

Pathways to Liberation:

Paul Ricoeur on Memory, History, and the Dynamics of Forgiveness

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Abstract:

To the question of the origin of the subject, from a strictly phenomenological approach, Paul Ricoeur adds the question of lack and its overcoming, its liberation through forgiveness. For him, the questions of the origin of the subject and the origin of forgiveness are inseparable: the question of identity "who am I?" would lead to the question of forgiveness, "how can I effectively be free?" His theoretical description of the will highlights the structure of human freedom. Freedom is the condition of all human responsibility, upon which guilt will be structured, from which, according to Paul Ricoeur, no man escapes: guilt is freedom reduced to slavery. We find the situation of the guilty one described above, extended to all humanity. Humanity is guilty, so its freedom is inherent. Therefore, it is not destroyed, it becomes a hope for liberation. This is precisely what myths come to tell man: the myth of innocence is desire, courage, and the imaginative experience that supports the eidetic description of the voluntary and the involuntary. Paul Ricoeur's approach to forgiveness synthesizes memory, history, and forgetting. In other words, it is a resumption of the phenomenological phase of our author which, by the way, has never been set aside, even in its most "hermeneutical" moments.

Keywords: Memory; Matter; Freedom; Forgiveness; Surplus

1. Introduction

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur embarks on a profound exploration of how memory and history intertwine with the human capacity for forgiveness, posing significant implications for personal and collective liberation. This inquiry is not merely academic but deeply existential, examining the fabric of human experience through the lens of temporal existence. Ricoeur's discourse navigates the complex terrain of phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology, revealing the nuanced ways in which our understanding of the past shapes our capability to envision and enact a future marked by freedom rather than determinism.

Central to Ricoeur's philosophy is the transformative potential of forgiveness – a theme that permeates his examination of historical consciousness. He engages with the thoughts of

prominent philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Jean Nabert, and Jacques Derrida, delving into the realms of the possible and impossible, the nature of evil, and the intricate dynamics of guilt and redemption. This exploration is further enriched by Ricoeur's engagement with the theological insights of Saint Augustine, which guide his reflections on memory as an enduring trace of historical moments that are both remembered and reinterpreted over time.

Forgiveness, for Ricoeur, is not an isolated concept but is deeply embedded in the phenomenological investigations of memory and the epistemological inquiries into history. It emerges as a critical juncture where philosophy meets theology, where personal narratives intersect with universal truths, and where the past is not merely recalled but is actively reconfigured through the processes of forgetting and remembering. This dual pathway – philosophical and theologico-philosophical – illuminates the foundational role of memory in constructing our identities and the potential of forgiveness as a liberating force that transcends traditional moral economies dominated by transactions of guilt and retribution.

As this article unfolds, it will delve into Ricoeur's 'maximal philosophico-theological instance' of forgiveness, exploring how the 'logic of abundance' and the generosity inherent in gospel narratives can radically alter our ethical landscape. By examining the intricacies of memory, the construction of historical knowledge, and the ethereal realms of theological thought, Ricoeur's work invites us to reconsider the essence of being human in a world fraught with forgetfulness and remembrance. Through his eyes, we see forgiveness not just as a moral or religious act, but as a fundamental human capability that offers a path toward both personal and communal renewal.

2. Ricoeur in theology: An introduction to forgiveness

The theology addressed by Ricoeur is understood through the naming of God and the word spoken by man in response. It considers philosophy and does not dare to cross boundaries, such as by asking "what is God?". According to him, philosophy and theology share the same fate in the face of the withdrawal of God's name; they can only emerge through an excess of discourse, a "second-degree discourse." The theme of hope, for example, becomes an open path where knowledge has stopped in its boundlessness, both philosophically and theologically. And it doesn't matter if theology is more affirmative, dogmatic, and ultimately more than any philosophy, being considered as a partner in dialogue.

In his work *La Critique et la Conviction* (1995), Ricoeur states that a philosophy cannot be thought about without being conceived. The myth of Enlightenment transparency is denounced, and the reading of the masters of suspicion is crucial for both Enlightenment philosophers and religion. Critique and conviction traverse a unique path in the formation of thought, often through a very thin threshold. However, in the preface of *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur demonstrates that critique must be autonomous, not entering the religious field, which we might say is a tendency closer to agnosticism.

In another central work, *Histoire et Vérité*, the great question of truth – the truth of history as knowledge, but above all, truth as the horizon of human work, theoretical or practical – is tied to two essential features: on one hand, the idea of truth as a means, defining the inclusion or belonging of those seeking truth and the truth sought, and on the other, the linking of truth to the dynamic system of theory-practice, which places it at the crossroads of two directions – the cognitive field of objectivity and the ethical field of action. Regarding theological thought itself, one of the most significant works of our author is *Penser la Bible*, along with approaches on parables, the naming of God, and the relationship between Love and Justice. Even if Ricoeur practices different types of Scriptural readings, he clearly demarcates several evidence from historical reading. Thus, Christian theology would not be a source, but rather the result of the meeting of philosophy and biblical thought. Ricoeur proposed to understand and extrapolate the domain of phenomenological and existential interpretation.

