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Henrik Syse and Asbjørn Bjornes

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Helge Høibraaten is a remarkable scholar within philosophy and the history of ideas. One of the authors of the present article knows this first-hand, having received immense help and encouragement from Helge in finishing his doctoral dissertation many years ago on the development of natural-law ethics from the Middle Ages and into modernity. Admittedly, “immense” is a grand term, but it is fitting, given the way in which Helge masters and understands the ideas marking the turn from classical and medieval to modern thought better than most other scholars.

Our aim in this article is to analyse and discuss an idea within medieval Christian thought in a way that we believe is most apposite in a book honouring Helge. By linking basic questions from ethics and anthropology with the challenges of human conflict and togetherness, we hope also to throw light on a question of great concern to virtually all human beings regardless of religious affiliation, namely, the use and abuse of memory.

¹ A previous and shorter version of this argument was presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting in 2002, and then left unfinished. Thanks to our fellow panel members in Boston, and especially to our discussant Dr. Lee Trepanier, as well as to an anonymous referee for this volume, for useful comments. Thanks are also due to Nadim Khoury for important and generous advice, and to the research programme NECORE (“Negotiating Values: Collective Identities and Resilience after 22/7”), funded by the Research Council of Norway, for allowing Henrik Syse to conduct this research on memory and conflict.

It is a trademark of violent conflict that previous injustices are used to legitimize one's present cause, however noble or ignoble. At times these injustices are real and widely acknowledged; equally often they represent contested interpretations of past events, tailored to suit one's political needs. The wars in the Balkans during the 1990s offer some of the most widely quoted examples of perceived past injustices used to create resentment towards others. Famous – but certainly not atypical – is the Slobodan Milošević government's framing and re-telling of the battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389, used to great effect to point to injustices needing to be avenged (see, for instance, Vetlesen 2000; Mikula 2002; Glenny 2012; US Army Command and General Staff College 2014).

The following remarks do not aim to recount such uses of history, which has been amply done elsewhere – indeed, examples can be found every day in news reports from conflict zones. This article takes it for granted that memory *has* indeed been customarily exploited in order to legitimize the use of force against others, and continues to be so. There is nothing new in this. Battle orators in the Middle Ages, for example, were no strangers to colourful depictions of past enemy transgressions. But the combination of memory and modern ideology, as seen in the Nazi movement's evocation of Aryan legends and Norse myths, mixed with nationalism and sometimes overt racism as well as modern means of mass communication, arguably makes for an especially lethal mix. An almost absurd concoction of such uses of history and myth, with devastating and tragic consequences, came to light in the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik's "Manifesto" of 2011. The ideas of the manifesto laid the groundwork for his killing of 77 people, most of them youngsters, in Oslo and at Utöya in Norway on July 22, 2011², in "defence" of European civilisation and identity.

It is our claim that such uses of history and memory stand in stark contrast to an important strand within the Christian tradition, which emphasizes the use of memory as a path towards reconciling and uniting human beings

² See "2083 – A European Declaration of Independence", available at <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/>.

before our common ground of being.³ In three authors famous for depicting the use of memory, Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch, we find examples of such *anamnetic* exercises,⁴ digging into one's personal memory, while essentially searching for a reality common – and in theory open – to all human beings. There is an interesting continuity between these older meditations on memory and the work on memory of two contemporary philosophers, Paul Ricoeur and Eric Voegelin.⁵ This article will attempt to sketch aspects of the anamnetic process as portrayed by Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch, using a challenge we find in Ricoeur as our starting point, and ending with a parallel conceptualization we find in Voegelin's meditations on memory. The aim is to offer an account of memory that is constructive, unifying, and a real alternative to the conflict-engendering use of (more or less manipulated) memories so amply found before, during, and in the aftermath of armed conflict.

Admittedly, we cannot here analyse in any real depth the thought of Ricoeur and Voegelin. Rather than going into detail on their understanding of memory and history, we let observations from them frame our argument, through important suggestions found in their work. We do believe, however, that the perspectives we glean from their works are indeed representative of the general thrust of their thought, and that they stand – and not just coincidentally so – in continuity with the Christian tradition we draw on in the main body of the article.

The abuse of memory: Ricoeur's challenge

Paul Ricoeur (2004, ch. 2; see also Reagan 2005) trenchantly analyses the many potential abuses of memory that can be perpetrated, not least when

³ By “ground of being” we mean a transcendent or divine grounding of existence situated outside of the particularity of each individual.

⁴ *Anamnesis* is the Greek word for recollection or reminiscence.

⁵ For a discussion of differences between Ricoeur's and Voegelin's approaches, which we choose not to explore here, see the interesting discussion in Petrakis (2006).

memories are manipulated by ideology. He divides the broader field of abused memory into the categories of blocked, manipulated, and abusively controlled memory (Ricoeur 2004, 68ff.). The first corresponds to more or less pathological responses to extreme situations, primarily on the individual level (such as reactions to the loss of something deeply cherished), while the latter two represent memory being consciously controlled by persons or institutions of power, with the aim of eliciting specific actions or reactions. All have in common attempts at utilizing and tailoring real or perceived past events to serve ideological needs in the present.

