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The Historical Condition in Paul Ricœur

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts (Philosophy) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

August 2009

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-63131-7
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-63131-7

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Abstract

The Historical Condition in Paul Ricoeur

Drew Desai

This thesis is an attempt to pursue the hermeneutics of the historical condition in the work of Paul Ricoeur through investigations of our relation of indebtedness to the past in the present and for the future. The working hypothesis is that this relation to the past appears differently depending on the style of our interrogation: epistemologically, the past appears as that which is no longer; ontologically, the past appears as that which has been. The ambivalence points to an aporia concerning the manner of the persistence of the absent in the present, an aporia that has no speculative resolution but one that can be made fruitful by a practical synthesis: the initiative of the citizen. It is at the level of the proper mode of discourse of the citizen, that is, at the level of opinion, that we pay our debt to the past, through an effort to remember more or an effort to forget. The epistemic weakness of this attestation, its declarative character, is the only possible mode of repayment. In this sense, we never finish with the past and remain haunted by the threat or promise of insolvency.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express a profound sense of debt felt toward and bestowed upon me by my teacher and advisor Dennis O'Connor. Keeping company with this remarkable philosopher and his "neighbours" has been and continues to be a wondrous apprenticeship.

I would also like to thank my parents for their support and encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank Sheena. In friendship and in love.

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List of Abbreviations

Works by Paul Ricœur

AJ	Amour et justice (Tübingen Lecture)
CH	Preface to <i>The Cogito and Hermeneutics</i>
CI	The Conflict of Interpretations
CR	The Concept of Responsibility
DS	The Dimensions of Sexuality
EC	Ethics and Culture
EH	L'écriture de l'histoire
ET	The Erosion of Tolerance
FM	Fallible Man
HB	The Human Being as Subject Matter of Philosophy
HP	Husserl, An Analysis of his Phenomenology
HPV	The Historical Presence of Non-Violence
HT	The Hermeneutics of Testimony
HV	Histoire et vérité
J	The Just
JM	Justice and the Market
KHL	The State and Coercion (Knox House Lecture)
OA	Oneself as Another
MHF	Memory, History, Forgetting
PEC	Pour un éthique du compromis
PV	Pouvoir et Violence
RJ	Reflections on the Just
SE	The Symbolism of Evil
TA	From Text to Action
TCR	The Course of Recognition
TN1	Time and Narrative, vol. 1
TN2	Time and Narrative, vol. 2
TN3	Time and Narrative, vol. 3
UJ	L'unicité humaine du pronom "je"
YV	"Y a-t-il une vie avant le mort?"
ZL	The Contribution of French Historiography to the Theory of History (Zaharoff Lecture)

INTRODUCTION

The following thesis is an attempt to interrogate the conceptual constellation that surrounds the human condition of being historical—temporality, traditionality, historicity, narrativity—by posing the question, “What is it to think historically?”. This discourse, conducted at the level of fundamental anthropology, is concerned with those basic capacities of human subjectivity which respond to our mode of existing as temporal and which we place under the figure of debt, being gifted.

Chief among these capacities is our ability to use language as such, and correlatively the ability to objectify language through inscription in documents, and monuments and the collecting and depositing of inscriptions in archives, broadly construed.¹ We will pose questions regarding the persistence of the absent in the present through our capacity for receiving transmitted heritage in the form of traces, those reifications of public memory which constitute our lived experience as a historical co-present—the where and when of our initiatives with others. Our living relations with received and given documents are taken as a model for the transmission of all cultural contents. It is through these contents, roughly, heritage-tradition, that we come to be ourselves. That is to say, our ability to identify ourselves and identify our *our* is profoundly a matter of an intertwined historical (and fictional, that is, imaginative) narrativity: we are constantly narrating ourselves to ourselves and to others at the same time as being implicated in the stories of others, of our friends, neighbours and families, of nation-states, peoples, even of humanity as such.² Our aim in the following is to clarify this narrative mode of being constituted and in particular its specific *visée* as bearing a relation of truthfulness and fidelity to the past.

¹ The sense of archives need not be limited to “houses of documents.” Indeed, architecture, artworks, libraries, museums, law courts, etc., all of these have an archival function: they serve to “structurate” and transmit culture through their exemplarity, formality, process character, repetition.

² The curious narratives of environmentalism articulated in terms of man’s earthly custodianship are announced in the name of the whole of humanity, even, perhaps all sentient creatures.

Such a thematic problematization has been developed and deployed variously in the work of Paul Ricœur under the dyadic heading of tradition-innovation. Taking his bearings from the stalemate between Habermas and Gadamer, Ricœur offers some conceptual resources to get beyond the antinomy of participatory belonging and alienating distanciation. In particular, the threefold distinction between tradition, traditions, and traditionality set in motion dialectically against the stasis of the burden of indebtedness under the figure of commanded or official memory. Too, the notion of non-doxic opinion provides the framework for the political *application* of the boundary notion of attestation which, as Ricœur says, serves as a transition between a phenomenological datum (the body as zero origin of all of my perspectives) and the ontological vehemence of the self's ability to act, to narrate, to ascribe her actions to herself.³ Having situated his thought thus and so, we take up the question of the encounter between our working hypothesis about the "ultimate volitional intention" of Ricœur work and the secondary literature. Our judgment of this encounter is largely negative; we simply or complexly are not really talking about the same Ricœur. This need not be seen as something like haughtiness on our part. Rather, we are asking idiosyncratic questions about his work, taking our bearings from the notion of attestation which appears only relatively late in his oeuvre.⁴ These questions concern the reality of the historical past, and the decidability of the either/or which we take to be the hallmark of historical consciousness: either faithfulness under the sign of an insolvent and engaged subjectivity, or a program of truth under the sign of a distanciated and detemporalized objectivity.

³ "Non-doxic opinion" describes the epistemological status of testimonial discourse which, as we will note, is intimately related to the ontological notion of attestation of self. We are employing the term "opinion" in a rather specific fashion which follows the language of Hannah Arendt. In her work, opinion and not truth is the proper level of political or public discourse. Cf. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5. This is not to debase the claims of, for example, scientific "experts", except insofar as their claim is made in the field of politics. Political language as related to rhetoric is always already fragile, alternating between sophism and rational argumentation.

⁴ In fact, the notion of attestation as the mode of being of the self is already present in his early work where it is articulated as "originary affirmation" marshaled against the negativity of theme of nothingness which dramatically marked the time during which Ricœur came of age (*FM* 135).

This thesis is not “intended” (later we will see whether we can use that word in any way other than under erasure) as a criticism of Paul Ricœur, even less is it a reprisal of the odd theme of “Ricœur as Another”.⁵ Rather, it is an attempt to think the radicality of our insertedness, our “historical condition,” without thereby choosing, at least peremptorily, between the occlusive “alternatives” of the sterile antinomy of alienating distanciation and the experience of participation by bringing the horizon of “ought”, so close to the emancipatory interest of critique, back within the relation of belonging.⁶ In this effort, the crucial move is disentangling the formal from the material aspects of heritage-debt: by giving nuances to the notion of heritage or tradition we can differentiate the formal dimension of “traditionality” and the manifest plurality of traditions from the experience of participation in the materiality of a tradition which claims legitimacy. Prior to posing the question of legitimacy,

we are always already preceded by evaluations beginning from which even our doubt and our contestation become possible. We can perhaps “transvaluate” values, but we can never create them beginning from zero. [...] But [...] it is only under the aegis of our interest in emancipation that we are stirred to transvaluate [...] Nothing survives from the past except through a reinterpretation in the present [...] (EC 164-5).

Our effort in this thesis is to clarify the mode of this “survival”, the forms of its reinterpretation and the style of continuity which characterizes the present as a historical present by asking “What is it to understand in the historical mode?” (MHF 283). Taking up the theme of the reception of transmitted heritage in the historical present, we will proceed (1) by reenacting the course of reception, beginning at the level of the handed down or already constituted corpus of an author. In particular, this section proffers an entry point to the problem of reception generally by stipulating the conceptual matrix which we use as a grid for reading Ricœur. Our suggestion is that we can approximate a hermeneutics of the historical condition by following out

⁵ Such an exercise of treating Ricœur alongside another philosopher has already been attempted, *Ricœur As Another*. Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh, eds, (Albany, SUNY Press, 2002).

⁶ This antinomy concerns “the ultimate meaning of the basic philosophical gesture [...] whether doing philosophy is to assume a condition of finitude for which historicity, preunderstanding, and prejudice are the implications, or if to do philosophy is to say “no”” (EC 156).

and deepening our sense of a chain of conceptual meanings of the related notions of credit and debt with the help of Ricœur and his investigations into tradition, reception, and historical intentionality, the aiming of the historian, the responsibility to get at the past and to get it right, [*un vrai récit*]. This conceptual matrix clarifies the “ontological commitment of attestation” which is at once a gift and a demand, always haunted by suspicion “as false testimony haunts true testimony” (OA 302). (2) The aim of our second section is to situate our reading of Ricœur within the secondary literature in an effort to clarify both his method and his guiding intention which often seem to be covered over by the convention of seeing Ricœur as a philosopher of “consensus.” (3) With our third section we enter the thematic core of the work where we take up the question of reception generally, by noting the stages of our engagement with “original” texts themselves, highlighting the anticipations marking the search for coherence in a naive first reading, the emergence of distance, and the excess of meaning in a critical second reading and the impetus to action called upon by the third reading where the problem of communication, “what does the text mean?” gives way to the question of reference and responsible application, the fusion of horizons between the world of the reader and “the world that constitutes the horizon of the work” (TN3 178). (4) From this triple dialectic of reception, what comes into focus are our living relations to a time that is bestowed by those that came before us; we will ask about the interconnectedness of these times, specifically, the question of the relation between memory and history, the difference in their aim (on the side of memory, faithfulness; on the side of history, giving a true account). The regulative intentionality of historical inquiry—the intention-pretension of aiming at the past approximately, suppliantly, to what extent can this be maintained when the historian’s practice is one of progressive conceptualization characterized by an occultation of the notion of event detemporalized to the point that the past being recounted is a passage neither near nor far, but simply no longer? This is what the limit or test case of Paul Veyne offers: the threat of an exoticism which represents a complete breaking away of the

past from its ties with memory as a living relation to the past and with action understood as the work of first-order entities corresponding, roughly, to characters in a story. With the occultation of the event, the memorative aspect of the past as “having been” is evacuated. Through the figure of Veyne, the notion of debt is tested in that the indirect filiation which had been surreptitiously assumed between memory and history is destroyed. We have then, on the one side, memory, as the guardian of the referential function of the past, the strong ontological claim of having *been* for which the watchword is fidelity. And on the other, history, as guardian of the forgotten of the past (through blocked or manipulated memory, commanded amnesia), enlarging the space and time of our memory, vindicating the “witnesses in spite of themselves” through an effort of documentary retrieval where the watchword is truth, giving a true account. Asking about the order of priority of these two operations, what one finds is an aporia concerning our concern for the past as such. With these divergent aims, what emerges is the possibility of an indirect filiation between being faithful and being true, governed by the figure of debt. The question here concerns the notion of debt itself, specifically, whether in the final analysis debt can remain untouched by the “sting of indictment”, of guilt. (5) With the emergence of a properly moral feeling in our description of the reception of the past (horror, indignation, intolerance), we would like to make a few remarks about the possibility of a just history and happy memory, including an assessment of the productive resources of forgetting. If the question of a indirect filiation between memory and history is to receive an answer that is neither entirely unconcerned with the pairing of debt and guilt, nor made pathological through a lack of distance from the blind feeling of indignation, it is a path which exceeds the imperatives of historian qua historian. This is the task of the citizen for whom the historical and the memorative intersect in the time of initiative. At this level, the aporetic situation or undecidability that characterizes speculation about history under the condition of “renouncing Hegel,” is practically impossible. It is here that we turn to a reflection on the time of initiative as the time of the citizen, the one who decides.

The three sections that make up the thematic core of the work (§§3-5), taking up by turns the reception of the past in the present, “the difficult though not impossible” refiguring of the present through the recovery of past unkept promises, and the moral feelings that give rise simultaneously to a will to narrate and a will to forget, of reconciliation and the possibility of happy expectations, even grounded hopes, these sections can be understood as explicating our condition of historical being in the midst of the three temporal ecstases of past, present, and future. “The tie between futureness and pastness is assured by a bridging concept, that of being-in-debt [...] stripped of its sting of indictment, of guilt [our third section] [...], confronted with admitted wrongs [the blind feeling of horror, indignation which dispel the possibility of a purely exotic relation to the past and govern the presumptive unity of history which we deal with in the fourth section]; the notion of wrongs done to others preserves the ethical dimension of the debt, its dimension of guilt [which, as per our fifth section, begins the course of a dialecticized memorative history and historicized memory under the exigence of reconciliation, forgiving, even forgetting]” (*MHF* 363).

I. RECEIVING RICŒUR

Without sincerely confessing a feeling of total incompetence, I believe that I have never been so lacking of strength as I am in approaching, in the form of a study or philosophical discussion, the immense work of Paul Ricœur.⁷

Following the directions of an author, and in particular, an author who is a philosopher, is a curious sort of asymmetrical recognition. Spending a number of years in a relationship of companionship with Paul Ricœur has meant learning to read his work attentively and cultivating the patience to dwell in his thought, “a strategy of going slow familiar from [his] work” (LD 72).⁸

⁷ Jacques Derrida, “La Parole: Donner, nommer, appeler” in *L’Herne Ricœur*, Paris: Éditions de l’Herne, 2004, 19-25 (translation mine): “*Sans même avouer, sincèrement, un sentiment d’incompétence, je crois que jamais la force ne m’aura autant manqué pour aborder, sous la forme d’une étude ou d’une discussion philosophique, l’œuvre immense de Paul Ricœur*” (19). Derrida explicates this sense of incompetence by pointing to the incredible breadth and variety of Ricœur’s researches and his unparalleled willingness to converse with a variety of disciplines, genres, modes of questioning. The crucial term here is “*jamais*” —“never,” invoking, as it does, the sense of an impossible task. The difference between the impossible and the difficult will be a recurrent theme in what follows. My experience of trying to approach Ricœur has not escaped this sense of bewilderment. In fact, this thesis began as an attempt to deepen my engagement with his texts, and specifically with the strangely insistent theme of...of what? So many themes, so many regions, so many problems. To name one—testimony, yes, but more than that, a kernel of meanings surrounding the notion of bearing witness (and with it the entire “documentary phase” of the historiographical operation), of acting responsively as a curious mode of activity-passivity, of speakingly being-in-the-wake-of. What became increasingly clear was that this phenomenon of giving and receiving testimony, of speaking in an alethic dimension, seemed to offer itself not merely as an example of one particular speech situation but rather served as a thinking or working site around which sprung up the outlines of a theory of reception, or, better, a phenomenology of receiving subjectivity and even its self-critique or rather, a critique of the totalizing aim that structures gestures of self-possession, self-recollection. The most elementary expression of this bearing witness was the phenomenon of birth, the giving witness of a new life, of a new view of the world as we say ordinarily, or perhaps rather extraordinarily, since it seems that this notion of a version of the world implied that there were always already other versions, that these would somehow be located interstitially, alongside one another without thereby denying the singularity and unity of the world. In other words, no matter how indebted we were to be, what seemed inescapable was this phenomenon of being asked “*who are you?*”. That is, with birth there came into the world an entirely novel witness of the really real, the speaking subject subpoenaed to the witness stand as the rebound of the notion of narrative identity where the notion of a narrated and narrative identity is the fruit of an aporia concerning the interconnectedness of life and the narrative intermingling of private, public, and cosmic times and time-scales. The investigation thus took the form of an attempt at reckoning with the necessity of the “Here I stand!” without losing sight of the suspicion surrounding the notion of a stand, of standing for, including most intriguingly, the standing-for the past with which we attempt to placate our relation of indebtedness to those in whom we participate: others, institutions, nation states, world historical identities, etc.

