

**Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2000).**

Paul Ricoeur's, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, dedicated to the memory of Simone Ricoeur, addresses the fundamental question of the representation of the past by examining the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting. The prevailing issue of the treatise is the possibility of the past's being made present again. Ricoeur situates his philosophy of history in-between the mastery of memory and the force of forgetting.

As indicated in the title, the book has a threefold structure determined by the three key words: memory, history, and forgetting. Continuing the project that he previously developed in *Time and Narrative* (representation as part of a philosophy of time describing human existence as historical) and *Oneself as Another* (human being is *l'homme capable*, as capable of talking, narrating, acting, and making him/herself responsible), Ricoeur is adding to his philosophical anthropology a vision of a human being as one who is capable of making memory and making history. *Memory, History, Forgetting* is a "prolongation of [the] uninterrupted conversation" on memory and history by "returning to a lacuna in the problematic of *Time and Narrative* and in *Oneself as Another*, where temporal experience and the narrative operation are directly placed in contact, at the price of an impasse with respect to memory and, worse yet, of an impasse with respect to forgetting, the median levels between time and narrative."

Ricoeur himself explains that his book is entirely closed and concluded before the epilogue itself. Adding the epilogue on forgiveness as a personal act, which happens from person to person, and does not concern juridical institutions, was for Ricoeur a matter of intellectual honesty. What holds the book together is the perspective of an appeased memory associated with forgiveness: the recognition of the past remembered without anger and prejudices. By emphasizing the fact that the relation between memory, history and forgetting is closed upon itself prior to the epilogue, Ricoeur opens up the question of a hermeneutic reading of his own work. As a philosopher who insisted that existence itself is essentially hermeneutic, he could hardly avoid endorsing the ideal of an ever-developing interpretation of himself. Ricoeur's is a truly polysemic voice, sacrificing neither truth nor variety. His voice has been made to the confused medley of voices that constitutes the tradition that we are.

Ricoeur's avowal that he cleanly avoided the admixture of philosophy and theology is at variance with the textual record of his *Memory, History, Forgetting*. This however is not a mistake. Selfinterpretation and textual record will always vary. This infinite variance is an invitation to an infinite task of self-interpretation. Brilliantly and eloquently moving between Aristotle, Sartre, Plato, Bergson, Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, and Heidegger, while concluding with the Song of Songs's "Love is as strong as death," Ricoeur invites us to a never-ending dialogue, leading us on the path "from memories to reflective memory, passing by way of recollection." However methodologically rigorous Ricoeur is in separating philosophy from theology, his Christian facticity nonetheless

determines the discourse. This is inevitable, given our hermeneutic belonging to tradition. Ricoeur philosophizes as a Protestant Christian, because he must philosophize as Protestant Christian. He has no recourse to another voice. This voice cannot be denied or ignored. With his distinctive voice, Ricoeur lets other voices come to expression in an “unstable equilibrium.” An essential incompleteness is a horizon of writing history. This incompleteness, the receding of horizons, might open up a horizon of religious transcendence. This possibility of interpretation cannot be denied and should not be understood as a flight into the unknown or a dream for completeness, since Ricoeur placed his whole enterprise “from the start under the banner of the merciless critique directed against the hubris of total reflection.” In this sense, the facticity of our being is the provision (*viaticum*) for the journey of life. As such, it is also the provision for the passage out of this mode of existence into the totally unknown.