Review of "Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting"

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Book Review | *Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*

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In much the same way that Burke and Santayana noted that those who cannot remember the past are bound to repeat it, Maria Duffy in *Paul Ricoeur’s Pedagogy of Pardon* suggests that those who do not meaningfully confront the past are bound to a fractured future. Duffy situates her work within the peace process of Northern Ireland and the reconciliation projects of South Africa (as part of the larger movement of Truth Commissions). She contends that the hermeneutical arc, as developed in Ricoeur’s latter writings, and the evangelical tradition have the potential to lead to a transfiguration capable of forging new relationships in communities raw from historical conflict. Duffy connects the idealized solicitude elucidated in Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* with John Paul II’s call for the purification of memory (*Incarnationis mysterium*) as post-conflict societies seek reconciliation and hopeful futures. As she states throughout the work, risk and time inevitably intervene to dissuade us from authentically entering the praxis of pardon. The hope, however, remains that the message of Leviticus 19:18 can find its voice post-conflict relationships. The eschatological message of hope, reconciliation, and love buoy *Paul Ricoeur’s Pedagogy of Pardon.* *Quoniam,* the *Pedagogy of Pardon* will find limited resonance; however, her argument provides other opportunities for historical and philosophical discussion that warrant its inclusion in multi-disciplinary studies.

Duffy links the potential of narrative theory to the theological and ethical as the “theology of memory” necessarily takes evil as the starting point.¹ Ricoeur calls the suffering community to engage the past critically, to risk a dynamic narrative exploration, and ultimately to work toward reconciliation. Within *Pedagogy of Pardon,* Northern Ireland and

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South Africa lend special alacrity to the call. In the wake of the Troubles and apartheid, institutional (such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa) and private/communal movements (oral histories, collected writings and reflections, etc.) have arisen to redress past excesses and provide some measure of healing. Though formal structures work to illuminate wrongs, Duffy warns that the utility of such formal structures make them ultimately inadequate to the task, for such structures risk their work being appropriated by the past presented as present with reconciliation sacrificed to punishment and denial. Here Duffy indirectly points to Ricoeur’s ideal of communities bound by shared moral values as opposed to those imposed by juridical institutions. While the need for pragmatic structure inevitably insinuates itself upon the peace process, the process remains incomplete without the “generous gift.”

Chapter One introduces the philosophical and theological content of Duffy’s argument. Duffy’s exploration of Ricoeur’s journey reflects a man deeply troubled by conflict and a need initiate praxis whereby the actor achieves self-esteem and, by extension, reciprocity and communion. The suffering fractured human works toward wholeness through the discovery of narrative identity. Narrative as understood by Duffy, then, seeks “to achieve a more human presentation of the person through an integration of reason and passion.” The connection between Ricoeur’s thought in *Oneself as Another* and Christian theology connect at this point. Ricoeur’s idealized solicitude necessitates equanimous dealings of Self and Other, which Duffy will connect to evangelical imperatives and from which justice can emerge. The presence of Hauerwas here is unmistakable. As Hauerwas has written, the Christian community, like the more secular version presented by Ricoeur, forms narratively and one cannot separate that community from its ethic. Because of the contextual nature of community in the Ricoeurian sense, the task for Hauerwas (and Duffy by extension) becomes one of action rather than system (the narrative community as doing rather than the community as a static corpus). True justice is not to be understood as that which is imposed through institutions or reason divorced from temporality upon the individual, but rather justice belongs to human beings bound through reciprocity and open to potentially meaningful futures.

In Chapter Two, “Ethical Being,” narrative becomes the medium through which the human being begins his or her journey toward that ethical community. Duffy begins by examining and tying Aristotle’s narrative framework (*Mythos*, *Mimesis*, *Catharsis*, *Phronesis*, *Ethos*) to Ricoeur’s thought. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur understood *mythos* in terms of the dynamic act of *emplotment*. Multifarious events become intelligible through *emplotment* and Ricoeur’s tripartite understanding of *mimesis*. As Duffy shows, mimesis for Ricoeur is a constructive, creative process. Crucially for Ricoeur, mimesis “…is the operation of organizing the events into a system, not the system itself.” Mimesis 1 seeks to understand
the nature of human action, or prefiguration. Mimesis 2 relates directly to emplotment, “...the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession.” Finally, narrative achieves its full promise through Mimesis 3, where text and human subject meet in creative praxis. Crucial in the context of confronting violent and silent histories, Aristotle’s structure opens the plot and makes imaginable that which has been hidden or ignored.