⁸ One might aphorize Ricœur’s contemplative ethos as follows: “First you live among men, then you begin to do philosophy.” What does that mean? It means that to get close to Ricœur is to be in a position to pose

This labile thinking-in-action might aptly be characterized as displaying a symbiotic pulsatility. Symbiotic, though not syncretic, in as much as Ricœur's project is one of increasingly refined discursive responsiveness to emphatically plural philosophical and non-philosophical traditions, all the while maintaining a certain autonomy for the mode of questioning specific to philosophy.⁹ Pulsatile because, notwithstanding the attempts of his now multi-generational commentators, getting at *his* thought involves learning how to interrogate indirectly which for me took the form of learning how to dance in the murk of certain irresolvable tensions in a tradition of thought which is emphatically transcendently bestowed upon us (though initially rather indeterminately) as ours. Working in the sites delineated by his texts, one finds oneself in the face of a supreme irony, that of a soporifically styled thought profoundly insistent on cultivating, individually and collectively (and discerning the floating gap between these), an imagination nourished by its own tensive allegiances to the in principle infinite imaginative variations of the fictional operation, and the limiting ethical and documentary imperatives of the historiographical operation,¹⁰ both of

certain questions, the entrance requirements for which can be earned only through extraordinary indirection: the cultivation of an imagination through apprenticing at becoming aware of our being situated in the midst of high level cultural artifice organized into institutions, with their ritualized ways of posing questions, of seeking clarity. To pose these questions is to attempt to understand explanation, "to understand better by explaining more" specifically understanding the sciences, their explanatory models, their self-understandings and their understandings of subjectivity. Taking up an old Husserlian theme, it is to demand that philosophy aim at being a rigorous science. Rigorize science. This invites some curious indirection as it means leaving philosophy proper and taking up residence with economists, historians, linguists, jurists, experimental scientists, etc. While one's access to that may be limited to books, journals, newspapers, radio, that is still quite entailing and one can easily get lost in the almost unlimitedness of documents. The hope is that one learns something about what counts as a move in a number of terrains, each with their own intelligibility. Equipped thus and so, one can point to whole thickets of imaginary possibilities with their boundedness and relative autonomy. It is here that Ricœur's sense of philosophizing (clearly heavily Aristotelian) is operative: at the interstices of instituted techniques and sciences.

⁹ "It will not cease to be true that we are born to philosophy by Greece [...] our philosophy is Greek by birth [...] oriented by the originally Greek question" (SE 20-3).

¹⁰ Ricœur wants to maintain this tension but lessen its dichotomousness by reordering the priority of the question of reference and bringing it under the tutelage of the truth-intentionalities specific to these modes of narrativity. What is fundamental for Ricœur is the move beyond the vocabulary of reference that was still rather misleadingly being deployed in his earlier work on semantic innovation toward a will to truth that he thinks operates differently across the different narrative operations. For example, when dated or datable events are "referred to" in fictional narratives, this is so only under the condition, not of "making real" the fictional account but of neutralizing the reality of those historical events: "all references to real historical events are divested of their function of standing for the historical past and are set on a par with

which are set against the limits of our factual languages and perspectival finitude in bringing about anything other than presumptive unities, a limitation of speculative thought which hints at if it does not call for a non-analytic practical synthesis at the farthest remove from a Hegelian style consummation.

This relationship of author-text-world to reader-narrative identity-world has occasioned a kind of deepening of the problematic of participatory relatedness (with its dual character of belonging-to and being-open) due to the more or less explicit and magisterial problematizing of the readerly relationship which is simultaneously a textual effect and philosophical problem.¹¹ Raised to the level of a theme of philosophical investigation, the question of “coming to a text” becomes a trope of one of the great kinds of philosophical problems, namely that of the Same, the Other, and the Analogous. The reception of texts must pass through this triple dialectic if it is to avoid any kind of romanticized immediacy. Indeed, Ricœur’s work can be seen as a singularly nuanced and convivial attempt to get beyond the kind of immediacy¹² belying an overweening self-possession. Curiously however, dispossession begins with and terminates in an “eidetic moment”¹³ of confident self-assertion, an “adhesion” to the “relative absolute” involuntary of “an irreducible situational fact” (*LD* 62). The stubborn insistence of this confident assurance or

the unreal status of the other events” (*TN3* 129). This divestiture does not point to a lessening of the reality of the “actual” historical events but to the impossibility of totalizing the temporal experience of the fictional world. What is preserved is the function of standing for under the condition of its neutralization with respect to human time. This is akin to the neutralization of the effort of interconnection or unification of the time of our imaginative projections (in the past, present or future) with the flow of time in ordinary perception.

¹¹ The position of the reader is one of rights and responsibilities: being inattentive to the epochality of authorship, “seems to me to be the right of every reader, before whom all the books are open simultaneously” (*MHF* xvii); as for responsibilities, here it is a question of a “principle of charity” or “good faith,” something rather opaque and not straightforwardly the opposite of Sartrean “bad faith.” We will explicitly take up the question of readerly engagement in the following sections.

¹² “Immediacy,” this is something like a bad word for Ricœur: “I am wary of the immediate” (*LD* 16).

¹³ Rasmussen, “Preserving the Eidetic Moment: Reflections on the Work of Paul Ricœur,” *Research in Phenomenology* 37 (2007): 195-202.

originary faith in the unity of the world and oneself which Ricœur calls “attestation” will be one of the main threads of this work.¹⁴

This interest in the emergence of a problematic in the life of the mind of a philosopher is not a matter of psychological fascination where one points to the unity of their thought “by citing isolated texts and making explications of each of them separately; [...] the sense of a philosopher only emerges to a “critical view of the whole” which reveals his total personal intention in relation to the total intention of the Idea of philosophy” (*HP* 156). What we are trying to get at is the “ultimate volitional intention” of Ricœur’s philosophy. Such an attempt differs from the kind of synthetic gesture performed by Jervolino, in which the coherence of his thought is displayed from *without*, that is, “by citing isolated texts” and showing their interrelational unity.¹⁵ For these authors, the synthesis is a matter of a common problematic.¹⁶ For our purposes, the unity of Ricœur’s truth intention can only be understood “by instituting [his aim] as the present sense of life” (*HP* 155). Doing that demands instituting a dialectic of nearness and distance, a questioning back from the already said in an effort of renewal; renewing the buried sense of his problems, reactivating the sedimentations built up in the density of his thought. In other words, we place

¹⁴ Ricœur writes, “the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering remains the ultimate recourse against all suspicion; even if it is always in some sense received from another, it still remains *self-attestation*” (*OA* 23).

¹⁵ “From without”, this would seem to imply that these readers fail to get inside the text. What is being suggested rather is that the texts themselves are way outside themselves, that the effects or results of the texts are not repeatable in summary, that the work of the texts are the detours themselves, an ethos of taking detours, of “going slow”. What does this imply with respect to the project of performing textual exegesis on Ricœur? That it simply cannot be done? We shall have to wait and see.

¹⁶ It is an interesting exercise to go through several of Ricœur’s introductions to critical readings of his work and note the frequency of his discomfort in the face of gestures which seem to bring together many of his problematics, illustrating a hidden coherence working as though behind his back. This is not to say he denies the plausibility of such a synthetic approach. Indeed, such a denial would constitute an utter incomprehension of the dialectic of event and meaning, whereby the autonomy of textual meaning from authorial intent and circumstance is won through objectification in cultural signs—a dialectic at the very heart of Ricœur’s hermeneutics of historical consciousness. Rather and quite typically of a philosopher who, in our reading, has come to be thought of as the unremitting guardian of the speaking subject (however decentered this subject may turn out to be, however distant from the imperiousness of the monological “I”), he perforce reminds us of the intentionality of the author without thereby claiming to exhaust the meaning of “his” writerly gesture: that his effort was never to write systematically but to deal with problems as they arose without haste and to do so with the utmost rigor and with a charity that by our lights has been so often and so unfortunately been misconstrued as a species of compromise (*CH*).

ourselves at the mercy of our readerly “apprenticeship to signs” with the hope that our wager will be repaid in the sense of an application that is indeed *truthful* (without thereby asserting itself as truth).¹⁷

What then is our wager? What do we claim to be the “ultimate volitional unity” of Ricœur’s work? The unity of his work concerns unity itself, the old Kantian insistence on “humanity as a collective singular” not in the sense of a biological species, but rather “in so far as they share a History,”; “*humanity*, not in the collective sense of all *men* but the human quality of man” (*FM* 70). In this sense, “the human as such” is taken to be the condition of possibility of a history of the world, a history of reason. This is the kind of fundamental anthropology that Ricœur develops: the temporality of the self, one could even say the temporality of subjectivity, within a scale of duration closest to the *longue durée* of the *Annalesiens*. The *longue durée* is called for by the overt insistence in Ricœur that the short term is stultifying, that our freedom, in as much as what we mean by freedom is something other than mere sovereignty, that this freedom manifests itself in our aiming at each other and that this aiming is mediated by institutions which are multi-generational initiatives marked by a span exceeding that of authenticity as being toward my unique and irreplaceable death.¹⁸ That is, the time of our initiatives is, *de jure*, unlimited in scope, “the inclusion of the distant in the ethical project” (*OA 195n37*) is already apparent in the notion of institutions: “rule-governed” practices or activities which “come to light” (*OA 196*) in the “public space of appearance” according to standards of excellence based in common mores and empowered by the support of “action in concert” which turns out to be the invisible and forgotten

¹⁷ Cf. Our third section for “the style of verification suited to the reception of texts.”

¹⁸ Against the notion of a social contract to which human beings assent in the form of a “contract of submission” where it is a question of surrendering preconstituted natural capacities already fully realized, Ricœur insists that the actualization of human capabilities is dialogically and institutionally constituted (*TCR 208*). That is, the capable subject as a subject of rights is made possible, real, only with and for others in institutions; “without institutional mediation, individuals are only the initial drafts of human persons” (*J 7*).

heritage of our will to live together, the eschatological horizon of which is the community or cosmopolis of humanity as such.

What kind of dignity and esteem can we have for something approaching “the human as such,” that “cunning animal” that Nietzsche says can make and keep promises? What is the sense of promise in the “moral faculty” of making promises?¹⁹ This is not meant as a tautology. What promising brings to light explicitly is the implicit clause of sincerity animating every speech act, the confidence we have in the speech of another. Even if our sense of effective communication “comes from the rather narrow sphere of interpersonal relations” (EC 164), the possibility of such communication is contained in the institution of language as such:

the interpersonal relation is already in reference to the institution of language in which all speakers of one natural language are bound together by the common rules of a language as well as the requirement of confidence each one places in the *rule of sincerity*: that each one will *mean what he or she says*. [...] This fiduciary base [...] is the institutional condition for every interpersonal relation (J 6).²⁰

What we would like to note in reference to the expressions “fiduciary base” (J 6), “presumptive confidence,” “linguistic security” (MHF 166), these invocations of our participatory

¹⁹ What comes to the fore in the description of the phenomenon of making and keeping promises is the fiduciary base upon which all linguistic activity, including that of promising is ordered. What we are pointing to is the relationship between this *promesse avant toute promesse* and the kind of trust involved in attestation.

²⁰ What Ricœur is attempting to describe is the institutional level of trust that is assumed in the interpersonal relation—whether our relations with others are trustworthy depends on our ability to use language in more or less determinate and non-strategic ways; thus, at the heart of the interpersonal relation is this forgotten “institutional” relation that we have to the language that we share and coinhabit (that obeys the economy of the gift—the gift of language), and that we are without our ever appropriating it. The danger of any claim to appropriate a language is to become wholly responsible for the language, for its functioning as a fiduciary base: “What is reinforced by confidence in the speech of another is not only the interdependence but the shared humanity of members of the community. The exchange of confidences specifies the link between like beings. This must be said *in fine* to compensate for the excessive accentuation of the theme of difference in many contemporary theories of the constitution of the social bond. Reciprocity is corrective of the insubstitutability of actors. The reciprocal exchange strengthens the sentiment of existing in the realm of plurality—*inter homines esse*, as Arendt liked to say. This in-between opens the field to *dissensus* as much as consensus. And it is *dissensus* that is introduced in the confrontation of potentially divergent testimonies on the path from testimony to the archive. The linguistic security of a society depends, in the final analysis, on the trustworthiness (*fiabilité*), the biographical attestation of each witness taken one by one. It is against this background (*fond*) of presumptive confidence that is figured the tragic loneliness of “historical witnesses” whose extraordinary experience outspends the capacity for ordinary understanding” (MHF 166, translation modified).

belonging “prior to any criticism” occur at critical moments in Ricœur’s argumentation and concern the only style of unity that can be claimed by a self²¹ whose spatiotemporal experience is lived in a densely textured presence wholly articulated only by reference to a past that we did not make or choose, and imaginatively projected futures which bear on others with whom we will never, irremediably, be, at least not straightforwardly, in a relation of co-presence (“plurality includes third parties who will never be faces” *OA* 195). These dialectics of being between past and future, of being ourselves in the sense of the identity of our character, while being way outside of ourselves, our ownmost possibilities, these dialectics are our way of being situated with and for others in institutions whose temporal existence and continuation is taken for granted from the outset as “presumptively” just there, enduringly. It is in and through these institutions, the first of which is language as such, that we come to find ourselves as bearing historicities of which we are not only not the author or initiator but whose destiny is itself not entirely of our choosing even if we are ineliminably implicated by them in ordering our desire, our aiming, our care; “a situation in which each person is in each case implicated [*enfermé*]” (*MHF* 284).

