

## Ritual, Narrative and Time: Bridging between Durkheim and Ricoeur

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### Abstract

Paul Ricoeur's theory of the narrative constitution of time, and Emile Durkheim's conception of the ritual construction of time, seem, at least on first examination, incommensurable. While their important and influential theories of the social constitution of time are not easily harmonised, it is possible to construct several bridges between the two, such that they may at least be brought into conversation with one another (a dialogue Ricoeur himself seemed keen to avoid). While the two theories may contradict one another, if we look at the relationship between ritual and narrative, we find unexpected points of possible convergence where bridges may be built. We find that ritual and narrative are themselves not entirely distinct from one another, and even sometimes difficult to disentangle. Further, narratives of the past require the calendar (itself owing much to its ritual heritage) to provide a structure for, and a way of marking, the flow of time. Conversely, ritual practices often act as carriers of narrative, and assisting the transmission of narratives from generation to generation.

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Paul Ricoeur's theory of the narrative constitution of time, and Emile Durkheim's conception of the ritual construction of time, seem, at least on first examination, incommensurable. While their explanations of the social organisation of time cannot be readily harmonised, it is possible to construct several bridges between the two, such that they begin a conversation with one another (a dialogue Ricoeur himself seemed keen to avoid). I will suggest that, while the two theories may be mutually exclusive, if we look at the relationship between ritual and narrative, we find unexpected points where the gap between the two theories of time narrows.

In *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and *Time and Narrative*, Durkheim and Ricoeur respectively address fundamentally philosophical questions and provide effectively sociological means of addressing them. Although Ricoeur would undoubtedly have objected to the use of "sociological" to describe his work, I argue below that we are justified in understanding his approach to time and narrative in these terms. While the social relations of the category of time is in many ways underdeveloped in Durkheim's book—he foregrounds class, force, cause and to some degree, space—it looms large in the neo- or post-Kantian problematic which he is looking to address and to reframe sociologically.

Durkheim allows no place for narrative in the constitution of time; Ricoeur snubs any interaction with Durkheim (and most of those who followed him), countenancing little role for ritual in the structure and experience of time. And yet, there are several crossing over points—fords, if not bridges—between the two. This includes the calendar, which is a notable product of the recurring tendency to ritualise narrative, and to narrativise ritual. Indeed, thinking through several examples, it becomes apparent that, *pace* Durkheim and Ricoeur both, it may not be possible to entirely disentangle ritual from narrative or vice-versa. Thus, while their explanations of social time may be mutually exclusive, the key elements in the explanation (ritual and narrative) are in reality deeply intertwined. As the examples of the Christian Mass and the Passover Seder that I will discuss show, the elements of these important examples of ritual-narratives are like conjoined twins that share a heart and cannot be separated. While one could argue that what really matters is the ritual (Durkheim), or conversely, that what is important is the narrative (Ricoeur), and the opposing part is incidental, neither move would be well advised. If we were to extract the narrative from the ritual, the ritual seems to lose its stated purpose, which is the remembrance and re-enactment of the story. On the other hand, if we were to attempt to extract the ritual from the narrative, leaving only the story, the story itself would lose its means of being told and of being embodied, as well as its means of being passed on to a subsequent generation; each new generation embodies the narrative as they consume it ritually.

Durkheim on ritual and time

Durkheim sets up his study in *Elementary Forms* as a response to a long-standing philosophical debate with which he hopes to provide a sociological resolution. This is not a minor point, nor is it a sideshow in the book—Durkheim contends that the origins of humankind's fundamental capacity for conceptual thought (including about time) derive from religion:

At the root of our judgements, there are certain fundamental notions that dominate our entire intellectual life. It is these ideas that philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, have

called the categories of understanding: notions of time, space, number cause, substance, personality. They correspond to the most universal properties of things. They are like solid frames that confine thought. Thought does not seem to be able to break out of them without destroying itself, since it seems we cannot think of objects that are not in time or space, that cannot be counted, and so forth (Durkheim, 1995: 9).

