HOPE AND TRAGEDY: INSIGHTS FROM RELIGION IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF PAUL RICŒUR

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Abstract. The trajectory of Paul Ricœur's thought from the fallible to the capable human person offers a hopeful vision of human nature constitutive of our shared political life. Yet, by necessity, hope arises in response to the tragic, which also features in Ricœur's work at the existential and ethical levels. At the same time hope and tragedy represent concepts at the limit of philosophical reasoning, introducing meeting points with religious discourse. Exploring those meeting points reveals the contribution of religious thinking to the understanding of hope and tragedy and establishes Ricœur's political thinking as ultimately shaped by their interplay.

I. INTRODUCTION

The whole trajectory of Paul Ricœur's philosophy might be thought of as a hopeful journey. Certainly it is frequently characterised that way, with his exploration of human self-understanding described as a move from *l'homme faillible*, to *l'homme capable*[1], allowing hope in human capability to be the climactic concept of his oeuvre. That journey takes a course though diverse areas of philosophical enquiry, including the early phenomenology of the will; hermeneutics, language and narrative; and the great turn toward ethics in the mid-80s and onwards, which would see application in questions of memory, historiography, and justice.

1 An early example is Domenico Jervolino who stressed the capable human as the ultimately unifying idea of Ricœur's work, relying on Ricœur's own reference to *Soi-même comme un autre* as his '*summa*'. See Domenico Jervolino, "The Unity of Paul Ricœur's Work: l'homme capable", in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy*: *Paul Ricœur's Unstable Equilibrium*, ed. Andrzej Wierciński (Hermeneutic Press, 2003). See also Gaëlle Fiasse ed., *Paul Ricœur: De l'homme faillible à l'homme capable* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2008). More systematically, see Jean Greisch, *Fehlbarkeit und Fähigkeit: Die philosophische Anthropologie Paul Ricœurs* (LIT Verlag, 2009).

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In her excellent work *Ricœur on Hope*, Rebecca Huskey has suggested that hope might be taken as "the centre of and the guiding theme for Ricœur's hermeneutics."[2] What I find especially valuable about Huskey's approach is that her understanding of that hermeneutical hope goes beyond consideration of texts to frame the wider work on the self. Indeed, Huskey's analysis is of hope as a particular human capacity. Thus, she is able to introduce her own reading through Ricœur of "hope as an expectation of some future good, an expectation that must be acted upon for oneself and for others."[3] This maps the turn to *l'homme capable*, and indeed, when we consider the self in Ricœur's later work, including in its political entanglement with others and institutions, there is a consistent hopefulness.

Ricœur is not simply erasing the differences of political life with an irenic resolution in hope. What this article intends is to reintroduce the complexity of hope in its constant interplay with the tragic that continued to inflect Ricœur's work from the early to the late. Indeed one can read the tragic forwards through Ricœur's work to its later stages, even in *Reflections on the Just*, and read hope backwards, finding its origins in very early work such as *History and Truth*. The return of hope and the tragic at multiple stages of Ricœur's *oeuvre* allows us to consider their significance at both the existential and the ethical level. Hope and the tragic are not an opposing pair of concepts, not two sides of the same coin. Instead they frame what is in prospect for our political life together.

Understanding this interplay might valuably be begun with a methodological consideration of how Ricœur, as a philosopher, grappled with religious discourse as a wholly distinct form of understanding. This is a live question as hope and tragedy are emblems of how Ricœur conceived of the conceptual limits where philosophy and religion meet.

II. HOPE IN PHILOSOPHY AND HOPE IN RELIGION

Speaking of his early career, Paul Ricœur remarked "I had to permanently justify my existence saying that I was not a 'crypto-theologian.'"[4] In response

2 Rebecca K. Huskey, *Ricœur on Hope: Expecting the Good* (Peter Lang, 2009), 5.

3 Huskey, *Ricœur on Hope*, 18.

4 Paul Ricœur and questioners, "Roundtable Discussion", in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God*: *The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricœur*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny (LIT Verlag, 2004), 203.

to the imprecations of the French philosophical academy[5], Ricœur would continue to draw an abiding distinction between theology, versus the inclusion of religious sources as the discursive context for philosophical enquiry. He consistently presented himself as philosopher, and intended his systematic works to explore strictly within philosophical limits. Perhaps the most significant example of this in practice was Ricœur's notorious division of his published Gifford Lectures. Ten of the lectures formed the chapters of the systematic *Oneself as Another* while the final two lectures which treated religious sources, including the figure of the summoned prophet, and themes of justice and love, were published as isolated essays[6].