Key to Duffy’s argument, the discussion of Aristotle and Ricoeur prefigure two points. First, catharsis becomes the stage through which the silences of the narrative can be redressed through empathy, thus opening the path to phronesis. Second, phronesis represents the ethical fruition of the storied self. For Ricoeur, the historical and ethical cannot be disentangled. We are formed temporally, configure and reconfigure our understanding with introspection and attention to what is (and, importantly, what is not) in the text, and arrive at the “good life” properly understood in terms of Ricoeur’s concepts of self-esteem and solicitude. Duffy’s use of perichoretic in describing the ethical culmination of the storied person has significance, leading to a discussion of love and justice. Duffy sees Ricoeur as the bridge between the dynamic tension of love, as a “supra-ethical” concern, and justice, understood in the sense of distribution and equality. Both presuppose solicitude, for justice cannot exist without esteem for the other, and, similarly, love becomes meaningless without the other. Resplendent love, buttressed by justice, holds the promise of the reconciliation of fractured lives.

By Chapter Three, Duffy has provided both the immediacy and the framework for a deeper evaluation of reconciling brutal pasts. Again, Ricoeur’s use of Aristotelian mirrored his concern to narratively construct history as a tonic against “bad” memory, which demands an ethical commitment. The spirit of self-esteem and solicitude guide the engagement. The storied person emerges as he or she becomes capable of authentically remembering, lamenting, and bringing forth that which has been silenced or unresolved in the past. Failure to meaningfully deal with the past, warts and all, inevitably taints the present and future. At the level of the individual, community, and the political, memory may ultimately be an act of mourning through which one may be healed through acceptance and understanding. Collective memory needs to be ethically engaged at the risk of old or contrived wrongs limiting the future or selective memory poisoning forgiveness and its therapeutic potential. Infused with Christian imagination, conscientious memory leads to a justified hope of a positive influence upon social and political institutions. Ricoeur’s continued effort to reformulate his theory of memory and forgiveness, especially in his later years, entailed a search for deeper metaphors of sin, suffering, and ultimately redemption. Through Duffy, “the narrative imagination can be interpreted as a ‘perichoretic’ space of hospitality” in which hopeful futures can emerge affectively engaged memory.
Ultimately, community as understood in the Ricoeurian sense confronts juridical process. In Chapter Four, Duffy seeks to demonstrate how the contextualized consensus of Ricoeur can temper mundane (and fragile) processes that seek to address and redress wrongs of the past. Commissions, hearings, etc. serve as forums (though always at risk of supporting the status quo and allowing vehement grievances to be voiced by those eager to find a sounding board) through which injustice may be revealed, silences brought forward, victim and perpetrator acknowledged, and catharsis may be explored, but the process remains incomplete and peace insecure without the superabundant role of love. For Duffy, for true healing to occur “…we have to be able to consider [hurt memories] from a distance, the stage upon memories of the past are invited to make an appearance, if we are to truly claim them as our own, in order to be unbound from them eventually.”

For Ricoeur, hermeneutics relies upon distanciation, or separation. Duffy uses An Crann/The Tree and The Healing through Remembering Project as examples of ways in which hurt memories may be brought to light and engaged. A critical point need to be addressed. Duffy’s earlier discussion of Zakor! stresses conscientiously dealing with the suffering of the past via remembrance made tangible in the oral histories (which can be extended to slave narratives in the United States, post-conflict narratives in Northern Ireland, post-apartheid narratives, etc.). As the testimony of historical actors enters narrative form, hermeneutics begins. Discourse places the speaker within a nexus of circumstances until the speech act is separated by the act of inscription, at which point the written (versus the spoken) word gains a degree of semantic autonomy. Echoing Heidegger, Ricoeur wrote that “Only writing, in freeing itself, not only from its author, but from the narrowness of the dialogical situation, reveals this destination of discourse as projecting a world.” The autonomy works on four levels of distance: the distance between the event and its perceived significance; the distance between the “from whom” and the “to whom;” the distance between the subjective world as experienced and a world that can be meaningfully reconstructed; and the distance between a situated, biased self and a self capable of appropriation) At the most visceral level, distance opens that place of reflective interpretation deepens understanding and solicitude, and moves the acting being beyond ultimately destructive prejudice.

