical to the I* who initially wrote this example. In argument form, Strawson's justification might look like this:

1) What we call a "self" emerges from conscious lived experience.
2) Corresponding to each conscious lived experience is a distinct mental state (e.g. imagination is different from perception, which is different from memory, etc.)
3) If the self emerges from conscious lived experience, and each experience has a distinct mental state, then there is not one self, but many—one for each distinct experience.
4) Therefore, episodicity is true.

If sound, this demonstrates that an episodic life is as viable as a diachronic one. Further, it may even be preferable to a diachronic one, since living this way is closer to the metaphysical truth.

---

[23] Ibid., p. 437.

2. If we have followed Strawson up to this point, we have reason to favor episodicity over diachronicity. But what about narrative identity? What about the psychological and ethical theses? One question at a time. According to Strawson, narrative identity arises from a combination of certain features—four in total. First, as Schechtman notes, is diachronicity.[24] By itself, however, this is not enough to establish narrative identity; one could be a diachronic without ever blinking an eye towards the psychological thesis. One could very well be, say, a substance dualist, and thus the diachronic nature of one's self-experience would be due to a soul-like substance—however philosophically problematic this position is.

It is when we combine diachronicity with another feature—a "form-finding tendency" in one's life—that narrative identity emerges.[25] According to Strawson, this tendency is a constructive process; that is, in attempting to find coherency in the myriad of experiences one has lived through, one construes, constructs, "a pattern of narrative development" in one's life.[26] The form-finding tendency allows for a smooth transition into the third possible feature, a "story-telling" tendency; i.e. beyond seeking patterns in

---

[24] Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival".
[25] Strawson, "Against Narrativity", p. 440.
[26] Ibid., p. 441.

one's life, one begins to select events and connect them into "the form of some recognized narrative genre".[27] Lastly, the combination of the form-finding and story-telling tendency leaves narrative identity open to one more feature—one that may be particularly problematic—revision.[28] By revision, Strawson does not mean simply changing one's views on one's past (e.g. coming to appreciate the significance of what were once-dreaded yearly family vacations). Revision entails the conscious or non-conscious distortion or falsification of events in one's life-story. Strawson concedes that revision need not be a feature of narrative identity—in fact, episodics can also be victims of revision, insofar as revision entails not just a distortion or falsification of one's life story, but of one's episodic memories. However, when it *is* present in narrative identity, it can surely undermine its integrity.

3. All the pieces are now in place to lay out Strawson's arguments against narrative identity. All of Strawson's arguments will follow either from his episodic metaphysics, or from his definition of narrative identity. As such, the first argument was already developed above, i.e. the argument for multiple selves. If the self is an inner mental entity that emerges from experience, and if the self that coincides with experience is distinct according to each experience, then

---

[27] Ibid., p. 442.
[28] Ibid., p. 443.

episodicity is true. The self of one experience is not necessarily the self of another experience.

The second argument sets out to refute the psychological narrativity thesis. Let us call it the argument from episodicity. If Strawson's transient, multiple self theory is true, then the diachronic style of self-understanding rests on a mistake in judgment. If the diachronic style is an error in judgment, then we ought to be episodic. As Strawson says, "if you're episodic, you're not narrative".[29] Therefore, the psychological narrativity thesis does not follow.

We can identify the third argument as the argument from narrative egoism. Narrative identity theorists tend to make the claim that it is not possible to live a full or (morally) flourishing life without adopting a narrative framework of self-understanding. Here, Strawson even quotes Ricoeur:

> How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not precisely, in the form of a narrative?[30]

But is this view truly one that would enable us to lead a fully moral life, or is it actually, as Strawson suggests, "motivated

---

[29] Ibid., p. 432.
[30] Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself As Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 158.

by a sense of [one's] own importance… that is absent in other human beings?"[31] Indeed, in a more recent publication,[32] Strawson makes the following observation:

> [We] have a rich way of talking about [unattractive self-concerned emotions]—as when we say that people are self-satisfied, smug, self-righteous, complacent and holier-than-thou… Our model of morally good people seems to require that they be somehow ignorant of the fact that they are morally good, on pain of corruption.[33]

The gesture here is straightforward: the form-finding features of narrative identity entails an exclusive concern for one's self, and this can diminish, rather than enable, ethical action.

The fourth argument is what Davenport calls the artifact argument.[34] One's identity will never be fully reducible to a narrative or a set of narratives, for the story-telling component of narrative identity *requires* that certain experiences, details, or facts of the matter be omitted from the narrative on the basis that doing so helps create cohesion.

---

[31] Strawson, "Against Narrativity", p. 436.
[32] Strawson, Galen. "Episodic Ethics." In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 85-116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
[33] Ibid., p. 95
[34] Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, Mortality,* p. 39.

As Strawson claims, quoting V.S. Pritchett, "We live… beyond any tale that we happen to enact".[35] If this is true, so much for the psychological thesis.

The final argument is the revision argument. As its name suggests, it stems from the tendency to revise one's life story, in terms of distortion or falsification, or perhaps even, complete fabrication. If "retelling one's past leads to changes, smoothings, enhancements, [and] shifts away from the facts," then "the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding".[36] Rather than being a means toward self-understanding, narrative identity hinders it. In sum, if the episodic style has metaphysical precedence over the diachronic one, and if Strawson's characterization of narrative identity is true, then neither the psychological or ethical theses are true.

II. The Demand to Be Said: From Strawson's Theses to Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

In order to create a path from which Ricoeur's account of narrative identity can emerge, two possible moves can be made. 1) We may directly argue against Strawson's account of episodicity, reaffirming the diachronic style, and thus continue operating within Strawson's conceptual framework. 2) We may question the basic presupposition

---

[35] Strawson, "Against Narrativity", p. 450.
[36] Ibid., p. 447.

that Strawson implicitly relies upon in order to make the distinction between diachronicity and episodicity. Following the second path will result in a deconstruction of Strawson's framework. If we are interested in developing Ricoeur's account of narrative identity as a viable alternative to Strawson's account, then the second move is the more advantageous option.

Much of Strawson's critique rests on his favoring of episodic selfhood. If episodicity is true, then any priority granted to narrative accounts of identity risk (mis)leading the subject away from the 'true' nature of what it means to be a self. A narrative account of oneself is a varnish that is added to reality, but it is nevertheless unreal. It conceals the episodic truth. Any recourse to narrative is to already make an unnecessary philosophical move.

Yet it seems that Strawson's argument for episodicity rests on a presupposition that Ricoeur would regard with suspicion. As much as Strawson might deny that he is a part of this tradition, it seems that he relies upon a philosophical move set that belongs firmly in what Ricoeur would classify as "reflexive philosophy".[37] Strawson's argument for

---

[37] Ricoeur, Paul. "On Interpretation." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 1-22. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

episodicity, in other words, presupposes that the self of self-knowledge—whether it is a singular, unified self, a la a Cartesian *cogito*, or whether it consists in having a Strawsonian account of multiple, transient selves—is graspable, knowable, through direct intuition. One has privileged—non-linguistic—access to oneself "from the inside", as Strawson himself has stated.

The question now must be raised: is it the case that one has—or can have—direct, privileged, 'from-the-inside' access to the nature of one's own self? Ricoeur would deny this. Let me be clear. It is not that Ricoeur would deny the intentional structure of consciousness. It is not that he would deny that every conscious experience of something also implies a subject of experience by which the object earns its sense of 'givenness'. However, what he would suggest is that taking the 'return path', by way of reflection—from the object of experience to the subject of experience—is one that will be marked by an infinite process whereby "active syntheses continually refer to ever more radical passive syntheses".[38]

---

[38] Ricoeur, "On Interpretation", p. 13. Ricoeur is quite consistent with this idea. In a different essay, he maintains that this 'return path' serves to:

> [Unfold] the layers of sense, the levels of synthesis, making the passive syntheses behind the active syntheses appear, and so on. We are then involved in "backward questioning"… which is an endless task,

To unleash a fully Husserlian vocabulary, there is no direct philosophical route that one can take when analyzing the intentional structure of an experience that would allow the reflecting subject to effortlessly move from the noematic content of an intentional act to its noetic content. Each step in this reflective path is tasked with clarifying a dense, tightly knit network of phenomenological concepts (e.g. pretension, retention, affectivity) that continually refer to other concepts (e.g. hyletic data, internal time consciousness, etc.).

If Ricoeur is correct, there is no hope for direct self-knowledge, it is out of reach. Immediately, this means two things. First, we cannot assess the truth-value of the central claims of Strawson's argument for multiple selves; the grounds from which he made it have dissolved. Second, and perhaps more interesting, we can begin to understand the model of subjectivity to which Ricoeur's account of narrative identity will respond. For Ricoeur, at the heart of our subjectivity is a temporal fission. I never fully coincide with myself. This fault line that is forever etched onto the structure of my identity means, as Atkins has so aptly

---

> even if it operates in a field of vision, for in this field of vision, the analysis is never terminated.

See Ricoeur, "Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity" in *From Text to Action*, p. 234.

encapsulated it, that *who* I am is first and foremost a question that *demands* to be answered.[39]

How can one begin to answer the question of selfhood? If, as Ricoeur contends, a direct path is closed off, then the only avenue left open is an *indirect* path. The subject of experience can only come to any sort of self-understanding through the interpretation of the symbolic network to which it belongs. “There is no self-understanding that is not *mediated* by signs, symbols, and texts; in the last resort, understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms”.[40] Even the most basic perceptual experience of something, Ricoeur would contend, is always already permeated with a symbolic structure that could only become meaningful via interpretation. Thus, when Strawson[41] wonders why one would, “while in the beauty of being”, seek to understand an experience with greater clarity via narrative, Ricoeur would respond:

> Experience in all its fullness… has an expressibility [*disibilité*] in principle. Experience can be said, it demands to be said. To bring it to language is not to

---

[39] Atkins, Kim. *Self and Subjectivity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005; p. 222.
[40] Ricoeur, “On Interpretation”, p. 15.
[41] Strawson, “Against Narrativity”, p. 236.

> change it into something else, but in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself.[42]

Indeed, Ricoeur would contend that we have arrived at the central question to which narrative is an answer. If time constitutes one of the fundamental problems of human existence—if it is at the heart of the structure of personal identity—then it is through narrative that we can begin to unravel it.

> My basic hypothesis, in this regard, is the following: the common feature of human experience, that which is marked, organized, and clarified by the act of storytelling in all its forms, is its *temporal character*. Everything that is recounted occurs in time, takes time, unfolds temporally, and what unfolds in time can be recounted. Perhaps, indeed, every temporal process is recognized as such only to the extent that it can, in one way or another, be recounted.[43]

Thus, while Strawson would maintain that the recourse to narrative is an unnecessary move for adequate self-knowledge, Ricoeur would respond that it is the best move

---

[42] Ricoeur, Paul. "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 39. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

[43] Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 2.

we can make, if we seriously consider 1) that we have no direct access to ourselves; and 2) that self-knowledge only comes as the fruit of an interpretive process.

To put it into the perspective of the maturation of Ricoeur's own thought, this is why Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy moved away from being a strict phenomenology of consciousness, and started to reconfigure itself as a philosophical anthropology, where both discourse and action were the central starting points. The same is true of Ricoeur's concept of narrative. Narrativity—and by extension, narrative identity—is not, first and foremost, a psychological phenomenon, as Strawson posits it, but a cultural one, conditioned by the dialectic at root at the historical tradition to which one belongs.

III. The Dialectic of Emplotment: Narrative and the Mimetic Triad

The focus must now turn to adequately understanding Ricoeur's account of narrative. It is in doing so that we can lay out his notion of narrative identity, and from this, ultimately respond to Strawson's arguments. For Ricoeur, the function of narrative is intimately related to that of metaphor: to go beyond the confines of merely descriptive language, and expose the meaning potential that is simultaneously concealed and revealed by the symbolic

dimensions of human existence.[44] To tie this to what was stated earlier: a narrative is recounted in response to a demand placed upon us by experience itself—a demand to poetically explore the meaning of experience in order to understand it better.

Where the *function* of narrative is to bring out meaning, the *content* of narrative—i.e. what ultimately *is* narrated—is action. Narrative gives an extra order of intelligibility to action. Hence, in his attempt to further develop the notion of narrative, Ricoeur has recourse to Aristotle. Narrative is mimetic in nature. However, the mimetic structure of narrative is marked by a nuanced interplay between a threefold dialectical structure, dubbed as $Mimesis_1$, $Mimesis_2$, and $Mimesis_3$.[45] The core of this dialectic is $Mimesis_2$. As Ricoeur understands it, $Mimesis_2$ denotes the process of emplotment itself. It is at this level where the activity of narrative is able to interweave human action with its temporal character. However, while emplotment is clearly pivotal in the analysis, it also serves a mediating role between $Mimesis_1$ and $Mimesis_3$. Thus, the structure of narrative ought not be viewed statically, but rather as a dynamic process.

---

[44] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, p. ix.
[45] Ibid., p. 53.

> What is at stake, therefore, is the concrete *process* by which textual configuration [Mimesis_2], mediates between the prefiguration [Mimesis_1] of the practical field and its refiguration [Mimesis_3] through the reception of the work.[46]

If the content of narrative is action, then the most basic level of mimesis—prefiguration—deals with disclosing the tacit method through which narrative refers to the broader field of action, as well as foreshadowing how the later phases of the mimetic structure will modify it. At the stage of prefiguration, then, is an analysis of the structural, symbolic, and temporal features of action.[47] Structurally, the relation between action and narrative operates on two levels: 1) a presuppositional level and 2) a transformative level. Any narrative—by virtue of being a narrative—presupposes that its author or its audience has a familiarity with the "conceptual network" of action.[48] Here, Ricoeur's emphasis is not so much on deducing 'clear and distinct' definitions of key concepts, but in underscoring the way each concept in action theory relates to another. A concept like "action" refers to other concepts, such as motives, goals, agents, different modes of interaction (e.g. struggle, cooperation,

---

[46] Ibid, emphasis mine.
[47] Ibid., p. 54.
[48] Ibid., p. 55.

competition), etc. Understanding the relationships between each concept leads to a better understanding of the entire conceptual network as such.[49] Indeed, as Hutto's own research articulates, much of our 'folk' understanding of action theory begins in childhood play, where the competence to follow and create a story initially develops.[50]

The relation between the structural components of action and narrative are not just limited to tacit familiarity with the conceptual network of the field of action. At the transformative level, there is a transition from the paradigmatic structure of action, to a "syntagmatic" relation between chains of actions. In other words, whereas in the presuppositional level, we saw how narrative relies upon action, in the transformative level, we see where action relies on the discursive tools of narrative. Narratives create a diachronic link between a series of actions, such that their order becomes irreversible. As Ricoeur states:

> Narrative understanding is not limited to presupposing a familiarity with the conceptual network constitutive of the semantics of action. It further requires a familiarity with the rules of

[49] Ibid.

[50] Hutto, Daniel. "The Narrative Practice Hypothesis: Origins and Applications of Folk Psychology." In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 43-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

> composition that govern the diachronic order of a story.[51]

One may question to what extent action is in need of any narrative resuscitation via syntagmatic transformation. Ricoeur would respond that, given that action is always already symbolic in nature, it is only fitting to employ the means of narrative to further understand the symbolic structure nascent in even the most basic human actions.[52] Indeed, prior to being primarily textual in nature, symbolic mediation can already be found "incorporated into action and [as such, it is] decipherable… by other actors [engaged in] social interplay".[53] As Ricoeur would have it, the symbolic nature of actions render to them a certain "texture" that confers upon them a context-dependent meaning. Hence, his example where a movement of the arm can signify hailing a cab, greeting someone, casting a vote, or wishing despicable profanities to someone and their dearest loved ones.[54] In other words, human action is readable, and deciphering the meaning of an action requires more than being familiar with the paradigmatic structure of action. It also requires familiarity with the means by which one can interpret action,

---

[51] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, p. 56.
[52] Ibid., p. 57.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p. 58.

as well. Narratives provide an avenue to further interpret courses of action.

Lastly, it is not just the structural and symbolic features of action that demand narration; it is also its temporal features. I will be brief here, as the most important relation between time and narrative lies within emplotment itself, Mimesis_2. Nevertheless, action, Ricoeur notes, always already takes place within time. It is this 'within-time-ness' of action—to borrow from Heidegger's terminology—that becomes prominent for narrative understanding. Taken narratively, the temporal features of action become, in Ricoeur's words, de-substantialized. Time is no longer simply understood linearly, ranging from past to future, with the present operating as an atomistic point-like moment. Rather, the present signifies a 'reckoning with time', where the present is one of calculated action.[55] Thus, here we have Mimesis_1: a rich reserve of cultural significance that both author and reader refer to, a reserve that makes the rest of narrative activity possible in the first place.

At the heart of narrative's triadic mimetic structure is Mimesis_2—emplotment. Ricoeur favors the phrase "emplotment" as it emphasizes the *act* of telling a story over the *structure* of a story (i.e. plot). Taken as an activity, the

---

[55] Ibid., p. 63. The phrase "reckoning with time" is a rather overt nod to Heidegger.

central feature of emplotment is *configuration*, the arrangement of actions and events into the form of a plot. Nevertheless, while emplotment is at the center of mimesis, and while Ricoeur would indicate its significance over $Mimesis_1$ and $Mimesis_3$, the importance of emplotment rests on the mediating role it has between prefiguration and refiguration. Thus, to understand emplotment is to clarify, first, the relationship that the configurational operation of emplotment has with $Mimesis_1$, and second, its relationship with $Mimesis_3$.

The guiding constellation of narrative is configuration. When one narrates, one arranges the events of the story under the (syntagmatic) form of the plot. Taken in terms of the relationship between prefiguration ($Mimesis_1$) and emplotment ($Mimesis_2$), there are three points of configuration. First, emplotment is what renders a series of actions and events into a story as such.[56] From the many, arises the one. Emplotment "draws a meaningful story from a diversity of events or incidents… it transforms the events or incidents into a story".[57] The relationship entails a hermeneutic circle: the story cannot exist without the events within it, and the events within it lack meaning without the thematic unity of the story.

---

[56] Ibid., p. 65.
[57] Ibid.

At the second level of configuration, the notion of plot itself is further qualified. The kinds of events gathered under the aegis of a plot include those that have the potential to undermine the thematic unity for which the plot stands. Think here of the reversals of fortune that punctuate the most tragic stories, or the most tragic events of one's life. The act of emplotment, then, is marked by a "concordant discordance" that constantly threatens to undermine the plot itself.[58]

Lastly, emplotment configures the temporal characteristics of the actions that comprise the story. Here, the configurational operation of emplotment operates on a chronological level and an a-chronological one.[59] Chronologically, emplotment orders a series of events in accordance with the episodic (in the non-Strawsonian sense of the term) nature of narratives as such; they have a beginning, middle, and end. Taken as a whole, the story has a temporal unity that cannot be violated; e.g. that which happens to inaugurate the story cannot be moved to the middle, nor could it serve as a conclusion.[60] Nevertheless, the act of emplotment also leaves us with a set of a-chronological tools at our disposal. On the second order level of the

[58] Ibid., p. 66.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

narrative taken as a whole, stories are often said to have themes.[61] Further, these themes are capable of being 're-read' into each action-sequence or event in a story. Thus, without violating the temporal order of the events in a story, it is possible for one to thematically grasp, for instance, the way in which a story's conclusion is already present in the beginning, and how the beginning of a story is obliquely referred to at its resolution.[62]

We saw that the relationship between $Mimesis_1$ and $Mimesis_2$ resulted in the configuration of the paradigmatic, syntagmatic, and temporal features of action under the order of emplotment. Here, action was closed in on by narrativity. Conversely, the relation between emplotment and $Mimesis_3$—i.e. refiguration—constitutes the plot's opening to a new paradigm: the reception of the audience. Ultimately, narrative is inextricably intersubjective. Ricoeur would concur, insofar as narratives are discursive in nature, they belong to language—and language ought not only be regarded as a closed system. As Ricoeur often says: To speak is to say something about something to someone.[63]

---

[61] Ibid., p. 67.

[62] As Ricoeur notes, here we have a subversion of the natural order of time; rather than moving from past to future, one can, within a story, move backwards in time. See, ibid., p. 68.

[63] Ricoeur cites this phrase throughout both *Oneself as Another* and the essays collected in *From Text to Action*.

Before we go immediately to Mimesis$_3$, we must disclose its relationship to emplotment. Every story uttered comes from someone who belongs to a tradition, and within that tradition is the dialectical relation between innovation and sedimentation. Thus, according to Ricoeur:

> Tradition is not the inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material, but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity.[64]

In (re)telling a story, one inevitably relies upon the inherited paradigms of emplotment one shares with one's audience.[65] Stories told can be classified as certain 'types' or 'genres'. Thus, the sedimented paradigms of emplotment are its constitutive rules. Yet, as Ricoeur adamantly holds, tradition is not about imparting on one lifeless rules. There is also space for innovation. In giving an account of myself, for example, I am free to play with, bend, or sometimes even break the sedimented rules of the type of story I am telling. In doing so, there is the possibility to create a new genre, or a new type, which, over time, may crystalize. What was at first innovation can become sedimented, and what is sedimented offers itself to innovation.

---

[64] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, p. 68.
[65] Ibid.

Apart from its relation to emplotment, $Mimesis_3$ deals with the relationship between a narrative and its audience, particularly with its reception *by* the audience, along with the practical consequences that result *from* it. At stake in $Mimesis_3$, then, is what Ricoeur, citing Gadamer, calls the 'fusion of horizons'—i.e. "the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs".[66]

A narrative, by virtue of its linguistic nature, belongs to the realm of discourse. As a kind of discourse, narratives attempt to say something about something to someone—and here we would add—in the world. Understood as a method of discourse, narratives, be they fictional, historical, or autobiographical, articulate an experience. This suggests that each articulated experience belongs to a horizon of other, possible experiences. This entire network constitutes the world of the text. In engaging a story, the reader (or listener) projects their ownmost possibilities in the horizon disclosed by the story. For example, in reading Orwell's *1984*, one imaginatively projects oneself into the dystopian world depicted by it, forging connections with a myriad of characters, and becoming invested in the outcome of the plot.

---

[66] Ibid., p. 71.

Interestingly, in the case of fiction, then, Ricoeur would argue that the experiences articulated by a narrative has a referential quality beyond illusion. It is not the case that fiction is only and totally unreal. Fictional stories do articulate an experience; do make a reference to something. The referential quality of fictional stories is rooted in metaphor, with the aim of enriching the reader's own being-in-the-world, by depicting experiences that cannot be talked about directly, that are not limited to basic empirical description.[67]

It is at this moment that we reach the peak of Mimesis$_3$, the overlap of the world of the text—e.g. the horizon of possible experiences that a narrative can articulate—and the world of the reader—e.g. being-in-the-world. As Ricoeur states:

> Indeed, we owe a large part of the enlarging of our horizon of existence to poetic works. Far from producing only weakened images of reality… literary works depict reality by *augmenting* it with meanings that themselves depend on the virtues… illustrated by emplotment.[68]

Having investigated the dialectical relation between the threefold mimetic structure of narrative, let us conclude by looking at narrativity as a whole. Narrativity is not primarily

[67] Ibid., p. 80.
[68] Ibid., p. 80.

a psychological phenomenon—it is not a function that occurs 'in' us. It is a capacity that emerges from out of the relationship one has with the symbolic order of social interplay, made possible and limited by the cultural tradition to which one belongs. In other words, narrativity is not simply psychological, but anthropological. At its core, narrativity is a capacity that can be best understood via emplotment. Emplotment is a dynamic process wherein the thematic concordance of a plot struggles with integrating discordant events.[69] The relationship between concordance and discordance is fragile. The discordant events (i.e. reversals of fortune) of a narrative, on the one hand, undermine its thematic unity—sometimes to the point of threatening to unravel the entire narrative itself. On the other hand, discordance is necessary for the story to advance. Understood on a solely descriptive basis, (discordant) events tend to adopt a contingent, impersonal character. They simply happen—e.g. "The plane crashed"; "There was an outbreak of a virus"; "The actor was found dead". In becoming integrated into the concordant theme of a plot, a discordant event loses its contingent, impersonal character in order to adopt one of necessity.[70] The outcome of an event becomes unified with, or *matters* for, the plot. As such, both

---

[69] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 141.
[70] Ibid., p. 142.

discordance and concordance are necessary for emplotment. Taken together, they establish a model of narrativity known as discordant concordance.[71]

IV. The Dialectic of Selfhood: Personal Identity and Narrative Identity

Within Ricoeur's hermeneutics, narrative identity performs a specific task: poetically respond to the "aporia" of personal identity, which Ricoeur dubs as the problem of permanence in time.[72] Others have identified this as the problem of diachronic unity.[73] If time is a central issue for human existence, what can guarantee that *I* am the same person who has continued over several gaps in time? Much like many of his contemporaries, Ricoeur did not believe that the answer to this question comes from a recapitulation of substance dualism. But neither is it the case that one should deny any or all continuity of one's identity. The choice between substantialism and non-self is, in Ricoeur's work, a false dichotomy. There is another avenue to pursue: establish a non-substantialist account of selfhood. As Ricoeur admits, this is not without its difficulties. The self—understood non-substantially—is a fragile phenomenon. Philosophically, it is

---

[71] Ibid., p. 141.
[72] Ibid., p. 115.
[73] I specifically have Dan Zahavi, John Davenport, and Mark Siderits in mind, whose work has been referenced throughout the entirety of this chapter.

fragile because it rests on a twofold dialectic: that between what Ricoeur calls idem (identity understood as 'sameness') and ipse (identity understood as 'selfhood'), and *within* this dialectic, that of narrativity itself. It is not without great care, then, that one can bring out how selfhood is constituted within Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

There is another way in which selfhood presents itself as a fragile phenomenon: the process of living itself. With the absence of the substantialist placebo—of a 'true' or 'ideal' self that will always resist time's scars—the model of selfhood Ricoeur will adopt is one that is forever exposed to the traumas of existence: aging, violence, mortality. As we will see, Ricoeur's non-substantial self is not immutable, but neither is it powerless. With that, this section will unfold in two steps. First, we will look at the dialectic of idem and ipse. From there, we will develop, finally, narrative identity in Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

1. Ricoeur's original contribution to the problem of personal identity resides in the dialectical relationship between idem and ipse. According to Ricoeur, the history of philosophy has been preoccupied with understanding identity and its surrounding problems solely through the aegis of idem-identity; that is, identity understood simply as

'sameness'.[74] Here, the paradigmatic question of selfhood is a matter of "what"—i.e., "what *is* the self?" There is another way to understand identity. It is possible to investigate it through the aegis of ipse-identity, where the paradigmatic question is one of "who"—i.e. "who *is* the self; who *am* I?" Fittingly, Ricoeur does not wish to have idem and ipse oppose each other. Rather, in order to better understand identity, we must think through their complicated relationship. Let us proceed, then, as Ricoeur does. First with idem, followed by its relationship with ipse, and finally, ipse itself.

The history of philosophy has dealt almost exclusively with identity as it is understood through the rubric of sameness. With such a vast history, Ricoeur notes the polysemy of the notion of sameness. In terms of identity, sameness can signify four different meanings. It is the fourth meaning that is most relevant to personal identity, and it is also this meaning that instantiated substantialist notions of it. I will briefly recount all four meanings. When one speaks of sameness, one could do so in terms of *numerical* identity, where multiple occurrences of something are not confused with distinct tokens of a similar type.[75] Rather, a thing at

---

[74] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 116.
[75] Ibid., p. 116.

occurrence x is taken to be "one and the same thing" as that which was at occurrence y, z, etc.[76]

Apart from a *quantitative* reading of sameness, one can also interpret it *qualitatively*. They key feature here, Ricoeur contends, is that of "extreme resemblance".[77] Think, for instance, of a situation where two people order the same dish at a restaurant. We would naturally say, as I just did, that they ordered the 'same thing', even though we are aware that by the phrase "same thing", we mean two tokens of the same type. The two dishes resemble each other to the point that they are practically interchangeable.

Though the quantitative and qualitative understandings of sameness are irreducible to each other, it does not follow that they must also be foreign to each other as well.[78] Often, we have to employ the qualitative understanding of sameness in order to resolve an issue with the numeric account, as in the case where a TSA agent confirms that I am one and the same person as the one depicted in my passport photo (even if the photo is now six years old). As one can imagine, the relationship between quantitative and qualitative sameness is not always harmonious. The most obvious example here comes from Ricoeur: A case where it is frightfully ambiguous

---

[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

as to whether a person standing trial is truly one and the same as the person who committed the crime.[79]

One can also interpret sameness in a third way: uninterrupted continuity, where something in its final stage of development is taken to be identical with what was in its first stage. "Thus, we say of an oak tree that it is the same from the acorn to the fully developed tree; in the same way we speak of one animal, from birth to death; so too, we speak of a man or woman… as a simple token of a species".[80] This may be the most hopeful understanding of sameness, as it seeks to preserve the integrity of one's identity despite the inevitable accumulations of small (or drastic) changes that one can go through over time. Here, time is revealed to be a "factor of dissemblance, of divergence, of difference".[81]

This leads us to the final understanding of sameness: that of *permanence* in time. Here, Ricoeur notes that this notion has been read in terms of a permanence of *structure*.[82] Despite all the life-changing events one may go through, one remains the same through the *structure* of their identity. Historically, this structure has been interpreted as something that is over, above, and beyond the event itself. Here, we

---

[79] Ibid., p.117.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

arrive at the birth of the notion of substance. Yet, has it not been the case that the history of philosophy has shown that substantialist understandings of self are simply too good to be true? Does the notion of sameness taken as permanence in time necessarily lead to having to posit the self as a substantialist, ontologically distinct entity apart from experience? Is it possible for there to be a "form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question 'who' inasmuch as it is irreducible to any question of 'what'? Is there a form of permanence in time that is a reply to the question 'who am I'?"[83] According to Ricoeur, it is possible to interpret the notion of permanence in time, without falling into the perils of substantialism. But this will require exploring the relationship between idem and ipse.

The goal that Ricoeur has in mind is that of finding the point of unification between the "what" of sameness (idem) and the "who" of selfhood (ipse). At the nucleus of this relationship is the intermediary concept of 'character'. Ricoeur's conclusion is going to be that, in terms of personal identity, one's character is the "what" that also announces the "who" that one is.[84] Before we get to this, however, we must ask what Ricoeur means by character. In truth, this is a concept that Ricoeur has wrestled with throughout the

[83] Ibid., p. 118.
[84] Ibid., p. 122.

entirety of his philosophical career. In both *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man*, he initially understood one's character as a finite, immutable, and un-chosen perspective on the world that conditions the values that one accepts.[85] Within the confines of *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur revises his definition: One's character consists of a set of lasting, though not necessarily immutable, dispositions that permit one to be recognized.[86]

The formation of the dispositions of one's character stems from a twofold dialectical process: 1) the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation involved in the acquisition of one's habits; and 2) the dialectic of otherness and internalization involved in what Ricoeur calls "acquired identifications".[87] Of particular importance to the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation is the role of embodiment. Of note is the reading of the body as a site of conflict for the development of a new habit. Sedimented in one's ways, the initial moment of innovative activity is most often met with resistance by the body. Think of the guitarist who struggles, not with the instrument, but with his own fingers, to make a chord progression. Think of a martial artist struggling with her sense of equilibrium, as she maintains the posture

[85] Ibid., p. 119.
[86] Ibid., p. 121
[87] Ibid.

required of her art. Nevertheless, after much practice or repetition, what was once resisted can become internalized, to the point of being second nature.[88] In becoming second nature, the acquired habit contributes to the overall lasting dispositions that shape one's character. With the formation of a new habit added to one's embodied being, so too, is there now a mark with which one can be identified and re-identified.[89] Thus, the "what" of one's character habits grants access to the "who" of whom one is speaking.

While the acquisition of a new habit hinges upon the *internal* dialectic of innovation and sedimentation—"internal" because it deals solely with the body's struggle with itself—the dialectic of acquired identifications is *external*—for it implies the subject's relationship with culture. Here, we can refer back to what was established earlier in this chapter: i.e., the 'shortest' route towards self-understanding is the indirect one by which one interprets oneself according to the vast symbolic structures of one's culture. "To a large extent, in fact, the identity of a person… is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes in which the person… recognizes [him- or herself]".[90] For example, in recognizing my own struggle

---

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

in the trials and tribulations of, say, Peter Parker, I begin to recognize these struggles *by* those of Peter Parker. My understanding of myself is made possible by metaphorically seeing myself *as* Peter Parker. The otherness inherent in this cultural icon—because we all know that I am not *really* Peter Parker—is internalized and annulled. Of course, let us not get too lost in the charm of utilizing pop culture as a means towards better self-understanding. There is a larger point here:

> The identification with heroic figures clearly displays this otherness assumed as one's own, but this is already latent in the identification with values which make us place a "cause" above our own survival. An element of loyalty is thus incorporated into character and makes it turn towards fidelity, hence toward maintaining the self. [91]

In the process by which one learns to recognize oneself in, through, and by a cultural icon, value, or ideal, one also starts to establish a sense of integrity, a sense of who one is. To be true to oneself, then, is to be true to the cultural icons that constitute oneself. What would Peter Parker do?

> This is why behavior that does not correspond to dispositions of this sort makes us say that it is not in

[91] Ibid.

> the character of the individual in question, that this person is not herself or even that the person is acting completely out of character.[92]

Again, we arrive at the same position, this time perhaps more profoundly: the "what" of one's character leads us to better understanding the "who" that one is. Through the intermediary role of character, we acquire a form of permanence in time that is not reducible to substantialism.

Yet, the totality of one's identity is not fully reducible to the paradigm of idem, as well as its relationship with ipse. In a very real sense, understanding oneself requires exploring the significance of one's ipseity. According to Ricoeur, while idem and ipse do not mutually exclude each other to the point of making any mediation between the two impossible, there still exists a gap between idem and ipse.[93] Whereas Ricoeur's study concerning the dialectic of character reveals a sense of permanence in time that is attributable to the *continuity*—i.e. unbroken or consistent nature—of one's dispositions, habits, and acquired identifications, his understanding of ipse-identity hinges on a sense of *constancy*. Here, constancy denotes a faithfulness or dependability that rests not on one's character, but on one's commitment. "The continuity of

[92] Ibid., p. 122
[93] Ibid.

character is one thing, the constancy of friendship is quite another".[94]

Recently, Davenport has objected that the distinction between idem and ipse in Ricoeur's work is ambiguous. In what sense is the "continuity of character" truly distinct from the "constancy of friendship"?[95] Is it not the case that one's character, in the Ricoeurian reading of the term, would also designate one's capacity to be a friend, and be dependable as a friend? These are appropriate questions, and I would maintain that addressing Davenport's objection takes an argument that is, at best, only *implied* in Ricoeur's work. I will briefly lay it out. If we were to read Ricoeur's account of character in *Oneself as Another* as being continuous with his earlier account in *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man*, then we would see that Ricoeur has always situated the notion of character on the level of what he calls "the involuntary"—i.e. that about oneself which one has little choice over, except perhaps, but to consent to it.[96] In other words, the primordial mark of one's character is that of *passivity*. The same seems true in *Oneself as Another*. A habit, once acquired, is second nature; one spontaneously behaves according to their character. While it might be the case that *developing* a new

---

[94] Ibid., p. 123.
[95] Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality*.
[96] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 119.

habit is *not* necessarily passive—how could it be, when practice above all else requires initiative—this means little in the long run. Prior to one's acquisition of a new habit of character, one still has a character of some kind or another—e.g. take, for instance, the descriptions one might offer of their newborn infant: "He is rather shy" or "She can be quite assertive". Whatever the nature of this character, it is still, first and foremost, a passive horizon of identity.

What Ricoeur is trying to get at with ipse, conversely, is a dimension of identity that is primordially *active*.[97] This could be one of the reasons why the act of promising is his preferred example when attempting to illustrate the significance of ipse-identity. If time is an agent of change, if character is about continuity in time, then keeping a promise is to stand in defiance of time. In keeping a promise, one commits oneself to someone or something, *despite* whatever any change might occur between the moment the promise was made, and the moment it is fulfilled. "In this respect, keeping one's promise… does indeed appear to stand as a challenge to time, a denial of change: even if my desire were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or inclination,

---

[97] Henry Isaac Venema's work on Ricoeur has been the one to show this most forcefully. See, especially, *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur*, New York: State University Press of New York, 2000, p. 156.

'I will hold firm'".[98] We should read ipse-identity, in response to Davenport's objection, existentially. It pertains to the *active* horizon of one's identity, wherein one (authentically) makes a commitment to someone or something beyond oneself, and holds oneself to that choice.

2. It is within the dialectic between idem and ipse that Ricoeur proposes his own account of narrative identity. As stated at the beginning of this section, Ricoeur is making an enormously technical move. In order to establish narrative identity, he is philosophically jury-rigging two dialectics: that of idem and ipse, and that of the threefold mimetic structure of narrative, which he developed in *Time and Narrative*.[99] The

---

[98] Ibid., p. 124.

[99] As a small reminder, here are the basic points of narrative's threefold mimetic structure, as I attempted to establish in the previous section. According to Ricoeur, rather than talking about a particular *narrative*, we ought to talk about *narrativity* as such. That is, narrative ought to be understood as a dynamic, threefold, dialectical process, revolving around its mimetic capacity. The first stage of mimesis—Mimesis$_1$, or "prefiguration"—refers to the broader conceptual network of action theory that the author, narrative, and audience implicitly refer to, in order to establish a meaningful narrative. The second stage—Mimesis$_2$ or "emplotment"—represents the activity of telling a story. Any narrative, by virtue of being a narrative, will configure thematic unity and meaning—i.e. establish concordance—over a series of events, including reversals of fortune which resist and threaten the story's overall coherence—i.e. create discordance. Hence, Ricoeur's term to identify all narratives

proposed goal of Ricoeur's hermeneutic gambit is to poetically resolve the problem of permanence in time. By virtue of appropriating key aspects of narrative's threefold mimetic structure, one is able to weave unity and stability out of the diversity, variability, and discontinuity of lived experience.[100] As stated earlier in this chapter, it is not that we 'naturally' or spontaneously view ourselves as belonging to a story—as Strawson's psychological thesis suggests—it is that the tools with which narrative understanding equips us allow for a possibility that goes beyond simply following a story laid out in a text. Narrative understanding also enables us to more deeply explore and express our subjectivity—both in terms of idem and ipse.

As we saw earlier, understanding idem-identity required exploring the notion of character in Ricoeur's philosophy. One's character hinges upon the habits that arise out of the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation, as well as that of one's acquired identifications. According to Ricoeur, the

---

as a form of 'discordant concordance'. Lastly, the final stage of mimesis—Mimesis$_3$ or "refiguration"—involves the audience's reception of the story, especially in terms of the way in which a story creates a Gadamerian 'fusion of horizons', where the 'world' of the text collides with the 'world' of the reader. Ultimately, the collision serves to create new possible avenues for the reader to move 'from text to action'.

[100] Ibid., p. 140.

model of emplotment (Mimesis$_2$)—when grafted onto the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation—serves as a privileged way to bring out the rich history surrounding the development of one's character.[101] As Ricoeur argues, left by itself, sedimentation tends to obscure the creativity involved in the initial moment of innovation—not to mention the struggle of establishing a habit. Creating a narrative about the history of one's character development—about the journey one embarked upon, and the struggle(s) one found—brings out layers of meaning that would otherwise be forgotten. Perhaps the crafted story is used to take stock of one's life—to appreciate how far one has truly come, and how far one still needs to go. Perhaps it is told to console someone else, who is now facing a similar situation. Think of the philosophy student who is endeavoring to understand Kantian deontology, but who is unsure of her own intellectual potential. What is the appropriate response to the student's struggle? Ricoeur's proposal: A story of our shared experience.

If the structure of narrative were only capable of disclosing the history of one's habit formations, then it would be an inherently backwards-looking phenomenon. According to Ricoeur, this is not the case. Narrative identity is not just

---

[101] Ibid., p. 121.

limited to disclosing one's past; it is also capable of orienting one towards the future, toward "the global project of an existence".[102] The idea here is that it is through the means of emplotment that one is able to create, refine, or revise a life plan—the "practical units" that make up one's professional, personal, and family life.[103] Life plans are not static blue prints; they are flexible plans of action that emerge from deriving narrative unity between one's habits—or practices—and the "mobile" ideals one adopts through the process of acquired identifications.[104] Between the relationship of one's habits and one's ideals exists a hermeneutic circle—i.e. one's habits help shape one's ideals, and one's ideals help orient and establish new habits. According to Ricoeur, by adhering to one's life plan, one is able to establish, borrowing from MacIntyre,[105] narrative unity of life—a form of concordance that holds discordance at its epicenter: discordant concordance.[106]

How appropriate is it, really, to speak of life as having a 'narrative unity'? There are at least five initial arguments that one may pose against Ricoeur's position. Ricoeur has a

---

[102] Ibid., p. 157.
[103] Ibid., p. 151.
[104] Ibid., p. 158.
[105] MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.
[106] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 153.

response for each one. 1) Is it not a grandiose equivocation to say that one is a 'character' in one's life-'story' much like the protagonist and antagonists of the greatest works of literature?[107] 2) In works of literature, the narrator, author, and character are three distinct voices. But if life has a narrative unity, then would it not follow that we are all three? Is this not too much for one to be?[108] 3) Is it not the case that life and narrative have different understandings of the temporal notions of 'beginning' and 'end'? The 'beginning' of a story is a very different thing than the 'beginning' of a life. The same is true of the 'ending' of a story, and that of life. As Ricoeur notes, in life, my birth and death do not and will not belong to me, but to those who preceded me and those who will succeed me.[109] On these grounds, it seems that narrative unity is impossible, as I will never be in a position to grasp my entire life; key features will always be inaccessible to me. 4) Does it make sense to speak of narrative unity when it seems that we do not have only one life story? Indeed, one can create a vast number of stories; one can tell the same story, but in different ways, with a different perspective.[110] Where goes the narrative unity of life here? 5) Novels take

---

[107] Ibid., p. 158
[108] Ibid., p. 160
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., p. 161.

place in a unique world. Yet is it not the case that my life story takes place in a world I share with others? Further, is it also not true that some of the most significant moments of my life are only, at best, brief interludes in the lives of others?[111] Is it still meaningful to talk of life's narrative unity?

For every question, Ricoeur has an answer. 1) As we have previously stated, Ricoeur *never* intended narrative identity to be read *literally*; rather, narrative identity, in his philosophy denotes the appropriation of certain parts of the narrative process to better understand life.[112] The structure of narrative *augments* our ability to comprehend ourselves—much like it does with other aspects of being. 2) Since the relationship between narrative identity should not be read *literally*, one ought to interpret oneself to be author, character, and narrator of one's life *metaphorically*. In this sense, we ought to see ourselves, not as the sole authority of our lives, but as the co-authors of our life's meaning.[113] 3) Life is slippery, and this is precisely why borrowing from narrative notions of 'beginning'—i.e. sequences of actions or events that stem from new initiatives or reversals of fortune—and 'ending'—i.e. the climax and resolution of certain slivers of life—can help us make better sense of our

---

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., p. 162.
[113] Ibid.

own life.[114] 4) Further, that one is able to re-tell certain stories, and from different perspectives points, not to a problem, but to our ability to find new layers of meaning in life.[115] Indeed, this could create conflicts of interpretation—e.g. which 'version' of a story is the 'true' version? However, conflicts of interpretation are not necessarily unresolvable aporias. Instead, they are opportunities to creatively and critically demonstrate which meaning-potential, on the basis of evidence, is most reasonable. 5) Lastly, that our stories are intertwined with the lives of others allows them the opportunity to have greater intelligibility.[116] That one's life intersects with others means that it is possible to derive deeper, richer stories that can be shared with others.[117]

Narrativity does not simply bring out deeper textures implied by idem-identity. According to Ricoeur, there is also an important sense in which the mimetic structure of narrative mediates with ipse-identity: it discloses the insight that human living is always already ethical in nature.[118] Whereas the fundamental polemic concerning idem-identity revolved around the continuity of one's character, that of ipse was uniquely concerned with one's self-constancy. Whereas,

---

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., p. 165

idem was concerned with of *what* one is made, ipse is concerned with *who* one is. According to Ricoeur, the notion of self-constancy central to ipse-identity *fundamentally* entails our relationships with other human beings.[119]

Ipse-identity is primarily intersubjective in nature. The 'call' or demand for self-constancy prefigures a relationship with others, so that others may count on us. That is, if self-constancy is an issue concerning my being-in-the-world—concerning my very identity—then it is an issue placed upon me by the other. It is an issue of being trustworthy, and being held *accountable* for my actions. The desire for self-constancy discloses one's responsibility to others.[120] Ricoeur, perhaps in his most Levinasian moment, maintains that there is an ambiguous double meaning to one's responsibility.[121] To be responsible means to both be *counted* on by another, and be *accountable* for oneself.