As the separate publication of those scripturally shaped final lectures indicates though, Ricœur continued to give religious discourse an important if distinct role in his work. He saw part of his task as a philosopher to be to listen to the mythic "utterance of man about himself,"[7] which necessarily included the scriptural myths and their reception within communities of faith. In this way Ricœur was engaged with what religious discourses could offer to the philosopher in terms of their understanding of the human person.

Still Ricœur's wariness about religious discourse remained and cannot be attributed to a merely political consciousness of academic suspicion; what was crucial for him was to distinguish his approach from that of the theologian. Even in the 1970s when Ricœur had already held the Nuveen Chair of Divinity for some years, he saw in theology the potential to be an uprooted discipline that was dangerously abstracted from what he called the "originary expressions of [the] community of faith."[8] What gave Ricœur pause was that theology itself ran the risk of confusing the distinction between religious

5 It may be that the early collection *History and Truth* prompted these difficulties for Ricœur, which frequently draws and reflects on religious sources and concepts, without dwelling clearly on the methodological distinctions in play. Subsequent work was far more austere in this respect.

6 Among other publications, these essays found form in English in an essay collection edited by Mark Wallace, ed., *Figuring the Sacred Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1995).

7 Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Beacon Press, 1967), 4. Originally published as Paul Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté: Finitude et Culpabilité II. La symbolique du mal.* (Aubier, 1960). The details of the original French publication more clearly show the place of the *Symbolism* within Ricœur's unfinished series on the philosophy of the will.

8 Paul Ricœur, "Philosophy and Religious Language", *The Journal of Religion* 54, no. 1 (1974): 73.

responses to originary texts and philosophical theorising[9]. By contrast, he would go on to describe his philosophy as "strictly agnostic":

> the experience of transcendence, such as the experience of the moral conscience, can be interpreted in multiple ways... philosophy leaves open these opportunities. And that's the intersection, where the properly philosophical dimension stops and the strictly religious dimension begins.[10]

This careful limit is what Christoph Mandry has characterised "as a distinction between the general and the particular,"[11] where religion responds in a particular way, to that which philosophy keeps open.

Still the way in which religious discourse responds is not merely a particular version of philosophy, but rather singular to its own discourse, which is revealed in how Ricœur discussed his use of religious resources. In a relatively late set of interviews, he articulated the relationship as a conversation between two distinct kinds of thinking: "I place great importance on the mediation of writings, which are different from one sphere to another, even if the activity of reading draws them closer."[12] Indeed, this includes the "mediation of language and scripture; this is even where my two affiliations confront one another."[13] Ricœur's approach of mediating between forms of thinking absolutely requires their continuing distinction from each other, and thus his work may engage with certain kinds of religious shaped discourse, on their own terms, while distinguishing the philosophical task and its proper limits. This can be illustrated by Ricœur's treatment of hope itself as a meeting point between philosophy and theology.

Hope as the Structure of Philosophical Systems

In the essay 'Hope as the Structure of Philosophical Systems', Ricœur considers the role of hope as a concept shaping both philosophy and theology. He

9 See especially Ricœur's treatment of Thomas Aquinas's *De Potentia* in *The Rule of Metaphor* for a further consideration of the distinction between speculative and poetic discourse.

10 Charles E. Reagan, "Interview avec Paul Ricœur", *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1991): 157. Translation my own.

11 Christoph Mandry, "The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology in the Recent Work of Paul Ricœur", in *Memory, Narrativity, Self and the Challenge to Think God*: *The Reception within Theology of the Recent Work of Paul Ricœur*, ed. Maureen Junker-Kenny and Peter Kenny (LIT Verlag, 2004), 72.

12 Paul Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction, Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay* (Polity Press, 1998), 140.

13 Ibid.

turns to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant as the needed alternative to Hegelian frameworks. As Alison Scott-Baumann has observed, by contrast with the determinist character of Absolute Knowledge, Kant's philosophy represented "a practical philosophy that stresses human capacities for action"[14]. Philosophy in the Kantian sense, Ricœur suggests, encounters hope not as a distinct object of thought, but as what he calls an "approximation,"[15] an idea that can only be attempted to be thought but not grasped and thus lies at the very horizon of its reasoning. Hope appears repeatedly through Kant's critiques, as a limit that reshapes the structure of philosophical enquiry. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant comes to the conclusion that we cannot achieve an understanding of the unconditioned from conditions. This is a "repudiation by reason of its absolute claim."[16] Although this is a limit on the powers of reason — "reason must first despair"[17] — yet nevertheless Ricœur argues that this is profoundly hopeful because it represents the rejection of the illusion that we might somehow achieve absolute knowledge. Thus, as Maureen Junker-Kenny has articulated, "it leaves open the possibility to "think" beyond them, in the shape of postulates such as freedom."[18]

The *Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned with the good and "extends to the will the same structure, the same act of ending the philosophical discourse in a way that both breaks a closure and opens a horizon."[19] The limit on the will is that we cannot "acquire by ourselves" congruence between virtue and happiness, "between the work of humankind and the fulfilment of the desire that constitutes human existence... a connection between the purity of heart and satisfaction of our most intimate desire."[20] We can only hope for that congruence, rather than achieving it. Thus freedom and God appear again as postulates, not subject to speculative reasoning. God is a rational

14 Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Negation of Happiness* (Bloomsbury, 2013), 72.

