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Does Good Gather Together?

Reflections on Primary Affirmation, Justification, and *Phronesis*

Roger W. H. Savage
UCLA

Abstract

The notion that exemplary deeds and acts provide models that we can follow invites some further consideration of the connection between the good to which they singularly attest and practical reason. By attributing such deeds and acts' prospective and even prophetic dimension to their fittingness in response to moral and political dilemmas and crises, I relate the way that in reflective judgment the individual case summons its rule to *phronesis*. That only events, acts, and lives attesting that evil is overcome *hic et nunc* reopen a path to an affirmation of the being that we are provides a critical touchstone in this regard. Resisting the idea that evil gives rise to a summons thus safeguards the idea of humanity through conferring the sanction of reality on the good manifest by exemplary deeds, acts, and lives.

Keywords: *affirmation, exemplarity,* phronesis*, justification, testimony*

Résumé

L'idée que les actes et les actions exemplaires constituent des modèles à suivre invite à une réflexion plus approfondie sur le lien entre le bien dont ils témoignent singulièrement et la raison pratique. En attribuant à ces actes et actions une dimension prospective, voire prophétique, à leur pertinence face aux dilemmes et aux crises morales et politiques, je relie la manière dont, dans le jugement réflexif, le cas individuel appelle sa règle à la phronesis. Que seuls les événements, les actes et les vies attestant que le mal est surmonté *hic et nunc* rouvrent la voie à une affirmation de l'être que nous sommes constitue une pierre de touche essentielle à cet égard. Résister à l'idée que le mal suscite une convocation préserve ainsi l'idée d'humanité en conférant la sanction de la réalité au bien manifesté par des actes, des actions et des vies exemplaires.

Mots-clés *: affirmation, exemplarité,* phronesis*, justification, témoignage*

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Introduction

In his remarks on aesthetic experience, Paul Ricoeur asks whether it is a prejudice to believe that "only the good gathers together."[1] By likening moral and political examples that we can follow to literary fictions, musical performances, and works of art that refashion our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, he sets the exemplary value of such works, words, deeds, and acts against the contagion of lies and violence that today threatens the body politic from within. The falsehoods deployed in rewriting history stand in marked contrast to the claims to which exemplary works, deeds, acts, and lives give voice. Holding the future hostage to these perverse narratives signals the nadir of the freedom that Hannah Arendt celebrated with the revolutionary founding of a republican form of government and its constitutional rule of law. This freedom is the hallmark of the capacity to respond to problems, challenges, and crises by intervening in the course of human affairs. By asking if the good at which our initiatives take aim is the fruit of the ability to judge wisely what the situation requires, I therefore want to keep sight of the connection between *phronesis* and the capacity to reply to exigencies and demands in fitting ways in surpassing the given order from within.

To what end, we could therefore ask, do the initiatives we take animate the present by vesting it with its social, moral, and political force? And how in the absence of accepted conventions and norms to serve as guides can we know what the "right" thing to do is in situations calling for critical discernment? Deeds, acts, and lives that exemplify the good, the right, and the just stand as testament to the power to respond to the exigencies and demands of the moment in singularly fitting ways. The question, however, remains: Since we stand neither at the beginning nor at the end but are always *in medias res*, how can we know that the good we seek is good at all?

The Idea of the Good

The fact that we are invariably caught up in the stream of social, political, and historical events in which we intervene through inserting ourselves in the world through our works, words, deeds, and acts lays to rest the notion that we can know what is good, right, and just independently of the substance of our outlooks, orientations, convictions, and beliefs. In this regard, the universality of our hermeneutical situation—by which I mean the situation in which we find ourselves already affected by a history of which we are a part—places some theoretically universal

[1] Paul Ricoeur, François Azouvi, and Marc de Launay, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 184.

