

# On the Face and Construction of Memory Ethics: Social Memory and Individual Memory

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## Abstract

Memory has been a hot research topic in a variety of contemporary disciplinary fields, and it is also an important issue that cannot be ignored in the study of ethics. How should we memorize historical events? This cannot be separated from the ethics of memory in ethics, which covers both social memory and individual memory. Social memory seeks to reflect the overall appearance of social events, adopts grand narratives, records the times, and highlights the function of social integration in order to construct the basic consensus of society; individual memory highlights the individual's life situation, emotional experience, and value demands, and seeks to make social history present the "face of humanity", enrich the details of history, and feel the real existence of life and humanity. The individual memory emphasizes the individual's life situation, emotional experience and value appeal. Through the interaction and co-construction of social memory and individual memory, we can draw a picture of history, reflecting the contemporary demands and practical significance of the ethics of memory.

## Keywords

Memory Obligation, Social Memory, Individual Memory, Ethical Constructs

## 1. Introduction

The study of memory exists in a wide range of multidisciplinary fields. In addition to the inquiry of natural sciences, the humanities and social sciences such as history, sociology, ethics and so on have also been involved in memory, which plays an important role in the construction of social history and the creation of self-knowledge. The ethics of memory refers to the moral principles, value norms, and

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behavioral guidelines that should be followed in the processes of constructing, transmitting, and reproducing memory. Its focus is not on “how we remember”, but rather on “how we ought to remember,” with its core lying in responsibility toward the “other”. Hegel mentioned in the *Philosophy of History*, “The moral lessons that people often hope to seek from history, ..... but what experience and history show us is that peoples and governments have learned nothing from history and have not acted according to the laws that have been deduced from it.” (Hegel, 2001: p. 6). Whether it is to remember this historical event or to avoid repeating it in the future, for whatever reason, this historic event should always be remembered. So, do “we” have an ethical obligation to remember this historical event? If there is such an obligation, then who is the one who remembers it? Is it “we” as a collective concept, or is it the individual “I” as one of the constitutive consciousnesses of a collective? These are the questions that must be addressed and answered in terms of the ethics of memory. In addition, what remains to be pondered in depth is how we should record such a historical event, which is in the process of happening and fading away, and what mode of memory we should choose. What kind of memory mode should we choose to portray the historical event? In order to respond to the above questions, this paper proposes a corresponding construction method based on the perspective of memory ethics and on the two aspects of social memory and individual memory.

## 2. The Obligation of the Ethics of Memory

“Memory is a glorious and enviable gift of nature through which, thanks to the realism of recollection, we can recall the past, embrace the present, and think about the future.” (Le Goff, 2010: p. 87). Memory is one of the important dimensions in constructing history, “The voluntary or involuntary absence and loss of the collective memory of a people and a nation can also lead to serious problems in terms of collective identity” (Le Goff, 2010: p. 59). It is through memory that history is transformed from a “dead past” into a “living past”. We do not use the future to elucidate history, but we use history to explain the future, and we find all the answers for the future in the “living past”. It is “memory that nourishes history, which in turn feeds memory, which seeks to defend the past in order to serve the present and the future” (Le Goff, 2010: p. 113).

Is the subject of memory, then, the “I” or the “we” as a community or collective? Do both “I” and “we” have an obligation to remember significant events? The Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit characterizes this question as an important and inescapable issue in the study of the ethics of memory. She categorizes memory as an ethical category and states in *The Ethics of Memory*: “Memory is the glue that binds people with strong relationships together, and thus the community of memory is the habitat of strong relationships and ethics. Relying on this central function of bonding thick relationships, memory becomes an enterprise that refers to ethics and guides us in how to deal with thick relationships between people.” (Margalit, 2015: p. 8). Margalit states that there is an intrinsic correla-

tion between memory and caring because memory is in a way a constitutive element of caring. This means that if we do care for someone or something then it is natural for us to remember fond images of our time with them. It may be difficult, both rationally and logically, to say that a person cares for someone but does not remember the memories associated with being with that person. We should maintain a sense of empathy for all suffering beings; we have reason to remember them.

