

## PAUL RICOEUR AND MAURICE HALBWACHS, AN APPROACH TO THEIR HISTORICAL FORMATION

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### SUMMARY

The premises that Maurice Halbwachs will make in reference to memory will make it possible to reveal to what extent intellectual history is the guardian of History itself (Namer, 2007). Maurice Halbwachs was born in Reims, a city located in the northwest of France in 1877, the son of a German professor. Dying without being able to know his legacy, Halbwachs meant one of the most important characters in the world of sociology and philosophy of history (Namer, 2007). In France, at the beginning of the 20th century, the so-called “Solidarity movement” allowed the Third Republic to be founded on the solidarity of the wise and the proletariat, in the face of the rise of the bloody monarchy and the Church (Namer, 2007). From here, the idea of verifiable history will start (Namer, 2004).

**Keywords:** Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricoeur, historical memory, training, philosophy of history.

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## INDEX

SUMMARY	17
INTRODUCTION	21
MAURICE HALBWACHS	21
PAUL RICOEUR	25
BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES	28



## INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to stop and analyze the life and works of the authors with whom we propose our research. The importance played by the life context of both in the consequent development of their works, as well as the characteristics of the conditions of the academic scenario to which both philosophers were submitted. Once these circumstances are clarified, it will be easier to locate the intentionality given by each of the authors to the works we wish to analyze.

## MAURICE HALBWACHS

The premises that Maurice Halbwachs will make in reference to memory will make it possible to reveal to what extent intellectual history is the guardian of History itself (Namer, 2007). In the context of his life, there were many cases in which memory was violated by historical theories; forgotten records and experiences that would not be sufficiently disseminated and would become part of a tradition in constant risk of disappearing (Sorá, 2005).

Maurice Halbwachs was born in Reims, a city located in the northwest of France in 1877, the son of a German professor. Passing away without being able to know his legacy, Halbwachs meant one of the most important characters in the world of sociology and philosophy of history (Namer, 2007).

In France, at the beginning of the 20th century, the so-called “Solidarity movement” allowed the Third Republic to be founded on the solidarity of the wise and the proletariat, in the face of the rise of the bloody monarchy and the Church (Namer, 2007). Its maximum representative will be none other than Emile Durkheim, who would act years later as a maximum influence on Halbwachs. The author in fact in the mid 1930’s will label himself as “more Durkheimian than Durkheimian” (Fournier, 1994, p. 633).

In the decade beginning in 1910, Halbwachs, journalist in *L’Humanité*, will seek to revise Marxism, sharing this project with the sociologist Mauss, Durkheim’s nephew (Sorá, 2005). He will start from here, the idea of verifiable history (Namer, 2004). He will find the first approach to what will be fundamental for his trajectory: the idea that nothing is ever forgotten (Halbwachs, 2004).

Halbwachs will start, like the future Mannheim, from the gap of the masses between culture and economic infrastructure (Namer, 2004). Becoming a Durkheimian, he makes the

synthesis on the economic behavior of the working class, and founds a theory of economic memory verified by statistics: an individual memory, as well as a memory for the working class (Sorá, 2005, p.152).

It will be characteristic of the author to emphasize the importance of statistical research in the social sciences (Sorá, 2005). In his work *El hombre medio* (1912) he will state that it is common to see in working class society deviations in statistical surveys, since the person questioned very commonly forgets what he really did (this, together with the alienation of work) (Sorá, 2005).

It is for this moment that universities will play a fundamental role in the renaissance of German culture, summit of European philosophical thought (Namer, 2007). The academic environment in the history of social sciences in France at the time conditioned a considerable number of philosophers to rediscover their vocation (Namer, 2007); “staining” their hands with history, societies, documents, ethnography and statistics. It is largely thanks to this that Maurice Halbwachs made a breakthrough in questioning Henri Bergson’s philosophy of memory (Namer, 2007).

