

## Limiting Evil: The Value of Ideology for the Mitigation of Political Alienation in Ricœur's Political Paradox

Darryl Dale-Ferguson  
University of Chicago

### Abstract

This paper uses Paul Ricœur's analyses of ideology to argue for the mitigation of the possibility of political evil within the political paradox. In explicating the paradox, Ricœur seeks to hold in tension two basic aspects of politics: its benefits and its propensity to evil. This tension, however, should not be viewed as representative of a dualism. The evil of politics notwithstanding, Ricœur encourages us to view the political order as a deeply important part of our shared existence. By thinking past the distorting function of ideology to the legitimating and integrating functions that Ricœur calls more basic than distortion, a mode of thought that is often at the heart of political evil, ideology can be used to mitigate that very evil.

*Keywords:* Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," Ideology, Political Violence, Justice.

### Résumé

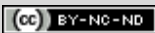
Cet article s'appuie sur les analyses ricœuriennes de l'idéologie dans le but de montrer que l'idéologie est susceptible de contribuer à une atténuation du mal politique inhérent au paradoxe politique. Dans son explicitation de ce paradoxe, Ricœur cherche à mettre en relation tensionnelle deux aspects fondamentaux de la politique: ses avantages et ses maux. Cependant, cette tension ne devrait pas être interprétée comme l'expression d'un dualisme. En dépit du mal inhérent au politique, Ricœur nous encourage à voir l'ordre politique comme une partie profondément importante de notre existence partagée. Si l'on régresse en-deçà de la fonction de distorsion de l'idéologie vers ses fonctions légitimantes et intégratrices, c'est-à-dire vers ses fonctions les plus fondamentales, il apparaît en effet que l'idéologie, tout en étant souvent au cœur du mal politique, peut néanmoins être utilisée pour atténuer ce mal.

*Mots-clés:* Ricœur, paradoxe politique, ideologie, violence politique, justice.

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 5, No 2 (2014), pp. 48-63

ISSN 2155-1162 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2014.258

<http://ricoeur.pitt.edu>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#) of the [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

# Limiting Evil: The Value of Ideology for the Mitigation of Political Alienation in Ricœur's Political Paradox

Darryl Dale-Ferguson  
University of Chicago

## Introduction

When writing "The Political Paradox" in the mid-1950s, the persistence of the State as a historical actor seemed to Paul Ricœur to be a foregone conclusion. In today's global world the perennial nature of the State cannot be taken for granted. And yet the presence of the State and its actions vis-à-vis its own citizens and the international community remain a very real part of contemporary political life. The oppressive and violent nature of the State is one of the leading concerns on this front. And it was a leading concern of Ricœur who, in "The Political Paradox" attempts to grapple with the simple fact of the State and its tendency to political evil, a specific kind of violence. Simply put, the paradox holds in tension the benefit and risk of politics, the good and evil of political organization. Ricœur maintains that these two aspects of reality cannot be overcome, one simply cannot be subsumed by the other; it is, ultimately, impossible to resolve the political paradox. I intend to show that by using his analysis of ideology to understand politics it is possible to mitigate the threat of political evil.

This essay will outline the political paradox that Ricœur develops in his essay of the same name. Particular attention will be paid to the distinction between the originary polity and the subsequent possibility of political alienation. In order to illuminate the concept of political alienation I propose a close reading of parts of Ricœur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, where the imaginative force of ideology in particular will prove to be central to addressing the political paradox. These lectures will thus form the basis for reading back into the political paradox the possibility of its amelioration. By viewing ideology in its positive mode, as proposed by Ricœur in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, the negative aspect of the political paradox that he identifies can be mitigated. The paradox cannot be resolved; the possibility of political evil remains. However, consistent with Ricœur's own strategy, through recourse to the integrative stage of ideology I seek to provide an alternative to the crippling effect of the inevitability of political evil expressed by the political paradox.

By reading the political paradox through the lens of a positively conceived ideology, the State will appear in its rightful place as an aid to the fulfillment of human good. Against the often unbridled growth of government power and the egregious offences that governments around the world perpetrate against the governed it is tempting to think that the exercise of political power is simply evil. But to call all politics evil is to ignore the degree to which Ricœur views political power as legitimately and even vitally exercised. To reject politics as merely evil would deny the possibility of amending socially organizing institutions to the benefit of humanity.

## The Political Paradox

For Paul Ricœur, the political sphere is home to a troubling paradox. On the one hand, it unites and organizes people according to similar values and for the pursuit of similar goods, thus contributing to the equality of citizens and their abilities to flourish. On the other hand, the very act of organizing politically entails the installation of an authority and the inauguration of practices of power that are fundamentally alienating, that do violence to citizens. As Ricœur puts it, the paradox is “that the greatest evil adheres to the greatest rationality, that there is political alienation because polity is relatively autonomous.”<sup>1</sup> Evil inheres in the very ends and means of political organization, which is the very necessity of human social existence. The inescapability of this potential for evil gives exigency to the paradox. That the paradox Ricœur is referring to is political is emphasized by the causal relation indicated in the latter half of this quotation, which should not be taken to mean that there is alienation because there is autonomy, but rather that there is specifically political alienation because polity is relatively autonomous, meaning that it is irreducible to other categories, notably socio-economics. The paradox is a political paradox because it addresses itself specifically to the political sphere, and the evil to which it refers is specifically political evil because it is different in kind from other human evils.