“We” have an obligation to remember historical events, and the community of destiny requires that “we” as a social group remember them together. Because of the specificity of historical events, it is the power of the “event” that connects people to each other as a community of destiny. According to Žižek’s description of “events”, “the usual rhythm of life is disrupted by the sudden occurrence of a shocking and unexpected event without any preparation; these sudden situations have neither signs nor detectable causes, and their appearance does not seem to be based on anything solid” (Žižek, “The Event”), thing on which they are based” (Zizek, 2016: p. 2). Under the community of destiny, people have an unspoken moral obligation.

From the point of view of the individual in this historical event, as an individual “I” of course also have the obligation to remember. Because the individual is not only a member of the community, with the community’s responsibility and accountability; at the same time, it is also an individual as an independent will and self-awareness, in a symbiotic and coexisting social relationship with others. As far as the ethics of caring is concerned, “caring” for others means having a moral obligation to others, that is, caring for their well-being, which involves the needs and desires of the one being cared for. American scholar Nell Noddings believes that this impulse to care for the sake of others is innate in human beings, that it is latent in each individual, that it develops gradually in the continuity of caring relationships, and that people’s moral interest derives from caring. In caring we accept the natural impulse to act for the good of others and to feel their suffering and happiness. When people care for each other, they naturally want others to share their common past and common memories with us.

According to Noddings, caring is like concentric circles stacked on top of each other. Individuals are located at the center of this concentric circle, while the people we are closest to are closest to the center of the circle, and the more distant the relationship, the further away from the center of the circle (Noddings, 2014: p. 31). If this is indeed the case, why are we obligated to remember people with whom we have little connection? As one gradually extends the lens of caring outward from those in the inner circle who are close to us, we realize that some of these people are potentially connected to those in the inner circle. From an ethic of care, we should care for them who are suffering and remember them. However, it is also necessary to remember strangers who have little possibility of coming to me and who have no relationship with my intimate circle. I, as an individual, can remain open and receptive to caring for strangers from afar. Noddings says, “In a very important sense, the stranger needs me desperately, for I do not know where

he will feel comfortable, what he has a right to ask for, or what private needs he has for me.” (Nel Noddings, 2014: pp. 31-32). In other words, a caring person should remain an open and receptive person to a stranger from afar, ready to care for others. Moral obligations initially stem from care for the intimate circle of parents, relatives, and friends, a care deeply intertwined with memory. As this circle of care expands from the family to larger imagined communities such as the nation or the state, the responsibility of memory demands that members of the community remember significant events in their history.

It can be seen that the ethics of memory is not a dogma or policy that insists on defending the traditional past, but a positive attitude towards the future. Why do people expect to be remembered after death, especially by parents, spouses, children and friends with whom we had intimate relationships? In fact, such an expectation of being remembered after death is a normative consciousness. If people believe that the intimate relationships they have now are in a good state, then saying, “I expect you to remember me after I die” is essentially the same as saying, “You should remember me after I die”—even if “I have not yet died”. Even now, “I am not dead”. So the desire to be remembered after death is not an expectation, but an action of a normative nature, determined by the intensity of the relationship in which one now finds oneself. To this point, Margaret notes, “We expect an intimacy that will remain valid after we die.” (Margaret, 2015: p. 85). This means that people expect the thick relationships they have now to be maintained and to continue to be maintained towards the future. This is similar to Alain Badiou’s discourse on love. According to Badiou, “I love you” in many ways also means “I will always love you”, which in essence lies in fixing chance on an eternal scale (Badiou, 2012: p. 78). The same is true for memory, when one promises to someone in a close relationship that “I” will remember you, it also means that “I” will always remember you, from this moment until the future.

