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FORGETTING: DECONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGIES IN LIGHT OF PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract: In this paper, I propose a Derridean deconstructive account of forgetting as an aporetic structure, and compare this with Husserl's phenomenological description of memory. The Derridean interpretation is based off of Derrida's analyses of the gift and of forgiveness. For the Derridean, forgetting is an ethical impossibility, whereas for Husserl, it is an epistemological impossibility. Husserlian phenomenology maintains that memory is a re-activation of specific acts of intentionality. The Husserlian and Derridean accounts of forgetting join to directly challenge the Nietzschean and Jamesian contentions that forgetting is necessary to human survival. Instead of claiming that forgetting is necessary, Derrida and Husserl support the claim that it is impossible to fully forget.

Keywords: Derrida, Husserl, phenomenology, deconstruction, memory

Forgetting: Deconstructive Strategies in Light of Phenomenology^{1*}

In the practical use of our intellect, *forgetting* is as important a function as *remembering*. – William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course* [1892]

Memory ought to be the seat, the throne, of absolute subjectivity.

– David Farrell Krell, „Phenomenology of Memory from Husserl to Merleau-Ponty” [1982]

Jacques Derrida's 'recent' writings have concerned themselves with social and political issues, such as ethics and „the gift,” forgiveness, obligation, friendship, cosmopo-

1 NOTES:

* First, it should be noted at the outset of this paper that the version of forgetting that I will limit myself to is *individual* acts of forgetting, although it would prove to be rather difficult to speak of the individual outside of her social situation. An entirely other (and perhaps more interesting) paper could be written on a deconstructive and phenomenological account of *collective* memory and forgetting, but that is not attempted here. This other topic will be investigated in a companion piece by the author in the future. Second, a debt of gratitude is owed to Edward S. Casey, professor of philosophy at SUNY-Stony Brook, for his helpful assistance and suggestions at an all-too-brief meeting at the 2002 Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy meeting at Loyola University-Chicago; and Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, professor emeritus of philosophy at Lewis University, for her kind and continuing guidance in matters phenomenological.

litanism, and so on. These are philosophical topics that appear as somewhat of a surprise to those who have superficially followed Derrida's work. Allegedly, the activity of deconstruction is twofold (and interconnected at its core): (1) it would demonstrate the *aporias* of certain historically crucial concepts; and (2) it would go about *reading* literary and philosophical texts, and critically interpret the genealogies found therein. Deconstruction then would display a character to it that would appear a-social or a-political, and it would not seem to concern itself with current events, such as asylum for political refugees and their rights to hospitality, forgiveness after the Holocaust, etc. „What does textuality have to do with ethics or politics?” one may rightly pose to Derrida. The response to this question is to be found explicitly in Derrida's 'later' work, and implicitly all along. We will consider responses to this first question soon enough. „Why the apparent turn toward societal questions and ethical decisions, in light of Derrida's previously apolitical writings?” another may ask. A place to start when these questions would be through a re-reading of relevant aspects of 'early' Derrida, which may present us with implied, unspoken, or underestimated ethical and political reflections and themes (as I believe the case to be). However, we have neither the time nor the space to discuss said topics, as that could take us away from our chosen problematic.

This paper will investigate an important, but not fully thematized *ethical* notion in Derrida's recent writings – *forgetting* – in light of a broader context of a discussion of memory in deconstructive and phenomenological research, chiefly the work of Edmund Husserl. We aim to discover what, if anything, are the commonalities between the two accounts, and where Derridean deconstruction diverges from the Husserlian phenomenological method of analysis and description. To begin, we will briefly introduce and examine a phenomenological account of forgetting, and see where that takes us. This needs to be done by way of a reinterpretation of Husserl's thoughts on memory and time-consciousness. Later, we will extract relevant thoughts from Derrida and deconstructive analyses of forgetting from his recent essays, specifically in regard to (1) ethics and „the gift” and (2) the discussions surrounding the notion of „forgiveness.” Some creative imagination is to be required here, as Derrida (to my knowledge and research) has not yet delivered a lecture, published an article, book, etc., that deals specifically with the issue of forgetting as a theme to be deconstructed. In addition, while browsing through the indexes of Husserl's English translations and secondary sources, there has not (to my knowledge) been a concerted discussion of the explicit theme of „forgetting.” Finally, we should be able to see, in section IV, where deconstruction advances phenomenological research, and where it rejects certain notions and methods. A comparative analysis will be executed, with the intent of seeing how the two 20th (and 21st) century philosophical standpoints fare in regard to one another. It is the author's hope that such an analysis will provide a critical examination of certain aspects of the trajectory of 20th century Continental European philosophy, (both figuratively and literally) from 'beginning to end.'