While Ricœur is at pains to demonstrate that there is a political paradox, the central problem is not that there is a paradox, but that there is evil. Evil indicates suffering that is unjust. The identification of a specifically political paradox is instrumental to identifying the exercises of power that usher in political evil with the purpose of eradicating or more likely mitigating the effects of such actions or practices. Ricœur demonstrates a methodology for exactly this when he outlines a critique of power in a socialist state in the third part of “The Political Paradox.” The present essay takes a different approach to the same problem, an engagement with the positive aspects of ideology.

In the evil at the heart of the political paradox is a specific kind of alienation. Reference to this alienation raises at least two questions. The first question: From what is one politically alienated? The answer to this question is relatively simple insofar as Ricœur’s argument depends on an important distinction between the political, or polity, and politics. The second question: What is the nature of political alienation? While Ricœur engages Marx’s critique extensively, he is least clear on the issue of alienation, at least as he addresses it in “Political Paradox.” But there are important clues to what alienation looks like, and there are certainly passages in other texts that provide details that should not be overlooked. I will address the “what” of political alienation after first having considered the “from what” of alienation.

From what are individuals politically alienated? The short answer is polity. Consider the following claim as regards the polity: “equality before the law, and the *ideal* equality of each before all, is the *truth* of polity. This is what constitutes the *reality* of the State...As soon as there is a State, a body politic, the organization of an historical community, there exists the reality of this ideality.”<sup>2</sup> Historical reality does not yet refer to the sphere of power, or if the temporal implications of “not yet” are problematic, then at least historical reality does not *only* refer to the sphere of power and its exercise. The historical presence of the State is, for Ricœur, the actualization in history of the idea of the equality of persons. Irrespective of the historical fact of the domination of persons by others, the State is not predicated on domination. The importance of this cannot be overstated. It marks the hope that I share with Ricœur that political violence can be mitigated by human action and intervention.

The interplay of the ideal and the real in Ricœur's conception of the State is part of his larger reflection on the idea of the social contract, drawn from Rousseau. Ricœur is under no illusion regarding the fictional nature of the social contract, which he refers to as a "ready-made fiction."<sup>3</sup> The pact stands outside of history and is thus operative always as an ideal concept. But importantly, this ideal has a hermeneutic function. The fictional nature of the social contract indicates that the contract represents an originary moment that by its very nature always lies in the past. It is not something that will have been; it is something that has been. Thus, Ricœur notes that it is only in retrospection that, "polity takes on meaning."<sup>4</sup> Polity is about the formation of a narrative through which a given community understands itself. Through this hermeneutic function the virtual act founds a historical community to which is given the title polity, and which represents, Ricœur suggests, the *telos* of the State that aligns Rousseau with Aristotle. "The pact which engenders the body politic is," Ricœur writes, "the *telos* of the State referred to by the Greeks."<sup>5</sup> The comparison is made clear if the opening lines of Aristotle's *Politics* are considered: "Since we see that every city is some sort of partnership, and that every partnership is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city of the political partnership."<sup>6</sup>

Ricœur sees in this the clear alignment of the political sphere with the human end of happiness. This does not mean that Ricœur espouses a single end of happiness toward which all aim. He recognizes the various and varied goods to which individuals aim, identified by each independently in basic reflection on a good life. One of the reasons that Ricœur develops his "little ethic" in *Oneself as Another* is the recognition of the validity of various individual goods within the broader context of a common good towards which the State is oriented. Thus, for Ricœur, politics is meant to represent the enhancement of the individual's capacity to seek the good and a mechanism for the adjudication of conflicting goods. Against this background, "Politics," Ricœur claims, "discloses its meaning only if its aim...can be linked up with the fundamental intention of philosophy itself, with the Good and with Happiness."<sup>7</sup> The creation of the contract is a response to goods sought, with the assumption that mutual cooperation will enhance the ability of members to the contract to achieve their sought after goods. In this way, polity serves, for Ricœur, as a positive concept for the realization of the rights of each to the pursuit of the good, and the benefit of the community for that very pursuit. The polity is a response to a central concern of human existence, the possibility of good.

If the goodness of human life together indicates the pole of polity in the paradox, the shift to the pole of political evil is brought about in the reflection on power within politics. The nature of the distinction between these poles is given in an important clarification, made in the English translation of "The Political Paradox" that appears in *History and Truth*. Addressing himself to the language that Ricœur employs throughout the text, the translator notes, "throughout this essay, particularly in the second section, the author contrasts polity (*le politique*) with politics (*la politique*). By polity, the author intends the ideal sphere of political organization and historical rationality; by politics, the empirical and concrete manifestations of this ideal sphere, the sum total of the means employed to implement the ideal sphere of polity."<sup>8</sup> Sociologist Oliver Marchart is illuminating on this distinction. He claims that the distinction is "between an ideal sphere of the political (the polity embodying rational concord), defined by a specific rationality, and the sphere of power (politics)."<sup>9</sup> By highlighting the concept of power as occupying the pole opposite to the political within the paradox, Marchart has picked up on the

key aspect motivating violence and political evil that will provide for me the bridge between “The Political Paradox” and *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. It is exactly the struggle for power and in particular the exercise of power over others that signals the nature of political evil with which Ricœur is concerned.