In short, memory acts as the glue that binds modern society to the integration of human relationships, a community that involves both the living and the dead. This is precisely as the movie “Finding Dory” points out, death is not the end, forgetting is. Within this community, the element of remembrance that tends towards the ritual of resurrection is far stronger than that of a community that relies solely on communication, a community that relates to the question of survivorship through memory. Not only that, but memory is key to corroborating the identity of the person as an individual, and the unique personality of the individual is constructed by memory (Margaret, 2015: p. 40). We believe that the individual and the society are in a two-way mutually constructive relationship, where the social psyche is understood through the individual psyche and the individual psyche is grasped in the social psyche. Just as Plato understood the relationship between the individual and the city-state, the capitalized city-state is a combination of lower-case individuals, and the structure of the individual’s psyche is revealed in the city-state community. Thus, social memory and individual memory constitute the two faces of the ethics of memory in the great events of history, and

one cannot be absent from the other.

### 3. The First Face of Memory Ethics: Social Memory

The first face of memory ethics is social memory. Discussions on the concept of social memory have been varied. Turgot was the first to develop a theory of social memory, which he saw as a framework for social integration. Habwah, following Turgot's school of thought, used the concept of social memory cautiously and replaced it with the concept of collective memory. Lewis Coser, in his introduction to *On Collective Memory*, states, "In almost every place where Turgot refers to Society with a capital 'S', Habwach is talking about Groups" (Coser, 1992). We infer from this that the subjective notion of "society" in Turgot's notion of social memory has been narrowed down by Habwah to the subjective notion of "collective". It can be said that Habwach is more concerned with the details of the facts of social experience than Turgot, but his notion of "collective" and Turgot's notion of "society" have in common that they are both concepts of a social construction, and Jeffrey Olick argues that The study of social memory has not yet developed a unified research paradigm and is still multicentered and interdisciplinary (Olick, 2009). Scot French notes that the concept of social memory, which is often used by historians or other researchers to inquire into the links between social identity and historical memory, asks how and why different peoples see themselves as members of a group with a shaped past. members of groups with a shaped past (French, 1995). He goes on to argue that historians use the term "collective memory" to emphasize the internalization of group identity, while he himself prefers the term "social memory" because it evokes the idea of "social memory". James Fentress and Chris Wickham argue that the notion of collective consciousness separates the thought processes of a particular individual, which can lead to the individual becoming a robot that passively adheres to the beliefs implanted in him or her. This can lead to individuals becoming robots, passively complying with the collective will implanted within them, whereby they replace 'collective memory' with 'social memory' (Fentress & Wickham, 1992). Peter Burke reiterates that social memory is history, describing it as a convenient shorthand that summarizes the rather complex processes of selection and interpretation (Burke, 1989).

The above studies related to the concept of social memory show that social memory is an important way of constructing social history. Social memory (in the most ideal situation) is often a memory shared by all people in the society. In terms of the memory sensibility of those who participate in it, social memory consists of two aspects: common memory and shared memory. The former refers to "the memory of all people who experience and remember an event" (Margaret, 2015: p. 47). If the memory of an event is to be called a common memory, then the number of people involved in remembering the event must exceed a certain value, and it is difficult to call a memory that only sporadically involves only a few people a common memory. It can be said that shared memory is a quantitative relation-

ship, *i.e.*, a superposition of individuals involved in remembering the same event. This is not the case with shared memory. Margaret states that “shared memorability requires internal interconnections that blend and adjust the different perspectives of the people who remember the event.” (Margaret, 2015: p. 47). Social memory is clearly distinct from social history, but it plays an important role in its construction. Social history itself is a history of the factual flux of process, which is gradually constructed into social history through the change, interweaving and integration of social memory. Without the review of memory there can be no construction of social history.

Social memory is both abstract and embodied. Social memory is a unity of both abstraction and embodiment, as well as a unity of material reality and spiritual reality, and is thus the basis for the construction of social history. Habwach states, “Collective memory has a dual nature, being both a material object, a material reality, such as a statue, a monument, a place in space, and a symbol, or something with a spiritual connotation, something attached to and imposed on this material reality that is shared by the group.” (Habwah, 2002: p. 335). Social memory as an abstract symbol both effectively absorbs the subjective content of figurative memory and makes the most general abstract synthesis of figurative memory. Its essential being as the spiritual imagery of abstract symbols abstracts itself from material reality and is no longer dependent on a material vehicle, “This process of symbolization in turn divorces these sites from the material environment in which they are situated and connects them to beliefs so that they can no longer change in response to changes in the material environment” (Habwah, 2002: p. 336). Therefore, social memory is not only a material entity, but also an authentic spiritual being that coalesces in the flow of time, which is integrated into the construction of social history, transcends the abstractness of limited space and time, and exists eternally as a spiritual conviction and moral force, and, by combining with embodied memories, makes the spiritual conviction and moral force coalesced in abstract social memory come alive, thus serving as a living, dynamic and dynamic force. A kind of endless spiritual vitality is passed down in the long river of social history.