I. PHENOMENOLOGY AND FORGETTING
RECOLLECTION IS RE-PRESENTING – HUSSERL,
PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY [1925]

Remembering, for phenomenology, involves sedimentation and reproduction. Phenomenologists assert that retention means that there is no instantaneous „now.“ Forgetting, then, has to do with the category of „reproductive memory“ for Husserl. I can, to a small degree, make the ‘then’ reappear now, through a successful act of memory. This line of reasoning may run down a similar line as deconstructive theory, where Derrida notes that „the now is and is not what it is. More precisely, it only ‘scarcely’ is what it is.”² Stephen Tyman asserts that

the purpose of the phenomenology of forgetting is to determine whether or not it is possible, on a phenomenological basis, to take up an essential attitude towards forgetting and the forgotten as such, and in this way to instill a consciousness a defensible orientation not only to what is not merely the unconscious, but equally to what may even be functioning pre-consciously within consciousness.³

Husserlian phenomenology’s method is the radical suspension of belief (or conviction) in our conception of the objects of consciousness – the epoché. The basic structures of intentionality are revealed as having been forgotten in the „natural attitude,” as previously the phenomenologist assumed the reality of the objective (outside) world prior to the subjective experiencer. This is, of course, taking place within a temporal framework, such that what was once ‘known’ was forgotten, namely the open horizons of consciousness and the intentionality of consciousness. The goal, then, of Husserlian phenomenology, it could be stated, is to remember (i.e., recollect, re-present) what we have forgotten through the naturalistic attitude of thinking, doing, and experiencing. Husserl notes:

...concrete perception as original consciousness (original givenness) of a temporally extended object is structured internally as itself a streaming system of momentary perceptions (so-called originary impressions). But each such momentary perception is the nuclear phase of a continuity, a continuity of momentary graduated *retentions* on the one side, and a horizon of what is coming on the other side: a horizon of ‘*protention*,’ which is disclosed to be characterized as a constantly graded coming.⁴

2 Derrida 1993, 14

3 Tyman 1983, 46

4 Husserl 1977, 154; emphasis mine. Husserl later notes that „Recollection... exercises the intentional function of forming the meaning of the past...” (1970, 168). Ed Casey, in *Remembering*, notes that, expanding Husserl’s thesis, „there is an entire set of intermediate forms of remembering: intermediate between primary and secondary memory, as well as between mind and world” (2000, x). It stands to reason then that there are multiple forms of forgetting, or breaches of memory, as well. Casey: „There is not simple forgetting or forgetting-what but forgetting-*how*: forgetting not only how to do something but *forgetting how we forgot it* in the first place” (ibid., xii; original emphasis).

The intentionality of consciousness, simply stated, posits that consciousness is always directed outside of itself toward some intentional object – not only does this occur spatially, but it also happens temporally. Consciousness, then, is always and ever transcending itself and moving *beyond* in an active, intentional motion. In addition, when in the phenomenological attitude, consciousness is also self-consciousness, in that when I phenomenologically perceive a red barn, I am aware not only of the barn but also, in a marginal way, of my seeing it.⁵ It is through phenomenology that, echoing Tyman’s phrase, we are able to investigate the intentional structures of remembering and forgetting. Once the epoché is performed, we are presented with a three-fold intentionality of time-consciousness. First, a conception of *primal impression* (or „consciousness”) is revealed in the original consciousness of the now, as opposed to the immediate past and immediate future. Second, as alluded to above in the quotation from Husserl, *retention* is the original consciousness of the past, which at once preserves and modifies the just elapsed phases of the object. Third, *protention* is the immediate consciousness of the future phases or phases of the object. It might be aptly described as the perpetual openness of consciousness to further experience. Retention is not to be confused with secondary memory, as it re-presents or reproduces the past object rather than presenting or actually perceiving it. Similarly, protention stands opposed to expectation, which would be the explicit representation of a future event, which would be a contradiction in terms. The three-fold intentional structures of primal impression, retention, and protention reveal themselves not only as constituting our perceptions, memories, and strivings, but also they disclose themselves as intentional acts. Hence we have a phenomenology of external, as well as of internal, time-consciousness.

