



Institute for Christian Studies
Institutional Repository

Kuipers, Ronald A. "Turning Memory into Prophecy: Roberto Unger and Paul Ricoeur on the Human Condition Between Past and Future." *The Heythrop Journal*, v. 52, no. 2 (2011): 1-10.

Used in accordance with publisher's copyright and self-archiving policies
[<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/issn/0018-1196/>]: "Can archive pre-print (ie pre-refereeing)"

Dated: March 25, 2015

TURNING MEMORY INTO PROPHECY

Roberto Unger and Paul Ricoeur on the Human Condition between Past and Future

By Ronald A. Kuipers

c/o The Institute for Christian Studies
Suite 100, 229 College Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R4
(416)-979-2331, x227
rkuipers@icscanada.edu

TURNING MEMORY INTO PROPHECY

Roberto Unger and Paul Ricoeur on the Human Condition between Past and Future

‘...an excess of history is harmful to life...’

—Friedrich Nietzsche¹

‘I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane;
I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.’

—Ralph Waldo Emerson²

‘...is imitating repeating in the sense of copying,
or repeating in the sense of calling back to life?’

—Paul Ricoeur³

I. PRAGMATISM AND HISTORY: UNGER’S NIETZSCHEAN STRAIN

In *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound*, Roberto Unger consistently maintains that, in any democracy worthy of the name, ‘prophecy’ ought to speak louder than ‘memory’.⁴

Precisely what Unger means by these two evocative terms is not immediately or manifestly clear, although one could be forgiven for getting the impression that, in making this claim, Unger is offering his unique expression of pragmatism’s uneasy and ambiguous feelings about the past; among other things, this claim constitutes a warning against the temptation of succumbing to an enervating conservatism with which the past always presents us. But beyond offering such a warning, what precisely does Unger mean by ‘memory’ and ‘prophecy’? How does he think we ought to understand the relationship between this prophecy that ought to speak louder than memory, and the past from which, he admits, it always emerges? Finally, are there different ways of considering this relationship than the one Unger offers, ways that also resist the temptations of conservatism, yet while in so doing preserve a more edifying role for

memory (not to mention tradition or history)? My purpose in this essay is to explore these questions.

Despite his complaint that the tradition of classical pragmatism is constrained, and therefore needs to be 'unbound', Unger retains the pragmatist's worry that an unhealthy attachment to the past will become a hindrance to our ability to be open to the future, and therefore to the possibilities and alternatives that are presently available to us. Such conservative fatalism is a problem for a philosophical movement that, for the sake of bettering present life, emphasizes the virtues of futurity, experimentalism, possibility, and ameliorative transformation—virtues which Unger, too, is quite keen to push.

Ultimately, he worries about a prevailing philosophical conservatism that eagerly capitulates to what he, following Leibniz, dubs 'the perennial philosophy'—the doctrine that the manifest world of time, change, and difference is illusory, and that true reality is, ultimately, 'a unity prior to all difference'.⁵

John Dewey expresses a similar worry about philosophy's perennial attachment to the idea of fixed Truth already in existence. According to him, '[a] society that chiefly esteems order, that finds growth painful and change disturbing, inevitably seeks for a fixed body of superior truths upon which it may depend. It looks backward, to something already in existence, for the source and sanction of truth.... The thought of looking ahead, toward the eventual, toward consequences, creates uneasiness and fear.'⁶ Like Unger, Dewey wants us to shape a society in which the thought of looking ahead would inspire, not fear, but hope. Only such a society would be alive to emergent possibilities for change, and so be in a position to ameliorate those problems and injustices that a conservative society is tempted to regard as predetermined fate. What is more, this

move, for both Dewey and Unger, seems to have the aspect of a spiritual exercise; it is for them a matter of, in the present moment, turning from death toward life.⁷