Durkheim contends that there are two opposed positions for dealing with the basic epistemological question—he designates these as the *empiricist* and the *apriorist* and argues that neither approach is really adequate (Rawls, 2004). Whatever Durkheim’s reputation in the discipline he helped to found and his fondness (very often misunderstood) for social facts, he has much less sympathy for empiricist arguments than for those of the apriorist. Durkheim observes that what is most fundamental about the categories of understanding is their universality. By contrast, the most basic thing about any sense experience is its particularity: it is an immediate experience of this unique object. Durkheim accepts Hume’s argument that there is no way to get from particular sense experience to the categories of understanding, which must not only be general, but universal. The individual cannot make up the categories out of “bits and pieces” of sense experience (Hart and McKinnon, 2010). One may be able to see that one outcome regularly occurs after a particular action, but this cannot confirm that the one *caused* the other. Likewise, we may be able to sense similarity between objects, but we cannot derive from this the concept a class of objects. Durkheim goes so far as to argue that to the extent that we allow particulars to dominate philosophical thought, we give up on reason; he suggests, at least half seriously, that empiricism should therefore be renamed as irrationalism on that account (13).

Durkheim nevertheless has significant concerns about aspects of the apriorist position, and this sets him apart from those who have understood his position as straightforwardly Kantian (Rose, 2009; Hall, 2007:22). Durkheim worries that apriorists grant “to the intellect a certain power to transcend experience... without explanation or warrant” (14). While warrant indicates a philosophical concern, “explanation” is here the more significant criticism, because for the apriorists nothing is prior to the categories, and no experience is possible without them. Durkheim sees a basically theological impetus in the apriorists, whereby a “mystic participation” allows individuals to partake of the “divine reason” which underpins such a “marvellous faculty” (15).

Both the empiricists and the apriorists treat perception, and hence the categories which inform or can be constructed from it, as the processes and structures of *an individual’s* perception. Durkheim is convinced that his research has shown the categories to be of social origin, and this distinguishes his own approach from both apriorism and empiricism. It also allows him to capitalise on the strengths of the two, otherwise incommensurable, approaches. Durkheim maintains the verity of the empiricist’s sense perception and the apriorist’s categories as distinct “levels”, corresponding to the individual (empiricism) and to society (apriorism), which he believes reflects the duality of human nature he refers to as *homo duplex* (14-15).

In addition to arguing that social relations are prior to the a priori categories, Durkheim distinguishes himself from Kant and his followers. He argues that for apriorism, the categories are the condition of any and all experience of the world; Durkheim himself contends, however, that individuals do have sense experience, though it is inchoate, pre-conceptual, non-rational, and cannot be shared with others. The ability to share one’s perceptions of the world with others accounts for the social

necessity of the categories, as Durkheim argues in the conclusion (1995: 435). These provide the framework for communication and coordinated action, and they are able to provide such an infrastructure because they are also the product of society. Echoing some of Friedrich Nietzsche's early arguments (McKinnon, 2012; 2014) Durkheim contends that the categories are metaphors that translate the social organization of the group into categories that its members use to understand the world (1995:15).

While time is a category of considerable theoretical importance to his argument, Durkheim devotes considerably less attention to time than he does to class, force or cause. Nevertheless, Durkheim identifies the same basic problem in empiricist understandings of time that Ricoeur will identify with the phenomenology of time in *Time and Narrative*, when he writes (1995:9):

...what if one tried to imagine what the notion of time would be in the absence of the methods we use to divide, measure, and express it with objective signs, a time that was not a succession of years, months, weeks, days, and hours? It would be nearly impossible to conceive of. We can conceive of time only if we differentiate between moments. Now what is the origin of that differentiation?

Durkheim shows that he is familiar with Augustine's famous reflection on time, where the writer of late antiquity tries to grasp the essence of time by means of recollection and expectancy. However important such an exercise might be for "our personal experience" it is an inadequate basis for conceptualising time. To grasp the category of time, one must escape the prison of solipsism. Thus:

The category of time is not simply a partial or complete commemoration of our lived life. It is an abstract and impersonal framework that contains not only our individual existence but also that of humanity. It is like an endless canvas on which duration is spread out before the mind's eye and on which all possible events are located in relation to points of reference that are fixed and specified. It is not *my time* that is organised in this way; it is time that is conceived of objectively by all men of the same civilization. This by itself is enough to make us begin to see that any such organisation would have to be collective. And indeed, observation establishes that these indispensable points, in reference to which all things are arranged temporally, are taken from social life. The division into days, weeks, months, years, etc., corresponds to the recurrence of rites, festivals, and public ceremonies at regular intervals. A calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activity while ensuring that regularity (10).

