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GADAMER'S DISTANCE AND RICOEUR'S BELONGING

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It is a commonplace that Gadamer's hermeneutics and Ricoeur's hermeneutics emphasize, by way of contrast, a hermeneutics of belonging and a hermeneutics of difference.¹ A corollary to this contrasting emphasis is the attribution of a conservative profile to Gadamer's philosophy and its critical correction in Ricoeur.² In this paper I want to explore how, in a fundamental way, the situation is in fact the reverse. I will defend my claim by looking at Gadamer's and Ricoeur's explications of the hermeneutic structure of human time, which Gadamer construes as an eventful interruption that calls for transformation, and Ricoeur as a three-fold present that binds the finite to the infinite. The juxtaposition of the present as change (against what has been), and the threefold as the extracting of "a figure from a succession" (narrative identity), illustrates—in the logics of

¹ Merold Westphal complained in 2011 that "Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer are often described as opposite poles of hermeneutic thought, with Gadamer elaborating our belonging and Ricoeur our distancing." Merold Westphal, "The Dialectic of Belonging and Distancing in Gadamer and Ricoeur," Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics, eds. Francis J. Mootz II and George H. Taylor (London: Continuum Press, 2011), 43. Although offering a subtle dialectical interpretation of the two hermeneuts, Marc-Antoine Vallée offered a fully-worked-out example of this division of labor. Marc-Antoine Vallée, "La Conception Herméneutique du Langage: Pour une Mise en Dialogue des Herméneutiques de Gadamer et Ricoeur," Dissertation, Département de Philosophie, Université de Montréal, 2011, 71-94.

² For an exposition of this issue, see Dieter Misgeld, "Poetry, Dialogue, and Negotiation: Liberal Culture and Conservative Politics in Hans-Georg Gadamer's Thought," Festivals of *Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work*, ed. Kathleen Wright (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 161-81.

the two theories—a distinctive commitment to transformation (Gadamer) and a distinctive commitment to belonging (Ricoeur).³

I. Gadamer: A Hermeneutics of Interruption

In an essay entitled “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment,” Gadamer proposed, in the context of decades-long upheavals in German philosophy of history and Protestant theology, that historical understanding should distance itself from the objective research methods of the hard sciences.⁴ To support this claim, as the double theme of the title suggests, Gadamer established a dialectic between the ability of history to speak to human beings (*wirkliche Geschichte*), and the interpretive role of a contemporary person or community called by that history.⁵ Both sides of this dialectic are distinctive in philosophical hermeneutics. On the one hand, history has what might be called a strong agency. It is an operative (*wirkliche*) acting being, “ein handelndes Wesen.”⁶ It not only speaks to us, it pulls us up short. On the other hand, as historical beings, we have a role in response to this shock. History’s (or culture’s) interruptions spur us to come to terms with who we are. While the traditional historians in Gadamer’s audience thought of history as an account of what happened in the past, Gadamer proposed the strong agency or effectiveness of history as the driving engine and spur for coming to terms with things as they are and rethinking how we should respond to them. This movement of rupture and repair differs from what we normally think of as dialogue or conversation, and holds the key to Gadamer’s transformational view of the hermeneutic process.⁷

Gadamer begins by invoking Kant’s aphorism that an historical event “does not let itself be forgotten.”⁸ Such an historical address (“Do not forget me!”) means that history makes demands upon us, even if we are not ready to hear them. When an eminent event “suddenly stands still and

³ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. I, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66 (hereafter TN1).

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment,” *Philosophy Today* 16:3, trans. Thomas Wren (1972): 230-40 (hereafter CHEM). The original „Die Kontinuität der Geschichte und der Augenblick der Existenz“ was published originally in an anthology of essays co-edited by Gadamer, Reinhard Wittram, and Jürgen Moltmann.

⁵ Gadamer, CHEM, 231; “Die Kontinuität der Geschichte und der Augenblick der Existenz,” *Gesammelte Werke 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 133-45 (hereafter GW2).

⁶ Gadamer, CHEM, 233; GW2, 137.

⁷ The word *Sinnfigur* contains the idea that meaning is carried in the image, the symbolic or artistic representation as opposed to the literal and linear exposition of descriptive logic. Pictograms and icons convey meanings differently from explanations. The conceptual artist Georg Salner is a good reference here: georgsalner.net/?action=context&text=5. For Gadamer, what is most important about the conception of a *Sinnfigur* is that the meaning is not conveyed through the grammar of the proposition, but through a logic of embodiment. A plot, for instance, is a logic of experience that defies paraphrase; it creates a space that we live in rather than a dictum that we live by.

⁸ CHEM, 233.

remains standing still,” it “seems to help the truth to speak.”⁹ Against the presumptuous belief in “our adjudicating consciousness,” Gadamer asserts that historical events disrupt our assumptions, instigating a “truly real course of events itself,” which is not a looking back, but a refashioning forward.¹⁰

Gadamer’s leitmotif of history as interruption was taken over from Heidegger, who understood the event of being as a history-shattering rupturing of consciousness (*Zerklüftung*) from out of the everydayness of our mundane habits-of-mind, a transporting-breaking-open (*entrückende-eröffnende*) fissure in our indifferent complacencies, a shock to our “unprotected core unleashed by the storm of the event.”¹¹ Heidegger frequently deployed the word *Stoß* (hit, blow) to characterize this unsuspected shock to beings lulled into conventional thinking, and Gadamer carried the term over to the heart of his theory of *Wirkungsgeschichte*.¹² “It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked.”¹³

To be clear—because I do not wish my emphasis to be interpreted as a forced reading of the theory’s political utility—Gadamer folds the shock of interruption immediately into the process of transformation with a fluidity that makes it generally unsuitable for political analogies. Despite Heidegger’s deeply troubled political facing, for him there is a prodigious and difficult preparation for the rare transformative event (*Er-eignis*), something more analogous in proportion and scale to societal transformation, whereas the character of the passage from shock to transformation in Gadamer’s teaching, perfectly suitable to the encounter with a work of art or great text, does not resemble in its rhythms the agonized process of political change. So, before I go to the heart of Gadamer’s theory of interruption, I need to fix Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s contrasting orientations to the dialectic of interruption-transformation as praxis.

The exposition of the interruption-transformation process in Part II-2 of *Truth and Method* exemplifies Gadamer’s version. He later pointed to the fact that his concerns in *Truth and Method* were grounded in aesthetic and literary interests, and that was a telling admission. The *Verwandlung ins Gebilde* of the artwork provides the ready opportunity (through catharsis, for instance) not only to encounter but to begin immediately to come to terms with weakness, evil, suffering, and mortality. Gadamer speaks of “reconstruction and integration” as an immediate

⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe* 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1989), 244, 192, 245, my translation (hereafter *Beiträge*). Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* devotes sixteen folio pages to the word *Stoß*. At its core it is attached to the physical feeling of a punch, kick, butt, or tremor. It is what a passenger in a vehicle feels going over a pot-hole, the jolt of an ungrounded circuit.

¹² Heidegger, *Beiträge*, 17, 87, 108, 160, 169, 172, 235, 237, 242, 260, 283, 315, 318, 353, 384.

