

BERGSON'S THEORY OF MEMORY AS DEFINED BY VETERANS IN
LITERATURE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Samuel Marthaller Jr., whose support and love made the completion of this work possible.

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I wish to thank Dr. Kathryn Broyles for her constant support, patience, and good humor.

From the beginning, she has had confidence in my abilities to not only complete a degree, but to complete it with excellence for which I will be eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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Henri Bergson's theory of memory as presented in *Matter and Memory* contains elements of thought found in a wide range of literature written by or about military veterans illustrating the connectivity of spirit that binds humankind. It is in and through moments of trauma experienced by veterans that the connection to spirit through memory is most readily revealed. In order to understand not only the connectivity of spirit as described by Bergson, but how it functions as a lens revealing deeper truths in literature

by or about military veterans, this paper explores Bergson's theory as it manifests along a literary timeline, the array of material ranging from ancient to modern texts. By contemplating "pure memory" and the existence of "élan vital" in literature produced by or about military veterans in a philosophical, scientific, and theological context, the opportunity to better understand Bergson's concept as well as veteran experience exists.

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CHAPTER I:

Introduction

Henri Bergson's theory of memory as presented in his seminal work *Matter and Memory* contains elements of thought found in a wide range of literature written by or about military veterans illustrating the connectivity of spirit that binds humankind. It is in and through moments of trauma experienced by military veterans that the connection to spirit – through the “pure memory” that Bergson describes – most clearly emerges. In order to understand not only the connectivity of spirit as described by Bergson, but how it functions as a lens revealing deeper truths in literature by or about military veterans, this paper leverages Bergson's theory as lens to explore a literary timeline, the array of texts to be considered ranging from ancient to modern. By contemplating “pure memory” and the existence of “*élan vital*” in literature produced by or about military veterans in a philosophical, scientific, and theological context, the opportunity to better understand Bergson's concept as well as veteran experience exists.

Because Bergson's theories are metaphysical in nature, there is no scientific proof to support his theory of “pure memory” or “*élan vital*” but by showing similarities in the description of memory over a range of centuries and cultures a cross-section of literary and academic genre, a common thread of experience is evident. Following is a timeline of the veterans or authors that are considered:

- Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.) – Philosopher; served with valor in the Peloponnesian War
- Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) – Philosopher; served during Peloponnesian War
- Miguel Cervantes (1547-1616) – Author; served at the Battle of Lepanto
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) – Poet/Professor; served with 15th Light Dragoons
- Mark Twain (1835-1910) – Journalist/Author; joined the Confederate Army

- Stephen Crane (1871-1900) – Author; wrote about Civil War
- Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) – Novelist; WWI veteran
- Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) – Philosopher/Author; WWII veteran and POW
- Karl Marlantes (1944-) – Rhodes Scholar/Author; decorated Vietnam War veteran
- Tim O’Brien (1946-) – Journalist/Author; Vietnam War veteran
- Stephen Earle Robbins, PhD (undisclosed) – AI Executive/Author; Vietnam War veteran
- Parker Gyokeres (1973-) – UAV Photojournalist; Iraq War veteran

This list incorporates works that are philosophical, theological, scientific, fictional, and nonfictional in nature composed by or about veterans and veteran experience. These works demonstrate ideas and concepts that can be illuminated by the concept of “pure memory” or may have been creatively inspired by or follow a connection with “pure memory” or the “*élan vital*” as the subject or author navigated trauma.

What is Henri Bergson’s definition of “pure memory”? Bergson describes pure memory as “a view of what is called ‘spirit’” (Bergson MM 78). Conversely, he describes pure perception as a nature of matter. Pure memory, then, is a philosophical concept of something outside the material, the human body, or matter. He further allows that it is not the working memory for remembering bodily processes like finding keys or tying shoes. Pure memory is something more universal and connected to the “*élan vital*” or vital force of all creation which he posited in his later work *Creative Evolution*. This connectedness of humankind through the “*élan vital*” or “pure memory” is illustrated in creative works by or about military veterans that perhaps best describe the indescribable. Memory has as part of its definition a component of time or duration, and this concept too is illustrated in the creative works by veterans who have experienced mortal combat. Because military veterans face life-threatening trauma so directly, they understand the

connection more clearly and literature written by veterans captures the essence as well as supports Bergson's theory of "pure memory" that he presented in *Matter and Memory*. How does this literature apply to Bergson's "élan vital" or "pure memory"? By an awareness of the connection to all things when in the moment before or as battle trauma begins time and space stop or slow to near stopping; when memories flood in of loved ones or special places in nature; when everything is still, except the trees, the grass, the water – even when there is combat noise all around; when memories combine with the current scenery, and the human spirit is connected as a whole. This is perhaps best illustrated by the novelist and World War I veteran Erich Maria Remarque who wrote about his battle experience in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He describes how it is "strange that all the memories that come have . . . two qualities. They are always completely calm and . . . soundless" (Remarque 118). This is a recurrent theme in the creative work of battle veterans.

Henri Bergson's theory of memory is metaphysical in nature and defies absolute proof. The best illustration of its existence is the similarity of experience and understanding expressed in philosophical posits about memory and imagination that military veterans share. By examining in specific detail, the work by veteran authors regarding these similar experiences, there is an opportunity to show support and perhaps even confirmation for Bergson's theory of pure memory and shared human connectivity through spirit.

CHAPTER II:

Design and Theory – Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological

According to George Wald, a Nobel Prize winner and professor at Harvard University, as a scientist there is nothing he can do “to identify either the presence *or absence* of consciousness” (Wald 349). He states in his essay entitled “Consciousness and Cosmology” that consciousness “has no location” (350). He continues by affirming that although he believes consciousness has no location, he also believes in its existence. This is not unlike the metaphysical philosophy of Henri Bergson’s theory of “pure memory” which, likewise, cannot be scientifically demonstrated or “mathematized” as described by Wald, but it can be dissected and exemplified in a variety of literature.

By identifying and demonstrating common themes regarding memory in literature by or about veterans across a broad spectrum of discourse and over a range of time – from ancient to modern – a potential to illustrate “pure memory” exists. The nature of metaphysical philosophy defies scientific proof, however the examination of literature across disciplines provides an understanding or acknowledgement of the existence of an “*élan vital*” or “pure memory” as described by Bergson, which connects humankind. In addition to examining a range of literature by or about military veterans, a review of medical and psychological literature exploring the existence of inexplicable phenomena which defies scientific proof, particularly regarding memory or spirit, will be considered. This will aid in understanding the heightened sense of awareness in situations of trauma experienced by military veterans during battle. This heightened sense of awareness during conflict is demonstrated most vividly in fictional works like that of Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* with descriptions of human bonding like, “I could read his mind. I was there with him . . . [t]his, now, was something we shared” (O’Brien 200-201).

Examples of the merging mind or the connected soul can be found throughout literature and this research provides a sampling over the course of time that unpacks and illustrates Bergson's theory and the focus of the literature provides a nominal sampling of the unique identifier of military veteran.

Is it possible that the philosophical theories about memory by military veterans Socrates, Plato, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and others were formed due to their military service experience? How may the exposure to battle trauma have established or affected their theories? The research methodology of this paper purposes to show a common theme or quality that will help one better appreciate Bergson's theory of "pure memory" or "élan vital" to show the greater connection of humankind using the specific military veteran quotient.

Theological concepts about holy spirit, dharma, Sufism, and other precepts will demonstrate a possible equivalency to "élan vital" or "pure memory" as defined by Bergson. This examination will show a common ideology globally and further acknowledge the existence of "élan vital" or "pure memory" due to mutual belief when scientific proof is not possible. In the context of separation from time and space through prayer, meditation, reflection, or similar practice there is a direct comparison to the momentary timelessness and separation from the actual trauma experienced in battle by veterans. Just like the inability of Wald to scientifically prove the existence of consciousness, the ability to prove the existence of holy spirit or dharma does not preclude its existence, but the examples in literature by veterans who have experienced battle best illustrate the possibility.

Presentation of psychologic, clinical, and medical theories about memory by military veterans like author Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, clinicians Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, Dr. Marc-Antoine Crocq and Dr. Louis Crocq, as well as others, will provide a scientific perspective. Their

work is with post-traumatic stress injury and provides first-hand knowledge regarding the trauma veterans have suffered as a result of battle. In addition, they provide examples of the workings of memory in the treatment of military veterans who have suffered after the exposure to trauma has occurred. By including this literature for examination through the lens of Bergson's theory of memory, there is an opportunity to determine a connection to an "élan vital" in all humankind by considering the similarities of experience documented through treatment post-trauma.

Close reading of fictional literature by military veterans Miguel Cervantes, Tim O'Brien, and Erich Remarque will provide vivid examples of the connection to an "élan vital" or "pure memory" during situations of trauma. The production of fictional literature by these authors has added to our understanding of their experience and by again using Bergson's theory as a lens to examine their work, an opportunity to bring science and theology together might be possible.

The experience of trauma may be a pathway to understanding the connection to the "élan vital" or "pure memory" that connects humankind. The importance of the results of this close examination of literature by or about military veterans in the context of Henri Bergson's theory and their interpretation will provide possible avenues for further research or discussion that can contribute to a greater understanding of how not only veterans but all humankind is connected through spirit.

CHAPTER III:

Henri Bergson and Memory

HENRI BERGSON AND MEMORY

Henri Bergson wrote *Matter and Memory* in 1896, thirty-one years before he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1927. Algot Ruhe in his book, *Henri Bergson: An Account of His Life and Philosophy* a work written during Bergson's lifetime, introduces well Bergson's theory of memory. According to Ruhe, Bergson was born in 1859 in Paris. As a student, he excelled in study of the classics, math, and natural science winning "special distinction as a Hellenist" (Ruhe 3). Starting in 1900, Bergson was a professor at the Collège de France in Paris where he served as the chair for Greek Philosophy and then as the chair for Modern Philosophy. During his career as an esteemed teacher and writer, Bergson wrote a textbook that achieved eight editions by 1912 and his lectures drew large crowds from not only academia, but the general public, leaving many interested attendees without admission. Bergson visited America for a lecture tour in February 1913, and "the craze for Bergson was unique, best captured by the frequent mention of the Broadway traffic jam that his arrival caused" (McGrath 599). As described by Ruhe, Bergson's deliver technique was not one of dry lecture, but storytelling. Bergson would start "modestly with an anecdote and, while the audience is still laughing, the lecturer has made his point and drawn his conclusion from the little story" (Ruhe 9). This anecdote emphasizes the importance of literature as a medium for proof of Bergson's theory of memory.

