

## Memory, History, Forgiveness: A Dialogue Between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi

*This dialogue between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi took place in Budapest on March 10, 2003 at Pasts, Inc., Center for Historical Studies, which is affiliated with Central European University (CEU). Ricoeur was the honorary president of Pasts, Inc., and its spiritus rector. On March 8, he had given a lecture on "History, Memory, and Forgetting" in the context of an international conference entitled "Haunting Memories? History in Europe after Authoritarianism," and organized by Pasts Inc. and the Körber Foundation. On March 9, Ricoeur had received the first Honoris Causa doctorate ever granted by CEU. Ricoeur had already visited Hungary in 1933. At the time, he was participating in a Boy Scouts European jamboree at Gödöllő (where he also saw Horthy on his white horse). After WWII, he went back to Hungary to meet with Lukács. Mona Antohi has transcribed and edited the recording of the dialogue. The two interlocutors have then made some minor revisions. The original text, in French, is available on the website of Pasts, Inc. ([www.ceu.hu/pasts](http://www.ceu.hu/pasts)). This English version, translated and annotated by Gil Anidjar, will be included in Sorin Antohi's book, *Talking History. Making Sense of Pasts*, forthcoming in 2006 from CEU Press. His own Romanian translation of the dialogue was published in the Iasi-based journal, *Xenopoliana* (3-4, 2004), as was the Hungarian translation by Réka Toth, which appeared in the Budapest-based journal, 2000 (November-December 2003).*

SORIN ANTOHI: I am going to begin from the end, as it were, as I first want to ask you some questions about *Memory, History, Forgetting*. We will start there in order to move forward to other questions, if you agree.<sup>1</sup> There is an entire world in this book, but I would like to begin by exploring the problem of forgiveness. This is a very difficult problematic to understand for those who lack a theological culture, not simply a moral, ethical or philosophical culture, but at least a kind of theological openness. You have been poorly understood at times. For example, I have heard someone criticize you with the claim that your "forgiveness" is a kind of forgetting, an unacceptable amnesty which would signify a retrospective approbation regarding the evil done. How would you explain the problem of forgiveness to someone who is not a believer (a Christian one, for example), to someone of a secular spirit?

PAUL RICOEUR: First of all, I would like to recall and emphasize the space taken by this problem in my book. Strictly speaking, it is not part of the book. It is an epilogue, which was asked of me as a matter of intellectual honesty. The question of the relation between memory, history and forgetting is entirely closed upon itself at the end of the book. Therefore,

we are only talking about an epilogue. Second, the question that forgiveness raises does not concern the forgiving of others, but rather the asking for forgiveness. Thus, the first relation to forgiveness is also to the one from which one asks. I am thinking of something that the Neoplatonic philosopher of Jewish origins, Vladimir Jankélévitch, said while reflecting as well on forgiveness. He said: "They have not even asked us for forgiveness." He correctly observed, therefore, that the problem of forgiveness concerns a request addressed to others. There is another answer: Those who have read me know very well that the person you mention in your question is mistaken. The idea that governs the entire chapter on forgiveness is that forgiveness is a personal act, an act from person to person that does not concern juridical institutions. It is therefore precisely in this chapter that I speak of all the juridical institutions that must be protected, including in the case of crimes with no statutes of limitation. At the heart of this chapter, I write that "justice must pass, justice must be done." Allow me to give an example. When the Pope went to visit his assailant in his jail cell, they spoke face to face, personally. We have no idea of what was said, but the Pontiff has never requested that his sentence be suspended. Instead, it is the Italian State that granted him his pardon. The problem that interests me here is the dialectic between love and justice. I have written, in fact, a small essay, which was published in German and in French, on "love and justice." In this conference, given at the University of Tübingen, I showed that the idea of justice rests essentially on a relation of equivalence. Forgiveness, on the other hand, rests on a relation of excess, of over-abundance. There are two different logics operating here. Hence the question: can the logic of excess, which defines forgiveness, penetrate the logic of equivalence that defines justice? The answer is yes, but on matters that can only be symbolical. Take for example the gesture of Chancellor Willy Brandt who went to kneel in Warsaw at the feet of the monument commemorating the persecution of the Jews and the Warsaw Ghetto. This was a symbolic gesture that created no institution, but indicated that a common path may be forged beyond the refusal of mutual recognition, which even prevents the exercise of a relation of equivalence. And I would add that there are all kinds of signs of forgiveness within the juridical institutions, be it in the consideration owed to the accused, who is treated like an equal enjoying the right of speech in front of the courts. This word, "consideration," is of great importance to me, because there is in the idea of justice left to its own device something that is vindictive, something that is very hard to distinguish from vengeance. Hegel