15 Paul Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", in *Figuring the Sacred Religion, Narrative and Imagination*, ed. Mark Wallace (Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), 216. Originally published in 1970 in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Society*.

16 Ibid., 213.

17 Ibid., 212.

18 Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Religion and Public Reason: A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricœur* (de Gruyter, 2014), 260.

19 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 213.

20 Ibid., 213–4.

postulate, since God remains a response to the practical level and thus "the necessity of hope is not epistemological but practical and existential."[21]

These limits introduced by the earlier Critiques offer a foundation for what *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* then establishes: our knowledge has limits, our power has limits and one of those limits is the reality of evil, of our will captured in some way by evil. Junker-Kenny's articulation of the problem at hand here is especially helpful. It is "how the agent's capability can be regained after becoming culpable, as an inescapable question of individual hope."[22] As Ricœur puts it, even in the face of evil, "a real liberty can only be hoped."[23] That liberty is found in what Kant called the 'regeneration' of the will, toward the good and he leaves it as "the task of 'religion within the limits of reason alone' to elaborate the condition of possibility of this regeneration without alienating freedom either to a magical conception of grace and salvation, or to an authoritarian organisation of the religious community."[24]

Religion, specifically Christian thinking, offers a particular assertion of that condition of possibility in its own hopeful narration of the human condition. Ricœur proposes (while noting his lack of authority on the question) that the theological significance of hope is in the character of Christian thinking as eschatological. A distinctively Christian theology declares a God who is yet to come, rather than an ontologically eternal being made manifest as the Hellenistic legacy instead emphasises.[25] Thus, hope is not presented as something proven, but as a kind of assertion for the future: a new way of understanding oneself in the face of death, of despair: "seen from the standpoint of hope, life is not only the contrary of but the denial of death."[26] In this sense then Christian hope inaugurates a new way of living, a new rationality. This is a logic of love that goes beyond mere *do ut des* exchanges (I give so that you may give), and which we take up as our new law, asserting it as a chosen rationality: "Freedom is the capacity to live according to the paradoxical law of superabundance, of

21 Ibid.

22 Junker-Kenny, *Religion and Public Reason*, 263.

23 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 215.

24 Ibid. The translation here is perhaps a little unclear — freedom should not be reduced or made strange to its real meaning by linking it with a hermetic system of grace, or a rigid hierarchy.

25 See also Paul Ricœur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope: Translated by Robert Sweeney", in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Idhe (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), 407.

26 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 206.

denying death and asserting an excess of sense over non-sense, in all desperate situations."[27] Thus the logic of Christian superabundance represents precisely that renewal of freedom, which is "the very content of hope."[28]

Here we see that the content of hope is named when religious thinking meets philosophy at the point of philosophy's rational approximation of hope in the face of its own limits. Ultimately then Ricœur can characterise philosophy in the Kantian mode as "saying something of the Easter-preaching. But why it knows and what it says remains within the limits of reason alone. In this self-restraint abide both the responsibility and the modesty of philosophy."[29] Philosophy itself may even need to continue with 'regeneration', rather than the religious name of hope.

Already we begin to see that the great theme of hope in Ricœur's work is intertwined with the notion of limits, introduced here at both the existential and the ethical levels. I suggest that we can see these levels playing out in two major works, separated by thirty years and representative of different stages of Ricœur's consideration of the human person: his 1960 *La symbolique du mal*, and *Soi-même comme un autre* in 1990. Both explore hope arising in response to negative limits: dread, and the tragic, respectively, and do so through the symbolic resources of myth, including religious myth. Yet although the human condition is framed by this interplay, I will argue that hope is what ultimately helps point toward the prospects for political life.

III. HOPE, IN THE FACE OF...

As we noted above, Ricœur's early work focused on the fallible human person, which was primarily driven by his interest in a phenomenology of the will. Specifically that was begun in his work in1950 on the interplay of voluntary and involuntary action, translated into English as *Freedom and Nature*. The works of 1960, *L'homme faillible* and *La symbolique du mal*, translated later as *Fallible Man* (1965) and *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967), build on this beginning, and it is the latter of these with which our exploration will begin, already introducing hope by way of the tragic.