Where does narrative feature? If it is true that ipse-identity is always already intersubjective in nature, then it must also be the case that the 'who' question—so central to ipse—is also intersubjective. In other words, it is only through, by, and with my relationship with others that 'who' I am becomes an issue for me. It is only through, by, and with

---

[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

others that I am asked, and can begin to ask myself, "who am I?" If human existence were not intersubjective in nature, then the question of identity would have never become a problem. If it is the other who first and foremost asks of me the question "who am I?" and who obliges me to respond, then it is through narrative means that I can address myself to the other. The "who" that I am is not substantialist in nature. It is only accessible via the story that I tell to the other, and conditioned by the scene of address, to borrow from Butler, in which we found ourselves.[122]

In being asked to give an account of myself, I am rendered accountable by the other. In responding to the other, I accept responsibility for my past actions, and for the intended outcome of my life plan. Yet, there is fragility here. If Ricoeur is correct, then I never fully know 'who' I am until I am confronted with this question. Despite this, we are all tasked to respond to this fragility with a commitment that goes beyond all doubt: Who am I? Here I am.[123]

V. Neither Trivial Nor Pernicious: A Ricoeurian Response to Strawson

We have taken many detours to reach this point. The time has come now to fully develop and lay out a Ricoeurian response

---

[122] Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
[123] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 167.

to Strawson's anti-narrativist argument. Let us proceed by responding to each argument in the order of its appearance.

The first argument that merits a response is not necessarily one of Strawson's anti-narrativist arguments, but rather, his argument in favor of episodicity over diachronicity. If it can be shown that there is a reason to doubt this argument, then there will be reason to doubt all of Strawson's anti-narrativist arguments which implicitly or explicitly rely on the truth of episodicity over diachronicity. As a refresher, here is the argument, as presented earlier.

1) What we call a "self" emerges from conscious lived experience.
2) Corresponding to each conscious lived experience is a distinct mental state (e.g. imagination is different from perception, which is different from memory, etc.)
3) If the self emerges from conscious lived experience, and each experience has a distinct mental state, then there is not one self, but many—one for each distinct experience.
4) Therefore, episodicity is true.

In actuality, the response to this argument was earlier laid out: it seems that Strawson relies upon direct intuition in order to assert the truth of the premises. However, it is this very methodology which Ricoeur's hermeneutics calls into

doubt. I shall develop this further below. First, I would like to point out an additional problem with premise two. While we would all readily admit that certain mental states are distinct from each other—e.g. *imagining* a hike through the Rocky Mountains is certainly distinct from *remembering* what it was actually like to go on such a hike—it does not follow that there is no *overlap* between certain mental states. Indeed—to further use memory and imagination—while each may have certain unique phenomenological characteristics, there is still a great deal that they do share. Both memory and imagination entail the phenomenology of perception, the intentional structure of consciousness, embodiment, the first person perspective, etc. While it is possible, and fruitful, to indicate what makes each clear and distinct, let us not forget that this comes with cost of bracketing what they share. Further, if there is overlap, and if the self emerges from these experiences, can we truly go as far as to Strawson wishes to go with episodicity—i.e. that each experience entails a distinct self? Insofar as each kind of experience has phenomenological overlaps, should it not be the case that there are overlaps in selfhood? What does this entail?

That was only the smaller version of the problem with Strawson's argument. The larger issue comes from the intuitive nature by which Strawson wishes to assert the truth of his premises. That is, it is by attending to the nature of

experience, and the mental states that arise from experience, that we can intuitively verify the episodic nature of the self. The truth of this is verified by the clear and distinct nature of intuition itself; it is so basic that it needs no further justification. It is evidential on its own. Yet, Ricoeur would offer the very same objection that Menary has recently made of intuition as a method of verification.[124] Strawson rests on a Cartesian model by which direct intuition can be taken as a reliable access to truth. By intuition of the nature of the mental processes/states that correlate with lived experience, Strawson concludes that episodicity is true. However, can we truly rely on intuition? What if it is the case that what we think is intuitive is, rather and at best, inferential—and thus, fallible—in nature? As Menary argues, if we had the capacity to distinguish between inferential and intuitive mental states, then there would not be any question as to which insights were inferential in nature, and which were intuitive in nature.[125] Yet, is it not the case that there can, and often is, great controversy as to whether something is true by intuition, or whether it is simply an inference? One need only refer to Strawson's own distinction between diachronicity

---

[124] Menary, Richard. "Our Glassy Essence: The Fallible Self in Pragmatist Thought." In *The Oxford Handbook of The Self*, edited by Shaun Gallagher, 609-32. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
[125] Ibid.

and episodicity. According to his argument, intuitively attending to the nature of one's mental life reveals the episodic truth of selfhood. Yet, if the truth of episodicity was so crystal clear on the basis of intuition alone, why is it the case that many hold diachronicity to be true, on the basis of what they would say is their own intuition? Hence, if Strawson's arguments in favor of episodicity hinge exclusively on direction intuition, then it seems that Ricoeur would have reason to doubt the truth of episodicity over that of diachronicity. Intuition alone is not enough evidence to assert the truth of one position over another. As such, the argument must be rejected.

The hermeneutic gesture here is that, if we want to understand the nature of the self, we can only do so indirectly through the interpretation of vast symbolic structure that—as symbols—stand in the place for direct lived experience. Narrative—and the tools we use to interpret it—is one such structure. However, the structure of narrative is not simply one amongst many others. Emplotment refigures human (inter-)action as it persists through time—whether it be futile or fructiferous. As such, if we want to understand the nature of the self, the best place to start is through its narrative dimensions.

With that, we can now move through the rest of Strawson's arguments with less effort. We dubbed the second formal argument as the argument from episodicity.

1) Episodicity is true.
2) If episodicity is true, then we do not experience ourselves narratively.
3) Therefore, the psychological narrative thesis—i.e. that human beings naturally experience their lives as already have a plot-like structure—is false.

Given the problems we encountered with Strawson's argument for episodicity, it seems that the truth of the first premise is, at best unclear, and at worst, false. Either way, this argument is unconvincing. However, allow me to make things a little more interesting. Ricoeur, I think would *also* reject the psychological thesis. For him, it is not the case that we naturally experience ourselves in narrative terms. Rather, we appropriate certain features of narrativity in order to better understand lived experience, and ourselves. Rather than being a psychological phenomenon, narrative is an ontological condition of possibility: it is through narrative means that we can understand what it means to be a self.

The next argument was the argument from narrative egoism.

1) Narrativity entails finding forms of repetitive patterns that make up a story of one's life.

2) In searching for these forms, one focuses only on oneself.
3) Focusing only on oneself inhibits, rather than promotes, ethical action.
4) Therefore, we should not adopt narrative identity.

Perhaps this argument works on the other theories of narrative identity, but clearly, it is preposterous to apply this to Ricoeur's. Let us simply recall that, for Ricoeur, narrative is the answer to the very question posed by ipse-identity: Who am I? Further, it is not I who asks this question of myself, it is the other. According to Ricoeur, selfhood is *fundamentally* intersubjective in nature. One cannot begin to understand oneself in the absence of another, and moreover, the initial character of self-understanding is ethical in nature. That is, in giving an account of myself, my life story is *always already* a response to a moral summons. Even the most mundane story that I can tell of myself to another has a moral dimension: it builds trust, and establishes a sense of self-constancy—the latter of which we might hold to be essential for an ethical life. On these grounds, we simply cannot recognize Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity in Strawson's argument.

Let us now turn to the artifact argument.

1) Giving an account of oneself necessarily entails that certain details, experience, or facts of the matter be omitted for the aesthetic smoothness of the story.
2) If experiences, details, or facts of the matter are omitted, then one's life is not exhausted by narrative.
3) If one's life is not exhausted by narrative, then one's life is not reducible to narrative identity.
4) Therefore, life is not narrative.

Recently, Davenport has attempted to refute the artifact argument's conclusion by developing the concept of the "narravive", which states that lived experience is always already experienced in a sort of narrative-like way.[126] I do not want to go in this direction, and I do not think Ricoeur would go in this direction either—as it seems like it might repeat Strawson's psychological thesis, which Ricoeur would reject. I think Ricoeur would question premise three. Just because one's life is not exhausted by narrative, it does not mean that there is nothing to gain—in terms of self-understanding—by appropriating aspects of the structure of narrative. To the contrary, Ricoeur would argue that narrative identity affords us with the opportunity to return to previous slivers of our life-story. Further, in returning to our life-story, we are presented with the possibility of reinterpreting a particular

---

[126] Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality.*

experience or chapter—I use the word metaphorically, of course—in order to derive new meaning, and in order to inspire action. That the lived experience I narrate exceeds the story I tell is a *good* thing. It means that there is a wealth of meaning-potential that can be mined by the task of hermeneutic understanding.

It is precisely here where Strawson would retort with the revision argument.

1) Telling one's life-story can lead to revising it.
2) Revision is distortion or falsification.
3) If telling one's life story leads to revision, then, in giving an account of oneself, one serves only to move further and farther away from the truth of who one is.
4) Therefore, we should not adopt narrative identity.

Ricoeur would respond in two ways. The first involves premise two. It seems that Strawson assumes that revision *only ever* entails distortion. In this sense, revision is not just a form of distortion, it also a form of deception, and if so, revision is coercive in nature. Yet, this is clearly false. Not all cases of revising one's life story are deceptive or distorted. It is neither uncommon nor dishonest that we reflect on, or simply revisit, past experiences, and re-contextualize their meaning. In doing this, we find patterns that translate to life lessons, find struggles that turn into triumphs (or vice versa). The present casts new light on the past, and the past casts

new light on the present. When this hermeneutic circle is a healthy one, Ricoeur would argue that it serves to inspire new courses of action, new ways of being.

Not all cases of revision are deceptive. Still, some are. What would be Ricoeur's response here? Clearly, Ricoeur would see this as a moral problem. Yet, I would raise two points: First, taking Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity seriously entails an intersubjective relation with other human beings. As has already been mentioned, this relation always already discloses the moral dimension of human living. My life story conveys a sense of trust. One cannot be trustworthy—in the moral sense of the word—without being honest. Thus, if we take Ricoeur's account seriously, in that we seek to be Ricoeurian in how we capitulate our own narrative identity, any revisions we make to our life story ought not be deceptive in nature. Second, I would like to briefly bolster this position with the notion of the debt to the past that Ricoeur develops in *Time and Narrative* and in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.[127] Accordingly, each and everyone of us has a debt to the past—a debt that discloses a duty to live with a sense of fidelity that respects the past suffering and injustices to which humanity has been exposed by both the

---

[127] Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

toll of history, and the tragedy of our own inhumanity. Here, I would like to add the following: my debt to the past also entails a duty to not distort my own past. Where the temptation arises, I *owe* it to myself and others to refrain from (inauthentically) representing my past. I ought to take responsibility for it. If I live according to this duty, then Strawson's argument need not be a concern.

Conclusion

The confrontation between Ricoeur's hermeneutic understanding of narrative identity and Strawson's anti-narrative arguments ought to be viewed in a healthy, productive way. There is much space for dialogue—and even some agreement—between these two authors. For our purposes, this has afforded us with the opportunity to approach Ricoeur's account of narrative identity in a different context—specifically, one that shows where Ricoeur's account identity differs from his contemporaries, as well as how he would respond to the variety of objections capitulated by Strawson. As we have seen, Ricoeur's hermeneutic understanding of narrative identity is able to withstand and respond to all of Strawson's objections. To the extent that these objections rest on his episodic understanding of selfhood, and to the extent that this understanding of selfhood rests primarily on intuition, Ricoeur would respond that intuition alone is not enough to

understand the nature of selfhood or identity. Rather, the shortest path to self-understanding is via a ‘detour’, as Ricoeur would say, which entails reflecting on, and interpreting, one’s lived experiences through the structure of narrative configuration. Narrativity, then, ought to be cast in a new light—namely, as an ontological condition of possibility. It is through narrative that understanding ‘who’ I am becomes possible in the first place.

Chapter 2

The Hermeneutics of Memory: The Aporetic Nature of Memory

It is unsurprising that Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology would eventually seek out, as its central theme of philosophical investigation, 'mnemonic phenomena'—the umbrella term Ricoeur uses to refer to all aspects of memory, history, and forgetting. To focus solely on memory, the term refers to *more* than simply what is encapsulated by the phenomenology of memory—with 'phenomenology' being understood in the Husserlian sense of the term; i.e. an analysis that entails disclosing the nature of the specific intentional *act* of remembrance as well as one that entails disclosing the nature of the *object* of this specific intentional act.[1] It is a phenomenology of memory bolstered by a hermeneutics of the subject who has been 'decentered' as a result of the 'post-modern' human condition. I speak of a subject who is no longer the gravitational nexus of meaning

---

[1] Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 22.

in the world, a subject who is at once made and unmade by being subjected through societal and linguistic forces that precondition one's understanding of the world and of oneself. Yet, I also speak of a subject who is not totally powerless in confronting these forces. To seek to understand memory in this light is indicative of undertaking a hermeneutics of memory.

The hermeneutics of memory has a central role to play in the later development of Ricoeur's philosophical thought, which emphasized the way in which narrativity mediates with, and makes possible, some of the most basic aspects of human existence (i.e. personal identity, intersubjectivity, social living). In Ricoeur's own words, "it is a question here of returning to a lacuna in the problematic of *Time and Narrative* and in *Oneself as Another*, where temporal experience and the narrative operation are directly placed in contact."[2] Yet, if one were to examine the 'lacuna' of which Ricoeur speaks, the examination would reveal that the focal point of both *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* entailed the development of, and (temporary) response to, a set of philosophical aporias. For *Time and Narrative*, the central aporia was the gap between phenomenological time and cosmological time.[3] For *Oneself As Another*, the central

---

[2] Ibid., p. xv.
[3] See especially Vol. III of *Time and Narrative.*

aporia was that of diachronic unity; i.e. under what condition(s) is it meaningful to suggest that I am 'one and the same person' over long stretches of time? It follows, then, that Ricoeur's hermeneutic analysis of memory also entails bringing to light the aporetic nature of memory. If our goal is to better understand the relation between memory, narrativity, and identity from within Ricoeur's hermeneutics, then we must also go forward from here. Thus, the initial question is: what does the hermeneutics of memory disclose—what does it bring to light—concerning the aporetic nature of memory?

My own proposal is that, unlike the aporias explored in both *Time and Narrative and Oneself as Another*, there is no *central, one-pointed* aporia around which memory revolves. My contention is that the aporetic nature of memory is twofold, dyadic. This dyadic nature to memory's aporia is revealed from Ricoeur's phenomenological hermeneutic analysis of memory, which also takes a dyadic structure. On the one hand, Ricoeur's analysis entails an examination of memory as the *object* of an intentional act. I shall refer to this as the objective analysis of memory. Yet, such an analysis would remain incomplete, for memory always, already belongs to 'someone'. Thus, on the other hand, Ricoeur's analysis of memory also entails an examination of the subject

who is capable of remembering. I shall refer to this as the subjective analysis of memory.

Both the objective and subjective analysis of memory reveal their own distinct aporia—hence the dyadic structure of the aporetic nature of memory. From the objective analysis, the aporia of memory emerges out of the relationship between memory and imagination. From Ricoeur's perspective, in order for memory to faithfully represent the past, memory must rely upon the imagination's capacity to 'give to be seen'. Yet, insofar as the domain of the imagination is that of the 'unreal', memory's capacity to faithfully represent the past is always in question.

From the subjective analysis, the aporia of memory emerges from the question concerning precisely 'who' is the subject that remembers. Is remembering, reminiscing, recalling, etc. an activity that is done in the first person, singular—or rather, does remembering fall under the domain of the collective singular, the 'we' that constitutes a community? Is memory personal or collective? The reader familiar with *Time and Narrative* will see that the subjective analysis reveals a similar aporia to that between phenomenological and cosmological time.[4] Only now, the

---

[4] I will go on to demonstrate the structural similarity between the aporia of time in *Time and Narrative* and the

conflict has shifted from existential phenomenology and the physical sciences, to existential phenomenology and the social sciences.

The groundwork has been laid. Broadly, this chapter shall be organized in two sections. The first section will develop the aporia of memory that emerges from Ricoeur's objective analysis. Contemporaneously, I will also develop what I call the 'dialectical spiral' upon which the objective analysis rests. I shall develop this dialectical spiral below. The second section will focus on the aporia of memory that emerges from Ricoeur's subjective analysis. Overall, the focus of this chapter is to engage in a close reading of the sections of *Memory, History, Forgetting* that are dedicated to memory in order to develop—and not resolve—each of memory's aporias. From Ricoeur's perspective, any aporia, by virtue of being an aporia, is *de facto* unresolvable. Nevertheless, it is up to philosophers to poetically put the aporia to use. However, before an aporia can be 'put to use', it must first be articulated.

I. The Representation of the Past and the Dialectic of Memory

I will begin this section with a brief description of the aporia concerning the objective analysis of memory—i.e. that which

---

aporia concerning the subject of memory in *Memory History Forgetting* more clearly in the third chapter of this work.

Ricoeur dubs the aporia concerning the representation of the past. Following this, I shall introduce the four oppositional pairs by which Ricoeur proposes we understand memory, and wherein which the aporia of memory further expresses itself. I will seek to describe these pairs in their singularity, but I will also propose that, in relation to one another, they form a dialectical spiral, where the aporetic nature of the representation of the past becomes deepened, radicalized, and ultimately unresolvable on the level of descriptive language.

1. The Representation of the Past

At first sight, that memory is merely a representation of the past—and not rather, say, a complete repetition of it—seems straightforward and unproblematic. I can think back to the first day of school in the third grade. I can recall being in a classroom, feeling a mixture of enthusiasm and anxiety. Enthusiasm for the promise of being with, and making new, friends. Anxiety for a school year filled with still nebulous challenges. I recall this memory and I *know* that it is a memory. I am not confused; I do not think that I am once again in the third grade. In other words, I *know* that this memory—whether I understand it metaphorically as an imprint of wax on the fabric of my psyche, as a series of neurons firing in different regions of my brain, or as the intentional correlate of a rememorative representation of a

past perceptual experience—simply stands for, and in the place of, an event that is now 'in' the past. I no longer have access to the actual event; I can only (re)experience it *indirectly* through my recollection.

We can now begin to see the aporia taking shape. Memory, to invoke Plato, makes an absent thing present, but it does so precisely through the thing's absence.[5] Memory, as a representation of the past, is not a repetition of the past; it is, at least, a recreation of it.[6] If the representation of the past

---

[5] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 88. The 'invocation of Plato' stems primarily from the analogy between memory and an imprint of wax developed and employed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus.* Within the broader context of the *Theaetetus*, the analogy functions as a way for Socrates to explore how a false belief may emerge from the 'imprint' of a prior perceptual experience. Thus, in those moments when one cannot directly compare the perception of a thing with a memory of it, all that one has is the original imprint—and so, a thing is present by its absence. See, Plato, *Theaetetus and Sophist,* edited by Christopher Rowe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 70 – 76. To anticipate the position that I was on the way towards developing in the main body of this section, Plato's willingness to use an analogy to develop and understand memory is indicative of the coupling between both memory and imagination, in that 'taking' memory to be 'like' a wax imprint requires the capacity of the imagination.

[6] Besides the textual evidence that I will provide to suggest that this understanding of memory can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy, there is also significant neurological evidence to suggest that, memory, in representing the past, also *recreates* the past. In *What Makes*

also entails a (re)creative relationship with it, then several important questions must be raised. To what extent does memory belong in the "province" of the imagination?[7] If memory is involved in any way with the imagination, what is its relationship with reality? Can a memory truly stand in the place of a past event, and do so with faithfulness?

According to Ricoeur, this aporia of memory originated in ancient Greece, with both Plato and Aristotle acting as the

---

Us Think?, Changeux goes to great lengths to show how the act of remembrance involves and recruits several regions of the brain—linguistic, motor, and emotional—in order to successfully recall an autobiographical event. The implication, then, is that in recalling an event, one's brain recreates it in terms of the neural regions that become active. In this sense, Abumrad and Krulwich's analogy might be particularly instructive: any instance of remembering is like that of an orchestral performance, which, through the activity of performing, recreates the piece that is being played. My use of the term "autobiographical event" is quite telling, as it also prefigures what I will argue in Chapter 3—that narrativity and the mnemonic must be combined in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of (human) memory, capable of responding to the second aporia of memory, to be developed later in this chapter (as well as at the start of Chapter 3). In any case, for Changeux's neurological insights, see *What Makes Us Think?* Translated by M. B. DeBevoise. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 138. For the analogy by Abumrad and Krulwich, see "Memory and Forgetting". *Radiolab*, June 7, 2007. Podcast, website, 1:00:07.https//www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/episodes/91569-memory-and-forgetting

[7] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 5.

representative figureheads of its emergence and development. Plato would contend that if memory involves tending to, or cultivating, mental images that are meant to represent the past, then memory ultimately belongs to the imagination. Insofar as this is the case, the reality it represents is always already an imperfect copy (of a copy). As such, Plato's (in)famous criticism of art as imitation—and the artist as an imitator—in Book 10 of *The Republic* can be analogously applied to memory: if a memory reflected upon or recounted is simply an *image* of a past experience, it may fail to grasp the *truth* of that experience.[8] Thus, the coupling

---

[8] The original passage from which I am 'drawing' the analogy is that of Plato's criticism of painting in particular. Consider, for instance, the following exchange between Socrates and Glaucon:

> 'Well that's the point of my question. In each individual case, what is the object of painting? Does it aim to imitate what is, as it is? Or imitate what appears, as it appears? Is it imitation of appearance, or of truth?'
> 'Of appearance,' he said.
> 'In that case, I would imagine, the art of imitation is a far cry from truth. The reason it can make everything, apparently, is that it grasps just a little of each thing—and only an image at that.'

To the extent that our memories are only capable, too, of grasping and retaining "just a little of each thing", it would seem that memory is also, therefore, quite "a far cry from truth". See Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Tom Griffith, Camrbidge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 317.

of memory and imagination is one that one must regard with suspicion.

Of course, the above is an inference of Plato's position, and based on a work that does not deal with the topic of memory. To understand Plato's position on memory, one must turn, as Ricoeur does, to the *Theaetetus*.[9] Engaging with this text reveals that, from Plato's perspective, memory could be understood in a passive sense and an active one—explaining both requires that each be understood through a distinct metaphors.[10] On the one hand, memory is like an imprint of

---

[9] Indeed, virtually all of Ricoeur's treatment of Plato in *Memory, History, Forgetting* stems from a close reading of the *Theaetetus*, cited earlier in this chapter.

[10] As I have already noted in footnote 5 of this chapter, the broader context of this dialogue is *not* that of memory as such, but rather that of knowledge. In fact, Plato's discussion of memory in the *Theaetetus* is done at the service of investigating the possibility of false beliefs. That this text is not directly concerned with understanding memory, that it can only have implications for memory, is not at all lost on Ricoeur. As he points out in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the fact that Plato only looks at memory whilst attempting to explain how a false belief can emerge, risks contaminating the way in which memory is received and understood by him (or a 'disciple') with a contagion of suspicion. The careful interpreter of Plato would have to decide whether all problems of memory are subsumable to epistemology, or whether memory could (have) be(en) a topic worthy of individual discussion by such an important figure in the discipline's history. See, Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 8.

wax. The original event leaves its trace behind in one's psyche, and is only made present from this trace.[11] This is memory in its passive sense. An event happens, and we can only bear witness to it. On the other hand, *retrieving* a memory is like plucking a particular bird from an aviary containing many other birds.[12] Here we have memory in an active sense, the process of recollection. Yet, this distinction between memory in an active or passive sense does not really change the insight that was inferred from *The Republic* on the relationship between memory and imagination. As long as memory is about *representing* the past, it will always be at best one step removed from reality. As such, whether in the passive or active sense of memory, there is the possibility of *misrepresentation*. The wax may have left a faulty imprint—or as Socrates suggests in dialogue, perhaps a person's soul is composed of faulty wax. The wrong bird may have been retrieved. The memory-image conceals as much as it reveals. Memory is fallible, unreliable, and prone to error.

According to Ricoeur, in Aristotle's work—specifically *De Memoria et Remeniscentia*—we see both a resistance to the collapse of memory into the imagination, as well as a deeper

---

[11] See footnote 5 of this chapter, once again, or see the *Theaetetus*, pp. 70 – 76.

[12] Ibid., pp. 78 – 82. Again, though, the epistemological context being discussed is that of understanding how knowledge can be possessed but confusedly recalled.

entanglement of the two.[13] On the side of resistance, much of the early argumentation that Aristotle employs in *De Memoria* is to assert that all "memory is of the past".[14] Memory's primary relationship lies not with the imagination, but with temporality. As Aristotle maintains:

> Memory, then, is neither sensation nor conception, but a state of having one of these or an affection resulting from one of these, when some time elapses. As we have stated, there is no memory of the now in the now. For of the present there is sensation, of the future there is expectation, and of the past there is memory. Therefore, all memory happens with time.[15]

Yet, as Ricoeur maintains in *The Course of Recognition,* even the Aristotelian coupling of memory and temporality requires mediation from the imagination. Insofar as a

---

[13] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*., p. 6.

[14] Consider the broader passage from which stems Aristotle's claim that all memory is of the past:

> For on cannot remember the future, but of this one has opinion and expectation… nor can one remember the present, but of this there is sensation; for in sensation, we cognize neither the future nor the past but only the present. Now, memory is of the past; and nobody would claim to remember the present, when it is actually present.

See, Bloch, *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection,* edited and translated by David Bloch, Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007, p. 25.

[15] Ibid., p. 27.

memory is something that stands in the place of the original event, the power of the imagination is required.[16] After all, a memory is only useful insofar as it *accurately* represents the past, as it really happened. The representation of the past necessitates the involvement of the imagination. To this extent, memory is still liable to fallibility, unreliability, and error. As Ricoeur states:

> The problem posed by the entanglement of memory and imagination is as old as Western philosophy. Socratic philosophy bequeathed to us two rival and complementary *topoi* on this subject, one Platonic, the other Aristotelian. The first… speaks of the present representation of an absent thing; it argues implicitly for enclosing the problematic of memory within that of imagination. The second, centered on the theme of the representation of a thing formerly perceived, acquired, or learned, argues for including the problematic of the image within that of remembering. These are the two versions of the aporia of imagination and memory from which we can never completely extricate ourselves. [17]

---

[16] Ricoeur, Paul, *The Course of Recognition*, translated by David Pellauer, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 111.
[17] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 7.

Thus, we can now state this aporia of memory as clearly and distinctly as possible: inasmuch as we might try to understand memory in a way to disentangle it from the imagination, we will, under every avenue of research, have recourse to the imagination in order to bestow to memory its representational force.

If Ricoeur is correct, and the relationship between memory and imagination is ever present, then one may be tempted to view all of memory with suspicion. As a phenomenon, memory will never be able to rid itself of its tendency to error, of eroding over time, or of simply being inaccurate and unreliable. Better to simply regard memory—all memory—as dysfunctional or pathological in nature; it just does not work like it is supposed to, and it never will. Yet this view might be going too far. If one were to cut one's finger, what would be the more reasonable response: 1) putting a bandage on it, and from there try to understand how the injury happened in the first place, so that it is less likely to be repeated in the future, or 2) amputating the finger, so that it is never cut again? Clearly the former is the most reasonable response. Ricoeur would suggest the same holds for memory. While we must be vigilant in assessing the reliability of a memory, it is not the case that every memory, by virtue of being a memory, is dysfunctional.

> The truthful ambition of memory has its own merits, which deserve to be recognized before any consideration is given to the pathological deficiencies and the nonpathological weaknesses of memory… To put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it.[18]

Ricoeur's suggestion is clear. Even with the fundamental aporia of memory firmly articulated, we ought not view memory solely in terms of its weaknesses. Rather, we ought to first try to understand memory in terms of its *capacities*. Memory is capable of doing something; it grants us indirect access to the past.

2. The Dialectic of Memory

In order to understand memory in terms of its capacities, Ricoeur proposes enacting a phenomenological investigation of memory, sensitive to addressing two central issues: 1) the intentional objects of memory; i.e. the *things* that one remembers; and 2) the intentional act of memory; i.e. remembrance as a process that one undergoes. The two are interrelated within a hermeneutic circle. By attending to, and further explaining, the intentional act of memory, one can

---

[18] Ibid., p. 21.

better understand the intentional object(s) of memory. In other words, by explaining the 'how' through which one remembers, one can better understand the 'what' of memory—and vice versa. Attending to the 'what' of memory can lead us to better understanding the 'how' through which one remembers.[19] Further, it is in trying to understand the intentional act of memory that we find the four oppositional pairs, which will be developed throughout this section, both in their singularity and in their relation. They are the following: 1) Reflexivity/Worldliness; 2) Habit/Memory; 3) Evocation/Search; 4) Retention/Reproduction.

From Ricoeur's perspective, memory is a dense and complicated phenomenon. It can be understood as a

---

[19] Interestingly, in *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur takes up once again this objective analysis of memory, however, the interplay between the 'what' of memory and the 'how' of memory goes on to serve a slightly different role. The 'what' and 'how' of memory is, ultimately, at the service of providing a path—or a *course*, if you will—that leads back to the 'who' of memory. Thus, in *The Course of Recognition*, the circular relationship between the 'what' and 'how' of memory is not developed. As such, the *Course of Recognition* allows Ricoeur to 'graft' his work on memory onto the conception of subjectivity that was most forcefully developed in *Oneself as Another*—that of the capable self, understood as and through the phrase "I can". In this sense, besides the capacity to speak, to act, to narrate, and to be the subject of imputation. Ricoeur would also add: to remember. See, *The Course of Recognition*, 89 – 111.

passivity, as an activity, as a mental phenomenon—as something that takes place 'in' an individual's mind—as a nonmental phenomenon—as something that is made possible by collective, social living, etc. To focus only on one of these dimensions of memory, then, would not exhaust the meaning-potential latent in such a rich topic of investigation. This is precisely why Ricoeur develops the series of oppositional pairs. Each functions as a typology, disclosing a different dimension of memory. No individual pair ought to be understood as a 'black and white' binary. Rather, each pair forms a spectrum, with the "line", as Ricoeur says, that unites each side of the spectrum serving as memory's capacity to represent time.[20] While each individual pair discloses a possible avenue through which to understand memory, all the pairs taken together represent a comprehensive phenomenology of memory. Nevertheless, however thorough this phenomenology might be, Ricoeur *does not* intend for it to create a totality of memory, addressing all and every problem that may emerge.

> Now the "working" concepts that prime the interpretation and direct the ordering of the "thematic" concepts proposed here, escape the mastery of meaning that a total reflection would want

---

[20] Ibid., p. 24.

> to command. More than others, the phenomena of memory, so closely connected to what we are, oppose the most obstinate of resistances to the *hubris* of total reflection.[21]

As Michel has argued, Ricoeur's resistance to establish a totality with regard to his phenomenological analysis of memory is characteristic of the entirety of his philosophical body of work.[22] That is, any dialectical process proposed by Ricoeur is purposely left 'open' so as to be further explored by future philosophers, capable of carrying and advancing the dialectic to even greater depths. Ricoeur, then, establishes a dialectic fit for a post-Hegelian age.

Ricoeur's approach will ultimately serve to *deepen* the aporia of memory, leaving it unresolvable. It is unresolvable, to be sure, but not without hope to be poetically put to use. Such is the hermeneutic wager Ricoeur has made throughout his philosophical career.[23] Allow me to delay no further. The following are the four oppositional pairs of memory that Ricoeur proposes.

Reflexivity/Worldliness*.* The pair reflexivity/worldliness is unique amongst all other pairs as it serves as their

---

[21] Ibid.
[22] Michel, Johann. *Ricoeur and The Post-Structuralists*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
[23] Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

condition of possibility. Indeed, every memory, by virtue of being a memory, is one that belongs to someone, is about something, and that something in question took place in the world. On the one hand, we have the subject who remembers, and on the other hand, we have the worldly context to which a memory refers. At this point in the analysis, Ricoeur presupposes that the subjective side of this oppositional pair refers to any subject capable of appreciating its own 'inner' life: "In this regard, nothing should be stripped from the assertion that memory belongs to the sphere of interiority".[24]

Nevertheless, memory is not simply something that occurs 'in one's head'.[25] It also has a worldly dimension, a public character, "implying the body, space, and the horizon of the world or of a world".[26] The body alone offers itself as a wellspring from which virtually all avenues of memory can be explored. Phenomenologically, my body opens me to the world, rendering to me the capabilities that make living a

---

[24] Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 36.

[25] In *What Makes Us Think?*, a portion of Ricoeur and Changeux's exchange on the nature of memory is dedicated towards establishing the various pairs of memory, with that of reflexivity and worldiness being explicitly mentioned by Ricoeur. Ricoeur's position that memory has a worldly, and not just bodily or neurological component, actually marks a moment of agreement between the 'neuroscientist and philosopher'. See *What Makes Us Think?*, p. 145.

[26] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 40.

fully human life possible. From this insight springs the prefiguration of the mnemonic notion of habit,[27] already explored in the previous chapter. My body is capable of acquiring, and remembering how to do such skills as driving, writing, speaking, teaching, dancing, etc. Further, this process of acquisition is mediated by a dialectical process of innovation and sedimentation.[28] However, in the same breath in which I affirm that my body opens me to the world, I must also acknowledge that embodiment also places me at its mercy to what Levinas might call the elemental features of the world.[29] I am open to injury, illness, trauma—and these

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] I will refer the reader back to the first chapter of this work for a broader discussion of habit-acquisition and the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation.

[29] Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, see especially p. 143. My reference to the 'elemental' in Levinas might seem odd here, considering how much of his analysis in *Totality and Infinity* is dedicated to disclosing how the elemental features of the world lend themselves to the subject's unmitigated, carefree enjoyment of it. However, there are dark glimmers throughout the sections on the elemental where Levinas hints at there being another 'side' to his analysis, one that reveals how the elemental features of the world are, or can be, menacing. What I have in mind here is the precise connection he makes at the end of his analysis of the elemental to his earlier concept of the *il y a*—that aspect of existence that reduces all that it encounters into an anonymity. In this sense, those features of the world that lend themselves to one's enjoyment could also be the

states of affairs, if they leave no physical mark, surely leave a psychical one. Here we see a different kind of memory; a kind that invites me to recount the experience to others, or simply to myself, in the hopes that I may 'work' through the violence to which the world leaves me open—to mention nothing, of course, of the narrativizalibility of more enjoyable memories, as well.[30]

Beyond the body, the world, too, presents itself as a mnemonic phenomenon. Think of a stroll through one's childhood neighborhood, or home, and think of the capacity

---

very same features that lead to the dissolution of one's subjectivity. To be clear, in speaking of the dissolution of one's subjectivity, I am *not* speaking about death or about being-towards-death. As Levinas argues in *Existence and Existents*, the *il y a* is a concept that is *opposed* to Heidegger's being-towards'death, and his conception of anxiety. The *threat* of anonymity of the *il y a* is to suggest that, at the heart of being, there is something menacing. Some examples that come to my mind is that of say, succumbing to cancer or Alzheimer's disease. The menace that underlies these examples is not that cancer or Alzheimer's will kill me—after all, for how many people is death *preferable* to Alzheimer's? It is not that they will kill me; it is that they will *undo* me and all those projects that I had for my life-plan. I will simply become a statistic. That Levinas hints that this is part of the elemental is something that I cannot think should be ignored. Further, my own reading of Ricoeur is that his philosophy is one that, though it affirms the goodness of being alive, is also quite aware of its fragility, too—hence the necessity to continuously affirm it and reaffirm it.

[30] Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 40.

that such a stroll has to evoke powerful memories. Here, we see one's capacity to not just 'store' a memory 'in one's head', but in the world, in specific places in it. Also relevant is the broader social horizon wherein which one lives. Neighborhoods are located in cities, and cities in countries, and the government in each country goes through great lengths to commemorate its past through museums, monuments, holidays, etc.[31] We find ourselves in a social world that precedes us, and it is always already inhabited by others. In this way, the pair of reflexivity and worldliness prefigures the second aporia of memory, that of the subject of memory. However, I shall turn to this aporia later in the chapter. That is, for the time being, I shall not 'problematize' this pair.

The polarity of reflexivity and worldliness form a spectrum. Between reflexivity and worldliness, Ricoeur maintains, are three "mnemonic modes".[32] The first is the mode of reminding, "which stands for clues that guard against forgetting".[33] Reminders can be 'inner' (e.g. a mental note to call one's mother on her birthday) or 'outer' (e.g. a penny placed in one's back pocket to ensure that cat food is

[31] Ibid., p. 41.
[32] Ibid., p. 38.
[33] Ibid.

purchased on the way home).[34] More profound is the relationship that reminding has with time and forgetting. Reminding guards against forgetting, to be sure, but it specifically guards against *future* instances of forgetting. I remind myself *now* so as not to forget *later.*

Reminiscing is the second mnemonic mode, and it is the one most marked by intersubjectivity. From Ricoeur's perspective, reminiscing is an activity done most often in the company of others. The back-and-forth of reminiscing serves to strengthen a memory, as well as the relationships one has with others.

> As for *reminiscing*, this is a phenomenon more strongly marked by activity than *reminding*; it consists in making the past live again by evoking it together with others, each helping the other to remember shared events or knowledge, the memories of one person serving as a reminder for the memories of the other.[35]

The final mode is recognizing. Here, we must approach this mode with great care. As Ricoeur contends in *The Course of Recognition*, recognition as such is a polysemic phenomenon. Indeed, the 'course' of *The Course of Recognition* is one of demonstrating that the different meaning-potentials of

---

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

recognition are marked by a discontinuity from each other, and this discontinuity threatens to unravel the possibility of developing a coherent theory of recognition.[36] Indeed, Ricoeur himself does not even propose a rubric by which a coherent theory can be postulated, preferring instead to undergo a highly exegetical analysis of the various philosophical problems that arise from within each distinct meaning through which recognition itself could be understood.[37]

---

[36] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* p. 2.

[37] This is not, however, to suggest that such a coherent theory would be impossible to develop, or to suggest that there is no possibility of finding the thread that unites the differing meanings and uses of recognition. Indeed, the opening pages of *The Course of Recognition* present an argument that could possibly be revisited after and reinforced by the exegetical analyses that make up the bulk of the text. That is, at the start of the text, Ricoeur, citing Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, notes that each differing definition—and therefore, each differing *use*—of the word 'recognition' stems from the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation that is at the heart of a lived, spoken language. Language has a plasticity to it. The definition and connotation of words can change over time, and over time, these new definitions can take on a life of their own, such that it is difficult—but not impossible—to discover the initial moment of linguistic innovation that prompted a change of meaning. To this, I would add what I stated in the first chapter of this dissertation: that one of the functions of narrative identity is to recount the history of habit formation—which rests on the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation, and which also, without the tools of

Accordingly, recognition can be understood in three distinct ways. The first way of understanding recognition is as a form of identification and distinction.[38] It entails, therefore, taking something or someone to be identical with itself.[39] Importantly, this form of recognition is taken as the 'first' form primarily because of the dyadic approach through which Ricoeur explores recognition. He does so both chronologically and by the trajectory of activity to passivity.[40] The two are interrelated. As newer definitions of 'recognition' developed, they also revealed deeper layers of passivity. I will make this clearer after stating briefly the other two ways of understanding recognition.

The second form of recognition deals with the reflexive moment contained within any act of recognition-identification; namely, the capacity for self-recognition.[41] That is, as opposed to being about *identification*, the second understanding of recognition is about (one's) *identity*. At issue here is the capacities that one possesses as the condition of possibility for self-recognition, as such. The

---

narrativity, tends to become obfuscated. At any rate, Littré's argument can be found on p. 4 of *The Course of Recognition*.

[38] Ibid, p. 21.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid, p. 19.

[41] Ibid, p. 21.

model for these capacities is encapsulated by Ricoeur's phrase "I can".[42]

According to Ricoeur, however, self-recognition itself rests on, and requires, the intersubjective relationship between oneself and others.[43] It is the intersubjective relationship that is at the heart of the third and final form of recognition, mutual recognition. At stake here are the ways through which people can come to be recognized by others at the deepest level of their "authentic identity".[44] Ricoeur's analysis culminates in the way in which people can come to mutually recognize the humanity of the other through the symbolic exchange of gifts, demarcated by an act of generosity awakened by a sense of gratitude that cannot find its expression through any other means.[45] Thus, with all three understandings taken together, the trajectory of recognition is that of a subject who recognizes and catalogues the objects and entities that reside in their being-

---

[42] This phrase is a result of the analysis of subjectivity and selfhood that emerged from *Oneself as Another*, and which Ricoeur continued to expand upon in the works that followed this text. For the most succinct recapitulation of constitutive elements of the "I can", see Ricoeur's essay, "Who is the Subject of Rights?" in *The Just*, translated by David Pellauer, pp. 1- 10. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
[43] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 69.
[44] Ibid., p. 21.
[45] Ibid, p. 243.

in-the-world, to that of the subject who is recognized by others for their deeds.

If one were to embark upon a 'backwards' reading—which Ricoeur tends to do within the confines and context of individual works[46]—between *The Course of Recognition*, on the one hand, and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, on the other, it becomes evident that *Memory, History, Forgetting* represents the 'germ cell' from which the deeper analyses of recognition later emerged. As such, within *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the form of recognition that is almost of exclusive focus for Ricoeur is that of recognition-identification.[47]

---

[46] See, for instance the Ninth Study of *Oneself as Another*, where Ricoeur explores his "little ethics" (as he often called it) backwards. In the Seventh Study, Ricoeur proposes that his ethics could be understood in the following sentence: "Living the good life, with and for others, in just institutions". The trajectory of the text is contained within the sentence: the starting point is that of the self, its mediation with others, as well as its mediation with the 'other' other, that is, the third person, constituted by and through social institutions. However, in the Ninth Study, Ricoeur begins with social institutions and moves backwards towards the first person, singular. See, *Oneself as Another,* pp. 240 – 296. I could also reference *The Course of Recognition* itself, as the components of the conclusion entails Ricoeur doing yet another backwards reading, from the passivity of mutual recognition to the activity of recognition-identification. See the concluding chapter of *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 248 – 258, especially.

[47] I say "almost of exclusive focus" because there are some moments in *Memory, History, Forgetting* where Ricoeur does

Indeed, at this stage of the text, Ricoeur's treatment of recognition lines up solely with recognition-identification.

Where it concerns the intersection between recognition-identification and memory, we see the reemergence of memory's first aporia, the interplay between presence and absence, memory and imagination. I think of my childhood friend, and immediately recognize the face before me. "That's him," I exclaim, "that's Jake." Only, it is not Jake, but a memory of him—Jake himself is absent. Further, it is not a memory of Jake as I saw him yesterday, but of him when we were children. "The 'thing' recognized is doubly other: as absent (other than *presence*) and as earlier (other than the *present*)".[48] Within the simple "miracle" of recognition—as it is treated in both *Memory, History, Forgetting,* and *The Course of Recognition*—lies a Gordian knot of similitude and alterity.

---

speak of self-recognition and mutual recognition, though it is obvious that the exegetical work of *The Course of Recognition* is still nascent in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Consider, for instance, the concluding passages of *Memory, History, Forgetting* where Ricoeur speaks of self-recognition through memory coming in the form of a "wish" (p. 496), and mutual recognition through identifying with one's heritage (p. 503). Indeed, the *Course of Recognition* goes much further than *Memory, History, Forgetting* does on these other forms of recognition. However, it is also important to note that his treatment of recognition-identification in both texts is consistent.

[48] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 39.

How is it that a memory—which is other than an event or state of affairs—can be taken to be 'the same thing' as an event, so as to stand for, and represent, it?