Unger therefore encourages his readers to experiment hopefully with such ways of liberating us from the clutches of the habitual and the actual, in order that something truly new may come: 'Futurity should cease to be a predicament and should become a program: we should radicalize it to empower ourselves. That is the reason to take an interest in ways of organizing thought and society that diminish the influence of what happened before on what can happen next.'⁸ Yet in encouraging us to pursue directions that enable us to diminish the control that the past exercises upon the future, Unger does not simply seem to be recommending a *Brave New World* form of futurity; he is not recommending that we quicken the development of a forgetful, consumerist society whose citizens are reduced to passivity and egoism. As he is quick to point out, there is 'a structure to the organized revision of structures. Its constituents however, are not timeless. We paste them together with the time-soaked materials at hand.'⁹ In our efforts to make futurity into a program, Unger also recognizes a teaching role for these 'time-soaked' materials; at one point he even indicates that prophecy is 'tutored' by memory.¹⁰ Finally, in a discussion of education, he recommends a life-long pattern of learning that ever strives to make the new out of the old, '[t]o open up the space in which collective memory serves individual imagination.'¹¹

These admittedly scant references to the past as something that we cannot simply shuck off, but must in fact use, are nonetheless real, and serve to indicate that Unger's vision of making futurity a program is something more than an expression of the desire to be completely free of the weight of the past. His position on this score seems closer to

Nietzsche's, who in 'On the Utility and Liability of History for Life' recognizes that life in fact 'requires the service of history.' Because life requires the service of history, Nietzsche restricts his polemics to a particular way of regarding the past that he considers to be dangerously enervating.¹² The vigorous life that Nietzsche so forcefully promotes depends, he says, 'on whether one knows how to forget things at the proper time just as well as one knows how to remember at the proper time; on whether one senses with a powerful instinct which occasions should be experienced historically, and which ahistorically.'¹³ For Nietzsche, the past must serve the present, rather than the other way around: 'only by means of the power to utilize the past for life and to reshape past events into history once more...does the human being become a human being; but in an excess of history the human being ceases once again, and without that mantle of the ahistorical he would never have begun and would never have dared to begin.'¹⁴

Like Nietzsche, Unger wishes to defend human natality (to borrow an expression from Hannah Arendt)—our ability to begin, to embark on a new path. And this ability, moreover, does not require us to cut ourselves off from our past; rather, it depends upon our ability to use the past, to make something of it. In defending an antiquarian moment as one component of a healthy historical sensibility, Nietzsche criticizes 'a people that has forfeited loyalty to its own past and has succumbed to restless, cosmopolitan craving for new and ever newer things.' To this forgetful attitude, he opposes 'what today we are in the habit of calling the true historical sensibility'—namely, 'the contentment the tree feels with its roots, the happiness of knowing that one's existence is not formed arbitrarily and by chance, but that instead it grows as the blossom and the fruit of a past that is its inheritance....'¹⁵ For Nietzsche, this organic metaphor, according to which the

roots of the past exist for the sake of the present flourishing life of the tree, properly frames the healthy relationship between past and present. Antiquarian history degenerates, however, the moment we forget this relationship: 'when history serves past life to the extent that it not only undermines further life but especially higher life; when the historical sense no longer conserves but rather mummifies it, then beginning at its crown and moving down to its roots, the tree gradually dies an unnatural death—and eventually the roots themselves commonly perish.'¹⁶ This kind of death is what I think Unger has in mind when he says that, as a result of our failure to embody context-transcending 'spirit' in our habitual routines, 'we live out much of our lives in a daze, as if we are acting out a script someone else had written.'¹⁷