Henri Bergson actively engaged with notable philosophers and scientists during his career including collaboration with William James – the two philosophers exchanging ideas as well as Bergson writing the introduction for the French translation of James' *Pragmatism*. Bergson debated Einstein regarding the latter's theory of relativity and corresponded with other

notable scientists and philosophers including Sigmund Freud. In addition to his lecturing expertise and teaching experience, Bergson served on several academic and scientific committees. Most notably he helped form the League of Nations, working on behalf of the French government with Woodrow Wilson. The League of Nations was “a body that would include representatives of all nations and that would aim at establishing and maintaining peace” (Lawlor). Bergson served as the first president of the Committee for Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations which included Madame Curie, Albert Einstein, as well as other notable theorists.

Early in his career, Bergson began thinking about memory and where it resides and how it is called into use, as related by Ruhe from Bergson’s early papers where Bergson posited, “between the psychological fact and its substratum in the brain there must be a relation answering to no one of the ready-made concepts offered by philosophy for our use” (19). In this citation from Bergson’s papers, there is evidence that Bergson was utilizing his background in the natural sciences to define the workings of the brain in a material sense in order to understand the age-old question of where memory resides.

Ruhe provides additional background regarding human connection from a response by Bergson to an Ravaisson-Mollien essay stating that “the unity that links being to being, the unity of a thought which we see passing from inert matter to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man, gathering itself into its own substance until, from concentration to concentration, we come to the divine thought that thinks all things in thinking itself” (33). This illustrates Bergson’s concept of connectivity in all things. Later, Bergson wrote that poets or artists provide heartfelt clarity where intellect and the language of philosophy cannot. He describes literature as “a geometry without figures and a metaphysic freed from the jargon of the

schools” (5). Considering literature in this way, there is a foundation for the methodology of literature as proof to theory by providing meaning and understanding to otherwise indescribable concepts. Perhaps by being boundless and unhampered by the strict rules of science, Bergson was able to describe philosophical concepts in a way that appealed to a broader audience and that is why lecture halls were packed to overflowing when he presented his theories to not only other academics, but the general public.

All audiences did not embrace Bergson’s ideas, however. In 1914, the Roman Catholic Church added his work to the list of forbidden material. According to Karoline Szatek-Tudor in her book *Uniting Regions and Nations through the Looking Glass of Literature*, the reason for this censorship of Bergson’s work was “his perceived abandonment of the mandatory scholastic rationalism in favor of an emphasis on intuition” (Szatek-Tudor 58). This emphasis on intuition as stated by Bergson was related to common sense with a common denominator of memory. He states in *Matter and Memory* that “common sense believes in spirit” (Bergson MM 80). The text continually points to “pure memory” or a greater connected consciousness. He clarifies the difference between matter and memory stating that “Our present . . . is that which acts on us and which makes us act, it is sensory and it is motor . . . the state of our body [while] with memory we are . . . in the domain of spirit” (MM 129). This statement is illustrated by the literary works of military veterans.

Time or the duration of time has direct bearing on Bergson’s theory of memory. In their book, *The Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting*, David Middleton and Steven Brown point to how “prolonging of the past into the present, and the forms of experience that are thereby granted, is what Bergson calls ‘duration’” (Middleton 62). Bergson discussed duration in his first work, *Time and Free Will*. Middleton points out that the

experience of passing time is duration. Bergson compares duration to melodic phrasing by using the musical metaphor. Middleton explains that to experience music “as it is played is completely different from reading the score or hearing the individual notes. Similarly, our conscious experience of time passing, where moments prolong into one another is entirely different to the retrospective attempt to divide those moments apart and consider them individually. Bergson . . . insists that duration, as we live it, be considered as an indivisible, continuous flow of conscious states” (Middleton 63). Defined in this way, memory is not matter or an ‘image’ as described by Aristotle and others, but a constant flow existing in varying planes of duration. This is illustrated by Stephen Crane in his Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* which provides a sample of a varying plane of duration when Crane describes how the “trees hushed and stood motionless. Everything seemed to be listening to the crackle and clatter and earthshaking thunder” (Crane). This is a frequent description by war veterans regarding the nature of moments in battle – time standing still, silence even in the instance of heavy gunfire or bombing, and the noise of conflict all around them. They describe how time and space are altered.

To further describe and therefore understand Bergson’s theory of memory, Middleton describes reality as “a ‘fluid and mobile continuity’, an ‘undivided flux’ consisting of ‘innumerable movements’ or ‘vibrations’. An image is, then, a snapshot or provisional stable view that is artificially cut out of this ongoing flow . . . in this way, perception extracts images as so many parts from the fluid whole that is reality itself” (Middleton 67). Therefore, pure perception as defined by Bergson is a process of taking away or subtraction. A subtraction of a snapshot from pure memory, which is then held in duration to utilize it in the material perception or state of matter, constitutes the flow of memory.

Specifically, it is illustrated that “[p]ure memory’ is Bergson’s term for the ongoing, automatic preservation of the entirety of the past . . .and it is impossible that we could ever truly ‘forget’ any part of experience” (Middleton 73-74). Instead, there is only a disconnection from pure memory, a temporary forgetting, in order to process the immediate activity necessary for the current duration. The opposite of remembering is forgetting and forgetting is as important to the process of memory as the image duration. To better understand the interconnection, it is important to explore memory and forgetting as individual parts of the whole and how they function together.

MEMORY AND FORGETTING

Early theorists, including Aristotle, defined memory as an image storage process based on the perception of time or the past. James Burton, who is a proponent for the emergent field of memory studies, reiterates the conception of memory as archival in western culture. Viewing memory through the lens of Bergson’s theory, however, “offers a valuable conceptual framework for rethinking the relationship between memory and archive” (Burton 323). Not denying the concept of archival memory but expanding beyond temporary perceptions and personal recollection to the broader concept of “pure memory,” Bergson asserts a much broader interpretation. By moving away from the single image burned into a wax block concept of ancient thought to a more fluid interpretation of memory similar to melodic flow, Burton asserts that “the durational unity of the extended world of matter means that every point, every object (including my body) is connected to every other” (335). This concurs with Bergson who states that “images can never be anything but things, and thought is a movement” (Bergson MM 69). Pure memory then is a fluid stream from which an image can be withdrawn to make sense of

matter or the material world. Bergson explains in detail the sensory movement of memories to the brain as a scientific process of physical anatomy, “our body is an instrument of action, and of action only” (MM 122). This is a process that Bergson illustrates in *Matter and Memory* with a line image showing the flow of pure memory to memory image to perception for material use or action. This process is one of continual interpretation and flow and can occur on multiple planes as opposed to a single, isolated instance. It also accounts for duration or a specific time box in which the flow occurs. Much the same as a melody that has synchronous notes, as well as different rhythms and patterns, occurring together.

In his book, *On Combat*, Grossman provides statistics regarding law enforcement officers during deadly force situations who experience “missing frames” (Grossman 100). These missing frames are a “significant chunk of memory lost from their event [where] it is common within the first 24 hours to recall roughly 30 percent of the occurrence, 50 percent of it after 48 hours and 75 to 95 percent after 72 to 100 hours” (101). By way of Grossman’s data, it is possible to see how time and duration interconnect to correctly assimilate and replay a memory. Bergson states that, “perception fills a certain depth of duration, prolongs the past into the present” (Bergson MM 131). Thus, by moving away from a stressful or traumatic event in time, perception brings it into clearer focus and the event is perceived with stronger clarity.

Dr. Messay Kebede, in an article for *Philosophy Today*, explains that “use of past experiences involves knowledge, and so explains why philosophers mistook perception for knowledge” (Kebede 349). He agrees with Bergson when he states that “forgetting, and not memory, requires explanation . . . that what is not remembered from our past has been either not registered or erased: owing to its irrelevance to the present, it is simply kept in the dark” (349). This would explain why some memories, even though there, cannot be recalled. Even after the

recall timeframes outlined by Grossman, some memories are not singled from others because perception does not find them useful.

Kebede states, “for Bergson, just as perceiving everything or all of matter would be detrimental to action in that the conscious act would forsake its capacity to detect what is useful, so too without forgetting or blocking out what is not relevant to the present memory would hamper action” (350). If the functioning brain were not capable of perceiving useful from not useful, needed from unnecessary, an overwhelming explosion of archival images/memories would impede any action in the present. As explained by Dr. Kebede, these theories are rooted in the understanding of duration as defined by Bergson that “time is cumulative and not dissolving” (351). The past isn’t gone, it is no longer useful or not useful to the present action state. This is qualified by Dr. Kebede who describes it as an orientation forward which is then attentive to life.

For example, in the case of post-traumatic stress injury, the brain, in all its complex functions, while attempting to preserve and protect, may continue to recall traumatized memory like a broken record or a continuously firing circuit. In an article by Remo Bodei we see how through Kebede’s example of a continuously firing circuit, that “forgetting is just as indispensable to memory as memory is to forgetting” (Bodei 96). If memory that is no longer useful continues to produce its memory image flowing to perception, the continuity of flow is broken, new images are overridden or unbidden and forgetting, by not taking place, prolongs duration or the past. “We need memory of the past as experience as well as the attention of a present aimed at simulating what is yet to come” (98). If the flow from pure memory to memory image to perception and subsequently to action then to forgetting does not melodically flow, there can be no simulation or projection of future action.

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk tells us that “psychological problems occur when our internal signals don’t work . . . trauma can interfere” (van der Kolk 55). This interrupts the normal function of the brain. He describes the process of neuroplasticity where “neurons...’ fire together, wire together” (56). When fired repeatedly in the same way, this becomes a default setting or “the response most likely to occur” (56). When repeatedly submitted to constant torture, mental abuses, battle scenes – our brain signals a knee-jerk reaction to similar stimulus even if it is a memory. Dr. van der Kolk also asserts that “the more intense the visceral, sensory input from the emotional brain, the less capacity the rational brain has to put a damper on it” (60). Instead of a melodic flow, the process becomes one of repetition.

In his book, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Miroslav Volf, states that it is the way we remember wrongs that prolongs them. Volf relates that abusive memories should be “suffered as people with identities defined by God, not by wrongdoers’ evil deeds and their echo in our memory” (Volf 868). From this theologian point of view, memory and the process of forgetting a memory are entwined with the ability to forgive – to forgive and forget.