Phenomenology concedes to the fact that human beings are natural gap-fillers, that there is no instantaneous „now” to be separated from all of the other fleeting „nows.” Time exists not atomistically but as a flow of continuous moments: past, present, and future. John Brough notes that „Husserl often affirms the inseparability in principle of the moments of the absolute flow and the moments of immanent content intended by them.”⁶ We should revisit some of Husserl’s reflections from his works on time-consciousness, as this exercise should prove fruitful in further uncovering structures of forgetting and its complement, remembering. Tyman asserts, „The assimilative character of consciousness... is rooted in the underlying connectedness of the moments of its *lived time*, and the fact that a moment just past is still retained as part of the living structure of the present.”⁷ A Husserlian phenomenology of memory rightly presupposes prior perceptions and presentations of objects to consciousness; it stands to reason that a phenomenology of remembering would then be able to describe the re-perceiving, or better, the remembrance of ‘forgotten’ objects of consciousness: people, events, experiences, figures, dates, and so on.

As time goes by, we are able to synthesize phenomena from the past (recent or distant) into understandable, comprehensive, and ‘memorable’ anamneses. The givenness

5 Brough 1977, 87

6 *ibid.*, 94

7 Tyman 1983, 52; emphasis mine

and ability to recollect the past comprises our memory. Husserl adds, „The further we withdraw from the now, ... the greater the blending and drawing together.”⁸ Conversely, as time goes by, not everything that we experienced within the external or internal intentionalities of time-consciousness are able to be re-collected – thus we forget things for various reasons. It appears as though forgetting is an unfortunate by-product of the synthetic capacities of our intentional memories. We simply cannot retain everything we experience, hear, see, learn, smell, taste, etc.

Forgetting, like memory, takes on different structures. There is the ‘tip of the tongue’ syndrome, which many of us can attest to as occurring in regard to facts, definitions, names, numbers, etc. We „know” that we once perceived the information, and we ought to be able to retain and re-present the item, but recollecting right now it is just outside our reach. For example, I may have been thinking about, and planning to attend, my friend’s birthday soirée for weeks ahead of time, but when the Saturday evening of her party comes and goes, and I forget to attend the celebration, it happened to be the case that the object of intentional consciousness did not appropriately come to my attention. It simply ‘slipped my mind’ – a glitch in my ability to recollect and re-connect September 7, 2002 with Siobhan’s birthday occurred. I forgot. And when I receive the deservedly reprimanding phone call on my cell phone, I temporarily ‘freak out,’ because I knew to attend and bring a present (I’ve known about it for a month), but that simply did not happen. Through a phenomenological analysis of this experience, I can examine the event as an example of a failed connection in memory and representation. Apparently, the sedimentation process of this piece of information had difficulties in being reactivated when it needed to be. Tyman adds, „I reflect back on the experience of frustrated memory, and by extension and generalization, I reconstruct a conception of the forgotten as such: a dimension of consciousness in which memory is... frustrated. This is as close as I seem to be able to come to a direct experience of the forgotten: the limiting case of a total failure of recall.”⁹