So I think it helps to understand Unger's prioritizing of prophecy over memory in this Nietzschean frame. When Unger urges us to turn memory into prophecy, we should hear echoes of Nietzsche's belief that 'the voice of the past is always the voice of an oracle.'¹⁸ That is, Unger's criticism of a life-energating obsession with memory can be read as an expression of the Nietzschean fear that such an obsession with the past will (not without irony) make us deaf to its 'oracular voice.' Its 'oracular voice' has to do precisely with the way in which the past can serve the present and thereby open up new possibilities for the future. In much the same way that Nietzsche tells us that 'only those who build the future have the right to sit in judgment of the past,' Unger tells us that '[o]ur most general ideas about self and society arise from the extension of our most vivid local experience, *corrected by a studied recollection of past events* and the imagination of a future direction.'¹⁹ And just as Nietzsche urges us to draw around ourselves 'the fence of a great, all-embracing hope,' to create within ourselves 'an image

to which the future should conform,' and thereby to forget the false conviction that we are 'epigones,'²⁰ so Unger urges us to 'so accelerate and direct the permanent invention of the new that we are able to overthrow the dictatorship of the dead over the living and to turn our minds more freely and fully toward the people and the phenomena around us.'²¹

2. RICOEUR'S LIBERATING MEMORY: TURNING MEMORY INTO ESCHATOLOGY

Unger's Nietzschean understanding of the appropriate relationship between past and future also echoes the one put forward by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the essay 'Circles', Emerson describes the human situation between past and future as follows: 'The new position of the advancing man has all the powers of the old, yet has them all new. It carries in its bosom all the energies of the past, yet is itself an exhalation of the morning. I cast away in this new moment all my once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain. Now for the first time seem I to know any thing rightly. The simplest words—we do not know what they mean except when we love and aspire.'²² There is much to admire in this lyrical passage, but for my purposes, I would like to focus on Emerson's claim that, in the exhalation of this bright, new morning, the 'advancing man' *casts away* all of his 'once-hoarded' knowledge. Now, such hoarded knowledge is precisely what Nietzsche complains about: our stockpiling of it indicates our suffering from a 'debilitating historical fever', one that treats history as a standing reserve of accumulated factual claims about the past.²³ While one might agree that historical knowledge taken in this way may indeed prove to be detrimental to present life—or, as Nietzsche says, 'a kind of

conclusion to life and a settling of accounts'—one might still wonder whether the most fruitful response to this dangerous situation is the sort of 'casting away' that Emerson appears to recommend in 'Circles'.

Emerson makes an important point of course. Hoarding is an unhealthy form of attachment, and when one finds oneself in such a situation, 'casting away' might well indeed be the most therapeutic response. So, like Nietzsche, we should take Emerson seriously when he says that the new position of the 'advancing man' has all the powers of the old, yet in a new way. Simply because Emerson claims to have no Past at his back, does not mean he considers himself to be unshaped or uninfluenced by the past in any way whatsoever.²⁴ Indeed, as we have already heard him claim, the new position he recommends carries all of the past's energies 'in its bosom'. Yet how is this trick turned? How does one go about making the past into a true inheritance and not a smothering burden, so that, as Nietzsche says, we can experience our existence as neither arbitrary nor by chance, but as the living fruit and flower of that inheritance? Putting the question another way, how might we best go about making such dead knowledge live again, so that history might once again serve life? Or, this time in Unger's terms: How might we liberate 'memory' so that it may serve, if not become, 'prophecy'?

In order to suggest an answer to this question, I would like to turn briefly to a philosopher whose mood and sensibility differs somewhat from those I have examined so far. Specifically, I wish to explore Paul Ricoeur's intervention in the now somewhat dated debate between Jürgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer on the question of the authority of tradition. I do so in order to probe the possibility that our capacity to make the past into a true inheritance might depend, not just on our ability and willingness to

experiment with that inheritance, but also on our willingness to be still and listen to the past, to allow it to read us just as much as we read it.