Thus, Durkheim treats the calendar as providing hints of the organisation of time as a social product. This takes on added significance when he gets into the heart of the empirical analysis of "the principal modes of ritual conduct" in section three, chapters one (the negative cult) and two (the positive cult, part i), where he discovers the social practices of sacred and profane as the foundation of the calendar. The negative cult establishes the relationship between Durkheim's conception of the sacred and the categories of time and space, and the positive cult establishes the connection between collective effervescence and the categories of time and space. Between the two, this takes us to the heart of Durkheim's argument.

Durkheim argues that the absolute separation between sacred and profane is both universal and, collectively experienced, it is the essence of religion<sup>1</sup>. What he terms the “negative cult” are those ritualised processes that distinguish “all that is sacred from all that is profane” (306); the way this separation is constructed and maintained is the foundation for the categories of both space and time, which he discusses together as articulated categories. The negative cult does not simply reflect the sacred but “implements” (1995: 306; “réaliser” 1960:431) it. The negative cult provides the ritual institution of the division between sacred and profane; the boundary to sacred space is marked by rituals that both show respect, but these also ensure safe passage from profane to sacred, as well as back again to profane. So also is the distinction between sacred time and profane time is marked liturgically:

Likewise religious and profane life cannot coexist at the same time. In consequence, religious life must have specified days or periods assigned to it from which all profane occupations are withdrawn. Thus were holy days born. There is no religion, and hence no society, that has not known and practiced this division of time into two distinct parts that alternate with one another according to a principle that varies with peoples and civilizations. In fact, probably the necessity of that alternation led men to insert distinctions and differentiations into the homogeneity and continuity that it does not naturally have (313).

The first, and primary distinction made between kinds of time is between sacred time and profane time, and the two must be kept apart by the observation of prohibitions and rituals. Profane activities (such as, for example, work) is prohibited on sacred days, allowing sacred and profane to avoid all “contact” with one another. The beginning and end of sacred time are often marked with rituals, drawing a boundary in time, akin to the border created in space.

When Durkheim talks about the “positive cult” these two things come together. There is a world of difference between the experience of profane time, where the group is scattered and preoccupied with mundane, economic endeavours, and those seasons when the group gathers. In gathering, the group generates energy from shared proximity and common focus on the ideals of the group in an experience of collective effervescence. “We know,” says Durkheim:

That the positive cult tends naturally to take on periodic forms; this is one of its distinguishing traits...The essence of the cult is the cycle of feasts that are regularly repeated at definite times. We are now in a position to understand where the impulse toward periodicity comes from. The rhythm that religious life obeys only expresses, and results from, the rhythm of social life (353).

While it is not possible to gather all the time—profane labours mean that there is food to eat and shelter in which to dwell—but the social group needs to revive itself periodically, to renew its awareness of itself and reaffirm its commonality. Such periodic gatherings have often, Durkheim notes, been seasonal, as they were with some of the aboriginal groups in his study, but while that is common feature of religious rituals as well as an enduring tendency, this is a “purely eternal” factor. This seems somewhat over-stating his case for the sake of consistency, as we will discuss following

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<sup>1</sup> This is by no means an uncontroversial claim (McKinnon, 2002); the argument I am developing here does not require that we accept that the distinction between sacred and profane, or the category of religion, is universal. These are themselves distinct claims which need to be evaluated separately (Lynch, 2012).

an examination of Ricoeur's alternate position on the social organisation of time, as we talk about how we might be able to think with Ricoeur and Durkheim together.

### Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Social Time

Paul Ricoeur's magisterial three volume *Time and Narrative* begins with a somewhat different problematic than does Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*, though the two are not unrelated. Of the parallels, Ricoeur seems—possibly willfully—unaware; he relegates the contribution of Durkheim on the concept of time to two footnotes. The first simply provides a list of relevant references in the Durkheimian tradition. The second relegates Durkheim and the Durkheimians to a “genealogical” approach to the question of the calendar, more concerned with the social origin of the calendar than its “significance”. Ricoeur's dismissive gesture is significant in itself, even if the substantial point by which Ricoeur dispatches Durkheim is distinctly out of character for Ricoeur, whose writing is typically thoughtful, generous and synthetic.