discusses this in a passage from the *Philosophy of Right* on punishment. He shows that punishment always remains imprisoned within the repetition of vengeance. Hegel evokes Greek tragedy in this context. And here the proverb "*Summun jus, summa injuria*" remains true still: the apex of law is also the apex of injustice. Consequently, the world of justice must always be humanized. And one last remark. It is in the pages of the epilogue that you will find the most virulent critique of an institution that is accepted by all, namely, amnesty. I have spoken about this in the conference you have heard: amnesty is organized forgetting, and it has nothing to do with the pacification that forgiveness can bring between two consciences. It is not by chance that there is a kinship, a semantic kinship, at any rate in French, between "amnesty" and "amnesia." The institutions of amnesty are not all the institutions of forgiveness. They constitute a forgiveness that is public, commanded, and that has therefore nothing to do with what I described earlier as a personal act of compassion. In my opinion, amnesty does wrong at once to truth, thereby repressed and as if forbidden, and to justice, at it is due to the victims.

SORIN ANTOHI: You believe, therefore, that amnesty prevents what I would call the work of forgiveness; amnesty thwarts the possibility of forgiveness.

PAUL RICOEUR: Amnesty prevents both forgiveness and justice.

SORIN ANTOHI: Yes, justice is thereby excluded from the process, because there is no judgment made about the evil done and suffered. At the same time, the absence of judgment thwarts the possibility of forgiveness.

PAUL RICOEUR: And that is why you will find in this epilogue a defense of the notion that certain crimes should not be subjects to statutes of limitation, because they belong to the domain of justice. Why is this necessary? Because these crimes themselves have long-lasting effects. Moreover, those guilty of such crimes have time on their side. They can hide and they can organize among themselves. Today, there are still war criminals, in South America or elsewhere, from the time of World War II. It is good, therefore, that the possibility of punishing them remains open. And here, we are in a domain of complete confusion between the private world of forgiveness and the public world of justice.

SORIN ANTOHI: Absolutely. This last—“topological”—distinction between forgiveness and justice participates in the great democratic debate regarding the distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere.

PAUL RICOEUR: You can now see why this is an epilogue in my book, a book that is entirely closed and concluded before the epilogue itself.

SORIN ANTOHI: Is there after all some relation between the epilogue and the general substance of the book?

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, yes. I would say that there is a running thread that goes through the entire book without transforming itself into a method, which is to say that the book takes the perspective of an appeased memory. This is the word that I would like to associate with forgiveness. The appeased memory does not seek to forget the evil suffered or committed. It seeks rather to speak of it without anger. I am thinking of the saying: *Sine ira nec studio*, which comes from Tacitus's *Annals*. Thus, without anger nor prejudice. So, why do I say that there was a moment in my discussion of memory that announced, in a way, the matter of forgiveness? These are my reflections on the recognition of the remembered past: At this point, I speak of the “small miracle of recognition.” And I was interested in this without knowing that there was going to be a follow-up in the chapter on forgiveness. But there is already an echo in the chapter on history, because it is the privilege of memory to recognize the past and to rejoice, by saying: “Yes, this is her, and this is him; this was so and it happened so; I recognize my parents, my friends on the photographs, and I recognize in particular those who, at my age, have already died.” The recognition that remembrance brings about is a kind of appeased memory. And the problem, then—which is, in fact, a part of the book—is the fact that in history we have no place for recognition, except as a form of ultimate reward, I would say, which Michelet thought he had reached when he spoke of a kind of resurrection of the past – he uses the word, he who was non-religious. To achieve the re-creation of a quasi-presence, much as Michelet thought he did for France, from Joan of Arc until the French Revolution (for him, France was a sort of person): “I have encountered France,” he says. It is true that this is not the daily fare of the historian. Historians work with documents, and a document is already a rupture with memory, since it is written and since the voices have already turned silent. One can then say, of course, that those who are familiar with