27 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 207.
28 Ricœur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope", 422.
29 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 216.

The Symbolism of Evil

The *Symbolism* represents Ricœur's concern with the transition from "the possibility of evil in man (*sic*) to its reality, fallibility to fault".[30] It also constitutes a significant engagement with religious resources, since, as Ricœur argues:

> In fact there is no direct, nonsymbolic language of evil undergone, suffered, or committed; whether man admits his responsibility or claims to be the prey of an evil which takes hold of him, he does so first and foremost in a symbolism whose articulations can be traced out thanks to various rituals of "confession" that the history of religion has interpreted for us.[31]

Ricœur therefore proceeds from what he calls "primary symbols" of evil — stain, sin, guilt — not as a theologian, but with the aim of building "a hermeneutics of rational symbols whose task is to reconstitute the layers of meaning which have become sedimented in the concept."[32] This is not an attempt at finding an explanation in the symbol, but rather its "dark analogical riches."[33]

It is in his consideration of the first of these, stain or defilement, that Ricœur makes what I find to be an especially fascinating remark. The symbol of defilement (harm, intrusion, suffering, etc.) is something that "is experienced subjectively in a specific feeling which is of the order of Dread. Man enters into the ethical world through fear and not through love."[34] A later explication puts it: "Man asks himself: since I experience this failure, this sickness, this evil, what sin have I committed?"[35] At this level of the primary symbol, what we are dreading is the experience of defilement as a consequence: "suffering evil clings to doing evil as punishment proceeds ineluctably from defilement."[36]

When Ricœur turns to consider dread, then — standing for an originary experience of fear of harm — he sees the self-reflexive move introducing fault as an ethical implication. He explains:

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30 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 3.

31 Paul Ricœur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection", *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1962): 193.

32 Ricœur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection", 210.

33 Paul Ricœur, "'Original Sin': A Study in Meaning", in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Don Idhe (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), 282.

34 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 30.

35 Ibid., 41.

36 Ibid., 31.

> that dread contains in germ all the later moments, because it conceals within itself the secret of its own passing; for it is already ethical dread and not merely physical fear, dread of a danger which is itself ethical and which, at a higher level of the consciousness of evil, will be the danger of not being able to love any more, the danger of being a dead man in the realm of ends.[37]

Ricœur's analysis is that this is a fundamentally ethical concern with our own failure, perhaps more existentially our inability, to seek the good that strikes at the heart of who we are as individual human persons. "A spiritual death" he describes it, "a diminution of existence, a loss of the personal core of one's being."[38] In this way, fallibility is the "constitutional weakness that makes evil possible,"[39] but dread introduces fault: "because fate belongs to freedom as the non-chosen portion of all our choices, it must be experienced as fault."[40]

This may seem a strange place to begin the consideration of hope in the work of Ricœur, but as Bernard Dauenhauer has observed, the outworking of that dynamic of fault and freedom is that "if fallibility makes human evil possible, it also makes genuinely human goodness, knowledge and achievement possible."[41] Even the limiting choices that one makes that close off other paths, Ricœur is able to articulate hopefully: "in an existential sense: to become oneself is to fail to realize wholeness, which nevertheless remains the end, the dream, the horizon, and that which the Idea of happiness points to."[42]

So fascinatingly, even in the moment of Dread there is a moment of hope. As Peter Kemp has proposed, "by thinking an existential negation to its end, one is brought to an affirmation of existence which [Nabert] calls 'original affirmation.'"[43] Thus this consideration of Dread, introduces the possibility of fault, but therefore also the possibility of right choices. We can see the roots of this insight already in *Fallible Man* where, considering Jean Nabert's

37 Ibid., 30.

38 Ibid., 41.

39 Ricœur, *Fallible Man* (Fordham Univ. Press, 1986), xiii.

40 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 313.

41 Bernard Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricœur: The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 62.

42 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 312.

43 Peter Kemp, "Ricœur between Heidegger and Lévinas: original affirmation between ontological attestation and ethical injunction", *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 21, no. 5-6 (1995): 43.

