

Ricœur's hermeneutic philosophy. Keys to reflect upon the case of Chile and its memory

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Abstract

This article argues that Ricœur's categories of memory, narrative, and recognition illuminate and critically problematize the unresolved ethical and political tensions of post-dictatorial Chile. Human fragility – an anthropological theme central to Ricœur's thought – underlies political life and reveals its inherent paradoxes. His ethical and political reflections provide a framework for examining the symbolic and narrative dimensions of Chile's ongoing crisis of social reconciliation, marked by disappeared detainees, persistent impunity, and enduring forms of denialism, despite the efforts undertaken since the restoration of democracy. Ricœur characterizes such phenomena as impeded or manipulated memory. The hermeneutic approach serves both as a methodological mode of inquiry and as a means of understanding the conflict itself. The analysis develops along three interconnected lines: the aporias and limits of memory, the narrative construction of collective experience and its distortions, and the challenges of mutual recognition in the presence of institutional, social, and political barriers. An examination of key Chilean sites and moments of memory tests the explanatory power and limits of Ricœur's hermeneutic categories when confronted with Chile's historical experience. The article also examines the narrative dimension through two intersecting registers – factual (reports and testimonies) and fictional (documentary film) – thereby recovering the history/fiction dialectic developed in *Time and Narrative III*. Finally, it engages critically with objections raised by leading scholars regarding personal and collective memory and their relation to mutual recognition, showing how the Chilean case challenges these categories. In doing so, it demonstrates how a non-European experience of democratic transition enriches Ricœurian debates on the phenomenology of memory developed in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

Keywords: *Memory, Narrative, Mutual Recognition, Fragility, Postdictatorial Chile, Hermeneutic.*

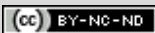
Résumé

Cet article soutient que les catégories de mémoire, de narration et de reconnaissance développées par Ricœur permettent d'éclairer et de remettre en question de manière critique les tensions éthiques et politiques non

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résolues du Chili post-dictatorial. La fragilité humaine – thème anthropologique central dans la pensée de Ricœur – sous-tend la vie politique et en révèle les paradoxes inhérents. Ses réflexions éthiques et politiques fournissent un cadre pour examiner les dimensions symboliques et narratives de la crise actuelle de la réconciliation sociale au Chili, marquée par les disparus, l'impunité persistante et des formes tenaces de négationnisme, malgré les efforts entrepris depuis le rétablissement de la démocratie. Ricœur caractérise de tels phénomènes comme une mémoire empêchée ou manipulée. L'approche herméneutique sert à la fois de mode d'enquête méthodologique et de moyen de comprendre le conflit lui-même. L'analyse se développe selon trois axes interdépendants : les apories et les limites de la mémoire, la construction narrative de l'expérience collective et ses distorsions, et les défis de la reconnaissance mutuelle face aux barrières institutionnelles, sociales et politiques. L'examen de sites et de moments clés de la mémoire chilienne permet de tester la puissance explicative et les limites des catégories herméneutiques de Ricœur face à l'expérience historique du Chili. L'article examine également la dimension narrative à travers deux registres qui s'entrecroisent – le factuel (rapports et témoignages) et le fictionnel (film documentaire) – reprenant ainsi la dialectique histoire/fiction développée dans *Temps et récit III*. Enfin, il aborde de manière critique les objections soulevées par d'éminents chercheurs concernant la mémoire individuelle et collective et leur rapport à la reconnaissance mutuelle, en montrant comment le cas chilien défie ces catégories. Ce fait montre comment une expérience non européenne de la transition démocratique enrichit le débat ricœurien autour de la phénoménologie de la mémoire, développée dans *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*.

Mots-clés : mémoire, récit, reconnaissance mutuelle, fragilité, Chili post-dictatorial, herméneutique.

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Introduction

For the purposes of this analysis, I propose to create a dialogue between two paths of wounded memory: private, intersubjective memory, with its ethical dimensions and individual psychic traces, and memory as a public event and instance, with its social and political repercussions. I argue that the Chilean case reveals, at both levels, the problems that impede a *happy memory* and *mutual recognition* – two key Ricoeurian concepts –, whenever conditions of institutional impunity persist. At the same time, the Chilean case is theoretically productive because it is broadly applicable to other countries in the region that have experienced dictatorships and have faced similar obstacles to social and political reconciliation, including Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, and Nicaragua, among others.¹

The analysis developed here requires a critical assessment of the relationship between the interpersonal dimension of memory and its narrative articulation, on the one hand, and the collective symbolic sphere, on the other – a relationship that lies at the heart of conflict in postdictatorial Chilean society. From this perspective, the process of carrying out the *work of memory*, together with the resistances it encounters under the phenomenological-hermeneutic framework developed by Ricœur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, particularly through the categories of *impeded* memory or *manipulated* memory, invites us to consider possible revisions in dialogue with authors who have offered important critical perspectives.² Such an approach makes it possible to address the difficulties that characterize Chilean conflicts not only in terms of the institutional conditions that shape them, but also in relation to the collective symbolic pathways that have themselves been obstructed.³ Accordingly, a philosophical-hermeneutic reflection on the crisis of recognition in Chilean society and on the dilemmas of memory facilitates fruitful interpretation

¹ Cf. Guillermo O'Donnell, *El Estado Burocrático Autoritario: Triunfos, derrotas y crisis*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano. 1982); Scott Mainwaring, Aníbal Pérez Liñán, *Democracies and dictatorships in Latin America. Emergence, survival, and fall* (Reino Unido: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

² Andrew Barash, Johan Michel, and Geoffrey Dierckxsen have some critical stance, while Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, Olivier Abel, and Pierre-Olivier Monteil consider Ricœur's contributions as a fundamental approach to the interpretations of collective memory.

³ Recent studies have revisited the question of memory in Chile. See, for example, Graciela Rubio, "Hegemonic Memory and Social Memory: Tensions and Pedagogical Challenges Surrounding Chile's Recent Past," *Revista Colombiana de Educación*, 71 (2016), 109–135; Vania Martínez, "Transgenerational Trauma and Postmemory among the Grandchildren of Victims of the Chilean Dictatorship," *Revista de Estudios Sociales, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia*, N° 84, (2023), 59–76.

and broadens the channels through which conflict may be mediated in the spirit of Ricœur's thought.

The hermeneutic inquiry proposed here offers a phenomenological account focused on exemplary events. To this end, it moves epistemologically across three interconnected planes: memory as the ethical core of action; the *narrative sense* that accompanies *memory* as the *poetic* dimension of analysis; and *mutual recognition* as both a real and symbolic instance, together with its political and institutional implications. The investigation thus traverses both the public sphere of events and the sphere of individual testimony in order to reveal their interweaving and, in so doing, advance toward an emancipatory hermeneutic understanding. The fundamental Ricœurian concepts identified above provide the basis for a reflection on concrete cases that reveal the latent symbolic texture of historical experience and its impact on the narrative understanding through which collective identities are formed.⁴ Through the examination of difficult experiences that call for truth and justice, the aim is to understand the obstacles that have hindered the construction of a political project capable of aspiring to the ethical formulation so dear to Ricœur: "the aim of the good life, with and for others, in just institutions".⁵

The present study takes human *fragility* as a fundamental hermeneutic key for understanding the social and political phenomena of Chile's recent past. Paradoxically, Ricœur's anthropological reflection on action derives its productive strength from the capacities of the capable human being. *Strength* and *fragility* thus form an inseparable dialectic within the ontological architecture of the human condition in Ricœur's philosophy. The challenge of this analysis is to test this model against capacities that have remained "impeded" in Chile's recent history, in light of the fragilization of memory, insufficient processes of justice, persistent denialism, and the absence of collective symbolic reparation in place of the privatization of suffering endured by the families of the disappeared detainees. These political and institutional realities express forms of human incapacity and reflect both a lack of mutual recognition and an impoverished, polarized narrative construction. Within this difficult landscape of social and political reconciliation, the article critically examines the desirability of aspiring – even as an incipient utopia – to a just or "happy" memory and to its narrative elaboration. A retrospective view of the Chilean experience confronts the social and political wounds that remain present in our history thirty-seven years after the restoration of democracy. Debates surrounding the last fifty years of Chilean history reveal a complexity that stems not only from the diversity of interpretations but also from the different epistemological perspectives through which recent political reality is understood.⁶ Philosophical reflection requires two forms of caution: attentiveness

⁴ The relationship between the narrative dimension of understanding and the historical dimension of narrative has been developed extensively by Ricœur in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), and in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 172.

