MEMORY, HISTORY, FORGETTING
Dans la mémoire de Simone Ricoeur
He who has been, from then on cannot not have been:

henceforth this mysterious and profoundly obscure fact of

having been is his viaticum for all eternity.

§ Vladimir Jankélévitch
In a special place in the library of the monastery there stands a superb baroque sculpture. It is the dual figure of history. In the foreground, Kronos, the winged god. An old man with wreathed brow: his left hand grips a large book, his right hand attempts to tear out a page. Behind and above, stands history itself. The gaze is grave and searching; one foot topples a horn of plenty from which spills a cascade of gold and silver, sign of instability; the left hand checks the act of the god, while the right displays history’s instruments: the book, the inkpot, and the stylus.

§ Wiblingen Monastery, Ulm
Entre la déchirure par l'empirisme et l'écriture de l'histoire et son objet

Paul Ricoeur
CONTENTS

Preface  xv

PART I  ON MEMORY AND RECOLLECTION  1

Chapter 1  Memory and Imagination  5

• Reading Guidelines  5
• The Greek Heritage  7
  ~ Plato: The Present Representation of an Absent Thing  7
  ~ Aristotle: “Memory Is of the Past”  15
• A Phenomenological Sketch of Memory  21
• Memories and Images  44

Chapter 2  The Exercise of Memory: Uses and Abuses  56

• Reading Guidelines  56
• The Abuses of Artificial Memory: The Feats of Memorization  58
• The Abuses of Natural Memory: Blocked Memory, Manipulated Memory, Abusively Controlled Memory  68
  ~ The Pathological-Therapeutic Level: Blocked Memory  69
  ~ The Practical Level: Manipulated Memory  80
  ~ The Ethico-Political Level: Obligated Memory  86

Chapter 3  Personal Memory, Collective Memory  93

• Reading Guidelines  93
• The Tradition of Inwardness  96
  ~ Augustine  96
Locke 102
Husserl 109

- The External Gaze: Maurice Halbwachs 120
- Three Subjects of the Attribution of Memories: Ego, Collectives, Close Relations 124

PART II HISTORY, EPISTEMOLOGY 133

Prelude History: Remedy or Poison? 141

Chapter 1 The Documentary Phase: Archived Memory 146
- Reading Guidelines 146
- Inhabited Space 147
- Historical Time 153
- Testimony 161
- The Archive 166
- Documentary Proof 176

Chapter 2 Explanation/Understanding 182
- Reading Guidelines 182
- Promoting the History of Mentalities 188
- Some Advocates of Rigor: Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Norbert Elias 200
- Variations in Scale 209
- From the Idea of Mentality to That of Representation 216
  - The Scale of Efficacy or of Coerciveness 218
  - The Scale of Degrees of Legitimation 221
  - The Scale of Nonquantitative Aspects of Social Times 223
- The Dialectic of Representation 227

Chapter 3 The Historian’s Representation 234
- Reading Guidelines 234
- Representation and Narration 238
- Representation and Rhetoric 248
- The Historian’s Representation and the Prestige of the Image 261
- Standing For 274
PART III  THE HISTORICAL CONDITION  281

Prelude  The Burden of History and the Nonhistorical  287

Chapter 1  The Critical Philosophy of History  293

- Reading Guidelines  293
- “Die Geschichte Selber,” “History Itself”  296
- “Our” Modernity  305
- The Historian and the Judge  314
- Interpretation in History  333

Chapter 2  History and Time  343

- Reading Guidelines  343
- Temporality  352
  - Being-toward-Death  352
  - Death in History  361
- Historicity  369
  - The Trajectory of the Term Geschichtlichkeit  370
  - Historicity and Historiography  376
- Within-Timeness: Being-“in”-Time  382
  - Along the Path of the Inauthentic  382
  - Within-Timeness and the Dialectic of Memory and History  384
    - Memory, Just a Province of History?  385
    - Memory, in Charge of History?  389
- The Uncanniness of History  393
  - Maurice Halbwachs: Memory Fractured by History  393
  - Yerushalmi: “Historiography and Its Discontents”  397
  - Pierre Nora: Strange Places of Memory  401

Chapter 3  Forgetting  412

- Reading Guidelines  412
- Forgetting and the Effacing of Traces  418
- Forgetting and the Persistence of Traces  427
- The Forgetting of Recollection: Uses and Abuses  443
  - Forgetting and Blocked Memory  444
Forgetting and Manipulated Memory  
Commanded Forgetting: Amnesty

Epilogue  Difficult Forgiveness

The Forgiveness Equation  
- Depth: The Fault  
- Height: Forgiveness

The Odyssey of the Spirit of Forgiveness: The Passage through Institutions  
- Criminal Guilt and the Imprescriptible  
- Political Guilt  
- Moral Guilt

The Odyssey of the Spirit of Forgiveness: The Stage of Exchange
- The Economy of the Gift  
- Gift and Forgiveness

The Return to the Self  
- Forgiveing and Promising  
- Unbinding the Agent from the Act

Looking Back over an Itinerary: Recapitulation  
- Happy Memory  
- Unhappy History?  
- Forgiveness and Forgetting

Notes
Works Cited
Index
The present investigation has grown out of several preoccupations, some private, some professional, and others, finally, that I would call public.