Eléments pour une éthique[44], Ricœur uncovers that "the avowal of fault is, at the same time, the discovery of freedom."[45] Thus, the assessment of the symbols of evil produces:

> an interpretation in which evil as far as possible is reset within the context of freedom; in which, therefore, evil is an invention of freedom. Reciprocally, an ethical vision of evil is a vision in which freedom is revealed in its depths as power to act and power to be; the freedom that evil supposes is a freedom capable of digression, deviation, subversion, wandering. This mutual "explanation" of evil by freedom and of freedom by evil is the essence of the moral vision of the world and of evil.[46]

Thus the symbols of evil bring to the surface the "fateful aspects," with which Ricœur's work on fallibility is always ultimately concerned: the freedom of the self is not posited as in Cartesian philosophy but rather "in a dialogue with the conditions in which it itself is rooted."[47]

There are two key elements to establish from this brief exploration. Firstly, we begin to see the working out of the relationship with religious discourse in Ricœur's philosophy. He does not reason from religious discourse, but reflects philosophically upon its resources. The cultural resources of religious myth articulate "everything which the believer experiences in a fugitive fashion and confesses in an allusive way... inexpressible in direct and clear language."[48] In this sense it is the myths "*revealing* power concerning the human condition as a whole which constitutes its *revealed* meaning."[49]

Secondly, what is revealed is something radical. Although Ricœur's work here indicates that fear is a kind of originary moment for ethics, hope arises as an originary assertion in the face of that fear. This interplay makes sense of later references by Ricœur to "the fundamental relation of history to violence,"[50] and his acceptance of Hobbes' political anthropology of fear. One cannot approach

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44 Jean Nabert, *Eléments pour une éthique* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1943). Ricœur would go on to write the Preface to the second edition of the *Eléments* in the same year as he published *L'homme faillible*.

45 Paul Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, xlvii.

46 Ricœur, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection", 205.

47 Paul Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Chicago Univ. Press, 1966), 18.

48 Ricœur, "'Original Sin'", 283.

49 Ibid., 284.

50 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting: Translated by Kathleen Blamey* (Chicago Univ. Press, 2006), 79.

Ricœur's work on the capable human without continuing to place it in relation to this early work on the conditions of its freedom. Still there remains an original affirmation of hope even in these early studies, which we will see transforms Ricœur's thinking in contrast with the Hobbesian solution.

Oneself as Another

In *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur considers the human person in terms of her capacity to speak, to act, to narrate and to impute action to herself, introducing conditions of possibility that already show a more positive framing. At the same time, Ricœur constructs these capacities in terms of self-reflection and inter-subjectivity, mediated by institutions. He thereby introduces an explicitly ethical approach to his continuing concern with human nature. Thus the later studies of this work begin to build up the levels of ethical reasoning that are bound up in the human person in relation with others. Those levels are the ethical aim, the test of the moral norm, and finally practical wisdom.

The ethical aim is the aim of the good life, living well, with and for others, in just institutions, and is marked by the intuitions of self-esteem, solicitude, and the sense of justice.[51] The plurality of teleological visions meets at the test or the "sieve of the norm,"[52] where diverse persons, mediated by institutions, agree on certain limits on moral norms and obligations. The structural conflict appears when Ricœur argues that "a morality of obligation... produces conflictual situations where practical wisdom has no recourse, in our opinion, other than to return to the initial intuition of ethics."[53] Thus practical wisdom is introduced as the moment where these visions and principles meet the judgement of particular situations — the tension between particular and universal.

Practical wisdom is thus a way of deliberatively engaging with potential contradictions and conflicts of morals and ethics in particular situations, by "reawakening the resources of singularity inherent in the aim of the true life."[54] This means returning to the intuition of ethics as for the good life, with and for others, in just institutions and thus shaped by solicitude for the other,

51 For a more thorough reconstruction of these elements of Ricœur's ethics see Amy Daughton, *With and For Others: Developing Ricœur's Ethics of Self using Aquinas's Language of Analogy* (Herder Verlag, 2016).

52 Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago Univ. Press, 1992), 170.

53 Ibid., 240.

54 Ibid.

and a sense of justice. In this way the conflict between ethical and moral in real situations is already being heralded as a genuinely productive one, returning consideration back to the teleological level to find a route through the difficulty. It is for this reason that John Wall can address Ricœur's ethics by emphasising its roots in the Greek *phronêsis* of "acting well in society."[55]

For our exploration of hope and the tragic, we might find Ricœur's practical wisdom tipping toward the hopeful. Indeed, Fred Dallmayr has complained that *phronêsis* enters Ricœur's ethics as a kind of "*deus ex machina*,"[56] easily resolving conflict. However, practical wisdom is not the resolving capstone to a disagreement. Instead it arises at the point which Ricœur would later call "the enigmatic point of the conversion of plurality into hostility."[57] Ricœur turns again to mythic expressions of this intuition, by taking up Sophocles' *Antigone.* This play treats the aftermath of the conflict between Antigone's brothers over rule of Thebes. Their deaths have led to Creon taking the throne and his early act is to refuse to permit burial or mourning for Polynices, one of Antigone's brothers. Antigone insists on performing the rites regardless, and tragedy ensues in the consequent reactions. The play is frequently taken as a classic expression of conflict over incommensurable goods. Civic order versus godly piety proves impossible to resolve and this is used by Ricœur to illustrate "the hubris of practical reason itself."[58]