Ricoeur's analysis issues in a practical, ethico-political challenge, which can be paraphrased as follows: Memory consists in *not forgetting*, in a quest to allow certain events to form part of one's history. The boundary between good use and abuse of memory is to a large extent determined by the choice of which events – or sometimes, which distorted representations of events, or even imagined events – we allow to constitute history. We are not dealing primarily with unconscious processes here, according to Ricoeur, but with *willing* and *working*. The “work of memory” is that oftentimes conscious struggle we go through to preserve images and events that can have exemplary value for the future (ibid., 86, 88).⁶

Ricoeur insists that the work of turning memory into an exemplary project for the future must be considered as an “imperative of justice” (ibid., 88): “It is thus the relation of *the duty of memory* to *the idea of justice* that must be interrogated” (ibid., 89, emphasis added). This task, in turn, is described in terms of three elements:

⁶ We find a similar insistence on the moral demands associated with memory in Blustein (2008), who closely associates memory with identity – individual and collective – and formulates his challenge in the following way: “[M]emory conditions and shapes biographical (individual and collective) identity and is reciprocally shaped by it. ... Identity is not only a descriptive category but a normative one as well, and part of its normative significance consists in its being a source of *values*. It is a source in this sense: one's having a particular identity makes it valuable for one to do certain things that might not be valuable or valuable in the same way for someone with a different identity” (44, emphasis in original). In other words, actions are formed and judged (at least partly) by one's sense of who one is, and this identity in turn is formed by those memories that help constitute one's identity. This certainly makes memory a normative category, because it is a source of one's values.

First, we must acknowledge the other-regarding nature of the virtue of justice. In the vast project – so easily manipulated – of working through those memories, individual and collective, which can and should be maintained (and maybe even ritually commemorated), the moral duty of memory is “the duty to do justice, through memories, to an *other* than the self” (ibid., emphasis added). Most memories concern – and have consequences for – more than just one’s own self. They constitute to a large extent social events, and they can as such be construed unjustly and falsely vis-à-vis those related in some way to the memory. Hence, memory is social, and normatively speaking it cannot be disentangled from the virtue and duty of justice.

Second, memory is inextricably linked to *debt* and to the notion of *heritage*, according to Ricoeur: “We are indebted to those who have gone before us for part of what we are” (ibid.). Hence, there is, Ricoeur claims, a species of moral duty involved in memory, directed towards those about whom memories are recalled. This debt should not be paid by manipulating – or, even worse, abusively and violently controlling – the past in order to make the characters of the past appear more palatable. Our duty is rather to “inventory the heritage”, as Ricoeur says, and thus access and recollect the past in a way that remains true to the victories as well as the horrors of the past. We should note, therefore, that debt is not merely debt of gratitude, and heritage does not merely mean receipt of greatness.

That second point can hardly be understood without reference to the third, which needs to be quoted in full:

[A]mong those to whom we are indebted, the moral priority belongs to the victims. [Tzvetan] Todorov [in the essay *Les Abus de la mémoire*] cautioned [...] against the tendency to proclaim oneself a victim and endlessly demand reparation. He was right. The victim at issue here is the other victim, other than oneself. (ibid.)

This may seem excessively demanding: Can we expect that any individual’s, group’s, or national collective’s work to “inventory the heritage”, as Ricoeur says, will constitute anything other than a primarily self-serving construction of the past? Ricoeur recognizes this danger, but for that very reason exhorts us to escape from “the tyranny of memory” (ibid., 91, with reference to Pierre Nora): the kind of tyranny that issues in grand commemo-

rations of past events designed to enclose the interpretations of those very events, and make them serve an ideological purpose.⁷ One can read in Ricoeur a plea for liberation, where memories are not used to differentiate, but where they are exemplars of actual human experiences of suffering – “exemplars” in the sense of meaningful sense data relevant beyond one’s own self, and conveying a message about what the future should (and should not) be like.

If we have hereby interpreted Ricoeur fairly – and if we accept his critique of memory – we are indeed faced with a momentous ethical challenge: namely, to strive towards an ideal of memory that is truly other-regarding, that is animated by the virtue of justice, but that nonetheless remains true to the past and to those who lived in it, thereby not falling prey to an ideological project that is marked by manipulation and violent control.⁸

It is in this very context that we will propose a direction to take, not foreign to Ricoeur’s own study, but adding to it, and deeply rooted in the Christian tradition that Ricoeur to a significant extent draws on. We suggest that we should look towards a *transcendent* understanding of memory. By transcendent we mean an understanding that looks to transcend the physical and time-constrained boundaries of concrete memories, even while remaining faithful to their concreteness. We believe we find this ideal expressed in parts of the Christian conceptualization and understanding of memory, and it is to three representatives of that tradition that we now turn.⁹

⁷ See also Patrick Devine-Wright’s useful overview of uses of memory in conflict (and the literature thereon), including observations on the role of collective ritual and commemoration (in Cairns & Roe 2003, 9ff.).

⁸ Cf. here the following passage from Feldman & Laub (1992, 204, emphasis in original), about memory-based narratives: “To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to *take responsibility* – in speech – for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences”.

⁹ As Nadim Khoury has noted in reading an earlier version of this article, we do not clearly distinguish in the following between different *forms* or *species* of memory, such as aesthetic memory (remembering what is beautiful), ethical or political memory (remembering what is right or just), epistemological memory (remembering what is true), and religious mem-

Augustine – *Confessiones* and *De Trinitate*

Both in Augustine's (354–430) *Confessiones* (*Confessions*) and *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*), we find a remarkable preoccupation with memory. There is little doubt that the reflections on memory and eternal ideas found among the Platonic and neo-Platonic schools of Augustine's time influenced him and left a stamp on his entire body of work. As Roland Teske (2001, 148–158) points out in an essay on Augustine's philosophy of memory, Augustine initially – even after his conversion – held on to a more or less literally Platonic view of recollection, gradually substituting for this his own Christian teaching of “illumination”.

