

The Poetics of Remembrance: Communal Memory and Identity in Heidegger and Ricoeur

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THE POETICS OF REMEMBRANCE: COMMUNAL MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN
HEIDEGGER AND RICOEUR

By

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ABSTRACT
THE POETICS OF REMEMBRANCE: COMMUNAL MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN
HEIDEGGER AND RICOEUR

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Marquette University, 2011

In this dissertation, I explore the significance of remembering, especially in its communal form, and its relationship to narrative identity by examining the practices that make possible the formation and transmission of a heritage. To explore this issue I use Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur, who have dedicated several of their major works to remembrance and forgetting. In comparing Heidegger and Ricoeur, I suggest that Ricoeur's formulation of the identity of a subject and a community offers an alternative to Heidegger's account. For, if Heidegger's critique of subjectivity offers the possibility of a new relationship to history and community, it nevertheless overlooks the possibility of a humanism that is not tied to a metaphysical account of subjectivity. By contrast, the positive work of remembrance can recover heretofore concealed possibilities through our being faithful to the past, and saving it from the destructive forces of time.

To show how the fragility of memory preserves the past against the destructive work of time and brings with it the hope of a better future, I emphasize one specific theme—namely, the debt we owe to the dead, which opens the possibility for ethical consideration of an historical community. In this regard, this dissertation pursues two goals. The first task is to elucidate how Heidegger's and Ricoeur's phenomenological projects understand the intimate connection between remembrance and the creation of a community. The second goal of this dissertation is to show how Ricoeur is able to respond to the problems that Heidegger's ontological account of memory raises. The completion of these two tasks will contribute to a phenomenological hermeneutics of memory and forgetting.

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The Poetics of Remembrance: Communal Memory and Identity in Heidegger and Ricoeur

Introduction

In describing the challenges facing the construction of a memorial to the victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Marita Sturken suggests that perhaps the most complex challenge is how to do justice to the tension between those who are able to view the memorial in the present and those who died in the attack.¹ She writes “[i]n the face of absence, especially an absence so violently and tragically wrought at the cost of so many lives, people feel a need to create a presence of some kind, and it may be for this reason that questions of memorialization have so quickly followed this event.”² While the construction of a memorial there has been delayed, this “rush to memorialize” reveals an important feature of remembering, namely the proper way to memorialize the past such that it does justice to the victims, lauds the endurance of those who continue to survive, and embraces the values that a group or community take to be fundamental.³ More than that, when we raise such questions regarding the possibility of doing justice to the dead

¹ A similar question arises in the recent controversy regarding the construction of a mosque near the site of the World Trade Center. Some argue that building a mosque disrespects the memory of those killed there and will cause some victims undue pain, while others, notably Mayor Michael Bloomberg, have suggested

² Marita Sturken, “Memorializing Absence.” *Understanding September 11*. Ed. Craig J. Calhoun et al. (New York: The New York Press, 2002): pp. 374–84, p. 375.

³ The phrase “rush to memorialize” is used in a number of recent essays that have appeared over the last decade to indicate just how quick we have been to erect monuments to traumatic events. Sturken, for example, wonders “Could we imagine people talking of memorialization after the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, or the bombing of Hiroshima? Or, for that matter, that the people of Rwanda talked of memorialization after the massacres that killed hundreds of thousands there? Throughout history, collective and public memorialization has most commonly taken place with the distance of time.” “Memorializing Absence,” p. 375. Janet Donohoe similarly uses the phrase in wondering whether or not such a rush can obscure questions about the meaning of such desire to remember. Cf. Janet Donohoe, “Rushing to Memorialize,” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*: Vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 2006): pp. 6-12. While the desire to memorialize is no doubt a central feature about what it means to be human, the pace at which it is done can obscure ethical and political questions.

and the proper ways to do so, we are ultimately unable to deny that such an act is partly constitutive of communal identity.

In my dissertation I examine the contribution of memory to the identity of a community. In order to do so, I argue against a common metaphor often used to describe memory—that of a storehouse or lockbox. This metaphor has several significant features worth mentioning. First, it emphasizes that memories primarily belong to individuals. As a result, it would seem that communal memory does not actually exist; it is instead an aggregate of individuals' memories. Second, in order to render these memories public, they are externalized in monuments, memorials, museums, and the like. These places retain an element of “interiority” insofar as they are often separated from the places where we conduct our everyday business. Third, this metaphor appears to separate the past and the present, such that our memories can be turned into objects of historical research. In so doing, however, it can lead to a viewing of the past as a curiosity or as “said and done.” These assumptions contribute to an abstract conception of memory that is individual, archival, linear and alienating.

My dissertation responds to this image of memory in two ways. First, I explore how communities are constituted and challenged by remembering the past. An account of what it means to remember requires understanding how we *belong* to the past. Narratives, I argue, help to make sense of who we are at the communal level. Additionally, I examine how narratives offer us the possibility to come to terms with the very real experiences of trauma, loss, and anxiety.

Second, I examine some of the ethical and political implications of the connection between narrative and identity. Examples of the uses and abuses of memory are easy to

come by, and so we can wonder what some implications of the “rush to memorialize” are especially since the desire to remember or forget can be distorted by political aims, psychological barriers, and ethical demands. How much of the past should we remember? How much should we forget? If possible, what, and who, should we forgive?

In examining these issues, I draw from Martin Heidegger’s and Paul Ricoeur’s phenomenological accounts of selfhood. While different in some respects, both offer an account of the self that arises from the dialogical structure of calling and responding. From Heidegger, I argue for understanding authentic selfhood as a vocational commitment to continually live up to one’s Being. We find ourselves called to respond to our past in order to give it a new, unique future. While Heidegger offers an account of selfhood that takes heritage, destiny and fate into consideration, he nevertheless neglects the ways that we exist “from others.”

In order to restore the specific modes in which human beings exist with, for, and from others, I turn to Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur argues for a conception of the self that “is constituted and defined by its position as respondent to propositions of meaning issuing from a symbolic network.”⁴ Like Heidegger, Ricoeur sees this response as attesting to one’s own Being; unlike Heidegger, Ricoeur suggests that insofar as remembering and forgetting are responses to the past, they attest to our narrative and ethical identities. To be called is to experience a summons from an other – it is to be enjoined to live with and for, and even from, others in just institutions.

To show how the past can operate as one source for such an injunction, I emphasize one theme: the debt we owe to the dead. Just as the self is constituted through

⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “The Summoned Subject in the School of the Prophetic Vision.” Trans. David Pellauer. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): pp. 262-275, p. 262.

otherness, memory occurs in the space between individuals and the past to which they belong, such that to remember means to respond to a claim or call that issues from others who have passed. The meaning of the past does not exist as if it were there waiting to be uncovered; nor is it a construction that we impose on it. Rather, remembering moves between the individual who places an event into his or her own narrative identity, and its symbolic expression as a debt, whose embodiment enables memory to be passed on to others. This movement allows memories to form a tradition or heritage, and opens up the possibility for reinterpreting what happened.

Furthermore, the transmission of tradition undermines the rigid distinction between individual memory and communal memory. Memory has different modalities, which move between two poles. At one end, there is the unique perspective individuals have on the events of the past, which is expressed as testimony. At the other end, a symbolic order codifies memories in rituals, commemorations, and texts. This pole secures the public transmission of memory beyond the sphere of those who personally witnessed the event. Not only does the embodiment of such memories ensure that that they can be transmitted to others despite temporal discontinuities, they also render us inescapably responsible for the way that we transmit it. The gap between the present and the past, self and other, makes each of us responsible for how we remember our past and how we are responsible to others.

At the same time, I recognize that the gap between the present and the past, individual and community, can have tragic consequences. In order to illustrate the connection between tragedy and this debt, I again draw from Heidegger's and Ricoeur's respective interpretations of tragedy. Both use tragedy to highlight an important element

of human experience. In Heidegger's interpretation, tragedy occupies a transitional place in the "History of Being." It signifies at once the dawn of metaphysics and its inevitable decline. In this regard, it recalls the always-questionable sources for thinking about who "we" are to be. It calls upon us to remember that who we are called to be is never settled, and offers an occasion to reflect on the way that the hidden consequences of the past can bring us to ruin. It reminds us that the meaning of our decisions comes to us too late, and that it is impossible to forge an enduring connection with those who came before us.

Ricoeur, by contrast, suggests that tragedy instructs us in responding to the intractability of ethical and political conflict. All too often, we often act from moral principles or on the basis of a tradition that is not as inclusive or as just as we would like to think. Rather than inevitably ruin us, Ricoeur sees in tragedy an occasion to reorient our perspective. This means that we must be attuned to the possibilities that arise from our social institutions and norms, as well as the limits of such possibilities. As a result, we are compelled to refigure or reorient our actions as a response to the claims of others. In short, we ought to see how the debt can be made lighter or responsibly increased.

Rather than choose between Heidegger and Ricoeur, I suggest that their positions are complementary. From Heidegger, I argue that the past is never done with us, even if we want to be done with it. Heidegger's emphasis on mortality reminds us that solidarity with the living is never permanent, perhaps even impossible. From Ricoeur, I argue that remembering, forgetting, and forgiving are ways of reconciling ourselves with the past and offer us the hope of establishing a new, more inclusive communal identity. Thus, while Ricoeur offers us the possibility of hope through new beginning, Heidegger reminds us that those modes of expressing such hope can never fully capture (recapture)

the past as a unified vision for the future. Remembering is a creative response to the past. Self-constancy with remembering requires flexibility – to interpret, explain, and recount one's past means that such identity can be told otherwise. It allows us to move forward while acknowledging that we can never fully discharge the debt. It allows us to work through the loss of the past, while indicating that such work will inevitably be incomplete.

Outline of Dissertation

In the first chapter, I will begin by introducing the problem of memory and forgetting in a broad phenomenological context, but especially focusing on tracing the understanding of remembrance and forgetting in conjunction with the question of the subject. To have a past is not to be understood in terms of a linear passage of time, nor is memory to be configured solely in terms of the possession of an individual subject. Instead, to have a past must be understood in terms of seeing oneself as belonging to a past far beyond what one knows, and to be already subjected to the demands of a community and tradition. To remember one's tradition or heritage is to recognize one's dependence on it, and to be responsible for it. To be a self, in other words, is to recognize a debt to and be responsible for the other who is only as having been. Memory is one way, then, that human existence is open to the possibility of being with others. It is precisely the otherness of tradition inscribed in selfhood that prevents the self from being a closed, solipsistic, or autonomous self.

In the next chapter, I introduce Heidegger's phenomenological ontology of the 1920s, which he uses as a method to uncover that which grounds experience but is

forgotten in that very experience and the articulation of that experience. Here, Heidegger's 'hermeneutics of facticity' plays an important role, for facticity indicates the opacity of life in its very movement, which is to say, in its thrownness. Heidegger names the tendency of life to hide this opacity behind its everyday experience "fallenness" in *Being and Time*. Furthermore, as the project of *Being and Time* is developed in subsequent works, such as *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, the specific problem of forgetting appears in the context of temporality and the thinking of being as pure presence. As such, forgetfulness and fallenness become keywords by which we can enter into dialogue with Heidegger's phenomenological ontology. The second division of *Being and Time*, which contains important terms, such as repetition, heritage, destiny, guilt, debt, and historicity, is concerned with the existential-ontological structure that makes it possible for Dasein to remember its past. As such, remembrance is an important key to constituting intersubjectivity along historical lines in what Heidegger calls the Da-sein of a people.

In the third chapter, I examine how Heidegger gives a clearer account of these important concepts in the 1930s, where history comes to the forefront of his concerns. Here, Heidegger constantly emphasizes that forgetting has priority over remembering—without an original forgetting, there can be no remembering or retrieval of the question of Being.⁵ While his first attempt to recover this question remains squarely within the confines of phenomenology, his later writings suggest that a poetic thinking can

⁵ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests, "remembering is possible only on [the basis] of forgetting, and not vice versa (BT 389/SZ 339). In his course immediately following the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes "understanding oneself by way of feasible and directly encountered things involves a self-forgetting. The possibility of retaining something which one was just now expecting rests only on the basis of the original forgottenness that belongs to factual Dasein." *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 290).

commemoratively retrieve a forgotten and concealed origin that nevertheless remains hidden in decisive moments of western metaphysics. If the modern conception of the subject constitutes the forgetting of being, the remembrance of the thoughtful poetry of Sophocles founds a new relationship to truth, being, and others. I will limit my discussion by specifically looking at his interpretations of the famous ‘Ode to Man’ in Sophocles’ *Antigone* in *Introduction to Metaphysics* and Hölderlin’s *Hymn: The Ister* while developing their significance in conjunction with *Elucidations on Hölderlin’s Poetry* and his lecture course *Hölderlin’s Hymn: Andenken*. I draw out some of the implications of the connection between poetic language and the recollection of being, specifically seeing how Heidegger employs a notion of the tragic in conjunction with remembrance. Rather than tragedy representing a heroic figure, embracing his or her fate, Heidegger’s account of tragedy in these essays suggests instead that it is impossible to fully remember the past; it is always subject to forgetting. As such, it is possible for the past to return, and thus it is possible to recognize the ways that we are responsible for its return.

The fourth chapter introduces Ricoeur’s work on memory and forgetting by way of his account of selfhood and attestation. Ricoeur’s account of the meaning of history is able to retrieve the phenomenological insights that Heidegger turns away from in his later works while at the same time offering an account of experience of the past that is ethically engaged with its meaning. Remembrance, on Ricoeur’s interpretation, is to be understood as an ability, or power, in which humans participate. The power to remember, in this work, becomes explicitly part of the dynamic of being in which humans creatively participate. For Ricoeur, the question of the subject of memory is a question of who responds to the obligation of remembering the past and of reviving hope for the future.

His approach here indicates a path for what I call a poetics of remembrance. The activity of constructing a narrative integrates the different experiences of time and from it constructs a unity that does not dissolve the heterogeneity of different human and communal experiences of time. The historian's project of narrating the past is bound by a duty to represent it *as* it actually happened. To show how the identity of the remembering self is connected to the remembered past, I first develop Ricoeur's account of "emplotment," focusing on how otherness is intertwined with selfhood to reconfigure the possibilities of communal existence. Next, I examine Ricoeur's account of how narratives represent or "stand-for" what happened in the past. Central to this relationship, as I will make clear, is the role attestation and testimony play. Ricoeur suggests that passivity experienced in being called by the past bears witness to otherness, which means, I argue, that remembering is essentially a relationship to death and the dead.

This chapter further indicates ways that remembrance contributes to a richer intersubjective life by drawing out some of the ethical and political implications of memory, forgetting, and forgiving. Taking cues from the epilogue to *Memory, History, Forgetting*, which focuses on forgiveness, I develop an account of memory and remembrance that shows how a commemoration not only preserves the past by reminding us of deeds and events, but also that remembrance is an act that has implications for the future. The poetics of remembrance, as I will present it, is something in which humans are always already entangled. In this sense, communities participate in narratives and have a specific self-understanding that arises from the ways that they remember themselves to have been. However, because these memories are based on objective traces and testimonials, they always carry with them the possibility of being retold and re-

envisioned. This imaginative possibility that comes with historical being-in-the-world allows one to give voice to those who have been forgotten and tell new stories that open the possibility for a new way to understand ourselves in our being with others.

Specifically, to remember something is not merely to see the past as dead, but rather as a resource for opening the future to new possibilities.

Chapter I: What Calls for Remembering?

I.1 Introduction and Thesis

What does it mean to remember the past? What calls to be remembered? There is little doubt that certain situations provoke us to become aware of the significance and meaning of the past. However, it is unclear how the past is given to us, in these situations, not as present but as past. It is quite enigmatic that the remnants of the past can stubbornly remain meaningful in the present, despite their being past. Said differently, it is strange that the absence of the past nevertheless remains in the present, without becoming present. That the past, as absent, remains meaningful, however, seems to indicate that these remnants and ruins call out to us to remember them. What is the nature of this obligation to and for the past, and how does a responsibility for the past shape how we are to remember the past? These questions indicate the central place remembering has in understanding the structure of human identity, and form the core concerns of this dissertation.

Recent years have seen a proliferation of works concerned with the possibility and meaning of memorializing the traumatic events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁶ Certain places, such as Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the killing fields of Cambodia,

⁶ The most comprehensive bibliography of the study of memory has been meticulously compiled by John Sutton, and can be found at his website, <http://www.phil.mq.edu.au/staff/jsutton/Memory>. (Retrieved on July 30th, 2010). There has been a proliferation of journals devoted to the study of memory, including *History and Memory*, *Memory*, and *Memory Studies* have all begun publishing articles in the last twenty years; *The Journal of Memory and Language* began publishing in 1985. This proliferation suggests that memory has become an increasing concern among people at the turn of the millennium and continuing into it. There are several general introductions to memory that have done a fine job of setting out the basic historical and philosophical problems tied to memory: Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory*. Trans. Paul Vincent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Mary Warnock, *Memory* (London: Faber, 1987), and Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2009). The best phenomenological studies of memory begin with Edward Casey's *Remembering*, 2nd Ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence, and Writing* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), Charles Scott's *The Time of Memory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999). David Wood directs his own phenomenological insights to the way that memory appears in conjunction with the more general

the Bogside area outside of Derry in Northern Ireland, and more recently “Ground Zero” in lower Manhattan, have all become highly politicized and controversial sites of remembering precisely because we are at a loss as to how to understand the meaning of those distressing places and times. That debates continue over the meaning of these sites and the proper way to honor those who died there indicates that not only are we concerned with continued significance of these events, but that we are also concerned with the proper way to remember those who died there and honor those who survived these traumatic events. A philosophical analysis of the meaning of remembering can help to clarify our understanding of remembering, its possibility, and its limits.

In this dissertation, I examine how remembering constitutes the identity of a people and community, and the ways that this very experience of remembering can challenge that very identity. Traditionally, the connection between memory and identity has been understood solely on the basis of an individual’s identity. By taking this approach, the philosophical tradition has tended to privilege the mind as the source and receptacle of images and memories. As a result, a community is often understood as an aggregate of such individuals or is instead understood as a kind of super-individual, that subsumes each person into its communal body. Against this long-established tradition, I pursue one way that remembering is not limited to the account of the mind’s contents. Instead, I examine how remembering is always situated in the thick of things; not only do we remember events, but we remember with others, at a particular time, in a particular

experience of temporality in *The Deconstruction of Time* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1989) and more recently in *Time After Time* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007). The phenomenological study of memory is applied in the collection *Framing Public Memory*. Ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), *Meaning and Representation in History*. Ed. Jörn Rüsen (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), and *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

place, and through particular practices and rituals. As such, particular places retain a sense of the past and situate one's memories in such a way that their meaning can be reanimated through particular acts of remembering with others.

In this chapter, I will sketch out one way that the past confronts the present with a challenge. This challenge is the way that the past can be understood in two different and apparently incompatible ways. On one hand, the past is what is understood as no longer there. On the other hand, the past can also be understood in terms of its having-been, and harbors within it the possibility of the present and future.⁷ Traditionally, the hermeneutic problem of memory and history takes the form of a problem of intersubjectivity. The past is not only at risk of being forgotten, but it is also at risk of being misunderstood because it is foreign or other. After developing these two challenges, I introduce the notion of a called subject. The called or summoned subject that I draw arises from the phenomenological hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur. This subject is one who is capable of fulfilling the obligation to remember the past and, through such remembering, is able to revive hope for the future. As such, one constitutive element of the summoned subject is its remembrance of the past. Remembering, by responding to a call from the past, can shape who we are and how we are with others by bearing witness to the past.

⁷ This distinction comes from Martin Heidegger's distinction between the past as no longer (*Vergangenheit*) and the past as having-been (*Gewesenheit*). The former term suggests that there is a finality to the past, such that it is "over and done with," or, as a common phrase might have it, it is "ancient history." To suggest that the past also exists as "having-been," on the other hand, refers to the way we *are* our past, and the way that we carry our past along with us. Heidegger thus writes, "'As long as' Dasein factually exists, it is never past [*vergangen*], but it always is indeed as already having *been*, in the sense of the 'I-am-as-having-been [*ich bin-gewesen*].'" Cf. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1962): p. 376. The phrase "always already" emphasizes the way that we carry the past along with us as well, or, analogously, as in the phrase "I am *still* working." The past as "having been" suggests an existential sense of the past rather than a chronological sense of it. See Chapter II for further details about this distinction and its meaning in Heidegger.

In exploring the communal dimension of our experience of remembering, I develop a twofold claim. First, what motivates a people or community to remember is a certain self-understanding or conception of who they take themselves to be and the concomitant attempt to live up to that conception. Secondly, remembering opens itself up to the challenge from others who witnessed the event in question, and in what social and ethical contexts such challenges are able to arise. This ability to witness and testify, I argue, suggests that intersubjectivity, or what it means to be in community, is constituted through and challenged by the particular ways a community remembers and forgets its own past. As I will be arguing throughout this dissertation, remembering has two distinct though inseparable dimensions: a poetic dimension that can challenge a community's self-understanding and a constitutive dimension that establishes the identity of such a community or people.⁸

I.2. The Challenges of the Past: Identity, Time, and Memory

Before developing how the called subject can motivate us to rethink what it means to remember, it will first be necessary to understand why such an account is

⁸ These two elements of remembering echo Heidegger's distinction between *Vergangenheit* and *Gewesenheit* as he applies to history itself. On the one hand, history can refer to the science of history (*Historie*), and, on the other hand, it refers to the "history that we are," (*Geschichte*). Cf. *Being and Time*, §§72-76. There is a similar distinction in contemporary discussions regarding the difference between memory and history, where memory seeks a fusion with the past and make it part of its identity and history refers to the objective study of what happened. Paul Ricoeur develops the relationship between these two ideas in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). A similar idea can be found in some discussions of the meaning and implications of testimony. For example, Dori Laub distinguishes witnessing, as being an eye-witness to historical facts and who is thus subject to rigorous standards of assessing the historical record, from witnessing in the sense of bearing witness to a truth about what it means to be human. Dori Laub. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. (New York: Routledge, 1992): pp. 57-74. I will discuss this notion further below. As will become apparent over the course of this dissertation, I am more sympathetic with Ricoeur's attempt to show how both memory and history contribute to identity, rather than with those who suggest that the two have entirely different aims and are even opposed to each other.

required. Many discussions of the relationship between memory and identity, whether individual or communal, tend to rely on two basic assumptions. The first is that memory is something intensely private, like a box or storehouse of images that are available for recall. On this view, persons can share memories, even memories of the same event, although they fundamentally belong to each person individually. The second assumption concerns the relationship between the subject who remembers and the object of remembering. The identity of the knowing subject is temporally distinct from the object remembered, making the connection between the two problematic. While these two claims capture two important features of memory, focusing solely on them can obscure other roles that memory plays in helping to constitute the texture of our world: first, the way that remembering is a social phenomenon, and, second, a sense of the way that we belong to the past. In this section, I will sketch out these two assumptions, noting their respective shortcomings. In the following section, I introduce the alternative to the traditional account of remembering.

I.2.1 Individual Memory, Communal Memory

Analyses of remembering often begin with the claim that memories first and foremost belong to individuals. John Locke, for example, took memory to be a power of the mind “to revive perceptions, which it once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before.”⁹ Memory is thus regarded as a capacity of recalling to mind specific events that an individual witnessed or in which he or she was personally involved. No doubt, part of the allure of this position is its connection to the

⁹ John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. P.H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 150.

experience of remembering. Though we might remember the same thing, my memory of the experience is intimately bound together with my own perspective of what happened. Thus, even if two individuals share the memory of the same thing, the remembered object has the status of something that is viewed from different perspectives. My memories are just that: mine.

If memories belong to individuals, then the act of remembering is also an individual affair. That we continue to record and retrieve data from a kind of box of memories reinforces the idea of remembering as a process of recalling a previously inscribed detail that has been imprinted, whether such an imprint is left on a magnetic tape, file in a hard drive, or, analogously, in the mind. This view of the operation of remembering has been further bolstered by neuroscience, which has suggested that the brain devotes specific regions for particular functions, and psychoanalysis, which suggests that we can uncover hidden or repressed memories. Memories, then, appear to be stored in particular lobes of the brain, much the same way that memory of a computer is stored in a microchip. Given the right stimulus, we can retrieve these memories.

If memories are thusly understood as documents, traces, or vestiges of the past that are stored in an archive, then remembering becomes akin to the retrieval of such traces. This storehouse of the mind finds its cultural correlate in archives, museums, computers, and other institutions, objects, and practices where we feel obligated to collect remains, testimonies, documents, images, speeches, videos, and every other piece of the past. These collections are intended to provide proof that this past actually happened, even when we are unsure why these particular vestiges are worthy of being remembered. Pierre Nora puts this point forcefully, saying that the mind becomes a “gigantic and

brehtaking storehouse of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled.”¹⁰ The archive takes the place of memory insofar as it is the repository of all traces of the past, thus ensuring that, even though an individual cannot remember everything, the past can be saved.

The importance of the trace is further emphasized by a number of metaphors we have to describe memory. Henry Roediger identifies a number of spatial metaphors that philosophers and psychologists have used to describe memory. The metaphor of the wax tablet has already been suggested as one of them. Others suggest that we think of memory as like rooms in a house, as a junk box, a switchbox, library, dictionary, tape recorder, subway map, and record player.¹¹ These metaphors are further reinforced by the ways that we use memory in conjunction with technology. Computers, for example, keep a record of our on-line activities and can keep track of a wide array of our “real-world” activities, such as shopping patterns, taxes, and letters. Furthermore, surveillance cameras are becoming more prevalent in our cities and shops, recording our movements for instant playback. These metaphors, while pervasive, can nevertheless obscure different ways to think about memory.

This common understanding of memory thus succumbs to what Edward Casey calls “an unexamined mentalism.”¹² By this phrase, Casey means “the view that human minds—or surrogates for these minds, most notably computers—furnish the ultimate locus as well as the primary limit of human experience.”¹³ To speak about acts of

¹⁰ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire.” *Representations* Vol. 26 (Spring 1989): pp. 7-24, p. 13.

¹¹ Henry Roediger. “Memory Metaphors in Cognitive Psychology.” *Memory and Cognition* Vol. 8, no. 3 (1980), pp. 231-246, p. 233.

¹² Edward Casey, *Remembering*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 88

¹³ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 88.

remembering and the objects that we remember construes memory as a specifically mental achievement that individuals perform. Indeed, as Casey further notes, we often speak about remembering in terms of “keeping something *in mind*,” thereby reinforcing the image of the mind as a receptacle of images. We understand the relationship between the sphere of the mental and the external world. Indeed, this problem arises because we tend to think of the mind as a container of representations, invisible and inaccessible to the outside world and to others. This reinforces the thought that all acts of the mind, including remembering, occurs only from within the solitary confines of the ego, which must then stretch out into a separate world in which it finds corroboration and validation.

Such accounts of memory imply that there is no such thing as “collective memory.” Because remembering is performed by individuals, and memories are “stored” in minds, the phrase “communal memory” becomes dangerously misleading. Only individuals remember; communities do not. Amos Funkenstein, for example, writes “just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember.”¹⁴ Collective or communal memory, on such an account, is in fact the aggregate of the memories of the individuals who comprise that community. The memories of people who have experienced the same event, for example a baseball game, will each have different associations and feelings that arise from that experience.

Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam argue that the notion of a “collective memory” commits the fallacy of concrete generalization.¹⁵ It mistakes a generalization and an abstraction for a concrete entity. Thus there is no such “thing” as a nation, sports team, company, or

¹⁴ Amos Funkenstein, “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness.” *History and Memory* Vol. 1, no. 1 (1989): pp. 5-26, p. 6

¹⁵ Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam. “Collective Memory: What Is It?” *History and Memory* Vol. 8, no. 1 (1996): pp. 30-50, p. 35

community. There are only individuals who comprise such organizations. The only way that a “society,” “nation,” “community,” or “tribe” can thus be said to exist is through the continued subsistence of the individual members of those collectivities they comprise. A nation or community has no separate existence from its individuals. Nevertheless, they do identify a more limited use of such terms. They can be legitimately used metaphorically for collections of people who share myths, customs, stories, habits, and the like. In order to resist the temptation to reify such ideas, one should use the term “collected memories,” rather than “collective memory,” to more accurately describe such a phenomenon.¹⁶

The upshot of this approach, Jeffery Olick notes, is that such analyses are “formally open to the investigation of psychological or even neurological factors in social memory outcomes. Symbols, texts, or rituals that commemorate the past do not have a life of their own, on this account, but are instead causally elicited by identifiable and measurable factors.”¹⁷ As such, the “collected memory” approach is better able to integrate different approaches to memory, including behavioral, psychological, cognitive, and neurological findings.

However, by affording the individual a central role in the elaboration of memory in communal contexts, Olick explains that the collected memories approach ignores the way that certain ways to be with others is not reducible to individual, psychological processes.¹⁸ Communities can provide the frameworks through which people remember, exemplars for how individuals ought to remember, and even value some histories at the expense of others. It thus appears that in order to explain memory, we need to account for

¹⁶ Jeffery Olick offers the term “collected memory” to describe those accounts that are based on such individualistic principles. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 23-27.

¹⁷ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, p. 27.

its sources in social and communal life.

Collective memory is closely associated with the ideas of the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. The social phenomenon of memory, on Halbwachs account, is not a collected or aggregate of individual memories. Rather, as Halbwachs argues, “it is in this sense that there is a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these [social] frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection.”¹⁹ In other words, social contexts offer those frameworks and structures that make possible individual acts of remembering. Thus, the past is not so much preserved, but reconstructed on the basis of present concerns. This makes collective memory a horizon for specific acts of memory. There are, Olick writes, “clearly demonstrable long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them that arise because of the interests of certain institutions that provide acceptable patterns of behavior, possibilities for acting and understanding oneself, others in the community, and foreign others.”²⁰ It provides a sense of life, mores, habits, in short, an ethos, for a community that allows it to understand its past. Language, narrative, and dialogue thus become central to the preservation of memory.

The emphasis Halbwachs places on the social frameworks, however, threatens to subsume individual memory into collective or communal memory. Though psychological account of memory over-emphasizes memory as an individual achievement, it now appears that memory is possible only as a collective or social achievement. Is there a way that memory can be understood that does justice to both its communal dimension and its

¹⁹ Maurice Halbwachs. *The Social Frameworks of Memory. On Collective Memory*. Ed. and Trans. Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): pp. 37-189, p. 38.

²⁰ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, p. 28.

individual one?

There are good philosophical reasons for supposing that something like collective memory exists as a correlate to individual memory. In order to see how such an account is possible, it will first be necessary to develop the meaning of a collective attitude or collective intentionality. While it is tempting to analyze collective attitudes in terms of individuals who have them, this account fails to identify what John Searle and others have called “collective intentionality.”²¹ The difference between a collection of intentionalities and “collective intentionality” is the difference between an aggregate of individuals acting the same way and genuine cooperative activity. For example, while driving on the highway, each person in their respective cars has the same goal, namely, to get to their destination. This is an example of aggregate action, where each person has the same intention but there is no unified, collective action. There is no “we” involved in such a case. If however a few motorists were to help another motorist push his car to the shoulder of the road to change a tire, the act would be a case of genuine collective intentionality. The reason for this is that, as Taylor Carman writes, “your comportment and my comportment are immediately intelligible to each of us as *our* doing something, not as the mere summation of *your* doing it and *my* doing it.”²² Each person’s contribution to the act makes sense only as part of our performing the action together.²³ This can occur even if each person performs a different task, as happens in many team

²¹ Cf. John Searle, “Collective Intentions and Actions.” *Intentions in Communication*. Eds. P. Cohen, J. Morgan, and M.E. Pollack (Cambridge, MA: Bradford Books, MIT Press, 1990): pp. 401-416 and his *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995). Taylor Carman employs this account to describe Heidegger’s existential-ontological meaning of being-with as presented in *Being and Time*. Cf. Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): pp. 237-244.

²² Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic*, p. 242.

²³ Cf. Searle, “Collective Intentions and Actions,” pp. 402-403.

sports.²⁴ While each member of the team may have a different task, each of their individual actions makes sense insofar as it contributes to or impedes the effort of the team. As such, the meaning of each individual's action depends on the existence of a collective intentionality, and thus makes the meaning of collective intentionality irreducible to the sum of individual acts.

One important example of the phenomenon of collective intentionality and of collective memory can be found in commemorations. Edward Casey again proves to be a helpful interlocutor here. Commemorations are literally instances of intensified remembering.²⁵ Memory is intensified in commemorations because it is a highly mediated affair: texts, such as eulogies and liturgies, become the vehicle through which we remember, the ritual provides a social setting in which remembering occurs, and these two become fully realized only when the commemoration is performed with others.²⁶ Casey writes, "if I am remembering at all on such an occasion, I am remembering with [others] and they with me. It is a matter of something communal."²⁷ On the occasions of such commemorations, we can only attain the commemorative aim via an interpolated ritual and text in the co-presence of others. Commemoration and memorialization are essentially public and essentially done with others, even as they are performed by individuals.

²⁴ This may reach a kind of limit case in baseball, whose central tension is uniquely centered between the pitcher and the batter. However, while the pitcher's job, as managers, scouts, and journalists like to say, is to throw strikes, that only makes sense insofar as it is part of a collective intentionality to make outs, which is a collective effort.

²⁵ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 217. The *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* points out that the prefix *com-* acts as an intensifier of the root. Thus to commemorate is to intensify in memory. "commemorate" *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Ed. T. F. Hoad. Oxford University Press, 1996. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Marquette University. 11 August 2010 <<http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.libus.csd.mu.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t27.e3086>>

²⁶ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 218.

²⁷ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 216-217.

In commemoration, we participate with others in two ways, one of which Casey names a “vertical” aspect and the other a “horizontal.”²⁸ The horizontal names the way that we commemorate with others who are present and who participate in the act of commemoration. The vertical, by contrast, refers to those whose absence is commemorated in the event. On some occasions, such as in mourning, the two coincide: “the dyadic community of myself-as-griever and the other-as-grieved is at once horizontal and vertical.”²⁹ In grieving and mourning, the others with whom one mourns and the one who is mourned help give the intentional act of mourning meaning. It “calls on us not as separate beings but as always already intertwined; it calls us in our strictly social being.”³⁰ Commemoration thus deals with overcoming the separation between individuals, and even shows that such separation is derivative of an original belonging together that cannot be reduced to its members.

Furthermore, the significance of the communal dimension of remembering, Casey argues, does not end with the way it is founded on one’s already socially established being. He writes, “commemorating also creates new forms of sociality, new modes of interconnection: between past and present, self and other, one group and another, one form of thinking or acting or speaking and another, one sex and another, one art form and another.”³¹ Remembering thus does not merely pay tribute to the past and to our collective being together. It also helps to construct new forms of community and sociality. Remembering can thus transform our understanding of others and add different configurations for communal existence.

²⁸ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 247.

²⁹ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 247.

³⁰ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 250.

³¹ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 251.

I.2.2. The Distinction between the Past and the Present

If, as Casey suggests, the separation between self and other is overcome in commemorations, this overcoming just as much applies to the distinction between past and present. By highlighting the distinction between the past as something to which we belong and the past as something that is finished, I introduce a second common assumption that often occurs in discussions of the relationship between the present and the past. In order to sharpen the meaning of identity and highlight its importance in discussions of remembering, especially concerning its meaning in communal and commemorative contexts, I will turn to David Hume's challenge to questions of identity across time, and its further amplification by Derek Parfit.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes "if any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable."³² It makes no sense to speak of an enduring self that underlies experience and combines a variety of such experiences into a unity that could be possessed by an "I" because there is no experience of something constant that underlies our impressions of other things. Rather than discovering a single impression that could be called a self and designated by the personal pronoun "I," Hume argues instead that the self is nothing but a "bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux or movement."³³ Giving rise to the idea of the self are the relationships among the various impressions, or, as

³² David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 164.

³³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 165.

Hume writes, “the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are supposed to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation.”³⁴ This means that myself now and “my” self at a point sometime in the past or in the future is not connected except insofar as the two events resemble each other, are continuous with each other, or are causally connected to each other.³⁵

Derek Parfit, following Hume, rejects the claim that a self underlies and unites various experiences. In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit rejects the “non-reductionist” view of the self, which posits a Cartesian ego or soul that subtends and unites various experiences, and argues instead that there is “no further fact” of the self underlying experience.³⁶ In its place, Parfit argues that there is only a spectrum of more or less related psychological or physical connections, which ultimately renders the self radically indeterminate. When speaking about one’s death, for example, Parfit suggests that the sentence “I shall be dead” does not capture the relationship between my present experience and the inevitable event of my own demise. Rather, a more accurate statement would be, “there will be no future experiences that will be related, in certain ways, to these present experiences.”³⁷ It is instead the psychological and physical connections between past and present and future that matter, not a “self” who “owns” the events of his or her life. W. James Booth describes Parfit's position thusly, “it is the related events of the body and mind, related in a way that admits of considerable indeterminacy that

³⁴ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 166.

³⁵ It should be noted that phrasing it thusly seems to invite the kind of metaphysical view that Hume is trying to dismantle. To speak of “myself” in the future, it would seem, requires something like an underlying substance or subject that is the same such that we could call both “my” self at different times. Rather, it should be reemphasized that all that exists are the varying degrees of resemblance.

³⁶ Derek Parfit. *Reasons and Persons*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

³⁷ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 281.

matter, not identity.”³⁸

The upshot of both Hume’s and Parfit’s accounts is that they can explain how an individual can come to look at his or her past actions *as if* they were performed by another person. The psychological and physical relations matter, and not identity. By removing such relations and unbinding oneself from those ties, a person becomes less connected to the previous “individual.” This suggests that the self, for Hume and Parfit, is ultimately temporal relation. They interpret the self as scattered along a linear sequence of past, present, future that require unification. The “self” endures a sequence of temporal moments, which appear from the future, become present, and then fade into the past. A past event is one that has happened and is now irretrievably lost, something that was once here but is no longer.

W. James Booth suggests that Hume’s and Parfit’s accounts of selfhood have significant consequences for understanding the relationship between agency and selfhood. For example, consider the meaning of imputing acts to others and holding them responsible for such actions. Imputation connects an agent to an action by designating someone responsible for the effects of a particular action. “If there is no enduring self but only mutable and dissolvable relations,” Booth writes, “then it would seem also that the self as a subject of attribution, as a responsible agent accountable for her past deeds and able to assume commitments to a future, would also be weakened or would wither away altogether.”³⁹ By arguing for a conception of identity cast in terms of the relationship between psychological and physical experiences, Hume and Parfit suggest that moral concepts such as imputation and responsibility admit of degrees and are more provisional

³⁸ W. James Booth. *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Justice, and Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 5.

³⁹ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 6.

than has been commonly assumed. For example, it can make sense to say that the indiscretions of one's youth were almost committed by someone else, if in the intervening years that person has repented, lived well, or otherwise changed. Parfit's account thus reveals how it is possible to be able to say and mean such things because it clarifies how assigning responsibility is connected to one's identity. Responsibility for one's past or one's future can simply cease to hold, given the right conditions.

Paul Ricoeur identifies an important reason why Parfit's account makes it difficult to assign responsibility for actions. Ricoeur writes, "what [Parfit's] puzzling cases render radically contingent is this corporeal and terrestrial condition which the hermeneutics of existence, underlying the notion of acting and suffering, takes to be insurmountable."⁴⁰ When, for example, Parfit suggests that the meaning of death is just a matter of saying that there might be experiences in the future that are not related to the present, he misses the way that death is in each case my own and that I experience my own death as mattering. Ricoeur wonders, "are we capable of conceiving of (I do not say of realizing) variations such that the corporeal and terrestrial condition itself becomes a mere variable, a contingent variable...?"⁴¹ Even if such a question cannot be answered at the epistemological level, Ricoeur nevertheless suggests that "the existential invariant of corporeality and worldliness, around which revolve all the imaginative variations of literary fiction, [must] itself [be] taken as indispensable on the ontological plane" (OA, 151). In short, what Parfit tries to imagine is a subject who is no longer embodied and no longer tied to its world.

In fact, it seems that Parfit's neglect of the existentiality of human being will have

⁴⁰ Paul Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 150.

⁴¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 151.

serious consequences for the very possibility of memory and identity. Take, for example, Edward Casey's examination of body memory in his book *Remembering*. He offers an example of a person who, after more than ten years of not driving a 1926 Model T Ford, was able to slide back into the driver's seat of one and drive away.⁴² What was striking, Casey notes, is that no explicit recollection was needed, nor did the driver attempt to refamiliarize himself with the car. Casey concludes that "it is evident from this example and many others like it that habitual body memories are at once pre-reflective and presupposed in human experience."⁴³ If Casey is correct in his claim that body memory orients us to our world and even opens up the world for us, then it would seem that Parfit not only annihilates the self, but his also dissolves the possibility of experience as such.

For Parfit there is no "me" or "I" to which an action could be imputed. Similarly there is no "author" which could be responsible for initiating a course of events. Thus there is nothing that would ground the possibility of experience, identity, or moral accountability. By removing an "I" that could be held accountable, Parfit renders an important dimension of practical life opaque. Practical life requires deliberation; without the ability to choose and without the ability to plan a future, our practical lives become unmoored. Booth captures this sense of agency required for practical life when he writes "the idea of a purely present-tense self is unintelligible from the standpoint of the person as agent because (among other things) it lacks the notion of the mineness of the future that allows us to make sense of deliberation."⁴⁴ By doing away with the possibility of imputation, Parfit also eliminates the possibility of being responsible. As Ricoeur writes, "imputing would not only be placing an action under someone's responsibility but would

⁴² Casey, *Remembering*, p. 148.

⁴³ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ Booth. *Communities of Memory*, p. 9

moreover be placing an *action*, as that which can come under the category permissible-impermissible, under the responsibility of *someone* who can be deemed culpable-inculpable.”⁴⁵ Imputation thus serves to link a particular action, with all of its ethical import and meaning, to a particular agent. Imputation and deliberation matter because they make assigning responsibility for actions possible and enable one to hold another accountable for actions.

Parfit and Hume leave us at an impasse. They reveal that the account of the self as a substance or ego that remains the same throughout changes is inadequate. The implications of this claim for our understanding of the relationship between memory and identity should not go unnoticed. By rejecting the “further fact” of an ego and upholding a reductionist view of the self, understood as a bundle of perceptions and stronger or weaker psychological perceptions, they can thus provide a plausible account of the difference in identity between the child of four, the awkward teenager of sixteen, the thirty-three year old adult, and the seventy-four year old senior citizen. It is plausible, and often correct, when one says at thirty-three, that the actions of the sixteen year-old are not one’s own. In arguing for this position, however, Hume and Parfit render it difficult, if not impossible, to be a self that can have actions imputed to it and be responsible for them. A self cannot have actions imputed it if there is no self that could be the subject of attributes and if it cannot be said to be the author of its actions.

This problem arises because of Hume’s and Parfit’s understanding of time. Roughly put, their accounts of selfhood suggest that it is scattered across discrete units of time that are in need of unification. Time is understood as a collection of units that begin by not being present, are momentarily present, and then are no longer present. Once time

⁴⁵ Ricoeur. *Oneself as Another*, p. 293.

is understood thusly, the most plausible way to reunite the self is by offering an account of the relationships between the self and linear and abstract moments. Specifically, a past event, on this account, is one that has happened, but is now irretrievably lost. Even if it has significance for the present, it is only due to causal relations—events in the past can cause effects in the present and future.

But is this interpretation of the relationship between the self and time, and more specifically the self and the past, the only way to do so? Can the past be understood in a way different from something irretrievably gone? Martin Heidegger's distinction between the past as finished and done, no longer there (*Vergangenheit*) and the past as having-been (*Gewesenheit*) offers a helpful distinction between two ways of thinking about the past. The former suggests that the past is finished, and foreign to the present. To understand the past as "having-been," on the other hand, means that it "is anything but bygone. It is something that I can return to again and again."⁴⁶ It has more to do with how one's present understanding of the world and one's own self-understanding carries an understanding of the past with it, and how absence itself helps to shape the present. This suggests that the past underlies and makes possible any particular perspective on the world, even if one can never fully reveal the meaning of the past that underlies one's own identity.⁴⁷

Edward Casey's description of commemorations is also useful in illuminating this

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger. *The Concept of Time*. Trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): p. 19.

⁴⁷ While I develop Heidegger's account of this in Chapter II, it may be useful to briefly indicate why this is the case. I cannot observe my own entry to the world, and thus from my own perspective I have always been in the world. As such, even though I may learn personal facts about my past or historical facts about the cultural and historical situation in which I find myself, such facts are learned and do not capture the way that the past is carried along with me. Furthermore, insofar as I carry the past along with me, and because this is constitutive of my own being, I can never fully clarify its meaning or fully master and control it. If I belong to the past, any perspective I take on it will be part of such a belonging. As such, I can never fully get behind it or fully illuminate the way that I carry the past with me.

distinction. On the one hand, commemorations reveal the way that a community exists as having-been. They honor the past, and pay homage to it. As such, “they seek to *preserve* and *stabilize* the memory of the honoree, and to do so in a time-binding, invariant manner.”⁴⁸ Commemorations attempt to ward off the ravages of time, and show how the memory of something past lasts into the present and will continue into the future.⁴⁹ They help those who participate in them come to terms with the past by not letting it revert into something over and done with, and instead actively harboring the meaning of the past in the present and transmitting such a meaning to future generations. They thus reveal the way a particular community exists as having-been.

On the other hand, Casey notes, we cannot fully commemorate something unless it has come to an end in some significant sense.⁵⁰ If the event or person were still alive, we would not be commemorating but celebrating (or suffering from) it. As such, we can only commemorate those events that are no longer here. Commemorations are, in short, a way of coming to terms with endings. They are, in important respects, Janus-faced insofar as they look back to the past, they look ahead to the future. Commemoration thus comes to terms with endings and the past by carrying it forward into the present, recognizing how its effects still affect us and can continue to do so.

What, then, is the role that memory plays in an account of practical identity?

While memory plays an integral role in constituting identity, it is not the only factor. As Kant and Hegel have suggested, self-consciousness presupposes memory; without the

⁴⁸ Casey, *Remembering*, p. 226. Italics in the original.

⁴⁹ Casey notes further that it is for this reason that many memorials are made of materials that are meant to last, such as stone. If the materials are not meant to last, such as film or celluloid, the loss of temporal obduracy is compensated for by its considerable accessibility to the many who can own individual copies of it, p. 227.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

ability to tie together representations from the past, the present would be empty.⁵¹ As such, memory both ties the present to the past and is a condition for the possibility of self-consciousness. Insofar as agency requires the agent to persist through time, such that it can be the subject of imputation, it requires memory in order to be able to identify the relevant features of the past that carry over into the present. Remembering does not merely confront the finality of the past, insofar as part of what it means to remember is contained in those actions that help to carry the past forward into the present in order for it to be remembered again in the future.

What then is the collective identity that constitutes a community as responsible or as being indebted? Clearly, the Cartesian ego that underlies identity will not be adequate to understand how this is possible; there is, as Parfit and Hume have argued, no “further fact” to identity that would serve to render individuals or communities responsible. At the same time, Parfit and Hume miss an important feature of identity in their accounts, namely the way that identity seems to endure through a commitment to a project. This feature of identity is not mere sameness over time, but, as Ricoeur suggests, selfhood.⁵² Selfhood refers to the way that one can maintain oneself, despite change. The commitment and recommitment of a group to a specific plan of action contributes to a way that a community becomes responsible for its actions, such that those actions are not merely the province of individual agents. The notion of commitment shares a kind of kinship with a number of important phenomena, such as promising, bearing witness, and offering testimony. On the basis of this form of identity, we can, for example, hold the

⁵¹ Cf. Immanuel Kant. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 229ff., 247. Also, Cf. G.W.F. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. J.N. Findlay. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 479ff.

⁵² I will be discussing Ricoeur’s account of selfhood in Chapter IV. Cf. *Oneself as Another*, pp. 117-125.

current presidential administration responsible for the actions executed by prior presidents, accept apologies from governments for their culpability for past offenses, and hope that future generations can fulfill the promises that we make on their behalf. As such, the identity at the core of community is, in part, one that enables a group to be held responsible and to make promises; it is one that configures a community as being indebted to and responsible for its past and enables it to be held accountable for its actions and promises.

I.2.3. The Hermeneutics of Historical Subjectivity

Memory, as I have indicated, is not confined to the achievements of an individual, subsisting self. Rather, I have suggested that there are good reasons to think that the basic structures and frameworks through which individuals remember something are provided by communal or collective existence. Furthermore, such communal existence helps to transmit these frameworks for remembering. The separation between the present and the past, self and others, and history and present action is not as strict as one might be initially led to believe. There is a sense in which the present “belongs” to the past, such that we can be with past others in mourning and grieving, and that the meaning of selfhood is to be found in conjunction with others. This blurring of distinctions, I have suggested, occurs quite forcefully in commemorations. How is it possible to commemorate events in the first place? What, in other words, calls us to remember certain events, specific places, unique individuals, and particular times?

In order to answer these questions I draw from the hermeneutic tradition, which takes the question of history and historical knowledge as one of its main concerns. The

hermeneutic tradition has cast the problem of historical knowledge in terms of intersubjectivity, which makes knowledge of the past part of the broader problem of relating to an other. Wilhelm Dilthey articulates this position most explicitly. Dilthey's primary aim was to pose the question of the meaning of history and its relationship to human life.⁵³ Insofar as "understanding is a rediscovery of the I in the Thou," historical understanding is a relationship between the self and the other.⁵⁴ Such a rediscovery is to be found in what he calls projective "re-creation" or "re-living" (*Nacherleben*) by which the individual transposes himself or herself into the place of another person, moving along with the events in the same way that the person experienced them.⁵⁵ Dilthey writes, "when we find in history values...we can by empathy (*durch das Nacherleben*) put back into them the relationship to life that they once contained."⁵⁶ Moving along with and experiencing the event as others had suggests that remembering the past is a reconstruction of those values that motivated the action in the first place.

It is clear that such a recreation is not as straightforward as it initially appears. Memory is never innocent. It always carries dispositions, beliefs, values, and prejudices of the one remembering. Nevertheless, Dilthey claims that "the interpreter can momentarily emphasize and strengthen some mental processes and allow others to fade

⁵³ Cf. Heidegger, "Wilhelm Dilthey's Research and the Struggle for a Historical Worldview". Trans. Charles Bambach. *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*. Ed. John Van Buren (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002): pp. 147-176.

⁵⁴ Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Construction of the Historical World in the Human Sciences," *Selected Writings*. Ed. H.P. Rickman. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979): pp. 168-245, p. 208.

⁵⁵ Ronald Bontekoe. *Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), p. 55. Bontekoe follows Rudolf Makkreel's understanding of *Nacherleben* as a "re-living" or "re-experiencing" something rather than as Rickman's translation of the phrase *durch das Nacherleben* as "by empathy." Cf. Makkreel's *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). I tend to agree with Makkreel's account. Reliving and reexperiencing something will become central in Chapter II, where I discuss Heidegger's understanding of repetition or retrieval (*Wiederholung*).

⁵⁶ Dilthey, "The Construction of the Historical World," p. 244.

into the background and thus reproduce an alien life in himself.”⁵⁷ In so doing, the interpreter is in a position to bring to light the various constraints that can impede remembering the past, including those prejudices and presuppositions that the interpretation necessarily carries with it, the difference in values between the present and the past, and the ability of the interpreter to imagine himself or herself in the place of another person. While remembering is a projective recreation of the past and allows us to come to know what happened by the imaginative reinsertion of oneself into past events, it is never completely successful.

If we extend Dilthey’s claim that understanding involves rediscovering the “I in the Thou” to include the relationship between the past and the present, it follows that we understand the past on the basis of the present and that we come to understand the present only insofar as we understand the past. Ronald Bontekoe suggests that there are at least two ways in which the expansion of self-understanding occurs. First, when an individual struggles to understand past actions, events and objects, she necessarily draws upon her own experiences in order to unlock their meaning. The result is that “her understanding of human nature expands, and with it the clarity with which she grasps the nature of that uniquely significant member of the human species—herself.”⁵⁸ When this idea is applied to the relationship between the present and the past, we find that the study of the past can help us gain clarity on the present. The second way that historical research expands self-understanding is by inverting the first pattern. Rather than examine the events, actions, and objects of the past, the individual now turns to events, objects, and actions in the present in order to see how they affect others. Bontekoe puts this point nicely: “in order

⁵⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Development of Hermeneutics,” *Selected Writings*. Ed. H.P. Rickman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979): pp. 246-263, p. 258.

⁵⁸ Bontekoe, *Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle*, p. 57.

to gauge how her actions affect others, the individual must again project herself into the position of someone else, but this time in order to understand *her* creation from the standpoint of *their* experience.”⁵⁹ As a result, in the recreation of the past, I come to understand myself differently. To use a phrase from Ricoeur, I come to understand myself as another.

Furthermore, Dilthey’s approach focuses on the whole of life, as it shows up in pre-reflective experience, and how such a whole is interconnected. To understand such life, one cannot conceive it abstractly in terms of causal connections. Rather, it must be understood in the purposive terms of motivation, and the way that such a life is always shared with others. He writes,

What primarily characterizes generations, ages, and epochs is that they are general, dominant, and permeating tendencies. They involve the *concentration* of the whole culture of such a temporal span within itself, so that the values, purposes, and life-rules of the time can provide the norm for judging, evaluating, and assessing the persons and tendencies or direction that give a specific time its character. An individual, a tendency, and a community derive their *meaning* through their inner relation to the spirit of the age.⁶⁰

Self-understanding and the understanding of others depends on the commonalities of a generation and the shared tendency or direction toward which such a generation sees itself going. Thus, a generation helps to form the unique context or situation in which individuals find themselves, and offers the basic questions that a generation finds posed to itself.

I introduce this admittedly simple sketch of Dilthey’s conception of historical understanding for several reasons. First, Heidegger’s concept of “generation,” which he

⁵⁹ Bontekoe, *Dimensions of the Hermeneutic Circle*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ Dilthey, “Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft, und dem Staat.” As cited and translated in Benjamin Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006): p. 197-198.

introduces in *Being and Time*, is indebted to Dilthey. Heidegger uses this concept in order to shed light on a constellation of related ideas, such as a “heritage” and the endowment and appointed task that each generation faces. Second, it helps to underscore a tension that arises within the hermeneutic conception of history that forms a basic problem that requires further development. On one hand, it appears that history concerns a special kind of object of knowledge, namely knowledge of past things. On the other hand, history also affects our own self-understanding and thus is not limited to the strictly epistemological domain. This tension is manifest in Heidegger’s distinction between the two senses of the past, the past as no longer and the past as having been, as well as the distinction between two senses of history, history as something lived through (*Geschichte*) and the objective study of the past (*Historie*). It is also evident in the contemporary opposition between memory and history.⁶¹ Historian Bernard Bailyn frames their differences clearly. In its historiographical mode, history is “the critical skeptical, empirical source-bound reconstruction of past events, circumstances, and people based on the belief that the past is not only distant from us but also different.”⁶² Memory, by contrast, is “not a critical, skeptical reconstruction of what happened. It is the spontaneous experience of the past. It is absolute, not tentative or distant, and it is expressed in signs, symbols, images, and

⁶¹ Pierre Nora is perhaps the most prominent theorist who makes this distinction. Cf. “Between Memory and History,” p. 7. This distinction has its roots in Halbwachs’ work on collective memory, though as Angelica Nuzzo suggests, it may have its philosophical origins in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Cf. Nuzzo’s “Memory and History in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*. Vol. 29, no. 1 (2009): pp. 161-198. This distinction is most explicit in Yosef Yerushalmi’s book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996). Yerushalmi argues that throughout the Middle Ages, and even into the 16th century, Jews had a strong collective memory mediated by rituals and liturgy, but no explicit study of Jewish history. Jewish history as a discipline started to flourish in the 19th century, in conjunction with the rise in German historicism and hermeneutics. During this time, and to a large extent still occurring, collective Jewish memory and identity finds itself in a crisis. Commenting on this, Pierre Nora writes that the Jewish tradition “has no other history than its own memory, to be Jewish is to remember that one is such.” “Between Memory and History”: p. 16.

⁶² Bernard Bailyn. “Considering the Slave Trade: History and Memory.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 58, no. 1 (January 2001): pp. 245-252, p. 250-251.

mnemonic clues of all sorts.”⁶³ Memory is thus alive and belongs to particular communities; history, on the other hand, is analytical, detached, and is a reconstruction of the past. One concern will thus be establishing the relationship between these two senses of the past.

Third, Dilthey’s conception of historical understanding suggests that the problem of history and the relationship one has to one’s past is ultimately a relationship between the self and other. To understand the past is to understand oneself as another. The relationship to the past is not one that separates individuals from one another, as if memory and individuals are isolated. Rather it shows how the self and the other, understood now in terms of the relationship between the past and the present, mutually imply each other. To think of oneself as another is, as Paul Ricoeur shows, no simple task. Rather, in his work on the meaning of selfhood, appropriately titled *Oneself as Another*, he writes that to think of the relationship between selfhood and otherness is not merely to compare the two. Rather, it is to suggest from the beginning that “selfhood implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.”⁶⁴ Thus, selfhood is not merely similar to another; to be self at all is to be self inasmuch as one is also other.

The aim of interpretation is to reveal the meaning of the object, which makes hermeneutics the discipline that attempts to establish the method by which one can come to understand the past better. While Dilthey’s conception of historical knowledge remains epistemologically motivated, in that it aims at the possibility of knowing the past, Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur raise the hermeneutic structure to the ontological level. This

⁶³ Bailyn, p. 251.

⁶⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 3

is not to say that epistemological concerns about knowing the past are irrelevant to them—Heidegger wants to show that it is because Dasein is open to its own Being that its history is also an issue for it, and Ricoeur argues that the epistemological and the ontological domains are not to be kept rigidly separate. Understanding and interpretation are modes of our being in the world, and not merely methods of approaching texts. As such, hermeneutics designates, on the one hand, the basic way that human beings exist, which is to say as in terms of one's own possibilities and the being that one "has to be." Human beings understand and interpret themselves in terms of their ability to be. On the other hand, it designates the proper access to the subject.

I.3 The Called Subject: Witnessing and Testimony

How is memory constituted in the self and through communal existence? One avenue for answering this seemingly straightforward question is to examine the way that testimony and bearing witness help establish a relationship to the past and to others. The idea of bearing witness is central to hermeneutic phenomenology insofar as texts from the past continue to hold significance today, and, importantly, call out to readers to understand, interpret and apply them in the present. Such texts testify to a past world, and mark out the parameters of a common life. However, how they do so remains underdeveloped. Thus, my turn to Heidegger and Ricoeur, and more specifically their respective understandings of testimony and bearing witness, is an attempt to begin to develop the meaning of testimony in the hermeneutic tradition as a way to mark out the meaning of the past as it absently remains in the present.

I.3.1. Two Meanings of Testimony

In order to secure the meaning of bearing witness and its relationship to memory and history, it will first be useful to distinguish two related meanings of “testimony.” Testimony and witnessing not only pertain to a specific epistemological problem that deals with the reliability or truthfulness of a certain domain of propositions. It can also refer to a particular modality of being human. In the ordinary sense of the word, the witness is an eyewitness, one who has firsthand experience of an event and reports what he or she has seen. This form of witnessing is often employed in the historical sciences, which attempts to narrate the past “such as it actually happened.” As such, historiography attempts to explain what happened, giving a causal account, from a third-person perspective. The form that witnessing takes in historiography is thus one aspires to be objective, distanced, and critical of what happened. The witness’s testimony is put on trial, so to speak, insofar as her testimony is questioned and secured in its veracity.

There is, however, an additional sense of witnessing: bearing witness to something, which may be either one’s own memory or the memory of something passed down from previous generations. To bear witness, in W. James Booth’s words, “is to remember, to be a living memory, to guard the past, to ask others to do likewise, and to illuminate the traces of the past and their meaning.”⁶⁵ Here, witnessing is closer to the idea of being faithful to the past; it is an act of fidelity to it. Rather than the distance between the present and the past that makes possible the historical sciences, the act of bearing witness in memory is an attempt to reconnect with the past, and to bring it back in order to transmit it to the future. Witnessing, in other words, does not merely render an

⁶⁵ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 73.

account of events; it keeps the absence of the past present.⁶⁶ In testifying to what happened, the witness transmits memory to others. By speaking, she acts in fidelity to the past, not just to give an account of what actually happened, but to reveal a particular life in common and to be motivated by a burden, perhaps in desire to discharge a debt or feeling of guilt, or a feeling of gratitude, one that attempts to honor the past.

An example of such witnessing should sharpen and clarify the tension between the historical and epistemic sense of testimony and the way that testimony is also an attempt to safeguard the past from the ever-widening gulf of temporal distance and from the desire to forget. Dori Laub recounts a lively debate after historians and psychoanalysts listened to a Holocaust survivor's account of the uprising at Auschwitz during the fall of 1944. The witness recounted that "we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable."⁶⁷ As a matter of the historical record, however, this testimony is inaccurate—only one chimney was destroyed, not four. Because of her inaccurate testimony, historians "could not accept—nor give credence to—her whole account of the events."⁶⁸ To this, one participant responded that the witness was not testifying to an historical fact, the number of chimneys destroyed, but rather something more "radical" and more "crucial."⁶⁹ The witness testified to something unimaginable, not merely to the horrors she saw while an inmate at Auschwitz, but also to the event of an uprising and the possibility of resistance and survival in an overwhelmingly desperate and bleak situation. In one sense, the witness saw something that did not in fact happen—the destruction of

⁶⁶ Cf. Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide. Entre la mémoire et l'oubli*. As cited in Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 92.

⁶⁷ As recounted in Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witness in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. p. 59

⁶⁸ Laub, p. 59-60

⁶⁹ Laub, p. 60.

four chimneys. In other sense, what did not happen made all the difference to her survival. By seeing something that she could not fathom, something that she thought was impossible—and in fact was impossible, in a sense—she was able to summon the strength to persevere. In other words, she testified to the meaning of the situation, and not the empirical details.

Thus, her testimony is in one sense false—four chimneys were not destroyed. In another sense, by bearing witness to the meaning of event, she reveals that what actually happened made all the difference in this woman's life. Seeing the impossible, that is, what did not happen, gave her the power to make what was seemingly impossible possible—surviving the Shoah. In so doing, she transformed herself into a kind of living reminder of the past, exhorting others not to forget the unspeakable horrors that she experienced and the possibility of speaking and acting against those horrors.

What is striking about bearing witness is that the events recounted stand out and remain unable to be assimilated into a coherent narrative. Dori Laub, himself a survivor of the Shoah, suggests that the testimony involved in recounting these events “seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference.”⁷⁰ As such, what is witnessed through these various media resists being incorporated into a cohesive unity, one that would finally explain or account for such an event happening. What monuments, memorials, and other ways of bearing witness reveal is that testimony, rather than being reducible to a propositional form of knowledge, is a discursive act whose very speech or writing produces evidence for its truth. Testimony is

⁷⁰ Laub and Felman, p. 5

discursive because it is “a vow to tell, to promise, and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for the truth,” and, as a result, it “accomplishes a speech act, rather than simply formulate a statement.”⁷¹ The meaning of historical events always exceeds and transforms the medium in which they are expressed.

The term testimony thus covers an array of significations. On the one hand, to witness something is to be an eye-witness to an event. In this instance, being an eye-witness to an historical event suggests the ability to give an accurate report of a sequence of events. The witness’s testimony is an account that adjudicates between two parties’ claims. Testimony in this sense has a juridical connotation, and is often given in a highly formalized and symbolic setting, such as a trial. On the other hand, to bear witness to something suggests that what was seen was an event that transcends the ability to be put into our everyday language. In this case, the witness testifies to something that cannot be seen and to something that resists being fully understood.⁷² To testify, in this sense, means to bear witness to that which is unsayable and to make this unsayable element of language appear within speech *as* unsayable. This dimension of witnessing and testimony indicates a political, and even religious, dimension that resists full articulation and continually calls established and conventional meanings into question. There is a tension between these two senses of witnessing here: to be an eye-witness to an event means to develop an historical account and indicates a fidelity to what actually happened; to bear witness indicates a relationship to a truth about human existence that transcends those facts and cannot be easily assimilated into such an account. There is both a juridical sense of witnessing, and a quasi-religious, or ethical sense, of witnessing. This productive

⁷¹ Laub and Felman, p. 5.

⁷² Kelly Oliver makes a similar point about the dual meaning of testimony in her essay “Witnessing and Testimony.” *Parallax*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (2004) pp. 79-88, p. 80.

tension introduces the historical truth of what happened as well as the phenomenological truth of the experience of something that exceeds the account.

Both Heidegger and Ricoeur suggest that bearing witness plays a central role in their respective hermeneutic accounts of the self. Rather than conceive of the self in terms of an underlying substratum that remains the same throughout change, both offer an account of the self that primarily takes the way that it is “steadfast” or “self-constant.” Their respective accounts of selfhood attend both to the way that the self is constituted through temporality generally, and remembering specifically, and how such remembering helps to establish the identity of a community. Central to their accounts is the role that testimony and witnessing play, a role that is especially evidenced in their analyses of conscience. Conscience reveals the self as having been addressed by a tradition and charged with the responsibility of being tradition’s heir. It names those moments where the normal course of life is interrupted, discloses the unique historical situation, and makes a reorientation or recommitment to something possible. To see oneself as being addressed, or called, by one’s life and placed in a position of having to respond to such a call comprises the dialectic of address and response, and is the formal structure of bearing witness that I will be developing.