Bergson relates that “a remembrance cannot be the result of a state of the brain. The state of the brain continues the remembrance; it gives it a hold on the present by the materiality which it confers upon it: but pure memory is a spiritual manifestation” (Bergson MM 320). In agreement with Volf, this restates the importance of forgetting and releasing the material image manifested in the physical bodily reaction to the original experience. The body reacts to the negative memory recall or perception in order to preserve itself and protect its physical resources. The body and the brain within it are matter. Bergson states, “Pain is...in the place where it is felt, as the object is at the place where it is perceived” (MM 126). Pain is a physical

sensation for the purpose of identifying harm or malfunction within the body. Bergson continues to explain that “Spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on which it feeds” (MM 134). This illustrates the opposing nature of memory and matter.

If, when we interact with “pure memory” we are in the domain of spirit as Bergson posits, what is that spirit? This is best described by Bergson’s term “élan vital” or vital life force.

ÉLAN VITAL – CONNECTION TO SPIRIT

It is in Bergson’s *Creative Evolution* that he posits the philosophy of the “élan vital” or vital life force. He describes how instinct and intuition work with intellect to correspond with matter.

Instinct is sympathy. If this sympathy could extend its object and also reflect upon itself, it would give us the key to vital operations—just as intelligence, developed and disciplined, guides us into matter. For—we cannot too often repeat it—intelligence and instinct are turned in opposite directions, the former towards inert matter, the latter towards life. Intelligence, by means of science, which is its work, will deliver up to us more and more completely the secret of physical operations; of life it brings us, and moreover only claims to bring us, a translation in terms of inertia. It goes all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it, drawing it into itself instead of entering into it. But it is to the very inwardness of life that intuition leads us—by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely. (Bergson CE 177)

Bergson demonstrates how disconnection from the material or self-aware state is a state or resource exhibited through the geometric pattern of existence and conversely absence. This is the

same absence described by military veterans in moments of battle when everything stands still, or time stops, and there is no sound.

For instance, Miguel de Cervantes, illustrates in *Don Quixote* the connectivity to “pure memory” when he describes in the introduction:

But I could not counteract Nature's law that everything shall beget its like; and what, then, could this sterile, illtitled wit of mine beget but the story of a dry, shrivelled, whimsical offspring, full of thoughts of all sorts and such as never came into any other imagination—just what might be begotten in a prison, where every misery is lodged and every doleful sound makes its dwelling? Tranquillity, a cheerful retreat, pleasant fields, bright skies, murmuring brooks, peace of mind, these are the things that go far to make even the most barren muses fertile, and bring into the world births that fill it with wonder and delight. (Cervantes)

Having experienced the trauma of imprisonment, the connection to “pure memory” and the “élan vital” or vital life force is illustrated by the same description of grassy fields, clear sky, moving water, and the same sense of peace described by other battle trauma veterans.

In describing memory and its function, Bergson explains how past perceptions comparable with a present situation or perception are utilized to define or propose action. It is by grasping multiple durations through intuition by which occurs the freedom from the flow of present or the “rhythm of necessity” (Bergson MM 303). Is it this momentary break from the present flow where perception cannot make sense of the situation that it navigates to “pure memory” or “élan vital” and proposes a solution of peace and tranquility?

CHAPTER IV:

Veterans Writing/Veterans as Written

“Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle” (*The Holy Bible* ESV, Psalms 144:1). In support of, or rather to bring forward, Henri Bergson’s theories of “pure memory” and connection to an “élan vital” or vital life force, exploring literature by or about combat veterans illustrates how humankind is ultimately connected in spirit.

RELATING THE VETERAN TO PURE MEMORY

Memory had an important role in ancient Greek and Roman civilization. Mnemosyne was the Greek goddess of Memory and the mother of the muses or creative inspiration. Classical orators built “memory palaces” or a method of loci using mental images for retaining lengthy and complicated rhetoric. Because “in the ancient world, devoid of printing, without paper for note-taking or on which to type lectures, the trained memory was of vital importance” (Yates 20). Cicero and Quintilian were among those who used the method of loci and wrote about the process as well. “It is surely significant that the technical terms of the artificial memory come into the orator’s mind when, as philosopher, he is proving the divinity of the soul” (Yates 59). These examples illustrate the importance that ancient and medieval cultures placed on memory and the ability to fully utilize recall.

There was in fact a concern that written language would diminish memory because writing would be relied on instead and implied a certain lack of knowing. Socrates expressed these concerns. By understanding the background of memory in ancient and medieval culture, it

is possible to begin the exploration of veterans and their relation to or experience with pure memory during the trauma of battle.

In her book, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Mary Carruthers points out that modern psychology encourages understanding memory that is for reproduction of information. She explains, however, that reproduction of information is not what pre-modern writers meant when terming memory. Carruthers states that memory by rote or repetition was not considered “true memory” or recollection and that in medieval culture, images were often used to bring forward memory detail. Orated memories were meaningful if the “speaker and audience share[d] a common cultural or civic bond” (Carruthers 28). This makes the process of memory more vivid by shared experience or a material sense of community.

Parker Gyokeres, an Iraq War veteran, discusses this connection through spirit and experience stating how soldiers returning home “left behind memories, some of them beautiful and some horrific, that left a deep impression on us” (Gyokeres 468). He explains how these “[t]raumatic, life-changing, or profoundly spiritual events can bond people together in ways that are hard to explain” (468). These experiences and memories are something that only other veterans can understand. Gyokeres affirms this in his contribution to *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian*, where he states that there are “things about war that people will never comprehend unless they have experienced them firsthand” (472). This is a distinct part of the battle trauma experience that provides connectivity of spirit to veterans.

The Vietnam war veteran Tim O’Brien describes this process in his book *The Things They Carried*, stating that the significant “thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head. There is the illusion of aliveness” (O’Brien

218). Carruthers points out that this process of recall, elucidated by O'Brien, is one of interpretation, inference, investigation, and reconstruction. A process that happens in mere fragments of seconds to connect with pure memory or spirit in order to pull the imagery of that domain into perception and illustrate it for others.

Memory has been described as “the word which shines within [and the] eye of the mind” (Carruthers 30-31). This is what the Romantic era poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge described as “esemplastic” memory or imagination. In his autobiographical work, *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge states that he invented the word esemplastic, defined as molding into one. He identified the ideas of “Fancy” and imagination coming from a source that connects all of humanity. Coleridge defined his concepts of imagination or “Fancy” in two distinct ways:

The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phaenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the

ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. (Coleridge, ch. XIII)

However the term is labeled – the primary Imagination, creative spark, pure memory – it is the “living power and prime agent of all human perception” (ch. XIII). If we use Bergson’s term, it is the *élan vital* or vital life force. This concept is illustrated through the work of O’Brien and defined in work by Coleridge.

Carruthers notes when discussing Aristotle’s philosophy of memory that “our ability to judge time-lapses depends on a mechanism of visual comparison” (Carruthers 32). Like Coleridge’s examples, time and space must be considered in relation to memory. The construct of time lapse and duration is also significant to Bergson’s theory of memory. In an article entitled, “Narrative Happiness and the Meaning of Life,” Claire Colebrook states, “Literature is the creation of points of view beyond the body or present . . . for once we have created a literary voice or perception it is no longer grounded in a feeling and moving body . . . and becomes one with the flow of life” (Colebrook 85). This transportation is evident in the description of memory by Bergson as he relates that when “we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit” (Bergson, MM 127).

Moving into these collective states of imagination gives us a sense of our humanity because we cannot and “do not arrive at humanity in general, or a transcendental *power*, but multiple powers of imaging, a multiplicity of bodies that shatters the notion of a general sympathy or ‘a’ point of view” (Colebrook 85). This “esemplastic” imagination or unified intuition as defined by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* is affirmed by current poets. For instance, Peter Cooley states “I often experienced a kind of spiritual connection with the whole of the universe while writing, one that continued in the after-writing state. I had heard some

people talk of such feelings as ‘inspiration,’ but this was something larger” (Cooley). Both above creative intuitive instances confirm the idea of “Fancy” and imagination coming from a source that connects all of humanity.

Again, we see Bergson echoed in these sentiments. He provides his theory of memory through the dualism of spirit and matter defining the different forms of memory and their functions by separating them from what he calls “pure memory” which is not part of the body rather of spirit. And, like Coleridge, Bergson explores the need to form or unify two concepts as one asserting that “introspection reveals to us the distinction between matter and spirit, it also bears witness to their union” (Bergson, MM 98). Not only did Bergson propose there are two kinds of memory, Coleridge posits that there are two kinds of imagination, but both Bergson and Coleridge postulate that these opposite forces share a certain commonality, a unification or “esemplastic” memory where imagination and intuition are joined with reality.

Another kind of intuitive spark is offered by a short piece of fiction entitled, “Mental Telegraphy” by Mark Twain and it considers “curious coincidences” and how “mind acts on mind” over great distance without aid of conveyance. This short story published in Harper’s magazine in 1891 offers a layman’s opinion about creative intuition that supports both Coleridge and Bergson in their philosophy.

Best known for his Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane also addresses existence, God, the universe, and memory in his poetry which is lesser known. But it is memory and separation from time and space that is illustrated in *The Red Badge of Courage*, like scenes in the work of Cervantes, Remarque, and O’Brien.

As he listened to the din from the hillside, to a deep pulsating thunder that came from afar to the left, and to the lesser clamors which came from many directions, it occurred to him

that they were fighting, too, over there, and over there, and over there. Heretofore he had supposed that all the battle was directly under his nose. (Crane)

The disconnection from time and space or the present is also illustrated in descriptions of “the blue, pure sky and the sun gleamings on the trees and fields. It was surprising that Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment” (Crane). This depiction is consistent with those found in the work of battle veterans Remarque and O’Brien. There is an important distinction about the connection with spirit in quotes that illustrate that the “landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace” (Crane).

Johann Wolfgang van Goethe, philosopher, during the Battle of Valmy in 1792 wrote that; “I could soon realize that something unusual was happening in me . . . as if you were in a very hot place, and at the same time impregnated with that heat until you blended completely with the element surrounding you. Your eyes can still see with the same acuity and sharpness, but it is as if the world had put on a reddish-brown hue that makes the objects and the situation still more scary . . . I had the impression that everything was being consumed by this fire . . . this situation is one of the most unpleasant that you can experience.” (Crocq 48). This sentiment is a recurrent theme for the battle trauma veteran.