It is “politics defined by reference to power—which poses the problem of political evil.”<sup>10</sup> The interpretive movement at the heart of polity is not an exercise of power. This means that political evil is not present at the advent of polity. The advent of the political does not bring about political evil. It is only in the working out of polity where “politics is pursued step by step, in ‘prospection,’ in projects, that is to say both in an uncertain deciphering of contemporary events, and in the steadfastness of resolutions,”<sup>11</sup> that political evil is born. This is not to say that, according to Ricœur, we can imagine politics without violence, without alienation. Rather, because the political and political alienation are not co-originary a greater possibility for the mitigation of political evil opens up.

By arriving at the fact of political evil this way an important point can be noted. While the definition of politics with reference to power opens up the possibility of political evil, Ricœur is clear that power itself does not entail evil. “There is a problem of political evil because there is a specific problem of power. Not that power is evil. But power is one of the splendors of man that is eminently prone to evil.”<sup>12</sup> It is useful here to note the distinction that Ricœur will make later in his career between power-in-common and domination, a distinction that he borrows from Arendt.<sup>13</sup> Simply speaking, power is the capacity to act. When power is addressed in the sphere of the political, then it is deemed the capability for common action, or acting together. This too is borrowed from Arendt.<sup>14</sup> The presence of power in the sphere of the political does not represent political evil. It is only when the exercise of power creates asymmetry in the relations of members, contrary to the social contract, that political alienation comes into view. This is when politics becomes evil.

While Ricœur names a specifically political evil, and while it is clear that such evil refers to political alienation, there is little in the way of an analysis of abstract political evil in “The Political Paradox.” Ricœur discusses instances of political evil, including the exhortations of prophets in ancient Israel, the execution of Jesus as a political act, and the tyrant that is tied to lies, flattery and untruth in Plato’s writings.<sup>15</sup> Each of these examples has at its heart violence against others made possible by the fact that there are some who rule over others. What these examples demonstrate, thus, is that political evil is attached to a certain expression of power-over. The corollary to Arendt’s concept of power-in-common, noted above, is domination. Domination is alienation par excellence in that it takes political power, originally a part of power-in-common, and places it in the hands of one or a few.<sup>16</sup> At the heart of this shift is the concept of authority, with the question of legitimacy ultimately addressing itself to the emergence of political evil.

The difficulty of differentiating between the exercise of power and its abuse can be seen in Ricœur’s discussion of Machiavelli. Ricœur rightly notes that, “the Prince evinces the implacable logic of political action: the logic of means, the pure and simple techniques of acquiring and preserving power.”<sup>17</sup> If the specific problem of politics is the problem of power, then it is clearly the case that violence and alienation are intimately linked to the exercise of power. As Ricœur states here, politics is about power. But earlier in the essay Ricœur, in a characteristically hermeneutic move, invokes Aristotle and asserts that, for politics to be meaningful its aim must be linked to a conception of “the Good and with Happiness.”<sup>18</sup> Now, while this assertion appears in the section of the text dedicated to polity, Ricœur, this time, uses

politics (*la politique*) rather than polity (*le politique*). Thus he is referring to the circumstantial nature of political life and the specificity of context to which a given politics must respond. Given Ricœur's constant care in the deployment of language it can hardly be the case that he meant to write polity (*le politique*). What is one to make of this ambiguity? There is, on the one hand, the claim that politics is about power, that the machinations of politics are about the acquisition and preservation of power. The focus in this claim is on the means, though there remains a *telos*, which is power itself. On the other hand, politics is about, or is to be about the Good and Happiness, which means for Ricœur the general well-being of citizens with presumed equality and a limited infringement on individual opportunities to seek a personal good-life. Here, means are not identified but the *telos* remains central and clear, it is the happiness of the citizen(s). I must admit to an uncertain footing. Certainly the aim at happiness is present in the initial pact that establishes polity. There can be little doubt about this. But I submit that the aim at happiness remains a central issue in the analytical move from polity to politics, and that this is so is important for the hope that Ricœur embeds in his political theory and the possibility for mitigating the threat of political evil. As long as politics remains subservient to the good of the people — and this can only be determined through constant dialogue and policy refinement — then political evil is kept at bay. The moment people become the servants of power we are confronted with political evil.

Having located the source of political evil in a certain kind of exercise of power it remains to be shown what political alienation looks like for Ricœur. Though Ricœur does not provide a clear description of political alienation in "The Political Paradox," some elements of this alienation can be found in that essay. In his discussion of Marx's response to Hegel's theorization of the State Ricœur writes, "the essence of Marx's critique lies in exposing the illusion in this pretension. The State is not the true world of man but rather another and unreal world; it resolves real contradictions only in virtue of a fictive law which is, in turn, in contradiction with the real relationships between men."<sup>19</sup> This reading of Marx is particularly insightful in that it picks up on the symbolic nature of the State and its organizing elements. Whereas Hegel understood the State to be an accurate, a real representation of humanity, Marx criticizes the State for being a distorted representative of human relationships. It is on account of this distortion that Ricœur will ultimately join Marx in a critique of ideology. In this text, "The Political Paradox," Ricœur does not yet attach significance to the way in which ideology is functioning here; indeed the term ideology does not yet appear. Rather, Ricœur criticizes Marx for the claim that all alienation is based on wage relations and is thus economic alienation. Because, in contrast, Ricœur is writing about political alienation he can point to the actual experience of socialism in the 20th century as evidence against Marx's idea of the "withering away of the State." The socialist state, perhaps more than any other system of governance, increased remarkably in size and power under Marxist-Leninist influences.