¹³ *TM*, 299.

hermeneutic task, which is immanently possible within the ‘as-if’ of the fictive imagination.¹⁴ But his dialectic of question and answer in *Truth and Method* does not describe the prodigious dislocations that accompany the movement from the long, laborious preparation for the kind of transformations that constitute fundamental political change. We see Gadamer’s ready leap (Sprung) in his description of the answer to a question. The rude and unexpected question prompts or quickens a sudden idea (Einfall), an intimation of a solution: “Let us say first of all that it can occur only in the way an idea hits us [wie einem ein Einfall kommt].”¹⁵ Gadamer is clear that the solution does not appear ready-made like a commonplace, since it is a genuine inventional moment: “The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less that a solution occurs to us like an answer to a riddle than that a question occurs to us that breaks through into the open [die Frage einfällt, die ins Offene vorstößt] and thereby makes an answer possible.”¹⁶

This sudden idea is like Heidegger insofar as we are still in the territory of the question, but for Heidegger, there is not an Einfall suggesting the rough contours of a response, but rather an Anfall, a paroxysm that notifies us of the advent of a great coming: “If we knew the law of the advent and absconding of the gods, then we could begin to grasp something of the sudden attack [Anfall] and remaining absent of truth and thus something of the essential occurrence of being.”¹⁷ Heidegger is insistent that the shock of interruption scrambles us and leaves us in a state of suspension: “Yet the intrusion [Anfall] of beyng, as seldom and sparse as it is, always comes out of the persistent remaining of absent of beyng, for the force [Wucht] and endurance of the absence are not less than those of the intrusion.”¹⁸ While “the storm of being is thus allowed to rage,” we are tossed about in “the plight of the abandonment” [die Not der Seinsverlassenheit].¹⁹

By virtue of his growing international exposure, Gadamer was drawn increasingly to think about the ethical and political bearing of his hermeneutics, and as this happened, he showed a keener awareness of the difference between Einfall and Anfall. A greater emphasis on the working of the Stoß, and a less immediate move toward transformation, marks several of the later texts. This change comes out especially clearly in Gadamer’s response to the 1984 Derrida encounter in Paris. In response to what he thought was Derrida’s critical overreach against his hermeneutics of self-understanding, good will, and conversation, Gadamer drew out the significance of the moment of withdrawal in hermeneutic experience. He acknowledged to Derrida that “who we are is

14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik*, (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990), 169 (hereafter WM).

15 “Zunächst halten wir fest, daß es dazu nur so kommen kann, wie einem ein Einfall kommt.“ WM, 372; TM, 372, translation modified.

16 “Das eigentliche Wesen des Einfalls ist vielleicht weniger, daß einem wie auf ein Rätsel die Lösung einfällt, sondern daß einem die Frage einfällt, die ins Offene vorstößt und dadurch Antwort möglich macht.“ TM, 372.

17 *Contributions*, 185, modified; *Beiträge*, 235.

18 *Ibid.*, modified; *Beiträge*, 236.

19 *Contributions*, 237, 240; *Beiträge*, 304.

something unfulfillable, an ever-new undertaking and an ever new defeat.”²⁰ In his letter to Dallmayr after the conference, Gadamer continued to press this point. He asked if he had “too much conceded to reciprocal understanding and mutual agreement,” and not granted enough to the “blow as blow [Stoß], the breach as breach, the unintelligible as unintelligible.”²¹ The letter ends by answering that we are indeed subject to the “undeniable weakness” of the logoi, and that the challenge of the other “not only transforms us but always throws us back on ourselves.”²² So here Gadamer is pulling the reins a bit on the hermeneutic capacity for reconstruction and integration.

For Heidegger the problem was the opposite. The event of encounter with the truth of being, and the transformation it will occasion, has an almost prophetic feel in its epochal-mythological character and scale. The necessity of long periods of difficult preparation for the sudden, brief lighting of truth is the hesitant rhythm of the encounter with being in the *Beiträge*.²³ But it is precisely here that he moves into a grandiose mythologizing that becomes overwrought and portentous: “A people is a people only if it receives its history as allotted to it through finding its god, the god that compels this people beyond itself and thus places the people back amid beings. Only then does a people escape the danger of circling around itself.”²⁴

So, we have an excess and defect, both of which present problems for a political praxis. Yet Heidegger’s excess is closer to the political register and its rhythms. The reason is because the political landscape—partisan struggle in entrenched hegemonic systems—rarely resembles the reader of a text who “is prepared for it to tell him something.”²⁵ Unlike the ideal reader of Truth and Method, most citizens (and non-citizens) live in mass societies that move with the greatest difficulty toward self-understanding, let alone toward becoming vulnerable to the position of the other. Thus, it is crucial to accept Heidegger’s disaggregation of the Stoß-structure from the moment of transformation itself, which may or may not happen at any particular time. All the Stoß does in Heidegger is ready beings for an event whose timing they do not control: “The extent to which the long-since-ungrounded, though yet accessible, coming-to-be can be made ready in that shock depends on the possibility that the interruption readies us for the eruption...”²⁶

Heidegger underlined with great care this temporal caesura between the shock that prepares us and the truth that takes hold, and hermeneutics needs to appreciate the difficulty of the leap. I want to interpose here, however, that Gadamer’s more grounded version, which works as the

20 Hans-Georg Gadamer in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer, eds. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 97.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 101.

23 *Beiträge*, 176 et passim.

24 *Contributions*, 316.

25 Gadamer, TM, 269.

26 “Inwieweit längst Ungründiggewordenes und noch Fortbestehendes und Übliches je noch in eine Anfallbereitschaft gebracht werden kann, das entscheidet mit den möglichen Ausschlagsbereich der Wahrheit des Seyns.“ *Beiträge*, 260, my translation.

engine of understanding as we simply live out our lives, could have its own utility for the political sphere in another sense - whenever we need to deploy prudence and practical reasoning in the conduct of our affairs in the day-to-day life of the community. Indeed, we see Gadamer turning his interruption structure to political account as he turns his attention more regularly to the nature of practical reason after *Truth and Method*. Wherever and whenever the conventional can be addressed by modifications and alignments, we move back into the regions of phronesis. Phronesis is not governed by a phronimos, Gadamer warned, but by social reason, the push and pull of debate among communities of interest.²⁷ So he took a step beyond Heidegger into the socius, and even recognized the dangers lurking in those forms of controversia. Gadamer himself acknowledged that the “abuse of power is the original problem of human coexistence.”²⁸

Gadamer did not focus on the abuse of power and its force in the political context, but there is still a radicality in his hermeneutics that we should not lose sight of. We cannot forget that the “shattering and demolition of the familiar” is the animating center of what he calls the structure of hermeneutic experience.²⁹ Genuine experience is “a sense of the questionableness of something [that] requires of us” some fundamental change.³⁰ The cornerstone of the edifice of philosophical hermeneutics is provocation (Stoß).³¹ However much Gadamer wants us to see our belonging to a tradition, to a set of assumptions, to an ideology, the modus operandi of his theory is how we break away from this belonging.

Stepping back from hermeneutics, we see that the structural logic of interruption-transformation (whether of conscience or structure) is the rudimentary formula of all revolutionary processes. We see it in Rancière, in Badiou, in Levinas, and on and on. To give him his due, Gadamer’s explication of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* is a distinctive expression of the radicalizing moment of interruption with its own special utility even in the public sphere. It provides a topology for just those circumstances in which consciousness can turn. Those moments may be rare, but they cannot be discounted, and they need to be in our tool kit. There is a way in which, before we turn to Ricoeur, I would like to suggest Gadamer gives us a powerful resource to make his theory of interruption more suitable for the political register.