As noted above, this hesitation regarding too easy a resolution is already at play in the *Symbolism*, where Ricœur observes that even the choices we make freely for ourselves are of a limiting kind. For example, Ricœur asks, "who can realise himself without excluding not only possibilities, but also realities and existences, and consequently without destroying?"[59] Already that level is being indicated in the other mythic utterances that Ricœur treats in a text such as *Antigone*, where:

> [she] and Creon destroy one another, and there is no third force that might mediate their opposition and embrace the good reasons of both. That a

55 John Wall, *Moral Creativity: Paul Ricœur and the Poetics of Possibility* (OUP, 2005), 5.

56 Fred Dallmayr, "Ethics and Public Life: A Critical Tribute to Paul Ricœur", in *Paul Ricœur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. John Wall, William Schweiker and David W. Hall (Routledge, 2002), 225.

57 Paul Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just* (Chicago Univ. Press, 2007), 25.

58 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 241.

59 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 312.

> value cannot be realized without the destruction of another value, equally positive — there again is the tragic.[60]

As Robert Piercey has observed, "Tragedy illustrates the conflicts that occur within rationality"[61] and thus tragedy reintroduces the *Symbolism*'s existential concern at the ethical level. As Ricœur emphasises, this clash is of the "one-sidedness of the moral principles which themselves are confronted with the complexity of life,"[62] from which there may simply be no good way out. This is a challenge so fundamental that Ricœur later proposed that his work on this reality "should become the crucial chapter" of his whole ethical project[63].

Yet the route through inevitable conflict is found in the continuing interplay of the tragic with the real hope for the possibility of acting well. Indeed, there is a sense in which tragedy itself offers hope by nourishing our resources for critiquing our own and others' convictions. In that sense, ethical conflict offers "instruction wholly immanent to the tragic itself."[64] The tragic story of *Antigone* introduces us to the idea of conviction — a principled stance — but also to the Chorus's repeated exhortation to "deliberate well."[65]

Throughout his work, Ricœur takes seriously the incompletion of solutions to practical, intransigent problems. No perfect translation exists; no solution for genuinely incommensurable goods is available[66]. Yet it is in the deliberation, in the attempt to translate, that we can learn from the other, rather than collapse into fear of her. This is characteristic of Ricœur's own

60 Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 323. But see also amongst others Martha Nussbaum on non-Western examples, such as the *Mahabarata*: Martha Nussbaum, "Ricœur on Tragedy: Teleology, Deontology, Phronesis", in *Paul Ricœur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. John Wall, William Schweiker and David W. Hall (Routledge, 2002).

61 Robert Piercey, "The Role of Greek Tragedy in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur", *Philosophy Today* 49, no. 1 (2005): 3.

62 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 249.

63 Paul Ricœur, "Ethics and Human Capability: A Response", in *Paul Ricœur and Contemporary Moral Thought*, ed. John Wall, William Schweiker and David W. Hall (Routledge, 2002), 288.

64 Piercey, "The Role of Greek Tragedy in the Philosophy of Paul Ricœur", 3. An important influence may also have been Karl Jaspers on tragic wisdom: Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wehrweit* (Piper Verlag, 1947), 915–60.

65 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 247. c.f. Gaëlle Fiasse, "La phronesis dans l'ethique de Paul Ricœur", in *Le jugement pratique*: *Autour de la notion de phronesis*, ed. Danielle Lories and Laura Rizzerio (Vrin, 2008).

66 See Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Negation of Happiness*, which treats the role of the negative throughout Ricœur's work.

philosophical method of dialectic debate, and of keeping that argument open as long as possible.

Moreover, such conflicts can arise even within our own commitments, prompting us to turn to the other to seek to make sense of a vision of the good. Ricœur recalls to the attention of the reader the nature of the ethical ground: rooted in a shared development of self-esteem, solicitude and the sense of justice, made universal principles in the shared test of the norm. This further explicates what a conviction is — a principled stance that arises in a social context and can also be upheld against it. Thus practical wisdom is consistently directed by an ethical intuition that is social and oriented to the other. Hence Scott-Baumann has noted that what characterises practical wisdom is that "it adheres to respect for persons", while it also "attempts to reconcile opposed claims and seeks to avoid arbitrariness."[67] What this requires is that we turn our concern to the individuals within the particular situation, as a singular fulfilment of the ethical concern with the good life, lived with and for others, in just institutions. The treatment of those individuals feeds and shapes the wider social context in which future decisions might be made. This is why Ricœur argues that "in the conflicts to which morality gives rise, only a recourse to the ethical ground against which morality stands out can give rise to the wisdom of judgement in situation."[68] Practical wisdom cleaves to the ethical sensibilities of solicitude and justice in "intractable, nonnegotiable"[69] situations, because, while there are no good solutions, there could be worse solutions.