Influenced by Emmanuel Mounier, he advocates for a thought centered on the person, avoiding nihilism and individualism. In Ricoeur's approach, man is a being of lack. Unlike everything else in nature, which is identical to itself, man's being is characterized by its lack of being. Therefore, he is driven by desire and the effort to appropriate himself through his thoughts and actions. In this way, he seeks himself in his totality. This movement is a constant struggle that gains space in hermeneutic action, in the reflective activity of interpretation. This only makes sense because the human being seeks to understand himself. However, the totality of the human is his real self in the fullness of the founding act that constitutes the arché and the telos of the search, of hermeneutic action.

Peter Kenny (2009: 98) identified three stages in Ricoeur's career that demonstrate the boundary between the two disciplines. He suggests that in Ricoeur's early works, the boundary is more clearly delineated, as there was an attempt for acceptance by academia. The intermediate stage is marked, on the other hand, by a clearer delimitation between the areas of knowledge. The last Ricoeur is the one that clearly demonstrates foundational concepts such as

"Capable Man" (Ricoeur, 1994) and "Superabundance" (Ricoeur, 1998) as foundations of the human condition. These concepts are extensively worked on in his later works. Boyd Blundell (2010: 175) criticizes these conceptions, which often overemphasize the interviews and religious works of the French philosopher. He explores, instead, a boundary between philosophy and theology, covering a broad set of Ricoeur's works. According to this author, one can distinguish three phases in Ricoeur: that of biblical hermeneutics, that of the philosophy of religion, and that of pure philosophy, and suggests that the first two received excessive emphasis in Ricoeur's reception in the United States, making him more theological than he really is.

Blundell examines works on narrative and the self and employs Ricoeur's standard "to and fro" structure. From the beginning, Ricoeur considered philosophical rationality a challenge to assume in the condition of a believer. In this way, he seeks in the hermeneutical circle to understand more to believe and believe more to understand and achieve a path of greater harmony between philosophy and religion, but never a simplistic solution. "I have always walked on two legs. It was not just for methodological precaution that I did not mix genres, but because I seek to affirm a double reference, primary for me" (Ricoeur, 1995a: 211). In both his philosophical interventions and his exegetical works, Ricoeur strives to reject everything that could be identified as "reductive fundamentalism," whether speculative, conceptual, or theological. It is precisely the dialogue between philosophy and religion that he sees as an antidote to such a problem. This dialogue cannot be established without this principal otherness, without this very clear differentiation between two fields, which animate, with the same rigor, a thought that never loses sight of incompleteness. This split between the two domains even tended to strengthen.

Ricoeur's articles published in the 1950s and 1960s juxtapose interventions from both registers. On the other hand, the three volumes of *Lectures* separate these domains. In *Lectures* 2, he dedicates himself to philosophers, in *Lectures* 3, he is situated at the border of philosophy, studying theological themes. In *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ricoeur did not want, even though his editor, François Wahl, saw no objection, his hermeneutics of the self, properly philosophical, to end with two chapters of biblical hermeneutics. He explains in the preface of the work, acknowledging that his choice is debatable and can be criticized, that it maintains an "autonomous philosophical discourse." It is clear here that he intends to avoid criticisms in the theological field that he would be a "crypto-philosopher," as he would try to transform biblical faith into a philosophy; and in the philosophical field that he would be a "crypto-theologian,"

as he would bring to discussion themes that are not proper to philosophical reason. Certainly, in environments where philosophical criticism is more intense, like in France, Ricoeur seems not comfortable addressing theological themes. However, he gives several lectures across Europe, for example, the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh, in which he also addresses themes with strong theological inspiration. This form of asceticism permeates his entire work, configuring him as a "type of philosopher in which the effective naming of God is absent and where the question of God, as a philosophical question, remains in a suspense that we might say is agnostic" (Ricoeur, 1990: 36).

3. Ricoeur's exploration of forgiveness

In *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paul Ricoeur synthesizes the theme of forgiveness with related themes like memory, history, and forgetting, establishing interfaces to think through the concept. His analysis engages with various authors and works, proposing the "forgiveness equation," which juxtaposes the depth of fault (guilt) against the height of forgiveness. Beyond a metaphysical concept, this idea points to an anthropological foundation suggesting an unfathomable depth where human action is rooted. Here, Ricoeur introduces Karl Jaspers' concept of the "limit situation" as a constitutive dimension of existence that eludes any conceptual representation. Addressing the abyss of fault, he also brings in Emmanuel Levinas's idea of illeity to portray forgiveness as conceptually unrepresentable. Ricoeur articulates forgiveness through the phrase "there is forgiveness".