The most suitable way to incorporate Gadamer’s praxis into a viable political orientation is by keeping it firmly attached to his instruction on the Greek idea of the tragic.³² Here is how the

²⁷ On this point see my paper, “Who Are We and Who Am I? Gadamer’s Communal Ontology as Palimpsest,” *Communication Studies* 51:1 (2000): 15-34.

²⁸ This common was made in 1983. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 218.

²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 104.

³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 42.

³¹ TM, 299.

³² Gadamer, TM, 116.

Verwandlung escapes being politically naïve. In the history lecture I began with, Gadamer identified two modalities (knowledge and comportment) of transformation with the rich Kierkegaardian-Diltheyan-Heideggerian concept of the Augenblick, the “fulfilled act of seeing” (der erfüllte Blick des Augens).³³ Kierkegaard fleshed out this complex structure in his many reflections on the Augenblick. As it is characterized in 1 Corinthians 15:52, the Augenblick relates three distinct moments, not one, and they occur in sequence: “We shall not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”³⁴ The three parts occur ad seriatim. The first is the strike or blow from without. A light from the heavens knocks a Pharisee off his horse. The second is blind moment of realization, recognition, awareness. I suddenly see. (Gadamer has a lot to say about the structure of the second moment elsewhere.) The third part is the changed life that ensues after the sudden event. Agency is transferred to or accepted by the person who received the blow, and the imperative for a new habituation emerges from the transference, a new existential structure of intention, conviction, action, and commitment. Saul changes his name, his religion, and his way of life.

The philosophical fascination with the Augenblick has always been that it telescopes time in its paradoxical structure. The knowledge that is received in the blow contains multitudes, or rather, contains the sweep of time before and after, and it is only a moment. It is, in effect, the eternal present housed in the broken vessel of a finite being. The best explanation of this paradoxical structure in Gadamer is his brief commentary in *Truth and Method* on the sociologist Georg Simmel’s concept of the adventure (das Abenteuer), which describes the temporal logic of the personal event as simultaneously a compression and an expansion (analogous to the metaphysical doctrine of complicatio-explicatio in Cusanus) in the personal experience of the adventurer: “An adventure, however, interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus, an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength.”³⁵ Gadamer does something extra with Simmel’s wonderful idea that should not be missed. He adds that the meaning of the event has to be taken up, worked into (eingearbeitet), and threaded through the larger life which it so abruptly interrupts:

It is not simply that an experience remains vital only as long as it has not been fully integrated into the context of one’s life consciousness, but the very way it is “preserved and dissolved” (aufgehoben) by being worked into the whole of life consciousness goes far beyond

³³ Gadamer, *CHEM*, 237, GW 2, 142.

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15, *The New American Bible*, vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/___PZK.HTM.

³⁵ Gadamer, *TM*, 69.

any “significance” it might be thought to have. Because it is itself within the whole of life, the whole life is present in it too.³⁶

How does the life become informed by the event in this way? The secret to this process, I think, lies in the temporal paradox itself. Although the Augenblick holds the whole of the life within itself, it is only a finite moment; likewise, the whole of the life becomes informed by the event, but the whole can never find the intensity and perfection of the moment’s insight. The two are, therefore, co-dependent, in the genuine sense of being bound in a mutual imperfection. They are condemned to each other as a perpetual task. From this perspective, Gadamer is no utopianist.

Progress, to the extent that there is any, is advanced by the operation of what Gadamer calls reflective consciousness, the back-and-forth relay of event to life and life to event. Reflective consciousness is a heightened awareness, a second-order practice of remaining aware of the entailments that our finite condition prescribes. Thus, the mode of comportment (which would otherwise be just a habit) is fed by the mode of knowledge, the realization of our finitude spurred by the confrontation with reality. The way Gadamer explains this in the history essay is to say that the Augenblick “necessitates choice.”³⁷ If history stands still in the moment because we are pulled up short, that is not the end of it. It compels us by its force to take up and work through what we have just experienced. And what we discover in that process is something more than just a truth we cannot avoid; it forces us to take up another way of living, a new comportment. In Gadamer’s words, “it is important to produce within ourselves” a consciousness of history’s agency, “to take its truth upon ourselves.”³⁸ A “hermeneutically-trained mind” is “a capacity to learn” rather than an achieved knowledge.³⁹

The analogy of the historical event in “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment” with the tragic triad of peripeteia, anagnorisis and catharsis allows us finally to understand the working relationship of knowledge and comportment as something that occurs at a cost. Tragic knowledge is a knowledge that implicates us, that we realize either gradually or all at once has grave consequence for who we are and what our life means, and so coming to terms with that is unavoidable. Hermeneutics sometimes arrives too quickly at belonging, and this premature arrival can cover over the terrible tension between distance and belonging that marks our fate. So we need to slow down and appreciate the structure of meaning that Gadamer analogizes to tragic recognition (anagnorisis). The idea is that terrible knowledge is not resolved without an increase

36 Ibid., 69. „Nicht nur, daß es als Erlebnis nur so lange lebendig ist, als es in den Zusammenhang des eigenen Lebensbewußtseins noch nicht völlig eingearbeitet ist. Auch die Weise, wie es durch seine Verarbeitung im Ganzen des Lebensbewußtseins >aufgehoben< ist, geht über jede >Bedeutung< grundsätzlich hinaus, von der einer selbst zu wissen meint.“ WM, 75.

37 CHEM, 237.

38 Ibid., 238.

39 Gadamer, TM, 299; „das hermeneutisch geschulte Bewußtsein“ WM, 304; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 123.

of being, an elevation and deepening of understanding. The disruption has both cost and benefit, an irreparable loss which comes, paradoxically, with the fullest recognition of something irreplaceably meaningful.

Gadamer says that we need “to deal with terrible knowledge and so to manage it, and in a certain respect to take its truth upon ourselves.”⁴⁰ Whether we bear some personal responsibility for a terrible flaw or not, we as citizens need to be instructed by it to avoid its repetition. The structure of traumatic repression is bivalent, since the two parties involved, persecutor and victim, have parallel but inverse interests. The persecutor lives peaceably in the aftermath of a harm either by suppressing the truth or expiating the guilt. The victim finds peace in the aftermath either by repressing the trauma or exposing the crime. In a moral universe in which repression is understood to be pathological, however, there is only one path. Responsibility must be owned, atonement sought, and a levy paid. This is the necessary response to past harm for both persecutor and victim. That is what sets up the structure of hermeneutic consciousness. The shock of recognition is the rupture that precipitates a coming-to-terms-with the repression of the past and the atonement of the future. The charge “to hold fast and to preserve those things which have faded and fallen into forgottenness” comes from the juxtaposition of two temporalities - the initial shock, the Augenblick, and the fading from memory, which must be fought back.⁴¹ It is because we are aware of “the constant sinking away of everything” that we realize we have to do what we can to hold onto to some things, i.e., those things we cannot afford to forget, because they quite literally inform who we are, aware or unaware.⁴² We have in our mind the impact of the shock, and its significance, and we see that significance fading from our grasp as the impact of the experience fades. It is that contrast that creates the feeling of obligation “to hold fast and to preserve.” This juxtaposition and sense of obligation make plain the distance between knowledge and comportment. Comportment makes knowledge last; knowledge stands vigilant over comportment.