I.3.2. The Called Subject in Heidegger

For Heidegger, the meaning of bearing witness is to be found in the more “existential” passages of *Being and Time*, wherein he elaborates the meaning of death, guilt, conscience, resoluteness, and repetition. The notion of “authenticity” and being authentic pervades that work, and offers the possibility of a style or way of life that

involves constantly renewing one's responsibility for one's own history..⁷³ The function of conscience is to dislodge Dasein from the interpretation and understanding of itself from the perspective of its everyday concerns, and return to it the possibility of committing itself anew to the possibilities that arise from its own being. Heidegger writes "the sort of Dasein which is understood after the manner of the world both for Others and for itself, gets *passed over* in this appeal" by the call of conscience and its everyday world "is something which the call to the Self takes not the slightest cognizance."⁷⁴ The "self, which the appeal has robbed of this lodgment and hiding-place, gets brought to itself by the call" (BT 317/SZ 273). By listening to the call, "Dasein is *in thrall to its ownmost possibility of existence*" (BT 334/SZ 287). Conscience calls Dasein to responsibility, though not in the sense of being responsible for its actions. Rather, conscience calls Dasein to be responsible for the very possibility of being a self at all. This suggests that through the call of conscience, Dasein bears witness to the genesis of the responsibility it has for being a self at all.

Heidegger's account will have significant implications for the meaning of history and temporality. Rather than the everyday experience of time, which is measured out by clocks and calendars, the temporality of selfhood transforms how Dasein experiences its

⁷³ While I do not wish to get into an extended discussion of the "moral" or "normative" claims that this notion may or may not entail, a few words about this will be necessary. It is clear that Heidegger's understanding of this concept diverge significantly from traditional moral theories, as he is not interested in justifying our normative or moral claims nor in arguing for a supreme principle of morality from which we could deduce maxims for acting. That said, insofar as (some) moral theories and Heidegger's examination of authenticity both articulate a way of life or argue that a certain kind of character is better than others, both engage in similar projects. Heidegger is recommending a certain way of life, by advocating that we take up a specific relationship to ourselves. In this regard, authenticity shares some important characteristics with Aristotle's conception of virtue. Nevertheless, authenticity is not the realization of some universal human "essence," and it cannot be properly captured by appealing to traditional moral concepts and values. See Chapter II for more detail on Heidegger's conception of authenticity.

⁷⁴ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, Harper & Collins, 1962), p. 317. I will be using the Macquarrie/Robinson translation of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* throughout, citing the translation first (BT) and German pagination second (SZ) in the body of the text.

past. In the 1924 lecture, *The Concept of Time* Heidegger explicitly links up the connection between conscience and the past: “The past remains closed off from any present so long as such a present, Dasein, is not historical. Dasein, however, is in itself historical in so far as it is its possibility. In being futural Dasein is its past; it comes back to it in the ‘how.’ The manner of its coming back is, among other things, conscience.”⁷⁵ Conscience discloses to Dasein those possibilities for being a self that it inherits from tradition. Such responsibility is the explicit appropriation of a possibility for existing derived from a shared culture and a common tradition. Rather than conceive of the past in terms of empirical facts that can be known, Heidegger instead suggests that the meaning of the past is revealed in the appropriation of one’s past as a possibility for the future. “Conscience” becomes a key-word for the transformation of one element of one’s heritage into a possibility for the future. It amounts to revitalizing the past in understanding itself from its own future. Remembering, as a form of bearing witness, is a way to restore the past from a common understanding of it as a set of facts that are no longer present and from forgetfulness.

In so doing, Heidegger maintains the distinction between “history” and “historicity,” or “history” and “memory,” to the point of radically separating the two. Historicity names the way that Dasein lives its history. Because of Dasein’s historical condition, there is “stretching behind it an absolute past that it will never be able to appropriate completely, and for which, even so, it is ‘originally’ guilty.”⁷⁶ Because the past has already happened by the time Dasein arrives, it cannot be fully incorporated into its understanding. As such, a quasi-scientific investigation into the past will miss how it is

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*. Trans. William McNeill (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 1992): p. 19.

⁷⁶ Françoise Dastur. *Death: An Essay on Finitude*. Trans. John Llewelyn. (London: Athlone, 1996): p. 71.

irrevocable. History, on the other hand, refers to the objectification of past objects in representations, thereby reifying the past and thus “forgetting” the history that Dasein essentially is. Where histories are written according to a chronological or linear structure, historicity refers the possibility of retrieving and repeating one’s own historical being (Cf. BT/SZ §74). At each moment Dasein is called to be responsible for itself and its history; it thus maintains a recommitment to itself and to its past through the very way that it bears witnessing” to it. This moment of bearing witness calls received concepts and categories into question insofar as its relationship to the past essentially wonders whether or not we have lived up to the task of remembering who we truly are at all. To bear witness is to reveal the questionability of oneself, which includes the temptation to understand the past over and done with, while also opening up new specific possibilities for understanding who we are. Witnessing and testifying thus reveal that some possibilities have been played out, and are no longer a source for self-understanding, on the one hand, and, on the other, witnessing indicates a way to understand ourselves anew.

While Heidegger abandons the language of conscience, debt, and authenticity in the years immediately following the publication of *Being and Time*, he nevertheless maintains a rigid distinction between history, as an objective science of what happened, and the experience of history as it is lived. Concomitant with this continued development is his interest in giving an account of the “history of Being.” Such a history designates the withdrawal and concealment of Being in the Western metaphysical tradition. This “history” involves the tension between the historical sciences, which empirically describe and narrate the history of thought, and historicity itself, which resists chronological narration. The contemporary age is characterized by a lack of a sense of its own

historicity; it instead sees the past as something that can be discerned and, in practice, is fully understandable. As such, the present age is separated from its past.

Heidegger's account of the history of Being is an attempt to thus revitalize a sense of the past that we have dangerously ignored. In order to do so, he appeals to Greek tragedy, specifically Sophocles' *Antigone*. While his remarks on tragedy are scattered, Heidegger places particular emphasis on Sophoclean tragedy as highlighting the ontological meaning of tragedy itself. On one hand, Sophoclean tragedy marks a time of transition, specifically the one between the pre-metaphysical thinking of Parmenides and Heraclitus and the inauguration of metaphysics with Plato and Aristotle.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the ontological meaning of such tragedy becomes the privileged mode of disclosing the entire history of Being, which is only disclosed through its withdrawal.⁷⁸ Tragedy, in other words, discloses the origins of thinking, or the meaning of the past, only once its development has reached its completion and has exhausted its possibilities for enlivening the present. Tragedy thus "bears witness" to the moment where the transmission of possibilities occurs, and it attests to the way that these possibilities play themselves out as something to which we must submit or undergo.⁷⁹

While tragedy appears to underlie much of Heidegger's work in the 1930s and 1940s, he only explicitly engages Sophocles' *Antigone* twice: once in his 1935 work *Introduction to Metaphysics* and again in 1941, in a lecture on Hölderlin's poem "The

⁷⁷ Cf. *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Shuwer. (Bloomington: Indianapolis University Press, 1994): p. 186.

⁷⁸ Cf. Heidegger. *Mindfulness*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (London: Continuum Press, 2006): p. 197-198.

⁷⁹ Robert Gall recognizes this aspect of tragedy when he writes, "the characters of tragedy undergo what has already happened. ... The past rises up as a given in tragedy, but a given that has unforeseen consequences, that plays itself out in unexpected ways to which the characters must submit." Cf. Robert Gall. "Interrupting Speculation: The Thinking of Heidegger and Greek Tragedy," *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003), pp. 177-194, p. 179.

Ister.” In the former, Heidegger emphasizes the way that tragedy bears witness to the gap between the present and the past.⁸⁰ In so doing, their respective meanings come to be in the first place. It expresses the violent forces of history, by showing the way that humans are submitted to powers beyond their control and thus become shattered. Such shattering exposes both the power of history and reveals the meaning of being human. In the lecture on Hölderlin, by contrast, Heidegger reveals the place where the conflict between human beings and Being itself takes place.⁸¹ Such a place is essentially historical, as Heidegger now explicitly calls the process of retrieving those possibilities from the past, “remembrance” (*Andenken*). Remembrance means to be attentive to that which is incomparably distant and foreign, and thus to recognize how we are connected to and submitted to a world that is not of our own making.

Heidegger’s turn to Sophocles’ tragic poetry can help reveal the meaning of remembering. Heidegger’s inquiries into the essence of tragic poetry reveal a dynamic tension issuing from Being itself: on one hand, the desire to master and control the ways that we remember the past, and, on the other hand, the countermovement of Being that conceals its temporal and finite character. Where tragedy highlights the blindness that results from taking too narrow a perspective on oneself, Heidegger finds a similar blindness arising from our attempts to make our way in the world. Heidegger suggests that by directly confronting the possibility of forgetting the question of Being, we will be led to a critical retrieval of the unthought ground of philosophical thinking. As such,

⁸⁰ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): pp. 151-176.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn: The Ister*. Trans. Julia Davis and William McNeill. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): pp. 51-114.

rather than try to overcome the possibility of forgetfulness, we must instead directly confront forgetting as a distinct possibility of our time.

Heidegger's difficult and idiosyncratic language often forces the reader to experience the limits of forgetting and remembering the question of Being. Rather than attempt to overcome forgetfulness in an act of remembering, which might be envisaged as a temple or monument of remembering, his suggestion is preparatory. We must make our *way* by reflecting on those old, venerable words whose saying directs us to the co-belonging of remembering and forgetting. It is, for Heidegger, commemorative thinking (*Andenken*) that reveals how the confrontation and opening the question of the possibility of remembering and forgetting such a question can only arise through a confrontation with that which has been handed down to us through tradition and history.

How is this commemorative thinking supposed to take place, and how might it help us understand the intertwining of remembering and forgetting? If the attempts to overcome the possibility of forgetting further compound our forgetting, how might we understand what we are to remember? Similarly, are there some things that we are better off forgetting? Heidegger here leaves this question open, and in order to attempt to give an answer to it, I again find an ally in Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's work develops a conception of poetics that is a creative response to the calls of tradition. As such, Ricoeur's conception of poetics is intimately tied to action and interpretation. This will be important in developing what I mean when I claim that remembering is itself a kind of poetics.

I.3.2. Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of the Summoned Subject

The concept of “poetics” runs throughout Ricoeur’s work. His early work, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, develops a “poetics of the will.” He envisages this poetics as an antidote to the tendency of modern philosophy to posit the self as the foundation of all being. Against this tendency and in a rather Heideggerian move, Ricoeur focuses on the “*gift* of being, which heals the rents of freedom.”⁸² Though he later abandons the project of developing the poetics of the will, he nevertheless maintains that a commitment to a poetics runs throughout his major works:

The Symbolism of Evil, The Rule of Metaphor, Time and Narrative do aspire to in several ways to the title of poetics, less in the sense of a meditation on primordial creation than in that investigation of the multiple modalities of what I will later call an ordered creation...[which] still belongs to a philosophical anthropology.⁸³

For Ricoeur, a poetics of an “ordered creation” focuses on a capacity of the self to innovate new meanings through speaking, acting, and interpreting. Ricoeur calls the self’s capacity to innovate, “a synthesis of the heterogeneous.”⁸⁴ In this a synthesis, two similar fields of meaning are not combined, but rather the reader draws out a similarity between two *dissimilar* semantic fields. As Richard Kearney writes, Ricoeur’s understanding of hermeneutics replaces “the visual mode of the image with the verbal,” and in doing so Ricoeur “affirms the more *poetical* role of imagining—that is, its ability to say one thing in terms of another, or to say several things at the same time, thereby

⁸² Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*. Trans. Erazim Kohak. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 30

⁸³ Ricoeur, “Intellectual Autobiography.” *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* Ed. E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), p. 14.

⁸⁴ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. ix.

creating something new.”⁸⁵ As such, Ricoeur departs from the Husserlian legacy of phenomenology, which emphasizes visual and eidetic modes of thought with a “semantic innovation” that juxtaposes two different worlds, a real and imaginary one, to produce new meaning. In doing so, Ricoeur’s theory of poetics opens up new possibilities of meaning by going beyond the reference to the immediate world of perception. The result of this operation is the disclosure of new ways to be, interpret, and act in the world. We can transform the world through action on the basis of such imaginative projections of new ways to be in the world.

Against Heidegger’s direct route to a conception of Being, one which immediately connects the understanding of Dasein to an understanding of Being, Ricoeur’s conception of hermeneutics focuses on those winding, indirect paths through which we decipher meanings. In doing so, Ricoeur emphasizes and examines the innovative power of symbols, metaphors, and narratives. The verbal metaphor in poetry, for example, combines two different fields of meaning: on one hand, the poet takes what is impertinent at a literal level and transforms it into something pertinent at a new, poetic level. Ricoeur further applies this notion of semantic innovation to the construction of narrative identity. The plot, goals, and causes are brought together in the temporal unity of the narrative work. The result of this particular reconfiguration of the meaning of actions also reconfigures the reader’s understanding of his or her world.⁸⁶ This means that by reading a narrative, we are able to reconfigure and re-create not only how we understand our possibilities in the world but also how we understand ourselves.

⁸⁵ Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: Owl of Minerva*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2004), p. 38.

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation.” Trans. John B. Thompson. *From Text to Action, Essays in Hermeneutics II*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991).

The narrative view of identity means that we understand ourselves according to a narrative model. A narrative account of oneself does not merely include the first-person perspective; it also is deeply informed by a dialectical process that includes our bodies, our emotions, social relations, and histories. Each of these elements contributes to our narrative self-understanding. In order to answer the questions “what happened?”, “who acted?”, “why did they act?”, and “under what circumstances did the action take place?” we need to appeal to the resources that narrative provides. Thus, when we want to give an account of ourselves, we construct our identity as if it were a narrative. We receive this identity, in part, from external forces, such as tradition, but nevertheless are in the position to creatively interpret and critically appropriate the very tradition that we have been given. Indeed, Ricoeur notes that “narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity.”⁸⁷ “It is,” he continues, “always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives.”⁸⁸ Narrative identity is in the position of always making and remaking itself through the challenges of others and the reflexive self-understanding of the self and the world.

John Wall suggests two important results of Ricoeur’s conception of narrative identity.⁸⁹ Narrative identity is poetic, firstly, because it arises out of a tragic conflict.⁹⁰ The self inevitably comes into conflict with those narrative forces that threaten to overwhelm it. For example, Antigone’s identity is threatened insofar as her action runs counter to the political power of the State. Wall writes, “this threat, in its broadest sense,

⁸⁷ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 248.

⁸⁸ Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, p. 248.

⁸⁹ Wall, “Poetics, Phronesis, and Moral Creativity.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. Vol. 6 (2003): pp. 317-341, p. 333

⁹⁰ Cf. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*: pp. 241-249.

is the discordance of the self's own existing, particular meaning to itself with the larger social history on which this meaning nevertheless depends, a potential rupturing of meaning through one's narrative incommensurability with others."⁹¹ *Antigone* reveals the tension between selfhood and otherness as it is taken to its breaking point.

The second feature of narrative identity is the creative *response* that is engendered through the impetus to act. The self always stands in relationship to its community, and as a result must mediate the ways that meaning must be rendered more inclusive. *Antigone*, again, shows that tragedy arises through the inability of the protagonists to go beyond their respective narrow visions. As such, the moral that tragedy can show us is that we must respond to our situation in the recognition of otherness that challenges us. The challenge that the other poses to us, then, is to re-create and reconfigure the tacit and heretofore unremarked upon ways that we understand our selves through our narrative practices. It is, in other words, an effort to take both one's own narrative identity and the otherness that challenges us into account.

There is another sense of testimony that has not yet been addressed. W. James Booth suggests that "the impulse to bear witness is intimately related to...a silence that fuels the witness's sense of the need to bring that past before his contemporaries."⁹² This silence is not an absolute or total silence; if it were, it would risk not meaning anything at all. Silence is not a mere void, the complete disappearance of the past, or the erasure of all traces of the past. Rather, silences are "absences that shape our world by pointing to its incompleteness, to the co-presence in it of the seen and unseen."⁹³ Such absences and silences arise from voluntarily and involuntarily forgetting as well as the effacement,

⁹¹ Wall, "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity," p. 333

⁹² Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 74.

⁹³ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 75.

erosion, or destruction of traces. These absences are a kind of a “hollow” or “indentation” of the past.⁹⁴ They are neither fully present nor absent, occupying a liminal space between the two shaping experience. Such “hollows” are silences that mutely speak by enjoining us to remember what happened.

In order to understand the way that such “hollows” and “silences” are created by language, I will be focusing, in chapters three and four respectively, on the way that Heidegger’s conception of tragedy and Ricoeur’s elaboration of the role that narrative plays in our lives help to give an always tenuous and fragile voice to such silences. While Heidegger tends to suggest that the gaps and fissures of poetry cannot be rendered present through strategies of textual interpretation,⁹⁵ Ricoeur argues that, in principle, we must be able to narrate such silences and lacunae. Silences in bearing witness, I will be suggesting, can motivate recounting what happened, even if it cannot be completely narrated. As such, in what follows, I will focus on the ways that the past can challenge our self-understanding and how it functions at the same time to constitute some of the ways that we understand ourselves.

The constant reconfiguration that arises through the mediation between listening and speaking is poetic, I argue, and can perhaps best be revealed through the challenges that poetry gives to us to respond to a hidden meaning of the past. The witnessing self finds herself in a strange position of having to testify for the past. She cannot avoid the burden to bear witness, for the events demand to be recounted, nor can this task be

⁹⁴ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 74.

⁹⁵ Heidegger maintains the priority of listening and silence throughout his oeuvre. For example, “as a mode of discourse, discretion articulates the intelligibility of Dasein in so ordinary a manner that it gives rise to a potentiality-for-hearing which is genuine, and to a being-with-one-another that is transparent.” It is thus in silence that Dasein is most attuned to the other (SZ 165). Also, see Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*. (New York: Routledge Press, 1998): pp. 146-157 for an analysis of the meaning of Heidegger’s silences.

delegated to another person or representative. The responsibility to bear witness, in other words, cannot be transferred to another person. The witness herself experiences the necessity to testify as a radically unique, non-substitutable, and non-interchangeable burden. It is for this reason Paul Celan writes that “no one bears witness for the witness.”⁹⁶ The appointment to bear witness is one that individuates the person such that it is only that particular person who can adequately bear witness. Celan described his poetic endeavors as “the efforts of someone, who overarced by starts that are human handiwork, and who, shelterless in this till now undreamt-of sense and thus most uncannily in the open, goes with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality.”⁹⁷ To seek out reality, as his poetry attests, is to explore those traumatic events that gave the impetus to speak. To seek this reality, however, is not done in order to relive it. It is an attempt to emerge from the paralysis of being stricken, and to engage in the work of remembering in order to move past it. He thus writes that language “had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darkneses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, ‘enriched’ by all this.”⁹⁸ It is by remembering the wound and trauma that the event, in its incomprehensibility and terror, becomes manifest and available to us. To give oneself over to the power of language, and to the power of remembering, is one way to make one’s shelterlessness and unhomeliness a way to understand what transpired. As

⁹⁶ Celan, “Ash-Aureole, Trans. John Felstiner. *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 261.

⁹⁷ Celan, “Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen.” Trans. John Felstiner. *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 395-396, p. 396.

⁹⁸ Celan, “Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize,” p. 395.

such, the testimony proffered through poetic memory gives reality and meaning to the vulnerability and powerlessness that calls to be remembered.

I.4. Conclusion

Bearing witness and testimony are keys to understanding the meaning of remembering and the possibility of doing justice to the past and those who were affected by it.⁹⁹ Elie Wiesel has suggested that testimony is the defining mode of discourse of the present age: “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, many works of literature, poetry, and art call attention to testimony as its subject and the witness as the medium of transmission. Wiesel’s *Night* trilogy, Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge,” Marcel Ophüls’ *The Sorrow and the Pity*, to name only a few, attempt to come to terms with the horrors of World War II and the Shoah by bearing witness to its unspeakable horrors. The act of testifying, of bearing witness, is a defiant gesture made against the flow of time, which erases the traces of the past, and gives a tenuous voice to the muteness of the dead. Furthermore, public monuments and memorials, such as the museum and memorial at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Cenotaph in London, the Genbaku Dome

⁹⁹ The connection between remembering and testimony has generally been formulated in epistemological terms, focusing particularly on the reliability of testimonials and what kind of warrant the listener has for believing the witness. Cf. *The Epistemology of Testimony*. Ed. Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). There is also a vibrant strand of thought in the existential and phenomenological traditions that also develops the connection between the two, focusing particularly on the way that bearing witness is a mode of historical being. Cf. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), Jacques Derrida, “A Self-unsealing Poetic Text’: Poetics and Politics of Witnessing.” Trans. Rachel Bowlby. *The Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*. Ed. Michael P. Clark. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 180–207, Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Elie Wiesel. “The Holocaust as a Literary Inspiration” *Dimensions of the Holocaust*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977: p. 9.

in Hiroshima, the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., and Ground Zero in Manhattan, starkly remind the community of specific places, events, and people who call out to be remembered. Testimony, as evidenced through the proliferation of these sites and the continued discussions of their meaning, has become one of the primary ways that we relate to the events that help us understand both our contemporary times and our history.

Understanding and interpreting oneself happens through the dialectical experience of belonging to a tradition and the experience of distance, alienation, and foreignness from that tradition. The past is at once very familiar to us and strangely foreign to us; it is both our own past and a past that nevertheless happened to someone else. Since memory is always of the past, the deposit of memories in our habits, in our bodies, in specific places each of us holds dear, and in the continuation of institutions provides the necessary stability for self-understanding insofar as they help to perpetuate particular social practices and preserve communal relationships. The significance of this form of memory saturates communal existence, often underlying explicit knowledge of it because it does its work tacitly, without explicit awareness. At the same time, such practices and habits never completely overcome the sense of distance and absence of the past. In order to remember something, as noted above, it must have come to an end. The sense of the past as having passed on can lead to melancholy, mourning, regret, remorse, or nostalgia. In each of these experiences, the painful recognition that the past cannot be changed is central.

Historical understanding and interpretation aim at overcoming the distance between the past and the present to which the interpreter belongs, and incorporate this

distance into one's own identity, while at the same time recognizing and preserving its foreignness. To the extent that memory forms a core part of identity, it contributes to the establishment of habits, institutions, and places that help to characterize the ethos of a community. Memory, furthermore, is intimately connected to a demand that certain images, events, and traces be preserved as a kind of bearing witness to the past, and transmitted as debt owed to the past. To fail to bear witness to the past would be to fail to be a member of the community, insofar as such a failure damages and betrays the identity of the collective to which one belongs.

Chapter II: Authenticity, Historicity, and Community

"The past, from which the soul thought it had ransomed itself, stood there again with its demand, not as a recollection, but more terrifying than ever by having conspired with the future."¹⁰¹

--S. Kierkegaard

II.1 Introduction and Thesis

The next two chapters will be an examination of the meaning of historicity and the ways it gives rise to the possibility of communal identity first through the lens of Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics and then through his appropriation of Sophoclean tragic poetry during the 1930s. Specifically, I will show how the meaning of community and solidarity with others is achieved through the experience of one's own finitude, which is to say, one's own death. While it might seem that the experience of death isolates by individuating Dasein, I suggest that death instead opens Dasein to others by exposing it to the history that Dasein already is.

In this chapter, I develop the connection among a constellation of concepts — which include guilt, conscience, resoluteness, and repetition—that appear in *Being and Time*. These concepts designate the peculiar and finite way that human beings bear witness to the transmission of meaning, which is to say the way that we are our history. I argue that Heidegger's ontological conception of remembering essentially individuates each Dasein by confronting it with the finitude of its own particular historical situation. In other words, remembering occurs a call or summons to bear witness to the genesis of the meaning of one's own historical situation and to transmit such meaning for the future. Remembering, in short, is not primarily directed toward recovering the past "as it was," but instead it exposes each person to his or her ownmost future.

¹⁰¹ Søren Kierkegaard. *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Ed. and Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990): p. 344.

In developing my argument, I hope to make Heidegger an active participant in contemporary discussions about the meaning and possibility of collective memory. The study of collective memory has become an increasingly important way to show how representations of the past, including texts, monuments, memorials, and norms, can help to organize, structure, and perpetuate a shared identity for future generations.

Participation in such representations and rituals is essential for endowing the individual with a sense of identity within a community because it is an active and dynamic process of meaning-making through time. It is only because an individual is situated within a community that he or she can remember the past, even in apparently individual and utterly private situations. Insofar as memory is crucial to personal identity, such an identity arises out of a network of social and shared objects, institutions, events, and meanings. To be an individual is to be situated within an historical community.

I hope to use discussions of collective memory to shed light on Heidegger's formal account of historical human existence, both in its authentic and inauthentic forms, offered in *Being and Time*. Similarly, in appealing to Heidegger's account of historicity, I hope to show that memory is not merely a matter of a finished and completed past. In other words, memory is not merely a matter of keeping in mind certain events and historical figures. Rather, memory helps to structure the self-understanding of an individual and community by exposing the past as a challenge to transform and revitalize the possibilities of our own future. This understanding of memory is a matter of the way one takes a stand on the meaning of the past. To show this, I interpret the contemporary distinction between memory and history, where memory refers to those cultural institutions, rituals, and practices that preserve a community's identity and where history

refers to the work carried about by historians and their practices of historiography, in terms of Heidegger's distinction between history as the experience of the origins of historical meaning (*Geschichte*) and History (*Historie*), which Heidegger suggests objectifies and ultimately forgets the history (*Geschichte*) that Dasein is.

The distinction between history (*Geschichte*) and History (*Historie*) provides a link between Heidegger's phenomenological years and his turn to poetic language that would reveal the truth of Being. He opposed the academic and scientific understanding of history to the lived experience of history. Heidegger's philosophical contribution to our understanding of the significance of history diverges from those speculative theories of history that Marx or Hegel offer. Furthermore, he is not interested in offering an account of the study of history, which would provide the epistemic criteria and methodology for the selection of documents, procedures in accurately dating events, and determining the particular causes or intentions of agents' actions. His interest instead is to show the way that history existentially individuates each Dasein. At issue in such a problem is the sense or meaning history has for human existence. By emphasizing the way that the past claims or summons us, Heidegger transforms the meaning of heritage and tradition in two ways. First, he shows that the past is not only a repository for dateable facts, events, or personages, and that meaning of history is not confined to an attempt to reproduce or represent the interests held by agents and their peers. Second, he shifts the emphasis of heritage from a passive reception of traditions, legacies, rites, and rituals from previous generations to a freely chosen appropriation of such a past on the part of Dasein itself. Historical Dasein discloses and enacts history, allows one to encounter a world.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first introduces the problem of

remembering and forgetting in the analytic of Dasein by articulating the main aims of *Being and Time*. The second and third sections examine the inauthentic and authentic ways that Dasein remembers the past. The fourth section argues that because Heidegger's account of authenticity remains focused on the first-person experience of the past, it is unable to give an account of the ways that we are responsible for the way that we exist from others.

II.2. Forgetting the Question of Being

Before presenting how Dasein's particular hermeneutic situation helps to constitute the way it experiences its past, it will first be necessary to outline briefly the central aims and structure of *Being and Time*. What first strikes the attentive reader is, as the opening pages of *Being and Time* make clear, that Heidegger is less concerned with the way we remember the past than he is with confronting the persistent threat of forgetting the fundamental question of philosophy. Forgetting this decisive question is different from the forgetfulness that arises as a result of the distinction between the present and the past. Rather, Heidegger is concerned with a kind of philosophical, even ontological, forgetfulness—we forget that which underlies our judgments, comportments, and existence but is nevertheless necessary for us to be able to be at all. The question of Being has thus been forgotten, and it is only on the basis of such forgetfulness that the question of Being can be explicitly retrieved and posed again (BT 21/SZ 2). By framing the question of Being in this manner, Heidegger claims that that remembering is meaningful only insofar as it attempts to recover something from forgetfulness. In order to see how he argues this, it will first be necessary to detail the significance of basic

problem Heidegger identifies in *Being and Time*, as well as sketch out the proper mode of access that will allow a retrieval of the question of Being.

II.2.1. Heidegger's Aims and Method

Throughout the 1920s, Heidegger employs hermeneutics as his preferred methodology to articulate the basic sense and meaning of pre-theoretical life. What interests him is the way that life is meaningful prior to the application of theories and concepts. The meaning of human existence is not dependent on objective or abstract concepts, but is instead given to humans in the immediacy of existing. Theodore Kisiel concisely summarizes Heidegger's lifelong topic, "the true locus of our experience is not in objects or things which 'in addition are then interpreted as signifying this or that,' but rather the signifying element itself now dynamized and set in motion, the 'It' that 'worlds.'"¹⁰² This dynamic signifying movement allows one to make sense of oneself, of others, and of one's surroundings, environment, and historical situation in the first place.¹⁰³ In order to see how he approaches the basic question of *Being and Time*, it will first be helpful to trace in a brief sketch some of the ways that Heidegger articulated this problem in the years leading up to *Being and Time*'s publication. Additionally, because Heidegger sometimes treats some central issues in *Being and Time* rather hastily, notably

¹⁰² Theodore Kisiel, "Why Students of Heidegger Will Have to Read Emil Lask," *Heidegger's Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretive Signposts*. Ed. Alfred Denker and Marion Heinz (New York: Continuum, 2002): p. 130.

¹⁰³ Recently, a number of commentators, including John Van Buren, Thomas Sheehan, and Theodore Kisiel, have come to the conclusion that Heidegger's transformation of the "question of Being" is so radical that the term "Being" as a marker for his life-long project is misleading. Indeed, to use the word "Being" to name Heidegger's concern is misleading and confusing if we do not inquire into what it is that makes raising it as a question possible. Throughout his writings, Heidegger takes pains to determine the way that before theory, before categories, before concepts, life is already meaningful, and he offers various terms for this including, "Dasein," "factual life experience," "Beying," "transcendence," "*Ereignis*," and "dwelling" to name a few.

the connection between conscience and historicity, referring back to these earlier texts will help us understand their significance more clearly.

By most accounts, Heidegger found his philosophical voice and broke through to the topic that would be his life-long concern in War Emergency Seminar of 1919. In the closing hours of the semester, he introduces hermeneutics by saying

The gripping experiencing of lived experience that takes itself along is the understanding intuition, the *hermeneutical intuition*, the originary phenomenological back-and-forth formation of concepts from which all theoretical objectification, indeed, every transcendental positing, falls out.¹⁰⁴

The “hermeneutical intuition” refers to the method through which he will explicate the pre-theoretical, immediate sense of life. Such a method is not to be carried out from an abstract, or third-person, perspective. It is instead to be a kind of lived experience, one which is already caught within a web of meaning. He applies this starting point in his 1920-1921 courses on religious life, which often begin with a description of the ways that life is *already* religious. Doing so involves making the implicit sense and meaning of religious practices, rituals, and beliefs explicit. By beginning with the rich meaningfulness of life, prior to theoretical reflection, Heidegger intends to capture the sense of life without reducing it to an objective content.

Later, in the 1923 course, *Ontology: the Hermeneutics of Facticity*, Heidegger provides the following formal definition of hermeneutics: “a definite unity in the actualizing ...of the *interpreting of facticity* in which facticity is being encountered, seen,

¹⁰⁴ Martin Heidegger. *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*. Trans. Ted Sadler (London: Athlone Press, 2000), as cited in Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 22.

grasped, and expressed in concepts.”¹⁰⁵ The schematic definition suggests that the phrase “hermeneutics of facticity” should be understood in two senses. On one hand, it designates a particular method and subject matter; it is the interpretation of factic life. On the other hand, it suggests that factic life is itself interpretive. Hermeneutics brings factic life into clarity and factic life itself is hermeneutic and essentially interpretive. The hermeneutics of facticity is the formal articulation of life experience by life experience itself. On the basis of this definition, Heidegger goes on to claim that

Hermeneutics has the task of making the Dasein which is in each case our own accessible to this Dasein itself with regard to the character of its being, communicating Dasein to itself in this regard, hunting down the alienation from itself with which it is smitten. In hermeneutics what is developed for Dasein is a possibility of becoming and being for itself in the manner of an *understanding* of itself.¹⁰⁶

Not only is Dasein’s factic life to be understood as an activity of interpretation, but hermeneutics itself can bring Dasein’s very interpretive tendency to fruition.

Hermeneutics is successful only to the extent that it makes possible an explicit form of self-understanding.

Importantly, a hermeneutic methodology is not an algorithm for calculating or deriving truths. It instead belongs to a “hermeneutics of facticity,” which attempts to uncover the pre-conceptual meaningfulness of human life, which is often forgotten or unremarked upon in everyday experience and life. Heidegger’s hermeneutic approach to facticity begins with the position that the sense of life is not initially explicit, and that in the immediacy of living we are not concerned explicitly with its sense. Such a methodology can be carried out only on the basis of a kind of first-person perspective,

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans. John van Buren. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999): p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p. 11.

and one which stays close to lived experience and brings it to a kind of fulfillment. Similarly, the plan of *Being and Time* first delimits the ways that Dasein already exists as forgetful of its own Being, and then show, on the basis of such forgetting, that it is possible to retrieve its ownmost Being from the threat of falling into total oblivion.

On the basis of these early lectures, *Being and Time* builds on the model of a hermeneutic argument, in which the meaning and force of a lost question is to be retrieved by carefully working out the tendency of the present situation.¹⁰⁷ Heidegger's objective, put succinctly, is to work out "the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely by showing that time is the horizon for any understanding of Being whatsoever" (BT 19/SZ 1). Whereas ontology has traditionally been conceived as an inquiry into what is, Heidegger argues that such an approach forgets the difference between Being and beings, or the "ontological difference."¹⁰⁸ In doing so, the philosophical tradition has interpreted beings from the point of view of their substantiality and persistence, which is, Heidegger points out, only one modality of temporality: the present. Heidegger's task, therefore, is to show how the unity of temporality—the past, present, and future—makes possible the question of Being at all. As such, Heidegger's work may be best understood as a project of reawakening the forgotten ways that time itself structures both human existence and the understanding of Being.

But, why should we think that the question of Being needs to be raised again? Is not this question too abstract and obscure? Heidegger recognizes that the current fashion

¹⁰⁷ Hans Ruin, *Engimatic Origins: Tracing the Theme of Historicity in Heidegger's Works* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger makes this point explicitly in his lecture immediately following the publication of *Being and Time*. Cf. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988): p. 318ff.

in philosophical circles is to ignore such a question, and offers several reasons why we might think that the question regarding the meaning of Being need not be reopened: 1) Being is the most universal and empty of all concepts; 2) Being is ultimately indefinable because it cannot be derived from higher concepts or presented through lower concepts; and 3) the meaning of Being is obvious since everyone understands it immediately, as in such phrases as “The sky is blue,” or “I am happy” (BT 22-23/SZ 3-4). Heidegger does not recount these prejudices in order to refute them, but rather to better understand their origin and remind the reader why the question of Being may seem superfluous.

Importantly, the third reason—that we implicitly understand the meaning of Being—motivates the necessity for posing the question of Being again. This is the hermeneutic situation of the present age. Heidegger writes, “the fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise the question again” (BT 23/SZ 4). If we were content to let such a question remain shrouded, we could not assess the conditions of possibility for other regional or ontic inquiries, such as politics, ethics, anthropology, and the natural sciences. If phenomenology is to uncover how meaning is possible in concrete contexts, then it must also be able to disclose how such uncovering is possible. If, however, it cannot reveal how such disclosure is possible it cannot reveal the possibility of meaning as given in concrete contexts. Thus, at stake in ignoring or forgetting the question of Being is the prospect of nihilism, which is to say, meaning might come to naught. To reopen the question of Being should thus have significant consequences not only for the ways that we understand the most basic philosophical question. It should help clarify the meaning of our own temporal existence and the

meaning of history insofar as temporality is the ground of Being.

II.2.2 From Understanding to Tradition

In order to clarify the meaning that history has for life, it will be first useful to delineate Dasein's peculiar hermeneutic situation. In its experience of the world, Dasein encounters things not as inert, brute objects upon which it then imposes meaning, but instead as things that already have significance. Part of what accounts for the significance that things have is that Dasein grows into inherited contexts of meaning; it experiences its world as have already been interpreted. Such interpretations lay out the specific possibilities that Dasein can then take in understanding its own being. To have a tradition means to identify with those practices and world into which one was thrown, thereby transmitting them and preserving them as true. The hermeneutic circle of understanding, interpretation, and transmission of possibilities thus becomes the site where Dasein's tradition happens.

Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's world begins with an account of Dasein "as it is *proximally and for the most part* – in its average everydayness" (BT 37-38/SZ 16). In such average, everyday existence, Dasein need not explicitly know or reflect on its experiences or their meaning. It has, Heidegger notes, "grown into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself primarily and, within a certain range, constantly" (BT 41/SZ 20). This feature of Dasein's Being is significant because it reveals that Dasein is unique because it has a pre-ontological understanding of possibilities for being, given to it by its tradition. As such, the "understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is

ontological' (BT 32/SZ 12). Dasein already understands the meaning of "to be" in its everyday life, which becomes manifest in the way that it deals with its world.

What, however, does it mean to say that Dasein has a pre-ontological understanding of Being? Heidegger describes Dasein as Being-in-the-world in order to capture a sense of the way that Dasein finds itself already involved in the project of making sense of things, itself and others. "In understanding its own Being," Heidegger writes, Dasein "has a tendency to do so in terms of that entity towards which it comports itself proximally and in a way which is essentially constant – in terms of the 'world'" (BT 36/SZ 15). It is familiar with those things that it help it "make do," even if such familiarity is often silent. Dasein's "making do" and "dealing with" things indicate that it is a "clearing" in and through which beings become manifest. This clearing, as Hubert Dreyfus explains, is another word for Dasein's situation: "Current Dasein...is always in the world by way of being in a situation—dealing with something specific in a context of things and people, directed toward some specific end, doing what it does for the sake of being Dasein in some specific way."¹⁰⁹ In its situation, Dasein takes care of things. This context, however, is not merely characterized by Dasein's immediate surroundings. Such a situation is, in Heidegger's terminology, its disclosed in the way that Dasein finds itself which is indicated by the use of the term *Befindlichkeit*. It refers to the existential structure of Dasein's Being that allows the world to matter to it. Things have salience – they are attractive, boring, tempting, repelling, and so forth. When it deals with things, there is typically little need to express what one is doing. Dasein finds itself immersed in its daily activities, actively trying to get things done.

¹⁰⁹ Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*, Division I (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991): p. 163.

To say that Dasein is characterized by a pre-ontological understanding reorients the meaning of human existence from a subject that possesses or is defined by certain properties to one that understands its existence in terms of possibilities. Understanding, on Heidegger's account, is intimately connected to Dasein's ability-to-be. To understand oneself in terms of possibilities means to understand oneself in terms succeeding or failing to live up to the meaning of such possibilities. For example, I can understand myself as a student by fulfilling some institutional criteria, such as enrolling in a college and courses; however, the existential understanding of such possibilities entails that I can only be a student by continually living up to what it means to be a student or failing to do so. By situating understanding in such terms, Heidegger suggests that understanding is primarily a "know how" or facility with things and not a theoretical or scientific "know that." Thus, in being a student, I understand my current situation in terms of knowing how to participate in academic life, which would include knowing how to study, write, and so forth. This means that Dasein is essentially defined by the future. "As projecting," Heidegger writes, "understanding is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it *is* its possibilities as possibilities" (BT 185/SZ 145). Understanding is the mode of Dasein's Being wherein possibilities of being involved in the world, with others, are realized as possibilities for it to take up.

By understanding, Heidegger therefore does not refer to a specific kind of cognition, one akin to explaining or conceptualizing, or an explicit grasping of something (BT 385/SZ 336). Rather, taking a cue from the everyday sense of understanding, which means something like "being able to manage" or "being a match for" something, Heidegger suggests that the existential meaning of understanding does not refer to those

things over which we have competence, but rather the competence we have at existing as the kind of being that we are (BT 183/SZ 143). Understanding is an ability by means of which Dasein knows how to do something. In understanding, we do not necessarily have explicit perception of the things around us, but rather they are available for us to use. It is because Dasein has practical know-how that it can encounter things in terms of their possibilities – that is, things can be useful, a hindrance, or indifferent to Dasein's projects. As such, understanding does not consist in one's explicitly being aware of carrying out something. It is instead the non-explicit teleologically structured way that Dasein manages to go about its activities for the sake of itself.

Interpretation, by contrast, emerges from the unthematized situation that Dasein implicitly and non-thematically understands. Heidegger writes,

To say that "circumspection discovers" means that the "world" which has already been understood comes to be interpreted....All preparing, putting to rights, repairing, improving, rounding out, are accomplished in the following way: we take apart (*auseinanderglegt*) in its 'in-order-to' that which is circumspectively ready-to-hand, and we concern ourselves with it in accordance with what becomes visible through this process. That which has been circumspectively taken apart...has the structure of *something as something*. (BT 189/SZ 149)

Interpretation is the act of making the meaning of what one is doing explicit and helps reveal the way that something appears *as* something. Interpretation thus works out possibilities that have already been projected in understanding, and makes explicit what was previously implicit. The process of making the pre-understanding explicit, however, does not leave the way that we are engaged with the world unchanged. Rather, in the process of explicitly laying out possibilities, Dasein can discover new possibilities for understanding and interaction.

Further possibilities arise when Dasein makes explicit those possibilities that were implicitly understood. Heidegger observes that the spectrum of interpretation runs from “the kind of interpretation which is still wholly wrapped up in a concerned understanding and the extreme opposite case of a theoretical assertion about something present-at-hand” (BT 201/SZ 158). Thus, we interpret a hammer, for example, when we use it in hanging a picture on the wall, and when we discard it without further ado as being unusable or unsuitable. We also offer an interpretation of the hammer when we explicitly enumerate those properties that make it a good hammer, such as its weight and the materials that give it its hardness. The explicit statement can disclose the ready-to-hand tool in such a way that it reveals the primordial way that it is given, that is, in Dasein’s getting to work at something, is concealed. Assertion conceals the original way that meaning is formed, which is to say, through concerned involvement with the world.

Interpretation need not be construed as essentially linguistic; interpretation does not require explicitly expressing something in propositions. Rather, meaning found in interpretation Heidegger notes, precedes its explicit articulation. “To significations,” Heidegger writes, “words accrue” (BT 204/SZ 161). This suggests that there is a level of meaning formation that occurs at a level prior to interpretation. This level, he argues, is “discourse.” Discourse is, Hans Ruin writes, “a pre-linguistic discursiveness... within which the ‘interpretive’ movement operates, or out of which it arises.”¹¹⁰ This pre-linguistic discursivity means that, Heidegger explains, “in language, as a way things have been expressed or spoken out, there is hidden a way in which the understanding of Dasein has been interpreted” (BT 211/SZ 167). Because of such discursivity underlies Dasein’s

¹¹⁰ Ruin, *Enigmatic Origins*, p. 98.

interpretation of the world, there always will be new ways to interpret and understand the world.

Discourse, furthermore, is the articulation of intelligibility (BT 203/SZ 161), and as such must be intersubjective. This is because discourse helps constitute Dasein's way to be with others, specifically through communication of shared dispositions and understandings. "In discourse," Heidegger posits, Dasein's "being-with is 'explicitly' shared and so does the understanding of Being-with...Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-state-of-mind and a co-understanding" (BT 205/SZ 162). The totality of significations that have been brought to language or otherwise expressed helps to preserve and harbor "an understanding of the disclosed world and therewith, equiprimordially, an understanding of the Dasein-with of Others and of one's own Being-in" (BT 211/SZ 168). For objects, others, and the world to be significant, they must be part of a shared world, whose intelligibility has already been expressed.

Heidegger concludes that "the understanding which has thus already been 'deposited' in the way things have been expressed, pertains just as much to any traditional discoveredness of entities which may have been reached as it does to one's current understanding of Being and to whatever possibilities and horizons for fresh interpretation and conceptual Articulation may be available" (BT 211/SZ 168). Once an interpretation gets expressed in language, it becomes the shared property of a community of speakers. As we become competent in speaking, we become acculturated to a form of life. Possibilities are handed down, shared, and safeguarded. In this manner, we come to inhabit, though in a largely tacit way, a definite heritage and tradition.

On this account, understanding, interpretation, and the expression of possibilities in language help to constitute the way that tradition becomes transmitted to future generations. In Dasein's everyday understanding, the possibilities it "has" are so familiar to it so as to be unremarkable and unremarked upon. These possibilities cannot be separated from the situation in which Dasein finds itself. As it appropriates or lays hold of some possibilities and not others, it interprets itself. In so doing, it makes its interpretation of those possibilities explicit, and thereby makes those possibilities public. The next generation will find itself similarly situated, with possibilities that are more or less available to it, which form the background texture of their own Being-in-the-world. In this manner, tradition thus becomes integral to understanding who Dasein is. Tradition involves a realm of previously articulated possibilities, which form the familiar background for our self-interpretation.

This suggests that we cannot understand who we are without understanding our relationship to tradition, even if such understanding is tacit. We find ourselves in a world, attuned to it in a specific way. Heidegger's notion of *Befindlichkeit*, which William Richardson characterizes as one's already-having-found-oneself-there-ness, suggests that the past has made us who we are.¹¹¹ This suggests that a kind of memory plays an important role in Dasein's understanding of itself, its world, and others. By finding ourselves already in a particular place, with determinate possibilities, we find ourselves with particular possibilities for understanding and already legitimated ways of interpreting our environment. Nevertheless, we are not passive vessels, determined by the possibilities that tradition offers. Rather, because tradition offers directions and

¹¹¹ William Richardson. *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*. (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1963): p. 64.

possibilities for understanding ourselves, it implicates us in its transmission. It could be said that in interpreting ourselves in light of tradition, we enact it. Insofar as we continue to interpret ourselves in light of such possibilities, we transmit them to others. The interpretation of ourselves as being certain kinds of people, and as living up to or failing to live up to certain norms, helps to hand down these possibilities to future generations. As a heritage continues to develop, certain possibilities will remain “in play,” and other will fade from significance. Some possibilities, in other words, cease to be legitimate possibilities to pursue. In short, this account of the meaning of tradition is neither an explicit achievement of a subject, nor is it performed in isolation from others.

II.2.3. Idle Talk: The Transmission and Decline of Tradition

If all Heidegger had to say about this topic was that the transmission of tradition occurs through the on-going activity of interpretation, his thesis would be unremarkable. The above account, however, does not exhaust Heidegger’s description of the significance the relationship to the past past plays in Dasein’s existence. He makes two further claims about the effect that tradition exerts on Dasein’s particular situation. The first is that tradition tends to decline and fall into a superficial level that blocks access to the possibility of properly appropriating the meaning it offers. The second claim is that as it tends to make things self-evident, tradition tends to perpetuate certain interpretations and possibilities at the expense of others. The result of these two tendencies levels meaning and closes off certain possibilities for meaning that can reveal different ways to understand human life.

Heidegger introduces the term “falling” in order to capture the way that Dasein becomes absorbed in the world, caught up in its everyday affairs, but without taking notice of its very Being. Falling names one way, perhaps the primary way, in which Dasein is a self. Falling and its counterpart, inauthenticity, play a central role in Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s everyday existence. In order to understand what “falling” means, it may be useful to first note what it does not mean. First, Heidegger is clear in suggesting that falling does not refer to some sort of metaphysical deficiency or a failure to live up to the demands of a universal human nature. He similarly suggests that inauthenticity does not signify “really not authentic” “as if in this mode of Being, Dasein were altogether to lose its Being” (BT 220/SZ 176). Furthermore, falling should not be taken to suggest that Dasein has fallen from a pristine state into the mire of the world, nor is it a theological understanding of human existence in terms of a sinful nature. Rather, falling, like understanding, disposition, and discourse, is an existential feature of Dasein – as long as it is, it exists as falling.

Inauthenticity designates one of the ways that Dasein can exist as falling. Dasein’s everyday way to be a self is one in which it abdicates responsibility for itself. Inauthenticity “does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world—the kind which is completely fascinated (*benommen*) by the ‘world’ and by the Dasein-with of Others in the ‘they’” (BT 220/SZ 176). Dasein’s fascination with the world is a kind of “numbing” of possibilities. How does the everyday experience of the world anesthetize the way that Dasein feels? What are the traits of inauthentic existence?

Befitting a phenomenological approach to the matters themselves, Heidegger does not define inauthenticity in necessary and sufficient terms. Rather, he identifies a cluster of structural features that characterize the experience of being inauthentic. Over two quick pages, Heidegger characterizes inauthenticity as being tempting, tranquilizing, alienating, entangling, and turbulent (BT 221-223/SZ 177-178). There is, admittedly, a certain self-evidence regarding the meaning of inauthenticity with these terms; their relationship, however, remains rather unclear. First, it may help to dispel a common interpretation of the meaning of inauthenticity. While these terms appear to suggest inauthenticity and falling is morally evil, Heidegger cautions that “our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein” (BT 211/SZ 167). It is not that inauthenticity ought to be avoided, but that we should be wary of importing moralistic language in a description of human existence. In short, because these terms are used to describe the meaning of Dasein’s everyday existence rather than morally censure those people whom we might think to be inauthentic we should attend to their existential and ontological meanings.

“Being-in-the-world,” Heidegger writes, “is in itself *tempting*” (BT 221/SZ 177). By characterizing the world as “tempting,” Heidegger reiterates that his conception of the self is not a static unchanging identity, but is instead a movement, which is manifested in the ways that Dasein is oriented toward practical activities that form the core of its identity. Such a movement is one in which Dasein plunges itself or, rather, is pulled into its everyday concerns. Rather than suggest that such activities are conscious compartments that it willingly and knowingly takes up, its practical activities constitute its routine – Dasein experiences its day to day life in terms of the things that need to get

done and tasks that need to get accomplished. Certain tasks need attention, and other projects can draw us into them fully absorbing us in finishing it. Heidegger had earlier formulated this point thusly, “Dasein finds ‘itself’ proximally in *what* it does, uses, expects, avoids – in those things environmentally ready-to-hand with which it is proximally *concerned*” (BT 155/SZ 119). In short, the jobs, chores, and other tasks come to have a weight to them, which claims Dasein’s attention to ensuring that these things get done. The result of this is that Dasein tends to think of itself in terms of what it does.

Why should we think of life as being “tempting” in the first place? To call life tempting suggests that it seduces or entices us to live such a life. We saw above that engaging oneself in one’s practical affairs appears to exhibit a tendency such that Dasein is drawn into them. But this is not all that Heidegger has to say about the tempting quality of our practical activities. Earlier in *Being and Time*, Heidegger further argues that what makes life tempting is that it levels down all possibilities for Being by controlling “every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted, and it is always right” (BT 165/SZ 127). It does so because “it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to the ‘heart of the matter’...what has been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone” (BT 165/SZ 127). Dasein’s everyday life helps to circumscribe the possibilities that it has for understanding and interpreting its existence. This urge to make things available and familiar as a matter of course is rooted in a desire to “guarantee to Dasein that all the possibilities of its Being will be secure, genuine, and full” (BT 222/SZ 177). There is no need to look into things because everything is in its right place, and, if not, it can be made readily available.

Dasein, in other words, wants to be disburdened of its possibilities. Most forcefully, it wants to abdicate responsibility for its self; it does not want to be accountable for who it is. For this reason, it takes refuge in common appeals to the “one.” Because its everyday public life levels down possibilities, Dasein is disburdened from taking responsibility. Dasein does things because that is the way that “one” does it. Practices, judgments, decisions are justified because Dasein can always appeal to a timeless, abstract norm: things have always been done that way. However, such an appeal is dubious because it is supposed to be timeless precisely because such a justification deprives Dasein of its answerability. No one has to own up to a decision or claim a particular way of doing things as one’s own because it can always pass off responsibility to an anonymous other, the “one” or “they.” In making such appeals, Dasein is not so much attempting to get away with anything morally problematic; it instead justifies its practices with the appeal to the anonymous and abstract “one,” because such a justification affords it some security and some refuge. Everything appears to be as it should be.

Everyday life is tempting because it makes things easier for Dasein. Nevertheless, while the “tempting tranquilizing” of Dasein’s everyday possibilities is meant to find security amidst the vicissitudes of life, Dasein in fact “drifts along toward an alienation” and dispersion among its possibilities (BT 222/SZ 178). Heidegger’s initial description of the alienation of its everyday life focuses on Dasein’s self-absorption. It tends to get caught up in trying to “figure out” who it is, and in doing so constructs character types (Cf., BT 222/SZ 178). A contemporary analogue might be to find some solace and

direction for life in self-help books or writing a memoir to help one come to terms with a certain part of one's life.

However, a different kind of alienation comes to the fore when considering the various projects in which we are engaged. For example, in his discussion of curiosity, Heidegger suggests that the fore-sight that partially characterizes the possibility for understanding can become "idle curiosity." The German word Heidegger uses, "*Neugier*," suggests that circumspection can become a greed for the new. Curiosity sees "not in order to understand what is seen (that is, to come into a Being towards it) but *just* in order to see. It seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty" (BT 216/SZ 172). Because of its inability to tarry and observe, Dasein is distracted. Curiosity constantly uproots Dasein, and moves it from one fad to the next. Such curiosity knows "just in order to have known" (BT 217/SZ 173).

Heidegger reinforces this point later, at §75, in order to sharpen the difference between the distracted, inauthentic Dasein and the steadfast and loyal authentic Dasein. He writes, "everyday Dasein has been dispersed into the many kinds of things which daily 'come to pass'" (BT 441/SZ 389). One's identity is forged by "the opportunities and circumstances which concern keeps 'tactically' awaiting in advance" (BT 441/SZ 390). Such opportunities present the next new thing that Dasein must keep up with, and forget what has come before. Heidegger dramatically writes, "blind for possibilities, [Dasein] cannot repeat what has been, but only retains and receives the 'actual' that is left over, the world-historical that has been, the leavings, and the information about them that is present-at-hand. Lost in the making present of the 'today,' it understands the 'past' in terms of the Present" (BT 443/SZ 391). What gives these claims their force is an

underlying supposition that historical meaning derives from Dasein's projection of possibilities into the future. In other words, what belongs to the "past" is not merely facts that happened; rather past "is first opened up for the present by its direction into the future."¹¹² Dasein's dispersion in its current possibilities means that it loses both an understanding of who it truly is and a sense of the concealed and forgotten possibilities contained in the cultural tradition it has inherited. Rather than retrieving those possibilities that the past harbors, Dasein's thinking becomes constricted, and the possibilities through which it understands itself and its world are judged according to their usefulness. Possibilities are appropriated only because Dasein knows the practice to be "tried and true." Otherwise, the possibilities are discarded as a mere relic of the past, suitable only for academic study.

It may be helpful to briefly take stock of where we are, before moving to the way that tradition is transmitted. First note what may seem to be a rather obvious point: human being is the site where tradition is transmitted, where memory occurs and is passed on to others. As we saw above, however, this does not commit us to an account of memory that is dependent on the conscious achievements of a subject. As was borne out by the account of inauthenticity that Heidegger presents, the transmission of tradition through memory occurs tacitly and uncritically to the extent that it is in fact a form of forgetting. Thus, rather than seizing on the possibility of appropriating one's own unique historical tradition, Dasein tends to transmit only the most superficial and banal interpretations, which become self-evident modes of life that resist being revealed for what they are. In the drive to seek security, Dasein disburdens itself of being responsible for itself, and thus traverses well-worn paths of thinking and acting. Despite this picture

¹¹² Benjamin Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*, p. 87

of human existence, Heidegger nevertheless makes it clear that our heritage contains concealed possibilities that can be revitalized and taken up anew. Inauthenticity, in other words, is but one way to dwell in our own historical world.

How do Dasein's possibilities come to be leveled down? More specifically, how do such possibilities come to be seen as the only viable possibilities for Dasein to understand itself from? How, in other words, does Dasein's tradition become transmitted, and what are the implications for the way that it understands and experiences the past? Furthermore, is it possible to retrieve such possibilities from oblivion?

Because discourse and communication are the way that Dasein's understanding gets shared and passed to others, we should look for an answer in Heidegger's account of "idle talk" (*Gerede*). As Heidegger makes clear, "discourse is expressed by being spoken out, and as always been so expressed" (BT 211/SZ 167). Such expression is communication, which itself aims at "bringing the hearer to participate in disclosed Being toward what is talked about" (BT 212/SZ 168). As such, expression and articulation make meaning available to others in such a way that we make such meaning worldly, which is to say something that can be talked about, passed along, discussed, challenged, taught, revised, and the like. In working out his conception of idle talk in a draft of *Being and Time*, Heidegger comments, "every Dasein moves in such an interpretation, which for the most part coincides with the way the generation of a particular time has been interpreted and which is modified with the time."¹¹³ A generation's self-understanding gets shared and passed along to other members of it, as well as being a response to the previous generation and taught to the next one.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985): p. 270

Heidegger names the availability of meaning to the members of a community “average intelligibility” (BT 168/SZ 212). Average intelligibility, as the name suggests, implies a basic level of understanding among communicators, and one which does not “have a primordial understanding of it” (BT 212/SZ 168). The reason for the lack of a primordial understanding of the matter, Heidegger quickly adds, is because “we already are listening only to what is said-in-the-talk as such. What is said-in-the-talk gets understood; but what the talk is about is understood only approximately and superficially” (BT 212/SZ 168). Thus, rather than sharing understanding with others in a genuinely meaningful and authentic way, all that gets understood is what gets passed about in chatter and gossip. These forms of communication serve “not so much to keep Being-in-the-world open for us in an articulated understanding, as rather to close it off, and cover up the entities within-the-world” (BT 213/SZ 169). Rather than opening possibilities for meaning, idle talk closes off such possibilities by making the matters appear to reach a common understanding.

Communication consists in sharing an understanding of one’s possibilities with others, and need not be an explicit transfer of meaning in statements and assertions. It also includes the ways that we can constitute a kind of rapport with one another. Insofar as idle talk is the primary mode in which possibilities are passed along, it becomes the central way that meaning gets passed along to others. Idle talk not only constitutes one of the fundamental ways that Dasein becomes entangled in its projects, but it also indicates the primary relationship it has to its past. Heidegger suggests that Dasein is not only “inclined to fall back upon its world (the world in which it is) and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light, but also...Dasein simultaneously falls prey to

the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold” (BT 42/SZ 21). By falling prey to the tradition, its contents are

made inaccessible, proximally and for the most part [and] it rather becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those ‘primordial’ sources from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite genuinely drawn. Indeed, it makes us forget that they have such an origin, and makes us suppose that the necessity of going back to these sources is something that we need not even understand. (BT 43/SZ 21)

Tradition does not explicitly give Dasein the means to understand its Being. It is instead an obstacle that impedes and “blocks access” to those sources for thinking. Furthermore, tradition uproots and disperses Dasein by constricting its “interests to the multifariousness of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophical activity in the most exotic and alien of cultures” (BT 43/SZ 21). Rather than uncover that which gives rise to thought, Dasein relationship to its past ultimately takes the form of historicism: it only looks to cultural traditions in order to determine their social function and validity. Finally, the transmission of tradition is such that it covers over, obliterates, and deprives Dasein of “its own guidance, whether in inquiring or in choosing” (BT 42-43/SZ 21). Such “external” traditions and practices conceal the way that Dasein’s factic life is always open to question. Dasein, in short, forgets its fundamental relationship to the primordial sources of meaning from which it draws its possibilities. Forgetting, in other words, belongs to a particular mode of Dasein’s being – that of inauthenticity.

The explication of Dasein’s Being, in other words, must be accompanied by a deconstructing of the sedimented layers of the past, “which would alone enable [Dasein] to go back to the past in a positive manner and make it productively its own” (BT 43/SZ 21). This means that Dasein’s proper Being can only be explicated through an

understanding of its historicity. Heidegger writes, “in its factual Being, any Dasein is as it already was, and it is ‘what’ it already was. It *is* its past, whether explicitly or not” (BT 41/SZ 20). Dasein’s everyday Being arises from an understanding, and even pre-understanding, of its historical Being. This means that the past is not some repository of facts or something that has “after-effects” on Dasein’s existence. Rather, “Dasein ‘is’ its past in the way of *its* own Being, which, to put it roughly, ‘historizes’ out of its future on each occasion” (BT 41/SZ 20). This means that the past is not something that “follows along after Dasein but [is] something which already goes ahead of it” (BT 41/SZ 20). The past should not be ontologically construed as something that is irretrievably lost. Rather, the ontological meaning of the past can only be understood in terms of Dasein’s possibilities.

Before characterizing the temporality of Dasein’s authentic existence, it will be useful to first draw some conclusions about the temporality of inauthentic Dasein. In inauthentic existence, Dasein loses itself in its concerns and becomes absorbed in the daily task of living. Rather than become concerned with its ownmost potentiality for Being, Dasein’s everyday existence involves the projection of a specific, existentiell, understanding of Being that is based on a non-thematic readiness for dealing or coping with things. Such facility with one’s daily activities, Heidegger suggests, corresponds with a kind of forgetfulness. Forgetfulness is not a relationship to past events, but rather concerns Dasein’s ownmost Being. In such ontological forgetting, Dasein closes itself off from the fact that its own Being is questionable. Who Dasein is can never be fully settled.

II.3 The Problem of Authenticity

If a specific kind of forgetting belongs to the mode of being inauthentic—that of forgetting that its own Being is at stake—it would seem natural to conclude that remembering belongs to the mode of being authentic. There is a broad consensus regarding the meaning and implications of inauthenticity – namely that it refers to the ways that Dasein avoids taking responsibility for who it is and for the way that it projects itself into possibilities, and lets itself be carried along by its daily concerns and the possibilities that are made available to it. Nevertheless, there is less agreement regarding the meaning of authenticity and its implications for understanding historicity. The understanding of the self, to say nothing of its communal existence or its relationship to the past, is thus still enigmatic. This situation, however, has started to change in recent years.¹¹⁴ I argue that authenticity indicates the way that Dasein takes responsibility for itself by wholeheartedly committing itself to itself. This wholehearted commitment to a vocation or calling clarifies the meaning that the past and history has for human life. My aim here is to show the way in which authenticity designates how human beings can take responsibility, or testify to, the history that we are—or, in Ricoeurian terms, authenticity is a kind of attestation through remembering.

However, before explicating my own account of authenticity, it will be useful to briefly sketch out several ways to understand the meaning of authenticity: one is existential-individualist in character, another more ontologically oriented, and the third is emphasizes the grasp of one's own existence as a narrative. These three interpretations dominate discussions of the meaning of authenticity. My aim is to incorporate certain

¹¹⁴ Francois Raffoul has perhaps the most complete account of selfhood and subjectivity in *Heidegger and the Subject* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 2001).

elements that each of these conceptions draws attention to while supplementing them with my own account. This should help render more clearly the meaning of authenticity as Heidegger presents it, as well as helping to articulate a more complete and nuanced understanding of it.

II.3.1. The Existential-Individualist Interpretation

One of the most dominant accounts of authenticity is the existential-individualist account. I name this account of authenticity “existential-individualist” partly because Sartre’s own definition of existentialism in the essay “Existentialism as a Humanism” explicitly acknowledges Heidegger as an inspiration, and partly because this interpretation tends to focus on the way the individual takes a stand apart from the anonymous public to create its own values and meaning. This tends to lead to the charge that Heidegger’s account of authenticity is incommensurable with communal existence.

Jacques Taminiaux, for one, argues that Heidegger affords too much authority to the individual Dasein, whose authenticity entails its isolation and detachment from social and communal concerns.¹¹⁵ Taminiaux characterizes Heidegger’s claim that “Dasein is in each case my own” as the culmination of the modern metaphysical tradition of subjectivity, and finally bringing it to its final “paroxysm.” He writes, “on the one hand, the project offers the most sobering and unrelenting description of finitude, and on the other hand, it turns out to be the last implementation of the absolute pretensions of metaphysics.”¹¹⁶ While Heidegger offers a careful and precise account of finitude, his account nevertheless “turns out to be the last implementation of the pretensions of

¹¹⁵ Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

¹¹⁶ Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, p. xix.

metaphysics.”¹¹⁷ This tension is encapsulated in the concise, yet powerful, phrase “Dasein exists for the sake of itself.” “These words,” Taminiaux writes, “signify that Dasein is always engaged in the care of itself, and of itself alone, and that Dasein wills itself exclusively...The Dasein of *Sein und Zeit* is open only to make room for a circle leading back to itself. Dasein has an authentic understanding if and only if it wants to be itself.”¹¹⁸ Taminiaux’s concern thus raises the problem about the ways that Dasein is related to others, especially as it concerns the ways that Dasein may not be able to be with others from out of its ownmost possibilities.

Patricia Huntington offers two reasons for interpreting Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s authenticity in terms of a dislocation between an individuated Dasein and the community in which it finds itself. The first, she writes, is that “he bases critique, undialectically, on the total *negation of what is*, namely the world of popular opinion and everyday practices.”¹¹⁹ Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s everyday social existence is, as this interpretation emphasizes, almost purely negative, employing pejorative phrases such as being “lost in” and “falling prey to” the anonymous norms of the everyday. In the social and political sphere, Dasein cannot be itself. Heidegger writes, for example, “falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time alienating” (BT 222/SZ 178). The alienation that arises through Dasein’s falling furthermore suggests “a kind of motion which constantly tears the understanding away from the projecting of authentic possibilities, and into the tranquilized supposition that it possesses everything or that everything is within reach” (BT 223/SZ 178). Everyday life

¹¹⁷ Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, p. xix.

¹¹⁸ Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology* p. xxi.

¹¹⁹ Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utopia, and Recognition: Kristeva, Heidegger, and Irigaray* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), p. xviii.

is reassuring because it presents values as being part of the texture of the world, already there for us, and therefore in no need of justification.