Insofar as Marx views the State as distorting human relations he proves useful to Ricœur's argument for a political paradox. The challenge to political thought is that,

the political sphere is divided between the *ideal* of sovereignty and the *reality* of power, between sovereignty and the sovereign, between the constitution and the government... This is of the essence of political evil. No State exists without a government, an administration, a police force; consequently, the phenomenon of political alienation traverses all regimes and is found within all constitutional forms. Political society involves this external contradiction between an ideal sphere of legal relations and a real sphere of



communal relations—and this internal contradiction between sovereignty and the sovereign, between the constitution and power or, in the extreme, the police. We aspire to attain a State wherein the radical contradiction which exists between the universality pursued by the State and the particularity and caprice which it evinces in reality would be resolved. The evil is that this aspiration is not within our reach.<sup>20</sup>

The distinction between an external contradiction and an internal contradiction is illuminating. Earlier, I argued that political evil must not be viewed as co-originary with the political sphere, that it was important to hold them apart philosophically regardless of the historical outworking of political action. Here, in commenting on Marx's critique of the State, Ricœur provides a clear methodological way to distinguish between the nature of the State and its propensity to violence, to evil. It is in the internal contradiction that evil appears. Prior to this, the contradiction between the ideal sphere and the real sphere of community is marked by the problematic of a dialectic of equality and authority. There is not yet violence or evil. Violence emerges when authority is attached to a concrete person or group with a concomitant shift of the priority of politics from a *telos* of happiness to a *telos* of power. One of the best ways to understand this shift is through the nuances of ideology developed by Ricœur in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.

## Ideology

The preceding analysis of "The Political Paradox" is in need of some assistance if it is to achieve clarity. The formation of the goals of good and happiness corresponding to the formation of a community of persons with shared interests, the authorization of leadership or rulers, and the shift from the goal of happiness to the goal of power are three areas in which Ricœur's reflections on ideology are revealing. As will be demonstrated, ideology is in fact operative in all of these areas, an insight that opens up the possibility of mitigating the second part of the political paradox, the inevitability of political evil.

Ricœur's most sustained analysis of ideology appears in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. In this text, along with other essays on the topic, Ricœur engages with the work of Karl Mannheim. Ricœur details the way in which Mannheim brings ideology and utopia together on the basis of their sharing the characteristic of non-congruence. That is, they both signal a discrepancy with reality. One of Ricœur's arguments is that this discrepancy is in fact constitutive of human social existence.<sup>21</sup> The social imagination, operative in both ideology and utopia, brings into being the social world. The centrality of imagination is highlighted throughout the text by virtue of the dependence of all forms of both ideology and utopia on symbolic structures. And it is in the symbolic nature of social reality that ideology, and to a less emphasized degree utopia, come to be understood as fundamentally interpretive structures. Within the interpretive framework of ideology in particular Ricœur demonstrates the way in which legitimation and integration can be understood as hermeneutic concepts.

The symbolic nature of ideology is noted at the outset. "The process of distortion is grafted onto the symbolic function. Only because the structure of human social life is already symbolic can it be distorted."<sup>22</sup> This claim strips away the most common understanding of ideology, that of distortion, on the basis that ideology is grounded in something more primitive. In *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* Ricœur identifies and engages in a regressive analysis of three stages of ideology: integration, legitimation, and distortion. As Ricœur notes, by deploying a

material and economic conception of a ruling class and ruling ideas Marx demonstrates a break between ideology and reality. But Ricœur's analysis leads him to interrogate the nature of the ruling class by addressing the way in which class structure distorts. With the aid of Weber's analysis of authority Ricœur's analysis leads him to ideology as legitimation. But Ricœur does not stop there. The ability of someone or some group to claim authority, to be granted authority, is dependent on a symbolic field of shared values that constitute a shared identity. This is ideology as identity or integration.<sup>23</sup>

It is exactly ideology as integration, and to some extent ideology as legitimation, that I want to focus on. Without simply ignoring ideology as distorting, it is in Ricœur's novel interpretation of ideology that it will be possible to find resources to mitigate the threatening element of the political paradox.

Let us start with ideology as integration. Ricœur is well-known for his hermeneutics of suspicion, developed around the masters of suspicion, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Those familiar with this approach will not find it surprising, then, that in discussing ideology as distortion, linked to Marx, Ricœur argues that suspicion is the appropriate interpretive approach.<sup>24</sup> However, in the integrative stage, "the main attitude is not at all suspicion nor even the value-free but conversation."<sup>25</sup> The presence of values and their full acceptance is important at this stage and will be addressed. But first it should be noted that conversation gestures in the first instance to language, and thus the symbolic structure of human social life. Recall Ricœur's claim in the book's introduction that practice, and also ideology, is embedded in and dependent on an existing symbolic structure. Human social life is fundamentally symbolic and the elements that organize social life are both expressions of that symbolism and dependent on it. The use of a system of symbols already reveals a shared aspect of human life that is then enhanced by the formation of additional structures designed to organize that shared life, such as social institutions. It is here that the seeds of ideology as integration can be found. It becomes full-blown through the realization of socially organizing structures. The conversation that Ricœur highlights occurs within a symbolic framework that is intended to identify further common values, values that are widely shared and meet with the desire for historical continuity. This conversation is the outworking, the discovery of a shared sense of meaning, even possibly shared life goals that give the members of a community a shared sense of identity. Ideology at this stage is the formation of a shared meaning that drives or will drive a shared narrative.<sup>26</sup> And insofar as ideology as integration is tied to the formation of a shared narrative understanding of who a people is and where they come from, it aligns with the sustaining and stabilizing functions of social institutions.<sup>27</sup> Thus, ideology as integration is also preservative. The task of the community, and that to which ideology as integration responds, is relieving the strain caused by the threat of lost identity.<sup>28</sup>