Practical wisdom is rightly humbled by the detour through tragedy, and can only be considered a limited response to the encounter of conflicting principles. However, Ricœur's conception of it as returning to place the singular situation against the horizon of the envisioned ethical life with and for others, also heralds hope in that vision, and its practical outworking. It is with its outworking understood as political with which the final section is concerned and where we also see the return of religion once again as a contribution to hope, not only the utterances of dread.

67 Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (Continuum, 2011), 143.
68 Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 249.
69 Ibid., 248.

IV. HOPE FOR THE POLITICAL

I open this closing segment with Dauenhauer's powerful expression of hope in relation to politics: hope is not an ever-receding horizon, but a "way of bearing the present into the future"[70].

Much of Ricœur's own politically focused work can be seen in his critical essays on political philosophers in *Ideology and Utopia*, and then later in the wake of his ethics. However, for the purpose of this study, I turn to a very early collection, *History and Truth*, originally published in French in 1955. The essays gathered in this work treat issues in history but frequently do so in relation to the questions of power that lie behind both the writing and the reality of historical events. As the translator Charles Kelbley observes in his introduction, the focus on power at the practical level draws out the continuing "ambiguous nature of man,"[71] with which the themes of hope and tragedy have repeatedly been concerned above.

"Power is the central question of politics: Who commands? For whom? Within what limits and under what conditions?"[72] As my earlier allusion to Ricœur's use of Hobbes already indicates, power introduces for him the fear of the other and the violent response. This is a practical expression of the ambiguity Kelbley names. As Dauenhauer aptly describes it, "Power, as the capacity to shape the conduct of men among themselves and in their dealings with nature, is one of man's splendors. And yet this very splendor is prone to evil, prone to destructive exercise."[73] So here at the political level, the existential and ethical limits of human nature return. Many of the essays in *History and Truth* are concerned with confronting this reality of power in the political, understood as requiring a certain coercion, even a certain violence.

Still in the face of this somewhat pessimistic assessment, the citizen is not given over to despair, but is instead confronted with his own culpability in relation to political power, in institutions and practices: "One could not infer a political defeatism on the basis of this lucidity. Such a reflection leads

70 Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricœur*, 92.

71 Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth* (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), xvii. Originally published in French in 1955.

72 Ibid., 91.

73 Bernard Dauenhauer, *The Politics of Hope* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 176.

rather to a political vigilance."[74] That vigilance is called to praxis, and even here in the mid-1950s, we can see the beginnings of what Ricœur would more systematically consider in terms of practical wisdom: "discussion is a vital necessity for the State; through discussion it is given orientation and impetus; discussion curbs its tendency to abuse power."[75] It is also this vigilance which Peggy Avez argues Ricœur connects directly with "tentative hope," since hope returns to traditions of politics their own intention to make people free:

> Ricœur restores to the critical project its necessary positivity. To be fruitful, criticism must be compelled to resist the totalization of suspicion, its extension into a vision of the world. By virtue of the emancipatory ambition, inscribed in their own traditions, the critical attitude must also allow hope.[76]

Hope here arises from the critical attitude, as enriching debate may arise from disagreement at the ethical level. Rather than merely abstract, at this political level are concrete resources for reimagining the intention to make people free. Such a re-envisioning:

> [shares] in the particularity of its context of origin. It will be connected to the founding promises of a culture, reinvigorating its unrealized hopes, drawing on possibilities marginalized by historical circumstances, and holding up a mirror to the power arrangements of the current stage. By imagining a different world, utopias reveal a critical, reflective capacity.[77]

We see here the cultural resources for non-religious hope also, found in the moral recognition of broken promises to be fulfilled in the future. Still, Avez's assessment also reminds us that the frontier of political hope returns Ricœur to the resources of religion, which for him name his own particular heritage. Here Ricœur again comes to the limits of what his philosophy can build and turns instead to the narratives of religion to give content to what political hope can mean. For him, walking on two legs, this means stepping from philosophy into a biblically grounded response.

It is in the essay "The Image of God and the Epic of Man" where the originary expressions of the Christian faith community can be seen as a hopeful reinterpretation of politics:

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74 Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 261.

75 Ibid., 270.

76 Peggy Avez, "Une espérance post-critique ? Enjeux critiques de la conception ricœurienne de l'imaginaire social", Études Ricœuriennes 5, no. 2 (2014): 29. My translation.