the archive (I am thinking of this very beautiful book by Arlette Farge on *The Taste of the Archive* [*Le goût de l'archive*])—the historians—begin with mute voices and proceed to make them speak, as it were.<sup>2</sup> I would say that the historian is pursuing a kind of permanent testimony. True testimony is oral. It is therefore a living voice. Once it is written, and only then, it becomes a document. And at this moment it becomes part of an archive. But the very fact of the archive constitutes a neutralization of the living voice, which lines up voluntary testimonies, themselves given from presence to presence. I testify in front of someone and for something. There is this triangular relation in testimony: I testify in front of someone about something, an event that I claim to have witnessed. There is therefore a presumption of credibility for the voice that bears witness. But this credibility itself can always be submitted to criticism. One can say that the witness is a false witness, a liar or an impostor. In this sense, history truly begins only with the confrontation with and between testimonies and, in particular, with testimonies that were reduced to silence by archivization. The model for this confrontation is described in Lorenzo Valla's famous book on the *Donation of Constantine*, and it is in many respects the beginning point of historical criticism, as Carlo Ginzburg has written.<sup>3</sup> And this is so because—I am returning to what I said earlier—memory is oral, in the narrative I produce for myself and for others, whereas in history, everything begins with writings. And the reduction of testimony to writing marks the turning over of memory to history, which accumulates its architecture of methodologies, its various uses of the idea of causality, from very proximate causalities in the exact sciences, and all the way to notions of intentional causality, of “reasons for,” as one says in English, of motives to act. Between these two extreme uses of causality, there are the various uses of the word “because.” The grammar of the “because” is immense. And then, there is the use, one could say, the methodological use of the “because” in history. I add to all this a category that I share with my friend Jacques Revel, himself a friend of the Italian micro-historians . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: . . . and their promoter in France . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. To speak of the idea of scale: the fact that historians can work according to hierarchized scales, something which memory cannot do. In contradistinction with memory, history can manipulate the choice of duration, as it were. It began, by the way, with Braudel, the advocate of the

*longue durée*. His great book on *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* is articulated around three levels.<sup>4</sup> There is the level of a time, which can be said to be quasi-immobile, namely, the Mediterranean itself, with its populations, the Turks and the Spanish. Then comes the time of the institutions, the middle term. And finally, the event. For Braudel, that event is the battle of Lepanto, but it is also the death of Philip II. In this manner, there are two deaths in this book. There is the death of Philip, which belongs to the history of events (*histoire événementielle*), and there is, as it were, a structural death, which belongs to the *longue durée*, the death of the Mediterranean as center of the world, to the benefit of the Atlantic Ocean—today, we would speak of the Pacific Ocean. Allow me to add something on the matter of scale. One does not see the same things on different scales: what can be seen on a large scale are the developing forces. But what can be seen on a small scale—and this is the lesson of microhistory—are the situations of uncertainty within which individuals (among them is the famous miller Menocchio) attempt to orient themselves; individuals who have a closed horizon and a problem of survival vis-à-vis institutions they do not understand and that will be largely perceived as deceitful and dangerous.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, when you write macrohistory, you are more likely to work with determinisms, whereas when you work on microhistories, you have to engage indecisions, that is to say, indeterminism. There are those who sometimes want to lock me into the purely theoretical and abstract discussion: “Are you a determinist or indeterminist?” I answer, well, let us work at different scales of human history, and you will have both answers.

SORIN ANTOHI: But how can one link the two scales? Microhistory has not taught us much about how to work with scales; how to find or at least think the passage from one scale to the next. What is lost? What is retained? If one takes the problem of memory, of forgetting, or else the problem of forgiveness: what is gained and what is lost at the moment one moves from the individual scale to the middle scale of institutions and finally to the macro scale?

PAUL RICOEUR: I think this is a new capacity that the historian has acquired: to learn to move between scales. The notion of scale is not static. It is rather a path. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, for example, I have done much work on large scales with this great historian of culture, Norbert Elias, in particular on the mores of the royal court: How was a kind of education

fashioned that concerned itself with feelings, even the feelings that are most deeply rooted in the proximity of the unconscious, by way of models that came from a superior hierarchy. Elias follows a descending path from the high structures of the court (he studies two courts that lasted two or three centuries, the British court and the French one).<sup>6</sup> As for me, since I am not a historian by profession, my problem is that of the epistemology of history. I say that what makes the greatness of the epistemology of history is that it can make use of a variation of scales. There are thus cases in which the historian teaches the philosopher, by helping him treat the problem of determinism and indeterminism.