Social memory also serves the important function of promoting personal identity and enhancing social integration. Social memory forms the basis of people’s understanding of social history, because people’s understanding of past history is carried out by means of social memory. Even people who have not experienced the major events of social history deepen the common knowledge of this history through the representation of social memory objects to understand the history of the events at that time. For those who have experienced the event, they have a common memory, understand and care about each other more, confirm themselves in the group, and create a stronger identity, which also strengthens the cohesion of the group. The most typical examples are the monuments and cemeteries of heroes. These monuments are given public and ceremonial homage precisely because they are shaped by social memory. We, as later generations, have

no way of knowing exactly who lies beneath them, but this does not prevent us from creating worship and admiration for these heroes through social memory.

“Memory connects a myriad of individual phenomena into a whole, and were it not for the material attraction that holds our bodies together, our bodies would have split into a myriad of atoms long ago; similarly, were it not for the cohesive power of memory, our consciousness would have fallen apart long ago.” (Weltzer, 2007: p. 159). Shared memories can facilitate the formation of more closely related groups, where individual strengths coalesce through social memory. This is approximated by Benedict Anderson’s statement that a nation is an imagined political community (Anderson, 2016: p. 6). As a member of the community, people are unlikely to recognize and meet most of their fellow citizens throughout their lives, but the imagery of their interconnectedness is deeply embedded in people’s minds through social memory. In addition, social memory brings individuals together as a collective and enhances cohesion based on the premise of a sense of identity. Since “identity is a social construction that is constantly redefined in the context of a dialogical relationship with others, and there is a subsequent consensus that recognizes that memory is not so much a faithful reproduction of the past as a reconstruction that has been continually renewed since that same past” (Delich & Chen, 2007).

Social memory tends to be grand narrative and ideological as well. According to Jacques Le Goff’s theory of the historical development of memory, the grand narratives and ideologies of social memory are always intertwined at different stages of social history. First, the collective memory of unwritten societies—“racial memory.” (Le Goff, 2010: p. 61). For those peoples without writing, primitive myths form the historical roots of race or family (Le Goff, 2010: p. 62). Whether it is the memory of the collective identity of the group, the memory of a famous family, or the memory of technological knowledge, it is the grand narratives based on myths, either through genealogy, or in the form of practices with religious witchcraft overtones, that dominate. Second, in the ancient phase, the change from the oral to the written is dominated by grand narratives that glorify the gods of nature, such as the writings of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Third, medieval memory involves grand narratives about the sanctity of Christianity. Fourth, since the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the 19th century, when science replaced superstition and reason replaced myth and opened up Enlightenment-style grand narratives, the theoretical basis of social memory has shifted from the sacred heaven to the secular earth, and the power of human beings themselves has replaced the divine will. In social memory, grand “narratives tell of the sources of legitimacy of society’s rulers, society’s legal system, and religious organizations, associating these with the sacred, the sources of history, or the hopes for the future, and establishing legitimacy by repeating them over and over again” (Zhang, Kong, & Huang, 2001). In addition, with the development of globalization, the grand narrative of social memory is not only confined to the domain of the region, nation, and country, but also emerges a broad vision of the world, globality, and

humanity, presenting a narrative framework of the community of human destiny and even the unity of destiny of human beings and the natural world.