In the phenomenological explorations of the book, the repertoire of capabilities significantly expands: the powers to remember, testify, understand historically, forget, and even, despite its difficulty, forgive. "Happy memory" is a key theme for Ricoeur, representing an attempt to reconcile phenomenology of memory with hermeneutics, outlining his deeper anthropological conception ending in the subject who can forgive.

Discussing "happy memory" implies addressing memory only through the sign of fallibility, meaning its dysfunctions. Phenomenologically, Ricoeur asserts that the primary objects of memory are events rather than mere objects, challenging the legitimacy of "happy memory." The distinction between "beginning" and "continuing" plays a crucial role in phenomenology of memory, questioning the primacy of perception and linking the living present to joy, sorrow, and individual initiative. This capability allows for the "small miracle of

recognition," a constant theme in Ricoeur's work from *Soi-même comme un autre*, thinking about a "capable man".

At the end of his discussion on testimony in the same work, Ricoeur stresses the role of trust, understood as "biographical attestation," vital for the linguistic security necessary for societal survival. Here, the ability to attest is also a fundamental expression of a capable man, in the absence of which society would live in complete social chaos. This "presumed trust" is not always up to the level of "solicitude of historical witnesses," complicating the understanding of extraordinary experiences, such as recognizing the testimony of a concentration camp refugee in Auschwitz. Could one attest to their own death? The horror and strangeness surrounding such cruel acts make them seem impossible.

Ricoeur revisits the theme of testimony in *Lectures 3: Aux frontières de la philosophie*, where he explains the relationship between testimony and interpretation. A philosophy of testimony must be a hermeneutics, meaning a philosophy of interpretation, characterized by an ellipse with two foci that his meditation attempts to resume but cannot bring back to the unity of a focal point. What does it mean, indeed, "to interpret testimony"? It is a dual act: an act of self-consciousness on itself and a historical understanding of the signs given by the absolute to which consciousness recognizes itself.

Thus, Ricoeur delimits the theme of forgiveness under the title of "Le pardon difficile," introducing the idea that forgiveness is embedded in a philosophical (and, as we argue, theological) problematics. Although horizontal in nature, this stance diverges from the trajectory explored through memory, history, and forgetting. If the challenges of forgetting surpass those of memory and fidelity to the past, then the challenges of forgiveness concern guilt and reconciliation with the past itself. Forgiveness, if it has meaning and exists, constitutes the common horizon of memory, history, and forgetting. Always receding, the horizon eludes grasp, making forgiveness difficult: neither easy nor impossible. It stamps the entire endeavor with incompleteness. If it is hard to give and receive, it is equally hard to conceive.

4. Memory and identity

When addressing the freedom and autonomy of the subject, the most important theme of Augustinian reflection in Paul Ricoeur is that of the inner word, which underlies his approach to memory. This theme appears more clearly at certain moments in Ricoeur's thought, such as in *The Conflict of Interpretations* from 1969, which deals with the symbolism of evil, and the

first and third volumes of *Time and Narrative*, where Book XI of the *Confessions* is emphasized. Furthermore, the contemporary philosopher occasionally takes up the Augustinian figure of the inner master in *De magistro*, in the tenth of the Gifford Lectures, posthumously published as "Love and Justice" (Ricoeur, 2008).

Memory, in this sense, is a central theme linking Augustine and Ricoeur. It has a foundational role in the constitution of one's own identity, situated not only by persisting in the memory of past experiences but also by the act in which I seek to achieve unity. Hence, one can say that this "thinking of oneself" must be an exercise of encounter with oneself, a way of being in front of oneself to be in the world. Memory's role is to question what may seem given, to show the breaches through which doubt will penetrate, and with that, to destroy apparent certainties, to seek another plan, superhuman (while passing through the human itself).

The thesis of the original and primordial character of individual memory is linked to the uses of ordinary language and the abbreviated psychology that endorses these uses. In each of the registers of lived experience, whether in the cognitive field, the practical field, or the affective field, the adherence is not as total in the act of self-designation of the subject to the objectual view of its experience. In this perspective, the use in French and in other languages of the reflexive pronoun "*soi*" (oneself) does not seem fortuitous. To remember something is to remember oneself (Ricoeur, 2000: 115).

In this sense, the approach to memory is a reflexive approach, and one can speak of its dimension of recognition. Memory can be said to be "happy" insofar as it is possible, a "small miracle of recognition." Instead of neutralizing the past of the event, the phenomenological analysis of acts of recognition aims to acknowledge a complex alterity, ranging from absolute familiarity to the unsettling strangeness of the indeterminate "already seen." Under the title of "altered memory," Ricoeur analyzes the pathological manifestations of injured memory, as they appear in clinical work. His main inspiration is Freud's proposition. At this moment, his engagement with Freud takes place towards the work *Mourning and Melancholia* from 1915, in which the Austrian physician studies the resistances that can be encountered by the analytical interpretation work from the moment it requires a remembrance work from the analysand. Thus, Ricoeur explores Freud's perspective on the repression of traumatic memories altered by repetitive behaviors.