For Duffy, however, distanciation collides with a living, corrosive memory in the wake of the Troubles and apartheid, so the question becomes one of immediacy. The pedagogy of pardon, then, first needs to be situated in a milieu where conflict is truly over, the community has consensually devised methods for dealing with the past, and a “generosity of spirit” is present. Within such a framework, praxis takes Ricoeur’s form of the reflective interpretation whereby the balance between the deontological and the contextualized is achieved. “The articulations that we never cease to reinforce between
deontology and teleology find its highest—and most fragile—expression in the reflective equilibrium between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions.” Considered convictions point to attestation. Attested being has the power to act, to engage ethically. At the level of discourse and argumentation, the sharing of histories, sufferings, and careful reflection on narratives, all require open and actively engaged being. “Such a mechanism will help to distinguish between ‘good and bad history’ and by implication, between good and bad memory.”

As beings thrown into the world and inextricably linked to the lives of others, appropriation opens the future and eases the inevitable alienation of our existential condition. Reconciliation as a necessary precondition of an open future becomes Duffy’s focus in Chapter Five. To this end, we turn to the reconciling capacities of the sacred and the profane. In Ricoeur’s discussion of sanction, rehabilitation, and pardon in The Just, he stresses that pardon, in particular, “…stems from an economy of the gift, in virtue of the logic of superabundance that articulates it and that has to be opposed to the logic of equivalence presiding over justice.” For Duffy, religious metaphor, Ricoeur’s appropriation of Rawls’ Veil, and the ideal of the supra-ethical combine to reconcile society, influence politics, and build a new “moral order.” The moral order as conceived by Ricoeur is driven by the spirit of charity and empathy. While Duffy notes that “Societies coming out of violent conflict need more than laws, agreements, and contracts” and idealizes the transformative power of love, readers should be careful not to ignore the profane. Just institutions can work to secure that memory and mourning remains transparent, for “morality is held to constitute only a limited, but legitimate and even indispensable, actualization of the ethical aim, and ethics in this sense would then encompass morality.” Ricoeur would suggest that just laws, agreements, and contracts become manifest as the dross of phronesis. Ricoeur’s avoidance of totality (be it political or religious) speaks to his ideal of reconciled human beings living and working in concert.

Duffy does admit to the “utilitarian value” of reconciliation, however, for post-conflict societies. She returns to a discussion of the mimetic arc as a mode of understanding, configuring, and re-configuring events (see discussion of mimesis, above). In order to better understand the descriptive power of the mimetic arc, it’s helpful to tie together Duffy’s discussion of aporias with earlier discussion of the twin concepts of ipse and idem. In Oneself as Another, attestation, or a belief in by the individual self, is the necessary starting point of hermeneutics. Narrative identity is formed from the dialectical tension between ipse (as selfhood, individuality, the who of our being) and idem (as sameness, the what of our being). The aporias here concerns problems of sameness and change over time and the problem of the other. While Ricoeur’s narrative identity goes some way in interpreting the conflicts and interactions of the who with the what, Duffy is able to somewhat address the
aporetic through the evangelical. Ultimately, the attested living, suffering human being confronts the past (bad memory), the present, and the other through the praxis of reconciliation and pardon. Ricoeur points to how such a release from “bad memory” will transpire. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, “just memory” allows guilt to be assuaged so that a new beginning (commencement) appears. The perpetrated act must be remembered to be forgotten; i.e., the guilt arising from the remembered act is forgotten, not the act itself. Only the victim can forgive, and by so doing frees him or herself from a painful, burdensome past. Forgiveness has to be unconditional for it to free the actors and restore the ability to act as autonomous agents. For Duffy, a social realm freed from guilt and sharing in just memory through patience and love holds the promise of orienting post-conflict societies towards re-figured futures.