⁶ Cf. Heraldo Muñoz, *The Dictator's Shadow: A Political Memoir of Life under the Pinochet Regime* (Santiago: Random House, 2023); Steve J. Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998*, vol. I of *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile* trilogy (Santiago: Ediciones UDP, 2009); Alberto Mayol, *The Collapse of the Model: The Crisis of the Market Economy in Contemporary Chile* (Santiago: LOM, 2012).

to the phenomenon's irreducible polysemy and awareness of the limits imposed by the historical dialectic between closeness and distance. We remain very close to a history that is still unfolding, one that continues to operate beneath the surface of the present and thereby limits the possibility of genuine distanciation.⁷

The article is organized around two principal axes followed by a conclusion. 1° Memory in the public sphere and its social and political impact as a hermeneutic event of recognition and divergence. 2° Narrative as the core of understanding and its possibilities for reconstructing identity. 3° Conclusion: Balance between the impediments to and possibilities of recognizing the other in Ricœur's phenomenological hermeneutics.

1. Memory in the public sphere and its social and political impact as a hermeneutic event of recognition and divergence

In *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur demonstrates the connection between memory and forgetting, as well as between memory and recognition, while adding a reflexive component: self-recognition. This connection carries philosophical implications. To begin with, the act of recognizing oneself is, to a significant extent, an exercise of memory. Amnesia is a pathological form of forgetting that serves to demonstrate this irreducible alliance between identity and memory. Memory is therefore inseparable from self-recognition. Likewise, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricœur highlights the act of recollection⁸ as a voluntary enactment characterized by active searching (*zētēsis*), or what Aristotle calls *anamnēsis*, in contrast to memory understood as evocation (*mnēmē*), in which remembrance takes the form of an affection (*pathos*). This distinction allows us to enter the moral and political terrain of memory. Clarifying the truth of events thus opens the possibility of justice and makes it possible to reconstruct the social fabric within which identity is forged. This active search, or work of memory, seeks to overcome the forgetting of what has occurred and, in some measure, to repair the inevitable irreversibility of events. The moral dilemma is whether recollection ultimately achieves its primary purpose. In other words, whether it truly succeeds in overcoming the barriers imposed by forgetting, which make the task so difficult. As Ricœur writes: "The work of Anamnesis moves against the current of the river Lēthē. One searches for what one fears having forgotten temporarily or for good..."⁹ The question is whether there is a future for this search – that is, whether the effort involved can succeed or fail. As Ricœur further emphasizes: "Successful recollection is one of the figures of what we call 'happy' memory".¹⁰

As we shall see in the Chilean case – and this will constitute one of the central sources of conflict – this effort to search for memory against forgetting unfolds along two distinct dimensions.

⁷ As Ricœur observes, the principle of distanciation is inherent in that of belonging, Cf. Paul Ricœur, "Histoire et Herméneutique" (1976), en *Paul Ricœur. Penser la Mémoire*, edit. François Dosse and Catherine Goldenstien, (2013), 25.

⁸ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 18.

⁹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 27.

¹⁰ Ricœur offers a detailed analysis of the methodological question of memory and its power to represent the past in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, through a reexamination of Plato and Aristotle, cf. p. 33 and following pages. He also examines the issue of mourning, likewise, linked to memory, as a process of healing in cases of psychic wounds that acquire pathological psychological dimensions.

One concerns fidelity to the past as the recollection of what truly happened, the truth-bearing function of memory. The other concerns the ethical meaning that arises from the need for justice and reparation in order to honor memory in this struggle against forgetting. These two dimensions of the political work of memory do not always go hand in hand. In both cases, we encounter the factor of memory's fragility: the fragility of agents confronted with obstacles to remembering at the political and institutional levels, as well as forms of self-censorship or forgetting at the private and personal levels. Ricœur assigns a crucial place to forgetting – a certain forgetting that is not simply the opposite of memory understood as negation, but rather one that ontologically grounds memory's central role, even though it remains one of the less developed dimensions of his major work. Forgetting is an important issue, but it will not be addressed directly in this analysis.

Returning to the idea of memory's fragility, it is necessary to consider its hermeneutic implications. An analysis of the post-dictatorial Chilean experience explores its implicit hermeneutic significance to demonstrate the impossibility of a univocal account of the past at the ethical and political levels. It is necessary to recognize that the past is not remembered through a single story but through interpretations of events whose complexities have multiple dimensions. Through the analysis of specific examples, we explore the difficult role of memory in its deepest hermeneutic sense. What is at stake is our way of understanding the past, our way of interpreting lived experience, and the possibility of establishing basic bridges of agreement around moral principles that are nevertheless accepted by different groups who have either lived through or inherited that past.¹¹

Our focus is the political history of Chile during the period following the restoration of democracy in 1990. The issue remains so current that today, more than thirty-five years later, in fact, we have witnessed a renewed confrontation over human rights and over the still unresolved fate of thousands of disappeared detainees.¹² This remains an open social wound and a matter of profound disagreement within political debate.¹³

Remembering is part of the effort to resist forgetting. Yet remembering also presupposes a power on the part of the one who exercises this capacity. In his analysis of the paradoxes of recollection and evocation – opened by Plato and Aristotle – Ricœur emphasizes that the point of departure lies within ourselves and refers to a "capacity for searching".¹⁴ Memory, then, is not merely an arbitrary appearance, a pure passivity that deprives us of the resources necessary to "recover" the past as unavailable memory; memory is also an active capacity to remember

¹¹ Studies on this period are diverse, but the consensus among historians is divided between those who value the stabilization of democracy despite the political costs entailed by the transition, and those who concur with the assessment of the traumas associated with what has been termed "military power and social trauma," a notion employed by Ricœur; cf. Eduardo Pizarro Yong, *Chile and Latin America. The Role of the Armed Forces in Democratic Consolidation (1990–2000)* (Santiago: Planeta, 2003), 29.

¹² Likewise, the Chilean Senate approved (4 March 2026) the Alternative Sentence Compliance Bill, on humanitarian grounds. The measure applies to individuals convicted of various types of offenses, including those of a political-historical nature as well as those convicted of serious criminal offenses. This measure has once again reopened the debate and generated renewed controversy.

¹³ Cf. Edmundo Pérez Yoma, *Civilians and the Military: The Role of Defense in Democratic Consolidation (1994–2000)* (Santiago: Planeta, 2025), 216.

¹⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 18.

