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The Hope of History: Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy on the Uses and Abuses of History

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Abstract: This article investigates Paul Ricoeur's thought on the interrelations between history, memory, and ideology, with a particular focus on the contemporary challenges of historical interpretation. It draws on Ricoeur's hermeneutical methodology to argue that history is not a neutral or objective recounting of the past but is inevitably shaped by present perspectives and ideological forces. Central to this inquiry is the role of memory—both personal and collective—in constructing identity and informing ideological narratives, which may function either as instruments of emancipation or mechanisms of domination. The study offers a critical analysis of the ideological distortions that can arise from historical narratives, especially within contexts of political power. Furthermore, it proposes that a Christian hermeneutic contributes valuable insights into the ethical dimensions of historical engagement, particularly through the lenses of truth, justice, and reconciliation. The article ultimately advocates for a redemptive and dialogical approach to history, one that affirms the potential of narrative identity and collective memory to serve as agents of healing and social transformation in fragmented societies.

Keywords: Paul Ricoeur's philosophy, memory, history, ideology.

History lies in the crosshairs of the present. But it always has been. History is not just about the neutral, objective past, as it was dominantly perceived throughout much of modernity; history usually pertains to the present and sends shock waves through the present. At this moment, the United States' continual debate about what happened in the Civil War has risen to fever pitch with political efforts to suppress undue attention to racism in the past to forego attention to racism in the present. The Russian war against Ukraine is a war of histories.[1] In my Baptist world in the U.S., the traditional Baptist history of favoring separation of church and state is questioned in favor of political

[1] A personal note with gratitude to the Odesa Baptist Seminary stems from the invitation to teach a course for them in the summer of 2009, and I was greeted with wonderful hospitality. It was especially meaningful to be present for their celebration of the twentieth anniversary of their founding. This has always meant for me a more personal connection with the trials, and also triumphs, of Ukraine.

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benefits flowing towards a Baptist, evangelical majority. History is not just about the past; sometimes it's not even history, that is, it is not true at all.[2] As one of the premiere philosophers of the twentieth century, Paul Ricoeur focused extensively on issues of history. As a hermeneutical philosopher, he was acutely aware of the matter of the interpretation of history and the way that it is often misused in furthering ideology. His work can provide a vantage point to deal with the prevalent uses and abuses of history.

Memory, of course, is synchronized with history as its basis. The phenomenon of memory has intrigued philosophers for millennia; the phenomenology of memory was a starting point in fact for Ricoeur's last major book. How can the past be present, sometimes as real as the present? And why does it reverberate through the present, so much so, as in the case of trauma, it may paralyze one in the present? How reliable is memory? One of the gifts that humans have, compared to most if not all animals, is this sense of memory in great detail of the past, not just of the immediate but of the far distant past. Psychologists have argued that we are deeply shaped by early childhood experiences, some that we do not consciously remember but which are inscribed into our brains, bodies, and behaviors. Our memories thus turn into our histories, not just into ours but into our collective histories with massive repercussions.

What do we make of this, when the issue of history has such existential significance for us all, for good and for ill? More particularly, what does a Christian make of this from a perspective of faith? Is it a matter only for scientists and professional historians? Or is it also a question actually of Christian discipleship, of transformation, of sanctification? Usually, it is not seen as a matter of discipleship—but it should be.

It may seem odd in this light to turn to a philosopher such as Ricoeur. It is the case, however, that Ricoeur was a Christian whose faith, sometimes despite his demurrals, deeply shaped or at least was integrated into his philosophy. Moreover, he has inspired much reflection on his work in a multitude of books and an active Society for the Study of Paul Ricoeur. His work has been influential in various areas of theology.[3] He focused on human identity and pioneered in the notion of narrative identity, which in turn allied with his extensive work on history. He was concerned with how history, and story, goes well but also how it goes wrong in ideology. He was concerned not just with the nature of history but with the issue of the truth of history. This interest culminated in his last major work, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (MHF), which will be a focus of this essay.[4] The thesis therefore of this essay is to show how Paul Ricoeur's philosophy provides in these troubled times a framework for constructively understanding and

[2] As one can see, there is some ambiguity between the use of the word "history" as it pertains to events that happened and to the interpretation of those events in terms of historiography. I typically will use the word history to represent the word historiography.