As she concludes in Chapter Six, both John Paul II and Ricoeur shared in a hopeful vision of re-figured futures marked by “…peace and a civilization of love.” Duffy suggests that John Paul II may even have been enlightened by Ricoeur’s pedagogy of pardon as “John Paul II sought to lead Catholic Christians into the third millennium,” which involve previous discussions of just memory and forgiveness as addressed in *Incarnationis mysterium*. Rightly, Duffy realizes that the hermeneutic imperative of Ricoeur’s work requires a degree of archaeology to bridge the philosophical and the theological. In the middle of the bridge stands the human being struggling to narratively construct meaning. Duffy alludes throughout her work to the absolute need of human beings to achieve identity and seek reconciliation despite the aporetic nature of temporal existence. Developed by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, we validate our humanity and commonality through the narrative act and time and narrative cannot be separated. Augustine could never move beyond the contradiction between a soul distended in time (*distentio animi*) and the capacity of the human being to act (*intentio*) in time. We seek to escape our connection to time by acting toward a future. That future toward which we act inevitably becomes part of our past, and the effort to escape begins anew. For Ricoeur, Augustine’s discordant concordance narrows the horizons of the acting human being. Ricoeur’s particular genius (which becomes particularly significant in Duffy) was to add Aristotle’s *emplotment* to the mix. “We tell stories,” Ricoeur wrote, “because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated.” Ricoeur sought to establish a correlation and dialogical relationship between the poetics of narrativity (Aristotle) and the aporetics of temporality (Augustine) in such a way that human beings can meaningfully address the past and claim dignity, self-esteem, and hope. Having claimed hope, human beings bound in solicitude achieve communitarian unity and can envision a future of just institutions. In the end, Duffy sees this as Ricoeur’s legacy of giving “expression to nothing less than the heart’s profound longing.”
One note regarding Duffy’s conclusion needs to be noted. She notes that the Catholic Church moved to favor the problem of how to secure peace post bellum rather than focusing upon Just War Theory through the 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. The encyclical never directly confronts Just War Theory, and I fear that readers unfamiliar with Ricoeur will retroactively believe that Ricoeur spent much time on the subject (which he didn’t), and readers should reflect upon Ricoeur’s discussion of the abuses of memory in Chapter Two of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. “Bad” memory can easily be employed to justify the worst excesses. Though I sympathize with the spirit of her argument, Duffy’s connection of Just War Theory, *jus post bellum*, and Ricoeur is problematic without a great deal more development. I note this for three reasons. First, I believe that Duffy’s argument remains coherent just as presented in the first five chapters. In fact, §114 of *Pacem in Terris* could be incorporated easily. “There is general agreement—or at least should be—that relations between States, as between individuals, must be regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation.” From here it is a short leap to the economy of the gift as Duffy presents it. Second, a distinction needs to be made between post-conflict (unless Duffy wishes to engage the incredibly acerbic discussion of how the Troubles constitutes a just or unjust war) and post-war. In particular, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* (the right to go to war and right conduct within war, respectively) are assumed in most discussions of *jus post bellum*.24 It’s safe to say that every culture has sought a justification to violence through a consensus of how and even if violence will be mitigated. Duffy is consistent if the just war theorizing on Augustine, Gratian, Tertullian, Aquinas, et al. is included in the catalog of wrongs which John Paul II sought to redress, and not much else is needed. Finally, the larger problem of the conduct of war and violence (whether “legitimate” or not) for Christians is problematic at best. Succinctly, the problem involves questions of theodicy (involving God’s morality, power, justice, and providence) and the fracture with Christian ethical values (the teachings and examples of Jesus, striving for the common good, etc.). While Augustine (*Contra Faustum*, CFXII, 74-79, especially) sought to reconcile tensions between precepts of the Old and New Testaments and Aquinas incorporated Aristotle’s teleology of the common good, the problem of licit violence within a Christian context remains. Ricoeur’s exploration of the ethical danger of violence as an act that violates the power-to-do others and his warnings of the abuse of history make the discussion of Just War within the context of a pedagogy of pardon unnecessary and ultimately counter-productive.25

Duffy’s admirable presentation of the hermeneutical arc and the relationship to reconciliation and hope present a valuable opportunity for inter-disciplinary exploration of *commencement* through the works of Arendt (to whom I’ll restrict my observations, as Derrida and Lévinas aren’t explicitly explored by Duffy). As Duffy notes, Arendt and
Ricoeur shared a belief that forgiveness was a necessary step in breaking cycles of violence. As noted above, being freed from guilt allows the acting human being to refigure the future. Arendt’s ideal of promise (and here the connection to hope is not untoward) begins with forgiveness and, with Ricoeur, the act of forgiveness unburdens guilt and allows the acting being to move forward. Forgiveness is directed at the past, promise looks to the future. As she explains in *The Human Condition*, we form our identities through the capacity of promise keeping, which irrevocably ties us to others in commencement. Unlike Ricoeur, Arendt sees the utilitarian aspect of forgiveness as necessary for substantive breaks with painful history. Punishment serves a therapeutic function in Arendt. Both punishment and forgiveness share in that “they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly.” For Arendt, the individual human being can forgive that which can be forgiven, but “radical evil” (as developed by Kant in *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*) demands forgiveness that human beings cannot provide. At this point of departure, Ricoeur’s “economy of the gift” effectively calls for a forgiveness of the unforgivable for commencement to occur. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur links Arendt’s “promise” to the political, while forgiveness’ “relation to love keeps it at a distance from the political.” From here Duffy effectively connects Ricoeurian *solicitude* with the eschatological imperative, but Arendt’s therapeutic concerns with punishment remain in the background. Related directly to Duffy’s argument, John Hatch has written an exceptional study focused upon post-conflict reconciliation in South Africa. Hatch notes that the “value of religion…lies not in guiding direct action, but in providing a background orientation that checks the push of power in the pragmatic realm of politics.” The transformative relationship of the spiritual to the political (giving prominence to one over the other) opens a complimentary and powerful opportunity to further hone Duffy’s thesis.