What does this discussion of identity formation and preservation have to do with the political paradox discussed above? In discussing the concept of polity, which forms one pole of the paradox, Ricœur addresses at considerable length the fiction of a social contract, in particular as it is developed by Rousseau. Importantly, the social contract is an originary event; it represents the formation of a community of at least minimally shared values organizing for the betterment of all. One of the reasons that Ricœur uses Rousseau's vision of the social contract is the way in which the general will is representative of the general interest of a people united under the social contract.<sup>29</sup> Not only do people form a political community for protection against threat, as is the case for Hobbes's conception of the political, but they form a community for the good that the community is and the good that the community can offer.<sup>30</sup> While social bonds can and often do



limit experiences of freedom, the act of contracting also makes each participant in the contract a part of something else, something bigger and with greater promise; with the social contract emerges the citizen who, for Ricœur following Aristotle, has the potential for realizing the fullest humanity.<sup>31</sup> A new identity attaches to this new stage of human interaction in the State.

That the form of the State represents the initial stage of ideology as integration is fairly clear. It is more difficult to see ideology as integration operative in the struggle to maintain a community identity, though this is exactly what Ricœur has in mind in his reading of Clifford Geertz that makes up lecture 15 of his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Perhaps the clearest articulation of the bridge between community formation and the preservation of its identity, with respect to ideology, can be found in Ricœur's analysis of the ideological nature of the social sciences. In "Ideology and Science" he identifies five characteristics of ideology: it diffuses a founding act, is both dynamic and motivational, thrives on simplicity and schematics, rejects themes in favor of operation, and is resistant to new ideas not easily assimilable to what already exists.<sup>32</sup> Ricœur will go on to argue in this text that ideology as distortion only appears with the final characteristic; ideology's resistance to the new employs protective strategies that dissimulate from the actual state of things that is inducing change. It is the first of the listed characteristics that is immediately useful for present purposes.

Ricœur discusses diffusion of the founding act as an extension of the imaginary moment of the act into the present. "Ideology is a function of the distance that separates the social memory from an inaugural event that must nevertheless be repeated. Its role is not only to diffuse the conviction beyond the circle of founding fathers, so as to make it the creed of the entire group, but also to perpetuate the initial energy behind the period of effervescence."<sup>33</sup> The repetition or replay of the inaugurating event, presumably in the celebration of national holidays commemorating the founding of nations, connects citizens to those who went before, reinforcing some form of shared identity. This is not to say that identity remains static. Indeed, the event is replayed in a new context and is related to in light of the context, it is both old and new.

Bernard Dauenhauer refers to the exertion of ideology in the establishment and maintenance of identity as a struggle for "narrative control." Two different attempts at such control are exemplified in revolutionary and reactionary politics, both of which are responses to a tension caused by a disjunction between "historical actuality and fictive possibility."<sup>34</sup> Dauenhauer goes on to write, "reactionary attempts to eliminate this tension seek to constrict the future by wholly subjugating it to the past. They dogmatically disdain the genuinely new and the initiative that can bring it about. Conversely, revolutionary attempts to eliminate this tension so favor the merely dreamed-for that they dogmatically dismiss the abiding achievements of the predecessors."<sup>35</sup> The necessity for both truth and imagination in politics that Dauenhauer is here advocating, in his reading of Ricœur's political thought, gestures towards an important hermeneutic element. Ideology is a reading of the world that seeks to contribute meaning to disparate or discordant elements. Much like the emplotment of life events into a narrative identity, discussed by Ricœur in depth in *Oneself as Another*, ideology provides identity to the community.

While the struggle for narrative control refers to ideology as integration, it also indicates ideology as legitimation or justification. This move is indicated by an intensification of language that was noted to be at the heart of concerns about ideology. In fact, the language of revolution and strong-arm reaction demonstrates an intensification that already signals the possibility of distortion. Furthermore, by demonstrating political decision and action, reaction and revolution bring into play the concept of power that is at the heart of the political paradox, as noted above.

In attempting to resolve tension and produce stability, these responses enact violence. However, the giving or taking of authority to control the narrative of a community represents ideology as legitimation and thus requires careful consideration of this intermediary form.

If the political community begins with a polity based on equality, establishing sovereignty of a people, it is the selection and authorization of a sovereign that is the initial move of political alienation. Note that Rousseau would have each and every member of the political community have a say in deciding legislation, eschewing political representation.<sup>36</sup> Among other things, this is because without actual participation of every member the general will cannot be determined, and thus the common good to which the community is oriented is in danger. Ricœur does not support Rousseau in this extreme form of direct government, but he is deeply aware that the installation of a sovereign has important implications for political equality. Thus it is that at the level of legitimation one finds the seeds of political evil in the violence perpetrated through the appeal to ideology.