While giving systematic philosophical expression to being thusly is not the avowed aim of any of Ricœur’s works, we would like to note how an experience of positivity or credence whose kernel is the notion of attestation illuminates many of his discussions at the very moment a crucial dialectical mediation is demanded. The peculiar kind of certainty or truth-bearing of attestation is not an explicit avowal of sincerity, good faith, or some conclusiveness that each of us comes to, on their own as it were, about the credibility of speech, of speaking about oneself, of attesting to

²¹ Or indeed a people, or any other institution of a common will to live together. “This is so because identity, whether personal or collective, is always only presumed, claimed, reclaimed [...] the model of which would be for me the promise, i.e. the capacity to keep one’s word. This is not the same as remaining inflexible or unchanged through time.” Paul Ricœur, “Memory and Forgetting,” in *Questioning Ethics: Debates in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney, Mark Dooley, (London: Routledge, 1999), 8.

the other who demands, “Who did this?”, “Who witnessed this?”.²² The very possibility of questioning, the sayability which fills the openings in silence, the operative intentionality of the silence itself is a credence more primitive than opinion, a buried or latent intentionality instituted by an a priori forgotten fiduciary base.²³ This fiduciary base establishes us as insolvent debtors at the very moment it qualifies us as credited.

²² Peculiar hardly covers the uncanniness of this notion as it emerges insistently across the many studies of *Oneself as Another*. On more than one occasion in the text, Ricœur stops to note the “peculiar strangeness” of the capacity of attestation—cf. *OA* pp. 37, 48, 95, 133.

²³ Without forgetting the discomfort in the face of any alleged primitive or immediate datum, in speaking about the self-assurance of the ability to act, Ricœur writes: “[Attestation] is indeed a matter of a primitive datum, namely the assurance that the agent has the power to do things, to produce changes in the world” (*OA* 112).

II. READERLY SITUATEDNESS

Any hermeneutical exercise reflecting on its limits must reckon with the fact that it proceeds from a wager,²⁴ that this wager is made on the basis of credits borrowed, as it were, against future earnings,²⁵ and that the success of such a wager is measured and verified by the degree of

²⁴ The notion of a wager as both presupposition and task of hermeneutics is discussed in Ricœur's first explicitly hermeneutical exercise, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Cf. SE 355. This notion of wager, of a bet made using credit, bears a striking resemblance to the epistemic situation of testimony, and the ontological status of attestation. The movement from the text to action, from considering the text as a model for meaningful action, will help lessen the puerility of the notion of violence applied to textual exegesis and criticism. Testimony-attestation, while being the thematic core of this text, is also its operative presupposition; herein lies the self-reflexivity of the text itself. One of the joys of the contemplative life animated by the task of perpetually beginning anew, as distinguished from that of the tribunal with its requirement of a final pronouncement, is its unfinished or programmatic character: "the plurivocity common to texts and to actions is exhibited in the form of a conflict of interpretations, and the final interpretation appears as a verdict to which it is possible to make an appeal. Like legal utterances, all interpretations in the field of literary criticism and in the social sciences may be challenged and the question "What can defeat a claim?" is common to all argumentative situations. Only in the tribunal is there a moment when the procedures of appeal are exhausted. But it is so only because the decision of the judge is implemented by the *force* of public power. Neither in literary criticism nor in the social sciences is there such a last word. Or, if there is, we call it violence" (TA 162). It is due to the residual violence of publicly sanctioned force that Ricœur's public and professional vows of non-violence become significant; this is a thought which systematically resists any philosophy of politics which would have the philosopher occupy the lofty throne of the kingly judge.

²⁵ The notion of credit, beyond its economic significance, is one averted to by Ricœur with increasing frequency in his later work. This notion bears more than a passing resemblance to that of attestation whose elaboration is one of the aims of this endeavor. We can illustrate both the theoretical and practical consequences of this increasingly prominent notion through two quotations. The first, taken from *Time and Narrative*, addresses simultaneously the finitude of all understanding and the validity of the successful communication as a regulative ideal: "[...] the truth claim of the contents of traditions merits being taken as a presumption of truth, so long as a stronger reason, that is, a better argument has not been established. By a "presumption of truth," I mean that credit, that confident reception by which we respond, in an initial move preceding all criticism, to any proposition of meaning, any claim to truth, because we are never at the beginning of the process of truth and because we belong, before any critical gesture, to a domain of presumed truth" (TN3 227). The second treats the notion of credit, not so much as a theoretical grounding for the presumption of truth which we are, but as a practical category that grounds our capacity for being responsible in the notion of a personal ledger: "The metaphor of account is extraordinarily interesting [...] suggesting the idea of a moral bookkeeping of merits and demerits as in a double-entry ledger [...] the last offspring of this metaphor must be the very readable and physical demerit book all French drivers carry" (CR 14). The intertwined notions of being able to *give* an account, and being able to be *held* to account are seen to be emptied in some contemporary situations of socialized risk and the proliferation of the realms governed by the vocabulary of insurance. It is precisely in the impossibility of determining ownership, of giving an account of what is properly one's own, that Ricœur recognizes the contemporary shattering of the concept of responsibility, and its decomposition into seemingly autonomous regions of application: the lack of a bridge between juridical responsibility (ascription) and moral responsibility (imputation). This is topically evident in the legal cases arising out of the relentless repackaging of debt in contemporary finance. The amplification of the dissociation between character and actor in emplotment and the analogous

intelligibility with which it structures itself in a coherent discourse.²⁶ Such is the nature of any weakly foundational enterprise and it is the merit of proceeding thusly that reflection, which is always in a sense a self-reflection, maintains its filiation to the existential categories of belonging-to and being-open.²⁷ Taken together, both figures, that of belonging-to, with its inherence in the disparate problematics of reciprocity (and its model of successful communication), exchange (with its model of the market), and the gift (with its model of superabundance), and that of being-open, with its simultaneous naïveté and pre-understanding, assure, however tenuously, the “presumed, claimed, and reclaimed” continuity of our

extension of the semantics of action to collective entities protracts the notion of responsibility to bear on an entire people, a whole society, or the interconnected institutions of a financial system. To speak of the responsibility of hedge funds or to speak of singular causal imputation with respect to repackaged credit derivatives represents something like a limit situation where the “actors” include dynamically programmed financial instruments with trillions of variable inputs, where the “events” are typified by payment defaults or bankruptcies. In this kind of infinite algorithmic space, the concept of responsibility, taken as the ability to ascribe the predicate ‘mine,’ is effectively evacuated.

²⁶ An apt metaphor which we have found helpful in characterizing the style of hermeneutic investigation practiced by Ricœur is that of the banyan tree. This semantic impertinence *works* (in the sense that it is made productive) in so far as it references and differentiates the very old image of the tree of philosophy in Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy* where the taxonomic variety of possible trees is taken for granted as modeled on the relative ideality of Aristotle’s oak, that is, a tree with more or less vertically oriented branches as if reaching to the heavens stemming from a single trunk and a root system symmetrical with the branches buried in the earth (AT IXB 14-15). This is the model of Cartesian foundationalism. In the case of the banyan tree, the branches produce aerial roots only to sink them back into the ground, becoming trunks themselves; in this way, the trees can grow to cover several acres. It is this constant bending back, this zigzag approach, that illustrates the style of weak foundationalism in Ricœur’s phenomenological hermeneutics.

²⁷ The self of this self-reflection remains to be clarified: “we do not need to understand [the ego as] an epistemological subjectivity of some kind but simply the one who inquires [...] it is immediately as an “I am” and not as an “I think” that I am implied in the inquiry” (CI 221-2). While the closeness to Heidegger is evident in the common project of a hermeneutics of the “I am”, Ricœur displaces the hinge of the question from the phenomena of one’s death to that of one’s “own” birth, a move which takes its bearing from Arendt’s beautiful analyses of the ontological condition of natality. (We have placed ‘own’ in quotation marks to indicate the necessarily regressive movement toward identity through which we narrate ourselves “as if” we are present, with all of our mature capacities, at our birth—these projective imperatives are well expressed in the inescapable question that accompanies the birth of a newcomer: “Who will she be?”). While the questioning that takes place about the “who?” in the storytelling of an obituary is thematically archaeological, the kind of questing of “who?” at birth is operatively teleological—“who will you be?”—that is to say, it has the character of optativity where what is given is choice as such. In this way, stress is moved from the always already character of finitude to the not yet character of becoming oneself that the birth date intends in an admittedly arbitrary though essential way.

interconnectedness with the past and the presumptive confidence²⁸ with which we set out to reconstruct the *having-been*, always under the figure of debt.²⁹

A reflection on the figure of debt in the space of a thesis which purports to offer a reconstruction of the notion of attestation in the work of Paul Ricœur³⁰ might take up the problem of the reception of secondary literature devoted to his work.³¹

²⁸ The notion of presumptive confidence is the key to Ricœur's theory of reception and along with the related notion of attestation represent the eidetic or phenomenological heritage of his thought summed up nicely in the phrasing of Merleau-Ponty: "philosophy begins with [...] a pure "It seems to me that";" *Signs*, tr. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 14. This declarative, attestative or doxic foundation is the key to the hermeneutical-philosophical gesture; it contains in kernel his response which is not an answer to the so-called Gadamer-Habermas debate. Cf. "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" (*TA* 270-307), as well as *TN3* pp. 224-227, and "Ethics and Culture. Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue" *Philosophy Today* 17 (Summer 1973): 153-65. That this is uniquely a response or reply rather than a synthesis stems from Ricœur's ethic of compromise wherein it is understood that the intervention of the notion of compromise comes only at the moment when a plurality of worlds or systems of justification come into conflict. These "tragic" situations recall us to the forgotten character of our will to live together and its incarnation in our public institutions (law courts, school boards) which are founded upon a multiplicity of traditions where there is nothing like a unique system of justification of the just and unjust. It is only through making those great traditions (*ordres de grandeur*) intersect, not in some mythical reciprocity covering over asymmetries but "controversy" (*LD* 73-5) that we can attain a com-promise of the good that is shared. In this sense, a true compromise is never a compromise of principles (*compromission*); "Dans le compromis, chacun reste à sa place, personne n'est dépouillé de son ordre de justification" (*PEC* 5). In the case of the meeting between hermeneutics and critical theory, or participation and distanciation, the intersection takes the form, as we have come to expect, of a practical mediation that we cannot not live as subjects capable of a properly ethical interrogation; "[...] a perpetual transaction between the project of freedom and its ethical situation outlined by the given world of institutions" (*EC* 165).

²⁹ Ricœur's forcefulness on this point is remarkable in as much as it is utterly uncharacteristic, at least uncharacteristic of the character or caricature of Ricœur as the gentle philosopher well represented by the pronouncement, attributed to Norman O. Brown, "Ricœur never goes *too far*!" Quoted in Hayden White, "Guilty of History? The *Longue Durée* of Paul Ricœur", *History and Theory* 46 (May 2007): 249. Exemplifying this forcefulness, Ricœur points to the ineluctability of the dimension of aiming at the good life that animates the historian, as much as anyone else (the debt of this attitude to Aristotle is unmistakable): "As soon as the idea of a debt to the dead, to people of flesh and blood to whom something really happened in the past, stops giving documentary research its highest end, history loses its meaning" (*TN3* 118).

³⁰ "Naming the work in terms of its author implies no conjecture about the psychology of invention or of discovery, therefore no assertion concerning the presumed intention of the inventor; it implies only the singularity of a solution to a problem...This singularity of the solution, replying to the singularity of the problem, can take on a proper name, that of the author" (*TN3* 162).

³¹ Secondary literature, included within the boundaries of the work itself in the sense of its "effects" [*Wirkung*], prior to being criticized, is considered as the texture of the world of the text linked to the implied author indicated by the proper name "Paul Ricœur" with all of the historical efficacy of its transmission and dissemination. In this sense, the question of secondary literature's relative adequacy is secondary to the fact of its *standing for* past attempts at responding to Ricœur. This is not to say that all responses are equal but only to point to the dialectical constitution of their truth value. It is thus that we must set ourselves at an equal distance from, on the one hand, treating reading according to the prerogatives of the authorial rhetoric of persuasion and, on the other, an aesthetic of reception itself pluralized in a chain

For the reader who came to these secondary texts only secondarily, having first worked on some chapters from *Time and Narrative*, such a reception is necessarily in conflict, hence critical: as we highlighted with respect to the finitude of understanding and the presumptive credit bestowed on received texts, we always proceed from the already-said and the secondary literature must be judged in accordance with its fidelity to the texts as responding to and proceeding from specific questions.³² A crucial aspect of our reading of Ricœur is its contra-position against certain scholars who, in our estimation, fail to remain faithful to the specificity of his projects, his gestures, and the imperatives which guide them.³³ We contend that these authors would like to make of Ricœur a figure in the middle, a sort of non-partisan thinker whose thought is always tempered and tempering, as witnessed by the excessive profusion of book and article titles devoted to his work which contain the term ‘between.’³⁴ That a person would come to occupy the non-place of the in-between in a theoretical mode seems to me utterly inimical to Ricœur’s intentions as well as his understanding of the in principle inhospitability of the in-between, a nowhere which cannot by definition be occupied by embodied subjects except through an initial

of readings within a community of readers. “To the ideas of effect, history of effects, and horizon of expectations must be added the logic of question and answer; a logic whereby we understand a work only if we understand that to which it responds” (*TN3* 172). In this way, the contribution of the secondary literature must be taken by turns according to the same, the other and the similar. Cf. *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, the chapter entitled, “The Reality of the Past,” pp. 142ff.

³² The anticipatory, eschatological, even utopic dimension is crucial to a proper application of Ricœur’s thought. In this regard, the productivity of utopia and the paradox of hope are irrecusable advents in his thought. The dialectic of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ are already operative at the level of mimesis, that is, at the prefigurative level of passive perception.