An “existential moment” follows the pattern of catharsis.⁴³ A Lebensvollzug is a step up of consciousness, a meta-consciousness that is wrenched around to see itself, not in the way of objective observers who can “raise ourselves above the course of events,” but in the way of someone who has been forced to come to terms with their own strangeness.⁴⁴

The downside effect of catastrophe (pathos), reversal (peripeteia), and recognition (anagnorisis) is the pattern for the structure of hermeneutic experience. The affront of the peripeteia does not just catch us off guard and grab our attention like a deer in the headlights—it also gets us to thinking (dianoia).

⁴⁰ CHEM, 238.

⁴¹ Ibid., 240.

⁴² Ibid., 240.

⁴³ Ibid., 239.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 237.

Aristotle designates the part of the plot that follows the peripeteia as what is commonly translated as “dénouement” (outcome), a translation that obscures the multiple meanings of the Greek word *lisis*, which means literally unweaving or unknotting, a significant derivation of which is *ana-lisis*, breaking down for purposes of understanding.⁴⁵ As Michael Davis points out, the unravelling of the plot consequent upon the terrible revelation means just as much solve as resolve: “Lisis, in its deepest sense, is not a part of the plot but a second sailing—a rereading that makes visible what was implicit from the outset but could never have been seen without first having been missed.”⁴⁶ The *lisis* as a structural function of plot is therefore analogous to the mental process of *dianoia* that results in tragic wisdom, and *pari passu*, the knowledge of historical understanding. Stephen Halliwell explains that, for Aristotle, *catharsis* is a form of contemplation, the work of *ana-lisis*, and “to ‘reason’ or ‘infer,’ will accordingly imply an intricate, unfolding process of attentive comprehension. To understand in this way is to see an accumulating structure of meanings.”⁴⁷ The protagonist’s working out (*ana-lisis*) of the tragic situation is precipitated by an interruption that is ultimately responsible for the transformation the protagonist undergoes, and the subsequent tragic identity is nothing other than the tragic history inscribed on the person. Tragic awareness, an inexpiable guilt, is now what keeps the protagonist tethered to the working out.

II. Ricoeur: The Aporetic Structure of the Hermeneutics of Time.

My assignment of an unconventional attribution of difference? and belonging to Gadamer and Ricoeur is not about an insuperable philosophical difference, but of their different appropriations from Heidegger’s hermeneutic initiative. Both were partisans of the hermeneutic process of understanding, which means encountering the difficulty of understanding and attempting to overcome it, and both were informed by the tragedy of finitude and the imperfection of any understanding. But, whereas Gadamer concentrated on the process of understanding triggered by hermeneutic interruption (*Stoß*), Ricoeur focused narrative understanding on the hermeneutic structures of projecting ahead and reading back. His adoption of the Heideggerian sense of *Dasein* as time in the aporetic structure of a threefold present is a belonging structure devoutly to be wished.

⁴⁵ Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 474, 522, 538-39.

⁴⁶ Michael Davis, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Poetry of Philosophy* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 93.

⁴⁷ Stephen Halliwell, “Pleasure, Understanding, and Emotion,” *Essays on Aristotle’s Poetics*, ed. Amélie O. Rorty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 249.

Ricoeur regards time as a unity, even if human beings lack “the secret of its completeness.”⁴⁸ He reads the intellectual history of Western thought about time as a series of attempts to solve its intractable aporias, and he presents his own narrative theory of time as one of those attempts. The aporia that looms over all the others is the stubborn irreconcilability of objective and subjective time—the sovereign objectivity of chronological time and the subjective perception of time as it is experienced by human beings. The former describes time as an objective reality of the cosmos independent of human perception, and the latter as the subjective experience of the soul or mind. In Ricoeur’s reading, Aristotle and Augustine established these two paradigmatic approaches to time, respectively, as the dominant Western paradigms. Kant followed Aristotle by hypothesizing time as an a priori condition of possibility of experience outside the range of perception, and Husserl followed Augustine by attempting to make time visible to perception. Although all of these thinkers in one way or another acknowledged a connection between objective and subjective senses of time, their work served to deepen the aporia rather than resolve it.

Heidegger attempted to undermine the aporia, first with reference to time-out-of-mind (“world-time”), and then with reference to the subjective-objective admixture he called public time. In the first case, what Heidegger called “world-time” is neither objective nor subjective, but “‘earlier’ than any subjectivity or objectivity.”⁴⁹ In the second case, the intermixture of human and cosmic being, on account of the ecstatico-temporal nature of Dasein, creates or discovers public time: “One directs oneself according to it, so that it must somehow be the sort of thing which Everyman can come across.”⁵⁰ These two genres of time, world-time and public time, themselves merge through the process Heidegger calls worlding. If world-time is not dependent on Dasein (time is the very possibility of any before or after), it “gets enhanced and strengthened” in Dasein’s reckoning with it.⁵¹ Heidegger attempts the cosmological bridgework of worlding with some of the same interweaving narrative devices that Ricoeur will later elaborate, calling up the plenum of “procedures of connection” such as calendars, archives, and documents.⁵² Heidegger also anticipates Ricoeur in confronting the plurality of the scales of objective time: “Our understanding of the natural clock develops with the advancing discovery of Nature, and instructs us as to new possibilities of a kind of time-measurement which is relatively independent of the day and of any explicit observation of the sky.”⁵³

48 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 64 (hereafter TN3).

49 *Ibid.*, 472.

50 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 464 (hereafter BT).

51 *Ibid.*, 468.

52 TN3, 99

53 *Ibid.*, 468.

So, much of Ricoeur's theory of time is basically an extension of the second half of *Being and Time*. But Ricoeur judged Heidegger's effort to surmount the dualism of time there to be unsatisfactory and incomplete:

For someone who is attracted wholly to the polemic that Heidegger has undertaken, by designating ordinary time the universal time of astronomy, the physical sciences, biology, and, finally, the human sciences, and by attributing the genesis of this alleged ordinary time to the leveling off of the aspects of phenomenological time, for this sort of reader *Being and Time* appears to end in failure—the failure of the genesis of the ordinary concept of time.⁵⁴

This failure was a result of Heidegger's focus on death as the event that distinguishes each "I" from all others. Ricoeur believed that Heidegger abandoned this focus after the turn, when *Dasein* is absorbed into the poetic word "which preserves (*bewahrt*), what has been opened up."⁵⁵ But the analytic of existential time is closed off from the many routes to the interweaving structures of world-time, public time, and *existentiell* time. The "plurality of temporalities" uncovered by the newer scientific revelations of "quantum time, thermodynamic time, the time of galactic transformations, or that of the evolution of species" expose the inadequacy of Heidegger's analytics of historicity and within-time-ness both to the scale and nature of the disparity between these genres of time, and the richness of *Dasein*'s responses to those disparities.⁵⁶

So, Heidegger's insufficient effort to bridge cosmic time and world time is Ricoeur's jumping off point for *Time and Narrative 3*. The bridge that Ricoeur throws between phenomenological and cosmic time is fully a constitutive idiom of human mediation, not a discovery, but an invention: "This form of time is a genuine creation that surpasses the resources of both physical and psychological time."⁵⁷ This "third time" is on the one side a product of human invention. The calendar, generational succession, documentary evidence, the archive are all forward emplacements against the ruin of time, the finiteness of perspective, mortality, and memory. The eventfulness of the calendar date is elaborated in an extensive repertoire of institutional supports to secure and promote the anchorage of public time. This third time is a hybrid form that, in the plasticity and richness of its devices, links subjective experience with not only shared cultural institutional and historical identities, but to the most remote spheres of temporal relation. Burial rituals, for example, are a veritable index of the modal expressions of temporality, both of continuity and rupture, of incommensurability and heterogeneity. Ricoeur points to the genres of Greek and Roman elegy and to the scriptural genre of lamentation as forms of recognition of the aporetic character of our temporality:

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 233.