The second reason to be wary of Heidegger's account of authenticity, Huntington argues, is that "Heidegger grounds the recuperation of agency, undialectically, in a *transgressive dislocation* of prevailing social norms that *repudiates public accountability or normative theory in toto.*"¹²⁰ If Dasein cannot draw an authentic understanding of itself from the prevailing political or social categories, it can only retrieve itself by dislocating itself from the public sphere and the norms that govern the public arena. Dasein, on this interpretation, must "win itself" by attending to its ownmost possibilities and not those given to it by its tradition. The only imperatives that are binding for Dasein are those that it resolutely stands upon when it chooses itself. Indeed, when it resolves upon itself in the moment of decision (*Augenblick*), Dasein must divorce itself from the inauthentic traditions, practices, and norms of *das Man* that it previously unthinkingly relied upon for its possibilities. The implication thus is that Dasein, in being authentic, must be beholden only to those claims that arise from how it seizes on its *own* possibilities and not those given to it by another Dasein or its past. Rather than succumb to the anonymous standards of *das Man*, Heidegger suggests that Dasein stands against them, in either what amounts to a willful, perhaps even fascistic, positing of values or a kind of stoic withdrawal from the historically rich world and the world that it shares with others.

The language Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*, no doubt, gives the motivation for such a reading. For example, in his account of being-toward-death, which confronts Dasein with the possibility of impossibility—the experience of the possibility of its own nothingness—Heidegger suggests that Dasein finds a possibility that is non-relational,

¹²⁰ Patricia Huntington, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utopia, and Recognition*, p. xviii (Huntington's italics).

and thus individuates each Dasein in its own being. No one can die for me, and I cannot die for another. The emphasis placed on individuated Dasein, facing death, separated from others, seems to suggest at the very least that the problem of Dasein's relationship to others can only be inauthentic; to be with others means to deliver oneself over to *das Man* and abdicate responsibility for oneself. Tina Chanter writes "in the end, Heidegger's Dasein stands alone against the world, resolute in its finitude. Dasein's isolation is uncompromising. It begins and ends in the closed circuit of Dasein's own self-understanding."¹²¹ The image is one of a resolute Dasein standing alone, above the masses, triumphantly willing itself and creating its own values.

There is, no doubt, something to this interpretation of Dasein's authenticity, especially as it emphasizes the way that Dasein retrieves itself in Being-towards-death and insofar as it places respect for its individuated being at the center of its interpretation. Dasein in being authentic takes a stand on its own existence. However, insofar as it suggests that Dasein is alone responsible for the willful imposition of values this account appears to be significantly at odds with Heidegger's critique of subjectivity. Dasein is not a willful subject who creates values *ex nihilo* and imposes them on a valueless or neutral field of objects. Indeed, Heidegger seems to suggest that the Sartrean existential subject is but a product of the metaphysics of subjectivity, which argues that the subject is the origin and center of meaning.

Rather, Dasein is always situated within a world, claimed by the past even as it projects its possibilities. In Being-toward-death, for example, Dasein does not so much choose or create its values as it appropriates and recognizes that the values it lands upon

¹²¹ Tina Chanter, *Time, Death, and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) p. 106.

are always inherited and drawn from the past. Heidegger thus suggests that in being authentic, Dasein “discloses current factual possibilities...and discloses them *in terms of the heritage*” that it takes over (BT 435/SZ 383). Indeed, authentic resolve is not freedom from the past or freedom from the social and communal contexts in which Dasein finds itself as it is a freedom through an appropriation of those hidden and heretofore concealed possibilities that it inherits.

II.3.2. The Ontological Interpretation¹²²

The “ontological interpretation” integrates the conception of authenticity with Heidegger’s broader philosophical concerns—the project of delineating the possibility of raising the question of Being. Michael Zimmerman’s *Eclipse of the Self* and Thomas Sheehan’s work perhaps best represent this understanding of authenticity. Both focus primarily on the formal elements of Heidegger’s project, and make the connection between Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s existentials and Aristotle’s conception of Being explicit. While highlighting the continuity and the debt that Heidegger owes to the Aristotle and the Greeks, their account sometimes appears to offer a highly abstract, and even theoretical, account of human being.

Zimmerman describes authenticity thusly: “to be authentic means resolving to accept the openness which, paradoxically, one already is....Authenticity means to be most appropriately what one already is.”¹²³ In contrast to the existential account,

¹²² I take this particular name from Benjamin Crowe’s characterization of the different interpretations of authenticity, p. 164.

¹²³ Michael Zimmerman, *The Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger’s Concept of Authenticity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) p. xx.

Zimmerman emphasizes the “openness” that Dasein already is, is a temporal openness.¹²⁴ Thomas Sheehan offers a similar account in his account of authenticity as “waking up to and ‘allowing’ one’s appropriation-unto-beingness.”¹²⁵ In a different essay, he similarly characterizes authentic selfhood as when “man comes into his own by resolving not to be his own but to let himself go into the potentiality he already is. In so doing he wakes up to the fact that his transcendence is rooted in and governed by the *lethe*-dimension of disclosure.”¹²⁶ At the forefront of this interpretation is the notion that authenticity is that the individual has gained a more appropriate or proper understanding of itself through moments of intensification that disclose the truth of its disclosive existence. As such, conscience, *Angst*, and death all help to disclose the truth of Dasein’s very Being.

Authenticity is, in this reading, a kind of ontological insight into the nature of human being.¹²⁷ In being authentic, one has a particular understanding of the way that humans really are, and not as how it is in flight from the finitude of its facticity. Sheehan presents Heidegger’s understanding of authenticity as drawing on, and occupying a position in between, Plato’s objective-transcendent conception of Being and Aristotle’s completed and present perfect understanding of Being. Dasein’s Being, for Sheehan, is an existential a priori: it is that which is prior to and beyond determination. Sheehan’s interpretation of Heidegger thus places the account of authenticity into a broader theory of human nature.

¹²⁴ Zimmerman, *The Eclipse of the Self*, p. 41.

¹²⁵ Thomas Sheehan, “Heidegger’s ‘Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion,’” *The Personalist*, 60 (3) 1979: p. 624.

¹²⁶ Thomas Sheehan, “Time and Being 1925-1927” *Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, Vol. 1. Ed. Christopher Macann, (London: Routledge, 1992): pp. 29-67, p. 49.

¹²⁷ Crowe characterizes such an insight as a “cognitive achievement.” However, calling it “cognitive” seems a little too strong, as it does not appear that Sheehan indicates that Dasein comes to have a particular kind of knowledge about itself that it could express in propositional forms. Rather it is an insight into who one is.

While this account plays close attention to Dasein's temporal openness, it appears to be more of a "theory" of human nature or human Being. Insight into one's own Being, in other words, is an insight into the openness that one already is. At this point, it becomes difficult to pinpoint the way that authenticity is a way of existing that has practical implications. If authenticity is a transformation in the way that Dasein exists, it is difficult to see how an insight into its own nature can motivate it to change. In other words, the mere suggestion of a theory of human being does not, at least by itself, offer reasons for transforming one's style or mode of existence. For example, Sheehan suggests that there is an essential difference between retrieving specific past possibilities and retrieving one's essential "alreadyness," and that Heidegger is more concerned with the latter.¹²⁸ However, if this is the case, it becomes unclear what sort of relationship there is between the existential-ontological concerns of *Being and Time* and the existentiell-ontic realm. In other words, it obscures how the experience of our "alreadyness" is historical.

II.3.3. The Narrative-Coherence Interpretation

The final understanding of authenticity I want to consider is the "narrativist," which can be found in Charles Guignon's work.¹²⁹ In his essay "Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy," Guignon suggests that the distinctive temporal structure of authenticity "involves taking over the possibilities made by the past and acting in the

¹²⁸ Sheehan. "Heidegger's New Aspect: On *In-sein*, *Zittlichkeit*, and The Genesis of "Being and Time." *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 25 (1995): pp. 207-225, p. 220.

¹²⁹ While one may argue that Paul Ricoeur belongs in this tradition, considering his work on time and narrative, I will be arguing in chapter four that his position is different enough from Guignon's. Ricoeur's position, I argue, allows for human existence to be narrated while also recognizing the fundamentally incomplete and revisable nature of such a narrative through attestation. Others who work in the narrative-coherent tradition include Alistair MacIntyre and David Carr.

present in order to accomplish something for the future. Or to rephrase this in the narrativist mode, such a life is lived as a coherent story.”¹³⁰ What this means is that there Dasein has certain “constituent ends,” or ends that Dasein constitutes as a particular way of life and which it experiences its actions as integral to being a person of a particular sort. Such ends involve the way that Dasein takes up possibilities and “projects them as a coherent and unified configuration of meaning for its life as a whole.”¹³¹ For example, I might exercise not only to become healthy, but because that is what healthy people do. By thinking of Dasein in terms of a coherent and unified project of a story, Guignon emphasizes the ways that lived life is a process of self-building and self-composing into a unified whole that only makes sense in light of one’s own temporal finitude. An authentic life is meaningful, in other words, because of its temporal unity and its coherence.

The strength of this account of Dasein’s existence is that it emphasizes the difference between the “styles” of living authentically and inauthentically. To be authentic is to be focused and to recognize “the gravity of the task to which one is delivered over and to take full responsibility for one’s life.”¹³² Similarly, to be inauthentic means to be dispersed and distracted; it forgets that it is called upon to take a coherent stand in the world where the meaning of its existence is genuinely at stake.¹³³ Rather than understanding certain ends as constituting the meaning of its projects, in its inauthenticity, Dasein experiences life as a series of episodes that are more or less related, lacking cumulative significance and a sense of an overriding purpose. To be inauthentic

¹³⁰ Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy” in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. Ed. Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): pp. 215-239, p. 230.

¹³¹ Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983): p. 135.

¹³² Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* p. 135

¹³³ Guignon, “Authenticity, Moral Values, and Psychotherapy,” p. 227

means that one cannot see the point of its own life as a whole. In focusing on the difference in styles of life, rather than content, Guignon reveals that the difference between inauthentic existence and an authentically owned existence lies not in the content of one's life but rather in the style of one's life and "how" one lives life.

Guignon is surely right to suggest that the difference between being authentic and being inauthentic lies in the difference between focused and coherent activity and dispersed and distracted activity. Nevertheless, those moments that would enable Dasein to seize its ownmost Being are moments that cannot be easily assimilated into a narrative and even can call narrative coherence into question. As I will be arguing below, Dasein's relationship to its own death and its own birth cannot be understood in terms of events that frame its life. Rather, these two experiences offer Dasein the opportunity to reconfigure the meaning of its life. Indeed, the kind of biographical distance I would need to make sense of my life as a narrative just is not available to me as I live it. Indeed, insofar as the possibility of being authentic arises through the breakdown of meaning that occurs in such extraordinary instances, such as in conscience and *Angst*, Heidegger suggests that such experiences resist being incorporated into a narrative whole. Such events instead reveal that *who* Dasein is cannot be reduced to those actions or deeds that it commits.

Perhaps part of the problem with how Guignon understands authenticity lies in his use of the term "coherence" to explain Dasein's authentic, or owned, existence.

Coherence, as found in many philosophical discussions, refers to a particular kind of epistemic criteria, such that certain propositions are consistent with other propositions or are entailed by other propositions. This philosophical meaning of coherence thus

represents a real danger in using such a term to describe Heidegger's position. The coherence view of authenticity can call to mind a requirement to think of oneself and actions, as in Kant's practical philosophy. Furthermore, Dasein's existence is not primarily characterized by its cognitive achievements, such that authenticity is a matter of making beliefs cohere with actions. Instead, as Guignon himself notes, authenticity is a matter of *how* one lives rather than the beliefs that cohere together.

II.4. Death, Conscience, and History in *Being and Time*

Thus far, I have suggested that Dasein's inauthenticity is a matter of closing off and forgetting those possibilities that would allow it to grasp its own being. By uncritically accepting the traditional modes of self-understanding, Dasein participates in the transmission of tradition, though at the loss of appropriating those possibilities that arise from the structure of its own being. The question becomes one of elucidating a positive conception of Dasein's authentic being.

If, as I argued above, forgetting the question of Being belongs to Dasein's inauthenticity, then it would be natural to suggest that remembering it belongs to authenticity. Similarly, if the temptation to take it easy and avoid responsibility for oneself characterizes the meaning of inauthenticity, it should not be surprising to see that authenticity is characterized by the active appropriation of the possibility to be oneself. Indeed, to be oneself, as John Haugeland suggests, means living "in a way that explicitly has everything at stake."¹³⁴ To be Dasein authentically means taking over "the ultimate *riskiness* of its life as a whole—it lives resolutely as and only as ultimately

¹³⁴ John Haugeland, "Truth and Finitude: Heidegger's Transcendental Existentialism," in *Heidegger, Authenticity and Modernity: Essays in Honor of Hubert Dreyfus* Vol. 1. Ed. Jeff Malpas and Mark Wrathall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000): pp. 43-77 (73).

vulnerable.”¹³⁵ Following Haugeland, I suggest that risking one’s life by setting it at stake is best understood as a commitment to a vocational calling. Such a calling thus means being a witness to or enacting one’s own historical Being by remembering the past as a future possibility.

Human finitude provides the phenomenological context for understanding memory and history. Just as forgetting does not primarily refer to events in the past that Dasein can no longer recall to mind, remembering should not be taken as referring to a set of cognitive judgments that aims at recovering a sense of what actually happened. Remembering instead refers to the way that Dasein is open to its ownmost possibilities. This becomes clear in his work entitled *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, where he articulates a conception of authentic memory:

The basic fundamental-ontological act of the *Metaphysics of Dasein* as the laying of the ground for metaphysics is hence a “remembering again.” True remembering, however, must at all times interiorize what is remembered, i.e., let it again come closer and closer in its innermost possibility.¹³⁶

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues that the possibility of such “interiorization” first occurs in the experience of the possibility of one’s own death. “Authentic Being-towards-death,” Heidegger therefore claims, “is the hidden basis of Dasein’s historicity” (BT 438/SZ 386). The problem of history, and thus the problem of remembering, arises in conjunction with the problem of death. By exposing itself to its finitude, Dasein’s relationship to its past becomes manifest through such notable experiences as conscience, resoluteness, and repetition.

¹³⁵ Haugeland, “Truth and Finitude: Heidegger’s Transcendental Existentialism,” p. 352, fn. 9.

¹³⁶ Heidegger. *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): p. 164.

II.4.1. The Death of Dasein

In order to see how the experience of the past arises through a confrontation with one's own mortality, it will be necessary first to go into some detail about Heidegger's understanding of death. Heidegger raises the problem of death in order to bring into view the possibility of Dasein existing as a whole and as authentic. While the first division of *Being and Time* shows Dasein absorbed in its daily concerns, forgetful of its own Being, such an account neglects the conditions that make it possible for its own Being to become an issue for it. We can further wonder whether or not the existential account offered in the first division gets at the whole of Dasein insofar as it only focuses on the way that Dasein exists in its everydayness. As long as the analysis does not get at the way that Dasein exists toward its birth and towards its death, Heidegger cannot yet lay claim to bringing the whole of Dasein into view.

An account of Dasein's being-a-whole poses a problem from the very beginning: if Dasein's being is constituted by its possibilities, then as long as it is, it is "not yet."

Heidegger writes,

As long as Dasein is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which Dasein can and will be. But to that which is thus outstanding, the 'end' itself belongs. The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, to existence—limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Dasein. (BT 276-277/SZ 233-234)

In introducing the problem of death, Heidegger notes that there is "something still outstanding" in its Being. While Heidegger initially appears to connect this lack to Dasein's physical death, his subsequent analysis of guilt and conscience reaffirms that "it is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something to be settled*" (BT 277/SZ 236). Rather than describe the biological event of death, Heidegger

is concerned with developing an existential account of death. While Heidegger obviously wants to retain something of the common notion of death, as the cessation of possibilities, it is just as clear that he wants to reveal the ontological inadequacy of the biological understanding of death.¹³⁷ He thus takes special care to distinguish the existential conception of death from the end of life, which he calls “perishing,” and the demise (*Ableben*) of Dasein. Against these traditional and common understandings of wholeness and end, Heidegger offers an account of the way that, as Carol White writes, “the end of Dasein *qua* Dasein is the existential end which determines Dasein’s wholeness *as* an understanding of being.”¹³⁸ Because Dasein is not simply a biological entity, and has its own Being to be, it does not merely perish. Its end is distinctively its own.

Heidegger defines the meaning of death thusly: “death, as the end of Dasein is Dasein’s ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain, and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein’s end, in the Being of this entity towards its end” (BT 303/SZ 259). Befitting Heidegger’s characterization of the essence of Dasein lying in its existence and ability to be (BT 67/SZ 42), Dasein’s death is to be understood as a possibility. Nevertheless, the kind of possibility that characterizes death is a strange kind of possibility. Existentially understood, death is not a one time, sudden occurrence that happens at a specific time and place. Death, in other words, is not “being-at-an-end,” either biologically or physiologically, but is instead the way that Dasein is “being-

¹³⁷ Heidegger identifies several different ways that “something outstanding” becomes completed. The first example is one in which one has a debt that needs to be repaid, which indicates that a sum that is an aggregate of distinct parts. The second example refers to the phases of the moon. Against this example, Heidegger suggests that the moon is always full, and it is merely our perspective from Earth that makes it appear to wax and wane. A third example is of a piece of fruit, which in the course of ripening is in a constant state of immaturity and progressively matures.

¹³⁸ Carol White, *Time and Death: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude*. Ed. Mark Ralkowski (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) p. 71

toward-the-end.” Death is, in other words, the preeminent possibility of Dasein itself. It is a “way to be,” which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. From the moment that Dasein’s being is thrown into the world, Dasein is at the same time delivered over to the facticity of its own death. Dasein’s death is thus an existential feature of its Being, which determines the way that it lets its own being matter.

Death is, Heidegger writes in an odd turn of phrase, “the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all” (BT 307/SZ 262). To claim that death denotes the impossibility of existence suggests that Dasein is no longer able to be, and no longer able to understand itself in terms of its possibilities, or as Heidegger says it “is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there” (BT 294/SZ 250). Unlike other possibilities, death can only stand before us; it is constantly impending. “Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to actualize, nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*” (BT 307/SZ 262). Death is something that Dasein stands toward, which means, as Sean Ireton puts it, “[Dasein] continually relates to its end and is always aware that this limitation of being forms its horizon of existence.”¹³⁹ Rather than other possibilities that can be made actual, death, as a possibility, is one that, when actualized, renders us no longer able to be. Its status as an existential possibility is thus one that makes it always and only a possibility. By “standing towards” death, Heidegger stresses the way that death operates as a horizon of possibility against which we come to understand the significance of our own existence. This horizon does not as much limit and separate two distinct realms of being – death and life – as much as it contains and encompasses life.¹⁴⁰ Insofar as Dasein existence means

¹³⁹ Sean Ireton, *An Ontological Study of Death* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007): p. 249

¹⁴⁰ Carol White offers an appropriate metaphor to describe this difficult characterization. She suggests that the “clearing,” “opening,” or “lightening” that Dasein is, is akin to clearing in a forest: “a forest clearing highlights the things in it by setting them off against the dark background of the surrounding forest.” The

that it stretches out into its possibilities, their meaning only comes to light against the possibility of its death. Death helps to form that which it limits. As such, Heidegger writes, “death, in the widest sense, is a phenomenon of life” (BT 290/SZ 246).

What, then, does Heidegger mean by characterizing the impossible possibility of death as Dasein’s “ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped” (BT 294/SZ 251)? To characterize death as Dasein’s “ownmost” (*eigenst*) possibility, Heidegger stresses the way that the Being of Dasein is “in each case mine” (BT 67/SZ 41). By stressing death’s “ownmost” quality Heidegger reiterates that it is the most personal and intimate experience – “No one can take the Other’s dying away from him” (BT 284/SZ 240). Even if a person were to sacrifice herself for another, she is not taking the other’s dying away. In recognizing the way that death is in each case mine, Dasein avails itself of the possibility of laying hold of its own Being insofar as it recognizes it as solely its own possibility. Laying hold of such a possibility indicates that death is a non-relational possibility. Where Dasein’s possibilities help to circumscribe the various relationships it can enter into with others and with things, death “is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself toward anything, of every way of existing” (BT 307/SZ 262). Death thus “makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us” (BT 308/SZ 263). Such an individuating function of death is not necessarily sociological, but existential. Death throws Dasein back on itself to disclose its ability to be.

Death thus individuates Dasein. It furthermore cannot be “outstripped” or bypassed (*überholt*). Two further dimensions of death can clarify what this means: the

clearing refers to the realm of possibilities revealed to Dasein by Being; beyond the clearing, in the forest, lie impossibilities in the realm of Being’s concealment. Such impossibilities lie beyond our ability to represent or control them, yet are still part of the clearing. Cf. *Time and Death*, p. 74.

certainty of death, its indefiniteness. Because it is certain, it lurks behind all of our possibilities. Furthermore, because we do not know when it will happen, it constantly casts a pall over us. Death cannot be expected, as one might wait for the arrival of a train. Eventually the train arrives, and, once it has, we can view it as a past event, one that has been temporally surpassed. Death, by contrast, cannot be similarly expected or viewed as “on time” or “late.” It is instead an unsurpassable horizon that cannot be transcended. Because death is a possibility that retains its status as a possibility for as long as Dasein is alive, and because it threatens to undermine Dasein’s possibilities, it is the most extreme of possibilities.

The characteristics of the existential conception of death discussed above – that it is Dasein’s ownmost, non-relational possibility, not to be bypassed, certain and indefinite – offer a formal sketch of this phenomenon. However, because it is a sketch it is, as it now stands, incomplete. In order to flesh out some of its implications, Heidegger situates these features within the authentic and inauthentic modes of Dasein’s Being. Everyday Dasein will cling to life at all costs, and put off thinking about the possibility of its death. It tends to think of death as an event that may happen, but probably will not happen today. By refusing to claim death as its own possibility, Dasein becomes alienated from itself and takes refuge in its everyday affairs. Dasein tends to avoid confronting the possibility of its death, and instead, as noted above, opts to take things easy, tranquilizing itself in its everyday affairs. In consoling the dying, Dasein tends to assuage itself and others of the possibility of death (BT 297/SZ 254).

How does this compare to authentic Dasein’s Being-toward-death? In contrast to inauthentically fleeing death, the authentic way to be toward death involves making

Dasein's ownmost self manifest. In order to explain what this means, it may be useful to explore one claim Heidegger makes regarding death: "in the first instance, we must characterize Being-towards-death as a *Being towards a possibility* – indeed, toward a distinctive possibility of Dasein itself" (BT 305/SZ 261). Above, I noted the way that death is a peculiar kind of possibility, one which Heidegger often calls "the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein's existence." The possibility of death, however, is not something that can be actualized without obliterating Dasein's ability-to-be as such. What then does it mean to seize on the possibility of the impossibility of existing?

Heidegger names the ability to be authentically open to the possibility of death, "anticipation" (*Vorlaufen*). The term "anticipation" is a technical term, one which should not be understood as a kind of mental phenomenon similar to expectation or one in which a subject looks forward to a specific possibility. In "anticipating" its death, Dasein does not expect or await something to happen or brood about the event that will end its life. Rather, as the German *Vorlaufen* suggests, "anticipation" is a kind of metaphor that refers to the way that Dasein runs ahead (*Vor-laufen*) into the possibility of its death. For this reason, I will sometimes use "running ahead" or "forerunning" in characterizing the meaning of anticipation.

Dasein's anticipation of its death is one way for it to understand who it is, and as such anticipation is one way for Dasein to project itself into its possibilities. To run ahead suggests that Dasein propels itself into a possibility that cannot be realized. Such a possibility is also an impossibility. The limit that is death is thus one whose excessiveness increases as Dasein runs forward: "In anticipation, of this possibility it becomes 'greater and greater'; the possibility reveals itself to be such that it knows no

measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence” (BT 307/SZ 262). Thus, the possibility of death is not merely the oblivion of possibilities, but it is the most extreme of possibilities.¹⁴¹ To run ahead thus suggests a dynamic potentiating process that does not seek to master and manipulate a possibility, turning it into something actual. Rather, in running ahead, Dasein understands itself in terms of a possibility that remains a possibility.

It can never be stressed too much that when Heidegger speaks of the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein’s existence, he is referring to death in the existential sense rather than the biological sense. How, then, are we to concretely understand this phenomenon? There are a few different interpretations of this phenomenon, a description of which would require its own study. Nevertheless, a rather common interpretation of existential death is, as Hubert Dreyfus characterizes, “a structural condition of Dasein’s existence that an individual’s identity can always be lost. Dying is, then, the resigned, heroic acceptance of this condition.”¹⁴² The image of an isolated, heroic Dasein, jutting its chin into the wind, characterizes the existential account of authenticity. While Heidegger does maintain that Dasein can never have a fixed, constant identity, the heroic, and rather pessimistic, conception of death only makes sense if one measures the

¹⁴¹ Carol White further notes that the German prefix “un-“ can signify a negation or an excessive amount. When Heidegger italicizes the “Un-“ of “*Unmöglichkeit*,” he does so in order to stress this dual character. Thus the possibility of death is both an “impossibility” and the most extreme of all possibilities. Cf. White, *Time and Death*, p. 88 n. 71. Interestingly, Freud makes a similar claim about *unheimlich* in his essay “The Uncanny.” In that essay, he notes that *Unheimlich* does not simply the opposite of *Heimlich*, despite the prefix. Rather, the “un-“ indicates an intensification of the *Heimlich*, such that the meaning of the two terms overlap. Cf. Freud, “The Uncanny.” Freud, *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McClintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003): pp. 121-161, p. 124-126. As we will see in the next chapter, Heidegger continues with this characterization of death as the ultimate possibility and as a “measureless measure” of existence.

¹⁴² “Forward” to White’s book, xxxi, see also Dreyfus *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time*, Division I (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 305.

possibility of such a loss against the twin epistemological and metaphysical ideals of certainty and permanence.

Against this reading, both John Haugeland and Carol White argue that death is a kind of world-collapse, and Dasein's anticipation of its death is the readiness for such a collapse and acknowledgement that what upon which it stakes its life is always fragile and vulnerable to such collapse. Existential death, White writes, "occurs when old worlds die and new ones are born."¹⁴³ When a world dies, old possibilities are no longer viable and new possibilities take their place. For example, the modern revolution of science allowed things to be treated and understood in new ways that were beyond what thinkers in the Middle Age could fathom.¹⁴⁴ Even if one were to try to recreate that era, it would never be the same because there the possibilities contained in that world are no longer viable. There thus is a specific sense in which past is "dead to us," namely insofar as the possibilities that the dead had are not possibilities *for us* any longer. A change in the understanding of one's Being leaves old possibilities behind and, with it, brings new possibilities in its place. Certain possibilities are now available for us that were not envisioned by our forebears. Possibilities turn into impossibilities, for they are no longer legitimate ways to understand existence, and impossibilities turn into viable possibilities through which Dasein can now understand itself.

White's account of death reiterates the relationship between an individual and the culture and tradition in which it finds itself. She writes, "as Dasein we always have to take up being-toward-the-end either by taking being for granted and thus simply moving within the possibilities of being that our culture has laid out, or by making an issue of it

¹⁴³ White, *Time and Death*, p. 89

¹⁴⁴ White, *Time and Death*, p. 89.

and thus determining where the limits of our cultural possibilities actually do lie.”¹⁴⁵

Either Dasein understands itself from within the possibilities of its inherited tradition, which as noted above means that Dasein is closed off to appropriating its own possibilities, or it can risk itself and show that the current ways of understanding what it is to be are vulnerable or perhaps even untenable. Rather than remembering a particular event or practice, Heidegger’s account suggests that, when facing death, we are put into a position where we can remember or retrieve the formal structure of our very Being.

The experience of death enables Dasein to recognize that the possibilities for understanding Being handed to it by others are no longer viable, or said differently, are impossible. Some things never will have been – some ways to understand ourselves have passed, and can no longer be. Such possibilities are dead to us. To be towards death would thus mean to stake one’s way of Being, one’s life on something, while recognizing that it too will pass. Heidegger’s conception of death as a possibility suggests that it is a possibility that reveals Dasein’s very Being as possibility. To run ahead does not mean to get beyond death or overcome it, but rather it suggests that Dasein seizes it as a possibility, letting it determine its own Being. It stakes its Being on a different understanding of who it is to be, one distinct from the ones it unquestioningly takes over. In running ahead, Dasein breaks free from its tranquilizing concern for its everyday affairs, which can be more or less realized in its projects, and prepares to take a stand on who it understands itself to be.

¹⁴⁵ White, *Time and Death*, p. 81

II.4.2. Guilt, Conscience, Resoluteness

What then does it mean to stake oneself on a way of Being, even when recognizing that a commitment to that identity is always vulnerable? How is it even possible to commit to such a possibility that is so fragile? At stake in these questions is the very possibility of being authentic in the first place; a possibility that is given to Dasein in its current, factual situation and as such is given to it despite Dasein's tendency to abdicate responsibility for itself by appealing to the unquestioned authority of its tradition. The last section showed that when Dasein authentically faces its own death Dasein's existence and relationship to Being is disclosed as something that is at stake, and that who it is, can always be put into question. This section will show that the experience of anticipation coalesces in conscience, in which Dasein experiences the possibility of granting the past a unique future.

Conscience exposes Dasein to its historicity. Heidegger does not explicitly connect conscience with historicity in *Being and Time*; however, in earlier lectures and essays he makes their relationship a little more apparent. In his review "Comments on Karl Jaspers' *Psychology of Worldviews*," Heidegger quickly establishes the experience of "the meaning of conscience and responsibility that lies in the historical itself," in one paragraph.¹⁴⁶ Despite its brevity, the importance of this connection cannot be underestimated. Conscience, he suggests, is the way that we continually "have ourselves," and it is enacted through "a constant renewal of anxious worry that is of necessity motivated by a concern for the self as such, and is moreover oriented in a

¹⁴⁶ Heidegger, "Comments on Karl Jaspers' *Psychology of Worldviews*." Trans. John van Buren. *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): pp. 1-38, p. 29.

historical manner.”¹⁴⁷ To stake one’s life does not mean making a one-time commitment. Rather, it requires continually renewing one’s loyalty to such a commitment over time and in different situations. Heidegger thus writes that “conscience is a historically defined ‘how’ of experiencing the self. . . In indicating this connection between the sense of historical experience and the sense of the phenomenon of conscience, we are not giving the concept of the historical a broader meaning; rather, we are understanding it in such a way that it is being returned to the authentic source of its sense.”¹⁴⁸ The way we authentically experience ourselves is through appropriating past possibility as something that we must live up to. Conscience thus refers to an individual’s transformation of a possibility inherited from its culture by committing oneself to it and to live up to its demands. Thus, rather than avoiding taking responsibility for who we are, as we do in being inauthentic, authenticity involves directly confronting the historical dimensions of one’s own self, by continuously renewing the responsibility we have for the history that we are. In doing so, conscience can give the past a unique future.

Benjamin Crowe identifies another lecture where Heidegger connects conscience to the experience of history. In the 1924 “The Concept of Time,” Heidegger explains that “the past remains closed off from any present so long as such a present, Dasein, is not historical. Dasein however is in itself historical insofar as it is its possibility. In being futural Dasein is its past; it comes back to it in the ‘how.’ The manner of its coming back is, among other things, conscience.”¹⁴⁹ Heidegger again contrasts the experience of history as an appropriation of one’s past for the sake of the future with the objectifying tendencies of the historical sciences. To be historical, Heidegger suggests, requires

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, “Comments on Karl Jaspers’s *Psychology of Worldviews*,” p. 28

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger, “Comments on Karl Jaspers’s *Psychology of Worldviews*,” p. 28-29

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, in Crowe, p. 181.

understanding ourselves from our possibilities, which is to say from the future. The appropriation of such possibilities, Heidegger suggests, is the experience of conscience. To be historical is to see the past not as something dead that no longer affords possibilities for existing, but as an inheritance that can be transformed. In Heidegger's account in this lecture, conscience is the way that Dasein appropriates and transforms some element of its own cultural inheritance. It is the way that Dasein gives the past a new and unique future.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's account of conscience implies a more limited role for it to play than he previously claimed. The narrower function it plays arises because of the formal analysis of Dasein's authentic Being. As long as the discussion of death remains at the existential-ontological level there is a particular problem. It could well be that the account that Heidegger has thus far provided is a free-floating, abstract construction, a "fantastical demand" to run ahead into death, that could never be accomplished by Dasein, who always lives in a specific time and place. In order to ensure that his existential analysis has such traction, Heidegger needs existentiell testimony of Dasein's authentic ability to be. Because Dasein understands itself initially from the guiding norms of its situation, it must be "shown" the possibility of being authentic. It is here that Heidegger locates the phenomenon of conscience: "in the following interpretation, we shall claim that this potentiality is attested by that which, in Dasein's everyday interpretation of itself, is familiar to us as the '*voice of conscience*'" (BT 313/SZ 268). The voice or call of conscience thus functions to bring Dasein back from its everyday concerns.

Against the moral, theological, and epistemological conceptions of conscience, Heidegger conceives conscience as a form of disclosure, one in which Dasein's own Being is disclosed to itself. Dasein's everyday understanding of its Being is one that is characterized by a failure to listen to itself. Instead, it understands itself from the possibilities that have been delivered to it by its tradition and by the "idle talk" found in its everyday conversations with others. Heidegger further characterizes this chatter as a failure to listen to oneself because Dasein instead listens in on the lives and exploits of others (BT 315/SZ 271). Such listening "must get broken off; in other words, the possibility of another kind of hearing which will interrupt it, must be given by Dasein itself" (BT 316/SZ 271). Hearing, Heidegger earlier claimed, is being open to the voice of the other (BT 206/SZ 163). Insofar as conscience is the mode through which Dasein gains access to itself, it does so by opening Dasein up to the possibility of being addressed. Conscience thus first appears in the form of a voice that gives its addressee something to understand.

What does conscience give to understand? Heidegger is quick to characterize the call as one that says *nothing*, or at least nothing that can be talked about in our everyday language. The call speaks in the mode of silence (BT 318/SZ 273). The contrast between our everyday language in which we try to convey some information or make a report about something to someone and the call of conscience is that the call participates in an uncanny mode discourse – silence. The result of this is that "the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned for nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so" (BT 320/SZ 275). In suggesting that the call need not be a vocal utterance and that such an experience is uncanny, Heidegger suggests that

there can be sudden flashes where a new understanding of our situation is opened up because there is a break with the current possibilities that Dasein's world gives to it. The call of conscience thus testifies to the power of the unexpected and un hoped for to change the path of Dasein's life. It makes a new future possible by throwing Dasein's life into relief.

Silently speaking, the call gives Dasein something to understand—it bears the message of its guilt. In a by now familiar maneuver, Heidegger distinguishes the ontological sense of guilt from the everyday understanding of guilt, which includes both the juridical and moral senses of it. The ontological meaning of guilt contains two elements: the experience of not being the basis of one's own existence (facticity) but nevertheless being responsible for the cause of the “not.”¹⁵⁰ Although Dasein does not lay the foundation for its own existence, and it cannot be the master of its own existence, it nevertheless must take upon itself the responsibility for its very being. The “nullity” or “not” of Dasein's existence lies in the fact that Dasein is *not* the basis of its own Being, in other words, that it is *thrown* into existing. Heidegger writes that Dasein's “thrown basis” means that “the Self, which as such has to lay the basis for itself, can *never* get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis” (BT 330/SZ 284). Thrownness refers to the way that Dasein finds itself always already disclosed, open to the world and finds itself in the position of having to respond to claims that have already been made on it. To be thrown is to exist through an identification with those possibilities that have been inherited from one's own tradition. The appeal of conscience calls Dasein

¹⁵⁰ Françoise Dastur notes that the German *Schuld*, or ‘guilt,’ shares a root with *sollen*, which indicates an obligation. As such there is both a sense of responsibility and indebtedness that is contained in the ontological understanding of guilt. *Heidegger and the Question of Time* (Humanity Books: Amhurst, NY, 1998): p. 31.

to be responsible for the way it determines its always-incomplete character, and to determine who it is to be responsibly. Despite the fact that the situation in which Dasein finds itself is not one that it is responsible for, this lack nevertheless makes Dasein responsible for choosing how to understand itself in light of the possibilities given to it. As such, we can say that the call of conscience calls Dasein to be responsible for itself, even though Dasein finds itself in a situation not of its own making. To be responsible in this sense means to make a decision regarding who one is to be.

If the addressee of the call of conscience “is an appeal to the they-self in its Self” (BT 319/SZ 274), we might well wonder who calls Dasein. Heidegger’s response is enigmatic in its simplicity: “in conscience Dasein calls itself” and “is *at the same time* both the caller and the one to whom the appeal is made” (BT 320/SZ 275). These claims seem to suggest that Dasein is closed on itself in an act of auto-affection or a kind of conversation with itself. However, rather than conclude that Dasein is solipsistically closed upon itself, the caller opens Dasein up to its “ownmost potentiality-for-Being-itself” (BT 320/SZ 275). Dasein, as called, experiences this call to its ownmost possibility as something that it must assume and make its own, and so cannot be the source of the call. Heidegger suggests that “‘It’ calls against our expectations and even against our will...the call comes *from me* and yet *from beyond me and over me*” (BT 320/SZ 275). The transcendence of the call ensures that it is a non-subjective call, and indeed there is no author or origin to the call.¹⁵¹ The call arises from “within” Dasein, and as a result the call is the site where the self experiences itself as other. This other who calls, however, is not “someone else who is with me in the world” (BT 320/SZ 275), nor is it definable in a

¹⁵¹ It is precisely this lack of origin that Ricoeur describes as a kind of “strangeness without a stranger.” Cf. “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, Imagination*. Ed. Mark I. Wallace. Trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): pp. 108-126, p. 111.

worldly way at all. Rather, the impersonal “It” calls Dasein to appropriate its possibilities. The identity of the caller “is Dasein in its uncanniness: primordial thrown Being-in-the-world as the ‘not-at-home’—the bare ‘that-it-is’ in the ‘nothing’ of the world” (BT 321/SZ 276-277). The caller is thus not a specific person or a transcendent power but is instead the bare, strange fact of being at all that calls Dasein back to itself in its sheer individuated thrownness. As a result, the experience of the uncanny call cleaves the two modalities of Dasein’s being: on the one hand, as it is lost in its everyday possibilities, and on the other, Dasein as authentic.

Heidegger’s account of conscience has been criticized for neglecting the way that Dasein can be open to others. Indeed, given the formal nature of his general analysis it sometimes does appear that Heidegger suggests that in such an experience Dasein is closed on itself, or that a “true self” reaches up from Dasein’s innermost Being to call it. However, some care must be taken in answering the question of the “who” that calls Dasein. One way to understand the meaning of the impersonal “it” that calls Dasein is by noting that “every Dasein always exists factically” (BT 321/SZ 276), or as the familiar phrase explains, Dasein is a thrown projection. To say that Dasein exists as thrown means that Dasein understands itself in terms of inherited possibilities, which are circumscribed by its cultural heritage, its language, ethnicity, social groups, family, and the like. It suggests that Dasein exists as already having made certain decisions about who it is to be, further embedding it within a nexus of meaningful relations. Similarly, because Dasein is thrown into existence there is something still outstanding and something that is still at stake in living; Dasein’s existence is an issue for it. It is because it is capable of opening itself to the possibilities that it finds already in the world that it can be an heir to them and

assume its own factic being. As a result, it is the strange and uncanny structure that constitutes Dasein's thrown projection issues the call.

Nevertheless, it is unclear what connection exists between conscience and historicity, as Heidegger had earlier claimed. The call is a kind of formal indication of those moments in life where the problems of one's own historical situation become manifest in its uncanniness. In the essay on Jaspers, Heidegger seeks a way to understand life and human existence that is not reducible to an objective or scientific account. The term "historical" is used in order to ensure such an account of life insofar as we understand its meaning in the sense of a history that we are and not in terms of facts that have happened. History arises not from the chronological development of events, but from those unexpected moments that can alter the course of one's life in a profound way, moments that make possible a new future by throwing one's life into relief. Conscience helps in understanding this meaning of history because it is one that shatters the apparently stable structure of Dasein, opening it up for a radical reinterpretation of who it is to be.

Similarly, Dasein's being-guilty and being indebted come to have meaning through Dasein's recognition and affirmation of its existence as a thrown projection. To be responsible for the history that we are means to take up responsibility for something for which it was not responsible for in the first place. While the past has already happened and cannot be changed, its possibilities are nevertheless open for retrieval. Dasein's existence as a nullity means that it must always understand itself from those possibilities into which it was thrown, and not from its own making. Such a structure will ensure not only that in landing on certain possibilities it excludes others, but also that

there will be possibilities that are not available for Dasein to appropriate. It is not possible for us to merely return to previous ways of understanding what it means to be out of nostalgic longing. Thus, in projecting its possibilities, Dasein is responsible for them, even though it has inherited them. The call of conscience makes possible a new future for its past.

To hear the voice of conscience, as Heidegger describes it, means to project oneself onto one's own being guilty (BT 288/SZ 334). This entails a recommitment, or "attestation" to living one's life from the basis of one's own Being: "conscience manifests itself as an *attestation* which belongs to Dasein's Being – an attestation in which conscience calls Dasein itself face to face with its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (BT 334/SZ 288). In such attestation, Dasein commits itself to its own Being, which entails committing itself wholeheartedly to a vocation.¹⁵²

Heidegger further characterizes Dasein's response to the call of conscience as "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*, BT 296/SZ 343). The meaning of the German *Entschlossenheit* should not go unremarked upon. While Heidegger again differentiates the everyday meaning of the word, "determination" and "resolve" from the ontological sense, there nevertheless remain some commonalities between the two. By using the word *Entschlossenheit*, Heidegger intends to capture a sense of the way that in "resolve," Dasein's Being is unlocked or opened up (*Ent-schlossen*). In resolution, then, there is a sense in which new possibilities for existing are unlocked, opened up, or as Heidegger

¹⁵² Crowe notes that many of Heidegger's examples of conscience during the lectures of the 1920s are religious in nature. However, it need not be. For example, Heidegger seemed to regard the experience of fighting as a moment where one can be "there for oneself." Crowe nevertheless maintains that the religious experience of "graced moments" or being wakeful or vigilant remains paradigmatic. Cf., *Heidegger's Religious Origins*: p., 183-184.

sometimes says “set free.” It is the way that Dasein’s Being, as the site where meaning, truth, and history happens, is put into practical activity.

Resoluteness amounts to “letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the ‘they’” (BT 345/SZ 299). However, this does not mean that Dasein becomes “detached” from the world or that it becomes isolated from others. Furthermore, “the ‘world’ which is ready-to-hand does not become another one ‘in its content,’ nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one” (BT 344/SZ 297f). Rather, “resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being-with-Others” (BT 344/SZ 298). This means, Heidegger explains that, “both one’s Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one’s solicitous Being-with-Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (BT 344/SZ 298). Far from detaching Dasein from its world, then, Dasein’s resolve is the way that it explicitly seizes on specific possibilities, which it has inherited from its tradition and from its current situation. In seizing specific possibilities, Dasein attests to who it is to be, and in doing so commits itself to being a unique kind of person.¹⁵³

II.4.3. Repetition, Historicity, and Remembering

The meaning of Dasein’s resolve is further enhanced in the account of “repetition” (*Wiederholung*) and historicity in §74. Repetition augments resolution by incorporating historicity into the Being of authentic Dasein. In the context of this discussion, Heidegger elucidates from where Dasein draws those possibilities upon which it resolves. Dasein’s appropriation of its own having-been is to be taken over from the

¹⁵³ Crowe, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins*, p. 189.

Dasein who is as having been. To appropriate a past and make it one's own past requires taking over possibilities from those who have come before. I will focus here on the ways that Dasein's constitution as a self is achieved through the retrieval of what is other.¹⁵⁴ It is this movement that constitutes remembering in *Being and Time*.

Dasein's facticity, or having-been, raises the question of Dasein's coming into being, or birth. Facticity, of course, does not refer to the past in the sense of something that has happened and is now over, but rather indicates something irretrievable in existence that nevertheless remains effective. This raises the issue of Dasein's birth, or its "being-towards-its-beginning," and is placed at the other "end" of Dasein's existence as a counterpart to Dasein's mortality. Being-toward-birth, like being-towards-death, is not a possibility that can be made 'actual.' Instead, Dasein "*stretches* along between birth and death" (BT 425/SZ 373). This stretching, however, cannot be thought in terms of life's connectedness or in terms of a cohesive narrative unity.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Heidegger wonders whether thinking of Dasein's existence in terms of the "connectedness of life," access to authentic historicity will be blocked off (BT 439/SZ 387) because it takes Dasein to be something merely objectively occurring. Against this, Heidegger suggests that the "movement in which Dasein *is stretched along and stretches itself along*," or historicity, will reveal the temporal 'constancy' of the self (BT 427/SZ 375).

Throughout this discussion, Heidegger maintains a rigid distinction between history as it is lived and history as a science. The original sense of history (*Geschichte*)

¹⁵⁴ Hans Ruin gives a similar account of the nature of historicity in *Enigmatic Origins: Tracing the Theme of Historicity Through Heidegger's Works* (Almqvist & Wiksell International: Stockholm, 1994). Cf. especially chapter III.

¹⁵⁵ Steven Crowell suggests that Heidegger's critique of the 'connectedness of life' can be extended to a critique of narrative theories of selfhood, specifically MacIntyre's. Cf. "Authentic Historicity" *Space, Time, and Culture* Ed. David Carr and Cheung Chan-Fai (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004): pp. 57-73, p. 63.

refers to an enactment of possibilities that open up or free a past that has become stale; history as a science, however, refers to the objective sequencing and study of past events. What characterizes the phenomenon of history is its enigmatic relationship with the past—“why is it” Heidegger asks, “that the function of the past gets particularly stressed when the Dasein which historicizes ‘in time’ is characterized ‘temporally’?” (BT 431/SZ 379) Heidegger begins by attending to everyday utensils and artifacts we might find in a museum. These objects are peculiar because they have meaning only in reference to a world that has passed; these objects ‘belong’ to a past world. Their belonging to this past world is made possible only by referring to one who was engaged practically with them. A past world exists only because it was related to a Dasein who is no longer here—or, more accurately, who is only as ‘having-been here’ (*da-gewesen*). This claim nevertheless makes the enigma of Dasein’s historicity all the more pressing—for Dasein’s having-been, which is equiprimordial with the future and present, is distinct from the passage of time.

However, we must be careful at this point, for Heidegger wants to show that historical existence arises from factually existing Dasein. To show this, Heidegger must be committed to the claim that history is not the result of a passage of time, such that only someone who is no longer there is ‘historical’ and could then be studied, but that history belongs to Dasein originally. As such, there are two dimensions of ‘the past,’ whose relationship Heidegger must now articulate: the past that is a quality of the Dasein no longer there (*da-gewesen*), and the past that is constitutive of Dasein (*Gewesen*), which is to say its “having-been.” The former refers to the way that others belong to a world that is no longer there; the latter describes the existential past that is constitutive of the temporal

stretch of an individual Dasein. The transition between the two, then, concerns the transition from the temporality of the other—whose historical being is the result of a passage of time—to the temporality of the factually existing self—whose historical being constitutes a specific way of being.¹⁵⁶ It is this transition that constitutes the particular event that is the “happening” or event wherein the pastness of the Dasein who is as having-been is generated. To this end, Heidegger needs to explain how possibilities of the Dasein who is as having-been can be wrestled away from it and taken up by the factually existing Dasein.

In §65, Heidegger had already suggested that the meaning of past is possible on the basis of a projection of the future, such that Dasein must live up to its past.¹⁵⁷ In the sections on history and temporality, Heidegger intends to graft the specific historicizing happening of Dasein to the formal, authentic account of care already described as resoluteness. In so doing, he offers an account for the possibility of the way that the having-been of the past nevertheless remains effective in the present. By assuming its own burdensome guilt, Heidegger writes, Dasein “discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*” (BT 434/SZ 383). Though Dasein need not explicitly be aware of its past as past, the possibilities it takes up are nevertheless possibilities it has been given. Its heritage is the source out of which the factually existing Dasein draws its possibilities; and thereby signals a transition from the time of Dasein in its factic

¹⁵⁶ Ruin, *Enigmatic Origins*, p. 131.

¹⁵⁷ §65 suggests that the future (*Zukunft*) is to be understood in terms of what is to come (*Zukunft*). Heidegger adds to this that the “anticipation of one’s uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one’s ownmost ‘been’ Only so far as it is futural can Dasein *be* authentically as having been. The character of ‘having been’ arises, in a certain way, from the future” (BT 373/SZ 326). I take this to mean that to be authentic in part means that Dasein must project its possibilities in a way that allows it to be worthy of the past that it has.

specificity back to the time of the other Dasein, who exists as having been. Heidegger names this transmission of tradition that Dasein projects a possibility it takes over from elsewhere, ‘retrieval’ or ‘repetition’ (*Wiederholung*).

Importantly, repetition retains specific features of the call of conscience, namely hearing and responding to the address of an other, that constitutes Dasein’s communal existence. Heidegger writes that the resolute Dasein “comes back to itself and hands itself down [and] then becomes the repetition of a possibility of experience that has been handed down. Repeating is handing down explicitly—that is to say going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has been there” (BT 437/SZ 385). There is an affirmation of Dasein’s primordial indebtedness to a past other, and an attempt to ground this indebtedness in the factually existing Dasein. Heidegger suggests that this movement of the retrieval of possibilities must take place, naming this necessity “fate” (BT 435/SZ 384). While fate is often understood in terms of events that befall an individual, Heidegger stresses instead that “Dasein is fate.” Dasein is fated to have a history and is obliged to respond to that history by projecting the possibility that must be kept open as a possibility. Such repeating can be more or less explicit, more or less conscious, and more or less oriented to the future. Dasein exists as thrown into being and is thus in a way “powerless” to avoid projecting its possibilities on the basis of its thrownness. At the same time, in being thrown Dasein is delivered to the “superior power” to take over these inherited possibilities, transforming them for its own time. In this way, the retrieval of possibilities reveals itself in the concrete ways we communicate to make manifest those possibilities we are revitalizing. Because Dasein is essentially being-with-Others, “its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny*” (BT 436/SZ 384).

Destiny occurs as the happening of community. Dasein's heritage indicates the transition between times, from the time of Dasein to the time of Dasein who is no longer there, such that "Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full historizing of Dasein" (BT 436/SZ 385). The retrieval of possibilities is not a nostalgic recreation or a mechanical reproduction of the past, but is instead the return of a possible 'having-been' that arises out of Dasein's authentic self-understanding. Dasein's authentic history, in other words, rests upon the retrieval of possible modalities of being.

Dasein's indebtedness and guilt enables it to respond and be responsible for its retrieval of its inherited and yet ownmost possibilities. In this manner, the retrieval of tradition is a responsive movement through which the self repeats and transforms that which is other. Retrieval, on Heidegger's account, is the appropriation of the tradition's possibilities while at the same time transforming these possibilities for its own time. In retrieving such possibilities, Dasein at once recognizes its distance from the past, while also acknowledging the efficacy of the past. Because of this interplay between one's heritage and the appropriation of such a heritage, authentic historicity becomes the name of the passage through which Dasein must come to itself through that which is other and in such a way that such a passage constitutes a new origin.

Heidegger emphasizes that in retrieving or repeating the past Dasein is not returning to some golden age and does not harbor some nostalgic longing for a bygone era. He writes, "the repeating of that which is possible does not bring again something that is 'past,' nor does it bind the 'Present' back to that which has already been 'outstripped'" (BT 437/SZ 385). Repetition is not a glorification of the past, and repetition does not hold up the past as a model that should be recreated in the present

because it avoids acknowledging one's inheritance precisely as inheritance. Repetition, as noted above, is a kind of response, a "reciprocatve rejoinder" to the past as possibility (BT 438/SZ 386). As such, it takes the past as a challenge to the future, and not as something that is to be studied for its own sake through a kind of scientific labor. The past here is to be understood as harboring a promise for Dasein's future; something that harbors unique possibilities for existing is hidden in that which has passed.

Dasein's historicity is not an aggregate of facts, which the historian can then put together into a cohesive narrative. Rather, history is integral to who Dasein is. Through Dasein's self-interpretation and self-understanding, Dasein participates in the transmission of tradition, by bearing witness to the possibilities of the Dasein who has been. In so doing, Dasein makes history its own through a vocational commitment, rather than dispersing itself in its everyday business.

IV. Conclusions: Being-From-Others?

I have suggested that repetition and authentic historicity build upon the call of conscience insofar as both rely on a dynamic of hearing and responding to a call. Dasein's response attests to the transmission of new possibilities for existing that have already been given to it by its past. The renewal, retrieval, or repetition of such possibilities occurs only when Dasein anxiously confronts its own mortality. The seemingly solitary posture that results suggests that the death of others cannot play a significant role in its retrieval or repetition of possibilities. Insofar as Heidegger had excluded the death of others from shedding light on our own mortality, it becomes difficult to see how the retrieval of possibilities from a heritage becomes meaningful. In

concluding this chapter, I wish to challenge and supplement Heidegger's claims about the way that Dasein can retrieve those possibilities of the Dasein who has been.

The experience of death as a possibility, Heidegger argues, is one that opens Dasein up to the possibility of retrieving those possibilities from the past that have been until now concealed. Death opens Dasein to the possibility of taking a stand on the history that it is. To experience oneself as mortal is to experience the fragility and vulnerability of one's own Being. The *cogito sum*, in other words, does not define my being; rather, Heidegger notes, the *sum moribundus* exposes me to the finite being that I am.¹⁵⁸ While each of our lives is defined in terms of the way that it lives up to death, such an experience is necessarily one that can be experienced by each of us in our individuality. The death of others, as Heidegger argues, is one that does not necessarily expose Dasein to its own possibilities. As Dennis Schmidt puts it, "even if the death of the other is suffered as an irreparable loss, the loss that the other suffered has still not become accessible."¹⁵⁹ Each of us is destined to die alone, and even though our lamentations try to create solidarity with the dead, lasting solidarity is not possible.

The experience of death puts Dasein in the position of answering for itself and of being responsible for itself. Nevertheless, we can further wonder whether my experience of my own death as possibility is the primary, and even only, form of the consciousness of death. Heidegger's emphasis on the connection between death and historicity raises a peculiar paradox. Whereas Dasein constitutes the past as having been, the Dasein who exists as having-been chronologically precedes the present era. How is it possible, we can

¹⁵⁸ Heidegger. *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 316-317.

¹⁵⁹ Dennis Schmidt, "What We Owe the Dead." *Heidegger and the Greeks*. Edited by Drew A. Hyland and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 111-125, p. 115.

ask, to constitute the past in the very act of retrieving it? Does not the retrieval itself presuppose the historical reality of the past as a reality that is possible rather than constituting its meaning in retrieving it? On the other hand, if the past is constituted through Dasein's comportment to its possibilities, in what sense is it 'retrieved'? These questions raise the status of the 'connectedness' of authentic historicity, and in what this 'connectedness' might mean. I take these problems to comprise the "enigma" of historicity to which Heidegger alludes when he wonders "in what way this historizing, as fate, is to constitute the whole 'connectedness' of Dasein from its birth to its death" (BT 429/SZ 387). I will here proffer a brief outline of some implications of what Dasein's authentic historicity may mean.

Heidegger suggests that to be Dasein is to find itself in the midst of an already constituted world, and can thus recognize that it is indebted to the claims its history makes on it. Recognizing this debt, however, is possible only in virtue of Dasein's ability to question the force or legitimacy of such a tradition. Historicity is the condition for the possibility of distancing ourselves from the past and the condition that allows us to see ourselves as belonging to a tradition. In other words, the retrieval attests to the efficacy that tradition has as the responsibility that Dasein *always already* had for owning its past. What it means to be Dasein, therefore, is to be found in a past constituted by Dasein's very historicity. Dasein is thrown into a world that is already there, and a past that has already happened; at the same time, it has the task of appropriating its past. As Françoise Dastur notes, it is a matter of an "absolute past," which we cannot completely appropriate. What is absolute is not its inappropriability, but its pastness. While the past

is irrevocable and has already happened by the time we have arrived, we are nevertheless responsible for appropriating it and making it our own past.¹⁶⁰

As a result, the remembering that is figured in the retrieval must therefore be of a different sort than the remembering that is connected to historical events. Dasein's heritage, or inheritance (*Erbe*), is, as we know, grasped in the act of "handing down to oneself of the possibilities that have come down...but not necessarily as having thus come down" (BT 435/SZ 384). In interpreting inheritance in this way, Heidegger transforms the passive reception of an unchosen legacy into an active transformation of those possibilities in relation to Dasein's own projects. Dasein can authentically relate to the past only insofar as it retakes past possibilities in terms of a future yet to come. This becomes clear in the moment of anxiety, which "brings one back to one's thrownness as something *possible* which *can be repeated*. And in this way it *also* reveals the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being – a potentiality which must, in repeating, come back to its thrown 'there,' but come back as something futural which comes toward (*zukünftig*)" (BT 394/SZ 343). Anxiety thus discloses possibility of being reborn through a confrontation with one's own mortality.

Heidegger emphasizes the priority of the future, especially the possibility of one's own death, over the past. Such emphasis reaches a climax when he suggests:

In the fateful repetition of possibilities that have been, Dasein brings itself back 'immediately' – that is to say, in way that this temporally ecstatic – to what has been before it. But when its heritage is thus handed down to itself, its 'birth' is *caught up into its existence* in coming back from the possibility of death (the possibility which is not to be outstripped, if only so that this existence may accept the thrownness of its own 'there' in a way which is more free from Illusion. (BT 442-443/SZ 391)

¹⁶⁰ Dastur, *Death: An Essay in Finitude*, pp. 71-72.

This entails that Dasein catches up to its “birth” when it is disclosed as a repeatable possibility, which is to say, as rebirth. In so doing, it frees itself for a resolute choice that it can now make in the face of death, freeing it from the illusions that constitute its inauthentic Being.

However, while there is something to Heidegger’s analysis, specifically the way that the experience of anxiety exposes us to the possibility of self-responsibility, it neglects an important experience of such inheritance. Lisa Guenther captures this experience in the concise phrase “Being-from-Others.”¹⁶¹ This phrase captures the way that others give to me not only concrete possibilities of existing, which are of necessity culturally and historically bound, but also the way that others, specifically my parents, give to me the possibility of existing as such. There is, she writes, “a rigorous distinction must be made between the originating possibility of birth and all the other possibilities granted to me at birth, in order to mark the ontological distinction between the unrepeatable, deeply passive, and irreducibly past possibility *of* birth, and the heritage of repeatable possibilities given to me *at* birth.”¹⁶² Birth, on the one hand, gives me the sheer ontological possibility of existing, and, on the other, the tradition, language, practices, and the like that are received but must also be chosen.

Guenther develops her account by attending to the ways that an account of motherhood can enrich Heidegger’s account of heritage. I will take a slightly different path in developing the way that Dasein’s “being-from-Others” can take place. Specifically, I would like to highlight the way that the experience of mourning can reveal the way that Dasein’s existence is “from others.”

¹⁶¹ Lisa Guenther, “Being-From-Others: Reading Heidegger after Cavarero”. *Hypatia*: Vol. 23, no. 1 (Jan-March 2008): pp. 99-118.

¹⁶² Guenther, “Being from Others,” p. 106.

The form remembering is perhaps experienced most forcefully in mourning. This may sound like a rather striking conclusion, insofar as the death of others cannot help us to understand our own finitude. Death, recall, is Dasein's ownmost possibility, one which no one can take away from it. Indeed, even if I experience the other's death as an immense loss, the meaning of the death of the other always eludes us (BT 282/SZ 238). As Dennis Schmidt suggests, if anxiety opens the experience of the finitude of the world and forces Dasein to take responsibility for itself, then in mourning, "the limits of the capacity of the self to define itself by itself are exposed."¹⁶³ This means that in the experience of mourning, we recognize that the meaning of the world is something that extends far beyond my own projects and my own possibilities.

The debt owed the dead that is recognized in mourning becomes manifest when we recognize we can no longer be with them—the lack of our ability to be with the other in death makes the separation between the living and dead more apparent. In other words, what is experienced in mourning is the recognition that there is a loss of possibilities that cannot be recuperated or fully retrieved. The debt becomes manifest when we recognize that the dead do not endure in solidarity with the living. Authentically being with others requires the recognition that Dasein itself can never adequately appropriate the dead's possibilities. In this manner, we ought to recognize that funeral rites, commemorations, and memorials neither cancel nor overcome death. They do not bridge the distance between the past and the present, but instead become the markers that signify the failure of possibilities because they reveal an unbridgeable separation between the self and the other. As such, the retrieval or repetition of tradition is not something in which the debt to the dead is settled but that through which the loss of the past is preserved and concealed.

¹⁶³ Dennis Schmidt, "What We Owe the Dead" p. 117.

In this manner, the transmission of tradition does not appear in the preservation of tradition but instead occurs through the failure to wholly render the debt paid in full. I owe a debt to the dead to bear witness to their being dead, and to those possibilities that never will have been.

The community that is formed on the basis of Dasein's historicity, if my interpretation is correct, indicates a two-fold relationship to the past that can be best captured in the phenomenon of mourning. On one hand, mourning and remembrance are attempts to honor the debt we owe the dead by carrying the memory of the loved one. Mourning, in this way, makes the absence of the other all the more present. On the other hand, the mourner does not undertake the act of mourning to cling to the past, as if it were an act of nostalgia. Rather, one mourns in order to move forward. Through mourning, we recognize the way that we are constituted by others, and that our existence is dependent on others. In it, we recognize a debt to others, perhaps to bear witness to their life and to ensure that we recognize that their lives were not in vain. Nevertheless, through such experiences, mourning and remembrance enable us to recognize that the possibilities that the dead have given us can never be fully appropriated, so that the past something that is never fully our own. However, in coming back to itself in these acts of remembrance, Dasein becomes open to retrieve those lost and forgotten possibilities of human existence and attest to them (BT 448/SZ 396-7). The attempt to make manifest our debt in mourning through such resolve at the same time conceals because that which is to be made manifest can never be fully present. In other words, those acts of remembrance that attempt to preserve the loss of the past are thus always inadequate. In

this way, then, the debt we owe the dead is something that can never be settled. To honor our dead is a burden we must take up, but of which we can never take possession.

Chapter III: Heidegger and the Origins of Remembering

III.1 Introduction and Thesis

In the previous chapter, I argued that Heidegger's conception of repetition, or retrieval (*Wiederholung*), makes remembering and forgetting possible because it casts the relationship to the past in terms of calling, hearing, and responding to one's heritage. Repetition, furthermore, is the movement through which Dasein inherits its own possibilities, preserving and transforming them as it projects its own future. In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between remembering and tragedy that Heidegger develops in the 1930s and 1940s. During these years, tragedy becomes one of the primary ways, if not *the* primary way, that Heidegger conceives of history and memory.¹⁶⁴ This is most evidently seen in his interpretations of *Antigone*, first in 1935 and then again in 1941. Heidegger's conception of tragedy, I argue, refers less to insights gleaned from its dramatic elements than it does to disclosing the limits of thinking from the Greek heritage.

This chapter thus has two related aims: first, to illustrate an ontological conception of the tragic by way of Heidegger's interpretation of Sophocles' *Antigone*; second, to clarify the relationship between his conception of the tragic and what it means to remember. It is sometimes supposed that Heidegger's interest in Sophoclean tragedy is evidence of his idealization of the Greeks.¹⁶⁵ However, while Heidegger does attempt to retrieve the experience of Being through the Greeks by way of tragedy, his position is considerably more nuanced than offering a nostalgic return to them. Specifically, he

¹⁶⁴ Dennis Schmidt makes a similar claim in his *On Germans and Other Greeks* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 226.

¹⁶⁵ One significant example of this line of thinking can be found in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Heidegger Art and Politics*. Trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

draws a connection between remembering and tragedy such that the crisis and the contradictions emerging in the present are understood to be the fated or destined result of the concealed foundation of metaphysical thinking. If we keep in mind what Heidegger means by tragedy, and that it is not a simple return to a Greek conception, we will be in a better position to understand what he means by remembrance (*Andenken*).

III.2 Tragedy and Historicity

Heidegger's interest in tragedy overlaps with some of the most tumultuous years of the twentieth century. References to it can be found in his Rectoral Address in 1933 and extend through "The Anaximander Fragment," written in 1946, before he drops it as a topic.¹⁶⁶ However, his references to it are scattered through essays and lectures, such that it is impossible to say that he sets out a "theory" of the tragic in the manner that Hegel, Schelling, or even Nietzsche had.¹⁶⁷ Thus, not only are the references to tragedy terse, but even when he focuses on tragedies, most notably *Antigone*, to glean an

¹⁶⁶ This has led some commentators, notably Kathleen Wright, Veronique Fotí, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to advance the claim that Heidegger's turn to tragedy cannot be separated from his involvement with the abhorrent politics of National Socialism. To suggest that Heidegger's political choices are tragic, whether interpreting such commitments as supremely ignorant or deludedly heroic, is no doubt a tempting connection to draw. It is uncanny that his turn to tragedy and the tragic overlap with the politics of Nazism. However, drawing this connection seems to ignore Heidegger's own attempts to move an understanding of tragedy away from the willful or heroic subject. This certainly calls for a further understanding of the relationship between a non-subjective conception of politics and the tragic, as Heidegger understands it, but it is also just as certain that such an account lies far beyond the parameters of this dissertation.