(recollection).¹⁵ At this level, memory fulfills an irreducible ethical role: recognizing what happened, recounting the atrocities committed, and making mourning possible. Within this psychic sphere, there are individual resistances to confronting the past, but there are also political resistances to confronting responsibility. The possibility of genuine reconciliation, although difficult, is not impossible. Yet one of its fundamental conditions is remembering lived reality, acknowledging crimes, pursuing justice, and providing reparation for the victims.¹⁶ Some progress has been made in this regard through important initiatives that will be discussed below, although not all processes have been completed. Yes, we have moved forward and restored democratic stability; however, history has left subterranean traces that strike at the heart of trust itself, which is fractured by its own vulnerability.¹⁷

The task of history is to investigate those “traces” that provide access to the past through their vestiges – marks, inscriptions, documents, archives, monuments, and so forth. Indeed, as Ricœur reminds us, these are observable facts that can be explained through a model of “scientific” intelligibility.¹⁸ The problem is that lived experience contains a moral and affective dimension that presupposes the acceptance and narrative elaboration of facts, and this is a difficult process.

One might assume that the passage of time and historical distance serve as a way to help heal wounds – a *pharmakon* that may nevertheless prove to be double-edged. The scars of this “wounded memory” conceal reserves of bitterness and feelings of injustice that are transmitted across generations and emerge at unexpected moments. During periods of crisis and social discontent, often driven by different forms of inequality, these hidden wounds resurface through movements of social, political, or economic protest. The Chilean social uprising of 2019 was an important example of this phenomenon.¹⁹

The expressions of rebellion and the feelings of anger that have emerged in recent years within Chilean political life compel us to understand the depth of this malaise and to ask about its causes, so as to re-signify this past in the hope of reducing the suffering and projecting a new future. In this context, hermeneutic phenomenology re-emerges with renewed force as a “philosophical and methodological path” to rethink the local realities that afflict us and the broader global horizon, at a time when “humanity as a whole is undergoing a situation of crisis”.²⁰

¹⁵ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 26.

¹⁶ Graciela Rubio, *Memory, Politics, and Pedagogy: Paths toward Teaching Chile's Recent Past* (Santiago: LOM, 2013); Cath Collins, Katherine Hite, and Alfredo Joignant, *Memory Politics in Chile: From Pinochet to Bachelet* (Santiago: Ediciones UDP, 2013).

¹⁷ For critiques of Chile's neoliberal model and democratic transition, see Mayol, *Boric: The Labyrinth of the Doors* (2025).

¹⁸ Ricœur, “Histoire et Herméneutique”, 23.

¹⁹ Cf. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Crisis in Chile, December 2019*; Carolina Aguilera and M. Badilla, “Human Rights Memorials in Turmoil: Antagonistic Memories in Contemporary Chile,” *Political Geography* 98 (2022).

²⁰ Luz Ascárate, *Imaginer selon Paul Ricœur. La phénoménologie à la rencontre de l'ontologie sociale* (Paris: Hermann, 2022), 149.

1.1. The relationship between narrative and memory

In the present inquiry, memory functions as the witness that supports the search for clarification and enables those reserves of experience that continue to operate beneath the surface to be brought into language. Their elucidation and narrative refiguration are achieved through the hermeneutic appropriation of the past into present life and projecting a "forward horizon".²¹ In this sense, the path toward understanding the past rests upon an essential hermeneutic principle: "...objectification is at once primitive, radical, and possible. It begins when life is no longer simply lived, but understands itself and makes itself understood to others through its connectedness. Through this connectedness, life can be spoken and described".²² In this passage, Ricœur refers to the historian's need to attain the objectification of the past. Yet life itself also comes to be "spoken" through its narrative unfolding, in which imagination plays a constitutive role. The world and life demand narration, and where narration is absent, it is due to a lack of imagination, argues Revault D'Allonnes. She adds: "Because language makes a world, all the meanings that emerge in experience find a word; their existence is indivisible".²³ In this way, she invokes Ricœur's thesis outlined in "Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator", where he formulates a crucial proposition: so long as a life remains untold, it is nothing more than a biological phenomenon (*zōē*). Ricœur further adds that it remains a biological phenomenon "(...) insofar as it has not been interpreted. And in interpretation, fiction plays a considerable mediating role".²⁴ In this text, Ricœur explores the pre-narrative character of human experience, which continually seeks to be brought into language to render that experience intelligible (*bios*). This is the possibility we possess of making experience into a path of understanding. What is at stake is the passage from life to lived experience, and the mediating role of fiction is essential, because the plot of a life is woven from a mixture of acting and suffering, of acting and suffering human beings.²⁵

From the perspective of the past and the history of a community, this narrative capacity is translated into communication and makes possible an ethics of communication. To listen to a story is to become part of the history of the one who tells it; the one who reads it participates in the society from which it emerges. In short: "Whoever says participation also says sharing, exchange, communicability, or even a 'common measure' that renders reality transmissible".²⁶ Yet the critical point of this communicative process lies in the obstacles that threaten the very possibility of narration. As D'Allonnes emphasizes, these obstacles undermine the ability to tell either a personal

²¹ By the term *refiguration*, which will appear several times throughout this article, we refer to the third moment of Ricœur's theory of narrative, *mimesis III*, developed in *Time and Narrative* vol. 1 (1990), 70. The refiguration of temporal experience is the reader's appropriation of the work; through what is narrated, we are able to project our own capacities and to re-signify our world from the perspective of action.

²² Ricœur, "Histoire et Herméneutique", 25.

²³ Myriam Revault D'Allonnes, "La vie refigurée. Autour des *Disparus* de Daniel Mendelsohn", in François Dosse & Catherine Goldenstein, eds., *Paul Ricœur : penser la mémoire* (Paris : Seuil, 2013), 208. Our translation.

²⁴ Paul Ricœur, "La vie: un récit en quête de narrateur," *Écrits et conférences, vol. I: autour de la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 268.

²⁵ M. Revault D'Allonnes, 207.

²⁶ Revault D'Allonnes, 210.

or a collective story, as is evident in experiences of horror associated with extreme violence – Auschwitz being the paradigmatic example – where lived evil resists representation.²⁷

From this perspective, a politics of memory acquires its full significance, and it becomes worthwhile to revisit our history in order to identify the knots that have hindered communicability. In some cases, these obstacles arise from irreducible causes – that is, from individual impediments produced by the horror of limit-experiences, experiences that may exceed the capacity of witnesses to bring them into language. As Revault D’Allonnes writes: “(...) narrating life, narrating the world, its sufferings and its pains, presupposes that the gulf between lived experience and the language available to account for it is not impassable”.²⁸ In other cases, communication becomes fractured because it contains gaps or because it has not been made sufficiently public. In this respect, communication possesses an ethical function, and testimony does as well, since it allows dialogue between those who have lived the history and those who receive and acknowledge it. Trust plays a crucial role in this process. The willingness to believe, and not to refuse belief from the outset, presupposes the good faith of all parties, reinforced by the institutions that support them. Such a process depends upon the credibility of witnesses, which, as we shall see, enables their words to possess value and legitimacy. As Ricœur writes: “This fiduciary dimension, common to testimony and promise, extends far beyond the circumstances of its exercise. Through its habitual character, trust in testimony... strengthens the general institution of language, whose ordinary practice includes a tacit clause of sincerity and, one might say, of charity...”.²⁹ Yet a political system fractured by dictatorship can hardly serve as a repository of such trust. Indeed, it is precisely this willingness to believe that has been broken in the Chilean political experience. For this reason, it becomes essential to recover, through explicit public policies, that moral foundation of authentic belief in the word of the other.

As we shall examine in what follows, there are institutional examples that precisely lead towards this direction.

1.2. Institutional-testimonial level

We shall analyze the question of memory and its relationship to narrative configuration on the basis of what Ricœur calls in *Memory, History, Forgetting* “a phenomenology of remembering”, in order to distinguish between memory itself, which is singular and refers to a fundamental anthropological capacity, and memories, which are plural and constitute its enactment, more or less “happy” according to their degree of fidelity to the past.³⁰ In this respect, what we examine are the memories that accumulate around a history and the way in which their narrative configuration makes it possible to take a step toward the social and political recognition of events. In other words, we remember limit-experiences that, because of their moral and political weight, come to be regarded as historical events.