As Stanislas Deprez (2015) has demonstrated in compelling detail, Ricoeur has long evaded close encounters with sociology—especially French sociology—and his work shows a striking lack of reference in particular to the two dominant sociological intellects of twentieth century France, Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, he seems more receptive of the work of Max Weber. This avoidance of the work of the French thinkers may stem from his concerns about sociological holism—though this would apply more to Durkheim than to Bourdieu—or from a concern that sociological explanation could undermine his commitment to individual moral responsibility. His work on time nevertheless has a much greater affinity with Durkheim's social time than Ricoeur was prepared to admit.

Ricoeur was one of the most important French philosophers from the end of the Second World War until his death in 2005. He was particularly interested in the philosophy of religion (cf. Ricoeur, 1995), and held a post for fifteen years (1970-1985) in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago (Dosse, 2008). In this paper, however, my focus is his magisterial three volume *Time and Narrative* (1984; 1985; and 1988), which some have suggested is the most important philosophical examination ever conducted into either time or narrative (Dowling, 2011). Sociologists have tended to repay Ricoeur's lack of attentiveness to their enterprise like for like. With the exception of medical sociology, which has adopted his notion of narrative identity as part of its theoretical toolkit, largely appropriated, in second, or third,-hand bowdlerisations (but see Ezzy, 1998), the discipline has, by and large, ignored Ricoeur's work, and in particular his analysis of narrative. The last major monograph on Ricoeur's work by a sociologist antedated most of his work on narrative (Thompson, 1981a), as does the anthology of Ricoeur's writings most likely to be consulted by social scientists, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Ricoeur, 1981). The result is that a common frame of reference is often missing, though this may be showing signs of changing in the recent appropriation of Ricoeur's work in post-Bourdieuian French sociology (Truc, 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Halbwachs and Raymond Aron are partial exceptions: Halbwachs work on collective memory occupies an important place in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2005); Aron appears largely as an interpreter of Weber, or as an historian than as a sociologist

Ricoeur's primary concern in *Time and Narrative* is to address a series of fundamental problems in the philosophy of time. Ricoeur shows that there is an antinomy at the heart of all previous philosophy of time in western thought since (late-) antiquity, with its two basic and competing approaches to time, the objective (or cosmological) and the subjective (or phenomenological). The first position stems from Aristotle, and treats time as an objective, natural phenomenon, marked for example by the movement of the sun and moon and planets. The other school of thought takes its departure from Augustine's *Confessions*, from which develops what will become the 'phenomenology' of time: it understands time in terms of the subject's experience of it passing. Ricoeur argues that both approaches bring something essential to our understanding of time, even if the two approaches are mutually contradictory and lack internal consistency. In fact, in order to maintain their accounts of time, subjective theories repeatedly sneak in 'objective' or 'natural' elements (for example, death in Heidegger). Likewise, the objective accounts of time smuggle in subjective notions to prop up their objective accounts of time (notions like before and after, which are the very conceptions on which subjective accounts of time depend). The two approaches do thus meet undisclosed, all the while denying their secret tryst.

Between the psychic and the cosmological lies the social (or "human") experience of temporality which is configured and shared by means of narrative. Social time is not held hostage by the aporia at the heart of traditional philosophies of time; narrative anchors subjective time in the cosmos and provides meaning to objective time; it thereby mediates between these two approaches (and dimensions of time) long seen as an exclusively either/or option. Narrative provides the means of bringing the two conceptions of time openly into relation to one another. How this can be done is Ricoeur's primary preoccupation in his intricate and challenging three-volume work.

Ricoeur notes that Homo sapiens seem to have an innate capacity for narrative. Narrative has been a feature of every known culture, at every known point in history; it and plays a vital role in the development, and self-understanding, of both individuals and collectives. In coming to terms with narrative, Ricoeur constructs a theory on the back of Aristotle's examination of tragic drama in his *Poetics* (2013). Ricoeur argues that the classical philosopher's conception of tragedy is sufficiently general to provide the basis of a theory of all narratives, and not just tragedies<sup>3</sup>. A narrative is above all a form of discourse with a beginning, a middle, and an end. While we can call this structure the 'plot' of the narrative, Ricoeur is much more interested in the activity of making plots, or as he calls it, 'emplotment', which is his translation of Aristotle's *muthos*; consonant with much of contemporary sociology, his emphasis is less on structure than on *structuration* (1984: 48).