Grief, as said at the outset, is always the reaction to the loss of a loved one or of an abstraction built to replace that person, such as: homeland, freedom, ideal, etc. An opening is thus provided from the start in the direction we later take. And the first question the analyst

poses is why in certain diseases we see melancholy emerge "because of the same circumstances, instead of grief" (Ricoeur, 2000: 87).

The act of remembering refers to a memory of what has already happened in the past, so it is inseparable from time; it is closely linked to temporality, since the act of remembering already implies something that has already happened some time ago. There is a fundamental difference between memory and remembrance. Remembrance puts the facts back in order as if there had been no past; the thing no longer comes, and the image of the thing comes. Memories are always plural, while memory is treated in the singular and with capacity.

Starting from the questions "What is memory?" and "To whom does memory belong?", Paul Ricoeur proposes a phenomenology of memory, anticipating questions about the object of memory to those of the subject remembering, considering that all consciousness is consciousness of something and remembering something is remembering oneself. Thus, memories can be approached as discrete forms with a certain precision that stand out from what could be called a foundation of memory.

Contrary to the polysemy which, at first glance, seems to discourage any attempt, even modest, to order the semantic field designated by the term "memory," it is possible to outline a fragmented phenomenology, but not radically dispersed, whose last thread remains the relationship in time (Ricoeur, 2007: 40).

Thus, memory, in the most significant way to express what has happened, is essential in recognizing the individual who transmits their experiences and existence. That is, testimony is understood as essential in the passage from memory to history, opening the space for a hermeneutical field.

From epic poets to writers who survived the massacres of the 20th century, through the multiple philosophical exercises, constantly repeated, to explain the enigma of reality, the memory of men is built between these two poles: that of the living, but fragile and ephemeral transmission, oral, and that of conservation through writing, an inscription that can last longer, but that outlines the form of absence. Neither living presence nor fixation on writing can ensure immortality; both, in fact, do not even guarantee the certainty of duration; they only testify to the splendor and fragility of existence and the effort to say it (Gagnebin, 2009: 11).

Memory is as important to think about as history; one cannot make history without doing and understanding memory. It is therefore very important to consider it also in a reflexive dimension.

The reflexive dimension of memory allows, not only to convincingly confront the antithesis between personal memory and collective memory but also to shed decisive light on the question of the subject, a central question in an old philosophical tradition that goes from Augustine to Husserl and that can be called the "school of inner gaze"; a question restated in antithetical terms in the objectivist climate of the "human sciences." Indeed, memory can be attributed to all grammatical people, to oneself and to others, to strangers and their loved ones. A subject that can be plural, as it is also finitude, living corporeality, and historicity (Jervolino, 2001: 89-90).

So, we have the notion that time exists because there is memory, which allows us to think about facts that are sometimes trapped in the course of time. If we have the notion of being, it's because time has passed; we have discovered this notion, and with that, I cannot think about memory without considering time as a fundamental basis for thinking about memory and then history.

One can also speak of a memory that is a habit; habit is characteristic of human nature. For example, when repetition becomes a habit, when one learns something and finds it incredible, they will continue to repeat this new learning several times, and therefore, this fact that has become a habit will settle in memory. In this case, there is a memory that has become a habit; repetition is the cause of this habit. According to Paul Ricoeur, memories and habit form a couple.

Habit memory is the one we engage in when reciting a text without mentioning each of the successive readings that were done in the learning period one by one. Thus, scholarly reading "is part of it, like my habit of walking or writing; it's lived, it's a representation" (Ricoeur, 1994: 97). In contrast, recalling a particular lesson, a specific step in memorization, does not bring out any of the "usual characters."

With this conception of memory, Paul Ricoeur shows that man can accomplish something because habit has already made him confident in his actions, in his theories. Thus, the "difficult forgiveness" is thought of as a horizon, as the anticipation of a happy or reconciled memory. Ricoeur wonders if it would be an act of will in search of reconciliation with the past, which remains between guilt and reconciliation, that is, "a form of non-punctual work on how to expect and welcome typical situations: the inextricable, the irreconcilable, the irreparable" (Ricoeur, 1998: 46).