SORIN ANTOHI: It is true. Yet, Elias practices a kind of evolutionism when he thinks of cultural transmission (from top to bottom) of mores, habits, manners of behaving at the table, spitting, and so forth. Elias has shown, among other things, how the Humanists—Erasmus, for example—were writing manuals of good behavior in order to codify social interaction. I see here a kind of “soft utopianism” (*soft, debole*) as normative as its complement, the classic utopianism of Erasmus’ friend, Thomas More. There is thus a path from top to bottom for Norbert Elias, whereas the microhistorians, it seems to me, follow an opposite circuit . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, but as a philosopher, I do not see why I would choose between the two. It is incumbent upon you, historians, to know what you are doing. And you have choices. I am fortunate not to have a choice to make. I want to account for the specificity of history in relation to memory, and I show that history has resources that memory lacks.

SORIN ANTOHI: You are then proposing a kind of epistemological dualism, which exists for history and does not for memory.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. However, and anticipating our conversation, when I speak today—as I did yesterday—of a memory taught by history, I am obligated to say that the lesson is double. I am taught, therefore, and educated by a long history and by a short one, by the history of events. We can apply this, I would not say without risks, but rather at great risk, when we try to understand the parallel function, during the same period, of the two major totalitarianisms. We shall be able to produce large scale readings, much in the way of what historians call “functional history.” But you reach the level

of microhistory when you ask yourself “When did Hitler decide to launch the Final Solution?” This is an immense discussion among historians, German and others, who are trying to identify the moment of decision-making concerning the deportation and extermination of the Jews. Therefore, a historian is in no way prisoner—he is, on the contrary, the beneficiary—of the handling of durations, long or short. You will find the same phenomenon among economists, when they have to address trends, that is to say, heavy tendencies; or conjectural history, such as occurs at the level of medium duration; or the decisions that confront our politicians in the horizon of a four-year logic, in democracies. But I am recalling yet another problem, which affects us in the very *longue durée* and concerns the three major disasters that threaten us in the next fifty years. First, the increased rarity of energy with the impending exhaustion of oil fields is quite predictable. Second, the extended duration of greenhouse effects and of global warming, which will lead to the flooding of countries like Bangladesh, with millions of people turning into refugees and into a source of great insecurity for all. Third, the increased scarcity of water. Someone who lives in a hotel, here, can take ten showers a day, whereas in another corner of the world, there are women who must walk for three hours in order to carry ten liters of water back to the family after a whole day’s work and at the edge of exhaustion. Hence the necessity of prioritizing political decisions, from the long term of anticipated disasters, to the short term by way of the middle term, for example, that of European institutions, and the short term of national politics. We constantly have, therefore, this play of durations.

SORIN ANTOHI: Agreed. But there is also—I am coming back to the play of scales—a qualitative difference between the scales, meaning that one loses or gains sense, one loses or gains values, when moving from one scale to the next. In the more concrete domains of memory, of history and of justice, the passage from one scale to the other leads to fundamental changes in the problematic, in the ethical horizon, and so forth. On the individual micro-scale of the German citizen of the 1930s and 1940s, there are certain experiences, choices and actions. And there is the larger scale, that of World War II and of the Holocaust. I have always found it difficult to transpose my value judgments from one scale to the other: moral and ethical judgments such as one makes them in relation to the individual do not seem relevant once they are carried to the level of the group, or to the people, in fact. Not to say anything of judgments proper, that is to say, those made by justice, by the juridical instances.