²⁷ Myriam Revault D’Allonnes, “La vie refigurée : les implications éthiques du récit”, in *Archives de Philosophie*, (Paris : Octobre-Décembre 2011, Tome 74, Cahier 4), 604.

²⁸ Revault D’Allonnes, “La vie refigurée. Autour des *Disparus* de Daniel Mendelsohn”, 208.

²⁹ Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. D. Pellauer (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 131.

³⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21.

There is likewise a relationship between remembering and knowing, because such events make it possible to relive and bring the past to light. "At this level," Ricœur observes, "remembering and knowing completely overlap," yet what gives these memories their distinctive character is their reference to facts rather than to theories, rules of conjugation, and the like. Thus, "the events with which documentary history is concerned assume the propositional form that grants them the status of facts. What is at stake, therefore, is the 'fact that...' things happened in one way rather than another".³¹ This reference to the past as something that truly occurred and occurred in a particular way is what makes it possible to grant lived experience a moral status and to orient the possible enactment of justice.

During the administration of President Patricio Aylwin (1990–1994), democracy was restored in Chile after seventeen years of military dictatorship. One symbolic gesture in this process was the creation of the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, whose work culminated in the Rettig Report.³² The Commission's purpose was to establish the truth regarding the human rights violations committed between 11 September 1973 and 11 March 1990 that resulted in the death or disappearance of victims. The Commission was composed of a group, including figures from different political alignments, both opponents and supporters of the military regime, in order to lend legitimacy to the process. Its task was to establish an official account of what had occurred and thereby lay the foundations for national reconciliation. It was entrusted with compiling a comprehensive record of events and gathering and documenting as much information as possible concerning the most serious human rights violations committed by agents of the State. To accomplish this task, it was necessary to identify the victims through the testimonies of individuals and families who had directly or indirectly suffered abuses – disappearances, torture, summary executions, kidnappings, and attacks – and who were in a position to testify. The Commission also recommended measures of moral and material reparation, proposed legal and institutional reforms, and assembled evidence that could assist judicial proceedings.

Although it did not exercise a strictly legal function, the Commission contributed significantly to establishing the truth in many cases, even though numerous others remained unresolved. Nevertheless, it represented a genuine attempt to do justice to the victims.³³ When President Aylwin publicly presented the Rettig Report, he acknowledged the Commission's efforts to reveal the truth. One statement from that moment remains engraved in Chile's symbolic memory: "The reconciliation of Chileans requires that the truth about what occurred be established and that justice be done insofar as possible".³⁴ This phrase produced a profound emotional impact because it captured both the limits of the Commission's work and the political fragility of the historical moment.

³¹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 24.

³² Created on April 25th, 1990, through Executive Order N° 355. Cf. Report of the Chilean National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (Santiago: La Corporación, 1996), 24 volumes, published in 3 vols.

³³ According to the figures reported in the Rettig Report, a total of 3.550 cases were examined. Based on subsequent historical updates and the review conducted by the National Reparation Corporation (1996), the official number of victims of disappearance and death stands at 3.216. If the survivors of political imprisonment and torture officially recognized in the years following the Rettig Report are also taken into account, the total number of victims of the regime rises to 40.000.

³⁴ A statement made at the National Stadium on March 12, 1990. The underlining is ours.

The history of Chile during those years is well known and, in many respects, quite singular. A peaceful transition took place from a brutal dictatorship to a democracy through a process of negotiated agreements that, as might be expected, imposed limits on democratic restoration. These agreements included political restrictions and guarantees of immunity for outgoing authorities, revealing the difficulty of the transition.³⁵ Yet what interests us here is the symbolic gesture of recovering memory that accompanied this democratic inauguration. The Rettig Report offered a detailed account of violations of individual rights by gathering the testimonies of victims. In this way, a public space was created in which those who had suffered could finally be heard. Their pain and suffering were acknowledged. This did not solve the problem, but it constituted an important sign of recognition of their dignity.

Individuals were able to recount what had happened to them within an official setting, free from threats. They were able to describe unforgivable abuses and bear witness to others who had been judged and executed without any form of due process. This constituted a decisive milestone in Chile's effort to restore the rule of law and democracy. Moreover, it enabled a symbolic act through which a group of individuals respected for their moral standing in society repaired, in part, the official silence surrounding the past by listening to accounts of what had occurred and recording them in a public report. This gesture of political objectification regarding the wrongs that had been committed was indispensable for establishing the truth and opening the possibility of reconciliation.

In Ricœur's terms, memory is a resource against forgetting. It is a source of justice and must be exercised through institutions that legitimize the rule of law, affirm the truth of what occurred, acknowledge injustices and perpetrators, and provide reparation for victims. The context in which the Rettig Report emerged – in the midst of a highly fragile political transition, under the constant threat of regression and the watchful presence of the military in the background – made it a defining moment in Chile's democratic transition.³⁶ Its reception, however, generated criticism from different directions. One could say that its results gave rise to a crossed hermeneutics between those who deeply valued this step toward truth and those who failed to obtain justice and therefore did not approve of this effort to uncover the truth.³⁷ At the same time, among supporters of Pinochet there were reactions of indifference or contempt, since many either did not wish to see or did not believe the abuses that had been committed. The most conflictive response came from those for whom the process remained insufficient because they hoped to learn the truth in every case and continued to demand justice. Nevertheless, the Rettig Report represented a crucial milestone

³⁵ It should not be forgotten that former President Salvador Allende, who was overthrown by the military dictatorship in 1973, came to power through a democratic election in 1970 and represented an unprecedented case: the election by popular vote of a socialist president in a Latin American country. In rhetorical terms, his left-wing political project emulated the Cuban revolutionary model. Cf. Daniel Mansuy, *Salvador Allende: La Izquierda Chilena y la Unidad Popular* (Santiago, Chile: Penguin Random House, 2023).

³⁶ Edmundo Pérez Yoma, *Civiles y Militares. El rol de la defensa en la consolidación democrática* (1994-2000), (Santiago: Planeta, 2025); Cath Collins - Katherine Hite - Alfredo Joignant, *Las políticas de la memoria en Chile: desde Pinochet a Bachelet*, (Santiago: Ediciones UDP, 2013).

³⁷ Cf. Zalaquett, "La reconstrucción de la unidad nacional y el legado de violaciones de los derechos humanos," (*Perspectivas*, Vol. 2, Nº 2, 1999).

in the public clarification of what had occurred. It was regarded as a symbolic act of democratic reparation and truth-telling and helped pave the way for the restoration of social coexistence.³⁸

This is a first example illustrating the political dilemmas of memory understood as an active registration of the past, or recollection, capable of serving as evidence of what occurred, though it is not always possible to achieve a complete or “happy” memory of events. Remembering is difficult because it must pass through the complexities of memory fractured by its own fragility. Ricœur refers to forgetting as the shadow that haunts memory and transforms it into an “unhappy” memory.³⁹ This unhappiness may arise for different reasons. At times, it results from the inability to remember; at others, from a deliberate will to erase, to maintain concealment, or to refuse remembrance to avoid suffering or punishment. In every case, however, memory as a human capacity remains exposed to failure and reveals the fragilities inherent in the human condition, for the paradigm of the “capable human being” contains both powers and incapacities. In the case of experiences marked by a terrible and painful past, the process of recollection becomes even more difficult and complicates the construction of identity. Consequently, the problem of memory’s fragility is joined by the need to reclaim identity. The fragility of memory is rooted in the fragility of identity itself, as a continual search spurred by the question: *Who am I?*

According to Ricœur: “As the first cause of the fragility of identity we must cite its difficult relation to time; this is a primary difficulty that, precisely, justifies recourse to memory as the temporal component of identity, in conjunction with the evaluation of the present and the projection of the future”.⁴⁰ In other words, understanding who I am presupposes the possibility of weaving together my history and remembering it. When memory is impeded, when memory is censored, the narrative constitution of identity is weakened. As we shall see later in Part II of this study, identity is forged narratively and is continuously refigured through stories and narratives interwoven with the stories of others. It is at this point that personal identity and collective identity intersect.