> The small miracle of recognition, however, is to coat with presence the otherness of that which is over and gone. In this, memory is re-presentation in the twofold sense of re-: turning back, anew. This small miracle is at the same time a large snare for phenomenological analysis, to the extent that this representation threatens to shut reflection up once again within the invisible enclosure of representation, locking it within our head, in the mind.[49]

As stated above, the polarity of reflexivity and worldliness serve as the condition of possibility for all the other pairs developed by Ricoeur. In order for something like 'the mnemonic' to occur, it is necessary for there to be an agent who is both capable of acting (and suffering) in a worldly context and capable of reflecting on previous matters. As the condition of possibility, reflexivity and worldliness is not the end of the discussion, but its beginning. If one were to start at the polarity of reflexivity and worldliness and then 'zoom in' on the mnemonic, the next phase in this lengthy dialectic would be the polarity between habit and memory.[50]

---

[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., p. 24.

Habit and Memory. Ricoeur develops the polarity of habit and memory in light of Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*—and in truth, Bergson's presence will be felt throughout the entirety of Ricoeur's treatment of memory. However, whereas Bergson developed the distinction between habit (*memoire-habitude*) and memory (*memoire-souvenir*) as a dichotomy—as a strict either/or—Ricoeur maintains that the two form a spectrum.[51] Between the two

---

[51] My reading of Bergson here is very much influenced by that of Guerlac's, who argues that *Matter and Memory* rests on postulating not only the 'radical' difference between both 'matter' and 'memory'—which she argues is Bergson's way of elegantly responding to the mind/body problem via dualism—but also of the *relation* between matter and memory. In this sense, Bergson's insistence that the distinction between *memoire-habitude* and *memoire-souvenir* is not a difference of degrees, but of a *kind*, can be seen as a way creating a fractal that further radicalizes the profundity the relation between matter and memory. How so? From Bergson's perspective, perception, insofar as it is related to action, ought to be viewed as radically different from memory, insofar as memory cannot be reduced to the 'matter' that constitutes the brain. Yet, perception is constantly fused with memory, as this yields a greater ability to respond to the situation that defines the present moment. Further, within memory, the distinction between *memoire-habitude* and *memoire-souvenir* is taken to be radical because, that of *memoire-habitude* is, accordingly, aligned with the lived moment of action that defines the present (and perception), whereas *memoire-souvenir* is simply that of representation. And so we see here the fractalization of Bergson's work: at the macroscopic level, a radical

poles of habit and memory, one can find a "continuous range of mnemonic phenomena."[52] Indeed, the final two polarities

---

distinction between perception and memory that must (and is) nevertheless be surmounted; at the microscopic level (within memory): another radical distinction between perception and memory, but that may also help serve as the connective tissue that unites the two—perception must also carry memory, and within memory, there must also be perception. See Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 125. See also Bergson, *Matter and Memory,* Translated by Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 80.

[52] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 24. Despite the fact that Ricoeur is clearly disagreeing with Bergson's insistence that *memoire-habitude* and *memoire-souvenir* constitute a difference, not of degrees, but of kind, I think there is still a link that binds both Ricoeur and Bergson, namely, the desire to use philosophy in order to better understand the horizon of human action and interaction in which we live (and suffer). But even here, I do not think I am capturing the connection well. I shall take as a point of departure Geurlac's assessment of Bergson's philosophical project, as well as Taylor's assessment of Ricoeur's view of metaphor. Geurlac maintains that, ultimately, Bergson's philosophy postulates life as being neither mechanistic nor teleological, but proposes that within life is the capacity to grow, to change, to differentiate, all for the sake of the creation of novelty (see *Thinking in Time,* p. 7). Similarly, Taylor maintains that Ricoeur's account of metaphor is for the sake of indicating the way in which metaphor allows for ruptures in our way of thinking about things, such that we can create a space for novelty and creativity in the expression of our thought and of our understanding of being (see Taylor's introduction to Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. xxvii – xxxv). In both thinkers, then, there is a commitment towards

developed by Ricoeur—evocation and recollection, and retention and representation—will fall somewhere between habit and memory. However, they will lean more towards the memory than habit. As such, I will use the remainder of this exposition on habit and memory to discuss habit.

Suppose I have a friend, Patricio. Poor Patricio is in a terrible car accident. Let us not be too pessimistic. Let us say that he will survive and, eventually, return to normal. In the meantime, however, he is hospitalized, and requires the use of a respirator in order to breathe. Being the excellent friend that I am, I visit Patricio in the hospital, and upon seeing the severity of his condition, and upon my natural inclination to attempt to lighten his somber mood, I quip, quoting Homer Simpson, "Man, they have machines that breath for you? Here I am using my own lungs like a sucker!"[53]

Whenever one recites something by heart—be it a poem or a quotation from Homer Simpson—notice that one is not

---

making a space for novelty—albeit, within Ricoeur's work, this novelty is *poetic*, whereas in Bergson, it is *vitalistic*.

[53] *The Simpsons.* "The Two Mrs. Nahasapeemapetilons". Episode 185. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Richard Appel. Fox, November 16, 1997. The full dialogue is as follows:

> Homer: Hey, what's lucky hooked up to?
> Nurse: A respirator. It breathes for him.
> Homer: Man, they have machines that breath for you? And here I am using my own lungs like a sucker!

evoking a particular memory of a particular moment of a particular recitation. It is, as Bergson states, "part of my present… it is lived and acted, rather than represented."[54] Habitually quoting Homer Simpson is one thing, recounting to someone where one was when one first heard that quotation is another. The former *acts out* something that is past, repeats it, and places the burden of tracing the line from present to past on the interlocutor.[55] The latter *represents* the past. "To memory that repeats is opposed memory that imagines."[56] Here again, we arrive at the central aporia of memory. In order to bridge the temporal distance between past and present, memory—at this level understood as a single moment of recollection—must borrow from the imagination so that it can stand for the past. What more can be said of memory?

---

[54] Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory.* Translated by Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 81.

[55] Consider how Ricoeur encapsulates the distinction between the two in *What Makes Us Think?*:

> [In] the case of habit memory, the past is acted out and incorporated in the present without distance; in the case of pure memory, the anteriority or priorness of the remembered event stands out, whereas in habit memory, it does not.

See, Changeux and Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think?*, p. 144.

[56] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 25.

Evocation and the Search. As we enter into the polarity between evocation and the search, we are now ever closer to understanding memory proper. No longer are we exploring its conditions of possibility, nor are we exploring its relationship to habituality. Taken together, evocation and the search create a complex topography. As Ricoeur suggests, their relation forms that of an algebraic grid.[57] Between the two horizontal poles—i.e. running along the x-axis—we find a spectrum denoting passivity (evocation) and activity (the search). Along the y-axis, we find gradient levels of consciousness; from fully conscious at the peak, to unconscious at the base.

Evocation is fairly straightforward. It denotes the "unexpected appearance of memory."[58] It is an affection, and as such, it denotes the tendency for memories to flood our consciousness; i.e. there are times in our life where we cannot help but to be passive with regard to our memories. They arrive not out of a conscious effort to recall them; they simply happen to us. Granted, we have already seen this when we spoke of the spectrum between reflexivity and worldliness. Because we are, as Gallagher and Zahavi might say, embodied and embedded (in a worldly context), we are

---

[57] Ibid., p. 444.
[58] Ibid., p. 26.

always already at the mercy of life.[59] The experiences we endure—be they fortunate or unfortunate, joyful or sorrowful, meaningful or absurd—leave their marks on us, dwell within us, and, if modern philosophy had anything to teach us, by the power of association alone, are capable of being brought to consciousness in the form of a memory-image.

By 'the search', Ricoeur mainly means the process of recollection.[60] Whereas evocation represented memory in its passive dimension, recollection signifies the conscious effort to retrieve a memory; it is an activity. In this sense, recollection also implies the *agency* of the subject who remembers. Within Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology, agency coincides with his conception of the capable subject, understood through the phrase "I can". In this sense, the capable subject is one who 'can' be the speaker and listener in interlocution, who 'can' be the agent of action, and who 'can' be the narrator of one's life story, who 'can' be the subject of imputation.[61] To this extent, as I had articulated

---

[59] Gallagher, Shaun and Dan Zahavi. *The Phenomenological Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

[60] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 27.

[61] See Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?" in *the Just,* pp. 1 – 10. My utilization of the essay in *the Just* is one born out of the sake of expediency. As Ricoeur states within the opening pages of *the Just*, the essays that comprise the work encapsulate the time wherein his research culminated in

earlier[62] in this chapter, the capacity to remember is an extension of this "I can".

To this, one might respond with a possible objection. If the retrieval of a memory represents an activity, and if this implies the agency of the (or a) subject, to what extent is memory an *additional* feature of the "I can"? Is it not, rather, reducible to one's capacity to be an agent of action? My view is that this is a rather artificial problem. Insofar as Ricoeur has, in *Oneself as Another* and elsewhere[63], incorporated

---

Oneself as Another. As such, *The Just* can be seen as a way for him to recapitulate the features of the capable subject, and to explore some questions that arise in parallel to the way in which he developed it within *Oneself as Another*. In other words, insofar as the works of *Time and Narrative*, *Oneself as Another,* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, create a continuum where Ricoeur is investigating the problematic of time and narrative at the level of various planes, *The Just* may be seen as a small stepping-stone upon which one may traverse as they make their way between *Oneself as Another* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Moreover, the concept of the capable subject also is revisited in *The Course of Recognition*, published after *Memory, History, Forgetting*. As such, this conception has an important role to play within the context of Ricoeur's late(r) hermeneutics. Therefore, see also, Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 93 – 126.

[62] See footnote 19, to be precise.

[63] See, for instance, the Second Study of *Oneself as Another*, pp. 40 – 55; "The Model of the Text" in *From Text to Action*, especially pp. 146 - 147 and 152; "Who Is the Subject of Rights?" in *The Just*, especially pp. 2 – 4; *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 93 – 96.

speech-act theory into his hermeneutics, this would also entail that one's capacity to speak—one's capacity to 'do things with words'—is also reducible to agency and action. It may well be. However, this would be at the cost of covering over various philosophical problems that arise when each 'unit' of the "I can" is taken up in its distinction. To this end, each feature of the "I can" is an opportunity to explore a litany of philosophical problems—e.g. the use of corporeal and mental predicates when designating a subject; the relationship between the causality of events and the agency of actions; the diachronic unity of one's personal identity; the relationship between identity and alterity in the constitution of selfhood, in addition to the role that social institutions have to play in this constitution as well; and, finally, with memory, the aporias of memory that will be developed in this chapter. As such, it makes sense to explore each feature of the capable subject independently of the other, while also keeping in mind the possibility for reach to relate to the other.

To return to recollection, Ricoeur emphasizes the "re-" of recollection; it "signifies *re*turning to, *re*taking, *re*covering what had earlier been seen, experienced, or learned, hence signifies, in a sense repetition."[64] Of course, not every search

---

[64] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 27. Emphasis mine.

of 'lost time' is a successful one.[65] As Ricoeur maintains in *The Course of Recognition,* the backdrop that animates every search for a memory is the spectre of forgetting[66]—whether one views forgetting as something that is fundamentally hostile to memory, a dysfunction of memory, or as a great existential theme in one's life that one must nevertheless take a stand on in order to live a more meaningful one.[67]

> One searches for what one fears having forgotten temporarily or for good, without being able to decide, on the basis of the everyday experience of recollection, between two hypotheses concerning the everyday experience of recollection, between two hypotheses concerning the origin of forgetting. Is it a definitive erasing of the traces of what was learned earlier, or is it a temporary obstacle… preventing their reawakening? This uncertainty regarding the essential nature of forgetting gives the search its unsettling character.[68]

---

[65] The astute reader will recognize this little nod to Proust, whose work is a rite of passage amongst French intellectuals as that of Cervantes is for Spanish ones.
[66] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* p. 112.
[67] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 426.
[68] Ibid., p. 27. Interestingly, in *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur is keen on presenting forgetting as a threat to memory than anything else. To be clear, forgetting is certainly presented as a threat to memory in *Memory,*

Indeed any search for a memory requires a certain amount of effort on the part of the individual in order to successfully recall it—i.e. what Ricoeur deems a "happy memory".[69] Sometimes this requires very little effort; a memory quickly lends itself to be recalled. Other times, it can require great effort; one must reflect deeply in order to accurately recall the experience. Nevertheless, there are also times when any attempt of a search will end in failure.

The effort it takes to retrieve a memory reveals something rather bold about memory as such. Namely, it reveals that memory is not first and foremost an image of some sort; rather it is something else, something requiring the capability of the imagination in order to be represented to

---

History, Forgetting, as well. Certainly, the quotation just cited testifies to this. However, to the extent Ricoeur is capable of connecting forgetting to forgiveness in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and to the extent that receiving forgiveness symbolically liberates one from the previous courses of action—specifically those that *wronged* another—forgetting may also grant one the permission to 'begin again', to start over with one's life.

[69] Ibid., p. 28. I should note here that for Ricoeur, a memory is not "happy" because of the *content* being recalled, but *that* it is an experience that is *recallable*. Thus, the term "happy memory" should not be taken as judgment concerning the emotional undertones of a previous lived experience. It is, rather, a descriptive term that he uses for memory proper. I shall return to this concept in the next chapter in order to analyze it more fully in an effort to show the way in which narrativity helps modify his hermeneutic account of memory.

consciousness. The same insight can be derived from evocation. That certain memories can, without warning, invade one's conscious awareness suggests that, before any memory whatsoever appears to consciousness, it is something else, something that requires the imagination's capacity to depict—something that can only be present through its absence.

What could memory be before it is the intentional object of consciousness, i.e. a memory(-image) of some sort? In both *Memory, History, Forgetting* and *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur develops the concept of the mnemonic trace. The term "mnemonic trace" can be read in three ways.[70] The third way will be the object of our focus. 1) The social institution of the archive through which historians, metaphorically, retrace the past through the preservation of the testimony of those who lived through it; 2) the organizational structure of

---

[70] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 427, and *The Course of Recognition,* p. 123. Within the confines of *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur ties the mnemonic trace, especially the third understanding of the term, to the work of Bergson, especially to the interest Bergson expressed in better understanding the 'union'—as Bergson would phrase it—between the soul and the body. Besides mentioning the famous mind-body problem, Ricoeur does not himself attempt to enter into this debate, even commenting throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting* that he wants to side-step this issue, in favor of developing the aporias of memory from his hermeneutic analysis.

the brain, which, once activated may 'trigger' certain memories; and 3) the passive persistence that an experience can have on one's psyche, which we typically say, 'leaves a mark on us'.

According to Ricoeur, experiences that we live through or endure leave their 'mark' upon us, and it is this 'residue' that remains and lends itself to memory. Moreover, Ricoeur would argue that the best proof that we have for this comes through the act of recognition.[71] In other words, that affections can endure beyond the moment of their initial 'impression' and can be 'reanimated' through the process by which an absent thing is made present (i.e. memory) is verifiable by recognition. Within the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, recognition (as identification) can be understood in two ways: 1) as a part of the perceptual process; 2) as the end result of recollection, a mnemonic process. Both forms have a similar phenomenological structure. Phenomenologically, recognition revolves around the interplay between appearance, disappearance, and reappearance. Take the case of perception: I meet an old friend for some coffee. We part ways. Several minutes later, we happen to run into each other in the parking lot. "There he is," I can proclaim to myself. He is the *same* person that I

[71] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* pp. 124 – 125.

met only moments ago; I have found him again. According to Ricoeur, “recognition adjusts—fits—the reappearing to the appearing across the disappearing.”[72] One need not go any further than the basic precepts of Husserlian phenomenology to show this. The perception of my friend is ‘squared’ with all previous profiles, sides, and adumbrations.[73]

A similar structure of recognition applies to memory. The (indirect) reappearance of my old friend via the memory(-image) overlaps with the initial mnemonic trace, and by virtue of the way the juxtaposition ‘fits’, I can say that the memory is faithful to the original event: “mnemonic recognition… *outside of the context of perception*… consists in the exact superimposition of the image present to the mind and the psychical trace… left by the initial impression.”[74] Here, Ricoeur is keen to argue that mnemonic recognition requires something other than perception. If it is not perception as such, then it must be the capacity of the imagination that makes mnemonic recognition possible. Consider, for instance, Ricoeur’s recapitulation of the above argument in *The Course of Recognition:*

> The argument then runs as follows: Something had to remain of the first impression for me to remember it

---

[72] Ibid., p. 429.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., p. 430, italics mine.

> now. If a memory returns, it is because I have not lost it. If, in spite of everything, I rediscover and recognize it, it is because its image has survived.[75]

Once again, we witness the aporia of the objective analysis of memory. It is also important to note that Ricoeur is arguing that the act of recognition *presupposes* that something like a psychical mnemonic trace exists. If it did not, and if there were no such thing as a psychical mnemonic trace, we would not ever be able to differentiate a *memory* of something from a *fantasy* of something. This inability is absurd, because we clearly are capable of making such a distinction. We may not be infallible when making this distinction, but to treat the confusion between memory and imagination as total would be to *pathologize* memory from the outset.

Ricoeur would echo the likes of Husserl. The phenomenological structure of memory, whether it is an evoked memory, or one that is searched for, is always already given to consciousness as having-taken-place, as being-in-the-past. As Ricoeur concludes, “it is a primordial attribute of affections to survive, to persist, to remain, to endure, *while*

[75] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* p. 125. It is just after this passage that Ricoeur connects the Bergsonian idea of ‘pure’ memory with the mnemonic trace; it is that part of memory that requires the power of the imagination in order for it to be given to consciousness as a memory.

keeping the mark of absence and of distance."[76] Thus, the pastness of a memory is not a varnish that is added to it *after* is given to consciousness; it is equiprimordially given alongside with the memory.

Primary Memory (Retention) and Secondary Memory (Representation). Let us pause for a moment and consider the following two scenarios. Suppose you are at a concert, where your favorite band performs your favorite song. Before they start playing this song, a long silence washes over the venue. They build anticipation. They begin to play an introduction that does not sound like any of their other songs—it is as if they are experimenting with a melody, and indeed, are playing off each other. Then you realize it: this is your favorite song, albeit with an introductory sequence that has been modified. But once you realize that it is one-and-the-same as your favorite song, recognition takes hold; the differences between the performance and your memory of the song are squared off. Once initial elation of hearing your favorite song wears off, you allow yourself to enjoy each moment, each note, of the song.

Now suppose that it has been several hours since the concert. You are at a bar with a friend who attended with you, enjoying drinks. Out of curiosity, your friend asks you about

[76] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 427, italics mine.

how excited you were to have heard your favorite song. Without hesitation, you begin to recollect. You think back to, and share, your initial excitement, and from there, deliver a play-by-play of everything that transpired whilst you heard the song.

On the one hand, we have the seemingly simple experience of listening to a song performed live. On the other hand, we have the more complicated experience of recalling a specific memory at a specific time. Though the same evening, indeed, the same event, is in question in both scenarios, there are important phenomenological differences between the two—differences that ultimately further demonstrate the aporia of memory itself. Fundamentally, this is what is at stake in the final pole of memory, the distinction between 'primary memory' (retention) and 'secondary memory' (reproduction).[77]

I have already given it away. In order to draw this distinction between primary and secondary memory, Ricoeur calls upon the vast philosophical resources contained within Husserlian phenomenology, specifically, Husserl's 1905 "Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time".[78] Nevertheless, in

---

[77] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 31.
[78] Husserl, Edmund. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893 – 1917). Vol 4. Of the

elaborating on the nature of primary memory, Ricoeur does not want to simply retrace Husserl's steps to enter into his analysis of internal time; he has something else in mind:

> My argument here is that the famous *epoché* with which the work opens and that results in bracketing objective time—the time that cosmology, psychology, and other human sciences take as a reality, formal to be sure, yet of a piece with the realist status of the phenomena it frames—does not begin by laying bare a pure flow, but rather a temporal experience (*Erfahrung*) that has an object-oriented side in memory.[79]

In other words, the implications that internal time consciousness has on time as such notwithstanding, the conceptual framework offered by Husserl's analysis of pretension, primary impression, and retention has implications on the nature of memory. Ricoeur's interest lies in developing these implications.

According to Ricoeur, at least two points can be made. The first is that even the enduring present moment, insofar as it necessarily invokes duration is meaningful and cohesive because it *always already* entails an element of futurity

---

Collected Works. Translated by John Barnett Brough. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1991.

[79] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 31.

(protention) and pastness (retention). Perception, if it is to be meaningful, requires some minimal form of memory, some minimal capacity to remember that which came immediately before the current moment. Second, and perhaps this is even more radical, primary memory, insofar as it is implied by retention, is not a product of the imagination, but rather, a modified form of perception. As Ricoeur states, "retention is not a form of imagination, but consists in a modification of perception… [it] is still a phenomenon of perception and not of imagination."[80]

Indeed, the insight may even serve as the condition of possibility for further advances that have been made in the phenomenology of memory. Consider, for instance, Sokolowski's own take on memory:

> In memory the object that was once perceived is given as past, as remembered. Moreover, it is given as it was then perceived; if I saw an automobile accident, I remember it from the same angle, with the same sides, aspects, and profiles, from which I saw it.[81]

Sokolowski, too, stresses the perceptual nature of memory. This rootedness stems from the primacy of perception that follows from Husserlian phenomenology.

---

[80] Ibid., p. 33.

[81] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 69.

To refer back, once again, to the scenarios articulated at the beginning of this section: You are enjoying a drink with a friend. During your conversation, your friend asks you about what it was like to hear your favorite song at the concert. You recollect and recount the details. It is precisely here where we move from primary memory and transition towards secondary memory, which Ricoeur deems reproduction. As Ricoeur states, the main distinction between primary and secondary memory is that "reproduction assumes that the primary memory of a temporal object such as a melody has 'disappeared' and that it comes back."[82] Initial experience, disappearance, return via remembrance—a deceptively simple process that nevertheless has large philosophical ramifications, as it is in reproduction where the aporia between memory and imagination reaches its insurmountable crescendo.

Since secondary memory entails reproduction, and since reproduction rests on the disappearance and return of the remembered object, Ricoeur's key insight is that secondary memory is not totally reducible to perception. As Ricoeur states, "the essential thing is that the reproduced temporal object has no longer a foot, so to speak, in perception."[83] Accordingly, the reproduced memory comes in the form of a

[82] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 35.
[83] Ibid.

memory-image.[84] Great care, however, needs to be employed when deciphering exactly what Ricoeur has in mind with the term 'memory-image'. As Sokolowski notes, it is tempting to completely misconstrue what the term represents.[85] It is easy to be seduced by the mundane metaphor that the reproduction of a memory is much like watching a film or looking at a series of pictures that unfold entirely 'in one's head'. This, as Sokolowski argues—and as Ricoeur would agree—is a phenomenologically inaccurate, if not troubling, metaphor. It confuses the intentional act of remembering with an entirely different intentional act: picturing. In picturing, an object of some sort stands in the place of another.[86] To be sure, both remembering and picturing do share, are conditioned by, and take part in the interplay between presence and absence. In both remembering and picturing, an object of some sort is presented to consciousness *through* its absence—e.g. in remembering, the remembered event is in the past, and is not accessible via the usual perceptual process; in picturing, the object is *depicted* by a mediating object (like, say, a photograph of my mother). However, it should be noted that this similarity ought not be too striking. If Sokolowski is correct, the interplay between

[84] Ibid., p. 50.
[85] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 67.
[86] Ibid.

presence and absence is one of the constitutional formal structures explored and brought to light by phenomenology as such.[87] Accordingly, it is at root in virtually all forms of phenomenological analysis. Despite this similarity, then, picturing and remembering ought not to be confused. In remembering the performance of your favorite song, you are not *picturing* it; you are reproducing it. As Sokolowski describes it:

> [When] we actually remember… we call up those earlier perceptions. When these perceptions are called up and reenacted, they bring along their objects, their objective correlates. What happens in remembering is that we relive earlier perceptions, and we remember the objects as they were given at that time. We capture that earlier part of our intentional life. We bring it to life again. That is why memories can be so nostalgic. They are not just reminders, they are the activity of reliving.[88]

I wish to pause for a moment on Sokolowski's words. Reproducing entails the activity of reliving. How is this so?

According to Ricoeur, memory must rely in some way, shape, or form on the productive power of the imagination. This is no easy task. The imagination, too, entails a complex

---

[87] Ibid., p. 33.
[88] Ibid., p. 68.

phenomenological analysis. Taken one way, memory and imagination have a sharp distinction. A memory is, as Ricoeur indicates throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting,* of the past. It is given as 'having-taken-place'. Distinctly, an imagined object is *not* given as having-taken-place. It is given as unreal.[89] The imagined thing—whether it is a minotaur, a flying car, or the winning lottery ticket—is presented as unreal, as fictional. But this need not be all that there is to say about the imagination. Indeed, Sokolowski has gone through considerable lengths to suggest that the imagination can serve another role: anticipation.[90] Here, the emphasis is not so much on the unreality of the imagined object, but on its *possibility*. It *can* happen, for example, that the person driving in front of me might slam on his brakes, stopping suddenly. As such, I adjust my behavior accordingly. Ricoeur, too, is familiar with the anticipatory capacity of the imagination. Here, From Ricoeur's perspective, the imagination serves a practical function with regard to one's being in the world:

> In contrast to the function of derealization, culminating in a fiction exiled to the margins of reality considered in its totality, what is celebrated here is

---

[89] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 52.
[90] Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 71.

> instead the visualizing function of imagination, *its manner of giving something to be seen*.[91]

That the imagination can also "give something to be seen" propels Ricoeur to develop the imagination into a polarity, much like he has done with memory. As with memory, this polarity too, constitutes a broad spectrum, as opposed to a binary. On one side of the pole, we have fiction, which I have just elaborated upon above (i.e. an imagined object's givenness as unreal), and which Ricoeur explores more in *Time and Narrative*.[92] On the other side, we have hallucination. A memory's capacity to be relived will fall somewhere in between these two poles, leaning more towards hallucination.[93]

In order to more accurately develop the hallucinatory capacity of the imagination, Ricoeur turns away from the phenomenological analyses of Husserl, in favor of another phenomenologist: Jean-Paul Sartre. Ricoeur specifically focuses on Sartre's work on the *Psychology of the Imagination*.[94] There are two curious remarks that are worth making. First, as Levy has indicated, Ricoeur had, in earlier writings, been critical of Sartre's understanding of the

---

[91] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 52, emphasis mine.
[92] See, specifically, the second volume of *Time and Narrative.*
[93] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 53.
[94] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Psychology of Imagination*. New York: Citadel, 1965.

imagination.[95] From Levy's analysis, Ricoeur has argued that Sartre's account failed to consider the imagination's more creative capacities.[96] That Ricoeur now, in the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, (re)turns to Sartre suggests that there may be fruitful avenues of research between the two philosophers. Second, it is noteworthy to remark that there is a hint of irony in Ricoeur's turn to the Sartrian understanding of the imagination. Ricoeur's motive in doing so is to show the inextricable link between memory and imagination. However, within the pages of Sartre's text, Sartre himself suggests that his study of the imagination is to demonstrate memory and imagination's irreducibility!

> [There] is… an essential difference between the theme of a recollection and that of an image. If I recall an incident of my past life I do not imagine it, I *recall* it. That is, I do not posit it as a *given-in-its-absence* but as *given-now-in-the-past* in the past.[97]

Despite Sartre's own motivations, it is precisely in his account of hallucination—as a pathology of the imagination—that Ricoeur is able to reconnect both memory and imagination. The (re)connection stems from what Sartre

---

[95] Levy, Lior. "Sartre and Ricoeur on the Productive Imagination." *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, volume 52, Issue 1 (March 2014), pp. 43 – 60.
[96] Ibid., p. 43.
[97] Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, p. 263.

calls a "magical" operation[98] that one's imagination alone, through hallucination, is capable of committing: The seductive annulment of the imagined object's givenness as unreal. A hallucination can be so strong, so captivating, that its unreality becomes covered over.

Of course, Sartre is developing an account of hallucinatory experiences in order to demonstrate the imagination's capacity to "produce the object of one's thought, the thing one desires, in a manner that one can take possession of it."[99] Ricoeur's focus is not to argue that a reproduced memory is a full-blown hallucination, but that it is a *quasi-hallucination*. It entails:

> [An] intermediary form of imagination, half-way between fiction and hallucination, namely, the "image" component of the memory-image. So it is also a mixed form that we must speak of the function of the imagination consisting in "placing before the eyes," a function that can be termed ostensive: this is an imagination that shows, gives to be seen, makes visible.[100]

If secondary memory relies on the capacity of the imagination, then Ricoeur's position is not without some

---

[98] Ibid., p. 177.
[99] Ibid., p. 179.
[100] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 54.

explanatory power. For starters, his position can explain why certain memories are so vivid. In recalling the performance of your favorite song, for example, it is as if you are truly there again, reliving each note. Perhaps the vividness of such memories is due to the tie between memory and imagination. More tragically, this may also explain the tendency some have to become 'stuck' in the past, to fail to move beyond one's 'glory' days, or move beyond a traumatic event—e.g. the early or unexpected death of a loved one. Here, one can become trapped in one's memories in a way similar to how one can become captivated by a hallucination: it is relived with such an intensity, that the pastness of the mnemonic object becomes covered over. In other words, it is experienced, not as a memory, but as a repetition.

The tie between memory and imagination can help explain one more tendency—namely, the tendency for our memories to become unreliable.[101] Though the imagination makes it possible for one's memories to be given "to be seen", it also makes it possible for one's memories to become distorted, to no longer correctly account for how events actually took place. Indeed, this is a part of the tragic dimension of life. Though the process of living includes the possibility of discovering and developing immense meaning, it also

---

[101] Ibid.

includes the possibility of suffering, of violence, of loss. It is an inescapable part of our shared human condition. Where it concerns overcoming the pitfalls of unreliable memory, Ricoeur's remedy echoes the closing pages of Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*.[102] One must cultivate an attitude that is open to life, whilst also being concerned with, and oriented towards, the truth.[103] It is up to us to live a life that is faithful to the truth of our past.[104]

3. The Representation of the Past: An Insurmountable Aporia

This section had two functions. The first was to disclose the aporetic nature of memory, from the vantage point of Ricoeur's objective analysis of memory, which took the form of a hermeneutic phenomenology of memory. The second was to elaborate upon the 'dialectical spiral' through which the aporia expresses itself. The central aporia that surrounds the objective analysis of memory concerns the representation of the past. When one reminisces, remembers, or is reminded of a past event, the event in question is present to the subject, but it is present through its very absence. As a result, memory in some way shape or form

---

[102] Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. Translated by Barbara Galli. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
[103] Ibid., p. 447.
[104] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 55.

must rely on the productive power of the imagination. Given that the imagination is of that which is unreal and memory is of the past, there is always the risk that memory itself is the object of its own undoing.

Nevertheless, it is this very same aporia that must be put to use if the 'work' of memory is to be accomplished: the remembrance of the past. In this sense, the work of memory comprises a rich dialectical spiral, which ultimately emerges from the subject's relationship with a worldly context, or milieu. Out of this relationship, one can see the spiral unfold in various other 'oppositional pairs', as Ricoeur calls them. Through the pair of habit and memory, we see both the relation and distinction between memory and repetition (habit), and memory and representation (memory). Grafted onto the (re-)presentational power of memory is the aporia of memory, which unfolds most deeply in the oppositional pair of primary memory and secondary memory. Here, we see the tension reach a crescendo—at one and the same time, memory is a modification of perception (primary memory) and in need of the imagination's capacity to 'give something to be seen' (secondary memory).

II. The Subject Who Remembers: Between Personal and Collective Memory

If Ricoeur is correct, the aporia of the representation of the past—the interplay between presence and absence, as well

as memory's recourse to utilize the (re)creative capacity of the imagination in order to represent itself—is an unsurpassable limit that conditions all discourse on memory. This remains true whether one investigates memory as an intentional object of investigation (*le souvenir)* or as an intentional act (*la memoire*). Even further, this also remains true whether one investigates the passive syntheses of memory (evocation) or its active syntheses (search). Nevertheless, the aporetic nature of memory ought not be viewed as a detriment, nor ought it give way to a nihilistic cynicism. From Ricoeur's perspective, it is simply another avenue to explore one of the central theses that animate the entirety of his philosophical career. While it belongs to descriptive language to disclose the aporetic nature of a central theme of (human) existence, it is up to poetic language—e.g. metaphor, narrative, and their shared tropes—to put these aporias to use, and to deepen humanity's understanding of being.[105] In other words, to explain more is to understand better, as Ricoeur often exclaims.

No truer do we encounter this intimate interplay between description and poetics, between explanation and understanding, than when we attempt, along with Ricoeur, to

---

[105] I shall say more about the structure of Ricoeur's poetic response to the aporias he develops in Chapter 3.

take the 'return path' from the "object-oriented" side of memory—The 'what' of memory—back to the "subject-oriented" side of memory—the "who" that remembers.[106] In true Ricoeurian fashion, there is no direct path between the object and subject of memory. Many detours must be taken, for this 'return path' entails confronting its own aporia. The aporia comes in the form of the following question: "To whom is it legitimate to attribute the *pathos* corresponding to the reception of memories and the *praxis* in which the search consists?"[107] As the question suggests, and as Ricoeur contends, there is actually great controversy within the philosophical literature as to *who* the subject of discussion *ought* to be. On the one hand, one can contend that memory is, fundamentally, a *personal* phenomenon, as such, the subject whose nature needs to be elaborated upon is none other than the individual person, or persons. Memory ought to be attributed "to me, to you, to her or to him, in the singular of the three grammatical persons capable of referring to themselves."[108] On the other hand, one can contend that memory is rather a *collective* phenomenon. As such, it belongs to the domain of sociology, for the attribution of memories belongs squarely, not to any individual person, but

---

[106] Ibid., p. 93.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

"to us, to you in the plural, to them."[109] Between those who maintain that memory is personal and those who contend that it is collective, there exists an immense gulf:

> In this intensely polemical situation, which opposes a younger tradition of objectivity [sociology] to the ancient tradition of reflexivity [philosophy], individual memory and collective memory are placed in a position of rivalry. However, they do not oppose one another on the same plane, but occupy universes of discourse that have become estranged from each other.[110]

Bridging this gulf is no easy task. It will require rehabilitating and revising the central thesis of *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, fortifying it with the concept of narrative identity developed in *Oneself as Another*, and grafting it to the aporia of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In other words, in the same way that narrative, in *Time and Narrative*, bridged the gulf between internal, phenomenological time and external, cosmological time,[111] it will bridge the gulf between personal memory and collective memory. Nevertheless, I am getting ahead of myself as to the work that must be done. Before attempting

---

[109] Ibid., p. 94.
[110] Ibid., p. 95.
[111] See especially chapters 2, 4, and the Conclusions to *Time and Narrative Vol. 3*.

to poetically respond to the aporia of the subjective analysis of memory, the aporia must first be developed. The remainder of this chapter shall unfold in two subsections. First, I shall develop the central underlying arguments for personal memory while also sketching out their limitations. Second, I shall do the same concerning the arguments for collective memory. The goal is to develop the aporia of memory that emerges on the subjective analysis of memory—the 'who' that remembers. In the same way that the objective analysis revealed that memory both requires and is undermined by the power of the imagination, the subjective analysis will reveal that both personal and collective memory will require and be undermined by their respective counterparts.

1. Personal Memory: Arguments and Analysis

I will begin by presenting and critically assessing three arguments which hold that memory ought to be understood primarily as a personal phenomenon. I shall note that these arguments are not explicitly developed by Ricoeur himself within the confines of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Rather, they are derived from his exegesis of the three figures of "the tradition of inwardness"—Augustine, Locke, and Husserl—who each, in their own way, champion the primacy of

personal memory.[112] Interestingly, in the passages on memory—specifically on the subject (or the 'who') of memory—in *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur recapitulates his exegesis of both Augustine and Locke. However, Husserl is replaced by a broader exegesis on Bergson.[113] Since this is the case, the question arises as to how we ought to properly understand such a glaring omission on Ricoeur's part, especially considering the prominent position that Husserl typically occupies in Ricoeur's work. I think the best way to go about addressing this concern is to reiterate that, within *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur is able to bring out the polysemic nature of recognition as such. No longer is it the case that recognition is confined primarily to that of recognition-identification, as it is in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Recognition now is tripartite, and as such, it involves the identification of an external object, personal identity, or the mutual recognition between oneself and another. With this 'explosion' of recognition, there is also an opportunity to invite new interlocutors into the discussion, as well as the opportunity to cast old ones into new roles. Thus, Husserl's absence in *The Course of Recognition* is not an omission, but rather a shift in the way in which Ricoeur places the contribution that Husserlian phenomenology has

---

[112] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 95.
[113] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, see pp. 117 – 126.

to make on the topic. That is, in *The Course of Recognition,* Husserl figures most especially in the pages dedicated to mutual recognition, via his account of intersubjectivity—however, the full extent of this account goes beyond the confines of this chapter. Conversely, the addition of Bergson, in *The Course of Recognition* serves the role of finding the point of unification between recognition-identification and the recognition of oneself, in terms of personal identity. I shall indicate Bergson's role in the analysis of the arguments below. With this being said, I shall now transition into synthesizing the three arguments that one can make in favor of personal memory, in light of Ricoeur's treatment of it in both *Memory, History, Forgetting,* and *The Course of Recognition*.

I shall dub the first argument the 'Mineness Argument'.

1) Any memory, by virtue of being a memory, is 'given' to a conscious subject as always already *belonging* to the conscious subject.
2) If a memory belongs to a conscious subject, then that subject *possesses* that memory; i.e. 'The memory is *mine*'.
3) If subjects possess their memories, then memory must be personal.
4) Therefore, memory is personal.

Of the three arguments for personal memory, this is the most noncontroversial. Indeed, this argument prefigures the contemporary work of Dan Zahavi.[114] If Zahavi's work has accomplished anything, it is that one of the original, lasting contributions that phenomenology has made to the discipline of philosophy entails the inherently reflexive nature of conscious lived experience as such. Indeed, while every conscious lived experience is that *of something*, it is also an experience *for someone*. Every intentional act of experience, in other words, whether it is perceptual, rememorative, imaginative, etc. is given as *belonging* to the subject of experience. As Zahavi might phrase it, there is something-it-is-like-*for-me* to remember *my* first night in Leuven. It is upon this insight on the inherently reflexive nature of consciousness that Zahavi makes his own argument on minimal selfhood.

Not only is the Mineness Argument the least controversial, it may also be the only one that Ricoeur fully endorses. Evidence of this endorsement can be found in two separate sources. The most recent is *The Course of Recognition*. The other is the Fifth Study of *Oneself as Another.* I will begin with *The Course of Recognition*. As I indicated at the start of this

---

[114] See especially Zahavi, Dan. *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005; and Zavahi, Dan. *Self and Other.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

section, *The Course of Recognition* sees Ricoeur extend his discussion with Bergson, incorporating his work into his analysis of the subject who remembers.[115] Ricoeur's position is that in Bergson's inquiry into the nature of recognition, we find the point of unification between recognition-identification and self-recognition.[116] The key is the self-preservation of the mnemonic trace:

> To recognize a memory is to rediscover it. And to rediscover it is to presume it is available in principle, even if not accessible. It thus belongs to the experience of recognition to refer to a latent state of the memory of a first impression whose image must have been constituted at the time of the original experience.[117]

In this sense, Bergson, Husserl, and Aristotle all share in common the idea that all memory is of the past.[118] Further—and this shift is so subtle, that Ricoeur only makes it in a single sentence—if the recognition-identification is possible in the act of remembrance, if, through memory, recognition entails a 'rediscovery' of a past experience, then this moment

---

[115] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 123 – 126.
[116] Ibid., p. 126.
[117] Ibid., p. 126. As Ricoeur notes, the self-preservation of the mnemonic trace is what constitutes the Bergsonian concept of duration.
[118] Ibid.

of rediscovery implies a subject who remembers. The mnemonic trace *must* leave its impression on *someone.* If the phenomenological experience of recognition is that of rediscovery, it must be the case that the subject who recognizes a memory, recognizes it as a memory that is *mine*. As Ricoeur says in the single sentence that he devotes to the matter: "Recognition of images of the past and self-recognition coincide in this meditating memory."[119] As such, we can see the way in which Bergson anticipates the mineness argument in favor of personal memory.

I turn now to the Fifth Study of *Oneself as Another,* wherein Ricoeur critically responds to Derek Parfit's reductionistic, non-self position.[120] Indeed, for Parfit, the existence of a person depends on a brain, a body, and the occurrence of physical and mental events.[121] Further, Parfit maintains that physical and mental events are entirely impersonal; they simply happen.[122] Any sense of self that emerges from this threefold, impersonal relation is a *derivation*. 'The self' is a

---

[119] Ibid.
[120] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 113 – 139.
[121] Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 211.
[122] Ibid.

"separate further fact"; it is distinct from the brain and from one's experiences.[123]

According to Ricoeur, the main flaw of Parfit's position is that it entirely ignores the significance of the first person perspective.[124] As he argues in *Oneself as Another*, the first person perspective reveals that the sense of self is *not* a "separate and further fact" from experience; rather it is an essential ontological characteristic of experience as such.[125] In other words, any experience that I live through is an experience that is given as *mine*.

> [The] question is to know whether mineness belongs to the range of facts, to the epistemology of observable entities, and, finally, to the ontology of events. We are thus carried back once again to the distinction between two problematics of identity, that of *ipse* and that of *idem*. It is because [Parfit] neglects this possible dichotomy that [he] has no other recourse than to consider as superfluous, in the precise sense of the word, the phenomenon of mineness in relation to the factual character of the event.[126]

---

[123] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 211 and Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 131.
[124] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p.131.
[125] Ibid., p. 132.
[126] Ibid.

As such, Ricoeur would endorse the mineness argument in favor of personal memory. However, as we shall soon see, his position will be that just because every remembered lived experience is given as *belonging* to the subject of experience, it does not follow that all forms of memory—including and especially collective memory—is reducible to, and derived from, personal memory. This will be further clarified upon the critical reflections of the remaining two arguments.

Allow me to call the second argument the 'Temporal Continuity Argument':

1) It is possible for one to retrace one's memories in order to connect past experiences with one's current—i.e. present—situation.
2) Connecting the present with the past establishes the temporal continuity of a person.
3) If connecting the present with the past establishes the continuity of a person, then memory must be personal.
4) Therefore, memory is personal.

The spectre of Locke figures strongly in this argument. According to Ricoeur, it is Locke who so forcefully maintained that diachronic unity—the persistence of one and the same 'self' over time—is maintained, broadly, through consciousness, and, specifically, through memory.

> It is not the soul that makes the man but the same consciousness. With regard to our inquiry, the matter has been decided: consciousness and memory are one and the same thing.... In short, in the matter of personal identity, sameness equals memory.[127]

Consider, also, the following quotation from *The Course of Recognition*, where Ricoeur quotes Locke directly:

> Consciousness alone is what makes each persona a self. And here is where memory comes into play as a result of the temporal extension of reflection. "As far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that the action was done."[128]

I would also like to note that premises 1 and 2 contain traces of Husserlian phenomenology, especially where it concerns the relationship between primary memory (retention) and secondary memory (reproduction). That one is capable of tending to the memories of one's lived experiences, in order to establish the continuity between the past and the present

---

[127] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 105.

[128] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 121. The quotation from Locke comes from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2 vols. New York: Dover, 1959, 1:449.

seems to reinforce the primacy of retention over that of reproduction.

Yet it is precisely this reinforcement that would make Ricoeur uneasy. It is not so much that Ricoeur would entirely reject the argument; it is that he would worry about what the argument leaves unsaid, and therefore, unthought. If accepted uncritically, the argument risks—by way of a philosophical osmosis—reducing secondary memory into primary memory, for it makes no reference to the unique feature of secondary memory. As I attempted to demonstrate in the previous section of this chapter, the unique feature of secondary memory is that it maintains the aporetic nature of memory itself. Since retention is still inextricably tied to the phenomenology of perception, jeopardizes the precise formulation of memory's aporia with the imagination. Insofar as reproduction is eclipsed by retention, Ricoeur would worry that the aporia of memory remains unformulated and unthought.