PAUL RICOEUR: We must distinguish between the retrospective gaze that we are casting now—we can speak in the manner we have so far—and the perspective of the people who found themselves in the situation. This is also one of the historian's problems: to step back and into the situation studied. There was, for example, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book, which claimed that all Germans were criminals, and so forth.<sup>7</sup> The historians did not follow. Who is being spoken about, first of all? You have people who lived, I do not know, in Bavaria, in the country. There were certain people, I would say this very honestly, who had no idea of what was happening in a camp, not even about its existence perhaps. It is very possible. And there is the case of the East Germans, who had a problem of survival vis-à-vis the Russians and their advance. One fails to see how they could bear responsibility to the point of sacrifice—and still, it did happen!—in order to save Jews, whereas they had to save their own skin. So, it is necessary to put everything back into the context, into the situation. From this point of view, I owe much to an American historian, I think he is Jewish, Dominick LaCapra. He intervened in the great discussion that took place a few years ago, and about which I write at length in my book. It was a conference organized by Saul Friedländer, where Carlo Ginzburg was confronted with Hayden White and his "rhetorical" interpretation of historical discourse . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: . . . a conference which produced the book edited by Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution."*<sup>8</sup>

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, indeed. It is a key book for my endeavor, since it is the very subject of the book, the representation of the past. The title, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, brings about the solution: Until what point can one represent the past? This is not representation in the sense I give to the word in my book, that of a *mimesis*, of an equivalence of the realities of history, but it is representation at the narrative level, at the filmic level, at the level of all the means of which one disposes in order to give the illusion of presence regarding mortal events. And therefore, *Probing the Limits of Representation* is a test of our capacity to make traumas visible and readable. So, I return to LaCapra, because he deploys psychoanalytic concepts, particularly with regard to our ability to identify, which is limited: we cannot play all the roles at once. One day perhaps, in the future, and when all the people involved will have passed away, a very great historian will be able to

produce a great epic where everybody's suffering will have their place. But this time is not ours.

SORIN ANTOHI: In the meantime, then, I would like to get to what seems to me the very ground of your work on history, memory and forgetting: your philosophical anthropology. You have proposed at first an anthropology of fallible man, of weak man, of suffering man.

PAUL RICOEUR: I am enjoying this conversation!

SORIN ANTOHI: This philosophical anthropology was defined by a modesty, a humility that is quite rare in the human sciences. It was telling us to accept that man is not all-powerful and omniscient, but that he is prone to err. He is fallible by virtue of his very nature. But then . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: . . . Yes, this is a notion that I have been trying to transcend. In the intermediary book between *Memory, History, Forgetting* and *Time and Narrative*, namely, *Oneself as Another*, the central concept is man insofar as he is able and capable. What man *can* do: I *can* speak, I *can* narrate, I *can* act, I *can* feel responsible. The evolution of my thought has gone from the culture of guilt of the 1950s and 1960s to the Gifford Lectures, which I gave in 1986, at the center of which was capable man. And therefore my last book on memory, history and forgetting is related not to fallible man but to capable man. This is to say that man is capable of making memory and of making history. The very distinction, which I owe to Pierre Nora and to Michel de Certeau, between “doing history” and “making history,” revolves around the idea of ability: incapability appears only negatively, whereas fallible man was almost the positive side of man. I do not renounce or deny this. I have written all this, and I perfectly admit that people might say, “Listen, when you speak of fallible man, I am with you; but when you speak of capable man, I no longer do so, nor do I follow you when you produce a grand theory on the representation of the past.” I have even invented a word, *la représentance*, which is about the ability of the historian to give us a credible equivalent to what the Germans call *Darstellung*—that great concept of the German historical school, of Droysen in particular. For me, the problem of history is the problem of *Darstellung*, which is related to the idea of truth. And I will tell you why I hold on to it. I hold on to it because of the moral discussion surrounding the question of

knowing whether there is a duty to remember [*un devoir de mémoire*] vis-à-vis such or such group of victims. If we were not certain of what the witnesses report and of what the historians within a fairly large consensus have begun to establish concerning these crimes, if none of it were true, we would not be under the obligation to remember. Therefore, we are under an obligation to seek truth before we are bound by a duty, by a debt of memory.

SORIN ANTOHI: But allow me to understand how this passage occurred for you, from weak man to capable man. You had this surprising vision at first of a weak God . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: Here, these are only speculations, personal wanderings. And I wasn't the only one. The great Jewish thinker Hans Jonas, whom I have known and admired so much, has dared to write, after his *The Imperative of Responsibility* [*Das Prinzip Verantwortung*], on "The Concept of God after Auschwitz" [*Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*], explaining that it is no longer possible to think of an omnipotent God.<sup>9</sup>

SORIN ANTOHI: But this was not your point of departure.