[3] See for example Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Dan R. Stiver, *Ricoeur and Theology*, Philosophy and Theology (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012); Joseph A. Edelheit and James F. Moore, eds., *Reading Scripture with Paul Ricoeur*, Series on the Thought of Paul Ricoeur (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

[4] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

responding to the contemporary uses and abuses of memory and history. The challenge is that Ricoeur himself did not always integrate his forays into various fields that are pertinent to the topic, which has made it difficult for readers. For instance, there is not one *magnum opus* but several books that one has to read to get a sense of his overall thought. Thus, it is already a task initially to pull together threads of his thought. A second creative task is then to apply these threads to the current complexities of ideological uses of history. Both of these cases will also involve critique and modification of Ricoeur's views. First, then, I will present his basic approach to hermeneutics as applied to history. Second, I will relate his work on ideology to treating not only the horrors of history but of the recounting of history. This will involve significant modification of his treatment of ideology critique. Finally, I will look at how his thought, suitably integrated and modified, can ground an approach to history in meaningful and hopeful ways.

The Hermeneutics of History

Ricoeur's primary significance as a hermeneutical philosopher provides a crucial backdrop to the problems of history, or of historiography. Ricoeur followed the central insight of hermeneutical philosophy in seeing that it is hermeneutics "all the way down." In other words, interpretation is always occurring. This is pertinent to the case of memory and history, even for the most vivid memories and what seems to be the most objective of histories, which Ricoeur explored in his treatment of historiography in *Time and Narrative*, volume 1, and in MHF.[5] In the seventies, Ricoeur proposed a hermeneutical arc that reflects human experience in general but was inspired by the nature of interpreting texts, particularly the long history of the interpretation of biblical texts.[6] He saw that there can be a "surplus of meaning" where people can return again and again to rich texts to find new ways of meaning, a common experience of biblical interpreters. This, however, works against the notion that one can come up with the final, literal, definitive meaning of texts, which stands for all time. With the richness of meaning especially in the profuseness of story and symbol in Scripture, Ricoeur's extensive studies of metaphor, symbol, and story, along with focused study of Jesus' parables as extended metaphors, point to the way people can continue interpreting and re-interpreting not only rich texts such as Scripture but also their own lives, pointing to the significance of narrative identity.[7] Of course, this liveliness

[5] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[6] He mentions this in a number of works, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 71–88; Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 197–221.

[7] Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan, Religious Perspectives (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975): 27–138.

of meaning inevitably leads to the "conflict of interpretations," the title of one of his early collections of essays.[8]

How does one deal with that issue? His hermeneutical arc thus pointed to an initial understanding, which can be seen as a holistic response, not all of which is clear or conscious. This aspect was evident to him from his earlier major work on Sigmund Freud.[9] One can of course remain with this first naivete. At best, this is followed by reflection and critique, a second moment that he called "explanation," which related to his attempt to transcend a division between more holistic understanding and analytical explanation that corresponded on the Continent to a split between the human sciences and the natural sciences. Ricoeur saw the necessity for critique. Although Ricoeur did not apply this point to biblical studies, one can think here of all of the types of criticisms such as form criticism, tradition criticism, liberationist approaches, and even structuralism.[10] The basic principles of interpretation are crucial such as the putting a passage into its immediate context; for the Bible, it means putting a passage into the context of the Bible as a whole, an application of the hermeneutical circle. These basic principles are often ignored and actually lead, often in well meaning ways, to major distortions of the biblical message. One can point here to the Apostle Paul's admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 to "test everything," apparently already having to deal with claims of inspiration that were off target.

Ricoeur saw this critical moment as an impulse of modernity, but he also saw its danger, worrying that one can get "stuck in the desert of criticism."[11] One can see this in seminary students overwhelmed by a plethora of commentaries with different ideas, wondering what to do with the profusion of interpretations. It is here that Ricoeur made one of his most notable contributions in calling for a postcritical naivete, a second understanding, that involves practical appropriation into one's life.[12] He recognized that it does not happen automatically. One may have to push oneself to make such judgments. And of course he did not think of this simply as a one-time activity but mentioned that it could be thought of as a hermeneutical spiral.[13]At times, he would speak of this as a wager, but he did not mean just a leap into the dark for no

[8] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

[9] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage, Terry Lectures (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

[10] For more analysis of the hermeneutical arc with special reference to theology and biblical studies, see Dan R. Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), chap. 2.