We do not have to decide on the actual prevalence of Platonism in Augustine's teaching for our purposes, since Augustine's mature emphasis on recollection and memory as keys to the human mind is not dependent on a belief in the soul's pre-existence or the reality of Platonic ideas. The general Platonic background should, nonetheless, be kept in mind.

In our context, the most important elements to notice are the following:

Memory for Augustine is not only a passive remembrance of things past, but also an active ability of the mind, which “includes the present and anticipates the future” (ibid., 151). Thus, memory helps make sense of the present state of affairs, and makes possible an anticipation of the future.

Memory is indispensable in man's search for God (cf. *Confessiones* X). As Augustine pointedly says: “How, then, am I to find you, if I have no memory of you?” (*Confessiones* X, 17; in Augustine 1961, 224).

ory (remembering what is pious and sacred). Indeed, we will in the following not be demarcating each of them, not least because the late ancient and medieval Christian world view saw all of these species of memory as closely related, all leading us towards a deeper understanding of the divine. However, the distinctions are clearly relevant and worth noting, since memory in each of these cases fulfils different functions. Hence, conflating various functions of memory in the way we do here *can* court the danger of blurring these distinctions and thus the different aims and practical uses of memory. That is not our intention – hence, the point should be noted.

The search for human happiness – which is ultimately to be found in God – is therefore also a function of memory. This is worth emphasizing, because the *Confessiones* is decidedly not meant to be a work about the general recollections of humankind. It is in many ways intensely personal. Yet, Augustine’s anamnestic meditations focus on the common experiences of humankind, grounded in the desire for happiness (cf. *Confessiones* X, 21f.).

There is an important lesson here that Augustine arguably wants to teach his readers: In exploring one’s own memory, one actually joins in a human quest for happiness, insight, or meaning. One should realize that one has in one’s “spacious palace [of memory]” (cf. *Confessiones* X, 8; in Augustine 1961, 214) the matter that makes it meaningful – indeed, possible – to speak of human fulfilment, joy, and happiness. Yet, so has everyone else. In digging ever deeper into personal memory, one does not thereby become increasingly estranged from the rest of mankind, but one ideally realizes more fully the unity of the human quest. However, one also comes to understand that *true* joy and meaning can be found only through belief in the one, true God. When some do *not* see this, it is because they do not use memory to look back into their own life and mind in order to discover the presence and truth of God:

Why are they not happy? It is because they attend far more closely to other things whose power to make them unhappy is greater than the power of their dim memory of truth to make them happy. [But there] is still a faint glow of light in man. (*Confessiones* X, 23; in Augustine 1961, 229)

The final sentence quoted here brings forth both a Platonic and New-Testament, Johannitic image of the “light of truth” in man (cf. John 1:9 about “the true light”). Regardless of how Augustine’s reference to the “light” is most properly to be understood,¹⁰ the ideal is clear: Memory has the capacity to unite people, because memories – while certainly different due to the various circumstances human beings live under, and their varying nature and functions – enable human beings to situate their lives in a larger context

¹⁰ Alternatively it can be understood as conscience, or as a sign from God imprinted on mankind, or as Christ as “the inner man”, to mention three possibilities.

that is ultimately “henological”, i.e., *unifying*.¹¹ Accordingly, Augustine’s own travels through memory and experience, as recounted for everyone to read in the *Confessiones*, are meant to highlight *not what separates Augustine from others, but the presence of the One God in any human life* – in this case, Augustine’s own (cf. Kristo 1991, esp. ch. 4).¹²

This travel through memory also has a didactic, educational function: Augustine recounts his own past and his inner thoughts not only in order to remind *himself* of the truth, but also in order to bring witness to others about God – and the path to Him. Hence, we are reminded of the didactic and hence communal function of memory.¹³

In *De Trinitate*, Augustine’s preoccupation with memory is further deepened, as he sees memory as an aspect of the triune mind (bearing thus the imprint of the triune God), alongside understanding and will. This trinity is something all human beings bear in them, as an image and likeness of God.

Three points are especially worth noting, the first being the idea of having a “memory of Christ’s life”. In book XIII of *De Trinitate*, Augustine holds forth this central pedagogical point: Anyone who has once learned of Christ and his life, death, and resurrection in the Gospel stories, can come to love and believe in them through holding them fast in one’s memory (cf. Teske 2001, 156). Even someone who tries to refute the events of

¹¹ This is a Greek term, often utilized by Norwegian philosopher Egil A. Wyller in his commentaries on Plato; see, e.g., Wyller (1981), from the Greek prefix *hen-* (or *heno-*), signifying unity or oneness.

¹² It can be worth noting here, as Nadim Khoury has pointed out, the way in which the Christian tradition at its very core links memory, reconciliation, and universality in its grand narrative of salvation history: we alienated ourselves from God, and through Jesus Christ we again become reconciled with God. Acts of remembrance play an important part in the daily enactment (or re-enactment) of this salvific story. William Cavanaugh has, emphasizing this very point, stressed the role of the liturgy as the *public art of remembrance* – anamnesis – of the history of salvation, and its function is indeed to concretely remind us of that “communal body of people that is formed by the liturgy” This is more than merely symbolic. This communal body “is meant to embody the politics of reconciliation, the politics of Jesus, in the world” (Cavanaugh 2004, 219). Here we see clearly the link between liturgy, memory, and reconciliation.