³³ In particular, his happy and unabashed anthropocentrism. For Ricœur, the question of the human is largely the question of self-designation at all of its levels, anchoring, ascription, imputation—in short, responsibility. Cf. especially his article and its rather pointed title: “The Human Being as Subject Matter of Philosophy.” Chief among these responsibilities, at the level of our analyses, that of fundamental anthropology, is the responsibility for future humanity, for the future of human dignity; In this vein Ricœur asks: “à quelles conditions un monde non concentrationnaire est-il possible?” (*PHC* 50).

³⁴ A cursory glance at the secondary literature is all that is required to light on a number of such studies. These include: Peter Kemp, “Ricœur between Heidegger and Levinas: Original Affirmation between Ontological Attestation and Ethical Injunction,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21: 5-6 (1995); Richard Kearney, “Narrative Imagination: Between Ethics and Poetics,” in *ibid.*; Andrzej Wiercinski, *Between Suspicion and Sympathy* (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003); William David Hall, *Paul Ricœur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension between Love and Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

disproportion which is incoincidence as such.³⁵ An example of the substantiation and embalming of the dialectic concerns the use of the term “between” in a recent publication of William David Hall subtitled “between Love and Justice.” Hall argues that amnesty, with its dual character of referring at the same time to truth and justice, stands between truth and justice.³⁶ Is this a place to stand? Taking up the question indirectly, one must insist on what is meant by dialectical: “by dialectic I mean [...] the acknowledgement of the initial disproportionality between our two terms and [...] the search for *practical* mediations between them that are always fragile and provisory” (AJ 23). In a more direct manner, one must insist, with Ricœur, that amnesty prevents both forgiveness and justice by occupying an in-between with a muddled logic; by staking its claim in a territory that follows neither the logic of the institution of justice (a logic of equivalence which maintains a relation, however distant, to the *lex talionis*) nor the logic of the noninstitution of love

³⁵One of the few commentators to pay close attention to his “almost desperate” refusal of premature synthesis or the totalization of oppositions is Pamela Sue Anderson, particularly in “Agnosticism and Attestation”, in *The Journal of Religion* 74 (January 1994): 65-76. This theme is already very much present in the early work on finitude, and is itself always being reworked, taken up again at a further remove, adding another layer of indirection in an odd sort of disproportional dialogue that, at least since Husserl, has organized the relationship between philosophy and non-philosophy. Ricœur writes, “to say that man is situated *between* [...] is already to treat human reality as a region, an ontological locality, or a place lodged *between* other places. Now this schema of intercalation is extremely deceptive. [...] Man is not intermediate because he is between angel and animal; he is intermediate between himself, between his selves” (FM 3; translation modified). This intermediacy is exceeded in every decision, action, testimony or confession.

³⁶ The difficulty expressed here with the use of the term “between” is not meant as a rebuttal of W. David Hall’s reading. In fact, what follows regarding the incommensurability of what Ricœur would call the “unilateral” logic of love and the “bilateral” logic of justice is well noted by Hall. What seems problematic however, is the insertion of a theological perspective into a question that Ricœur himself addresses strictly philosophically, that is, under his self imposed exile from any kind of crypto-theology. It is helpful to recall Ricœur’s reticence invoked at the beginning and end of *Oneself as Another*, and, even more forcefully, his solemn pronouncement: “I am frightened by this word “sacred”” (STC 72). Thus we have refused, for example, in our discussion of initiative, any reference to the doctrine of creation, instead finding support in the Arendtian notion of natality which, one might argue, is itself inextricably linked to the Gospels and in particular to Lukan theonomy. Support for this claim could be found in the number of references (four) to passages from the Gospel of Luke in the section on “Irreversibility and the Power to Forgive” (*The Human Condition* 236-43). Given the eminently political role played by this faculty in Arendt’s phenomenology of the public realm, and, in addition, given the fact of her deafening muteness on religious experience, the charge of crypto-theology seems arbitrary and rather unseemly. Furthermore, it is worth noting that her references to Luke or to the other evangelists tend to point to the immanence of the miraculous in the properly human world rather than to any kind of divine intervention.

(a logic of superabundance).³⁷ These logics are not analogical. Amnesty forgets the evil done, and speaks nothing to the sufferer, relinquishing its claim to justice.³⁸ As commanded and organized forgiveness, it is not an act between two others; amnesty has nothing to do with forgiveness. Pure love cannot exist within institutions, it is anti-institutional by definition since it erases the gap that is the condition of plurality, responsibility and hence public life; in love, two become one.³⁹

In this example as in many others, there is a tendency to make Ricœur into the philosopher of compromise or consensus which misses, at least in this reader's opinion, the extraordinary care which Ricœur has taken in renouncing Hegelian gestures of totalizing synthesis and his conviction regarding the irreducible multiplicity of legitimating discourses.⁴⁰ Of course not all

³⁷ Amnesty is treated at length in *Memory, History, Forgetting* as an abuse or pathology of forgetting under the figure of "commanded forgetting" (MHF 452ff.)

³⁸ The proper aim of justice is, for Ricœur, first and foremost the recognition of the common situation from which litigation arose: the recognition by each party, of and through the "just distance" of the institution of right incarnated in the judicial form of judging (that is, under conditions where there is an inscribed code of law, law courts, independent and competent judges, and a trial process that ends with a judgment) of their respective roles as victim (or better, sufferer, the party to whom harm was done) and accused. He even goes as far as to say that the public recognition of these respective roles can, in certain circumstances, take the place of the penalty of sanction. At the least, this recognition on the part of the protagonist and antagonist serve to restore self-esteem and contribute in that way to respect for the law thereby strengthening and reiterating our will to live together (*J* 127-145).

³⁹ With respect to the problematic of amnesty, forgiveness and the possibility of their institutional inherence, one of Ricœur's most privileged interlocutors is Hannah Arendt who approached the problem of forgiveness as specifically responsive to the fragility of human action, that is, the inevitable conflicts and suffering arising out the plurality of initiatives that make our world an inter-world. The notion of love as anti-institutional is dramatically emphasized in the penultimate section of her chapter entitled, "Action" in *The Human Condition*. She writes: "Love [...] destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others [...] Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical [...]" (242). And yet... And yet we have, in the institution of marriage, an example where the properly political virtues of justice, respect, equality and reciprocal duties are transposed into the conjugal sphere, "disciplining Eros" as Ricœur says (*DS* 137). Does this transposition of the public onto the private find vengeance in a reverse movement whereby a similar transposition takes place from the private onto the public? It is hard to say. What is clear is that our time is one in which there is nothing paradoxical about such formulations as the "politics of marriage" or the "politics of sexuality" and where deliberations on marriage and sexuality have an intensely public character. Finally, it must be remembered that any disciplining of love is essentially transitory; its reciprocity is not that of the contract but that of the gift. "Lastly, whatever one might say of its equilibrium in marriage, Eros is not institutional" (*DS* 141). This is not to deny the force of the imperative, however difficult: to bring the economy of the gift to dwell in the interior of the logics of equivalence of the market and of justice. We see examples of this penetration in the "forgiveness" of the debts of the third world, or the exceptional prerogative of the presidential pardon in the French and American republics (cf. *AJ*).

⁴⁰ "Le consensus supposerait le nivellement de tous dans un magma" (*PEC* 3). This is not merely a deferral or an attempt to always in principle keep questions open; rather, the insistence on maintaining

compromises are equally fragile and it is clear that the critical function can never invoke the privilege of its sovereignty too quickly since there is always the danger that that which it criticizes has become irrelevant by way of anachronism. It is from within a specific geopolitical horizon that the critical gesture proceeds and it is by way of its situatedness that its hyperbolic tendency needs to be deployed. So that, when addressing tolerance, it is, for us, post-Westphalia, something like indifference and the inability to ground the moral feeling of indignance that is most threatening, and no longer perhaps the kinds of intolerance whose model has long been the religious wars of early modern Europe. Considering the fall of the Soviet republics Ricœur states:

doesn't the critique of the administered economy, of bureaucratic "socialism," and even totalitarianism too often end up extinguishing all social imagination, all visions of social transformation? Doesn't it all lead to renouncing the idea of utopia, or even any possible conception of the common good? I think we have to admit that the critique of the administered economy is over—more precisely, that while critiques of both totalitarian societies and even the welfare state must be pursued for as long as *necessary*, it is in a certain sense behind us. Instead, *what we need to begin today* is a critique of capitalism as a system of distribution that identifies all goods as commodities (*JM* 507 emphasis mine).

It is thus that we feel that his thought is better characterized as one of dissensus (as he himself has stated)⁴¹ which is more or less akin to what Chantal Mouffe has called "agonistic pluralism."⁴² While this may bring us a little too close to someone like Claude Lefort for Ricœur's comfort,⁴³ it

distances between conflicting interpretations is the consequence of a theory of perceptual and motivational consciousness worked out in his early work. In particular, the notions of perspective, and the absolute involuntary of corporeal life (birth, being embodied thus and so)—the inalienable character of *my* perception, desire, or reflection as *mine*, coupled with the reminder, coming from the object as it were, that my perspective is finite – these notions serve to delimit the two formal tendencies of consciousness: that human reflection moves presumptively toward a total reflection; and, as Merleau-Ponty was fond of saying, echoing Husserl, that not one of our reflections does not carry a date. Thus, there is a way to take up Hegel's formal logic without thereby attempting his transcendental, summing gesture.

⁴¹ "Le conflit est un structure de l'action humaine" (*PEC*). The development of the theme of dissensus, of a crucial for our final section where we take up the dialectic of memory and forgetting under the epistemological, ontological and ethical force of being-in-debt in an effort to characterizes a just history and happy memory.

⁴² Cf. "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism," in *Social Research* 66 (Fall 1999): 745-58; and *Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy*, (Center for the Study of Democracy by courtesy of Pepin Press: Amsterdam, 2002).

⁴³ To the notion of legitimate authority and Lefort's insistence on the fundamental indeterminacy that institutes democracy Ricœur writes, "should we turn to a more radical solution, like that of Claude Lefort...I resist and refuse to yield" (*RJ* 105).

is from within the conviction of agonistic pluralism that our claim is made—that is, that there are legitimate adversarial positions in the reception of a work. Therefore it is in full acceptance of the hermeneutic challenge posed by this “*excess in philosophical argumentation*”⁴⁴ that we take up this adversarial position even, at the limit, with Ricœur against himself.⁴⁵

However, the renouncement of one Hegel does not preclude a certain proximity of Ricœur with another Hegel in their shared insistence on the primacy of the institution (*le tiers*) with the difference that, for Ricœur, to pass by way of the third is not the result of a dialectical compact between the I and the you. The third is not constituted as a higher order face to face relation but has its constitution within the will to live together rooted in the common public world of appearing, rather than the intimacy of multiple privacy. Notwithstanding the seeming affinity in some instances of Ricœur with either a Rawlsian procedural normativity or a Habermasian communicative rationality, our interpretation cedes little ground to those authors who would make too much of this proximity.⁴⁶ The radicality of Ricœur’s insistence on the fragility of the self implied in the notion of attestation stems from the phenomenological presuppositions of his hermeneutic trajectory.⁴⁷ While the style of phenomenological reduction which Ricœur favors may not be orthodoxly Husserlian, it is certainly inspired by him, if it does undergo a heretical

⁴⁴ *OA*, 337. Ricœur is referring here to the hyperbolic style practiced by Levinas.

⁴⁵ This is not without assuming a readerly privilege or permission gleaned from his own work: “*Je suis trop conscient de l’inéluctable partialité qui s’attache à toute entreprise de pensée*” (*UJ* 37).

⁴⁶ Cf. David M. Kaplan, “Ricœur’s Critical Theory,” in *Reading Ricœur*, edited by David M. Kaplan, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 197-212.

⁴⁷ The mutual interdependency is explored by Ricœur in “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *TA*. This point has been appropriately highlighted by David M. Rasmussen in “Preserving the Eidetic Moment: Reflections on the Work of Paul Ricœur.” If attestation is not merely mythically generated, if it is to avoid the excesses of a reactionary Romantic philosophy in the wake of the purification of the Enlightenment, if it is to attain the level of “right opinion” then it must never sever its claim to reality; it must maintain its ties to a kind of speaking which we would characterize as non-egoic and yet the speech of a multiple I. It is this radical divestment that is the cardinal gesture of Husserlian phenomenological methodology that marks the highest temptation of idealism and the necessity of traversing that dangerous path. A disengaged subjectivity unaccompanied by an absolute external world is the starting point for such a mode of philosophizing. But, like most starting points, it is posited only through a retrograde movement. It is the movement or adventure itself which marks the affinity between the gesture of idealist philosophy and the positing of the witness. In this way, the transcendental solipsism which is the price of this radicality is a *solus ipse* without a *sola*.

modification by Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁸ By answering the Kantian demand (obligation) from within the reduction, Ricœur is able to accommodate the kind of aiming at “the good life” which he takes to be philosophy’s birth certificate by treating it as belonging to the noetic context, as the fabric of the flesh, “the original incarnation of thought, which cannot be expressed in terms of objectification...a synthesis prior to all syntheses.”⁴⁹ It is precisely the radicality of this synthesis and the quasi-doxic character of the primitive datum of attestation that is missed by reading Ricœur along consensualist lines.⁵⁰ After all, a rigorous ethic of ideal communication *pace* Habermas would be utterly unwilling to “found” the project of emancipation on something as suspicious as attestation, “that mode of certainty which is at once irrefutable in terms of cognitive proof and subjected to suspicion by virtue of its character of belief” (*MHF* 392).⁵¹ A “thesis” like that is unthematizable—it cannot be treated as a thematic object and finds no foothold in auto-referentiality.⁵² Failure to situate “attestation” on its phenomenological terrain runs the risk of turning Ricœur into just one more liberal.⁵³

⁴⁸ Such a modification is very well explicated by Lévinas, “On Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty,” in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 96-103.

⁴⁹ Lévinas, *Outside the Subject*, 97.

⁵⁰ That attestation already contains within its structure the possibility of a critical gesture is the starting point of the non-syncretic mediation Ricœur offers to the fundamental ambivalence that characterizes beginning philosophically (*TA*, 270ff).