⁵⁶ TN3, 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

We can thus swing from one feeling to the other: from the consolation that we may experience in discovering a kinship between the feeling of Being-thrown-into-the-world and the spectacle of the heavens and the spectacle of the heavens where time shows itself, to the desolation that unceasingly reemerges from the contrast between the fragility of life and the power of time, which is more destructive than anything else.⁵⁸

The resources of a narrative poetics have from time immemorial been enlisted in this work of encounter, in celebration, mourning, and speculation, illustrating Ricoeur's central claim that, although we can never fully resolve the breach between the time of the soul and the cosmos, we can put it to work.

The imperfect mediation of time's registers is modelled on Heidegger's mediation in a second way—their common critique of Hegel. Time's Janus face, for Hegel, outstrips itself by its very logic, proceeding toward reconciliation. Ricoeur's rejection of Hegel was only partial; he did not reject the desideratum of a unity, but rather of the false hope that it is within our grasp. Heidegger's critique of Hegel is more complicated, because it involves the interposition of death, which, even as late as the *Beiträge*, he characterized as the positive condition of understanding: "Running ahead towards death . . . is the highest Da-sein, the one that incorporates the protection of the 'there' into the intimate steadfastness of enduring the truth."⁵⁹ That is a line of critique that leads us down the path to Gadamer, so we will come back to that in the conclusion. Right now we have to see how Ricoeur deals with Hegel.

“Triplification”

As Ricoeur sets out to conceptualize an aspirational, never-fully realizable, and therefore tragic mediation of times, he carries Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger along with him. But it is Augustine, Husserl, and Heidegger who provide the spine or through-line for his effort, since these three subscribe to some version of what Ricoeur calls triplification.⁶⁰ Whether priority is given to the future, the present, or the past, an imperfect union of time involves the bleeding over, overlapping, or grasping together of the seemingly separated temporal modes—Augustine by the dialectic of *distentio* and *intentio*, Husserl through the interaction of *protention* and *retention*, and Heidegger through the interweaving of the ecstatic structures of *care* (*forehaving*, *foregrasping*). Ricoeur thinks what is unfinished in this direction of thought is the closer interweaving of the phenomenological structures of the temporal ecstasies to the hermeneutic structures of *within-time-ness*, which will not close the gap between subjective and

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University sPress, 2012), 257, modified; *Beiträge*, 65, 325.

⁶⁰ Ricoeur, TN1, 8.

objective time, but will show how their reciprocity is animated. Such a result will reinforce the fundamental connectedness of these disparate parts as beings-in-the-world.

In making this case, as I have said, he is continuing and extending Heidegger's project from the last half of *Being and Time*, and his attempt to repair Heidegger's "failure" there reveals the inflection point of Ricoeur's entire project. His mending of the breach between Aristotle and Augustine, Husserl and Kant, is in an imperfect mediation, weaker than Hegel's and more expansive than Heidegger's, but a mediation nevertheless. Ricoeur's project remains what he named it from the beginning, a search for "some collective singular reality."⁶¹ What I am going to try to understand is how Ricoeur imagines this premise of unity.

For Ricoeur, narrative order is not superimposed on a recalcitrant chaos but elicited from a recalcitrant potential. His basic strategy is clear. The schema of the threefold mimesis of time in the first volume of *Time and Narrative*—how time is narrativized by discourse—is to be transposed now to the weak mediation of a hermeneutics of universal history. This narrative-hermeneutic mediation involves the employment of both continuity and rupture. Employment is a device of human ordering, a technique that Ricoeur describes as extracting "an order from a succession" and as "a synthesis of heterogeneous orders."⁶² On the side of continuity, narrative provides a repository of ordering devices—diegetic composition, anchor points, founding events, axial moments, archetypal figures, etc.—knitting together disparate and heterogeneous elements in a unity. On the side of rupture, it involves complication, interruption, reversal, accident, chaos, dissolution. The author of a narrative fiction, of course, controls the ratio of these two opposing dynamics, while the historiographer has far less control, and that difference becomes the crux of Ricoeur's meditations on time in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*. The recalcitrance of history to narrative is part and parcel of the resistance of the wider universe to human comprehension.

The key challenge in the mediation of the two orders is to say whether the objective time of the cosmos and the "singular, incomparable, unique" experience of subjective experience are of a piece.⁶³ Narrative fiction, Ricoeur believes, is not a superimposition of order, but an extraction. Because its material is the concrete and unique experience of the imagination, it is not a subsuming template but a collaborative dialectic, a dialectic that owns its own limitations: "Fiction, I will say, is a treasure trove of imaginative variations applied to the theme of phenomenological time and its aporias."⁶⁴ The principle running through this recitation of treasures, and one of the things that mark Ricoeur's improvement on Heidegger, is the assertion that narrative bridges are constitutionally plural and heterogeneous: "And this contribution continues to lie in the

⁶¹ TN3, 102.

⁶² Ricoeur, TN1, 66, 83.

⁶³ Ricoeur, TN3, 128.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

imaginative variations that attest to the fact that eternity . . . can be said in many different ways.”⁶⁵ Every narrative connector between subjective and objective time is individual to the particular narrative work. This is not a secondary attribute of the narrative response but essential to it. The infinite creativity of the narrative account of phenomenological time matches the immensity and plurivocality of cosmic time on its end:

The study of the interplay of imaginative variations will have the task of clarifying this relation of the aporia to the ideal type of its resolution. In fact, it is principally in fictional literature that the innumerable ways in which *intentio* and *distentio* combat each other and harmonize with each other are explored in this literature is the irreplaceable instrument for the exploration of the discordant concordance that constitutes the cohesiveness of a life.⁶⁶

What are these imaginative variations that constitute the treasure trove of fictional bridges? The devices Ricoeur describes are suitably heterogeneous—motifs, plot devices, scenes, tropes, dreams, signs, actions, moments, meaning-effects, figures, monologues. The commonality of them all is that they relate (as incongruous, paradoxical, consonant, constitutive, irrelevant, contingent, integral) the personal experience of temporality and its impersonal uncaring immensity. They match in their heterogeneity the multiplicity of times and time scales that objective time throws at subjective experience. The imaginative variations that fiction provides are not a pale echo, or a useful confirmation, but the very thing that corrects the deficiencies of that structure as a conceptualization of time: “[L]iterature is the irreplaceable instrument for the exploration of the discordant concordance that constitutes the cohesiveness of a life.”⁶⁷ Each variation is a unique conceptualization of the dialectical exchange, a working out of its plural embodiments with the heterogeneity proper to it.