Ideology as legitimation operates on the basis of a claim and belief in that claim. Ricœur suggests that the claim to political authority is by its very nature dependent on a surplus-value. This is not surprising given the initial equality of the social contract that rejects a differentiation of valuation between members. But it means that there is what Ricœur refers to as a gap between the claim to authority and the belief in that claim. It is in this gap, in response to the disparity between claim and belief that ideology seeks to offer credibility.<sup>37</sup> At this stage the claim to authority is not yet submitted to considerations of legitimacy. Ricœur is here concerned with the way in which ideology aids in establishing any sort of political authority, whether legitimate or illegitimate. Much of Ricœur's treatment of Weber, in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, is designed to argue that Weber's is a motivational model of authority, in that it emphasizes social practices aimed at encouraging participation. Thus, Ricœur is not directly interested in explicating details with which I am now dealing. But he does elaborate on the relationship between claim and belief as they appear in the three ideal types of authority treated by Weber. Only the legal type and the charismatic type get due treatment. Ricœur demonstrates that the legal type is "ideological to the extent that it uses formal bureaucratic efficiency to mask the real nature of the power at work,"<sup>38</sup> and charismatic authority is characterized by a lack of reliance on belief, "the claim does not rely on the belief, but the belief is extorted by the claim."<sup>39</sup> It is the character or person of the leader that enforces the claim to authority. Further, it is in the charismatic type that Ricœur locates the grounds for all concerns of power and domination.<sup>40</sup> Whatever the symbolic elements, and wherever they are being drawn from for the legitimation of authority, Ricœur wants to highlight that the process of legitimation, the claim that demands belief or is upheld by belief, is ideologically grounded. There is an ideological aspect to legitimation precisely because authority is not innate to human social existence.

If there is a clue to the way in which ideology actually operates in legitimation it may be in the idea of reification that Ricœur briefly mentions at the end of the second chapter on Weber in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. If it has been difficult to identify the specific nature of ideology in its legitimating function, this is because of the tendency for legitimating processes to employ distorted and distorting messages. This can be attested to by the absence of a reference to ideology in Weber's analysis, a fact that Ricœur attributes to the mistaken view that ideology is always distorting. But it is through ideology, Ricœur suggests that "our relationships are frozen and no longer appear to us as what they are; there is a reification of human relationships."<sup>41</sup> Here it is the claim to authority and the ensuing belief in that claim that leads to the actualization of authority, not by an intention towards distortion or manipulation, but by reification of human

relationships. By being seen as static, relationships, including, and perhaps primarily relationships of authority, no longer display the dynamism and complexity of historical relationships. The reified relationships are not yet distorted, but reveal an inchoate break with the actual course of things. Thus this initial break with reality cannot yet be aligned with the active distortion that will be the basis of political evil.

If Ricœur had “The Political Paradox” in mind when delivering his lectures on ideology and utopia he might have been seeking out political evil in the emergence of violence and coercion from the initial act of claiming authority as detailed in his discussion of Weber’s concept of *Herrschaft*. But this is not to say that every claim to authority is inherently violent, or, more accurately, that every claim to authority is inherently evil. This distinction is predicated on the distinction that Ricœur makes, albeit with an uncharacteristic lack of depth in analysis, between legitimate violence and political evil, characterized by political alienation. There is already political alienation with the extortion of belief that the claim to authority exercises. One could thus conclude that the legitimation of an authority does violence to the people and is therefore an expression of political evil. Given that Ricœur follows Weber’s discussion of authority through to the violence of domination it would be reasonable to see the end of politics being exactly the power that Ricœur reflects on in “The Political Paradox.” But to call all politics evil, as such a reading implies, is to ignore the degree to which Ricœur views political power as legitimately exercised, even when violently imposed.

In his essay, “State and Violence,” Ricœur introduces the idea of legitimate violence, which is intimately tied to the political nature of human life. He writes, “the political existence of man is watched over and guided by violence, the violence of the State which has the characteristics of legitimate violence.”<sup>42</sup> Two things in particular are of note in this claim. First, the use of the phrase, “characteristics of legitimate violence,” intimates the possibility that the purported violence may in fact be illegitimate. What is likely is that Ricœur is equating the State with the exercise of a certain kind of power that finds its most articulate expression in certain kinds of violence. But the question of legitimacy remains, and it is this question that in fact fuels the paradox expressed in the tension between the two ethics of distress outlined in the conclusion to that essay. The paradox is the juxtaposition of the legality and therefore justice of the State and the rational justification of the individual to resist the State on issues of sanctioned killing. The paradox in that essay is the truth of both the preservation of the State and treason.<sup>43</sup> By rejecting the resolution of the paradox Ricœur ensures that the question of the limits of legitimate State violence will return again and again to the reflections of political philosophy.

A second thing to be noted in Ricœur’s claim about legitimate violence is the very nature of that violence. “In its most elementary and at the same time most indomitable form,” Ricœur writes, “the violence of the State is the violence of a penal character.”<sup>44</sup> Here the most basic form of State violence, violence that has been given the mark of legitimacy, is the punitive force that is exercised in response to the violation of law. The option of the death penalty means that in the State the law of love, which Ricœur here equates with the commandment not to kill, is repudiated. Thus, while Ricœur identifies the limit to violence in the commandment not to kill,<sup>45</sup> the ethics of distress is predicated on the very fact of this limit’s violation. This violation is brought into sharper relief with the exigencies of war.