¹³ See Bjornes (2007, 32ff.), with reference to *Confessiones* I, 15; X, 4; XI, 2.

Christ's life will come to have them in his or her memory. By knowing about Christ and meditating on one's recollections of Him (as Augustine surely had done even prior to his conversion, having learned about Christianity through his mother), one may come closer to the deepest truth about God. Thereby, memory ideally serves to unify human beings around the powerful life and example of Christ.

Secondly, Augustine seems to hold that even concrete memories of, for instance, physical entities must be understood somehow as an amalgamation of the particular and the general, at least as the memory is made fully intelligible to one's mind (and through communication, to the minds of others). Consider the following passage:

Again, when I call back to my mind some arch, turned beautifully and symmetrically, which, let us say, I saw at Carthage; a certain reality that had been made known to the mind through the eyes, and transferred to the memory, causes the imaginary view. But I behold in my mind yet another thing, according to which that work of art pleases me; and whence also, if it displeased me, I should correct it. We judge therefore of those particular things according to that [form of eternal truth], and discern that form by the intuition of the rational mind. (*De Trinitate* IX, 6, par. 11; in Augustine [1887] 2008)

In other words, even as we recall something purely physical and individual, we have the capacity to judge that thing according to general standards. This does not have to be read as eternal ideas in the Platonic sense, but can more vaguely and generally – but no less importantly – be understood as the human ability to go beyond the concrete image and weigh it, normatively speaking, against a standard: Is it right? Is it good? Is it beautiful? Is it harmonious? Is it just? In short, we as human beings are able – actively and consciously – to *judge* memories, and the ultimate seat of judgement is the rational human mind, which is a hallmark of not only some human beings, but of human beings *per se* (even if they have different talents, levels of development, and strengths). Hence, memory, which forms a part of this rational mind, does not only particularize, but it also helps us generalize and unite.

Thirdly, a particularly important point in Augustine's meditation on the Trinity is the view of man's mind as itself representing an image of God (as briefly indicated above). Indeed, if memory is to serve the kind of role accorded to it in the *Confessiones*, it seems that God cannot be found only

through the “outer” (external) things, which a human being senses and then recollects, but must be found in recollection itself – not in the Platonic sense, which Augustine had more or less explicitly broken with by the time he finished *De Trinitate*, but in the sense of the mind bearing the imprint of the triune God, thus in itself reflecting the work of the Creator:

Whoever, then, can understand the word, not only before it is sounded externally, but even before the images of its sounds are present in thought ... can already see through this glass and in this enigma some likeness of that Word [of which Saint John wrote in the Prologue of his Gospel]. (*De Trinitate* XV, 10, par. 19; in Teske 2001, 156)

This is memory working in concert with will and understanding – the mental word, as Teske puts it, “which is brought forth from memory” (*ibid.*). This is an *inner* word, which is not dependent on any concrete language, but a knowledge that the mind holds, which is accessible through the right use of memory, and which helps inform our will and understanding.

Thus, memory for Augustine is a mental faculty that assists – indeed, is indispensable – in the quest for true and full happiness. Memories help us better understand our own lives as part of a larger whole. Consequently, we could say that Augustine creates an amalgam of a Platonic and a Christian understanding of memory. As in Plato, remembrance is held to be indispensable for a right understanding of human life and God; but unlike Plato, Augustine comes to oppose a teaching of pre-existence and instead emphasizes the God-like character of the soul or mind itself and its partaking in divine activity through the right use of its mental apparatus: understanding, will, and memory. This trinity resembles the triune nature of God, and it belongs to all human beings as a basic constituent of what it means to be human.

To what extent this teaching is meaningful for a more secular age, is a question which we will ponder in the final part of this article.

Dante and Petrarch on memory and “the new life”

As mentioned above, memory for Augustine is not only a passive remembrance of things past, or a mere mechanical representation of previous experiences, but also an active faculty indispensable to man’s search for happiness and indeed peace. As such, it has a normative dimension, related to the core meanings of ethics: right action and true virtue.

We must mention here, even if only in passing, that the normative dimension of memory is clearly present in the widespread medieval view – with roots (as Frances Yates has shown) going back at least to Cicero’s *De Inventione* – that memory is an intrinsic part of the knowledge of what is good and bad: that is, it is a part of the virtue of prudence. The indispensable role of memory in drawing useful and virtuous lessons from the past, and thus in forming an inventory of ideals and role models on which prudence can build, is stressed, for instance, by Albertus Magnus in his treatment of the four cardinal virtues.¹⁴

But for our purposes, it is even more relevant to look to Dante Alighieri’s (1265–1321) early work the *Vita Nuova* (*New Life*) – another benchmark work in the Christian literature on memory – even though it does not have the same metaphysical and philosophical form as the works of Augustine (*Confessiones* and *De Trinitate*); nor does it contain the trenchant analysis of the virtues that we find in Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, or for that matter in other works of Dante himself. We believe that the *Vita Nuova* represents an important contribution within the Christian tradition to treat personal memory as providing a road to divine knowledge – a road from the particular to the universal.