Private preoccupation: to say nothing of my gaze directed back now over a long life—Réflexion faîte (looking back)—it is a question here of returning to a lacuna in the problematic of Time and Narrative and in Oneself as Another, where temporal experience and the narrative operation are directly placed in contact, at the price of an impasse with respect to memory and, worse yet, of an impasse with respect to forgetting, the median levels between time and narrative.

Professional consideration: this investigation reflects the frequenting of works, seminars, and symposia in the company of professional historians who have been confronting the same problems regarding the ties between memory and history. This book is a prolongation of this uninterrupted conversation.

Public preoccupation: I continue to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory—and of forgetting. The idea of a policy of the just allotment of memory is in this respect one of my avowed civic themes.

§

The work contains three clearly defined parts, distinguished by their theme and their method. The first part, devoted to memory and to mnemonic phenomena, is placed under the aegis of phenomenology in the Husserlian sense of the term. The second part, dedicated to history, comes under the scope
of an epistemology of the historical sciences. The third part, culminating in
a meditation on forgetting, is framed within a hermeneutics of the historical
condition of the human beings that we are.

Each of these three parts unfolds along a planned course marked in each
case by a threefold rhythm. In this way, the phenomenology of memory
begins deliberately with an analysis turned toward the object of memory, the
memory (souvenir) that one has before the mind; it then passes through the
stage of the search for a given memory, the stage of anamnesis, of recollection;
we then finally move from memory as it is given and exercised to reflective
memory, to memory of oneself.

The epistemological course embraces the three phases of the historiographic
operation; from the stage of witnessing and of the archives, it
passes through the usages of “because” in the figures of explanation and
understanding; it ends on the scriptural level of the historian’s representa-
tion of the past.

The hermeneutics of the historical condition also embodies three stages;
the first is that of a critical philosophy of history, of a critical hermeneutics, at-
tentive to the limits of historical knowledge that a certain hubris of historical
science transgresses again and again; the second stage is that of an onto-
logical hermeneutics intent on exploring the modalities of temporalization
that together constitute the existential condition of historical knowledge;
buried under the footprints of memory and history then opens the empire
of forgetting, an empire divided against itself, torn between the threat of
the definitive effacement of traces and the assurance that the resources of
anamnesis are placed in reserve.

These three parts, however, do not constitute three books. Although the
three masts carry interlocking but distinct sails, they belong to the same
ship setting off for a single itinerary. A common problematic, in fact, flows
through the phenomenology of memory, the epistemology of history, and
the hermeneutics of the historical condition: the problematic of the repre-
tation of the past. The question is posed in its radicality as early as the
investigation of the object-side of memory: what is there to say of the enigma
of an image, of an eikôn—to speak Greek with Plato and Aristotle—that offers itself as the presence of an absent thing stamped with the seal of the
anterior? The same question crosses through the epistemology of testimony,
then through that of social representations taken as the privileged object of
explanation/understanding, to unfold on the plane of the scriptural represen-
tation of events, conjunctures, and structures that punctuate the historical
past. The initial enigma of the eikôn will continue to grow from chapter to
chapter. Transferred from the sphere of memory to that of history, it reaches its height in the hermeneutics of the historical condition, where the representation of the past is found to be exposed to the dangers of forgetting, but is also entrusted to its protection.

§

A few remarks addressed to the reader.

In this book I am trying out a form of presentation I have never used before: in an effort to rid the text of the most burdensome didactic considerations—introducing each theme, recalling the links with the preceding line of arguments, anticipating subsequent developments—I have placed guidelines to the reader at the main strategic points of the work that will tell the reader at what point I am in the investigation. I hope that this manner of negotiating with the reader’s patience will be well received.

Another remark: I frequently mention and quote authors belonging to different epochs, but I do not present a history of the problem. I summon this or that author according to the requirements of the argument, without concerning myself with the epoch. This seems to me to be the right of every reader, before whom all the books are open simultaneously.

Shall I confess, finally, that I have no fixed rule in the use of “I” and “we,” excluding the “we” of authority and majesty? I prefer to say “I” when I assume an argument as my own and “we” when I hope to draw my reader along with me.

So let our three-masted ship set sail!

§

Allow me, now that the work is over, to express my gratitude to those among my close relations who have accompanied and, if I may venture to say, have approved of my undertaking. I will not name them here.

I set apart the names of those who, in addition to their friendship, have shared their competence with me: François Dosse who advised me in my exploration of the historian’s workshop; Thérèse Duflot who, thanks to her typing skills, became my first reader, always vigilant and at times merciless; and, finally, Emmanuel Macron to whom I am indebted for a pertinent critique of the writing and the elaboration of the critical apparatus of this work. A final word of thanks to the president and director of the Éditions du Seuil and to the directors of the collection “L’ordre philosophique,” who have, once again, accorded me their trust and their patience.
PART I

On Memory and Recollection