Finally, an inter-disciplinary approach to Duffy’s exploration of the production of historical narrative (through oral and written projects such as *An Crann* or the Healing through Remembering Project) can be meaningfully connected with Ricoeur’s historical sensibilities. When Duffy uses the term “silences” in regard to historical memory, she points to one of the fundamental problems of remembered time: are we forgetting something that shouldn’t be forgotten? While Ricoeur rejected the notion of a universal history or that as yet undiscovered gems of historical knowledge can yield “facts” about the world, he believed that historiography held the promise of being able to confront potentially flawed memory—collective and individual. Any representation of the past is a *reconstruction* of the past, and will remain interpretive. As Marc Bloch (to whom Ricoeur extended a great deal of respect) noted, “The good historian is like a giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.” Throughout his life Ricoeur was troubled by the abuse inherent in the selective nature of memory. Just memory called for active archaeology and (in Duffy) *An Crann*, Healing through Remembering, and
other narrative and oral histories point to the quarry of historical inquiry as well as a warning to be wary of what is being recorded and by whom. The tendency of many to “opt-out” (or, worse, to be ignored) during tribunals and hearings leaves substantial gaps in the historical record. Just memory demands that we look for “silences” in the historical record as surely as we critically examine that which is not silent. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, after Ricoeur, believed that conscientious historians explain history as best they can, but inevitably have to contend with silences. Silences take several forms. Some events take prominence over others that may have been or are deemed secondary. Records can be lost or destroyed. Those recording history choose the best story to present. Together, the most insidious danger of silences is when the historical narrative becomes “an idol” (to borrow a common term) and forms the basis of a society’s reified understanding of the past.

Duffy’s *Pedagogy of Pardon* reverberates with the immediacy of addressing these silences in the hope of commencement. “True peace, therefore necessitates the evolution of ‘a culture of just memory’.” The “good life” understood in terms of reciprocity, self-esteem, and the concomitant hope of just institutions can only be reached in such a culture. Whereas Ricoeur never fully works through the aporia of the Other, the supra-ethical as advanced by Duffy allows for a less fragmented vision of the attested self living in accord with the Other. For Duffy, Ricoeur provides the tools, faith provides the impetus.

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2 Ibid., p. 1.

3 Ibid., p. 23.

4 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). Two ideas presented by Hauerwas will have direct bearing on Duffy’s argument. First, that while the demands of the Sermon on the Mount are difficult, the “decisive eschatological act” can manifest itself in present relationships. (pp. 85-90) Second, Hauerwas employs the metaphor of the Kingdom to describe the faith-based community as one “at peace with themselves, one another, the stranger, and of course, most of all, God.” (p. 97) Duffy will later adapt these two ideas as she extends her argument to an expanded narrative community.

6 Ibid., p. 65.


8 Duffy, p. 37.

9 Ibid., pp. 46-47.

10 Ibid., p. 83.


12 Duffy, p. 4.

13 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 289. It is important to remember that Ricoeur drew a distinction between the *ethical aim*, which is teleological, and the *moral norm*, which is more characteristic of the deontological.

14 Duffy, p. 97.


17 Ibid., p. 115, 119.

18 Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.

19 See, especially, Ricoeur’s “Epilogue” in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

20 Duffy, p. 134.

21 Ibid., p. 133.

22 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, p. 75.

23 Duffy, p. 139.


27 Ibid., p. 241.

28 Ibid.

29 Duffy, p. 144.

30 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, p. 488.


32 Ibid., p. 18.


35 Duffy, p. 106.