¹⁴ See Yates (1966, 35f. and 73 ff.), with reference to, *inter alia*, Cicero’s *De Inventione* and Albertus Magnus’s *De Bono*. The role of memory as a “craft” or “work” should also be mentioned in this context. In the Middle Ages, as Carruthers & Ziolkowski (2002, 1f.; emphasis in original) point out in their introduction to an anthology on the medieval craft of memory, “[far] from being passive and thus (at least possibly) neutral, memory-making was regarded as active; it was even a craft with techniques and tools, all designed to *make* an ethical, useful product”.

In *Vita Nuova*'s forty-two short chapters, we find a combination of poetry and prose. Its basic theme is the "new life" the protagonist finds through his love for Beatrice ("the Beatifier"), whom Dante describes as both an earthly and a divine woman.

According to Barbara Reynolds, Dante did not make his most important literary innovations in structure or vocabulary, but *in the way he combined experience and fiction*, "in the gradually increasing admittance of reality into the enclosed garden of poetic convention ..." (Reynolds 1969, 17). It is this combination of experience and fiction that provides the foundation for the *Vita Nuova*, and which makes memory such a crucial part of the work.

The *Vita Nuova* is, like the *Confessiones* of Augustine, intensely personal. It is a poetic autobiography written in retrospective form, describing the author's spiritual development. This is an important point: While personal almost to the extreme, dwelling on purely private memories of an intense love, it simultaneously points towards a love for the divine. Thereby, the anamnestic process of the *Vita Nuova* does not lead us to a merely personal, private conclusion, but rather points us towards the divine ground of love.

As with Augustine in his *Confessiones*, the protagonist in the *Vita Nuova* looks back on past experiences – events that are now closed, chronologically speaking. He remembers the meetings he had with Beatrice, as well as his reflections on, thoughts about, and visions of her (e.g., chs. 2, 3, 23–24, 29). He writes down all of these experiences in his "book of memory". This "book" – like any autobiography – is shaped through experiences and the way in which those experiences are recollected and interpreted.

The literary story of the "new life" comes out, in other words, of the protagonist's experience and interpretation. He recalls the sensory impressions he had of Beatrice – when he was a child and when he became the young lover:

Many times [Love] commanded that I seek to behold this youthful angel; thus many times in my childhood I sought her, and I saw in her such noble and laudable bearing that of her could certainly be said those words of the poet Homer: "She seemed no child of mortal man, but of god". (*Vita Nuova*, ch. 2; Dante 1995, 49)

Chapter 1 marks the starting point for the work's self-reflexive discourse and indicates that the "new life" is grounded in the lover's own experience. It is here that Dante describes the *Vita Nuova* as the protagonist's own "book of my memory" ("libro de la mia memoria"; *Vita Nuova*, ch. 1; Dante 1995, 47). It is, in Ginsberg's words, "[an] analogy of memory and book" (Ginsberg 1999, 74). The book is the story about how he – through the literary language – gradually arrives at clarity concerning the divinity that is reflected in and by Beatrice:

In that part of the book of my memory before which little could be read, a rubric is found that says: *Incipit vita nova* [Here begins the new life]. Beneath this rubric I find written the words that it is my intention to transcribe into this little book: if not all of them, at least their substance. (*Vita Nuova*, ch. 1; Dante 1995, 47)

Dante's conception of his work as a book of memory underlines the acknowledgement that finds expression in the lover's writing process. The narrator-protagonist looks back in time. He writes out of his own memory, and the proem (ch. 1) constitutes so to speak the programme of the protagonist: He wants to tell about his "*new life*", that is, the life he has found in and through Beatrice. It is thus the metaphor of the Book of Memory, his own memory and experience, which is the starting point of the protagonist's knowledge, writing project, introspection, and self-centeredness. And even more importantly, the metaphor of the Book of Memory provides the starting point for his journey towards the divine, that is, towards that which transcends all particularity.

In order to understand the connection between individual memory on the one hand and praise of the divine on the other, we must realize that for Dante the "book of memory" is not only – we dare say, not even primarily – about private experiences, in spite of its intensely personal nature. For Dante as for Augustine, memory and experience rightly understood point to the universal, the highest – to God. In the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice is described as a reflection of divine, universal love, and it is the nature of this reflection that draws the protagonist towards her, and which ultimately gives the memories their meaning.

The structure of the *Vita Nuova* should also be noted. Mark Musa, along with several other Dante scholars, divides the work into three parts:

“Dante’s three movements in love” (Musa 1992, viii). The thematic movement suggests levels in the lover’s increasing knowledge of Beatrice’s divinity and of the nature of love through memory. The knowledge is both poetical and theological. By degrees the protagonist is – with the aid of Beatrice – led to the higher goal.

In the first part of the *Vita Nuova*, the protagonist and his feelings are dominated by or, one could say, subordinated to an earthly love (chs. 1–16). Dante is deeply rooted in the courtly tradition of the troubadours and the Italian “sweet new style” (*dolce stil nuovo*). The lover’s feelings are characterized by physiological sufferings, weeping, sighs, despair, etc.

His feelings explain the direction of the protagonist’s love only to a certain degree. We gradually become aware of his true feelings for Beatrice; thus the meaning of the lover’s feelings is best understood in a retrospective process (cf. ch. 3).¹⁵ In reading parts II and III (chs. 17–31 and 32–42 respectively), we become aware that his feelings point beyond his previously exclusive self-centeredness, towards Beatrice and, finally, to God, who represents the highest form of love. We are, in other words, faced with a gradual *anamnetic* movement from the particular (which is first self-centred and then other-centred) to the transcendent.