We cannot miss how this textual weaving process relates directly to the phenomenological structure of the threefold (“triplicity”).⁶⁸ Augustine’s famous analogy of the reading of a line of poetry in Book XI of the *Confessions*, the very paradigm of the structure of hermeneutic understanding as a three-fold present, provides only the primary colors of which the imaginative variations on time are its application in an infinite palette. So, for example, the characters in Mrs. Dalloway are each an “anchorage point” of the interweaving connections between human time, clock time, and cosmic time.⁶⁹ Each of these anchor points works out a different relation of response, and all of them are valuable encounter with its aporias. These imaginative variations are, thus, the missing link between the hermeneutic rule of the threefold, which remains lodged in subjective experience, and our broken or troubled relation to cosmic time in its profound indifference. Ricoeur reads the two competencies as necessary collaborators: “What does the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁸ Ricoeur, TN1, 12.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

dialectic of *intentio*/*distentio* signify if not a rule for interpreting the recitation of a poem as well as the unity of a vaster story, extended to the dimension of an entire life, even to that of universal history?"⁷⁰ Ricoeur emphasizes that "the major contribution of fiction to philosophy does not lie in the range of solutions it proposes for the discordance between the time of the world and lived time but in the exploration of the nonlinear features of phenomenological tie that historical time conceals due to the very fact that it is set within the great chronology of the universe."⁷¹ The phenomenological heritage had oriented time to human experience (even though Heidegger broadened its scope to world-time), so the task of the imaginative variations of narrative is explore that bias as a problem. Thus also the snow storm in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* depicts the character of the incongruity "when internal time, freed from the chronological constraints, collides with cosmic time, exalted by this contrast."⁷² The imaginative variations of fiction do not solve the last great *aporia* of the phenomenology of time consciousness, but they attempt to come to terms with it.

Ricoeur's privileged example of hermeneutic temporality, throughout his works, is Judeo-Christian scripture. One can easily see why it serves as an exemplary case for the narrative encounter of cosmic time and time-consciousness. Its patch-quilt of texts explores the poignant depths of our temporal predicament, our smallness in the universe, and the disproportion of finitude and infinity with rich and fecund variations. Not only does it provide an extraordinary wealth of narrative resources to engage the connections between temporal modalities of existential pathos and within-timeness, it is a canvas upon which meditation on these temporal ecstases and their *aporias* is part of the textual weave itself. Scripture becomes, by Ricoeur's way of thinking, "a vast field of words open to comparisons and linkages without any constraint or limit on this process," an analogy for human time closer to the spatial image of the papyrus scroll than to the modern codex.⁷³ Scriptural understanding works on the scale of eschatological history, and the confrontation with mortality and infinity is an inescapable part of its narrative-hermeneutic work.

I have to show now how Ricoeur's biblical exemplar is the paradigmatic illumination of the graft of the triple ecstases to universal time. In each of the three ecstases, narrative resources of Scripture are deployed to throw a bridge over the chasm of time, and where this bridge fails, to confront the failure as an aspect of its own hermeneutic.⁷⁴

Ecstasis 1. Back-Filling. The conventionally backward orientation of history is transformed in the hermeneutic imagination from an account of what is no longer (in the linear

⁷⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁷¹ Ibid., 132.

⁷² Ibid., 137.

⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 285 (hereafter TB).

⁷⁴ Ricoeur went to great pains to keep separate his philosophical and theological thinking. I both respect and appreciate this effort yet find an absolute separation unsustainable in the end.

account) to an interanimating structure of the present with the past. The backward-stretching of Ricoeur's textual temporality is plainly indebted to Kierkegaard's, Husserl's, and Heidegger's phenomenological accounts. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl's theory of synthesizing consciousness involves, as Jay Lampert explains it, "a self-propelling, self-explicating system of interpretative acts driven by ongoing forward and backward references, grounding its structures as it proceeds, and positing its origins as that which must have been given 'in advance'."⁷⁵ Heidegger amplifies Husserl's concept of "referring backward" (*zurückweisen*) by drawing on Kierkegaard's much denser ethical concept of repetition: "Repeating [*Wiederholung*, fetch back again] is handing down explicitly—that is to say, going back into the possibilities [*der Rückgang in Möglichkeiten*] of the *Dasein* that has-been-there." Macquarrie and Robinson explain *Wiederholung* as "an attempt to go back to the past and retrieve former possibilities, which are thus 'explicitly handed down' or 'transmitted'."⁷⁶ *Wiederholung* is not a mechanical repetition, but a recovery of the hidden possibilities that were present in an original moment. This repetition requires a momentary vision (*Augenblick*) in which the possibilities of a past, rather than its recorded decision, are recovered.⁷⁷ The going back into possibilities is the active appropriation of latent possibilities that lie ready.⁷⁸

Ricoeur applies this backward-stretching of phenomenology, and this will always be the case for him, to a reading tradition. We "read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences."⁷⁹ This reactualization is a process of unification: "[R]epetition is the name given to the process with which, on the derived level of historicity the anticipation of the future, the recovery of falseness, and the moment of vision (*augenblicklich*) in tune with 'its time' reconstitute their unity."⁸⁰ It is important to understand that this discovery of unity is not a superimposition, but rather a retrospective augmentation of possibilities (a "seeing more in") through imitation. New iterations of an original model actually change the model itself by a "recoil effect."⁸¹ We are forever "rethinking the event in its internal thought."⁸²

Ecstasis 2. Forward-Filling. The accent of the phenomenon of repetition in the structure of reading backward is past oriented, but it contains, in nuce, a Hegelian opposite, because every

⁷⁵ Jay Lampert, *Synthesis and Backward Reference in Husserl's Logical Investigations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), viii.

⁷⁶ John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson in Heidegger, BT, 437.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, sect. 74, 436.

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2001), 385 (hereafter SZ). See Wenche Marit Quist, "When your Past Lies Ahead of You: Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the Concept of Repetition," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 1 (2002): 78-92.

⁷⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdés (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 110.

⁸⁰ TN3, 76.

⁸¹ Ricoeur, TB, 302.

⁸² Ricoeur, TN3, 146.

act of repetition is also a fulfillment of prophecy. Repetition as a new iteration takes the time of the past and the present and sets it on the path the future.

We become, in hailing the past, the fulfillment of its prophecy. In reciprocating its having-once-been, we are the instantiation of its futural promise, of its soon-to-be. Every act of citation, paraphrase, or echo is a displacement or transference of contexts in potentiating a backward-forward motion, a perpetual extension of the prophetic vision into the future as a narrative expression of a prophesied faith. Creation looking back, prophecy looking forward, are all components of the universalist vocabulary of the scriptural hermeneutics of time, knitting together acting, suffering, and witnessing humanity with infinity.

Ricoeur borrows this Heideggerian structure, this backward-forward enactment of temporality, and then once again textualizes it. The past “leaves behind a storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities. But it requires prophecy and its eschatology to open this initial surplus of meaning that, so to speak, lies dreaming in the traditional narrative.”⁸³ There are three things to explicate about this crucial formulation.