PAUL RICOEUR: No, it is not my point of departure. It is an encounter that, in turn, pushes me further, to the Christological idea, the idea of a suffering God. I am not the only one . . . There is an entire post-Moltmanian theology, with the concept of a crucified God.

SORIN ANTOHI: For me, it was a vision that I was associating with Christ, but not with God. You were able, therefore, to evolve toward the idea of capable man and to arrive to the moment when you say: "Yes, man can, he acts, he makes . . ."

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, man can within limits, those of fallibility. Fallibility reappears, in a way, within the inabilities of capable man. But I devote space to four sorts of abilities in this book. First, language. All beings capable of language do not have the same access to language. Cultivated people are better able than others within the order of language. Friends of mine who work as judges tell me that they see people who are accused but are unable even to understand the word "stealing." I think of these boys who have been arrested and who are dragged through the courts ten times, thirty times . . .

We are not equal within language. There are inabilities. Take now the ability to act. It is greater among people with power, whereas in the history of the miller, Menocchio, in microhistory in general, we see weak people, who dwell in uncertainty, and who ask themselves whether they will be arrested by the Inquisition, and so forth. There are degrees of ability, therefore. For example—and we may have to reconcile ourselves with this, including with Hayden White—this marvelous ability to narrate. Because it is universal: everybody has narrated. We are trying together to narrate a path and it is with small narratives that we are now progressing in our discussion. And one must be able to narrate in order to have this next, fourth ability: accountability. That is to say that I can feel, as one says in English, *accountable*. For this, one must be able *to give an account*.<sup>10</sup>

SORIN ANTOHI: I think that there is here a key for the passage from fallible man to capable man. Because among the limits of one's ability, there is the duty of giving an account, of accountability—a concrete and, in principle, immanent form of responsibility and of self-limitation.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. This is why all the debates that we have had elsewhere on the duty to remember [*le devoir de mémoire*] presuppose that we are first accountable, and therefore that we have this ability, this accountability.

SORIN ANTOHI: At stake is therefore a limit that is assumed, that is to say, of a positive limit.

PAUL RICOEUR: It cannot be a notion that one throws in the other's face. If we say like Goldhagen that all the Germans have been "willing executioners," we are going to attribute accountability in its criminal form to everybody. This is an abuse, because accountability is what one is able to exercise when giving an account for oneself. Kant reminds us of this when he invokes one of the great contradictions of the dialectic of pure reason, in the third, cosmological Antinomy.<sup>11</sup> What is an event that occurs? The question is asked either in the manner of the natural sciences, or it is assumed in the *Rechnungsfähigkeit*, the ability to give an account. In this respect, I am very interested by this word, *Rechnung*, in the semantic plane. In English, it is rendered, *account*, and in French, *imputer*. It is therefore about the ability to count, to compute [*com-puter*] one's own actions . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: . . . a settling of accounts with oneself . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: . . . yes, that is the worst of abilities this one! And even this reading, which has impressed me so much—Hans Jonas’s book on the concept of God after Auschwitz—always brings us back to human responsibility.

SORIN ANTOHI: That’s it. And by the way, it seems to me that the passage from fallible man to capable man includes this idea that we are responsible, *accountable*. At the limit, fallible man could have been excused, exonerated . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: One should not exaggerate, however, since this little book on “fallible man” does come after the book on the voluntary and the involuntary, where I have nonetheless tried to give much to the voluntary since I speak of the possibility of managing emotions, managing habits, and then of assuming mortality.<sup>12</sup> This book concludes with an avowal concerning what I call the “absolute involuntary,” which includes the unconscious and the fact of being born. For there is, after all, and since the beginning of my work sixty years ago, the idea of mortality which traverses everything through and through. At this time, I was welcoming this . . . I would not say joyously, but I had concluded my book with the idea of assenting to finitude. I was an avid reader of Rilke, and I ended with this verse: *Hier sein ist herrlich*: “being here is sumptuous, wonderful, magical.” Now, in my old age, with the proximity of death, I repeat again: *Hier sein ist herrlich*.<sup>13</sup>