⁵¹ As Jean Greisch has argued, epistemically, attestation is modeled on testimony, imbued as it is with a quasi-doxic sort of certainty that is provisional with respect to the conflict of testimonies. “Testimony and Attestation,” in *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney (London: Sage Publications, 1996): 81-98. In other words, it is akin to the specifically political notion of opinion “et son statut épistémique suspect” (*PV* 33) that one finds in Arendt. And as we well know: “pour Arendt la solidarité est étroite entre les deux sens du terme grec doxa: d’un côté, le contraire de l’illusion, l’apparaître au sens fort et positif, la mise en lumière, voire la mise en scène et même la gloire, quand l’action termine son cours éphémère dans le récit qui en recueille l’éclat; de l’autre côté, le contraire de la science, qui chagrine Habermas” (*PV* 33). “For Arendt, there is a tight linkage between the two senses of the Greek term *doxa*: on one side, the contrary of illusion, the strong and positive sense of appearing, bringing to light, even the drama and the glory of action which, having terminated its short term end, is recollected and recounted in its brilliance; on the other side, the contrary of science which pains Habermas.” Ricœur, directing his question squarely at Habermas, asks, “un communication sans bornes ni entraves serait-elle encore communication si en était exclu le conflit des opinions?” (*PV* 35).

⁵² In *Pouvoir et Violence*, Ricœur takes up the critique leveled at Arendt by Habermas and in particular the charge of nostalgia. His insistence is that there is in Arendt a kind of opinion which is irreducible to that criticized by Habermas. Going even further, he argues that Habermas’ notion of an ideal speech situation is

Finally, as anyone familiar with Ricœur can attest, his work is always already profoundly in dialogue, and in that sense, is always moving toward its own critique, pointing to its limitations, concluding with thornier questions.⁵⁴ As with most secondary literature in the history of philosophy, that which deals with Ricœur tends toward an epistemological gaze or a sort of game of finding inconsistencies which fails to do justice to the properly therapeutic aim of his work (he never tires of reminding us that what he is doing is practical philosophy). As we will attempt to become more clear about in unfolding the phenomenology of reception in Ricœur's work, the critical gesture cannot be the first move; this is why a theory of reception or receiving seems to us to make sense in the face of the quasi-impossibility alluded to in the epigraph with which we began this work. By proceeding from our readerly engagement with his work and from what seems to be merely latent or at least something like an underdeveloped presupposition in his work, we hope to offer something other than an appraisal of the way in which he handled an already constituted and bounded problem.⁵⁵

itself born of specific examples of the public use of reason, that is, it already operates with an ideal taken from the realm of opinion (*PV* 35-6).

⁵³ Dealing with the literature and the various Ricœurs found there, what is crucial in our view is the retention of the tragic character of Ricœur's ethics, political philosophy and ontology to the extent that we can speak meaningfully of an ontology in Ricœur. While tragedy is an operative notion across the writings dealing with practical wisdom (*OA*, Study 9), institutional responsibility (*CR*) and the kind of residual violence in the forcible ending to appeals in juridical matters (*J*), it is expressed most affectively in his work on the violence of the state, its linkage with coercion (*KHL*), persuasion, rhetoric and a non-benevolent sacrality.

⁵⁴ One need only look at the extraordinary number of footnotes or the number of bibliographic entries in any of Ricœur's texts (at least the later texts where he is no longer practicing direct description) to note just how generously Ricœur "converses" with others.

⁵⁵ The notion of attestation is a rather late formulation in Ricœur's oeuvre. However, to call this operative concept the "unthought" in his work would be an overstatement.

III. TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RECEPTION

In this section, we would like to take up the problem of reception, bracketing for as long as possible the question of the adequacy of the transmission. We will limit ourselves primarily to texts which we take as the model for the reception of handed down contents as such.⁵⁶ In this sense, language comes first in the form of the relation of the reader to a text, because of its fixity in writing [*schriften*]; the security of the transmission of the contents of a heritage is assured through writing which is the preeminent institution or “vehicle” of this transmission. The formal transmission of heritage through education or teaching and the informal transmission via “costume and usage” (*EC* 154), all of these transmissions are more or less unproblematic in so far as the content of tradition is seen in the light of this notion of transmission, “a relatively neutral term susceptible at its limit to a purely technical [...] notion of information” (*EC* 154). It is only when we move from the transmission of information to the plurality of traditions and the legitimacy claimed by each, with the difficult, though not impossible disentanglement from that of authority, then, “all at once the word “tradition” loses all neutrality.⁵⁷ But let us remain at the level of transmission and slowly move toward the question of legitimacy contained within the polarizing problematic of tradition-authority. In this way, we will begin by limiting ourselves “to describing our dependence on the past as fact” (*EC* 154).

The readerly reception of texts is fraught with richness and poverty. Coming to a text means attempting to make its problems one’s *own* and doing so in such a way as to not merely repeat the “results” of the author, whatever or whoever the author may turn out to be—implied categorically, under erasure psychologically, undecidably demarcated autobiographically, with

⁵⁶ Cf. “The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered As a Text,” *TA* 144ff.

⁵⁷ “Difficult, not impossible”, this distinction governs the *difference* or distance between Ricœur and Derrida, particularly though not uniquely in relation to the horizon of forgiving. Cf. the epilogue of *Memory, History, Forgetting* entitled “Difficult Forgiveness,” *MHF* 457ff.

the floating significance of a history of textual effectiveness, according to the coimplications of translators upon the floating signification of idiomatic usage.⁵⁸

To understand oneself is to understand oneself before the text and to receive from it the conditions of a self, other than the "I" which comes to reading. Thus the reader, because he or she has suspended the exclusivity of his or her point of view, receives a subjectivity augmented by the opening of new possibilities which is the work in me of the issue of the text (TA 110).⁵⁹

So we begin to read feeling all of this thickness operative but we do so unconfidently as the problems aren't yet ours, they aren't even problems. We open the text, begin a chapter, and follow the directions. Following directions means adhering to the text's "structure of appeal" as competent readers participating in "the sedimented expectations of a general reading public" (TN3 167).⁶⁰

The first thing we note is that, for the reader, "the quasi-past" of the text is borrowed, fictive; it is a past projected formally by virtue of the historicity of writing, of the written as such. This imagined past need not bear anything more than a superficial resemblance to the philological-historical past of the actual author, distinct from the "implied author," a notion which, along with

⁵⁸ Insisting on the "coimplication of translators" is crucial for Ricœur's "theory of reference" where the question of the relative adequacy of a translation to its original is necessarily secondary to the fact of being "after Babel" which merely asserts "the plurality characteristic of all human phenomena" (LD 64-5). It is in this light that we find both strange and inconsistent when Gadamer, the preeminent thinker of historical effectiveness and rehabilitator of rhetoric, remarks, "I have no great faith in translations. Translation does not serve as an ideal mediator of ideas." Hans-Georg Gadamer, "An Interview," *Theory, Culture & Society* 5 (1988): 29. To pose the question of adequacy of translation prior to a mere "noting" of the effects of the translation itself, what Gadamer would call its "application"; this seems to contradict the presumptive confidence that is the very heart of a hermeneutics of tradition. In other words, there is, prior to the determination of adequacy, a history of effects of (mis)translations. The regulative Idea of an adequate translation governs all of our speech acts, whether intra- or inter-linguistic. This is one of the crucial anticipations that make up the "horizon of expectations" of the of the reader: "it is inasmuch as readers participate in the sedimented expectations of the general reading public that they are constituted as competent readers. The act of reading thus becomes one link in the chain of the history of the reception of a work by the public" (TN3 166).

⁵⁹ Quoted in Olivier Abel, "Ricœur's Ethics of Method," *Philosophy Today* (Spring 1993): 26.

⁶⁰ Including the "law of genre." It is this set of expectations engendered by the formality of novelistic strategies that makes the history of the anti-novel continuous with that of the novel.

the indeclinable historicity of *schriften*, can be taken as the formal principles of reading as an already historical activity.⁶¹

We move through the text, anticipating the coherence of the sequence, the continuity of the sentences, and through protentional expectations, we become aware of the tricks of an author's rhetorical persuasion in leading us one way or another. This is particularly apparent with the modern novel where the "frustration" of expectations takes on preeminence as the explicit rhetorical strategy of an author. "The presupposition of this strategy [...] is that reading is a search for coherence" (TN3 168). The point is that the search for coherence, the prejudgment of textual configuration, is always already there in "the pact of reading," roughly, that the text is followable, faithful to itself as a unity, as generic. "By virtue of this pact, the reader's guard is lowered. Mistrust is willingly suspended. Confidence reigns" (TN3 186).⁶² This confidence allows the play of indeterminacy and even the critique of norms, for example voyeuristic forms of cathartic violence,⁶³ such that the unreliable narrator who defamiliarizes the norms of reading (TN3 170) operates only on the condition that narration is generally held to be reliable. This reliability is what connects, however loosely, fictional and historical spheres of discourse.⁶⁴ Indeed, without the disappointment of the expectations of meaning, the problem of indebtedness remains invisible in the reception of transmitted contents. Prior to the controversy introduced by an excess of

⁶¹ In the eidetic-historical "questioning back" of Husserlian imaginative variation, practiced exemplarily in the text on "The Origin of Geometry", Husserl refers to an indexical Galileo about whom Derrida comments in his "Introduction" to Husserl's short text: Galileo's "name here is the exemplary index of an attitude and a moment, rather than a proper name." Jacques Derrida, "*Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry*": An Introduction, trans. John P. Leavey (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 35.

⁶² Joycean plurivocity frustrates the innocent reader anticipating univocal meaning.

⁶³ The films of Michael Haneke serve as an excellent example of disappointing our expectations for certain "domesticated" and acceptable forms of violence. These films are shocking to the point of being unwatchable, in as much as, "after feigning to satisfy the public's expectation, run directly counter to it" (TN3 172).

⁶⁴ What the limits of communicability lay bare is the ideal type of reading as a fusion of horizons, "an analogizing relation, not without resemblance to that in which the relation of standing-for the historical past culminates" (TN3 178).

signification in light of an opacity or incoherence of the text, the placated reader is fully prestructured by the text and its strategy of persuasion is unnoticed as it is entirely unproblematic.

Through the indeterminacy of unfulfilled protentions, an element of distance is introduced and the search for reconstructive coherence governing the first reading gives way to a second reading where naive expectations turn into questions, or to borrow a phrase from Paul Veyne, to a lengthening of the questionnaire. "Reading then becomes a place, itself unreal, where reflection takes a pause" (*TN3* 179). This distanciation brings to the fore the problem of debt by marking the text with a non-immediacy of meaning where the notion of pure receptivity or unfettered communication makes room for the work of translation. Here the question of the "right" reading arises in the midst of the "plurality of possible questions," and with it the question of receptive legitimacy, of an adequate or faithful translation. As we have seen in the course of reading, we anticipate certain continuities, we find ourselves with residual questions and only then, in light of the excess of significations won through our second reading, does the historico-philological question appear. Only at this furthest remove from innocence do we begin to pose the questions of authorship that structuralism has banished: "their proper place is defined by their function of verification which, in a certain sense, makes immediate reading, and even reflective reading, dependent on the reading based on historical reconstruction" (*TN3* 175). But it must be noted that the style of verification suited to the reception of texts is one "closer to logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification" (*TA* 159). As in the controversy generated by divergent testimonies, the question of truth as verifiability is supplanted by that of the probable, always with respect to a horizon of uncertainty. In this sense, hermeneutical wagers are ranked according to the plausibility of interpretive constructions, which are always finite reconstructions. This is not some methodological defect which would lead to an unlimited skepticism but reminds us of

the link between texts and their model, human action⁶⁵, where meaning always exceeds the purposive or motivational field in which human acts are formulated due to the fact of human plurality.⁶⁶

It is in the confrontation between the excess of meaning characterizing the second reading and the verification begun by the critical aspect of the third that a resolution of the indeterminacy of the questions emerging from the first two readings is demanded. The problem of an adequate and accurate reading is broached in as much as here we reach the level of application, “the work’s influence on social reality” (*TN3* 179).⁶⁷ In the application or imitation of textual action, reading ceases to be marked by the passivity with which we began and the text is no longer the neutral document before which the readers rest; it becomes “a medium they cross through” (*TN3* 179) on the way to refiguring the world through intervention.

What becomes clear with the belated emergence of the question of reference in regard to the notion of verifiability, of probability, and actionability is that a theory of reception must begin to distinguish between fictional and historical discourse.⁶⁸ While the question of legitimacy remains

⁶⁵ Within a monological conceptual framework of action, the question of the agent of an action, “who acts?” is exhausted by the question of her intention, her motives, “why did she do that?”. The peculiarity of a finite answer to an infinite series can be clarified only within a narrative theory of action for which “to identify an agent and to recognize this agent’s motives are complementary operations” (*TN1* 53).

⁶⁶ We would refer here to Hannah Arendt’s analysis of action in *The Human Condition* where the threefold fragility of action is happily enumerated as “unpredictable,” “irreversible,” “unreliable.” Happily in as much as these “defects” are the “price to pay” for freedom and plurality (244).

⁶⁷ The level of application refers to the fusion of horizons between the reader and the text when the reader imitates the ability to act, when he initiates something, intervenes in the world, that is, where his intention to speak and do, “what he knows, without observation, he is capable of doing coincides with the initial state of a closed physical system” (*TN1* 53).

⁶⁸ “Not to ignore the fact that sometimes fictions come closer to what really happened than do mere historical narratives...It is puzzling. But, finally, we have to return to a body count. You have to accurately *count* the corpses in the death camps as well as offering vivid narrative *accounts* that people will remember....This is why I stress so strongly the reality claims of memory to remain faithful to our *debt* to the past, to the pastness of the past. Which brings me finally to the indispensable issue of *testimony*. Testimony is the ultimate link *between* imagination and memory, because the witness says, “I was part of the story. I was there.”...It is very difficult, of course. I am struggling with this difficulty at present. Maybe it has to do with the two meanings of pastness—no longer there and still there, absent and present (or quasi-present). How do we make the past visible as if it were present, while acknowledging our debt to the past as it actually happened? That is my main ethical question of memory.... In the final analysis, however, we must emphasize the role of trust. When I testify to something, I am asking the other to trust that what I am

more or less senseless if posed in relation to fictional discourse (except of course in so far as one asks, “Is this an imitable action?”), this question “is the most troubling of all the questions that historiography raises for thought about history” (TN3 142). With the question of reference comes another notion which has been sidelined until now, the notion of memory. It is no surprise that the figure of memory, even if it remains an operative concept in *Time and Narrative*, is enlisted in support of an argument in favor of the unending circle of historical consciousness and historiographical practice. This underdeveloped concept which seems to carry so much weight in *Time and Narrative* is made thematic in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Ricœur himself remarks as much when he states:

Je dois avouer que je suis passé à côté d'un facteur intermédiaire entre le temps et le récit, qui est le mémoire. On ne peut lier le temps directement à la fonction narrative, il manque un chaînon: celui de la mémoire et l'oubli qui ne sont jamais entièrement conscients” (YVM 2).⁶⁹

With the problems of reference and memory, the stakes of probability in determining “what the text says” are raised to the level of actionable events and retributive blood claims. However the pair memory-debt as “guardians of the referential function of history”

must not be limited to the concept of guilt. The idea of debt is inseparable from the notion of heritage. We are indebted to those who have gone before us for part of what we are. The duty of memory is not restricted to preserving the material trace [...] but maintains the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others, of whom we shall say later, not that they are no more, but that they were (MHF 89).