A narrative emplots or configures events into a sequence, which makes them into an "intelligible whole" (Ricoeur, 1984:65). Events are arranged events in a chronology, first "then", "and then" and so forth, "in accord with the irreversible order of time common to physical and human events" (67). Events follow one another, and characters develop, not just in a sequence, but into a meaningful and intelligible sequence, into a story that a reader or hearer can follow, guided by cultural expectations and genres. A narrator shapes sequence of "one thing after another" in conjunction with the expectations of the audience, whereby it becomes "one thing because of another" (Dowling, 2011: 5). For this reason, a narrative always entails a causal chain (explicit or implied) between events; events that do not figure in the development of the plot, or show the development of the

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<sup>3</sup> Aristotle only knew three narrative genres: tragedy, comedy, and the epic.

characters, need to be edited-out or else refigured so that they do. Causal relationships between events, and their effects on characters that act and suffer the actions of others, must be “probable” (to use Aristotle’s terms), or in less technical terms, they must be plausible and cohere with our expectations of how the world works.

Following Aristotle’s theory of narrative, Ricoeur argues that narratives entail “discordant concordance”. Discordance, such as meaningless, unmerited, suffering brings chaos and anomie; these are made “concordant” as they are integrated into the arc of the plot, and resolved, or at least made meaningful. In this context, Ricoeur draws our attention to a key term in Aristotle’s discussion of complex tragedies, such as Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex: peripeteia*. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, *peripeteia*, (“strokes of fate, terrifying and pitiful events, a profound error” (1991b: 32), designates is the key problem to be resolved or given meaning in the course of a tragic narrative plot. In this sense, one of the functions of narrative is precisely how some authors have understood religion, as a “sacred canopy” that shields humans from disorder, anomie and meaninglessness (Berger, 1969). Thus, one could argue that even profane stories take on a religious role insofar as they order the world.

Life and the stories that we tell about life exist in a reciprocal or dialectical relationship with one another. Ricoeur argues that human life and action is inescapably symbolic, and each of us is shaped by the stories we have heard from a young age—children learn much of what they know of the world early on, from stories. Narrative—be it fictional, historical, sociological— is assembled from the raw material of life. Narrative is *mimetic*, which for Ricoeur means not simply mean that art ‘imitates’ life; rather, Ricoeur stresses the active, creative, structuration of emplotment that shapes life into story. Nevertheless, narrative and life remain tethered to one another. Thus, the dialectic. We can only understand stories because of “our familiarity with the conceptual network of human acting that is of the same order as the familiarity we have with the plots of stories that are known to us” (Ricoeur, 1991b: 28). At the same time, stories we have appropriated shape our understanding of the world and our action within it.

Narratives order experience, but historical narratives (as opposed to fictional narratives<sup>4</sup>) do so in conjunction with three primary “bridges” that facilitate the connection between the phenomenological and cosmological between the “time of the soul” and the “time of the world”. The bridges that Ricoeur has identified allow narrative to stitch together the self’s relationship with the cosmos are 1) the calendar 2) the sequence of generations and 3) the “trace”.

Ricoeur’s thinking about the calendar draws very heavily on Emil Benveniste’s essay “Le langage et l’expérience humaine”. Ricoeur uses this article as the basis for his argument that the technology of the calendar provides the means for the development of “chronicle time” which connects everyday experience to the movement of the sun, moon and planets. Three features of the calendar stand out in particular: 1) calendars begin with a culturally significant point of origin: the birth of Christ or the Buddha, Muhammed’s departure from Mecca to Medina, or the creation of the world in the Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur is as interested in fiction as in history, and in fact the whole of volume two is concerned primarily with fictional narratives, which provide a “laboratory” for thinking about time (and ethics) precisely because of their looser connection to the time of the world. My reason for focusing on historical narratives is because, although these are by no means less important than historical narratives, the direction of thought Ricoeur pursues by thinking about and with fiction is at some remove from the comparison and conversation with Durkheim that I am developing here.

calendar. 2) the founding event provides a point along which an axis stretches through the present and into the future; this allows every event in human history to be dated (at least in theory). Finally, 3) Astronomy allows the determination (if not, Ricoeur adds, the enumeration) of time by dividing that time into intervals. Calendar time thus “borrows from physical time” (1988: 107)