This example is one of partial forgetting. For, I can easily remember a lot about the time that Siobhan and I spent two years ago in Baltimore, her kind notes and email messages, and her cell phone number, but remembering the event of her birthday simply was not possible at the time of necessary recollection. When reminded of the event, I am able to remember that which was forgotten. As such, absolute forgetting is not seen as likely, or even possible, through this phenomenological analysis. The ‘forgotten as such’ could be described phenomenologically as a present absence, located just below the surface of representation. Tyman again adds, „My experience of the forgotten as such, when it is accessible to be *via* reproductive memory seems always to be of this *partial* sort.”¹⁰ Following from this, in forgetting, I must in principle be able to be aware of my forgetting as such, and therefore there is within me an infinite and non-temporal capacity to deal with the terms and conditions of my finitude as such, both for theoretical and practical purposes. I learn through forgetting to ‘try’ to remember the important

8 Husserl 1981, 280

9 Tyman 1983, 54

10 *ibid.*

things (plans, engagements, deadlines, etc.) in the near and distant future by mnemonic devices, notes, messages scribbled and affixed to the refrigerator, and so on. I ought to be able to recall these mental states as needed, but doing this without failure is an impossibility, for the world of horizons is beyond my capacities as a singular individual.¹¹

II. DECONSTRUCTION AND FORGETTING

Before we progress with a discussion of Derrida's recent writings that deal with forgetting, some relevant background discussion may be in order in the form of two prefatory remarks. First, as Tyman observes, „French phenomenology [of which Derrida could be claimed as a member] has clung fiercely to the talisman of finitude, to the worldly character of cognition, and to the essence of intentionality as *situated*.¹² This is important to keep in mind as we move from a phenomenological account of forgetting to a deconstructive one. We have neither the time nor the space here to trace the development of Continental European philosophy from Husserl to Derrida – accordingly, 20th century intellectual history has been abbreviated in this paper. Second, in the lecture notes later collected and entitled „Freud and the Scene of Writing” in *Writing and Difference* (1978), Derrida intimates a theory of forgetting as being different from, but not absolutely distinct from, the Freudian theory of repression. What is left for both Freud and Derrida after memory temporarily negates itself (after the act of forgetting) is the *trace*¹³, or some sort of symptomatic representation, reminding us in an indirect way of the once-present memory. It should suffice, then, that forgetting is a sort of *absence-ing* of a thought, memory, fantasy, experience, etc. Derrida is somewhat vague as to the intentional or non-intentional character of forgetting here. However, the erasure of the trace equals death for Derrida. Traces of the traces remain in „the unconscious, where ‘nothing ends, nothing happens, nothing is forgotten.’¹⁴ To actually and totally forget something, then, remains to be done. Some-thing will always endure with us, even if it is „latent” and repressed deep into our psyches. Presence (read: memory) and absence (read: forgetting) cannot exist without one another, and without one in the other. Therefore, the act of pure forgetting is at one and the same time an irrational absurdity, an

11 Ed Casey, taking our example and pushing it to its extreme, mentions the occurrence of „double oblivion, i.e., forgetting that we ever knew something (in contrast with remembering that we once knew something but cannot now recall what this something is)” (Casey 2000, xii). At this midpoint, a connecting apparatus between Husserl and Derrida by way of Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, *et al* could be attempted. In this paper, however, it has not been endeavored. This unwritten section could indeed be a subject of scholarly investigation in its own right, as studies by Krell (1982) and others have shown.

12 Tyman, 56; original emphasis

13 The „trace” is, no doubt, a term gleaned by Derrida from the ethical writings of Emmanuel Lévinas. The trace of the Other, according to Lévinas, is the constant presence, an omni-present reminder, even in their absence, of my ethical responsibility for the Other.

14 Derrida 1978, 230. In addition, intentional acts of repression (or forgetting), due to individual or collective trauma, will not be investigated (or deconstructed) here. This project, in my opinion, would fit better with the complementary paper to be written on deconstructive and phenomenological analyses of *collective* memory and forgetting.

aporia. The condition for the possibility of absolute forgetting is its own impossibility, according to a deconstructive strategy.

One of Derrida's major criticisms of the history of philosophy is that it is an onto-theological *metaphysics of presence*, meaning that not enough creative energy was spent on discovering the difference of things, people, ideas, etc. Consequently, too much time and effort was spent on the attempt to totalize the self-identical unity and forge sameness out of an originary *différance*.