As Ricoeur notices, in the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, Gadamer defends a certain 'authority of the past', one that Habermas finds objectionable. According to Ricoeur, we can adopt two different attitudes toward this authority: It 'can appear to us in turn as a form of violence exercised against our thinking, which prevents us from advancing to maturity of judgment, or as a means of assistance, as a necessary guide on the pathway from infancy to maturity.'²⁵ Habermas's theory of ideology, Ricoeur notes, 'adopts a suspicious approach, seeing tradition as merely the systematically distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence.'²⁶

While, *pace* Habermas, Ricoeur accepts the legitimacy of Gadamer's claim that we are all products of our effective histories, he adds to this affirmation the novel suggestion that our reception of the past is not simply something we undergo, but also something that we bring about.²⁷ We are more than just passive receivers of a cultural heritage; we are active interpreters of that heritage. In an affirmative nod to Habermas' position, Ricoeur acknowledges that the human interest in emancipation accompanies any creative reception of a cultural heritage, thereby introducing 'ethical distance' into the activity of this reception.²⁸

In staking out a position that moves beyond the impasse reached by Gadamer and Habermas, Ricoeur calls our attention specifically to the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, one whose historical transmission, he claims, has preserved a memory of liberation that is itself liberating.²⁹ Because of the liberating potential of such memory,

Ricoeur refuses to identify its active reception and ongoing transmission with a conservatism that would shut the future down: '[N]othing is more decepetive than the alleged antinomy between an ontology of prior understanding and an eschatology of freedom.... [A]s if it were necessary to choose between reminiscence and hope!'³⁰

Echoing Ricoeur's comments on the liberating potential housed within Judeo-Christian Religious traditions, Richard Kearney claims that 'biblical stories add a future oriented or eschatological dimension to the recall of ancient events.'³¹ Kearney here emphasizes the possibility for religious memory to refuse the conservative religious gesture and instead awaken us to the possibility for a different and transformed future. Participating in a religious tradition, for Kearney, is a way of entering a story whose narration is ongoing and incomplete. Those who choose to actively receive and pass along such a tradition become actors in a narrative, interpreters involved in a memorial retrieval of ancient texts, a work that can in fact serve the urgent task Unger emphasizes—liberating us from the habitual so that we may welcome novel possibilities.

Indeed, this work of simultaneous retrieval and interpretation can be radically transformative for the persons and communities who undertake it. I am reminded here specifically of the final, controversial chapter of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, entitled 'Conversions.' There, Taylor speaks about the possibility and desirability of rejecting what he calls a 'closed spin' on modernity's 'immanent frame,' and instead adopting an 'open spin' that allows for a human relationship with transcendence (a transcendence that is not the same as Unger's redefinition of transcendence, by which he means to describe only our 'active power' of self-transcendence, or the remainder within ourselves that cannot be contained by the social and cultural codes that otherwise define us).³² In

proffering a phenomenological description of these sorts of conversions—that is conversions from a modern secular life pattern *to* a religiously-qualified one—Taylor is careful to note that such conversions need not, in fact ought not, be regarded as simple *reversions* to previously outmoded life patterns, or as slavish, mechanical reproductions of the same. Rather, feeling the inadequacy of a modern secular outlook, the contemporary convert can appeal to a tradition of memory in order to enact something radically and creatively new in their lives, as well as in the life of their society.³³

Ricoeur, for his part, comes out quite strongly in favour of the role of memory in this transformative process (whether or not a religious conversion is implied) when he speculates that ‘[p]erhaps there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and the Resurrection were effaced from the memory of mankind....’³⁴ However, in his attempt to counter Habermas’ insistence on universalism and formalism as the only means by which to safeguard the human interest in emancipation, Ricoeur perhaps overstates his case. Surely it would be highly insulting to tell any currently oppressed or victimized group that, but for the modern inheritance of the Judeo-Christian tradition, they would otherwise lack any consciousness of their suffering as well as any desire for liberation.³⁵ Yet I think it would be uncharitable to read Ricoeur this way, however lacking in nuance we might find his particular formulation here. Perhaps a more sensitive way to make his point would be to suggest that any consciousness of suffering or interest in liberation comes to us always-already clothed in traditioned or enculturated forms, and that, *pace* Habermas, to insist on the formal translation of these particular forms into neutral or universal terms would completely impoverish their unique ability to arouse consciousness and stir human

imagination and action.³⁶ With this gloss, we can take Ricoeur's insight in a more pluralist direction, without denying the force of his larger claim that the human interest in emancipation grows out of the memorial inheritance of particular cultural forms, which include but are not limited to the various strands of Judaism and Christianity that have come to us today. Still, the fact that our interest in emancipation comes clothed with an effective history underlines the importance of cultural memory as well as the danger of cultural amnesia.