¹⁶⁷ Schmidt notes that as early as the 1930 lecture entitled *Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger makes a rather suggestive claim that connects tragedy to the movement of history: "In the history of all essential questions, it is our prerogative, and also our responsibility to become the murderers of our forefathers; indeed, this is even a fateful necessity for us!" Cf. *The Essence of Human Freedom*. Trans. Ted Sadler (New York: Continuum, 2002): p. 27. While there is no direct reference to tragedy, the claim Heidegger makes here, according to Schmidt, is clearly Oedipal in its suggestion that the movement of history is essentially one of parricide. Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 227. It should also be noted that Heidegger referred also to Plato's parricide of Parmenides in his lecture on the *Sophist*, in which he suggests that the destruction of the tradition requires a similar kind of parricide: "Ruthlessness toward the tradition is reverence toward the past, and it is genuine only in an appropriation of the latter (the past) out of a destruction of the former (the tradition)". Cf. *Plato's Sophist*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): p. 286. Heidegger's method can be understood as a kind of parricide, which also centers on the problem of the possibility of critiquing the tradition to which one has been given.

ontological meaning, he presents them as a digression from the main theme of the lecture or essay. Heidegger's references to tragedy are complicated because he often focuses on one part of the play, such as the famous choral "Ode to Man" in *Antigone*. It is thus difficult, if not impossible, to systematize his various claims about this topic and develop something that could be called "Heidegger's theory of the tragic."

Nevertheless, the importance of tragedy to Heidegger's thought during this period can be worked out through an interpretation of a few passages where he raises the issue of tragedy as it relates to the aims of philosophical thinking. In this section, I introduce Heidegger's understanding of the tragic in two steps. First, I develop a distinction introduced by Peter Szondi between a "poetics of tragedy," which emphasizes the features of the genre, and a "philosophy of the tragic," which is more existential in nature. The second step develops Heidegger's conception of the tragic by drawing on several passages in which he declares the importance of tragedy in the development of metaphysics. The first passage, taken from *The Basic Questions of Philosophy*, situates tragic poetry within the history of western metaphysics and its inevitable "decline," and helps to clarify the relationship between remembering and tragedy. The second passage, from *Mindfulness*, contains perhaps the most direct statement of Heidegger's understanding of tragedy. The following section will apply these insights to Heidegger's readings of *Antigone*.

III.2.1 Tragedy and the Tragic

Peter Szondi, in his book *An Essay on the Tragic*, makes a distinction between what he names a “poetics of tragedy” and a “philosophy of the tragic”¹⁶⁸ The poetics of tragedy, first systematically proposed by Aristotle, “determines the elements of tragic art” and distinguishes it from other literary genres, such as lyric and epic poetry as well as history.¹⁶⁹ A poetics of tragedy develops the elements of tragedies and the different ways that authors compose such works. Tragedy, under this heading, can be placed under the heading of an aesthetic theory insofar as it refers specifically to the cathartic and purifying response to dramas and how authors can elicit such an experience from an audience. Furthermore, a poetics of tragedy is not limited to merely detailing how an audience reacts to watching a tragedy unfold on stage but also how it participates in the performance of the drama.¹⁷⁰

By contrast, a philosophy of the tragic is a more recent phenomenon, whose origins lie in German Idealism, and thus render it uniquely German.¹⁷¹ The philosophy of the tragic is not a theory *about* specific tragedies nor is it an attempt to define the boundaries of a literary genre and distinguishing it from others. Rather, as J.G. Finlayson writes, “it is a theory about what makes a work of theater into a tragedy, about what it is to be a tragedy.”¹⁷² If the poetics of tragedy tells us something about a literary genre, a philosophy of the tragic relates to us something about human experience that makes the genre possible. There is thus a kind of priority of the philosophy of the tragic over the

¹⁶⁸ Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): p. 1-3. J.G. Findlayson’s “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic.” *The Journal for the History of Philosophy* Vol. 37, no. 3 (July 1999): pp. 493-520, p. 494 makes a similar distinction in his own discussion of Hegel’s conception of tragedy.

¹⁶⁹ Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, p. 1

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 494.

¹⁷¹ Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, p. 1.

¹⁷² J.G. Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 494.

literary analysis of tragedies. It is because there is something called “the tragic” in human experience that we can name certain dramatic performances “tragedies.” Finlayson even suggests that because of the widespread disagreement over what constitutes a work being a tragedy, we need to inquire into those features that make tragedies particularly tragic.¹⁷³

What features characterize tragedies? What is the tragic?

In a provocative essay, Jacques Taminiaux distinguishes two ways to understand the meaning of the tragic: one that draws from Plato, and the other from Aristotle.¹⁷⁴

Though Aristotle is responsible for delineating the features of the genre of tragedy, thereby setting the basic groundwork for a “poetics of tragedy,” there is nevertheless a germ of the meaning of the tragic contained in the *Poetics*. Specifically, the tragic can be found in his claim that in tragedies we find an imitation of action. This imitation, Taminiaux suggests, is not a passive reception of a representation, but is instead “an active composition of a plot which reveals universal possibilities of human interaction.”¹⁷⁵ The philosophical importance of tragedy lies in its ability to represent action, thereby bringing some of its latent elements to light. The actions represented in tragedies narrate a human’s downfall, a downfall that results from irresolvable tensions arising from the protagonists’ failures to deliberate on their actions. Once we recognize the complexities and ambiguities of practical life, we should be in a better position to avoid, or at the very least alleviate, conflicts that might arise in practical life.

¹⁷³ J.G. Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 495.

¹⁷⁴ Jacques Taminiaux, “Plato’s Legacy in Heidegger’s Two Readings of *Antigone*.” *Phenomenology and Literature: Historical Perspectives and Systematic Accounts*. Ed. Pol Vandeveld. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neuman, 2010): pp. 58-76. As I turn to Paul Ricoeur in Chapter IV, it will become clear that Ricoeur is more “Aristotelian” in his understanding of tragedy, while Heidegger is more “Platonic” in his reading of its significance.

¹⁷⁵ Taminiaux, “Plato’s Legacy in Heidegger’s Two Readings of *Antigone*,” p. 62.

The lesson here is that tragedy does not merely evoke an aesthetic response, such as pity and catharsis. It imparts an ethical lesson to the audience and helps to establish a community. Finlayson explains, “a theory of the tragic tells us something about human experience, human actions, and the ethical-life of a community in which the actions are played out.”¹⁷⁶ The tragic dimension of human existence, on Taminiaux’s reading, similarly refers to the way that “human deeds often [transcend] the doer’s intentions because action as interaction...is unpredictable, indefinite in its beginning as well as in its effects.”¹⁷⁷ The tragic wisdom arising from such an experience is thus an appeal to deliberate on a course of action, while recognizing that such actions are intertwined with those of others.

In contrast to the lessons regarding praxis found in the Aristotelian conception of tragedy, the philosophical understanding of the tragic that dominates the German tradition is marked, Taminiaux argues, by a strong Platonic influence. Plato, according to Taminiaux, offers a metaphysics or ontology of tragedy. Plato’s suspicion of any kind of imitation extends to his wariness of the poetic renderings of tragedy, and saves some of his most pointed critiques of representation by directing them at the poets who have no precise knowledge of their craft or the objects that they depict.¹⁷⁸ A good tragedy, one that does not unthoughtfully represent objects in a public forum, would be one that imitates the Forms, those models of excellence in which all other modes of representation

¹⁷⁶ Finlayson, “Conflict and Resolution in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 494.

¹⁷⁷ Taminiaux, “Plato’s Legacy in Heidegger’s Two Readings of *Antigone*,” p. 62.

¹⁷⁸ This is especially evident in the *Apology*, where Socrates describes himself trying to refute the Oracle at Delphi’s claim that he was the wisest in Athens. Where politicians think themselves wise, but are not in fact wise, and where artisans know some things, but tend to overreach in their claims to knowledge, the poets do not even possess the wisdom to write poetry, and instead rely on inspiration (cf. *Apology*, 22a-c).

deficiently participate.¹⁷⁹ Thus, dramatists only depict the ways that humans are trapped in a theater of appearances, unable to free themselves from their shackles.

By rigidly separating the realm of appearances from the metaphysical realm of the Forms, Plato effectively introduces a different way to think of tragedy. Taminiaux writes: “if we mean by tragedy a drama or action which is entirely based on the contemplation of the *ontos on*,” then tragedy becomes a kind of “metaphysical document.”¹⁸⁰ The ordinary spectator, the citizen, in other words, is not truly able to appreciate the meaning of tragedy; only the philosopher, who speculatively inquires into the Being of beings (*ontos on*), apart from the contamination of the everyday and the common, can understand and judge what tragedy is truly about. It is this speculative, and thoroughly metaphysical, understanding of tragedy that Taminiaux suggests saturates the German appropriation and transformation of Greek tragedy, and reaches a kind of apex in Heidegger’s interpretation of *Antigone*.¹⁸¹

III.2.2 Historicity and the Tragic

In order to assess the relationship Heidegger draws between tragedy and remembering, and the extent of the Platonism that Taminiaux sees in Heidegger’s account, I will now examine two passages in Heidegger’s writings that Karen Gover identifies as being remarkably direct in stating the place and significance of tragedy as it pertains to metaphysics and its “ending.”¹⁸² The first is a 1938 text labeled “From the

¹⁷⁹ Taminiaux. “Plato’s Legacy in Heidegger’s Two Readings of *Antigone*,” p. 61. Also see Plato, *Laws*, 817b-c

¹⁸⁰ Taminiaux, “Plato’s Legacy in Heidegger’s Two Readings of *Antigone*,” p. 61.

¹⁸¹ Szondi similarly suggests that the “philosophy of the tragic” is thoroughly German: “the concept of the tragic has remained a fundamentally German one” *An Essay on the Tragic*, p. 2.

¹⁸² Karen Gover. “Tragedy and Metaphysics in Heidegger’s ‘The Anaximander Fragment.’” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* Vol. 40, no. 1 (January 2009): pp. 37-53, p. 37. See also her dissertation “Heidegger and the Question of Tragedy (PhD diss, The Pennsylvania State University, 2005).

First Draft” included in *Basic Problems of Philosophy* situates the meaning of tragedy within the larger framework of the history of western metaphysics. The second, from §69 in his 1938 work *Mindfulness*, contains some of his most direct claims regarding the meaning of tragedy and its connection with the movement of historicity from the “first beginning” to an “other beginning. While I generally agree with Gover’s analysis, I will be reading these two passages with an eye toward the problem of the meaning of history with which Heidegger is concerned.¹⁸³

First, however, a word of caution is in order. As noted above, Heidegger does not offer a systematic or speculative theory of tragedy. The reason for this is because Heidegger is generally averse to traditional forms of metaphysical questioning. If a metaphysical question takes the traditional form “what is it?” or “what is the essence of it?” then any inquiry into tragedy that begins by attempting to define tragedy or determine what its essence is will succumb to a form of metaphysics that Heidegger wants to rethink. Thus, to raise the question “what is tragedy?” is, in Gover’s words, to “risk reinscribing tragedy within its metaphysical determinations.”¹⁸⁴ A different, non-metaphysical, approach is thus needed in order to assess how tragedy is related to history.

In “The Question of Truth from the First Draft” tragedy occupies a decisive place the transformation of the meaning of truth. Heidegger writes:

The recollection of the first shining forth of *aletheia*, as we require it and which we hold to be possible only on the basis of the question of truth, may be articulated in five levels of reflection: 1) The unexpressed flaming up of *aletheia* in the pronouncements of Anaximander. 2) The first unfoldings of *aletheia*, though not the ones explicitly directed to a foundation, in Heraclitus, Parmenides, the tragic poets, and Pindar. 3) The

¹⁸³ To be sure, these two aims are not entirely separable especially insofar as it is only at the end or close of metaphysics that we can come to terms with the “history of Being.” As such, what I am proposing is a shift of emphasis, rather than a radical rereading.

¹⁸⁴ Gover, “Tragedy and Metaphysics in Heidegger,” p. 38.

last glimmering of *aletheia* within this question of beings...as the basic philosophical question in Plato and Aristotle. 4) The extinguishing of *aletheia* and its transformation into *homoiosis* (correctness). 5) The mediate and mediated transition from *aletheia* to *homoiosis* on the by-way over incorrectness.¹⁸⁵

At first glance, this account appears to be a straightforward historical narrative, one where tragedy is one moment in the historical development of the truth of Being. The chronological development seems to suggest a narrative account, and implies that we could catalogue various uses of the term *aletheia* in those Greek sources or trace the etymological development of the term in an attempt to come to a better understanding of its meaning.¹⁸⁶ Because tragedy is situated between Parmenides and Plato, it may appear that the task of retrieving the meaning of truth requires an examination or return to a conception of truth that belongs to a particular historical time.

Interpreting the unfolding strictly historically, however, is misleading. Heidegger is not interested in giving a historical account of the development of *aletheia* that could be reviewed and dated by classicists or historians of philosophy. In order to see why Heidegger is reluctant to conceive of tragedy thusly, we need to pay attention to his distinction between the truth proper to historicity, as distinct from the truth with which historiography deals. Truth as *aletheia* refers the concealing and unconcealing of Being, and whose manifestations define an historical epoch. The recognition that it does so, however, becomes apparent only at the end of western metaphysics such that we can

¹⁸⁵ Martin Heidegger. *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): p. 186.

¹⁸⁶ A common criticism of Heidegger is that his "etymologies" of basic Greek words at best twist around the meaning of the words, and at worst have no connection to the way that such words were historically used. Indeed, Paul Friedländer leveled this very criticism at Heidegger's conception of *aletheia*, and suggest that the etymology of the word contrasts with Heidegger's interpretation to such an extent that we should be skeptical of Heidegger's conception of his interpretation of *aletheia* as "unconcealment." For an account of their debate, see Robert Bernasconi's *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1985: pp. 19-23).

trace its degradation from unconcealment to correspondence. Tracing this history is not a matter for the historical sciences. “Historiography,” Heidegger claims, “means an exploration of the past from the perspective of the present” because it is primarily concerned with comparing and calculating the similarities and differences between historical ages, and it does so only in order to come to know and to understand them.¹⁸⁷

To think of history solely in terms of a linear and chronological progression suggests that it is made, produced, and, implicitly intelligible because it relies on notions of agency, motives, intentions, and design.¹⁸⁸ This approach can be understood as a matter of accurately representing the past “such as it actually happened,” or as a way to make the past come alive on the basis of present purposes. Humans, on this model, make history, whether through actions or by reading and interpreting historical works, and places human activity at the center of all historical thinking.

Heidegger argues that when we interpret history in terms of historiographical objects and methods, we have been “abandoned” among beings. Such abandonment arises because the historical sciences mistake ontological questions for empirical questions. With empirical questions, “everything becomes obvious, without any impenetrable depths, and this transparency derives from a luminosity in which the eye of knowledge is dazzled to the verge of blindness.”¹⁸⁹ Historiographical inquiry interprets to

¹⁸⁷ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 33.

¹⁸⁸ This view of history is common to both religious views of history, which posit that history is a product of God’s providence, and a humanist view of history, in which history is the product of human activity. As Eric Sean Nelson suggests, the model of history that claims that it is “something made and produced relies on problematic notions of agency, design, intentionality, and decision.” Cf. “History as Decision and Event in Heidegger” *Arhe* Vol. 4, no. 8 (2007): pp. 97-114, p. 105.

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 169. Note the allusion to Hölderlin’s claim that “King Oedipus has an eye too many,” which Heidegger had suggested in *Introduction to Metaphysics* is the “fundamental condition for all great questioning and knowing as well as their sole metaphysical ground.” *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): p. 112. Further references to *Introduction to Metaphysics* will be cited in the text as IM.

beings and their significance in terms of their usefulness for understanding the present, ignoring and blocking the possibility of beings to have their own significance. The desire of historians to come to know everything that has happened “reveals behind all progress and all domination over beings a dark emptiness of irrelevance and a shrinking back in the face of the first and last decisions.”¹⁹⁰ The question of Being has withdrawn from concern, and it has been deemed too obvious a question to pursue: “beings are now taken for all that is, as if there were no such thing as Being and the truth of being.”¹⁹¹

The suggestion that tragedy’s importance is because of its function in Athenian democracy or because it has specific features misses its philosophical significance. Nor is its significance tied exclusively to its chronological place in the development of the *aletheia*. Finally, it is not important because it offers a narrative paradigm for thinking the history of the West.¹⁹² What remains distinctive about tragedy is the way it opens up a different kind of meaning of history, one more in line with human being’s historicity and the truth of being. Thus, the place that tragedy occupies in Heidegger’s “history” is primarily significant because of its ontological, rather than chronological or narratological, qualities.

If the place that tragedy occupies in Heidegger’s “narrative” is important for ontological rather than strictly historical reasons, how does Heidegger thus understand

¹⁹⁰ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 169.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 169.

¹⁹² James Crooks, for example, suggests that both Heidegger and Nietzsche use tragedy as the “narrative model of Western history.” This is problematic for a few reasons. First, his argument neglects those places where Heidegger discusses tragedy, including his interpretation of *Antigone*. Second, it seems to erect a kind of paradigm through which we can come to definitively understand the historicity of the present situation, a move about which Heidegger is often skeptical. In so doing, Crooks suggests that Heidegger uncritically appropriates features of tragedy, such as “undergoing,” and “tragic flaw,” and “destiny” or “fate.” Finally, Crooks often appears to neglect the way that Heidegger’s reflections on tragedy often challenge and call in question the way that we are to understand the meaning of metaphysics. Cf. “Getting Over Nihilism: Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Appropriation of Tragedy.” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*. Vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 2002): pp. 36-50.

the “place” tragedy occupies in the history of Being? If the significance of history is not to be found in contingent events, anecdotal stories that we recount to one another, or in that which is finished and no longer present, how are we to understand its significance? It is clear that by situating tragedy between the “first unfoldings” of *aletheia* and its “last glimmering,” Heidegger wants to capture something of the transitional quality between two different epochs. It thus plays a significant role in what Heidegger calls the “history of Being.” Because tragedy names the transition between the initial flaring up of *aletheia* and the metaphysics of the West, Heidegger’s return to it at the “end of metaphysics” becomes apparent because it signifies the way that such a transition occurs. Heidegger continues to argue that the contemporary age is also a transitional space between two kinds of “beginnings.” We need attend to what sort of “history” tragedy discloses, as well as its difference from the chronological and datable history with which historians are generally concerned, and finally what it means to think of tragedy “ontologically” rather than dramatically.

To think tragedy ontologically requires thinking through its relationship to historicity. Heidegger claims that such “historical reflection” aims at understanding history as a “happening.”¹⁹³ Rather than treating the past as an object, or domain of objects, as historiography does, historical reflection looks “for the meaning of a happening, the meaning of history.”¹⁹⁴ The meaning of history becomes evident as a possibility, which suggests that historical reflection receives its meaning from where it is going, rather than from where it came. The future is decisive for understanding the

¹⁹³ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁴ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 34.

meaning of the past because it is “the beginning of all happening.”¹⁹⁵ The primary sense of the past, and of history, comes from the future: “the happenings of history are primordially and always the future, that which in a concealed way comes toward us, a revelatory process that puts us at risk, and thus is compelling in advance.”¹⁹⁶ By placing the emphasis of the past’s meaning on the future, what it means to be past is that the past exists as having been (*Gewesen*). To exist as having been refers to that which is lasting and harbors the future: “the essential having-been [*Gewesendes*] abides in coming.”¹⁹⁷ This history is, Heidegger argues, a “history of being,” which is entirely unlike the history created by acting and suffering human agents. The history of being is instead a history in which human beings already find themselves and a history that carries them through its unfolding.

The unfolding of Being’s history is essentially related to a dynamic disclosure and concealing, exposing and sheltering, and remembering and forgetting of the truth of being. The past as “having-been” is carried along insofar as that beginning “sends” possibilities. The idea that the past exists as having-been is, in Michel Haar’s words, “an absolutely inaugural anteriority.”¹⁹⁸ It is a past that is irrevocable, yet one which summons the future. This inaugural beginning, the “first essential having-been,” “exerts a

¹⁹⁵ Michel Haar, “The History of Being and its Hegelian Model,” *Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*. Eds. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999): pp. 45-56, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 34-35

¹⁹⁷ Heidegger, as cited in Michel Haar, “The History of Being and its Hegelian Model.” p. 47. Compare this to Heidegger’s claim in *Being and Time*: “only in so far as Dasein is as ‘having-been,’ can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes *back*. Anticipation of one’s uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one’s ownmost ‘been.’ Only so far as it is futural can Dasein be authentically as having been. The character of ‘having been’ arises, in a certain way, from the future” (BT 373/SZ 326). It is important here to note that Heidegger emphasizes the way that “*Zukunft*,” the ordinary German word for “future,” is related to “*zukommen auf...*” or “to come towards.” The future, in other words, is that which comes to us. Cf. *Being and Time*, p. 372, fn 3.

¹⁹⁸ Michel Haar, “The History of Being and its Hegelian Model,” p. 48.

destiny-like influence over the whole tradition.”¹⁹⁹ It is, in short, a kind of “destinal sending,” and contains, in advance, the totality of all of history’s possibilities. It is for this reason that Heidegger employs a number of related terms to meaning of history: the history (*Geschichte*) of being is a happening (*Geschehen*) that constitutes a destiny (*Geschick*).²⁰⁰

The commencement, the “first beginning,” persists throughout the entire history of Being; if it did not, the Greek interpretation of the being of Beings would not exert the influence that it does over the history of metaphysical thinking. However, as Haar writes, “the commencement has always already fallen into oblivion, has always already been left behind...but remains sheltered within the entire process.”²⁰¹ It has “always already” done so because it contains the seeds of the future, and implicitly contains all of history’s possibilities, and has thus “sent” them. The contemporary age has thus already been determined by possibilities that have been handed down to it, though it has not yet realized that such possibilities define it. A new relationship to history is thus needed because the relationship to the “first beginning” that characterizes western metaphysics no longer harbors possibilities for contemporary life.

There is thus a tension between those possibilities that have already been “sent” out and inherited, and the inability to recognize the significance of such possibilities. Heidegger argues that this tension is between a “first beginning” and an “other beginning.” Where the “first beginning” refers to the “Greek” experience of the Being of beings and the inception of Greek metaphysics, the “other beginning” refers to the

¹⁹⁹ Michel Haar, “The History of Being and its Hegelian Model,” p. 48.

²⁰⁰ Charles Guignon, “The History of Being.” *A Companion to Heidegger*. Eds. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): pp. 392-406, p. 393.

²⁰¹ Michel Haar, “The History of Being and its Hegelian Model,” p. 49.

explicit recognition, transformation, and appropriation of this first beginning as a heritage. This “other beginning” names, in Eric S. Nelson’s words, “the other of history entering into and potentially interrupting and transforming existing historical life.”²⁰² A reflection on the first beginning shows that it “can never be repeated in the sense of a mere imitation, and that...it remains the only thing repeatable in the sense of a reopening of that by which the discussion has to commence if a beginning, and consequently the *other beginning*, is to come to be historically.”²⁰³ This “other beginning” does not imply that history has “ended” or that history is somehow impossible. Rather, the “other beginning” is a break with history as commonly understood and as traditionally experienced. It is an experience of an end that is at the same time another beginning, which Heidegger names “remembrance” or “recollective thinking” (*Andenken*).

Historical reflection and recollective thinking is thus a movement between a first beginning and an other beginning. Recollective thinking is thus part of the dynamic tension between the first beginning and the other beginning. It looks back and thus steps back from the first beginning in order to grasp the meaning and essence of metaphysics. In so doing, it can look ahead to another beginning that is to come. The reason for the Janus-face of remembering the other beginning is that we are historically situated and finite, dwelling at the “end” of one mode of thinking and not yet crossed over to a “totally other” mode of thinking and relating to our own historical existence. As such, in experiencing the crisis of the present, the past is not entirely closed off to us; rather, it allows us to hear and respond to what the tradition has given to us as a task to re-inaugurate a tradition. Thus, the other beginning experienced in remembering is one

²⁰² Eric Sean Nelson, “History as Decision and Event,” p. 106.

²⁰³ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 171.

where we distance ourselves from the past in order to experience it again, as if for the first time.²⁰⁴

Heidegger's conception of remembering means neither an imitation of the past nor an encounter of it "as it actually happened." Rather, remembering is oriented toward the future, and toward the unfathomability of the "first beginning." Eric Nelson again puts the point concisely: Heidegger attempts to encounter the past "from the non-identity and interruptive force of...the 'other beginning,' which is accessible in its relation to and difference from the first."²⁰⁵ It refers to a time that cannot be determined through historiographical dating and always has the power to disrupt and call the present into question. Heidegger's remembering reveals the mode of being of the historical and establishes a different relationship to history that can encounter, experience, and respond to the past. Remembering is thus shot through with otherness, such that we can never fully retrieve the past or determine and calculate what will happen.

What, however, do this "other beginning" and the possibility of remembering have to do with the importance of tragedy? The experience of the tragic is essential to the experience of the historical. Karen Gover suggests that "the word 'tragic' is used to characterize a thinking that attempts to overcome metaphysics and to overcome it not by attempting to go beyond or to transcend the tradition, but rather by means of an

²⁰⁴ One way to understand this crisis in concrete terms is through the experience of mourning. While mourning, the mourner is related to the event that precipitated the mourning. However, the mourner is also related to an absence, and one which contains all of the possibilities for living with such an absence: one can try to move on, erect a memorial or monument, or try to forget what happened. Nevertheless each of these possibilities are contained within the initial relationship. At the same time, insofar as she is still mourning, she is related to a future in which she no longer mourns, and thus is not related to the event that caused her to mourn in the first place. She might not know what this future looks like, and thus it is an "other" beginning, one that does not refer to her current situation.

²⁰⁵ Eric Nelson, "History and Decision and Event," p. 98.

undergoing” of it.²⁰⁶ Heidegger appeals to Greek tragedy in order to describe the dynamic movement between the first beginning and the other beginning. Heidegger suggests that the recollection of *aletheia* “comes down to a discussion of the essential steps of the basic movement of the great Greek philosophy, whose beginning and end are attached to the names Anaximander and Aristotle.”²⁰⁷ Between them lies Sophoclean tragedy.

Heidegger’s return to the Greeks is thus to be “supported by *the* question, the one through which the primordial Greek thinking must surpass itself and enter into another beginning” rather than slavishly attempt to imitate or reconstruct the Greek world.²⁰⁸ In other words, to think tragedy means to think through what the tradition has given us in order to inaugurate another beginning. It is to think through Greek tragedy *other* than the Greeks thought. Such a rethinking hopes to transform and open up other possibilities than those handed down and uncritically accepted. We must, in short, “remember” the meaning of Greek tragedy better than the Greeks knew it themselves in order to open up a different, other beginning of thinking.

What does it mean to say that Heidegger thus wants to “remember” a sense of the tragic more tragic than the Greeks had conceived? In a dense passage in *Mindfulness* (*Besinnung*), Heidegger offers a dense, and often paradoxical, statement of the philosophical significance of tragedy and the tragic, by connecting it to the meaning of history. “By realizing that the ownmost of ‘the tragic’ consists in the beginning being the ground of the ‘going under,’ and the ‘going under’ not being the end but rather the rounding of the beginning we also realize that the tragic belongs to the sway of be-

²⁰⁶ Gover, “Tragedy and Metaphysics in Heidegger’s ‘The Anaximander Fragment,’” p.39.

²⁰⁷ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 185.

²⁰⁸ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, p. 185.

ing.”²⁰⁹ Just a few sentences later, Heidegger continues this thought: “what is fundamentally important is only the knowing-awareness of the beginning as the ground of the ‘going under’ that rounds the beginning.”²¹⁰ “Going under” (*Untergang*), as Robert Gall notes, means “decline.”²¹¹ To go under is to experience time as disjointed; it is to “undergo” and suffer the slings and arrows of time. Gall writes, “tragedy shows us a passage, a going-between and falling-between past and future that nonetheless holds together...past and future in and through the present.”²¹² Such a transition between two times is held together in such a way that what has been and what will be are not abstractly related to the present, as if they were merely “no longer” or “not yet.” Rather, the transition holds together the having-been of the past and the yet-to-come of the future by giving meaning to the present.

By suggesting that “going under” “rounds the beginning,” Heidegger thus implicitly reiterates the tenuous connection between the “first beginning” and the “other beginning,” present in the passage from *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. It is only by confronting the way that the Greeks had initially grasped the meaning of Being, that Heidegger can show how a particular understanding of Being has been at work throughout history and how it has withdrawn. If the present age is defined by its lack of raising the question of Being, a confrontation with the “decline” or “going under” of the present acknowledges the removal of a ground, or basis, for what takes place and for understanding being. It is an acknowledgement of the finitude and mortality of human

²⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 197.

²¹⁰ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 197.

²¹¹ Robert Gall “Interrupting Speculation: The Thinking of Heidegger and Greek Tragedy” *Continental Philosophy Review* Vol. 36 (2006): pp. 177-194, p. 179.

²¹² Robert Gall, “Interrupting Speculation,” p. 179.

being. Going under indicates a time of transition between the first and other beginnings, and lets us see what it means to go about the world and undergo time.

The tragic not only names the way that we undergo time; it also names, in Gover's words, "the movement according to which the history of being paradoxically discloses itself through a kind of withdrawal."²¹³ The origin of this history discloses itself once its unfolding has reached its completion. Thus, the experience of history is one in which we undergo that which has already happened; we suffer consequences for actions that happened prior to our arrival. This is a common experience in Greek tragedy: Agamemnon has already sacrificed his daughter and led his soldiers to victory over the Trojans before the opening act of the *Agamemnon*; Clytemnestra has already killed Agamemnon at the beginning of *The Libation Bearers*; Orestes has already killed Clytemnestra as the *Eumenides* begins; Oedipus has already killed his father and unknowingly married his mother when *Oedipus Rex* begins; Polyneices is already dead, and Creon has already issued his edict that Polyneices shall not be given a proper burial.²¹⁴ In this regard, the significance of the past only comes to light when it is too late, that is, when its possibilities have exhausted themselves and thus carry the characters along through to their end.

At the same time, Heidegger clearly does not interpret the history of being in terms of the actions of individual humans. Rather, this "tragic" movement occurs at an epochal level, and thereby emphasizes the way that history carries along and implicates humans who have not intended or willed the consequences of its trajectory. To conceive history as tragic furthermore means to recognize that the unfolding of history operates

²¹³ Gover, "Tragedy and Metaphysics," p. 41.

²¹⁴ Gall, "Interrupting Speculation" p. 179.

according to a hidden and concealed necessity. By recognizing this hidden necessity, one can begin to delineate way that humanity itself is both a victim who undergoes its “decline” and the protagonist who continues to perpetuate such a movement. As such, it is not as much a matter of transcending or inverting metaphysics, but “undergoing” it more essentially than before and witnessing it in its inevitable decline.²¹⁵

Heidegger’s understanding of tragedy is thus ambiguous. On one hand, he specifically connects it with the works of Sophocles, thereby placing it in a specific place in the unfolding of *aletheia* before its degradation. On the other hand, from the point of view of the “end of metaphysics” where Heidegger now sees the present age standing, tragedy names the necessity and inevitability of the unfolding of the history of being. It is in this latter understanding of tragedy that he explicitly connects it to “undergoing” and “decline” (*Untergang*). Tragedy thus refers to a kind of loss or passing-away, a refusal or withdrawing, of Be-ing (*Sein*). In the experience of tragedy, the past is left behind or future is renounced – yet in such a way that what has been or what will be gives meaning to the present. By leaving behind one’s past or future, one recognizes the way that their absences nevertheless are definitive of who they are.

Heidegger understands the “undergoing,” and by extension the historicity of being, as essentially tragic: “if in the thinking of beginning we speak of an ‘end,’ then this ‘end’ never means a mere cessation and lessening but means rather the completion that equals but falls away from the beginning—a completion of that which the beginning posits and decides as possibilities by leaping ahead of its history.”²¹⁶ The inceptive moment that initiates the beginning inaugurates an inevitable decline. To fulfill the

²¹⁵ Gover, “Tragedy and Metaphysics,” p. 41.

²¹⁶ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 197.

beginning means both to complete it and to exhaust its possibilities. As such, the tragic names the movement of the history of Being, which reveals itself only through its withdrawal, indeed to the point where such a withdrawal is no longer experienced as a withdrawal. The origin discloses itself as an origin only when its unfolding as history has been completed. The decline and withdrawal of metaphysics culminates in a situation where its possibilities are no longer viable, which thereby indicates the possibility of an other beginning. The tragic similarly confronts us with an “abyss,” the removal of a permanent ground that would secure beings in their presence. It presents us with the experience of our mortality, and implies that our finite being characterizes who we are. Heidegger thus turns to tragedy in order to show how we go about our existence, how we undergo our history, and how possibilities for understanding who we are no longer make sense, thereby give us the opportunity to open up a new history.

III.3 *Introduction to Metaphysics: The 1935 Interpretation of Antigone*

Heidegger interprets to Sophocles’ tragic poetry in *Introduction to Metaphysics* for two closely related reasons: first, in order to illuminate the relationship between the Greek experience of Being and Greek Dasein, and, second, so that he can bring this experience to bear on the present time, thereby opening new possibilities for life. In this manner, his interpretation is an instance of his desire to overcome metaphysics by experiencing it more originally than did the Greeks. Sophocles’ tragedies, along with the philosophical fragments of Parmenides and Heraclitus, are key texts for understanding who we are because in them “Greek Being and Dasein [a Dasein belonging to Being]

were authentically founded”.²¹⁷ The “poetic thinking” of Parmenides and Heraclitus contains the first “decisive determination” of being human, though it is only with the aid of Sophocles’ tragedy that we can finally “hear” what this determination might mean (IM, 154). By appealing to Sophoclean tragedy, Heidegger brings to light the site of a conflict, more specifically, the site where the dynamic, violent relationship between human being and Dasein happens. This conflict is capable of opening up the possibility of another history, one free from the constrictions of metaphysical thinking and capable of founding another understanding of who “we” are. This other sense of who “we” are is founded, not on nostalgia for a lost time, but on the recognition of the vulnerability and fragility of a common bond with the past.

Heidegger’s turn to Sophoclean tragedy repeats the ontological, rather than chronological, origins of the history of a people, and more specifically the history of the West. Heidegger characterizes the difference between these two as the difference between a beginning and a commencement.²¹⁸ A chronological beginning is that with which something starts. By contrast, a commencement is that form which something originates. For example, a war may begin with skirmishes; its commencement, however, began long before any actual fighting.²¹⁹ The beginning often disappears as events progress, while the commencement only comes to light at the conclusion of such a course. By focusing on the ontological commencement, rather than its chronological beginning, Heidegger suggests that we come to appreciate what it means to be human

²¹⁷ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): p. 155. Hereafter, I will be citing this work in the body of the text as “IM” followed by the page number of this translation.

²¹⁸ Cf. Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymnen: “Germanien” und der “Rhine.”* (Winter semester 1934/35), ed. S. Ziegler, 1980, 2nd edn. 1989, 3rd edn. 1999, XII: p. 3-4. As cited by William McNeill. “Heimat: Heidegger on the Threshold. *Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s.* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), p. 349.

²¹⁹ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymnen: “Germanien” und der “Rhine.”* p. 3-4.

“only when humanity steps into the confrontation with beings by attempting to bring them into their Being—that is, sets beings into limits and form, projects something new (not yet present), originally poeticizes, grounds poetically” (IM 153-154). Human beings cannot start with the commencement, we can only see what it means to be human, in other words, with something that points to or indicates the origin. Heidegger’s interpretation of *Antigone* is an attempt to indicate the commencement of western metaphysics.

In order to “step into,” and thus experience, the ontological inception, he offers a striking interpretation of the choral ode of *Antigone*, one which is notable for a number of idiosyncracies. For one, it does not consider the plot of the text. Heidegger does not mention Antigone’s act of defiance, Creon, or even Antigone herself. Nor does his account include the final verse of the ode itself in which the chorus hopes that Antigone has not committed the crime of burying Polyneices.²²⁰ Instead, Heidegger separates the the ode from the context of the play, offering a nuanced, though no doubt coercive reading of this text. Words that are often translated into accessible and familiar language become jarring in his translation; the rhythms of everyday language become inadequate once we hear the poetic meter of the chorus. The importance of these jarring aspects of the poem serves a larger purpose: they wrench the reader out of the familiar, everyday world, leaving her without a way. “From the start [the poem] breaks up all everyday standards of questioning and defining” (IM, 158). This jarring, shattering effect of the

²²⁰ This final stanza reads: “Is this a portent sent by God?/I cannot tell./I know her./ How can I say/that this is not Anitgone?/Unhappy girl, child of unhappy Oedipus,/what is this?/Surely it is not you they bring here/as disobedient to the royal edict,/surely not you, taken in such folly.” *Antigone*, 376-384. Trans. David Grene. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

ode is emblematic of the human relation to Being itself—so much so that the ode participates in what it describes.

What permeates the choral ode, he says, “assails us three times, like a repeated assault, and from the start breaks up all everyday standards of questioning and defining” (IM, 158). These opening salvos are three Greek phrases: *to deinon*, *pantoporos aporos*, and *hupsipolis apolis*. Heidegger interprets the latter two phrases as paradoxes, which might offend the sensibilities of those who would prefer a more traditional translation.²²¹ However, in forcing language to its breaking point, Heidegger’s interpretation of Sophocles intends to capture different moments in the Greek experience of the “opposed con-frontations of Being” (IM, 158). With Heidegger’s translation, these terms articulate the oppositional unity that characterizes the Greek experience of Being, but the Greeks did not explicitly develop. By unfolding them and standing within the clefts that they open, Heidegger intends to retrieve that which has been forgotten in order to open the possibility of an other beginning.

The initial assault begins with the opening two lines, “*polla ta deina...*” which has been traditionally translated as “Many are the wonders, none/is more wonderful than what is man.”²²² Rather than this classical rendering, Heidegger instead interprets it: “Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing/uncannier than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him” (IM, 158). These first two lines of the choral ode characterize its fundamental idea, which Heidegger will continue to fill in as his interpretation progresses. In order to

²²¹ The latter two phrases, *pantoporos aporos* and *hupsipolis apolis* occur in the lines more traditionally translated “He has a way against everything,/and he faces nothing that is to come without contrivance” and “high is his city; no city has he with whom dwells dishonor prompted by recklessness.” Thus, where Heidegger sees a paradox, David Grene’s translation sees an expansion of “having a way” and the other suggests that if man honors the laws of the city and gods, he will be honored in return. *Antigone*, lines 358-360, 370-372.

²²² *Antigone*. Trans. David Grene, 332.

unlock the meaning of the text, Heidegger focuses on the way that “the human being is, in *one* word, *to deinotaton*, the uncanniest” (IM, 159). The Greek word “*deinon*,” Heidegger argues, “provides the inner integrity of the poem and sustains and permeates the whole” of it (IM, 158). How, then, does Heidegger translate the term “*deinon*”? And what experience does he intend to capture?

The word *deinon* has a number of different meanings, which include wonderful, terrible, marvelous, strange, and powerful. In order to capture the range of these significations, Heidegger translates it with the word “*unheimlich*,” a word already familiar to readers of *Being and Time*, where it refers to the experience of anxiety, in which Dasein is confronted with itself in its barest facticity. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, however, Heidegger wants to draw out the range of experiences contained in this word. Just as *deinon* has a plurivocity of meanings, the German word *unheimlich* combines oppositional meanings, which Heidegger takes advantage of in order to reveal the essence of human being. The word *unheimlich* is the opposite of *heimlich*, which means “familiar” and “native.” It also shares a semantic kinship with *heimisch*, that which belongs to the home.²²³ One is at home in the familiar and everyday. Indeed, the familiar and everyday is where we take refuge and find protection from the truly disturbing. We are safe in the protection of the familiar home, in the *heimlich*.

The *unheimlich* would thus seem to indicate that which is unhomely, unfamiliar, and uncanny. However, there is a further meaning to the *heimlich* that should be noted: it

²²³ Cf. Sigmund Freud’s famous essay “The Uncanny” (*Das Unheimliche*), which examines the many different, even ambiguous, meanings of the word “*unheimliche*.” It is, however, unclear to what extent Heidegger was influenced by Freud’s reading of this term. Cf. Freud, “The Uncanny.” *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McClintock (New York: Penguin Books, 2003): pp. 121-161, p. 124-126.

can also mean “secret” or “concealed.”²²⁴ In this context, however, *unheimlich* does not mean unconcealed or the unhidden. Rather, the “un-” of *unheimliche* is like the “un-” of *unmöglichkeit* in *Being and Time*; it functions to intensify the meaning of the word. This prefix, as Carol White notes, can mean both “not” and “excessive amount.”²²⁵ It thus belongs to two sets of meanings, which, while not contradictory, are different: it is that which is familiar and that which is concealed and kept out of sight. *Das Unheimliche* is, in other words, the recognition of a strangeness that is part of the familiar, always lurking at the edges of the familiar but never noticed. It is strange that we do find things familiar at all, strange to be anything at all. When we recognize this uncanniness, it is a recognition of something that was there all along, but concealed rather than purely absent. The *unheimlich*, then, indicates an experience of unfamiliarity or strangeness of something that is deeply and intimately familiar. That which has been unconcealed was previously present, though unremarked upon, it jars us out of our everyday familiarity in becoming apparent. As a result, we discover who we are only when we are cast out of the home, and constantly being thrown out of the familiarities in which we previously sought refuge. The unsettling is both disruptive, insofar as it jars us out of the familiar, and disclosive, in so far as it reveals the ground of the familiar.

The “uncanny” thus names the complex experience or happening of disclosure that displaces human being from its “home” in the familiar. “We understand the un-canny as that which throws one out of the ‘canny,’ that is, the homely, the accustomed, the usual, the unendangered. The unhomely does not allow us to be at home” (IM, 161). In displacing human beings from their “home” the uncanny makes that which was hidden,

²²⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” p. 125.

²²⁵ Cf. Carol White, *Time and Death: Heidegger’s Analysis of Finitude*. Ed. Mark Ralkowski (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005): p. 88, note 71.

unhidden. While human being is secure in its home, such security comes with a price: specifically, security allows human being to hide its own being from itself. The uncanny thus exposes human beings in two senses: it displaces them from their familiar modes of understanding, valuing, and thinking, and it discloses the tendency to hide and find security from one's very being. Rather than "uncanny," it may thus be more exact to use the term "unsettling" to describe the *unheimliche* insofar as "unsettling" refers to something that jars us from our place.²²⁶

Furthermore, saturating the meaning of *deinon* is the presence of "power," "force," and "violence."²²⁷ Indeed, for Heidegger the violence that characterizes *deinon* defines the fundamental relationship between Being and beings. Because human being is exposed to the tension between beings and Being, it is defined by and through violence. However, such violence is not to be construed as mere "brutality," "arbitrariness," or the deviation and transgression of a moral norm (IM, 160).²²⁸ The ontological dimension of violence that Heidegger indicates has nothing to do with the useless suffering that results from evil actions. Rather, it refers to the "overwhelming sway" of *phusis* (IM, 160). It suggests a gathering of elemental forces of nature, which threatens to overpower humans. The overwhelming power of *das Gewaltige*, also refers to the excessiveness proper to

²²⁶ In translating *unheimlich* as 'unsettling,' I follow Claire Pearson Geiman's translation in her essay "Heidegger's *Antigones*". Though the more common translation of *unheimlich* is 'uncanny,' 'unsettling' captures the sense of dwelling or settling that Heidegger draws upon in his understanding of the *unheimlich*. It furthermore clarifies the connection between the 1935 interpretation of *Antigone* with the 1941 interpretation, which Heidegger puts more emphasis on the sense of dwelling that is at the root of the *unheimlich*. Cf. Geiman "Heidegger's *Antigones*." *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*. Ed. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 311, note 14.

²²⁷ The German word for "power" that Heidegger uses is "*Walt-*," whose compounds include the common words for government (e.g., *Kommunalverwaltung*). Authority (e.g., *Amtsgewalt*), being mighty or powerful (e.g., *gewaltig*), and for violence and violation (*Gewalt*). Cf. Geiman, *Heidegger's Antigones*, p. 167.

²²⁸ Heidegger goes on to suggest that "violence is usually seen in terms of the domain in which concurring compromise and mutual assistance set the standard for Dasein, and accordingly all violence is necessarily deemed only a disturbance and offence" (IM, 160). This everyday, politicized sense of violence is quite distinct from the "ontological" violence that characterizes Dasein.

Being itself. By translating this as “overwhelming sway,” we can see how this notion contains within it a kind of tension: it expresses the gathering together of the sway and its excessive character.²²⁹

It is against this background of the formal and semantic considerations that the meaning of *deinon* as *unheimlich* needs to be further clarified. What is the experience of the uncanny? What is the occasion that motivates this experience? The first line of Heidegger’s interpretative translation of the ode seems to provide an answer to the first of these questions, “manifold is the uncanny;” many things can be said to be unsettling (IM, 156). However, Heidegger does not interpret this line as naming the different *things* that are unsettling; rather he wants to examine how human beings exist as unsettling. Clare Pearson Geiman suggests three different, though intimately connected, meanings of *deinon*: 1) the totality of beings that confronts human being, which challenge, sustain, and envelop it; 2) the Being of this totality; and 3) the human being’s essential relation to both the totality of beings and to Being itself, and thus expresses the peculiarly human modes of acting and knowing.²³⁰

The first sense of *deinon* refers to the fundamental force or power of beings as a whole. It is “the overwhelming sway, which induces panicked fear, true anxiety, as well as collected, inwardly reverberating, reticent awe” (IM, 159). This overwhelming sway initially indicates the elemental power (*Gewaltige*) of beings to overpower and overwhelm (*Überwältigende*). It thus indicates the Being of beings in their powerful capacity, reaffirming Heidegger’s commitment to illuminate the finite ways that Being becomes manifest. This experience of the unsettling arises as we are exposed to the

²²⁹ William McNeill. “Porosity: Violence and the Question of Politics in Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*. *The Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14:2-15:1 (1991): pp. 183-212, p. 190.

²³⁰ Clare Pearson Geiman, “Heidegger’s Antigonés,” p. 166.

natural elements, an experience that both draws us close and induces fear and awe. The sublimity of nature threatens to overwhelm us, thus revealing our potential powerlessness, vulnerability, and impotency. The totality of beings, including the “foaming tide,” the “southerly tempest,” the “raging, clefted swells” each threaten to overwhelm and drown human being with its shear force. *Deinon*, in Heidegger’s interpretation, thus initially characterizes nature as an emerging, temporally ordered, force.

The second sense of *deinon* refers to the Being of this totality. Heidegger suggests that this sense of *deinon* is connected to *dikē*. Eschewing traditional translations of *dikē* as “justice,” and purging it of its juridical and moral connotations, Heidegger idiosyncratically translates *dikē* as “fittingness” (IM, 171). In doing so, Heidegger indicates the “direction” that the “arrangement” of forces gives to the movement of power (IM, 171).²³¹ It thus means something like according things their own fitting time and place. *Deinon* as *dikē* is both the dynamic structure of forces that confront the human being and the temporally unfolding movement of that very power. Rather than thinking nature as merely ordered according to static and abstract physical laws, Heidegger describes nature as a dynamic, emerging force that is temporally structured by the ordering of *logos*: “Being, *phusis*, is, as sway, originary gatheredness: *logos*. Being is fittingness that enjoins: *dikē*” (IM, 171). The conception of Being as the “overwhelming

²³¹ The German word Heidegger uses to translate *dikē* is “*Fug*,” which is rather difficult to translate. Dennis Schmidt offers a few idiomatic expressions to help clarify its meaning, including “*mit Fug und Recht*” (“to be fully justified” or “to have full right”) and “*die Zeit ist aus den Fugen*” (“time is out of joint”). Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 250-251. Clare Pearson Gaiman notes a further semantic relationship between *Fug* and a musical fugue, which is a composition of music with many voices based on a single melody and repeated in various ways. Cf. “Heidegger’s *Antigones*” note 12, p. 311.

sway” exceeds, shatters, and otherwise resists the human inventions and creations that attempt to master it and make it fully intelligible.

The third and final sense of *deinon* is captured in the sense of the human being as the one who uses violence. *Deinon* in this sense “means the violent in the sense of one who needs to use violence—and does not have violence at his disposal but is violence-doing, insofar as using violence is the basic trait not just of his doing but of his Dasein” (IM, 160). Human beings are unsettling because they are “exposed to this overwhelming sway” and more importantly “because they are violence-doing” (IM, 160). Rather than understand violence as a specific act against an established order or against others, Heidegger sees in human beings an essential, “ontological” violence. Because they are the most unsettling, humans are violent from the “ground up” because they “[use] violence against the overwhelming” (IM, 160). Human beings both belong to the overwhelming sway of Being, while at the same time struggle mightily against this very sway. As such, human Dasein marks the site where the violence of Being turns against itself.

Heidegger connects this sense of violence with *technē*, or the human resourcefulness and ingenuity that found or establish a world. *Technē* does not primarily refer to the production or creation of artifacts; it refers to a kind of knowing, one which “[puts] Being to work in a being,” and “brings Being to stand and to manifestation as a being” (IM, 170). The poem sings the praises of the inventiveness of human beings, who are able to set sail over the foaming tide, tame wild beasts, and till the earth, and create shelter from raging storms. In Heidegger’s idiom, *technē* refers less to the production or craftwork of particular tools or objects than to the ability to “set Being into work as

something that in each case *is* in such and such a way” (IM, 170).²³² Echoing the hermeneutic structure of understanding in *Being and Time*, *technē* “sets to work in advance that which gives to what is already present at hand its relative justification, its possible determinateness, and thus its limit” (IM, 170). *Technē* refers to how humans are “initially and constantly looking out beyond what, in each case, is directly present at hand” (IM, 169). Rather than see things in terms of their actuality, we see things in terms of their possibilities. To see a field as fertile or fallow, a river as a waterway, or rock as building material, is to see them in terms of their possibilities. These very acts change the human understanding of land, of nutrition, rural and urban centers of commerce, and so forth, showing them to have always harbored such a possibility. Doing so does not merely control nature, but instead it enables the overwhelming force of nature to appear in the first place. In short, it aids in setting up a world. In so doing, *technē* “works out” the manifestation of Being in history.

Human beings are thus doubly uncanny. On one hand, we live in the midst of the unsettling and are exposed to the “overwhelming sway,” which throws us out of that which is “homely.” On the other hand, we actively transcend the limits of the homely. As Heidegger puts it:

Human beings are the uncanniest, not only because they spend their lives essentially in the midst of the un-canny understood in this sense [of the overwhelming], but also because they step out, move out of the limits that at first and for the most part are accustomed and homely, because as those who do violence, they overstep the limits of the homely, precisely in the direction of the uncanny in the sense of the overwhelming. (IM, 161)

²³² In “On the Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger expands his understanding of *technē* and *dikē* by interpreting them in terms of the dyad ‘world’ and ‘earth’ respectively. Whereas the violence of *technē* opens up a world, *dikē* refers to the resistance of the earth to final and total mastery. As such, *technē*, Heidegger writes, “puts Being to work (*Er-wirkt*) in a being” (IM, 170). Through the artwork, beings come to appear as what they are. Importantly, it is in the work of tragedy that “human being” is “set to work.”

Human beings erects marvels to behold and expose themselves to Being; but in doing so, their works shatter against the enigma of Being. Robert Gall thus suggests that by “violating familiar limits, human beings show what is native (*heimisch*), essential, to who they are.”²³³ This means that the unsettling is not some accidental feature or property of human being, but instead is a kind of fate that human being must endure and suffer as its own. The transgression of limits thus constitutes, challenges and undermines human existence. The unsettling element of this ode to which Heidegger calls our attention thus suggests that the overwhelming and unsurpassable emerges in, through, and from our very actions and refuses our control.

Heidegger further develops the dynamic, even paradoxical, characterization of the relationship between human being, the overwhelming sway of beings, and Being by focusing on the movement inherent in two phrases: *pantoporos aporos* and *hupsipolis apolis*. While his interpretation of both phrases distorts their “literal” meaning, Heidegger suggests that they designate a conflict that characterizes the connection between human existence and Being. *Pantoporos aporos*, which Heidegger translates, “many ways without a way,” indicates humanity’s continuous attempts to make a home for itself in the overwhelming sway of beings. As noted above, *technē* is the way in which human beings make their way through the world, and it also reveals the essential homelessness of our Being. This unsettling nature of being human suggests that to lack a determinate place constitutes what it means to be human. In being unsettled we are expelled from our world—the uncanny jars us from those possibilities that we had settled upon for understanding our world. However, being thusly unsettled we often tie ourselves all the more tightly to that world.

²³³ Gall, “Interrupting Speculation,” p. 185.

However, the relationship does not have a chronological progression, as if humans were first exposed to the overwhelming, and then try to find a place in it. Heidegger claims, quite to the contrary, that, “in all this they first become the uncanniest, because now, as those who on all ways have no way out, they are thrown out of all relation to the homely, and *atē*, ruin, calamity, overtakes them” (IM, 162). Human beings are those beings who make things and, in so doing, make and remake the world as all the more familiar. At the same time, such making and remaking all the more entrenches humanity’s essential homelessness. It is therefore not the case that humans first experience the unsettling and then try to make a home; rather Dasein finds itself accustomed to a particular “route” or mode of self-understanding. It is because the familiar inexorably tugs at us that the most pressing concerns of our own Being do not explicitly become an issue for us. Because we are everywhere, always already underway, we find no final way out. What is unsettling then is that we discover who we are only when we discover that the familiarity of our existence is quite strange. We find ourselves ensnared in the familiar; or to use the language of *Being and Time*, we find ourselves entangled in the fallenness of the everyday.

Pantoporos aporos therefore means that the strange nature of humans lies in their attempt to try to make their way in the world, yet without ever finally transcending the world once and for all. Humans are essentially resourceful, having many routes and ways (*pantoporos*) that enable them to continuously make the world a hospitable, even familiar, place for human dwelling. However, this essence turns into its opposite, insofar as human beings “are continually thrown back on the paths that they themselves have laid out; they get bogged down in routes, get stuck in ruts, and by getting stuck they draw in

the circle of their world, get enmeshed in seeming, and thus shut themselves out of Being” (IM, 168). Thus, in having many routes, or possibilities for understanding our world, we find ourselves without a way (*aporos*), and confront an impossible possibility. Not only does the latter suggest that we are unable to have complete mastery over the world, despite our attempts to find our way. It also suggests that our desire to make our way in the world closes us off to who we are.

The tension between the disclosive and concealing power of *technē* echoes Heidegger account of death in *Being and Time*. The ways and routes established through *technē* become undone in the experience of death, which confronts us with the possibility of absolute impossibility of existing. Insofar as such possibilities arise from our very Being, the lack of the “way out” cannot be understood as an external limit. It is instead a kind of “internal” limit that characterizes the way that we are “everywhere underway.” Heidegger reminds us that humans have no way out in the face of death, which shuts “us simply and suddenly out from everything homely once and for all” (IM, 169). There is no exit from death, no resource that would help us control or tame this limit beyond limits. It is precisely because death cannot be mastered that it enables human beings to retrieve the experience of the originary force of Being. Being-toward-death opens up the possibility of a new relationship to the world, and is found in the way that we relate to, or fail to relate to, our ownmost possibilities at all.

Hupsipolis apolis, which Heidegger formulates as the paradox “towering high above the city and citiless,” specifies some of the communal implications of human beings’ uncanniness. In setting up a home, humans drive themselves from that home (IM, 162). As the site that enables various possibilities to be actualized and given concretion,

the founding of the *polis* also exiles the human.²³⁴ While the common understanding of the *polis* is the city, Heidegger interprets the Being of the *polis* as the ontological “site” where human beings are unsettling, one which makes possible the empirical and historical city-state. The *polis* corresponds to the existential structure of “world” that Heidegger first described in *Being and Time*. Where in the latter, the world refers to the totality of significations or web of meaningful relations through which Dasein understands itself, the *polis* on Heidegger’s interpretation is “pre-political” insofar as it allows political institutions to come into being, and is the “originally unifying unity of what strives in confrontation” (IM, 139). In other words, if we interpreted a *polis* ontologically, we would find that the various structures of the city—its walls, statues, festivals, and buildings—mean something because of the possibilities for existing that they reveal. The *polis*, in other words, attests to the confrontation between humans and overwhelming totality of beings—two things which are wholly incommensurate. The foundational act of human knowing and work creates a space for the being of beings to become manifest. To set up a world, or found the rule and measure for human being as the *polis*, humans are unable to be fully bound by that order. In other words, the only way for humans to exist is to exist as dwelling without a home, in search of a home. This “pre-political” conception of the *polis* thus marks the place where human beings become at home, and at the same time homeless, in the face of the overwhelming.

While Heidegger underplayed the historical dimensions of the world in *Being and Time*, he does not do so in his interpretation of the *polis*. In its ontological sense, “the *polis* is the site of history, the Here, *in* which, *out of* which and *for* which history

²³⁴ For a sustained interpretation of the *polis* in Heidegger’s oeuvre, see Miguel de Beistegui’s book *Heidegger and the Political*. (London: Routledge, 1998).

happens” (IM, 162). Those poets and thinkers that found the site of history are those who “use violence as violence-doers and become those who rise high in historical Being as creators, as doers” (IM, 163). In creating order and governance for the city, they rise high in it. In so doing, however, they become without a city. Again, as with his characterizations of *to deinon* and *pantoporos aporos*, we find that *hupsipolis apolis* indicates the violence both of a gathering together as well as an excess that threatens to overwhelm and bring to ruin. Indeed, just as the threat of death permeates Dasein as a limit against which its resourcefulness shatters, arising from the nature of Dasein itself to the point of constituting its nature, the threat of the unhistorical threatens to overwhelm and bring to ruin historical Dasein. The founding of history in and through the violence of setting to work being into beings is part of human resourcefulness, yet this resourcefulness always is in danger of being overwhelmed by a countermovement that arises from within itself.

The human activity of *technē* is caught in a paradoxical necessity. On the one hand, Dasein is creative insofar as it can secure and establish a world through it. It orders, stabilizes, and controls the forces of nature, and helps to create the possibility for standards of justice and governance, and any possible configuration of communal existence. On the other hand, *technē* is not a separate power that humans bring to bear on nature. It is instead the actualization and mastery of forces that implicitly belong to beings in general and to Being as such. “Language, understanding, mood, passion, and building are no less part of the overwhelming violence than sea and earth and animal” (IM, 166). These abilities pervade human beings to such an extent that “they have to take [them] over expressly as the beings that they themselves are” (IM, 166). The violence of

technē, which discloses beings, Heidegger writes, “is a disciplining and disposing of the violent forces by virtue of which beings disclose themselves as such” (IM, 167). Dasein is thus pressed, beyond its own action, into the site of its disclosure. It is the relationship to Being that defines human being, thus suggesting that it is not humans that make history through great deeds but that history makes human being.

Human being is forced to be the “site of openness,” in which there is a struggle between the presence of a world and those possibilities that threaten to undermine and destroy such a world (IM, 174). Ruin and disaster is not merely one possible outcome of life, it is basic to the structure of human existence, and belongs to the way that human being appears in history: “historical humanity’s Being-here means: being-positing as the breach into which the excessive violence of Being breaks in its appearing, so that this breach shatters against itself” (IM, 174). Furthermore, as the breach, “the Dasein of historical humanity is an *in-cident*, the incident in which the violent powers of the released excessive violence of Being suddenly emerge and go to work as history” (IM, 174). Insofar as human being is the “site of openness,” it is also the uncanniest. Though it is always at the mercy of the overwhelming power of nature, it nevertheless feels the impulse to oppose it and transform it into its own abode. However, it is also in this very gesture, through the creativity of *technē*, that human being unleashes the frightful and overwhelming power of nature. Heidegger puts this point thusly:

For the poet, the assault of *technē* against *dikē* is the happening through which human beings become homeless. When one is put out of the home in this way, the home first discloses itself as such. But at the same time, and only in this way, the alienating first discloses itself, the overwhelming as such. In the happening of uncanniness, beings as a whole open themselves up. This opening up is the happening of unconcealment. This is nothing other than the happening of uncanniness. (IM, 178)

It is the “happening” of uncanniness that is at the same time the “happening” of history. The site of human historical dwelling, the *polis*, is at the same time the place of its homelessness, such that to dwell homelessly is to dwell historically. The *polis* is the place where the confrontation between *technē* and *dikē* occurs, such that the violent overwhelming and its counterturning come to light in art, language, and poetry. It is only because human beings are uncanny that there is history.

It is in tragedy that the Greek heritage comes into its fullest expression. Heidegger writes: “the Greeks had a deep intimation of [the sudden and violent power of Being] and uniqueness of Dasein, an intimation into which they were urged by Being itself, which disclosed itself to them as *phusis* and *logos* and *dikē*” (IM, 174-175). Human beings are the most unsettling because it is, as Miguel de Beistegui argues, “in his very opposition to the overwhelming ruling of nature he brings the uncanniness of nature to stand and shine forth in the work.”²³⁵ At the point where human being “comes to posit himself in the midst of beings, in what appears like a triumphant stand, the very power of nature comes to be exposed in its irreducible unmasterability.”²³⁶ The essence of human being becomes apparent when it is forced beyond itself, such as when one’s creations and pretenses to knowledge wind up undoing him or her.

Though Heidegger does not explicitly make this connection, it is clear that something like this occurs in Greek tragedy. Oedipus, for example, becomes undone when his attempts to find out who made Thebes impure lead back to himself. Similarly, Antigone’s attempt to honor her brother by burying him ends with her own entombment. Tragedy thus indicates the structure of world formation, how they come into Being, and

²³⁵ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, p. 125.

²³⁶ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, p. 125.

the violent possibilities of existing that confront human being with the possibility of disaster. In the drive for mastery, knowledge, and dominion human being's fatal undoing becomes inevitable. The reason for this is that the original relation between *technē* and *dikē* comes to be the ordering of the world through technology. While *technē* initially discloses the power of the overwhelming sway, it soon overtakes nature in an attempt not to disclose it but to control it. The result of this is that the originary violence and uncanniness that characterizes the Greek sense of the Being of beings becomes concealed by the strategies of global technology and the forgetfulness of Being.

We should be careful at this point, for it is easy to fall into thinking that Heidegger's language indicates a willful, "Promethean" subject who performs acts of violence against the established norm.²³⁷ Heidegger is in fact wary of the willful subject, and often suggests that the conception of human being as creative and heroic in fact conceals the original strife that underlies and makes possible its very Being. Rather, human being is compelled or forced into the "in-cident" or "breach." It is forced into being-there (Da-sein). Heidegger writes that the "necessity of shattering can subsist only insofar as what must shatter is urged into such Being-here. But the human being is urged into such Being-here, thrown into the urgency of Being, because the overwhelming as such, in order to appear in its sway, *requires* the site of openness for itself" (IM, 173). Thus, by blindly resisting the overwhelming sway, through the construction of a world, human beings also necessitate their own downfall. The downfall is thus not a result of a lust for glory in battle; it is instead the result of blindness and ignorance, which constitute the conditions for all knowing, that is, questioning: "the greatness and genuineness in

²³⁷ Véronique Fóti, for example, in her essay "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sopotclean Tragedy" suggests that "the figure of man, the creator, is drawn with Promethean *pathos*," *Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*. Ed. James Risser (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999): pp. 163-186, p. 169.

historical knowing lie in the character of this inception as a mystery” (IM,166). Like Oedipus, then, we do not know who we are, and that is who we are; our Being is a question for us. However, this very condition both motivates questioning, and brings about our ruin.

What it means to be human is manifest only when humans are pushed, beyond their own actions, to the limits of existence. As such, Heidegger writes, “insofar as humans *are*, they stand in the no-exit of death” (IM, 169). Just as in *Being and Time*, where the unsettling (*unheimliche*) opens up the possibility of authentically relating to one’s own finitude, Heidegger’s use of the unsettling continues to resonate with the experience of finitude and death. The work of *technē*, which is at the same time the institution of human historical existence, is at the same time the work of death. In other words, the work of *technē*, in projective acts of disclosure, brings with it the inevitable ruin that is at the limit of each project. Though what it means to be is only manifest through human beings, the opening of human beings shatters them against the overwhelming itself. The very fact that we do not know who we are forces us to try to master ourselves, though it is through this very desire that we come to ruin.

Greek tragedy teases out the experience of the always present possibility of a sudden reversal, as well as the singularity of each existing Dasein. By returning to *Antigone*, even in a strained translation of one passage that threatens to collapse, Heidegger attempts to recapture the experience of Being that the Greeks felt. Thus, what Heidegger wanted to retrieve through his interpretation of the choral ode is the a sense of what motivated the Greeks to the heights of poetry and philosophy, rather than the crude classicism that is found in academic texts or in the superficial appropriation of Greek

values by political institutions and parties (Cf. IM, 213). The result of this, Heidegger hopes, is to reconnect a people with its heritage.

We are now in a position to sketch out the reason why Heidegger's turn to tragedy in *Introduction to Metaphysics* can illuminate the possibility and meaning of history for a people. History, rather than a series of events that can be placed into a narrative, transports humanity "back to the being that it itself is and has to be" (IM, 153). History is the transportation of a people into its heritage or what Heidegger sometimes calls "endowment." It is, in other words, a potential community becoming an actual, living community. In *Being and Time*, we saw that this process required the individually existing Dasein to critically distance itself from current public opinion and the projection of a future based on its heritage. While Heidegger has shifted focus from the individually existing Dasein to the Dasein of a people, his account of the appropriation and transmission of tradition remains the same. The Being of the Dasein of a people (*Volk*) is a matter of actively remembering, retrieving, and appropriating its heritage (IM, 41).²³⁸ Formally speaking, this means to project a possibility that one has taken over from its past. This requires overcoming the disguised, fractured tradition that is uncritically passed down.