[11] Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 349.

[12] See for example Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. John B Thompson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 351; Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, 28.

[13] Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 171.

reason.[14] He compared it to evaluating testimony in a trial that is backed by evidence.[15] One of his best statements called it "attestation," a kind of personal commitment, perhaps reflecting his earlier existentialist roots, where he was quite shaped by the thought of Gabriel Marcel. He points out its placement between the extremes of total objective certainty and skepticism, "'To my mind, attestation defines the sort of certainty that hermeneutics may claim, not only with respect to the epistemic exaltation of the cogito in Descartes, but also with respect to its humiliation in Nietzsche and its successors. Attestation may appear to require less than one and more than the other."[16] Attestation points to the kind of judgments one makes not only in the interpretation of history but in the response to abuses of history. These often involve risk.

This "second understanding," it is important to note, is a more holistic, embodied appropriation, much like the first understanding. It is a judgment that perhaps goes beyond what one can explicitly demonstrate, as in Michael Polanyi's saying even about scientific judgments, "We know more than we can tell."[17] This dynamic especially relates to faith convictions that can be critically supported but involve the felt sense of God's leading or God's will. To return to the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul calls for testing everything but not to "quench the Spirit." (1 Thess. 5:19) Holding these impulses together is a challenge. One can be too gullible and also too critical. The title of a book of interviews with Ricoeur points to this tension, *Critique and Conviction*.[18] We are prone to shy away from being critical of deeply ensconced memories and histories. The shock of realizing that we have been wrong, perhaps for a long time, about a major assumption can lead to skepticism and despair. The movement to the second and third moments of the hermeneutical spiral is thus not automatic but often is a discipline, even a spiritual discipline, as the Apostle Paul suggests. Critical thinking is a spiritual task.

How does this hermeneutical backdrop relate to memory and history? As Ricoeur would explicitly point out, history and memory are already selective interpretations, always. And he extended the hermeneutical arc to events and experiences, not just to texts. One could think today not just of major historical events such as revolutions and wars but also of movies, music, art, and dance. The initial reception of experience, whether from experience or what one has learned in childhood, may be rather innocent but should be critically examined, leading to a postcritical evaluation.

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[14] The fuller quotation is this, "We cannot eliminate from a social ethics the element of risk. We wager on a certain set of values and then try to be consistent with them; verification is therefore a question of our whole life. No one can escape this." Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 312.

[15] Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Mudge, trans. David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 123–30. He says in speaking of hermeneutics of the social sciences and humanities, "It is an argumentative discipline comparable to the juridical procedures used in legal interpretation, a logic of uncertainty and of qualitative probability." Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, 78.

[16] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21.

[17] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 88.

[18] Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Further, in his three-volume work, *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur put historiography and fiction into dialogue, engaging with major theorists about the nature of historiography.[19] He concluded that both are figurative—one could even say fictive—in the sense that they involve the creative imagination of a story-like element. Nevertheless, there is a difference. History, or historiography, owes a debt to the past. It is based on archives, documents, and testimony, that is, memory. Fiction can be true, perhaps truer, to life in another way, a more indirect way, much as Jesus' parables might not be literally true but are deeply true on another level. In this work, he elaborated a narrative arc, which he called preconfiguration, configuration, and refiguration.[20] The first element importantly points to all of the presuppositions that one brings to interpretation, the way that tradition shapes interpretation. Of course, traditional understandings of history come into play and are often difficult to dislodge, even if questionable. "Configuration" applies to the creation of an interpretation, whether original or of a text or event. Refiguration points again to a postcritical appropriation that reflects one's overall evaluation, say, of the truth of a historical event.[21]

The significance for memory is that memory studies indicate that recall is not just bringing up a text, like a document, that never changes, but every recall involves a dynamic reconfiguration to some extent, a continuing interpretation.[22] This is seen where people later remember being at events when it turns out that they were not. Even the immediate experience and memory is an interpretation, shown by people who interpret an event falsely such as being sure that they have identified a perpetrator in a legal case when it turns out to be mistaken. The critical moment is crucial when it comes to memory and history.