In Erich Maria Remarque’s fictional depiction of battle in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, escape from the realism of battle is performed by memory, “I am on sentry and stare into the darkness. My strength is exhausted as always after an attack . . . memories which in my weakness haunt me and strangely move me . . . strange that all the memories that come have . . . two qualities. They are always completely calm and . . . soundless” (Remarque 118). This depiction of peace and tranquility is in direct opposition to the reality of the front where “there is no quietness . . . the droning . . . muffled noise of shelling is always in our ears” (Remarque 120).

This is a description alliterated by most veterans who have experienced battle trauma. For veterans writing about battle like Crane, van Goethe, O'Brien, and Remarque, there is a shared experience that joins them in a unique way.

Dr. van der Kolk states we must recognize that “traumatized people look at the world in a fundamentally different way from other people” (van der Kolk 17). This is because trauma causes a fundamental reorganization by the mind and brain for management of perceptions according to Dr. van der Kolk. This is best described by Remarque in *All Quiet on the Western Front* when he describes a leave from the trenches of WWI to go home only to discover “a sense of strangeness . . . a distance, a veil between us” (Remarque 159). In his New York Times best-selling novel *Matterhorn*, a fictional work based on his experience in the Vietnam war, Marlantes describes not only the direct experience during combat that echoes the sentiments of other veterans, but explores the aftermath of feelings, thoughts, and emotions that remain in memory long after battle is over. For instance, he explains how his “body was shut down against pain as far as I could get it shut. Shut down to where it would not feel a thing, while my mind was still seven thousand miles away, unattached, floating, watching” (Marlantes 185). This describes similar experience for many veterans. The unattached, floating experience of connection to pure memory that combat veterans share through the conduit of battle.

In his novel, *The Things They Carried*, Vietnam War veteran Tim O'Brien takes the reader into the battlefields of Vietnam along with its characters. His creative voice echoes the sentiments of Henri Bergson's theory with similar eloquence of thought and voice. He best describes the process of remembering when he states in *The Things They Carried*, “But the thing about remembering is that you don't forget. You take your material where you find it, which is in your life, at the intersection of past and present. The memory-traffic feeds into a rotary up on

your head, where it goes in circles for a while, then pretty soon imagination flows in and the traffic merges and shoots off down a thousand different streets” (O’Brien 33). This is the intersection described by Samuel Taylor Coleridge with his new word *esemplastic* unifying imagination with memory.

With his creative voice, O’Brien helps define the process of duration when he states, “What sticks to memory, often, are those odd little fragments that have no beginning and no end” (O’Brien 34). Simple memories of individual moments that preserve a time box of elements like a “field of elephant grass weighted with wind, bowing under the stir of a helicopter's blades, the grass dark and servile, bending low, but then rising straight again when the chopper went away” (O’Brien 35). For O’Brien, like the mystics of medieval memory passing along generations of memories to achieve connection to a collective past, “the war occurred half a lifetime ago, and yet the remembering makes it now. And sometimes remembering will lead to a story, which makes it forever. That's what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story” (O’Brien 36).

Stephen Earle Robbins in his book, *Time and Memory: A Primer on the Scientific Mysticism of Consciousness*, briefly describes his personal experience about loss during the Vietnam war. “O’Connor was killed on a recon patrol on the same day we both had sat on an LZ together talking . . . the same day my own team got in a firefight, had a man killed and we were forced to make our escape” (Robbins 5). But even in this brief passage, he describes the circumstances illustrated repeatedly by other veterans when relating their stories.

For both Remarque and O'Brien, when writing about actual battle, it is interesting to note that invoked memories are in direct opposition to the current environment – soundless as opposed to the ongoing din of battle. Melchior points out that “the psychological effect of shelling seems to result from the combined effect of awaiting injury while at the same time having no power to combat it” (Melchior 220). It would seem then that the mind, through memory, finds a safe-haven from the unbearable environment that confronts a soldier on the battlefield – thoughts of home or of peaceful places.

Related again in fiction, but also born out of actual experience, Tim O'Brien tells us that “in any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening . . . angles of vision are skewed . . . when a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes . . . and float outside yourself . . . pictures get jumbled . . . but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it *seemed*” (O'Brien 67-68). This confirms the “missing frames” concept during deadly force situations related by Grossman.

Per Bergson, “[p]erception . . . consists in detaching, from the totality of objects, the possible action of my body upon them” (Bergson MM 124). Through the connection to “pure memory” and spirit, trauma is suspended momentarily or slowed to silence and quiet so that the connection can be made to personal comfort and a sense of well-being. The memories are invoked from the contraindication of trauma as a defense and not by rote or because something caused a trigger of remembrance.

For Cervantes in his introduction to *Don Quixote*, Crane's character in the Civil War, Remarque in World War I, and O'Brien in the Vietnam War, all express memories of sunlight, quiet rivers, wind in the trees, and love while enduring gruesome conflict. These memories, often

surreal, are accompanied by regret and the need to forgive oneself. Bergson stated that “when we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit” and that “remembrance is the representation of an *absent* object” (Bergson MM 127). This would appear true for all the authors mentioned as well as countless others.

DISCUSSION: PHILOSOPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC

The coping mechanisms of memory are evidenced in fiction. Also, there is a relatable definition of the bridge from the physical world to the state of pure memory in an eternal second or microcosm of eternity. By exploring the philosophical, scientific, and theological proclivities of memory in juxtaposition with Bergson’s theory, the opportunity for illustrating the connectivity of spirit that binds humankind exists.

PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION

Examining battle trauma veteran experience through a philosophical lens demonstrates how pure memory is better understood and perhaps explained. For instance, exploring memory or past remembering using the philosophical techniques of Plato requires a dialectic of his theory of Forms and an understanding of the concepts presented in his allegory of the cave, both of which are presented in *The Republic*.

Plato’s Forms were a way to attempt to define intangible concepts. Pure (or immanent) Forms are not the imitations that transcend from the original itself which is the true Form. “However, the distinction between a form as an image—and a form as an isolated object investigated critically by intellect, involves transforming image-recognition in memory into a definition of speech” (Roecklein 81). Thus, in trying to define a pure or true form, it becomes

impure or not true. “Plato describes the Forms as the original ‘patterns’ of which particular physical things are copies” (Sim 45). The idea of this replicative duality is consistent throughout much of Plato’s philosophy. For instance, in *The Republic*, Plato states that defining the form of God, “in words is only a kind of imitation and shadowy image of a previous affection of the soul” (Plato, Book II, 374). Borrowing from Eric Perl he describes that, “In one sense, we cannot see the forms . . . in another sense, we never see anything but forms: they are the very ‘looks’ which our sense experience is always presenting to us . . . everything we encounter with our senses is not reality itself but an image, an appearance, a presentation, of the intelligible, eternal, divine reality” (Perl 362). It is a story built on the foundation of expression and imagination drawn from the infinity of pure memory.

Plato describes the inability of words or images to express pure knowledge again in *Phaedrus* when he refers to “the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which written word is properly no more than an image” (Plato 1b:2303-2304). We also find this described in the words of Lao Tzu when he states that, “Existence is beyond the power of words” (Bynner 25). It is in the definition of a true or pure Form that we experience words which make the expression of Form seem different.

In further describing the true Form, Eric Perl suggests we consider if any can be defined by how, what, where. He states, “A form, in short, is an idea, a ‘look’ which is apprehended not by the eyes but by the mind . . . universal natures or characters grasped by thought” (Perl 342). While trying to define the purity of a Form, Plato uses a plus/delta system of reversals showing the positive nature of a Form and then describing the opposite to complete the description of what it is by defining what it is not. Again, much like Lao Tzu when he describes that “people through finding something beautiful, think something else unbeautiful” (Bynner 25). A true or

pure Form is as Plato describes God in *The Republic* when he states, “Then is God perfectly simple and true both in word and deed; he changes not; he deceives not” (Plato, Book II, 375).

So, a true Form does not change, and it is altered only through the words we use in describing it.

“It is Plato’s view that natural languages are based upon names of forms or patterns: that is, names that we use repeatedly to refer to a limitless number of individual objects, which have a share in the respective form. For Plato, not only do ordinary speakers recognize something real when they assign name to object in their daily business: within certain broad parameters, it is actually an indisputable kind of knowledge that the ordinary use of names involves” (Roecklein 84). In *The Republic*, Plato describes this “conception of plurality” (Plato, Book VII, 591) through being and contradiction as how thought is aroused – the soul, or pure Form, seeking a decision or answer. “This is the way in which the study of the one has a power of drawing and converting the mind to the contemplation of true being” (Book VII, 591). Henri Bergson described this “plurality of moments” in *Matter and Memory* when “impersonal perception, which is at the very root of our knowledge of things . . . memory adds to or subtracts from” (Bergson MM 18). This describes how pure memory is altered through perception.

Taking a turn to scientific reasoning and specifically through the example of arithmetic and calculation in *The Republic*, Plato attempts to show again how, through description and definition, one arrives at “those numbers which can only be realized in thought” (Plato, Book VII, 592) and how one must employ “the use of pure intelligence in the attainment of pure truth” (Book VII, 592). Whereby, pure thought, pure intelligence, pure truth, pure memory become those a priori concepts that exist in Forms. “Another aspect of Forms that was clearly important to Plato is that they are eternal and unchanging. The contrast between unchanging Forms and the constant change of the sensible world is drawn in the *Phaedo* . . . and again in the *Timaeus*”

(Mason 30). Again, Plato expands on earlier theories and continues to mete additional logic or logos to define his cognitive principles.

Plato was committed to sharing his philosophy and started his academy to imbue these theories to youth, because, as he describes, “a young person cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable; and therefore it is most important that the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts” (Plato, Book II, 367). It is interesting to note that veterans don’t start out as veterans, battle scarred and middle aged. They begin as youth, often not yet twenty years of age.

Much of Plato’s teaching was through metaphor or using the maieutic method – a method of teaching by question and answer. Combining these techniques in *The Republic*, Plato uses the maieutic method to elucidate his theory of Forms and combines this technique with metaphor in the cave allegory. Plato describes how people held captive in a cave establish a way of life that is based on shadows and perceptions: “the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images” (Plato, Book VII, 576). When one of the captives is set free from his bondage and experiences the real world, he has a difficult time adapting to the cave world when he returns and an even more difficult experience in trying to describe the outer world to those who have never left the cave.