> It is worth noting that the question of absence in relation to presence… seems to have disappeared from the philosophical horizon of phenomenology. […] We can thus wonder whether the dynamism that leads from one level of constitution to another, going beyond the constitution of the duration of something by means of the self-constitution of the temporal flow,

> is not equivalent to the progressive reduction of negativity in the very concept of time.[129]

Thus, it is not that Ricoeur would completely reject the second argument. He would simply object that the argument is incomplete, and insofar as it remains incomplete, it misses out on presenting the central philosophical concern over the topic of memory.[130]

I name the final argument the 'Derivative Argument'. Here it is:

1) From the Mineness Argument and from the Temporal Continuity Argument, memory is personal.
2) If memory is personal, then any attribution of mnemonic phenomena to collective entities will ultimately be derived from personal memory.
3) Therefore, collective memory is derived from personal memory.
4) Therefore, personal memory is primordial to collective memory.

---

[129] Ibid., p. 115.

[130] I would add here that within the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur notes that his fundamental critique of Husserlian internal time consciousness—i.e. that its emphasis on retention over reproduction ignores the inherent *alterity* of time itself—is indebted to the work of Professor Rudolf Bernet, especially "*La présence du passé dans l'analyse husserlienne de la conscience du temps,*" *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 19 (1983): 178-98.

Once again, Husserlian phenomenology is invoked to give this argument its persuasive force, especially the argument's second premise. However, this is not the Husserl of the 1905 lectures on internal time consciousness.[131] Rather, this is the Husserl of the fifth meditation, where the experience of the other dispels the danger of trapping phenomenology into a bankrupt solipsism.[132] The other is given as an alter ego through pairing, fortified as such through appresentation, and then utilized to co-constitute an objective, intersubjective natural world, from which is constituted "higher levels of intermonadic communities".[133] As Ricoeur summarizes it: "Sphere of ownness, pairing, and communalization thus form an unbroken conceptual chain, leading to the threshold of what could be called a phenomenological sociology."[134] From here, it is not much of a stretch, then, to posit that any phenomenon elaborated

---

[131] Husserl, Edmund. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893 – 1917). Vol 4. Of the *Collected Works*.
[132] Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, pp. 89 – 151. Coincidentally, French translation of the fifth meditation was conducted by Emmanuel Levinas. This coincidence will become more meaningful in chapter 4, where I place Ricoeur and Levinas's conception of intersubjectivity in dialogue with each other.
[133] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 128.
[134] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 118.

upon within sociology—including that of collective memory—is rooted in and derived from a phenomenological investigation that holds the individual as its starting point.

Yet it is precisely the second premise of this argument that Ricoeur would *reject*. Consider the following two quotations:

> There is a moment when one has to move from an *I* to a *we*. But is this moment not original, in the manner of a new beginning?[135]

And:

> [In] order to reach the notion of common experience, must we begin with the idea of ownness, pass through the experience of the other, and finally proceed to a third operation, said to be the communalization of subjective experience? Is this chain truly irreversible? Is it not the speculative presupposition of transcendental idealism that imposes this irreversibility, rather than any constraint characteristic of phenomenological description? But is a pure [presuppositionless] phenomenology either conceivable or feasible? I remain puzzled by this.[136]

Ricoeur offers us a consideration. Perhaps the second premise is a false cause. Perhaps the notion of collective memory entails a *paradigm shift* that merits its own analysis,

---

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p. 119.

irreducible to that of phenomenology. Indeed, Sholl has recently articulated a similar critique of phenomenology—particularly with contemporary attempts to ground the concept of health within the phenomenological tradition.[137] As stated earlier, it might make sense to suggest that memory is personal. But does it truly follow from this insight that collective memory is reducible to personal memory?

2. Collective Memory: Arguments and Analysis

The notion of collective memory originates from sociology. Ricoeur credits the work of Maurice Halbwachs for developing the concept at its highest level of scrutiny.[138] There are two theses that underly the concept of collective memory. The first entails recognizing the intersubjective nature of memory. In other words, we need others to remember.[139] This thesis is the more modest one; we shall see Ricoeur offer it the least resistance. The second thesis is more radical. Accordingly, it maintains that individual persons are "not an authentic subject of the attribution of

---

[137] Sholl, Jon. "Putting Phenomenology in its Place: Some Limits of a Phenomenology of Medicine." *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* volume 36, issue 6 (2015): 391 – 410.
[138] Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; and *The Collective Memory*. Translated by Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon, 1950.
[139] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 120.

memories."[140] Rather, the "authentic subject" of attribution belongs to societies or social groups—and it is the existence of these entities that make personal recounting of memories possible. In other words, personal memory ultimately gains its sense from, and is reducible to, collective memory. As was the case with the primacy of personal memory, Ricoeur will resist this thesis the most. Once again, I have derived three arguments on the basis of Ricoeur's treatment of the concept within *Memory, History, Forgetting*. I shall present them below, and develop Ricoeur's response to each.

Let us call the first argument for collective memory the 'Intersubjective Argument'. It advances only the first thesis of collective memory.

1) When one remembers, one does not just recall experiences, but also the milieu of the social group to which one belonged during the experience.
2) However, when one no longer belongs to a social group, memories of experiences lived through within that group 'weaken' (i.e. become less coherent).
3) If the coherency of a memory rests on belongingness to a social group, then memory is intersubjective.
4) Therefore, memory is intersubjective.

[140] Ibid.

As stated above, Ricoeur will offer the least amount of resistance to this argument. As I demonstrated in the first chapter, intersubjectivity plays a pivotal role in the development of one's (narrative) identity. One narrates one's life story—one borrows from the threefold mimetic structure of narrativity as such—in the face-to-face relationship with another. The 'scene of address' wherein which one cultivates a sense of self is always already intersubjective.[141] If the stories one tells about oneself to another stem from past experiences, it makes sense to hold that there is an intersubjective component to memory.

We find even more evidence of the intersubjective nature of memory within the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Recall that in this very chapter's previous sections, Ricoeur takes the time to develop the notion of reminiscing. According to Ricoeur, when one reminisces, one reminisces with others. Reminiscing reveals that the activity of remembrance is, or can be, a collaborative process. Nevertheless, this only demonstrates that Ricoeur would agree with the *conclusion* of the Intersubjective Argument. What about the premises? The first two premises are empirical. As such, the burden of proving them rests on sociology and the outcome of sociological research.

---

[141] Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Within the section on collective memory as such in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur spends some time discussing the results of sociological studies on childhood memories.[142] As Ricoeur points out, in most cases, a child's first experience with mnemonic phenomena is actually that of receiving the memories of *others*—one's parents, one's teachers, one's classmates. In fact, Ricoeur goes as far to suggest that these shared memories play an important role in the development of a sense of community—a sense of belonging to a group of people.

> In this regard, the earliest memories encountered along this path are shared memories, common memories… They allow us to affirm that "in reality, we are never alone"… They offer the special opportunity of setting oneself mentally back in this or that group. Starting with the role of the testimony of others in recalling memories, we then move step-by-step to memories that we have as members of a group; they require a shift in our viewpoint, which we are well able to perform. In this way, we gain access to events reconstructed for us by others.[143]

---

[142] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 121. Ricoeur specifically refers to portions of Halbwachs's work, *The Collective Memory*, cited above.
[143] Ibid.

From this, it is not a stretch to maintain that the coherency of memories, especially early childhood memories, rests on one's belonging to a group. Thus, it is clear that Ricoeur would hold the Intersubjective Argument as plausible.

I shall call the second argument the 'Collective Coherence Argument'. It serves to bridge the first thesis of collective memory with the second thesis.

1) Memory is either primarily personal or collective, but not both.
2) If memory was personal, then the coherence of memory would be due to the internal unity of consciousness.
3) However, the coherence of memories is due, not to the unity of consciousness, but to the belongingness to a larger social group.
4) Memory is not personal.
5) Therefore, memory is collective.

It is apparent from the outset that this argument is more combative than the first argument. Further, this second argument—especially its third premise—gains strength from the plausibility of the first. Yet it is precisely over premise three that Ricoeur would express careful reservations.

Accepted uncritically, premise three would have us completely reject the role that consciousness—especially in

light of internal time consciousness—has to play in the coherence of a memory; all coherence is due to vast social structures that condition the way in which a subject experiences herself and the world.[144] While Ricoeur has indeed been critical of Husserlian phenomenology in general,[145] and Husserl's treatment of internal time consciousness in particular,[146] he does not flatly and totally reject the methodology and conclusions that stem from phenomenology. His position has consistently been one of combining the resources of both phenomenology and hermeneutics towards establishing a coherent philosophical anthropology. To limit the discussion exclusively to internal time consciousness, two things merit a statement. On the one hand, Ricoeur accepts the role that internal time consciousness has to play in disclosing the nature of 'primary' memory, i.e. retention. On the other hand, much of what Ricoeur—and I will add, Zahavi—has to say about the 'mineness' of experience *also* rests on the outcome of Husserl's analysis of internal time consciousness. On these grounds, Ricoeur would reject the Collective Coherency

---

[144] Ibid., p. 123.
[145] See particularly, Ricoeur, Paul. "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." In *From Text to Action*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007, pp. 25 – 52.
[146] See *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, Chapter 2, pp. 23 - 59.

Argument's third premise. It is simply too far of a stretch to suggest that *entirety* of a memory's coherence is due to one's social group(s), and *not* to the unity of consciousness.

Yet, Ricoeur is a subtle thinker. While he would reject the third premise's denial that the unity of consciousness has anything to contribute to the coherency of memories, he would maintain that there is some truth to the claim that belongingness to a social group *also* contributes to this coherency. Ricoeur certainly understands that social structures and frameworks play a large role in establishing "coherence presiding over the perceptions of the world."[147] Nevertheless, that is precisely the rub: social structures play a *large* role, not the *only* role. To suggest that the coherence of one's memories (or one's perceptions!) rests *only* on these social structures presupposes an understanding of human nature that Ricoeur would deny. Namely, it presupposes that human beings are entirely at the mercy of the social forces that make and unmake human individuals. Under this view, we are completely passive to the social, linguistic, and ideological structures that govern our being-in-the-world.

It is the view that human beings are utterly helpless in the face of these vast social forces that Ricoeur would deny. For is it truly the case that any given individual person lacks the

---

[147] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 123.

"spontaneity capable" of transforming one's milieu, rather than simply acquiescing to it?[148] One need only to return to the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation that Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another*, and that was also elaborated upon in Chapter 1. Beyond demonstrating the rich history of habit-formation within an individual's life, the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation is a powerful conceptual tool that can account for linguistic changes over time (e.g. the creation of new words, or the revision of previously existing words, etc.), the emergence of new artistic genres (e.g. cyber-punk, dystopian science fiction, etc.), as well as instances of moral and social progress (e.g. animal rights, gender equality, income equality, etc.)—to list only a few examples. These social changes are not the product of social forces acting entirely on their own. They all presuppose people who are both patients and agents capable of acting and interacting with each other, and within the broader structures of society. Thus, while Ricoeur would be open to some of the components of the Collective Coherence Argument, he would clearly be critical of accepting it without heavy revisions, and thus would reject the argument.

[148] Ibid., p. 122.

The final argument for collective memory is the 'Attribution Argument'. If sound, it establishes the full-blown notion of collective memory.

1) From the Collective Coherence Argument, memory is collective.
2) If memory is collective, then any specific memory ought not be attributed to individual persons.
3) If memories ought not be attributed to persons, then they must be attributed to a society as such, or smaller social groups.
4) Therefore, memories ought to be attributed to a society as such, or smaller social groups.

As intimated above, this argument is the most controversial, and will be met with the greatest amount of critical resistance from Ricoeur. Indeed, consider the following two quotations:

> But does Halbwachs cross an invisible line, the line separating the thesis "no never ever remembers alone" [collective memory's first thesis] from the thesis "we are not an authentic subject of the attribution of memories" [collective memory's second thesis]?[149]

And:

[149] Ibid.

> Is this the final word of this study, so remarkable in other ways, rigidifying itself in the end into a surprising dogmatism?[150]

It is one thing to suggest that (human) memory has an intersubjective component; it is another thing entirely to assert that memories ought to be *solely* attributed to collective, social entities.[151] If true, this conclusion seems to have absurd ramifications. If memory is not personal, and therefore not attributable to persons, then what about other matters concerning the question of attribution? Does this conclusion carry over to the attribution of actions, as well? If *my* memories do not belong to *me*, but to the social forces that make 'me' possible in the first place, is the same true of *my* actions? What about my virtues or vices, my triumphs or struggles? As Ricoeur aptly points out, if we follow this line of thinking all the way through—and attribute all human action and interaction to the social forces that help make it possible—we would be left with a society that has no social actors.[152] At best, this state of affairs would be counter-intuitive. At worst, it would be entirely absurd. Society as

---

[150] Ibid., p. 123.

[151] I add the parenthetical "(human)" to quickly state that certainly animals are capable of remembering as well. One has to wonder what the defender of collective memory's second thesis would say in response to animal memory.

[152] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 122.

such does not act; it is the agents and patients within society that do.

A similar analogy can be drawn from biology. Though human action has a genetic component, it seems counter-intuitive to suggest that the results of an action ought to be attributed, not to the agent of action, but entirely to the agent's genes. After all, a petri dish consisting of my hair and flakes of skin—i.e. of my genetic information—would be unable to complete this dissertation. Similarly, the social forces that help make me possible, left to their own devices, would also be incapable of completing this dissertation. Though they have an undeniably important role, attribution falls squarely on the agent, on the person.

Ultimately, the problem with the Attribution Argument, and with collective memory's second thesis, is that it—much like Ricoeur maintains concerning Parfit's non-self position in *Oneself as Another*—ignores the first-person perspective. Given Ricoeur's endorsement of the Mineness Argument developed above, this should come as no surprise. As Ricoeur articulates:

> The starting point for the entire analysis [on personal and collective memory] cannot be erased by [collective memory's second thesis]: it was in the personal act of recollection that the mark of the social was initially sought and then found. This act of

> recollection is in each case ours. To believe this, to attest to it, cannot be denounced as a radical illusion.[153]

Thus, in the same way that Ricoeur would resist personal memory's insistence that any understanding of collective memory is derived from personal memory itself, he would also resist collective memory's insistence that personal memory is totally eclipsed by collective memory's analysis.

3. Personal and Collective Memory: A Poetically Surmountable Aporia

I would like to return to the opening remarks made at the beginning of this subsection. From the above analyses, it is clear that within the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur is attempting to reconfigure and recalibrate one of the central theses of *Time and Narrative*. Namely, that between personal time and cosmological time, there is an immense and unbridgeable gulf—a gulf whose threshold can only be crossed by utilizing the resources offered to us through narrativity as such, the threefold mimetic structure of $Mimesis_1$, $Mimesis_2$, and $Mimesis_3$. Similarly, between personal memory and collective memory, there, too, is an immense and unbridgeable gulf. Each occludes—all the while obliquely referring to—the other. Personal memory has the

---

[153] Ibid., p. 123.

audacity of contending that collective memory is its derivative, while at the same time, relying on the intersubjective component of collective memory. Meanwhile, collective memory is equally audacious in its reductive account of personal memory, while it too, requires the riches of the first-person perspective. It now remains to be shown how narrativity can bridge the gulf between personal and collective memory, through the form of narrative identity Ricoeur develops in *Oneself as Another*.

Chapter 3

Narrated Memory: The Hermeneutic Response to the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory[1]

I would like to begin this chapter by briefly taking stock over what this dissertation has accomplished thus far. The first chapter of this work made three major moves. First, in light of Galen Strawson's anti-narrative arguments, it developed Ricoeur's understanding of narrativity, in terms of its threefold mimetic structure—prefiguration, configuration, refiguration. The second major move consisted in connecting Ricoeur's understanding of narrativity with the interplay between *idem* and *ipse* in order to clarify his account of narrative identity. There, my position was that we can view Ricoeur's account of subjectivity as belonging squarely

[1] A revised version of this chapter will be published in the forthcoming issue of *Polygon*: Arca, Kristofer, "Narrative Memory: The Poetic Response to the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics," *Polygon* 14, no. 1 (July 2021): Forthcoming. I would like to thank the editors and reviewers at *Polygon* for seeing the potential in this chapter and for their encouraging feedback.

within the existential phenomenological tradition: the fundamental experience of one's identity is that of an open question. Further, we also saw how Ricoeur utilizes hermeneutic analysis to augment his existential phenomenological one: it is through narrative means that one can begin to address the question concerning who one is. Finally, the first chapter concluded by utilizing Ricoeur's account of narrative identity in order to respond to Galen Strawson's arguments. For my purposes, this served to further legitimize Ricoeur's original account of narrative identity. It also served to clear a path, allowing me to demonstrate from where Ricoeur's analysis of memory 'fits' within the later stages of his hermeneutic project.

To this end, the previous chapter also made three major moves. The first move was to develop the, as I called it, 'dialectical spiral' that weaved together the various opposing pairs of memory (e.g. habit/memory; evocation/the search; etc.). The connection between the opposing pairs only ever remained implicit in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. The second and third moves of the Chapter 2 happened in parallel. Here, I am referring to the two major aporias of memory. The first is the aporia concerning the relationship between memory and imagination. The relationship between memory and imagination, as I showed, is both a limit and a possibility. The mnemonic trace requires the creative capacity of the

imagination; but at the same time, the creative capacity of the imagination entails the possibility of undermining the fidelity of one's memories. This lead straight into the second aporia of memory—namely, to who can we ultimately attribute a memory? Is memory personal or is it collective? The nature of the aporia was formulated as such: between personal and collective memory, there is an immense gulf. Each relies on its other, while simultaneously excluding the other. Thus, it becomes a philosophical impossibility to determine which—personal or collective memory—serves as the condition of possibility for the other.

In this chapter, I would like to propose that the underlying structure of the second aporia is not new. It has the same structure as the aporia of time that Ricoeur developed in *Time and Narrative*: the aporia between phenomenological time and cosmological time. As such, the poetic resolution of the aporia between personal and collective memory is already prefigured in the pages of *Time and Narrative*. In the same way that poetically resolving the aporia between phenomenological and cosmological time required utilizing the resources of narrativity to develop a third, intermediary notion of time—i.e. 'historical' or 'human' time—I propose that poetically resolving the aporia between personal and collective memory requires utilizing the resources of narrativity to develop a third, intermediary notion of

memory—which I am calling ‘narrated’ memory. Further, this concept will also poetically refigure the relationship between memory and imagination, such that it can be understood in a ‘healthy’ or ‘productive’ way, with an emphasis on what this relationship makes possible for the subject who is capable of giving an account of their life’s story.

This chapter will be organized into four major sections. The first three sections of this chapter will each respectively recapitulate three major components of *Time and Narrative*: 1) The structure of narrativity; 2) the structure of the aporia of time; and 3) the way in which narrativity refigures time to poetically resolve the aporia. These first three sections serve two major roles. First, they more greatly show the parallel between the aporia of time in *Time and Narrative* and that of personal and collective memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Second, they will culminate with an analysis of a concept that will be central to the development of the notion of narrated memory—namely, the idea that human subjects are always, already ‘being-affected’ by the past, which Ricoeur developed at the conclusion of *Time and Narrative*. The notion of being-affected by the past will allow me to argue that memories are subject to interpretation. If they must be interpreted, then they require narrativity. Thus, in the fourth section of this chapter, I will develop the notion of

narrated memory. In order to state fully and clearly what a narrated memory properly 'is', I will base my analysis off of Ricoeur's notion of a 'happy memory'—which is implicated throughout the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. This analysis will require developing the essential features of a happy memory—a task that Ricoeur only sketched out in his work—and from there, demonstrating how the poetic capacity of narrativity reconfigures each essential feature so as to arrive at the full-blown concept of narrated memory.

A hermeneutic analysis of memory must go beyond the phenomenological analysis that Ricoeur engaged in within *Memory, History, Forgetting*. It must demonstrate that 'mnemonic phenomena' have a reality far richer than, and inexhaustible to, an analysis concerned with their manner of (re-)presentation. Memories require the resources of narrativity in order to be more fully explained, more fully understood. If this is the case, then the concept of narrated memory will not simply poetically resolve the aporia between personal and collective memory; it will also implicate the first aporia of memory—that between memory and imagination—insofar as narrativity necessarily utilizes the resources of one's imagination.

I. Narrativity as the Activity of Emplotment

I shall begin by recapitulating the nature of narrative within Ricoeur's hermeneutics. To do so, I will base my analysis off

of that contained in the first chapter of this dissertation. However, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition, I shall also incorporate elements of Ricoeur's essay "Life in Quest of Narrative", as the account he provides therein elegantly prefigures the aporia of time in *Time and Narrative*.[2]

According to Ricoeur, the basis of narrativity stems from the ancient Greek notion of *muthos*, specifically, the Aristotelian configuration of the term, indicating what Ricoeur calls emplotment.[3] Ricoeur's preference of the term

---

[2] Ricoeur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative." In *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, pp. 20 – 33. New York: Routledge, 1991.

[3] Interestingly, as Kenny articulates in the introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics, 'muthos',* in its ordinary Greek usage, is just the word for 'story'. However, as it concerns the history of the various translations of Aristotle's *Poetics*, '*muthos*' has consistently been translated as 'plot'. Nevertheless, this shift from 'story' to 'plot', all by itself, does not seem to be enough for Ricoeur to justify his favoring of the term 'emplotment', given the importance of the term's double-meaning for Ricoeur. In this sense, to capture the double-meaning of emplotment, *muthos* must also be taken along with Aristotle's term for dramatic plots (as opposed to tragic plots), '*sustasis pragmatōn'*, which, according to Kenny, translates to 'the putting together of events'. Is this an oversight on Ricoeur's part? Not necessarily. In the first volume of *Time and Narrative,* Ricoeur notes that his reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* stems primarily from the French translation by Dupont-Roc et Lallot. Primarily, but not solely; for his reading is also based off of Hutton's English translation. It could very well be, then, that his privileging of the concept of *muthos* is more 'in tune' with the translations

'emplotment'—over that of 'plot', 'narrative', or 'story'—stems from the term's double-meaning.[4] On the one hand, the term could refer to the *structure* of emplotment, i.e. the dialectic between $Mimesis_1$, $Mimesis_2$, and $Mimesis_3$.[5] On the other hand, it could refer to the dynamic *activity* of emplotment as such, which is made possible by the dialectical mimetic structure of narrativity. In the first chapter, I developed narrativity both in terms of its structure, as well as a dynamic activity. For my purposes here, I am referring to emplotment as an activity. If the activity of

---

he utilized. Moreover, Ricoeur's overall favoring of emplotment, and his underlying reasons for it (based on the terms double-meaning), I think, stands on its own terms. For Kenny's elucidation of the term *muthos* and *sustasis pragmatōn,* see: Kenny, "Introduction", p. 18, in Aristotle, *Poetics.* Translated by Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Ricoeur's notes on the translations of the *Poetics* to which he referred in *Time and Narrative* can be found on p. 237 of the first volume, between footnotes 1 – 4, especially 4. Ricoeur's emphasis on the link between *muthos* and emplotment can also be seen in: Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", pp. 20 – 21.

[4] As Ihde has articulated, it is characteristic of the 'middle Ricoeur'—especially the Ricoeur of *the Symbolism of Evil*—to analyze phenomena that have double- or triple-meanings. See Ihde, Don. "Paul Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic Tradition". In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 59 – 70. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

[5] Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol. 1 - 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

emplotment stems from the dialectic of $Mimesis_1$, $Mimesis_2$, and $Mimesis_3$, then emplotment is a synthetic activity—albeit one that, as many scholars have noted, avoids the danger of reconstituting a Hegelian totality.[6]

As a synthetic activity, emplotment recontextualizes three phenomena. First, emplotment recontextualizes the notion of an event. Out of many, divergent events, emplotment is capable of weaving a coherent story.[7] As Ricoeur states, "an event is more than an occurrence, I mean more than something that just happens; it is what contributes to the progress of the narrative as well as to its beginning and to its end."[8] The metaphysical notions of an event—and other notions weaved into its conceptual network—is augmented from the synthetic act of emplotment. Second, emplotment synthesizes the complicated topography between agents and patients, as well as the reversals of fortune that mediate between the two: acting and suffering, chance encounters and inevitable confrontations, conflict and collaboration, etc.[9] As I stated in the first chapter, it is here where stochastic

---

[6] See Ihde, "Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic Tradition", as well as Bourgeois, Patrick, "The Limits of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Existence" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 549 – 566, and Michel, Johann. *Ricoeur and The Post-Structuralists*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
[7] Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", p. 21.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

'happenings' become ordered and necessary for the entirety of the story told. It is here, therefore, where Ricoeur aptly employs the description of emplotment as discordant concordance. Lastly, emplotment is capable of poetically weaving together two distinct notions of temporality. On the one hand, through a story's ordering of events and the series of actions and reversals of fortunes contained therein, emplotment relies upon and makes use of temporality as a succession of events, as a 'now' and 'later', a 'before' and 'after'.[10] On the other hand, a story taken as a complete work incorporates an understanding of the *permanence* of time; events begin and end, but time endures—as do the stories we tell.[11]

Narratives do not simply exist in a vacuum, nor do they form a closed system upon themselves. Narratives are a form of discourse; they, as Ricoeur often repeated, say something about something to someone.[12] As discursive, narratives belong to a tradition that contextualizes the way in which a particular narrative is received. I will touch upon this more when I highlight the way in which emplotment poetically responds to the aporia of time. For now, I will simply remind

---

[10] Ibid., 22.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See, for instance, Ricoeur, Paul, "What is a Text?" In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, pp. 105 – 124. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

the reader that much of this was accounted for in this dissertation's first chapter. Further, as discursive, a narrative is not truly complete until its encounter with an audience—whether that audience is simply a single reader or an entire population of readers. It is in this encounter, Ricoeur argues, that the world of the text collides with that of the reader, and from this collision emerges a 'fusion of horizons'.[13] By 'world of the text', Ricoeur means a possible horizon of experience to and for the reader; a horizon that opens one to a possible world different from one's own, but similar enough that it offers itself as a realm of imaginative engagement—hence Ricoeur's fondness to metaphorically refer to the world of the text as a laboratory of action and experimentation.[14] To take the confrontation between the text and the reader seriously is to allow oneself to be 'moved' by the text; i.e. it is to open

---

[13] The hermeneutic notion of the fusion of horizons, of course, traces back to Gadamer's *Truth and Method.* According to Gadamer, one of the central roles that the fusion of horizons plays is not that of *covering over* the tension that emerges in the confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, but of tasking the reader to "consciously [bring] it out". See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum, 2004, especially p. 305. See also, Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", p. 26.

[14] Ricoeur, Paul, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology." In *From Text to Action*, p. 298.

oneself to and become vulnerable enough to the ‘face’ of the text, that it transforms—refigures—one’s horizon of action.

Finally, as Ricoeur goes on to explain, the fusion of horizons places a text—a story, a narrative—in a threefold intermediary relationship between the reader and 1) the world; 2) others; and 3) herself.[15] The text has the capacity to transform the reader’s understanding of each of these relationships. With regard to the world, the fusion of horizons nourishes an understanding of it beyond pure description—think of the child who (re-)kindles their sense of wonder in the world around them through the *Harry Potter* series.[16] With others, the fusion of horizons augments our empathetic relations.[17] Lastly, as Blamey has argued, the fusion of horizons discloses a relationship to oneself that is purged of egotistical desires of mastery, to make a space for self-understanding guided by open and honest self-interpretation.[18]

---

[15] Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative”, p. 26.

[16] For example, Rowling, JK, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* New York: Scholastic, 1999.

[17] Here, I have in mind a work like that of Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. See for instance, *Half a Yellow Sun.* New York: Random House, 2006.

[18] Blamey, Kathleen, “From the Ego to the Self: A Philosophical Itinerary”. In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 571 – 603.

II. The Structure of the Aporia of Time in *Time and Narrative*

In the opening pages of the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur states rather plainly that what animates his analysis is the conviction that the synthetic activity of emplotment is able to creatively respond to the aporia of time, which emerges from the unbridgeable gulf between phenomenological and cosmological time.[19] Indeed, it is interesting to note that Ricoeur's treatment of emplotment in "Life in Quest of Narrative" already anticipates this aporia, as well as its creative resolution. One of the synthetic elements of emplotment, we noted above, revolves around bringing together and creatively interweaving two seemingly conflicting characteristics of time—that it, first, flows; and second, that it endures. In saying this, I have already given it all away! My goal here is not to painstakingly recount the aporia, but rather to elucidate upon its structure. I do so for two reasons: 1) to more clearly show how narrativity responds to this aporia; and more importantly 2) to show that it has the same structure as that between personal and collective memory.

Ricoeur dedicates three chapters to the aporia of time, and each chapter serves not to develop three differing aporias,

---

[19] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 3.

but to deepen one central aporia. The aporia stems from two notions of time: a phenomenological one and a cosmological one. From the perspective of the phenomenological notion of time, the constitution of time stems from conscious lived experience and the structure of the first-person perspective—or from Dasein's being-in-the-world.[20] From the perspective of the cosmological notion, time is part of the fabric of the cosmos. The issue is not that there are two competing mutually exclusive theses on the constitution and nature of time. If that were the case, there would be no aporia; there would only be a debate between two competing positions, where the best argument—or the best arguer—wins. The issue is that both phenomenological and cosmological accounts of time implicitly rely on each other, while each, at the same time, claims to be originary and more fundamental to the other. Stevens presents the most succinct and clear explanation:

> Philosophical speculation on time leads to the irreconcilable contrast between a phenomenological perspective… and a cosmological perspective... Through an acute analysis of these two perspectives…

[20] I am switching between a Husserlian and Heideggerian vocabulary out of fidelity to Ricoeur's analysis of the aporia of time, which, from the phenomenological perspective, entails the philosophies of Augustine, Husserl, and Heidegger.

> Ricoeur shows that each relies on the presupposition of its opposite while, altogether, concealing it: cosmological time, while aiming at the rejection of any subjectivity, cannot be measured without being perceived by a contingent subject; phenomenological temporality, on the other hand, while trying to present itself as the source of time, cannot create its own conceptuality without referring to an objective preconcept of time.[21]

As a brief illustration, consider the aporia as it manifests itself in both Husserl and Kant. On the Husserlian side of the equation, Ricoeur painstakingly retraces the steps involved in Husserl's analysis of internal time consciousness. Here, the object is to make time itself, as flux, appear; and to do so, Husserl must perform two phenomenological reductions: The first on world time, where Husserl brackets four a priori truths of time;[22] the second on the "objectified time of tempo-objects" (e.g. a tone, a recited poem, etc.).[23] Yet, Ricoeur's

---

[21] Stevens, Bernard, "On Ricoeur's Analysis of Time and Narration". In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 499 – 506.
[22] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol.* III, p. 25. The a priori truths of time are: 1) That the temporal order is fixed and two dimensional; 2) that two different temporal points can never coincide; 3) that the relationship between two distinct temporal points is that of non-simultaneity; and 4) that time is organized by an 'earlier' and a 'later'.
[23] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* p. 44.

analysis suggests that, in order for Husserl to finalize his argument concerning the self-constitution of the temporal flux, he surreptitiously has to rely on the objectified time that was the target of the second reduction.[24] Even further, the constitution of the unity of the flux of time requires a conception of time which endures—and such a conception is precisely that which Kant holds as a necessary condition of possibility. If this conception of time is a necessary condition of possibility for experience, then this conception of time cannot itself be directly experienced. Thus, we see how the phenomenological conception relies on and excludes the cosmological.

The Kantian route commits the same crime. Kant, contra Husserl, maintained that time cannot appear, and that one has no recourse to time through the first-person perspective; rather, it is a condition of possibility of experience as such. Yet, it seems that Kant is incapable of truly committing to his transcendental route without implicitly borrowing from the first-person perspective. As Godlove eloquently puts it:

> Here, too, there is no dispute about how Kant must argue if he is to maintain a transcendental stance: all agree that he must presuppose rather than perceive the permanence of objects of experience. But, if what

[24] Ibid.

> recommends objects of experience as models for the permanence of time is the *perceivability* of their permanence, then we ought to conclude that, in this instance, Kant *cannot* keep to the transcendental path; indeed, it is his failure to do so at precisely this point that Ricoeur claims to document.[25]

Thus, the structure of the aporia of time is more clearly apparent. Both phenomenology and cosmology rely on each other as they exclude each other.[26] Therefore, the aporia of time in *Time and Narrative* has a similar structure as the aporia of the subjective analysis of memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, as it was developed in the previous chapter. Phenomenology requires and brackets the rich social world to which one belongs in order to claim that the foundation of memory is personal; whereas sociology also requires and brackets the rich inner life of individuals in order to claim that the foundation of memory is collective.

III. The Poetic Response to the Aporia of Time

What remains to be shown is how narrative, as developed by Ricoeur, is able to poetically resolve the aporia of time, and from this, whether the rubric through which narrative is

---

[25] Godlove, Jr., Terry. "Ricoeur, Kant, and the Permanence of Time." In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, pp. 399 - 415. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

[26] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 57.

capable of responding to the aporia of time can be (imperfectly) transposed to that of memory.

First, however, I should highlight the nature of Ricoeur's method for responding to aporias. As many have noted, Ricoeur's philosophical style is that of a 'post-Hegelian Kantian'.[27] Much of his later work entails unconcealing the nuanced dialectical structures that make human living possible. We see this clearly throughout the various dialectical structures that have been highlighted through this dissertation: the mimetic triad of emplotment, the relationship between innovation and sedimentation with regard to narrativity and to selfhood, the 'dialectical spiral'—as I have called it—of memory, etc. Invariably, these dialectics serve either to address or to illustrate a philosophical aporia—that is, a virtually irreconcilable philosophical problem. Typically, Ricoeur's contention is that the history of philosophy only serves to deepen and radicalize the various aporias he brings forth. Consider, as a brief illustration, Ricoeur's opening remarks concerning the relationship between the Ancient Greek tradition and the

---

[27] See, for instance, Ihde, "Paul Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic Tradition", Bourgeois, "The Limits of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Existence", and Michel, Johann. "Anthropology of Homo Interpretans."

aporia between memory and imagination, which I developed in Chapter 2:

> The problem posed by the entanglement of memory and imagination is as old as Western philosophy. Socratic philosophy bequeathed to us two rival and complementary *topoi* on this subject, one Platonic, the other Aristotelian. The first… argues implicitly for enclosing the problematic of memory within that of imagination. The second… argues for including the problematic of the image within that of remembering. These are the two versions of the aporia of imagination and memory *from which we can never completely extricate ourselves*.[28]

Moments ago, I indicated that the aporias Ricoeur wrestles with are 'virtually irreconcilable'. By now, Ricoeur's Hegelian tendencies ought to be abundantly clear. In order to address any aporia between x and y, Ricoeur's most reliable strategy entails the formulation of a third mediating term. Similarly, by now, Ricoeur's *post*-Hegelian tendencies ought to be abundantly clear. Unlike Hegel, Ricoeur's proposed resolutions do not form a totality; his dialectical method does not form a system closed upon itself, proudly testifying

[28] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 7. Italics on the final sentence are mine.

towards and boasting of reason's capability of resolving all problems.

Ricoeur's proposed "resolutions" to the aporias he develops are poetic—they involve the creative capacity of language to go beyond the realm of physical or pure description; they make use of the creative tropes and resources upon which Western philosophy, the (human) sciences, and fiction rest. As such, Ricoeur's way of responding to philosophical aporias is 'jury-rigged', imperfect. Thus, Ricoeur emphasizes that his goal is not to resolve or dissolve a philosophical problem, but to make that problem "work".[29] As Michel has argued, though Ricoeur himself never had the opportunity to more fully engage with American pragmatism, his manner of responding to aporias certainly has pragmatic undertones.[30] Without question, then, Ricoeur is capable of responding to the aporias he uncovers, but only with respect to certain limits. It is up to each generation of philosophers, then, to disclose these limits, reignite the aporias, and to also formulate new, more original ways of responding to them. Philosophical progress may be slow, careful, unsteady—but it is still progress.

---

[29] See, Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 4, where he states, "My aim will be to discover what resources a poetics of narrative possesses for, if not resolving, at least making this aporia *work* for us." (Italics mine).

[30] Michel, "Anthropology of Homo Interpretans," p. 17.

With that in mind, to the aporia between phenomenological time and cosmological time, Ricoeur proposes an intermediary term: historical time—also sometimes referred to as human time, or even, narrated time.[31] Narrative's capacity to interweave and reconfigure events, human action, interaction, and suffering, and the various characteristics of temporality make it ripe with creative resources to respond to the aporia of time. Through the analysis of the features of historical time, Ricoeur is able to show how history blends—however imperfectly—both phenomenological and cosmological time.

Historical time has three features: 1) calendar time; 2) the succession of generations; and 3) the historical trace.[32] I shall speak only briefly about each. In calendar time, we see quite plainly the interweaving of phenomenology and cosmology. From phenomenology stems the more pragmatic re-appropriation of within timeness: today, tomorrow, yesterday, etc. History is the horizon from which one resolutely pursues one's projects—and to devoting oneself to losing, finding, unmaking, and remaking oneself through these projects.[33] From cosmology, we have the overall

---

[31] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 104.
[32] Ibid, p. 105, 109, 116, respectively.
[33] Ibid, p. 107.

organization of the calendar revolving around astronomy.[34] Further, Ricoeur points out that calendar time, inasmuch as it interweaves phenomenology and cosmology, also interweaves history with fiction. Holidays punctuate the calendar year, offering people opportunities to pause and reflect on the circumstances of their lives, as well as they offer entire communities to connect and reconnect with a community's constitutive founding moments—moments that have the tendency of being elevated to mythic proportions: The signing of the Declaration of Independence, *El Grito de Dolores*, Armistice Day, etc.

The interweaving of 'lived' and 'universal' time continues with the succession of generations. Here we see the biological reality that underlines our being-towards-death open itself to, and becoming fused with, our sociality. Through the succession of generations, predecessors give way to their successors and contemporaries act and suffer together in order to respond to the ethico-politico task of human living.[35] There is much that narrativity has to offer here, as the succession of generations is itself mediated by the dialectic of innovation and sedimentation. Each member of a new generation is already the result of innovation—albeit at the genetic and biological level. Each generation of people,

---

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, p 110.

further, work from within the context of the tradition to which they belong, modifying it as time goes by, to allow human existence to continue to unfold, chronicled by the stories we tell.

Last is the historical trace. In Chapter 2, I developed Ricoeur's notion of the trace in connection with memory—the mnemonic trace. There, Ricoeur's position was that the (mnemonic) trace is that residue upon which memory must have recourse to the imagination in order for one to recollect, reminisce, or remember. In terms of historical time, the trace is a similar phenomenon—it is a residue that leaves a 'mark' on the social world. Whereas the mnemonic trace required the resources of the imagination, the historical trace *de facto* lends itself to narrativity. Later, I will show how the mnemonic trace also *requires* enrichment from narrative, and thus, *must* go beyond Ricoeur's phenomenological analysis of memory. For now, I will limit my treatment of the historical trace to a few remarks.

The first is the *symbolic* nature of the trace. As Ricoeur notes, the historical trace can be understood either as a mark (a streak, a groove) or as a passage.[36] Regardless, the symbolic nature of the trace announces its discursivity. It communicates that *something* happened. Further, taking the

---

[36] Ibid, pp. 119 – 120.

trace as a passage indicates that *following* the trace might reveal *what* happened, but determining *what* happened requires interpretation, narration, argumentation, etc.[37]

Secondly, as symbolic and discursive, the trace reveals something else: the extent to which we are at time's mercy. What I have in mind is Ricoeur's position that human beings are always already being-affected by the past.[38] Through this notion, Ricoeur's hermeneutics comes into contact with Gadamer's hermeneutics. Specifically, Ricoeur's notion of being-affected by the past is a modification of Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein,*[39] by which Ricoeur understands "consciousness of being exposed to the efficacity of history".[40] Others have translated it as

---

[37] Ibid.

[38] Zimmerman, Jens. *Hermeneutics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

[39] I am initially referring to the original German term for this concept out of double fidelity to, first, Weinsheimer and Marshall's note that translating the term into English poses difficulty in that it inevitably loses the 'doubleness' that is present in German (in terms of the distinction between effect and affect), and second, as my reader can see from the remainder of the above paragraph, the multiplicity of attempts made to properly translate the concept (one of which is Ricoeur's own translation—the source of which is in the footnote below this one). For Weinsheimer and Marshall's comments, see "Translator's Preface", p. xv, in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

[40] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 217.

'historically affected consciousness'.[41] I shall follow the latter trend.

As I just mentioned, Ricoeur's notion of being-affected by the past is a modification of Gadamer's historically affected consciousness. Ricoeur specifically modifies the intermediary notion of tradition. Within the confines of *Time and Narrative*, traditionality is used to 1) develop a hermeneutic relationship with the past that is capable of withstanding the critical vulnerabilities to which Gadamer's hermeneutics is susceptible—i.e. that the notion of tradition runs the risk of allowing people to fall prey to the *camera obscura* of ideological contamination;[42] and 2) clarify the concept of being-affected by the past by articulating its dialectical structure, which necessitates mediation and interpretation. Though my main focus will be with the second point, for the sake of providing greater historical context to the philosophical dialogues to which Ricoeur's works, clustered around the constellation of *Time and Narrative,* participated in, furthered, and responded to, I will begin by developing some brief remarks concerning the former point. In this way, we will be able to see how Ricoeur's thoughts on

---

[41] Zimmerman, *Hermeneutics*, p. 40.

[42] Ricoeur, Paul, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, pp. 270 - 307. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

the nature of ideology and utopia were ultimately refined into that of tradition and traditionality, as it is expressed in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*.

1. The main proponent of this criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics in particular, and 20th century hermeneutics in general, stems from the Frankfurt school, specifically Habermas, especially during the period surrounding *Knowledge and Human Interests.*[43] Accordingly, the central problem of hermeneutics is its blindness to the pernicious nature of ideological mediation within a tradition. From Habermas's perspective, hermeneutics has a specific 'place' and a specific 'function' within the humanities—that of interpreting a tradition at the service of clarifying the meaning of this tradition, and therefore, renewing one's

---

[43] Habermas, Jurgen, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by J. Shapiro, Boston: Beacon Press, 1972. As Ricoeur notes in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, it is the appendix to this text—which was added to the English translation of it, while being unavailable in the original German edition—i.e. "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective", where Habermas develops his critique of (Gadamerian) hermeneutics, that is, while not overtly mentioning Gadamer himself. Therefore, see *Knowledge and Human Interests,* especially section V onward, starting on p. 308. For Ricoeur's assessment of Habermas's critique, see especially, Lecture 14 of *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, edited by GH Taylor, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

cultural heritage.[44] But if the goal can ever only be that of renewal, then hermeneutics never leaves the plain of understanding a tradition, which means that it never embarks upon a 'critical moment' of reflection. Where in this does ideology feature? That hermeneutics never embarks upon critique means that it never can uncover the way in which ideology can distort a tradition, i.e. by the values of a ruling class asserting and perpetuating themselves within that tradition, bordering on violence.[45] In more strictly Habermasian terms, the hermeneutic sciences, because of their emphasis on renewal, lack an emancipatory interest that seeks to critique the ideological structure of society through a desymbolizing explanatory process.[46]

As Ricoeur understands it, the confrontation between Gadamer and Habermas pushes philosophy to the threshold of a hard either/or: either one avows the conditions of hermeneutic understanding *or* one defiantly engages in a critique of 'false consciousness'—i.e. the distortions that conceal layers of domination and of violence.[47] However, in

---

[44] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology", pp. 288 – 290.
[45] Ibid., 290.
[46] Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests,* pp. 316 – 317.
[47] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology", p. 270.

his view, this is actually a false dichotomy.[48] It rests on the rather narrow interpretation of the function of ideology that was reflective of the time during which this debate initially unfolded.[49]

As Kearney has noted, during this time, most philosophical work on ideology took for granted Marx's understanding of the concept—as a distortion of reality.[50] As such, on the other end of the spectrum, and in opposition to ideology, was science and scientific knowledge, which was taken to be nonideological.[51] Indeed, to a certain extent, Ricoeur is consistent with both of these positions. Ideology *can* be distortive.[52] However, taking distortion as the exclusive

---

[48] Ibid., 270.

[49] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", in *From Text to Action,* see especially pp. 255 – 256.

[50] Kearney, Richard, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004, p. 76. See also, Kearney, *The Poetics of Modernity: Towards a Hermeneutic Imagination*, New York: Humanity Books, 1999, p. 66.