The Horrors of History

To support the importance of the critical task, even before his major work on historiography, Ricoeur had dealt in the seventies with the issue of the distortions of history and of interpretation, that is, with the problems of ideology and the tradition of ideology critique. Again, he fought on two fronts. He was critical of Hans-Georg Gadamer to some extent for not being critical enough, thus introducing a much-needed dimension of critical hermeneutics, which allowed for all of the tools of

[19] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1984; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen McLaughlin, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. David Pellauer and Kathleen Blamey, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[20] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1984, 1:52–87; Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1985, 2:157–79.

[21] For more explanation of the narrative arc and its relationship to the earlier hermeneutical arc, see Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 66–76.

[22] Peter A. Levine Levine, *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 140.

analysis.[23] On the other hand, he criticized the Marxist tradition, which had importantly elevated the role of ideology critique, for being too negative about ideology. Ideologies are stories; they can be positive. Here one can look to Ricoeur's later work on narrative identity. In theology studies, narrative theology is often seen as a positive.[24] Ricoeur very significantly identified the positive or neutral role of stories but also a hermeneutics of suspicion of a dissimulating tendency. At this point, he was drawing on the masters of suspicion such as Freud and Marx to note the way ideologies often come to serve the vested interests of the powerful in suppressing the vulnerable. History is replete with the victims of such efforts. Wars and genocide are rarely if ever engaged without attempts at justification, which involves an interpretation of history and typically a manipulation of history.

To bring out multiple dimensions of ideology, Ricoeur creatively played it off against the utopian imagination. Ricoeur begins with dissatisfaction with the simple, Marxist understanding of ideology as distortive. He then extends it to three different dimensions of ideology, drawing on the work of Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, and Clifford Geertz. He lays out therefore a *constitutive*, *legitimative*, and a *distortive* function of ideology.[25] Any society, he argues, drawing here on Clifford Geertz, has a symbolic, cultural dimension that integrates and legitimates it. Interestingly, he suggests that this initial function of ideology is usually idealistic and even utopian, although he does not develop this point. A new movement, even a new country, usually begins as a utopian criticism of the old and desires to solidify itself. As it gains power and authority, the utopia is transmuted into ideology. In this first sense, ideology has a necessary constitutive and potentially healthy function. Ricoeur explains, "Logically if not temporally the constitutive function of ideology must precede its distortive function. We could not understand what distortion meant if there were not something to be distorted, something that was of the same symbolic nature."[26] Thus, ideology, or story, helps to begin but moves into conserving.

The problem, as Ricoeur indicates, is that ideology inevitably has to simplify complex realities, and one could add that its idealistic side also tends to downplay complex realities. A gap therefore between reality and the ideology has to be filled in by belief in order to have legitimacy. "My argument," Ricoeur says, "is that ideology occurs in the gap between a system of authority's claim to legitimacy and our response in terms of belief."[27] In an interesting use of a Marxist idea, he terms this "surplus value."

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[23] See for Ricoeur's response to the Gadamer-Jürgen Habermas exchange and the significance of the development of critical hermeneutics, Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 63–100; John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[24] For example, see Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

[25] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 254–55.

[26] Ricoeur, 182.

[27] Ricoeur, 183.

The damaging effect of ideology can emerge here.[28] In order to defend legitimacy against challenge, ideology solidifies and is weaponized by those in power to suppress opposition. Ricoeur adds, "This feature appears to contradict the first function of ideology, which is to prolong the shock wave of the founding act. But the initial energy has a limited capacity; it obeys the law of attrition."[29] Ideology tends to fall prey to this tendency. Its ambiguity lies in this unstable tension between conserving something valuable but also distorting it.

The distortive and negative sense of ideology thus ensues. Almost any venture begins with high ideals; it is difficult to imagine the effort and sacrifice that it takes to begin something directed towards an outcome that one anticipates being disappointing and destructive. Founding myths and dreams have a place, but eventually they always call for a degree of demythologization. In the fifties, Ricoeur's significant essay on "the political paradox" pointed out this same dynamic of the state being necessary for humans to live together in peace, yet the state also being founded by violence and maintained by violence, inevitably slipping into abuses of that power.[30] In a similar essay at that time, Ricoeur referred to these tensions as giving rise to "an ethics of distress."[31]