The discussion of violence that Ricœur presents in “State and Violence” does not yet get at the nature of the violence that is expressed in the political evil of the political paradox. If the most basic violence is penal violence, then to what does penal violence refer? Is violence that precedes penal violence considered “violence”? Certainly Ricœur refers to the motivation to

adhere to prescribed actions as falling under the sway of enforcement powers, suggesting that penal violence, or at least the threat of penal violence is already operative at the level of basic laws.<sup>46</sup> But the claim to authority and the granting of that authority occurs even before the most basic sanctioning of behavior by an authority, suggesting that the legitimation of authority can, at least by some measure, be considered prior to the violence being considered.

The challenges of a concept of legitimate violence only delay the naming of political evil. If the violence of the State is legitimate, at least insofar as its actions are sanctioned by law, at what point does the predication of political evil apply to the State? A hint towards an answer to this question can be found exactly in the functions of ideology. I submit that the transition from legitimate violence to political evil occurs, sometimes at the level of legitimation and sometimes at the level of distortion. As was shown, ideology as legitimation fills the gap between the claim to authority and the belief in that authority. But the surplus-value to which ideology here responds does not automatically signal manipulation or coercion, in short, authority does not signal illegitimacy by necessity. Bruce Lincoln's analysis of authority is useful here because, like Ricœur, it focuses on a claim to authority, but then introduces an important distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy that is largely absent from Ricœur's works. Lincoln describes authority as "(1) an effect; (2) the capacity for producing that effect; and (3) the commonly shared opinion that a given actor has the capacity for producing that effect."<sup>47</sup> What exactly the effect is appears differently in different contexts, some of which Lincoln treats throughout the text. The claim to authority is the claim of (2), the claim that one is able to bring about that for which one is making the claim. The belief in authority lies in the shared opinion described above. Lincoln's work traverses different expressions of this relationship. Importantly for current purposes, he rejects the idea that manipulation and coercion are operative in authority proper.

Unlike Weber, Lincoln rejects the possibility that force and physical violence can be aspects of authority. "And when authority operates (and is seen to operate) on pain and fear rather than on trust and respect, it ceases to be authority and becomes (an attempt at) coercion."<sup>48</sup> It is in this distinction that I see an incredibly helpful way of distinguishing, in Ricœur, between the legitimacy of violence for political purposes and political evil. In fact, Ricœur, in his treatment of Weber's discussion of order, power, and domination, has gone a long way towards accepting such a distinction, without actually articulating it. Ricœur refers to a pessimistic definition of the State in which Weber highlights the "claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order."<sup>49</sup> Though it is the threat of force that distinguishes the State from other forms of organizations, it is in the idea of the enforcement of order that I take Ricœur's conception of the State to be most well-formed. While tensions deriving from internal conflicts of identity give to politics an internal instability, the political sphere is established on the basis of a certain order that is representative of the values shared by those agreeing to the social contract. The establishment of an authority, the distinguishing of a sovereign from the body sovereign, comes from the belief that that order requires protection, whether it is protection from within or protection from without. If this can reasonably be deemed to be the case, then the enforcement of order does not yet necessitate physical coercion, or the threat of coercion, embodied in the legitimate force of Weber's State. Indeed, the protection or preservation of an order begins with the codification of the order. This codification amounts to the initial stages of its enforcement. This does not at all mean that the stage of the threat of physical force can be avoided or that it is ultimately beneficial to avoid it. Rather, by placing the State prior to the deployment of physical force or coercion, Ricœur can conceptualize the State more positively. Recall that the organization of society under polity depends already on symbolic structures. One of the ordering elements of

society under this symbolism is the institution. But institutions are exactly representative of both shared values and constraint. Institutions can thus operate in this space between integration and distortion, representing as they do the preservation of order through non-coercive enforcement. Thus, even following the rules on the basis of it not being good to be punished does not necessarily represent ideology as distorting and so, is not the mark of political evil.

Given that the central text for this analysis has been *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, it is reasonable to ask, where is utopia in all of this? Utopia remains as a protective critique of ideology. At the level of legitimation utopias unmask the overvaluation provided by ideology and thus force authority to work in the light. "In other words," Ricœur suggests, "utopias always imply alternative ways of using power, whether in family, political, economic, or religious life, and in that way they call established systems of power into question."<sup>50</sup> This is an important caution against the too quick and too full acceptance of integrating and legitimating ideology. The threat of distorted reality is an ever present threat, and with it the threat of political evil. Viewing ideology as formative and even positive in communities enhances the need for checks and balances. Utopia can provide correction and hope, it can positively impact its target community insofar as it effectively critiques and grounds the community in a reality with hope. Here lies the positive function of utopia—it has the capacity to present the social imaginary in full force. It is in this way that utopia is more than just a critique. Like ideology, utopia can be integrating. Utopia "as the function of the nowhere in the constitution of social or symbolic action, is the counterpart of our first concept of ideology (integration). There is no social integration without social subversion, we may say. The reflexivity of the process of integration occurs by means of the process of subversion."<sup>51</sup> Ideology as integration cannot operate without the imaginative force of utopia. The pre-political person cannot imagine the benefits of polity without this view from "nowhere." In this way utopia has the potential for furnishing the possibilities of human social existence.