[51] Kearney, *The Poetics of Modernity*, pp. 66 – 67.

[52] Ricoeur asserts this on numerous occasions in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, as well as the essays he published around the time he gave these lectures, and collected in *From Text to Action*, "Science and Ideology", and "Ideology and Utopia", the latter of which, in my view any way, is the most succinct and accessible of Ricoeur's work on both ideology and utopia. As such, consider one of the opening remarks he makes in this essay, where Ricoeur declares that his intention is not "to refute the [Marxist understanding of the] concept,

function of ideology, in Ricoeur's view, means normalizing the *pathologized* version of the concept. Likewise, scientific knowledge *can* break completely from ideology. However, in Ricoeur's view, this is only when such scientific knowledge is the result of the 'positive' sciences—e.g. the "mathematical physics of Galileo"—which have the capacity to instantiate a complete epistemological break from an ideological framework.[53] To the extent that the social sciences lack this capacity, they are unable to offer a nonideological haven. I shall unpack these two claims—on the nonpathological function(s) of ideology, and on the possibility of the critique of ideology—further.

The danger of the pathological, distortive function of ideology is that the disfigured image of "reality" can become autonomous to that of which it is a distortion.[54] The vehicle

---

but to establish it on a sounder basis than the polemical claim to which it first gives expression." See p. 309 of the essay in *From Text to Action*.

[53] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 256.

[54] My recapitulation of Ricoeur's position on ideology is glossing over two issues that, while important, would lead me too far astray from the purpose of this brief excursion, and therefore from the purpose of this chapter. The first is that Ricoeur argues that the late-Marx opposition between ideology and science is more problematic than the mid-Marx conception of ideology's opposition to praxis. It is at the level of praxis that ideology is able to affect living individuals who are simply attempting to live their lives in a larger social system over which they have little control. This ties directly

for this autonomy, in Marxist thought, is class struggle; the desires, values, and ideas of the ruling class are coercively and surreptitiously internalized by the general population and in such a way to allow the ruling class to perpetually assert its dominance in and throughout society.[55]

However, if one resists the tendency of an ideologically distorted image to become autonomous, if one 'unmasks' this autonomy, and therefore seeks to ground the distortive function of ideology into something deeper, Ricoeur would argue that what we find is a function of ideology that is less pathological. It is the function of ideology that mediates with

---

into the second issue, namely that of how to conceive the distortive relationship between ideology, on the one hand, and reality (praxis) on the other. One of the reasons why Ricoeur rejected the later opposition between ideology and science is because of the underlying *causal* relationship that Marx postulated between the values of the ruling class and the domination of the subordinate classes. But, as Ricoeur goes to great lengths to demonstrate in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, no causal model has ever been sufficiently demonstrated. Ricoeur's hermeneutic gambit is that the proposal of a causal model should be rejected in favor of a 'motivational' one that can be found within Max Weber's analysis of social action. See *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* especially lectures 3 and 4, and 11 and 12—but Ricoeur does an excellent job of prefiguring the argumentative trajectory of the entire lecture series in his introductory lecture.

[55] Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia", p. 312.

the issue of the legitimation of a state's social order.[56] By now, Weber's account of a state's monopolization of violence as its primary function is well known. That states claim to possess the only legitimate authority to the use of force entails that states are inherently coercive.[57] Nevertheless, Ricoeur adds that a state can only effectively monopolize violence when enough people within it have *assented* to it, holding it as legitimate.[58] As such, prior to coercion, violence, and distortion, there is something else: a *claim* to legitimacy that seeks a response through the *belief* in this claim.[59] However, between this polarity of claim/belief, there is a gap

[56] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 252. See also, Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia", p. 314. Here, one can see the traces of the influence that Weber had on Ricoeur's reading of Marx, as I discussed in footnote 54.

[57] Indeed, this is what has propelled anarchists like K. Williams to maintain that the presence of a police officer is not at all the presence of someone who is there to 'serve and protect'; but is rather the presence of the *threat* of violent action perpetuated and justified by the state. See his rigorous polemic, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, Oalkland: AK Press, 2015.

[58] Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia", p. 314.

[59] The motivational model that I discussed in footnote 54 can more clearly be seen here. If it is the case that what is sought in the claim to legitimacy is *belief*, then we are operating in the conceptual network, not of causality, but that of motivation, intention, agency, etc.

of *credibility*. Ricoeur’s position is that ideology is that which fills this gap.[60] It is a three-step process:

> First, that an interest asserts itself at the level of power or authority. Second, that authority makes itself acceptable at the level of a claim to legitimacy and not only at the level of sheer application of force. Third, that rationality is understood for its own sake as the general horizon of understanding and mutual recognition before being unduly diverted for the sake of a ruling group.[61]

The role of ideology in this three-step process lies between the second and the third step; the power of ideology is such that it is capable of taking a particular desire and connecting it to a symbolic framework that represents it to a group of people as a universalizable claim, worthy of assent.

The broader point that Ricoeur is making is that all social action, by virtue of being social action, is inherently symbolic. As such, establishing the meaning of any social action requires some detour through interpretation.[62] It is at this

---

[60] Ricoeur, “Ideology and Utopia”, p. 315.
[61] Ibid., p. 316.
[62] In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* as well as the essay “Ideology and Utopia”, Ricoeur develops this point alongside the work of C. Geertz who serves as the bridge between the mid-level function of ideology—in terms of filling the credibility gap between the claim/belief in the legitimacy in authority—and the ground-level function of ideology of

primordial level of the symbolic nature of human action that Ricoeur locates the deepest and most fundamental function of ideology as such: it is the framework through which a group of people are capable of understanding the meaning of various social actions, as well as the framework through which a group is able to represent and realize itself.[63] In this regard, ideology is concomitant with traditionality—though I shall further develop the notion of traditionality, *after* I finish these brief comments on ideology and the critique of ideology.

In his essay, "Science and Ideology", Ricoeur develops the five central features of the primordial level of ideology.[64] The

---

providing a framework through which a group can understand social action and represent themselves through symbolic imagery. While a full-blown analysis of the relationship between Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Geertz's cultural anthropology would go beyond the confines of this chapter, I should note that my reading of Ricoeur here is informed by MC Clorinda Vendra's work, "Paul Ricoeur and Clifford Geertz: The Hermeneutic Dialogue Between Philosophical Hermeneutics and Cultural Anthropology" in *Études Ricoeuriennes/*Ricoeur Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020) pp. 49 – 64.

[63] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 249.

[64] Interestingly, in both the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and the essay, "Ideology and Utopia", Ricoeur develops his understanding of ideology through a genetic reading. That is, he begins with the pathological conception of ideology, and moves deeper towards the hidden levels and functions of ideology. I have treated my brief description of ideology in

first feature is that ideology helps to preserve and perpetuate the initial 'energy' that led to a group splintering or rupturing from a larger subset of a population; ideology serves to maintain the vitality of a group's founding moment.[65]

Ricoeur's hermeneutics similarly. However, in "Science and Ideology", Ricoeur employs a more vertical approach, starting from the deepest and most primordial function of ideology and moving upwards to the pathological. I see these two approaches as being analogically similar to his usual tendency of engaging in forwards- and then backwards-readings of an issue to help further bring to light the connective tissue that unites his various topics. I touched upon Ricoeur's tendency to engage in backwards readings in the second chapter of this work, specifically footnote 44.

[65] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 249. To offer a small anecdote of this, several years ago, I had the privilege of helping a student organization at Miami Dade College organize their yearly celebration of Mexican Independence. I learned there that this particular celebration is highly mediated by ritualistic symbols meant to reenact the founding moment that triggered the Mexican War of Independence. In Mexico, for instance, this celebration is marked by a ceremony where the President reenacts the founding moment of revolution through ringing the very same bell that catalyzed the move towards independence. From there, names and important moments of the past are shouted, along with the ringing of the bell. The College's event mimicked this, with a section of the College's campus being converted to look like that of a Mexican street festival, filled with live music and vendors, all with traces of Mexican heritage, and all situated such that a main corridor could be followed, leading up to a large bell on a pedestal. At 11pm on the 15th of September, the bell was rung, and the *grito* was shared by everyone in attendance. I have to admit that, while

Secondly, ideology does not simply maintain a group's founding moment, it is also capable of granting to a group a set of social motivations that project it towards an end. As Ricoeur states, "ideology is always more than a *reflection*, [it] is always also a *justification* and *project*".[66] In this sense, ideology has a generative power that extends beyond the repetition of a founding moment.

This generative power is at the heart of the third feature of ideology, which is its capacity to simplify, codify, and schematize the way in which a group is able to understand itself, its history, and the surrounding world.[67] Indeed, great care must be taken with this feature of ideology, as it is this generative capacity of ideology that helps account for the process by which the *ideas* that a group uses to convey its understanding of itself, history, and the world transform into the *beliefs* that a group has of itself, etc. In this transformation from an idea to a belief, there is a laxity of critical thinking and examination. Even further, as Ricoeur notes, this explains how *any* system of thought can become a system of

---

attending the celebration itself, the emotional energy in the room was palpable and infectious; there was no denying the importance that this event, to the point that my own reading of these passages on ideology by Ricoeur is tinged with the memory of this event in particular.

[66] Ibid., p. 250.

[67] Ibid.

belief, and therefore, virtually anything is subject to becoming an ideology.[68]

The third feature of ideology allows for a smooth transition into its fourth—namely, that ideology is *operative* before it is *thematic*. As Ricoeur develops it:

> [The fourth feature of ideology] consists in the fact that the interpretive code of an ideology is something *in which* men live and think, rather than a conception *that* they pose…. It operates behind our backs, rather than appearing as a theme before our eyes. We think from it rather than about it.[69]

We can see, therefore, how the third and fourth features of ideology can be combined in such a way as to form the condition of possibility of the Marxist conception of ideology as a distortion of reality; that ideology is operative prior to it being a theme of critical inquiry implies that one's default relationship with the ideological framework from the tradition to which one belongs is that of acceptance of it. As Ricoeur maintains, however, while this need not be a pathological relationship, it certainly can *become* one.

---

[68] As Kearney notes, the "profound irony" here, especially when one keeps in mind the pathological understanding of ideology (as distortion), is the extent to which many Marxist societies transformed Marxism itself into an ideology of domination. See *On Paul Ricoeur,* p. 82.

[69] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 251.

The final feature of ideology is what allows Ricoeur to, ultimately, refer to ideology as a force of integration and conservation.[70] Namely, ideology is "both interpretation of the real and obturation of the possible".[71] In this sense, every ideological framework, by virtue of being one, presents a limit-point, beyond which one ceases to 'belong' as a member of the group. Nevertheless, when conceived outside of its pathological expression, ideology offers to individuals within a group, and groups themselves, with a powerful framework by which to understand themselves and their surrounding world.

Allow me a moment to approach this differently, in an attempt to clarify the main points that Ricoeur makes on ideology. Ricoeur's position is that, from the later-Marx onward, the counterpoint to ideology—i.e. that which ideology 'distorts'—is objective reality. From this fact alone, it is understandable why the topic of ideology would be treated in a polemical way; the danger that ideology poses is that of leading people away from 'the truth', all the while working in the service of allowing a dominant group to coercively perpetuate its power. However, while the distortive function of ideology certainly *is* alarming, and

---

[70] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 14 – 16, and "Ideology and Utopia", p. 318.
[71] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 252.

certainly *does* require one to think and reflect as clearly as possible, Ricoeur would also point out that there is a problem with the coupling of ideology, on the one hand, and objective reality, on the other. If one's 'default' relationship with their surrounding world is that of relating to objective reality, only for this reality to eventually become distorted by ideology, how, exactly, does this work? How would ideology be able to dilute, disfigure, and distort that which is objectively and unequivocally real? This is, as Ricoeur states in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, a mystical understanding of ideology.[72] Perhaps, then, what ideology distorts *is not* 'objective reality', but rather a symbolic framework of and for action, that we collectively interpret to pre-understand ourselves and the world around us. Perhaps the reason why an ideologically distorted interpretation of a series of actions or a course of events is capable of gaining a degree of autonomy—so as to become a false idol—is because *all* understanding of actions or events are the product of interpretation to begin with. Consider the following three quotations by Ricoeur:

> We must integrate the concept of ideology as distortion into a framework that recognizes the symbolic structure of social life. *Unless social life has a*

---

[72] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* Introductory Lecture, specifically page 8.

> *symbolic structure,* there is no way to understand how we live, do things, and project these activities in ideas, no way to understand how reality can become an idea or how real life can produce illusions… this symbolic structure can be perverted… but if there were not a symbolic function already at work in the most primitive kind of action, I could not understand, for my part, how reality could produce shadows of this kind.[73]

And:

> What [theories of ideology that view it primarily as distortion] fail to understand is that action in its most elementary forms is already mediated and articulated by symbolic systems. If this is the case, the explanation of action has to be itself mediated by an interpretation of its ruling symbols. Without recourse to the *ultimate layer of symbolic action, of action symbolically articulated*, ideology has to appear as the intellectual depravity that its opponents aim to unmask… This cannot be done as long as the rhetorical force of the surface ideology [i.e. ideology as distortion] is not related to the depth layer of

[73] Ibid., italics mine.

> symbolic systems that constitute and integrate the social phenomenon as such.[74]

And, most directly:

> For how could illusions and fantasies [produced by the distortive function of ideology] have any historical efficacy if ideology did not have a mediating role incorporated in the most elementary social bond[?][75]

Ricoeur, therefore, employs a *reductio ad absurdum* to unveil this false dichotomy. If the relationship between ideology and reality was that of ideology and *objective* reality, it is absurd to think that distortive ideologies could ever actually take hold. The relationship we collectively have with ourselves and with the surrounding social world is *always, already* one that is mediated by an interpretation of a symbolic framework of action, and the interpretation that is operatively employed as we are learning how to navigate through our being-in-the-world is one that has already been mediated by a particular ideology of some sort. But this need not be a *pathological* understanding of ideology. Much like Ricoeur's defense against the pathologizing of memory, it might be in our best interest to first understand what ideology *is capable of*, before deeming it all as carcinogenic. Ultimately, it is the integrative function of ideology that

---

[74] Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia", p. 317.
[75] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology", p. 254.

demonstrates that which it is capable of doing non-pathologically.

Unfortunately, Ricoeur's understanding of ideology does come at a cost: it closes the door on the possibility of arriving at a non-ideologically mediated position. As such, one may very well pose the question, if Ricoeur's position that *anything* can become an ideology—including the methods used to *critique* an ideology—how is it possible to do so without instantiating some form of relativism? If relativism is ultimately the position that 'wins', then it would seem that the best that can be done is simply the acknowledgement that different ideologies present differing views, but there are no standards by which one can adjudicate between competing views. Indeed, the problem is immediately foreseeable: if ideological relativism is true, then there are no standards by which we can unequivocally state that a democracy, for instance, is preferable to a nationalist dictatorship. Such a position is poisonous to genuine philosophical discourse. Indeed, it is poisonous to the flourishing of humanity as such. Ricoeur is well aware of all of this.[76] The triplet of essays

---

[76] Indeed, as Madison has shown, Ricoeur's 'critical' hermeneutics responds to both the tendency of placing so-called 'objective' reality on the opposite end of the spectrum of ideology, as well as the tendency to maintain that, if it is not, then what is amounted to is a kind of relativism. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, then, walks quite a narrow ridge,

collected in *From Text to Action* dedicated to ideology—i.e. "Science and Ideology"; "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology"; and "Ideology and Utopia"—all contain elements of a rubric that Ricoeur uses in order to go about critiquing ideological frameworks, with the caveat being that no critique of ideology is ever complete, or *total*. As such, it is impossible to arrive at an a-ideological position. But this does not imply that it is impossible to critique ideology.

Broadly, Ricoeur maintains that it is possible to critique ideological frameworks on two grounds. The first is by paying close attention to the relationship of noncongruence between ideology and utopia.[77] Accordingly, for every function of ideology, there is an equal and opposite function

---

between both objectivism and relativism. See, G.B. Madison, "Gadamer and Ricoeur" in *Continental Philosophy in the 20th Century*, edited by Richard Kearney, London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 240 – 288.

[77] In this regard, Ricoeur both praises and criticizes the work of Mannheim for being the first to suggest the close relationship between the two seemingly disparate phenomena. Praise: it was Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* that first proposed that the relationship of noncongruence was all the more reason to investigate the relationship between the two. Criticism: Mannheim, for all of his strengths, writes with the aim of attempting to establish an a-ideological grounds of critique. In this sense, he too, is taken by the idea that ideology is or must be essentially pathological. See Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Lecture 16, especially pp. 283 - 284.

of utopia. At the pathological level, ideology was a distortion of reality. For utopia, it is a schizophrenic-like escapism from reality, incapable, therefore, of ever being realizable.[78] At the mid-level, ideology helps legitimize a claim of authority, by filling the credibility gap between the claim and the belief in authority. To the extent that utopian views of society are those of what is *possible* and what constitutes an *alternative*, utopia is able reveal the degree to which a social order is *contingent* as opposed to universal.[79] At the most fundamental level, ideology is integrative and conservative, allowing for a group to consistently represent and realize itself. Utopia is otherwise; it has a subversive power that seeks to break, to tear open, to make way for new paradigms. In short, utopia has the capacity to decenter, in the name of finding the ground upon which to be recentered.[80] In this sense, Ricoeur proposes that the two concepts require each other: the integrative capacity of ideology is capable of rehabilitating a utopian view that has become too schizophrenic, and the subversive power of utopia is able to wake one up from even the most distortive ideological brainwash.

---

[78] Ricoeur, “Ideology and Utopia”, p. 322.
[79] Ibid., 321.
[80] Ibid., 322.

Thus, it is this final coupling of both ideology and utopia that one can find the Ricoeurian response to the Gadamer-Habermas debate. To maintain that hermeneutics is incapable of critique, and that the act of critique requires abandoning the hermeneutic project of 'renewal' via understanding is to misunderstand that, within hermeneutics, the process of coming to an understanding *entails* critique via the long detour of the confrontation between various ideological and utopian frameworks. Further, the nature of these frameworks are not necessarily pathological. Both ideology and utopia have healthy functions—be they that of integration or subversion—and any tradition, by virtue of being one, will display both the ideological tendency of coalescing around a view that allows a group to continuously represent itself, as well as a utopian aim towards which to strive.

This now leads to the second ground upon which a critique of ideology is possible. It is, indeed, that which grounds both ideology and utopia: namely, traditionality as such, and the underlying dialectical structures contained therein. It is here, therefore, where I can resume the path upon which this chapter was originally traversing, namely the clarification of the concept of being-affected by the past, and its mediation

with traditionality such that it opens the door towards a critical form of interpretation.[81]

2. The central dialectic of being-affected by the past is that of belongingness and distanciation.[82] Human beings are deeply social creatures, and our sociality carries with it a shared history that becomes furcated through the prism of traditionality. Indeed, the issue here is not *which* tradition one belongs to, or identifies with, but *that* our being-in-the-world is always, already demarcated by a historicity that conditions the range of meaningful actions on which we can rely to respond to the particularities of our existential

---

[81] Indeed, the critique of ideology rendered to hermeneutics in general—and Gadamerian hermeneutics in particular—by both Habermas and Apel, while fruitful, is, in my mind, a settled affair. It is plain to see that Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach does not fall prey to the same criticism that Gadamer's did, for Ricoeur's understanding of traditionality includes both a relationship of belongingness and distanciation. Within the domain of distanciation, there is a space, not only for interpretation, but for critique and critical distance from the totality of traditionality—i.e. from the dangers of ideological brainwashing. To this end, Ricoeur has sometimes described his (later) hermeneutics as a form of 'critical hermeneutics'. If hermeneutics is an aid to one's self-understanding, then it is a necessary step in one's journey towards greater understanding that one takes a critical distance towards one's tradition.

[82] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology", pp. 294 – 301. This is a similar dialectic, I should note, to that of innovation and sedimentation that we see in narrative and in selfhood (habit formation).

situation. From Ricoeur's perspective, it is a given—a necessary condition of possibility—that human beings belong to, before one can begin to question and criticize, a tradition of some sort or another. As I stated earlier, ideology is concomitant with traditionality, and one of their shared features is that of being operative before being thematic. "The past questions us and calls us into question," Ricoeur contends, "before we question it or call it into question."[83] Humanity's belongingess to (some such) tradition is what Ricoeur means when he uses the term 'traditionality'.[84]

Traditionality as such *humanizes* the past and the present—or better, it modifies the *relationship* between the past and the present. Through the intermediary concept of traditionality, the past ought not be understood as something that is 'over and done with', no longer existent, "a dead interval", or "an inert deposit".[85] Neither should it be taken as

---

[83] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 222.
[84] Ibid, p. 221. See also, "Science and Ideology", p. 267, where Ricoeur elaborates on the relationship of belongingness and distanciation, as well. The position he sketches out in this essay is precisely what I am developing with greater rigor above: that though our primordial relationship is that of belonging, and though we will never completely extricate ourselves from this belongingness, distanciation is nevertheless a possibility, and with distanciation comes critique.
[85] Ibid, p. 220.

being contemporaneously fused with the present.[86] There is still a temporal gap between the past and the present, however, this gap is bridged by traditionality, for through it, the past is able to 'transmit' a wealth of meaning-potential that every present generation—or every individual of a present generation—may (or may not) actualize. Through traditionality, then, a vast network of symbolic meaning is 'handed down' and given to those in the lived present, and those in the lived present receive and take upon the task of unfolding this symbolic network of meaning.[87] As Ricoeur states, traditionality "proceeds from the tension, at the very heart of what we call experience, between the efficacity of the past we undergo and the reception of the past we bring about."[88]

To attempt to articulate this more clearly, between the past and the present, there is a fusion of horizons.[89] This fusion of horizons is a combination of our passivity to

---

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, pp. 220 - 221. To drive the point home further, Ricoeur describes humanity as being the 'heirs' of their tradition: "The notion of tradition… signifies that we are never in a position of being absolute innovators, but rather are always first of all in the situation of being heirs." *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 221.
[88] Ibid, p. 220.
[89] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* p. 305. For Ricoeur's take, *Time and Narrative Vol. III,* p. 220.

history—we always already dwell within circumstances we have not made, and have had no part in—as well as our capability of 'making' history. Between this passivity and activity is traditionality. The tradition to which one belongs grants one a vast symbolic network that can be utilized to 1) understand the past and its relationship with the present; and 2) use this understanding to formulate plans of action geared towards the future.[90] Consider, for instance, the person who justifies her volunteer work to help the poor as being 'the Christian thing to do', or the person who cheerfully insists that developing a strong work ethic hinged upon self-reliance and industriousness is 'the American way(!)'. These two examples might be rather kitschy, but they do get the point across. They also allow me to stress another point. Namely, that the relation one has with one's tradition is *not* direct. It is symbolically mediated, and as such, the fusion of horizons between the past and present is one marked by interpretation. Consider the following quotations by Ricoeur:

> [Traditionality] is not a separating interval, but a process of mediation staked out by the chain of interpretations and reinterpretations.[91]

And

---

[90] In this sense, traditionality encapsulates the functions of both ideology and utopia.
[91] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, p. 220.

> Before being an inert deposit, tradition is an operation that can only make sense dialectically through the exchange between the interpreted past and the interpreting present.[92]

To return to my kitschy examples, this is precisely why it is possible for different people to have staggeringly different ideas as to what, exactly the 'Christian thing to do' or 'the American way(!)' *is* to begin with.

To put it differently, Ricoeur's concept of being-affected by the past suggests that, metaphorically, the *humanized* past 'speaks' to us; it has a discursive reality. However, the discursivity of the past is not like that of a dialogue. It lacks both the symmetry of the Buberian I-Thou relation, as well as the asymmetry of the Levinasian face-to-face.[93] Rather, the discourse is like that between a text and its readers.

The nature of discourse is best incapsulated by the expression of which Ricoeur is so fond. Discourse entails someone saying something about something to someone

---

[92] Ibid, p. 221.

[93] Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by RG Smith. New York: Scribner, 1958. Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2004. For more on the relationship between Buber and Levinas, see, Arca, Kristofer. "Facing the Thou." Master's Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008.

else.[94] From this, discourse has three major traits: a speaker, a topic of discussion situated within a worldly (or social) context, and an interlocutor.[95] To these three, a fourth can be added, i.e. a temporal dimension through which discourse unfolds.[96]

Written or textual discourse modifies all four traits. The temporal: whereas spoken discourse takes the character of a fleeting event—two friends meet, catch up, and then go their separate ways—written discourse *inscribes* what is said such that its meaning—"the noema of speaking"[97]— is retrievable. In other words, in speaking, *saying* something to someone is an event with a beginning, middle, and end. Whereas in writing, *that which is said* remains; it becomes an artifact.

The speaker: In spoken discourse, the *meaning* of what one is saying overlaps with the speaker's intention. As Ricoeur states, "it is almost the same thing to ask, what do *you* mean? What does *that* mean?"[98] In written discourse, there is a break between the author's intention and what is written;

---

[94] Ricoeur, "What is a Text?" p. 108.
[95] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology", p. 298.
[96] Ricoeur, Paul, "The Model of the Text." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, pp. 144 – 167. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 145.
[97] Ibid, p. 146.
[98] Ibid, p. 148, emphasis mine.

the text takes a life of its own.[99] Understanding the meaning of a text, then, is not about inquiring into the psychological state of its author—this would be to reduce the meaning of a text to a form of psychologism. Understanding the meaning of a text, then, requires allowing the text to 'speak for itself': "What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say".[100] The meaning of the text, then, can only be discovered by *reading* the text.

The worldly context: In spoken discourse, the interlocutors are situated within a shared social context, a "situation", as Ricoeur describes it.[101] As such, the dialogical event has a direct reference. In written discourse—as is the case with important works of philosophy, history, or literature—the reference is not direct, but rather discloses a possible world laden with meaning—enough so that it can augment one's own being-in-the-world.

> Thus we speak about the "world of Greece, not to designate any more what were the situations for those who lived them, but to designate the nonsituational references that outline the effacement of the first and that henceforth are offered as possible

---

[99] This is precisely where Ricoeur's hermeneutics differs form that of Dilthey, who held that the interpretative process was about understanding the mind of the author.
[100] Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text", p. 148.
[101] Ibid.

> modes of being, as symbolic dimensions of our being-in-the-world.[102]

Consider, for instance, the example I gave in the first chapter: in reading a work of literature, such as *1984*, one also gains a richer symbolic relation with one's own worldly context; the world of the reader collides with the world of the text, unlocking new meaning-potentials—new ways of relating to, understanding, and interpreting the world.[103]

The interlocutor/reader: The dialogical, face-to-face relation is one wherein which the interlocutors are present to each other. However, textual discourse entails a double absence. The writer is writing to and for an audience, but this audience is invisible to the author. Further, the reader receives the text, and as was suggested earlier, the matter is no longer the author's intent, but the text itself. Hence, the double absence is that of the writer and the audience. More radically, the reader need not even belong to the same

---

[102] Ibid, 149.

[103] Consider also the opening lines of Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" There, Heidegger contends that a philosophical question, by virtue of being a philosophical question, necessarily calls the questioner into question, requiring that the questioner ultimately confront a philosophical presupposition, test its veracity, and allow the outcome of that test to *alter* the way in which one experiences reality. See, Heidegger, Martin. "What Is Metaphysics?" In *Basic Writings*, 89-110. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

worldly situation or sociological context as the author; the temporal distance between the two can be of several lifespans. Yet, as Ricoeur argued in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, it is through the reader that the text is realized, actualized.[104] I would like to add one more thought to the relationship between the reader and the text. Namely, the reader's capacity, in actualizing the text, to discover—in a moment of interpretative innovation—a possible meaning that exceeds the historical boundaries of the text (e.g. to see in one of the work's of William Shakespeare an analogy of our current scientific understanding of memory, say). In sum, the relationship between the reader and the text grants texts with a "peculiarity":

> The peculiarity of the literary work, and indeed of the work as such, is nevertheless to transcend its own psychosociological conditions of production and thereby to open itself to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated in sociocultural contexts that are always different. In short, the work *decontextualizes* itself, from the sociological as well as

[104] I am alluding to, of course, to the section in Vol. I of *Time and Narrative* on Mimesis$_3$. As Ricoeur states there, "it is the reader who completes the work inasmuch as… the written work is a sketch for reading." Ricoeur even goes on to say that in some cases, the reader's role is to carry "the burden of emplotment". *Time and Narrative Volume I,* p. 77.

> the psychological point of view, and is able to *recontextualizes* itself differently in the act of reading.[105]

By now, it ought to be clear that the proposed metaphor between one's relationship with the past—via being-affected by the past and via traditionality—and the relationship of the text and its reader is a healthy one. In the same way that a text lends itself to be read and understood through a fusion of horizons between the 'world' of the text and the world of the reader, so too does tradition grant one a manner of being-in-the-world that transforms one's worldly social context or situation. In the same way that one actualizes and revitalizes the meaning of a text through interpretation, so too does one actualize and revitalize the meaning of their historical belonging to a tradition. In the same way that one may break from interpretative orthodoxy with a text and discover a new meaning-potential, one may break from the orthodoxy of one's tradition, innovating upon the level of receptivity of the past. In these three features, we find the fullness of the dialectical relation between belongingness and distanciation that is at the heart of being-affected by the past.

To return to the aporia of time: between phenomenological and cosmological time, the resources of

---

[105] Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology", p. 298.

narrativity allowed Ricoeur to posit historical, humanized time. Historical time weaves together features of both phenomenological and cosmological time. It also *transcends* both accounts of time, becoming its own paradigm. Within this paradigm, we find that time affects us. In order to work through this passivity with regard to temporality, we must refer to our inherent traditionality. Through this, we discover our belongingness to and distanciation from the historical past. Our belongingness to history, through tradition, contextualizes how we live in the present. Our distance allows us to break from the chains of the past, and act for the sake of a hope towards a better future.

IV. Narrated Memory: Between Personal and Collective Memory

In the closing of the first part of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur returns to the aporia between personal and collective memory. Within these pages, Ricoeur offers a brief remark as to that which the hermeneutic response to this aporia consists. Ricoeur's gesture comes in the form of an open question:

> Does there not exist an intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual

> persons and the public memory of the communities to which we belong?[106]

Accordingly, it is in one's shared life "with and for others"[107] where we can find the poetic resolution to the aporia—a phenomenology open to social reality, a sociology capable of taking into account social agents and patients, acting and suffering.[108]

In Chapter 2, I suggested that the poetic response to the aporia between personal and collective memory would require making a connection between the dialectic of selfhood in *Oneself as Another* as well as that of narrative in *Time and Narrative*. It would appear that Ricoeur has lead us to it, for in gesturing that the response to the aporia between personal and collective memory lies in one's intersubjective relation(s) with others, we are transposed back to the relationship between narrativity and selfhood in *Oneself as Another*, insofar as (narrative) selfhood necessarily requires intersubjectivity as a condition of possibility.

In Chapter 1, I explored the relationship between narrativity and selfhood more fully. I demonstrated that selfhood, in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, emerges out of the dialectical relationships between narrativity and idem

---

[106] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 131.
[107] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172.
[108] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 130.

identity, on the one hand, and narrativity and ipse identity, on the other. Between narrative and idem, we find the annunciation of 'who' one is through 'what' one is—i.e. the ability to put into words the rich and often complex history of one's character. Between narrative and ipse, we find the demand for self-constancy through the concrete, face-to-face relation with another—whether this relation is symmetrical or asymmetrical, or with a predecessor, successor, or contemporary. It is because of others that fidelity and authenticity become a concern for me. It is to the other that I attest this fidelity. It is with others that I become a self, in the fullest sense of the word.

With the reality and intricacy of the intersubjective relation in mind, I would like to more fully respond to the aporia between personal and collective memory. Between these two forms of memory, I propose a third, intermediary form: narrative memory. To develop this intermediary form of memory, I will analyze more closely Ricoeur's notion of a 'happy memory'—to which he refers throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting*. I will demonstrate that in order for any memory to meet the criteria required to be designated as a happy memory, it is necessary to appropriate from the structure and form of emplotment, narrativity. In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, a happy memory, then, is one that can be put into words, articulated to oneself and to others.

By Ricoeur's own admission, the notion of the happy memory is one of the guiding principles of his analysis of memory and mnemonic phenomena in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.[109] Indeed, the notion is invoked no less than seventeen times during his rigorous analysis of memory. Despite its centrality to his analysis of memory, Ricoeur does not develop the concept in a coherent manner. I shall attempt to do so here by developing four essential features of a happy memory. I shall base these features off of the way in which Ricoeur utilized the notion of a happy memory throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

The first feature of a happy memory is that it is nonpathological.[110] By "nonpathological", I mean two different interpretative meanings of the word. The first is that a happy memory is not an unhealthy one—where the reinvigoration of a traumatic event's mnemonic trace, for example, causes, not a recollection of the event, but its repetition. A happy memory is not necessarily a pleasant memory, but it is one that lends itself to recollection *as* recollection. Secondly, as nonpathological, a happy memory is not one that emerges from a *suspicious* analysis of mnemonic phenomena—suspicious, namely of the aporia between memory and imagination. As I argued in Chapter 2,

---

[109] Ibid, p. 494.

[110] See p. 37 and 412 of *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

though this aporia is insurmountable, it is also what makes the ‘dialectical spiral’ of memory possible in the first place.

The first feature of a happy memory tells us only what it is *not*. The following three will sketch out more clearly what a happy memory *is*. The second feature of a happy memory is that it is accessible.[111] Here, Ricoeur has in mind what he sometimes referred to as the “work” of memory—the effort it takes for one to successfully recall a specific memory, a specific moment. There is a quasi-economic rule that underlies this accessibility: the less effort required to bring a memory to consciousness, the more accessible it is. Thus, a happy memory is not simply one that lends itself to recollection; it does so with *ease.*

A happy memory is, third, recognizable.[112] What Ricoeur has in mind here is the phenomenological theme of recognition upon which I elaborated in Chapter 2. Whether perceptual or mnemonic, recognition has a similar phenomenological structure: appearance, disappearance, reappearance. In terms of mnemonic recognition, recognition is made possible through the “quasi-hallucinatory” capacity of the imagination.[113] The remembered event is superimposed on top of the mnemonic

---

[111] Ibid, pages 58, 65, 77,98, and 99.
[112] Ibid, pages 391, 414, 429.
[113] Ibid, p. 54.

trace in a way that is analogous to the perceived object being 'squared' with its numerous sides, profiles, and adumbrations. The recognized memory is recognized *as* a memory; phenomenologically, it is (re)presented alongside with "the seal of anteriority".[114] Every happy memory is always already given as being "of the past".[115]

If the concept of a happy memory is nonpathological, accessible, and recognizable, then Ricoeur would maintain that it is, fourthly and finally, discursive.[116] If memory is discursive, then Ricoeur's hermeneutic analysis of memory is consistent with one of the central theses of the entirety of his

---

[114] Ibid, p. 494.

[115] Ibid, p. 15.

[116] Ibid, pages 143, 494 - 496. Interestingly, in *What Makes Us Think?*, Ricoeur rhetorically asks whether the relationship between memory and language—in the form of the scientific/psychological concept of declarative memory—can be properly severed. He specifically asks whether "the prenarrative level [rises] above muteness?" It would seem, then, that my dissertation addresses the questions that he purposefully left open: At the level of human memory, can the link between memory and language be severed? No. Exploring and understanding the meaning of a memory requires interpretation. Does the prenarrative rise above muteness? Yes. In doing so, one helps that which is 'prenarrative' articulate, develop, and become itself, as the quotation that I will (re-)deploy shortly shall go on to say. See Changeux and Ricoeur, *What Makes Us Think?,* p. 145.

hermeneutics—i.e. what I have previously dubbed the "descriptive inescapability"[117] of experience:

> Experience in all its fullness… has an expressibility [*disibilité*] in principle. Experience can be said, it demands to be said. To bring it to language is not to change it into something else, but in articulating and developing it, to make it become itself.[118]

The discursivity of memory can be understood in two ways, and whichever way it is understood, therein lies the necessity to couple memory with narrativity. Memory "demands to be said". First and foremost, the discursive nature of a happy memory means that one is capable of *sharing* one's memories with others—i.e. reminiscing, as I developed it in Chapter 2. Sharing one's memories with others necessarily entails appropriating from the triadic structure of narrativity. The lived experiences one recounts to others are disclosed in the form of a life story, resting on the threefold relation of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration.

Secondly, *prior to* an instance wherein one shares a life story with others, memory is discursive in another capacity. As discursive, one's memories metaphorically 'speak' to the

---

[117] Arca, Kris. "Opaque Selves: A Ricoeurian Response to Galen Strawson's Anti-Narrative Arguments." In *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2018), pp. 70 – 89. DOI 10.595/errs.2018.387.
[118] Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics", p. 39.

subject to whom the memory belongs. Memory itself places on the subject the "demand to be said". In other words, to understand a memory, to understand the meaning of a past lived experience, to understand the meaning of one's present *in relation to* the past, one must interpret one's memories. Doing so requires that one appropriate the features of narrativity. We have arrived, then, at the middle concept of narrated memory.

Narrated memory relies on both personal and collective memory. Personal: Any recounted memory is one that is narrated *by* someone. The activity of recounting a memory contains a claim—i.e. an attestation[119]—concerning the veracity of the experience; the memory has fidelity to the past. In recounting a memory to my best friend, I attest to him that *this really happened to me*. Making this attestation necessarily relies on the *mineness* of memory—the narrated memory conveys that there was something it was like *for me* to endure the experience being remembered, recounted.

---

[119] Fundamental to the notion of attestation is that it entails a relationship of trust. When I attest to someone, I am not only discussing the state of affairs of some thing, I am also asking the person to trust me. As Ricoeur says, "attestation is fundamentally attestation *of* self. This trust will, in turn, be a trust in the power to say, in the power to do, in the power to recognize oneself as a character in a narrative, in the power, finally, to respond to the accusation in the form of the accusative: 'It's me here'". Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 22.

Collective: In order for a memory to be recounted—and in order for the recounted memory to be understood by others—it must appropriate features of narrativity, and these features are conditioned by the tradition to which one belongs, whichever specific tradition it may be.

Through narrated memory, the discursive nature of memory refigures the other three features of a happy memory. Working backwards, the notion of narrated memory refigures recognition. I stated earlier that, phenomenologically, a recognized memory is recognized *as* a memory because it is constituted as being of the past. Through the resources of narrative, the pastness of one's past becomes analogously similar to the pastness of one's tradition. In the same way that the relationship one has with one's tradition is marked by belongingness and distanciation, so too can we find belongingness and distanciation with regard to the relationship with one's past.[120] As such, my past 'belongs' to me, and I to it. Yet, I am capable—through the process of interpreting my life—to discover, uncover, recover, and create meaning that deepens or transcends a pure description of the circumstances of my life—and the same goes for those with whom I share my life story, my selfhood. They are just as capable of discovering meaning

[120] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 496.

that is consistent with—or in *conflict* with—my own interpretation of my life story.

Through narrated memory, an accessible memory is no longer one that is simply easily recalled. It is one that is more fully integrated into one's coherent life story. When recounting such an integrated memory, one can understand more deeply where it 'fits' with regard to one's identity. It illustrates who one was, who one currently is, and who one may become. Mnemonic phenomena, therefore, benefit from the 'discordant concordance' of narrativity. Indeed, as Gildea has recently framed it, Ricoeur's account of narrativity allows for an integrative view of oneself that is a form of "existential healing" capable of responding to the "primordial discord" that depicts the gap between living and reflection.[121] My view is that the 'primordial discord' of which Gildea speaks is one and the same with the way in which I depicted subjectivity in the first chapter of this dissertation: i.e. that of there being a fission with regard to one's relationship with oneself. If 'who' I am is an open question to me, then what better method of closing this gap, of pacifying this discord, and of 'existential healing' is there than narrative memory? What better form of existential health can there be, if not for an account of oneself that is integrated, consistent, and capable of identifying with

---

[121] Iris J. Brooke Gildea, "The Poetics of the Self" in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* volume 9, no. 2 (2018), p. 99.

and living up to the themes, values, and principles that animate one's life-story?

Through the synthetic capacity of narrative, a happy memory refigures its nonpathological characteristic by putting the aporia between memory and imagination to use. The imagination is no longer reducible to its hallucinatory capabilities—as is emphasized in Sartre's analysis. The understanding of the imagination upon which the aporia rests is no longer strictly phenomenological; it is hermeneutic. As Amalric has argued, Ricoeur's hermeneutic understanding of the imagination is *poetic*, rather than *perceptual*; it grants to the subject the capacity to synthesize multiple interpretations of an event, phenomena, or state of affairs, and to put that synthesis into action.[122] To this extent, it is possible to see how this hermeneutic conception of the imagination is able to transpose the noncongruent relationship of ideology and utopia from the collective level to that of the individual level, all contained within the concept of narrative memory. One's ability to interpret, integrate, and narrate one's life story mirrors both the integrative function of ideology as well as the subversive

[122] Amalric, Jean-Luc, "L'imagination poético-pratique dans l'identité narrative," in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* volume 3, no. 2 (2012).

function of utopia; the reception of one's past helps determine the courses of action that shape one's future. In this light, the nonpathological nature of a happy memory ought to be reframed. That memory requires the resources of the (hermeneutic) imagination entails that memory, first and foremost, is not an *epistemological issue*—as in, "how do I know that this memory is true?" Memory is, primarily a theme in philosophical anthropology. The issue is not necessarily about the *veracity* of one's memories, but about whether one is being *faithful* to the events and the experiences of one's past. To designate a memory as a happy memory is to also attest to one's existential authenticity.

Conclusion

I shall conclude by clarifying the underlying argumentative arc of this chapter. Given that the aporia between personal and collective memory is structured similarly to that of the aporia between phenomenological and cosmological time, Ricoeur's theory of narrativity—in addition to other constitutive elements of his hermeneutic philosophy (e.g. being-affected by the past, traditionality)—is capable of responding to the aporia of the subject of memory similarly to how it responds to the aporia of time. Responding to the aporia of time required developing a third, mediating concept of time—historical, or narrated, time. The historical understanding of time weaved together both

phenomenological and cosmological accounts of time. Historical time was also capable of transcending the limits of both phenomenological and cosmological time. In other words, historical time becomes its own paradigm—capable of being understood on its own terms. From this emerged Ricoeur's thesis of being-affected by the past, as well as the dialectic of belongingness and distanciation. Human beings belong to a historical past, and this past both informs the way in which humanity receives the present, while also at the same time sketching out a horizon for future action (and suffering). However, there is also a distance that demarcates humanity's relationship with the past—a temporal fission. This allows humanity to reinterpret its own past, alter the meaning-potential that the past has to offer, and thus, alter the course of human history. Yet, reinterpreting the past necessitates that we are beings capable of utilizing the resources of narrativity in order to uncover or recover the various meaning-potentials contained within the past. History, as I articulated throughout this chapter, has a discursive element.

Being-affected by the past does not only describe humanity's relationship with time, it also describes each individual's relationship with their own life story. In the same way that human beings simultaneously belong to and are distant from human history via the intermediary network

of traditionality, individuals belong to and are distant from *their own* past. In the same way, then, that one may interpret and reinterpret (human) history, one may interpret and reinterpret one's own history, one's own past. Memories lend themselves to this interpretive process, and are that upon which the stories one tells about oneself are based. It is not enough, then, for memory to be viewed or investigated purely from the lens of phenomenology (personal memory) or solely from that of sociology (collective memory). Memory—human memory—is a matter of hermeneutic concern. Human memory is narrated memory. A narrated memory is one that is integrated into a coherent life story, and a coherent life story is made possible by the intersubjective nature of human existence.

Yet, it also seems that we can end this chapter with a question. Besides responding to this specific aporia, what 'use' does a concept like this have, with regard to Ricoeur's hermeneutics? After all, as I said towards the beginning of this chapter, each and every poetic response crafted by Ricoeur was meant to be put to *use*; it was meant to have an impact on human living, action, and interaction. What of this concept? In the forthcoming chapter, I would like to embark upon a 'return path' to everyday living and explore a way in which this concept of narrated memory could apply to one's existential everyday life. I would like to explore the way in

which this concept can be utilized to better understand, ‘process’, or live through the death of another—of a friend or a family member. In this, I hope to demonstrate what narrated memory has to offer outside of the confines of the aporetic structure of the subjective side of memory.