5. Memory and awareness

The problem of forgetting follows Paul Ricoeur's long epistemological reflections that prepare the ground for the hermeneutics of the historical condition. It is imposed from the prelude, in the form of a gloss on Plato's myth of the invention of writing: if writing is a remedy for the failures of living memory, which eventually becomes a poison, this poison has a specific name: amnesia, generalized forgetting in the form of erasure of traces. However, there is also another aspect related to forgetting, which is "the art of forgetting." A problem arises then: is forgetting reconcilable with the "capable man"? Would it be a secondary characteristic of this? But what about forgetfulness situations due to illness which are involuntary? What is the meaning of "the art of forgetting"?

I would say that it is the art of turning away from official stories and the festive frenzy that stages them, choosing to tell them differently. Betting on this possibility is more difficult, but also even more urgent because, in our world, narratives are more than once directly linked to a "war of images."

Reflection on "the art of forgetting" adds to the concern of the ethics of "living well, with and for others, in just institutions," and the practice of wisdom in the ninth study of the same book. To say, "you will remember" is also to say, "you will not forget." We can no longer speak of a "duty of memory," but of a "duty to forget."

What is this supposed duty of forgetting? In addition to a future projection in the imperative mode as incongruous for forgetting as for memory, such a command would amount to commanded amnesia. [...] I will say how the boundary between amnesty and amnesia can be preserved in its integrity for the benefit of memory work, supplemented by mourning work, and guided by the spirit of forgiveness. (Ricoeur, 2000: 17)

Nothing seems to assimilate better than individual memory. The elements contributing to this assimilation are the private nature of memory, which seems to reside in the original link of consciousness with the past, and it is in it that the sense of orientation of the passage of time is attached. On these aspects, present in experience and language, has been built what Paul Ricoeur calls "the tradition of the inner gaze". This tradition begins with Augustine and reaches its peak in Husserl.

What Ricoeur calls, following Charles Taylor, the tradition of the "inner gaze," is represented by three major testimonies: St. Augustine, John Locke, and Husserl. The chapters of Book X of the *Confessions* dedicated to memory and forgetting offer a beautiful example of a phenomenology of reminiscence that, exploring to the end the path of interiority, discovers the intimate connection between memory and selfhood.

With this, it can be said that there is no phenomenology of memory without an incessant search for interiority. Paul Ricoeur reconstructs some stages of this search. Similarly, he is interested in the question of forgetting and reproduces Augustine's concern at the beginning of Book X, when he speaks of the inner man, where what space cannot satisfy transpires to the soul. The recognition of a memory is felt as a victory over forgetfulness. For recognition to occur, forgetfulness must be named.

What is the internal structure of this consciousness? Precisely its dialogical structure, which calls from oneself to oneself, so as not to be lost in anonymity. Consciousness is therefore a voice, and this dialogical structure inscribes it as a presupposition anthropological prior to the kerygma: consciousness thus becomes, in a perspective that continues to be, profoundly Pauline, the organ of reception of the kerygma, so that, prior to the constitution of consciousness as responding to the Word of Scripture, Ricoeur emphasizes its neutral character.

Against the tendency that emphasizes the potentiality of hermeneutics, one may argue that it neglects the dimension of meaning which is not fully constituted by the individual interpreter but, rather, is bestowed upon him from a prior and higher instance. At the same time, for Paul Ricoeur, there emerges a gain in a second hermeneutic moment, in which temporal experience approaches more closely the horizon of eternity. If in a first act, there is only a withdrawal and a denial of being, in this second act, there is room for something positive. In the third function of eternity, the French philosopher finds the possibility of establishing the hierarchy of levels of temporalization, according to the great proximity with the eternal Word. The similarity between time and eternity lies in the very definition of time in the Platonic sense. Augustine's original contribution lies in the connection between the themes of instruction through the inner Word and that of return.

Moreover, it seems evident that Ricoeur reserves the figure of the inner master, associated with the inner word, to designate internal consciousness and reflection; and the eternal Verbum to refer to God; however, unlike traditional Neoplatonic schemes, in the process of instruction, different from Creation by the Word, it is the Word (eternity) that descends towards the soul and it is the soul that ascends towards the Word in a tension that intensifies over time. Thus, it

is not only the Verbum that descends, nor only the soul that ascends: both intertwine in time and in consciousness.

One can therefore say that the inner word is not only an identification with a linguistic structure, being beyond it. The eternal Word can be completely identified with the figure of the Master within. This is the result of the dialectic between the permanence of the eternal Verbum and the mutuality of the verba, in the figure of the spoken voice. The inner master resides in an intentional consciousness that is instructed in the same way by the higher Word as by external words, the primordial function of consciousness never being suppressed.

The opening title of the eleventh lecture of the Gifford lectures is very significant in this context: “The Self in the Mirror of Scripture.” It is a clear influence of Augustine, when one thinks, for example, of the *Speculum quis ignorantat* or of the different texts in which the patristic theologian compares Holy Scripture to a mirror.