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system of values drawn from situationless abstractions forever out of reach. We could justifiably wonder whether dismantling the Enlightenment's faith in reason as a presuppositionless ideal raises the specter of the radical relativization of all cultural values. Armed with the critique that all claims and assertions are ideologically charged, the historicization of a plurality of viewpoints assigns the values articulated by each to their particular conditions and circumstances.[2] With Ricoeur, we could however ask if not only "the idea of truth, but also the ideas of the good and the just can be radically historicized without disappearing."[3] No moral conviction, he at the same time reminds us, "would have any force if it did not make a claim to universality."[4] In this respect, the connection between *ethos* and *logos* in the Socratic question of the good also underscores the multiplicity of cultural heritages that diverse groups and communities claim as their own. The virulence of the aporia unleashed by the loss of credibility of the Hegelian philosophy of history lays bare the enigma that the difference of individual destinies and the destination of humankind can only be understood through each other.[5] Since there is "no plot of all plots capable of equaling the idea of one humanity and one history,"[6] how can we conceive of humanity as a project if, as Ricoeur maintains, it can be regarded as one species only "insofar as it has one history, and, reciprocally, that for there to be such a history, humanity as a whole must be its subject as a collective singular"?[7]

By setting this project under the aegis of the good, I mean from the outset to highlight how practical reason acquires its manifest specificity thanks to the exercise of prudential wisdom (*phronesis*). Gadamer's reading of Aristotle's critique of Plato's doctrine of the ideas is instructive in this regard. By transferring Plato's metaphorical references to the "cautious and tentative language of philosophical concepts,"[8] Aristotle sets out the practical relation between our actions and the good at which they aim. Gadamer maintains that neither the Socratic Plato nor Aristotle lost sight of two basic truths. First, "in human actions the good we project as *hou heneka* (that for the sake of which) is concretized and defined only by our practical reason—in the *euboulia* (well-advised-ness) of *phronēsis*."[9] Second, "every existent thing is 'good' when it fulfills its *telos* (purpose, goal)."[10] *Entelechia,* which according to Gadamer is an artificial expression introduced by Aristotle, is intended to make clear that this "telos is not a goal that belongs to some faraway order of perfection."[11] On the contrary, every particular existent thing realizes its telos in manifesting

[2] See Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 260–64. Ricoeur stresses that reality's symbolic constitution is an inescapable condition of social life.

[3] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press 2004), 304.

[4] Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 247.

[5] See Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press), 1986, 138; see also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 60–61.

[6] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 259.

[7] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vol. 3, 215.

[8] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 178.

[9] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 177; italics added.

[10] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 177.

[11] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 177.

itself. The eidetic determination of an existent thing as "'what-it-is' (*ti estin*)"[12] is for Gadamer the thematic focus of an Aristotelian metaphysics for which this thing's self-mediation is the key. The mediation between being and becoming that the concept of *entelechia* captures is accordingly the necessary presupposition for the postulation of ideas, and especially the idea of the good and the "barely comprehensible doctrine of the one, and the two, (...) which point to such a mediation,"[13] however metaphorically formulated it is in Plato's dialogues.

By calling into question the supposed ontological hiatus between the ideas and the appearances of things in themselves in Plato's thought, Gadamer brings to the fore the connection between them. The problem common to both Plato's and Aristotle's investigations, he maintains, "is how the *logos ousias* (the statement of being, of what a thing is) is possible."[14] Since "what is encountered in appearances is always to be thought of in reference to what is invariant in it,"[15] the separation (*chōrismos*) of the noetic from sensory appearances is fundamental. At the same time, because "the ideas are ideas *of* appearances (...) they do not constitute a world existing for itself."[16] Severing the connection between the ideas and their appearances would "be a crass absurdity."[17] Thus, the seminal relationship between an intelligible reality as being-for-itself and the being of appearances is the counterweight to the ontological divorce wrought by the Platonic *chōrismos* (separation) of them. For Gadamer, the doctrine of *chōrismos* is an essential component of the dialectic in which the particular thing's participation (*methexis*) in the universal obviously figures.[18] He accordingly remarks that "'the good,' which is at the same time 'the beautiful,' does not exist somewhere apart for itself and in itself, somewhere 'beyond.'"[19] Rather, it only appears concretely in each case in which "the good" can be found.

Transposing the distinction between sensory appearances and a reality that is intelligible for itself from the world of mathematics to the field of action brings the problematic raised by the idea of the good into view. On the one hand, "the famous *epekeina tēs ouisias* (beyond all being) lends the idea of the good a transcendence that distinguishes it from all other noetic objects, which is to say all other ideas."[20] On the other hand, the "distinction between justice itself and what is considered (*dokei*) to be just,"[21] for example, rests on the way that particular examples illumine the universal. Gadamer explains that in Plato's view, "true and just behavior cannot be based on the conventional concepts and standards to which public opinion clings."[22] Hence, only those norms that reveal themselves to our moral conscience as unalterably and incontestably true can serve as

[12] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 177.