²³⁸ The notion of "*Volk*" is highly contested in Heidegger circles because of its appropriation by the politics of National Socialism. However, it is also important to note that *Volk* has no necessary connection to race, as the Nazi's loudly claimed. Aside from terminological considerations, it is also clear that as Heidegger uses this term, he uses it in order to come to grips with the crisis that Europe, and specifically Germany, was experiencing during the 1930s. For nuanced accounts of Heidegger's relationship to the politics of his times see: Richard Wolin, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis, eds. *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political: Dystopias* (New York: Routledge Press, 1998).

Greek tragedy, when understood in conjunction with Heidegger's account of Greek Dasein, expresses and enacts the structure of appropriating and transmitting one's heritage. While human beings are caught in a paradox—that of being in the position to create order and the necessity to continually call this order into question—such a paradox entails that “the Dasein of historical humanity is an *in-cident*, the incident in which the violent powers of the released excessive violence of Being suddenly emerge and go to work as history” (IM, 174). By putting Being to work, a heritage is appropriated and determines the outline or shape of a historical people's proper future, its destiny (IM, 47). The appropriation of a heritage allows a people to become united by a commitment to a common project and a shared destiny. Because the disclosure of Being remains appropriate for humans through the work of *technē*, and will ultimately be shattered against its own internal limits of disclosure, the only measure for its historical greatness is the extent to which it engages the past and draws out the hidden possibilities of that historical tradition (IM 41). Without the founding, creative acts of the poets, thinkers, priests, and rulers there is no meaning.

Heidegger's ontological interpretation of *Antigone* runs closely parallel to its drama, even if it does not explicitly engage it. Antigone's burial of her brother introduces her, offers a “space of appearance” that sets into motion the “overwhelming” force of the plot, and culminates in Antigone's live burial by Creon. Thus, the play's climax is where the contradiction between Creon's and Antigone's respective claims becomes most apparent, where their respective fates play out. Antigone is *hupsipolis* insofar as she is defined by her identification with divine laws, which grounds the human law by organizing and taking care of property, family rites, and recognizing the particularity of

each member of the family. She is also *apolis*, insofar as the divine law comes to *oppose* the human laws of justice and politics in the play, which ultimately leads to her burial at the limits of the city. Both Creon and Antigone, in being stubbornly attached to their respective “worlds,” come face-to-face with the “no exit” of death, the untenable exclusivity of their positions, self-understanding, and lives. In this manner, the play reveals the “singularity” of each protagonist by paying tribute to their struggle that defines them as human being.

Despite the parallel, there are significant ways that Heidegger fails to appropriate the meaning of this tragedy. For example, Véronique Fóti writes that Heidegger construes human being’s resourcefulness “exclusively in terms of the ontological status of human creations, to the exclusion of questions concerning singular agency or the political arena.”²³⁹ As a result there is little connection between Antigone’s burial of Polyneices and her own burial by Creon and Heidegger’s own conception of *technē* as “violence-doing” against the “overwhelming sway” of Being. Her burial, dramatically speaking, is imbued with two meanings: it refers, on the one hand, to her intention to fill the tomb of Polyneices, and, on the other hand, because she too is buried, it constitutes her bridal chamber and marriage to death. As she approaches her tomb, she remarks: “Tomb, bridal chamber, prison forever/dug in rock, it is to you I am going/to join my people, that great number that have died.”²⁴⁰ She thus understands her own death as a marriage to those in her family who have already died.²⁴¹ Even if we shift the emphasis to Creon’s actions, specifically his own edict to leave Polyneices’ corpse exposed to the elements and burial

²³⁹ Fóti, “Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy,” p. 169.

²⁴⁰ *Antigone*, Trans. David Grene, lines 891-893.

²⁴¹ Cf. also Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): p. 22

of *Antigone*, we come no closer to understanding the meaning of *technē* as it reveals and is overwhelmed by the powerful forces of nature.

The tension between Heidegger's account of tragedy's significance and *Antigone* itself results in the inability to fulfill the promise to retrieve the Greek experience of Being because he neglects the concrete contexts in which remembering occurs in *Antigone*. The play, significantly, focuses on the proper way to remember and honor the dead—a conflict that takes the form of the issue of burial. The individual's death both links together and destroys bond between the family and the community. Death links the two because death in the protection of the *polis* is the highest duty an individual can perform for his community, and the burial of the individual by the family restores his or her singularity. While death equalizes people, burial emphasizes that it was *this* person who lived and died. At the same time, death undermines the familial bond because, for *Antigone*, Creon's refusal of burial rites for Polyneices does not restore the equilibrium between the community and the family. *Antigone's* burial, in both senses of the genitive, becomes a sign of the tragic distortedness of the Theban community rather than the site where the singularity of the dead individual is honored. Indeed, part of what makes *Antigone* a tragic figure is that the loss of her brother is not recognized by Creon as a legitimate loss. Her attempt to mourn is not recognized by the political community, thus doubling her loss: not only has she lost her brother, but she has lost the ability to mourn for her loss. The connection between the dynamic of concealing and revealing that characterizes the Greek experience of Being and tension between the burial and the exposure of the corpse that runs throughout *Antigone* is a missed opportunity to understand the ontological possibilities contained in remembering and mourning.

To the extent that Heidegger does not name *Antigone* or her act, he too misses the significance of remembering that this play introduces. He fails to call attention to how specific forms of remembering, such as burial, contribute to the maintenance of the bond between the living and the dead. Additionally, given that the *polis* is characterized as conflicted unity, he fails to recognize how such a bond is vulnerable—it might not be recognized by others as a legitimate connection to the past and to the dead. This means that Heidegger’s own interpretation fails to measure up to its task of retrieving the Greek sensibility because it does not recognize the fragility of those acts through which we remember the past. It would have to call attention to itself as an act of remembrance, which the account given in *Introduction to Metaphysics* does not fully accomplish. For an account of *Antigone* that calls attention to itself as remembrance—perhaps even poeticizing the essence of remembrance—we turn to his 1942 his lecture course entitled, *Hölderlin’s Hymn: The Ister*.

III.4 Hölderlin’s Hymn: “The Ister”: The 1942 Interpretation of *Antigone*

In the early 1940s, Heidegger revisits the connection between remembering and tragedy in his back-to-back lecture courses on Hölderlin’s hymns “Remembrance” and “The Ister.” Strikingly, in both semesters, Heidegger connects his reading of one of Friedrich Hölderlin’s poems with the experience of the Greek tragic festival. In doing so, he deepens and modifies the conception of tragedy first introduced in *Introduction to Metaphysics* by explicitly connecting it to the structure of remembering. These poems thus offer Heidegger an occasion for reflecting on what we have inherited from the Greeks, and what heritage is to be our own to pass to the future. The structure of tragedy,

which Heidegger now interprets through the image of the Ister, will provide a path for understanding the “course of remembrance,” and the structure of remembering will illuminate the meaning of tragedy for the contemporary age.²⁴²

Just as in the 1935 interpretation, Heidegger’s return to *Antigone* takes the form of a digression from the main theme of the course. However, where Sophocles’ poetry was enlisted to clarify Parmenides “poetic thinking,” in 1942 the same choral ode is used in order to reveal a complementary poetic sensibility between Sophocles and Hölderlin. This shift immediately suggests a modification in Heidegger’s own understanding of the relationship between the Germans and the Greeks. In his earlier interpretation, Heidegger’s remembering and retrieval of the Greeks is a projection of his own heritage because the Greeks and the Germans share the same heritage; to remember the Greeks means acknowledging a debt to them and project an understanding of ourselves on that basis. In 1942, however, Heidegger recognizes the impossibility of retrieving the Greek world, thus making remembering (*Andenken*) a matter of recognizing first that the Greek

²⁴² The phrase “course of remembering,” no doubt, recalls Dieter Henrich’s essay “The Course of Remembering,” in which he rather harshly criticizes Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s poem “Remembrance” (“*Andenken*”), criticizing it for its imperiousness and claiming unique access to Hölderlin’s meaning. While I am more interested in Heidegger’s account of remembering than I am in the adequacy of his interpretation and appropriation of Hölderlin’s poetry, a word should be said about Henrich’s essay. Henrich is generally more concerned with the correct interpretation of Hölderlin’s poem, which is to say, getting Hölderlin *right* than it is with a conception of remembering that Hölderlin presents or the one that Heidegger proffers in his interpretation. He thus identifies *what* the poet remembers with *where* the poet remembers, which Henrich takes to be the French city of Bordeaux. It is only through remembering, for Henrich’s Hölderlin, that we come to value appropriately what we have lost: “remembering... is at once the course and the retrospective connection to the whole of the course. The course leads to its goal only if at the same time it leads to an understanding of itself as a course. Without the structure of the whole, the course would not arrive at any perspicuous view.” “The Course of Remembrance,” Trans. Taylor Carman. *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays*. Ed. Eckhart Förster (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997): pp. 141-254, p. 241. For further analyses of Heidegger’s appropriation of Hölderlin see Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Hölderlin’s ‘Andenken,’” Trans. Richard Palmer, in *Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s*. Ed. James Risser (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999): pp. 145-162 and Bernard Freydsberg “On Hölderlin’s ‘Andenken’: Heidegger, Gadamer, and Henrich—A Decision?” *Research in Phenomenology* Vol. 34 (2004): pp. 181-197.

world is no longer our own and, second, that it is a non-appropriative preparation for new possibilities for understanding who we are.

Heidegger's revisions to his interpretation of *Antigone* have not gone unnoticed. For some, it sheds light on his political commitments and his deepening reservations about the on-going war in Germany. Véronique Fóti suggests that these reservations are notably evident because Heidegger's "entire rhetoric has changed from a rhetoric of power to a rhetoric of alienation."²⁴³ This rhetorical shift signals a change from the violent and uncanny conflict between *technē* and *dikē* to a conception of the uncanny that emphasizes human being's unhomely character. Kathleen Wright interprets such a rhetorical shift as a desire on Heidegger's part to conceal the "militantly political version of the essence of poetry and poetic dwelling" in the 1930s with the "quietism" of his later years because of his political failings.²⁴⁴

Heidegger himself has interpreted these lectures in terms of an encrypted critique of National Socialism.²⁴⁵ We should, for obvious reasons, be wary of Heidegger's own recommendation for understanding the meaning of this course. Not only may we be naturally suspicious of his motives, but we may question his assumed transparent self-understanding and the attempt to control the interpretation of his work. More hermeneutically, taking these suggestions can foreclose the possibility of genuinely coming to an understanding of what is being said in these lectures.

If Heidegger's return to the ode is not primarily motivated by political concerns, and if it cannot be fully explained by the historical and political conditions of war-torn

²⁴³ Véronique Fóti, "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy," p. 173.

²⁴⁴ Kathleen Wright, "Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin's Poetry," *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, Technology*, eds. Karsten Harries, Christoph Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994): pp. 164-174. p. 165.

²⁴⁵ Cf. Véronique Fóti, "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Sophoclean Tragedy," p. 165.

Germany, what motivates his return to it? Julian Young offers an interesting suggestion worth developing. He writes that Heidegger's "attempt to portray Hölderlin's 'remembrance' of Greece as a reminding us of *our* true gods [was] a bad mistake" because it prevented him from listening to and being educated by what Hölderlin had to say about the relationship between tragedy, remembering, and the Greeks.²⁴⁶ Rather than retrieve a specific content of the Greek world, Heidegger instead turns his sights on the structure of remembering. The way we experience remembering, its form, thus is more important than the content of what we remember.

In order to show how tragedy offers a structure for remembering, it will first be useful to rethink some of Heidegger's reasons for retrieving the Greeks. Heidegger still maintains that the forgetfulness of Being characterizes the present age and uses a number of striking metaphors to describe it, including calling it a time of "destitution,"²⁴⁷ a time of "night,"²⁴⁸ and a time of "winter."²⁴⁹ Calculative thinking is a consequence of forgetfulness, which obscures the way that we experience Being. Human action is interpreted, under calculative thinking, as "that which a process yields and provides a result."²⁵⁰ The contemporary age is characterized by its drive to order things, amass results, and judge something in terms of its usefulness. "The only thing that is ever questionable," Heidegger writes, "is how we can measure and fathom and exploit the world as quickly as possible, as securely as possible, and as completely as possible"

²⁴⁶ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, p. 81.

²⁴⁷ Heidegger, "What are Poets for?" *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971): pp. 91-142, p. 91.

²⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: "Andenken"*, (Frankfurt am Main : Vittorio Klostermann, 1982), p. 92, my translation.

²⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, Trans. Keith Hoeller. (Amherst, NY: Humanities Press, 2000): p. 52.

²⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: "The Ister."* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): p. 41. Hereafter, citations to this work will be made in text, with the abbreviation HHI, followed by the page number of this translation.

(HHI, 42). This suggests a deeper problem than merely not knowing who we are. Not only do we not know who we are, but this very problem is no longer experienced as a problem for us any longer.

The reason for this forgetfulness of Being is, simply put, that the modern age lacks a festival.²⁵¹ More specifically, not only does the present age lack a festival but it does not even recognize that it lacks a festival. The result of this lack has significant implications for understanding the meaning of communal life and the meaning of history. It suggests that we tend to take our life in common for granted and as no longer in need of being questioned. It is as if our communal narrative identity has become self-evident. What thus needs to be grasped through the festive celebration is the way that we come to challenge who we are through the course of remembering, thus offering the possibility for configuring another sense of who we are. The festival thus offers an occasion for remembering who we are by calling our everyday practices into question, thus inaugurating history.

What makes Greece unique, Heidegger claims, is that its calendar “is actually (*eigentlich*) a festival calendar.”²⁵² The experience of festive time inaugurates another history because it offers an experience of time distinct from everyday time. To observe a holiday means “setting oneself outside everyday activity, the cessation of work.”²⁵³ A cessation of work is distinct from a break from work or a vacation. Such is the difference between describing the Sabbath, for example, as the day of rest, and calling a Saturday

²⁵¹ Cf. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne: Andenken*, pp 59-85

²⁵² Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne: Andenken*, p. 67 (my translation).

²⁵³ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: Andenken*, p. 62 (my translation).

the first day of the weekend.²⁵⁴ One ceases to work during a festival, not merely to rest and steel oneself for the oncoming work week, but to develop connection with the sacred and the holy. During a holiday, Heidegger continues, we “step into the...intimation of the wonder that all around us a world worlds at all, that there is something rather than nothing, that there are things, and that we ourselves are in their midst, that we ourselves are and nevertheless hardly know who we are, and hardly know that we do not know all of this.”²⁵⁵ Thus, when, as Hölderlin writes in “Remembrance,” one passes “a fragrant cupful of dark light, that I might rest,” on such a holiday, it is done so Heidegger argues, “in the poetic sense of the poet, the *wedding festival between men and gods*.”²⁵⁶ The poetic memory at work in “Remembrance”, according to Heidegger, thus steps outside the everyday and the ordinary in order to experience the holy. It is this experience of the holy that inaugurates a memory of another kind of experience of time and a different experience of history.

The Greek festival Hölderlin has in mind here, according to Heidegger, is tragedy: “The tragedies (*Trauerspiele*) of the Greeks are festivals. It says: here, decisions are made about the rejoinder (*Entgegnung*) and also the rejoinder (*Entgegnung*) of the people and the gods.”²⁵⁷ Tragedy constitutes a people insofar as it places them into contact with the holy. Furthermore, the festivals of tragedy constitute history: “Festivals are the

²⁵⁴ For a particularly insightful description of this distinction, see Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Sabbath* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979). In distinction from the holy spaces that churches construct, he suggests that the Jewish practice of the Sabbath sanctifies time through rest.

²⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymne: Andenken*, p. 64. As translated by Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, p. 86, with my own slight modifications.

²⁵⁶ Heidegger, “Remembrance,” *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, p. 126.

²⁵⁷ “Die “Trauerspiele” der Griechen sind Festfeiern. Das sagt: Hier fallen Entscheidungen ueber die Entgegnung und aus der Entgegnung der Menschen und Goetter.” Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymne: Andenken*, p. 78 (my translation).

authentic (*eigenlichen*) days of history: history making days.”²⁵⁸ Festivals do not merely commemorate something that has passed, but they help to prepare for what is to come. Thus, the poet’s reference to the festival day that marks the beginning of spring, that day in March “when night and day are equal,” in fact marks the transition from the foreign, which calls us into question, to the home. As a result, the poet’s founding of history through tragic poetry is a cause for both mourning and for celebration.²⁵⁹ Because the festive experience through tragedy is no longer available to us, we can only experience the festival as a loss and as absent. Though Hölderlin’s memory directs us toward the festival, it does so only in terms of an absence and as no longer our own to appropriate. It is thus in order to restore a sense of the tragic that is appropriate to our own times and our own sensibility, that Heidegger finds an interlocutor in both Hölderlin and Sophocles. As such, we can understand the reason for Heidegger’s return to Sophoclean poetry as an attempt to bring the lecture’s listeners, and the book’s readers, face-to-face with the foreign in order to relate to and understand “one’s own.”

How, then, would it be possible to inaugurate a new festival calendar, one which is motivated by a recollection of the Greeks but also is a recognition that ours must be different from the Greeks? In offering a strategy for such retrieval, Heidegger cites Hölderlin’s letter to his friend, Böhlendorff: “We shall learn nothing more difficult than to freely use our national character. And as I believe, it is precisely the clarity of presentation which is as natural to us as the fire of heaven was to the Greeks. But what is proper to us must be learned as well as what is foreign. That is why the Greeks are

²⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymne: Andenken*, p. 78 (my translation).

²⁵⁹ As Hölderlin writes in his epigram “Sophocles,” “Many have tried, but in vain with joy to express the most joyful; here at last, in mourning, wholly I find it expressed.”

indispensable to us.”²⁶⁰ To this structure of appropriation, Heidegger further emphasizes, “what for the Greeks is their own, is what is foreign to the Germans; and what is foreign to the Germans is proper to the Greeks” (HHI, 124). Thus, the “clarity of presentation” is proper to the Germans, and the “fire of heaven” is foreign. What is significant about this structure is, as Dennis Schmidt notes, that the relationship to the Greeks “is not to be understood according to a model that takes antiquity as the childhood of our present where we find a sort of naïve and innocent form of the art of the present.” Instead, “it is to be understood as the realm in which what is most our own appears in the guise of something foreign.”²⁶¹ The only way for the Germans to appropriate what is natural or proper to them is through a “journey” to the Greeks thereby retrieve the “fire from heaven.” Doing so will also allow the Germans to appropriate what is proper to them because what is proper for a people, a *Volk*, can only be appropriated if it is experienced in the foreign and as the foreign. This suggests that to retrieve or remember the Greeks expresses, at once, the unity between journeying from one’s home and dwelling within it.

In becoming “unhomely” through the experience of the foreign, we cannot assimilate it, or otherwise reduce its otherness into the same. Rather, as Heidegger puts in his lecture on “The Ister,” “only where the foreign is known and acknowledged in its essential oppositional character does there exist the possibility of a genuine relationship, that is, of a uniting that is not a confused mixing but a conjoining in distinction” (HHI, 54). Such a journey makes manifest a form of presence that is at the same time an absence. What is absent is doubly so: Greek possibilities are no longer our own, and we do not even immediately recognize the loss of such possibilities as a loss. It is as if we

²⁶⁰ Hölderlin, as cited in Heidegger’s essay “Remembrance,” p. 112.

²⁶¹ Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 140.

have lost the ability to experience a loss as a loss. We are, in other words, separated, even exiled, from something that is not ours to claim, but which nevertheless determines who we are. To remember the festival is to remember something that is foreign to us. We are, in other words, separated, even exiled, from something that is not ours to claim, but which nevertheless determines who we are.

The journey through the foreign is played out on several levels: first, Heidegger argues that Hölderlin's hymn itself "has taken into its singular core this becoming homely in one's own" (HHI, 49); second, the image of the river's course that Hölderlin poetizes suggests that it comes from the east and turns back on itself; and, thirdly, it is in Hölderlin's own encounter with Sophocles and Greek poetry that the homeliness and homelessness of Western human being comes to be decided. The river Ister becomes an image through which Heidegger examines the relationship, both spatially and temporally, between Germany and Greece. Spatially, the river runs from the west, beginning near Heidegger's Black Forest home, and flows east, emptying in the Black Sea. Heidegger interprets the course of this river as an expression of the relationship between east and west, Germany and Greece, and origins and ends. The river becomes the dynamic place where the destiny of the West is decided because it both indicates the relationship between two cultures, one Greek and the other German. Heidegger in fact reverses the flow of the river by suggesting that, though it begins in Germany, its commencement is in Greece.

This reversal has at least two significant implications. First, the river flows hesitantly at its source, and appears almost to flow backwards. He writes, "such hesitancy can come only from there being a mysterious counterflow that pushes counter to its

originary springing forth” (HHI, 143). The “flow” toward the east is met with a counter-turning that brings it back close to the originary power of the home. Second, “the Ister dwells by the source and is reluctant to abandon its locale because it dwells near the origin. And it dwells near the origin because it has returned home to its locality from its journeying to foreign parts” (HHI, 164). The Ister thus expresses the unity of journeying out from the homeland toward the foreign and dwelling within it.

Heidegger names this dynamic movement of “coming-to-be-at-home” through the loss of the home the “law of history” (HHI, 143). Such a law “consists in the fact that historical human beings, at the beginning of their history, are not intimate with what is homely, and indeed must even become unhomely with respect to the latter in order to learn the proper appropriation of what is their own in venturing to the foreign, and to first become homely in the return from the foreign” (HHI, 125). This journey further requires letting “what is foreign come toward that humankind in its being unhomely so as to find, in an encounter with the foreign, whatever is fitting for the return to the hearth” (HHI, 125). By revisiting Sophocles, Heidegger attempts to show how Antigone herself enacts this very journey, thereby securing the origins of western history.

There are, however, significant risks that Heidegger takes in employing this particular interpretive strategy. Dieter Henrich puts the point succinctly when he argues that Heidegger “speaks with the conviction of someone in touch with Hölderlin’s ideas from the outset.”²⁶² They give the appearance of a rapprochement between his philosophical analysis and Hölderlin’s poetry. It is as if Heidegger’s language is wholly in touch with Hölderlin’s. If this is the case, a particular dilemma arises: either the process of translating poetic ideas and images into a philosophical idiom requires, as

²⁶² Dieter Henrich, “The Course of Remembrance,” p. 294, n. 94

Julian Young puts it, “the substitution of co-designators, of synonyms”²⁶³ or it has no essential connection to the original text and is merely free-standing constructions. One interpretive strategy assumes that the foreign or other completely and adequately translated or subsumed into that which is one’s own; the other suggests that the two are incommensurable. While these two seem diametrically opposed, both presuppose that there is a gulf between languages or idioms that needs to be bridged in order for understanding to take place.

Heidegger claims that understanding translation in terms of having to bridge languages reduces it to a methodology, one which tries to produce a mechanical algorithm that finds an exact equivalence between languages. Heidegger’s interpretive strategy for understanding and “translating” moves along a different path, one which “goes along” with the object of inquiry” (HHI, 28-29). The reason for this is “because every translation must necessarily accomplish the transition from the spirit of one language to another” (HHI, 62). Different languages have different “spirits” (*Geister*). However, rather than the Hegelian conception of “spirit”, with its connotations of the absolute and “that which conditions and determines every being in its being,” Heidegger suggests instead that spirit thinks “that which is fittingly destined for human beings” (HHI, 127-128). What is “fitting” is decidedly futural in character, and because it “always remains in coming” it is something “‘nonactual’ that is already ‘acting’” (HHI, 128). It is something into which we grow and from which we understand ourselves. Because human being is “open” to what is destined, to that which is coming, spirit refers to the way that we experience our world.

²⁶³ Julian Young, “Poets and Rivers: Heidegger on Hölderlin’s “*Der Ister*. *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*. Vol. 38, no. 2 (Spring 1999): pp. 391-416, p. 392.

Because each language has a different “spirit,” translation and interpretation cannot be a one-to-one correspondence of terms. The past is not a matter of stepping into the mind or place of those who experienced an event, nor is it an attempt to find an exact equivalence between terms and worlds.²⁶⁴ For example, a contemporary orchestra performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 cannot fully recapture the initial audiences’ and performers’ attitudes and understandings of the piece, even if it is played on period pieces. At the same time, this does not mean that all performances are of equal worth. Rather, the performance seeks to recreate the composition from within its own vocabulary and experience. Interpretation, insofar as it is also a translation, “is more an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one’s own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language” (HHI, 65-66). Because translation is a poetic venture, it is creative, circumspect and approximate. It is an encounter with a foreign language in order to appropriate the possibilities that remain concealed in one’s own language: “We learn the Greek language so that the concealed essence of our own historical commencement can find its way into the clarity of our word” (HHI, 66). Heidegger’s reflections on translation and interpretation can help to clarify the structure of remembering. To remember or retrieve the Greek experience cannot be to reinstitute their sensibilities or their worldview. Nor does it mean that Greek experience is irretrievably lost to us, and that all forms of remembering the Greeks are equally true. Thus, remembering does not mean remembering a particular *content* of the Greek experience of Being. What Heidegger means by remembrance (*Andenken*) is instead a

²⁶⁴ It is also important to note that the argument that suggests Heidegger is merely “doing his own thing” when he turns to Hölderlin’s and Sophocles’ poetry for insight tends to neglect the way that Heidegger’s interpretations are in fact rather scholarly. Heidegger often turns to Hölderlin’s letters, drafts, and he cross references ideas with other poems. Cf. Bernard Freydburg’s “On Hölderlin’s *Andenken*: Heidegger, Gadamer, and Henrich – A Decision?” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 34 (2004): pp. 181-197.

certain *style* of thinking, one which is attentive to otherness, to the fragility, to the frailty, and to the mortality at the very essence of one's belonging to a history and people. It is one that relates both to that which has passed, but from the perspective of that which is to come. Remembering the Greeks, in other words, is not done to revitalize some ancient, long-forgotten, understanding of Being. Rather, staging an encounter with Greek tragedy is thus done in service of the appropriation of our own "destiny."

Thus, in order to experience the force of Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger develops a sort of philosophical "play within a play" between Hölderlin and Sophocles. Heidegger writes:

[Hölderlin's] poetizing is itself the historical being of Western human beings as historical. Such poetizing must therefore remain in historical dialogue with those foreign poets who, in their own way, poetized the essence of human beings with respect to this becoming homely. The pure fulfillment of this poetic necessity in the foreign land of the Greeks is a choral song in the *Antigone* tragedy by Sophocles. (HHI, 64-65)

Thus, in order to determine what is proper to "us," we must first confront the meaning of Sophocles' *Antigone* in order bring ourselves face-to-face with the "foreign of the other" (*Fremden des Anderen*) before we can understand Hölderlin's poetry.²⁶⁵ This oblique approach to Sophocles, through a series of digressions is thus necessitated by the attempt to confront the reader and listeners with the experience of the foreign in order to appropriate one's own.

Immediately apparent in this interpretation is that Heidegger does not limit himself to the first part of the choral ode, as he did in 1935. He now draws on other aspects of the play, including its characters and its plot. Furthermore, the fundamental tension between *technē* and *dikē* is replaced by a more original tension, one between

²⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne: "Andenken,"* p. 86.

polis-pelein. The result of this break with the earlier translation is that the place of Being's disclosure is neither longer violently wrestled away from concealment nor can it be conceived as setting Being into work through the work of *technē*. Rather, as Clare Geiman suggests, the "founding" of the essence of Being takes place in tragedy's orientation to the "not" and the "nothing," which silently indicate the concealed source that "gives" place and time for human dwelling.²⁶⁶

Just as striking as the divergences between these two interpretations are the continuities. Heidegger organizes his interpretation around the already familiar phrases *to deinotaton*, *hupsipolis apolis*, and *pantoporos aporos*. To these three pairings, Heidegger adds the closing lines of the second antistrophe, which describe the banishment from the hearth (*Hestia*). These paradoxical formulations provide the basic structure for Heidegger's interpretation, and help to clarify the necessity to pass through the foreign in order to appropriate one's own home.

Nevertheless, among these paradoxical formulations, the preeminent term in Heidegger's interpretation remains *to deinon*. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* this phrase expresses the uncanniness of human being insofar as its violence lets the overwhelming sway be gathered together and exposed through the work of *technē*, and the natural tendency of human being to transgress and overstep its bounds into the unfamiliar. In this lecture, however, *to deinon* refers to the essential unhomeliness of human being. In what appears to be an apparent criticism of his earlier position, Heidegger writes:

One might think that the *deinotaton* means that human beings are the most actively violent beings in the sense of that animal full of cunning that Nietzsche calls the "blond beast" and "the predator." Such predatory uncanniness of human beings as historical, however, is an extreme derivative and essential consequence of a concealed uncanniness that is

²⁶⁶ Clare Pearson Geiman, "Heidegger's *Antigones*," p. 174.

grounded in unhomeliness, an unhomeliness that in turn has its concealed ground in the counterturning relation of being to human beings. (HHI, 90)

Human beings are the most unfamiliar beings because they are essentially not at home in the familiar. This “unhomeliness” is essentially ontological, and characterizes the human being’s relationship to Being. It is not a mere property of human beings; rather as Heidegger notes, when connected to the *pelei*, which Heidegger interprets as “to stir,” “to come forth,” and “to abide in one’s locale,” it reveals that human being emerges from its being unsettled. Thus, “uncanniness does not first arise as a consequence of humankind; rather, humankind emerges from uncanniness and remains within it—looms out of it and stirs within it” (HHI, 72). Furthermore, because human beings are essentially not at home in the familiar, the historical task of being human is to “come to be at home.” Human beings are *to deinotaton* because becoming homely is being unhomely. The unique pairing of becoming homely-being unhomely expresses the way that the passage through the foreign enables one to become at home.

Human being’s experience of the foreign, Heidegger goes at length to emphasize, is not to be construed as a kind of tourism or adventure. It is not the sort of exotic travel that French engaged in during the 18th century to exotic locales to find human beings in a “state of nature,” nor is it travelling to foreign countries to get a better understanding of who one is. Such an adventurer is interesting and not at home, no doubt, but not *deinon*. As the most unsettled, human beings ontologically are never simply at home or simply homeless. Rather, human beings come to be homely by being continually shut out of one’s home. To be unsettled, in other words, is to seek out a home in the context of a lack

of stable ground. As a result, the foreign, the unhomely, belongs together with the home, one's own.

As the most unsettling, human beings are always in danger of being shut out of the home in the very movement to become homely. Heidegger thus writes "the homely is sought after and striven for in the violent activity of passing through that which is inhabital with respect to sea and earth, and yet in such passage the homely is not attained" (HHI, 73). In other words, human beings are, as Heidegger's paradoxical formulation has it, *pantoporos aporos*. The human being makes its way through everything (*pantoporos*), but in doing so, finds itself without a way (*aporos*), and "unable to transform that which it has made its way through into an experience that would let it attain any insight into its own essence" (HHI, 75). As human beings "earn their living," take care of their everyday business, and make their way, they fail to grasp who they are (HHI, 76). As a result, in comporting to beings, in caring for them and insofar as we can use and manipulate beings for our own purposes, we are shut out and excluded from grasping our essence; we "forget" our relation to Being in busying ourselves with beings (HHI, 76). This suggests that by building cities, establishing families, participating in the culture's ethical and political life, and worshipping the city's gods, we lose a relationship to our ownmost Being; similarly, it is because we do not know who we are that we try to make our way.

Because human being dwells amidst beings, and understands itself in terms of its involvement with beings, he or she is inclined to lose sight of and forget Being itself. In our familiarity with beings, we become oblivious to Being. Thus, the mode of unsettledness that is human being's unhomeliness "is possible for human beings alone,

because they comport themselves to beings as such, and thereby understand being. And because they understand being, human beings alone can also forget being” (HHI, 76).

Heidegger continues:

Strictly speaking, unhomeliness is not all one form of the uncanny among others but is essentially “beyond” these, something the poet expresses in calling the human being that which is most uncanny. The most powerful “catastrophes” we can think of in nature and in the cosmos are nothing in terms of their uncanniness compared to that uncanniness that the human essence in itself is, insofar as human beings, placed among beings as such and set in place for beings, forget being. In this way, the homely becomes an empty and errant wandering for them, one that they fill out with their activities. The uncanniness of the unhomely here consists in the fact that human beings themselves in their essence are a *catastrophe*—a reversal that turns them away from their own essence. Among beings, the human being is the sole catastrophe. (HHI, 76-77)

The essence of human being is thus understood as the being who, in its understanding and interpretation of beings, is confronted with Being as such. However, because of its involvement with beings, it is always at risk of forgetting Being itself. The understanding of beings brings us face-to-face with our very Being; at the same time, such an understanding of beings threatens us with the forgetfulness of Being. Human beings are thus *pantoporos aporos*.

The second characterization of human beings’ unsettling essence is *hupsipolis apolis*. This phrase, of course, mirrors the paradoxes of *pantoporos aporos* (Cf., HHI, 79). Just as *pantoporos aporos* focuses on the “counterturning” within the word *poros*, the phrase to be deciphered now keys in on the movement of the word *polis*. *Polis* even further designates that which is at stake in *poros*: the *polis* is “a particular realm of *poros*, as it were, one field in which the latter emphatically comes to pass” (HHI, 79). The *polis* does not designate the city-state, nor does it refer to the political domain where decisions about governing take place. Rather, the *polis* is, Heidegger writes, “the word for that

realm that constantly became questionable anew, remained worthy of question” (HHI, 80-81). It is “that realm and locale around which everything question-worthy and uncanny turns in an exceptional sense” (HHI, 81).²⁶⁷ The *polis* is the place where beings are made manifest in their inherent questionability, and is thus itself question-worthy.

The pairing *hupsipolis-apolis* thus no longer reveals the possibility of appropriating oneself in the tension of world creation and world disclosure, as it did in 1935. Rather, it now reveals, as Geiman notes, “the essential ground of the catastrophic turn away from essentiality” expressed by *pantoporos aporos*.²⁶⁸ The counterturning dyad *hupsipolis-apolis* will reveal the full scope of human possibilities from the perspective of the place where human being first appears. The *polis*, according to Heidegger’s interpretation, is now “the open site of that fitting destining [*Schickung*] from out of which all human relations toward beings—and that always means in the first instance the relation of beings as such to humans—are determined” (HHI, 82). To occupy such an “open site” means to be exposed, thus unconcealed, and to be thrust out of the “home,” thus binding human being to the possibility of forgetfulness and being shut out of the home.

The *polis* is thus the site of human being’s unfamiliarity. It is so, as Miguel de Beistegui concisely puts it, because “man has the twofold tendency to look beyond his place into the place of being, thus opening his own place as the place of an essential belonging-together with being, as much as to overlook such a place, and thus to dwell in

²⁶⁷ It is important to note that Heidegger begins each of these characterizations with a “perhaps,” as if to suggest that we cannot adequately define the *polis* once and for all and that there may be no empirical verification for his characterization. His desire to avoid the cruder forms of empiricism tempts some interpreters to conclude that Heidegger’s characterizations of these Greek words have no solid basis.

²⁶⁸ Clare Pearson Geiman, “Heidegger’s *Antigones*,” p. 177.

such a way that the whole of being becomes the most familiar and obvious.”²⁶⁹ The *polis*, in its ontological sense, becomes where human beings come to understand beings in their familiarity, thereby ensuring that we overlook being itself. At the same time, the *polis* becomes the place where any comportment to beings becomes possible because it is also the place of Being. Heidegger thus writes:

Human beings are placed into the site of their historical abode, into the *polis*, because they and they alone comport themselves toward beings as beings, toward beings in their unconcealment and concealing, and can be mistaken within the being of beings, and at times, that is, continually within the most extreme realms of this site, must be mistaken within being, so that they take nonbeings to be beings and beings to be nonbeings” (HHI, 87)

The *polis* thus makes possible each particular conception of politics because it determines human beings “negatively” by locating human beings in an “open” space, which binds them to errancy, refusal, and forgetfulness. This “open” space is always historical, insofar as it is the ground for the possibility of relating to the whole of being in such a way that what is experienced is not just particular beings but the truth, or the being, of such beings. At the same time the “open space” is one that is unsettling: human beings can only make their way in the world and establish a home on the basis of being fundamentally not-at-home. It thus renders human beings essentially *apolis*, without home and shut out of it.

Furthermore, the *polis* is intimately connected to *pelein*, which means to emerge and come forth of its own accord (HHI, 71). The sense of motion contained in this term is rendered more specific in Heidegger’s suggestion that it “means the concealed presencing of stillness and tranquility amid constant and unconcealed absencing and presencing, that is, amid the appearing of change” (HHI, 72). By pointing to a kind of constancy amidst

²⁶⁹ Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, p. 137.

the change, *pelein* underlies the way that particular beings come into being and pass. As such, it is not simply present or absent; it is only as withdrawing that allows for beings to be. It is an originary movement of coming to be present, which is never simply present but only is present only as an absence. The motion of the *polis* as *pelein* determines the place of human being by way of absence, withdrawal, and even abandonment.

This originary withdrawal and absence suggests the centrality of death in the drama of human affairs. To find oneself as human means to find oneself as mortal, and it is to discover that the possibility of such loss is constitutive of one's place. Such vanishing establishes abandonment and death as the ground for human historical dwelling. Human being can only come to be at home in the world when it is faced with the fundamental possibility of not being there any longer, which is to say, faced with the possibility of its death.

These tensions reveal that the relationship to absence, rather than presence, becomes the hallmark of unsettled human being. The relation to the homely is thus always a negative relationship. The human being is the most unsettling, *to deinotaton*, because it "finds no entry into [its] essence, [and] remains excluded from it and without any way that could allow it to enter the center of its essence" (HHI, 74-75). To experience how one's being is unsettled is thus an experience of refusal, one in which the "unhomely is deprived of the homely" (HHI, 75). This refusal is itself strange:

What becomes manifest in these relations is the essence of uncanniness itself, namely, presencing in the manner of an absencing, and in such a way that whatever presences and absences here is itself simultaneously the open realm of all presencing and absencing. (HHI, 75)

It is not the case that human being is fundamentally homeless or that it essentially lacks a home. Such an understanding would be a mere negation and a mere absence of human

being's essence. Heidegger instead wants to recover a positive sense of absence, a productivity of such a lack, a "presencing in the manner of an absencing." The interplay between presence and absence comes to define, albeit tacitly and silently, the tension and movement that belong to the human being as the most unsettling being.

What, then, does Heidegger's revised interpretation have to tell about Antigone herself? In his revised interpretation, Heidegger sees Antigone herself as revealing the essence of humanity, for she accepts the necessity of what befalls her as inherent in her own being (HHI, 103-104). Heidegger notes that her "suffering the *deinon* is her supreme action" which constitutes the movement and "drama of becoming homely" (HHI, 115). Antigone is thus not a tragic figure because of the consequences of her burying her brother. She is tragic on Heidegger's ontological account because she reveals what is to be human by estranging herself from herself. Antigone's actions do not stem from willful subjectivity, but arise because she enacts what it is to be human in her self-estrangement, which consists in her appropriating her unhomeliness and making it her essence and dwelling within it (HHI, 118). In Heidegger's terms "her dying is her becoming homely, but a becoming homely within and out of such being unhomely" (HHI, 104). Thus, Antigone, who is unhomely, is such because she places herself in relationship to the hearth; in other words, in both presence and absence (HHI, 107). Her understanding of her situation is no accident, served by chance or the gods. Heidegger explains that "what determines Antigone is that which first bestows ground and necessity upon the distinction of the dead and the priority of blood" (HHI, 117). Rather than raise the ontic question of whose blood and to whom we owe our loyalties, Heidegger refers to the ontological ground that makes questions of particular filial piety and one's particular heritage

meaningful. The primal bestowal of death and life, while remaining ultimately nameless, arises through the relation between human beings and Being itself. In other words, the homeliness and unhomeliness go together, as if through a “‘thoughtful remembrance’ of being and through a belonging to the hearth” (HHI, 115). Antigone’s suffering, as a result, arises through the pain of being separated and the ensuing search for the original belonging together of beings in their Being. It is by recognizing the most intimate truth of existence—that of her own suffering—that Antigone thoughtfully remembers the fragility and transitory character of her ownmost essence.

Separation from the hearth and the odyssey back to it reformulates the notion of tragedy first presented in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The distinction between presence and absence that runs throughout Heidegger’s writings comes to a head when he draws out the meaning of human being that he finds in Sophocles’ *Antigone*. While he initially conjoined the reversal of fortune that occurs in tragedy with the necessary ruination of beings, the revision of the experience of tragedy as arising in his Hölderlin lectures describes the duality of presence and absence in terms of conjoining being at home and displacement. In refiguring this displacement, the absence that is the hearth can only be retrieved through a thoughtful remembering, recalling, or an expectant anticipation.

This thoughtful remembrance (*Andenken*) stands in marked contrast to his interpretation of *technē* in this new rendering of the ode. *Technē* in his interpretation in this ode is relegated to a conception of metaphysics that is instituted with Plato (Cf. HHI, 114). Doing so ultimately equates *technē* with the dissolution of the self in the forgetfulness of Being by becoming lost in the desire for technical mastery of beings.

Heidegger in this way interprets Hölderlin's line "Full of merit, yet poetically/Humans dwell upon this earth" as suggesting the following:

In what they effect and in their works they are capable of a fullness. It is almost impossible to survey what humans achieve, the way in which they establish themselves upon this earth in using and exploiting and working it, in protecting and securing it and furthering their 'art,' that is, in Greek, *technē*. (HHI, 137)

Technē becomes part of the works and achievements of culture, which is itself only the consequence of human dwelling. As a result, *technē*, as Heidegger makes clear, does not articulate the essence of human beings anymore. Indeed, though *technē* is responsible for the achievements of culture, it is only on the basis of dwelling that culture itself is possible. Because *technē* does not reach into the "essential ground of [human] dwelling on this earth" it misses the way that absence helps to define human being.

In contrast to this, Heidegger's interpretation of Sophoclean tragedy achieves remembrance by displacing this technological desire and by acknowledging absence as absence. Indeed, Heidegger characterizes tragic poetry as a form of knowing that is of a fundamentally different kind than that of *technē*. It requires a form of knowing that "demands of us a transformation in our ways of experiencing, one that concerns being in its entirety" (HHI, 166). This means that poetic thinking addresses the concealment of Being and preserves its absence in its saying. "Dwelling, being properly homely," Heidegger writes, "is 'poetic'" (HHI, 137). This means that poetic remembering reorients the relationship between human beings and Being itself. This new orientation, according to Heidegger, founds a new history and constitutes another beginning.

III.5. Conclusion: Tragedy and Remembrance

In order to understand better the way that remembrance of Greek tragedy treats an absence as an absence, thereby enabling another beginning, I will return to Heidegger's interpretation of "Remembrance." Toward the end of this essay, Heidegger suggests that the word "but" structures the poem. This simple word occurs a number of times.

Together, they mark out "the structure of the voyage of becoming-at-home in which is one's own...[and] gives to the poem its hidden tone."²⁷⁰ For example, in the second stanza, "But a figtree is growing in the courtyard," announces a change in the time of memory, from the time of the everyday to the time of the festival. Heidegger suggests that this word is the "word of mystery...that which, *purely sprung*, remains its origin."²⁷¹

The simple word "but" thus become a kind of absence that shapes our world by pointing to its incompleteness, to the co-presence in it of the seen and unseen.²⁷² These sorts of absences are central to the work of remembering because they call upon us—much like the initial call to the sun that opens the hymn "The Ister"—to bear witness to what happened, retrieving what happened for the sake of that which has been lost.

While the loss of one's past cannot be fully retrieved or overcome, it is not a simple nullity. Here, the notion of being exiled might be of some help. To be exiled is to be separated from one's own; it is the loss of something that once belonged to oneself. This "loss of a direct memory, of a community, makes one a stranger to something, not of others but of one's own."²⁷³ In being a stranger to one's past, one is a stranger to oneself. It is precisely this experience that can motivate one to bring to light or give words to

²⁷⁰ Heidegger, "Remembrance," *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 172.

²⁷¹ Heidegger, "Remembrance," *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, p. 172.

²⁷² W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 75.

²⁷³ W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 81.

something there, but concealed. In so doing, the experience of loss and absence, of death, draws our attention to those hollows that have been carved out of our experience because of our blindness or inattentiveness. Such attempts, however, do not bring such an exile to an end. Such traces point “us to the absence, and in so doing awakens in us the desire to remember, to make the present, to overcome what cannot in fact be fully overcome, namely that absence itself.”²⁷⁴ Loss and absence creates the impetus to remember, and to bring the past closer to us. However, in indicating such absences, such remembrances do not, and cannot, restore the past to us.²⁷⁵

Tragic poetry achieves remembrance (*Andenken*) as a thoughtful engagement with the roots of one’s own tradition, recognition that it cannot actively preserve such roots without running the risk of concealing them.²⁷⁶ Remembrance, as Heidegger writes, “does not only think of what has been and of what is coming; it ponders from where the coming had first been uttered, and thinks back to where what has been must be concealed, so that this foreign element itself can remain what it is even when it is appropriated.”²⁷⁷ This suggests that in remembrance, human beings relationship to their very unsettled being becomes transformed. By adopting the language of Hölderlin’s poetry and Sophocles’ tragedy, Heidegger finds, “what is fitting in being unhomely is

²⁷⁴ W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 84.

²⁷⁵ W. James Booth offers a number of compelling examples to illustrate this point, which are worthy of mention. The first is George Perec’s novel *La disparition*, translated as *A Void*. While Perec tells a coherent story, the work is nevertheless composed without the letter *e*. Though it is never used, and even where the choice of words is not limited by its absence, the missing letter comes to be felt *as* missing, shaping the experience of reading the book. The second novel to which Booth refers is Vassilis Alexakis’s *La langue maternelle*. In this work, Alexakis makes a puzzle out of an epsilon that is found at the entrance to Apollo’s temple. In attempting to determine the meaning of this letter, it is tied to a number of other absences. Thus, in contrast to Perec’s missing *e*, which is felt as lost rather than explicitly remarked upon, the absence in Alexakis’s novel is one that draws us to retrieve its meaning. Booth’s book is noteworthy for its ability to draw on a number of different examples. Cf. Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 74-75.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn: The Ister*, pp. 114-119.

²⁷⁷ Heidegger, “Remembrance,” *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*. Trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000): pp. 101-174, p.171.

becoming homely. Preserving such becoming is that being historical that attains its essential fullness when it comes to know what has been fittingly destined for it as that which has already been” (HHI, 128). Human being’s becoming homely is the disclosure of having been destined, thus endowing the task of becoming homely with a heritage and a temporal aspect. Yet it can only know such a destiny until after it has been transmitted, and thus only after one has been already claimed by it.

It is, in a sense, part of the task of bearing witness to the past, safeguarding it from utter annihilation. Antigone herself becomes who she is by being unhomely among beings, estranging herself from the everyday. She leaves the hearth and home, the realm of the everyday, in order to take up the task of burying her brother Polyneices. In so doing, he becomes “homely within being” (HHI, 120). Only by leaving the hearth, does she preserve and sustain the meaning of Being. She experiences the way that death estranges that which near and familiar. For Dennis Schmidt, this means that “she now signifies the quality which the West and its traditions of metaphysics and Christianity cannot grasp.”²⁷⁸ This quality is that “the most elemental human solitude is not isolated, but at the site of what will become communal life.”²⁷⁹ This quality, though Schmidt does not explicitly draw this connection, is found in Antigone’s tomb. The tomb becomes a marker of absence that structures the present. It is an absence that we must let be an absence. This need not be a cause for pessimism or resignation. Rather, bearing witness in this sense allows another history to speak by remaining committed to that which has been concealed and passed over by technology.

²⁷⁸ Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 260.

²⁷⁹ Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks*, p. 260

Chapter IV: Remembering the Past: Selfhood and Community in Ricoeur

IV.1. Introduction and Thesis

The previous chapters developed Heidegger's ontological account of remembering and its connection to communal existence. However, his desire to maintain a rigid distinction between historicity and historiography threatens to undercut the correlation between selfhood and community that arises in memory. In order to see how remembering can help contribute to communal identity, I will turn to Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of the summoned, or called, subject helps to give some content to Heidegger's ontological account of history, while retaining many of Heidegger's achievements. I argue that there is no fundamental difference between their positions: Ricoeur appropriates some of Heidegger's fundamental themes, and transforms them in their application to the human historical condition.

Ricoeur's appreciation of Heidegger's phenomenology is most evident in his definition of the summoned subject, which he defines as a self "constituted and defined by its position as a respondent to propositions of meaning issuing from [a] symbolic network."²⁸⁰ While Heidegger's account of the call of conscience is formal, Ricoeur attends to the symbolic domain—including the text, action, narrative, ideology, and culture—that enable us to understand the source, the meaning, and the possible ways to respond to the call. Ricoeur suggests, "heritages are transmitted symbolically through language and most often on the basis of symbolic systems implying a minimum of shared beliefs and understandings about the rules permitting the deciphering of signs, symbols,

²⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "The Summoned Subject in the School of the Prophetic Vision." Trans. David Pellauer. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): pp. 262-275, p. 262.

and norms current in a group.”²⁸¹ By attending to the symbolic dimension of heritage, tradition, and memory Ricoeur enriches Heidegger’s account of remembering and repetition. Despite the persisting notion that remembering is an individual act, I will be focusing on the way that its symbolic and mediated nature opens an irreducibly communal element.

This chapter will have several parts. First, I examine Ricoeur’s methodological and substantive criticisms of Heidegger. I then introduce Ricoeur’s long route of memory by examining two basic forms of it—*mnemē* and *anamnesis*. In order to render these dimensions of memory meaningful, they need to be understood from within the perspective of narrative identity, which Ricoeur offers as a response to Heidegger’s existential analysis of Dasein. This brings us to the question “who remembers?” and the relationship between the self and the community. Here too Sophoclean tragedy plays a role, though in a manner quite different from Heidegger. Tragedy becomes a symbol for the way that remembering and forgetting come to constitute the relationship between a self and its community.

IV.2 Ricoeur and Heidegger: On Human Historical Existence

While generally sympathetic to Heidegger’s account of human existence, especially its hermeneutic and historical structure of being-in-the-world, Ricoeur claims that Heidegger’s approach misses an important interpretive dimension of human life. Ricoeur offers two distinct sets of criticisms: one set is methodological and the other substantive. Ultimately, despite their differences, the two stand in basic agreement to the

²⁸¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 256. Further references to this three volume work will occur in the body of the text as “TN” followed by the volume number and then the page number.

extent that Ricoeur's hermeneutics can be seen as a development and elaboration of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics.

IV.2.1. The "Short Route" and the "Long Route"

In a series of methodological essays, Ricoeur situates his own understanding of hermeneutics by distinguishing it from Heidegger's. Hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, is "the theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of a text."²⁸² In restoring the priority of the text to hermeneutics, the path to an ontological account of human existence becomes longer. In the essay "Existence and Hermeneutics," Ricoeur suggests that there are two ways to "graft" hermeneutics to ontology, a short route and a long route.²⁸³

The "short route" breaks "with any discussion of method [and] carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover *understanding*, no longer as a mode of knowledge, but rather as a mode of being."²⁸⁴ This route, which Heidegger takes, bypasses questions of methodology in order to reveal the essentially interpretive structure of human existence. Heidegger begins with the question "what kind of being it is whose being consists of understanding?"²⁸⁵ This question transforms the problem of hermeneutics from a method of textual interpretation to a mode of understanding one's world. Rather than the hermeneutic problem of knowing the past as if it were other, the problem becomes the way that we belong to the past.

²⁸² Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics." Trans. John B. Thompson. *From Text to Action*. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and John B. Thompson. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991): pp. 53-74, p. 53.

²⁸³ Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics." Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin. *The Conflict of Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974): pp. 3-26, p. 3, 6.

²⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," p. 6.

²⁸⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," p. 6.

Despite the merits of the “short route” to ontology, Ricoeur argues that it runs up against two problems. The first is that Heidegger’s ontology of Dasein cannot adjudicate conflicting interpretations of human existence. Heidegger subordinates historical knowledge to ontological understanding without showing how we can derive historical knowledge from ontological understanding.²⁸⁶ In the essay “The Task of Hermeneutics,” Ricoeur writes, “with Heidegger’s philosophy, we are always engaged in going back to the foundations, but we are left incapable of beginning the movement of return that would lead from the fundamental ontology to the properly epistemological question of the status of the human sciences.”²⁸⁷ This problem is especially evident in Heidegger’s claim that historiography cannot tell us anything authentic about Dasein’s existence. As a result, he cannot legitimately claim to have retrieved the origins of temporality and remains incomplete.²⁸⁸ The second problem arises from Heidegger’s rigid separation of the ontological and ontic domains. “If the reversal from epistemological understanding to the being who understands is to be possible,” Ricoeur writes, “we must then be able to describe directly...the privileged being of Dasein, such as it is constituted in itself and thus to be able to recover understanding as one of these modes of being.”²⁸⁹ The difficulty with this proposed strategy, Ricoeur argues, is that it is within language where we must seek understanding as a mode of Being. This requires an analysis of those modes of discourse, which would include the epistemological, symbolic, psychoanalytic, and historical forms of language.

²⁸⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 10.

²⁸⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “The Task of Hermeneutics,” p. 69.

²⁸⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 10. Ricoeur explores this point further in *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, pp. 63-96, cf. especially p. 79.

²⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 10.

The “longer route” Ricoeur proposes for interpreting human historical existence begins with the problem of language. It is “*within language* itself that we must seek the indication that the understanding is a mode of being,” that we can “keep in contact with the disciplines which seek to practice interpretation in a methodical manner.”²⁹⁰ Rather than separating truth from method, or ontology from epistemology, the longer route “starts from and is based upon the semantic elucidation of the concept of interpretation common to all the hermeneutic disciplines.”²⁹¹ By beginning with the semantic and symbolic dimensions of language, Ricoeur elaborates how different dimensions of meaning arise and how they are grounded in human experience. Thus, the longer route requires that we attend to different methods for interpreting human experience, and assess the criteria for adjudicating conflicting interpretations.

Signs and symbols mediate our understanding of experience. They do so because they mean more than what they say, and thus need to be deciphered. Ricoeur’s notion of a symbol, as David Kaplan defines it, is “any double-meaning expression defined by a semantic structure in which the first-order meaning designates a second-order meaning that is attainable only through the first-order meaning.”²⁹² Signs and symbols thus mean something on two distinct, though interrelated, levels: an apparent, revealed meaning and a hidden meaning that needs to be further explicated. This surplus of a symbol’s meaning “gives rise to thought.”²⁹³ Hermeneutics is thus “the work of thought which consists in

²⁹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 10.

²⁹¹ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 10.

²⁹² David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 20. This is a more felicitous rendering of Ricoeur’s definition proposed in “Existence and Hermeneutics,” where Ricoeur defines symbol as “any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first.” Cf. “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 12.

²⁹³ This phrase is the title of the conclusion to one of Ricoeur’s important early works, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning [and] in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning.”²⁹⁴ As such, it is not immediately connected to ontology, but instead reaches the ontological level only after being lead through the interpretation of signs.

Though the symbol calls upon us to interpret it, there is no single method that could claim to have privileged access to its meaning. Not only do different domains of human life have different symbols, but also different disciplines have their own research programs, methodologies to interpret these symbols. In order to determine the meaning of these symbols, Ricoeur emphasizes the necessity for multiple hermeneutics in order to decipher hidden meanings. On one hand, hermeneutics shows how the past belongs to the present, and the ways that the self and community are constituted by tradition. On the other hand, we need a hermeneutic method that will be on guard against those forms of understanding that imply that the meaning inherited by tradition is all too clear. This dimension of the hermeneutic project aims at the demystification, and is thus skeptical of the apparent univocal meaning that is presented. Such hermeneutics removes the illusions and the false claims of understanding. These two aims—a hermeneutics of belonging and a hermeneutics of suspicion—characterize Ricoeur’s basic philosophical methodology.

By being attentive to our belonging to a tradition and by being critical of the ways that we do so, Ricoeur’s methodology does not rely on only one philosophical program. As Bernard Dauenhauer suggests, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is governed by a logic of the “both-and” rather than the logic of “either-or.”²⁹⁵ Ricoeur “finds instruction not only in both Kant and Hegel, but also in both Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Benedict de

²⁹⁴ Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” p. 13.

²⁹⁵ Bernard Dauenhauer. *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*. (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Press, 1998): p. 3.

Spinoza, and Karl Marx and Freud.”²⁹⁶ We should thus not be surprised to see Ricoeur as eager to engage the problem of the relationship to the past, and steer a course between the phenomenological hermeneutics found in Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the Marxian critique of post-industrial society found in Max Weber’s and Jürgen Habermas’s critical theories.²⁹⁷

IV.2.2 Substantive Differences between Heidegger and Ricoeur

Ricoeur’s methodology has implications on the substantive level. Ricoeur critically appropriates Heidegger in at least three points: Heidegger’s conflation of being-towards-death and being-a-whole, the rejection of Heidegger’s hierarchy of the different modes of temporality, and the rejection of Heidegger’s ontologizing of conscience and debt.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 3.

²⁹⁷ While the terms of the Gadamer-Habermas debate are important for understanding history and tradition, I will be more concerned in this dissertation with Ricoeur’s development of Heidegger’s conception of remembering rather than Ricoeur’s interventions in this debate. The terms of the debate are roughly this: Gadamer argues that philosophy cannot be performed without coming to terms with its heritage and history. However, Habermas suggests that, while the history of philosophy is important, Gadamer’s hermeneutics cannot find adequate distance from its tradition in order to critique it and locate forms of false consciousness that are transmitted in tradition. There are several recent monographs that assess Ricoeur’s resolution of this debate. David Kaplan argues that Ricoeur adds to hermeneutics the critical resources provided by a theory of argumentation that can criticize false consciousness, and a creative and imaginative poetics to Habermas’s critical theory that enables a richer conception of the good life. Cf. David Kaplan. *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*. Against Kaplan’s position, Robert Piercey argues that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics rests on an implausible distinction between the form and the content of tradition; more specifically, the form of tradition, what Ricoeur calls “traditionality” cannot be entirely distinct or neatly separated from the content of particular traditions. In other words, what it means to participate in a tradition can only be acquired by actually participating in a particular tradition. Cf. Robert Piercey. “Ricoeur’s Account of Tradition and the Gadamer-Habermas Debate.” *Human Studies*. Vol. 27 (2004): pp. 259-280. Also see Piercey’s longer treatment of this issue in: Robert Piercey. *The Crisis in Continental Philosophy: History, Truth, and the Hegelian Legacy* (London: Continuum Press, 2009).

²⁹⁸ My account here draws from two sources: Bernard Dauenhauer’s “History’s Sources: Reflections on Heidegger and Ricoeur,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*. Vol. 20, no. 3 (October 1989): pp. 246-247, and Thomas Hohler’s “From Being to Ethics: The Time of Narration,” *International Studies in Philosophy*. Vol. 27, no. 4: pp. 21-43. There are few book length studies regarding their relationship, but one important one is Patrick Bourgeois and Frank Schalow’s *Traces of Understanding: A Profile of Heidegger’s and Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics* (Rodopi: Köninghausen & Neumann, 1990). Their account tends to prefer Heidegger’s “short route,” and they argue that Ricoeur can be absorbed into Heidegger’s hermeneutics by making a few adjustments. In what follows, as will be come more obvious, I prefer

First, Ricoeur argues that Heidegger overemphasizes Dasein's Being-towards-death by connecting it too tightly with Dasein's potentiality-for-Being-a-whole.²⁹⁹ If we can disentangle the possibility of being a whole from being-towards-death, "the potentiality-of-being-a-whole can once again be carried back to the power of unification, articulation, and dispersion belonging to time" (TN3, 67-68). In doing so, the different facets of anticipatory resoluteness, including guilt, debt, and fallenness could be reinterpreted as equal features of Dasein's being thereby restoring the unity of our temporal being. Our thrown Being could thus be revealed in the fact of birth as it is the necessity of our having to die (TN3, 68). Similarly, fallenness would not need to be interpreted strictly in terms of avoiding the confrontation with one's own mortality; it could signify the avoidance of fulfilling one's promises (TN3, 68). It thus appears the price Heidegger pays for his "short route" is his inability to see the way that these existential structures can also reveal the meaning of Dasein's existence.

Heidegger's failure to take into account the material, cultural, and historical ways that the tradition is transmitted ends up interpreting Dasein "too monadically."³⁰⁰ Ricoeur wonders, "is it true...that a heritage is handed down from the self to itself? Is it not always received from someone else? Yet Being-towards-death...excludes everything that is transferable from one person to another...The difficulty is compounded when we pass from individual history to common history" (TN3, 75). Ricoeur further develops this criticism in *Memory, History, Forgetting* by suggesting that the emphasis Heidegger places on being-toward-death obscures the social elements of human existence. Because

Ricoeur's longer route insofar as it can extend Heidegger's insights to the concrete understanding of the world.

²⁹⁹ Dauenhauer, "History's Sources," p. 238.

³⁰⁰ Dauenhauer, "History's Sources," p. 238.

“death affects the self in its untransferable and incommunicable solitude,” Heidegger effectively closes off the resources for the potentiality-for-being and masks the joys of life.³⁰¹ The radically one-sided dimensions of resoluteness thus obscures the “jubilation produced by the vow—which I take as my own—to remain alive until...” because it “[closes] off the reserves of openness characterizing the potentiality of being” (MHF, 357). Thus, as Peter Kemp notes, Dasein is “an ontological Self who in its mineness or ownness implies that the other is totally excluded as a partner,” and, furthermore, that “Dasein is unable to understand that the other is in its existence another mineness, an irreplaceable other in the world.”³⁰² In so doing, Ricoeur argues, Heidegger’s analysis of care misses both the way that the concrete experiences of one’s embodied self are the condition for the experience of others and the way that one’s close relations and anonymous others figure into our experience of finitude thereby endowing our experience of the world with a moral and ethical dimension.

The second flaw Ricoeur identifies refers to the relationship between original temporality and the derived modes of historicity and “within-time-ness” (*Innerzeitigkeit*). “Within-time-ness” refers to the way that we reckon with time in our everyday lives. We experience time in the way that we care about things, others, the world, and ourselves. We “take time out” of our day to talk with our friends, we “lose time” in a traffic jam on the way to a meeting, we “do not have enough time” to accomplish all of those things that we want to accomplish in a day, and so forth. This existential conception of time is the

³⁰¹ Paul Ricoeur. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 350, also Cf. 357. Further references to this work will occur in the body of the text, abbreviated “MHF” followed by the page number.

³⁰² Peter Kemp. “Ricoeur between Heidegger and Lévinas: Original Affirmation between Ontological Attestation and Ethical Injunction.” *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*. Ed. Richard Kearney (London: Sage Press, 1996): pp. 41-61, p. 49.

time in which we go about our business. This form of time can be further “leveled off” and rendered more abstract through such tools as the clock, which measures out the infinite and cyclical repetition of moments. Such moments come to be, are present for a moment, and then pass away. Each moment is a mere unit, and essentially interchangeable with any other moment. As a result, and despite its prestigious pedigree—Heidegger suggests that this conception of time is the dominant interpretation of temporality since Aristotle (Cf. BT 473/SZ 421)—it retains only a tenuous connection with the existential temporality of human being.

Ricoeur is skeptical of Heidegger’s suggestion that heretofore all conceptions of time are essentially Aristotelian. Indeed, Heidegger “takes it for granted that science has nothing original to say that has not been tacitly borrowed from metaphysics, from Plato to Hegel” (TN3, 88). There is an important experience of time that is distinct from the temporality of human existence Heidegger describes and from Aristotle’s abstract conception of time. Ricoeur names this experience of time “cosmic time,” or the “time of nature” (TN3, 89). The time of nature refers to the expansive, even sublime, temporality of eons, which is revealed not only in geological formations such as the Grand Canyon, the ever-so-slowly-shifting continents, and the stars. It is also infinitesimally small, those milliseconds and microseconds that happen more quickly than a blink of an eye. This time is indifferent, to put it mildly, to human concerns. Indeed, to suggest that it is indifferent to us is perhaps to anthropomorphize it too much. Rather, it is better to say that in our experience of such wonders we recognize how fleeting and inconsequential we are to it.

With Ricoeur's recognition of "cosmic time" comes the realization that its relation to the existential form of time is ambiguous: "we can speak of a mutual overlapping between one mode of discourse and the other. This borderline exchange takes on the extreme forms of contamination and conflict" (TN3, 92). They overlap insofar as a complicity is established between the passive experiences of time, such as in the experience of being thrown, and the contemplation of the stars. The sober contemplation of the heavens can lead to the recognition of the contingency of our existence. These two forms of experiencing time also conflict: "elegies on the human condition, ranging in their modulations from lamentation to resignation, have never ceased to sing of the contrast between the time that remains and we who are merely passing" (TN3, 93). We would not think that our lives are short if we did not also recognize the infinitude of cosmic time. The tensions between the cosmic and existential forms of time are nevertheless important for Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology: "we can swing from one feeling to another: from the consolation that we may experience in discovering a kinship between the feeling of Being-thrown-into-the-world and the spectacle of the heavens where time shows itself, to the desolation that unceasingly reemerges from the contrast between the fragility of life and the power of time, which is more destructive than anything else" (TN3, 93). These two experiences of temporality stand at opposite ends of a spectrum such that we need a third form of time that mediates the two. Ricoeur offers several names for this time, including "human time," "historical time," and "narrated time." I will develop the meaning of this time below, but before then, however, there is a third point where Heidegger and Ricoeur diverge.