What is decisive is neither the relation with nature, as in a cosmological treatise, nor the relation with the factual unfolding of events, as in a history book, but the capacity of the biblical text to awaken in the listener and reader the desire to understand themselves considering the *Great Code*. Precisely because the text seeks no external referent, its only “outside” is ourselves who, in receiving it and assimilating ourselves to it, transform the book into a mirror – according to the well-known patristic metaphor of the *Liber et Speculum* (Book and Mirror) recalled by Paul Ricoeur (1995a: 37).

Similarly, the last Gifford Lectures conference devotes significant development to Augustine: the figure of the inner master. It would not be possible for Ricoeur to surpass the figure of the self-called in the narratives of prophetic vocation or in Paul's Letters on the theme of consciousness, which corresponds to the intimate expression of oneself that makes his response effective, internalized to the point of constituting an autonomous instance.

The intention to demonstrate that the Augustinian figure of the inner master forms a decisive whole within the figures of the summoned subject guides Ricoeur's proposed reading of *De Magistro*. It leads him, first, to return only at the end of the dialogue and then to omit the long preceding reflection on the role of signs in teaching. It primarily prompts him to question the articulation between the Greek component and the biblical component of the doctrine of the inner master and to show the decisive transformation of the former by its integration with the latter: the master-disciple relationship is what ensures the Christian specificity of the theme of Enlightenment, sometimes so close to Platonic reminiscence. Moreover, it is reminiscence that presupposes the preexistence of the soul, in addition to illumination by truth, inner truth, and

transcendence identified with Christ who dwells in the inner man, according to Saint Paul's expression. Correlatively, the Augustinian assimilation of Christ to Eternal Wisdom does not have the effect of completely absorbing the subject of teaching in which illumination, because it is inner, even more inner than me, because the soul is a creature distinct from God and which must gradually discover the truth (Bochet, 2013: 60).

6. The extraordinary face of forgiveness through surplus

It is from this new perspective that forgiveness exists, in the perspective of the logic of surplus. Forgiveness does not entirely belong to the moral domain of reciprocity and recognition implied in models of memory exchange. It is of another order, that of the economy of gift and surplus, of what can be called the "poetics of will." By poetic, we must understand a double sense of creativity in terms of the dynamics of play and of hymn in terms of verbal expression. Its poetic power lies in emphasizing the law of irreversibility of time, considering the burden of guilt that paralyzes the relationship between men who act and undergo their own history. Jesus changes the logic of equivalence, as in the example cited by Ricoeur, the master's teaching materializes by the exception to the rule and not by the rule.

Poetic language is as much about the poetic image as it is about the reality to which the metaphorical statement refers. The functioning of reference in a metaphorical statement is as "strange". The literal meaning of the metaphorical statement refers to a first-line descriptive reference in ordinary language. The meaning of a vivid metaphor rests upon the emergence of a new semantic congruence over the ashes of the literal sense ruined by its incongruence. The self-suppression of the literal reference is the condition for projecting new ways of rewriting the world upon the ruins of common reference. Like fiction, poetic metaphor astutely penetrates the heart of the potentialities of our being in the world, deeply buried, hidden by our exchanges in current everyday life.

The linguistic functioning of the metaphor changes this old psychological conception of fiction, considered a complex image produced by the combination of images themselves that are evidence of impressions. With metaphor and fiction, imagination is no longer reduced to being a faculty of reproducing absent images, an activity that produces meaning. Imagination is thus moved from the perceptual sphere of representation to the sphere of language. Without privileging one sphere over the other, one may affirm that the implicit structure of imagination

is borne equally by image and language. The linguistic functioning of the metaphor renews the use of imagination.

You have heard that it said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". But I tell you, do not take revenge on those who wrong you. On the contrary: if someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer them the left! If someone sues you for your shirt, give them your coat too! If someone forces you to walk one mile, walk two miles with them! Give to those who ask, and do not turn your back on those who borrow. (Mt 5:38-39b-42)

Ricoeur suggests that absurd orders have been given with the intention of modifying our natural tendency. For this, a deliberate tension is created between order and how we normally live, think, and act. In these situations, it is useless to wait for the clarity of the law, for the teaching goes beyond it. The direction suggested by Jesus' words is aimed at ethical imagination, not at our will to obey the rule without resistance. In other words, imaginative capacity manifests as the power to open up to new possibilities, to discover another path, to see things differently, to achieve a new rule receiving the teaching of the exception. Here lies forgiveness, for it is also a good example of an exceptional event and a possibility of the same ethical imagination. The golden rule shows that the subject capable of acting is potentially a transgressor, capable of treating the other as a means: "To dramatize this initial asymmetry, I will say that the other is potentially the victim of my action as much as his adversary" (Ricoeur, 1995a: 294). Therefore, the moral problem of the golden rule is understood in such a way that it could not be solved by the principle of autonomy.