The meetings with Beatrice indicate an increasing knowledge of divine love. Memory is a central aspect of the protagonist’s experience and process of knowledge. Indeed, divine love becomes known through memory. Without the retrospective process, the protagonist would not have become aware of Beatrice’s divine significance.

By her death Beatrice, who, famously, becomes Dante’s guide in heaven in *La Divina Commedia*, has been transformed by God into spiritual beauty. This beauty leads his thought(s) up to her who reflects divine love:

... because the pleasure of her beauty,
taking itself from our sight,
became great spiritual beauty
that throughout heaven spreads

¹⁵ “The true meaning of the said dream was not seen by anyone then, but now it is perfectly clear even to the simplest” (*Vita Nuova*, ch. 3; Dante 1995, 53).

light of love, which beatifies the angels,
and makes their intellect, lofty and fine,
marvel, so gentle is she there.

(*Vita Nuova*, ch. 33; Dante 1995, 127)

And in the sonnet “Beyond the sphere” (ch. 41), Dante calls the lover’s thought(s) a “pilgrim spirit” (see also *La Divina Commedia: Paradiso XXXI*, 64–72, 103–111). The lover’s thought is like a pilgrim away from his homeland, but through the memory of the now glorious, heavenly Beatrice, it rises towards Heaven: “... and I call [the thought] then ‘pilgrim spirit,’ since it ascends on high spiritually, and like a pilgrim who is outside his fatherland, there abides” (*Vita Nuova*, ch. 41; Dante 1995, 143). The lover’s “sigh” rises from Earth to Heaven, towards Beatrice who contemplates God, “the font of peace” (*Vita Nuova*, ch. 23; Dante 1995, 97). In this way he is, theologically and metaphorically speaking, drawn towards her.

In a very real way, therefore, the “movements in love” are also “movements in memory”. Memory forms a crucial part of the lover’s process of knowledge in the sense that memory leads to wisdom. With that, memory is not only a “looking back”, but equally a “looking within”, even a “looking up”: to God. Hence, Musa (1973, 171) arguably overstates his point when he reflects upon the protagonist’s self-centeredness: “What contempt Augustine, either as saint or as the lover he had been, would have felt for Dante’s lover in the *Vita Nuova*!” After all, the process of memory in the *Vita Nuova* is strikingly *similar* to Augustine’s process in the *Confessiones*. It is a gradual move from the particular to the universal, from the merely human to the sublimely divine.¹⁶

We hold that the *Vita Nuova* in this sense represents an important moment in the medieval Christian tradition in its treatment of personal memory in relation to love and God. The short book was certainly controversial at the time (and for a long time thereafter), seemingly collapsing earthly

¹⁶ See also *La Divina Commedia: Inferno* I, 8–9; II, 3–9; XIII, 52–54, 76–78; XV, 88–90; and XVI, 82–85. All of these passages display the importance of looking back and faithfully preserving memory, but with the express aim of using it to reveal and pursue excellence rather than wallowing in hopelessness and misery.

and divine love. Yet, read in light of the Augustinian idea of an anamnetic road to divine illumination, it exemplifies and movingly portrays a view of introspection and memory as providing an all but indispensable path towards the universal love of God.¹⁷

We should note that Dante was not alone in his time in exploring the power of memory in relation to love. Not least in the French troubadour tradition, which influenced Dante heavily, memories of past events stand as a central topic, complementing the dreams of that which might come in the future. Of special interest to us, however, is Dante's compatriot Petrarch [Francesco Petrarca] (1304–1374), since his love poetry is very much modelled on Dante's example, but also adds important dimensions to Dante's meditation on memory.

We claim that in Petrarch's evocation of the memory of his beloved Laura in *Il Canzoniere* ("Song Book"), we see a strong attempt at using memory to move from the particular to the universal, not unlike Dante's meditation on Beatrice. For Petrarch, however, the memory of Laura also serves to integrate and harmonize that which is shattered and conflict-ridden in his present life.

There is in this story ambivalence, indeed a battle: The memory of Laura can lead him towards a deeper appreciation and understanding of love itself, but it can also serve to awaken unworthy desires.¹⁸ This ambiva-

¹⁷ A parallel reflection can be found in canto XXIX, verses 130–132 of the *Purgatorio* (of *La Divina Commedia*), where Dante and Virgil witness the four cardinal virtues, symbolized by four women dressed in crimson. Of these, Prudence has *three* eyes, thereby simultaneously looking at the past, the present, and the future. True prudence – the virtue of ethical and political practice – thus consists in holding that which has elapsed together with the demands of the present and the anticipation of the future, a view of prudence also found in several scholastic writers, with roots back to Cicero, as pointed out above (see also Rossi & Clucas (2000), with reference to, among others, Frances Yates). Significantly, in the tradition from Plato and Aristotle, the hallmark of the virtue of prudence, politically speaking, is the ability to have concern for the common good rather than for one's private good. We see here how the rightful use of memory is linked by Dante and other medieval writers to the concern for community and peace rather than the private fulfilment of desires.

¹⁸ Note, for instance, *Il Canzoniere*, poem 122, where the protagonist fights with the memory of Laura in order not to be dragged into covetousness; and poem 285 ff., where we

lence arguably betrays the influence of Augustine: We should be aware of the dangers of memories that serve to fuel desire and lust rather than true love of one's fellow human being(s), which is a reflection of the true love of God.

