



Memory, History, Forgetting

Paul Ricœur, Kathleen Blamey (Translator), David Pellauer (Translator)

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Why do major historical events such as the Holocaust occupy the forefront of the collective consciousness, while profound moments such as the Armenian genocide, the McCarthy era, and France's role in North Africa stand distantly behind? Is it possible that history "overly remembers" some events at the expense of others? A landmark work in philosophy, Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting* examines this reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting, showing how it affects both the perception of historical experience and the production of historical narrative.

Memory, History, Forgetting, like its title, is divided into three major sections. Ricoeur first takes a phenomenological approach to memory and mnemonic devices. The underlying question here is how a memory of present can be of something absent, the past. The second section addresses recent work by historians by reopening the question of the nature and truth of historical knowledge. Ricoeur explores whether historians, who can write a history of memory, can truly break with all dependence on memory, including memories that resist representation. The third and final section is a profound meditation on the necessity of forgetting as a condition for the possibility of remembering, and whether there can be something like happy forgetting in parallel to happy memory. Throughout the book there are careful and close readings of the texts of Aristotle and Plato, of Descartes and Kant, and of Halbwachs and Pierre Nora.

A momentous achievement in the career of one of the most significant philosophers of our age, *Memory, History, Forgetting* provides the crucial link between Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* and his recent reflections on ethics and the problems of responsibility and representation.

"His success in revealing the internal relations between recalling and forgetting, and how this dynamic becomes problematic in light of events once present but now past, will inspire academic dialogue and response but also holds great appeal to educated general readers in search of both method for and insight from considering the ethical ramifications of modern events. . . . It is indeed a master work, not only in Ricoeur's own vita but also in contemporary European philosophy."—*Library Journal*

"Ricoeur writes the best kind of philosophy—critical, economical, and clear."—*New York Times Book Review*

Memory, History, Forgetting Details

Date : Published August 15th 2006 by University of Chicago Press (first published 2000)

ISBN : 9780226713427

Author : Paul Ricoeur , Kathleen Blamey (Translator) , David Pellauer (Translator)

Format : Paperback 624 pages

Genre : Philosophy, History, Nonfiction, Theory, Cultural, France



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From Reader Review Memory, History, Forgetting for online ebook

Marilena says

Serious mnemonic study with mainly a historical perspective.

The style in which Ricoeur writes is difficult therefore it requires much attention and...rereadings.

Anyway when it comes to memory, oblivion, anamnesis, history, this is a very important book.

Hmmm...too bad I don't have it in English!!!!

Michelle Marvin says

I am so grateful that Ricoeur undertook this massive exploration of memory, history, forgetting, and forgiveness. I thoroughly enjoyed the first part, on memory, but found the second part on history much more difficult to follow. I am certain that if I were more acquainted with Husserl and Heidegger I would have been better prepared for this journey. This is the reason for the four stars - I unfortunately can't recommend the book unless you've done prior reading in Ricoeur (I came to the text having read *Oneself as Another*, *Interpretation Theory*, some readings on *Narrative Identity*, etc., and was glad I had read those beforehand,) or if you're otherwise super determined to make your way through this book one way or another, with the understanding that you'll glean more from this work after you come back to it armed with more Ricoeur as a foundation. He wrote this late in his life, so he makes frequent references to earlier works, thoughts, formulations, etc. All that said, the insights of course are brilliant and thought-provoking, quite wordy, dense, and abstract of course. At times he wanders off but you know he'll come back (the text proper in English is, after all, 506 pages!). I will return to this book again and again in my own quest to understand memory in relation to self, time, "truth," history, and forgetting.

David M says

Alright, this was my twelfth book by Paul Ricoeur this year, and now I'm seriously going to take a break...

I find philosophy can be incredibly seductive. Fiction really falls by the wayside. I mean, why should I care about this little domestic snafu somewhere when I have the chance to stalk being itself?? So I tend to binge, and then it starts to feel like my brain's bleeding, and I wonder if I've really learned anything at all... But then, months or even years later, I'll notice that I'm thinking about things differently than I did before. Subtle marks of progress along the road. You can't really DO philosophy while you're reading it; you have to let it settle.

(By doing philosophy, I just mean thinking.)

In an interview somewhere Hubert Dreyfus said that his dyslexia was actually helpful to him when studying philosophy. Because to really read a book like *Being and Time* you have to slow down and spend hours on just a few pages. While other students found this extremely difficult, for him slow was the natural setting.

Interesting, interesting. I'm afraid I find it impossible to read books slowly, even really dense books. I'd rather read two different books on the same subject than read one slowly. No doubt this has made my philosophical education haphazard and impressionistic.

Anyway, in my judgment Ricoeur's best books are the *Symbolism of Evil*, the *Conflict of Interpretations*, and *Freud and Philosophy*. *Memory, History, Forgetting* is not quite in that stratosphere, methinks. Some of his later pedantic tendencies are unfortunately on display.

Still, in many ways it's a deeply personal and beautiful book. His last major testament, written when he was in his nineties. This makes his quarrel with Heidegger's being-towards-death rather poignant. In the face of death, and having already lost the woman with whom he lived for over sixty years (the book is dedicated to the memory of Simone Ricoeur), he insists that the true subject of philosophy is life.

???????? says

Okla Elliott says

About 100 pages in so far, and I'm thoroughly impressed. I'll update this review when I finish it and let you know if the next 500 pages live up to the first 100.

[Update: It took me forever, but I finally finished the book. It is very strong in many regards, but I would not suggest it to even a highly educated general readership. This one is for specialists only. I had hoped to use it for my dissertation, which has a chapter on memory studies, but it ended up not proving useful for me.]