1.3. Memorial-documentary level

A second political milestone in the process of reparation was the creation of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights, inaugurated in January 2010. Conceived by President Ricardo Lagos, it fulfilled his commitment to “Truth, Justice, and Reparation”, which provided the museum with its ethical foundation and documentary depth. This memorial is based on the findings of official reports such as the Rettig Report discussed above and also takes into account the results of the Valech Commission, established during Lagos’s administration (2000–2006), whose findings had a profound impact because of the harrowing testimonies it collected.⁴¹ In this report, the events

³⁸ Heraldo Muñoz, *La sombra del dictador. Una memoria política de la vida bajo el régimen de Pinochet* (Santiago: Random House, 2023).

³⁹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 30.

⁴⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 81.

⁴¹ The Valech Report originated from the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, established by President Ricardo Lagos in 2003, whose findings were released in 2004. Unlike the Rettig Report, which focused on deaths and disappearances, its purpose was to document systematically and on a large scale the torture and political imprisonment carried out by state agents during the seventeen years of military rule.

that occurred between 1973 and 1990 were systematically documented.⁴² The aim of creating the museum was to move beyond the economic compensation of victims and provide a form of symbolic reparation by the State. Its message of “Never Again” has endured as an exhortation not to repeat these events and to learn from the lessons of our history. Lagos intended to create an active documentation center rather than merely preserve the information gathered by the political commissions, since memory was to become a democratic resource in the service of “Never Again.” The museum was built according to rigorous documentary standards and presents a meticulous compilation of information and offers archival records, testimonies, audiovisual material, and newspaper clippings that reveal the details of events that took place in detention centers throughout the country. In some cases, testimonies come directly from survivors who recorded their voices and personal accounts. Visitors can also view letters and other documents donated to the museum, as well as small objects recovered from these detention centers.

This memorial advances more explicitly in the direction of truth and justice through the documentation of past events, the objectification and acknowledgment of the violations committed, the deprivation of fundamental human rights, and the inhumane experiences endured and inflicted upon individuals because of their political opposition to the regime. It also records the experiences of those detained for their involvement in clandestine armed resistance groups. Likewise, individuals were imprisoned because of their political affiliations or their participation in the government of the overthrown socialist president, among many other circumstances, such as the unjust detention of people who had no political involvement whatsoever.

The competing interpretations surrounding the Museum were far more polarized because it presented a record of reality that some people had refused to believe had occurred, forcing them to acknowledge what had happened. Others continued to deny the truth and sought instead to vindicate their own victims – those associated with the Pinochet regime – who are not represented in this memorial. The polarization generated by the creation of the Museum remains evident in political debates today and, as noted earlier, resurfaces forcefully during election periods. The museum has also been criticized by sectors of the political right for failing to provide a sufficient account of the political context preceding the 1973 coup that led to the collapse of democracy.

Another sensitive moral issue is that, for some, symbolic reparation has not been accompanied by genuine justice in the form of judicial proceedings and convictions. This has generated frustration and criticism of the State for offering a museum rather than providing the full truth regarding the fate of the disappeared detainees.⁴³ From the standpoint of truth, however, it represents a significant step in the construction of historical memory. The creation of the Museum constitutes a success in institutionalizing the memory of these abuses and in moving beyond the

⁴² *Valech Report* (2004, 2011), Chile, National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (Santiago: The Commission, 2005).

⁴³ According to the National Search Plan established by President Gabriel Boric in 2023, a total of 1,469 victims of enforced disappearance have been identified. Of these, 1,092 correspond specifically to the category of *detenidos desaparecidos* (disappeared detainees), while the remaining 377 are political prisoners who were executed and whose bodies were never returned to their families. As of 2026, the whereabouts of more than 1,100 individuals who were detained or executed remain unknown. Cf. Michael J. Lazzara, *Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

threshold of private experience by making public and transparent a record that reveals the brutality inflicted upon the victims.

From a moral perspective, it is an attempt to acknowledge and repair these wrongs on the path toward justice. Yet from a social and political perspective, a profound understanding of what occurred cannot ignore its hermeneutic dimension, which reveals the human difficulties involved in collectively reconstructing the truth. Such truth is not immune to competing interpretations – namely, distortions and misunderstandings ranging from the outright denial of the facts presented to the relativization of truth through parallel interpretations that seek to justify the events. The challenge is how to foster awareness of the importance of establishing a just memory in order to learn from the horrors of the past and agree that there are moral limits to what can be tolerated.⁴⁴ Without such rational and affective consensus, the pursuit of reconciliation and the forward construction of a shared history become exceedingly difficult. Memory is an indispensable step, and in this respect, these political initiatives concerning collective memory deserve recognition.

It is at this ethical-political level of memory that Ricœur introduces the concept of *obligated memory* (*mémoire obligée*)⁴⁵ and refers to the *duty of memory*. It is the dimension of justice that gives ethical and political content to the duty of memory. At the same time, it is the hermeneutics of otherness that reemerges in this appeal to justice: “The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through remembrance, to another other than oneself”.⁴⁶ Although Ricœur offers in this section of *Memory, History, Forgetting* a critical assessment of the uses and abuses of memory as characteristic tendencies of the present age, he nonetheless affirms this important moral dimension of memory. He also introduces the notion of debt, understood not as guilt but as an obligation toward those who are no longer with us but once were – namely, the victims to whom we owe a duty of justice.⁴⁷

1.4. The reverse side: manipulated memory and the limits of Ricœurian solicitude

The preceding analyses have shown concrete forms through which conflicts relating to human rights in Chile have been channeled, and they have documented significant efforts within policies aimed at the reparation of memory. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention certain problems that, in light of the Chilean case itself, resist the reconciliation of memory and reveal critical points regarding the issue from a Ricœurian perspective. His ethical proposal establishes the responsive capacity of the agent, a notion that grounds responsibility as a fundamental ethical condition. However, the problem concerns the possibility of transferring categories from the personal sphere to the collective one. By way of example, we may refer to some instances where this transition is not evident.

The first concerns pacts of silence, which cannot be established objectively and are not the subject of legal proceedings, since the available evidence derives from journalistic investigations and other sources that do not possess procedural evidentiary value. Nevertheless, through plausible testimony, they reveal deliberate agreements to remain silent about what occurred, or even the concealment or planned disappearance of evidence relating to crimes that were

⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Epilogue, II. The odyssey of the Spirit of forgiveness.

⁴⁵ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 86.