With the appearance of this properly critical question, we turn to the specificity of the feeling of debt that animates the historian’s practice.

saying is true. To share a testimony is an exchange of trust. Beyond this we cannot go. Most institutions rely fundamentally on the trust they place in the word of the other.” Ricœur quoted in Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur: The Owl of Minerva* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 50-1.

⁶⁹ This is not to say that this lack was involuntary; rather, it seems that Ricœur avoided the question of memory in *Time and Narrative* for a number of reasons including importantly his decision to bracket the question of reference (“the reality claims of memory”) for as long as possible but at the same time to place his argument with the English-language narrativist camp (exemplified by Hayden White’s *tropics*) beyond the paradox of memory-imagination which would short circuit the fruitfulness of demonstrating the *indirect* filiation between history and fiction where the ability to follow a story, or, roughly the capacity for interpretation, while it is common to both, undergoes significant changes when it is confronted dialectically with the explanatory resources which signal an epistemological break with the strictly fictional narratives.

IV. THE ENIGMA OF THE PASTNESS OF THE PAST

“On the horizon stands out the wish for an integral memory that holds together individual memory, collective memory, and historical memory, a wish that [...] “We forget nothing” (MHF 396).

In the previous section, we limited ourselves, as far as possible, to making “use of a morally neutral concept of debt, one that does not express more than a heritage transmitted and assumed” (MHF 363). In this section, we will ask to what extent the neutrality of readerly transmission can be said to govern our relation to history. In this way, this section, our most lengthy, will follow the course from an epistemology of history, through a critical philosophy of history, to an ontology of the historical condition.

Returning to the notion of debt with which we began, thus, returning to the beginning in order to begin anew, to begin to continue, we would now like to unfold this notion of debt, no longer in the strict terms of the relation of a reader to “transcendental subjectless field” of the text pregnant with meaning, but via its anchoring or reinscription in lived historicity of a kind of “detemporalized” speech deposited in documents, monuments, and archives; “the anchorage of the *arch* in the ground of lived experience” (TA 124, emphasis mine).⁷⁰ This level of interrogation is taking its aim at the reception, not so much of a “world of the text,” but of the texture of the transmitted world as an ambiguous modality of being, ambivalent between its twofold expression: being no longer, having been.

Moving from the “fact of writing” and the question of linguistic security as such, we will take up the connectors which make reception and reading an ordered and situated experience through the notions of the calendar and the generation. That is to say, we are connected to our past selves

⁷⁰ The invocation of the metaphor of “arch” is serendipitous for our purposes: our anchoring in the arch, that literal lynchpin of Rome, will become problematized in our extended engagement with that “most philosophical of historians” (ZL), Paul Veyne for whom anchoring ourselves in the Roman arch will be seen to be a matter of mere curiosity, of disinterestedness.

and, more generally, to the past as having existed through its traces, commemorated in axial moments, epochal events and constituted filially, contemporaneously, ancestrally, successorially.

How is our relation to the past represented in the first place? Lived time is inscribed onto cosmic time through the introduction of regular intervals that shape the rhythm of a life. The preeminent intervals are those of the calendar and the generation. With the advent of the calendar comes the instauration of a public time providing “our traditions with the framework of an institution based on astronomy” (*TN3* 229) and articulated with respect to an axial moment or founding event, “the zero moment for computing chronicle time” (*TN3* 106). This making public of time allows for the situating of all of the events of our life, as well as the events of our predecessors and our successors in a kind of continuity such that there are contemporaneous events. This contemporaneousness is crucial for public gathering and bureaucratic functioning creating a common time-form which extends the limited reach of spatial co-presence. Even more intriguing is the adoption and translation of calendars, of public times by alien communities. In this way, we move toward a notion of humanity as a collective singular governed by a common public time.⁷¹

Along with the contemporaneousness engendered by calendrical time, which serves as a resource for a “history of the world,” there is the relationship of contemporaneousness in the socio-biological sense of being part of a generation, of having contemporaries, at all levels of anonymity.⁷² “How does this phenomenon affect history and historical time? With this concept of the generation comes into focus the question of “one dies” and with it the historian’s operation understood as “sepulcher” (*MHF* 365-69):

⁷¹ This should not be mistaken for a plea for a single calendar but rather as an attempt to highlight the translatability of calendars as pointing to the possible emergence of a shared history, a shared datability.

⁷² As Schütz would say, moving outward from we-relations, to include those most distant others with whom we share the planet at a given time. Though one might ask, “what given time?”, “whose given time?”. Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, translated by Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

“birth and death do not constitute personal memories but rely on the memory of close relations who are in a position to celebrate the first and suffer the loss of the second. Collective memory, and even more so historical memory, retain of these “events” only the replacement one by the other of the actors of history following the ordered sequence of the transmission of roles. From the viewpoint of the third-party historian, generations succeed one another in the civil registers” (*MHF* 587).

Here, the historiographical “work of mourning” extends the notion of death beyond the truncated anticipation in the authenticity of being-toward-death to include the death of relatives, of distant others, even “the death of the political body as such” (*MHF* 368).

Having passed through the institution of the calendar and the biological and sociological notion of the generation, what we note is a slight shift in our ability to interrogate the enigma of “the pastness of the past”, one which was assumed without being addressed by the problematic of the reader that we took up in the previous section. This shift concerns the inclusion within the notion of debt, until now a meaning arc predominantly bearing an economic significance, of an aspect of mournfulness manifested by the fact of human finitude. This relation to death in history, a relation that Ricœur has called “sepulcher,” was covered over in our earlier analysis by the “eternity” of *schriften* in the fusion of the world of text and the world of the reader. What was at issue there was the reader’s relation to a “quasi-past” where the question of the relation between the past and the memoratively recuperable was held in abeyance. It is only with the introduction of the work of mourning through the loss of our predecessors, the death of our close relations, that the notion of debt is decentered from that of an economic “obligation” in the direction of an intentionality less formal than that of the implied author (the formalities we noted were those of the pact of reading, configuration into plots). We are not yet at the level of the victims of the past. Here it is a question of the often abortive potentiality of the having been, “the representation of the dead, not just as absent from history, but as shadows haunting the historical present” (*TN3* 115). This shift also brings us closer to the problem of reference, and with it the ontology of the historical condition which had been placed within brackets in the consideration of readerly

reception. Let us proceed slowly.

By including a reference to death within a reflection on debt, what comes to the fore is the passage, in death, from living memory to history. In this sense, we are not far from someone like Derrida who would insist on the proximity of sepulcher, writing, and death. The death of those close to us and the work of mourning which death inaugurates calls for a narration and even a recording, an archiving to guard the remnants of the past. It is here, on the way to the archive, that we near the end of the documentary phase of the historiographical operation. Beyond the conflict of living testimonies, the archive is the final resting place for willful memorialization.⁷³ With the depositing into archives begins the historian's questionnaire, and with it the critical moment addressed to the problems of selectivity and motivation. Through the selective appropriation⁷⁴ of the archives, the historian bestows upon us a new kind of memory, a historicized memory which introduces a break between the group that witnesses the events being recounted and the community who reads this history.

What is called into question with the introduction of the problematic of the historicization of memory—beyond the living documents of public-private memory (the stories of the grandparent)—mediated by “dead” memories in need of “life support”⁷⁵ and stored in archives

⁷³ The problematic of testimony, with its ethical injunction, “I was there, believe me,” is the *terminus a quo* of the documentary phase of history. This doxic foundation grounds a hermeneutics of historical consciousness requires, not so much epistemically, but in the form of a plea: “a plea on behalf of memory as the womb of history, inasmuch as memory remains the guardian of the entire problem of the representative relation of the present to the past” (*MHF* 87). Decisive is its structure as an exchange between the one who gives and the one who receives (*MHF*, 167). With the question, ‘who bears witness?’ is opened up the entire field of ontology where the speaker is not only telling a story but speaking of the “real” past and acting in the present.

⁷⁴ Coupled with the “selective appropriation” is the selectivity of willed memory in the form of archives, institutions which require resources to ensure their proper care and custodianship. The crisis of the documentary phase of the historiographical operation covers the entire range of archiving activities: deposits, withdrawals, even at the limit, the destruction of archives, readily imaginable in our time through the fictional enrichments of the act of burning paper, books, corpses. The crisis thus concerns not only the selectiveness of the archival deposits but the selectiveness of the historian's questionnaire between the poles of utter arbitrariness and ideological manipulation.

⁷⁵ Historical testimony is “orphaned”; “a kind of ghostly presence that requires aid and succor in order to come back to life as a living presence” (White, 251).

with an astonishing level of anonymity is the externality of memory and the resulting potentiality for abuse.⁷⁶ What is at issue when criticizing the archival “witnesses in spite of themselves” is not the content of their testimony nor their reliability or even the possibility of reliability as such. What is in question is the readerly capacity to designate oneself as the possessor of one’s own memories (*MHF* 128).⁷⁷ The “crisis of memory” concerns “the sense that there is no spontaneous memory [...] that modern memory is, above all archival [...] delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering.”⁷⁸ This archival memory is, in our time, as in Nietzsche’s time, an “acculturation to externality”, “the progressive disappearance of the gap between the history taught in schools and the experience of memory” (*MHF* 394).

With the historicization of memory we have entered into a problem unaddressed by the critique of testimony coming from a judicial psychology⁷⁹ and its “paradigm of [the disinterested] recording” (*MHF* 162) of a single eyewitness. We are referring here to those orphaned testimonies sanctioned as collective memories, whether in the writing of popular history, the erection of monuments to military victories, or in classroom civics. But the polemical thrust of this lament over historicized or externalized memory has as a positive complement in the adoption of orphaned memories as ours, as collective memories.

⁷⁶ Nora poses the questions of an exploded intentionality with urgency, “Whose will to remember does [prosthesis-memory] ultimately reflect? ... What is being remembered? In a sense, it is memory itself.” Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” Translated by Marc Roudebush. *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 14-16.

⁷⁷ “The specificity of testimony lies in the fact that the assertion of a reality at which the witness says he was present is paired with the self-designation of the testifying subject. And this is part of a dialogical relation. The witness attests *before someone* to the reality of what is reported” (*TCR* 131).

⁷⁸ Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, 12-13. Nora refers to this memory as “anonymous data banks” and a “Leibnizian paper machine.”

⁷⁹ “The conditions of experimentation [...] contribute to masking the living being’s resources of exploration, anticipation, and negotiation, through which this being is engaged in an *Umwelt* that belongs to it in its own right and that it helps to construct” (*MHF* 59). The accuracy or inaccuracy of testimony is not the first question. In alethic speech, truth is always the result of a constitution which is not the free creation of a fully-reflexive constituting consciousness but the truth effects of the intention to truth animating the trial process itself (or other testimonial *mise en scène*)—what Foucault would call, the problematizations of truth-telling as distinguished from the problem of truth. Of course this is precisely why testimony is vehemently suspicious, not because of the inaccuracy of reporting “visual” phenomenon, nor due to the laboratory effect but because of the vicissitudes of the truth-telling intention itself, the contingency of its genesis thus and so. Alethic speech is illocutionary, allocutionary and interlocutionary (OA 43-4)

“Must we give up seeing in contemporary historiography an enlargement of our collective memory? This would be to break with the notions of a trace and the testimony of the past. However difficult the notion of a collective memory may be, particularly when it does not openly carry its credentials with it, to reject it would be to announce the suicide of history” (TN3 118).

The question remains as to whether the historicization of memory, “the dominion of history” (Nora) can be anything other than a *pharmakon*. We will investigate this by radicalizing the notion of externality through an utter rejection of Marrou’s conception of the historian’s “ethic of friendship” in the figure of Paul Veyne and his “poetry of distance” (TN3 149).

Why, in an effort to examine the possible resources of a truthful history, engage with Veyne? In such an endeavor, the obvious partner in dialogue is an historiographical positivism, the closest heir to the treatment of “past facts” as a species of ideality (and in particular, its omnitemporal and objective qualities) commensurate with the handed down traditions of geometry and natural science.⁸⁰ However, the difficulty of a direct engagement between a phenomenology of reading and positivist history is that there is no common ground to pose the question of science itself. We can avoid this abortive confrontation by taking up a positivism of historical factuality that simultaneously abases science or the scientific character of history. By freeing the notion of a “fact” from scientism, we can hope to see to what extent we can go along with the sheer factuality of historical documents. The attitude of curiosity, taken to the limit, represents an attempt to avoid, at the cost of a living relation to the past, the pitfalls of ideological manipulation to which, as we have seen, historicized memory is plagued: either we approximate a true account or we remain faithful. With Veyne, we harden this distinction to the point of ossification, of occlusion: “it is the topic which permits the historian to remove himself from the optic of his sources and to *conceptualize* the events in a different way than the historical agents or their contemporaries did” (ZL 43). But isn’t the action of conceptualizing “events in a different way” already to speak of a

⁸⁰ We are following the formal use of the term ideality in “The Origin of Geometry” and Derrida’s *Introduction* referred to above.

mere homonymy of events; is this not to confine oneself to the side of meaning?⁸¹ Is the price of the historian's "removal" a removal from history, from the historical intentionality guided by "the desire to do justice to the past" (*TN3* 151)? The task then is to specify whether "this history remains historical" (*ZL* 50).

What we would like especially to note about Veyne's positivism is indeed quite odd: on the one hand, Veyne completes the most radical critique of the documentary phase of the historiographical operation by making it infinitely distant, that is, by severing its ties to any controlling interest exercised by the magistrates of the present as the keepers or better the "selectors" of historical memory through the progressive conceptualization bringing about an almost absolute dislocation between events and their meanings, making impossible their dialectical mediation.⁸² On the other, one finds in Veyne this absolute insistence on the reliability of testimony, the "hard core" of the "documentary phase": "It is impossible to cast doubt on the element of sincerity in the many epigraphic texts in which attachment to the emperor is expressed."⁸³

One might ask, "What kind of dignity or respect or esteem is required to assume a rule of charity or sincerity?" Doesn't the act of reading their documents as sincere, doesn't that already dignify the Romans to the point that the debt owed to them is already one that exceeds an attitude of utter exoticism, an exoticism characteristic, not of the ethnographer, for even the "ethnocentric" anthropologist of the age of imperialism believes that the savage is who we

⁸¹ In this regard, Ricœur asks, "how can history remain narrative when it ceases to be eventful?" (*ZL* 44). As we shall see, the stakes here concern the "negative revelation" of "uniquely unique events" (*TN3* 187).