Halbwachs’ attraction to Bergson was gestated in his initial training at the Ecole Henri-IV, at the École Normale Supérieure, in the seminars of the College de France (Sorá, 2005). But his approach to the group of *L’Année Sociologique* was also early. This yearbook was published between 1898 and 1913 and was a catalyst for Durkheim’s projects (Namer, 2007). The rigorous division of tasks and the enormous academic work that gestated around the journal marked the trajectory of all those who participated in this undertaking, its objective was to publish *memoirs*, the French name for original monographic works, and reviews (Sorá, 2005). (Sorá, 2005).

Together with the academic experiences in favor of social sciences, other dimensions of Maurice Halbwachs’ life are superimposed: his approach to the Durkheimians, the Jewish origin and the socialist action (Urteaga, n.d.). The identification between Maurice Halbwachs, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Luden Herr, Robert Hertz was molded under the climate of the Dreyfus case, taken as a revolutionary combat against the Church. (Sorá, 2005).

A highlight in Halbwachs’ academic life is the author’s inclusion in the group *L’Année*, a group that, according to Viktor Karady (1976), represented a radical reconversion for the members of Halbwachs’ generation. In this regard Karady states:

“It can be said that all of Durkheim’s true pupils - that is to say all those among the collaborators of *L’Année* who did not belong to his generation - have made a radical intellectual reconversion before being able to obtain a university position related to their new specialty. This fact is perhaps the most significant measure of the cohesion of the team and of the centrality of the Durkheimian project on the careers of its members” (Karady quoted in Sorá, 2005, p.152).

It will be Halbwachs' originality that will distinguish him from the rest, emerging from his difference in relation to the ideas of Bergson and Durkheim, one of the most influential contributions in the differentiation of the social and human sciences in the first half of the twentieth century. Helped by other renowned figures such as Marx and Weber among others, he adds to the social sciences the analytical synthesis, in his fruitful work that goes beyond the studies of memory on a single plane (Namer, 2004).

Halbwachs, besides being recognized for his sociological contributions to memory, will also be taken into account in the field of socialist problems in university reflection (Namer, 2007). The results of this will be reflected in the works "*Expropriations and land prices in Paris*" (1909) and "*The working class and living standards*" (1912). Research on the hierarchy of needs in contemporary industrial societies (Colacrai, 2010). These works also served to validate the fact that Halbwachs was not only a fan of memory as a past fact, but also that he gave privilege to the analysis of the problems of the present.

Consequently, friends and colleagues of Halbwachs, among them Robert Hertz and Durkheim, will fall because of the war (Sorá, 2005). *L'Année Sociologique* will disappear from the academic scene and the Durkheimians will occupy only a few positions in some universities where social sciences could be taught (Sorá, 2005). It will be from this moment on that Halbwachs and the rest of the standing academics will play a fundamental role in the transmission of Durkheim's ethical and intellectual legacy in the social sciences (Sorá, 2005). (Sorá, 2005).

The publishing house Felix Alean will invest in the edition of the collection of books "*Travaux de L'Année Sociologique*", with Durkheim's *Moral Education* as the first work, followed by Halbwachs' *The Social Pictures of Memory*. The editorial choices will reflect the hierarchy of the social sciences as a topic of reading at the time (Colacrai, 2010). As these become detached from the merely philosophical, they will begin to receive greater public resonance (Sorá, 2005).

Halbwachs, at the same time, from 1922 to 1925, founded, as is well known, the sociology of collective memory with the book entitled *The Social Frames of Memory* (2004).

"Dealing with a duality between the rational and the irrational, expressly opposing the Bergsonian idea of memory, who on the one hand resisted the subjective, affective memory, of all images and all "duration", supporting the idea of a rational memory even, made entirely of experimental and measurable psychology, of intelligence and concepts." (Namer, 2004, p.91)

The edition of "*The social pictures of memory*" will be catalogued by many authors as a memoir in itself, which will confirm the intellectual interests of the recognized expert Halbwachs (Sorá, 2005). It was Marcel Mauss (1971) who highlighted in Halbwachs his statistical knowledge above his other skills, stating that this quality made the author stand out in the team, given his response to the theoretical challenges that lay ahead. Mauss affirmed: "At bottom, every social problem is a statistical problem (...) Statistical operations are not only a means to measure but the way to analyze every social fact" (Mauss, cited in Sorá, 2005, p.159). Mauss (1971)

recognized the important role that statistics would play in the study of social interactions and therefore the protagonism that a theorist like Halbwachs would have (Sorá, 2005).