This third point refers to the phenomena of conscience. Conscience enables Dasein to respond to its being-guilty and thus to be responsible for itself. Heidegger's inquiry into the meaning of guilt and indebtedness is strictly ontological, and wholly devoid of ethical or moral commitments. He thus writes "the primordial 'Being-guilty' cannot be defined by morality, since morality already presupposes it for itself" (BT 332/SZ 286). Ricoeur's worry is that "Heidegger does not show how we can travel this road [from the existentiell to the existential] in the opposite direction, from ontology to ethics."³⁰³ Heidegger's account of conscience, according to Ricoeur, grants very little to the dimensions of "height" and "exteriority" that would allow us to extend authenticity to our being-with-others. By "height" Ricoeur means the way that the call "hangs over me," "enjoins me," "calls me from on high," or, as Heidegger suggests, the way that call comes both *from* me and yet from *beyond* and *over* me.³⁰⁴ "Exteriority," on the other hand, refers to the otherness of the call, which for Heidegger refers not to specific others to the experience of uncanniness—a "strangeness without a stranger."³⁰⁵ By circumscribing the being of Dasein too tightly, Heidegger ultimately avoids the ethical dimensions of human experience. Ricoeur thus repeats the now familiar criticism that Heidegger's ontological approach to human existence obscures the concrete, historical ways in which we experience conscience.

If Ricoeur disagrees with Heidegger on these points, it is not as much to prove Heidegger wrong or claim that we have somehow overcome Heidegger and no longer need to deal with him. Rather, Ricoeur's criticisms are meant to help open the way for

³⁰³ Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony." Trans. David Pellauer. *Figuring the Sacred: Narrative, Imagination, and Religion*. Ed. Mark I. Wallace. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996): pp. 108-126, p. 112.

³⁰⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony," p. 110.

³⁰⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony," p. 111.

further rapprochement between Heidegger's phenomenological insights to the existential condition and the more practical dimensions that Ricoeur sees Heidegger as excluding. This reorientation of Heidegger's insights can be seen in Ricoeur's phenomenology of memory and its application to human time.

IV.3 The Phenomenology of Memory and Forgetting

Ricoeur's preference for the "long route" to ontology is in evidence at the beginning of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. There, he poses problem of memory around two questions: *of what* are there memories?" and "*whose* memory is it?" with the latter often taking priority over the former. Indeed, that question appears to structure the trajectory of *Being and Time*: the priority of the question "who?" is secured as a matter of ontological urgency (Cf. BT/SZ §25).³⁰⁶ To forget the question of Being is correlated to Dasein's forgetting its ownmost Being; to remember the question of Being is to retrieve and repeat those fundamental possibilities for understanding oneself that one has inherited from one's own heritage.

Ricoeur, however, subordinates the question "who remembers?" to the question "what are the objects of memory?" Doing so, he argues, will avoid "the negative effect of leading the analysis of mnemonic phenomena to an impasse, when the notion of collective memory [is] to be taken into account" (MHF, 3). Many studies of memory flounder when they attempt to give an account of collective memory precisely because they start with the remembering subject or self, whose memories cannot be transferred to

³⁰⁶ Also see *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: "Even a rough consideration shows that the being that we ourselves are, the Dasein, cannot at all be *interrogated* as such by the question *What* is this? We gain access to this being only if we ask: *Who* is it? The Dasein is not constituted by whatness—but if we may coin the expression—by *whoness*." Trans. Albert Hofstadter. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982): p. 120.

another person without losing their character as being “my own” memories. Collective memory thus tends to be interpreted either as an aggregate of individual memories or as an analogue to individual memory. In order to avoid the pitfalls of beginning with the question of “who?” we need to begin phenomenologically, which is to say with the mode of intentionality that characterizes memory. If memory is memory *of* something, of what is it a memory?

The answer to the above question is simple, if deceptively so. The problem of memory is the problem of representing the past. Ricoeur writes, “what is there to say of the enigma of an image, of an *eikon*—to speak Greek with Plato and Aristotle—that offers itself as the presence of an absent thing stamped with the seal of the anterior?” (MHF, xvi) On one hand, as Plato suggests, memory concerns “the present representation of an absent thing; it argues implicitly for enclosing the problematic of memory within that of imagination” (MHF, 7). For Aristotle, on the other hand, memory refers to “the representation of a thing formerly perceived, acquired, or learned [thus] including the problematic of the image within that of remembering” (MHF, 7). Memory’s presentation of an absence highlights the way that the absence is of something that has passed on. Or simply, in Aristotle’s simple thesis, “memory is of the past.”³⁰⁷

Furthermore, Ricoeur maintains the dual character of our access to the past: “On the one hand, memory as appearing, ultimately passively, to the point of characterizing as an affection – *pathos* – the popping into mind of a memory; and, on the other, the memory as an object of a search ordinarily named recall, recollection” (MHF, 4). The affective side of memory refers to *mnēme*, and its practical side is *anamnesis*.

³⁰⁷ Aristotle, “On Memory.” *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 1. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984): pp. 714-721.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to fully separate one from the other, as Ricoeur's distinction between these two forms of memory is less a substantial difference than it is a methodological one that allows him to sketch out the path from what memories are of to an account of the bearer of such memories. Before seeing the implications of memory for the meaning of selfhood and community, I will further sketch out the meaning of these two aspects to memory, as well as the meaning of forgetting that Ricoeur develops.

IV.3.1. Memory as *Mnēmē*

Mnēmē is the simple presence or affection of memories to the mind, which secures its character as an image or representation of something absent. While both memory and imagination represent something absent, imagining takes us into the absent realm of the possible, and remembering returns us to the absence of that which has been. Memory thus extends beyond the sphere of the mental and is intimately tied to specific places, our bodies, and specific rituals in ways that imagination is not.³⁰⁸ We have memories of the past because the past affects us through our bodies and because we inhabit certain places. Such an affect can be understood in terms of the wounds and scars that it inflicts upon us or as the happy recognition of someone or something long gone.

Nevertheless, the imagistic quality of our memories should not be overlooked. The representation, or *eikōn*, of memory, Ricoeur suggests, is “from the outset associated with the imprint, the *tupos*, through the metaphor of the slab of wax, error being assimilated either to an erasing of marks, *semeia*, or to a mistake akin to that of someone placing his feet in the wrong footprints” (MHF, 8). Memory, in other words, represents something that happened through a sign, symbol, imprint, or trace that mediates the past

³⁰⁸ Edward Casey makes a similar point in *Remembering* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

and present. Our memories immediately refer to the past, but they also may contain hidden meanings that require hermeneutic insight to be understood. Furthermore, as Ricoeur notes, “there is between the *eikōn* and the imprint a dialectic of accommodation, harmonization, or *adjustment* that can succeed or fail” (MHF, 13). The affective dimension of *mnēmē* gives rise to hermeneutic and epistemic concerns—to establish that something actually happened, we need to interpret the trace. Doing so presupposes, however, that the imprint and the image correspond to one another through their resemblance or their causal connection.

This introduces the second point: “a suspicion arises in our mind: what assures us that such a representation of a past thing is accurate, faithful to the past?”³⁰⁹ Or, as Plato writes in the *Theaetetus*, “supposing you were asked, ‘If a man has once come to know a certain thing, and continues to preserve the memory of it, is it possible that, at the moment when he remembers it, he does not know this thing that he is remembering?’”³¹⁰ Insofar as memory raises the claim that it is our only access to those events that occurred in the past, it is vulnerable in at least two ways. On one hand, the distinction between the image and the imprint exposes us to the threat of forgetting, insofar as one can be detached from the other. On the other hand, the preservation of the trace can be manipulative, which suggests that preservation can risk altering the memory. Due to such epistemological worries, the affectivity of memory can never be entirely free from suspicion.

Because memory characterizes the way that we are affected by the past, it is intimately connected to the notion of the trace. The trace, as W. James Booth suggests,

³⁰⁹ Paul Ricoeur. “The Difficulty to Forgive.” In *Memory, Narrativity, Self, and the Challenge to Think God*. Eds. Maureen Junker-Kenny, Peter Kenny. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004): pp. 6-16, p. 7.

³¹⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 163d, as cited in Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 8.

points to “what is missing, or simply [is] the marker of absence, of a hollow or impression. Above all, [it calls] us back to what is lost, seeking to ensure that effacement or concealment does not transform the silence of memory into an abyss of permanent forgetfulness.”³¹¹ Traces of the past bear witness to the reality of what actually happened. As such, they are condensations of the paradox of representing the past: “on the one hand, the trace is visible here and now, as a vestige, a mark. On the other hand, there is a trace (or track) because ‘earlier’ a human being...passed this way” (TN3, 119). The trace simultaneously belongs to the time of the present and the time of the past because it preserves the past in virtue of its remaining present. “As left behind, through the materiality of the mark, the trace designates the exteriority of the past...However, there is also a correlation between the significance of the followed trace and the efficacy of the transmitted tradition” (TN3, 229). The corporeality of the trace refers to a past that is no longer present, even as such corporeality also connects the present to the past, and shows how the present still belongs to the past.

In order to elaborate the relationship between traces and memory, it will be helpful to unpack the different meanings of the trace. The trace first refers to the material “on which historians work” (MHF, 13). Here, the trace is to be understood in terms of the remnants of the past—such as oral testimony, ruins, archaeological sites, pottery shards, documents, and the like. The historian’s work is to arrange such remains by situating their meaning within an historical context. These traces, once taken down in writing, can become documents to be placed in the archive and can expand our knowledge of the past

³¹¹ W. James Booth. *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 82.

if they are situated and organized in an institution that both conserves and preserves them against further deterioration.

Another meaning of the trace refers to “the impression as an affection resulting from the shock of an event that can be said to be striking, marking” (MHF, 14). The trace thus leaves the marks of a lasting impression of an event. Footprints left in the sand, or tracks left in the ground are benign examples of this kind of trace, it is also manifest as psychic wounds, or the memory of an injury that can still be called to mind. The imprint is something that makes an impression on us, and indicates the lasting effect of such an event. Ricoeur describes this form of the trace, which he sometimes refers to as a “psychical” or “affective” trace, as “the passive persistence of first impressions: an event has struck us, touched us, affected us” (MHF, 427). This affective trace remains in our mind, while maintaining the mark of absence and distance. However, the threat posed to such psychic memories is not so much the threat posed by the constant march of time. Rather, as Jean Greisch notes, “if there is a threat here...it is in fact that the unerasable that we would prefer to bury in the past might come back to haunt us.”³¹² Traces of what affected us cannot be fully erased, and even continue to have an effect on who we are. These lasting imprints can compel a witness to testify to injustices. Despite all attempts to erase the past, there always remains an element of the past that cannot be erased, elements that nevertheless persist because something happened.

The third, and final, meaning of the trace that Ricoeur notes is the corporeal, cortical imprint that is the focus of the neurosciences (MHF, 415). Neuroscience suggests that there is a connection between the impression left by experience and the material

³¹² Jean Greisch “Trace and Forgetting: Between the Threat of Erasure and the Persistence of the Unerasable” *Diogenes* 207: pp. 77-97, p. 82.

imprint on the brain. Such a trace, remaining in the province of the neurosciences, can become the objects of a scientific analysis and hold the promise of an objective map of the brain and the corresponding states to which it gives rise. Forgetting, on this account, is not only a malfunction of memory but can also be explained by indicating the erasure of the cortical imprint due to deterioration or degeneration of brain tissue.³¹³ These three conceptions of the trace reveal the dialectical tension between presence and absence at the center of the problem of representation.

The trace is thus intimately connected to the understanding of memory as *mnēmē*. It names the particular the way the past affects us and the closely related problem of representing the past. To preserve the trace is to risk changing it, while if we do nothing to it, we risk forgetting that to which it refers. The affective dimension of memory, however, does not exhaust its meaning. If traces highlight the way the past intrudes on the present, they never fully connect the two. As Booth writes, “the trace points us to the absence, and in so doing awakens in us the desire to remember, to make the past present, to overcome what cannot be in fact fully overcome, namely that absence itself.”³¹⁴ The very affectivity of the past thus introduces a practical side to memory, one to which I will now turn.

³¹³ For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be focusing on the tensions that arise between the first two senses of the trace, leaving aside the understanding of the trace proffered by neurosciences. For an illuminating account of the exchange between Ricoeur and the contemporary French neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux, see Bernard Dauenhauer’s “What Makes Us Think? Two Views.” *Reading Ricoeur*. Ed. David Kaplan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008): pp. 31-46.

³¹⁴ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 84.

IV.3.2. Memory as *Anamnesis*

Memory is not only the simple presence of an image of the past to the mind. It is also recollective. Ricoeur writes, “on the one hand, the simple memory arises in the manner of an affection, while recollection consists in an active search. On the other hand, the simple memory is under the dominion of the agent of the imprint, whereas movements and the entire sequence of changes...have their principle in us” (MHF, 17). The difference between these two forms of memory thus includes the distinction between the way that the past is evoked through the image and the way that the past is remembered through a search.

The act of remembering is made possible only after time has elapsed, and Ricoeur notes, “it is this interval of time, between the initial impression and its return, that recollection traverses” (MHF, 18). The process of recollection requires being able to attend to the differentiation of magnitudes or proportions of the interval between “now” and “before.” “The main thing is,” Aristotle writes, “that one must know the time.”³¹⁵ The starting point of such recollection is, of course, under the sway of the person recollecting; nevertheless, along the course of recollection there are several paths open to reminiscing. In other words, for any given search, as anyone who has dug through archives can tell, there is always the possibility of finding something unexpected, going down the wrong path, or finding nothing at all. Traversing a particular interval of time through recollection is ultimately a form of reasoning because it follows a chain of inferences from the starting point of a recollection to a successfully recalled event or object.

³¹⁵ Aristotle, “On Memory,” 452b7.

The trace thus not only evokes the past, but it calls upon us to recollect the origin of it. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur explicitly links the notion of debt to the trace, arguing that the notion of a past that actually existed “is supported by an implicit ontology, in virtue of which historian’s constructions have the ambition of being reconstructions, more or less fitting with what was once ‘real.’ Everything takes place as though historians knew themselves to be bound by a debt to people from earlier times, to the dead” (TN3, 100). Ricoeur further suggests that were the historian to avoid thinking herself as being obliged by the debt owed the dead, history would lose its meaning (Cf., TN3, 118). In other words, the motivation or desire to recollect the past requires us to render the past its due.

Under the figure of the debt, the historian operates under the constraint to represent the past such as it happened. Ricoeur names this constraint the “law of creativity.” As Ricoeur puts it: “The stringent law of creation...is to render as perfectly as possible the vision of the world that inspires the artist, [and which] corresponds feature by feature to the debt of the historian and the reader of history with respect to the dead” (TN3, 177). The “law of creation” refers to the way that an historian must bind her or himself to the represented object in order to reconstruct an image of things as they really were and of events as they really happened (TN3, 145). In this manner, Ricoeur maintains his commitment to the phenomenological maxim to return to the things themselves as they are manifest to us. In this case, such a maxim means that historians must be committed to the way in which the artifacts of the past present themselves *as* past. The debt of the historian, and of the reader of history, means that both are under the obligation to represent the past *as* past, *as* lost, and *as* other to the present. Nevertheless,

such a debt is not without a price. The result of such self-binding is the feeling of “anguish and suffering” (TN3, 177). The historian who finds herself bound to do justice to the constraints posed by the trace and document does so in service of opening up a possible world for the reader to inhabit. It is a world that, in its own suffering, calls out to be recounted and not forgotten. By identifying with the suffering and anguish of the past, the historian feels anguish in her attempt to render, as perfectly as possible the vision of the world that motivates her to write such a history.

While it is clear that not every act of recollection is motivated by a sense of indebtedness, to be responsible with memory requires such a notion. This is especially evident insofar as memory is prone to both uses and abuses. Recollection acts as one of the primary ways that a heritage is transmitted, or, as Ricoeur says, “it relates the being affected by the past to the potentiality-of-being turned toward the future” (MHF, 381). The historian thus “has the opportunity to carry herself in imagination back to a given moment of the past as having been present, and so as having been lived by people of the past as the present of their past and as the present of their future” (MHF, 381). It is thus intimately tied to the problems of bearing witness. To bear witness is not merely to recount facts about others or highlight important events. It is “the result of assuming a responsibility to bring them and their fates to light and to a sort of continued presence.”³¹⁶ To find oneself in a position to recollect the past in such terms is to find oneself as having to respond to those silent traces of the past, and work to bring them to light and carry them forward as a renewed future. This means that “we must struggle against the tendency to consider the past only from the angle of what is done, unchangeable, past. We have to reopen the past, to revivify its unaccomplished, cut-off—even slaughtered—

³¹⁶ Booth, *Communities of Memory*, p. 97.

possibilities” (TN3, 216). Indebtedness helps to give meaning to the work of recollection and to motivate the practices of memory. By operating under this figure of a debt, the historian finds herself under an obligation to remember a heritage that it takes over from another time (TN3, 256).

By developing how memory is both an active recollection and a passive affect, Ricoeur suggests that Aristotle’s main contribution to our understanding of memory is his distinction between *mnēme* and *anamnesis*. He has, for Ricoeur, highlighted the fundamental peculiarity of memory to represent something absent as something that has passed. Thus, “on the one hand, he sharpened the point of the enigma by making the reference to time the distinctive note of memory in the field of the imagination” (MHF, 19). Memory is not equivalent to imagination because, while both represent an absence, only memory refers to the past. “On the other hand,” Ricoeur continues, “by assuming the category of the *eikon* for the framework of the discussion, in connection with the category of the *tupos*, he is in danger of pursuing the aporia to the point of impasse” (MHF, 19). This impasse is such that there remains a question regarding the meaning of the “copy” or image that characterizes memory as a representation of the past and the extent to which memory requires resemblance with the initial impression.

Mnēme and *anamnesis* together thus bring to light two contrasting elements of remembering. First, memory is about the past. To call a particular object of consciousness a memory, there needs first to be a distinction between the present in which the act of memory occurs and the past that caused the trace or image. Memory, in other words, requires temporal distance. This entails, Ricoeur suggests, that memory “is our one and only resource for signifying the past-character of what we declare to remember... To put

it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it” (MHF, 21).

Secondly, memory, given its recollective dimension, is prone to change and movement. Memory is thus never a static phenomenon, written in stone. The reconstruction of memory as a narrative will have significant implications for understanding the practical dimensions of identity. Together, *mnēme* and *anemnesis* suggest that memory is tied to a particular ambition – that of being faithful to the past (MHF, 21). It aims at ensuring a truthful relationship between the representation of the past and the past that is thus represented.

IV.3.3. Memory and Forgetting

A threat to memory lies in the possibility of forgetting, which is the partial or complete erasure of traces of the past. Traces, especially the traces of the past with which the historian works, are especially vulnerable to destruction. The destruction of archives, the forgery or willful suppression of texts not only distorts memory, they can also cause us to forget what actually happened. What is there to say, however, about the “psychical trace,” which is to say, the impression of the affection left by a marking event? This trace, as noted above, “consists in the passive persistence of first impressions: an event has struck us, touched us, affected us, and the affective mark remains in our mind” (MHF, 427). If this trace were to be destroyed, there could be no such thing as memory, for there would be nothing that persists.

In order to establish the parameters of this problem, Ricoeur turns to both Henri Bergson and, again, to Heidegger. From Bergson, Ricoeur draws out a conception of

memory as an unconscious duration. The impression, or affectation, of memory remains, we know, “because...it makes recognition possible” (MHF, 430). In recognizing someone, the image comes back to me; it returns after a seemingly long absence, which makes recognition the mnemonic act par excellence (MHF, 430). We do not constantly perceive the survival of the image, as that would overwhelm us; rather, “we presuppose it and believe it” (MHF, 434). Ricoeur argues that “an ‘unconscious’ existence of memories must be postulated,” whose existence remains latent, in order to explain how we are able to recognize someone or something we have long since forgotten (MHF, 417). He names this “positive figure of forgetting” the “reserve of forgetting” (MHF, 417). It thus appears that forgetting is necessary for remembering, and makes possible recognition. Without a “reserve of forgetting” there can be no recognition, no recollection, and no memory.

Where, however, does such an image “survive?” Following Bergson, Ricoeur suggests that such the question “where?” should be replaced with the question “how?” In this way, he avoids understanding memory in terms of the classic, and dangerously metaphysical, metaphor of the mind as container or receptacle of images. The reserve of forgetting thus does not refer to a storehouse of images; it instead signifies the duration of memories in habits and places. Our bodies, understood phenomenologically as the lived body (*Leib*) rather than merely physiological body (*Körper*), “possesses, in its very being, an efficacious operative intentionality animating all of its ongoing maneuvers.”³¹⁷ This body memory is not explicitly intended, but is instead operative underneath all of our movements. It is a kind of forgetting in the sense that it “designates the *unperceived* character of the perseverance of memories, their removal from the vigilance of consciousness” (MHF, 440, Ricoeur’s italics). In order to explicate the way that the latent

³¹⁷ Edward Casey. *Remembering*, p. 178.

survival of memories becomes the positive figure of forgetting, Ricoeur turns to Heidegger.

While Ricoeur recognizes both those “point-like” episodes of recognition and those general forms of knowledge, such as the rules of grammar and language, there is also the “immemorial” (MHF, 441). The immemorial refers to “that which was never an event for me and which we have never even actually learned, and which is less formal than ontological” (MHF, 441). Forgetting the immemorial is a forgetting of those fundamental origins, origins which are irreducible to chronological beginnings. Here, Ricoeur cites a paradox Heidegger quickly introduces in *Being and Time*: “just as expectation is possible only on the basis of awaiting, *remembering* [*Erinnerung*] is possible only on the basis of forgetting, *and not the other way around*. In the mode of forgottenness, having-been primarily discloses the horizon in which Dasein, lost in the superficiality of what is taken care of, can remember” (BT 389/SZ 339). Having-been thus refers to “the complete anteriority of the past with respect to every event that is dated, remembered, or forgetting. An anteriority that is not confined to removing it from our grasp, as is the case of the past as expired (*Vergangenheit*), but an anteriority that preserves” (MHF, 442). This indicates a past that is “always already” with us, but one which cannot be given a specific date in the past. Rather, it is, as Steven Crowell suggests, “spectral,” which is to say one that cannot be narrated but is the ground for narratives.³¹⁸ The past, as having-been, thus makes the reserve of forgetting an immemorial resource for the work of remembering and makes possible repetition

³¹⁸ Steven Galt Crowell, “Spectral History: Narrative, Nostalgia, and the Time of the I.” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 29 (1999), pp. 83-104.

precisely because it does not consign the past to something that is wholly irretrievable and gone.

Memory and forgetting are thus not opposites. Rather, they condition one another in a complex interplay that constitutes the human historical condition. In order to see the role it plays in constituting identity, it will be necessary to turn to Ricoeur's conception of narrative identity and its correlate, communal identity.

IV.4. Narrative Identity

Ricoeur explicitly connects narrative, memory, and selfhood in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, which lays the foundation for his turn to collective memory. Insofar as memory is of the past, it "assures the temporal continuity of the person and, by this means, assures that identity" of a person (MHF, 96). This temporal continuity enables one to traverse from the living present to the distant past. "It is primarily in narrative," Ricoeur writes, "that memories in the plural and memory in the singular are articulated, and differentiation joined to continuity" (MHF, 96-97).³¹⁹ Because of this, memories and forgetting, to be understood, need to be formulated as a narrative.

In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur argued that "time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative" and that "narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (TN1, 3).

³¹⁹ Ridvan Askin. "Mneme, Anamnesis, and Mimesis: The Function of Narrative in Ricoeur's Theory of Memory." *Forum for Inter-American Research*. Vol. 2, no. 1 (January 2009). Accessed, June 8th, 2010: http://www.interamerica.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=28%3Aissue2-askin&catid=17%3Aissue2&Itemid=2&lang=en. Askin also notes that Ricoeur makes the same point much more directly in a lecture Ricoeur gave at the University of Ulm during the Winter semester 1998-1999. Ricoeur writes, "But most importantly, it is in narrative that the search for coherence which motivates the effort of recollection finds its first articulation. In this way a connection is established between recollection as search and recollection as narrative." Ricoeur, "Erinnerung und Vergessen," p. 15. As quoted and translated by Askin, "Mneme, Anamesis, Mimesis."

The most important application of narrative is thus to human experience. As such, the “core of [his] whole investigation” is summed up in his claim that historical consciousness finds its meaning in the search “by individuals and by the communities to which they belong, for their respective narrative identities” (TN3, 274). Given the centrality of memory, Ricoeur’s thesis can be further augmented to be that temporality becomes meaningful to human beings to the extent that memory, history, and forgetting are organized according to narrative.³²⁰ In this section, I will develop Ricoeur’s account of narrative identity, paying special attention to the role that memory plays in its constitution.

IV.4.1. *Idem-Identity and Ipse-Identity*

Identity, for Ricoeur, is primarily a “practical category” rather than a metaphysical one (TN3, 246). Metaphysical notions of identity, Ricoeur argues, are

condemned to an antinomy with no solution. Either we must posit a subject identical with itself through the diversity of its different states, or, following Hume and Nietzsche, we must hold that this identical subject is nothing more than a substantialist illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, or volitions. (TN3, 246)

Many accounts of personal identity do not recognize that the way that human beings exist is distinct from the way that objects exist. In Heideggerian terms, they make the mode of human being a present-at-hand object. In Ricoeurian terms, they conflate two distinct forms of identity: selfhood and sameness. Ricoeur gives the name “*idem-identity*” to the identification of the same thing over time. *Idem* “is a concept of relation and a relation of

³²⁰ Ridvan Askin makes the same point in “Mneme, Anamnesis, and Mimesis: The Function of Narrative in Ricoeur’s Theory of Memory.”

relations,” which can be expressed in terms of numerical identity, qualitative identity, or the “uninterrupted continuity between the first and the last stage in the development of what we consider to be the same individual.”³²¹ It allows us to identify and re-identify something as being the same over time. *Idem* thus refers to a substratum that allows us to think of change that happens to something that remains the same (OA, 118). When understood as being permanent over time, personal identity will “revolve around this search for a relational invariant” that remains the same through change (OA, 118). To search for *something’s* idem-identity is to search for the identity of an object.

Selfhood by contrast, is constituted through praxis; it is an answer to the “who did this?” and “who is responsible for this action?” Such a question introduces a different form of identity, *ipse*-identity. *Ipse* is defined by being the self-same (*soi-même*) or being self-constant. There are two ways to understand *ipse*-identity: character and keeping one’s word. Character refers to the “set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized,” and as such it designates the point where *ipse*-identity becomes almost indiscernible from *idem*-identity (OA, 121). These lasting dispositions include habits, which are those behaviors or traits “by which a person is recognized, reidentified as the same,” and “the set of *acquired identifications* by which the other enters into the composition of the same,” which include the “values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes *in which the person or community identifies itself*” (OA, 121, Ricoeur’s italics). The stability of character that arises through habits and adhering to norms secures an individual’s “numerical identity, qualitative identity, uninterrupted continuity across change, and, finally, permanence in time which defines sameness” (OA, 122). This

³²¹ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 116, 117. Further citations to this work will be cited in text, with the abbreviation OA followed by the page number.

dimension of selfhood makes it legitimate to refer to others in terms of what they do, their interests, physical and psychological characteristics, and the like.

If character marks the proximity between *ipse*-identity and *idem*-identity, then keeping one's word and being faithful to one's commitments "marks the extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same and so attests fully to the irreducibility of the two problematics one to the other" (OA, 118). The ability to keep a promise implies a complex set of relationships, based on an understanding of being accountable and responsible. To be accountable implies a "manner of conducting [oneself] so that others can *count on* that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am *accountable for* my actions before another" (OA, 165). The self becomes both dependable and capable of having actions imputed to it. Responsibility connects these two meanings of being accountable:

The term "responsibility" unites both meanings: "counting on" and "being accountable for." It unites them, adding to them the idea of a *response* to the question "Where are you?" asked by another who needs me. The response is the following: "Here I am!" a response that is a statement of self-constancy. (OA, 165)

A promise is a kind of challenge against the changes that time brings about. Making a promise entails that I should be able to hold firm to my word, even were I to change my opinion or desires. To keep a promise is to respond to and uphold the trust that others put in me. It attests to my self-constancy, revealing me as the kind of person I am despite changes in desires, opinions, in my physical or psychological make-up.

The permanence of the self as character is thus distinct from the sense of the self that is found when we hold someone to his or her word. In order to bridge this gap and tie together one's character and one's fidelity, Ricoeur draws on the poetic resources of

narrative. Because narratives articulate the essentially temporal and historical constitution of the world, and because the self has a memory and can keep its promises, personal identity can only be understood through the auspices of narrative. Narrative identity is constituted in a three step “mimetic arc,” which I will now elaborate.

IV.4.2. The Mimetic Arc of Narrative

Ricoeur’s account of mimesis in *Time and Narrative*, as Henry Venema describes, “repeats the central thesis of [Ricoeur’s] hermeneutical phenomenology: linguistic distance coupled with the proximity of belonging.”³²² While Ricoeur uses the threefold structure of mimesis to give an account of our understanding of texts, I will be more concerned with the ways that it helps an individual and community make sense of its identity. Narrative selfhood arises through its belonging to and distance from its past.

IV.4.2.1. Mimesis₁: Prefiguration

Narratives are, of course, narratives *of* events, people, places, circumstances, and actions. This means that “the composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character” (TN1, 54). In order to narrate, we need be able to identify action according to its structural features, have an understanding of the norms and symbols that make an action intelligible as a particular action, and recognize that temporal elements that would help us configure the actions in a coherent order (TN1, 54). Ricoeur names this pre-understanding of the world, “prefiguration.” Prefiguration roughly corresponds to fore-structure of understanding that Heidegger identified in §32 of *Being and Time*. However,

³²² Henry Venema, *Identifying Selfhood: Imagination, Narrative, and Hermeneutics in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000): p. 98.

while Heidegger focuses mainly on its formal elements, Ricoeur draws out three features of it: its structural, symbolic, temporal features.

Because human action is structurally different from mere physical movement, there needs to be a “conceptual network” that would allow us to make sense of action. (TN1, 54-55). In order to understand an action, we must be competent to answer questions of who, what, when, where, why, how, with whom, and against whom such an action occurred. This means that the “semantics” of action refers to “goals,” “motives,” “agents,” “reasons,” “intentions,” “ability to do something,” “means,” “contingency,” “cooperation,” “competition,” “struggle,” and the like. These components refer to the “paradigmatic order” of narrative, which, because they are paradigms, can be applied to any given event.

While the semantics of action makes use of the conceptual network of terms to distinguish action, the syntactic features are the rules that allow us to organize the motives, goals, and circumstances into a narrative. “Syntactic features” operate like schemata to unite the semantic elements of action into a whole (TN1, 56). Such schemata might include different genres of writing, such as revenge plays, tragedies, comedies, memoirs, and the like. These genres help to organize the goals, events, reasons, and agents into a whole. It is important to note that these paradigmatic features have “only a virtual signification...that is, a pure capacity to be used” and only “receive an actual [*effective*] signification thanks to the sequential interconnections the plot confers on the agents, their deeds, and their sufferings” (TN1, 56-57). To understand oneself, an individual needs to be familiar with the conceptual network of the semantics of action and the rules of composition that allow such a network to be temporally ordered into a

whole. As Ricoeur puts it, “to understand a story is to understand both the language of ‘doing something’ and the cultural tradition from which proceeds the typology of plots” (TN1, 57). A tradition thus provides us with paradigms, typologies, possibilities, and structures that allow one to make sense of oneself, others, and the world, even if it does not do so explicitly.

The symbolic character of our pre-understanding further complements the semantics and syntactic features of prefiguration. “If...human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms” (TN1, 57). Cultural rules and norms make action intelligible insofar as they provide the structures that make an action count as an instance of a general rule. Thus, depending on the context and cultural tradition, raising one’s own hand could mean that one is hailing a taxi, voting, or greeting another person (TN1, 58). We thus need to situate an act “within a ritual, set within a cultic system, and by degrees within the whole set of conventions, beliefs, and institutions that make up the symbolic framework of a culture” (TN1, 58). Actions can thus be read as “a quasi-text...insofar as the symbols, understood as interpretants, provide the rules of meaning as a function of which this or that behavior can be interpreted” (TN1, 58). We must have a pre-understanding of what counts a relevant feature, the norms involved, and what makes an action meaningful before we explicitly lay out what it means.

The symbolic dimension indicates an implicit a prescriptive, even ethical, dimension of actions and narratives:

As a function of the norms immanent in a culture, actions can be estimated or evaluated, that is, judged according to a scale of moral preferences. They thereby receive a relative value, which says that this action is more

valuable than that one. These degrees of value, first attributed to actions, can be extended to the agents themselves, who are held to be good or bad, better or worse. (TN1, 58)

As a result, configuring actions into a narrative “can never be ethically neutral” (TN1, 59). Narratives transform a description of action into a prescription for action, and thus furnish those values and norms that one can adhere to in developing one’s character, and evaluating the character and actions of others.³²³

The third, and final feature of prefiguration, or *mimesis*₁, refers directly to the temporality of action. The temporal character of action is “implicit in” action, and is present in our ordinary ways of talking about things that happen to us and those events in which we are caught up (TN1, 60). It is because action takes time to complete that it “calls for narration” (TN1, 59). The temporality of action is significantly different from the abstract sequence of instantaneous now points. “There is not a future time, a past time, and a present time,” Ricoeur argues, “but a threefold present, a present of future things, and a present of past things, and a present of present things” (TN1, 60). Everyday action, in other words, orders our experience of the past, present, and future by relating the experience of time back to the self.

To elaborate the connection between time and the self, Ricoeur draws from Heidegger’s explication of the temporality of care from the second division of *Being and Time*. However, rather than connect the temporality of action to the authentic temporality of care (*Zeitlichkeit*), in which time is “entirely desubstantialized” and is figured “as the exploded unity of the three temporal extases” from the point of view of Dasein’s Being-toward-death, Ricoeur focuses on “our relation to time as that ‘within which’ we ordinarily act” (TN1, 61). Though Heidegger claims that this dimension of temporality,

³²³ Venema, *Identifying Selfhood*, p. 100.

the time “within-which” we take care of business, is the least primordial (Cf. BT/SZ §79-81), it is where ordinary discourse about time takes place and the time in which we take care of our daily affairs. The temporality of care provides the framework for understanding ourselves because care not only concerns our own being-toward-death, but also our orientation to the past and the present.

Ricoeur’s account of prefiguration is thus closely connected to Heidegger’s account of the fore-structures of understanding. Understanding, for Heidegger, is the mode of Dasein’s Being wherein its possibilities for being concerned with its world are realized *as* possibilities. We understand our world, objects, and others from the perspective of “a totality of involvements; and such seeing *hides* itself in the explicitness of the assignment-relations (of the ‘in-order-to) which belong to that totality” (BT 189/SZ 149, my italics). Ricoeur interprets the hiddenness of such relations in terms of the tacit semantic, syntactic, rules, and norms that govern our everyday lives: “the plane we occupy, at this initial stage of our traversal, is precisely the one where ordinary language is truly...the *storehouse* of those expressions that are most appropriate to what is properly human in our experience” (TN1, 62, my italics). This suggests that this first level of mimesis is the domain of sedimented and implicit meaning. Because they are implicit, they make narration possible.

IV.4.2.2. Mimesis₂: Configuration

Mimesis₂ mediates, or “configures,” what was prefigured in the understanding of action and the application of meaning to identity. It interprets and renders explicit the implicit semantic, symbolic, and temporal structures that are implicit in human activity

and selfhood. Narrative identity is thus distinct from the life represented; nevertheless “despite the break it institutes, literature would be incomprehensible if it did not give a configuration to what was already a figure in human action” (TN1, 64). By making explicit the possibilities implicitly contained in the prefigured world, narrative identity belongs to the world.

In order to see the meaning of narratives, Ricoeur performs a kind of “narrative *epochè*.”³²⁴ This process brackets the question of narrative’s referents in order to describe the narrative act itself, which he names “*emplotment*.” *Emplotment* has three features. First, it is “the operation that draws a configuration out of simple succession” (TN1, 65). The plot mediates “individual events or incidents and a story taken as a whole” (TN1, 65). The plot of a story not only describes action, by highlighting the causes of events, it does so in such a way that it organizes agents, events, motives, and so forth “into an intelligible whole, of a sort that we can always ask what is the ‘thought’ of the story” (TN1, 65). The second element of *emplotment* is the way that it “brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means interactions, circumstances, and unexpected results” (TN 1, 65). *Emplotment* thus respects the episodic qualities of a story, thus allowing the author to be creative in writing the story and offering surprises, reversals, and recognitions for the reader. These first two elements of plot are the “concordant discordance” that characterizes narrative unity (TN1, 66). Finally, plot configures these elements into a temporal unity. While the first two elements require that

³²⁴ I am drawing the term “narrative *epochè*” from Henry Venema. Narratives, for Ricoeur, refer either to things that actually happened in the past, such as in historical narratives, or they refer to imaginary and “unreal” events and agents, such as in fiction. Doing so secures Ricoeur’s analysis as a phenomenological analysis, and suggests that narratives are always narratives *of* something. By bracketing the question of their referents, Ricoeur establishes a kind of kinship between these two narrative forms, and allows him to suggest that each borrows from the intentionality of the other. In volumes two and three of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur further elaborates the being of the objects of narrative. Cf. Venema, *Identifying Selfhood*, p. 101.

the plot must be a coherent whole that fits its elements together, this final feature emphasizes temporal features of narrative. By arranging events temporally, the narrative function of emplotment creates new meaning and offers different worlds into which the reader to project him or herself.

I have already indicated the role that traces of the past and being indebted to it is a central feature of memory. Emplotment, similarly, is “constituted by the interplay between innovation and sedimentation” that occurs in historical existence (TN1, 68). Ricoeur names this structure “traditionality.” The past furnishes the present with paradigms for thinking, acting, understanding and interpreting the world; the present always offers us the possibility of returning to, and reactivating those creative moments of poetic activity, reactivating them for the sake of the future. The dialectic between the present and the past, Ricoeur suggests, “proceeds from the tension...between the efficacy of the past that we undergo and the reception of the past that we bring about today” (TN3, 220). As a result, emplotment, or more specifically “traditionality,” rather than referring to a particular content that is transmitted, is the transcendental condition for thinking about history and memory at all (TN3, 219).

By understanding the transmission of tradition in terms of a dialectic between the sedimentation and innovation of meaning, Ricoeur avoids several problems that often arise the ways that we remember the past. First, it avoids thinking about the past as wholly foreign to the present by arguing that contemporary forms of thinking are indebted to the past. If the past could be wholly abolished, transcended or otherwise overcome, it would be difficult to understand what meaning the past might have for us. If the past is to be meaningful, such that writing history is a possible endeavor, it has to

affect the present. Second, it avoids thinking of the present in terms of the summation or culmination of the past by respecting its otherness. Were the present to be nothing but the rote imitation of the past, it would be impossible to retrieve possibilities from it and constitute new meaning. Ricoeur's conception of traditionality is thus a "transmission that is generative of meaning" that respects the way that the past is both foreign to the present and continuous with it (TN3, 221). The construction of a particular tradition thus occurs through narrative.

Traditions, because they draw from narratives, are dynamic. Narratives are a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" (TN1, 66). There are thus two dimensions of narrative: on one hand, there are episodic events, vignettes even, and, on the other, the concordant unity in which they come together (TN1, 66). The episodic dimension of human action is more or less linear, wherein actions and events follow one another in succession. Ricoeur follows Aristotle here, arguing that "a beginning is not an absence of some antecedent, but the absence of necessity in the succession" (TN1, 38). The end of a story comes after something prior to it "as its necessary sequel or as its usual [and hence probable] sequel" (TN1, 38). The middle of a story is defined by mere succession: it comes after something else, and has another event following it. In order to configure what appears to be a contingent succession of events into a meaningful whole, an author needs to introduce necessity.

Narrative necessity, however, is unique kind of necessity. It is not the deductive necessity that characterizes an argument. A narrative explains the events contained therein only to the extent that the connections it establishes between events are plausible. Narratives lead the reader to believe that the obstacles the protagonist encounters will be

overcome and that the conflicts that impede progress will be acceptably resolved or attenuated. Ricoeur writes:

To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the “conclusion” of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an “end point,” which in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story. (TN1, 66-67).

A story is acceptable from the perspective of its end: if the point of it is lacking, if there are “loose ends” that still need to be resolved, or if the characters do something dramatically “out of character” or for what seems to be no reason, the story is not an acceptable or plausible one.

Does this mean that traditions are merely stories, without any reference to what actually happened? Could it be that history is nothing but a pure fiction? Does bracketing the question of narrative’s referents mean that there is no significant distinction between fictional narratives and historical narratives? Ricoeur phrases this problem thusly: “we may be tempted to say that narrative puts consonance where there was only dissonance...At best, it furnishes the ‘as if’ proper to any fiction we know to be just fiction, a literary artifice” (TN1, 72). Is history merely one such artifice, a lie that we tell ourselves in order to make sense of action?

Underlying this objection is a problematic understanding of the relationship between temporality and narratives. Narratives do not externally impose form on the formless. As long as narrative is understood solely in terms of consonance, and temporality in terms of dissonance, “we miss the properly dialectical character of their

relationship” (TN1, 72). To oppose narrative and temporality seems to rely on an overly abstract understanding of time, one that is linear or sequential. In other words, it misses the mediated ways that we experience time. Kim Atkins explains their relationship thusly, “by connecting earlier and later events narrative sentences articulate no less than three temporal dimensions: that of the event being described; that of the earlier event in terms of which the latter is described, and the time of the narrator.”³²⁵ Depending on the beginning and end that one wants to recount, an author can “play” with time in such a way that does not correspond with the linear “before” and “after” of an action, such as in a flashback, vivid memory, in order to stretch out the present in order to highlight tension. This gives narrative a lived feel to them, one that makes time relatable to human experience. The creativity, or *poesis*, involved in recounting a story moves beyond what is presented in order to render explicit what was only implicit. They disclose meanings that may have been missed in the immediate present, and has the power to reveal and redefine experiences. Narratives thus arise out of the experience of time; they belong to temporal experience even as they are distinct from such experience.

Just as memory can disclose meanings and truths that might not have been available at the moment when we initially experienced, narratives can disclose meanings that might have gone unnoted or unarticulated. They both disclose a world in such a way that adds to it and releases possibilities. This point further suggests that in constructing personal identity through the resources of narrative, the events we hold to be significant, and the story that we tell about ourselves, can be scrutinized and contested. Narrative identity is caught up with others’ narrative identities, and the various stories that others can tell about each of us, for example the story of being a member of a particular class, profession, gender, nation, ethnicity, and the like. Emplotting a narrative thus helps to

³²⁵ Kim Atkins. “Narrative Identity, Practical Identity, and Ethical Subjectivity.” *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 37 (2004): pp. 341-366, p. 350.

establish the possible stories that can be told as well as one in which an agent acts, suffers, and the one for which the self takes responsibility. Narrative identity, that is, being a self, is thus the story in which one explicitly recognizes oneself.

IV.4.2.3. Mimesis₃: Refiguration

If the configuration of the text effectively separates the text from the practical field, mimesis₃ refers to the act of reading that reconnects the world opened up by the text with the world of the reader. Refiguration completes the movement “from a prefigured world to a transfigured world through the mediation of a configured world.”³²⁶ Thus, the prefigured structure of action, which was made explicit in the articulation in the plot of a narrative, is applied to and transforms the world in which one lives.

Refiguration brings to a temporary closure to the process of understanding and interpretation. As Ricoeur puts it, insofar as the text “consists of holes, lacunae, zones of indetermination,” the reader’s task is to “configure what the author seems to take malign delight in defiguring” (TN1, 77). The reader thus has the task of explicitly bringing the plot of the text to light. “What is to be interpreted in the text,” Ricoeur writes, “is a proposed world which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities.”³²⁷ The practice of reading “lies in a thought experiment by means of which we try to inhabit worlds foreign to us” (TN3, 249). Similarly, in giving an account of oneself, one proposes a narrative which one could be responsible for—it is to attest to such an identity.

³²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Mimesis and Representation.” *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. Ed. Mario J. Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): pp. 137-158, p. 150.

³²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics.” *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Ed. and Trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): pp. 131-144, p. 142.

Ricoeur clearly privileges the role of fiction over the role of historical narratives in the process of refiguration. The reason for this should be apparent: while historical narratives are defined by referring to the reality of the past, fiction is free from such constraints. As such, fiction is more closely aligned with opening new possibilities for self-understanding and understanding the world. Fiction is, for Ricoeur, “undividedly revealing and transforming” (TN3, 158). It is revealing “in the sense that it brings features to light that were concealed and yet already sketched out at the heart of experience, our praxis.” Fiction thus makes explicit possibilities that are implicitly part of our experience. It is transformative “in the sense that a life examined in this way is a changed life, another life” (TN3, 158). Transforming possibilities is possible only if the fictional dimension of hermeneutic seeing allows one to see the temporal world of human action disclosed by the narrative *as if* it could be inhabited by a responsible agent and the actual being of an agent in search of his or her identity.

IV.4.3. Narrative Identity and Selfhood

The process of narration tends toward praxis. Ricoeur writes, “the meaning of the literary work rests upon the dialogical (*dialogisch*) relation established between the work and its public image in each age” (TN3, 171). While individuals act, they do so on the basis of an inherited tradition. Just as Gadamer had characterized this process of inheritance as dialogical, Ricoeur incorporates the logic of question and answer and the “history of effects,” into his own understanding of the meaning and reception of narrative identity. To form an identity entails finding oneself opened up by and open to a tradition,

which necessarily refers to others, present and past, with whom you share the tradition. As such, narrative identity is to give an account of oneself and attest to one's own being.

Recounting and responding to the stories that constitute a tradition appear “by turns as an interruption in the course of action and as a new impetus to action” (TN3, 179). Narratives have a practical effect insofar as reading a text and listening to others includes “a provocation to be and to act differently” (TN3, 249). Thus, the act of reconfiguration does not merely show us “a smorgasbord of possible identities; it is intended as a discipleship toward selfhood.”³²⁸ Reading and listening allows us to look at our actions and evaluate them, so that we can wonder whether or not we ought to continue acting in that particular way. Such provocation “is transformed into action only through a decision whereby a person says: Here I stand!” (TN3, 249). In such instances, narrative identity overlaps with self-constancy and “makes ethical responsibility the highest factor in self-constancy” (TN3, 249). Thus, while a text or story may offer various possibilities for the reader to inhabit, it still “belongs to the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action, to choose among the multiple proposals of ethical justice brought forth by reading” (TN3, 249). Narrative identity at this point thus encounters a limit. This limit occurs when it intersects “nonnarrative components,” such as at the moment of an individual's decision or action, which cannot be rendered fully intelligible by a narrative.

Recounting one's identity can thus be cathartic, and can help discharge the debt to the past. The cathartic effect of narratives can propose “new evaluations, hitherto unheard of norms, [thus] confronting or shaking current customs” (TN3, 176). Richard Kearney similarly argues that retelling the stories of the past can have a cathartic effect insofar as they recount “events that were too painful to be properly registered at the time but which

³²⁸ Henry Venema, *Identifying Selfhood*, p. 102.

can, *après coup*, be allowed into expression indirectly, fictionally, ‘as if’ they were happening.”³²⁹ Recounting such memories and histories, in other words, allow us to experience ourselves as another, and the other as oneself by borrowing from fiction the ability to empathetically project oneself into the past. Historical narratives can thus “generate feelings of considerable ethical intensity” and establish a bond with between those in the present and the dead of history (TN3, 187).

Narratives thus provide a structure through which one’s identity can make sense. Telling a story of who one is, or what happened, combines the temporal, practical, and historical dimensions of human existence. While it often arises as a first person account, it also refers to dialogical dimensions and even the impersonal dimensions of human existence. Such reference, however, is such as to weave them into a complex, unstable, and contestable. Personal identity can thus be constituted in and through narratives.

We can now better see how memory and selfhood are related through stories. To remember an event is to articulate its meaning. Often such meaning was not apparent when the event was first experienced; rather, it is only because we are able to constitute the meaning of it by situating it in proximity and distance to other events, organize it according to a plot, that allows us to have insight into what happened. Similarly the poetic resources of narrative allow us to creatively draw out meaning where we might not have seen any. Narrative memory and selfhood thus allow us to understand the meaning of what happened, and reconfigure it in such a way to make it acceptable to us.

³²⁹ Richard Kearney, “Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis,” *Paragraph*. Vol. 30, no. 1 (March 2007): pp. 51-66, p. 54-55.

IV.5. Tragedy and Collective Memory

The contribution of memory to narrative selfhood, Ricoeur argues, applies at both the individual and the communal level: “individual and community are constituted in their identity by taking up narratives that become for them their actual history” (TN3, 247). For example, the reconstruction of identity by can be achieved by “working through” those unintelligible or unbearable pieces of a story in order to construct a coherent and acceptable story in which the patient can recognize his or her or self-constancy. Psychoanalysis reveals “how the story of a life comes to be constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives, just as a history of a people, or a collectivity, or an institution proceeds from the series of corrections that new historians bring to the predecessors’ descriptions and explanations” (TN3, 247). The goal of this reconstruction thus helps individuals and communities to see themselves in the stories that they recount about who they are.

Additionally, narrative selfhood at the communal level also arises when a group accepts a collection of texts, taken to be canonical, which expresses their character as a community and helps to constitute such identity. Ricoeur identifies the hermeneutic circularity of this relationship: “the historical community...has drawn its identity from the reception of those texts that it produced” (TN3, 248). The poetic resolution of their relationship in the dialectical and hermeneutic movement between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity, and its further elaboration in narrative arc of mimesis, ensure that it is not viciously circular but hermeneutically circular.

What, however, can we say about the relationship between the individual and the community? How can an individual’s identity arise from his or her communal existence,

and how can a community's identity arise from a story produced by an individual? Ricoeur phrases this problem as a dilemma: "on one side, it is the emergence of a problematic of a frankly egological mode of subjectivity, on the other, the irruption of sociology in the field of the social sciences and, with it, the appearance of an unprecedented concept of collective conscience" (MHF, 94). The problem with beginning with subjectivity to understand the meaning of remembering is that it "gave rise both to problematizing consciousness and to the movement by which consciousness turned back upon itself, to the point of speculative solipsism" (MHF, 94). Remembering, on this model, falls within the domain of an individual's mind. When beginning with consciousness, collective identity becomes unthinkable, parasitic on individual identity, or merely metaphorical. By starting with the "mineness" of consciousness and intentionality, this "tradition of inwardness" cannot think the meaning of community except as an aggregate of individuals (MHF, 94).³³⁰ On the basis of the latter, individual memory is impossible without the social structures provided by one's specific historical community. Whether one wants to begin with the meaning of remembering from the perspective of the individual or of the community, without inquiring into the possibility of their mutually supporting one another, they ultimately make it difficult to confront the complexities that befall the ethics of memory.

Ricoeur offers a clue regarding the meaning of the relationship between individual and communal identity when he claims, "that all private and public memories are constituted simultaneously, according to the schema of mutual and reciprocal

³³⁰ Ricoeur quite explicitly borrows this term from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989): pp. 111ff.

establishment (*instauration*).”³³¹ This reciprocity is established “only by analogy, and in relation to individual consciousness and its memory,” such that “collective memory is held to be a collection of traces left by the events that have affected the course of history of the groups concerned, and that it is accorded the power to place on stage these common memories, on the occasion of holidays, rites, and public celebrations” (MHF, 119). To express the analogical relationship between individuals and communities, I will employ a familiar phenomenological strategy and look at an instance where the mutually supporting ground of individual and communal identity becomes fragmented and untenable. For Ricoeur, it is in lessons that tragic drama teaches where the conflict between an individual and its community come to a head. By delineating how tragedy opens up the gulf between selfhood and community through the inability to come to terms with the debt owed the dead, we will be in a better position to see how they reciprocally and mutually establish one another.

IV.5.1. “The Little Ethics”: The Ethical Aim and the Moral Norm

The debt owed the dead, for Ricoeur, constitutes a moral obligation to remember. In order to understand how this obligation contributes to constituting the relationship between the self and community, it will be useful to briefly describe what Ricoeur describes as is “little ethics.”³³² “Ethics,” according to Ricoeur, is teleological because it refers to “the *aim* of an accomplished life,” whereas “morality” refers to “the articulation

³³¹ Paul Ricoeur, “Entre mémoire et histoire,” as cited and translated by Dauenhauer in *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, p. 129.

³³² For a more detailed discussion of Ricoeur’s “little ethics” see: *Ricoeur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity*. Eds. Richard Cohen and James L. Marsh (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Bernard Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricoeur: The Promise and Risk of Politics*, pp. 141-211, David Kaplan, *Ricoeur’s Critical Theory*, pp. 101-114; and Richard Kearney, *Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 91-115.

of this aim in *norms* characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an affect of constraint” (OA, 170). Ricoeur maintains the priority of ethics over morality, even though the aim of the good life must pass through the “sieve” of the moral norm. In the case of conflicts, the norm is resubmitted to the aims of the good life through practical wisdom.

Ethics teleologically aims at “the good life, with and for others in just institutions” (OA, 172). This initial level involves the practice “of judging well and acting well in a momentary approximation of living well” (OA, 180). It includes a formulation of what the good life is, and attempts to integrate actions into a “global project” or unified whole. “With respect to its content,” Ricoeur writes, “the ‘good life’ is, for each of us, the nebulous ideals and dreams of achievement with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled” (OA, 179). The choices a person makes are based on the working conception of the good life, and the good life is attained through the choices one makes. Each person is set with the task of weaving together a number of different aims under the heading of the good life, such as, for example, his or her professional life, family life, religious commitments, recreation, political commitments and so forth. By appreciating our successes and failures in carrying the project of a good life, we attest to ourselves and to the conception of the good. Thus, the ethical aim is profoundly self-reflexive insofar as the formation of goods at any level realizes one’s “self-esteem,” and attests to the self’s ability to constitute a narrative identity and the capacity to act.

Self-esteem opens the second dimension of the ethical aim, solicitude. The term “solicitude” captures the sense that the good life is one that is “lived with and for others.” Because the basis of my self-esteem is found in the capacity to act, it refers to others who

can also act and evaluate my actions. Others mediate the basic capacities of human being and their realization by recognizing the self and imputing actions to him or her. The recognition of who I am in solicitude works in two ways: in friendship and in the work of justice. On one hand, there is a movement of the self toward the other in friendship, in order to establish mutual relationship and reciprocity between the self and the other. On the other hand, there is the ethical dimension in which the self recognizes “the superiority of the authority enjoining to act in accordance with justice” (OA, 190). In other words, there is an important sense in which the other, in his or her suffering, calls upon the self to do the work of justice. Ricoeur thus writes that “this is perhaps the supreme act of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange, which, in the hour of agony, finds refuge in the shared whisper of voices or the feeble embrace of clasped hands” (OA, 191). Thus, where the desire for friendship reveals the mutual recognition of each person’s singularity, the call to justice arises from the recognition of our equality and our desire to render the unequal equal.

This brings the third dimension of the good life, justice, to the foreground. With the idea of justice, Ricoeur extends the meaning of the good life to the communal level. To be a self means to be a self in community; it is to be a citizen. Individuals participate in the life of a community through institutions. Institutions, for Ricoeur, refer to “the structure of *living together* as this belongs to a historical community—people, nation, region, and so forth—a structure irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with them in...the notion of distribution” (OA, 194). While a community is more than the sum of its individual members, it nevertheless requires their ongoing participation. Ricoeur writes,

It [is] only in a specific institutional milieu that the capacities and predispositions that distinguish human action can blossom; the individual... becomes human only under the condition of certain institutions... if this is so, the obligation to serve these institutions is itself a condition for the human agent to continue to develop. (OA, 254-255).

In so doing, institutions concretize the desire to live and act in concert with one another through the distribution of goods and removal of evils. Mark Muldoon writes, “the concept of distribution is tied to that of justice in the sense that it is institutions that govern the apportionment of roles, tasks, and advantages and disadvantages between members of a society.”³³³ The work of justice ensures that the goods distributed by such institutions do not transform the power to live together into a power over others by withholding goods, merit, or wealth. This work also takes note of the consequences of such distribution in order to ensure that the shares are appropriate to those who receive them. Because the recipients of the distribution of goods are the same people who comprise a community, the work of justice is a communal project.

While the aim towards the good life remains fundamental, Ricoeur nevertheless suggests that by itself it is incomplete. “It is necessary,” he writes, “to subject the ethical aim to the test of the norm” (OA, 203) in order to guard against the threat of violence. We need, in other words, to recognize both that our actions have consequences and that there may be others who suffer because of them. To guard against the inevitable possibility of violence, Ricoeur draws from Kant by suggesting that the morality of obligation can be seen as the “progressive strategy of placing at a distance, of purifying, of excluding, at the end of which the will that is good without qualification will equal the self-legislating will, in accordance with the supreme principles of autonomy” (OA, 207). The notion of

³³³ Mark S. Muldoon. “Ricoeur’s Ethical Poetics: Genesis and Elements.” *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 45, No. 1, (March 2005): pp. 61-86, p. 79.

the good life must be submitted to the test of the norm because self-esteem tends to be perverted into self-love (OA, 216). There is a tendency to take oneself to be an exception to the rule and think one's conception of the good life to be the only legitimate conception. The process of universalization ensures that the pursuit of the good life does not succumb to the propensity to evil that haunts our choices. As such, the ever-present possibility of violence and domination in our choices makes it necessary to employ the test of universalization for the good life. Such a process reveals the autonomy of human beings insofar as it enables an individual to act according to a rational, self-imposed law.

In order to further connect the ethical aim and the moral norm, Ricoeur finds an analogue for the notion of self-esteem on the moral plane. Just as solicitude is a component of the good life, respect is essential to understand autonomy. John Wall glosses self-respect as “an intensification that thematizes and radicalizes selves’ singular hermeneutical otherness from each other.”³³⁴ Just as we respect ourselves for being able to formulate meaning, we should respect others for being able to do the same. Thus, while I esteem myself as one who has a tradition and who is able to draw from that tradition in approximating the good life, I respect myself when I put my intuition of the good life to the test of universalization, and I respect others who are also able to approximate the good life. Self-esteem is thus connected with the respect of others. Ricoeur thus writes, “violence is equivalent to the diminishment or destruction of the power-to-do of others” (OA, 220). Ricoeur thus suggests that reducing others to one's own conception of the good life, such as when I impose my own view of the good onto

³³⁴ John Wall, “Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* (vol. 6, 2003): pp. 317-341, p. 328.

others, can only be adjudicated if we are able to respond to the vulnerability and suffering of the other.

IV.5.2 Tragedy as the Self and Community in Conflict

Despite his unique synthesis of teleological and deontological conceptions of our practical lives, Ricoeur nevertheless recognizes that conflicts are possible, perhaps even unavoidable. Universal norms, precisely because they are universal, cannot do justice to the complexity of human life; similarly, the conception of the good life cannot be realized without performing some violence or injustice to others. These conflicts directly threaten to undermine a just and harmonious relationship between selves, others, and communities. In order to see how the possibility of such violences threatens both individuals and the communities to which they belong, I will now turn to Ricoeur's account of *Antigone*.

Ricoeur turns to Sophocles' *Antigone* because "this tragedy says something about the unavoidable nature of conflict in moral life and, in addition, outlines a wisdom—the tragic wisdom of which Karl Jaspers spoke—capable of directing us in conflicts of an entirely different nature" (OA, 243). Ricoeur's analysis is most obviously indebted to Hegel's account of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both Hegel and Ricoeur are concerned with the potentially tragic dimensions of communal existence, and, more specifically, the conflicts that arise because of the reciprocal constitution of community, or institutions, and individuals. This tragedy, more than others, reveals something important about the ethical life of a community and the limits of such communal life. However, while Hegel suggests that such a conflict can be resolved in a

higher form of consciousness that grasps the conflict as a unity, Ricoeur interprets such a conflict as an ineluctable dimension of human life. However, just as conflict is inevitable, it also gives us the conceptual and practical tools through which we can forge a response to it.³³⁵

Where, then, does the tragic conflict of the play lie? Ricoeur's answer is remarkably direct: "the source of conflict lies not only in the one-sidedness of the characters but also in the one-sidedness of the moral *principles* which themselves are confronted with the complexity of life" (OA, 249). It is thus a problem identity at the level of character and at the level of self-constancy: they are stubborn inflexibility ultimately prevents them from keeping their respective promises. The plot runs as follows: Antigone defies the laws of the city by burying her dead brother, Polyneices, out of filial piety. Polyneices had died a traitor, having attacked his home city, Thebes, in an attempt to take the mantle of king. Creon, the new ruler of the city after Antigone's other brother, Eteocles, died, prohibits Polyneices' burial in order to uphold justice. The tension between Antigone and Creon leads Antigone to allow herself to be buried alive, which is then followed by the suicides of Haemon, Creon's son and Antigone's love, and Eurydice, Creon's wife and Haemon's mother. Creon recognizes, too late, that his practical world is too narrowly circumscribed, and that his adherence to his moral principles has caused his ruin.

³³⁵ It is interesting to note that in a later essay, "Fragility and Responsibility," Ricoeur revises his understanding of the meaning of the public exercise of human action from the tragedy of action to the fragility of human action. However, even in this essay, tragedy is closely tied to fragility because though the fragility of the situation calls for compromise and responsibility, our blindness to the inherent fragility of the situation leads to catastrophe. "Fragility and Responsibility." Trans. Elisabeth Iwanoski. In *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*. Ed. Richard Kearny. London: Sage Publications, 1996 (p. 15-21).

Creon's narrowness arises from his identification with his duties to the city by maintaining the laws of justice. His edict recognizes the equality and sameness of individuals regardless of filial connections. For Ricoeur, this understanding "does not take into account the variety and perhaps heterogeneity of the tasks belonging to the city" (OA, 244). Conversely, Antigone's narrowness stems from her commitment to filial piety and her recognition of the singularity of her brother—*this* person was her brother, and no one else can take his place. Insofar as both Creon and Antigone understand themselves from the possibilities afforded them by the institutions of their community—Creon from the political institutions of Thebes and Antigone from the religious rites that establish the lines of filiation—the conflict arises from within the community itself. In other words, Antigone, Creon, and the community reciprocally constitute and are constituted by one another. The crisis of the play reveals the inherent crises of communal life, specifically that it harbors within itself potentially discordant and conflicting possibilities.³³⁶

Both Antigone and Creon fail to reconcile, which they tragically recognize only too late. Their failure, however, is instructive, though not in the way Hegel supposed. While Hegel sought recourse in a higher synthesis of their actions, Ricoeur recognizes that such conflict is inevitable and suggests that we reorient our principles. Watching it teaches the audience to "deliberate well" and "condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom" (OA, 246-247). *Antigone* directs us to constantly negotiate the complexities of a life in which others challenge our own existence and inevitably all

³³⁶ Theodore George puts the point thusly: "In the experience of ethical life, both of the laws place necessary demands on consciousness: but necessary though they may be, it is impossible that they always admit of mutual fulfillment." "Community in the Idiom of Crisis: Hegel on Political Life, Tragedy, and the Dead." *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 32 (2002): pp. 123-138, p. 130.

too human ventures, and, as John Wall notes “requires us to face and overcome our own historical narrowness...in poetically re-shaped *practice*.”³³⁷ Rather than act from a different principle, we ought instead understand the situation differently. Ricoeur writes, the play “condemns the person of *praxis* to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom” (OA, 247). Robert Piercey emphasizes that this is a matter of perspective: “the chorus’s last piece of advice is not that we *do* anything in particular, but that we change our way of *looking* at the moral principles that come into conflict.”³³⁸ Rather than advocate a specific content that defines practical wisdom, Ricoeur offers the modest suggestion that it is a style of looking, understanding, and judging the situation.

Conflicting moral principles can only be adjudicated by *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. Ricoeur notes that practical wisdom, “consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by solicitude” for the other (OA, 269). This exception requires that that we invent “just behavior suited to the singular nature of the case” (OA, 269). Rather than discovering a rule that reduces the heteronomy of the other into the sphere of sameness and identity, we must develop a plan of action or reconfigure our narrative-identity such that it does justice to the singularity of the other. This creative element that responds to tragic wisdom stands in contrast to Heidegger’s account such, which emphasizes the way that tragedy renders humanity ineluctably passive and finite. Ricoeur’s account of tragic wisdom recognizes the fragility of such situations and it suggests that we can create new meaning from the conflict. Indeed, the best we can hope for is through “admitting proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us” while

³³⁷ Wall, “Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity,” p. 325-326.

³³⁸ Robert Piercey. “The Role of Greek Tragedy in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,” *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 49, no. 1 (Spring 2005): pp. 3-13, p. 9.

developing and revising our own meaningful proposals in conjunction with others (OA, 289). Human life is not only threatened by narrowness of vision, contingency, and chance; it is also oriented toward the good life and thus can be refigured through poetically minded practice.

Ricoeur offers three guidelines for judging moral conflicts. First, it is necessary that the conflicting parties recognize the same moral principles and that disagreements only concern the application of the principles. Second, explicitly drawing from Aristotle, Ricoeur suggests that the judgment must aim at the mean, even if such a mean is “extreme.” Third, such a judgment is most sound when “the decision maker—whether or not in the position of legislator—has taken the counsel of men and women reputed to be the most competent and wisest” (OA, 273). As such, the appeal to a universal rule cannot be divorced from the context in which it is applied, but must be developed through a dialogue with others and remain close to the particularities disclosed by the situation. This third principle suggests that judgment not only ought to arise from dialogue with others, which helps to establish a broader sense of communal life, but also that “the *phronimos* is not necessarily one individual alone” (OA, 273). By making *phronesis* into a social practice, in other words, we can transform the identity of a community. By developing a critical capacity for practical wisdom, human life with others is on a trajectory toward consensus, though never finally achieving it (OA, 289).