⁸² The movement toward a relation of "no longer" uncoupled with "having been" points to a lack or neutrality of criteria of selectiveness that Pierre Nora decries as the anonymization of memory and the utter split of archive-memory from retention. This refusal to distinguish and hierarchize the important, the memorable can be construed as an abuse of "artificial memory" (*MHF* 58).

⁸³ Paul Veyne, "What Was a Roman Emperor? Emperor, Therefore a God," tr. Jean Burrell, *Diogenes* 50 (3): 3-21. Cf. also an interview in *Le Point* where he is asked why Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity to which he responds, "Il se croyait appelé à sauver l'humanité. C'est outré, mais il l'a dit et écrit. Je suis un incroyant, mais je pense que la pire erreur serait de douter de cette sincérité." "Paul Veyne et le dieu unique," numero 1800, édition paru le 15 mars 2007.

were?⁸⁴ Indeed, the proper Rousseauian applauds the nobility of this uncorrupted life and finds in it an opportunity to understand the genealogy of social contracts. This style of interestedness implies a shared world. No, Veyne's curiosity is that of the "entomologist" (TN3 309n21). We might add that Veynian entomology is not particularly anthropomorphizing. In other words the gap separating us from them (humans from insects, moderns from Romans) is more or less total.

What is at stake in this debate with Veyne and generally with the "fate of the event" (ZL 45ff) in contemporary historiography is the filiation between human action, narrativity, history, and the cluster of consignant terms tradition, heritage, transmission, reception.⁸⁵ In other words, the question appears as to whether "estrangement" of historiography from lived historicity is the price to pay for a history unburdened by ideological abuse? Does the attitude of curiosity offer the resources "to break the vicious circle of commemorative historiography" (ZL 53)?

Veyne's insistence on the bookishness of history, at the price of the exclusion of its existential relation, turns out to be the foil for Ricœur's long circuited theory of reference. The extreme exoticism of Veyne's historiological intentionality, an attitude roughly characterized as "curiosity", doesn't this radical nominalism operate outside of any reference to the debt that keeps the dialectic between the violence of rhetorical persuasion and the pact of trust in an aesthetics of reception swinging, as it were? In other words, does this not determine negatively the possibility of historical imagination from being reconnected with a future and its present, enabling a "critical exchange" between memory and expectation? In privileging the "no longer" of historiography to the point of occluding the "having been" of historicity, of being-affected, recollection memory is severed from retention memory to the point that their mutual implication of "memory" is construed as mere homonymy. It seems as though the present as even having

⁸⁴ This attitude was exemplified in the curation of "human zoology" at *L'Exposition Coloniale de 1931 à Paris*.

⁸⁵ Ricœur writes, "the fate of the event can be taken as a touchstone marking the historical quality of history" (ZL 45).

occurred, this is an entirely irrelevant temporal mode for Veyne qua historian, for whom history, as a history of differences, has no method nor concepts, and entirely severs its ties to even the most nuanced notion of continuity with the living present⁸⁶: “Nothing is further from us”; “Little has entered into us”; “Between the Romans and us an abyss has been hollowed out.”⁸⁷ Veyne’s “events by emplotment” are “detemporalized to the point of no longer being either near or far away” (TN3 148).

In what follows, we will attempt to respond to the question which is sharpened into an either/or: either “curiosity gains the upper hand over sympathy, the stranger becomes alien” or, through a negative ontology of the past, it becomes what is missing, “a pertinent absence” which was “real and alive” taken as “the ultimate referent of history” (TN3 149).

By way of a first response, one that is not articulated explicitly in Ricœur, we can take up Veyne’s insistence on the non-existentially grounded intentionality of the historian. Roughly that: “History is a bookish, not an existential, notion. It is the organization by the intelligence of givens that refer to a temporality other than that of my *Dasein*.”⁸⁸ Ricœur’s response is undoubtedly implied through the notion of mimesis₁, the prefigurative level of lived experience. Posed in the form of a question: “Is there [...] any experience that is not already the fruit of narrative activity?” (TN3 248), the negative response given to this question, due to the always already character of the “semantics of desire [...] constitutive of human desire” (TN3 248), points to the inherence of bookishness, however vague or unrefined, in the existential itself. In other words, the overcoming of Veyne’s distinction is accomplished by means of a hermeneutical claim informed by an

⁸⁶ We saw such a nuanced notion of continuity earlier in differentiation of the anti-novel from the novel.

⁸⁷ Paul Veyne, “The Inventory of Differences,” translated by Elizabeth Kingdom, *Economy and Society* 11 (May 1982): 175-6.

⁸⁸ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire*. Paris: Seuil, 1971, 90. Quoted in TNJ p. 169.

eidetics of desire (uncovered in *Fallible Man* and elaborated in *The Symbolism of Evil*)—that theory is itself a practical category.⁸⁹

Most fundamentally, perhaps, Ricœur's response to Veyne is the same as the rejoinder he puts to all historians qua historians. His critical gesture is aimed at the level of their discourse itself, at its lack of a meta-question: “[historical] scholars do not understand what should be an enigma to them” (*TN3* 77); “for historians, the ontological question, implicitly contained in the notion of a trace, is immediately covered over by the epistemological question relating to the document” (*TN3* 143); “historians, as historians, do not know what they are doing when they constitute signs as traces” (*TN3* 126); “what remains enigmatic in the pastness of the past as such” is “the mysterious aspect of the debt that makes the master of the plot a servant of the *memory* of past human beings” (*TN3* 156, emphasis mine).

In Ricœur's responses we encounter, however reluctantly, the figure of the immediate in the “blind feeling” of Horror, the “negative revelation [of] an Anti-Sinai” (*TN3* 188) which carries with it the force of *must*, the will not to forget. Ricœur states, “historiography *can* exist without memory when it is driven by curiosity alone. [...] But there are perhaps crimes that *must not* be forgotten” (*TN3* 188-9, emphasis mine). With this response we have outspent a notion of debt which is neutral with respect to the feeling of indignance and the “rights of the victim” (*J* 133-45). Ricœur's admittedly “untimely”⁹⁰ plea for a just history proceeds only in so far as it

⁸⁹ This Gadamerian axiom has inchoately and unacknowledgedly been developed rather differently but not uninterestingly in the field that has come to be called science studies. Cf. preeminently the work of Bruno Latour in the emergent subfield of action-network theory where the practical mediations between the coagencies of scientists, instruments and laboratories, each with their own historicities and contingencies, are shown to exceed the rather sterile division between scientific theory and the embodied interventions of the practicing scientist. The study of action-networks has included judges and juridical institutions, door men and the eponymous technology that replaced them, as well as manifold other interactions between human and non-human institutional actors (which are more than the sum of the social ties which they engender).

⁹⁰ Just as Nietzsche's “untimely meditations” are not merely too early, but break with any ordinary sense of time as distinguishable along sublunary, superlunary lines, the “timeless simultaneity” of the “republic of geniuses” (*TN3* 330n68), so too, the untimeliness of Ricœur's plea, while not so much outside ordinary time—time as singular only in a projected sense, viz., we do not necessarily share a common time form

“grapples with and depends upon the crest of the present, between the projection of the future and the grasp of the past” (*TN3* 239); “the notion of difference does not do justice to what seems to be positive in the persistence of the past in the present” (*TN3* 151). In other words, we meet up with his insistence on the irreducible utopic, eschatological dimension of the enigma of having been—the future and its past, the “retrieval-projection of history” with its “ethical and political implications.”⁹¹

Perhaps the difficulty or intractability of the problem accounts for the relative weakness of these responses, though it must be stated that this weakness is not so much an argumentative deficit but is rather endemic to the fragility of historical being as such in as much as historical representation is always caught in the dialectic of the Same (Collingwood’s reenactment), the Other (Veyne’s differentiation) and the Analogous (Hayden White’s tropology). Too, his responses display at what point tradition and the correlative notion of being-in-debt demands a specifically non-neutral, even, perhaps moral reckoning:

this concept of heritage-debt comes to take its place [...] in the framework of the epistemology of historical knowledge as the guardian of the referential claim of historical discourse. [...] In this regard, being-in-debt constitutes the existential possibility of standing for. [...] It is, therefore, under the sign of being-in-debt that having-been predominates in terms of ontological density over the being-no-longer of the elapsed past (*MHF* 363).

Indeed, this is the properly hermeneutical question that is covered over by the epistemological gaze of the historian’s thinking about the past where epistemology “seems to eclipse the ontology of the past” (*TN3* 148). “The hermeneutical approach shifts the problematic from the sphere of knowledge into that of being-affected-by, that is, into the sphere of what we

with our contemporaries, (in the sociological sense of a generation)—manifests itself by the fact of his treating time in a quasi-speculative fashion, a time in which, if we only take the time to see, numerous irruptions have announced an eschaton, if only as interruptions. This is not a cryptotheological gesture; rather these irruptions are almost exclusively in the realm of man, or better, men—the announcement of the dignity of man in the *Räte*, the Budapest uprising, the Prague Spring, the eighteenth century revolutions on either side of the Atlantic. This is a sort of nostalgia in the future anterior tense: “what about abortive attempts? Do they not sometimes return at a later date and sometimes obtain the success that history had previously denied them?” (*TA* 323).

⁹¹ Ricœur quoted in Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur: The Owl of Minerva*, 152.

have not made" (*TN3* 228). But this being-affected-by, this being-indebted remains "apart from any sort of accusation" (*MHF* 285). In this way, we see another "response" to the estrangement of the absence of the past by way of the notion of *initiative* as aimed at the future, at the historical present: "By promising [...] initiative is clothed with an ethical significance [...] well expressed by the adverbial phrase "from now on". Indeed, to promise [...] is to make my initiative have a continuation [...] to make the present not just be an incident but the beginning of a continuation [...]; it gives the present the force of preserving, in short, of enduring" (*TN3* 233). Are Ricœur and Veyne still talking about the same "past"? I'm not sure. It is only to the extent that we have elected to include, in our discussion of the historical condition, an eschatological dimension (in remaining in a Ricœurian style, we will take this up in our final section), that the problem of guilt appears as the negative horizon to which forgetting responds, even if this is for the most part lived optatively.

V. THE HISTORICAL PRESENT

“I would like to place the following meditation under the aegis of the concept of initiative” (TN3 230).

Let us take up again those “weak” responses given to Paul Veyne, now under the “aegis of the concept of initiative.” As we stated, Veyne’s exoticism exorcises the haunting threat of violence that hangs over a normative, traditionalizing historiography by banishing our “rememorative” relation to the past. This gesture is twofold; not only is the exoticism of the past attended to in an attitude of curiosity, there is the insistence that one cannot really do a history of the recent past—that therefore the separation between memory and history is total and does not only concern the distant past—the Roman world or whatever we might mean by distant, depending on the historian’s choice of scales and duration.⁹²

The question remains as to whether this extreme disjunction of our relationship to the past as either “no longer” or “having been” is the price to pay for a happy memory and a just history—a

⁹² The notion of distance in historical emplotment, of the scale of durations is one of the privileges of historical imagination that Ricœur does not want to lose in the face of Veyne’s severance of history and the present. Emphasizing the multiplicity of scales of duration available to the historian evidenced in the multiple uses of ‘because’ in historical narration, we might understand the narrativity typical of everyday life stories to be characterized by a duration closer, perhaps, to the duration of the *told* in microhistorical accounts like Carlo Ginzburg’s recounting of Menocchio in *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, tr. Anne Tedeschi (London: Routledge, 1990). The time of the ‘action’ of creation commanded the distribution of durations for a great deal of Western history as evidenced by the “barrier of six thousand years assigned by a petrified Judeo-Christian tradition” (TN3 88). With the advent of the geological discourse, the durative scales are shaken, new fault lines are drawn as if by the *faults* themselves. The shift toward natural history retains the link to the notions of event, character and plot, that is, to the narrative configuration of change, only precariously; for example, Braudel’s sweeping histories of the Mediterranean world preserve this link only if we consider the Mediterranean itself to be a “quasi-character,” that is, an analog of the character of an agent construed as a Husserlian personality of a higher order “designated in the narrative as the grammatical subject of an action predicate in the basic narrative sentence “X does R”” (TN1 196). The diversity of meanings attached to the word ‘time’—in the sense of change or evolution, in light of these new “historical” sciences of nature appears paradoxically as amenable to making comparisons with the time of a life. As Ricœur has stressed, this peculiarity stems from a situation of paradox: cosmic time spans make the span of a human life seem insignificant, but the human life span is “the very place from which every question of significance arises” (TN3 91). Beginning with the geological, Braudel only secondarily traces human history, which he does geographically; of course Braudel was aware of this paradox and signals as much when he writes: “It is worth repeating that history is not made by geographical features, but by the men who control or discover them” (*The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, v. 1, tr. Sian Reynolds, New York: Harper and Row, p. 225; quoted in TN1 209).

“differencing” indistinguishable from utter indifference. Indeed, it is in light of the injustices which occur through the abuses of an unsettled memory that the privileging of the “no longer” holds so much promise for us. The attitude of mere curiosity puts into quarantine the “demands raised by impassioned memories, wounded memories” which “lend a threatening tone to the proclamation of the duty of memory, which finds its most blatant expression in the exhortation to commemorate now and always” (*MHF* 89).⁹³

What we noted in the series of responses “given” by Ricœur is a sort of acceptance of the epistemically suspect genealogical basis of his position which is less an argument than a plea.⁹⁴ Indeed, it is an impassioned plea set forth through the educated feelings of indignation, and horror that force Ricœur to oppose Veyne’s unlimited nominalism and its attitude of curiosity. In this regard, Ricœur comes quite close to Foucault the warrior: “I am not right, just passionately convicted.”⁹⁵ With this notion of conviction we meet up again with the figure of confident probability which emerged from our phenomenology of reading, with its triple dialectic culminating in an application or refiguration of reality, that is, an action which has the form, “Here I stand.” This is close to the notion of adherence which we hinted to at the beginning of our itinerary through the notion of attestation. But that is not all. As we have seen, the enigmatic nature of the trace is beyond the competence of the historian qua historian. The reprobation of events, the judgment that these events are unacceptable, this judgment is “uttered by the citizen” (*MHF* 285). And it is precisely this form of utterance, the speech of the citizen that we would like to lead us in taking up a reflection on the historical present guided by the notion of initiative.