77 Junker-Kenny, *Religion and Public Reason*, 196.

> Mankind is not only preserved through the medium of the political sphere, but is also established, elevated, and educated by it. If this education falls outside of the order of redemption, then what does it have to do with the Gospel and why does St Paul speak of it? And if redemption does not include the actual history of men, which is, in art, political, does it not become abstract and unreal?[78]

Here Ricœur gives the history of politics seeking liberation the religious name of redemption. To be clear, he is not evoking Paul of Tarsus in an attempt to render politics itself theological, as if a theocracy was more likely to establish justice. Rather he is identifying within Christian scripture the religious recognition of political institutions, "instituted by God, not when they are clerical, but rather when they are just."[79] Justice must still be sought, and deliberated on, and Ricœur's turn to scripture frames that task as recognisable within a religious understanding of the human person. He observes that,

> we are reluctant to speak of redemption at the level of the political development of mankind, because we have lost one of the fundamental meanings of redemption, namely, the growth of humanity, its coming to maturity, its state of adulthood.[80]

Redemption thus bears a double meaning: eschatological in the Christian hope of the new creation, but also eschatological in Dauenhauer's sense of bearing the present into the future. Hope here becomes a meeting point of the symbolic utterances and visions of religion, and the similarly culturally contingent histories of justice and liberation, sought by politics, both separately and together offering resources for a reimagined life together. The Christian hope of right relationships of love summons political deliberation and action to seek a transformed vision of itself. As Ricœur argues "this utopian ideal is vital for the very destiny of the political order. It gives the political sphere its aim, its tension and, if I may use the term, its hope."[81] Elsewhere, he more sharply articulates this as "reminding [the State] why it exists: to lead men to equality and freedom."[82]

78 Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 122.
79 Ibid., 123.
80 Ibid., 122.
81 Ibid., 123.
82 Ibid., 124.

Of course, other utopian visions exist: that is precisely the dilemma that *Oneself as Another* grappled with through the consideration of practical wisdom. Ricœur is not introducing the Christian understanding of redemption as a transformation of the world in order to argue for its superiority, but to retrieve from it part of the symbolic heritages that shape the plural political space. These particular heritages contribute to the universal, shared level of politics, rather than subsuming it. As Maureen Junker-Kenny has argued, this distinction, "allows for a dialectic in which one [tradition] can correct the other and drive it to a higher level"[83] including between religious and non-religious traditions. Ricœur's continued emphasis on the ethical as the returning emphasis in practical wisdom underscores this. The solution is always hermeneutical.

Thus, the resources of cultural imagination, including religion, represent a needed register of thinking–"a direct functionality for the project of democracy"[84]–which sits at and beyond the very limits of philosophical reasoning.

> In the broad sense of the word, these images of reconciliation are *myths*, not in the positivistic sense of legend or fable, but in the phenomenological sense of religion, in the sense of a meaningful story of the destiny of the whole human race... The imagination, insofar as it has a mytho-poetic function, is also the seat of profound workings which govern the decisive changes in our visions of the world. Every *real* conversion is first a revolution at the level of our directive images. By changing his imagination, man alters his existence.[85]

V. CONCLUSION

It would be easy to follow the thread of hope through Ricœur's work into complacency, casting him as a fundamentally irenic thinker, erasing the real tragedy of moral conflict. In fact hope only makes sense as a confrontation with real difficulty, perhaps the "impossibly difficult"[86]. While on one hand we are rightly reminded by Dauenhauer that "political critique must never

83 Junker-Kenny, *Religion and Public Reason*, 298.
84 Ibid., 299.
85 Ricœur, *History and Truth*, 127.
86 Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Negation of Happiness*, 23.

fail to recognize that the possibility of great political projects for human betterment is inseparable from guilt", yet we can also conclude, like him, that "the appropriate response is one of hope."[87] We have seen this interplay, of hope as the response to dread, to tragedy, to the limits and conditions of human freedom, mapped right through Ricœur's work, in both the "fallible" and the "capable" periods of his consideration of the human person. The symbolic resources of religion and engagement with the other offer meaningfulness to these limits, both the hope and the dread, articulating the existential fear but also replenishing our political imagination.

Where Ricœur concludes, in his sprawling, diverse philosophical projects, is that it is ultimately up to us to choose hope, to reject the Hobbesian fear. Although politics remains a discourse and a practice bounded by tragedy and hope, it is hope which represents the fulfilment of the conditions of our freedom, and it is hope which represents the imaginative resources that seek a way out of the tragic conflict. In this way, "Hope is not a theme that comes after other themes, an idea that closes the system, but an impulse that opens the system, that breaks the closure of the system; it is a way of opening what was unduly closed."[88]

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87 Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricœur*, 32.

88 Ricœur, "Hope and the Structure of Philosophical Systems", 211.

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