The question is, how does one gain a perspective in the midst of such deception to see through distortions? What does one do in light of the political paradox and the distress it causes? Marx could appeal to science or to a particular class, such as the proletariat, to see through the dissimulations, but even they are now seen as infected by ideology. In fact, Ricoeur says of Mannheim's critique of Marx, "Mannheim's contention, though, is that this discovery has escaped, has exploded the Marxist framework, because suspicion is now applied not to one specific group or class, but to the entire theoretical frame of reference in a chain reaction that cannot be stopped. For me, the dramatic honesty of Mannheim lies in his courage to face this challenge."[32] Ricoeur concludes, "We are caught in a kind of tornado, we are literally engulfed in a process which is self-defeating."[33]

This crisis is where utopia fits in. Ricoeur sees it also as having a three-fold structure that correlates intimately with ideology.[34] In fact, it is a dialectical correlate to ideology. As mentioned, ideology usually begins with the high hopes of utopia. Utopia

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[28] Ricoeur, 183, 200–202.

[29] Paul Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 227.

[30] Paul Ricoeur, "The Political Paradox," in *History and Truth*, ed. Charles A. Kelbley, 2nd ed., Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 247–70.

[31] This is in the previous essay, "State and Violence," before "The Political Paradox," referred to in the previous note. An "ethics of distress" especially refers to clashing ethical imperatives such as loyalty to the state and refusal to kill. Paul Ricoeur, "State and Violence," in *History and Truth*, ed. Charles A. Kelbley, 2nd ed., Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 234–46.

[32] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 162.

[33] Ricoeur, 172.

[34] Ricoeur, 310.

arises as an alternative to an existing ideology. Ricoeur discusses at some length whether they can be totally separable and decides that they cannot. The problem is that utopia, too, can be destructive, and as Marx saw, even serve the ends of ideology, by being wishful and unrealistic thinking. It can be dangerous in the minds and hands of fanatics. Where ideology distorts, utopia can be *illusory*. Ricoeur says in an essay on this topic, "It is as though we have to call upon the 'healthy' function of ideology to cure the madness of utopia and as though the critique of ideologies can only be carried out by a conscience capable of regarding itself from the point of view of 'nowhere.'"[35] At best, however, utopia can provide either a genuine and better alternative to the status quo or serve as continual, constructive criticism. In this positive sense, where ideology legitimates, utopia provides an *alternative*. Utopia's main contribution, as literally the view from nowhere, is to call into question the problems and stress points of ideology. Ricoeur says, "It is always from the point of view of the nascent utopia that we may speak of a dying ideology. It is the conflict and intersection of ideology and utopia that makes sense of each."[36] The third correlate then is that where ideology preserves identity, utopia explores possibilities. Ideology integrates, whereas utopia *subverts* through invention.[37] Interestingly, although Ricoeur never applied this point to theology, one can see here the role of the Kingdom of God as a kind of utopian vision that provides a vantage point to critique present realities, as inscribed in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it in heaven."

The reality is that there are many ways, not just one, to bring a hermeneutic of suspicion to ideology critique. Critical historiography is important as Ricoeur elaborated in *Time and Narrative*. A matter that Ricoeur only hinted at is how the utopian imagination does not always come from outside, from nowhere, but from within. This is especially true of Christian movements that almost always represent a return to the Bible or to the early church, as in the Protestant Reformation as a whole. One could look at the way Martin Luther King, Jr., called upon a return to his Christian tradition and to original impulses in the founding of the United States in the civil rights movement. Ricoeur says of ideology that it represents a way to preserve the "original effervescence."[38] It takes something like the utopian imagination, calling upon the original utopian dreams, to make that return and apply it to the present.[39]

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[35] Paul Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia," in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 324. See also the following: "What we must assume is that the judgment on an ideology is always the judgment from a utopia. This is my conviction: the only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on this basis." Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 172.

[36] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 181.

[37] Ricoeur, 319–20.

[38] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology," 225.

[39] For more on the way that renewal and the utopian imagination, contrary to Ricoeur, does not simply come from outside but sometimes from within the origins of a tradition, as one sees in Christianity in movements that return to the Bible, see Dan R. Stiver, "Renewing the 'Period of Effervescence': Utopia as Ideology Critique," in *Ideology and Utopia in the Twenty-First Century: The Surplus of Meaning in Ricoeur's Conception of the Dialectical Relationship of Ideology and Utopia*, ed. Stephanie N. Arel and Dan R. Stiver, Studies in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 53–71.