⁴⁶ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

⁴⁷ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Section 3, “Ethical-Political Level: Obligated Memory”, 86.

committed.⁴⁸ These examples constitute a critical point insofar as they expose mechanisms of power that make a happy memory impossible and instead express manipulated memory through the institutionalization and systematic silencing carried out by the State. In this case, there is an institutional form of forgetting and an inability on the part of affected families to recover information. The impossibility of clarifying the fate and whereabouts of the victims and incorporating them into personal and collective memory opens a symbolic void within memory itself, an oblivion imposed by the repressive mechanisms of the dictatorship.⁴⁹

The problem, then, is not how to undertake the process of re-signifying the traumas of blocked memory (*the work of memory, the work of mourning*, in Ricœurian terms), but rather how it is possible to heal wounds without the political support that would make it possible to advance the clarification of crimes and the pursuit of justice. How can loved ones be remembered if they disappeared and there is no evidence of what occurred, nor bodies to honor?⁵⁰ This is an issue that Ricœur addresses, albeit not directly, in his analysis of the abuses of memory or manipulated memory, as well as in his reflections on the possibilities and limits of ideological control over memory. As mentioned above, Ricœur proposes the category of *obligated memory* and develops his notion of the *duty of memory* “as an imperative of justice,” which could be applied to our analysis. Yet he himself recognizes the limits of a “simple phenomenology of memory” and clarifies that the issue concerns a moral problematic. It seems necessary to add that it also concerns a political one.⁵¹

In this regard, Johann Michel, from a socio-philosophical perspective, criticizes the limits of an analysis that begins at the individual level and proceeds by way of an analytical analogy to the collective sphere. In this sense, the personal framework of mnemonic capacities that an agent may activate is not the same as that which governs collective and institutional memory. At that level, one encounters questions of scale, conflicts of power, and logics of domination that depend upon state institutions. State policy in Chile regulated, selected, and either officialized or censored the past through public mechanisms (silence, concealment, commemorations, school textbooks, legal subterfuges, or the control exercised through state institutions, among others).⁵² Thus, stated schematically, Michel argues that Ricœur’s thesis concerning memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting* lacks the objective mediations proper to collective memory, since the individual level is

⁴⁸ Uribe (2021) criticizes the political agreements that shaped Chile’s transition, whereas Pérez Yoma reflects on the limits of the Mesa de Diálogo and the unresolved fate of many disappeared detainees. See especially Pérez Yoma, *Civiles y Militares*, 246.

⁴⁹ National Plan for the Search for Truth and Justice (Santiago, Chile: Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, 2023).

⁵⁰ Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet’s Chile, 1973-1988*, Series: Latin America otherwise (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006); Alexander White, *Irruptions of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile’s Transition to Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1999).

⁵¹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 86-90.

⁵² A. Wilde, *Irruptions of Memory: Expressive Politics in Chile’s Transition to Democracy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1999); Michel Lazzara, *Civil Obedience: Complicity and Complacency in Chile since Pinochet*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2018); Elizabeth Lira, “Algunas Reflexiones a Propósito de los 40 años del Golpe Militar en Chile y las Condiciones de la Reconciliation Política”, (*Psykhé*, Vol.22, Nº. Extra 2, 2013)

insufficient as a basis for establishing an analogy with the social sphere. In his view, the past must be governed and not merely remembered.⁵³

At the symbolic level, J. Andrew Barash advances a critique of Ricœur's approach to collective memory and affirms the existence of a fundamental symbolic dimension, one that emerges through group experiences of transmission that interweave personal life and collective memory. From this symbolic perspective, Barash argues that collective memory brings together, in the evocation of the past, both the singularity of the perspective associated with every significant collective experience and its symbolic embodiment, which confers meaning and communicability upon personal remembrance within the collective sphere. Collective memory thereby attains a durability that extends beyond the lives of those who directly remember the experience. This symbolic embodiment liberates memory from the sphere of personal consciousness and incorporates political and social practice into it, namely, language. Memory thus functions not only as a capacity within the individual cognitive sphere, but also as an act that configures meaning within the collective sphere.⁵⁴

Both critiques can be observed in the Chilean case and in its possibilities for symbolic construction. Although they do not negate the hermeneutic productivity of memory in Ricœur's work from the year 2000, they do make it possible to test certain interpretive keys in Ricœur's thought that concern the problem of identity in both its personal and collective dimensions.⁵⁵

2. Narrative as the core of understanding and its possibilities for the repair and reconstruction of identity

The bridge connecting the personal and collective poles is narrative, for it constitutes the symbolic fabric of social understanding, moving from the individual sphere to the broader domain of a plural society. From the perspective of the anthropology of capacities, Ricœur identifies three fundamental passions that underlie our search for self-affirmation: having, power, and worth.⁵⁶ The notion of worth reinforces Honneth's claim regarding the affirming and encouraging dimension of recognition, which plays a decisive role in the constitution of human beings as persons. The others constitute the indispensable counterpart through which we are confirmed in what we are. They care for us at the beginning of life and provide the welcome necessary for us to affirm ourselves as persons. Yet this possibility of self-affirmation may fail, since it requires a process of self-appropriation mediated by culture, works, labor, politics, and other forms of social belonging. In other words, the mediation of all those spheres in which the subject becomes rooted and comes to understand itself ultimately culminates in the narrative articulation of one's own

⁵³ Johann Michel, "La construction des objets de mémoire: une lecture critique de Paul Ricœur," *Archives de Philosophie*, Vol. 69, N°4, (2006).

⁵⁴ Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "The Place of Remembrance: Reflections on Paul Ricœur's Theory of Collective Memory", en *A passion for the possible: thinking with Paul Ricœur*, ed. Brian Treanor and Henry Isaac Venema (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 147-57.

⁵⁵ On the theme of individual and institutional forgiveness, see Geoffrey Dierckxsens, *The Politics of Forgiveness: Memory, Responsibility, and Justice* (2015).

⁵⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, translated by Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).

history and makes attestation possible.⁵⁷ Identity is thus exposed to others and never ceases to be constructed.⁵⁸

As we saw in the previous section, the personal events that “assemble” this identity are individual, familial, and interpersonal experiences, all of them anchored within broader social and political realities. If we disentangle the relationship between these untransferable personal experiences and the social and political contexts that accompany them, we can perceive the profound connection between the vicissitudes of political life and their effects upon both. At the same time, we can appreciate how political crossroads shape personal interpretation itself.

The following analysis considers two levels: narrative in individual factual testimony (section e), and art together with its narrative potential (section f). This connection is developed by Ricœur in *Time and Narrative III* through the productive dialectic between history and narrative.

2.1. The Voice of Individual Testimony and Its Hermeneutics

The aim, following Ricœur’s hermeneutic model, is to echo one of the philosophical qualities mentioned at the outset of this study: his ability to maintain a link between the universal and the singular. As we know, this connection is a central ethical motif within Ricœur’s practical wisdom, realized in moral judgment in situation, where moral tact emerges from consideration of the singular case and constitutes its decisive ethical moment⁵⁹. As Revault d’Allonnes observes:

We may be moved by the encounter between this questioning of singular identity, of the perception of individual living and dead persons, and certain essential motifs in Paul Ricœur’s work. These motifs concern precisely the relationship between the universal and the singular, understood above all in particular situations shaped by limit-experiences, experiences that Ricœur’s reflection never hesitated to confront.⁶⁰

When we speak of narratives concerning disappeared detainees or political prisoners in Chile, when we hear the voices of those who testify, we are able to access their stories, make them part of our own history and of our society, and thus transmit them while preserving records that do justice to individuals beyond the emblematic, general, or representative accounts of history. Testimony also allows us to demonstrate the implications of public recognition for the possibility of reworking one’s own identity.

Following the military coup of 1973, mass arrests were carried out throughout the country. One of the principal detention sites was the National Stadium, an emblematic public space in Santiago, traditionally associated with sporting events, cultural gatherings, and political demonstrations. We are interested in examining the experience of one family whose father was arrested together with his twenty-one-year-old son, first taken to a police investigation

⁵⁷ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 299.

⁵⁸ Revault D’allonnes, “La vie refigurée,” (2013), 206.