By comparing enlightenment to the experience of the cave, Plato illustrates how one might “interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world” (Book VII, 578). Plato also states that, even if one is willing or unwilling to acquire knowledge, “the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already” (Book VII, 578). To explain how a soul moves to enlightenment through the comparison of moving from the shadow of the cave

into the light as an ascent into being, Plato states: “the turning round of a soul passing from a day which is little better than night to the true day of being, that is, the ascent from below” (Book VII, 584). This process is affected through a kind of study Plato defines as reflection and that “true use of it is simply to draw the soul towards being” (Book VII, 587). The summation of this definition is, in Plato’s own words, that one must employ “the use of the pure intelligence in the attainment of pure truth” (Book VII, 592). Pure intelligence, pure truth, pure memory.

Plato drew from the gods of his society to show that memory existed eternal and before an individual human memory. It is through this “theory of recollection, the proposal that we gain knowledge through remembering something we have learned, outside the body, before our birth into the present life” (Mason 64) that Plato seated his philosophy of anamnesis.

Scanlon describes Plato’s idea of anamnesis as a “kind of understanding of memory – as a phenomenon that surrounds us, that exists as a kind of knowledge that is already there if only we looked . . . or the belief that recollection is the repossession of truth” (Scanlon 11). This is in part because Plato established that “the soul of man is immortal, and at one time has an end, which is termed dying, and at another time is born again, but is never destroyed” (Meno 207). He goes on to state that the soul being reborn again and again has knowledge of everything “for all inquiry and all learning is but recollection” (207). It should be noted that “one of the most striking claims about knowledge put forward in Plato’s works is that we acquire it by remembering something we have learned, in a discarnate state, before we were born into our present life: this is commonly called the theory of recollection” (Mason 76).

Plato as Socrates clarifies his point by describing a man with an untaught understanding of geometry by suggesting “if there have been always true thoughts in him, both at the time when he was and was not a man, which only need to be awakened into knowledge by putting questions

to him, his soul must have always possessed this knowledge” (Meno 213). And Bergson sums it up as “memory is spirit, not a manifestation of matter” (Bergson 127). Regarding memory and recollection, Bergson clarifies transit of memories by asking the question: “how should they find their way back to space, choose a locality within it, and coordinate themselves there so as to build up an experience that is common to all men?” (131). And according to later philosophers, for instance, Aristotle one of Plato’s students, memory was defined as an image storage process based on the perception of time or the past.

If we return to the Greek gods for explanation, “Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory and mother of the Muses, those other figures of memory, personifies memory as something eternal and complete that it is within her power to reveal. Plato’s idea of reminiscence, or anamnesis, works in a similar way to suggest that the past was always there, an immanent presence that is contrasted with sense perception, which reveals only glimpses of the true” (Scanlon 29). And Plato as Socrates tells us that “if the truth of all things always existed in the soul, then the soul is immortal” (Meno 213). Does truth exist in the pure memory of Bergson?

In a similar way, Virginia Woolf in her writing “imagines a ‘common mind’ that binds the world together, and she finds the central meaning of this mind to be repeated in various human creations . . . “Woolf imagines individual minds to be ‘threaded together’ into one common mind. The ‘central meaning’ of life is also likened to a visible pattern . . . Plato describes the Forms as the original ‘patterns’ of which particular physical things are copies” (Sim 45). Both descriptions are consistent with Bergson’s theory of memory.

“Plato’s doctrine of recollection has often been compared to the modern concept of a priori knowledge: knowledge which is gained by reasoning rather than by experience” (Mason 84) and that we inherently or intuitively know. “Spirit borrows from matter the perceptions on

which it feeds, and restores them to matter in the form of movements which it has stamped with its own freedom” (Bergson 134). This freedom harkens to free will because intellect “is equipped to deal only with that which is static, material, and spatial, whereas our conscious existence is dynamic, spiritual, and temporal. The faculty through which we have access to the principle of our conscious existence, then, is not the intellect, but the will” (Sinclair 476). Recollection of memories is delivered with an interpretation by individual perception.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato tells us that “there abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless intangible essence, visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul” (Plato, 1b:830-832). It is when “the human soul’s glimpse of the divine in its heavenly journeys becomes a kind of stored seed within memory, that once uncovered and appropriately nourished, expands in the soul to reestablish the human-divine connection” (Rapp 116). Given this train of thought, “the immortality of the soul is important because we must take care of our souls and prepare them for the afterlife” (Mason 4) so that we can return to true memory. Plato spent years developing and refining his theories. As a student of Socrates who provided no written record of his philosophies, Plato utilized Socrates as the voice and teacher in his own work. We learn from the examination of Plato’s theory of Forms that he believed in the concept of “true knowledge” which is the pure and incorruptible soul that is provided to all of mankind. And through his metaphorical allegory of the cave, Plato explains what enlightenment is, how learning can change a person, that with knowledge one is no longer the person they once were, but also that not everyone is willing to accept new learning and/or change. As Plato grew older and his theories matured, they assumed a more metaphysical or spiritual tone. He delved into anamnesis, remembering from past existence, adding an additional dimension to his theories

including the provision that the senses don't provide true reality, simply an independent copy or image.

Henri Bergson describes the process of remembering for future guidance succinctly outlined as the “interest of a living being lies in discovering in the present situation that which resembles a former situation, and then in placing alongside of that present situation what preceded and followed the previous one, in order to profit by past experience” (Bergson 130). To continue this discussion in the context of memory and forgetting, the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, a WWII and prisoner of war veteran as well as renown philosopher is important.

In his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Ricoeur states, “habit and memory form two poles of a continuous range of mnemonic phenomena. What forms the unity of this spectrum is the common feature of the relation to time” (Ricoeur 24). Time that stands still in a moment of extreme battle trauma as described by Remarque, O'Brien, and other military veterans. Ricoeur describes it as “the conquest of temporal distance” (25). He further alliterates the relation of action versus representation and lauds Bergson for his “text of great richness . . . its crystalline sobriety” (25). Ricoeur postulates the polarity of memory and imagination, the cognitive process at the moment of realization or recognition, and the search for truth.

Francis Yates in her book *The Art of Memory* describes that in general, “when we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not stirred by anything novel or marvelous” (Yates 25). This explains how the mind as conduit to pure memory deciphers the collection of experience. From pure memory simple memories provide comfort as described by Tim O'Brien.

There was the sound of the wind, the sound of birds and the quiet afternoon, which was the world we were in. That's what a story does. The bodies are animated. You make the

dead talk. They sometimes say things like, "Roger that." Or they say, "Timmy, stop crying," which is what Linda said to me after she was dead. (O'Brien 219)

In battle trauma, pure memory is intuitively accessed in order to provide calm to an otherwise horrific situation. We learn from Henri Bergson that one can utilize memory as "the inner energy which allows the being to free itself from the rhythm of the flow of things, and to retain in an ever higher degree of the past in order to influence ever more deeply the future" (Bergson MM 296). It is the intuitive connection to humanity that attempts to right wrongs in the physical world.

It is interesting to note that these invoked memories are in direct opposition to the current environment – soundless as opposed to the ongoing din of battle. Melchior points out that "the psychological effect of shelling seems to result from the combined effect of awaiting injury while at the same time having no power to combat it" (Melchior 220). It would seem then that the mind, through memory, finds a safe-haven from the unbearable environment that confronts a soldier on the battlefield – thoughts of home or peaceful places.

In philosophy there are many examples of connection to spirit or pure memory and by veterans who became philosophers. Is it possible that the interest in philosophy was due to their battle experience?

SCIENTIFIC DISCUSSION

According to George Wald, a Nobel Prize winner and professor at Harvard University, as a scientist there is nothing he can do "to identify either the presence *or absence* of consciousness" (Wald 349). He states in his essay entitled "Consciousness and Cosmology" that consciousness "has no location" (Wald 350). Most important to this discourse, Wald continues to state that

although he believes consciousness has no location, he also believes in its existence. This is like the metaphysical philosophy of Henri Bergson's theory of "pure memory" which, like consciousness, cannot be scientifically demonstrated or "mathematized" as described by Wald.

Before deciding to pursue literature and philosophy as a vocation, Henri Bergson showed much promise in mathematics and the natural sciences. According to Algot Ruhe, Bergson's mathematical solution to a problem was his first published work winning a prize and publication in 1877. Bergson himself describes how literature "is a geometry without figures" (Ruhe 5). He wrote many publications including a text book that underwent several reprintings. To explain the unexplainable is possible through literature as well as through medical and scientific anomalies. These sciences give us a record of what is known to help understand what is not.

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk tells us in his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, that "psychological problems occur when our internal signals don't work . . . trauma can interfere" (van der Kolk 55) with the workings of the brain. He describes the process of neuroplasticity where "neurons . . . 'fire together, wire together'" (56). When fired repeatedly in the same way, this becomes a default setting or "the response most likely to occur" (56). Repeatedly submitted to constant torture, mental abuses, battle scenes – our brain signals a knee-jerk reaction to similar stimulus even if it is a memory. Dr. van der Kolk also asserts that "the more intense the visceral, sensory input from the emotional brain, the less capacity the rational brain has to put a damper on it" (60). This clinical demonstration of the working of the brain, helps to define the functioning of the brain as a transmitter of physical reaction to memory, not the container for it.

In his book *Living Consciousness*, William Barnard explains that the "brain's primary function is not productive; it does not produce states of consciousness from the interactions of

supposedly inert brain matter . . . [i]nstead it is adaptive” (Barnard 141). According to Bergson it is an organ of choice acting like the telephone exchange of the early nineteenth century. Barnard compares this idea to the science of television.

There is, apparently, a one-to-one relationship between the electrical and mechanical activity of the television set and the programs that are appearing on the screen. But no one ever claims that the program that is appearing on the screen has been produced by the television. (Barnard 144)

This makes perfect scientific sense in terms of comparison with the brain’s function. There have been experiments to locate where in the brain memories are stored, but these have been unsuccessful. Barnard discusses the work of neuroscientist Wilder Penfield. The problem with Penfield’s experiments in locating memory storage in the brain being that they could not be replicated. There is also the problem of how memories are retrieved if, in fact, they are stored in the brain coupled with the infinite factors that define memories including sensory perception. This fact alone points out that science is not absolute in defining the working of memory.

There is documented evidence of a connection to another plane of existence by Edgar Cayce, who provided healing advice achieved while in an altered state of consciousness and connected to a source beyond the physical world. He learned, and it was documented, that “Mind is the builder; it is both spiritual and physical, and thus has its aspirations, its limitations, its fears, its hopes, its desires” (Cayce 20). He also described this realm as a river of consciousness where all knowledge and all time existed. Cayce in one of his readings described that “a soul, an entity, may hold on to life so long as it WELLS to obey that which is the consciousness as to the relationship of the entity to life – or God” (Woodward). Although Edgar Cayce helped many people overcome physical maladies and implemented healing remedies from his altered

experience that are still in use today, science in its limited scope of understanding, could not prove that Cayce made connection with another realm of existence and therefore would not accept his experience as real.