The support Halbwachs received from the academic authorities reaffirmed in the mid 1920s his status as an expert in the area of social sciences, prompting him to participate in institutional, editorial and academic projects of the Durkheimians and other participants in the publishing scene (Colacrai, 2010). From this moment on, Halbwachs will feel sufficiently legitimized to present his candidacy for the chair of social philosophy at the University of Paris. This step will set the tone in the Durkheimian community, this assault on the chair becoming, more than a mission, a matter of honor (Sorá, 2005).

From 1922 to 1925 Italian fascism will impose its totalitarian system, and many authors among them Halbwachs will perceive the rise of totalitarian systems in which intellectuals and workers are replaced by peasants. (Urteaga, n.d.). In 1930 Halbwachs will further establish himself as an interpreter and one of the main heirs of Durkheim in the eyes of peers and opposites. By publishing *The Causes of Suicide*, with a preface by Mauss. He will explicitly request that the release date of the work coincide with the reissue of Emile Durkheim's *Suicide*. (Sorá, 2005, p.53).

Other works will follow, such as *Evolution of the Needs of the Working Class* (1933), which will make clear to the reading public Halbwachs' recursiveness in returning to his research topics (working class, statistics, memory) in a spiral of increasingly refined knowledge (Sorá, 2005).

As positive aspects of the failure of the second series of *L'Année*, we will see how history and the organization of functions that marked the group formed around Durkheim became modular in other disciplines and generations, as shown by the approach of historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch when in 1929 they launched the famous *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (Namer, 2007). It was they themselves who requested the collaboration of authors such as Halbwachs, Mauss and Simiand in the editorial board of important projects related to the social sciences, which added important and significant discussions to the field. (Namer, 2007)

The challenge of the *Annales* consisted in the updating of the Durkheimian legacy in the face of new social realities (Sorá, 2005). Halbwachs will have as main objective to focus from sociology on social morphology, technology and aesthetics, showing the dynamism of his work, he was able to collaborate in all the remaining headings such as legal or religious sociology (Sorá, 2005).

In congruence with Halbwachs' expertise, the journal sought, according to Fournier (1994): "to give its discipline a clearly empiricist orientation, open to the management of social problems, and, as in the United States, to professionalize it" (Fournier, 1994, p.647). Being financed by the North American Rockefeller Foundation, the interaction and rapprochement with schools in the U.S. was significantly strengthened (Fournier, 1994).



In 1935 Francois Simiand died, leaving a place at the Colleege de France (Sorá, 2005). Mauss postulates Halbwachs for the second time, however, the latter decides to keep his place at the Sorbonne where he feels he already has an important number of students and disciples (Sorá, 2005). This loyalty will later be rewarded with multiple recognitions, among them being incorporated as a member of the National Institute of Statistics; in 1936 in the International Labor Office and in 1937 as a delegate of the League of Nations (Sorá, 2005).

From the second half of the 1930s onwards, the books published by Halbwachs will only expand the recurrent points of his spiral of knowledge (Namer, 2007). Subsequently, in 1944 Halbwachs finally gave in to the choice of the chair of Social Psychology at the Colleege de France, only to be deported and murdered in a concentration camp in Buchenwald in March 1945 (Sorá, 2005).

Rare would be the later cases in which we would see authors like Halbwachs, integral and dynamic in the social sciences (Urteaga, n.d.). An author who reformulated in a great way the syntheses of the social sciences without passing meaninglessly the tests of time, history or memory (Namer, 2004). His last work represents in many aspects the call for the emergence of nations and their members to join a reform movement beyond the sciences, in the imaginary and social collective (Namer, 2007).