First, the fact that meaning runs back and forth between the past and the future, from this angle, folds the present into the future. Such a folding is consonant with Heidegger’s temporal logic of care, which puts a premium on the anxious expectation driving the whole train. The future (Zukunft) is the origin (Herkunft). Hermeneutic temporality redescribes being-in-the-world as “anticipation itself.”⁸⁴ We derive our sense of the meaning of our lives from hopes of fulfillment that connect the end to the beginning. In this sense, Dasein “is always coming towards itself” and “is in every case already its ‘not-yet’.”⁸⁵ So, in the Heideggerian mode, we are always understanding the present as, in effect, the past of the future, and grasping time together in this way is how Dasein makes its way through life.

A second feature of the formulation is Ricoeur’s reorienting of meaning to biblical genres of cosmic time. Prophecy can refer to future presents in mortal time (e.g., the flood, the second coming), but eschatology is the coming of an eternal present in the register of the infinite. What lies dreaming in the traditional narrative is not the virgin birth, but what the virgin birth prophecies. The oracular function of the “messenger’s formula” is an “announcement (Verkündigung) of judgment or salvation.”⁸⁶ Ricoeur draws a distinction between prophetic and eschatological genres insofar as the “imminence that the prophet confronts is decidedly intrahistorical,” whereas eschatology is directed to end times.⁸⁷ Eschatology is paired with narratives of the apocalypse, which transpose the futural character of prophecy onto the scale of cosmic history. As Ricoeur

⁸³ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 176 (hereafter FTS).

⁸⁴ Heidegger, BT, sect. 53, 307.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 373; 288.

⁸⁶ Ricoeur, TB, 166, 168.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

develops this strain of the openness of the text to the future, Heidegger's meticulous focus on Dasein as pivot point gathers distance in the rear-view mirror. The individual soul will always be an object of care in the ethic of the gospel, but it is taken up into a much larger story that surpasses our comparatively insignificant concerns with world history.

The third thing to notice about Ricoeur's formula is that it is in the character of the narrative as text that it achieves its availability to the future. Although Ricoeur acknowledges the fact "that the prophetic message was initially oral," the faith tradition's transference from *Sitz im Leben* of exodus to *Sitz in Schrift* as scriptural is what assures "the destiny of the message as able to reach other receivers" in the distance of time.⁸⁸ The text's "fixed basis for its subsequent history" is axiomatic for Ricoeur's understanding of hermeneutic understanding, and the addition that renders the phenomenology of time consciousness a hermeneutic process for him.⁸⁹ It is in the capacity of the text to leave "behind a storehouse of inexhaustible potentialities" continually renewed that gives life to the future.⁹⁰

Ecstasis 3. Both Ends Against the Middle. The capacity of the hermeneutic imagination to find genuine connections across disparate temporal registers opens up in every direction. The reciprocating ends do not obviate the need for a present moment; there is not some empty hole or equivocal absence in the middle between the past and the future. In addition to the oscillation backward and forward, there is a momentary stillness, a point of rest, in the present. Augustine focused on this moment, and Heidegger for his own reasons didn't, but even for Heidegger it is inextricable in the structure of the ecstasies. The mid-place that the present occupies or manifests is the junction point that allows past and future to smooth time out; past and future are busy feeding the center that is the very presumption of their work. Ricoeur puts it this way: "[T]he gap between the time of the world and lived time is bridged only by constructing some specific connectors that serve to make historical time conceivable and manipulable."⁹¹ Ricoeur is using spatial terminology here, and this allows him to refer to the Christ-event as a narrative moment that refers equivocally to that whole nexus of persons, actions, and experiences that give the present moment substance. A connector or connecting point is not just a transit point or relay station, it is also a charging station, a potentiator, an energy cell.

Thus, for Ricoeur, the present is both the crossing point and sum of hermeneutic and phenomenological identity as "concentric understanding."⁹² In the theological writings he develops not only the three temporal methods of self-gathering (the how), but also the modes of intersection (the who, the when, the where). Texts (the where) serve as the topography of human

⁸⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, translated by David Pellauer. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 176.

⁹¹ TN3, 182.

⁹² FTS, 130.

time, person and community (the who) serve as the locus of identity, and axial date (the when) serves as the pivot or midpoint of the gathering sum, interpretively organizing cultural, political, and economic life. To complete our understanding of Ricoeur's commitment to the threefold I will take these three intersectional joins in order.

Text. The "crisscrossing" of textual meaning unites historical fragments into a single texture, a kind of thatch-work of events and personages as a punctuated story,⁹³ enacting what Heidegger calls the "perseveringly changing connectedness of" human experience—its "interconnections of Being" (Seinszusammenhängen).⁹⁴ The textual version of this weaving process is what Ricoeur calls intersignification.⁹⁵ Intersignification awakens new possibilities in the Old Testament, trips off "sparks of new meaning"—and at the same time informs and guides what follows. "[W]hat augmentation in meaning each text receives from the other through such intersecting readings" creates ever "new, originally unnoticed effects."⁹⁶ What it means to interpret is simply "to seek, in the other levels of significations crossed by the same signifier—the cosmological level, the social level, the level of institutions—the same functioning meaning."⁹⁷ For any one of the bible's texts to signify is "to intersignify every other level," while all levels "intersignify one another."⁹⁸ The sophistication of this process shows an extraordinary capacity for transfer through the various institutions of biblical reading and transmission. The Word is integrated into the life of the faithful, whether through evangelism, homiletics, ritual observances and holy days, and the weaving intersignification of this single Word finds its way into the multiplicity of daily life in a continual work of integration, until the faithful themselves become allegories of that great text.

Archetype. In this relay from text to life and back again, the biblical Word provides rich narrative resources that serve to enhance this binding process—the recapitulation of the Old Testament in the New, for instance, and the recurring typologies of narrative figures. The productive ambiguity of the prophet role as it develops in the New Testament provides a narrative instruction in continuity and change. Typology allows scripture to read "the economy of the Hebraic structure with its characters events, and institutions) as a prefiguration of the Christian economy of salvation."⁹⁹ And then John the Baptist and Jesus define themselves as part of this tradition with and against type. An archetype is an historical figure (broadly construed—persona or symbol) capable of embodying the universal and the concrete simultaneously, "a name that is

⁹³ Ibid., 160.

⁹⁴ Heidegger, BT, 426, 270; SZ, 228.

⁹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit* vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983), 89.

⁹⁶ Paul Ricoeur and André LaCocque, *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies* trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 295,296.

⁹⁷ Ricoeur, FTS, 143.

⁹⁸ TB, 302, 303.

⁹⁹ Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, 282.

the point of intersection and the index of incompleteness.”¹⁰⁰ The story of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection gives “to the word ‘God’ a density that the word ‘being’ does not possess,” a density that anticipates all future enunciations and embodiments of what it expresses, and clarifies previous iterations of its occurrence with the force of recognition.¹⁰¹ A typological grammar allows history to be told as the inventive repetition of what Ricoeur calls “kerygmatic kernels” that structure time in “concentric understanding.”¹⁰² If the birth of Christ is the defining event of salvation history, it is only because that event is anticipated and repeated in the course of time. The archetype (a) is, in Ricoeur’s phrase, an “enigma-expression,” a narrative symbol that contains too much meaning, (b) is overdetermined, and (c) must be worked out by life itself, in doing what we may call, in a Heideggerian spirit, a recollection-forward. The ability of the type to refer both backward and forward in time is a lynchpin of the ecstatic structure of the threefold on the textual stage of narrative history.