Chapter 4

The Affirmation of (a) Life: Narrative Memory and the Death of the Other

In the previous chapter, I developed the notion of 'narrative' or 'narrated' memory as a response to the aporia between personal and collective memory. The development of this concept has been the culmination of this entire dissertation. It has constituted a response to an unaddressed aporia within Ricoeur's hermeneutic project. Moreover, developing this response entailed weaving together all of Ricoeur's later works, from *Time and Narrative* onward, as well as reconnecting Ricoeur's hermeneutics with the discipline as such. Yet, taken only in this way, the concept of narrative memory could appear to be somewhat artificial. It could be said that the concept is simply a *post hoc* fabrication that may successfully resolve an issue in Ricoeur's work, but beyond this, it offers nothing. Not only, then, would this concept be artificial, it would also be *sterile*, offering little to the activity of philosophizing.

To issue such a judgment is also, I think, to make an error in judgment. As such, it is in response to this claim that this final chapter of my work shall unfold. My aim is to demonstrate not simply how the concept of narrated memory might respond to a problem within Ricoeur's hermeneutics, to fill a 'gap' in the scholarly literature on Ricoeur. My goal is to convey how this concept can extend the philosophical reach of Ricoeurian hermeneutics.

Throughout this dissertation, I have taken care to mention how Ricoeur's work modifies, utilizes, or connects with themes in the existential tradition. Philosophy is born out of the profundity of existence. The depth of this profundity can be witnessed when analyzing the basic features of existence—particularly of human existence. Human existence is unique in that the brute reality of our existence only implicitly suggests the greater significance of existence as such. Or, in other words, that I exist does not necessarily suggest the 'how', the 'as', or the 'why' of (my) existence. Existence—much like our own (narrative) identity—is an open question. Beginning to answer this question takes a great deal of courage. Confronting existence—confronting human existence—entails struggling with themes that animate one's life—love, sexuality, friendship, death. The struggle is always a personal one, for it involves one in one's own fullness—I cannot be indifferent to the underlying

significance of my own finitude. Yet, however difficult, the fruit of the struggle is greater insight into one's relationship with oneself, with others, and with one's surrounding world—and, I should add, with existence as such.

Thus, it is one of the great themes of existence that I will explore in this dissertation's final chapter. In order to show the viability of the concept of narrative memory in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, I shall explore the death of a loved one—the death of 'an' other, of the other, of a person.[1] Despite the importance of Heidegger's claim that one's relationship with one's own death occupies a special place of privilege in the existential task of living authentically, I think Heidegger fails to realize the significance of the fact that, for many, the first encounter with death—the first encounter with the profundity of the finitude of human existence—stems from the death of another in one's life, e.g. a grandparent, parent, friend, or a partner. Indeed, one's relationship with one's own death is not the *only*—or even *the last* word concerning death. To the extent that the significance of the death of another remains unthought, one will be deprived of, and ill

---

[1] I shall use these terms interchangeably. I am avoiding the capitalization of the 'Other' because I want to indicate that by 'an' other, I am referring to a specific person, as opposed to the broader theme of otherness or alterity.

equipped to cope with, the loss that follows the final moments of a loved one's life.

The reality of death is not absent in Ricoeur's work.[2] However, none of Ricoeur's later works manage to make the death of another an explicit and full theme. There are traces, to be sure, but the analysis is always couched in the scope of a larger project. Indeed, a more focused essay on death by Ricoeur—later posthumously published as *Living Up to Death*[3]—was abandoned by him prior to its completion.[4] What it presents in published format is only sketches and notes—thus showing more about the underlying process as to the way in which Ricoeur worked in the earliest stages of writing, than it does about death, and in particular, that of another person.

What I would like to show is how the concept of narrative memory can help clarify the experience of the death of another, and what instruction it might provide for those who

---

[2] Not to mention the tragedies that marked his life: the death of his parents in childhood, the suicide of his son, Olivier, the death of his wife, Simone.

[3] Ricoeur, Paul. *Living Up to Death*. Translated by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

[4] An afterword in *Living up to Death* written by one of Ricoeur's close friends suggests that Ricoeur began writing the essay during the decline of Simone Ricoeur's health in the mid- to late-90's. His abandonment of the essay fostered speculation that the emotional burden of writing it became too great for him. See, *Living Up to Death*, p. 92.

must continue to live. My thesis here is threefold: 1) Narrative memory deepens the significance of Ricoeur's understanding of intersubjectivity by revealing a hitherto hidden layer of meaning in his claim of 'living the good life with and for others'.[5] Narrative memory brings out what it might mean to live *for* another, after they have died. 2) Narrated memory suggests what 'becomes' of the person once they have died. A person becomes the stories that we tell of them as we continue to live, and continue to keep them 'alive'—albeit figuratively—through these shared stories and memories. 3) The 'work' of remembering the other ultimately teaches one to affirm life, even in its harshness.

This chapter shall unfold in two major sections. Since the focus of this chapter is on the experience of the death of another with whom one shares a close relationship, I will first develop Ricoeur's understanding of intersubjectivity, with an emphasis on illustrating the impact that the alterity of the other has on an individual's capacity to understand oneself in terms of one's ipseity. Ricoeur's account of intersubjectivity lays out the broader hermeneutic framework from which being with another as they die can be more firmly understood, and thus serves as the necessary first step in this analysis. Second, I will focus on both the phenomenological

---

[5] Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself As Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 172.

hermeneutics of being with someone as they die, as well as how narrative memory is able to respond to *surviving* the death of another person. After completing these two sections, the chapter will conclude by revisiting the three theses of this chapter, in order to clearly state how they have been established.

I. Between Ipseity and Alterity

Ricoeur's understanding of intersubjectivity has been obliquely referenced throughout this entire work. In the first chapter, I emphasized the importance of one's intersubjective relationship with others in order for the emergence of one's narrative identity. It is because of my relationship with others that I am 'called' to give an account of myself; it is the other who first calls me into question, and my response to this question is to address in narrative terms a summons that strikes me at the heart of my very subjectivity. The self-constancy of ipseity is fully expressed through the features of narrativity, and the demand for self-constancy emerges with and through the relationship with others.

In the second chapter, I made note of how different forms of remembering involve one's intersubjective relations. Indeed, that memory has a worldly component announces, either directly or indirectly, the intersubjective relationship with others. The worldly component of memory does not just

denote that every memory is a memory of a past event that takes place in a worldly setting, or that social institutions have an obligation to 'remember' and 'recount' important historical events of our collective past(s). The worldly component of memory *also* implies one's concrete relations with others. How often do friends gather—and how often during these times of gathering, do friends take especial joy in reminiscing together, with each account of a past event cascading from the others'?

Indeed, these special moments of gathering together with, sharing stories around, and laughing amongst friends involve nothing other than narrative memory—the center of this dissertation's third chapter. I do not need to say much, considering that chapter's recency, to remind the reader that the 'place' from out of which I could develop this notion was precisely that of the intersubjective relationship with (and for) others. Thus, what about this intersubjective relationship? How does Ricoeur approach intersubjectivity? How is it consistent with that of his predecessors (Husserl, for instance) and his contemporaries (Merleau-Ponty, Levinas)? How is it different? I shall answer both of these questions accordingly.

1. Ricoeur, in typical fashion, has a lot in common with the various figures in phenomenology where it concerns the question of intersubjectivity. Indeed, Ricoeur's

understanding of intersubjectivity touches upon virtually all of the different answers through which phenomenology has explored the topic. According to Zahavi, the phenomenological tradition has, generally speaking, understood intersubjectivity in four different ways[6]: 1) Empathy; 2) Embodiment; 3) Shared being-in-the-world; and 4) the confrontation with radical alterity.[7] As such, phenomenology endorses what he calls a "multidimensional approach", as each way touches upon an important feature of our intersubjective lives.[8] I shall spare only a few words for each, but only so that I can transition from there to focusing on what makes Ricoeur's approach unique, despite his indebtedness to phenomenology.

---

[6] I should note that not all of these ways are compatible with each other. Indeed, some of them have actually been developed in direct response to others. By way of example: Sartre's own account of intersubjectivity is precipitated on a critique of Heidegger's conception, while Levinas's account is both a response to Husserl's and Heidegger's differing accounts. See Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, pp. 161 – 174.

[7] Ibid, pp. 148 - 174. The astute reader will easily recognize Edith Stein and Husserl for empathy, Merleau-Ponty for embodiment, Heidegger for being-in-the-world, and Levinas for the confrontation with radical alterity. Though I will hasten to add that Zahavi, to varying degrees of success, argues that Husserl is able to anticipate *all* of his successors in all the various approaches to intersubjectivity—what a father figure.

[8] Ibid, p. 174.

On empathy, the work of Edith Stein continues to be equally well-regarded and under-appreciated. The importance of a phenomenology of empathy, of course, stems from the analysis of the empathic experience as such. Empathy can be understood as having its own form of intentional givenness, where the other is perceived, not as an object of experience, but a subject with their own intentional relationship with the world.[9] I should note briefly, however, that insofar as the empathic experience is a direct and unmediated experience, Ricoeur's approach to intersubjectivity will intersect the least here.[10] That said,

---

[9] Stein, Edith *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989, p. 12. Consider what Stein has to say when comparing her view with that of Lipps: "Lipps depicts empathy as an 'inner participation' in foreign experiences. Doubtless, this is equivalent to our highest level of the consummation of empathy—where we are 'at' the foreign subject and turned to its object".

[10] Ricoeur does discuss the phenomenological analysis of empathy more fully in a little-known essay (at least to the American audience) titled "*Sympathie et respect. Phénoménologie et éthique de la seconde personne",* in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 59 (1954) 380-397. Here, Ricoeur observes that the phenomenology of empathy is just as originary as experiences as hatred, jealousy, or even antipathy. As such, an account of intersubjectivity must be grounded on an even more fundamental analysis—which he posits as the freedom of both oneself and another, and which is the source of the Kantian respect for persons. See also, Anckaert, "Respect for the Other: The 'Place' of the Thou in

Ricoeur does have a positive appraisal of one implication of the phenomenology of empathy: “The givenness of the other never allows me to live the experiences of the other, and in this case, can never be connected into an originary presentation.”[11] Insofar as what the other experiences in their own first person perspective remains foreign to oneself, the phenomenology of empathy may be a way of introducing the radical alterity of the other.[12]

The phenomenology of embodiment plays an important role in understanding the nature of intersubjectivity in that the body’s “two-sidedness” announces one’s own interiority and one’s own exteriority (for others).[13] What comes to mind here is Merleau-Ponty’s famous example of touching one’s

---

Ricoeur’s Ethics”. In *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricoeur’s Ethical Order*. Edited by H. Opdebeek. Leuven: Peeters, 2000, pp. 37 – 50.

[11] Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself As Another*, p. 337.

[12] That is, despite the controversy such a thought will cause to a convinced Levinasian. From Levinas’s perspective insofar as empathy entails a form of representation, it denies the alterity of the other, and thus, cannot constitute an authentic encounter with the other. I should also add that Levinas’s resistance to the phenomenology of empathy may also stem from the fact that the phenomenological analysis of empathy tends to be treated as an epistemic concern (i.e. about *knowing* the other, or from the perspective of analytic philosophy of mind, about the possibility of knowing *other minds*). Yet, for Levinas, our intersubjective relationship with others is not primarily epistemological, but rather, ethical.

[13] Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood, p.* 156.

own hands. The ambiguity at the heart of this touching/being touched relation entails an inner alterity that makes intersubjectivity possible.[14] My own position is that Ricoeur's understanding of embodiment builds upon that which we find in Merleau-Ponty, and as such, is the best entry point into understanding Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to intersubjectivity.[15] Since this is the case, I will remain silent here, in terms of offering a quick Ricoeurian response as I did with empathy. I shall only suggest that my position here concerning the connection between these two thinkers is not unfounded, as Ricoeur makes explicit reference Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body within the pages of *Oneself as Another* that also attempt to capitulate the interplay of sameness and alterity entailed in embodiment.[16]

To that of being-in-the-world, we are entering, most obviously, into Heideggerian territory, where one's being is announced 'always already' as a being-with, or a being-

---

[14] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Kegan Paul. New York: Routledge Classics, 2002, p. 93.
[15] Indeed, one can get a glimpse of this in *The Course of Recognition*, where Ricoeur briefly criticizes Husserl's account of intersubjectivity in *The Cartesian Meditations*. According to Ricoeur, a flaw in Husserl's approach in this text is that his analysis of the body is one that makes "no reference" to alterity. See, *The Course of Recognition,* p. 155.
[16] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 321.

alongside others. Here, the projects in which one is absorbed, and about which one manifests one's care, suggests an intersubjective life as an *a priori* network of relationships. In the same way that the equipmentality of a hammer gains greater significance from the practical connections that are made in the activity of work—e.g. one hammers on a work table with nails, so that one can fashion a frame out of wood, for the sake of displaying a completed jigsaw puzzle—so too does an activity like, say, writing a dissertation, entail a network of intersubjective relationships. One writes a dissertation so that one can have the prestige of one's peers, the joy of one's family, and the silent, almost begrudging respect of one's doctoral supervisor.[17] Moreover, an activity like that of writing a dissertation rests on the fact that intersubjectivity is its *a priori* condition of possibility. If it was not the case that human existence was not 'always already' intersubjective, most human actions would be impossible. In Heideggerian terms, Dasein is essentially a being that is in-the-world.[18] Further, being-in-the-world

---

[17] I have known Prof. Anckaert since 2007. I think by now I can get away with including a joke in the main body of my work—without mentioning all the little jokes I have hidden in my footnotes throughout this dissertation. (You only just noticed?).

[18] My own analysis of intersubjectivity in Heidegger's work is based off of section 26 of *Being and Time*. See Heidegger,

entails a network of relations with equipment that is ready-to-hand. However, the network of relations that follows from that which is ready-to-hand does not *only* entail other pieces of equipment. This network also refers to others.[19] Others, then, are not phenomenologically 'given' to Dasein as something ready-to-hand, nor even something present-at-

---

Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962, pp. 152 – 162.

[19] One can accept the examples I gave at the beginning of this paragraph (using a hammer to make something, or writing a dissertation), or, if one prefers, one could also go along with the examples Heidegger gives: Walking alongside the border of a field discloses that the field belongs to another; crafting something out of raw material entails that there was someone who was able to extract the material from the land; sewing an article of clothing entails that there is another for whom the piece of clothing is intended, and therefore, one must make sure that this clothing is able to fit their figure. This list of examples is not exhaustive, but I think it shows clearly that there are various ways Dasein's being-in-the-world refers to others. Indeed, the ones I listed here are curated to illustrate a small subset of possibilities. That of walking alongside a field is one of being unconcerned, uninvolved in the affairs of, or indifferent towards the other that is disclosed; utilizing materials that were extracted by another discloses a continuity between oneself and another, in terms of carrying a project to its fruition; and that of making something for another is (or can be) a way of introducing the theme of 'care' as it relates to intersubjectivity in Heidegger's phenomenology—though I will have to take greater care in unpacking what 'care' is for Heidegger when it is directed towards another. See *Being and Time*, pp. 153 – 154.

hand. The 'Being' of another is disclosed to one as that of Dasein. As Heidegger says it:

> Thus Dasein's world frees entities which not only are quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also—in accordance with their kind of Being *as Dasein* themselves—are 'in' the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are 'in' it by way of Being-in-the-world. These entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand; on the contrary they are *like* the very Dasein which frees them, in that *they are there too, and there with it*.[20]

If others are disclosed as (also) Dasein, and therefore as being-in-the-world, then 'my' being-in-the-world is one that I share 'with' and 'alongside' others; Dasein is Mitdasein.[21] It is here in this being-with or being-alongside others where care for others manifests itself as *Fürsorge*, which, for Heidegger, in its most authentic form, is that of being able to help another Dasein 'grasp' the importance of the care one must have towards existence as such, so that the other can more authentically relate to their own (relationship with) being.[22]

---

[20] Ibid., p. 154.
[21] Ibid., p. 155.
[22] Take, for instance, the following quotation: "[*Fürsorge*] helps the Other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and to become *free for* it." See Ibid., p. 159.

While I do think there is a lot here to which Ricoeur would be sympathetic—especially considering the indirect nature of this account of intersubjectivity, and the way in which these relationships might add layers of meaning-potential, requiring feats of interpretation through which to actualize said potential—it does offer me a moment to make two notes, alongside of Kemp. The first is that one of Ricoeur's more salient critiques of Heideggerian being-in-the-world is that Heidegger seemed to have had a missed opportunity—so seduced was he by the mystique of Dasein—to have properly re-thought the way in which embodiment features into one's being-in-the-world.[23] The second is that of a missed opportunity on Ricoeur's part in his critical appraisal of Heidegger. According to Kemp, one of the limitations of Heideggerian *Fürsorge* is that it ultimately serves to reaffirm Heidegger's insistence towards the resolute and solitary nature of Dasein. The result is that Heidegger's work does not allow a proper space for the radical alterity of the other to intercept one's subjectivity, and as such, there can be no ethics that results from Heidegger's work, besides simply elevating the 'letting be of beings' to some sort of quasi-duty.

---

[23] See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 326 – 329. See, also, P. Kemp, "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas", in *The Hermeneutics of Action*, edited by Richard Kearney, London: Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 41 – 62, p. 50.

Given, as I will later show, the importance of solicitude in Ricoeur's own conception of intersubjectivity, it is surprising that Ricoeur failed to articulate a criticism of Heidegger's conception of intersubjectivity on these grounds.[24]

Lastly is the radical alterity of the other. Unlike the other understandings of intersubjectivity, where the initiative to constitute the alterity of the other is placed entirely on the subject (i.e. empathy—and to an extent, embodiment), or where the alterity of the other is (always) already there, *a priori* (i.e. shared being-in-the-world), the confrontation with the radical alterity of the other entails that it is the other who constitutes the subject. This is best espoused in the work

---

[24] Of course, I shouldn't fail to mention that Kemp's position of Ricoeur's missed opportunity is also a very Levinasian critique of Heidegger. However, he makes no reservations of showing the Levinasian roots from which this criticism stems, noting that Levinas is one of the few French philosophers of this time to lay out such a forceful critique of Heidegger's ontology. That said, while I agree with Kemp's assessment that Ricoeur's criticisms of Heidegger entailed a missed opportunity to critique him more deeply, I also think that, by the time of the publication of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, we can see a shift in Ricoeur's reception of Heidegger. Indeed, as I will go on to show later in this chapter, where it concerns both Heidegger's and Levinas's differing conceptions of death, Ricoeur is going to side much more closely with the Levinasian approach as opposed to the Heideggerian. In any case, for Kemp's description of Ricoeur's missed opportunity, see Kemp, "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas", pp. 50 – 53.

of Levinas, where the face of the other is that which resists becoming a phenomenon—and as such, is rather an epiphany that announces the priority and primacy of the ethical dimension of one's intersubjective life through the commandment forbidding murder.[25] In this way, the alterity of the other escapes any epistemological reduction to the same, as the other's arrival at the scene of address ruptures one's comfort. In the urgency of this break from the careless *jouissance* of one's life, one encounters, not just the alterity of the other, but the duty to be responsible for the other.[26]

There is much to the Levinasian approach that leaves one in awe—and, indeed, there is much to Ricoeur's approach that is indebted to Levinas. However, insofar as Levinas's approach entails a conception of selfhood that rests on a hard distinction between the same and the other, and insofar as that which is understood as the same is also equated with that which seeks to only establish a totality, one has to wonder whether intersubjectivity is actually *possible* in

---

[25] Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, see, especially the section "Ethics and the Face", pp. 197 – 201.

[26] Culminating, of course, in the Levinasian substitution of the same for the other. Levinas, Immanuel. *Otherwise than Being*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998, pp. 113 – 118.

Levinas's framework.[27] How can one ever respond to the address of the other, if we hold that the other is entirely foreign? Can a Levinasian respond to this question and still remain a committed Levinasian?

One possible response is to argue that the language that Levinas employs in order to describe the separation between the 'same' and the 'other' should not be taken literally; but is rather the product of Levinas's style of writing, which is laden with both urgency and hyperbole.[28] However, Ricoeur anticipates this response:

> Hyperbole, in fact, simultaneously reaches both poles, the Same and the Other. It is remarkable that *Totality and Infinity* begins by establishing an ego possessed by the desire to form a circle with itself, to identify itself… [The] ego before the encounter with the other (it would be better to say, the ego before it is broken

---

[27] See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 337 – 341. See, also, Anckaert, *A Critique of Infinity,* Peeters: Leuven, 2006, pp. 93 – 106. According to Anckaert's own analysis, if alterity is absolute, then one cannot know the other, and if one cannot know the other, then one cannot also know what ought to be done on behalf of the other.

[28] As Kemp's work has shown, given Levinas's analysis of both love and parenthood in *Totality and Infinity*, it is quite difficult to maintain that Levinas's language concerning the separation between oneself and the other was meant to be taken literally. See, "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas", p. 57.

> into by the other) is a stubbornly closed, locked up, separate ego. The theme of separation, as bound up as it is with phenomenology—with a phenomenology of egotism—already bears the mark of hyperbole: hyperbole expressed in the virulence of a declaration such as this: "In separation . . . the I is ignorant of the Other" (*Totality and Infinity*, p. 62). For an ego such as this, incapable of the Other, the epiphany of the face (still a phenomenological theme) signifies an absolute exteriority, that is, a nonrelative exteriority (a theme belonging to the dialectic of the "great kinds").[29]

Indeed, Ricoeur goes on to show that the hyperbole of *Totality and Infinity* only becomes more radical in *Otherwise Than Being*, which has a hyperbolic language that approaches a "paroxysm".[30] However, to the extent that it is a paroxysm, Ricoeur would maintain that it is a detriment to Levinas's analysis, as the other is no longer someone with whom I can engage in discourse, someone with whom I can share the task of living, but is rather a persecutor that oppresses one's subjectivity into a total passivity.[31] As such, though it is

---

[29] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 337.
[30] Ibid., p. 338.
[31] Kemp, "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas", p. 55. As a complete tangential side note, I would wonder if this might serve as the framework of a critical reading of contemporary 'cancel culture', as it is often called. On the one hand, the ideal

possible to defend Levinas from the initial criticism developed above, I think Ricoeur is able to anticipate this defense, and still maintain that there's a problematic line of thinking that underlies Levinas's work.

I shall continue to develop this criticism after I have more firmly established Ricoeur's own account of the intersubjective relationship. For now, however, I think have shown the lines of continuity and discontinuity that Ricoeur has with the phenomenological tradition, broadly construed. What remains to be shown, then, is what is unique about Ricoeur's analysis of intersubjectivity.

2. As I have articulated throughout this dissertation, *Oneself as Another* marked an important point in Ricoeur's hermeneutics—a point where the broader conclusions of *Time and Narrative* could be reflected back towards the subject, in order to show the contributions that hermeneutics

---

towards which cancel culture projects itself is certainly important—to the extent that institutional structures and systems have failed to address the abuses of power that marginalized populations have had to endure, cancel culture is a powerful way for those who have been abused to have their voices, their stories, heard and recognized. On the other hand, how often has cancel culture itself led to reconciliation? How often has the abuser-turned-accused recognized, through the act of being cancelled, that their pattern of behavior has contributed to a degradation of the values that are meant to underly a democracy?

has to offer the topic (and the problem) of selfhood. Ricoeur's guiding insight was, in his words:

> [The] assertion that the self only constitutes its identity through a relational structure that places the dialogical dimension above the monological one inherited from the great tradition of reflective philosophy, which is tempted to privilege the latter rather than the former.[32]

As such, intersubjectivity plays a prominent role in Ricoeur's later hermeneutics, as the relationship with the other is the condition of possibility for selfhood.

Ricoeur's original contribution to the question of intersubjectivity is twofold. First, he stresses the polysemic nature of the other to whom one dialogically relates. Second, Ricoeur's contribution stems from establishing a hermeneutic circle between the ipseity of the (one)self and the alterity of the other (than) self.

From Ricoeur's perspective, the dialogical relationship between oneself and the other is polysemic. On the one hand, the dialogical relation is that of an 'I-thou' relation, where the underlying understanding is that the 'thou' to whom 'I' speak and by whom I am addressed is also a being capable of

---

[32] Ricoeur, "Preface" in *The Just*, translated by David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. XII

referring back to themself as an 'I'.[33] In this sense, it is in the face-to-face that I address myself to another, and the tools of narrativity become reconfigured to make possible my narrative identity.[34]

On the other hand, the dialogical relation is incomplete if it remains a relation between the first and the second person. There is also the question of the third person. For Ricoeur, the third 'person' is not necessarily a particular person,[35] it is that of an 'anyone' or an 'everyone'—represented by the institutional mediations that are present at the heart of every I-thou relation.[36]

---

[33] Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?", in *The Just*, p. 6.
[34] The specifics of which were covered in the first chapter of this dissertation.
[35] I say "not necessarily", however, I recognize that it *can* be another person. Moreover, when another person *is* involved, Ricoeur would point out that the 'third' person in question usually plays that of the role of an impartial mediator between an 'I' and a 'thou'—such as a judge, which is Ricoeur's example *par excellence*. But the role of a judge, in the juridical sense brings up a whole host of other questions, particularly that of the phenomenological structure of the act of judging itself, which rests on position that being a capable person also entails being a *culpable* person, and which has the teleological goal establishing social peace. See, Ricoeur, "The Act of Judging", in *The Just*, pp. 127 – 132.
[36] In this sense, it should also be quite clear—to return to a figure I invoked at the introduction of this dissertation—that the I-thou relation in Ricoeur's hermeneutics is not at all similar to that of the Buberian conception of the I-thou relation, which Buber described as being a direct and

While the focus of this chapter is on the intersubjective face-to-face relation in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, insofar as the death of a significant other presupposes the primary relation to the other was that of a face-to-face relation, because the two accounts of otherness in Ricoeur's work are inextricably interrelated, I shall briefly show the way in which institutions mediate with the face-to-face, before primarily focusing on it.

2a. The most direct route to show the mediation of social institutions in the intersubjective relation is to revisit the central features of the Ricoeurian concept of the capable person, the "I can", in order to show how each feature involves both conceptions of otherness. As I showed in the second chapter of this work, Ricoeur's concept of the capable person became a cornerstone of his philosophical anthropology from *Oneself as Another* onward through *The Just* and *The Course of Recognition*.[37]

---

unmediated relation, bordering on a full-blown mystical experience.

[37] In fact, it is in *The Just* where Ricoeur most forcefully views the concept of the capable person through a sociopolitical lens, claiming that only through being a member of a state through citizenship can one fully realize oneself as a person. See, for instance, the essay, "Who is the Subject of Rights?", especially p. 10. The proficient reader of political philosophy from the 'continental' tradition may also recognize a connection to Hannah Arendt in this position. Ricoeur explores this connection more fully in *The Just*, in one of the concluding essays, "Aesthetic and Political Judgment

Despite the breadth of works—and the span of time between each work—the presentation of the concept of the capable self remains consistent throughout Ricoeur's various projects that involve the "I can". Being a capable self entails the capacity for the following features: 1) Speaking; 2) Action; 3) Narration; 4) Imputation.[38]

At root in the capacity for speech is the reflexivity implicit in the first-person indexical phrase of "I". One's capacity to perform speech-acts entails the capacity to *identify* oneself as the utterer of a sentence—and by extension, a performer of an action.[39] The intersubjective component of this capacity, in terms of a face-to-face relation can be inferred quite easily. It is in a moment of interlocution, where I am called on by another, questioned or confronted by another, that I address myself and speak to the other. Yet, as Ricoeur adds, this moment of dialogue is 'always already' mediated by social institutions—which lay out the foundations for the grammatical rules that allow for language to be meaningful in the first place, and may also be involved in the 'scene of

---

According to Hannah Arendt". A reference to citizenship here is also made on p. 108 of the essay.

[38] To which I noted in Chapter 2 that Ricoeur added the capacity for memory in *The Course of Recognition*.

[39] See Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?", p. 2, or Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 94.

address' in which the moment of dialogue transpires.[40] Within the confines of *The Just*, Ricoeur stresses the role institutions play in establishing the expectation that members in a dialogical exchange will act towards each other in accordance with fidelity.[41] That is to say, because of the complexities that emerge from the social nature of our lives, it is of the utmost importance that people are able to *trust* one another when speaking to each other; the duty to fidelity testifies to that very aim. Interestingly, in *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur adds that the institutional mediation between oneself and another in the dialogical relation entails that part of one's cultural tradition that governs the underlying rules towards how one identifies oneself in accordance with the structure of one's family or broader heritage.[42] This culminates, then, in one's capacity to identify oneself as, for example, "Kris Arca, doctoral student at the

---

[40] Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?" p. 6. I borrow the phrase "scene of address" from Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself,* cited throughout this dissertation, but especially in Chapter 1.

[41] Ibid, p. 6. This moral component should not come as a surprise, as the essays contained in *The Just* were compiled around the period of *Oneself as Another*. Indeed, much of Ricoeur's preface to *The Just* entails a brief summation of the "little ethics" that arose out of and within *Oneself as Another.* Thus, it is very much in the light of *Oneself as Another* that *The Just* should be received by the reader of Ricoeur.

[42] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 96.

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, and assistant professor of philosophy at Miami Dade College."

The capable self is also able to perform actions within the world, and in this way, is able to 'make (something) happen'.[43] As I stated in the second chapter of this dissertation, this feature of the "I can" brings to the fore the *agency* of the subject.[44] As the agent of (an) action, one is able to view oneself as being 'the cause' of an action in the world. A degree of care, however, needs to go into the capacity to view oneself as a cause'. Indeed, in both *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur reflects on the question as to whether, if an agent is meant to be seen as the cause' of an action, it remains meaningful to hold actions as being ontologically distinct from events. Suffice to say, from Ricoeur's perspective, the important distinction that can be drawn between an action, on the one hand, and an event, on the other, is that human actions can be predicated by an agent's motives and intentions. As such, while one can speak of an event purely on the basis of cause and effect, one can speak of a human action on the basis of motives. From there, one can move from the action in question to the agent responsible for the action. Indeed, it is in this move from

---

[43] Ibid, p. 97.

[44] Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?", p. 3.

action to agent that allows one to 'ascribe'[45] an action to an agent:

> The term *ascription* points to the specific character of attribution when this has to do with the connection between action and its agent, of which we say that he or she *possesses* it, that it is "his," "hers," that he or she *appropriates* it… ascription is directed to the agent's capacity to designate him- or herself as someone who does or who has done this. It binds the what and the how to the who.[46]

The face-to-face component of action stems from the fact that one's actions belong to a network of interaction that directly involves others somewhere between the polarity of collaboration and competition.[47] Indeed, this broader network of interaction includes the intermediary role of social institutions, which grant to us the symbolic framework that can be used in order to properly contextualize and interpret the meaning or significance of an action as it becomes part of a greater whole of a chain of action-

---

[45] As Pellauer mentions in the English translation of *The Just*, in the French text, Ricoeur does not use the term ascription, but rather the French, *assignation*, which carries the connotation of a court summons. See page 2 of "Who is the Subject of Rights?"

[46] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 98. The italics are Ricoeur's.

[47] See Ricoeur, "Who is the Subject of Rights?", p. 6.

sequences.[48] Take, for instance, both individual and collective actions being done to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. Whether these efforts are fruitful hinges upon the rubric(s) by which we can determine whether specific strategies and courses of action are consistent with what is currently known within the environmental sciences regarding climate change as such. Such criteria, then, constitutes the broader context by which we can interpret these actions. Indeed, since the body of knowledge brought to us by the environmental sciences can grow and shift over time, it is possible that criteria that was once used in order to positively appraise a course of action can change, resulting in a much different assessment of the action.

I would hope that, by this point in this dissertation, I do not need to say much about the features of narrative identity within Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In *Oneself as Another*, as I framed it in the first chapter of this dissertation, narrative identity is a response to the problem of diachronic unity. The mimetic triad of narrativity is appropriated by the subject for the sake of gaining a greater sense of self-understanding, both in terms of the lived-experiences that one has endured,

---

[48] See Ricoeur, "The Model of a Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" in *From Text to Action*, ed. and trans. by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 145.

and in terms of the (remaining) project(s) entailed by one's life-plan. Narrative identity is the connective tissue between idem- and ipse-identity, and is the ground upon which Ricoeur develops his "little ethics", aiming towards a conception of subjectivity that is capable of flourishing (in terms of eudaimonia) while sharing a life with others in just institutions. Indeed, from the first chapter of this dissertation, I indicated the importance that the face-to-face relation has in the cultivation of one's narrative identity, for it is the other who calls me into question, and it is to the other that I recount my life story. Even further is the fact that my life story is part of the life stories of others (and theirs with mine). Further still, the tropes from which one appropriates in order to formulate their narrative identity inevitably belong to a tradition of some sort—or to various traditions, given the multicultural backdrop in which most of us live. These traditions lay out the varying symbolic ways in which one can come to understand oneself, with and for others.

We arrive, finally, at the feature of imputability, where we also discover the full-blown conception of the moral self. By being able to attest to one's actions, and to situate them within the larger confines of one's life's story, one can also appropriate the "ethico-moral" predicates of both goodness

and obligation, thereby 'recognizing (one's) responsibility'.[49] Responsibility to whom? Certainly, and at least partially, to one's self. That is, insofar as Ricoeur's ethical project entails the cultivation of virtuous habits of character that contribute to one's capacity to flourish, then one has a responsibility to make the attempt to live in accordance with virtue. But clearly, Ricoeur is no ethical egoist. One's responsibility extends beyond the confines of oneself and also includes others. In this sense, Ricoeur speaks of the way accounting metaphors have figured into our understanding of the morality of an action:

> This metaphor suggests the idea of an obscure moral accountability of merits and faults, as in a double-entry bookkeeping system of credits and debits, with

---

[49] See Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 105. See also, "Who is the Subject of Rights?" p. 4. The "ethico-moral" distinction between the good and the obligatory gains greater significance when cast in the light of *Oneself as Another*, part of the project of that text, in developing Ricoeur's "little ethics" is precisely that of finding the point of unification between the eudaimonic tradition of Ancient Greek virtue ethics, and the tradition of autonomy and respect for human dignity in deontology, with Kant serving the emblematic role. Moreover, the phrase "recognizing responsibility" is one that Ricoeur utilizes throughout *The Course of Recognition*, though he acknowledges that it stems from Bernard Williams's work, *Shame and Necessity*.

> a view to a kind of positive or negative balance sheet.[50]

To the extent that the goal of a subject's moral life is to 'balance' one's moral account(s)[51]—perhaps better still, to have 'surplus credit' in one's moral account(s)—we inevitably arrive at the conception of retributive justice, championed, of course, by Kant. For is it not the goal of retributive systems of justice to issue punishments and reparations such that the balance between oneself and another can be restored?[52] Of course, the Kantian interpretation of justice is not the only conception. Within Ricoeur's work, it is the mid-point between the Aristotelian conception—tethered still to the cultivation of virtue, and

---

[50] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 106.

[51] As De Leeuw has shown, there is a limitation to this metaphor, in that it depicts an intersubjective life that is, ultimately one of struggle between self and other. One struggles to maintain this balance, struggles to ensure that the community in which one lives is also a just community 'with and for others'. However, this struggle need not be the *only* way in which intersubjectivity manifests itself. There could be—and, as De Leeuw goes on to argue that, in the closing sections of *The Course of Recognition*, there certainly is—a space for a relationship with others that is based on an agapeic exchange between self and other, with no real concern over 'the balance'. See De Leeuw's "Paul Ricoeur's Search for a Just Community", in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2017), pp. 46 – 54, especially pp. 50 – 52.

[52] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 108.

thus, to the desire for 'the good life' of eudaimonia—and the Rawlsian conception—operating, not at the individual level, but at the institutional level.[53] Moreover, Rawls's conception of justice as fairness goes beyond the punitive form of Kant's retributivism, and situates itself over the distribution of goods, rights, and responsibilities for the sake of the common good.[54] To be clear, I do not want to give the impression that Ricoeur is a card-carrying Rawlsian in his conception of (institutional) justice.[55] In *The Just*, Ricoeur makes it quite

---

[53] Ricoeur, "Is a Procedural Theory of Justice Possible?" in *The Just*, pp. 36 – 37.

[54] Ibid, p. 37. I should also add that it is also an attempt to formulate a system of justice that is able to overcome the problem that utilitarian conceptions are faced with—that of instituting a system of justice that has no moral qualms with creating scapegoats for the benefit, not of the commonwealth, but of the many.

[55] Indeed, as the works of both Benjamin Coy Hutchens and Maureen Junker-Kenny have shown, there is reason to believe that Ricoeur's Rawls is, well, not very Rawlsian. As Hutchens has argued, the issue is that Ricoeur searches for a hermeneutic circle in Rawls's work—specifically on whether Rawls's conception of justice is 'pre-understood' prior to its concrete development after the veil of ignorance—where they may not be one at all. As such, the criticism of Rawls that he derives, namely, that procedural forms of justice should be evaluated with high levels of scrutiny, is a criticism of which Rawls was well aware. See Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Religion and Public Reason: A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, especially pp. 14 – 17. See also Benjamin Coy Hutchens, "Ricoeur's Rawls: Constitutive Antecedents and

clear that where he and Rawls differ is in Ricoeur's insistence that justice should also be tethered to the individual level in the wish to live a fulfilling life.[56] Nevertheless, the Rawlsian ideal that everyone should have equal access to the most basic rights, and that, where social and economic inequalities are inevitable, institutions shall ensure that the distribution of these inequalities is to everyone's advantage follows Ricoeur up to the final pages of *The Course of Recognition*.[57]

Reflective Equilibrium", In *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020), pp. 130 - 143. DOI 10.595/errs.2020.388.

[56] Ricoeur, "Preface" in *The Just*, p. XIX.

[57] I am thinking especially of the passages within the final chapter of *The Course of Recognition* that Ricoeur devotes to the challenges of mutual recognition in multicultural societies, where underprivileged minorities often struggle to earn the recognition of equal respect in the society of which they are a part. Indeed, the struggle for recognition here is one of both individual and collective dignity. In these passages, Ricoeur relies heavily on Charles Taylor's essay, "The Politics of Recognition", which goes far to demonstrate that such struggles for recognition bring out the limitations of the classical liberal definition of equality. If equality is seen in terms of some universal identity, what is to stop this universalistic understanding to secretly mask only a particular kind of person (white or male), and therefore, form a kind of hegemony? As Ricoeur recapitulates it: "it is universal identity that appears as discriminatory, a form of particularism disguising itself as a universal principle" (p. 215). But then comes the danger of calls of 'reverse-discrimination' when there is an attempt to institutionalize some form of special treatment that is meant to rehabilitate

Through the integration of the role that alterity has in the establishment of the capable self, I believe I have shown how social institutions mediate with and through the face-to-face relation. I shall now turn to the face-to-face relation in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, in particular the relationship with a significant other—e.g. a friend—in order to show how there is a hermeneutic circle that forms between oneself and another.

2b. In *Oneself as Another*, friendship is the model form from which Ricoeur develops the face-to-face relationship.[58] As

---

the sense of dignity that underprivileged minorities find lacking. Thus, the dilemma: the classical liberal form of equality cannot, by itself, right this wrong, but neither can special treatment. How to respond? Note the Rawlsian undertones in Ricoeur's suggestion: whatever the response is, one must keep in mind the fact that future societies will judge ours on the basis of how well society has treated its most underprivileged minorities. (p. 216).

[58] In *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur expands this model to include familial relationships, erotic or romantic relationships, and friendships. Of these three, familial relationships deviate the most from his analysis in *Oneself as Another*, since familial relationships also feature relationships with family members who belong to different generations, and as such, can also be relationships with a degree of asymmetry in them. At any rate, the next footnote might give some idea as to how these relationships might still 'fit' the analysis in *Oneself as Another*—i.e. by having varying degrees of passivity and activity between, well, oneself and another, within the familial relationship. Moreover, later on in this chapter, I will revisit Ricoeur's idea of 'acquired

such, the 'originary' relationship between self and other—of which there can be several modifications[59]—is that of a mutual relationship, which establishes a degree of equality between the two.[60] More importantly, the condition of

---

identifications', which was also discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. I think there is good reason to hold that there is a parallel between one's ability to identify with one's family and one's family history, and one's ability to identify with a cultural figure from one's tradition. In any case, see Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 188 – 196.

[59] Ricoeur develops three models, the first of which is the originary, the other two being modifications: 1) That of the mutual reciprocity found in friendship, where self and other meet each other with (more or less) equal initiative; 2) those situations where the self is totally passive, and it is upon the initiative of the other that a relation is formed; and 3) the reverse of the second; a relation that is established from the initiative of the self to the other. In each of these three scenarios, Ricoeur emphasizes that mutuality is still present, however the difference lies in the interplay between passivity and activity. In the first scenario, self and other display equal amounts of giving and receiving, activity and passivity. In the second, the self is more passive, while the other is more active, and the contrast is true in the third.

[60] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 192. To add to this, in *The Course of Recognition*, Ricoeur makes a subtle distinction between reciprocity, on the one hand, and mutuality, on the other. A "reciprocal" relationship, according to Ricoeur, is one that entails an exchange of goods or services in relation to some sort of market economy (e.g. "I'll help you wash and wax your car, if you help me mow my lawn."). A "mutual" relationship, entails an exchange without any reference to—or desire to participate in—some sort of economic framework. For Ricoeur, the model *par excellence* for this is

possibility between self and other stems from Ricoeur's position that one's ipseity is already demarcated by a relationship with (inner) alterity. This was touched upon already in the first chapter of this dissertation when I noted that one's relationship with oneself was that of an "open question"; *who* I am is an issue for me, and responding to this question requires a confrontation with an inner alterity that makes possible a relation with the exterior alterity of the other. Pivotal to the testimony of one's inner alterity is one of the features of our hermeneutic philosophical anthropology, which was developed in this dissertation's previous chapter—namely that of belongingness and distanciation, broadly construed. The couplet of belongingness and distanciation permeates through every conceivable human relation—to one's tradition, to one's culture, to one's family, to one's past, to one's ipseity and selfhood. Intermediating between belongingness and distanciation is another concept—also properly introduced in the previous chapter—namely, that of 'being-affected'. In chapter 3, my focus was on demonstrating how 'being-affected' by the past helped foster the distance that necessitates the interpretation of one's life-story via one's (narrative) memories. Here, I would like to

---

the exchange of gifts between friends, where one gives to a friend a gift 'just because'. See *The Course of Recognition*, p. 232 – 233.

suggest that the notion of 'being-affected' can be broadened to the point that it reveals a deep inner alterity, which must be accounted for in order to make sense of the nature of intersubjectivity.

My proposal is that embodiment is the point of contact between one's ipseity and one's alterity, and from there, between oneself and another. This was touched upon already, again, in the first chapter of this dissertation. The conception of embodiment presented in the first chapter was that of a point of conflict for multiple dialectics to express themselves. One such dialectic is that between innovation and sedimentation in the formation of one's habits. How could 'being-affected' not be implicated here, especially where it concerns both the spontaneity of the innovative action or behavior, and the body's initial resistance to its repetition, re-enactment, ultimate settlement? Does this *not* reveal a relationship with inner alterity?[61] Perhaps more obvious is that of what Ricoeur called "acquired identifications", which I also explored in the first chapter, *en route* to narrative identity. Characters from one's historical or fictional mythos can affect one to the point where one begins to *identify* with the character in question—and while

---

[61] Ricoeur credits much of what he has to say about embodiment in terms of habit formation to Maine de Biran. See *Oneself as Another*, pp. 321 – 327.

this process of identification can consist in the cultivation of oneself, does it not first reveal a complex relationship with alterity? For example, in admiring the stubborn—and admittedly, too idealistic and unrealistic—individualism of Henry David Thoreau,[62] am I not also awakened to something in myself? In awakening to this part of myself, do I not also realize that I would not have been able to articulate, to put into words (to narrate!), this part of myself without having had this encounter? Here too, again, we also find the notion

---

[62] Here, I have in mind the period in which he wrote *Walden: or, Life in the Woods*. During my youth, I can remember being quite taken by both his minimalism and his desire to live a life in line with Emersonian self-reliance. Indeed, as I type this, a memory of my flirtation with Thoreau distinctly comes to mind. During the first semester of my undergraduate studies at Florida International University, I purposefully scheduled my classes such that there were large gaps of time between each one. I did this so I could allow myself the opportunity to lose myself within the university library, or within several books in the library, without having to worry about rushing to another class. One day, I found myself browsing a catalogue of the library's special collections. To my surprise and delight, I saw that they had a copy of *Walden* that dated back to around the time of its original publication, that is, around the time of 1854. To my even greater delight, the librarians who oversaw the special collections wing of FIU's library were happy to allow me to read through the text, provided that I did not leave the wing with it. Given my reverence for being able to hold and read such an early copy of the text, I suppose it is no surprise that my philosophical studies led me to hermeneutics.

of being-affected and the enunciation of an inner alterity at the core of one's subjectivity. Moreover, that one can be affected by a figure within either fiction or history, suggests that this type of affectivity rests on the notions of belongingness and distanciation that were touched upon just moments ago. One belongs to history, to tradition—but not totally so. The *meaning* of one's belongingness is subject to interpretation, and the leap into the interpretive act is marked by the fact that something—or someone—has affected the subject to such a profound extent that the necessary distance for interpretation transpires.