Ricoeur would here have us turn memory into eschatology, to hear the biblical narrative of emancipation in a way that shapes our spiritual horizon of hope and expectation. For Ricoeur, then, cultural memory plays a key role in mediating the dispute between Gadamer and Habermas. Expressing sympathy with Habermas' fear that too much deference to the authority of tradition can distort or even quash this emancipatory interest, Ricoeur argues that, instead of seeking to emancipate ourselves *from* tradition *per se*, we ought instead to take responsibility for the manner in which we appropriate it. We must tease out the emancipatory from the enslaving forms of appropriation. Should we wish to become more finely attuned to the traditions we inherit, he thinks, we will discover strands within them that can nurture, shape, and guide the human interest in emancipation and release from suffering.

In making this suggestion, Ricoeur highlights the human condition as one that finds itself, to use Hannah Arendt's formulation, 'between past and future'. To this point, I have examined the various ways that several thinkers—Unger, Emerson, Nietzsche, Ricoeur—construe the best way for people to inhabit this temporal tension. All reject a slavish adherence to the past as unhealthy, but perhaps Ricoeur's position

shows more openness to allowing the past to speak into the present, above and beyond our own efforts to use the past in a completely experimental way.

Although Ricoeur shares these thinkers' emphasis on maintaining an active and critical relationship with one's past inheritance, my suspicion is that he also spies a form of passivity in this relationship that is not simply damaging to persons, and might even prove to be edifying. This openness to a certain passivity distinguishes his position from Unger's, in particular, who tirelessly (not to mention somewhat tiresomely) emphasizes action. In the end, then, the different way each thinker construes the tension of the human situation between past and future speaks to different understandings of what it means to be human—what we have come to call an agent, a self, or a person. I turn now to an examination of this anthropological question, in order to highlight the difference that their differing answers to it make.

WHO ARE WE?

Although he opposes memory to prophecy, it would not be fair to say that Unger would thereby necessarily recommend the effacement of the sort of 'liberating memory' to which Ricoeur draws our attention. Remember that Unger highlights the need for prophecy to be 'tutored' by memory. Yet, in construing memory as mainly an enervating and inertial force (save for those few exceptions I have highlighted), we could forgive someone for reading Unger's position as being one-sided when it comes to the importance of memory. Something in his book has me wishing he might consider the possibility that the trick we need to accomplish is not to turn memory into prophecy, but rather to give prophecy the right kind of memory. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey too

reminds us of the power of tradition, when actively received, to enhance our imagination: 'The trouble with the academic imitator is not that he depends upon traditions, but that the latter have not entered into his mind; into the structures of his own ways of seeing and making.'³⁷ Surely, the correct diagnosis of an enervating religious conservatism is not based on the mere fact that it seeks to preserve and shelter ancient memory, but rather that it refuses to allow this memory to enter into its imagination of present possibilities in a lively way.

Such religious fundamentalism, however, is not the only target of Unger's recommendation that we turn memory into prophecy and make futurity into a program. He places within his sights all orthodoxies, religious or secular, that would allow the past to predetermine in advance what we might experimentally attempt in the present. Because he is concerned that we not foreclose upon future possibilities, however, it is ironic that in so doing he affirms a stance toward nature that has the potential to do just that, forever and finally. I am speaking here of his paean to human ingenuity in the book's 'First Digression: Nature in its Place.' Here Unger tells us that the current ecological concern about our lack of responsible stewardship of the earth's natural resources is 'an anxiety founded on an illusion.' He goes on to inform us that '[n]ecessity, mother of invention, has never yet in modern history failed to elicit a scientific and technological response to the scarcity of a resource, leaving us richer than we were before.' As if to drive the point home, he follows the logic of this position to its furthest conclusion, predicting that '[i]f the earth itself were to waste away, we would find a way to flee from it into other reaches of the universe. We would later revisit our abandoned and unlovely planet to re-fertilize and re-inhabit it before its fiery end.'³⁸ At

the risk of masking my sympathy for much of what Unger achieves in this book, I here submit that if this is the outworking of the inner logic of his vision of the self awakened, then I hope we all remain asleep (while I admire his gumption).