The phenomenon of one's memory, according to Derrida, „is not a psychical property among others; it is *the very essence of the psyche*... an opening to the effraction of the trace.”¹⁵ It stands to bear that forgetting, as a process of the memory, cannot adequately forget the trace (nor the trace of the trace, which exists in the realm of the unconscious) of the original memory. Derrida then quotes Freud as stating that „the memory of an experience (that is, its continuing operative power) depends on a factor which is called the magnitude of the impression...”¹⁶ The production of the trace could be re-interpreted as a moment of deferring, where we are temporally (and temporarily) not presented with an object, but merely a representation of it, which is, of course, not the object itself – thus the notion of deferral is operative here. Derrida seems quite sure that „life protects itself by repetition, trace, *différance* (deferral).” He continues, „Life must be thought of *as trace* before Being may be determined as presence.”¹⁷

Lastly, in „Finis,” Derrida explicitly discusses the „experience of the aporia,” and these preliminary notes ought to be brought to light in our later discussions of the aporias of „the gift” and forgiveness. Derrida is interested in describing the „experience (of the aporia) as such.”¹⁸ Synonyms for the experience of the aporia include ‘passage,’ ‘traversal (without line and without indivisible borders,’ ‘encumbrance,’ or ‘rites of passage.’ A more thorough explication of theaporetic structure of a concept presents itself as a

single duty that recurrently duplicates itself, interminably fissures itself, and contradicts itself without remaining the same, that is, concerning the only and single double, contradictory imperative.¹⁹

These discussions should be kept in mind as we move from Derrida's earlier works to his ‘recent’ works on ethics and politics. We shall see how he re-visits these ideas within more contemporary contexts with a keen eye looking for moments of consistency or revision in his basic project.

(1) Stemming from, and a crucial component of, his recent work on „the gift” and forgiveness (among other places), Derrida mentions the notion and activity of forgetting. First, *the gift*. Derrida has already highlighted theaporetic structures of „the gift”

15 *ibid.*, 201; emphasis mine

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*, 203; latter emphasis mine

18 Derrida 1993, 14, 15

19 *ibid.*, 16; originally written in Derrida's *The Other Heading*, p. 77

in various places, but most succinctly in „The Time of the King” in *Given Time, The Gift of Death*, and so on. To give a gift *in principle* is without conditions, or stipulations.²⁰ As Derrida notes, „the gift, *if there is any*, would no doubt be related to the economy.”²¹ A pure „gift” is that which is given without any expectation of return, or even of recognition of the gift *as gift* – it interrupts the conventional notion of „economy.” This is a *pure gift*. Derrida reiterates our point, „For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt. If the other *gives me back* or *owes me* or as to give me back what I give to him or her, there will not have been a gift.”²² The *practice* of this gift giving is always conditional. Without exception, one enters into a situation of recognition, or exchange, when one „gives” a gift. We assume reciprocity (or symmetrical justice) for our actions. ~~One begins (or rather, one continues)~~ a circular, or an „economical” exchange at the point of giving, complete with expected recognition and ramifications for improper (or neglected) receiving prepared. An actual gift, according to Derrida (and others) has to be, if it is going to be a gift at all, absolutely asymmetrical, ruptures the cyclical nature of time, and is not reciprocal at all. We are thus left with a contradictory situation, or a „double-bind”: giving gifts is, in principle, one of the most fundamental things that humans do; however, to actually give a gift is to do the impossible. Being presented with this state of affairs is not at all to discontinue giving gifts, and ethically thinking about gift giving. To paraphrase Critchley and Kearney, „Derrida’s identification of a contradictory logic at the very heart of the concept of [the „gift”] is not staged in order to paralyze [ethical behavior regarding giving], but, rather on the contrary, in order to enable it.”²³ The giving of an actual (or pure) gift is always deferred. It is, like democracy, the gift „to come” („à venir”).