Petrarch's memory of Laura in *Il Canzoniere* thus represents a use of memory highly relevant to our topic: the attempt to use a strong, at times disturbing, memory to serve an integrating and harmonious purpose. This is done in two ways: The protagonist struggles to find for himself the true meaning of the memory of Laura, but he also shares it with the reader and thereby uses a private memory to illuminate a general topic – indeed, a topic of universal relevance, namely, love of a woman and love of God.

In short, Petrarch points to one of the real problems of memory: how images in memory can create lust and be destructive. He struggles to make the memory of Laura one that ennobles rather than destroys him. Petrarch's struggle with memory thus serves to complement Dante's powerful meditation on memory in the *Vita Nuova*, but ends up emphasizing the same point: that memory constitutes a power in our mind to harmonize, integrate, and ennoble our lives, and that particular memories can and should lead us to a deeper appreciation of universal love.¹⁹

see the memory of the beloved leading the protagonist towards God.

¹⁹ Note how the memory of Laura becomes one that is reflected in all of nature, and how the intense love of her serves to create a deeper understanding and appreciation not only of her, but also of nature, love, and even God. See especially poem 127, with its striking passages on how the protagonist's appreciation of nature changes because of the memory of her, and how this serves to heal and harmonize his life: "... I remember her humble bearing which then was flowering and then grew before her years, sole cause and healing of my woes. When sometimes I see from afar new snow on the hill struck by the sun, Love controls me as the sun does snow ..." (*Il Canzoniere*, poem 127; Petrarch 1976, 250).

Conclusion – and reflections on Eric Voegelin

The intention of our reflections above has been to show the unifying – as opposed to the divisive – potential of memory as portrayed in central passages by three Christian writers: Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch. If we had treated a larger part of their corpus, we could have added other angles and possibly more nuance to our argument. However, the works we have concentrated on are central to each author's project and do serve as fitting points of departure for a discussion about memory in the Christian Middle Ages.

The road may seem long from our initial discussion of Paul Ricoeur's critique of politically abused memory to our treatment of Augustine, Dante, and Petrarch and their view of memory as a path to the vision of the divine. However, there is an underlying common idea of great significance, namely, the idea of an obligation – whether ethical or political – to make “the work of memory”, as Ricoeur (2004, 86) calls it, a quest that transcends particularity. The very real dangers of *particularity in cultivating memories* comprise both *untruth* and *conflict*. Through a failure to recognize in memory elements of what points us to what is *commonly* human, individuals or groups stand in danger of absolutizing and even universalizing their own private experiences, holding them to be unique yet all-encompassing representations of the truth. As a result, they stand in danger of using memories to underline and possibly magnify difference and thereby provoke conflict. The alternative view looks at memory instead as a means to dialogue, reconciliation, and peace. According to this view, memories are examples of common patterns of human existence, even when they are concretely speaking particular and distinct from the memories of others. However, the unifying potential of memory has to be consciously actualized – it does not manifest itself as a matter of course. The medieval works we have highlighted very much portray this struggle. And Paul Ricoeur stands in this same tradition of viewing the practical use of memory as an ethical challenge, not as a mere reproductive task.

Interestingly, we also notice here a marked contrast between a Christian approach to memory on the one hand and Marxist or other progressivist

approaches to the same faculty on the other. In the latter's portrayal of mankind's inevitable historical march towards universal secular reconciliation, we are essentially told to look exclusively forwards and not backwards to find our sought-for ideals of peace and community. John Torpey (2006, 10f.) formulates this point well:²⁰

For the revolutionaries of 1789, as later for Karl Marx, the past – replete with injustices as it was – had grown burdensome, a brake on progress that needed to be sloughed off on the road to the promised future. In his reflections on the Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*, Marx famously observed that the past “weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” [...] History was understood as a succession of injustices, but these injustices were hardly to be dwelt upon or “repaired”. Rather they were to be recognized, overcome, and left behind (or at least *aufgehoben*, that is subsumed in the structure of a more advanced epoch).

The Christian approach sketched in this article sees memory as an indispensable faculty in the quest to learn about humanity, understand oneself, and overcome injustice. But that does not happen through an intense and stubborn dwelling on memories as insurmountable obstacles to the future or as identity markers that sets one apart from everyone else, but rather through a willingness and openness to seeing in memories a deeper and more unifying view of oneself and one's fellow human beings. Hence, the road to peaceful community goes both backwards and forwards.

We believe that the same sort of impetus towards a less particularized and conflictual use of memory can be found in the political philosophy of Eric Voegelin. Voegelin, like Ricoeur, is an original twentieth-century thinker whose thought is deeply influenced by both Christian tradition and the encounter with modern, secular ideologies. In his powerful (and largely autobiographical) essay “Remembrance of Things Past” (Voegelin 1978, 3ff.),²¹ Voegelin calls for an opening of the field of questioning, so that the analyst of reality can refer to the concrete consciousness of himself and, by

²⁰ We are most grateful to Nadim Khoury for highlighting this point for us (and also for suggesting how to formulate it), and for making us aware of this passage from Torpey.

²¹ This essay is also available in the *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, volume 12: *Published Essays 1966–1985* (Voegelin 1990).

extension, the consciousness of human beings in search of truth, without ideological deformations that distort “historical restoration and original perception” (ibid., 5).