SORIN ANTOHI: You must have a lot of courage. At thirty, one can play with such thoughts, but at ninety . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: You know, the different ages of life meet with different kinds of happiness and unhappiness, as well as with, how should I say, different traps. The two traps of old age are sadness and boredom. Sadness? “It is so sad that one must leave all this, that one must prepare to go . . .” So here, I say, one must not succumb to sadness . . . To assent to sadness is what the old monks would call *acedia*. There is no modern word for *acedia*: it is a kind of melancholia, which is not Freud’s melancholia, but perhaps it is Dürer’s, when he paints *Melencolia I*, where one can see a woman, with her head lowered, a fist under her chin, looking at geometrical figures which no longer signify anything to her; and there is the clock which

marks the hours. That is *acedia*: Dürer's *melencolia*. And the remedy is the pleasure of an encounter, the pleasure of always seeing something new, of rejoicing. And in the same gesture, I answer the second great temptation of old age—boredom. Not the boredom of children who, when bored, say: “Mummy, I don't know what to do.” For me, it is the opposite. I do know what to do. But it is to say, “I have already seen all this, and I have already seen all that . . .” Well, the remedy is similar to that for sadness: to continue to be astonished. What Descartes at the beginning of his *Treatise on Passions*, called admiration.

SORIN ANTOHI: A major, governing quality of the human personality . . .

PAUL RICOEUR: . . . but not one that functions every day . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: Indeed, sadly. But let us go further still. What is, in the context of your philosophical anthropology, the rapport of suffering man to capable man?

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, I refer to this by way of very frequent allusions to Greek tragedy, when I say that capable man is a man who is at once acting and suffering. And I produce a kind of syntagm: “acting and suffering.” Take all the great heroes, already in Homer. They all feel that they are suffering. Think of Patroclus, the pain of Hector, and the final reconciliation around Priam and the funeral pyre, when the enemy is finally reconciled with the enemy. There occurs, one could say, a kind of mutual forgiving. The word is not uttered, but it does not matter. There is here a kind of quieting down. It is a calm that follows all the anger that suffuses the entire *Illiad*, and which begins with the stolen woman, Helen. In Greek tragedy, all the heroes are acting and suffering heroes. And tragedy is a kind of reconciliation through this purification, which is not properly speaking a forgiving, but . . . I do not want to mobilize and hold forgiveness captive. There are many synonyms, in particular when it comes to this other reconciliation around the chorus in Greek tragedy . . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: . . . *katharsis*.

PAUL RICOEUR: That's it, *katharsis*. After all, the two great words in Aristotle's *Poetics* are *mimesis* (operated by the characters themselves) and *katharsis*

(operated by the chorus). We are capable of successive identification with the different characters and then with the chorus, which represents us.

SORIN ANTOHI: So, there is a collective side to forgiveness in tragedy, represented and brought about by the chorus.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, of course. But I have put the emphasis on the personal, individual dimension of forgiveness, simply in order to protest against, I would say, forgiveness for all. This caricature of forgiveness, I have wanted to break it. But on the other hand, it is always and only in a community that one experiences forgiveness. I am very sensitive to this fact. I am not Catholic. I have received a protestant education and therefore I have never known this properly Catholic institution of ritual forgiveness, at the hands of the priest. I have only known the collective request for forgiveness. I insist on the term “forgiveness,” and I think that it is the same in the Orthodox Church, where there is no personal confession, particular to historical Catholicism. Forgiveness must not be deployed by anyone as if it were their specialty . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: I agree regarding the Orthodox Church, where there is nonetheless a form of confession. So there is a collective dimension—in the frame of the group, of the community—to this work of forgiveness, which remains nonetheless individual.

PAUL RICOEUR: Ah, yes. I do believe that someone, even when they forgive someone else in the secret of their heart, find themselves in deep accord with the community which carries them at this very moment, a community which is open to this problematic. And today the problem, if you want a political transposition, is the problem of the treatment of minorities. There are very few European countries without a minority. I think that one could now define democracy, among others, by the manner of equitable treatment of minorities, and therefore, by the recognition of values belonging to another culture residing among us. This openness to other values that are within the same juridical space, this empathy from community to community is an act of the heart.

SORIN ANTOHI: Are there, however, limits to the ability of organizing a life together among communities that, often, uphold very different, even opposed, values? For me, this is where problem of democracy lies.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, this is where the problem is. We have a problem of education. However, even without talking immediately of school, of the university, of popular education, by way of the press, and so forth, I want to invoke a category which we have not mentioned so far, and that was particularly underscored by Freud: the ability to mourn . . .