In 1922, Bergson debated with Einstein regarding Einstein's theory of relativity. Contrary to popular belief, Bergson had no objections to Einstein's theory. What "Bergson wanted to say was that "all did not end" with relativity" (Canales 1170). Einstein contested, maintaining that his theory was absolute, and that philosophy had no role in discussions about time. Einstein's "objections were based on his views about the role of philosophy in society – views which differed from Bergson's" (1170). Further to this debate, Bergson agreed with Einstein's theory of relativity, but opposed the lack of precision in the argument of the twin paradox concerning identical experience, which then, would not rule out philosophical determinations. He clarified that even though "physically the twins' times were equally valid . . . philosophically differences could remain between them. Whose time would prevail back on earth would depend on how their disagreement was negotiated – not only scientifically, but psychologically, socially, politically, and philosophically" (1172-1173). As an academic, Bergson was seeking precision in the qualitative argument for relativity and "wanted *more* not *less* weight placed on Lorentz's formulas and on the results of the Michelson-Morley experiment . . . Einstein, in contrast, showed a surprisingly cavalier lack of concern for its experimental results" (1172). This information leads one to believe that political or social 'opinions' more than scientific ones framed the debate which is interesting when science refuses to acknowledge inexplicable events because they cannot be replicated. More interesting is the fact that Einstein's theory of relativity is not absolute based on recent research. This allows that science isn't absolute and is relative only to the time in which the postulation occurs based on trending research and knowledge.

As described by Stephen Robbins in his book *Time and Memory*, Bergson's theories have been instrumental in forming artificial intelligence for computer modeling and in advancing original theories of holography. Robbins also points out that early computer simulation research by Newell and Simon developed protocols between human and machine demonstrating "reasonable" similarities. He explains the brain function as a holographic device along with research by Dr. Robert E. Shaw. Further, Robbins demonstrates how the brain is not a suitcase or storage receptacle for memory.

Medically, scientifically, biologically – there are many examples of unexplained anomalies that disprove absolute scientific fact. It is perhaps significant that during Bergson's career, he and countless other notable scientists, philosophers, and authors were members of the Society for Psychical Research which still exists today. Among its eminent members: Albert Einstein, Madame Curie, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Margaret Mead, John Muir, Alan Turing, Albert Schweitzer, Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung, Edward Pickering, Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, and of course, Henri Bergson. This demonstrates belief beyond scientific proof and confirms the statement by George Wald, that as a scientist there is nothing he can do "to identify either the presence *or absence* of consciousness" (Wald 349). Literature is perhaps the best proof as a geometry without numbers as described by Bergson.

When considering scientific theories and philosophies, there are a myriad of concerns that impact the 'absolute' conclusion including, but not limited to, the adaptability, social impact, religious and economic implications, potential obstacles, and geopolitical concerns.

THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

Henri Bergson's theory of memory is metaphysical in nature and defies absolute proof, however there is demonstration of its existence in theological comparatives regarding memory and spirit. By examining in specific detail, the similarities or possible conflicts in spiritual practice, there is another opportunity to show support for Bergson's theory of pure memory and *élan vital* as well as shared human connectivity. The spiritual connectivity experienced by combat veterans is uniquely described Karl Marlantes:

Many will argue that there is nothing remotely spiritual in combat. Consider this.

Mystical or religious experiences have four common components: constant awareness of one's own inevitable death, total focus on the present moment, the valuing of other people's lives above one's own, and being part of a larger religious community such as the Sangha, ummah, or church. All four of these exist in combat. (Marlantes 7)

Starting with Buddhist meditation practice, the pathway by which one can self-know and approach nirvana, some of the theological parallels with Bergson's philosophy of pure memory and *élan vital* are explored.

In his book, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, Damien Keown describes nirvana as achieving "the complete state of self-realization" (Keown 48). This is a process of inner knowing or deeply understanding the self in the deepest realities. Further, he explains that nirvana has two parts and is both experience and concept. As a concept, nirvana is explained as a "particular vision of human fulfilment [that] gives contour and shape to the ideal life" (48). This could be described as realistically looking at ourselves in relationship to our environment and to those around us. Conversely, as a practice experience, nirvana "becomes incarnate over the course of time in the person who seeks it" (48). This is not unlike Henri Bergson's description of the *élan*

vital as “*an absence of itself*” (Bergson CE 235). In a geometrical analysis of being, Bergson explains how “the real can pass from tension to extension and from freedom to mechanical necessity by way of inversion” (CE 236). This relation of forms is defined by two terms. One being consciousness and the other sensible experience. In order then to achieve one order, one must suppress the inverse order or opposing form. Bergson outlines how “it is the requirements of practical life alone that suggest to us here a way of speaking that deceives us both as to what happens in things and as to what is present to our thought” (CE 237). Keown explains nirvana as “a fusion of virtue and wisdom” (Keown 49). The two conditions are necessary to achieve because one is not enough without the other. Bergson’s conditions equal consciousness and sensible experience. Buddha’s conditions equal virtue and wisdom. These pairings are not dissimilar.

This relationship of contradictions of forms is what creates the impelling force or *élan vital* which pushes human matter through living consciousness in the material world. And to separate oneself from the natural cycle of consciousness, “continually drawn the opposite way, obliged, though it goes forward, to look behind” (Bergson CE 237) one might meditate, reflect, divorce oneself from a state of consciousness that is “*already-made*” (CE 237) and move to a state of “*being-made*” (CE 237). Like a state of consciousness that has been in Buddhist meditative practice, one moves to a state of now or to be, existing only in the moment of now and releasing matter or the physical world to reach nirvana. This explains the *élan vital* as “the current that runs through this matter, communicating life to it” (CE 237). In Buddhist practice, meditation is the way in which one separates from the state of “*already-made*” consciousness and moves to a state of “*being-made*” consciousness. During a state of battle trauma, it is possible to

see the similarity of interrupted contact with the physical world into a state of possible nirvana or élan vital.

Explaining the élan vital and nirvana through the process of already-made and being-made relates to Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, the source for "instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them" (Momen 64). Science is the discovery process by which we are "putting names on things and telling stories about them, the very habits that Buddhists urge us to transcend" (Gopnik). This storytelling is the process by which we exhibit consciousness as reality in the current time providing names to forms and giving them a history by which our physical consciousness can know them and regulate them. This demonstrates how storytelling by military veterans who have experienced battle trauma, communicates or exhibits consciousness in a way that imagination can understand.

However, this differs in the state of being because the "meditator's project [or process] of being here now will never be the same as the scientist's project [or process] of connecting the past to the future, of telling how and knowing why" (Gopnik). The Buddhist way is to be. To release oneself from consciousness and achieve nirvana. To connect to the élan vital divorced from the physical state of being. In a trauma state, based on descriptions by veterans in the novels or philosophy they produce, this is the physical state of being to which they transcend in moments of battle.

This connection to past and future, already-made versus being-made, denotes a process of time. One must recognize the differences in the concepts of time. First there is "physical time that is objective and secondly, psychological time that is subjective and has a mind-dependent existence" (Bunnag 1). Through meditation one can free oneself from the objective physical, or matter dependent, time and move freely to psychological time floating free from already-made

existence and move into the boundaries of *élan vital* and possibilities. This also provides one with the ability to prize “moral inclination rather than cause-effect deliberation” (An 337). There is no decision making or perception in the state of pure memory only a state of being.

By demonstrating the connection to another state of being outside of scientific proof, Edgar Cayce provided healing advice achieved while in an altered state of consciousness and connected to a source beyond the physical world. He was told in an altered state, and it was documented, that “Mind is the builder; it is both spiritual and physical, and thus has its aspirations, its limitations, its fears, its hopes, its desires” (Cayce 20). These aspirations, limitations, fears, hopes, desires, are the things that meditation separates one from to achieve a state of nirvana. Brain processes are evident in early Buddhist thought as described by the “arising and perishing of phases, the recurrence or moments, the phenomenal quality of perceptions” (Brown 261). The physical process of mental activity or microgenesis is “the mind/brain state is a continuous sheet or process from self to world” (261). This is the process which Buddhist meditative practice disconnects, deeply exploring self and breaking with the physical world. Or as Erich Maria Remarque wrote in his novel of battle experience *All Quiet on the Western Front*, it is “strange that all the memories that come have . . . two qualities. They are always completely calm and . . . soundless” (Remarque 118). In his description, Remarque clearly illustrates pure memory separated from physical connection or microgenesis of bodily form.

The similarities between the understanding of Henri Bergson’s *élan vital* and Buddhist meditation to achieve Nirvana are relatable through a roadmap of achievement. Both principles shown commonality with descriptions of battle experience in literature by military veterans. It is important to see that the Buddhist meditation practice is the pathway by which one can self-

know and approach nirvana to become break the cycle of human suffering and physicality.

Bergson's *élan vital* is the vital impetus that motivates the matter of our physical world and stimulates the common connectivity of consciousness. Both forms illustrate a process outside the realm of matter and human experience that correspond with the descriptions of battle trauma by veterans.

And it is not only with Buddhist practice and the concept of nirvana that correspondence with Bergson's pure memory exists. One of the foundational concepts of the Hindu religion is that of reincarnation or *samsara*, in addition to meditation. Reincarnation is linked to the idea of karma and repeating human life until one's action during the physical life breaks the cycle of rebirth achieving *Moksha*. Utilizing this philosophical concept and comparing it to the thesis of "pure memory" as outlined by Henri Bergson, there exists a potential link between religious practice relating to karma and what Bergson describes.

In Hinduism, reincarnation is the rebirth of the soul in a new body after death to continue learning life's lessons by practicing karma. Reincarnation is linked to the philosophy of immortality which "implies a never-ending existence" (Andrade). Socrates considered this in his theories of reminiscence wherein learning comes by recalling or remembering experience from a past life which would then support a belief in the transmigration of souls or reincarnation. This concurs with the concept of reincarnation when considering moral agency and free will because, "moral agency is central to the karma/rebirth solution: our moral decisions self-determine our future experiences" (Meister). In other words, we are reincarnated to live again to improve our lot in life. This is part of the cyclical life cycle recognized by Hindus where "[t]he world has no beginning, but rather has always existed in a series of great cosmic cycles of prosperity and

disaster” (Momen 36). Provided this explanation, reincarnation is an ongoing process of continuation in the cycle of life as opposed to the flow of life from beginning to end.