To complicate the issue of ideology even further, studies of bias reveal how embodied and unconscious the problem is. Bias is often implicit, unconscious, and embodied. There is now a great deal of research on the role of bias, especially confirmation bias.[40] To explore its implication further, much of this works unconsciously. Our bodies can respond to situations, such as triggers, before the signals even reach the conscious brain. This means that our response to things, such as race or even histories, is often a good deal underway in terms of emotions and physiology before our conscious mind takes hold. What this often means is that we go along for the ride rather than reversing course. We take our initial response to be a signal for the direction to continue to take. This is what makes overcoming bias so incredibly difficult and illuminates the problem of prejudice. Ideological histories are inscribed in our bones, so to speak.[41]

Thus the problem of history is the problem of ideology. The other side of the value of story and narrative identity is ideology. This is background to Ricoeur's treatment in *Memory, History, Forgetting* on the problems of history where the wrong or false account is remembered and the truth is forgotten. As I write, the U.S. president has had to be corrected in repeating Russian talking points indicating that Ukraine caused the war. In the preface to MHF, Ricoeur thanks Emmanuel Macron, then his graduate student but now the president of France, who as president has just had to resist this distortion of history.[42] The Gaza tragedy today revolves around long simmering disputes about history. While the two World Wars can be seen as power plays, they also involved great disputes about the meaning of history and where it should go, in a word, ideologies. Ricoeur himself experienced the trauma of these horrors.[43] His mother died soon after he was born and his father was missing in action in World War I, whose body was only discovered decades later. Ricoeur thus grew up without his parents amidst that uncertainty. In World War II, he was in a POW internment camp for almost five years under harsh conditions. He was later jailed and faced bomb threats for protests against French treatment of Algeria. He was in the middle of the student revolt in the sixties. He was thus well aware, experientially, of the way that misuse of ideology is almost always a misuse of history for the sake of preserving power in the present, usually to abuse the most vulnerable. As William Faulkner noted in his novel, *Requiem for a Nun,* "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The quest for truth and justice therefore almost always involves attention to history, as Ricoeur expresses it in MHF, what to remember and what to forget.

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[40] Jennifer L. Eberhardt, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020); Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

[41] For more on the way that the embodied unconscious problematizes ideology even more than is often thought, see Dan R. Stiver, "Ideology on the Ground: Ricoeur on Embodiment and Ideology Critique," in *Paul Ricoeur and the Lived Body*, ed. Roger W. H. Savage (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).

[42] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xvii; Andrea Shalal, Michel Rose, and Steve Holland, "Trump, Macron Display Stark Differences on Ukraine Despite Friendly Veneer," *Reuters*, February 25, 2025, sec. World, https://www.reuters.com/world/macron-arrives-white-house-ukraine-talks-with-trump-2025-02-24/.

[43] See Stiver, *Theology After Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 22–29.

The Hope of History

What then is to be done? The first is to be aware of all that is indicated above, namely, that the hermeneutics of history means that memory and history are always interpreted and thus require critical appraisal. Awareness of the misuse of history involves persistent vigilance. Overcoming the implicit bias that comes from such misuse, often of long historical traditions, takes work at the conceptual and embodied level.

The Christian faith offers resources in its impulses toward truth, justice, and personal transformation. This of course calls not only for "testing everything" in terms of history but also in good biblical interpretation and sound theology. Poor biblical interpretation and theology have supported untold amounts of suffering. It is not just a matter of handling the Word of Truth, it's "rightly" handling the Word of Truth. (2 Tim. 2:15) As Ricoeur stressed in MHF, "It is justice that turns memory into a project."[44]

Christian theology reminds us that memory and history can be positive forces for good as well as ill. The biblical story is rooted in memory and history. What would the Bible be without the memory of the Exodus, of the messianic and prophetic traditions, of the Exile and return, and, of course, the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ?[45] At the heart of the Christian faith are practices of such memory of Christ, baptism and the Lord's Supper. In terms of implicit bias, what if our bias is towards the good, helping us to respond instinctively and habitually in fruitful ways, as the proponents of character ethics advocate?[46] This seemingly would be the outcome of growing in the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23) Moreover, Ricoeur's general philosophical point that human identity is narratively shaped is a positive one, even though, as we have seen, most things human can miss the mark, turning a healthy use of story into oppressive ideologies.