It may be responded that while I have shown how this broader conception of 'being-affected' can disclose a form of inner alterity, I have yet to show how the relationship between being-affected and this inner alterity might bridge towards the alterity of the other. I have to admit that I think this is a rather artificial problem for two reasons. For one, the real issue here is that the above examples point to instances in which one *actively* encounters one's inner alterity. However, as Ricoeur adds in *The Course of Recognition*, it is also possible to *passively* encounter this inner alterity, through the way in which others might recognize one through one's actions, deeds, successes, or

failures.[63] Consider, for instance, a teacher who is told by her students and colleagues that she is inspiring, that she is a "great teacher". Indeed, the estimation that one is a 'great teacher' is not up for one to decide—that is an estimation that comes from the initiative of the other. All one can do is their best to be great. A moment like this, then, where one has been recognized for the effort they put into their work or their craft, is a moment where one's inner alterity is revealed and validated.[64] In this sense, being-affected by the recognition of another *is precisely one* where one's inner alterity mediates with the alterity of another.

Second, both inner alterity and the encounter with the 'exterior' alterity of the other presupposes a modified understanding of our being-in-the-world. That is, it presupposes that both oneself and another 'participate' in the hermeneutic concept of belongingness to (some sort of) tradition. The other with whom I share a bus ride, work alongside, who I consider a colleague, a friend or even an enemy—however conceived, the other also 'belongs' to a tradition. In many instances, the tradition to which the other belongs is the same—or similar enough—to the one to which

---

[63] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition,* p. 21.

[64] Of course, it could also go the other way around. According to Ricoeur, the 'hither side' of recognition is that of humiliation, where one is made to feel as if they are "less than". See ibid., p. 191.

I belong. This is not necessary, however. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the specific tradition here is not the issue, rather, it is traditionality *as such* that matters—and it is traditionality that offers the rubric through which action, interaction, and the interpretation of actions is possible and meaningful.[65] To the extent that oneself and another share

[65] That said, I do not want to downplay the challenges that can emerge when relating to someone who belongs to a radically different tradition than oneself. Indeed, human history is filled with many such encounters that have ended in unnecessary tragedy. Even further, I should not fail to mention how much this encounter with another tradition can become so quickly politicized, and how people from another tradition can become so stigmatized. Recent political events in the United States demonstrate this all too well, too readily, and too tragically. Here I have in mind the anti-immigrant rhetoric that is coming from the 45th President of the United States, which does not fall on deaf ears, as my family consists entirely of immigrants—it is only my sister and I who were born in the United States. While on this topic, let me also not fail to mention the challenges that can emerge between people from *within the same* tradition. I do not think it is controversial to say that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is consistent with the idea that factors like gender, race, and class can imply that people from within the same tradition can experience that tradition quite differently, and thus, the degree to which their lived experience corresponds to a felt 'belongingness' and 'distanciation' can correlate strongly with these factors. I need only mention the ugly history of racism in the United States, which is currently causing enormous amounts of civil unrest—even during a global pandemic. My position here is that America, as a country, and Americans, as a people, have taken for granted their (or

this same belongingness, the encounter with one also allows for the encounter with another—and vice versa.[66] Yet, were I to suppose that I have not already dispelled this response, I would propose that two other forms of inner alterity via embodiment could do so: that of suffering and that of desire. I shall speak of both independently of each other, while also finding a common link between them through the concept of solicitude, as Ricoeur formulates it.

The reality of suffering casts a long shadow in the works of Ricoeur—so quick is he to remind us that the opposite pole of human action and interaction, which so captivates our

---

should I say, *our*, considering my citizenship) own history, which tends to be viewed with as much privilege as it does with the optimism that underlies what is often called 'the American spirit'. Even a cursory look at American history shows that it is still grappling with forms of racism that are embedded in the writing of the Constitution—here I have in mind the way in which the Constitution allows convicted felons to have various rights stripped away, relegating ex-felons (who disproportionately tend to be Black Americans or Latinx Americans) to a highly marginalized position in society, repeating, in effect, the disastrous social and psychological effects of Jim Crow era laws. To see this thought carried to a well argued conclusion, I would refer the reader to Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

[66] The aforementioned parallels with Merleau-Ponty should be obvious here.

thinking and our imagination, is that of suffering.[67] If by embodiment we rest on the Husserlian distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*[68]—that is, of flesh and body—and if through this distinction the emphasis is on our existence 'in-the-flesh', then suffering becomes an inescapable horizon, wherein we witness just how much our embodied existence places us at the mercy of the world around us. The extent to which one's 'having-to-be' also entails a 'having-to-suffer' is also the extent to which one's 'ownmost possibilities' also entail a diminishment in capability. "With the decrease of the power of *acting*, experienced as a decrease of the effort of *existing*, the reign of suffering, properly speaking, commences."[69] Interestingly, Ricoeur maintains that far from locking one away in own's own victimhood, the "decrease of the effort of existing" entailed by suffering is but one of the vehicles through which one can relate to the alterity of the other. Consider the following two quotations:

> In a sharp-edged dialectic between praxis and pathos, one's own body becomes the emblematic title of a vast

---

[67] Honestly, take any work that involves Ricoeur expanding on a theory of action, and you will see that he will never fail to mention suffering as an equal possibility.

[68] I think that every figure in the phenomenological tradition is indebted to Husserl's investigation on embodiment in the *Cartesian Meditations,* despite Ricoeur's criticism that I highlighted in footnote 15 of this chapter.

[69] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 320.

> inquiry which, beyond the simple mineness of one's own body, denotes the entire sphere of *intimate* passivity, and hence of otherness, for which it forms the center of gravity.[70]

And:

> [In suffering], the passivity belonging to the metacategory of one's own body overlaps with the passivity belonging to the category of other people.[71]

Here we see a rare intersection between Ricoeurian hermeneutics, on the one hand, and the noble truths of Buddhism, on the other—life is suffering, and the extent to which we all share in the same burden of having to suffer, is the extent to which we can form bonds with each other.[72] Yet, how are we to properly conceive of this overlap between self and other in and through suffering? I think it would be a

---

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The intersections between Ricoeur's hermeneutics, on the one hand, and Buddhism, on the other, may be rare; but they are also consistent. One of the other places wherein which this intersection emerges is on Ricoeur's short work on evil, *Evil: A challenge to Philosophy and Theology*. Here, Buddhism emerges as an ally in the 'broken' dialectical response to evil, which calls for a transformation in thinking, action, and feeling. Ricoeur's position is that the Buddhist commitment to non-violently resisting evil—whether evil is conceived as the capacity for moral evil, or as the propensity to suffer as a result of it—is capable of uniting people under the aegis of good will towards others. See Ricoeur, *Evil*, p. 72.

mistake to suggest that this overlap *obliterates* the distinction between self and other, such that one becomes indistinguishable from the other. Two people who have each injured their left ankle in a biking accident do not exhibit such similar pain, for example, that neither can determine who is suffering and in what way. Neither is it the case that this overlap is best explained by the development of some sort of neutral third concept, which would capture our shared humanity, while also reducing each person into a featureless anonymity.[73] I think that this overlap is best explained by the Ricoeurian understanding of solicitude, which plays a central role in intersubjectivity as it is developed in *Oneself as Another*. From Ricoeur's perspective, solicitude is most manifested in acts of spontaneous benevolence between people—it is a response to the other person because they are precisely who they are, and not anything or anyone else.[74] In this way, being-affected by suffering helps express a degree of alterity that invites one to respond to the concrete situation of the other.

However, solicitude does not only emerge in moments of suffering. It is also present in the desire that underlies

[73] Such is the critique that Levinas develops of Heidegger. See, especially the section in *Totality and Infinity*, "Metaphysics Precedes Ontology", pp. 42 – 48.
[74] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, see pages 183 and 190. See also, *Evil*, pp. 64 – 72.

friendship. Moreover, it is the relationship that one has with one's friends that constitutes the privileged place whereupon Ricoeur develops an account of intersubjectivity that is most relevant to this chapter on responding to the death of a significant other in one's life. Within *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur's analysis of friendship emerges out of the development of his ethics, which could be summarized in the following sentence: "Aiming at the good life with and for others in just institutions."[75] Given the focus of this chapter, it is not my goal to give a full account of Ricoeur's ethics. I shall restrict myself only to understanding the "with and for others".[76] Here, the notion of solicitude is meant to modify our understanding of the Aristotelian concept of *philautia*—by which Ricoeur sometimes refers to as 'self-esteem'. Ricoeur's position is *not* that solicitude is something separate

---

[75] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 172.

[76] I will also note that by "ethics" Ricoeur has in mind an understanding of the term that is closer to the ancient Greek use. Ethics, for Ricoeur is about wisdom for the art of living well. If by "ethics" one means something along the lines of assessing the moral status of an action, Ricoeur would reply that, within his hermeneutics, this function is accomplished by what he calls "morality", which focuses on determining the norms that one is obliged to follow in order to making living in contemporary democratic societies possible. For his distinction between ethics, on the one hand, and morality, on the other, see *Oneself as Another,* p. 170.

from self-esteem, but is rather part of the process by which one can develop any self-esteem:

> My thesis is that solicitude is not something added on to self-esteem from outside but that it unfolds the dialogic dimension of self-esteem… such that self-esteem and solicitude cannot be experienced or reflected on without the other.[77]

Thus, we have the hermeneutic circle between ipseity and alterity, self and other. Between ipseity and alterity: solicitude is that which emerges through one's inner alterity and that which allows for a bridge to the exterior alterity of the other. Between self and other: the bonds of friendship—especially friendships of virtue—are bonds formed out of the recognition that a fully human life requires an *actualization* and *realization* that can only be accomplished by sharing oneself with another.

To speak as plainly as possible, what Ricoeur is trying to say in his treatment on friendship is that one becomes who one is in the relationships that one has with others. Each relationship that one has with another is as unique as the persons in the relationship. One's interactions with another shapes the way in which one develops, which then shapes the way in which one understands oneself. Similar to how my

---

[77] Ibid., p. 180.

reading of H. D. Thoreau brought out a sense of individualism that I did not know that I had, my relationship with a concrete other, like that with my fiancée, allows me to cultivate a 'side' of myself that I otherwise would be unable to cultivate on my own—and the same is true *for her*. This mutual relationship is also present in my relationships with my students. There are those who genuinely look up to me; they see something in me that calls to them to seek out my perspective. And in my witnessing the care in which they are receiving my words, they allow me to cultivate a part of myself that would remain undeveloped had they not come to me—and the same is true *for them*. Our shared relation is mutual in that they too have an opportunity to cultivate a part of themselves. In this way, people 'bounce off' each other—each giving the other permission to be and become a certain way, a certain person.

The Ricoeurian concept of 'acquired identifications'—which was covered more fully in the first chapter of this work, and to which I have referred now multiple times in this chapter—also applies to intersubjective relations, except with an added dimension of mutuality.[78] Admittedly, the mutuality between persons is not the same as the relation that one might have with a figure from one's tradition. Here, a historical or fictional figure from one's tradition may affect

---

[78] Ibid., p. 183.

one to the point that one identifies with this figure. Yet, this does not imply that one enters into a relation with this figure such that one also allows the figure to be(come) a certain way, too. Rather, one's actions become one amongst many within the horizon of one's community. And the collective actions of oneself and others help (re-)shape the tradition to which each belongs.[79] Nevertheless, the mutuality between persons is still marked by the detour-laden path characterized by belongingness, affectivity, distanciation, interpretation, and understanding. However, the emphasis is on this mutuality. In friendship, both oneself and another *belong* to each other, and as such, that both will have an impact towards the way in which each 'unfolds' within the relationship—i.e. the way in which each will further 'develop' as a person, or simply *become someone*—is inevitable.

The perspective of the other, stated slightly differently, *affects* one; their perspective *matters*. With this affectivity, there follows an *internal* distanciation *within oneself*. If Ricoeur is correct, and self-esteem cannot be what it is without solicitude, one is able to be who one is, by way of being able to see oneself as another. The relationship that one has with others, then, is an avenue for one to appropriate an *interpretation* of the 'who' that one is, in order to gain

---

[79] Here, I am retreading a path that was walked in the third chapter of this dissertation.

greater *self-understanding*. As such, one learns how to esteem oneself.[80] This is why, to the famous question concerning whether one must first love oneself in order to love others, Ricoeur answers:

> In order to be the "friend of oneself"—in accordance with Aristotelian *philautia*—one must already have entered into a relation of friendship with others, as though friendship for oneself were a self-affection rigorously correlative to the affection by and for the other, as friend.[81]

The exteriority of the other allows ones to become better acquainted with one's own interiority at the same time that one offers the same opportunity to the other.

In this way, Ricoeur is developing a face-to-face relation with others, but it is quite different from that of Sartre and that of Levinas. Sartre's famous example of *le regard* is that of being *objectified* by the other, and from there, his account of the intersubjective relation, unfolds as a struggle of wills—culminating in the domination (or submission) of one over

---

[80] This is also confirmed throughout the final chapter of *The Course of Recognition*, where the mutual recognition of others is one of "our most authentic identity, the one that makes us who we are" (p. 21).

[81] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 330.

(or under) the other.[82] I think Ricoeur is offering something different; namely that of two subjects mutually allowing each other to deepen their subjectivity.

This is also different from Levinas, where the initiative is totally one-sided and originates in the other's approach towards 'the same'. I think it is obvious when one reads Ricoeur that he holds Levinas's work in particularly high esteem. I would even go as far as to suggest that Ricoeur's own ethical thinking is a way for him to try to reconcile the differences between his approach and Levinas's. My reason for this is precisely because Ricoeur's critical reception of Levinas culminates with his suggestion that Levinas's 'ethics as first philosophy' is only realizable if it *includes* a conception of the subject that is not first and foremost entirely or hyperbolically separate from alterity, but rather that of one that is marked by a deeply complex relationship between ipseity and alterity:

> Now what resources might [there be to respond to the summons of the other] if not the resources of *goodness* which could spring forth from a being who

---

[82] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1984. See part three, starting on p. 301.

> does not detest itself to the point of being unable to hear the injunction coming from the other?[83]

However, I think the above quotation can be interpreted in such a way that it brings to light an additional critique of Levinas. In this sense, the issue is not just that it is difficult to situate how Levinas can respond the problem of there being a relationship between oneself and another, when the language used to describe the two hyperbolically depicts each as being absolutely separate from one another. There is another issue here. This one arises when we reflect on what Ricoeur might mean when he says that one is capable of responding to the summons of the other only when one "does not detest" oneself. What could this mean? My own position intersects with that of Galabru, who has argued that Levinas's ethical summons requires a capable self, rather than a dispossessed self.[84] Accordingly, I contend that Ricoeur is responding to the conception of the subject that emerges in Levinas's later work, *Otherwise than Being*, under the theme of substitution.

---

[83] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 189.

[84] As Galabru phrases it, "*l'analyse ricoeurienne de la responsabilité affirme la nécessité d'un Soi capable et non point dépossédé*." See Galabru, Sophie, "*Paul Ricoeur et Emmanuel Levinas: vulnérabilité, mémoire, et narration",* in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol 10, No 1 (2019), pp. 125 – 139, p. 125.

Indeed, anyone familiar with Levinas's passages on substitution is also familiar with the poignant descriptions that he deploys to convey his thesis: at root in the subject is a passivity that is anarchical, unthematizable. As such, it is a trauma, a persecution, a moral debt about which there is no hope for any expiation, an "unlimited guilt".[85] Consider, for instance the following quotations from *Otherwise than Being*:

> [The passivity of the subject] is the passivity of a trauma, but one that prevents its own representation, a deafening trauma, cutting the thread of consciousness, which should have welcomed it in its present, the passivity of being persecuted.[86]

And:

> Responsibility to another is not an accident that happens to a subject, but precedes essence in it, has not awaited freedom, in which a commitment to another would have been made. I have not done anything and I have always been under accusation—persecuted. The ipseity, in the passivity without arche characteristic of identity is a hostage. The word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone. Responsibility for the others has not been a

---

[85] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 160.
[86] Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 111.

> return to oneself, but an exasperated contraction, which the limits of identity cannot retain.[87]

And finally:

> The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible; the more just I am, the more guilty I am.[88]

Indeed, for Levinas, this trauma, this accusation, this persecution, this guilt that is at the heart of one's subjectivity also manifests itself as obsession, as desire, as inspiration to continuously surpass oneself in being responsible for the other, in being for the other and giving to the other, embodied in the phrase, "after you, sir."[89]

Yet, I think Ricoeur is asking us to consider: Is this really the case? Does all this trauma, this guilt and persecution, really lead one to respond to the ethical summons of the other, or can it rather exhaust one beyond one's breaking point, such that, not only will one fail to respond to the other, but will sabotage any instance where the alterity of the other can draw one out of oneself? How often does trauma prompt someone to behave in a way that is harmful to oneself and to

---

[87] Ibid., p. 114.
[88] Ibid., p. 112.
[89] Ibid., p. 117.

others, rather than helpful? How often does it prompt people to destroy their relationships with others? Perhaps what is called for, then, is an account of intersubjectivity that can help one *behave* like a Levinasian subject—in terms of being able to offer the other concrete help, aimed at creating a society where people can flourish—without *feeling* like one. It might be the case, then, that Ricoeur's account of the capable subject, and its various intermediations with the alterity of others through the face-to-face and through social institutions, is such an attempt.

To summarize, Ricoeur's account of intersubjectivity paints a realistic, if not pragmatic, picture of what it might mean to be with others. Ricoeur's conception does not start from the assumption that a subject is a fully formed and complete being *prior* to any relationship with another, but that the relationship one has with others are one of the vehicles through which each person in the relationship 'unfolds', or becomes who they are. This is possible by one's embodied subjectivity, and the way in which embodiment makes one open and vulnerable to the surrounding world. Indeed, this vulnerability is another way of returning to the hermeneutic concept of being-affected, which is situated within network of other hermeneutics concepts, such as belongingness, distanciation, and interpretation. Through

being-affected by the alterity of the other, one learns how to view oneself as another—a self amongst other selves.[90]

---

[90] The difficulty that follows from Ricoeur's conception of intersubjectivity, however, stems precisely in how to conceptualize this 'as' that analogically bridges oneself and another. In saying that one is a self amongst other selves, is it being postulated that one can know that others are 'like' me and I am 'like' them, by way of an analogical syllogism—as might be encapsulated in a phrase like 'A is to B as C is to D'? In this sense, where it concerns our relationships with others, if I know that having a mental experience of *x* tends to cause me to behave like *y*, and I see that you are behaving like *y*, then I can conclude that this is because you are undergoing a mental experience *x*. If this was the case, then Ricoeur's approach to intersubjectivity could be challenged by the classical 'problem of other minds' that one encounters in the philosophy of mind. However, when Ricoeur postulates that oneself is *as* or *like* another, I do not think the way in which he conceptualizes this analogous relationship takes on the form of a syllogism. As he argues in "Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity", the problem with this type of syllogistic conceptualization is that it rests on a faulty understanding of the way in which one's embodiment is phenomenologically given to oneself. Stated simply, my embodied actions lack the exteriority in which the actions of another are given to me. I 'live' through and express myself in my actions. Rather than conceptualizing this analogy through a form of syllogistic thinking, Ricoeur maintains that the analogical relationship is hermeneutical. My hermeneutical preunderstanding is that my predecessors, contemporaries, and successors are people who, 'like' me, are subjects capable of experience—even if I cannot know, from the first-person perspective, precisely *what* that experience is. The brilliance of this essay, however, is that here Ricoeur shows that Husserl's account of

II. Death and Narrativity

From the mutual constitution of oneself and another via the intersubjective relation, I turn now to the harrowing loss of another with whom one shared a close relation via death. In *Living up to Death*—the text that will mark my point of departure in this analysis—Ricoeur questions himself by asking in what way is it even possible to begin on the topic of death, a topic that he admits he comes to by way of a "late apprenticeship".[91] The tragedy of this work, of course, is that Ricoeur never completed it, which means that whatever wisdom it ultimately would have imparted remains implicit in its fragmentary nature. Nevertheless, as both de Lange[92] and Joy[93] have expressed independently of each other, it is

---

intersubjectivity in the fifth of the Cartesian meditations, is capable of *prefiguring* this type of analogical relationship. Though Husserl's conception of intersubjectivity begins with that of the subject and moves outwards to the constitution of others, of society, of history, the subject in question is *not* that of a transcendental subject, but of a living person. For Ricoeur's exegesis on the nature of the analogical relationship between oneself and another, see especially "Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity" in *From Text to Action*, especially pp. 237 – 239.

[91] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 7.

[92] de Lange, Frits. "Affirming Life in the Face of Death: Ricoeur's *Living Up to Death* as a Modern Ars Moriendi and a Lesson for Palliative Care." *Med Health Care and Philos*, 17 (2014): 509 – 518, p. 509.

[93] Joy, Morny. "Paul Ricoeur on Life and Death". *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, no. 37 (2011): 249 – 253, p. 249

still possible for one to approach Ricoeur as a teacher, who imparts wisdom for the art of living. Thus, though fragmentary, the text does offer insight as to what it means to "bear witness" to and survive the death of the other.[94]

In phrasing that last thought as I did, I have already touched upon the essential starting point for this analysis—namely, the polysemic character of the death of the other. For the purpose of this chapter, the death of the other can be understood in two distinct ways—each of which is necessary for this analysis.[95] On the one hand, the death of the other can signify the moments leading up to the other's death—that is, dying as such. On the other hand, it can signify the much longer journey of mourning, of coming to terms with the permanent loss of the other—of surviving the other. As Ricoeur states:

> [The] difference between these two [i.e. witnessing the death of the other and surviving the death of the other] is large. To be present at a death is more

---

[94] de Lange, "Affirming Life in the Face of Death", p. 512.

[95] In focusing only exclusively on the death of the other, I am also leaving out some of the other distinctions Ricoeur makes concerning the polysemic character of death. Here is the full list of distinctions: my death, the death of a loved one, the death of others (i.e. strangers), mass deaths due to war or to a pandemic, and mortality as such. I am putting aside these other distinctions simply because I want to focus on the particular topic of the death of the other.

> precise, more poignant [than] simply surviving. Taking part is a more point-like test, more event-like. To survive is a long trajectory, at best that of mourning, that is, of the accepted separation from the dead person who takes a distance on, becomes detached from the living so that he can survive.[96]

Thus, the remainder of this section shall unfold in two ways. First, I will explore the insights that can be derived in witnessing the death of the other. Secondly, I shall investigate the 'longer trajectory' of surviving (the death of) the other. On both counts, I will illustrate the role that narrative memory has to play in the intersubjective relationship with the dying other.

1. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur briefly discusses being present for the other's death. In these pages, being with someone as they are dying profoundly modifies the intersubjective relation in the usual sense. The mutual giving and receiving that one finds amongst friends—and which makes friends truly equals—shifts to an asymmetrical relationship where the other becomes (almost) totally passive, capable of receiving one's care.[97] Even here, however, the mutuality between oneself and another has not completely vanished. The way in which the other receives

---

[96] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 13.
[97] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another,* p. 191.

one's care is already a way of *giving* back. Yet this giving-back entails an agony. As the other is dying, as their health is deteriorating, one begins to understand that no amount of care will be enough. Nevertheless, one also understands that one must continue to provide care, even long after one has used every last reserve of strength. Consider the imagery on which Ricoeur ends the following passage:

> In true sympathy, the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return. For from the suffering other there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing but precisely from weakness itself. This is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands.[98]

Yet it is remarkable that, in returning to this imagery of fragility and vulnerability in *Living up to Death*, Ricoeur is able to arrive at a fundamental insight: The care that one expresses for the other as they are dying reveals that one's relationship to a dying other is still that of someone who is

---

[98] Ibid.

living. By entering into such a caring relationship, one understands—however boldly or implicitly—that though a person may be biologically dying, and though the moment of death itself may be inevitable, they are not experiencing these final moments as dying, but as living. As Ricoeur states, “So long as they remain lucid, ill dying people do not see themselves as dying, as soon to be dead, but as still living.”[99]

Here we have, then, the profundity of the term “living up to death”. To “live up to death” does not entail some sort of measurement as one might say when they determine whether an experience of some sort “lived up to” one’s expectations. Rather “living up to death” quite literally means that our relationship with death is that of continuing to live right up until the moment that death extinguishes life. That this insight can come out of being “with and for” someone as they die gives credence to de Lange’s conclusion: that though we may all die alone, no one should be alone in dying.[100] The dying of another is an intersubjective experience.

The intersubjective nature of being with someone as they live up to death is what leads Ricoeur to formulate the idea of “the Essential”.[101] Unfortunately, it is a struggle to understand precisely what Ricoeur has in mind with this

---

[99] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 14.
[100] de Lange, “Affirming Life”, p. 510.
[101] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 14.

concept, as it remains underdeveloped for the remainder of his essay. The little that he does say, however, suggests that the Essential is a profound, ineffable reality that borders on a mystical experience.[102] This is a radical departure of the Ricoeur that we know, master of the long and subtle detour. It is precisely because this is such a radical departure that I struggle to properly place this in Ricoeur's broader hermeneutics. De Lange has suggested that we receive this concept as that which announces the transcendence that animates all religiosity.[103] I think there is enough textual evidence in *Living up to Death* that suggests that this is an accurate reading.[104]

Still, that the concept is so underdeveloped makes me wonder whether it would not be inappropriate to interpret it differently. Maybe the Essential does not (need to) refer to some sort of transcendent reality; perhaps it has a polysemic

---

[102] Ibid, p. 15.

[103] de Lange, "Affirming Life in the Face of Death", p. 512.

[104] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, pp. 14 – 16. Consider the following quotations: "the Essential, in one sense… is the religious; it is, if I dare put it this way, that which is common to every religion and what, at the threshold of death, transgresses the consubstantial limitations of confessing and confessed religions" (14). Or, "It is perhaps only in the face of death that the religious gets equated with the Essential and that the barrier between religions, including the nonreligions (I am thinking, of course, of Buddhism) is transcended" (15 – 16).

meaning. Maybe the Essential implies that which is fully unique about one's subjectivity. What if, in witnessing the death of the other, one also witnesses the ineffability of the departure of the other's radical alterity? What if surviving the death of the other entails coming to terms with the ineffability of their alterity? What if it is this ineffability that one tries to express in remembering the other, and sharing the other's life story? A connection can be made here to *The Course of Recognition*. The final sections of this text revolve around mutual exchanges between oneself and another in the spirit of agapeic giving. One gives to the other, and one receives from the other, in the mode of unconditional love and affirmation. But what is that which is affirmed in agapeic love, agapeic giving? From Ricoeur's perspective, "it is indeed our most authentic identity, the one that makes us who we are".[105] It seems quite possible, then, that the Essential could be interpreted *otherwise*, as a moment where one is able to attest to the alterity of the other as fully as possible.

Apart from the few remarks that are made concerning this idea of the Essential in *Living Up to Death*, a fuller analysis by Ricoeur concerning how the Essential mediates with his account of narrativity would have gone far to determine the 'place' of the idea of the Essential within his hermeneutics.

---

[105] Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 21.

My suggestion that we 'read' the Essential as having more to do with witnessing the ineffability of the alterity of the other in the intimacy of the final moments of their life—and are therefore 'summoned' to give an account of this ineffability by remembering the other *after* they have died—is an attempt to more fully contextualize it within Ricoeur's later hermeneutics. As such, the emphasis that I place on the (possible) meaning of the Essential is that of being radically present in the wake of another's death, such that one fully grasps the implication of the departure of the other through their death. They have died. The perspective that they had on the world, the 'style' through which they lived in the world, is now irretrievably lost. To take the profundity of this moment seriously, to realize that it is now up to oneself to give an account of and for the life of the other—this strikes me as the task of the Essential, that which the Essential reveals.

Further, my own reading of Ricoeur's account of the Essential fits well within the scope of de Lange's reading—as de Lange's interest in Ricoeur rests on how Ricoeur's work can help instruct those who are offering palliative care to others. Palliative care workers are routinely in a position where they witness the Essential through the radical departure of the other's alterity. Part of the work of palliative care is to help the other cultivate meaning in the final

moments of their life. Narrativity is a way of helping the other cultivate this meaning—allowing them, to the best of their ability, to articulate those parts of their life about which they feel the greatest sense of accomplishment—and to reconcile with those parts that lack this sense. The work of Daniel Hutto is instructive here, as he often develops and defends the ways in which narrativity and narrative identity could have therapeutic applications.[106]

It is here where my concept of narrative memory features. To the extent that the work of palliative care involves helping another cultivate meaning in their life, the tools of narrativity may help to cathartically integrate memories of one's life into a coherent story. I say "cathartically", though this does create room for some controversy. Clearly, the connection to Aristotle's *Poetics* should not be lost here, since it is the basis upon which Ricoeur develops the idea of narrativity, and narrative identity. As such, the question emerges as to what it is meant by the phrase "cathartically", and what is its connection to Aristotle's concept of *katharsis*?

The challenge of responding to this question is compounded by the fact that, within Aristotle's work, no definition of *katharsis* is ever given, despite, as Kenny has

---

[106] See, for instance, Hutto, D.D. & Gallagher, S, "Re-Authoring Narrative Therapy," *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*. 24 (2017), pp. 157–67.

noted, the promise Aristotle makes in his *Politics* to define it in the *Poetics*.[107] Indeed, as Kenny points out, *katharsis* is only ever mentioned once in the *Poetics*—in the following quotation:

> Tragedy is a representation of an action of a superior kind—grand, and complete in itself—presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by actors rather than told by a narrator, effecting, through pity and fear, the purification [*katharsis*] of such emotions. (1449b24 ff.)[108]

Kenny's choice of translating *katharsis* as "purification" is already an insight as to how he would propose we should understand the concept. *Katharsis*, in its Aristotelian conception, is not a 'purging' of the emotions, such that one is capable of banishing them.[109] This would go against Aristotle's own doctrine of the golden mean, which holds that every virtuous habit of character is the balancing point between two vicious extremes. Importantly, for Aristotle, one's emotional life is a vital part of one's virtuous life—think, for instance of emotions like compassion or

---

[107] See Anthony Kenny's introduction to his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 23.
[108] Ibid., p. 18.
[109] Ibid., p. 23

indignation; these are emotions that have a rightful place alongside virtuous displays of action.[110] As such, *katharsis* does not entail purging emotions. Nor, Kenny holds, does it entail expressing emotions that would, if unexpressed, seek out unhealthy patterns of behavior. This conception, accordingly, rests on an account that is, in Kenny's words, anachronistic for Aristotle, as this interpretation rests on a quasi-psychoanalytic conception of human nature.[111]

Katharsis, then, must be something else, and Kenny's suggestion is that of the 'refinement' of an emotional experience, such that one is able to take pleasure in experiencing an emotion that would otherwise only be painful.[112] Take, for instance, Anthony Hopkins's recent performance in the 2020 film *The Father,*[113] where he plays an elderly man—named Anthony, no less—who is suffering from dementia. The film is a tear-jerker, to be sure. But it is an important film to view. Doing so allows the audience to

---

[110] I base this, of course, off of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, but also off of my own teaching of Aristotelian virtue ethics through my work at Miami Dade College. There, my teaching responsibilities are primarily for ethics. Admittedly, my virtue ethics lectures are amongst my favorite to give. Them, and logic, of all other things.

[111] Kenny, "Introduction", p. 24.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Zeller, Florian, dir. *The Father*. 2020; United Kingdom: Lionsgate.

connect with all of the characters in the story, let alone Anthony, and to forge this connection with these characters is also to allow the film to take one towards a greater height from which one can understand the weight of human finitude. Indeed, “the weight of human finitude” is not normally a pleasurable thing to grasp—if Heidegger is correct, most spend their lives *fleeing* from it. Thus, perhaps Kenny has an important point on his reading of *katharsis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

Perhaps. However, this only gives insight into the nature of *katharsis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. What about my own use in terms of narrative memory? I would like to keep Kenny’s interpretation of the concept, but simply move one small step further. Cathartically integrating memories into a coherent life story, indeed, entails creating a space wherein which one can refine one’s relationship with one’s past lived experiences, such that even painful ones can take on layers of appreciation that they otherwise would not have, but it is also for the sake of better understanding the ‘who’ that one ‘is’. In this sense, I have reason to revisit my own reading of Ricoeur’s concept of the Essential. In being with another as they die, narrative memory allows one to help another find that which is Essential in them or in their life story. Further, one need not be a palliative care worker to help the dying person in this way—one need only be a friend, a son or

daughter, a sibling, etc. One must simply be there, present to the other, for the other, in recognition of the other as a being capable of being a self; in recognition, therefore, of their dignity. As Purcell has phrased it, one need only have "narrative hospitality"—that is, between oneself and another, a space for an exchange of memories, testimonies, and life-stories, geared towards mutual understanding at the service of what Gildea has also called "existential healing".[114]

---

[114] See both Purcell, Elizabeth, "Testimony, Memory and Solidarity across National Borders" in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies,* Vol 8, No. 1 (2017), p. 118 and Iris J. Brooke Gildea, "The Poetics of the Self" in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* volume 9, no. 2 (2018), p. 99. I find in both Purcell's and Gildea's work analyses of Ricoeur that parallels my own, which indicates that narrative memory is something that 'fits' within the paradigm of contemporary research on Ricoeur, and the direction in which others have further developed Ricoeur's hermeneutics. One difference that I will point out between Purcell and I—and I do not think that this is a problematic difference, but one that shows the fecundity of our scholarship on Ricoeur—is that while I have developed the concept of narrative memory largely in connection to the topic of selfhood and the face-to-face relation as a response to the second aporia of memory, Purcell's work on narrative hospitality stems from Ricoeur's work on just communities. As such, Purcell would rightly say that narrative hospitality is not just 'between' oneself and another; but can exist within the scope of a larger community, as well as in instances of dialogue between separate communities. That these concepts can be applied at and in both the 'micro' and 'macro' level, is quite consistent with Ricoeur, who, by the time he

Where else can this sense of narrative hospitality be grafted if not in the solicitude between oneself and another, upon which Ricoeur's conception of the face-to-face rests?

What has been said thus far makes it plain to see how Ricoeur's 'living-up-to-death' differs staggeringly from Heidegger's 'being-towards-death'. Indeed, as I suggested in this chapter's introduction, Heidegger did not take the death

---

wrote *Time and Narrative*, was quite willing to transpose a concept that he developed at the individual level to that of the level of a community or collective, and vice versa. By way of example, I have two major concepts in mind. The first is that of narrative identity, which, in both the third volume of *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*, was developed in terms of responding to the question of *personal* identity. Nevertheless, within *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur was already keen on showing how narrative identity could also apply to collectives, communities, and even nations, by utilizing the polysemy of the concept of 'character' as the main fulcrum by which the transposition could be made. Secondly, is the transposition of belongingness and distanciation in relationship to one's tradition to that of the belongingness and distanciation in relationship to one's past. This is, namely, the work that I set out for myself in the previous chapter of this dissertation, at the service of demonstrating that one's relationship with one's past *requires* the tools of interpretation and narrativity, thus necessitating the concept of narrative memory. Nevertheless, these are but two examples that can be found in an oeuvre that consists of a myriad of even further examples that could be used to exhaustively illustrate the capacity to transpose Ricoeur's concepts to differing planes upon which subjectivity and intersubjectivity are mutually constitutive.

of the other seriously enough—and that this is the case is a detriment to his analysis of death. Ricoeur would concur, and in fact, in the pages of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, he expresses surprise that this would be left unthought in Heidegger's work:

> It is *astonishing* that for [Heidegger] the death of others is held to be an experience that does not measure up to the demand for radicality rooted in *Angst* and explicated on the level of discourse by the concept of being-toward-death.[115]

According to Ricoeur, it seems that the only justification that can be given to explain why Heidegger's account of (being-toward-)death ignores the profundity of the death of the other is that Heidegger was preoccupied by the idea that overemphasizing this experience would lead to an inauthentic relationship with one's own death. Solicitude for the dying other could be a way for Dasein to avoid its confrontation with its own mortality and finitude.[116] However, this does not seem to be a satisfying explanation, for as Ricoeur points out, in Heidegger's phenomenology, it is possible for one to cultivate an inauthentic attitude towards death even when the only relationship of concern is that of

---

[115] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 359, emphasis mine.

[116] Ibid.

Dasein's own relationship with itself.[117] As such, Heidegger's preoccupation with one's relationship to one's own death covers over what it might mean to authentically relate to the other as they die—and it is this authentic relation that is captured through Ricoeur's understanding of living-up-to-death, in terms of being-alongside the other as that which is Essential manifests itself.

Heidegger's preoccupation with one's own finitude, further, entails a component about death that remains unthought in Heidegger—i.e. that of the succession of generations, which Ricoeur developed in the third volume of *Time and Narrative.*[118] The death of one's predecessors stands as a symbol for the point where the 'baton' has been handed down to one, so that one can carry on with the task of living in a social world, and allowing this world to unfold. With this in mind, the relation between the succession of generations and death places Ricoeur in close relation, not to

---

[117] Ibid. In Ricoeur's own words: "That inauthenticity haunts the experience of the death of others is not in doubt: the secret admission that the death that has carried off the close relation dearest to us has, in fact, spared us opens the path for a strategy of avoidance by which we hope that it will also spare us the moment of truth in the face of our own death. *But the relation of the self to itself is likewise not immune from ruses just as cunning as this*." (Emphasis mine).

[118] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. III*, translated by Kathleen MacLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988, p. 109 – 112.

Heidegger, but to Arendt.[119] The problem—or one of the problems, better—with Heidegger is that his philosophy is too preoccupied with death, and as such, it ignores the 'natality' of human (co-)existence—"men, though they must die, are not born to die, but in order to begin".[120] That each human being represents this capacity to begin entails a spontaneity that makes the direction in which society will move virtually unpredictable.[121]

The underlying implication of living up to death is that death is not part of life, but rather, it is life's abrupt end. It is here where Ricoeur's account of witnessing the death of the other comes closest to Levinas's own analysis: "Perhaps every death," Ricoeur states with Levinas in mind, "is a sort of murder".[122] In this sense, death is an annihilation, and the call that Ricoeur makes for compassion when one is being-alongside the dying other, helping the other live up to death, is an ethical, as well as existential summons. Consider the following two quotations by Ricoeur:

> Compassion… it is a struggling-with, an accompanying—if not a sharing that identifies oneself

[119] For a slightly fuller exegesis on this relation, see especially Joy, Morny, "Paul Ricoeur on Life and Death", p. 251.
[120] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. New York: Doubleday, 1959, p. 222.
[121] Ibid., p. 22.
[122] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 360.

> with the other, which is neither possible nor desirable, a just distance remains the rule for friendship as for justice. Accompanying is perhaps the most adequate word to designate the favorable attitude thanks to which the gaze directed toward a dying person turns toward him, who is struggling for life until death… and not toward a dying person who will soon be dead. [123]

And:

> There is also a properly ethical dimension, concerning the capacity to accompany in imagination and in sympathy the still living dying person's struggle, still living until dead.[124]

I shall linger here only to make the parallel between Ricoeur and Levinas more apparent. Within the confines of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas's own analysis of death begins by coupling the fear of death with the fear of a *violent* death—and the suffering entailed in anticipation of this violence.[125] At this stage in Levinas's analysis, it is the other in their alterity that is feared—for if the fear of death is

---

[123] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 17.
[124] Ibid, p. 18.
[125] I am basing my analysis off of pp. 232 – 247 of *Totality and Infinity*. But to the point that I made in the main body, consider the following quotation by Levinas, "In death I am exposed to absolute violence, to murder in the night" (233).

simultaneously the fear of violence, of murder, then death is something that comes from the other, and not from *within* oneself. Yet, this fear—and the suffering entailed by it—reveals the openness and vulnerability that one has to the world around oneself. It reveals, in other words, the passivity at the heart of one's subjectivity. This vulnerability cannot be overcome, it can only be endured—which, for Levinas, is the very essence of "patience".[126] Moreover, Levinas's analysis of patience becomes the focal point upon which the initial fear of death, by way of fearing the other, is turned on its head. The endurance of pain and suffering reveals that life gains its meaning and significance, not from an "allergic" reaction to the other,[127] but rather through the relationships that one cultivates *with* others. As Levinas states, "in patience the will breaks through the cast of its egoism and as it were displaces its center of gravity outside of itself, to will as Desire and Goodness limited by nothing".[128] Thus, we see in Levinas's work a similar hypothesis to that seen in my earlier analysis of Ricoeur's account of suffering: rather than locking one into their own interiority, suffering endears one to others. In the recognition of the mortality and finitude of the other, the

---

[126] Ibid, p. 236.
[127] See Arca, Kristofer, "Facing the Thou: The Confrontation Between Martin Buber and Immanuel Levinas". Master's Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2007, p. 51.
[128] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 239.

other goes from being the *object* of the fear of death, to being the *subject* of one's solicitude.

I do not think that it is a stretch, then, to suggest that both Ricoeur and Levinas share the way in which they understand the significance of witnessing the death of the other. Indeed, to stress this point, note how Ricoeur ultimately describes Levinas's understanding of the relationship between being and death in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, and how he described it himself in a letter he wrote to a close friend, shortly before his own death. Accordingly, Levinas "is clear and firm" in his position that being is a *being-against-death* and not a *being-towards-death*.[129]

> To Heideggerian being-toward-death, Levinas opposes a despite-death, an *against-death*, which opens a fragile space of manifestation for "goodness liberated from the egoist gravitations".[130]

Now, compare that to the letter that Ricoeur sent to his friend:

> Dear Marie,
> At the hour of decline the word resurrection arises. Beyond every miraculous episode. From the depths of

[129] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 360.
[130] Ibid, emphasis mine. Ricoeur quotes Levinas, p. 236 of *Totality and Infinity*.

> life, a power suddenly appears, which says that *being is being against death*. Believe this with me.
>
> Your friend,
>
> Paul R.[131]

We should pause briefly, to note the profundity of this letter. Ricoeur, whilst he himself was entering into the final moments of his life, wrote to a friend, inviting her to share a moment—a final moment?—together. The brevity of this letter—and indeed, of each sentence therein—suggest the urgency under which it was written. It is never too late in life for one to have a moment of existential revelation, and to desire to share such a revelation with someone with whom one enjoys a close friendship. Further, the final sentence, "Believe this with me", is an invitation to carry on the relationship with the other. Even though Ricoeur was dying, he was still very much alive, and as such, being with others was still a deeply important component of his life.

In summation: to be with someone as they die is to be with someone in the final moments of their life. Taking the weight of this experience seriously entails cultivating a compassionate relationship with the person, where one helps them continue to live up until the moment of death, in recognition of the ineffable and radical alterity that will soon

---

[131] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 96, emphasis mine.

become 'lost' only to be given (back?) to eternity. The concept of narrative memory has a vital role to play in helping the other relate more deeply to their life and their life's story. The aim is to utilize the integrative component of narrative memory in such a way that the other is able to gain the distance required to interpret and reinterpret past lived experiences for the sake of cathartic 'existential healing', and out of the recognition of the dignity the dying other has as a person. As such, to witness the death of another is also to bear witness to an important part of human existence—to be is not to be towards death, but to stand against it, to strive to live up to the moment of death.