IV.5.3 The Self and Community as a Response to Tragic Conflict

Ricoeur’s account of tragedy reveals that communal identity is forged through the cooperation of individuals to listen to, challenge, and judge the stories and memories of

one another. Indeed, because one of the main lessons the play teaches us is that Antigone “posited the limit that points to the human, all too human, character of every institution” (OA, 245), it reveals possibilities for social coherency.³³⁹ In confronting the limits of social coherency, *phronesis* establishes the bonds of community. It reveals the way that the self and the community are correlates, such that to be a self is to be a self in community and to be a community is to be a community of selves.

How can this notion of imputation, and thus responsibility, extend to the level of communal identity and existence? One place where the correlation between the self and community can be found is in the concepts of imputation and responsibility.³⁴⁰ Because imputation is “phenomena of *initiative* and *intervention* whereby we catch sight of the interference of the agent on the course of the world, an interference that effectively causes changes in the world” it reveals the communal and intersubjective nature of remembering.³⁴¹ Ricoeur thus formulates a rather Kantian notion of acting: to initiate an action is to intervene in the course of the world, and such initiative allows us to designate an author or agent for the act. When an agent acts, she attests to who she is by allowing herself to be imputed as the action’s author.

Actions have effects that go beyond what the agent intended. Ricoeur thus limits responsibility in order to prevent it from covering all of the consequences of an action:

The idea of a person for whom one has responsibility joined with that of the thing one has under one's control, leads in this way to a quite remarkable broadening that makes the direct object of one's responsibility vulnerable and fragile insofar as it is something handed over to the care of an agent. Responsible for what, one

³³⁹ John Wall. “Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity,” p. 325.

³⁴⁰ John L. Meech. *Paul in Israel's Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): pp. 96-99.

³⁴¹ Ricoeur, “The Concept of Responsibility,” *The Just*. Trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 23, italics in the original.

may ask? For what is fragile, one is henceforth inclined to answer...one becomes responsible for harm because, first of all, one is responsible for others.³⁴²

Responsibility, for Ricoeur, is primarily responsibility *for* the other because it is the other, in its fragility and vulnerability that calls us to be responsible. “The self is ‘summoned to responsibility’ by the other. It is in the accusative mode alone that the self is enjoined. And the summons to responsibility has opposite it the passivity of an ‘I’ who has been called upon” (OA, 189). This suggests that responsibility is not merely a responsibility *for* an action, although such imputation is a central dimension of it. It is also being responsible *to* the other who calls upon me to be responsible for it.³⁴³ We are thus responsible for that which is within the sphere of care.

Far from being self-evident, however, the semantics and paradigms for imputing responsibility for an action are to be found at the intersubjective level. Not only does the self draw from the stock of meaningful predicates and ascriptions that are in circulation in a community; it also finds that, as John L. Meech notes, “the community supplies resources for telling stories that constitute the self as a meaning.”³⁴⁴ As a result, “the self acts in concert with others by internalizing practices that circulate in the life of a community.”³⁴⁵ Such practices include both the stock of social and cultural roles one can embody—such as a teacher, musician, lawyer, or doctor—and those canonical genres—such as tragedy, comedy, epic, farce, pastiche, and satire—that provide a structure for identifying the beginning and end of a series of events. Thus, the community in which one lives offers those possibilities from which one interprets one’s life. It provides, in

³⁴² Ricoeur, “The Concept of Responsibility,” p. 29.

³⁴³ W. David Hall makes a similar point in his book *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension between Love and Justice* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007): pp. 86-93. I will be further examining this in the next chapter, when I examine the ethical and political dimensions of memory and forgetting.

³⁴⁴ John L. Meech. *Paul in Israel’s Story*, p. 89.

³⁴⁵ John L. Meech. *Paul in Israel’s Story*, p. 90.

other words, a stock of cultural roles, characters, and identities on which an individual can formulate life plans and goals.

An additional way that imputation and responsibility appear at the communal level is through the way in which an individual explicitly acts in the name of the community. Meech writes, “imputability thus articulates a self who, in seeking to own her actions in accord with her intentions, also owns these actions on the behalf of a community when there has been profound collective misdirection.”³⁴⁶ Similarly, to be responsible in this communal context is to own “the consequences of [one’s] actions—even, perhaps, where there was no original intent to harm—and in so doing [seek] to live out the community’s ethical aim.”³⁴⁷ By taking on the burden of being imputed, and thus responsible, for the actions of others, an individual speaks for the community.

Speaking for, in this case, is symbolic. An individual takes the place of, or stands for, as a sacrifice, representative, or heir of the community. The structure of imputation and responsibility can reveal and constitute the community’s narrative identity insofar as it is one can it can assume its past or heritage as one’s own. Community emerges in the resolution of conflicts and their embodiment in the symbolic in such a way that it can be passed down to another generation. Similarly, an individual assumes selfhood not a product of work but as inherited from his or her own community. This means that the narratives and memories that are passed through institutions, symbols, and practices constitute the history and identity a community.

This symbol becomes the “spirit of a people” because it arises from the conflicts that might arise among “the moral consciousness” of a community and their “desire to

³⁴⁶ John L. Meech, *Paul in Israel’s Story*, p. 97.

³⁴⁷ John L. Meech, *Paul in Israel’s Story*, p. 97.

live together” (OA, 256). If “spirit of a people” is to be used to refer to a community, however, it must be divested of the metaphysical connotations that Hegel vested in it. John Meech suggests that “spirit...is not an ontological term but a metaphor for the collective life of a community in its ethical aim” and that “one has to speak, at least in an analogical sense, of the community as a person.”³⁴⁸ By designating spirit as a mere metaphor, however, Meech goes too far in divesting its Being. We should, of course, be wary of any conception of spirit that is wholly distinct from individuals and institutions. Such a conception would characterize spirit as an underlying substrate. However, suggesting spirit is a metaphor for communal identity or that communal identity is an analogue swings the pendulum too far the other way. It makes such identity into an illusion, in much the same way Nietzsche and Hume had attacked personal identity.

Rather, “spirit” in the sense that Ricoeur briefly suggests, is the form of ipseity proper to a community. In other words, if the dialectic of an individually existing person is between selfhood and sameness, the dialectic of identity that characterizes a community is between spirit and the individuals who comprise it. While a community is comprised of individually existing selves, it is not reducible to them. Rather, to be able to say “we” requires a unified commitment to something, even if each individual performs a different task. Genuine community is established when each individual recognizes his or her interdependence on others, while at the same time receiving that very recognition from others. As such, the “spirit” of a community is to be found in the way that they recognize others, incorporate them into the community while nevertheless recognizing their alterity and their desire to tell the story of his or her community.

³⁴⁸ John L. Meech, *Paul in Israel's Story*, p. 94, 97.

IV.6 Conclusion: The Crisis of Death

With the sketch of Ricoeur's use of *Antigone* complete, I would now like to see how it figures into an understanding of remembering. This will occur in two steps. First, I will connect tragedy and death, a link that Ricoeur misses in his account of *Antigone*. Second, I will argue that there is a sense of death that eludes us, and which reopens the possibility of memory's use and abuse at a more fundamental level. This will open the discussion for the process of healing and reconciliation that I will explore in the next, and final, chapter.

IV.6.1. Tragedy and Death

Ricoeur's discussion of *Antigone* overlooks the central conflict of the tragedy in order to make a larger point about the necessity of refiguring one's view. In doing so, he misses an opportunity to concretely examine the connection between tragedy, death, and remembering that is central to communal existence. As I will be suggesting, the debt owed the dead plays a decisive role in the play, and thus can reveal something about the constitution of communal life.

I noted above that Ricoeur's analysis of *Antigone* draws primarily from Hegel's classic account in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, Ricoeur misses an important detail that sets the course of the play to its inevitable conclusions: it is the suggestion that ethical life is framed around a dispute about the dead, Polyneices' corpse. Indeed, if the possibilities of communal existence are to be reexamined, then they must be pressed to their utmost limits. This means that we need to inquire into the ways that the community relates to those at its margins. The dead are one such group, partly because cemeteries are

walled off from the rest of the city and partly because the corpse occupies a space between the lived body (*Leib*) and a brute object. Thus we need to examine the meaning of burial that *Antigone* raises.

Why do the dead need to be buried? The empirical and psychological answer is that burial aids in the grieving process. However, burial also works to, as Hegel suggests, spiritualize the dead. Burial interrupts the destructive work of nature and rescues the corpse from oblivion.³⁴⁹ Indeed, the act of burial does not so much lay the past to rest as it reincorporates its loss into the life of the community. Burial gives the dead a “spiritual” life in the community by suggesting that the life was not lived in vain, and in so doing it offers the dead a place among the living. The problem that the play raises is that it appears that both Antigone and Creon can legitimately claim to the rights of burial. Creon can claim it as the right of the state because the state maintains and upholds the equality and sameness of individuals. Insofar as all individuals must die, death equalizes every individual. Theodore George puts the point concisely: “given its requirement that respect for the law be completely universal, the human law cannot but assert that the reach of the juridical extends over the sphere of not only the living, but of the dead as well.”³⁵⁰ Justice tends toward universality, and thus political institutions reconfirm their right to maintain and perpetuate themselves. Thus, if one were to try to undermine the rule of law or try to make themselves an exception to the law—traitors, in other words—such a person would not be granted the right to be reassumed spiritually into the community. To betray the laws of the state means to forfeit the right to be buried by the state.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): p. 271, § 452.

³⁵⁰ Theodore George, “Community in the Idiom of Crisis,” p. 127-128.

At the same time, Antigone can claim burial rights for herself. Her actions are justified because she is responsible to recognize the singularity and irreplaceability of each family member. There is thus a difference between the meaning behind her action and the meaning underlying Creon's rejection of Polyneices' burial. For Creon, maintaining the right to burial is a way to maintain his own sovereignty. Insofar as justice aims toward the universal, its highest expression occurs when it maintains control over the death, that is, the phenomenon to which all humans are subject. For Antigone, burial recognizes the singularity of the individual's death. What Antigone recognizes, in other words, is the asymmetry between herself and her brother. Such asymmetry is not merely that she cannot die his death for him, but that she is granted a possibility that is foreclosed to others—the possibility of birth.³⁵¹ Burial, in terms of filial piety, is not a recognition of the universality of death, but a recognition of the singularity of death and the possibility of rebirth.

The claims that both Antigone and Creon lay on the rights of burial normally do not conflict. They can both legitimately lay claim to Polyneices. Normally, the state protects the family in times of war, and the family provides the soldiers who battle. As such, the family is preserved and destroyed by the function of the state.³⁵² To go off to war to protect the state, and to die for it, is the highest duty an individual can undertake for the community. Conversely, burial is the highest duty for the family. As such, the

³⁵¹ Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 98. Along these lines, Hegel writes that there are two “syllogisms” that are united in opposite movements: “one from actuality down to unreality, the downward movement of human law, organized into independent members, to the danger and trial of death; and the other, the upward movement of the law of the netherworld to the actuality of the light of day and to conscious existence. Of these movements, the former falls to man, the latter to woman,” p. 278, §463.

³⁵² Philip J. Kain. *Hegel and the Other: A Study of the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005): p. 145.

political sphere performs the pageantry of honoring the dead while the family performs the rites of burial. One honors the dead; the other mourns them.

Antigone focuses on the way that right to bury, and burial rites, help constitute social and communal life. By claiming the right to bury, through the rites of burial, the protagonists of the play claim that they solely legitimate the social bond. In so doing, they expose the limits of community. The conflict that arises in the play is thus one of a conflict, even *the* conflict that defines communal life. This forms the backdrop of the play, and, if the meaning of communal existence and the possibility of resolution and reconciliation is to be intelligible, it needs to be articulated because it provides the specificity of the situation that calls for *phronesis*. To neglect the contexts and reasons for Antigone's and Creon's actions is to risk missing something fundamental, which, in this case, is the way that burial constitutes a community. Furthermore, because it is the inevitability of conflict over the rite of burial, and the right to bury, that takes hold of each of these institutions and brings them to utter ruin, the act of burial should call our attention to the way that communities are constituted.

IV.6.2. Death and Burial

I suggested above that burial serves to “spiritualize” the dead and reincorporate them into the life of the community. Burial is, in a sense, to bear witness to the dead. Ricoeur offers at least two symbols understand the spiritualization of such an act. First, burial is a symbolic act that makes manifest the transition of generations. Second, the materiality of the corpse and the symbolism of burial participate in the larger dialectic of the trace. However, this account threatens to make the movement of memory and history

too coherent and too concordant; it appears to make the transmission of tradition too seamless.

Burial first secures the transition from one generation to the next. Ricoeur had noted in *Time and Narrative* that the succession of generations is one of the ways that phenomenological time is mediated with objective time. He writes, “the notion of a succession of generations provides an answer to this antinomy [between mortal and public time] by designating the chain of historical agents as living people who come to take the place of dead people” (TN3, 109). Burial becomes a symbolic act of making manifest such a replacement and helps to establish the interconnection between the living and the dead. Burial does not resist the brute fact of death; it instead resists and transforms the rupture that death inevitably brings with it. Burial, insofar as it thus bears witness to the dead through burial helps to hold together a past no longer present with a past that continues to exist as having been. The burial site thus helps confer on the dead a lasting presence that is transformative of the decay of the corpse’s body.³⁵³ Thus, Ricoeur writes, “we must characterize the connection between generations (*Generationszusammenhang*) by prereflective participation in a common destiny as much as by real participation in its recognized directive intentions and formative tendencies” (TN3, 111). To remember someone through burial is to thus participate in the narrative formation of identity.

If burial symbolizes the transition between generations, it is because the corpse is a trace. It indicates a past that is no longer here, but nevertheless remains. This corpse is, quite literally, the remains of the past. If the corpse symbolizes the way that the past is

³⁵³ For a fascinating discussion of the way that the dead are memorialized in post-World War II French literature, see W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory*, pp. 99-111.

experienced through traces, the act of burial helps to confer meaning on the person's death. If, in other words, the act of burial is to be meaningful, it must be because those in the present find themselves under a debt owed to those who have died. Burial thus recognizes a debt that one has "fundamentally contracted on behalf of another" (TN3, 256). Such a debt arises because of the way that, as I suggested in Chapter II, we come from others and the way our existence is dependent on others. The gravestone, tomb, sepulcher, and even writing itself, can call upon individuals and a community to bear the memory of those who came before them. As such, burial recognizes the way that being indebted not only makes it possible for one to be responsible for oneself but it is a recognition that one's existence is dependent on others. Burial thus participates in establishing a heritage, which in turn makes one living indebted to it. In the act of burial, the past is rendered its due.

However, before moving to an account of this tenuous reconciliation in the next chapter, I will raise, once again, the question of ability to represent the dead, and Ricoeur's resolution of the play in the adage to deliberate well. The power that *Antigone* has is the power to call attention to, and, even, memorialize the crisis that establishes communal life. However, to the extent that such a crisis is precipitated by the crisis of burial and death, it raises a fundamental question about the very possibility of representing it in language at all. Theodore George puts the point concisely: "while it may be that the phenomenon of language provides the chief resource by means of which it is possible for consciousness to incorporate into the life of spirit even the memory of the dead, it is doubtful given the immeasurability of the loss that characterizes death, that

any language, even the language of tragedy, could capture it completely.”³⁵⁴ If the symbol of burial grants meaning to the past, it also withholds it. To bring memory to language, especially memory of the dead is to risk suggesting that we can recuperate the loss of the past without remainder. Indeed, to be able to bury, even symbolically, the dead suggest that the work of death has been completed. To suggest that one has adequately represented death, in other words, is, in some sense, to forget the meaning of such a death. It is, in other words, to think that the debt owed the dead has been paid back in full.

This problem is further exacerbated if the synthetic power of narrative is further questioned. Narrative, as I have suggested, operates by synthesizing the discordant experiences of time into something human. It renders time and memory meaningful by organizing them in the order of a plot. The problem arises when one is confronted with a narrative form that challenges our received notions of plot and unity. While Ricoeur suggests that such narratives “finally end up imitating by dint of not imitating the received paradigms, (TN1, 73), such a claim seems to avoid directly confronting the aporetic and paradoxical forms of narrative that these works can introduce.”³⁵⁵

This will have significant implications at the level of memory. With burial, for example, one may be tempted to think that a continuous tradition is all too easily established, and that the continuity with the past is all too seamless. One might be tempted to think that the symbolic of burial, and, analogously, the writing of history, simply puts the dead to rest or completes payment on the debt owed the dead. Ricoeur himself acknowledges that there is thus a “close tie between the restitution of this debt

³⁵⁴ Theodore George, “Community in the Idiom of Crisis,” p. 136.

³⁵⁵ Ridvan Askin makes the same point in “Mneme, Anamnesis, and Mimesis.”

and the return of the repressed, in the psychoanalytic sense of this term” (TN3, 312 n.42). To think one has repaid the debt, in other words, risks a return of the past. The debt, it seems, cannot be annulled; it can return insofar as we might try to repress what happened through the composition of an official or canonical history.³⁵⁶ Even though historians might think they are paying down the debt through writing, as it were, they may in fact be offering complicated strategies of repression and avoidance of the wrongs that might be part of their heritage.

In addition to seeing how remembering both constitutes a heritage and a community, it now remains to be seen how its paradoxical nature of representing the past can challenge a community or heritage and call it into question, and, if impossible to resolve, how best to respond to such a challenge. In order to do so, I will develop in the next, and final chapter of this dissertation, Ricoeur’s account of the ethical trajectory of memory and the process of healing and reconciliation that it offers. This process will thus highlight the therapeutic dimensions of writing history, and the possibility of justly representing the past through memory.

³⁵⁶ Ernst Gerhardt notes that the word “restitution” conveys both of senses: it can mean the paying down of the debt or the re-institution of the debt. Cf. “A Return on the Repressed: The Debt of History in Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*.” *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 48, no. 3 (Fall 2004): pp. 245-254, p. 249.

Chapter V: The Promises of Narrative Memory

V.1. Introduction and Thesis

In the previous chapter, I examined how memory is an important source for narrative identity. The stories we tell about our past helps to make us who we are. However, Ricoeur's account of the formation of selfhood risks implying that paradox of representing the past has been dissolved or overcome. In this chapter, my exploration of the connection between memory and communal identity comes to a close with an examination of the tension between conflict and reconciliation that arises in the relationship between memory and communal identity. Ricoeur suggests that the appropriate relationship to the past requires a "just allotment" of memory and forgetting: how much should we remember? How much should we forget? Should we forgive, if possible? (MHF, xv)

By developing the therapeutic and ethical dimensions of memory, I be arguing that memory has two interrelated aims. First, memory is responsible for reconciling a self and community with the reality of its past. Second, by retrieving a heritage and transmitting it to future generations, memory can revitalize forgotten possibilities and help us fulfill the promises made by our forebears. These two elements show that memory generate alternative modes for expressing that which resists narrative representations, and thus can help to reconcile a community with its past without dissolving its tragic dimensions.

In developing these points, I will examine two forms of reconciliation that Ricoeur, without explicitly calling attention to them, develops. The first form of reconciliation, which I name "critical reconciliation," refers to the recognition that one's narrative identity is tenuous and fragile. It is, in other words, a recognition of an always revisable, and ever expanding, reconciliation with the past and others. In delineating what

this reconciliation entails, I will develop the typology of the uses and abuses of memory that Ricoeur introduces in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Once a community has confronted the reality of its own past, it is faced with the challenge of incorporating it into the present, in an act that Ricoeur names “scriptural entombment.” This completes the just distribution of memory, and responds to the tragic wisdom of limits that was presented in the previous chapter. The second form of reconciliation, one that steps beyond the realm of justice to something more hopeful, culminates in the possibility of forgiveness. It is a “creative reconciliation” because it offers the possibility of a new beginning. I will be arguing that forgiveness, while it cuts against the grain of justice, nevertheless gives justice its sense and opens a future for new possibilities for an enlarged, more inclusive, communal life.

V.2 Conflict and Reconciliation: The Uses and Abuses of Memory

The first form of reconciliation that I will discuss centers on the way that selves, institutions, and communities come to recognize the sources and validity of each other’s narrative identity. Such reconciliation occurs through the telling, retelling, and rewriting one’s narrative identity. Importantly, reconciliation does not mean the dissolution of conflict or its resolution in complete harmony. It instead signifies an always tenuous resolution of conflict insofar as it recognizes the creativity of memory. Such creativity, or poiesis, I will be arguing, helps to expand a community’s identity to be more inclusive.

However, before detailing the prospects for reconciliation, it will first be necessary to detail some impediments to it. “The diseases of memory are basically

diseases of identity,” Ricoeur writes.³⁵⁷ In some instances we suffer from *too much* memory, as when as we dwell on the humiliations and traumas of the past with us. In such cases, we can speak of the ways that the past haunts and intrudes on the present, limiting and foreclosing possibilities for self-understanding. In other instances, we suffer from a *lack* of memory, such as when avoid confronting past traumas that have befallen us or that we have caused. Maria Duffy puts this point concisely: “wounded memories cause a rupture between the ‘area of experience’ (the past) and the ‘horizon of expectation (the future). It is the vivid present that plays the role of mediator between these two spheres – excess and lack of memory.”³⁵⁸ Ricoeur identifies three ways that memory distorts identity on an individual and social level: the pathological-therapeutic, the pragmatic, and the ethico-political. Each identifies a specific obstacle to remembering and each offers a way to begin to heal the troubles of memory. This analysis will help support the ethical and political implications of identity outlined in the previous chapter.

V.2.1. Pathological-Therapeutic Memory

The stories we tell about ourselves are suspect at a psychological level. We want to have a sense of identity, and we want to make sure that the stories we tell about us are acceptable ones. This can lead us to repress, distort, or block what happened, which can fragment identity. Psychoanalysis attempts to heal trauma by “working through” repressed memories. Drawing on Freud’s essays “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” and “Mourning and Melancholia,” Ricoeur analyzes how we

³⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting,” *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*. Eds. Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney (New York: Routledge Press, 1999): pp. 5-11, p. 7.

³⁵⁸ Maria Duffy. *Paul Ricoeur’s Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting* (London: Continuum Press, 2009), p. 52.

unconsciously bury traumatic memories, and he identifies some of the effects of repressing traumatic memories. Repressing memories can lead to their return in various guises, which can inhibit the development of healthy relationships with others.

In a classic statement, Freud writes that pathologies and obsessions are

Characterized by the *return of the repressed memories* -- that is, therefore, by the failure of the defense...The re-activated memories, however, and the self-reproaches formed from them never re-emerge into consciousness unchanged: what become conscious as obsessional ideas and affects, and take the place of the pathogenic memories so far as conscious life is concerned, are structures in the nature of a *compromise* between the repressed ideas and the repressing ones...A wounded identity in this case is one that has undergone a traumatic experience.³⁵⁹

In Ricoeurian terms, trauma displaces those horizons and expectations that constitute an individual's or a community's field of experience. It can circumscribe too tight a horizon, and thus limit the possible ways that we can act and understand ourselves. In his essay "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," Freud writes, "we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as memory but as an action; he *repeats* it without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it."³⁶⁰ The starting point of psychoanalysis is thus the identification of actions the patient tends to obsessively repeat. Repeating and acting out replaces the ability to remember and reveals a desire on the patient's part to deny the reality of the past because it is unbearable. Repressed memories can return in unexpected, and sometimes violent, ways.

³⁵⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defense." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 3, Trans. and Ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1952): pp. 159-185, p. 169-170.

³⁶⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12, Trans. and Ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958): pp. 147-156, p. 150.

But why should such memories return? In the essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud suggests that both mourning and melancholia are a “reaction to the loss of a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”³⁶¹ However, whereas mourning reconciles an individual to such a loss, in melancholia the loved object is lost without hope for reconciliation. Instead of ridding oneself of the attachment to the lost object, the melancholic person divests him or her self of “self-regard” (*Selbstgefühl*).³⁶² The loss of the object is transformed into a denigration of the self; a person identifies with the loss to such an extent that she comes to identify herself with the lost object or ideal.

Though Freud does not explicitly do so, Ricoeur establishes a connection between repeating, acting out, and melancholia. He writes, “the wounds and scars of history... are repeated in the state of melancholia.”³⁶³ This means that “what, in historical experience, takes the form of a paradox—namely, *too much* memory here, *not enough* memory there—can be reinterpreted in terms of the categories of resistance and compulsion to repeat, which... leads us to substitute acting out for the true recollection by which the present would be reconciled with the past” (MHF, 79).³⁶⁴ Those individuals and

³⁶¹ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, Trans and Ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, Press, 1958): pp. 243-258, p. 243.

³⁶² Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” p. 244, also Cf. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 72.

³⁶³ Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting,” p. 7.

³⁶⁴ One example of how this sort of pathological behavior can arise in terms of national and communal identity can be found in some discussions of Israeli-Palestinian relations. In one article, from the on-line magazine “Salon,” Sandy Tolan suggests that the reason that Israel sometimes appears to act against its own interests is because “the country is stuck in the political psychology of ‘never again’” and “appears so trapped by the wounds of its own terrible history that it keeps repeating its past mistakes of excessive force.” The use of force against Palestinian citizens is, in other words, the result of a structural pathology that arises from the traumatic wounds of the Shoah that have not yet been fully confronted. However, rather than say that it repeats its own past mistakes, as Tolan suggests, I would say that its internalization and repression of the trauma of the Holocaust has led to violent outbursts that can be construed as the return of such repression. The implication here is that if there is to be reconciliation between Israel and Palestine,

communities with too much memory lose themselves in the past, obsessing over the details of it and reopening its wounds. Those people who have too little memory fear being engulfed by the past, and avoid confronting it. Such fear can lead to repression and acting violently when similar situations arise.

Against these obsessive and pathological tendencies, Ricoeur connects the “work of remembering” with the “work of mourning.” Both help the patient confront the past and the ways that he or she remains attached to it. “Descriptively speaking,” Freud writes, the work of remembering “[fills] in the gaps of memory; dynamically speaking, it is to overcome the resistances due to repression.”³⁶⁵ This work allows the patient to become reconciled with the repressed memories by situating them within his or her life, which renders them understandable. Mourning complements remembering by incorporating “reality testing.” Reality testing occurs when a person “proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that [lost] object.”³⁶⁶ Through the work of mourning, the patient breaks off those desires that connect him or her to the object, and “interiorizes” the lost object. This interiorization of memory allows the mourner to become “free and uninhibited,” capable of attaching itself to new objects. The work of mourning thus can extend the horizons of an individual’s expectations and possibilities. As Ricoeur puts it, “mourning and ‘working through’ are to be brought together in the fight for the acceptability of memories: memories not only have to be understandable, they have to be acceptable, and it is this acceptability that is at stake in

they first need to embark on a long process of working through the repressed memories of the Shoah and other conditions under which Israel was granted statehood.

³⁶⁵ Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through,” p. 148.

³⁶⁶ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” p. 244.

the work of memory and mourning. Both are types of reconciliation.”³⁶⁷ The process can be lengthy, and so both the analyst and patient must be patient with one another: “they must be patient concerning the symptoms, which in turn allows them to be reconciled with the impossibility of going directly to the truth. But also the patient has to accept his illness in order to anticipate a time when he could be reconciled with his own past.”³⁶⁸ Memory is thus a difficult work of making its memories acceptable and bearable.

V.2.2. The Pragmatics of Memory

The stories a community tells to itself about itself lend cohesion among its citizens. What makes this particularly problematic is that individuals and communities want to have an acceptable view of who they are. There is thus a pragmatic dimension of narrative identity: rather than faithfully representing the past, there is always a temptation to exalt glories and triumphs over defeats—for example, to ignore colonialism and imperialism while praising one’s cosmopolitanism and philanthropy—or to selectively forget certain events perpetrated by individuals in the name of the community. Such retelling flees in the face of the fragility of identity.

Ricoeur offers several reasons for claiming that the link between memory and identity is fragile. First, the dialectic between *ipse* and *idem* renders one’s narrative identity fragile insofar as we often tend to respond to the questions “Who am I? Who are we?” in terms of what I am or what we are. By answering questions of identity in terms of a national character rather than in terms of the ability to keep one’s word, we do not understand ourselves in terms of possibilities, values, and commitments but in terms of

³⁶⁷ Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting” p. 7.

³⁶⁸ Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting” p. 6.

static properties. Second, the fact that there are others who differ from us, both in the way that they lead their lives and in the way that they have their own ways to understand themselves, can be seen as a threat to our own form of life. Indeed, if the other is perceived as threatening, the response is often one of suspicion, hostility, and rejection. “Humiliations, real or imaginary are linked to this threat, when this threat is felt as a wound which leaves scars.”³⁶⁹ Third, there is the heritage of violence. Insofar as collective identity is rooted in founding, violent events, collective memory is a repository of such a heritage. For any triumph or glory, others are humiliated and debased. Following Hannah Arendt, Ricoeur suggests that such violence threatens, wounds, and ultimately deforms those capabilities that define the self. In short, such violence prevents the self from having a future.

Memory can respond to the fragility of identity by developing narrative strategies that buttress and protect it from being called into question. One especially important narrative strategy, if only because it is so insidious, is the way that ideology insinuates itself between the demand for identity and public expressions of memory. At its most basic level, ideology helps to integrate and guard identity insofar as it offers a way to integrate individuals into a common world through the symbolic system immanent in action (MHF, 82). By doing so, it helps to configure narrative identity by offering a way to make action intelligible. At this basic level, there is no abuse of memory, according to Ricoeur, because it operates as a “factor of integration” and a “guardian of identity” (MHF, 82, 83).

Nevertheless, the symbolic, constitutive role that ideology plays is never innocent, insofar as it also aids in “the justification of a system of order or power” (MHF, 83).

³⁶⁹ Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting” p. 8.

Because ideology revolves around power, authority, and legitimation, it is ultimately inseparable from the possibility of distortion and violence. “It is on the level of where ideology operates as a discourse justifying power, domination, that the resources of manipulation provided by narrative are mobilized” (MHF, 85). It is easy to identify ways that ideology manipulates and distorts identity. Ideology can selectively omit some events, emphasize and exaggerate others, create associations among them, and even outright fabricate “facts.”³⁷⁰ While wartime propaganda is a rather clear example of this, ideological manipulation is often more insidious. Ideology is promulgated, celebrated, and perpetuated through stories of founding events, turning points, or the progression and expansion of certain ideals. Additionally, ideology can be used to enforce a specific social hierarchy by mobilizing and manipulating beliefs and memories by, among other things, reviving ancient feuds, obscuring past wrongs, and promulgating a specific national identity. Such a canonical or state-sponsored history strips “the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves” (MHF, 448). By speaking for the community, such narratives deprive its members of their voice to speak for themselves.

Fortunately, we are not consigned to ideological distortion. Though ideology is powerful, it is not omnipotent. To be able to narrate at all entails that we are also able to narrate otherwise. Richard Kearney puts the point thusly: “once one recognizes that one’s identity is fundamentally narrative in character, one discovers an ineradicable openness and indeterminacy at the root of one’s collective memory.”³⁷¹ Because of this openness,

³⁷⁰ Cf. Roy F. Baumeister and Stephen Hastings. “Distortions of Collective Memory: How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves.” *Collective Memory of Political Events*. Eds James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez, and Bernard Rimé. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997): pp. 277-293.

³⁷¹ Richard Kearney, “Narrative and the Ethics of Remembrance.” *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*. Eds. Mark Dooley and Richard Kearney (New York: Routledge, 1999): pp. 18-32, p. 26.

we can learn how to identify with the sufferings of others, share in their triumphs, and experience ourselves *as* another. Ricoeur further explains, “this exercise of memory is here an exercise in *telling otherwise*, and also in letting others tell their own history, especially the founding events which are the ground of a collective memory.”³⁷² By narrating otherwise, and exchanging memories through the process of retelling our stories to others, we can expand our narrative memory and our self-understanding to include others.

Through the exchange of memory, we can guard against possible abuses. The historian plays an important role here. On one hand, the historian is “supposed to set aside [his or her] own feelings” on the matter in order to establish the salience and meaning of certain facts and place them into relation to one another (TN3, 187). It would thus seem that the historian, *as* historian, is in no position to forgive or condemn anyone. To be able to give a critical and sober account of what happened as one writes history practice, one must respect the historical singularity of the era under consideration. On the other hand, “when it is a question of events closer to us, like Auschwitz, it seems that the sort of ethical neutralization that may be set at a distance in order to better be understood and explained, is no longer possible or desirable” (TN3, 187). What makes certain events worthy of reconsideration is their moral incomparability. This makes the historian’s task one of, “[extracting] from traumatic memories the exemplary value that can become pertinent only when memory has been turned into a project” (MHF, 86). This project, furthermore, “can only be formed by an enlightened public opinion that transforms the retrospective judgment on the crime into a pledge to prevent its reoccurrence” (MHF, 332). History’s aim to recount what actually happened thus helps in wresting us away

³⁷² Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting” p. 9.

from the vicious cycles of lamentation and melancholy, inculcation and exculpation, in directing us meaningfully toward the future. As Ricoeur writes, the power to tell one's history otherwise and the ability to let others recount one's own history, "is the power of justice to be just regarding victims, just also regarding victors, and justice towards new institutions by means of which we may prevent the same events from recurring in the future."³⁷³ The question of the good life that memory directs itself toward indicates the third, and final, site where memory's excesses appear.

V.2.3. The Ethico-Political Memory

The ethical and political dimensions of memory concern the relationship between the future and the meaning of the debt we have to the past. "The duty to remember consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of the past to the next generation."³⁷⁴ This duty obligates us not to repeat the mistakes that our forebears have made, and to see ourselves as heirs to a tradition and their promises. The duty to remember the past need not be something commanded by an external authority, such as the State, and enforced by a State-sponsored apparatus. We do a disservice to future generations when we construe our obligation to the dead in terms of a self-serving political agenda. The duty to remember is instead an obligation to be responsible to the others of the past and for them. Befitting the summoned or called subject that Ricoeur advocates, the obligation to remember the past is issued by an other for and to whom we are responsible, and such an obligation must be carried out for the sake of the future.

³⁷³ Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting," p. 9.

³⁷⁴ Ricoeur, "Memory and Forgetting," p. 9.

Why, however, should we think of the debt to the past in terms of an obligation? Why should we think that we are responsible for the past? To answer these difficult questions, it may be useful to redeploy the Ricoeur's account of the connection between imputability and solicitude. "Imputability," as Ricoeur writes, "is that capacity, that aptitude, by virtue of which actions can be held to someone's account" (MHF, 460). Imputation thus presupposes first that actions can be submitted to rules, norms, and moral laws. Second, its structure suggests that agents can be held responsible for aligning or not aligning their actions with such rules. Third, to be able to be imputed actions or to be held responsible for such actions suggests that one is able to initiate a course of action in the first place. In this manner, imputation helps to articulate the connection between what happened and who made it happen by assigning responsibility to the agent for the action. Thus, it belongs to the way the self appears as *ipse*, as capable of doing something.

There is, however, more to imputation than holding someone accountable for his or her actions. W. David Hall notes that, though Ricoeur sometimes glosses over this dimension, "there is the question of the other who imputes actions to me and, in so doing, holds me responsible."³⁷⁵ Imputation is thus not merely an abstract or impersonal assignment of responsibility, nor is it limited to those acts that I would like to hold myself responsible for. Rather, someone holds someone responsible for some action. In such a case, we are not merely responsible *for* those actions that are imputed to us; we are also responsible *to* another person, group, or community. This responsibility *to* the other refers to the capacity to respond to the other who calls me to justice.

³⁷⁵ W. David Hall. *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative: The Creative Tension between Love and Justice*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 90.

In order to draw out the way that responsibility involves responding, Ricoeur draws from Emmanuel Levinas. According to Levinas, the other confronts me as one who makes a moral claim upon me, which is to say as one who commands me to be responsible. The experience of the other is the condition for making moral action possible. I am responsible only because the other imputes actions to me. Ricoeur makes this clear in his discussion of the ethical aim in *Oneself as Another*:

The “appearing” of the Other in the *face* of the Other eludes vision, seeing forms, and even eludes hearing, apprehending voices. In truth, the face does not appear; it is not a phenomenon; it is an epiphany. Whose face is it?... This face is that of a master of justice, of a master who instructs and who does so only in the ethical mode: this face forbids murder and commands justice... To be sure, the self is “summoned to responsibility” by the other. But as the initiative of the injunction comes from the other, it is in the accusative mode alone that the self is enjoined. And the summons to responsibility has opposite it simply the passivity of an “I” who has been called upon. (OA, 189)

If the face of the other is to make the self responsible, then the self must be understood in terms of its capacity to hear, respond and be summoned. In short, the self must be construed as being open to the other who calls. Ricoeur later suggests that “to find oneself called upon in the second person at the very core of the optative of living well, then of the prohibition to kill, then of the search for the choice appropriate to the situation, is to recognize oneself as being enjoined to *live well with and for others in just institutions and to esteem oneself as the bearer of this wish*” (OA, 352). The cluster of related concepts – guilt, indebtedness, responsibility, and imputation – thus signifies how we are accountable for our actions and the way that we are guilty, indebted to, or otherwise responsible to the other who calls me.

The link between being indebted and responsible to the other suggests, in the words of Hall, that, “the other confronts me as the master of justice *out of his/her poverty*,

nakedness, vulnerability, etc.; in short, out of his/her suffering.”³⁷⁶ It is thus the suffering other that calls the sovereignty of the self into question by confronting it with a moral claim. The suffering other demands responsible action. The concept of responsibility and indebtedness therefore extends beyond holding oneself accountable for one’s own past, present, or future actions; it is constituted in and through being responsible and responsive to the suffering other.

If the work of memory is connected to the work of justice, to be guilty of abusing memory means that one has neglected the ways that one is responsible to the past. Furthermore, since memory is tied to identity, to be guilty of the abuses of memory is thus to be guilty of avoiding a confrontation with the very concrete ways that one’s indebtedness and heritage contribute to the formation of one’s identity. This appears most forcefully in forgetting the injustices, violences, and humiliations that one has committed to others in the past. However, it can also include the ways that individuals and communities distort what happened, either willfully or unconsciously, in order to protect their self-identity. These strategies, as we saw in the previous section, include the selective omission of disagreeable facts, the alteration or exaggeration of “facts,” blaming others or the circumstances for what happened, or contextually framing the narrative through the omission or emphasis of a certain causal chain of events. Such abuses of memory make the self and the community guilty because they attempt to avoid having such wrongs and evils imputed to it. The guilt that lies at the core of selfhood thus becomes a kind of motivation for not taking responsibility for the way that one recounts one’s past.

³⁷⁶ W. David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*: p. 91-92.

To be indebted to the past not only means to hold one responsible *for* a particular narrative or a particular understanding of the past, it also implies that we are responsible *to* the past. We are responsible to the past for the sake of the future. Responsibility is tied to the work of remembering, and corresponds to a duty to justice in three interlocking ways. First, insofar as the duty to justice is directed toward others, “the duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self” (MHF, 89). Second, “the duty of memory is restricted to preserving the material trace, whether scriptural or other, of past events, but maintains the feeling of being obligated with respect to these others...Pay the debt, I shall say, but also inventory the heritage” (MHF, 89). By directly confronting the past, its horrors and triumphs, we, the heirs of the past, are able to inventory and reactivate promises that were not kept and acknowledge promises that we still need to fulfill. Third, “the moral priority belongs to the victims...The victim at issue here is the other victim, other than ourselves” (MHF, 89). The work of memory thus extends the notion of responsibility further, widening it to include responsibility for the past. To be indebted to the past thus does not merely mean that I am responsible for my past actions; it means that I am responsible to the past for my very identity. It is, in other words, because my forebears, my tradition, and heritage give to me the linguistic, social, and symbolic tools that allow me to identify what counts as an action, I am able to distinguish myself in and through my actions and thus come to have an identity. Without these transmitted structures, I could not understand my world, others, or myself.

The duty to remember thus is based on a debt owed the dead, and is an obligation to ensure that the present and future are more just than the past. Responding to this duty helps connect people together, thereby widening the scope of community in two ways.

First, following Freud's insight, the narration of the sufferings of the past helps to reintegrate the fragmented and traumatized self into the community. Where trauma isolates an individual, the narration of trauma can help to reincorporate the individual into community. Second, the fruits that the work of memory can bear help to unite people. Here, the suffering of others calls out for justice and can lead to a better and more inclusive community. By revealing the ways injustice occurs, we can make use of the lessons of the past for the sake of the future.

If there is an obligation to remember, is there also a corresponding obligation to forget? First, note that such an idea is philosophically dubious. The act of remembering does not seem to have a corresponding partner on the side of forgetting. The reason for this is that remembering is characterized by a search, and, insofar as it is a search, it is something that is knowingly undertaken. Forgetting, on the other hand, is often not actively performed. Rather, the information "slips our mind" or is "on the tip of our tongue." Forgetting is thus something that often happens involuntarily.

However, there is an additional sense in which we can understand the duty to forget. "A command of this sort," Ricoeur suggests, "would amount to a commanded amnesia" (MHF, 456). It may be useful to note first that the terms "amnesty" and "amnesia" share a common semantic root, such that to grant political amnesty is to forget the misdeeds or evils that an individual or group has committed. Commanded forgetting is an institutionalized form of amnesty. In order to make this connection, Ricoeur uses the examples of Athenian decree of 403 B.C., as detailed by Aristotle's "The Athenian Constitution," and the Edict of Nantes, issued in 1598 by Henry IV. From these documents, Ricoeur notes that the citizens were "forbidden to recall the evils" that

happened, and instead act as if “something [had] not occurred” (MHF, 453). The proximity between “amnesty” and “amnesia,” however, is not merely semantic: it “signals the existence of a secret pact with the denial of memory” even as it attempts to disguise itself as a form of forgiving (MHF, 453). The result of this “secret pact” is that it disallows the exchange of memories that would have allowed grievances to be aired and worked through.

Amnesty attempts to enact the common phrase “forgive and forget.” It is, however, unclear if it is even possible to perform this act. Amnesty is ultimately a sort of forgetting against forgetting: citizens are commanded to act as though nothing had happened, and to forget the disagreement regarding the harms suffered, which they are to forget. Forgiveness, as we shall see below, is not simply forgetting; it requires going beyond anger, resentment, and hatred. This suggests that forgiveness has an intrinsic relation to remembering. For example, when deciding to forgive a loved one for some wrong or betrayal, I decide to suspend my anger and hurt feelings in order to continue to enable a future with this person. While I may not or perhaps even cannot forget what happened, I can go beyond my resentment. Amnesty, on the other hand, attempts to bring civil disorders to an end by exonerating all parties of culpability of crimes committed. As a result “it functions as a sort of selective and punctual prescription which leaves outside of its field certain categories of lawbreakers” (MHF, 453). The consequences of such enforced forgetting, Ricoeur claims, is that “private and collective memory would be deprived of the salutary identity crisis that permits a lucid reappropriation of the past and of its traumatic charge” (MHF, 456). Amnesty attempts not only to erase the debt that

present owes to the past, but it attempts to erase the fact that such deeds happened.³⁷⁷ In so doing, it erases an important distinction between forgetting and forgiving. To forgive, in other words, is not necessarily to forget; nor, as Ricoeur suggests in his discussion of amnesty, is forgetting a kind of forgiving. Amnesty might be a useful social or political function, but only for a time—it cannot take the place of actually working through the conflicts and problems that led to its edict. Amnesty thus cannot be a form of reconciliation in service of truth.

V.2.4. The Critical Reconciliation of Memory

The recognition of the fragile ties between memory and identity is the first step in reconciliation, and one that I call “critical reconciliation.” Critical reconciliation shares some important features with what J.G. Finlayson, names “reflective reconciliation.”³⁷⁸ Though Finlayson applies this term specifically to Hegel’s theory of the tragic, it can be extended to Ricoeur insofar as Ricoeur’s account of tragedy and the conflicts that arise through it are primarily Hegelian and insofar as the culmination of tragic wisdom, for Ricoeur, transforms one’s perspective.

Finlayson defines reflective reconciliation as “both the process in which a human agent reaches...self-knowledge by living through the consequences of her actions, and to the state of self-knowledge thus achieved.”³⁷⁹ It arises when an individual recognizes that suffering arises as a consequence of action.³⁸⁰ In terms of Ricoeur’s analysis thus far, this

³⁷⁷ Ricoeur, “Duty of Memory, Duty of Justice” *Critique and Conviction*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998): pp. 116-126, p. 126.

³⁷⁸ J.G. Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 37, no. 3 (July 1999): pp. 493-520, cf. pp. 503-506.

³⁷⁹ Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 506.

³⁸⁰ Finlayson, “Conflict and Reconciliation in Hegel’s Theory of the Tragic,” p. 505.

stage of reconciliation refers to the various ways that the self recognizes that her own self-understanding arises from narrative necessity. Narrative identity is a basic form of reconciliation insofar as through it synthesizes heterogeneous elements; it establishes concord out of discordance. It is also a form of reflection insofar as it requires identifying the sources of action, the motives for undertaking them, and the consequences intended. The work of such reflection is a preliminary stage in which the self and community determines how their perspectives have been distorted, repressed, oppressed, or forced.

For Ricoeur, once we recognize how identity arises from narrative memory, especially in its communal guise, we come to recognize two elements of selfhood's fragility. First, by retelling the stories that one takes to be definitive of identity, the self combines empathy with an acknowledgment of the cause of what happened. In other words, rather than identifying wholly with the past, as evidenced in melancholic nostalgia, or by distancing oneself from it, as in cases of extreme forgetfulness, narratives can allow us to experience certain events *as if* they happened. The hermeneutic interplay between distance from a narrative and our belonging to it becomes raised to the level of self-understanding: "The narrative work of displacement and condensation, of emplotment and schematism, of estrangement and synthesis, enables us to come in touch with the reality of the suffering which could not be faced head-on or at first-hand."³⁸¹ By allowing ourselves to "re-live" such events, we can begin to come to terms with them, or, in other words, begin to be reconciled with them.

The second point is that through such recounting, we can recognize the fragility of such stories. "Fragility," according to Ricoeur, "calls for action by virtue of an intrinsic

³⁸¹ Richard Kearney, "Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis." *Paragraph*, Vol. 30, no. 1 (March 2007): pp. 51-66, p. 56.

relation...with the idea of responsibility.”³⁸² To recognize that identity is fragile, such as when one sees a helpless child, a victim of injustice, or someone who is unable to speak for him or her self, is to “*feel* that we are *rendered* responsible for, and by, someone.”³⁸³ To be responsible with the ways that we remember means to recognize its fragility, and to direct ourselves toward the future such that we can help nurture the survival and growth of that which is fragile or who is fragile. In short, to recognize the fragility of communal life means to recognize the responsibility and the flexibility that comes with such a life.

This point warrants further clarification. The fragile thread that connects memory and identity arises in part because of its narrative dimensions. This means, as Richard Kearney notes, that “after such discovery of one’s narrative identity, it is more difficult to make the mistake of taking oneself *literally*, of assuming that one’s collective identity *goes without saying*.”³⁸⁴ By telling and retelling one’s narrative identity, as well as letting it be told by others, each community, institution, or individual recognizes the other. In this manner, confronting the deeds of the past, and recognizing the ways that others recount them, can help give traction to one’s own narrative identity. Paradoxically, one’s identity, whether it is an individual’s, community’s, or nation’s, becomes more secure the more it confronts the suffering, trauma, and violence that give rise to its narrative identity. Narrative identity becomes meaningful when it allows itself to be called into question, as when it is retold by the victims and by those who are marginalized. Here, one is reminded of the chorus of *Antigone* exhorting the audience to “deliberate well!” This is a call to recognize the fragility of the situation and to recognize the reasons for action and

³⁸² Ricoeur, “Fragility and Responsibility,” p. 15.

³⁸³ Ricoeur, “Fragility and Responsibility,” p. 16.

³⁸⁴ Kearney, “Narrative and the Ethics of Remembrance,” p. 26.

the narrative identity that gives rise to such stories and helps to justify one's motives for acting.

Ricoeur's critical reconciliation is at once challenged by the otherness of the past and unsettled by it, though in such a way that otherness does not completely decenter the self or render it meaningless. Critical reconciliation instead offers a way to recognize the incommensurability of differing narrative identities while also acknowledging the necessity of living together. Even though it does not result in an absolute synthesis, as in Hegel's Absolute Knowing, it nevertheless mediates proposals of meaning that are ever more inclusive and more just. By recognizing the otherness of the past and the possible challenges it poses to identity, a community is afforded the opportunity to reorganize and restructure itself as a response to the demands issued by its past. In order to see better how memory is flexible and the ways that it can give rise to change at the institutional and communal levels, I will now move to the second step in the process of reconciliation that Ricoeur delineates. This step is that of scriptural entombment.

V.3. The Scriptural Entombment of the Past

If critical reconciliation refers to an individual's or community's recognition of the fragility of its narrative identity, it does not yet reorder the institutions that comprise it or give any indication how such reordering is to take place. To recognize *that* narratives configure identity is not yet to recognize *how* they do so. Even though a community might recognize that its identity is organized according to a narrative, it may not see any need to reevaluate it or it can even become all the more stubborn in the face of the reality of the past. Indeed, it is quite possible that a community might uncritically replace one

ideological narrative with another; it may reemphasize its narrative identity in order to safeguard it against being questioned..

In order to see *how* narrative identity can be reconfigured by way of memory, another dimension of such reconciliation needs to be examined. I have indicated some of these strategies already under the names the “work of remembering” and the “work of mourning.” In order to see what these phrases mean and fix their content more securely, we need to go one step further and examine how reflection can transform the understanding of the human historical condition and the possibilities contained therein. Ricoeur characterizes this more “poetic” dimension of critical reconciliation as “scriptural entombment” (Cf. MHF, 365ff.).³⁸⁵

V.3.1. History and the Representation of the Past

Ricoeur argues that there is a form of reconciliation that occurs in the process of writing history. This form of reconciliation is different from the reconciliation that occurs in the work of remembering and the work of mourning. Memory concerns our being faithful to the past; history attempts to discover the truth of what actually happened. However, history, Ricoeur argues, should not “disregard its discipline of distantiation in relation to lived experience [and] collective memory” (MHF, 189). Ricoeur describes their different aims in a remarkably clear passage:

Between the mnemonic representation from the beginning of our discourse and the literary representation situated at the end of the trajectory of the historiographical operation, representation presents itself as an object, a referent, of the historian’s discourse. Can it be that the object represented by the historians bears the mark of the initial enigma of the mnemonic representation and

³⁸⁵ See also Paul Ricoeur “Temporal Distance and Death in History.” Trans. Bert Peeters. *Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Eds. Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnsuold, and Jens Kirtscher. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002): pp. 239-255.

anticipates the final enigma of the historical representation of the past? (MHF, 190)

Does the separation between memory, which is to be understood phenomenologically, and history, which is essentially epistemological, mean that the historian's representation of the past cannot aid in the process of reconciliation? How can the scriptural or literary dimensions of historiography aid in reconciliation?

Ricoeur's answer draws on the ambiguity of the phrase "the historian's representation" of the past. On one hand, this phrase refers to an object—the representation through which the historian depicts the past—and is but one part of the complex work of historiography. On the other hand, the historian's representation refers to the entire process of historiography, which includes sifting through documents, listening to testimony, and bringing together the causal connections and hermeneutic dimensions through which we understand human action. In this ambiguity that Ricoeur proposes to "narrow the gap between the notion of representation as an object of the historian's discourse" and the other use of the term (MHF, 228).

Ricoeur does so by considering the implications of a particular hypothesis: "does the historian, insofar as he does history by bringing it to the level of scholarly discourse, not mime in a creative way the interpretive gesture by which those who make history attempt to understand themselves and their world? (MHF, 228-229). If this is the case, then "there would indeed be a mimetic relation between the operation of representing as the moment of doing history, and the represented object as the moment of making history" (MHF, 229). In this case, then, just as he found in the phenomenology of memory, there is an ambition in the historian's project to faithfully represent the past. It is still the power of memory "to make present an absent thing that happened previously"

(MHF, 229). The result is that the ambition of memory to be faithful to the past precedes and underlies the pretension to truth that history makes (MHF, 229).

Representation lays bare the connection between memory and history. A phenomenology of memory makes use of representation insofar it describes “the mnemonic phenomenon in what is remembered is given as an image of what previously was seen, heard, experienced, learned, acquired” (MHF, 235). The past is given to consciousness as an image, icon, or representation of the past. With this, the correlation between the historian’s representation and mnemonic representation will have decisive implications: “literary or scriptural representation must in the final analysis allow itself to be understood as ‘standing for’ (*représentance*),” which places “the accent not only on the active character of the historical operation, but on the intended something that makes history the learned heir of memory and its foundational aporia” of being a representation of the past (MHF, 236).

The prospects for reconciliation to be found in the scriptural act of writing are summed up in the notion of “standing for.” The notion of standing for refers to the demands, expectations, and intentions that are involved in writing history. These expectations and demands first imply that there is a public dimension to the historian’s representation. “Pulled by the archive out of the world of action, the historian reenters that world by inscribing his work in the world of his readers” (MHF, 234). This implies that there is a kind of contract between the writer of history and the public, insofar as it poses the questions of “whether, how, and to what degree the historian satisfies the expectation and promise conveyed by this contract” (MHF, 275). This contract is one in which “the author and the reader of a historical text agree that it will deal with situations,

events, connections, and characters who once really existed” (MHF, 275). The work of the historian is complete only when it is addressed to a public body.

But, if the historian has constructed a narrative representation of what happened, what is to prevent it from being considered an outright fabrication? Ricoeur’s answer is again direct:

[O]nce the representative modes supposed to give a literary form to the historical intentionality are called into question, the only responsible way to make the attestation of reality prevail over the suspicion of nonpertinence is to put the scriptural phase back in its place in relation to the preliminary ones of comprehensive explanation and documentary proof. In other words, it is together that scripturality, comprehensive explanation, and documentary proof are capable of moves back from the art of writing to the “research techniques” and “critical procedures” is capable of raising the product to the rank of what has become a critical attestation. (MHF, 278)

Memory retains its priority over history insofar as the entirety of the historian’s representation is drawn up on the basis of listening to and accounting for the witness’s testimony. The centrality of witnessing and testimony is evidenced even in attempts to criticize the historian’s work: “we have nothing better than our memory to assure ourselves of the reality of our memories—we have nothing better than the testimony and criticism of testimony to accredit the historian’s representation of the past” (MHF, 278). The truth of history is thus measured against the past that it purports to represent.

At this point, Ricoeur raises a particular problem. “The historian’s representation is indeed a present image of an absent thing; the absent thing gets split into disappearance into and existence in the past. Past things are abolished, but one can make it that they should not have been” (MHF, 280). Again, we encounter the distinction between the understanding of the past as no longer and the understanding of the past as having been, which, in turn, forces the historian to confront the problem of death.

Ricoeur uses the phrase “scriptural entombment” to describe the relationship between death and history. Death becomes a problem for the historian because of “the simple fact that in history one is concerned with practically nothing but the dead of other times” (MHF, 364). The dead of history refers both to those prominent individuals who did great deeds, and those anonymous individuals who do nothing but silently pass across the grand stage of history (MHF, 365). However, conceived in this way, history offers us nothing but a “theater of shadows, stirred by survivors in possession of a suspended sentence of death” (MHF, 365).

Against this “theater of shadows,” Ricoeur offers a striking metaphor for the historiographical operation, one which refers to the process through which the historian’s representation enables us to come to terms with the relationship between the character of the past as having been and as no longer. He suggests that we consider the “historiographical operation to be the scriptural equivalent of the social ritual of entombment” (MHF, 365). Ricoeur writes:

Sepulcher, indeed, is not only a place set apart in our cities, the place we call a cemetery and in which we depose the remains of the living who return to dust. It is an act, the act of burial. This gesture is not punctual; it is not limited to the moment of burial. The sepulcher remains because the gesture of burying remains; its path is the path of mourning that transforms the physical absence of the lost object into an inner presence. The sepulcher as the material place thus becomes the enduring mark of mourning, the memory aid of the act of sepulcher. (MHF, 366)

Historical writing, as a symbolic form of burial, aids the works of memory and mourning transforming the absence of a past no longer there into a past that exists as having been by making a place for the dead. By externally marking out a place for the past in writing, we can confront what happened and come to terms with it.

Drawing on Michel de Certeau's work on history, Ricoeur makes several important points about the nature of the absent past and the process of historical writing as an act of scriptural entombment. First, scriptural entombment calls attention to the way that "the dead are those who are missing from historical discourse."³⁸⁶ The dead in this case are traces of what has been, but, because they cannot speak for themselves, they are irrevocably absent and lost to us. "Absence" Ricoeur writes "is thus no longer a state but the result of the work of history, the true machine for producing gaps, giving rise to heterology, that *logos* of the other" (MHF, 366). The cemetery and sepulcher is thus a fitting image for the work of history: the deceased are irrevocably absent, and histories are those works that make us all too aware of this dimension of their being. Writing thus makes room for the dead by carving out a place for them, and allowing a space to appear as once having been alive.

Second, taken to its extreme, the symbolic meaning of burial turns out to be something positive. Where writing history gives a place for the dead, reading history, as it were, "reopens" the tomb. Thus, on the one hand, as Ricoeur approvingly cites Certeau, "writing, like a burial ritual, 'exorcises death by inserting it into discourse'" (MHF, 367).³⁸⁷ On the other, "writing performs a 'symbolic function' which 'allows a society to situate itself by giving itself a past through language'" (MHF, 367).³⁸⁸ This means that by constructing a place for the dead through writing, the act of entombment helps to make a place for the reader, the "addressee of the writing of history."³⁸⁹ Not only do we bury the dead to let them be dead; we bury the dead for the sake of the living. "Scriptural

³⁸⁶ Ricoeur, "Temporal Distance and Death in History," p. 246.

³⁸⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*. Trans. Tom Conley. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989): p. 100. As cited by Ricoeur.

³⁸⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 100. As cited by Ricoeur.

³⁸⁹ Ricoeur, "Temporal Distance and Death in History," p. 247.

entombment,” in other words, “goes beyond simple narrativity in order to play a performative role; performativity assigns to the reader a place, a place to be filled, a ‘task to be undertaken.’”³⁹⁰ The reader of the text comes to understand him or herself through writing and reading history, as if to say “this is *my* history, and, in part, who *I am*.” By assigning the reader with the task of “filling” the tomb, thereby imbuing the past with meaning, history is prevented from sliding into a mere story or fiction.

By interpreting the meaning of death in history as the act of scriptural entombment, Ricoeur reconfigures the ontological meaning of death to include both the past and others. The retrospective discourse of history is not a “leveled off” form of history, as Heidegger had argued in *Being and Time*, because it also opens up the possibility of transforming the present and future. This suggests, contra Heidegger, that the historian does have a voice in the explication of the relationship between being and time. By retrospectively organizing a narrative of what happened, the historian organizes the way that necessity and contingency intertwine and allows the reader to see how events might have happened. The process of scriptural entombment reconfigures our possibilities with others because, rather than emphasize the individuating characteristics of death, it allows each person to see him or herself as having come from a shared past. It further resurrects lost possibilities for configuring communal identity so that it is more inclusive and more just. The final transformation of our understanding of the relationship between death and history arises when the dead are not only understood as that about whom history writes, but as the living of the past who made history.

³⁹⁰ Ricoeur, “Temporal Distance and Death in History,” p. 248. Also, cf. *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 367 and Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 102, as cited in Ricoeur.

Critical reconciliation operates against those forms of reflection that tend to distort or impede healthy ways of remembering the past. Narrative identity, recall, “is not a stable and seamless identity. Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents...so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives...in this sense, narrative identity continues to make and unmake itself” (TN3, 289-249). Scriptural entombment, and burial in general, is both retrospective and prospective, and operates much the same way that “repetition” does in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Because the historian’s representation of the past is an act of scriptural entombment, it incorporates a critical moment into its movement as it reinterprets Heidegger’s connection between being-indebted and being-toward-death. Rather than understand death as the ground of history insofar as it radically individuates Dasein, Ricoeur instead wants to emphasize how being-towards-death opens human being to the possibility of retrieving from the past new ways of being-with-others. In other words, the confrontation with death will allow a community to reorder its institutions and reconcile itself with its own past and with the accounts given by others, who might have experienced such a past differently.

V.3.2. Traces of the Past and Repetition

To suggest that the dead are both the objects of historical writing and subjects who have made history leads, for Ricoeur, to a reevaluation of the meaning of history for the present. In order to do so, he returns to the concept of “trace” or “vestige,” which, he suggests, is “capable of straddling [the] ontological discontinuity” between “the problematic of standing-for, on the historical plane, and, preceding it, that of iconic

representation on the mnemonic plane” (MHF, 378). While Heidegger overlooks the problem of deriving historiography from historicity by rigidly separating the two, in other words, Ricoeur attempts to show their connection by reexamining the meaning of traces and of repetition.

I have already noted how burial helps to make manifest the way that the living come to replace the dead and thus secures the transition from one generation to the next. Underlying that discussion, however, was the notion of the trace and of debt. By coupling together the trace and the debt, Ricoeur intends to “express our pure dependence on the past in the positive sense of a transmitted and inescapable heritage.”³⁹¹ By contrast, the trace, because it is only an effect of a sign, signifies without issuing an obligation. Debt, on the other hand, does obligate by linking “together the human being affected by the past to the potentiality-for-Being hidden in that past and in quest of the futural in the form of promise.”³⁹² Insofar as we are indebted to the past, in other words, we also have an obligation to redeem the past, to render it as a reconstruction or representation of the past, and “to free, retrospectively, certain possibilities that were not actualized in the historical past” (TN3, 191). While Heidegger understands the importance of the debt, trace, and heritage in terms of the transmission and appropriation of possibilities inherited from the past, Ricoeur includes the recognition of indebtedness that one contracts from another and thus incorporates a dimension of responsibility and ethics (Cf. TN3, 256).

The concept of repetition helps to reconfigure narrative identity and the possibilities it holds for understanding the meaning of memory. Repetition is not a slavish devotion or imitation of something that came before; nor is it an attempt to restore some

³⁹¹ Ricoeur, “Temporal Distance and Death in History,” p. 249.

³⁹² Ricoeur, “Temporal Distance and Death in History,” p. 249-250.

bygone era. Rather, as Ricoeur writes, “it is a matter of recalling, replying to, retorting, even of revoking heritages” (MHF, 380). First, at the most formal and abstract level, repetition allows us to read the end of a story into its beginning and the beginning of the story into its end. Repetition, in other words, allows us to recount the initial conditions of a course of action from the perspective of the consequences; similarly, we can learn to recount the consequences of an action in terms of what the agent intended to bring about or what motives impelled him or her to act. “In this way,” Ricoeur writes, “the plot does not merely establish human action ‘in’ time, it also establishes it in memory. And memory in turn repeats—re-collects—the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of the stretching-along of time between a beginning and an end.”³⁹³ To remember something is to trace back the course of events such that we can see how the end unfolds with a kind of literary necessity from the beginning. Memory, under the guise of repetition, “therefore, is no longer the narrative of external adventures stretching along episodic time. It is itself the spiral movement that, through anecdotes and episodes, brings us back to the almost motionless constellation of potentialities that the narrative retrieves. The end of the story is what equates the present with the past, the actual with the potential.”³⁹⁴ In this way, the repetition that arises through narratives helps set the ground for the critical appropriation of the memorial past.

Second, and more importantly, repetition “means the ‘retrieval’ of our most fundamental potentialities, as they are inherited from our own past, in terms of a personal fate and a common destiny.”³⁹⁵ Such inheritance implies by recognizing that “the dead of the past were once living,” and that writing history evokes the way that they had been

³⁹³ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” p. 183.

³⁹⁴ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” p. 186.

³⁹⁵ Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” p. 183.

alive. By acknowledging such an inheritance, the past is reopened to critical scrutiny. “In the end, it is all about reopening the past onto the future, more precisely onto the future of that past.”³⁹⁶ Because repetition reopens the past by bringing to light buried or forgotten possibilities, it offers the opportunity to re-appropriate such possibilities in the name of the community.

By connecting repetition and indebtedness, the ethical and political dimensions of scriptural entombment can be seen in a clearer light. Ricoeur writes,

If, in fact, the facts are ineffaceable, if one can no longer undo what has been done, nor make it so that what has happened did not occur, on the other hand, the sense of what has happened is not fixed once and for all. In addition to the fact that events of the past can be recounted and interpreted otherwise, the moral weight tied to the relation of debt with respect to the past can be increased or lightened. (MHF, 381)

As written, history unfolds according to narrative necessity; however, historians can also show that such events did not have to be as such, that if someone acted differently a catastrophe could have been avoided. In so doing, the historian can retrospectively reinsert contingency into history. Historiography and the work of historians help aid the understanding of the past by retrieving and making explicit hidden or buried possibilities. John Wall puts the point well: “beneath the actual grounds of social life in which we bury and murder those who are oppressed is an empty space of impossible new possibility for a still more radically shared community of all.”³⁹⁷ The repetition of buried possibilities, which allow us to image who we are and who we have been otherwise, can transform the way that we understand our history, our shared language, our community, and the hopes and promises that we wish to fulfill.

³⁹⁶ Ricoeur, “Temporal Distance and Death in History,” p. 250.

³⁹⁷ John Wall, *Moral Creativity*, p. 158.

V.3.3. Just History, Reconciled Memory

Memory aims at fidelity to the past; history aims at the truth of what happened. However, epistemologically speaking, one cannot claim definitive priority over the other: “the competition between memory and history, between the faithfulness of the one and the truth of the other, cannot be resolved on the epistemological plane” (MHF, 498-499). Memory however, is not a province of history merely because it aims at fidelity; nor is history an abstracted, theoretical, or scientific form of memory merely because it attempts to represent the past as it really happened. Rather, the “rival claims of history and memory to cover the totality of the field open up behind the present by the representation of the past does not, therefore, end in a paralyzing aporia” (MHF, 392). The history of memory, where the conception of memory is an object to be studied, is to be put into open dialectical conversation with the dimension of historicity that memory reveals.