Yet I do not wish this to be my final word on Unger's position. Although I do indeed struggle with this passage, I have tried to read it sympathetically. I have asked myself what good reasons one might have to make such a seemingly outrageous claim. Clearly, those reasons are linked to Unger's reinterpretation of transcendence as that residue of untapped potential that exists in every human being and that no tradition or set of social, political, or economic arrangements can contain.³⁹ While I think this understanding of transcendence is fruitful, the passage in question still strikes me as an undesirable and unnecessary conclusion to draw from it. In making these claims for the power of human ingenuity, Unger moves from a recognition of causal indeterminacy to an assumption about the absolute good of positive infinity⁴⁰; this is roughly akin to saying that, because our future is not predetermined, not only is there nothing we cannot do, but there is also nothing we could do that would be irreversibly and irreparably harmful. Unger seems to be saying that no such dire worries about the potentially fatal consequences of our actions should prevent us from experimenting with novel possibilities however we see fit.

Well, I think there are many reasons that might lead us to think long and hard about adopting Unger's presumption of the absolute good of positive infinity. For starters, Unger's recommendation here strikes me as singularly unimaginative, in the sense in which Dewey links imagination to the active reception of a tradition. According to Dewey, 'an imaginative experience is what happens when varied materials of sense

quality, emotion, and meaning come together in a union that marks a new birth in the world.’⁴¹ In making the case for human ingenuity and rational mastery in the way that he does, it is hard to see how Unger is doing anything more than offering an unlively recapitulation of the Enlightenment tradition, one that appears to be as fatalistically imprisoned by past tradition as is any other form of philosophical conservatism he criticizes. Is not such a recapitulation of the Enlightenment anthropology of human rational mastery precisely, if inadvertently, an attempt to create the future in our own image—something Unger says we should never do?

Perhaps the more ‘radical’, if less sexy, message we need to hear flows from the pen of a thinker like Wendell Berry. Ever the party-pooper, Berry risks accusations of conservatism, if not ludditism, by reminding us that

[a] healthy culture is not a collection of relics or ornaments, but a practical necessity, and its corruption invokes calamity. A healthy culture is a communal order of memory, insight, value, work, conviviality, reverence, aspiration. It reveals the human necessities and the human limits. It clarifies our inescapable bonds to the earth and to each other. It assures that the necessary restraints are observed, that the necessary work is done, and that it is done well.... [I]t nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace.⁴²

Now, I’m sure Unger would think Berry is too fond of words like ‘necessary’ and ‘restraint’, and I suppose the inherent danger in accepting Berry’s caution is that we might adopt a meekness that would inhibit us from experimenting with helpful alternative possibilities. But I don’t think Berry wants to stifle our imagination in this way; he would rather have it be informed by the kind of memory that can give it the power to speak to our current need.

Finally, I ask how Unger manages to turn what seems to be a manifestly dystopian vision into a utopian one. Must the glass always be half full for the

pragmatist? Is there no imagination of a future that is so horrible to contemplate that, instead of telling us what we might try next, would instead tell us what we ought *not* to try? I can think of one: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Among other things, this book envisions a world in which all the supports of human civilization have been stripped away, along with the ecological milieu that had sustained it physically. Interestingly enough, the book ends with an imagined memory coming from this future, one that is structurally similar, but in content substantially different, to the more hopeful memory Richard Rorty imagines in his essay 'Looking Backwards from the Year 2096.'⁴³

McCarthy's version reads:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.⁴⁴

Sometimes we are simply brought up short, and we then experience our limits not as fetters to be broken, but as the (admittedly) shifting yet inescapable edges of that space in which alone we may flourish. Here we indeed experience transcendence, indeterminacy, and possibility; but here we also experience necessary limitations that flout Unger's presumption concerning the good of a positive infinity.