Nevertheless, the Christian story is not just about what happened in the past but about the promises in the past about God's continual working for good in the present and for shalom in the future, ultimately meaning that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37) This is a faith that can help us "not be weary in well doing" (Gal. 6:9) no matter what the circumstances are.[47] It sustains an indefatigable hope in history and for history.

As the above contributions of Ricoeur show, the human penchant for story and for narrative identity is not in itself a bad thing. Paul's reminder is apropos here, "Everything created by God is good." (1 Tim. 4:4) As mentioned above, narrative theology usually sees narrative as a positive matter. It is just that this human feature, as most things human, can be turned in a negative direction.

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[44] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 88.

[45] A meaningful reflection on the significance of remembering events of the Hebrew Bible in connection with remembering the Holocaust, see Ricoeur's sermon to a Jewish synagogue, Paul Ricoeur, "The Memory of Suffering," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 289–92.

[46] For example, see Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, 2d edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).

[47] For this point, see Paul Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 155–82.

Another aspect of approaching the abuses of memory and history that Ricoeur highlights as the last section of his last major book, in MHF, is forgiveness, even though it was wise for Ricoeur to term this "a difficult forgiveness." It is important to note that forgiveness does not necessarily mean an absolute forgetting but one that allows for hope and reconciliation. It also is not "easy," without consequences or pain. Sometimes forgiveness does not lead to reconciliation, for it takes two, or more, to reconcile. And there are degrees of forgiveness, ranging from political amnesty, one backed by the force of the state, to personal reconciliation. Ricoeur raises the hope at times not only of a "happy memory" but of a "happy forgetting." In very biblical language, he appeals to the carefreeness in the Sermon on the Mount that is not oblivious to the cares of this world. Ricoeur ends MHF with these words, "Carefree memory on the horizon of concerned memory, the soul common to memory that forgets and does not forget."[48]

In the end, the Christian faith at best does not mean turning one's face away from the harm and trauma done in the name of memory and history. The pursuit of justice means a prophetic pursuit of truth, which is crucial for redemptive action. However, faith provides resources for steadfastness in going forward. Its call for continuous transformation in this context points even to the hard work of overcoming one's own implicit biases and healing from trauma. It means making the unconscious conscious and doing the work of mourning,[49] as painful as that might be. Ironically, it is often the healing stories, that is, remembering them, that helps to overcome pernicious stories. It helps us to find not only the truth of memory and history but the power to find the truth. And, as Ricoeur indicates, there is always the hope of some reconciliation, even for trauma, with reconciled memories, reconciled histories, and reconciled people.

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[48]Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 505.

[49] Ricoeur often drew on Sigmund Freud's notion of the work of mourning, for example, "The work of mourning is the cost of the work of remembering, but the work of remembering is the benefit of the work of mourning." Ricoeur, 72.

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Надія історії: філософія Поля Рікера про використання історії та зловживання нею

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Анотація: У статті досліджується думка Поля Рікера про взаємозв'язок між історією, пам'яттю та ідеологією, з особливим акцентом на сучасні виклики історичної інтерпретації. Спираючись на герменевтичну методологію Рікера, автор доводить, що історія не є нейтральною чи об'єктивною розповіддю про минуле, а неминуче формується під впливом сучасних поглядів та ідеологічних сил. Центральне місце в цьому дослідженні займає роль пам'яті – як особистої, так і колективної – у конструюванні ідентичності та формуванні ідеологічних наративів, які можуть функціонувати як інструменти емансипації або як механізми домінування. Дослідження пропонує критичний аналіз ідеологічних викривлень, які можуть виникати з історичних наративів, особливо в контексті політичної влади. Крім того, пропонується, що християнська герменевтика робить цінний внесок в етичні виміри історичної взаємодії, особливо через призму істини, справедливості та примирення. Зрештою, стаття виступає за викупний і діалогічний підхід до історії, який стверджує потенціал наративної ідентичності та колективної пам'яті, що сприятиме зціленню і соціальним перетворенням у фрагментованих суспільствах.

Ключові слова: філософія Поля Рікера, пам'ять, історія, ідеологія.

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