#### **4. The Second Face of Memory Ethics: Individual Memory**

The second facet of memory ethics is individual memory. Individual memory refers to the memory of an individual, “each individual memory is only, and only, a local connection of the memorizer to some common memory space through personal experience” (Xu, 2008: p. 10). Compared to social memory, the emphasis and research on individual memory in memory ethics started much later, and it can even be said that individual memory is in a situation of being unappreciated or obscured in memory research for quite a long time. In a certain sense, history is indeed a grand narrative, and in addition to historical figures, individual memories of ordinary people, for a long time, are difficult to find records in the grand narrative discourse of historical events, and are often neglected and cannot be truly “seen” (Stewardson et al., 2023: p. 962).

Until modern society, people have gradually realized, on the one hand, that although social memory is able to outline the trend of historical development in the form of a grand narrative of social history, the social memory formed under such integration is often endowed with political functions and tends to serve the interests of social rulers. Starting from this, social memory is often prone to over-abstraction and over-integration of historical information, or even obscuring the true nature of social and historical events, due to the fact that it has been trimmed and synthesized by the structure of the social system. On the other hand, with the establishment of individual subjectivity and the awakening of self-consciousness in modern society, the existential situation and emotional experience of individual life are increasingly emphasized. Under such circumstances, people begin to resort to individual memory to describe the details of social and historical facts, and begin to turn from social memory with abstract integration function to pay attention to the concrete individual memory, and pay attention to the individual’s survival situation and life experience under the historical events.

It is in the ethics of memory that the memory of the individual begins to be emphasized, which restores the “human face” of history. Individual memory, with its distinctive individual life narrative, reflects and refracts the unique survival situation and self-life experience of individuals under social and historical events, and has distinctive subjective characteristics. 1986 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wiesel, known as the “messenger of humanity”, recorded his personal experience when humanity suffered from great humiliation and utter contempt, and made it his mission to preserve the memory of the victims of suffering. The 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature winner, Belarusian author S.A. Alexeevich, focuses her writing on individuals who lived under the Soviet Union’s Patriotic War and socialism, and her books such as *Second Hand Time*, *I am a Soldier and a Woman*, and *I Still Miss You, Mom*, are written through interviews and oral narratives of individuals. Her writings such as *Second Hand Time*, *I Am a Woman Soldier*

and a Woman, and I Still Miss You, Mother, through interviews and oral narratives of individuals, seek to restore the life situations and real emotions of ordinary people, transcending the limitations of social memory that disregards the memories of individual lives, and have been praised as “her polyphonic writing is a remembrance of the sufferings and courage of our times”. It is the individual memories of these life narratives—both the recollection of suffering and the interpretation of truth—that restore the human face to history. In the wake of Alekseevich’s award in 2015, there has been a growing recognition of the importance and indispensability of individual memories in the narratives of great historical events. As a result, individual memory has gradually become another important and indispensable face in the narrative of big social and historical events. “Individual memory is an indispensable part of social memory.” (Delich & Chen, 2007).

In addition, individual memory, in the form of the narrative of individual life stories, has become an important way of accumulating human culture and passing on experience, and plays an important role in the evolution of the human race as a whole and the growth of individual life. British scholar Gaia Vince pointed out in her book *The History of Human Evolution* that individual “oral stories are the collective memory of human beings, and they store the cultural information of the human world in the form of narratives”, and that “a story helps to store cultural knowledge in the collective memory of human beings as much as possible, and facilitates human beings to transfer their cultural knowledge to the collective memory of human beings. stored in the collective human memory, making it easy for humans to pass it on from generation to generation and keep it up to date. Stories shape our minds, our societies, and even change our interactions with our environments” (Vince, 2021: p. 79). Clearly, such individual memories have the power to transmit and influence lives, as the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle pointed out, “Memories are neither sensations nor judgments, but some state or effect of them when time has passed.” (Aristotle, 1992: p. 133). In his view, “Feelings belong to the present, hopes to the future, and memories to the past.” (Aristotle, 1992: p. 134). Unlike reason, memory is characterized as a faculty of the “first sense”, *i.e.*, “the faculty of perceiving time”. One cannot reenact the “past”, but can only construct the “past” from the ‘present’, and construct the “past” as it was. They can only construct the past from the present, and construct it as it was. “In modern ways of knowing, for something to become ‘real’, there has to be an image, a photograph, to confirm the event. Photographs give significance to events and make them memorable. A war, an atrocity, an epidemic, a so-called natural disaster, if it is to become widely publicized, must be made known through the various systems (including television, the Internet, newspapers, and magazines) that disseminate photographic images to millions of people.” (Sontag, 2009: p. 130). In the face of human catastrophe, the personal experience of the suffering person is just a tiny speck of dust in the history of disaster. However, through this small dust, it may be able to reveal the feelings or demands of individuals who