Notes

¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 96.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Circles', in *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 260.

³ Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 307.

⁴ Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 242.

⁵ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 11.

⁶ John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 159.

⁷ See Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 237.

⁸ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 41.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 122.

¹¹ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 226.

¹² Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 96.

¹³ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 90. Nietzsche nails his point home by asking his reader to consider the following italicized proposition: '*the ahistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people, a culture.*'

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 91.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 104.

¹⁶ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 105.

¹⁷ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 217.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 130.

¹⁹ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 62. My emphasis.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 130.

²¹ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 237.

²² Emerson, 'Circles', p. 261.

²³ See Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, p. 86. See also p. 105: 'Antiquarian history degenerates from the moment when the fresh life of the present no longer animates and inspires it.... Then we view the repugnant spectacle of a blind mania to collect, of a restless gathering together of everything that once existed. The human being envelops himself in the smell of mustiness....'

²⁴ I am grateful to Jeffrey Stout for comments on an earlier draft of this essay, comments that have allowed me to offer this qualification of Emerson's understanding of the appropriate human relationship to the past.

²⁵ Paul Ricœur, 'Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue', in *Political and Social Essays*, eds. David Stewart and Joseph Bien (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), pp. 246-47.

²⁶ Paul Ricœur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), p. 271.

²⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 220.

²⁸ Ricœur, 'Ethics and Culture', p. 268.

²⁹ Ricœur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', p. 306.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Richard Kearney, *On Stories* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.

³² See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 768-69. For Unger's re-definition of transcendence, see *The Self Awakened*, pp. 55, 160-61.

³³ See Taylor's description of Charles Péguy's understanding of the memory-inspired renewal implied in authentic religious conversion in *A Secular Age*, p 747: 'What was at stake was not just how to know the past, but how to relate to it. A crucial distinction for Péguy lay between a life dominated by fixed habits, and one in which one could creatively renew oneself, even against the force of acquired and rigidified forms. The habit-dominated life was indeed, one in which one was determined by one's past, repeating the established forms which had been stamped into one. Creative renewal was only possible in action which by its very nature had to have a certain temporal depth. This kind of action had to draw on the forms which had been shaped in a deeper past, but not by a simple mechanical reproduction, as with "habit," but by a creative re-application of the spirit of the tradition.'

³⁴ Ricœur, 'Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology', p. 306.

³⁵ I thank William D. Hart, who responded to the oral presentation of this paper, for sensitizing me to this potential objection to Ricoeur's position.

³⁶ For a good example of how the memorial retrieval of a particular ancient religious tradition can inspire the human interest in emancipation, see Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus!: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). In this book, Glaude shows how the biblical Exodus narrative inspired a pragmatic tradition of racial advocacy among African Americans in the early nineteenth century.

³⁷ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), p. 277. See also p. 281: 'He would be poorer than a beast of the fields were it not for traditions that become a part of his mind....'

³⁸ Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 240.

³⁹ See Unger, *The Self Awakened*, p. 55. See also pp. 160-61.

⁴⁰ This position belies Unger's more subtle account of the tension between human finitude and the desire for infinity earlier in the book, a desire which he describes as 'the stigma of our humanity' (p. 56). On this tension, see also the first full paragraph of p. 213. I owe this particular formulation of Unger's position to my colleague at the Institute for Christian Studies, Robert Sweetman.

⁴¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 279.

⁴² Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, 3rd edition (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), p. 43.

⁴³ Richard Rorty, 'Looking Backwards from the Year 2096', in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Penguin: London, 1999), pp. 243-51.

⁴⁴ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), pp. 286-87.