Henri Bergson in his book, *Matter and Memory*, explores the idea of “pure memory . . . by opening to us a view of what is called spirit, should enable us to decide between those other two doctrines, materialism and spiritualism” (Bergson 78). He explores the deep knowing inherent in humanity without the actual personal experience. Bergson examines the difference of memory in the unconscious mind explaining how the past leaves its state of pure memory to enact with one’s present state to provide a utilitarian function for choices and decision making. For example, Bergson shares that pure memory is latent until consciousness evokes it.

This “pure memory” Bergson describes is that which is beyond our physical knowing. It is beyond the body and exists in spirit. In Hinduism, the six philosophical systems or Darshana as identified by Kim Knott in her book, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*, Samkhya is the “dualistic and atheistic perspective [which] focuses upon the distinctive nature of *purusha*, self or spirit, and *prakriti*, matter” (Knott). The Varna social class of brahmins personified the *purusha* or mouth of the cosmic person. Is this the voice of “pure memory” that Bergson describes?

When exploring the Hindu religion, its various beginnings and traditions, we learn that its “commentarial tradition presupposes particular practices of memory” (Jyvasjarvi 134). Original holy script wasn’t written but related verbally – memorized and passed down through oral tradition, which is very similar to Medieval traditions. These enlightened ideals known as Agamas are original concepts that are “fixed, eternal truths without human or divine origin” (135). Are these Agamas examples of the “pure memory” described by Bergson? When one considers paranormal experience, the power of prophecy, or otherwise unexplained knowledge,

there is an opportunity to perhaps see a connection between the Agama truths and the greater pure memory that Bergson describes. The Hindus as well as other religions often consider paranormal activities as evidence of this spiritual connection. This also corresponds with theories that “religion can be conceived of as memory which produces collective meanings” (Urbaniak 1). Whether by repeated oral tradition or collective human thought, memory appears to be the backbone of karmic or religious ideas. It is part of a collective memory we all share and is diluted through interpretation by an individual based on personal perception.

Meditation as practice in Hinduism is perhaps another way in which the collective “pure memory” Bergson describes is accessed since “meditation appears to work by stopping the normal flow of thought, thus allowing the individual to open himself or herself to concepts and ideas that would not have emerged otherwise” (Momen 108). The natural flow of thought being that which connects us to the here and now. Breaking with the physical world immediately available to memory and perception in our actions allows one to draw on the collective resource of “pure memory” as Bergson describes. It is important to recognize that there are “areas of life in which scientific answers are not forthcoming, [and] we are justified in believing as our inclinations take us” (Long 2). This practice extends beyond Hindu religious practice, like those described in Buddhist practice, and reaches other religions and traditions as well in varying ways which include trances and altered states.

So, how does the afterlife join us with memory? According to Vedantic tradition one can be reborn “either on the earth or in another plane of existence” (Long 5). It is this reincarnation or rebirth that is necessary until the self becomes one with “the infinite being, consciousness, and bliss that forms the ground, source, and ultimate destination of all entities . . . [w]ith this realization comes freedom” (5). When warriors experience battle trauma, they describe a state of

being one with everything around them in perfect peace. Perhaps in reincarnation one is opening the doorway to “pure memory” and providing, as well as taking from, the collective font of recollection or consciousness. From that instant of battle trauma where time ceases and warriors are in the state of collective calm, detached from time and space, are they reaching into the collective font of memory or consciousness and retaining some of it for their creative works?

The polymath, Emanuel Swedenborg, wrote about his experiences while in deep meditation at which time he described visits to Heaven. In his book, *True Christian Religion*, Swedenborg outlined the workings of the Holy Spirit. In it, he states, “the Divine energy, meant by the operation of the Holy Spirit” (Swedenborg 1555). Further he describes that “the spirit of man on the earth is encompassed with a body on account of its functions in the world” (1587). This observation outlines that our physical bodies are matter that is vitalized by spirit. An undefinable consciousness that stimulates matter into action which corresponds with Bergson’s theory of memory and matter.

There is an interesting similarity between the Holy Spirit described in Christian religion and Henri Bergson’s *élan vital* as outlined in *Creative Evolution*. Wherein the Holy Spirit is described as a driving force that guides mankind, Bergson describes his *élan vital* as the vital impetus from which all mankind is connected. For Bergson, consciousness is exhibited with the beginning of life and is a connective source for all of us. He describes that “life can progress only by means of the living, which are its depositaries” (Bergson CE 231).

Bergson delves further into this reasoning describing that “[a]n intelligent being bears within himself the means to transcend his own nature” (CE 159). Bergson does point out that a human being “transcends himself . . . less than he wishes, less also than he imagines himself to do” (CE 159). Transcending to the source of vital impetus or becoming one with the holy spirit

as it were, is hampered by the human self or the matter of one's body. During battle trauma, matter appears to be suspended allowing the connection with spirit. This is summarized by Bergson as there being "things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them" (CE 159). This describes the difference between instinct and intellect and the *élan vital* is the spark between the two to transcend the nature of each. It was Bergson's "contention that the most profound understanding comes not from reason, but from an affinity with the metaphysical" (Fosatti 279). This requires, then, reaching beyond the comprehension and physical proof of science to intuitively know, or have faith, in the existence of something more than ourselves or our physical being. By granting "Bergson his argument regarding the limits of discursive reasoning and the limitless potential of intuitive reasoning [is] to make all things possible" (279). This trend of thought by Bergson is consistent with Christianity's teaching that "all things are possible with God" (*The Holy Bible* ESV, Mark 10:27). Although neither philosophy provides an absolute definition of Holy Spirit or *élan vital*, they do acknowledge something transcended from physical matter yet within us.

Without an absolute or definitive description of the Holy Spirit, it is difficult to compare it to another consciousness. The same can be said for Henri Bergson's *élan vital*. We know that we are not the vital current or vital force of the *élan vital*, but where is it? According to Wald, "Consciousness is not something that is in space and time. It not only cannot be located, but I think it has no location" (Wald 350). It is the Bible that gives us an understanding or basis to comprehend what cannot be defined or located when it asks, "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him" (*The Holy Bible* ESV I Corinthians 2:11). And the scripture goes on to describe how this is something defined "not in words taught by

human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:13). Perhaps Bergson is closest to defining for us not what it is, but that it is there – an intuition that guides us in the most basic ways. Scientifically we cannot prove it, medically we cannot locate it, physically we cannot reach it and yet it is there in all of us. An intuition that not only guides us but defines us.

Conversely, forgetting has a part in the definition of words taught by the spirit. In his book, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Volf explores the “memory of wrongdoing” (Volf 94). Miroslav Volf, a Protestant theologian, experienced firsthand mental abuses contrary to human moral code during interrogation for being “a national security threat” (Volf 17) and a spy. His abusers expected gratitude from him because they had not done worse to him with their abuses. Volf endured months of severe mental torment, evoking fear, a sense of helplessness, and humiliation which together caused him to mistrust everyone and see the world through the lens of the abuse he had suffered. He dreaded “reliving in memory . . . terrifying interrogations” because “to relive those experiences is painful, even in memory” (235). Through remembering, unwanted memory “breaks into the present and gains a new lease on life” and “resurfaces in flashbacks beyond our control, and then we experience anew the horror of past pain” (251-252). Volf explains that separating the feelings associated with an event are difficult to separate from the memory. This is in accordance with Bergson who states, “There comes a moment when the recollection . . . is capable of blending so well with the present perception that we cannot say where perception ends or where memory begins” (Bergson MM 57). In addition, it illustrates how the memory image is drawn from pure memory and shaped by individual perception. It also demonstrates how important forgetting is in the process of moving beyond memory.

For Volf, it is the way we remember wrongs, “suffered as people with identities defined by God, not by wrongdoers’ evil deeds and their echo in our memory” (Volf 868). From this theologian point of view, memory and the process of forgetting a memory are entwined with the ability to forgive – to forgive and forget.

It is the process of forgetting and forgiving that takes us inward to ourselves. Early adepts of the Islam religion known as Sufis, sought to achieve a unity with God through a direct connection of prayer. If we examine their practices and credos, we see a definite similarity between their worship practice and Henri Bergson’s description of metaphysics as outlined in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* in which Bergson further connects his concepts of pure memory and *élan vital*.

Sufism is a mystical representation of the Islam religion. Early Sufi practitioners “rejected or de-emphasized outward or formalistic forms of observance in favour of a style of pietism that sought to apprehend the reality of God’s unity through direct experience” (Ruthven 69). Rather than choosing to worship in a formalized and ritualist way, these practitioners utilized “spiritual disciplines such as yogic breathing” (70). Not unlike the meditative practice exercised by Hindus and Buddhists, yogic practice by Sufis was to allow direct unity with God. According to a description by Mehdi Aminrazavi, “Sufism represents the esoteric dimension of Islam in its purest form” (Aminrazavi). The practice of Sufis is therefore esoteric as well as mystically pious.

Henri Bergson tells us in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* that there are not one, but two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. First is to know it outwardly or by moving around the object, second is to know it inwardly or by moving into an object. These two types of knowing a thing are in turn, relative and absolute. Here we see the comparative to Bergson’s

metaphysics with Sufism since the latter emphasizes direct unity with God and Bergson defines knowing an object through moving inward to the absolute. This relation is further described by James W. Felt as “by returning . . . to the ongoing immediacy of our concrete experience” (Felt 49). By doing so, we can “recover the unbroken unity of our selves” (49). The meditative practice allows for deep inner knowing and the unity of ourselves with God. This is described in Islam as Hikmah defined as being “both wisdom and philosophy” (Aminrazavi). By moving inward to the absolute as Bergson identifies, one can create a union with God as Sufism believes.

Sufism seeks inner reality and aspires to unicity with God. Bergson tells us that “what I experience will depend neither on the point of view I may take up in regard to the object, since I am in the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I may translate the motion” (Bergson IM 3). Being inside oneself as in Sufi meditation, exploring by looking beyond oneself to find closeness to God, is a metaphysical process. Bergson offers an absolute way of being. A Sufi mystic seeks an absolute way of being. This is an “intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible” (IM 7). By placing oneself inside and seeking absolute knowledge, a Sufi may find the unity with God that is absolute. For the Sufi, God’s essence, is that “which cannot be known or experienced” (Ruthven 74). For the mystic, unity is with the inner reality, not through the physical world or through ritualized religious practice. It is a deep personal journey on a path of profound inner knowing.