This just balance of history and memory, of the historiographical operation and the historicity of memory, must preserve the dialectical, even “uncanny,” relationship between memory and history (cf. MHF, 393). On the one hand, there is the claim of historians to reduce memory to yet another one of its objects in writing a “history of memory.” On the other hand, memory retains for itself the capacity to historicize itself under a number of figures. What makes this dialectic possible and sustaining is that “the relation of the past to the present of the historian is set against the backdrop of the great dialectic that mixes resolute anticipation, the repetition of the past, and present concern” (MHF, 392). To the extent that history aims to be objective, it can correct the abuses of communal memory. To the extent that memory requires fidelity to the past, it can moderate the historian’s hubris to faithfully and accurately represent the past.

This dialectic is most apparent in Ricoeur's discussion of the limits of the historian's representation. The historian encounters a peculiar set of limits when trying to represent historical events of extreme horror or trauma. The phrase "limits of representation" has two meanings. On one hand, it refers to the exhaustion of possibilities that a given culture has for representing events like the Shoah. This is an "internal" limit of representation, insofar as contemporary forms of representation cannot do justice to what happened. The limit to representing it arises because of the event itself—it is singular. On the other hand, there is an "external" limit, one which arises from the event itself—"a request, a demand to be spoken of" (MHF, 254). This limit is one which demands to be represented, one which, in order for it not to be forgotten, must be brought to language. It is an external limit insofar as it can be made to be an exemplar and instructive to us.

What, then, does it mean to come to terms with the past? Echoing the social practice of *phronesis* described in *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur argues that it is the citizen, at the level of his or her participation in collective memory, and prior to taking up the critical resources of historiography, that is summoned to recount the event (MHF, 258). It is the citizen who is called upon to recognize the acceptability or unacceptability of the event and make a moral judgment upon it. The representation of the event not only synthesizes different points of view into a coherent whole; it also acknowledges "heterogeneous investments" that different individuals and communities might have in the representation itself (MHF, 259). This means that the legitimacy of the historian's account is not founded primarily on the resemblance of the historical narrative to the events narrated. The account is instead legitimate insofar as it takes the diversity of

witnesses and their situations into account. Such a criterion, however, is not as epistemologically motivated as it is therapeutic. That which demands truth, and thus the source of the representation, lies in the lived experience of those who made history. This means that we must hone our ability to empathize with others and work to find a deeper, more inclusive, level of solidarity. It is, Ricoeur suggests, because of the moral protest arising from a collective memory—“Never again!”—that puts both the heirs of the past and the historians who write about it in a situation of indebtedness and responsibility.

To come to terms with the past thus means to accept responsibility for it, and to work toward making the memory of it acceptable. History is thus a kind of corrective to the possible pathologies of memory. Ricoeur thus writes, “it is by delivering, through history, on the unkept promises of the prior course of history, whether blocked or repressed, that a people, a nation, or a cultural entity can arrive at an open and living conception of their traditions.”³⁹⁸ This means that the historian has a debt to the past, to those individuals who have come before, to recount their stories in order to retrieve a vision of what happened, how it shapes who we are today, and offer a vision for where we are going. The threat of an internal limit to representation must thus not be taken to preclude exploration or lead to despair at representing the past; rather, it must instead stimulate alternative modes of expressing what happened.

Historical narratives participate in the transmission of tradition by bringing the present into a confrontation with the past. The result is that “the ‘true’ histories of the past uncover the buried potentialities of the present...*there is only a history of the potentialities of the present.* History, in this sense, explores the field of ‘imaginative’

³⁹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “La marque du passé,” p. 25. As cited in François Dosse, “Ricoeur and History: The Ricoeurian Moment of Historiographical Work.” Trans. Scott Davidson. *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*. Ed. Scott Davidson. (London: Continuum, 2010): pp. 65-83, p. 81.

variations which surround the present and the real that we take for granted in everyday life.”³⁹⁹ In order to guard against the tendency to rigidly divide the past and the future, Ricoeur writes,

We must struggle against the tendency to consider the past only from the angle of what is done, unchangeable, and past. We have to reopen the past, to revivify its unaccomplished, cut off—even slaughtered—possibilities. In short, when confronted with the adage that the past is unequivocally closed and necessary, we have to make our expectations more determinate and our experience less so. (TN3, 216)

It is only when we render our possibilities for existing more determinate, more specific, and more concrete, that we can see our past as a heritage that we appropriate. Insofar as critique is motivated by the possibility of liberation, it makes sense only against the horizon of a heritage we come to share with others.

Scriptural entombment thus refers to the poetic human capacity for social imagination and transformation because, in its return to the past to recount what happened, it revivifies those potentialities that were seemingly lost in the death of those who lived through those events. This poetic dimension of critical reconciliation has at least two features. First, it arises as a response to conflicting demands of memory and history. It recognizes a commitment to being true to the past, thus ensuring that a sense of selfhood and the debt owed the dead are acknowledged, and it recognizes the demands to be truthful about what happened in the past. It is thus a constitution of an individual’s or community’s selfhood. Second, because the act of scriptural entombment is a response to the past, it is also a moment where it can become more inclusive of other voices that recount what happened. Here, the dialectic between memory and history suggests that history must always look out for and accredit those testimonies that go against the grain

³⁹⁹ Paul Ricoeur. “The Narrative Function,” p. 294.

of a received history. The poetics of such critical reconciliation thus recognizes the other's demand, and responds to it by creatively responding to and including it in its reconfigured identity. As a result, the challenge that the past poses to narrative identity, whether in the guise of remembering too much or remembering too little of the past, must be met with a response that reconfigures the debt owed the dead.

V.4. Forgiveness

The exchange of memories, the just allotment of memory, and the therapeutic work of memory might be taken to imply that this is all there is to about its ability to help us reconcile with the past. The exchange, and retelling, of memory aims at social inclusion, at a more expansive community, and works under the heading of justice. Insofar as this exchange occurs, one might assume that the task of forging an identity has been satisfactorily met. However, Ricoeur further adds a radical form of reconciliation as an epilogue to *Memory, History, Forgetting*: forgiveness. "What forgiveness adds to the work of remembrance and the work of mourning" Ricoeur argues, "is its generosity."⁴⁰⁰ The generosity of forgiveness helps to relieve guilt and absolves the offender of a debt, and thus releases the offender from carrying the burden of the offence and reconfigures social and communal possibilities. In so doing, forgiveness opens new possibilities for communal living through its generosity, a generosity that exceeds the gains made in the first two stages.

Forgiveness is difficult. One reason the wounds and offenses of the past persist is because of the connection between the agent and the action. Fault and guilt are intimately

⁴⁰⁰ Ricoeur, "Can Forgiveness Heal?" *The Foundation and Application of Moral Philosophy: Ricoeur's Ethical Order*. Ed. Hendrik J. Opdebeek. (Leuven: Peeters, 2000): pp. 31-36, p. 35.

connected with the problem of imputation. Without imputation, there can be no guilt. To initiate an action is to be responsible for it; it is to be its author. Thus, because imputation binds an agent to the act, “human action is forever submitted to the experience of fault” (MHF, 466). To annihilate guilt would render meaningful human action impossible because it would annihilate the possibility of distinguishing an impersonal event from an action that has been freely initiated by an agent. “This adherence of guilt to the human condition,” Ricoeur claims, “renders it not only unforgiveable in fact, but unforgiveable by right” (MHF, 466). While we can thus comprehend and explain an action by stating the causes, motivations, intentions, and desires of the agent, we are never justified in absolving the doer for committing the deed. It is against this background that Ricoeur suggests that if there is forgiveness, it must be “directed to the unforgiveable, or it does not exist” (MHF, 468). Why, however, must forgiveness be directed to the unforgiveable and how are we to understand the meaning of this paradox?

Ricoeur offers two hints when he suggests that “forgiveness belongs to the same family” as joy, wisdom, extravagance, and love (MHF, 467) and when he identifies a semantic kinship between forgiving, giving, and the gift (MHF, 480). Ricoeur makes their connection explicit in his short essay, “Can Forgiveness Heal?” There, he explains that in forgiveness “it comes to light what one might call the economy of the gift, if one characterizes the latter in terms of the logic of superabundance which distinguishes love from the logic of the reciprocity of justice.”⁴⁰¹ Nevertheless, he does not explicitly offer an account of the way that the logic of superabundance and love are connected. To follow the direction of the path down which these clues point, it will be necessary to briefly elaborate the distinction between what Ricoeur names the “logic of equivalence” and the

⁴⁰¹ Ricoeur, “Can Forgiveness Heal?” p. 35.

“logic of superabundance.” On the basis of this distinction, Ricoeur elaborates two kinds of economies: the economy of reciprocity and the economy of the gift. After elaborating these formal structures, I will then show how Ricoeur’s discussion of forgiveness employs them and offers a form of reconciliation that critical reconciliation cannot offer.

V.4.1. The Logic of Equivalence and the Logic of Superabundance

The juxtaposition of the logic of equivalence and the logic of superabundance underpin Ricoeur’s discussion of justice and forgive. The logic of equivalence appears to render forgiveness impossible insofar as it establishes the possibility of justice. The first way it appears is as retribution or vengeance, which receives its most direct formulation in *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye. Vengeance is the first attempt to reestablish equality between two parties after one has been wronged. It does so by calculating a particular punishment that “fits” the harmful effects of the crime. John Wall puts the point concisely: “vengeance purports to right the wrongs of the past by calculating an *equivalent* return of harm for the harm that has been done.”⁴⁰² This is no doubt a primitive form of justice, and its punitive nature can quickly escalate. However, to conceive of justice as retribution represents the first step in establishing the rule of law.

The second, and more important, dimension of the logic of equivalence emphasizes the just distribution of goods. In order to share a life in common, the members of a community need to allot goods. This strengthens the social bond by incorporating individuals into the community through the establishment of institutions. While it is difficult to determine what the just proportion of goods are, Ricoeur

⁴⁰² John Wall. “The Economy of the Gift: Ricoeur’s Significance for Theological Ethics” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 29, no. 2 (2001) pp. 235-260, p. 245.

nevertheless maintains that it is essential for a community to consider justice as a social practice and maintain an ongoing discourse regarding the meaning of it (Cf., OA 283-290).

Critical reconciliation, which settles the uses and abuses of memory, operates according to the logic of equivalence. Put in perhaps the most utilitarian terms, in response to the suffering other, or the dead of the past, I give my attention to them in hopes that my response and attempts to do justice to the past will be acknowledged by future generations. It is utilitarian insofar as the attention given we take others into consideration when acting. Doing justice to the past requires that we recognize the aims, desires, motivations, and promises of past agents. Taking stock of one's heritage, for example, can lead a community to recognize promises that have been left unheard, and bind themselves to it. The give and take of heritage and projection of possibilities can thus be understood as a kind of just relationship with one's forebears and children. Communal memory, then, is both a matter of determining what to remember or forget, and a matter of identifying with, or participating in, the narrative identity of a community.

A heritage is not simply a quarry to be mined. In order to ensure that the dead of the past are not lauded merely because they have transmitted to us a past, there needs to be an additional way to understand a relationship to the other. One such path is offered by forgiveness. If justice seeks to establish an ideal of reciprocity and equivalence that intends to guide interpersonal relations, forgiveness offends justice insofar as it does not return harm for harm. Ricoeur writes, "if punishment is required by the violation of the law in order to restore the law, of satisfying the complaint of the victim and protecting

public order, then forgiving should appear as an act of injustice.⁴⁰³ Through forgiveness, the guilty party, who rightly deserves punishment, is released from the guilt so richly deserved. Furthermore, forgiving appears to favor some of the guilty and not others. To forgive, in other words, wounds the reciprocal standing among citizens.

In contrast to the logic of equivalence, forgiveness, like love, belongs to the logic of superabundance. Love, according to Ricoeur, is not to be understood in terms of the cardinal virtues belonging to an idealized Christian character. Rather, it designates a limit experience between the finite and the transcendent. Rather than responding to an act in terms of exchange and reciprocity, it offers the possibility of reorienting action by calling into question those established modes of behavior and judgment about the proper response in a given situation. In so doing, it reorients one's attention to the suffering other, who calls me to be responsible. This suggests that love operates as a kind of focal point directing one's attention to specific, and even highly unusual, situations. As a result, it cannot be made into a universal principle to which every action must conform; it instead refers us to what Heidegger might describe as the temporal situation in all of its specificity and what Jaspers might describe simply as a limit situation. The limit experience of love, and the possibility of forgiveness, disorients only in order to reorient us.

What, however, makes love part of the logic of superabundance? Ricoeur explains, "each response *gives more* than that asked by ordinary prudence...Not just this, but even that! It is this "giving more" that appears to me to constitute the point of these

⁴⁰³ Ricoeur, "The Difficulty to Forgive," *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God: The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricoeur*. Eds. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny (Lit Verlag: Münster, 2004): pp. 6-16, p. 9.

extreme commands.”⁴⁰⁴ This logic of excess constitutes the logic of superabundance by allowing us to refigure and reorient our actions toward the other who demands a response and calls me to be responsible. It is, in Karl Simms’s words, “a logic of generosity in which I give more than the other deserves in relation to me, and not merely an amount to that which I will receive in return.”⁴⁰⁵ If the Golden Rule presents the logic of equivalence, the logic of superabundance is “supraethical” insofar as it transcends the reciprocity that lies at the heart of traditional ethical theories. The logic of superabundance, in other words, becomes manifest in paradoxical and extreme forms of behavior and commitment.⁴⁰⁶

V.4.2 The Economy of the Gift

The connection Ricoeur draws between reciprocity and giving further clarifies Ricoeur’s account of forgiveness. The commandment to love one’s enemies “seems to constitute the expression closest, on the ethical plane, to which I have called the economy of the gift.”⁴⁰⁷ The reason for this, he continues, is that “the commandment to love one’s enemies is not ethical but supraethical, as is the whole economy of the gift to which it belongs.”⁴⁰⁸ We have already seen how the excesses of love operate according to the logic of superabundance. What, however, might Ricoeur mean by the phrase “economy of the gift”?

⁴⁰⁴ Ricoeur, “The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God,” *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Trans. David Pellauer. Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): pp.279-283, p. 281.

⁴⁰⁵ Karl Simms, *Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 117.

⁴⁰⁶ Ricoeur, “Love and Justice” *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Trans. David Pellauer. Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): pp. 315-330, p. 327.

⁴⁰⁷ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Trans. David Pellauer. Ed. Mark I. Wallace (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995): pp. 293-302, p. 300.

⁴⁰⁸ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” p. 301.

This is not an idle question, as both John Wall and W. David Hall suggest the “economy of the gift” plays a central role in Ricoeur’s poetical project.⁴⁰⁹ The economy of the gift is the structure through which the imperative to forgive operates. However, Ricoeur does not fully explain what the “economy of the gift” might mean in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In fact, this phrase often arises in those essays that are marked by explicit theological concerns. Nevertheless, there is also a philosophical and poetic meaning of the economy of the gift. In order to elaborate this meaning, I will first delineate a few important formulations of the meaning of the “gift” and its economy.

Recent French thought has emphasized the notion of the gift in order to understand the practice of phenomenology and its ethical, political, and theological implications.⁴¹⁰ The classic formulation of the gift is to be found in the anthropologist Marcel Mauss.⁴¹¹ Mauss claimed, contrary to the intuitive opposition between economy and gift, that these notions are inseparable. In fact, the systems based on the exchange of gifts come prior to the market systems of exchange currently in use. Gift giving is part of the logic of exchange, and thus helps to create and maintain institutions and legitimates the distribution of goods. The reason for this, according to Mauss, is that the gift is not a generous, free donation to someone else. Instead, giving a gift places the recipient under

⁴⁰⁹ John Wall, “The Economy of the Gift: Ricoeur’s Significance for Theological Ethics” and W. David Hall, *Ricoeur and the Poetical Imperative* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007). It also plays a key role in Ricoeur’s theological hermeneutics of the symbols. While it is perhaps unwise, despite Ricoeur’s own wishes to keep the two separate, to fully disentangle Ricoeur’s philosophical hermeneutics from his theological hermeneutics, I will focus on the philosophical implications of the “economy of the gift,” especially where philosophy and poetics intersect. Nevertheless, because Ricoeur develops the meaning of the economy of the gift in his explicitly theological essays, I will make use of the concepts while demarcating the line between the philosophical and the theological.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Dominique Janicaud, Et. Al. *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*. (The Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2000).

⁴¹¹ Marcel Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1990).

an obligation to return in kind. This system of reciprocity and obligation creates social relationships.

Jacques Derrida responds to this connection between the economy and gift with a remarkably strong thesis: anything given as a gift under any circumstances annuls itself were one to give something in return. The gift is thus not unrelated to exchange, but its relationship is such that they are mutually exclusive concepts—a gift that inspires a return is not, properly speaking, a gift any longer. Even though “one cannot treat the gift, this goes without saying, without treating this relation to economy, even to money economy... the gift, if such exists, [is] also that which interrupts economy.”⁴¹² Gifts, on Derrida’s account, must therefore be given out of pure generosity and thus without an expectation of return. He writes,

[A]s soon as a gift is identified as a gift, with the meaning of the gift, then it is cancelled as a gift. It is reintroduced into the circle of exchange and destroyed as a gift. As soon as the donee knows it is a gift, he already thanks the donator, and cancels the gift. As soon as the donator is conscious of giving, he himself thanks himself and again cancels the gift by re-inscribing it into a circle, an economic circle.⁴¹³

On Derrida’s account, the gift operates at the limits of economy—both in the sense of making it possible and in the sense of interrupting and challenging its very possibility. Significantly, Derrida understands forgiveness in these same terms. If there is forgiveness, it can, he argues, only be directed toward the unforgiveable. A forgiveness that is asked for does not deserve the name because it brings two parties together in a relationship of exchange – one asks, so that the other gives. A forgiveness that is

⁴¹² Jacques Derrida, *Given Time I: Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): p. 7.

⁴¹³ Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, “On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion.” *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* Eds. John Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): pp. 54-78, p. 59.

performed in order to get something in return, even if it is to put each party back on equal footing, is impure forgiveness, undeserving of the name.⁴¹⁴

A second account of the gift, one that runs counter to Derrida's, can be found in Jean-Luc Marion's work. In reply to Derrida's claim regarding the impossibility of the gift, that for there to be a gift, it must not be given or received as a gift, Marion argues that the most radical phenomenological reduction is neither Husserl's eidetic or transcendental reductions nor Heidegger's attempt to trace a phenomenon back to its Being. Rather, Marion's radical understanding of the reduction traces the phenomenon back to its "givenness" (*donation*). Insofar as the world appears to us, he argues, it is also primordially *given* to us. Phenomena, in other words, give themselves. In the most primordial sense possible, then, "givenness remains an immanent structure of any kind of phenomenality, whether immanent or transcendent."⁴¹⁵ This form of givenness is, according to Marion, constitutive of the givenness of the world itself, which, because it makes possible exchange and giving back, does not allow a return.

Ricoeur draws on this discussion in his employment of the phrase the "economy of the gift." However, there is something of a paradox in his use of this phrase. If the gift lies outside the bounds of exchange, as Derrida argued, or is part of the structure of reciprocity, as in Mauss, how can there be an "economy" of the gift? If Ricoeur uses the "economy of the gift" in the latter sense, the phrase is tautologous; if he uses it in the former sense, the phrase is absurd insofar as exchanging gifts seems to cancel the gift. The paradoxical nature of this phrase is somewhat attenuated if we do not see economy and the gift as simple oppositions. For Ricoeur, the economy of the gift implies both

⁴¹⁴ Jacques Derrida. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, and Jacques Derrida "On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion." *God the Gift and Postmodernism*, p. 70.

activity and passivity. John Wall puts this point concisely, “although we *receive* this gift through the passivity of faith, the gift itself received is nothing other than our own freedom to *give*—in this case, to give meaning to our own fallen existences.”⁴¹⁶ Ricoeur thus argues that the gift generates an obligation to give while at the same time transforming the relationship between the giver and the recipient by reorienting them toward new and yet to be hoped for configurations of communal existence.⁴¹⁷

The gift is something received, thus making the experience of it passive. Rather than argue that the passivity of being thrown into a world, and, with it, the recognition that one might never have existed at all is cause for anxiety, Ricoeur argues that it is instead the occasion for an “originary affirmation.” Originary affirmation is, for Ricoeur, “the joyous affirmation of being-able-to-be, of the effort to be, of the *conatus* at the origin of ethics’ very dynamic.”⁴¹⁸ Even in the experience of fault, or the experience of the tragic, affirmation remains originary because in such experience one feels “the gap between the desire to be and its actualization. . . . The feeling of the fault, in its absolutely primitive form, even before any determination of the law is inherent in any active consciousness (*la conscience oeuvrante*) in its feeling of inequality with its positing of freedom.”⁴¹⁹ To recognize that one’s situation is tragic or morally evil is to implicitly affirm a capacity for goodness that is able to transform the situation. Affirmation is the expression of the unique human ability to create new meaning and reconfigure the world in new ways, despite the ever-present tendency for such meaning to be taken as ever-

⁴¹⁶ John Wall, *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): p. 89.

⁴¹⁷ Ricoeur, “Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule,” pp. 300-302.

⁴¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy” *Philosophy Today*: Vol. 22, no. 3 (Fall 1978): pp. 175-192, p. 178.

⁴¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, “The Problem of the Foundation of Moral Philosophy,” p. 178.

present, literal, or something that goes without saying. It reaffirms the ability to aim at the good, despite one's necessarily finite and constrained existence. Originary affirmation arises out of the experience of the "givenness" and directs human beings to the possibility of creatively refiguring their world.

If the gift in the phrase "economy of the gift" refers to the ability to recreate and reinterpret the meaning of one's world, what then does economy mean in this context? With the notion of economy we return to the level of intersubjective relations, and specifically the problem of the other. However, because the logic of equivalence encourages equal exchange, it threatens to reduce communal existence to one of mutual reciprocity. W. David Hall writes, "the gift is not without a demand for reciprocity, but the reciprocity that it articulates is placed elsewhere than the attempt to establish equivalence."⁴²⁰ The economy of the gift arises because the excess of that which is given motivates the refiguration of the world. As a result, the economy of the gift has the structure of a creative response to something other than oneself, which has been given to oneself. The experience of others, and of the past, contributes to the constitution of selfhood. Ricoeur writes, "it is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, capable of responding" (OA, 336). The result of this is that the other "comes to be placed at the origin of my acts...[and] is now inscribed within an asymmetrical dialogic structure whose origin lies outside me" (OA, 336). If we are responsible for what arises out of our poetic capacities to create meaning, it is because we are already responsible to an other. The other demands a response, and Ricoeur suggests that such a response is to be construed in

⁴²⁰ W. David Hall, *Paul Ricoeur and the Poetic Imperative*, p. 130.

terms of one's poetic ability to transform, reconfigure, and re-narrate the possibilities of selfhood.

If the originary affirmation of the poetics of human creativity refers to the structure of the gift, the economic dimension of the gift suggests that it also be *given* back to the other in its otherness. Ricoeur thus claims, along with Levinas, that the possibility of being responsible for how we treat others presupposes that we have always already been constituted as being called by the other to be responsible to him or her. This anterior gift of the Other's call creates the self's obligation to it. "It is", as Ricoeur notes, "the gift which engenders the obligation."⁴²¹ At this point we can see how the economy of the gift is one of ever-increasing generosity: "because it has been given to you, you give in turn."⁴²² Even if the commandment to return the gift is one that can never be fully discharged, and the task that it sets out for us is never-ending, it nevertheless reorients human relations toward "a tenacious incorporation, step by step, of a supplementary degree of compassion and generosity."⁴²³ This suggests that the economy of the gift is one that can refigure experience and can reorient action toward upholding and respecting the integrity and alterity of the other. It demands that the generosity be directed toward the other and toward the prospects of reconciling the disparity of social goods in more inclusive ways. The other's call to me to be responsible is a poetic call, because it reorients us from thinking ourselves to be the master of meaning toward giving oneself over to creative possibilities of refigured meaning.

⁴²¹ Paul Ricoeur, "Le philosophe dans la cité: Paul Ricoeur, du texte à l'action." As cited in John Wall, "The Economy of the Gift," p. 247.

⁴²² Paul Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," p. 300.

⁴²³ Paul Ricoeur, "Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," p. 300.

The response to the command of love reorients the imagination to consider different possible ways of being. Ricoeur writes, “parables, paradoxes, hyperboles, and extreme commandments all *disorient* only in order to *reorient* us. But what is reoriented? and in what direction? I would say that what is reoriented by these extreme sayings is less our will than our imagination.” The imagination, he continues, “is the power to open us to new possibilities, to discover a new way of seeing, or acceding to a new rule in receiving the instruction of the exception.”⁴²⁴ Forgiveness, insofar as it shares a kinship with love, can poetically reorient one’s attention to the other and to other possibilities for existing. It poetically reorients action from the ideal of exchange and reciprocity that characterizes the just distribution of goods among individuals and from the ideal of equalizing the intersubjective relations of give and take, and directs one’s attention toward the vulnerable other who calls out to the self and calls out to creatively reconfigure the world such that it becomes a better world. These imaginative variations reveal how selfhood is constituted not only by holding myself responsible for my actions. They also reveal that selfhood is constituted through my being responsible for another and through my generosity to him or her. To be responsible for my own actions is possible only because I am responsible to another who obliges me to respond.

This means that selves are called by others to enter into, not transcend, the troublesome and murky sphere of finite moral being. As John Wall puts it, “facing otherness is not just a disruption of human life but part of the fabric of how the self transforms itself in the direction of ever more radically responsible human meaning.”⁴²⁵ Because the other calls for a creative response, each person is ultimately responsible for

⁴²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “The Logic of Jesus, the Logic of God,” p. 281.

⁴²⁵ John Wall. *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): p. 132.

the creation of meaning in a finite, temporal situation. It is in a word poetic. The poetic response to otherness is thus a way of exceeding the boundaries of selfhood and creating new, different meanings that respect the otherness of the other. To participate in such a poetics means to transform oneself in the response, and as the response to the call. It means to reconfigure the world in a new way such that it can further include the other and work against those forms of violence that attempt to reduce the alterity of the other to a form of sameness.

V.4.3. The Possibility of Forgiveness

It is clear, for the reasons already suggested, that forgiveness, if it is possible, does not belong to the logic of equivalence or market exchange. The work of remembering and the work of mourning fulfills the tasks of justice, insofar as they allow an individual and community to deal with the memory of the past. For example, in speaking of the duty to remember, Ricoeur emphasizes that we have a duty to teach our children and “keep alive the memory of suffering against the general tendency of history to celebrate the victors.”⁴²⁶ The duty to forget, on the other hand, is a duty to go beyond anger and hatred. Though the aims of the duties to remember and forget are incomparable, “justice is the horizon of both processes.”⁴²⁷ As such, the work of memory is to aid in establishing a culture of “just memory” that would help to right the wrongs of the past that continue to affect relations between states in the wake of the violence and victimization of the last century.

⁴²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting,” p. 10

⁴²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “Memory and Forgetting,” p. 11

In order to specify what makes forgiveness extraordinary it will be useful to further delineate what Ricoeur finds problematic about political pardons and amnesty. First, note that both amnesty and pardoning refer to specific actions. Political pardons release those who have committed crimes from further legal punishment, and usually come before a sentence is carried out or before the sentence has been completed. Amnesties, on the other hand, prevent legal action against certain crimes from taking place. Granting a person or a group amnesty is a way to ensure that they are not prosecuted for their crimes or their participation in an act of disobedience. Furthermore, both political pardon and amnesty refer to the connection between imputation and responsibility insofar as they recognize that certain parties have wronged others. It merely suggests that they cannot be punished for their culpability. Granting amnesty covers an individual or group who stand accused of committing certain actions.

Bernard Dauenhauer clarifies amnesty and political pardoning further by noting that in each case only a legitimate legal body, properly convened, can issue such edicts. This means that “the legitimacy of both pardons and amnesty [require] that only the appropriate legal official, acting in accordance with the law’s provisions, grant them.”⁴²⁸ Because they aim at a judicial redress of political crimes, both of these acts are intended to ensure civil peace, and as such these forms of forgiveness are tainted with the stamp of instrumentality. Jacques Derrida writes along these lines, that such forms of reconciliation always deal with “negotiations more or less acknowledged, with calculated transactions, with conditions and, as Kant would say, with hypothetical imperatives.” He further continues, “there is always a strategical or political calculation in the generous

⁴²⁸ Bernard Dauenhauer, “Responding to Evil” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 45, no. 2 (Summer 2007): pp. 207-222, p. 216.

gesture of one who offers reconciliation or amnesty, and it is necessary always to integrate this calculation in our analyses.”⁴²⁹ These forms of reconciliation are ways to ensure that a nation’s citizenry are not implicated as accomplices or unfairly burdened by the criminal acts of those responsible. Forgiveness used as a political tool can maintain the continuity of the state and ensure that the legitimacy of the state can survive the conflict. Indeed, Ricoeur follows Derrida, and approvingly cites his claim that “forgiveness is not, and it should not be, either normal, or normative, or normalizing” (MHF, 469).⁴³⁰

Ricoeur insists that genuine forgiveness only occurs between the guilty and the victim. What makes forgiveness difficult, however, is the relationship between the act and the agent. Forgiving the act, as we have seen in the discussion of amnesty, does not necessarily forgive the agent. At the same time, imputing an act to an agent seems to tie the two together so tightly as to render forgiveness impossible. If the ties that bind an

⁴²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, p. 39-40.

⁴³⁰ Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, p. 32. Though he is ultimately sympathetic to it, Ricoeur’s wariness of the normalizing effects of forgiveness extends to the famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The aims of the TRC did not include amnesty or collective immunity, but instead it was the attempt to understand what happened. On the one side, the victims had the opportunity to speak of their tortures and were able to identify the criminals, and thus “the hearings truly permitted the public exercise of the work of memory and of mourning” (MHF, 484). On the other side, that of the accused, however, the confession to specific crimes may have hindered the work of memory and mourning. Ricoeur writes, “the de facto immunity for earlier crimes was transformed for them into de jure impunity in return for admissions without contrition” (MHF, 484). The impasse that arose between accused and victim reveals “the limits inherent in a project of reconciliation like this” (MHF, 485). One victim of the Rwandan genocide, Immaculée Mukarwego, has gone so far as to say: “Reconciliation. This word became unbearable to me and to most of the survivors who[m] I know. To me, it is even perfectly indecent after genocide ‘To reconcile,’ as it is written in the dictionary, consists in making people at odds agree again. . . . Do I have to consider that what happened in Rwanda between April and July 1994 is the product of a dispute, a quarrel, a disagreement[,] and therefore that it would not be understandable not to reconcile? Do the people who use this word all the time realize that its meaning is fundamentally simplistic?” Such a politics of reconciliation tends to expect the victims to grant forgiveness to the accused in order to satisfy the authorities and the international community without adequately dealing with the continued suffering of the victims after the historically datable “end” of the genocide. Thus, even if the politics of forgiveness would allow for a new start, Esther Mujawayo wonders “but what would start again in fact?” Cf. Thomas Brudholm, “The Unforgiving: Reflections on the Resistance to Forgiveness after Atrocity” *Law and Contemporary Problems*. Vol. 72, no. 33: pp. 33-49, p. 47.

agent to an act are dissolved, then imputation is impossible, and, insofar as forgiveness aims to undo that tie, it appears that we are inextricably linked to our actions. The dimension of height, that forgiveness comes from “on high and is unconditional, is revealed through a series of dilemmas. The first is concisely formulated as a question: “can one forgive someone who has not admitted his or her fault?” If so, then it would appear that forgiveness enters into the logic of exchange and reciprocity. An additional problem that arises if one suggests that forgiveness cannot be granted if it is not asked for is that the door is open to the concern that “giving secretly creates inequality by placing the givers in a position of condescending superiority; giving ties the beneficiary, placing him or her under obligation, the obligation to be grateful; giving crushes the beneficiary under the weight of a debt he cannot pay” (MHF, 481). The objection is thus one that attempts to locate behind every act of generosity, a self-interested agent. On the one hand, it seems that asking for forgiveness gives too much superiority to the one forgiving; on the other hand, it also appears to reduce forgiveness to an exchange.

As we have already seen, however, the commandment to love one’s enemies begins by calling the logic of equivalence into question. Thus, rather than the give and return that characterizes some conceptions of gift-giving, Ricoeur identifies a kind of non-market form of the gift that occurs in forgiveness. What is at issue, he notes, is a “vertical” dimension that appears as “the confrontation between the unconditionality of forgiveness and the conditionality of the request for forgiveness” (MHF, 482). This vertical dimension is one that emphasizes the unconditional dimension of forgiveness, which is to say that it lies outside the sphere of calculation and distribution. It is only through the recognition of the exemplarity of the situation that forgiveness becomes

possible. What makes two parties capable of asking for, granting, and receiving forgiveness is heeding the call of the other. Forgiveness is given, in other words, as a response by the self to the other who calls upon the self to transform the way it understands its world. Forgiveness is thus a possibility in the self that is constituted by the other's irreducible and singular voice. Because forgiveness occurs only between individuals, and it is called for because of extremely singular events,

The unconditionality of forgiveness renders it asymmetrical. In seeking forgiveness, the guilty party must be prepared to receive a negative answer (MHF, 483). Merely because one has "paid the price of a formidable work of formulating the wrong" and has attempted to narrate it does not ensure that forgiveness will be granted (MHF, 478). Indeed, if it did, the model for forgiving would be that of exchange, which takes for granted the obligation to give, to receive, and to give in return. The distinction between the guilt or fault that one has for an action and the absolution that forgiveness grants is radically asymmetrical. One cannot presume to think that forgiveness is forthcoming even though it is asked for.

Forgiveness exists outside the sphere of the mere exchange of memories and the cultivation of a just memory. In fact, it disrupts such a language. Indeed, forgiveness speaks in the mode of silence because "there is no clamor of what rages" (MHF, 467). Rather than speak in everyday modes of discourse, forgiveness breaks with it and appears as an irruption of meaning. Ricoeur emphasizes, however, that such silence does not mean that it is mute. The language of forgiveness is the language of the hymn and praise (MHF, 467). "What the hymn names is not someone," Ricoeur continues; rather, as if to stress its distinction from the economy of reciprocity, it names a "spiritual gift" (MHF,

467). If forgiveness is to exist, if it is at all possible, it must be directed to the unforgiveable. The reason for this claim should now be somewhat clearer. If forgiveness belongs to the same family as love, and if love is defined by excess and generosity, then forgiveness too is characterized by excess. Suzanne Guerlac writes, “when forgiveness is weighed and placed in relation to considerations of commensurate punishment, degree of repentance, and other criteria, it becomes instrumental, contaminated by political agendas. It engages us in acts of calculation.”⁴³¹ For forgiveness to be worthy of the name, it paradoxically must be directed toward unforgiveable events and crimes.

While forgiveness must be directed toward the unforgivable, Ricoeur does not think that forgiveness is impossible. There is forgiveness. Here we connect back with Ricoeur’s ordinary affirmation. There is forgiveness, according to Ricoeur, in the same way that “there is” (*es gibt, il y a*) Being. In each case, there is a sense of opacity or resistance to understanding the way that it exists. That there is forgiveness goes beyond a mere reciprocal relationship between selves. Despite the sadness, suffering, and despair that often marks the finitude of the world, despite the fact that we often act from one-sided principles, despite even the fact that in many cases we do not deserve forgiveness, there is forgiveness. It is there, it exists, and it is good.

There is a thin line separating Derrida’s claim that forgiveness is impossible, and Ricoeur’s claim that forgiveness is directed toward the unforgiveable. For Ricoeur, forgiveness is very difficult. However, the incalculability and exceptionality of forgiveness does not mean that forgiveness does not exist. That forgiveness is there at all suggests that, despite the unforgivably enduring presence of evil, forgiveness forgives.

⁴³¹ Suzanne Guerlac, “The Fragility of the Pardon.” *Derrida and the Time of the Political*. Eds. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): pp. 255-273, p. 258.

Forgiveness thus participates in the excesses of love. Forgiveness need not come on the condition of repentance, nor can one ever be expected to be forgiven. Forgiveness, on Ricoeur's account, thus is to remain extraordinary and exceptional, outside of the sphere of justice and exchange. It cannot be rendered into a logic where we could determine when, where, and who to forgive. It is for this reason that it appears to come from "on high." There is forgiveness not in the sense that there are empirical instances of it, but in the sense of a promise—that there might be, there can be, some measure forgiveness for us. For Ricoeur, forgiveness does not properly belong to the speculative language of philosophy, but rather the poetic language of the hymn. Where philosophical language is abstract and conceptual insofar as it articulates the conditions for the possibility of experience, the language of forgiveness breaks with this language. In this way, it appears that forgiveness comes from a different domain and appears as the possibility of another world, even a world yet to come.

In addition to the dimension of height that characterizes forgiveness, there is also a "horizontal" dimension. Forgiveness arises in dialogical, face-to-face exchanges. The experience of the height of forgiveness intersects with the horizontal relations of intersubjectivity. The dialogical exchange is one of contrasting speech acts: asking for and granting forgiveness. This exchange can obscure the height and unconditionality of forgiveness. Indeed, it turns the vertical dimension on its side, creating a horizontal exchange and a willingness to embrace the other. The "horizontal" exchange reestablishes the relationship between the self and the other. Asking for forgiveness and granting it occur through speech acts. "The two speech acts do what they say: the wrong is actually admitted; it is actually forgiven" (MHF, 485). The performativity of such

speech acts condenses the vertical disparity between the two parties, and enables each party to enter into a reciprocal relationship of admitting fault and reconciling. By reestablishing a new relationship between the self and the other, the event of forgiveness transforms the current conditions of communal existence. The reconstruction of the interpersonal relation ultimately helps to “convert the enemy into a friend” (MHF, 482). What is restored in the act of forgiving is the mutual recognition of each parties’ dignity. As such, what forgiveness aims at is the restoration of the self.

V.4.4 Unbinding the Agent from the Act

In elaborating how forgiveness helps to restore the self, and thus operates at the margins of mere market exchange, Ricoeur draws on the conception of forgiveness Hannah Arendt elaborates in *The Human Condition*. Rather than absolve a person for performing a wrongful and evil action, Arendt proposes that forgiveness aims at restoring the dignity of the perpetrator. In a claim Ricoeur no doubt would agree with, Arendt writes, “although [love] is one of the rarest occurrences in human lives, [it] indeed possesses an unequalled power of self-revelation and an unequalled clarity of vision for the disclosure of *who*, precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with *what* the loved person may be.”⁴³² The power of forgiveness thus goes beyond *what* a person is, and instead recognizes *who* a person is. Arendt puts this point thusly, “forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal (though not necessarily individual or private) affair in which *what* was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it.”⁴³³ This position draws on Kantian morality, specifically the claim that

⁴³² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): p. 242.

⁴³³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 241.

each person has incomparable worth and unconditional dignity. Because of the respect that each person deserves, she writes, it “is sufficient to prompt forgiving what a person did, for the sake of the person.”⁴³⁴ Forgiveness thus is possible because it aims at the agent, not at the action the agent had performed.

For Arendt forgiveness is thus connected to the phenomenon of “natality.” Natality, for Arendt, refers to the distinctly human capacity to begin something new, and to initiate a new course of action. Furthermore, the ability to act and to embark on a new course of action means that “the unexpected can be expected” from humans. Furthermore, the condition of natality entails that humans are “able to perform what is infinitely improbable.”⁴³⁵ Action is thus a kind of miracle insofar as “the new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability.”⁴³⁶ It is this small miracle of action that prevents human existence from being consigned to causal, deterministic laws of nature. Stated positively, the miracle of action is the source of faith and hope; its existence reveals that what has happened does not have to happen again. Humans are thus born not in order to die, but in order to initiate a new course of action. Natality, not mortality, Arendt argues, defines human finitude.

However, whereas forgiveness for Arendt is perhaps the most exemplary way that acting is miraculous insofar as it frees “from [the act’s] consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven,” for Ricoeur it rather unbinds the agent from the action.⁴³⁷ By releasing the agent from the action, Ricoeur suggests that the “horizontal

⁴³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243.

⁴³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 178.

⁴³⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 178.

⁴³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 241. However, note that on the same page, Arendt suggests that we forgive “what was done” for the sake of who did it. This seems closer to Ricoeur’s own conception of forgiveness that he did not appear to notice. Cf. note 49 *supra*.

disparity between power and act” becomes inscribed with “the vertical disparity between the great height of forgiveness and the abyss of guilt” (MHF, 490). This inscription is no doubt the miracle of forgiveness—signifies that the capacity of commitment belonging to the moral subject is not exhausted by its various inscriptions in the affairs of the world...[and] expresses an act of faith, a credit addressed to the recourses of self-regeneration” (MHF, 490). In seeking forgiveness and granting atonement, “the guilty person is considered capable of something other than his offences and his faults.” Ricoeur continues

He is held to be restored to his capacity for acting, and action restored to its capacity for continuing...[t]his restored capacity is enlisted by promising as it projects action toward the future. The formula for this liberating word, reduced to the barrenness of its utterance, would be: you are better than your actions. (MHF, 493)

In forgiveness, the self is thus returned to itself as the initiator of action and capable of being self-constant. If the victim can thus forgive the aggressor it is because the victim recognizes the incomparable worth of the accused. In other words, it is because the accused stands as radically other, debased in his or her moral evil, that he or she faces humanity with the overwhelming and excessive possibilities for moral renewal and creativity. What does it mean to claim that forgiveness releases an agent from the action?

In this context, it should be helpful to reconsider the meaning of poetics as it generally appears in Ricoeur’s later work and apply it to the way that forgiving helps to release an agent from the act. In Ricoeur’s work on narrative, poetics refers to the unique power of human beings to use language for semantic innovation, by which he means the creation of meaning through various kinds of syntheses of heterogeneous elements (TN I, ix). Poetics, in other words, “‘grasps together’ and integrates into one whole and

complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole” (TN I, x). The acts of recounting what happened through a narrative, through the creation of a metaphor, and the interpretation of symbols do not merely “stand for” something and represent them. They create, produce, and innovate new meaning.

Narratives integrate different experiences of time and construct a temporal and semantic unity. By configuring language into a story with its own meaning, narratives are able, through the reader’s ability to follow and interpret the story being told, to refigure his or her understanding of the world in which he or she lives. By reading a narrative, in other words, I am able to recreate, by reinterpreting, my own self-understanding, my understanding of my world, and my understanding of my responsibilities to others. Poetics, in short, is the ability of redescription of what has already been given to us.

Though Ricoeur does not develop fully how forgiveness offers us the possibility of a new meaning apart from the unbinding of the agent from the action, it is clear that it too must participate in the process of semantic and narrative innovation. Forgiveness is part of Ricoeur’s larger project of delineating the poetic dimension of human existence. In order to show how forgiveness is poetic, it may be helpful to turn to one of Ricoeur’s privileged interlocutors, Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas and Ricoeur agree that forgiveness helps to inaugurate a new beginning. In *Totality and Infinity*, for example, Levinas distinguishes a sense of time that is linear, which he describes in terms of our ability to represent the past and bring it present, and the “discontinuous time of fecundity” that “makes possible an absolute youth and recommencement.”⁴³⁸ Fecund time is a time that

⁴³⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1991): p. 282.

opens one up to possibilities. This form of temporality renews time by making possible “a free return to that past...and in free interpretation and free choice, in an existence as entirely pardoned.”⁴³⁹ Like Ricoeur, Levinas’s conception of forgiveness emphasizes a sense of rebirth that occurs through an experience of the other. As Levinas puts it, “this recommencement of the instant, this triumph of the time of fecundity over the becoming of the mortal and aging being, is a pardon, the very work of time.”⁴⁴⁰ Forgiving, on Levinas’s account, is thus a way to begin again.

Levinas continues that forgiving is paradoxical insofar as it is retroactive and reverses what happened. The paradox can be construed thusly: if it reverses what happened, there will have been no need for forgiveness; if forgiveness is to have meaning, on the other hand, it cannot eradicate what happened. Levinas’s solution this paradox is to suggest that forgiveness does not erase from history the fact that the deed was done; it instead it reverses the ethical import of the action. When the forgiver faces the one who has been forgiven, it is not as though the forgiver is not unaware of the deed. It is instead as though, when facing the forgiven person, the forgiven is treated as though the deed had not happened. Forgiveness, in his words, “permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on, to be as though he had not committed himself.”⁴⁴¹ Whereas memory represents the past and brings it forward to the present, forgiving “acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it.”⁴⁴² This reversal is not a blotting out or erasing of the past because it does

⁴³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 282.

⁴⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 282.

⁴⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 283.

⁴⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 283.

not “nullify the relations with the past.”⁴⁴³ The reversal that constitutes forgiveness conserves the past in the purified present. As such, forgiveness is an ethical event that does not erase what happened. It instead reverses time and repeats the past *as if* it had not happened and *as if* the agent or subject had not undertaken that course of action. The repetition and reversal of the past purifies and cleanses the event, but does not eradicate the event. The result of this purification is to give the offender a new beginning, but without eradicating the “fact” that something happened. The possibility of a new beginning is offered by the Other who pardons and thus constitutes time.

This account helps to give traction to Ricoeur’s epilogue on forgiveness in *Memory, History Forgetting*. Ricoeur is certainly correct to argue that forgiveness aims to separate the doer from the deed, and open a future for a new configuration of communal life. Levinas’s account explicates how this is possible. Forgiveness does not entail that the deed did not occur; it only aims at the ethical relationship among humans. Forgiveness goes back to the misdeed, purifies it and makes it as if it did not happen. In so doing, forgiveness offers the possibility of a new beginning.

V.5 Conclusion

Forgiveness is a poetic possibility. Specifically, it is the possibility of refiguring time *as if* the offense had not been committed. Narratives can thus be seen to be purifying, not only insofar as they give the guilty and the victim an opportunity to describe what happened, but insofar as they help to retroactively work on the fault to repeat and purify it through narratives of forgiving. Repetition conserves the pardoned past in the present, though it does so in a way that allows us not be tied to the event. It is

⁴⁴³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 283.

a repetition that opens up the possibility of a new beginning. It can disburden a community from the weight of the past and thereby enables it to project its own possibilities creatively into the future. Though Ricoeur does not put it thusly, forgiveness is a radical form of poetic reconciliation. It participates in a radical innovation of meaning, insofar as it offers the possibility of a new beginning and break with the past. Furthermore, it aims at incorporating the other into a new form of social and communal life. It is able to recreate and reconfigure inherited possibilities from its heritage and refigure this tradition to include those who have wronged us. It allows us to retrieve those possibilities that were destroyed or ruined in the action, and creatively project them into the future as a new form of self-understanding. Thus, rather than limiting the guilty to a heavily circumscribed set of possibilities, which may lead to unhealthy repression and violently acting out, forgiving offers new possibilities through its poetic reconfiguration of what happened.

This form of forgiveness is modest. It does not eradicate the debt owed the victims or the one owed the dead. Rather, it resignifies it and changes its meaning. Furthermore, it is difficult, especially if one is to practice it openly and publicly. In so doing, such narratives of forgiveness enable one to begin again. Forgiveness is thus the gift of time insofar as it gives us a new beginning. Because the effects of forgiveness come slowly, sometimes with a great deal of pain, its possibility requires a radical reorientation of one's attitude.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored how Martin Heidegger's and Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic projects open new dimensions of remembering and forgetting at the communal level. These new dimensions, I have suggested, arise because the structure of selfhood that both envision is construed in terms of the dynamic structure of calling and responding to a debt. To be a self is to be, as Ricoeur puts it, enjoined by the other. In other words, possibilities for selfhood are delivered over to the self from another, for whom the self is responsible. I have interpreted the other's call as being issued from the past and as harboring possibilities for future existence. There remains a sense of memory that is not merely concerned with the past, but one that harbors hope for the future. It is this dynamic structure between the past and the future that I will turn to in this conclusion.

A fundamental tension that stubbornly clings to the hermeneutic analysis of subjectivity is the relationship between thrownness and understanding, finitude and freedom, and the memory of one's heritage or tradition and one's prospects for the future. This tension reaches a kind of culmination in the contrast between remembering and promising. Like the aforementioned dualities, remembering and promising do not imply a strict opposition or mutually exclusive concepts. Rather, just as Heidegger suggests that Dasein is a "thrown projection" and Ricoeur suggests that freedom is best understood in relation to finite historical existence, the use of memory in political and ethical contexts is essentially hopeful because it helps to constitute identity through the interpretation of possibilities inherited from tradition. Memory and hope are essentially poetic because they creatively respond to the past by projecting a vision of the future.

To explicate the particular way that remembering and hoping participate in the poetic and creative act of constituting meaning, I focus on the meaning of death by way of a striking symbol: the sepulcher. While it seems clear that the tomb can be a symbol of memory, less clear is the way that it might be said to be symbolic of hope. I will suggest in these concluding pages that the site of burial is hopeful because it directs attention to new ways to reconfigure communal existence and insofar as it reconciles with the past. The symbolic dimension of the sepulcher is able to do so because it operates at the intersection between the personal and the social dimensions of remembering and hope, and because it offers a special site where the possibilities of the poetics of remembering meet with ethical and political possibilities for resisting oppression and respecting the singularity of each individual within a community.

Examining the symbolism of two sepulchers can help clarify how the reconfiguration of possibilities at the social and communal levels occurs. I propose to interpret these tombs symbolically, which is to say as a kind of imagination of the limits of human experience. Neither Ricoeur nor Heidegger exploits this potential symbolic meaning of these tombs. However, a comparison of these two specific acts of entombment can indicate the possibility of social creativity that can resist the ossifying effects of an uncritical stance toward tradition and the threats of using tradition to continue to justify oppression. In this manner, I am not suggesting that all tombs reveal this possibility, but only that these particular tombs reveal a poetics of memory that underlies communal life. The first tomb there is the empty tomb of Polynices in Sophocles' *Antigone*. The second tomb I will briefly analyze is the Cenotaph in London, which memorializes the British dead of World War I. Both tombs, I suggest, help to

reveal the tension between memory and the future, and the tensions that arise in the social and political realm between the ability to act in concert in order to remember, mourn and find meaning and the possibility that such power will lead to oppression, marginalization and violence. It is the poetic ability to refigure experience that ultimately gives rise to hope.

While many philosophical accounts of Sophocles' *Antigone* focus on underlying principles of Antigone's and Creon's actions, less attention has been paid to the symbolic meaning of the entombment that motivates the drama of the play. The act of entombment, Antigone's burial of Polyneices and her own burial, begins and ends the drama of *Antigone*. Insofar as they are the bookends of the play, the act of entombment frames the meaning of the course of the play's events. Indeed, the central question of the play is "who has the right to bury a corpse?" The corpse is, to put it succinctly, uncanny. On the one hand, the corpse is no longer the body of a singular being characterized by understanding itself in terms of its possibilities. It is, we might say, a shell or husk of the person. On the other hand, insofar as a corpse is such a shell, it nevertheless indicates the now-deceased person. Corpses are thus ambiguous things, belonging both to the natural realm and the "spiritual" or human realm. They serve to remind the living that we are bodies that are subject to natural processes but not reducible to such processes. It is because they occupy this enigmatic space between living bodies and that which is merely, brutally present or useable that we are to bury them. The act of burial and entombment thus functions to counteract the work of nature and rescue the corpse from oblivion and decay. This means that burial does not merely fulfill a psychological need for grieving, it also serves to protect the dead from the descent into nothingness.

Creon's edict that Polyneices be "neither buried nor mourned by anyone, but everyone must leave him unburied, a feast for birds and dogs, an outrage to see" (A, 207-209) is an attempt to extend the universal jurisdiction of the law to include the dead. Burial, from the perspective of the political domain, subsumes the individual back into the body politic; it reincorporates the dead into the life of the community as subject to the law. By excluding Polyneices from being buried, Creon implicitly suggests that his life as a traitor is antithetical to the aims of the city and cannot be made part of the city. Antigone, on the other hand, argues that Creon "has no right to keep [her] from [her] own," (A, 49). Burying her brother is the highest duty she can perform because it is directed toward the protection of the singularity of his being. Thus, though their reasons for their actions differ, both Antigone and Creon see the act of burial as an attempt to rescue the corpse from oblivion, decay, and dissolution. Where Antigone's burial of Polyneices is done in order to acknowledge his singularity, Creon's attempt to prevent his burial is ultimately done in order to ensure that his life is not subsumed into the community's. An empty tomb, from Antigone's perspective, is thus an affront to the singularity and non-substitutability of a human life.

This means that Antigone's desire to bury her brother is not motivated by a desire to preserve the specific duties of the family, as she refuses to let her own sister share her action. Rather, as Dennis Schmidt notes, "Antigone dies as an act of solidarity with the dead."⁴⁴⁴ To leave Polynices unburied, to leave the tomb empty, would be a failure to make meaning out of death. The failure to bury is thus to foreclose the possibility of having meaning at all, insofar as a relationship to death characterizes our relationship to

⁴⁴⁴ Schmidt, "Ruins and Roses: Hegel and Heidegger on Sacrifice, Mourning and Memory," *Endings: Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*. Eds. Rebecca Comay and John McCumber. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999): pp. 97-113, p. 107.

life. An exposed corpse, in other words, fails to make a person's death, and thus life, meaningful.

By substituting herself for Polyneices, Antigone symbolically fills his tomb thereby rendering his death meaningful. In so doing, she reveals an important dimension regarding possibilities for communal life. Burial not only connects to those with whom we perform the burial act; it also connects us to those of whom we speak in our eulogies, laments, and sorrows. The experience of death through the act of burial helps to reveal possibilities that constitute a community. Entombment offers a way to render one's life with others meaningful. Antigone's tragic act is thus devoted to highlighting that we have a connection to the dead and a responsibility to them. Antigone's burial reveals that though the past is irretrievable, we cannot responsibly understand the past as if it did not occur.

Yet precisely because the act of burial recognizes the finality of death, it equally becomes a symbol of hope because it creates meaning through entombment. To bury someone is to show honor toward the life of the person buried in it; it is a kind of reconciliation with the past so that we can move on and even leave it behind. As Hegel puts it, the "negative essence" of death "shows itself to be the real power of the community and the force of its self-preservation" (PS, §455). Every act of burial, every eulogy, and indeed every memory, Schmidt further claims, "is directed toward the memory of future times" and the continuation of the community.⁴⁴⁵ Death and burial thus help to create solidarity with both the dead and with those who have yet to come.

However, this is not all there is to say about the relationship between remembering and hope as it is figured through the act of burial. While the empty tomb

⁴⁴⁵ Schmidt, "Roses and Ruins," p. 108

symbolically threatens meaning insofar as it resists placing meaning on death, this emptiness retains a positive value. In other words, I am suggesting that we should not be too quick to bury the dead. Heidegger's language of death, the impossibility of Dasein's possibilities, is helpful in this regard. Not only does death reveal that certain possibilities for self-understanding are no longer viable. Death also shows that through the experience of this impossibility our possibilities can be transformed. On this understanding, the filled tomb becomes symbolic of our inert and dead possibilities. In order to see how this is possible, I will now examine the symbolic nature of another tomb: the Cenotaph in London.

The word "cenotaph" literally means "empty tomb," and honors an individual or group whose remains are interred elsewhere. Rather than Antigone's filled tomb, the lack of a corpse in the Cenotaph preserves a fundamental absence. Jenny Edkins writes, "the design in its simplicity provides a monument that succeeds because it does not conceal the trauma of war but yet provides a means of marking it."⁴⁴⁶ It does so in a few important ways. First, as Jay Winter notes, the Cenotaph is "elemental in form and structure."⁴⁴⁷ Its mathematical and geometrical precision lacks ornamentation and overt symbolism. This lack of decoration evokes a mood of collective loss and bereavement. While Winter suggests that it is "a form on which anyone could inscribe his or her own thoughts, reveries, sadnesses," it nevertheless helps to evoke absence and loss that underlie the traumatic experience of war.⁴⁴⁸ According to Edkins, "it represents the lack, the trauma" of the Great War and "the impossibility of closure" in the wake of the

⁴⁴⁶ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): p. 64.

⁴⁴⁷ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): p. 103.

⁴⁴⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*: p. 103.

destruction and horror of that war.⁴⁴⁹ This lack of closure and the inability to “fill” the tomb with meaning ensures that its significance is not the property of a single individual or political group.

Second, it does not contain a single, vertical or horizontal line. Rather, as Sir Edwin Lutyens, the artist responsible for it, notes: “all its horizontal surfaces and planes are spherical, parts of parallel spheres 1801 feet 8 inches in diameter; and all its vertical lines converge upwards to a point some 1801 feet 8 inches above the center of these spheres.”⁴⁵⁰ While creating an illusion of linearity, these curved lines suggest that the monument is not a free-standing, separate structure. Though difficult to the untrained eye to see, they help to situate the monument within a larger though apparently absent whole. The whole that encircles the monument radiates out to the political and bureaucratic district of Whitehall. In so doing, it transforms the political and urban landscape of “official” London into a symbolic cemetery. Winter thus concludes that precisely because the Cenotaph “is the tomb of no one [it] became the tomb of all who had died in the war.”⁴⁵¹ By extension, it is a tomb for the ideals of British valor, patriotism, and service that “died” as a result of the war, insofar as British subjects could no longer see these ideals as possible for themselves.

An empty tomb, a tomb honoring the memory of the Unknown Soldier, or one dedicated to the memory of those who died in mass genocide opens up the possibility of unearthing new possibilities for honoring their promises and taking up the inheritance they have bestowed upon us. The empty tomb stares out at us, and suggests that we have

⁴⁴⁹ Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*: p. 66.

⁴⁵⁰ Lutyens’ words from Imperial War Graves Commission, 6th Report, 1926, as quoted in Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 104.

⁴⁵¹ Winters, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*: p. 105.

not yet lived up to the charge of making death of those who came before us meaningful. Ricoeur's characterization of phronesis as the "wisdom of limits" is instructive in this regard. Recall, phronesis consists in overcoming an all-too narrow perspective on a moral problem by attending to and taking care of the particularities of the situation. Insofar as one might be tempted to think that death renders one's life meaningless, phronesis calls upon us to recognize and respond to the ways that others constitute the self (OA, 296). The recognition that the dead were once living not only draws on our ability to empathize with others, it can also allow us to regenerate communal possibilities by putting them into dialogue. As a result, in giving us the charge to make death meaningful, critical phronesis as a response to the dead marks out at the same time the very possibility of creativity and meaning bestowal. With our inability to stand with the dead comes an opportunity to reconfigure our own existence in such a way that we can understand ourselves in light of possibilities for more inclusive social configurations. The figure of burial thus symbolically brings together memory and hope, even turning one into the other.

There is yet a final feature of these tombs worth noting. The tombs can also mark the way that politics and ideology can distort selfhood. As John Wall writes, "social life may not just lack procedures to ensure participation, but tragically distort how it defines (and who is included in) social participation itself" because it places ideological limits that too narrowly construe selfhood.⁴⁵² Antigone's tomb becomes a marker for the way that she is uniquely disempowered by the patriarchal structure of Thebes. Pamela Sue Anderson writes "Antigone is, first, marginalized as a woman who remains excluded from the public domain by the ancient *polis*, even when she initiates a political act of

⁴⁵² Wall, p. 141.

dissent; so she would have been marginalized in this sense whether she acted or not.”⁴⁵³

There is a further sense in which Antigone is disempowered. Anderson continues, “she is further marginalized from her family and religious community even as a consequence of her religiously motivated duty to bury her brother, since this involves ‘unwomanly’ public dissent from a civil religious duty to follow the king’s edicts.”⁴⁵⁴ Whatever claims to justice her position has does not receive even a hearing in the political structure of that *polis*. One’s participation in communal discourse is already configured by a heritage.

Similarly, the political battles that surrounded the construction and dedication of the Cenotaph were mired in the vocabulary of the language of commemoration. Some worried at its lack of overt Christian or Romantic symbolism. The attempts to reincorporate the traumatic dimension of the state’s promotion and sanction of war are attempts to neutralize its otherness and place the event back into a narrative structure that is easily understandable. In such instances, the poetics of remembering comes into tension with the ideological forces of a commanded memory and the state-legitimated forms of public expressions of memory.

As both the empty tomb and the filled tomb show, what we do with such memory has significant implications for our understanding of ourselves in a community. These two tombs highlight the way that narratives are constructed and can reinforce a particular identity. Similarly, they also suggest that, we can reinterpret their meaning, the selfhood that arises from a particular understanding of what happened is not set in stone. We can modify and change our relationship to the past and to the meaning of the past in light of our hopes for reconciliation. Similarly, though hope concerns the future, it is enlivened

⁴⁵³ Pamela Sue Anderson. *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality of Myths of Religious Belief* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 190.

⁴⁵⁴ Pamela Sue Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion*: p. 190.

by understanding its underlying vision of “a task to be accomplished, which corresponds to that of an origin to be discovered.”⁴⁵⁵ Such a vision of hope is thus to be understood from within a community’s practices and directed toward the possibility of regenerating freedom in anticipation of a revived humanity. To paraphrase Kant, memory without hope is dead, hope without memory is blind. The creative tension between the two is the possibility for renewing possibilities for all humanity while being faithful to the past.

How to progress together after forgiving raises a new set of difficulties.

Specifically, how are the newly reconciled parties to proceed? The initial problem Ricoeur identifies is the way that forgetting includes a hidden reserve of possibilities for understanding. A forgetting “in reserve” refers to the persistence and priority of the past as having-been rather than as elapsed. It refers to the survival of images and traces of the past in mind, but without being subject to the deleterious psychological blockages that can stunt memory. This “reserve” functions as a kind of repository for the past, harboring possibilities that one can retrieve and revitalize in the present. The cultivation of reconciled forgetting is “a concerned disposition established in duration” (MHF, 505). This form of forgetting is thus a kind of character trait or habit. It is the ability to let the past go, without forgetting it. This “memory,” if it deserves the name is a kind of carefree memory. It is part of the project of hope, a calm memory in conjunction with hope.

Memory and hope operate together in a kind of “poetic” fight against and a dismantling of the structures of oppression. The use of memory in these contexts directs a community toward a less violent and absolutely inclusive community. The hope that underlies the political and communal use of memory does not merely intend to reconcile one with another, but aims at the reconciliation of all. Such hope, as John Wall notes, has

⁴⁵⁵ Ricoeur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology.” *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 259

both a positive and negative component to it. Hope is “an aim combined with a prohibition, a sense of direction constrained by responsibility to alterity.”⁴⁵⁶ What hope seeks to negate or prohibit is a certain form of life. It can be used as a tool to critique forms of oppression and way to undo the deleterious effects of one’s history. It can also, as Heidegger had suggested, be directed toward dismantling those public forms of discourse that erect barriers that prevent us from appropriating those possibilities that are “our own.” By taking apart those apparently self-evident and unquestioned ways to interpret oneself, Heidegger opens up the possibility of an appropriation of one’s own heritage. Formally speaking, the movement from constraints is a movement away from present forms of understanding and interpretation. As Heidegger writes in one lecture, “the sort of critique already arising precisely through the concrete actualization of destruction is thereby centered not on the fact *that* we always stand within a tradition, but rather on the *how* of our standing within a tradition.”⁴⁵⁷ How we belong to the past is thus what is at issue. The reason to critique contemporary forms of life or institutions that promulgate and perpetuate forms of violence is in service of the hope to live an “authentic” life. What makes such institutions and ossified possibilities worthy of destruction and contempt is that they mask and obscure creative expressions of human existence.

The dismantling of traditional ideas traces them back to their origins. While Heidegger is certainly more concerned with the “spiritual” heritage of philosophical concepts, rather than political or social change, there is room to understand such a

⁴⁵⁶ John Wall, *Moral Creativity*: p. 164.

⁴⁵⁷ Heidegger, “Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle: An Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation,” p. 124, as cited in Benjamin Crow, *Heidegger’s Religious Origins* (Purdue: Indiana University Press, 2006): p. 257.

process in existential terms. The critique of various forms of ideology and the way that it works to obscure possibilities opens the scars of history and uses them for political advantage. This critique can show that ideas and practices, when traced back to their origins and remembered, are unsuitable for contemporary life and for the purposes they were initially intended. Additionally, such a critique can further show that contemporary practices of such ideas in fact run counter to their stated aims.

Positively speaking, hope can, at least in Heidegger's words, "free up" or "liberate" possibilities from the past for the sake of the future (Cf. BT 437/SZ 385). Similarly, for Ricoeur, hope is socially creative because it opens up new possibilities for social life that incorporates the fullest participation of humanity in its work. Such hope is not an abstract hope but instead comes from a tradition with its own set of symbols and concerns. On this basis, we can say that such hopeful remembering is one that does not slavishly imitate the past, or is beholden to a specific ideological framework, but is one that responds to the past by making it one's own, with regard to the current situation for the sake of the future. Does this mean that we must forget the debt we owe the dead?

Ricoeur responds to the question of the possibility of fully absolving oneself of debt both affirmatively and negatively. We are released from it insofar as the debt confines a community to its past, and places it in danger of unconsciously repeating pathological symptoms. We are not released from it inasmuch as the debt signifies the recognition of one's tradition and heritage. Ricoeur writes "a subtle work of binding and unbinding is to be pursued at the very heart of debt: on one hand, being released from the fault, on the other, binding a debtor who is forever insolvent. Debt without fault. Debt stripped bare. Where one finds the debt to the dead and history as sepulcher" (MFH,

503). The image of the sepulcher, and the relationship to death that it reveals as underlying communal existence, conveys both hope and remembering. The work of remembering, mourning, and forgiving is a work that is ever incomplete.

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