Halbwachs, who had been writing since 1925 the book he left unfinished, is confronted with a triple duel: the search after the 1914 war for a “national coherence, between the individual in his own right and the social and collective memories” (Sorá, 2005, p.158). He will die, deported in 1945, victim of an unfortunate fate, but undoubtedly renewing the conception of time, memory and history (Sorá, 2005).

## PAUL RICOEUR

Paul Ricoeur was born in Valence, France on February 27, 1913 (The source, 1998). He was orphaned of both parents at a very early age, so both he and his sister were raised by their paternal grandparents in Brittany, France. His brilliant philosophical career will be to some extent cut short by World War II; he is taken prisoner during most of the conflict in concentration camps in Poland and Germany (Vergara, 2006).

Two main elements will be implicit in his life and work; on the one hand, the clarity and “the rigor of phenomenology and secondly the need for commitment to academic, ethical and historical responsibility” (Vergara, 2006, p.23). Phenomenology and ethics will be two usual companions in his work. After Martin Heidegger’s death, Ricoeur will be considered one of the most important philosophers in the field of hermeneutics, for his work in relation to philosophy of history and literary theory (Moratalla, 2005).

He studied at the University of Rennes and the Sorbonne in Paris. Throughout his career he taught in several secondary schools. He received his degree in philosophy from the University of Paris in 1935 and it is in that same year that he decided to marry Simone Lejas (Vergara, 2006).

Like Maurice Halbwachs, he was taken prisoner by the Germans during the Second World War. During his stay in the concentration camps he will be allowed to read several Germanic thinkers (Moratalla, 2005).

After the Second World War, in 1948, he received the opportunity to teach philosophy at the University of Strasbourg. It was in 1949 that he published his first essays related to the study and analysis of history, his name will travel through halls of the University of Louvain, Chicago, Rome, Munich, Barcelona among others (Vergara, 2006).

Openly manifesting himself as a social democrat (Vergara, 2006), he will collaborate in different Christian magazines of left tendency. He will assume Martin Heidegger's intention oriented towards *phenomenological ontology*, constantly finding in his notes and writings inspiration for the categorization of being in the world (Vergara, 2006, p.26).

Paul Ricoeur's academic work can be divided into several stages (Vergara, 2006), stages that, according to the authors who have dared to establish these milestones, are those that demonstrate Ricoeur's continuous and excessive development in the social sciences and phenomenological hermeneutics. The author shows a continuous refinement in his work and language (Moratalla, 2005).

A first stage catalogued by Anderson Vergara (2006) as "pre-Ricoeurian" (p.25) seen in this way, because at this time Ricoeur has not yet shown a properly integral or autonomous tendency. This stage spans from his early writings to what would be the beginning of his first major work on the phenomenology of the will, *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950).

Secondly, another stage characterized by an approach to the existential element of the phenomenon (Vergara, 2006), establishing even more closeness with the theme of will, the author exhibits the masterpiece *The Symbolic of Evil* (1960), that is, in the fifties (Vergara, 2006, p.26). From this moment on Ricoeur will continue to strengthen his methodological interest in conflict awareness, releasing works such as *Freud: An Interpretation of Culture* (1965) and *The Living Metaphor* (1975) and during the first years of the sixties the symbol will be a predominant concept in Ricoeur's works, as well as the text, expanding wherever his interest in the value of the analysis of societies and their elements. (Vergara, 2006, p.27).

Opening his way to existential phenomenology, Ricoeur will undertake his first major project around a philosophy of the will (Moratalla, 2005). His objective according to Anderson Vergara (2006) will be "to counterbalance the philosophy of perception of Maurice Merleau-Ponty" (p.25), an important philosopher of the post-war years. This work will be entitled *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), seeking to give shape to a phenomenological analysis of the will, it will be based on the works of Edmund Husserl (Vergara, 2006, p.25).

Gabriel Marcel will be another of the authors with whom Ricoeur will support many of his arguments. From him, in the words of Anderson Vergara (2006):

The problematic of a subject that is both incarnated and capable of distancing itself from its drives, desires and powers, that is, of a subject that is master of itself and, at the same time, servant of this need, which is represented by character, unconscious and life (Vergara, 2006, p.26).