„What does all of this have to do with forgetting?” the curious reader may ask. If an actual (or pure) gift is ever to be given,²⁴ the giver needs to forget, or be completely oblivious, that she gave it, and the recipient (donée) is required to forget, or be completely oblivious, that a gift was ever given at all. It seems, then, that forgetting, in some respects, is a *sine qua non* for discussions regarding the pure giving of a gift. Unfortunately, forgetting „the gift” appears to be a concept (and as a ‘performative’ activity) that has been inadequately thematized or problematized and placed under scrutiny by deconstructionist theory. In Derrida’s writings on „the gift,” we discover that forgetting as an essential element has yet to be adequately presented and analyzed.

Derrida asserts, unsurprisingly, that „the conditions of the possibility of the gift de-

20 In „Time of the King,” Derrida notes the following to offer support for this point: „If there is a gift, the *given* of the gift must not come back to the giving. It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure.” (Derrida 1992a, 7; original emphasis).

21 Derrida 1992a, 7; original emphasis

22 *ibid.*, 12; original emphasis

23 Derrida 2002b, x. Later, Critchley and Kearney assert: „It is important to point out that, for Derrida, these two orders of the unconditional and the conditional are also in a relation of contradiction, where they remain both irreducible to one another and indissociable” (xi).

24 Derrida notes that „[i]f it has (indeed) [occurred]... - then, one has perhaps not yet recognized it” (*ibid.*, 23).

signate simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of the gift.”²⁵ Once one identifies a gift as gift, whether she is the donor or donée, the gift extinguishes itself. However, „across the forgetting, the non-keeping, and the non-consciousness called up by the [actual] gift, the debt and the symbolic would reconstitute themselves for the subject of the [Freudian] Unconscious or the unconscious subject.”²⁶ The actual conditions for gift giving and gift receiving, then include „forgetfulness, non-appearance, non-phenomenality, non-perception, and non-keeping” – in short, the gift is to be „displaced” (or not even apparent) if it is to be given at all. An extended quotation by Derrida may be in order here:

For there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also *forget* it right away and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytic categoriality of forgetting. This forgetting of the gift must even no longer be forgetting in the sense of repression.²⁷

Repression, for Freud, as well as for Derrida, „does not destroy or annul anything; it keeps by displacing.” What is left is the trace, or the symptom. Moreover, as Derrida states,

...this forgetting, this *forgetting of the gift* cannot be a simple non-experience, a simple non-appearance, a self-effacement that is carried off with what it effaces. For there to be gift event (we say event and not act), something must come about or happen, in an instant, in an instant that no doubt does not belong to the economy of time, in a time without time, in such a way that the forgetting forgets, it forgets *itself*, but also in such a way that this forgetting, without being something present, presentable, determinable, sensible or meaningful, is not nothing.²⁸

Following Critchley and Kearney’s advice, these negative notions are not put forth to preclude the giving of gifts. On the contrary, „it is on the basis of what takes shape in the name *gift* in this sense, there must be gift. The gift would also be the *condition* of forgetting,” and consequently, forgetting would be „in the condition of the gift.”²⁹ Thus, „forgetting and the gift would...be in the condition of the other.”

(2) The second issue in recent deconstructionist theory to be addressed in relation to forgetting is *forgiveness*, and this examination should take a similar tack as the previous discussion of „the gift.” Derrida argues that „forgiveness only forgives the unfor-

25 Derrida 1992a, 12

26 *ibid.*, 15

27 *ibid.*, 16; emphasis mine

28 *ibid.*, 17; original emphasis. Keep this quotation in mind as we move on to section IV, where the citation of Heidegger strikes a similar chord.

29 *ibid.*, 17, 18; original emphasis

givable.”³⁰ Before we discuss this, an example may help illustrate this aporia.