## Conclusion

"The effort," Ricœur suggests of his study of ideology and utopia, "is to recognize the claim of a concept which is at first sight merely a polemical tool."<sup>52</sup> Since ideology is always something that someone else has, something that guides the thought and actions of another, an awareness of the depth of meaning beyond the distorted surface of an ideology can contribute positively to the mutual recognition that is at the heart of Ricœur's conception of justice. Ricœur's work on ideology demonstrates that it is not merely the "other" that holds an ideology. Rather, the integrative aspect of ideology means that there is an ideological element to every community, especially those that are politically organized. This is because social existence is mediated symbolically. Though ideologies may seem threatening, because they "are gaps or discordances in relation to the real course of things...the death of ideologies would be the most sterile of lucidities; for a social group without ideology and utopia would be without a plan, without a distance from itself, without a self-representation."<sup>53</sup> Ideology, alongside utopia, in an important way, furnishes a community with a past and a future. Together they are, as Ricœur would say, mutually constitutive of a community.

Of course, ideology is much more than this. The downside of ideology is a very real danger to a community and to individuals in that community. With ideology in all its fullness comes the threat of political evil; this is the political paradox. An awareness of the depths of meaning of ideology, the depths of its role in the formation and maintenance of a community



appear to go a long way in mitigating the threat of political evil. That is to say, by looking past ideology as distortion, by seeing it present in the legitimation of systems of authority and also at the very heart of the identity of a political community it is possible to see another's ideology as so much more than a negative force. This realization gestures towards recognition of others for who they are, theoretically opening up the possibility of discussion rather than aggression. Social imagination in general, and ideology in particular, thus becomes a tool for the mitigation of the possibility of political evil because it works towards political integration rather than mere alienation. To see politics as only evil would be to miss this important opportunity for enhancing justice that Ricœur's reflections present.

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 247-70: 249.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 252. (*Emphasis in original.*)  
Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 253.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 255.
- <sup>5</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 253.
- <sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1252a1-5.
- <sup>7</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 249.
- <sup>8</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 248n1.
- <sup>9</sup> Oliver Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 36.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 255.
- <sup>11</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 255.
- <sup>12</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 255.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 194.
- <sup>14</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 195n36.
- <sup>15</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 256-57.
- <sup>16</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 195n36.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 257.
- <sup>18</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 249.
- <sup>19</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 259.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 259.
- <sup>21</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, George Taylor (ed.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 10.
- <sup>23</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 254-5.
- <sup>24</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 254.
- <sup>25</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 255.
- <sup>26</sup> In *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) Ricœur argues that a theory of narrative identity applies equally to individuals and communities. The importance of the narrative

will become clearer below when I engage Bernard Dauenhauer briefly on two ways in which communities seek to control their narrative identity.

- <sup>27</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Capabilities and Rights," in *Transforming Unjust Structures*, Séverine Deneuling, Mathias Nebel, and Nicholas Sagovsky (ed.), (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 17-26: 21.
- <sup>28</sup> Paul Ricœur references Clifford Geertz, claiming that "The concept of integration precisely has to do with the threat of the lack of identity...What a group fears most is no longer being able to identify itself because of crises and confusions creating strain; the task is to cope with this strain." *Lectures*, 261.
- <sup>29</sup> Paul Ricœur notes the numerous difficulties that have been raised with respect to the concept of the general will. These difficulties notwithstanding, the general will as representative of a common good remains central to Ricœur's argument. See "The Political Paradox," 253.
- <sup>30</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 252. Here Ricœur quotes Rousseau: "To find a form of association that will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each member, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone and remain just as free as before."
- <sup>31</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Political Paradox," 250.
- <sup>32</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Science and Ideology," in *From Text to Action*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 246-69: 249-51.
- <sup>33</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Science and Ideology," 249.
- <sup>34</sup> Bernard Dauenhauer, "Ricœur's Contribution to Contemporary Political Thought," in *Meaning in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricœur*, David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (ed.), (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 157-75: 169.
- <sup>35</sup> Bernard Dauenhauer, "Ricœur's Contribution to Contemporary Political Thought," 157-75: 169.
- <sup>36</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "The Social Contract," in *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Cress, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 141-227: 198.
- <sup>37</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures*, 200. See also Paul Ricœur, "Ideology and Utopia," in *From Text to Action*, 308-24: 315.
- <sup>38</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures*, 209.
- <sup>39</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures*, 212.
- <sup>40</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures*, 213.
- <sup>41</sup> Ricœur, *Lectures*, 213.
- <sup>42</sup> Paul Ricœur, "State and Violence," in *History and Truth*, 234.
- <sup>43</sup> Paul Ricœur, "State and Violence," 246.
- <sup>44</sup> Paul Ricœur, "State and Violence," 234. (*Emphasis in original.*)

<sup>45</sup> Paul Ricœur, "State and Violence," 242.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures*, 192.

<sup>47</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10-11.

<sup>48</sup> Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (ed.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 54. See also, Paul Ricœur, *Lectures*, 194.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Ideology and Utopia," 321.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Lectures*, 311.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Ideology and Science," 265.