The sequence of generations provides another “bridge” between the subjective experience of time and the natural world, this time the link is with biology, rather than with astronomy. This Ricoeur develops in dialogue with Martin Heidegger, who understood humans as distinctively “beings unto death”. Ricoeur does not share Heidegger’s neo-stoicism, but he does see the idea of a generation as “expressing brute facts about human biology: birth, aging and death” (110), but it also allows us to live as contemporaries in a world bequeathed to us by our forbearers, and which we pass on to our children and to our children’s children. The journey of a single generation, from birth, ageing, reproduction, and death, forms the basis of the individual’s biography.

Ricoeur sought to learn about narrative and time from historians, translating the objects of their practices into philosophical terms when he discusses “traces” or “marks”:

The trace is one of the more enigmatic instruments by means of which historical narrative “refigures” time. It refigures time by constructing the junction brought about by the overlapping of the existential and the empirical in the significance of the trace...With regard to traces [historians] stand in a relationship of usage. It is in frequenting archives and consulting documents that historians look for the trace of the past as it really occurred. The problem of what the trace as such signifies is not the historian’s but the philosopher’s.

Traces are those marks left in the past that have a presence in the future; while they may be documents organised into an archive, they may be anything that someone, or something, has done in the past that leaves behind a vestige of some sort. Traces may be texts, but they may be almost anything left behind in the past and waiting to be rediscovered: buildings, but also detritus found in an archaeologist’s digs: what remains of the buildings, tools, and above all, the rubbish, of people who have themselves long since stopped making their mark on the world. They become the building blocks of the professional historian’s reconstruction and interpretation of the past, but form the environment in which we dwell. People “make history, but not in conditions of their own choosing”, said Marx; those conditions are comprised in part of marks left by our forbearers.

Bridging from Durkheim to Ricoeur?

Durkheim’s and Ricoeur positions are without a doubt mutually exclusive. Durkheim permits no place for narrative in the constitution of time (this being fully accounted for by ritual practices); Ricoeur countenances little role for ritual in the experience of time, making only a partial exception for “mythic time” (discussed below). There are nevertheless several points of convergence, of which the calendar is the most significant. Further, ritual and narrative are not phenomena hermetically sealed off from one another; they are mutually imbricated, as the calendar, which we will discuss below, itself testifies. Narratives are very often enacted ritually, rituals are used to perform narrative, to bring them alive and give them social presence. While Durkheim and Ricoeur’s theories may not be readily harmonised, the recognition that the key elements of their respective explanations of social time, ritual and narrative are intertwined brings the theories into a relation with one another.

Ricoeur leaves very little room for the ritual action that configures “human” or “social” time, though he is happy to acknowledge that in elementary forms of social organisation, such as those Durkheim studied, which he refers to as “mythic time,” is organised around the ritual year. “Indeed”, he goes on to acknowledge,

it is through the mediation of ritual that mythic time is revealed to be the common root of world time and human time. Through its periodicity, a ritual expresses a time whose rhythms are broader than those of ordinary action. By punctuating action in this way, it sets ordinary time and each brief human life within a broader time (1988: 105).

The implications, however, are not explored in Ricoeur’s three volume work, nor does he give due consideration to the role of ritual in the development of modern society’s experience of time. Nevertheless, of Ricoeur’s three “bridges” that cross over between the psyche’s experience of time and the objective time of the cosmos making historical narratives possible, calendars (and, as I will suggest, clocks) have clear links to ritual. The movement and passing of generations are likewise marked ritually. Furthermore, ritual and narrative are themselves much more intimately interconnected than either Durkheim or Ricoeur would like to admit.