have been hidden for a long time or are not concerned, so that people can realize the real existence of life and humanity. As the famous Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa said, “To write is to be eternal.” (Pessoa, 2004: p. 9).

It can be said that in historical events, each of us is a playwright and a dramatist; a memorizer and a protagonist of the memory scene. Xu Ben points out that the memories of all those who experienced it personally, *i.e.*, individual memories, are aggregated to form a common memory (Xu, 2008: p. 8). In common memory, some common emotions are expressed, because memory is not only “knowing”, but also “feeling”. The same situation will inevitably produce some of the same emotions. Many individual narratives and memories of historical events, regardless of age, identity, occupation, etc., share memories, connect emotions, and jointly feel the pain and suffering brought by the historical events, just as Xu Ben pointed out, “Shared memories are not only the aggregation of personal memories. Memory must be freely exchanged in public space to become shared memory. Shared memory is conditioned by free public exchange and thus becomes a memory with a public-political nature.” (Xu, 2008: p. 9).

As Margaret emphasizes in *The Ethics of Memory*, “moral witnesses know suffering well” (Margaret, 2015: p. 140), and all human catastrophes must rely on moral witnesses in order to preserve their proper memory. The convergence of many individual memories also constitutes a barometer of the current social mentality, reflecting the common sentiments and values of civil society, as well as an enabler for the continuous improvement of social institutions. Human beings can always be remembered only as human beings, and no life’s suffering should be taken for granted or insignificant, and the dignity and value of human beings should not be absent at any time. Human beings remember on human moral grounds, remembering the present moment, but also to go on living better in the future; remembering history in order to learn lessons. “Through the memory of common human trauma, social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations, not only cognitively identify the existence and root causes of human suffering, but also assume some of the weighty responsibilities and guard against the indifference of inaction. As the British historian Ian Kershaw put it, ‘The road to Oświęcim was opened for hatred and paved with indifference.’” (Xu, 2008: p. 401).

## 5. Constructive Approaches to the Ethics of Memory

As “individual memory is an indispensable part of social memory, past events are constructed in social memory” (Delich & Chen, 2007). Therefore, the ethics of memory must be co-constructed by social memory and individual memory, complementing each other, so that it can help to comprehensively reflect the overall appearance of social and historical events, and also allow individual life narratives to enrich the specific details of social and historical events, presenting the historical dialectics of the state and the individual, the grand and the microscopic, and helping to promote social solidarity and humanistic care.

### 5.1. The Isomorphism of Social and Individual Memory, Reflecting History Together

Social memory and individual memory play different roles in the construction of social history due to the differences in their narrative styles. In terms of narrative mode, the former often adopts the grand narrative of social history events, while the latter presents itself in the form of individual narrative or private narrative. In the construction of social history, social memory is based on the macro perspective and strives to reflect the development and change of social history in terms of authenticity and accuracy, while individual memory is constantly enriched with the subtle branches and leaves of social history events from the different perspectives of individuals' different identity status, emotional feelings, and so on. In the final analysis, however, the grand narrative prevails. Although it "seems to give people a kind of compulsion, it does not necessarily constitute an infringement, smearing, covering or erasure of private narratives, and the two can exist at the same time" (Liu, 2010). Despite the obvious differences between the two, this does not mean that the grand narrative of social history and the narrative of individual activities are absolutely opposed to each other, nor does it mean that social memory and individual memory are in a tit-for-tat, mutually incompatible relationship.