⁵⁹ Beatriz Contreras, *La sabiduría práctica en la ética de Paul Ricœur* (Madrid: Plaza y Valdés, 2011).

⁶⁰ Revault D’allonnes “La vie refigurée,” (2013), 199.

headquarters and later transferred to the National Stadium. The arrest took place in the presence of his wife and daughters.⁶¹

This story allows us to analyze the issue in two directions. On the one hand, it reveals the moral sphere of the event and its hermeneutic effects on memory. On the other, it illustrates the significance of narrative and recognition and their role in the moral and psycho-emotional repair of those affected. According to the account provided by the youngest daughter, only days after the military coup, her father had returned home after spending several days in hiding. He was arrested before they could make a final decision. A group of twenty-five armed soldiers arrived at the family home and violently interrupted them while they were having lunch. Her memory centers on that moment: the sudden intrusion into their home and the arrest of both her father and her older brother. She recalls that one of the soldiers also attempted to seize her sixteen-year-old sister. Their mother intervened, placing herself between the soldier and her daughter, and offered to go in her place if another person had to be taken, insisting that her daughter was still a minor. Her courage and determination ultimately persuaded the soldier to abandon the attempt.

The family was devastated. They endured intense anguish upon learning that both men had been detained and subjected to torture. After a few days, the brother was released, while the father was transferred to the National Stadium. Although family members were permitted to visit him and bring clothing, uncertainty remained overwhelming, since no one knew what would happen next. This story reflects the experience of many Chilean families who endured the violence of those first days and the uncertainty generated by not knowing what was happening throughout the country. Several detainees held at the National Stadium were executed, while others who survived were transferred to detention centers located across Chile. He was finally released after one year. The repercussions of these events marked the father's biography permanently. He never fully recovered either his emotional stability or his professional life.

To understand the hermeneutic significance of this testimony and its implications for memory, narrative, and recognition, it is necessary to continue the story. In 2025, the daughters visited the National Stadium and discovered that their father's name was not included on the memorial plaque commemorating former political detainees. When they inquired about the omission, they were informed that they could submit a formal request to have his name added to the register. During this process of verification, the daughters were interviewed, and during the reconstruction of events, however, discrepancies emerged concerning certain details. There was disagreement about the precise moment when the arrest took place. The older sister did not remember the episode in which a soldier attempted to arrest her, whereas the younger sister retained a vivid memory of that event. They also discovered pieces of information that they had never previously shared, despite having lived through the same experience.

These differences in recollection confirm not only the effects of time – which makes it increasingly difficult to recover past events with precision, particularly after fifty-two years – but also the hermeneutic character of all understanding and, certainly, of every exercise of memory. Although the event itself remains objective and historically datable, there is never simply one story.

⁶¹ I requested permission from one of the daughters to recount this story and, out of respect for the family's privacy, I have omitted all names. I would also like to express my gratitude for her generosity in sharing this history, for the trust she placed in me, and for her willingness to open a painful chapter of her life and allow me to become a witness to her testimony.

Rather, there are distinct ways of recounting the same history, each unique and personal, reflecting the interpretations individuals develop in response to experiences whose emotional and moral impact is singular and incommunicable.

The hermeneutic dimension of memory must therefore be approached with both moral and epistemological caution. This does not entail denying or relativizing events themselves, but rather recognizing the different traces they leave upon those who experience them. This testimony shows how the daughters endured an unforgivable act of violence. Although they share feelings of pain, injustice, and the affront to their father's and brother's dignity in the process of recovering this memory, they narrate their recollections with different emphases, and even with certain gaps or lapses of memory. This should not surprise us if we accept that all understanding is mediated and that we possess no transparent access either to ourselves or to our past. Memory is itself rendered fragile by history. Narrative remains subject to the passage of time, to the psycho-affective impact that each person experiences differently, and to the varying forms of forgetting that individuals may elaborate.

Narrative, which occupies a central place in this story, has also played – and continues to play – a healing role for the younger daughter, who has been able to work through this pain in PRAIS therapy.⁶² This program enabled her to meet others who had endured similar experiences during the post-dictatorial period, to share their stories, and to be heard. In this sense, narrative has been fundamental because it allows lived experience to be brought into language, transforming what remains inscribed in memory into an articulated account.

When a shared narrative emerges – one expressed through the political recognition of the moral significance of historical events and embodied in institutions, legislation, commemorations, and collective dialogue within schools, universities, local communities, and research centers – the process of refiguring personal identity is reinforced by social esteem and collective understanding. Such recognition establishes moral minimums that cannot simply be ignored.

Likewise, concerning social and political recognition in this story, it is expressed in the need to leave some record for future generations. In other words, beyond the restorative dimension of self-esteem and the restoration of the family name as a way of honoring her father, what the younger daughter expresses in this case is a desire for social recognition so that such events may not be repeated. That is, the possibility that a record of her father's detention at the National Stadium (his name and photograph) may be preserved – a process that is still underway⁶³ – serves two purposes. One is the reparation achieved through the vindication of his memory; the other is the importance of public recognition and its social and political implications. The symbolic significance of recording a person's name is important because it demonstrates that reparation is not merely a material matter. In other words, policies of material compensation for victims of

⁶² PRAIS (*Programa de Reparación y Atención Integral en Salud y Derechos Humanos*) is the Program for Comprehensive Health and Human Rights Care and Reparation, established in 1991, almost simultaneously with the Rettig Report.

⁶³ The paradox in Chile is that policies of social recognition remain subject to the will of the government in power. In other words, securing funding for memorial initiatives depends on political approval rather than on a state policy that should remain consistent over time

human rights violations – such as health and educational benefits⁶⁴ – are not sufficient. There is also a dimension of social esteem grounded in the recognition of persons. The moral and psychological harm inflicted upon this family affected the self-esteem of all its members. Such deep wounds cannot simply be repaired. Yet it is possible to open channels of recognition that vindicate those who suffered, preserve their memory, and express a commitment to justice through the acknowledgment of events and the honoring of victims.

Ricœur reminds us: “(...) it must not be forgotten that I am first thrown into situations that I have not chosen, that I am affected by things that I receive without creating them, and that I can assign myself the task of orienting myself within these situations and, from them, projecting my ownmost possibilities”.⁶⁵ This capacity for projection becomes impeded when contingency fractures the possibility of appropriating our experiences and transforming them into a meaningful destiny.

2.2. Art and its narrative potential

Artistic expression represents a powerful means of transforming suffering into creation through the bestowal of meaning upon action, configuring alternative significations that tell stories across different registers – literary, theatrical, cinematic, and others. Ricœur recognizes the imaginative dimension of narrative and attributes to it a capacity to broaden our understanding of ourselves; in particular, he assigns fiction a privileged role as a threshold of ethics.⁶⁶ Indeed, the amplifying function of fiction contrasts with the constraints inherent in ethics and history. In both cases, some limits cannot be transgressed. Ethics possesses a normative dimension and remains bound to its fundamental regulative principles of respect for human beings. History, for its part, must remain faithful to the past and reconstruct events through documentary evidence and a commitment to the truth of what occurred. Artistic language, however, can recreate action through experiences that are unprecedented or even unthinkable, thereby deepening our understanding of human life itself.

The following example illustrates this creative power of art and its role in the refiguration of life itself within the Chilean context described above. I shall focus on a documentary film, known for its poetic quality and cultural impact. The documentary film: *Nostalgia for the Light* (*La Nostalgia de la Luz*), directed by Patricio Guzmán. The film presents a poetic narrative structured around three interconnected planes – the cosmic, the archaeological, and the political – from a philosophical and aesthetic perspective. The philosophical thesis underlying the film is the paradox of time and its evanescence. Guzmán develops the idea of the relativity of the present – indeed, of its apparent nonexistence – through the perspective of astronomy. The light captured by telescopes has taken millions of years to reach Earth; what we observe today occurred in the distant past. Our present is already the past.