This idea will be very useful in the consolidation of the concept of memory and in the journey from memory to feeling, to paper and history (Vergara, 2006). *The voluntary and the involuntary* (1950) will not be enough for Ricoeur, so works such as *The Fallible Man* (1960) and *The Symbolic of Evil* (1960) will come, in which the author will cover in an empirical and poetic sense the idea of will (Vergara, 2006).

Another key and evident point in the construction of Ricoeurian thought will undoubtedly be the interpretation of symbols (Vergara, 2006, p.27). The author's interest in the study of the philosophy of the will will in turn be accompanied by "a kind of confrontation with psychoanalysis that implicitly adds to the conflict of symbolic interpretations in general". (Vergara, 2006, p.27)

From the first collection of essays on themes of hermeneutics comes *Del texto a la acción* (1986), a work that evidences the thematic turn of the author (Vergara, 2006). It will then serve among one of Ricoeur's many contributions, a new definition of hermeneutics seen as a "theory of the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts" (Vergara, 2006, p.28).

It will be characteristic of Ricoeur to remain in constant conflict with the "established", opposing the traditional will be a constant practice in his work (La Fuente, 1998). Ricoeur's work will undoubtedly be charged with an energy of renewal, given the context in which many of his works are written (Vergara, 2006).

Undoubtedly, a differentiating element of Ricoeur will be the weight he gives to history as a key point in the study of memory and hermeneutics (Vergara, 2006). He will provide certainty of the elaboration of a third time; the historical time, that which mediates between the lived time and the cosmological time (Moratalla, 2005).

As a final consideration, *Time and Narration* (2003) will make explicit the narrative character of identity, both at the individual and collective level (Vergara, 2006, 32). Works such as *Sí mismo como otro* (1990) and *La memoria, la historia, el olvido* (2004) will act as a response to the author's project to carry out a significant restructuring of his research on the notion of subject (Vergara, 2016).

Each of Ricoeur's works will act as a complement to each other (Moratalla, 2005). It will be for the nineties and the entry into the new millennium that he will properly study memory as a philosophical phenomenon, as well as oblivion and testimony that will acquire prominence in his thought and works (Vergara, 2006) (Vergara, 2006).

In the words of Anderson Vergara (2006) this work is catalogued as:

A phenomenology of memory, an epistemology of historical sciences and a hermeneutics of historical consciousness that culminates in a meditation on forgetting. The three parts refer to a single problematic that constitutes the common thread of the whole book: the theme of the representation of the past and the enigma of the present image of an absent thing. (Vergara, 2006, p.34).

The clarity of Ricoeur's thought and the sharpness of his expression will be clearly represented in each and every one of his works (Vergara, 2006). The author's consistent influence on himself is due to his impressive command of language (Vergara, 2006). His elegance and absolute precision constitute in effect his differentiating style.

In an interview with Ricoeur a few years ago (Florian, 1983) he was asked: Are you a committed philosopher? His answer is simply inspiring.

Nothing is as strange to me as the false opposition between committed and uncommitted thinking. We have a duty to understand our times. I am opposed both to the attitude of the "disincarnated" intellectual who does not begin to take an interest in a problem until it has been overcome, that is, solved by others, and to the attitude of the doctrinaire who wants to impose by violence the logic of a system with the contingencies of life. (Ricoeur, 1983, p.6).

What is most impressive in Ricoeur's way of writing is his warrior spirit or, in other words, his lack of qualms about confronting any philosophy (Vergara, 2006). Paul Ricoeur's legacy teaches us that contemporary philosophy is nothing more than an effort of reflection, that life must be a constant exercise of interpretation (Florián, 1983). His legacy invites us to trust in the efficacy of the word, in the opportunity it offers us as a tool to change the world.

Ricoeur died peacefully in bed on Friday, May 20, 2005 at the age of 92 (La Fuente, 1998). His recognition continues to grow, as do the tributes to his work and legacy.

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