For example, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, as a "place of memory," embodies the bidirectional interplay between personal and collective memory. By gathering individual narratives of trauma, it constructs a collective memory that both shapes individuals' cognitive and emotional frameworks while integrating and amplifying fragmented private experiences through public rituals and spatial narratives. There is no doubt that social memory can reflect changes in social history. However, the individual memory of a single person is also a partial and fragmented reflection of past history, because the individual's political and social identity, fortunate or bitter experience, whether or not he or she is in the eye of the storm of a disaster, and other such experiential factors will directly affect the individual's perception and description of specific events. However, the convergence, exchange, and interaction of many individual memories can provide multidimensional and multifaceted direct experience for the construction of past history. "Although each individual only experiences fragments of an event from his or her own particular corner of the world, they can be fused into a whole event." (Xu, 2008: p. 9). In addition, individual life activities are carried out under certain historical conditions, influenced by the objective social environment, and in the final analysis, it is the product of social and historical development, the result of the development of the times, and has a distinctive epochal character.

Therefore, we should not only strengthen social memory, but also emphasize individual memory. Not only to understand the development of social history from social memory, to promote the construction of social ideology, and to enhance the sense of identity of the social community; we also need to pay attention

to the narrative mode of individual life activities, to get a glimpse of the entirety of the individual life narrative, and to explore the full picture of the social and historical events.

## **5.2. The Inherited Nature of Social Memory and the Infinite Nature of Individual Memory, Connecting the Past, Present and Future**

Social memory has both temporal and co-temporal transmission. In terms of temporal ephemerality, the reason why “future generations acquire memories from previous generations or re-previous generations” (Xu, 2008: p. 11) is that social memories about the life activities of previous generations or re-previous generations are transmitted through words, pictures, videos or oral narratives, so that the subsequent generation knows about and access to the memories of that time period. When the person who personally experienced or witnessed the memory of a certain period of time passes away, what the descendants get is the “memory of the memory”, which also illustrates the temporal transmission of social memory.

In terms of spatial co-temporality, the individual memories formed by many individuals of a historical event at the same time and place are characterized by commonality, collectivity and sharing, and their convergence constitutes the social memory of the historical event. As a result, people located in different spatial and geographical areas, though not experiencing it personally, can internalize and share the social memory of the historical event through a certain narrative channel, and thus gain knowledge and feelings about the event. In addition, from the dimension of social community, society extends and expands in space and develops over time, which also determines the transmission and development of social memory in space and time, confirming the continuity of social memory, and thus the continuity of the construction of the present and the past.

Individual memory is rooted in the soil of the individual’s life activities and life experiences in pursuit of his or her own significance, and arises from the individual’s experience of his or her life activities and the connection with the social community, rather than arising out of thin air in the individual’s mind or being passed on by word of mouth in hearsay. For the individual, the finite nature of life activity leads to the localized nature of the individual’s connection with the community. The personal memory inherent in a single individual is finite, but the unfolding of human life activities has no spatial boundaries, and the development of the human memory capacity is also infinite, which determines the infinite unfolding of individual memory in space and time.

The construction of individual memory to social memory is a process from the concrete to the abstract; the shift from social memory to individual memory is a process from the abstract to the concrete. The former process ensures the conformity between social memory and objective facts, and the latter process can make the social memory and individual’s emotion link up. The inheritance function of memory enables individuals in different time and space to share the

memory of past historical events. In this way, the co-construction and complicity of social memory and individual memory not only restores the social historical facts and recreates the past history, but also constrains the present and influences the future.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper elucidates two aspects of memory ethics: the bidirectional isomorphy between individual memory and social memory. Through a cyclical transformation between the concrete and the abstract, these two dimensions both ensure the authenticity of collective historical cognition and imbue it with individual emotional identification, thereby constructing an intergenerational “memory community.” This theoretical framework transcends unidirectional determinism, revealing memory as a core mechanism through which active social capital shapes reality and plans for the future. However, it lacks empirical validation of specific memory-building processes. Future research should incorporate fieldwork and other empirical materials to enhance explanatory power and critical rigor.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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