In this we find a plea for historical studies to become oriented towards a respectful rendering of man’s search for meaning and truth throughout history as a participant in reality – in a “cosmic whole” (ibid., 11) – rather than for such studies to become tools for conflict-prone agendas of nationalist, racist, or other ideological movements. And that call is deepened and intensified – in a way interestingly parallel to what we have found in Augustine and Dante – in Voegelin’s essay “Anamnestic Experiences” (ibid., 36ff.),²² which, movingly and introspectively, illustrates the connection between personal memory (even childhood memory) and experiences of transcendence. As Voegelin there sums it up, consciousness, in finite experience, *transcends into the world*, into the community, history, and the ground of being. Thus, the “biography of consciousness” (i.e., the I understanding itself through memory) ideally leads a human being to a deeper understanding of existence itself, not only individually, but on a more generally human level, since one thereby comes to reflect *on reflection itself*. Indeed, this is for Voegelin one of the origins of philosophizing.

For Voegelin, this cannot be understood apart from the intentionality of consciousness, to use a Husserlian phrase. But this intentionality is born and plays out within a reality of which man is only a part. And in responding to this reality

... there occur the processes of wondering, questing, and seeking, of being moved and drawn into the search by a consciousness of ignorance, which, in order to be sensed as ignorance, requires an apprehension of something worth to be known ... (ibid., 11)

Hence, man in reflecting on his own consciousness can admittedly be drawn towards himself, his own ideas, constructs, and ego, or that of his own in-group; but he can also experience the presence of the divine reality

²² This essay is also available under the title of “Anamnesis” in the *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, volume 6: *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (Voegelin 2002).

in the cosmos, through wondering, questing, and seeking. The great underlying question is how we employ *anamnesis*, the process of memory. Do we let it draw us away from the ground of being and towards an image of ourselves as different from and in perpetual conflict with others (a view both fuelling and sanctioned by ideological constructs)? Or do we let memory be a part of the quest and search for a ground of being beyond pure individuality and difference?

This underlying call for a less conflictual use of memory may seem like a simple plea. But history and present experience show us all too clearly that it is often overshadowed by partisan uses of historical memories, or what Paul Ricoeur has called abuses of memory. An awakening of the positive potential of memory in the Christian tradition should surely be as welcome as it is necessary. We believe especially that there is much Christian theologians and ministers throughout Christendom, and arguably clerics from other faith traditions, can do to remind the faithful of this potential, and they could do worse than turn to Augustine or Dante – or the other writers referred to above – as companions and pathfinders in this important task.

For the sake of focus and space, we have chosen not to discuss explicitly the closely related concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation in this article. However, their centrality to Christian ethics and the intimate relationship between them and the employment of memory would make them a natural object of study for those wishing to explore further the role of memory in conflict. We should especially note the way in which Desmond Tutu's explicit drawing on Christian theological categories in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission stands as a powerful example of using initially deeply divisive memories to play a conciliatory role. People on both sides of the apartheid divide came to see the way in which they could use painful memories, when faced honestly and with patience, to create understanding rather than deeper animosity.²³

²³ As Alan J. Torrance has put it: "In sum, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission witnessed to the redemptive, creative, and transformative effect of forgiveness. This is a forgiveness that heals while simultaneously honouring past victims precisely by bringing their history into a redemptive and creative movement towards what the Christian faith calls

A final question must, however, be asked: In a secular and pluralistic age, what value can a religiously grounded meditation on memory have? If our aim is to understand memory as a resource for unification rather than divisive conflict, do we not only contribute to that divisiveness by referring to particular thinkers from a particular tradition? The objection is important, but we believe it can be answered meaningfully in two ways:

Firstly, we may hold that we are speaking primarily to those who define themselves as belonging broadly within a Christian culture or a Christian faith-community. As participants in conflicts, these very people need to be aware of this critique of memory and the ideal of unification that come from their own tradition, and that ought to be inherent in Christian discourses about memory and recollection. In other words, while not a universal message in political practice, it remains deeply important for those touched by it. The South African example, played out in a country where Christian faith and tradition were important to both sides of the political conflict, is a case in point.

But secondly, we believe that the experiences recounted in all authors referred to here are not experiences incomprehensible outside of the specifically Christian context. They point from each individual human being to a common “ground of being”, i.e., a grounding of existence that is situated outside of the particularity of each individual. This ideal of finding the ultimately human and the ground of human existence through the enormous variety of memories is not restricted to the Christian life, probably not even to the religious life.

Paul Ricoeur’s adding of a *normative* element must, however, be constantly borne in mind: The unifying potential of memory is not the result of an automatic, mental occurrence taking place in the mind of human beings. Quite conversely, it is a “work”, an “effort”, that must be guided by the “duty of justice”. This, and nothing less, is the task that faces us, not least as we confront the use of memories to fuel brutal wars. The wars in the Balkans constitute but one example of armed conflicts that draw on di-

koinonia – a communion that transcends the categories of ‘justice’ by elevating a righteousness that the conceptions of neither *lex* nor contract (*foedus*) could generate or anticipate” (Torrance 2006, 79).

visive understandings of history and deeply contested and conflict-ridden memories. Only by sharing, respecting, discussing, and comparing memories in a spirit of community, with the aim of learning about our common humanity through those memories, can we create a world where memories are honoured not by the shedding of even more blood but by real, reciprocal respect.

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