2. Speaking of the 'longer trajectory' of surviving the death of another with whom one shared a close relationship necessarily involves the "work"—as Ricoeur calls it—of mourning.[132] Here, the reference to 'work' is a reference to

---

[132] I shall remind the reader here that this chapter is restricted to disclosing how the notion of narrative memory can figure into helping one navigate through the death of another with whom one shared a close relationship. But in focusing on those with whom we share a close relationship, I do leave out different ways in which we might receive the death of the other—namely, those others who we count as strangers, those who died before our own lifetime (like a famous author, or a distant relative, like a great-grandfather), and, of course, instances of mass death (like those who died during a pandemic, or from genocide). Each of these ways in which we can understand the other merit their own

psychoanalysis; the work of mourning is that of working-through the grief that one experiences when the other is permanently 'lost' due to death.[133] The process is time

---

analysis—and the importance of each of these analyses should be readily apparent. However, undertaking such analyses would go beyond the confines of this chapter.

[133] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 71- 77. These pages in *Memory, History, Forgetting* mark a return, on Ricoeur's part, to the works of Freud, a figure that played a significant role in the 'middle-period' of Ricoeur's work, but who, thereafter, was only mentioned rarely. In *Critique and Conviction* Ricoeur states that part of his interest in Freud was that it was psychoanalysis that allowed him to go beyond the confines of phenomenology, as psychoanalysis could be viewed as that which places a limit on phenomenological analysis (p. 72). Beyond this, this 'middle-period' of Ricoeur's work was also a period where he became interested in bringing out the double-meaning of words within sentence-level of discourse. One can see how this interest manifested itself within *Freud and Philosophy*, as one of the underlying theses he propelled in this work was that of the "epistemological fragility" that is laden within psychoanalysis, as a result of its "vocabulary of energy", on the one hand, and its "vocabulary of sense and interpretation", on the other (p. 69). Apart from this, one may ask why the later Ricoeur (from *Time and Narrative* onward) rarely returned to Freud or Freudian psychoanalysis? Again, *Critique and Conviction* gives the reader insight:

> When I have written a book on a topic, I don't speak about it after that, as though my duty has been done in that regard, leaving me free to continue on my way. It is in this way that I dropped the problem of psychoanalysis, but also that of metaphor after *The Rule of Metaphor*. (p. 76)

consuming and painful—and no reference to psychoanalysis is needed to state this last part as a fact; for most, the experience of another person's death is all that is needed. According to Ricoeur, however, a major contribution to the pain of grief is because of the "reality-testing" that is done during the mourning process.[134] The person one loves has died, is dead, shall remain dead. The time of this life—a time that was once shared with others—has ended.[135] Further, apart from this reference to time, the death of the other implies something else: the permanent loss of their *perspective* on the world, the perspective that they indirectly granted to oneself—the loss, in other words, of their entire worldview. The work of mourning—which entails the painful process of reality-testing—is the effort one makes to both reconcile and come to terms with the permanence of this loss, and to also attempt to more fully internalize the

---

In this sense, Ricoeur's return to Freudian psychoanalysis in *Memory, History, Forgetting* is bound to be a disappointment if one is expecting him to continue whatever dialogue was started—and subsequently frustrated, considering *Freud and Philosophy*'s reception in France—around the time of *The Conflict of Interpretations* and *Freud and Philosophy*. Within *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur uses psychoanalysis in order to transpose individual processes like 'grief' and 'mourning' to the collective level of communities.

[134] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 72.

[135] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p. 41.

perspective of the other, through the creative capacity of one's memory. I shall quote the passage from which I based this analysis in full, to note the poignancy of Ricoeur's words:

> Along the road that passes through the death of the other—another figure of the detour—we learn two things in succession: loss and mourning. As for loss… the deceased… constitutes a genuine amputation of oneself to the extent that the relation with the one who has disappeared forms an integral part of one's self-identity. The loss of the other is in a way the loss of self… The next step is that of mourning… At the end of the movement of internalization of the love object that has been lost forever, the reconciliation with this loss—in which, precisely, the work of mourning consists—begins to take shape.[136]

The work of mourning, then, entails taking in the world(view) of the other, and in this way, keeping them alive—albeit *figuratively*—through the power of memory.

---

[136] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* p. 359. The phrasing of the death of another also being experienced as an "amputation of self" finds a parallel in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, who, in the passages where he recounts that of the death of a close friend, confesses to God (and to the reader) how the loss of his friend was experienced as if part of his very soul had been severed. See, Augustine, *The Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwich. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 77.

This position is actually not unique to Ricoeur; it is one that he shares with others. Indeed, one can find a recapitulation of this view in the work of Derrida:

> [Mourning] consists in carrying the other in the self. There is no longer any world, it's the end of the world, for the other at his death. And so I welcome in me this end of the world, I must carry the other and his world, the world in me: introjection, interiorization of remembrance… and idealization.[137]

Yet, according to Derrida, this also entails, if not an aporia, a dilemma. Remembering the other by way of remembering their world(view) entails remembering them in their full alterity—but it is precisely the alterity of the other that slips away and cannot be (fully) represented, not even by memory. Failing to understand this impossibility entails being seduced by what Derrida calls an "idealizing introjection"—a false idol that stands in the place for the alterity of the other.[138] It is perhaps C.S. Lewis who captures this best when he agonizes over the memories of his wife, H., who died of cancer:

---

[137] Derrida, Jacques, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p. 160.
[138] Ibid.

> Thinking of the H. facts—real words, looks, laughs and actions of hers. But it is my own mind that selects and groups them. Already, less than a month after her death, I can feel the slow, insidious beginning of a process that will make the H. I think of into a more and more imaginary woman… The reality is no longer there to check me, to pull me up short, as the Real H. so often did, so unexpectedly, by being so thoroughly herself and not me.[139]

Tragically, if one understands that the memory of the other is only just that—an imperfect substitute—then the work of mourning can never be complete; and when the work of mourning fails to fully run its course, we have melancholia.[140] Stated more succinctly, the 'dillem-aporia' is this: either one 'lives on' with a false impression of the other, and thus fails to do the other justice, or one becomes 'stuck' in the self-destruction of melancholia, failing, then, to allow one to carry on—and thus failing the other in a different way; for is it not the wish of a loved one that one would be able to live on, and live fully after the loved one has died?

Is there a way out of this? My contention is yes—through the tools of narrative and narrative memory. In the previous

---

[139] Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994, p. 18.
[140] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 72

chapter, I developed the concept of narrative memory. The key feature of narrative memory is its discursivity. Narrative memories can be put into words, they can be communicated to others (or even just to oneself). The discursivity of narrative memory was a result of the relationship of belongingness and distanciation that one has with one's own past. One belongs to one's own past, but one can also take a distance from it, and this distance is what allows for the 'free play' of imaginative re-interpretations of one's life-story. Reinterpreting one's life-story allows one to bring out layers of meaning that transforms one's being-in-the-world. Additionally, the role of the imagination here is one of the ways in which the aporia between memory and imagination can be put to use in a 'healthy' way—that is in a way that does not pathologize memory, such that one sees memory as 'always, already' unreliable. Finally, that a narrative memory lends itself so readily to the art and act of interpretation, that it can be shared, discussed, written, or otherwise dialogically 'transmitted', suggest that a narrative memory is integrated into one's understanding of oneself.

Here, I would like to add that the integrative and coherent character of narrative memories, which grant one the capacity to understand oneself, is *not* exclusive to one's self-understanding. The memories that we have of others, and the stories that we weave from these memories, can be used as a

vehicle to understand others, as well. This, too, entails a process of interpretation; this, too, entails that layers of meaning with regard to one's relationship with another can be uncovered or recovered. This, too, entails that other others may have startingly different interpretations of the person that one remembers. But once again, before we take on the 'pathological' stance towards memory, and towards narrative memories—i.e. as seeing them as unreliable—we should keep in mind (we should remember!) Ricoeur's point: when all else fails, memory is all that we have left.[141] Thus, the proposal that I will lay out is indeed an imperfect proposal, one that will require the same commitment to fidelity that one finds in Ricoeur's analysis of ipseity. In the same way that understanding oneself in one's ipseity requires an authentic endorsement of fidelity—of both being true to oneself and giving a true account of oneself—taking in the world(view) of the other after they have died, requires an equal, if not greater, commitment to fidelity, for their ipseity always remains in some way, shape, or form, inaccessible.

How ought we begin this process? I think the best starting point, in attempting to pave the hermeneutic path out of the 'dilemm-aporia' is to return to the idea cited throughout this

[141] Ibid, p. 7.

entire dissertation—that descriptive language by itself is not enough to fully disclose the nature of being. Being requires the poetic uses of language. This is also true of death—and the death of another. Consider, for instance, the deeply symbolic rituals that different cultures undergo in response to a person who has died. As Ricoeur states, one does not discard a dead body as one would waste; the dead body of another requires ritual in order to pay respect to the ineffability of such a loss.[142]

Such rituals create a space for narratives, for narrative memory. Consider, for example, what happens at most funeral gatherings: stories of the person who has died are shared—tragic ones, comical ones, ones that are mundane, and ones that reveal 'layers' or 'sides' of the person of which one may have been unaware. It is here where the discursivity of narrative memory is on full display, as well as its integrative capacity. Indirectly, the depths of the person are revealed, albeit also incompletely and fallibly—but I think that most people are wise enough to grasp that the person they once knew had more to them than what was brought out of the specific relationship that was shared.

Nevertheless, in sharing the stories we have of the person who has died, we can begin to take in their world(view) into

---

[142] Ricoeur, *Living up to Death*, p . 8.

ours. The process of 'assembling' such a view is indirect, and quasi-hypothetical. It relies on the stories that are shared and the memories that are transmitted from oneself and to others. In this sense, what we share to others is not so much the person in their full alterity, but those facets of the person that were brought out by the relationships that we had with them. However, because each person may have had a different relationship with the other who has died, it is possible for there to be conflicts of interpretation in the stories that we share. Nevertheless, these conflicts of interpretation may be a good thing—it is testimony to the radical alterity of the other, and it may cause one to seek out a better understanding of the person by seeking out more stories, more memories that announce these layers of complexity. This seeking is a way of keeping the memory of the other *alive*, albeit, again, indirectly through the stories we tell. Here, Ricoeur quotes Jorge Semprun;

> But memory is nothing apart from recounting. And recounting is nothing without hearing. [Jorge Semprun's] problem: "How to tell such an unlikely truth, how you foster the imagination of the unimaginable, if not by elaborating, by reworking

> reality, by putting it into perspective. With a bit of artifice, then!"[143]

"With a bit of artifice, then!" To remember the uniqueness of a life, one must seek to exceed the descriptive boundaries of life—only the figurative, creative language of metaphor, simile, poetry, narrative is fit to honor someone.

I think it is also possible to tie this into the theses of *Time and Narrative*—the narratives that we share of the other refigures both personal and cosmological time. In the same way that cultures have different holidays that punctuate calendar time, one may have 'personal' or 'interpersonal' holidays that punctuate moments to remember the other—their birthday, the anniversary of their death[144], or moments that were significant for one's relationship with them. One may even further integrate the other into their daily life with small gestures, like ordering their favorite coffee. These are ways of *celebrating* the life of the other.

That last part, I believe, is key. In memorializing someone, in keeping their world(view) in mind, in sharing that view with others, in celebrating the reality they stood for—at some undisclosed and uncertain point in time, one might find

---

[143] Ibid, p. 31. The quotation is from Semprun, Jorge. *Literature or Life*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. New York: Viking, 1997, p. 124.

[144] Which is always a difficult day, as it also entails keeping the pain of their death 'alive', too.

that one is no longer doing these acts out of mourning the loss of a life. One is doing it because it adds an extra layer of joy to living. The joy that the other person had in living has transferred over to you; it has been added to yours—perhaps such that it has helped in rediscovering this joy with which to begin. As such, the more one mourns the death of a person, the more one inevitably affirms the value of life.[145] It is precisely here, I think, where Ricoeur's works come full circle. At the end of *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricoeur reflects on a passage from Rainer Maria Rilke, '*Hier sein ist herrlich'* and he concludes:

> Thus I do not say that 'this is the best of all possible worlds', but that this unique world, uniquely for me, this incomparable world is good with a goodness which itself knows no degrees, which is a goodness which is the *yes* of being.[146]

Thus, within the beginning and the end of Ricoeur's philosophical work, one finds a philosopher who does not appeal to some sort of afterworld in order to find value in this one, but who was capable of witnessing that this world, this

---

[145] de Lange, "Affirming Life in the Face of Death", p. 511.
[146] Ricoeur, Paul. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Translated by E.V. Kohak. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 475. The work of Morny allowed me to make this connection; see "Paul Ricoeur on Life and Death", p. 250.

life is already fit to be the object of affirmation. And where it concerns 'taking in' the (world)view of the other who has died via the creative capacity of narrative memory, the object of affirmation is the life that the other has lived, as well as the life one was able to share with the other.

Conclusion

I shall conclude by way of returning to the three theses that animated this final chapter, in order to show that the main body of this chapter has indirectly demonstrated them. My return path to them shall be done in reverse order. Thus, to begin with the final thesis: The 'work' of remembering the other ultimately teaches one to affirm life, even in its harshness. Indeed, the final paragraphs of this chapter were dedicated to this very thesis, and thus, they are the 'freshest' in one's memory. To this will simply say that the affirmation of life is done indirectly through the creative capacity of language, harnessed through the life-stories of others that we carry with us, in order to celebrate the fullness of the person of which these stories stand in the place.

Secondly, narrated memory suggests what 'becomes' of the person once they have died. A person becomes the stories that we tell of them as we continue to live, and continue to keep them 'alive'—albeit figuratively—through these shared stories and memories. Inevitably, this process is incomplete. Much as it was when the person was alive, there is always

something new to discover about the person. However, unlike how it was while they were still alive, the discovery of something new happens through the act of interpreting the stories that remain.

Lastly, narrative memory deepens the significance of Ricoeur's understanding of intersubjectivity by revealing a hitherto hidden layer of meaning in his claim of 'living the good life with and for others'. Narrative memory brings out what it might mean to live *for* another, after they have died. We carry the world(view) of the other 'in' us after they have died. In doing so, we continue to live *for* them. The experiences we accumulate, we also accumulate on their behalf. Those who have died may no longer be able to see for themselves the challenges and accomplishments that we will go on to endure and enjoy, but in fostering their world(view), we can do that *for* them. In this sense, surviving the death of the other is a way of keeping an unspoken promise on their behalf—to continue to live, and to do so as fully as possible, despite the pain that existence entails.

Conclusion

I shall divide this conclusion into two major sections. First, I will briefly revisit each chapter of this dissertation in order to show how each has both broadened the reach of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics by further creating connections to the discipline or to other figures within the discipline, and how each has deepened our understanding of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics by way of the argumentative arch that carried itself through this entire work. This will be done in an effort to emphasize the contributions that this dissertation has made to scholarship on Ricoeur's philosophy, and by extension, to hermeneutics as such. Second, I will develop several limitations to this study, taking the view that they either 1) constitute fruitful avenues for further research; or 2) pose a legitimate problem for Ricoeurian hermeneutics. I shall attempt to respond to each limitation upon their initial presentation.

I. The Broadening and Deepening of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics

The overall structure of this work has been that of an investigation into the threefold relationship between

personal identity or selfhood, narrativity, and memory within the confines of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, or more specifically, his philosophical anthropology. Since Ricoeur's theory of selfhood was that which launched this investigation, the starting point for this dissertation required an elucidation of his understanding of the self, in relation to the theory of narrativity that animated the final decades of his philosophical career.

My contention here has been that Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity is a philosophically productive one, which still has much to offer the discipline. As such, I take Zahavi's stance that narrative identity allows the phenomenological understanding of selfhood and subjectivity—typically presented by Zahavi as a 'minimal' or 'core' self, rooted in the 'mineness' that is at the foundation of first-person perspective—to be extended such that it allows one to have a better understanding of 'who' one is, which strikes me as the most important question concerning the 'nature' of selfhood. One's life story forms both the 'playground' and the 'connective tissue' wherein and whereby one can disclose to oneself and others the 'who' that one is. Further, given that Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity intersects with so many dense dialectical relationships (between idem and ipse, between innovation and sedimentation, between belongingness and distanciation, etc.), I do not think it is

controversial to state that his account offers a more realistic approach to selfhood—it lacks the artificiality that might exist with other narrative conceptions of selfhood and personal identity.

This is precisely why the first objective of this dissertation was to confront Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity with the most robust criticisms of it—promulgated by the figure of none other than Galen Strawson. From this, we can see how the first chapter of this work both broadened and deepened Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Broadened: the first chapter offered me a way to place Ricoeur into a contemporary debate on the viability of the narrative theory of personal identity, in order to show that his understanding of the concept was still worthwhile. Strawson's criticisms of narrative identity as such are all insightful and well-articulated—but they rest on a philosophical presupposition that Ricoeur would reject entirely, and this proved to be the fertile ground from which to reframe his view of narrativity and narrative identity. Deepened: Even in this first chapter, it was important to bring out connections that *Oneself as Another* and *Time and Narrative* had with each other that were not readily made by Ricoeur himself—specifically the overlapping dialectics that intersect between narrativity, idem and ipse, innovation and sedimentation, and, finally, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. By now, it should be rather

clear that the first chapter set the foundation for the entirety of this dissertation; I do not think any other chapter in this work is referred back to more than the first chapter.

The first chapter also ended with an appeal to Ricoeur's understanding of memory, which is where the second chapter of this investigation began. The focus of the second chapter was to develop the two aporias of memory—the first being the aporia between memory and imagination; the second being the aporia between personal and collective memory. The goal was to develop these aporias in parallel to each other so that a key difference between Ricoeur's treatment of the two could be made apparent. Namely, that while Ricoeur did an excellent job developing, describing, and then diagnosing the first aporia of memory, the second aporia was left underdeveloped, under-described, and undiagnosed. Thus, the ultimate role that the second chapter played in this dissertation was to indicate a problem—by way of a philosophical gap in research—within Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Nevertheless, within this chapter, several moves were made on my part to both broaden and deepen Ricoeur's philosophy. By way of broadening our understanding of Ricoeur, it was in this chapter that I was able to show the connection between Zahavi's more recent phenomenological studies on selfhood, and the way in which Ricoeur anticipated Zahavi's position. Anticipated, to be sure,

but did not fully develop this position with the clarity and rigor of Zahavi. This is so simply because these two philosophers do not share the same philosophical project. Zahavi typically operates with an overtly Husserlian approach to phenomenology, and with the goal of demonstrating how much phenomenology still has to offer both the philosophical and scientific community. Ricoeur, of course, is the master of the long detour, and is more devoted to demonstrating how many issues within phenomenology require going beyond an analysis of direct experience, necessitating appropriation from the creative resources of language in order better understand our relationship with being. Despite this tension, it strikes me that finding the connections between the positions of various philosophers can be just as important and instructive as finding the differences between them. Beyond connecting Ricoeur and Zahavi, the second chapter also placed Ricoeur in dialogue with many figures from the history of philosophy—Plato, Aristotle, Bergson, Husserl, Sartre, Parfit, etc. Many of these figures constitute the 'usual suspects' of those with whom Ricoeur is in dialogue with—albeit indirectly through his works. Nevertheless, highlighting the nature and product(s) of these various dialogues remained important for the sake of exegetic work entailed by the second chapter.

In terms of how the second chapter deepened Ricoeur's hermeneutics, I will refer back to two accomplishments made in this chapter, in addition to the connections I made between *Memory, History, Forgetting* and *The Course of Recognition.* I shall start with this latter point first, and then pivot back to the chapter's accomplishments. Throughout the second chapter, I made the effort to connect *Memory, History, Forgetting* with *The Course of Recognition* in order to show the lines of continuity in Ricoeur's thinking on memory, as well as the shifts in thinking—the chief of which is his expansion of the concept of recognition itself, which went beyond the initial phenomenological treatment of it in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Beyond this, in terms of the accomplishments of the chapter, there were two. The first was my proposed way of interpreting the relationship between the various oppositional pairs through which Ricoeur develops his understanding of memory. Within the confines of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the relationship between these oppositional pairs is not clarified; they are presented, and presented in separation of each other. Finding the thread that weaves together various components of Ricoeur's philosophy has been the defining trait of this dissertation as a whole, and it is on display in this second chapter. Secondly, this is the chapter wherein which I developed the second aporia of memory, bringing to light an

aporia that has largely gone ignored by scholarship on Ricoeur. Yet, it is an aporia, as I hope to have shown, that seems to be just as important as any of the other aporias that Ricoeur has confronted throughout his work, and as such, merited a more thorough investigation.

This leads me now to the third chapter of this dissertation, wherein I was tasked with responding to the aporia between personal and collective memory. This was not a small work order! Responding to this aporia fully entailed weaving the philosophical thread that united all of Ricoeur's later works, from the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*, through *Oneself as Another*, and finally to *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Along the way, it meant 'jury-rigging'—or, as Ricoeur prefers to say, 'grafting'—various dialectical relationships atop each other. It also entailed briefly uniting Ricoeurian hermeneutics with Gadamerian hermeneutics, as the notion of 'being-affected' by the past served a central pivot in the analysis that unfolded in the chapter. Despite these complex interactions, the compass that guided me throughout this process was the insight that the relationship between the aporia between personal and collective memory was similar (enough) to that between phenomenological and cosmological time in *Time and Narrative*. The similarity in question, however, was a *structural* similarity. The structure of this similarity was that of mutual exclusion and reliance.

As such, in *Time and Narrative*, the aporia of time entailed that the phenomenological conception of time, for instance, would *exclude* (the primacy of) of the cosmological conception, while at the same time, it *relied* on this primacy as a condition of its own possibility. The same is true for the cosmological conception—i.e. the exclusion of phenomenology, while at the same time, the reliance on it. This structure was also at the heart of the second aporia of memory—the exclusion of the other, while at the same time, reliance. With this, the path was set forward. Thus, in the same way that the concept of narrativity was able to give birth to a 'third' time—narrated time—so, too, could the concept be used again to birth a 'third' memory—narrated memory. The concept of narrated memory is the major contribution that this dissertation makes to Ricoeurian hermeneutics and to the discipline as such.

Formulating the concept of narrated (or narrative) memory required further developing another concept within Ricoeurian hermeneutics, the concept of a 'happy' memory. This was a concept that was utilized several times throughout *Memory, History, Forgetting*, but never fully developed by Ricoeur—it remained, in other words, a vague reference point throughout the entirety of the text. With this said, then, I think I have shown how my third chapter broadened—insofar as it required (re-)connecting Ricoeur

to Gadamer's hermeneutics—and deepened—insofar as it required the creation of a new concept between narrativity and memory.

This now leads to the final chapter of this dissertation, wherein I made the earnest attempt to take the concept of narrated memory and apply it to an important existential theme—the death of a loved one. Perhaps it was out of a Camusian spirit that lead me to leap into this topic; philosophy is at its best, I have always felt, when it can be connected to something that we must all live through, for it is here where I think many can return to that moment where they 'fell in love' with the discipline. Thus, to the extent that good philosophical analysis can provide something akin to a 'therapeutics for the soul', the final chapter of this dissertation served as a testing ground for the concept of narrative memory, in order to see what sort of insight it could provide as we confront an existential reality. This chapter also served as an opportunity to reconnect—and differentiate—Ricoeur with and from some of the major figures of phenomenology and continental thought as such. Husserl, Stein, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and even Derrida—all had a role to play in this chapter, with the hope that their contributions helped enrich the analysis.

Within the confines of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, the task at hand was to clarify the polysemic character of witnessing

the death of a loved one—both in terms of being-with the other as they are dying or living up until the moment of death, as I argued, and in terms of the 'longer trajectory' of surviving their death. In terms of this polysemy, the former understanding of being-with the other provided me with the opportunity to show how Ricoeur's understanding of the death differed profoundly from Heidegger's being-towards-death, and how it found an ally in Levinas's account of death. It also entailed investigating Ricoeur's *Living Up to Death*, and connecting the fragmentary thoughts contained therein with *Oneself as Another* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Nevertheless, on either 'side' of the polysemic reading of witnessing the death of the other, we found space to employ my concept of narrative memory. In terms of being-with the other, my position was that of using the tools of narrative memory in order to help the other find and express the Essential that constituting their life-story, and all for the sake of bringing their understanding of their life-story to a moment of catharsis—or, 'existential healing' as Gildea phrased it more eloquently than I. Importantly, the concept of narrative memory could also be applied to the latter understanding of surviving the death of the other. My position here was that it is through the appropriation of the structure of narrativity that one can truly begin to 'work through' the death of the other, in order to find a way 'out' of

the dilemma between mourning and melancholy. Mourning entails internalizing the world(view) of the other, and carrying it within oneself, such that one can continue to live *for* the other. But internalizing the world(view) of the other, entails internalizing the other in their alterity—an impossible task. However, sharing the life-story of the other entails understanding that world(view). But it is an infinite task in two ways. The first is that the stories one shares can always be revisited, reinterpreted—and in this way, new layers of meaning can be unveiled. The second way is that of the stories that others have to share of the same person. The relationship they had with the one who has died was different from one's own—even radically so. These stories, too, even if they can challenge our own, add to our understanding of the other. They do not replace the other, of course—nothing can. But the stories we share can teach one to celebrate (their) life.

Thus, the entirety of this dissertation has been laid bare. However, the work involved in it is not quite yet complete. I turn now to some of the limitations of this dissertation.

II. Limitations

I have four limitations in mind—the last of which is the most problematic for this work. The first is this: This dissertation has largely been about exploring philosophical hermeneutic issues that arise from within the topic of selfhood and

memory from Ricoeur's perspective. Further, given Ricoeur's suspicion of analyzing direct experience, and his emphasis that a topic like the self requires many interpretive detours, why is it the case that psychoanalysis—or Ricoeur's own confrontation with psychoanalysis—features so little in this work? Is this to suggest that some of the most essential psychoanalytic concepts—like that of the unconscious or of the nature of drives—offers little to this discussion? I think this is an excellent point. In truth, I think that footnote 131 of Chapter 4 prefigures my response to this limitation. I shall expand upon it now. My view is that Ricoeur's confrontation with Freudian psychoanalysis happened in what I would call the 'middle' stage of his career—wherein Ricoeur became more interested in breaking from the confines of phenomenology, and embarked upon a more hermeneutic task. I alluded to this in the very beginning of the first chapter of this dissertation. Between *The Symbolism of Evil* and *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur's work focused on exposing the 'double-meanings' that words and concepts might hide—and psychoanalysis is excellent at nothing, if it cannot unmask hidden meanings. In this sense, psychoanalysis helped Ricoeur transition to this period in his career. However, from *Time and Narrative* onward, Ricoeur's work revolved around the polysemy of sentence-level discourse, or that of chains of sentences—e.g. narratives. Indeed, from *Time and Narrative*

onward, psychoanalysis does not play an enormous role in Ricoeur's argumentation. Couple this with the fact that this dissertation takes *Time and Narrative* as the starting point, it struck me that incorporating vast amounts of psychoanalysis into this work, while offering an opportunity for scholarship that might help to clarify the link between 'middle' and 'late' Ricoeur, was not required for me to cement the arguments that I have promoted throughout this dissertation. Further, if there is a work from the 'middle' stage of Ricoeur's career that could serve as the nexus from which connect to the 'later' stage, it would be *The Rule of Metaphor*, as it is possible to connect the function of metaphor to that of certain tropes within narrativity. Thus, in response to this limitation, I offer what can be seen as an Ockham's razor: if the argumentation upon which this dissertation rests has been persuasive, and if it has been persuasive without requiring psychoanalysis, then it is not unreasonable to conclude that a prolonged confrontation with psychoanalysis was unrequired.

Another limitation comes in the form of history. One-third of *Memory, History, Forgetting* is devoted to the topic of history as such. Further, the concept of collective memory seems to be a middle concept that connects memory with the broader topic of history. Nevertheless, this dissertation does not really explore Ricoeur's philosophy of history. This is a more important limitation than the previous one, in my view.

To begin my response, I would like to point out that history has not been *entirely* ignored in this dissertation—it played a relatively large role in the third chapter, albeit indirectly through the concept of traditionality and of being-affected by the past. It was through the polysemy of 'by the past' that I could play a game between being-affected by 'the past' of history and by 'the past' of one's own previous lived experiences. That said, it is true that Ricoeur's broader view concerning the philosophy of history does go unsaid throughout this work. This was for yet another practical reason—one that I think my reader can anticipate: given that this dissertation began with the theme of selfhood, I purposely chose to stay closer to that theme, rather than stray away from it. However, with the main work of this dissertation accomplished, it is certainly important that any future research done on this topic take more seriously Ricoeur's contributions—not simply to existentialism, or to philosophical anthropology, which has been my chief interest in reading Ricoeur—but to the philosophy of history, as such.

In the same way that one-third of *Memory, History, Forgetting* revolves around history, another third of the text revolves around forgetting. To this extent, this dissertation did not really uncover the relationship between memory, on the one hand, and forgetting, on the other. Once again, I think this limitation is more serious than the previous one—

especially since an analysis of forgetting, and of the ‘place’ of forgetting within Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, could disclose more about our philosophical anthropology, in that this topic is more intuitively related to selfhood than that of the philosophy of history. Nevertheless, I believe this to be a limitation that lays the ground for fruitful future research more than a limitation that calls this current work into question. The main problem towards which this dissertation is an address is that of the second aporia of memory—between personal and collective memory. This is not necessarily an issue that directly involves forgetting. Nevertheless, the topic of forgetting does not go entirely unmentioned in this work. In the second chapter, I do spend some time speaking of the effacing of traces entailed by forgetting, and do suggest that, within the context of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, forgetting itself is treated as both a limit and challenge to memory, as well as something that makes memory possible. In this sense, within the confines of *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur is willing to see forgetting as a ‘great theme’ within our existential condition. Interestingly, within the confines of *The Course of Recognition*, whenever forgetting is mentioned, it takes on a more antagonistic role to the hermeneutic task of remembering. In the second chapter of this work, I speculated that this is because *The Course of Recognition* does

not look at the topic of forgiveness, which, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, is coupled with that of forgetting. Still, insofar as the theme of forgetting is an important existential theme, and insofar as it can also imply a host of deeply important features of human existence that can benefit from more rigorous philosophical reflection—i.e. aging, (mental) health, finitude—no philosophical anthropology would be complete without incorporating it. Yet, at no point in this dissertation was it my claim that this work would constitute a complete philosophical anthropology—and is such a task even possible, let alone preferable, within the framework of one, and only one, work? That said, given the possibilities that are entailed by the concept of narrative memory, a future study on the hermeneutics of aging and forgetting, could prove to be a fruitful way to develop limitations to this concept that may, at this point, only be implicated in this work.

The final limitation is, I think, the most serious, as it constitutes what could very well be a problem within Ricoeurian hermeneutics. It goes like this: central to Ricoeur's account of intersubjectivity is that of the reciprocal constitution between oneself and another. One's relationship with others brings out different 'sides' of oneself, and the process of being-with others, especially in that of friendship, is that of learning to *internalize* the view that another has of me, such that I can become familiar with this part of myself

even in the absence of another. This is the mark of alterity that allows self-esteem to unfold. Yet, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur goes on to describe the death of another as an 'amputation' of the self, because of the *loss* of the other's perspective. Part of the pain of mourning stems from having to internalize the view of the other, including the view that they had on oneself. But there's a tension here, if not a contradiction. If the intersubjective relationship in Ricoeur's hermeneutics is 'always, already' one of internalizing the view of the other, by way of an acquired identification, why should one feel a, or the, loss of the other upon their death? It seems like mourning, and the grief of mourning, does not 'fit' within Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In which case, why would narrative memory even be needed?

My hope is that the seriousness of this claim is readily apparent, as it calls into question the entirety of the final chapter of this work, and casts seeds of doubt onto narrative memory, as such. I think that this, along with all the other limitations that I have developed herein, is an excellent point. My response is the following: clearly, the internalization of the world(view) of the other through one's relationship with them while they are alive is imperfect. Further, I do not believe that Ricoeur would hold this process of internalization to be perfect, as it would imply that Ricoeur would maintain that one could have an idea of the other that

completely encapsulates their alterity. I think that Ricoeur would very much agree with Levinas that the profundity of the other is that they always remain as such—and no impression that they can make on oneself is ever so complete that they are entirely reducible to oneself, or to the idea that one has of them.

In this way, the pain of grief is very much that of having to reconcile with the reality that no matter how much one tries to rehabilitate their world(view) in carrying it with them as one continues to live 'for' the other, no rehabilitation will ever really be a replacement for the reality of the other in their fullness. Memorializing the person through the stories that we share of them is precisely that point which announces that no story can fully encapsulate them—which is why we might have to agree with Jorge Semprun's statement, cited in the fourth chapter, that the stories we share require a "bit of artifice, then!". To try to give an account of the life of another is to also place upon oneself the requirement to exceed the boundaries of life—if such a task is even possible.

In this way, I think that mourning—and the pain of mourning—is indeed a reality in Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology. Further, so is it necessary to use narrative means to help one go through the process of the work of mourning. Of course, to the mindset of one who is rather

possessed by the virtues of deductive analysis, this answer is unsatisfactory, as the power of narrative is also quite fallible. But when it comes to reconciling with the loss of someone, what other recourse is there, truly?

I suppose here, one response could very well be that of forgetting. Rather than attempt to construct narratives that no one believes will fully encapsulate a person who has died, one could simply just forget the person, and in doing so, allow oneself to move on with their own life. This is indeed a logical possibility, to be clear. But imagine if one made this choice in response to the untimely death of their mother, or to the death of their best friend, or to the death of their life partner. Does it not seem that such a choice is monstrous? If it is so, it is because it demonstrates that such a choice would be *morally wrong* in some way—to forget someone who, for the sake of this thought experiment, represented a deeply important part of someone's life. In the face of this, then, I would remind the reader of what Ricoeur called the duty to remember, the duty to have fidelity to the past. In this sense, it is a duty to have fidelity towards the other who played a significant role in one's life. How ought this duty be situated in Ricoeur's framework? My own view is that it is something like a prima facie duty; part of what it means to be a person is to have a duty towards fidelity—and the duty towards

fidelity entails a duty towards the pastness of the past, and of representing that past as truly as one can.

However, if this duty is prima facie—or similar enough to it that one might as well simply just *call* it prima facie—then it is situated alongside various other duties—duties that can conflict with it, and that can take priority over it. When might this be the case? When might the duty towards the fidelity of the past be ceded by a duty to *forget* the past and move on—perhaps out of nonmaleficence? Here, I suppose the only answer that I can give is that the process of prioritizing one duty over another entails that of interpreting the concrete situation that one is in, and offering the best argument in favor of one duty over the others. The duty justified by the best argument is the duty that ought to take priority. But all of this rests on one's interpretation. And interpretation is the inescapable horizon of human action and interaction.

Bibliography

Abumrad, Jad and Robert Krulwich. "Memory and Forgetting". *Radiolab*, June 7, 2007. Podcast, website, 1:00:07. https//www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/episodes/91569-memory-and-forgetting

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half a Yellow Sun.* New York: Random House, 2006.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. New York: The New Press, 2010

Amalric, Jean-Luc, "L'imagination poético-pratique dans l'identité narrative," in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* volume 3, no. 2 (2012).

Anckaert, Luc. "Respect for the Other: The 'Place' of the Thou in Ricoeur's Ethics". In *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricoeur's Ethical Order*. Edited by H. Opdebeek. Leuven: Peeters, 2000, pp. 37 – 50.

—. *A Critique of Infinity*: *Rosenzweig and Levinas.* Leuven: Peeters, 2006.

Arca, Kris. "Facing the Thou: The Confrontation Between Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas." Master's Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2008.

—. "The Invitation to Listen: The Question of Freedom and

Responsibility in the Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig." MPhil Thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009.

—. "Opaque Selves: A Ricoeurian Response to Galen

Strawson's Anti-Narrative Arguments." In *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2018), pp. 70 – 89. DOI 10.595/errs.2018.387

—. "Narrative Memory: The Poetic Response to the Aporia Between Personal and Collective Memory in Ricoeur's Hermeneutics." *Polygon, Vol.* 14, No. 1 (July 2021): Forthcoming.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. New York: Doubleday, 1959

Aristotle. *Poetics.* Translated by Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Atkins, Kim. *Self and Subjectivity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Augustine. *The Confessions.* Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bergson, Henri. *Matter and Memory.* Translated by Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1991.

Bernet, Rudolf. "*La présence du passé dans l'analyse husserlienne de la conscience du temps,*" *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 19 (1983): 178-98.

Blamey, Kathleen, "From the Ego to the Self: A Philosophical

Itinerary". In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, 571 – 603. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

Bloch, David. *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection: Text, Translation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Bourgeois, Patrick, "The Limits of Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Existence" in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, 549 – 566. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by RG Smith. New York: Scribner, 1958.

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Changeux, Jean-Pierre and Paul Ricoeur. *What Makes Us Think?* Translated by MB DeBevoise. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Davenport, John. *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

de Lange, Frits. "Affirming Life in the Face of Death: Ricoeur's *Living Up to Death* as a Modern Ars Moriendi and a Lesson for Palliative Care." *Med Health Care and Philos*, 17 (2014): 509 – 518, p. 509.

De Leeuw, Marc. "Ricoeur's Search for a Just Community: The Phenomenological Presupposition of a Life 'with and for others.' *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies,* Vol. 8, No. 2 (2017), pp. 46 – 54.

Derrida, Jacques, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London: Continuum, 2004.

Galabru, Sophie. "*Paul Ricoeur et Emmanuel Levinas: vulnérabilité, mémoire et narration: Peut-on raconteur la vulnérabilité?" Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 10. No. 1 (2019), pp. 125 – 139.

Gallagher, Shaun and Dan Zahavi. *The Phenomenological Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Gildea, Iris J. Brooke. "A Poetics of Self: Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Living Metaphor as Creative Praxis." *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2018), pp. 90 – 103.

Godlove, Jr., Terry. "Ricoeur, Kant, and the Permanence of Time." In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, 399 - 415. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

Guerlac, Suzanne. *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Habermas, Jurgen, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Translated by J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Translated by Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon, 1950.

—. *On Collective Memory*. Edited and translated by Lewis A.

Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Southampton: Basil Blackwell, 1962.

—. "What Is Metaphysics?" In *Basic Writings*. Edited and Translated by David Krell, 89-110. New York: Harper Collins, 1993.

Husserl, Edmund. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893 – 1917). Vol 4. Of the *Collected Works*. Translated by John Barnett Brough. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1991.

—. *Cartesian Meditations*. Translated by Dorion Cairns. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999

—. *Logical Investigations: Volume II*. Translated by JN Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001.

Hutchens, Benjamin Coy. "Ricoeur's Rawls: Constitutive Antecedence and Reflective Equilibrium." *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies,* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020), pp. 130 – 143.

Hutto, Daniel. "The Narrative Practice Hypothesis: Origins and Applications of Folk Psychology." In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 43-69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007

Hutto, Daniel and Shaun Gallagher. "Re-Authoring Narrative Therapy." In *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*. 24 (2017), pp. 157–67.

Ihde, Don. "Paul Ricoeur's Place in the Hermeneutic

Tradition". In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, 59 – 70. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

Junker-Kenny, Maureen. *Religion and Public Reason: A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Paul Ricoeur*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014

Kearney, Richard. *The Poetics of Modernity: Towards a Hemerneutic Imagination*. New York: Humanity Books. 1999.

—. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Kemp, Peter. "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas." In *The Hermeneutics of Action*. Edited by Richard Kearney, 41 – 62. London: Sage Publications, 1996.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

—. *Otherwise than Being*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998

Levy, Lior. "Sartre and Ricoeur on the Productive Imagination." *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, volume 52, Issue 1 (March 2014), pp. 43 – 60.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Madison, G.B. "Gadamer and Ricoeur" in *Continental*

Philosophy in the 20th Century. Edited by Richard Kearney, 240 – 288. London: Routledge, 1994.

Menary, Richard. "Our Glassy Essence: The Fallible Self in Pragmatist Thought." In *The Oxford Handbook of The Self*, edited by Shaun Gallagher, 609-32. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Kegan Paul, London: Routledge, 2002

Michel, Johann. *Ricoeur and The Post-Structuralists*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.

—. "Anthropology of Homo Interpretans." *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 8, No 2 (2017), pp. 9 – 21.

Joy, Morny. "Paul Ricoeur on Life and Death". *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, no. 37 (2011): 249 – 253

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Tom Griffith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

—. *Theaetetus and Sophist.* Edited by Christopher Rowe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Purcell, Elizabeth. "Testimony, Memory, and Solidarity across National Borders: Paul Ricoeur and Transnational Feminism." *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies,* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2017), pp. 110 – 121.

Ricoeur, Paul. "*Sympathie et respect. Phénoménologie et*

éthique de la seconde personne", in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale,* 59 (1954), 380-397.

—. *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Edited by George H. Taylor. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

—. *Time and Narrative*. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. Vol. 1 - 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

—. "Life in Quest of Narrative." In *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. Edited by David Wood, 20 – 33. New York: Routledge, 1991.

—. *Oneself As Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

—. *Critique and Conviction*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. New York: Coumbia University Press, 1998.

—. "Who Is the Subject of Rights?" In *The Just*. Translated by David Pellauer, 1 – 10. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

—. "Is a Purely Procedural Theory of Justice Possible? John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*." In *The Just*. Translated by David Pellauer, 36 – 57. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

—. "Aesthetic Judgment and Political Judgment According to Hannah Arendt." In *The Just*. Translated by David Pellauer, 94 – 108. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

—. "The Act of Judging." In *The Just*. Translted by David Pellauer, 127 – 132. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

—. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

—. *The Course of Recognition*. Translated by David Pellauer. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005.

—. *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*. Translated by John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 2007.

—. "The Question of the Subject", in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by Don Ihde, 236 – 267. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*. Translated by E.V. Kohak. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. "On Interpretation." In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 1-22. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics." In *From Text to Action*. Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 25 – 52. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation". In *From Text to Action.* Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 75 - 88. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. “What is a Text?” In *From Text to Action.* Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 105 – 124. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. “The Model of the Text.” In *From Text to Action.* Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 144 – 167. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. “Hegel and Husserl on Intersubjectivity.” In *From Text to Action*. Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 237 – 245. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwester University Press, 2007.

—. “Science and Ideology.” In *From Text to Action.* Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 246 – 269. Translated by John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology”. In *From Text to Action*. Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 270 – 307. Translated by Kathleen Bamey and John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. “Ideology and Utopia”, in *From Text to Action*. Edited by Kathleen Blamey, 308 – 324. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson. St. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

—. *Living Up to Death*. Translated by David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. Translated by Barbara Galli. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Rowling, JK. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban.* New York: Scholastic, 1999

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Psychology of Imagination*. New York: Citadel, 1965.

—. *Being and Nothingness.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1984

Schechtman, Marya. "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View." In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 155-79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Semprun, Jorge. *Literature or Life*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. New York: Viking, 1997.

Sholl, Jon. "Putting Phenomenology in its Place: Some Limits of a Phenomenology of Medicine." *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* volume 36, issue 6 (2015): 391 – 410.

Stein, Edith. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989

Stevens, Bernard, "On Ricoeur's Analysis of Time and Narration". In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*. Edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn, 499 – 506. Chicago: Open Court, 1995.

Strawson, Galen. "Against Narrativity." *Ratio* XVII, No. 4 (2004): 428 – 452.

—. "Episodic Ethics." In *Narrative and Understanding*

Persons, edited by Daniel D. Hutto, 85-116. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

The Simpsons. "The Two Mrs. Nahasapeemapetilons". Episode 185. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Richard Appel. Fox, November 16, 1997.

Sokolowski, Robert. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Vendra, Maria Cristina Clorinda. "Paul Ricoeur and Clifford Geertz: The Harmonic Dialogue between Philosophical Hermeneutics and Cultural Anthropology." *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2020), pp. 49 – 64.

Venema, Henry Isaac. *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur*. New York: State University Press of New York, 2000.

Zahavi, Dan. *Subjectivity and Selfhood.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005.

—. "Self and Other: Limits of Narrative Understanding". In *Narrative and Understanding Persons*. ed. by Daniel Hutto, 179 – 202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

—. "The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications." In *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, edited by Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, 56-78. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

—. *Self and Other.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Zeller, Florian, dir. *The Father*. 2020; United Kingdom: Lionsgate.

Zimmerman, Jens. *Hermeneutics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015