SORIN ANTOHI: . . . *Trauerarbeit*.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. I think that one cannot have a memory of the past without, at the same time, mourning a certain number of illusions, but also of hatred, or of love lost. Freud had written this little text, “Mourning and Melancholia,” while thinking about suffering people who were incapable of reconciling themselves with the lost object.<sup>14</sup> The idea of loss is important: there are no people in Europe today who cannot complain of having lost something. There are not only individual losses that occur to us, the loss of dear ones—at my age, my life is marked by all the losses I have experienced until today. One must come to terms with each one every time, which is to say, that one must interiorize the lost object as a kind of internal icon. This work of mourning is a long and patient travail, which brings under interrogation the ability to narrate it. I have written a short essay on the narrative structure of mourning. Let us say that, to mourn is to learn to narrate otherwise. To narrate otherwise what one has done, what one has suffered, what one has gained and what one has lost. The idea of loss is fundamental to life.

SORIN ANTOHI: And it seems to me to be related to the idea of forgiveness. To live with loss, to mourn someone or something that was lost—this also means forgiving oneself.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. Here, Freud used a word that is very proximate, *Versöhnung*, which has been translated as “reconciliation.” This word did not belong to the religious vocabulary. It can be found in great German literature, and in the writings of the young Hegel from Jena to Berlin, when he writes the *Encyclopedia*, which ends with *Versöhnung*; and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1807, in the chapter entitled *Geist*, the chapter on Spirit, ends in the same manner.<sup>15</sup> *Versöhnung* consists in exchanging roles: each party abandons its claim to be the only one occupying the terrain. Thus, each party must renounce something. What comes to my mind, and here I will perhaps antagonize some of your readers, are the relations between Israelis



and Palestinians. There is a problem of *loss* there: one cannot have everything, and therefore one must mourn that which will never be obtained.<sup>16</sup> Negotiations are also about making a list of the losses to which one consents.

SORIN ANTOHI: And in the work of mutual recognition, there is the recognition of what the other has lost in his turn. One must see that the other has lost too, that loss is shared.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes. I come back to the matter of narrative, to narrative as the path of mourning. One must know how to tell one's own story as seen by others. That is to say, for me to let myself be narrated by the other. Not only for me to narrate myself otherwise (one can always do that, arrange and gather the elements in another fashion), but to agree to let *mimesis* be produced by the other. *That* is difficult.

SORIN ANTOHI: Yet that is how notions such as forgiveness, loss and reconciliation are, it seems to me, related. They have a kind of common ground.

PAUL RICOEUR: Yes, that's it. You wanted to begin our dialogue with this, while for myself I ask my readers to conclude their reading with the epilogue on forgiveness and not to begin at the end.

SORIN ANTOHI: Agreed. And perhaps also for them to mark a pause, in order to reflect after the book proper, and before the epilogue.

PAUL RICOEUR: In any case, one must take a break after having read 600 pages. This is something already indicated by the title: *Memory, History, Forgetting*. The book is concluded. As for the epilogue, do with it as you will.

SORIN ANTOHI: Very well, but still: what would be, very briefly, the relation of the book to its epilogue?

PAUL RICOEUR: I propose the word: happy memory. Without resentment. And above all without anger. I would say that anger and envy are the two most negative passions. What Spinoza called the sad passions.

SORIN ANTOHI: We will have to end here, on this grave and melancholic

note, but without letting ourselves be submerged by sad passions. Thank you.

*Translated from French by Gil Anidjar*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg, "Lorenzo Valla on the 'Donation of Constantine'" in Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999) 54-70.

<sup>4</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process (The History of Manners & State Formation and Civilization)*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, Saul Friedländer, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, trans. Hans Jonas & David Herr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) and *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz*, Lawrence Fogel, ed. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> [Translator's Note] The italicized words are in English in the original. In what follows, the word "accountable" was also consistently invoked in English.

<sup>11</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and nature; the voluntary and involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966)

<sup>13</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, VII.

<sup>14</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," trans. Joan Riviere in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey, ed. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957) vol. XIV.

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> [TN] The word *loss* is in English in the original.

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