Guilherme Smee says

Comecei a ler este livro há mais de um ano por ser uma das leituras mais indicadas do nosso PPG em Memória Social e Bens Culturais. Foi sorte minha encontrar ele na livraria da universidade com apenas um rasgo na capa, porque após isso descobri que esta obra havia esgotado. Como a minha leitura do livro veio e

foi ao longo desse mais de um ano, fica difícil estabelecer um resumo para essa resenha. O livro é um apanhado das principais ideias de Paul Ricoeur em seus diversos livros como *Tempo e Narrativa*, *O Si Mesmo Como Um Outro*, *A Teoria da Percepção*, entre outros. Um texto que é considerado muito difícil, mas não o é. Ele é denso, isso sim, com imensas referências que nem todos entenderão ou compreenderão. Este é, também, um livro de mais de quinhentas páginas com letras miúdas e um entrelinha espremido, o que dificulta a insistência na leitura. Entretanto, talvez como resumo do livro ficam as palavras de Ricoeur quando ele fala nas derradeira páginas do livro de que entre a memória e a história, existe o esquecimento, e que, além dos três - memória, história e esquecimento -, está o perdão, o difícil perdão, tão inalcançável hoje em dia. O difícil perdão tão pouco praticado hoje em dia. Se torna irônico que, apesar de tudo, seja o perdão o embasamento de toda a doutrina moral da sociedade cristã ocidental. Por isso, quanto mais estudarmos a história, quanto mais nos devotarmos à memória coletiva, mais difícil será o esquecimento - seja ele proposital ou involuntário - e, portanto, mais difícil será conceder, mas principalmente ter a humildade de pedir perdão por nossa falhas, percalços, faltas, desrespeitos, preconceitos e pecados.

Rebecca says

"¿En qué medida, el libro de Ricoeur, *La memoria, la historia, el olvido*, aporta insumos teóricos para repensar historiográficamente nuestro presente, nuestra idea sobre la historia y la memoria?" Ricoeur menciona que los grandes fenómenos relativos al pasado son el mnemónico (memoria) y el histórico (historia), versando entre ellos el olvido. Cada uno corresponde una sección de su obra. Una relación de diálogo la que se da entre memoria, historia y olvido. La selección de diálogo no es casual, pues es parte del método de explicación/comprensión que el autor utiliza para dar estructura a su obra, pero también para iluminar las aporías, a la manera de diálogo platónico y puntos ciegos de las problemáticas que envuelven esta intrincada relación entre memoria, la historia y el olvido, no sólo como ser en el pasado sino como ser en el tiempo.

mahatmanto says

belum baca semua tapi udah ngasih rating.
biarin...
habis, emang asyik sih bagian introductionnya.
[haah? baru intro? lelet bangeet bacanya!]
biarin...
ini kotak review kok nggak cerita tentang 'what i learned from this book' seeh?
biarin...

Carl says

I'm reading this as a supplement to the Cultural Memory reading I'm doing-- not sure how closely it will relate, or how much it will help with the problems of source criticism for ancient, oral religious beliefs which I am investigating, but I love Ricoeur, so I'll give it a go anyway! I suspect it would be best if I were to finish the Time and Narrative series first, but this book seems more directly relevant, so I'm going to see what I can get through for the time being. It's huge though. Not sure I'll be able to afford the time.

María Eugenia says

... "la autonomía del conocimiento histórico respecto al fenómeno mnemónico sigue siendo la presuposición principal de una epistemología coherente de la historia en cuanto disciplina científica y literaria" ...Me dejó pensando...

Lisa Parisi says

This book changed my life. That's all I can say.

John says

Um...almost incomprehensible. Only read the first section. The few ideas I was able to grasp, however, did seem pretty remarkable. Still...it's 500 pages on memory, and the overall argumentation is hard to follow.

Andrew says

Phenomenology is often very hard to read, and Ricoeur is no exception. But despite that, all of Ricoeur's observations seem wise and measured. This is dense, not because of obscurantist writing techniques, but because Ricoeur simply has a lot to say. Even when I disagree with him (especially some of his ideas about the historiographic process), I found myself respecting his arguments enough to continue onwards. I wish I had a greater grounding in Norbert Elias, Erving Goffman, and a few other people so I could better comprehend his references, but I still found it to be a pretty darn good intellectual wrestling match.

Jonathan says

Much more readable than I expected, particularly as we are dealing with phenomenological approaches to time, and very clearly structured and argued. Lots of end-notes, so the text itself is actually much shorter than the number of pages suggests.

I agree with his fundamental concerns about 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*", though his slightly Christian attitude to "forgiveness" is not necessarily something I would agree with – some things cannot and should not be forgiven.

His critique of Heidegger's emphasis on the future-facing nature of Dasein (i.e care/anxiety etc) is correct, I think – the weight of the past bears constantly on Being. Care is not simply concentrated on being-toward-death, but has a narrative configuration – Care is orientated towards the various narratives of a self as a whole. It is also embodied in the body, in the flesh, which cannot but be historical – the past is made present

in the ache in my knee when I sit down.

I agree too with his view on "collective memory" – that it exists only in the individual, but is shaped by the relationship with others – it is something which enacts and re-enacts the networks of relationships which make up a community. Identity is a narrative construct, constantly being re-narrated, and its plot, as well as its tropes, come from the being embodied in a community. My memory is uniquely mine, of course, but it is riven with norms of remembrance, with cultural tradition, which are collectively held and always-already there.

He has also made me really want to read Husserl's fifth Cartesian meditation.

????? ??? says