Ricoeur does observe that the origin point of calendrical systems is usually a religiously narrated event. This becomes one point on an axis in relation to which all events thereafter are marked in time. The most obvious examples are the birth of Christ, the Buddha, and Guru Nanak, or the departure of Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, or the creation of the world in the Hebrew calendar. It is not just the point of origin for the calendar that matters, however; rather, as Durkheim argued, the periodicity of the annual calendar is typically also organised around sacred rites to be performed on particular days of the year. This means that the starting point of social time may lie in mythical time (as Ricoeur acknowledges), but the very units against which distance from that point, for most of the history of the west at least, was the liturgical calendar, with its feasts and saint’s days, and the stories that accompany them (Zerubavel, 1981). The naming of weeks in relation to the rituals and narratives of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost has largely passed out of common daily usage except in the few universities that maintain the tradition (Oxford, Cambridge, St Andrew’s in Scotland and Trinity College Dublin, for example, use different names for their terms, but all are based on the liturgical year). Christmas and Easter, however, nevertheless remain significant in the organisation of the year. Christmas and Easter may have become for most capitalist, rather than Christian, feasts, but they continue to make their mark on the organisation of the year, and observable as key moments of the annual business cycle.

Ricoeur argued that the periodicity of the calendar connects the psyche’s experience of time with the movements of the cosmos; Durkheim, by contrast thought that this was entirely secondary, conventional, and for the most part, irrelevant. Either the one or the other can be correct, depending on which calendrical marker one considers. Some of the calendar’s markers are tied to the movement of the sun, moon and stars, others are not; but all have all been constructed and marked liturgically. The day/night sequence and the 365¼ day year with its regular seasons, its equinoxes and solstices, are based on the movement of the planet and its relation to the sun. Some calendrical systems base their months on the waxing and waning of the moon, though this does not correspond to the solar calendar. As a result, some religious festivals, like Passover, Easter, or

Ramadan are inserted into the later, Roman based, solar calendar on the basis of calculations from the a lunar calendar (Muir, 2005).

There is nothing “natural” about the division of the year into weeks, or the grouping of days into weeks (depending from which end you start). Different cultures have had various and sundry systems of grouping days, and with different numbers of days making up a week (Richards, 2000). The Jewish tradition gave us the seven-day week, with its cycle of six profane days, followed by its sacred day, the Sabbath. Christians and Muslims both appropriated this seven-day week, though distinguished themselves by choosing a different day and setting it apart as sacred. Christians first moved their holy day, romanising it and setting it apart from Jewish practice by choosing Sunday; Muslims chose Friday in order to distinguish themselves from their monotheistic kin (Zerubavel, 1981).

Durkheim could have made a stronger case for the social origin of the conceptual framework by which we experience time by examining of how day/night are divided into smaller segments, though this would have been difficult to do within the confines of his study of an “elementary” society and its elementary forms. While we have come to take for granted that the day is marked by twenty-four hours, the day/night whole is divisible by any denominator (and has been divided variously in different cultures, Richards, 2000). To mark the hours requires sophisticated technology; the sundial being the most effective before the development of mechanical clocks—at least during daylight hours. But these were long what is known as “unequal hours”. Extrapolating from the movement of the sun across the sky, the time of daylight was divided into twelve equal parts, with no adjustments being made whether it was winter with its short daytime or summer with its long daytime. Thus, in the regime of unequal hours, one could accomplish twice as much in a summer hour than in a winter hour, at least Northern Europe. Until sufficiently accurate mechanical clocks made the division of the day and night into “equal hours”, the idea, which had long existed, was unrealised (Glennie and Thrift, 2009).

While technology made the division of equal hours possible, the impetus to divide the day accurately came in the first instance from the church—the bells (*clocca*, or ‘clock’) of the church which rang in the cities and towns to announce, above all, the beginning of mass. Even more important for its long-term consequences was the precisely scheduled lives of religious orders. Much of the impetus for a regime of time that would enable coordinated action amongst a sizeable a group of people, came from the Benedictines. The variation in the length of time between the unequal hours made the orderly life they sought to lead, with prayers offered at appointed “hours”, and every task in between done at its “anointed” time, challenging to say the least. The first mechanical clocks functioned as alarm clocks that alerted the sacrist to ring the bells for the earliest (before daylight) prayers, and they gradually assisted the shift to the more regular, equal hours. We derive not only our precisely scheduled, intricately coordinated lives from the religious orders, but the 24 units into which our days are carved: *horarium* was the name for the monks’ schedule of daily activities (Zerubavel, 1981; Glennie and Thrift, 2009).