⁹³ The kind of abuse we are referring to has been described by Henri Rousso as “obsession,” *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France*, translated by Ralph Schoolcraft (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁹⁴ “Given” in the sense of solicited and won through readerly questioning of Ricœur’s work, i.e. not explicitly given as responses to Veyne.

⁹⁵ Veyne, Paul, “The Final Foucault and his Ethics,” tr. Catherine Porter and Arnold Davidson, *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993): 5: “People can no more prevent themselves from valorizing than from breathing, and they do battle for their values. Foucault thus tries to impose one of his own preferences, revived from the Greeks, which he considers to be of present interest; in doing so he does not claim to be right or wrong, but he would like to win.”

What we note in thinking about history under the guidance of initiative is that this involves a shift in our attitude toward the past. In so far as the present is the time of initiative, of action, we can no longer speak about historical efficacy as a matter of reception in the neutral sense of observation for “we cannot be observers and agents at the same time” (*TN3* 231). We must appeal to a metaphor other than that of seeing; it is apt to speak here in terms of the metaphor of doing, of carnal possibilities and impossibilities of that acting and speaking subject we call the citizen.

This notion of the speech of the citizen, of opinion, like the giving of testimony, discloses the indissociation of faith and non-faith, of attestation and suspicion. We have been particularly careful to avoid speaking of this indissociation as indissociability—what we have called earlier, the sin of the embalmed “between,” between attestation and suspicion, whose undecidability is “impossible to stand.” The homonymy of “stand” recognizable to English speakers is providential as it brings to mind the im-position of the witness on the *stand* who experiences the impossibility of remaining in the undecidable. Such are the stakes of the game of being a citizen, stakes which, as we have seen, the historian qua historian can seemingly soar above. “Between the vow of fidelity of memory and the pact of truth of history, the order of priority is undecidable. Only the reader is empowered to make this decision, the reader as citizen.”⁹⁶ The citizen decides in as much as to “make” an initiative is to invest a moment of history with an absolute significance. It is a testimony to the applicability of a received interpretation through the refiguration of reality. In those situations of action, what is “denounced” is not the putative aloofness of the historian qua historian but the “exoneration [...] invoked by the citizen who considers himself not concerned with the life of the body politic” (*MHF* 475). In this attitude of absolution is conflated the excesses of a too narrow memory and a too distant history: either the question “who performs memorative acts?” is deemed answerable only in the first-person singular, or the historian refuses

⁹⁶ “Entre le vœu de fidélité de la mémoire et le pacte de vérité en histoire, l’ordre de priorité est indéterminable. Seul est habilité à trancher le lecteur et dans le lecteur le citoyen” (*EH*)

to yield anything to the role of “citizen-historian.” “The citizen-historian engages in resistance. [...] speaking in the future-perfect, the historian evokes the moment when “another way of living together” will be set into place” (MHF 411).

Is there an alternative to the attitude of curiosity which would similarly avoid the misuse of memory? It seems that there are resources in that aspect of the historical condition which we have until now spoken of only negatively, as the negative side of memory, as a debt unpaid. This is the notion of forgetting. Beyond the pathological side of the propensity to forget as “a threat that lurks in the background [...] an attack on the reliability of memory”, of manipulated or blocked memory, there is a productive forgetting which would allow for a destruction of the phenomenon being recounted. We have an example of such a historical effort in Arendt’s reflections on writing a history of totalitarianism.⁹⁷

Imagine Arendt, acting as a kind of historian, witnessing this phenomenon of total governmentality, sheer bureaucratic functioning, behaviorism come true, and imagine that she adopts an attitude of curiosity in the face of that kind of horror. That kind of truth-telling would seem to callously betray the responsibility to be faithful to the memory of anti-admiration. And so her attitude, an attitude born of indignation, is that the responsible historian must write about it, but must write about it destructively. This destructiveness aims at a recuperation in the name of power as a mode of being (being in plural) distinct from violence (in which the substitutability of personal pronouns is reduced to distinctions, “us/them” as hypostatized second-order entities). The point is, as Ricœur would implore, one cannot be indifferent in the face of these kinds of

⁹⁷ Arendt writes, “The problem originally confronting me was simple and baffling at the same time: all historiography is necessarily salvation and frequently justification; it is due to man's fear that he may forget and to his striving for something which is even more than remembrance. [...] Thus my first problem was how to write historically about something-totalitarianism-which I did not want to conserve but on the contrary felt engaged to destroy.[...] If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities [...] to describe the totalitarian phenomenon as occurring, not on the moon, but in the midst of human society. To describe the concentration camps *sine ira* is not to be “objective,” but to condone them.” “*The Origins of Totalitarianism. A Reply,*” *The Review of Politics*, 15 (Jan. 1953): 76-84.

phenomena.⁹⁸ In other words, there is an intersection between the historical and the political spheres (*MHF* 341), and while this relation is certainly not a conjunction, neither is it a disjunction. This intersection is the historical present where we do not exist simply as historians or philosophers, but as citizens. And it is for the citizen first and foremost that an attitude of curiosity or a dispassionate “search for invariants” in the historical *monde concentrationnaire* amounts, politically, to consenting to that utterly mortiferous form of life.

What we would like to note here is the filiation between a certain notion of forgetting and the capacity for initiating a new course of action.⁹⁹ As we noted earlier, the public exercise of action, by virtue of its triple character of fragility, is inescapably ill-founded. This fragile character of action (which is always already an attestation, an evaluation of the good, the worthwhile, the possible, the desirable) is crucial for Ricœur and it is linked to his very early work on the will. Because for Ricœur, the will or the heart or the soul is importantly the site of intersection between the imagination and taking initiatives enjoined by responsibility for the fragile in an historical present, or, if you like, in the language of systems theory, of finding oneself and one’s aiming, one’s initial state in correspondence with a state of the partially closed (that is, presumptively closed in imaginative anticipation) and hence determined system.¹⁰⁰ So initiative is heavily a

⁹⁸ In fact, Veyne’s indifference is not total as evidenced in Ricœur’s question, “why be interested in Greek history rather than in Medieval history?” (*MHF* 338).

⁹⁹ There is another aspect of forgetting which is worth mentioning here, at the level of citizenship, or the power to appear together and act in concert. This concerns the immemorial, the “forgetting of foundations” (*MHF* 441), what Derrida would call the “prosthesis of origins.” This is the forgotten status of the will to live together: “What seems to me essential is not the mode of forgetting but the status of the forgotten; the forgotten, precisely because it is not of a past which has passed but the force of being-together which we are without seeing, is not of the order of substance. It is rather our common power. The public sphere—like Kantian space which is the condition of seeing without itself being seen—has no other visibility than the publicity of the “betweenness” of the *inter-esse*. Political spatiality is *Öffentlichkeit* (the German word expresses it well: publicity brings openness.) Therefore, the visibility in question is nothing other than the openness of exchange. Exchange of what? Opinions of course!” (*PV* 33, my translation).

¹⁰⁰ This surveying of a partial determinism refers, not to the actor in the midst of acting but to the attitude of the spectator which characterizes projective or prospective action: “we can only think about closed systems, partial determinisms, without being able to move on to extrapolations extending to the whole universe except at the price of excluding ourselves as agents capable of producing events. [...] doing means [*fait*] that reality is not totalizable” (*TN3* 231).

projection into the future of the good. And this is tied up with a reflection on aiming at and bestowing happiness, and on the possibility of the institutive power of human action as distinct from and irreducible to natural causality. But this reflection on aiming at happiness and its installation in an imaginative project of making real, this is inevitably an extraordinarily fragile kind of aiming. Because there is a partial truth or motivated error of determinism that when we act historically, we are taking up an initiative from within circumstances, which, as Marx says, we did not make. This is the tragic characteristic of action, of being acted upon, of suffering. We know that there are situations which seem utterly determined, where the weight of the past feels like an unbearable burden, where any move is so overdetermined from the very start that changing the situation is going to require something akin to a Messianic gesture.¹⁰¹ Because having genuine confidence in that place means finding oneself in a situation of desperate indigence, taking one's bearings from a non-place, a desire to be on the wrong side of history in the name of a possible but very unlikely future. Like acting from within a regime of retributive violence, of reciprocal blood claims; if any new form of action is going to take place there, it is not going to be the offspring of a reflection on pertinence.¹⁰² In this, there is a role for the fictional operation which serves not so much to make good the giving of a true account but, which permits historiography to live up to the task of memory, of keeping faith. In order for initiatives to not be abortive from the start, in order for us to think their course as not entirely futile or pointless, we need resources which allow us to imagine a future which is effectively unimaginable, impossible,

¹⁰¹ Ricœur has referred to this as the ethico-mythical nucleus (*noyaux éthico-mythiques*), those operative archaisms of cultural inheritance at the level of our deepest feelings, "les rêves permanents qui constituent le fonds culturel d'un peuple et qui alimentent ses appréciations spontanées et ses réactions les moins élaborées" (*HV* 292).

¹⁰² Arendt would refer to this kind of intervention which is a genuine initiative or beginning, with neither exaggeration nor reference to the superhuman, as a miracle. Cf. *The Human Condition* 246ff.: "[...] from the standpoint of nature, the rectilinear movement of man's life-span between birth and death looks like a peculiar deviation from the common natural rule of cyclical movement, thus action, seen from the viewpoint of the automatic processes which seem to determine the course of the world, looks like a miracle" (246). Most interestingly for our purposes is the strong connection she draws between the power to forgive and the "fact of natality in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted" (247).

utopic, mythic.¹⁰³ Why? Because, in the face of genocidal crimes, “the more we explain in historical terms, the more indignant we become” (TN3 187). Here the relation of distance is not in the service of truth, of lengthening the questionnaire through progressive conceptualization. It is a matter of controlling the blind and blinding feeling of horror by the critical distance of fiction’s illusion of presence. There is a kind of amnesia there, a “controlled illusion” or at least a kind of productive forgetting in the name of a placated or happy memory-in-the-future as a resource of our historical condition.¹⁰⁴ This seems to be what Ricœur is getting at when he makes the remarkable injunction to “make our expectations more determinate and our experience less so” (TN3 216).

¹⁰³ “There is more in myth than in reflection; myth has more potential even if it is less determinate and less rigorous. This inexhaustible reserve of meanings is not only in Poros...but also in Penia” (FM 10).

¹⁰⁴ This productive or imaginative forgetting should not be assimilated too quickly to the realm of fiction. The sense of ‘fiction’ employed by Ricœur is rather idiosyncratic; it is not simply coextensive with the fruits of the productive imagination. Rather, as in every question of reference or representation, what is crucial in this regard is the disentanglement of confusion between the image (an absent thing that was formerly present) and an unreality (a new configuration without a direct reference to something previously present) in terms of their modes of givenness. There is a genuine difference between the nothingness of a mode of givenness (*absentia*) and the nothingness of a referent. It is the “ambition of truth” of the referential intention that distinguishes narrative configurations as historical or fictional. This “truth claim” is in no way diminished by the mediating role of the productive imagination in narrative configuration (TN2 vii). The oblique reference to that faculty of the imagination that Kant called *Einbildungskraft* is notable. Regarding its relation to fiction, Arendt is even less conciliatory: “*Einbildungskraft*...has nothing in common with fictional ability.” Arendt, “A Reply,” p. 79.

VI. CONCLUSION

We would like to conclude our interrogation of the historical condition by returning to the question with which we began, “What is it to think historically?”. What we can say at the end of our analysis of the reception of the past under the figure of debt is that our relation to the past, our ability to look to historical accounts to sort out who we are, where we are, and where we came from, this ability must be understood in terms of its limitations, limitations which are essential to historical reflections as such. Historical reflection proceeds invariably from the declarative and presumptive truth of testimony, the “hard core” of documents. This anchoring of the archive in a quasi-doxic kind of languaging, “I was there”, “Believe me”, limits the entire historiographical operation and any thinking about history to the status of dissensus, of controversy.¹⁰⁵ It is this limitation of the unfinished character of history which makes the citizen, and not the judge or tribunal, the proper agent of history in the present. Upon entering the courtroom, the entire vocabulary of history (evidence, fact, cause, witness, responsibility, imputability) is translated into a foreign language with an entirely different aim. While history aims at preserving the great deeds of a people and their enemies, the aim of the courtroom is the adjudication of conflict. The contrast here is between the short term goal of the trial, namely, putting an end to uncertainty, and the long term goal of historical practice, a goal which is *de jure* never realized in full, the repayment of the debt to the past in the form of getting at the truth, being faithful, even the aim of attaining justice.

Thinking about history is thinking about that which precedes us, and as we have noted repeatedly, this is a thought that is already caught up in the normativity of traditionalization. What the essentially unfinished character of history lights upon is the perpetual task of renewing

¹⁰⁵ “J’y étais”, “Croyez-moi”. Cf. Jean Greisch, *L’itinérance du sens* (Paris: Éditions Jerome Millon, 2001), 392-6.

or reactivating the sediments under which our traditions are buried. In this way we can hope for a sort of continuity between what precedes us (empirically and transcendentally and in admixture), what follows us, and our instituting power such that we move in and out of a relation of dependence that is both constitutive of who we are and that governs our ability to retreat from being thus and so.

If dependence is constitutive of who we are, then the who that thinks that dependence turns out to determine the appropriateness of one or another figure of debt. The ethical neutrality that makes readerly transit a formal exchange in strictly economic terms corresponds to a purely technical ability, a lossless transit. This kind of thinking about history is at the farthest remove from the “applicability” that completes the dialectics of receiving, the collision of the world of the text with the life-world in the form of innovative or refiguring *action*. The public exercise of action, as we have seen, can never be ethically neutral; actors, like character in a story, cannot not be evaluated as good or bad, noble or vile. Being-in-debt here signifies bearing one’s history in terms of an irreducibly ethical relation to the past. This is the heart of the truth claim of history, that the convictions and evaluations coming from the past are indeed true, worthwhile, worth remembering. In the face of a past that is deemed, by the artist as much as the citizen, not worth remembering, we move to yet another figure of debt, the debt-forgiven. Condemning the crimes and errors of the past amounts to giving a promissory note to the future in an active present: promising that this will not be your past, that that has passed. It is the figure of the debt-forgiven which marks a place for the newcomer in history, marking history with the openness of that which is to be made, giving, as Nietzsche would have said, history back to life.

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