When you cause some sort of harm to me, you may expect my forgiveness for this transgression of our relationship. In order to pardon you *as guilty*, though, I must know that you are sincerely sorry for your malignant action, or neglect of action. We (always) already find ourselves in this conditional (dialectical) system of symmetrical exchange and expectation,³¹ so how can I now *purely* and *absolutely* forgive you? Are you then forgiven? How? When a „third party” becomes present, Derrida would agree that this example could be easily extrapolated into a discussion of „crimes against humanity,” where the guilty is held culpable for their wrong-doing(s). Amnesty, reconciliation, and reparations are *not* the same things as acts of forgiveness. A pardon for such behavior is certainly difficult to come by, and nearly impossible if the guilty party does not perform some sort of repentance, or desire to be forgiven. However, this is not how actual (or pure) forgiveness works – and Derrida struggles with this double-bind in his essay „On Forgiveness.” An act of forgiveness, to bring the previous discussion to bear, is a pure „gift” given that interrupts the normal flow of time.

Forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself.³² Forgiveness then takes on a similar aporetic structure as gift giving, as the *unconditional principle* of forgiveness is as „irreconcilable” as it is „indissociable” to the *pragmatic practice* of it. To quote Derrida: „Forgiveness is not, *it should not be*, normal, normative, normalizing. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.”³³

Derrida notes that „the proliferation of scenes of repentance, or of asking ‘forgiveness,’ signifies, no doubt, a universal urgency of memory; *it is necessary* to turn toward the past; and *it is necessary* to take this act of memory...beyond the juridical instance....”³⁴ It is necessary, I feel, to quote Derrida at some length here, to let him speak for himself:

These two poles, *the unconditional and the conditional*, are absolutely heterogeneous, and must remain irreducible to one another. They are nonetheless indissociable: if one wants, and it is necessary, forgiveness to become effective, concrete, historic; if one wants it to *arrive* [à venir], to happen by changing things, it is necessary that this purity engage itself in a series of conditions of all kinds (psycho-sociological, political, etc.). It is between these two poles, *irreconcilable but indissociable*, that decisions and responsibilities are to be taken. Yet

30 Derrida 2002b, 32. Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney, in the „Preface,” word things a little more clearly: „Derrida argues that true forgiveness consists in forgiving the unforgivable....” (*ibid.*, vii). They continue, „If forgiveness forgave only the forgivable, then, Derrida claims, the very idea of forgiveness would disappear” (*ibid.*).

31 Derrida notes that, in this instance, „forgiveness can only be considered *on the condition* that it be asked, in the course of a scene of repentance attesting at once to the consciousness of the fault, the transformation of the guilty, and the at least implicit obligation to do everything to avoid the return of evil” (*ibid.*, 34; original emphasis).

32 *ibid.*, 33

33 *ibid.*, 32; original emphasis

34 *ibid.*, 28; original emphasis

despite all the confusions which reduce forgiveness to amnesty or to amnesia, to acquittal or prescription, to the work of mourning or some political therapy of reconciliation, in short to some historical ecology, it must never be forgotten, nevertheless, that all of that refers to a certain idea of pure and unconditional forgiveness, without which this discourse would not have the least meaning.³⁵

The very element, or possibility, then, of an act of forgiveness is its own impossibility. Derrida asks us, „Must forgiveness saturate this abyss [between the self and the Other]? Must it suture the wound in a process of reconciliation? Or rather give place to another peace, *without forgetting*, without amnesty, fusion, or confusion?”³⁶ So, it appears that, not only for an act of forgiveness to be a pardoning of the guilty as guilty, and a forgiving of the unforgivable, but also the original transgression is to be somehow forgotten. Erased from one’s (collective) memory. Only then could a pure act of forgiveness said to have taken place. „What is the possibility of this taking place?” one disgruntled reader may ask. The possibility for this act of forgetting taking place is the very impossibility of its taking place. We have thus extended Derrida’s framework of forgiveness to include one of intentional forgetfulness. Both forgiving and forgetting, then, have to embody the following characteristics: „non-negotiable, aneconomic, apolitical, [and] non-strategic unconditionality.” In an honest existentialist ethic of forgiving and forgetting, we can agree with Derrida when he maintains, „One is never sure of making the just choice; one never knows.... The future will give us no more knowledge.... It is here that responsibilities are to be re-evaluated at each moment, according to concrete situations, that is to say, those that do not wait, those that do not give us time for infinite deliberation.”³⁷ Originary moments of violence, such as the establishment of the State, have not only been intentionally repressed or forgotten, but make up the bedrock upon which we operate and work to this very day. Ours is a responsibility of shaking off the dead and rotting memories of the past, remembering the past and working through it, and re-asserting our ethical role as the authors and writers of human existence. One strategy of re-writing ourselves is to finally, and without assuming a hierarchical position of self over Other, be able to „forgive and forget.” „Perhaps,” as Derrida hopes, „this madness is not so mad.”