This is where the main difference between Kant and the golden rule lies: by placing violence in the same place that Kant placed desire, the golden rule embodies a fundamental aspect of human action, the power exercised in and over the other, and thus refuses to draw a line between the a priori and the empirical (Ricoeur, 1995a: 296).

One can recall here a form strongly defended by our philosopher about the Scriptures: the proverb. Subjected to paradox, it only guides by disorienting. Through a lack of logic, a new logic emerges. He who seeks to save his life will lose it, and he who loses it will save it (Mc 8:35; Lc 17:33). (Ricoeur, 2006: 196)

The flood myth is also evoked by Paul Ricoeur as a confrontation with the logic of equivalence. One can conceive here another logic presented, transforming the resurrection of humanity's waters into a parable (Gn 8:21-22).

Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was increasing on the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was always evil. So the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. And the Lord said: "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human beings I have created – people together with animals, the creatures that move along the ground, and the birds of the air – for I regret that I have made them." (Gn 6:5-7)

We verify that a similar logic is the one on which the apostle Paul relies, notably in the Epistle to the Romans, where he affirms the logic of surplus, excess, and grace. Paul emphasizes such a perspective by using the expression "all the more so," as if the abundance of exhortation were to accompany that of the gift he makes.

The novelty of Paul is what he will render, on the contrary, infinitely precious, that is, what is new – Jesus Christ himself is "with all the more reason from God." Jesus in the Gospel is first the one who speaks and proclaims the good news. Now, he is announced as the one who, by the folly of the Cross, breaks the norm of equivalence between sin and death. It is a battle of giants: law and grace; death and Life. The first man, on the one hand: "if by the offense of one man..." On the other hand, the true man "all the more the grace of God and the gift bestowed by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, if it is poured out abundantly on the crowd." The Church, through the mouth of Saint Paul, gives a name, the name of Jesus Christ, to the law of surplus. There are concrete signs of this new economy. Forgiveness can be one (Migliori, 2007: 46).

Paul's justification is a central element in the articulations of forgiveness because our philosopher adds to the analysis of forgiveness the logic of Pauline excess or surplus. There is a reciprocity between giving and receiving that resolves the problem of the horizontal asymmetry of giving without the spirit of retribution. Thus, recognizing the reciprocity dimension of the relationship between asking and offering forgiveness constitutes a crucial step in the reconstruction of this relationship. Our philosopher supports the economy of gift from a perspective of original gift and through theological grounding: religion attempts to place all experience in the perspective of the gift economy.

Saying perspective is not saying foundation, but meaning, that is, meaning and direction at the same time; saying gift is to have in mind an original donation, of which every creature is

a beneficiary, not only humanity and its morality, well founded on itself. Saying economy is to say that the gift is expressed in a symbolic network, much broader than that which revolves around confession and the remission of sins. The first predicate of goodness, which leads to this gift economy, is linked to the created being as such; it is therefore before any properly moral determination. From him, we read the first biblical expression towards the end of the Creation narrative: God saw all that he had made. Look, it was good. This is the supramoral sense of goodness in the gift economy. Recognizing this goodness of Creation is to respond to it with reverential humility towards the Creator and boundless compassion for all creatures (Ricoeur, 1992: 177).

The privileged place of forgiveness would be at a point of convergence between memory and mourning. We can thus imagine a kind of healing through forgiveness, through an intrinsic vulnerability to the human, beginning in the region of memory and continuing into forgetfulness. Forgiveness and forgetfulness have a fundamental relationship, as they add to memory and mourning the dimension of generosity. The logic of surplus in Paul, which opposes the logic of equivalence of the law, adds constitutive elements of the gift economy that interrupt the pattern of debt repayment.

It can be said here that the miseries to which the coming of Christ is intended to remedy are forms or consequences of sin. The dogma of the fall confirms this conclusion. At the origin of the redemptive economy, the affirmation carried by God to rebuild humans, after the disaster of the Fall, must be inserted. The dogma of redemption presupposes that of the incarnation of which it is the extension. The idea of redemption invites us to see in God a father always ready to help us and to grant his forgiveness. Parables like those of the prodigal son and the good shepherd reveal both the possibilities of conversion and the preventive help that one can expect from God. It is possible, in this way, to obtain liberation from evil and the remission of debts. Paul Ricoeur, examining what philosophical meaning can be attributed to the Passion and death of Jesus, affirms the existence of a majority tradition, based on the New Testament, which understood this death in terms of sacrifice. In other words, Jesus was punished in our place. On the other hand, there is another tradition that goes further, for it emphasizes the gracious gift that Jesus allows through his existence: "There is no greater love than to give your life for your friends" (Jo 16:13). Paul Ricoeur thus affirms the liberation of the theology of the cross from a sacrificial interpretation.