The connection between Ricoeur’s notion of the generation as a bridge between the time of the soul and the time of the world (in this case, biological, rather than cosmological) needs to be mentioned briefly, as well. While one could argue that the processes of birth, growth, reproduction and death are “natural” processes of the world, the “generation” is not. The conception of the generation is

maintained through some of the most universally ritualised activities known to humankind. Birth, the introduction to adulthood, marriage, the naming of children and grandchildren, and then death, are typically marked ritually. Whatever the problems with the concept of generation (Kertzer, 1983), there is little doubt that it is these markings, not only the biology of birth, growth, reproduction and decline, on which the concept of generation is built, and by which it is maintained liturgically (Rappaport, 1999) and remembered in narrative.

Whatever the branch of Christian tradition, and whether it refers to its central ritual as The Mass, as Holy Communion, or as The Lord's Supper, every time this Christian celebration is administered, ritual and narrative are intertwined. Thus, to take one example, according to the rite found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ordered for use in the Church of England, and elsewhere, for more than three hundred years, the priest says:

Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee; and grant that we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and blood: who, in the same night that he was betrayed took Bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying Take, eat; this is my Body which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me...("Lord's Supper or Holy Communion", *Book of Common Prayer* (1662))

The biblical narrative of Jesus's last supper with his disciples, which is always integrated into the ritual, becomes the model and provides the framework for the ritual. And while this is not the only time that this narrative is told, it is undoubtedly told most frequently in this fashion. This ritual repetition of the story, in some traditions celebrated multiple times every week, becomes the primary means of maintaining it as a live story, for consuming it, embodying it, along with the bread and wine. Which, then, is it? A story, or a ritual? In this example, the two elements are inseparable.

Behind the Christian Mass, lies another ritual-story-meal, celebrated by Jesus and his disciples. Celebrated annually by Jews, the Passover Seder is a meal where the different foods on the plate represent parts of the story; the key ingredients are explicated in response to the questions children. Here again, the story is literally eaten, the ritual enacts a story told through food consumed, but it is explicitly linked to the transmission of the very essence of Jewish tradition from one generation to the next generation. Thus, in his commentary on the Passover Haggadah, Elie Wiesel explains that the imperative of the Passover Haggadah, to tell the story of the Exodus, when God freed the Jews from Pharaoh's bondage,

expresses the essence of Jewish faith, of Jewish allegiance to a collective memory. It is as though we had all been in Egypt together, prisoners of the same enemy, suffering the same pain, the same anguish... (2006: 27).

But the ritual meal, which assigns roles to the children to ask questions, carries the imperative to pass this story on to the next generation: "and you shall tell your son on that day" (34).

In order to find convergence between Durkheim and Ricoeur, one need not argue that all rituals convey a story, nor that all narratives become ritualised. In both the example of the Christian Mass and the Passover Seder, the elements of the ritual-narratives are like conjoined twins that share a

heart. Some might argue that what really matters is the ritual, or else, that what is vital is the narrative. If, however, we were to extract the narrative from the ritual, in the case of either the Jewish memorial of the exodus, or the Christian remembrance of the crucifixion, the ritual seems to lose its stated purpose: the remembrance and re-enactment of the story. On the other hand, if one were to attempt to extract the ritual from the narrative, leaving only the story, the story itself would lose its means of being told, and of being embodied, as well as its means of being passed on to a subsequent generation; each new generation learns the narrative by consuming it in a ritual meal.

## Conclusion

Sociologists and other scholars have not often considered ritual and narrative together; indeed, they have tended to subsume the one into the other, or else to treat the one as a derivative of the other (Ryan 2013). Particularly given the dearth of research and theory at the intersection of ritual studies and narratology (Nünning and Nünning, 2013), a conversation between Ricoeur and Durkheim—these two dialogue partners that at first glance would not seem not well disposed to one another—has much to offer, and needs to be taken up in earnest. While their respective theories of “social time” cannot be easily synthesised, it has been possible to construct several “bridges” (to use one of Ricoeur’s favourite terms) between the two. While the two theories may be incommensurable, if we look at the relationship between ritual and narrative, we find that the two phenomena are, at least in some key instances, themselves impossible to separate. Narratives about the past depend on the calendar on the concept of the generation to provide a structure for, and a way of marking, the flow of time. And yet, while these may themselves bridge ‘natural time’ and ‘experiential time’, the way that they do so are themselves highly ritualised constructions, and derive from the liturgical practices of the past, if not also the present. Conversely, ritual practices often act as carriers of narrative, and providing for the transmission of narratives from generation to generation.

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