III. CONVERGENCES, DIVERGENCES, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

... forgetting is not nothing, nor is it just a failure to remember; it is rather a ‘positive’ ecstatic mode of one’s having been – a mode with a character of its own. The ecstasis (rapture) of forgetting has the character of backing away in the face of one’s ownmost ‘been’ Only on the basis of such forgetting can anything be

35 *ibid.*, 45; original emphasis

36 *ibid.*, 50; emphasis mine

37 *ibid.*, 56

retained. ... Just as expecting is possible only on the basis of awaiting, remembering is possible only on that of forgetting, and not vice versa. – Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927]

The mind of memory is already in the world. – Edward S. Casey, *Remembering* [2000]

The motivation and scope of forgetting has come to the fore as the major point of departure from Husserl to Derrida, and the essential (im)possibility of pure forgetting has brought the two together. At base, the theories of memory and forgetting advanced by phenomenology and deconstruction share this in common – „the reaching out beyond the now” (in all directions) is an essential feature of human experience. While phenomenology painstakingly attempts to describe the fundamental features of this experience, later deconstruction notes the ethical impossibility of breaking out of the „now” in order to confine our ethical responsibilities to the *à venir* of the future. Both intimate a theory of memory which Edward Casey has called „memory beyond mind.”

Whereas Husserlian phenomenology posits that absolute forgetting is an *epistemological impossibility*, Derridean deconstruction argues that it is an *ethical impossibility*. These perspectives should in no way be considered fixed and static, such that phenomenology of forgetting has nothing to say about ethics, and deconstructive theory is epistemologically bankrupt. The two, when observed in light of one another, combine into a more robust and revealing theory of memory and forgetting than seen independent of one another.

To bring our first epigram to light, William James, in *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, notes that „...*mental life is primarily teleological*; that is to say, that our various ways of feeling and thinking have grown to be what they are because of their utility in shaping our *reactions* on the outer world.”³⁸ James, Husserl, and Derrida rightly emphasize the lived-situatedness of the experience of memory. Casey emphasizes, „Instead of memory being confined to the mind alone. ...it enters. ...into a continuing close collusion with the lifeworld of its experience.”³⁹

Casey’s groundbreaking work, *Remembering*, does some very interesting things in regard to a comfortable relationship between phenomenological and deconstructive analyses of memory. Through his phenomenological investigations, Casey discovered that there are at least three non-mentalistic examples of remembering: body memory, place memory, and commemoration (bringing Heidegger’s *Being and Time* to bear). These findings propose that a deconstructive posture be taken toward „the accepted paradigms of remembering as re-presencing in favor of a more polymorphic vision of the scope and limits of memory in which the return of the past in an explicitly visualized format...is neither the aim nor the issue.”⁴⁰

38 James 1892, xxvii

39 Casey 2000, x

40 *ibid.*, xi. Interestingly, Casey makes mention of the potential future project of a companion volume to *Remembering*, entitled *Forgetting*.

Nascent in Husserl, emerging in Heidegger, brought to the fore in Derrida, and clearly articulated in the work of Casey is the dialectical nature of remembering and forgetting. Remembering what and how to do something at one level is forgetting why one is doing it another, deeper level. In a case such as this, the remembering is the forgetting, and vice versa.⁴¹

Casey points out, „In any effort to unforget our own forgetting, we need all the support we can find.”⁴² It appears as though the resourceful support offered by a Husserlian phenomenology and a Derridean deconstruction of forgetting would be integral tools in the epistemological and ethical significance of memory.

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41 *ibid.*, xiii

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