[...] We never have the right to speculate either on the evil we have begun or on the evil we have found outside any reference to the history of salvation. Original sin is only an antitype. Now, type and antitype are not only parallel, but there is a passage from one to the other, a "how much more," an "and especially": "Where sin increased, grace overflowed" (Rom 5:20). (Ricoeur, 1969: 281)

Forgiveness, by analogy with Grace, is then understood as essential to justice. Human sacrifices are surpassed, dissolving the search for justice in the face of respect for the laws, subverting them. Sacrifices remit the debts that the law establishes. It is the flexibility of the law through justice, emanating from the love of neighbor, from the recognition of the other, prior to the law, whose fulfillment produces justice.

7. Person, consciousness and autonomy

Any impersonal description of human existence, such as that asserted by any interpretation of the brain in a body, cannot achieve an adequate ontology of the person. As far as the phenomenal body is concerned, it is impossible to separate it from the body in action. Otherwise, we would be dealing with a purely theoretical world, where corporeality exists without the influence of will.

An impersonal description of human beings often neglects the crucial importance of their capacity for self-development over time, reducing their existence to a personal identity based solely on their physical body. According to Ricoeur, the term "own body" emerges from Husserl's tradition as a way of contrasting with the concept of "foreign body". He describes the subjective experience of the body as "my body", a place of subjectivity and objective identification for others.

The third level, which is my body or situation center, is not linked to the body of action in the same way that it is related to the phenomenal body. My body is not a mere manifestation within the world, for the body of action is not always involved, and therefore behavior is not always linked to a subject. For the body of action to engage, a fundamental transformation is necessary, manifesting not only the general will, but mainly the individual will.

It is crucial to understand this transition, which requires investigating the transformation of the body of action into an engaged body. The body itself is experienced and cannot simply be observed through scientific abstraction. Science studies the body according to its laws and behavioral processes, but only those who experience the body can truly understand it.

The development of personal identity over time involves a deconstruction of the self. Ricoeur emphasizes the living body as the epicenter of this tangibility of the human self through the other, while symbolic and imaginary relations reflect this living bodily exchange. He seeks to regain the notion of ego through voluntary action and involuntary suffering, expanding the limits of subjectivity beyond perception.

Ricoeur rejects the idea of "consciousness" as transparent and self-evident, arguing that psychoanalysis and philosophical critiques challenge this notion. He proposes a turnaround in the idea of person, highlighting its importance in legal, political, and social contexts, introducing the notion of person-attitude based on crisis and engagement.

Our philosopher adopts a reflective approach, highlighting the importance of ethics in the ontological constitution of the subject. He criticizes the excessive emphasis on the Cartesian cogito, proposing a more complex vision of human identity based on interaction with the world, others, and history. His philosophy seeks to unfold an ontology of subjectivity through the concepts of attestation, ipseity, sameness and otherness.

8. Conclusion

Paul Ricoeur's exploration of memory, history, and forgiveness in *Memory, History, Forgetting* offers a compelling vision of how these dimensions interweave to forge pathways toward personal and collective liberation. His philosophical journey reveals that forgiveness is not merely an act of forgetting or a simple negation of the past but a profound engagement with memory that enables the transformation of both individual lives and societal structures. Ricoeur's analysis extends beyond the traditional confines of ethical and moral discourse, proposing a 'poetic' use of memory that encompasses both the tragedy of forgetfulness and the excesses of remembrance.

By resignifying the past, Ricoeur argues that forgiveness reorients our relationship with time itself – shifting from a linear narrative that binds us to what has been, to a more emancipatory understanding that opens up future possibilities. In this framework, forgiveness becomes a creative act that not only addresses the debts and traumas of history but also catalyzes a renewed sense of agency and hope. It is an act that acknowledges the depths of human fallibility and yet strives towards an ideal of reconciled communities and reconciled histories.

Ricoeur's philosophical project culminates in a powerful affirmation of the 'capable subject,' who navigates the complexities of memory, acts with ethical imagination, and engages

in the ongoing work of forgiveness. This subject is not a passive recipient of time and history but an active participant in shaping both. Through the lenses of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and theological reflection, Ricoeur provides us with a roadmap for understanding our place within a temporal continuum that is marked by rupture and continuity, suffering and redemption.

Ultimately, Ricoeur challenges us to envision forgiveness as a radical form of wisdom that dares to confront the paradoxes of human existence. It is a force that demands rigorous reflection and boundless compassion, driving us towards a future where justice and peace are not merely idealized concepts but lived realities. In Ricoeur's philosophical narrative, the act of forgiving is an indispensable key to unlocking the chains of the past, allowing us to step into a horizon of infinite possibilities where memory serves not as a burden, but as a beacon guiding us toward a more just and humane world.

This conclusion aims to encapsulate the essence of Ricoeur's thought on forgiveness as an active engagement with memory and history, highlighting its transformative potential for both individuals and societies.

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