It is interesting to note that according to Momen, “An absolute knowledge of the metaphysical structure of the cosmos is . . . impossible for human beings to achieve because of the finite nature of the human mind” (Momen 198). This brings an interesting viewpoint to the understanding of the connection between metaphysics and Sufism. As the Sufi goes inside

himself to find the true essence of God, his mind in fact, is a deterrent. The very nature of his material self creates a conflict with the path to self-knowing and nearness to God.

Lastly, Bergson tells us that “metaphysical intuition, [which] . . . can only be obtained through material knowledge, is quite other than the mere summary or synthesis of that knowledge” (Bergson IM 92). An opposing contradiction of terms that coincides with the practice of Sufi wisdom and philosophy to achieve a unity or greater knowing of God.

Part of the battle trauma veteran story is the going inside of oneself to bring the story to actualization, from memory or dream or illusion to reality. “The thing about a story is that you dream it as you tell it, hoping that others might then dream along with you, and in this way memory and imagination and language combine to make spirits in the head. There is the illusion of aliveness” (O’Brien 218). Do veterans experience a greater knowing of God after battle?

Ricoeur tells us that the “veridical dimension of memory is united with the practical dimension tied to the idea of the exercise of memory” (Ricoeur 55). But, according to Tim O’Brien, it is “in the spell of memory and imagination, I can still see her as if through ice, as if I’m gazing into some other world” (O’Brien 232). Perhaps contact with pure memory provides battle trauma veterans a split second of unity or a greater knowing of God by gazing into another world that trauma exposes.

For Robbins, his connection to the “*élan vital*” comes as a dream in which he is “overlooking a long, long winding road, sensing this Being next to me. On the road, walking, filing by, was a vast stream of people. Suddenly, we – this Being and I – began racing swiftly up and down the length of the road, touching, traversing, melding with the minds of every individual moving in this vast stream” (Robbins 6). This experience is paramount to the understanding and explanations he provides in demonstrating Bergson’s theory of memory.

CHAPTER V:

Conclusion

Exploring the contributions of philosophical, scientific, and theological thought regarding memory show a commonality or an agreement especially when illustrated with descriptions from battle experienced veterans. This literature affirms Henri Bergson's theory of "pure memory" and the existence of an "élan vital" or the vital life force that connects humankind based on the imagery each individual veteran story relates over a range of centuries and cultures. Veterans, through their encounter with trauma during battle, share the momentary pause in time and space where "pure memory" or "élan vital" prevails. It gives them a deep connection to each other based on this shared experience, but also separates them from others who have not experienced battle. This relatable experience emphasizes not only the importance of memory and the connection to it as evidenced in medieval culture with verbal storytelling, but the necessity for forgetting.

So, what has this discourse revealed about the simple complexity of Bergson's theory of memory? Perhaps that memory has a "soul" or that it resides in the greater consciousness of humanity that connects us to the world around us and each other. Perhaps military veterans, by experiencing trauma, become directly connected to "pure memory" for an instant that is forever. As explained by Kaitlyn Smith in her article about Civil War nursing, veterans of war and those involved in its peripheral activities become "a more nurturing and functional network through the shared trauma of war" (Smith 185). This binding of spirit is part of the function of memory. Karl Marlantes described it when he returned from active duty and met his parents and a past girlfriend at the airport. He felt the bond that "kept the linkage with my past, with my little town, my tribe" (Marlantes 184). This describes the memory of medieval culture wherein there exists

civic and cultural commonality or connection – a community of memory or a greater connection to humanity.

Through literature created with imagination, exists the ability to describe and explain the inexplicable. It is to expose by experiencing trauma the esemplastic memory of a collective spirit. The trauma of battle opens a pathway to another way of knowing not unlike that of meditation or prayer.

“And in the end, of course, a true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory” (O'Brien 81).

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APPENDIX:

Veteran Timeline

SOCRATES (469-399 B.C.E.)

Philosopher; served with valor in the Peloponnesian War. In her contribution to the book, *Our Ancients Wars*, Sara Monoson provides a detailed, cumulative account of Socrates' military service based on the work of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophane. Socrates participated in three major campaigns as a hoplite or foot soldier. During campaign he would sometimes stand for hours in the same spot completely lost in thought. In the battle of Potidaea, Socrates rescued Alcibiades from the battlefield when all was lost. From other sources it is also described that the members of this campaign were so desperate for supplies, that they resorted to cannibalism. In another battle, there was so much confusion and carnage that members of the same side were attacking and killing each other. Monoson makes note of the battlefield as a "separate realm" (Monoson 108). Socrates showed extreme bravery and valor in battle and demonstrated a strong connection to his fellow soldiers and especially his commanders. Is it possible that the severe conditions he survived formed some of the philosophy for which Socrates is known? While standing alone and lost in thought, was he connecting to "pure memory" or a collective consciousness?

PLATO (427-347 B.C.E.)

Philosopher; served during Peloponnesian War. According to J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson, Plato served in the military during the Peloponnesian War from 409 B.C.E. to 404 B.C.E. In his philosophical works, Plato wrote at length about the valor and endurance of Socrates' military experience. Perhaps it was a combination of Plato's own battle experience and

relating those of Socrates that not only gave Plato a greater understanding of the philosophy that Socrates taught, but helped him expand and develop his own philosophy.

Through Plato's own human experience, including that of politics as the son of an aristocratic political heritage; warfare by his service in the Peloponnesian War; and justice in the form of his mentor Socrates' trial and ultimate death; Plato was instrumental in the development of logos as human reason or cognition. The conceptional ideas in Plato's work *The Republic* that birthed and lead to later philosophy entitled "anamnesis" – remembering from past experience or a priori knowledge – is one example of how his philosophy was related to memory.

Is it possible that his experience and connection to "pure memory" through the trauma of battle that Plato was able to experience and subsequently develop his theory of forms and other theories? Plato was a man who grew up in aristocratic politics, served his country during time of war and saw defeat, experienced the upheaval of two forms of government, lost a dear friend and mentor through an act of suicide, influenced art and creative thinking through public lecture, travelled to foreign countries taking his theories beyond the boundaries of Athens, scribed his theories in written form, started a school of academic inquiry and taught future thought leaders, but most importantly left behind philosophies that have provided the foundation for centuries of logos as reason and cognition.

MIGUEL CERVANTES (1547-1616)

Author; served at the Battle of Lepanto. – "As outlined in Krueger's brief online history of Cervantes, fought in the famous 1571 Battle of Lepanto against the Turks of the Ottoman Empire . . . It was in the Battle of Lepanto that Cervantes was injured" (Darbous Marthaller). As a result, Cervantes was disabled for life. While returning to Spain in 1575, Cervantes was held hostage by

the Algerian pirates who captured him, he was imprisoned in severe conditions, and for five years served as a slave. “Cervantes weaves his own experience and pain into his story as well as his characters, providing insight into what he suffered and endured. These lived experiences give the story and characters much deeper context than mere imagined pain or suffering.” (Darbous Marthaller). They hold the character of his own memory.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834)

Poet/Philosopher; served with the 15th Light Dragoons. Little is known about Coleridge’s military service except that he served under an assumed name. Best known for his Romantic era poetry, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was also a philosopher. His autobiographical work *Biographia Literaria* contemplates memory, imagination, and fancy.

MARK TWAIN (1835-1910)

Journalist/Author; joined the Confederate Army. Although Mark Twain only participated in the Confederate Army for about two weeks, he suffered severe trauma during his service as a pilot of a Mississippi sternwheeler when his younger brother was killed. Twain documented the incident in his book, *Life on the Mississippi*, describing it as a horrible and melancholy experience. Twain never forgot the incident and it caused him to reflect on human connectivity, spirituality, and life after death as evidenced by his membership in the Society for Psychical Research.

STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900)

Author; wrote about Civil War. According to the Poetry Foundation, Stephen Crane had parents who were devout, his father a minister and his mother active in social issues. Crane attended

military school before following two of his thirteen siblings into the field of journalism. Best known for his Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane addresses existence, God, the universe, and memory in his poetry. Although he did not fight in the Civil War himself, Crane experienced war as a news foreign correspondent.

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE (1898-1970)

Novelist; WWI veteran. Remarque was drafted into the German army during World War I. Following the war, he worked as a schoolteacher, drama critic, and sports magazine editor. His seminal work *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published in 1928 and sold over one million copies and was produced on film. During World War II in which he refused to fight, he lost his German citizenship and his books were burned.

PAUL RICOEUR (1913-2005)

Philosopher/Author; WWII veteran and POW. A distinguished twentieth century French philosopher whose long career produced an expansive range and body of work that has been widely translated and discussed. Ricoeur was drafted into the French army in 1939 and subsequently captured, spending most of his service in German POW camps. Notable is Ricoeur's philosophical examination of the experience of time and his book, *Memory, History, Forgetting* wherein he cites Henri Bergson and considers his philosophy of pure memory along with the work of other notable philosophers.

KARL MARLANTES (1944-)

Rhodes Scholar/Author; decorated Vietnam War veteran. Karl Marlantes served as a Marine during the Vietnam War and knew direct combat. He was awarded the Navy Cross for extraordinary heroism during war. His New York Times best-selling novel *Matterhorn* was a fictional work based on his experience. Marlantes also produced a later work entitled *What It Is Like To Go To War*. He describes not only the direct experience during combat that echoes the sentiments of other veterans, but explores the aftermath of feelings, thoughts, and emotions that remain in memory long after battle is over.

TIM O'BRIEN (1946-)

Journalist/Author; Vietnam War veteran. Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried* takes the reader into the battlefields of Vietnam along with its characters. His creative voice echoes the sentiments of Henri Bergson's theory with similar eloquence of thought and voice. O'Brien has received numerous awards and nominations for his contributions to literature.

STEPHEN EARLE ROBBINS, PHD (UNDISCLOSED)

AI Executive/Author; Vietnam War veteran. In his book, *Time and Memory: A Primer on the Scientific Mysticism of Consciousness*, Robbins briefly describes his personal experience during the Vietnam war. This experience is paramount to the understanding and explanations he provides in demonstrating Bergson's theory of memory.

PARKER GYOKERES (1973-)

UAV Photojournalist; Iraq War veteran. Writing about his battle experience, Parker Gyokeres shares that these experiences and memories are something that only other veterans can truly understand. In addition to his contribution in *Standing Down: From Warrior to Civilian*, “The Hardest Letter to Write,” Gyokeres contributed to the making of the film, *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*.