Axial Date. The discursive-concrete juncture of the present is the axial date: “On the basis of a periodic system of dates, a perpetual calendar allows us to allocate a particular date, that is, some particular place in the system of all possible dates, to an event that bears the mark of the present and by implication that of the past or the future.”¹⁰³ The concentration of identity in an *Augenblick* is an active construction of the imagination: “Dates are assigned to potential [future] presents, to imagined [past] presents. In this way, all the memories accumulated by a collective memory can become date events, due to their inscription in calendar time.”¹⁰⁴ The axial date serves as a kind of siphon to draw in and focus a community’s emotional investments, providing a temporal mechanism for reflective awareness and ritual reinforcement:

I have in mind those events that a historical community holds to be significant because it sees in them an origin, a return to its beginnings. These events, which are said to be ‘epoch-making,’ draw their specific meaning from their capacity to found or reinforce the community’s consciousness of its identity, its narrative identity, as well as the identity of its members.¹⁰⁵

The axial date creates a radial present that connects a community with its narratives: “Our own lives as well as those of the communities to which we belong are part of those events that calendar time allows us to situate at a variable distance in relation to this axial moment.”¹⁰⁶

Text, Archetype, Axial Date. Ricoeur refers to this ongoing process of time’s annexation as “a prosthesis,” as though historical time were a body.¹⁰⁷ And this is why, perhaps, when Ricoeur speaks of a “figure,” it is sometimes unclear whether he means the Christ figure or the calendar

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰³ TN3, 183.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

date. Archetype and axial date are both contained by “the emblematic expression of the most deeply concealed figure of discordant concordance, the one that holds together, in the most improbable manner, mortal time, public time, and world time. This ultimate figure sums up all the modalities of discordant concordance accumulated by the phenomenology of time.”¹⁰⁸ We are speaking here of the body of Christ as history. Through analogical transference, person and date interpenetrate each other. Ricoeur elaborates on this transitivity as a central feature of the figural function:

Thus, if we are to follow Origen, we must, on the one hand, hold firmly to the initial equivalence between the bearers of gesture and meaning (husband = Christ; bride = the Church or ecclesial soul), and on the other hand, admit that the whole of Scripture is a vast field of words open to comparisons and likenesses without any constrain or limit on the process, from the moment that they are made appropriate to the primordial equivalence.¹⁰⁹

In the following passage, Ricoeur makes person, psalm, and ritual transitive with each other in a relay of substance, word, and act:

The dying Jesus clothes his suffering in the words of the psalm, which he hears, so to speak, from the inside. The liturgical use of the Psalter over the millennia does not escape the rules of quotation. It rests on the repetition of the same sort of language acts in a practice analogous to the communal or private worship that found its original expression in the prayers of the psalms.¹¹⁰

In this last example we have archetype (Jesus), axial date (crucifixion) and text (Psalter) weaving together one particular moment with the long millennia through rituals of repetition and interpretation. In the very moment (Augenblick), Jesus himself hears and sees the whole, and the faithful in repeating that moment, enact the whole. Ricoeur’s favored example of Scripture is a maximal instruction in the binding resources of the text. Insofar as the model served for him as an instruction in human temporality, it is a story of belonging.

Conclusion

Ricoeur is acutely aware of the tendency of a pluralistic unity to tear itself apart, to decompose under the force of incoherence, accident, senselessness. Far more than Gadamer is he attuned to tragic finitude.¹¹¹ But Ricoeur reads phenomenological mechanisms of temporal comprehension as reading processes (forward anticipation, backward filling, intersignification, axial moments, transitivity) that taken together, depict a hermeneutic identity struggling to resolve

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 141.

¹⁰⁹ TB, 285.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 211.

¹¹¹ See Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 6-15.

the aporetics of human finitude. On the axis of time, Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity is ameliorative and integrating. In short, the theory of the three-fold present is a theory of belonging. Ricoeur attempts to reconcile the devices of fiction and history, to ask how truthful narrative is when the docile material of the imagination is exchanged for the recalcitrant material of the real, the insistent role of incoherence, incompatibility, senselessness, death.

It has always been a puzzle to me why Gadamer never developed a robust narrative theory for hermeneutic understanding, but I wonder now whether this was really a glaring omission. Could it not have been a constitutional suspicion of the kind of order that narrative promises? In his face-to-face debate with Ricoeur, Gadamer put this suspicion quite directly in terms of the conflict of interpretations. To attempt to solve the conflict between structuralism and hermeneutics, Ricoeur proposed a dialectical mediation, and to this Gadamer protested "that we have a serious problem about mediating links."¹¹² In an anti-Hegelian gesture, he suggests that the urge for system and its repudiation "cannot be brought together on a new level, and in a new form of approach." His underlying suspicion was "how you will get things to combine."¹¹³

Gadamer's caution was timely, as Ricoeur was just setting out on the vast three-volume project of narrative time that culminated in the terrible struggle in the culminating volume of that project. Ricoeur's editor was so concerned about the ending of volume three that he asked Ricoeur to rewrite its conclusion, and Ricoeur ended up writing two conclusions, the second of which seems only to complicate things further.¹¹⁴ In the penultimate chapter of the work, Ricoeur emphatically rejects an Hegelian synthesis, but in consequence is faced with diminishing resources to hold onto the human dream of "extracting an order from a succession."¹¹⁵ He will not take the Lacanian view that such a dream is a driving fantasy that feeds its own pathology, but he also shuns Gadamer's warning against "a reintegration of a disintegrating system of specialized approaches."¹¹⁶ Ricoeur has gone too far to stop. The poignancy of his predicament exquisite. The yearning for an *ordo temporis* does not, in any event, have a strong corollary in Gadamer, who takes a looser approach to the structure of human understanding as an ongoing process of debate and conversation. There is no telling where the movement of question and answer will lead, as our normal conversations illustrate.

It has also always struck me that Ricoeur's triple mimesis, per se, lacks a privative moment. The de- prefix that is so central to Derrida and the dominant theme in Deleuze and Guattari's own triple movement (territorialization, deterritorialization, reterritorialization) is absent from Ricoeur's circle of prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. Certainly a negative moment is

¹¹² Gadamer in Ricoeur, *A Ricoeur Reader*, 236.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ I offer a close analysis of Ricoeur's multiple conclusions in my *Hermeneutics After Ricoeur* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 105-107.

¹¹⁵ Ricoeur, TN1, 66.

¹¹⁶ Gadamer in Ricoeur, *A Ricoeur Reader*, 236.

present in Ricoeur's thought—in the dissolution of the subject, in the improvisations of difference, etc. But at the end of the day Ricoeur was a deeply religious thinker who believed in an afterlife, and Augustine's threefold present was to him not a fantasy, but a desideratum. Gadamer was a liberal-secular German Protestant who focused on the hope for a general paideia against a rationalized society that "had spiraled out of the order of nature." That was a more modest hope. In this paper I have shown an implication of Jean Grondin's distinction between Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutics. A hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on temporal-textual structure and is therefore oriented toward what Ricoeur calls "a sort of pluralistic unity," whereas a phenomenological hermeneutics focuses on the looser process of question and answer that involves itself in a more contingent difference.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Ricoeur, TN3, 207.