⁶⁴ In Chile, several laws were enacted beginning in 1991 to provide reparation for victims of enforced disappearance and political execution (Law 19.123, following the Rettig Commission), as well as for victims of political imprisonment and torture (Law 19.992, following the Valech Commission). Additional decrees established complementary non-monetary benefits, including free healthcare services for victims and their families through the PRAIS Program and various pension-related benefits.

⁶⁵ Ricœur, “Histoire et Herméneutique”, 17.

⁶⁶ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 241.

The film portrays a powerful political resonance by giving voice to the Women of Calama, relatives of victims of the Caravan of Death. More than thirty years after the events, these women continue searching the Chilean desert for the remains of their disappeared relatives. Their testimonies are deeply moving, combining hope with frustration and fear. The film exposes a striking social and political paradox: Chile supports and invests in major scientific institutions in the north of the country⁶⁷ dedicated to investigating the distant past of the universe, yet has devoted comparatively limited efforts to locating those who disappeared only decades ago within its own territory.

This ethical and political paradox is articulated through the story of Valentina, a young astronomer whose parents were forcibly disappeared during the dictatorship. Raised by her grandparents, she embodies the intersection of the film's two central themes: the search for the origins of the universe through the study of the stars and the search for personal identity marked by absence – the void left by an unresolved past that deprived her of her loved ones. The hope suggested by the film's conclusion is that memory can ultimately be transformed into recognition and light.

From this perspective, the search for recognition is inseparably bound to memory. As Ricœur writes at the end of *Memory, History, Forgetting*: "I consider recognition to be the small miracle of memory. And as a miracle, it can also fail to occur. But when it does take place, in thumbing through a photo album, or in the unexpected encounter with a familiar person, or in the silent evocation of a being who is absent or gone forever, the cry escapes: "That is her! That is him!"⁶⁸.

3. Conclusion: The balance between obstacles and possibilities of recognizing the other in Ricœur's phenomenological hermeneutics

The examples examined throughout this study reveal the intertwined dilemmas of memory, narrative, and mutual recognition. They illustrate how the selected cases express a search for worth (*valoir*), an anthropological aspiration that is not without conflict in the development of the self. Worth represents a fundamental desire for recognition by others. Hegel was right to identify this need for external affirmation as a driving force behind agonistic relations between individuals. Ricœur, however, goes further by exploring models of recognition inspired by *agape* and gift-giving – forms of recognition capable of creating moments of peace and establishing modes of exchange that differ from the struggle for recognition.

The realities analyzed here compel us to reflect deeply on how paths toward social reconciliation and renewed encounter may be established. The examples presented concern a particular moment in Chilean history, a history marked by violence and repression that continues to generate political dilemmas and bears the painful traces of lived experience. They also reveal the

⁶⁷ The most famous example is the Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array project, one of the largest astronomical initiatives in the world, consisting of sixty-six high-precision antennas located at an altitude of 5,000 meters on the Chajnantor Plateau near San Pedro de Atacama.

⁶⁸ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 495.

unfinished task of restoring a deeper dialogue capable of healing wounds and strengthening social cohesion.

Nevertheless, hope for such a renewed encounter may be placed in mutual recognition cultivated at social and cultural levels and anchored not only in politics, but also in art, education, and other forms of human activity. From a Ricœurian hermeneutic perspective, the logic of hospitality presupposes the development of mutual trust. Learning once again to believe that the other speaks truthfully is an essential – though difficult – step in the process of mutual recognition.

The question that remains is what forms of collective effort are required to reconstruct those zones of fragility within social, symbolic, and political narratives that continue to weaken democratic life and hinder the institutionalization of spaces of mutual recognition within society.

Indeed, the decision to write this article caused me, I must confess, a certain sense of vertigo, for it required confronting my own ghosts, silences, and deeply rooted fears. Distanciation is not easy to achieve. The philosophical aspiration to objectivity cannot be entirely separated from the internal unease that accompanies the recollection of a reality that, to a greater or lesser extent, marked our lives during adolescence and university years. The issue that still confronts us in contemporary Chile is whether it is possible to speak about the past without fear – without fear of social censorship and without fear of the subtler forms of self-censorship that often accompany it. There remain words that seem better left unspoken. It is still difficult to tell these stories to younger generations without worrying that they may be disturbed by them. We continue, in many respects, to navigate against the current of the River Lèthè. Ricœur's project is not to dissolve conflict but to channel it. The ability to do so remains both an individual and a collective challenge.

One feature of Ricœur's hermeneutic philosophy has served as a guiding thread throughout this analysis: the point of intersection between the universality of theoretical reflection and the singularity of lived experience. In this regard, it is worth returning to the notion of practical wisdom developed within his ethics of solicitude. Practical wisdom appeals to the tact of moral judgment as a resource for navigating difficult situations and moments of conflict, not only at the personal level but also in collective decision-making.

The challenge lies in finding a wise balance between the norm and the singular. Progress at the juridical level is indispensable. Law belongs to the sphere of universality, represented by institutions and legal frameworks, and constitutes a crucial stage in the channeling of conflict. Yet it is not sufficient. Political action may also emerge in smaller spaces and through singular initiatives: through pedagogy, through creative practices⁶⁹, through ethical-poetic forms of expression that invite imaginative exploration, and through singular experiences that cultivate the moral tact required to welcome, include, invite, and celebrate others rather than confront them.

This analysis has not addressed the question of forgetting. Ricœur himself recognized the immense difficulty of treating this subject in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.⁷⁰ Yet there may be a form

⁶⁹ Olivier Abel refers to Ricœur's analysis of the *socius* and the neighbor and asks whether a "politics of the neighbor" is conceivable, opening up a line of inquiry that seems particularly valuable for rethinking this issue. "La philosophie du proche" (*Clés. Paul Ricœur: interprétation et reconnaissance*, 33, 2008).

⁷⁰ We are aware of the critical debates that the publication of *Memory, History, Forgetting* generated in France regarding this issue.

of forgetting capable of teaching a different lesson – not one that denies memory, certainly, but one that helps us discover new ways of dialogue and recognition.

In Spanish, the word *discusión* often carries the negative connotation of a quarrel. In French, however, *discuter* primarily means to converse or debate. Perhaps this is what we have forgotten. We have become accustomed to a narrow understanding of the discussion in black-and-white terms, and to treat politics as a form of radical confrontation. In this sense, forgetting may possess an instructive dimension when understood as an impulse toward refiguration exercised through creative works. It invites us to place our trust once again in language as a human capacity, in this exemplary institution through which more hospitable forms of communication may emerge.

Ultimately, to regard the other as a “foreigner” place ourselves at the center and assigns us the role of “natives,” but in doing so it also inoculates us with resistance, fear, and rejection.⁷¹ A further turn of the screw introduces a second moment into our distant gaze toward the other, one in which, through the other's mirror, we come to see ourselves reflected. In that gaze, we perceive both what we are and what we are not, as well as the limits that define us. It is precisely in the risky encounter with someone different from ourselves that we come to value that difference; above all, however, we learn to view the “stranger” as a fellow human being. Human dissymmetry, as Arendt argues, makes us equal in our humanity while distinct in our personal identities. Memory is the foundation of identity, reminding us who we are, but narrative makes possible an imaginative variation that transforms us, and recognition establishes an interpersonal and collective space in which we may encounter others.

⁷¹ Vilém Flusser, “Exile and Creativity”, in *Vilém Flusser, Writings*, ed. Andreas Ströhl, trans. E. Eisel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 1984).

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