[13] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 178.

[14] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 16; italics added.

[15] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 16.

[16] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 16. Gadamer adds that this is "expressed negatively by Plato in this, the harshest aporia of the *Parmenides* (133b). Aristotle himself says that there is a basic reason for postulating the ideas: in view of the ever shifting tides of appearances, everything hinges on knowledge of their ideas if there is to be any knowledge at all (*Metaphysics* 987a32 ff.)" (17).

[17] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 16.

[18] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 9–10.

[19] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 115.

[20] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 27; italics added.

[21] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 18.

[22] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 18.

the standards of right moral conduct, "whether they can be, or are ever found to be, fully realized."[23] The idea of the good is therefore "not just any one idea among all the others."[24] Rather, the idea of the good owes its preeminence to the ways that works, words, deeds, and acts attesting to the good that we desire to be augment our manner of thinking, feeling, acting, and inscribing our lives in the web of human affairs.

The imperative that Ricoeur argues gives the idea of justice its federating force is a critical touchstone in this regard. Pairing memory's truthful and pragmatic dimensions with the work of remembering and the work of mourning brings to the fore the duty inhering in the project of justice. Operating "under the aegis of the epistemic fidelity of memories with respect to what actually took place,"[25] the concern for truth binds the duty to remember to the duty to do justice to the past. As the medial, third term between the work of remembering and the work of mourning, the duty of memory in this way turns the obligation to do justice to the past toward the future.[26] Ricoeur explains that the "twofold aspect of duty, as imposing itself on desire from outside and as exerting a constraint experienced subjectively as obligation"[27] are expressly found together in the idea of justice. Drawing on the exemplary value of traumatic memories, he stresses that "it is justice that turns memory into a project."[28] The "same project of justice that gives the form of the future and of the imperative to the duty of memory"[29] thus binds memory's truthful and pragmatic dimensions to this project's liberatory aims.

The imperative that Ricoeur attributes to the duty of memory accordingly vests the idea of justice with its federating force. By wresting the self from the closed-circuit of its relation, "the duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memories, to an other than the self."[30] Among all the virtues, the virtue of justice is "the one that, par excellence and by its very constitution is turned toward others."[31] The duty of memory moreover "maintains the feeling of being obligated"[32] to those to whom one is indebted. This debt cannot be limited to the concept of guilt since it is inseparable from the debt we owe to those who came before and from whom we have received our cultural practices, customs, and mores. Ricoeur reminds us that we must not only pay this debt but

[23] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 18.

[24] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 20.

[25] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 88.

[26] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Ricoeur explains that this imperative in return, "receives from the work of memory and the work of mourning the impetus that integrates it into an economy of drives" (88) in which memory's concern for truth and its use run ahead of consciousness. For him, "[t]his united force of the duty of justice can then extend beyond the memory and mourning pair to the pair formed by the truthful and pragmatic dimensions of memory; indeed, our own discourse on memory has been conducted up to now along two parallel lines, the line of memory's concern for truth, under the aegis of the epistemic fidelity of memories with respect to what actually took place, and the line of memory use, considered as a practice, even as the technique of memorization(...). It is as though the duty of memory was projected ahead of consciousness as a point of convergence between the truth perspective and the pragmatic perspective of memory" (88–89).

[27] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 88.

[28] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* 88.

[29] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 88.

[30] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

[31] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

[32] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

we must also inventory these heritages, which also weigh upon the future. Finally, we must never forget that "among those to whom we are indebted, the moral priority belongs to the victims"[33] who are other than ourselves.

We could accordingly ask whether the federating force that sets memory's truthful and pragmatic dimensions under the aegis of the idea of justice's liberatory aim places this idea at the heart of the project of humanity. Previously, I noted how for Gadamer the good projected by the actions we take is the fruit of our capacity to respond to exigencies and demands in singularly fitting ways. Human practice, Gadamer moreover tells us, "aims at nothing other than the highest fulfillment of human existence itself."[34] The notion that "humanity is given nowhere,"[35] as Ricoeur reminds us, makes this fulfillment of human existence the object of its—that is, humanity's—task. His "little ethics" accordingly preserves the idea of justice's "rootedness in the wish for a good life."[36] As a figure of the good, the just counterpoints the virtue of friendship at the level where third-party relations to others are structured by institutions. The deontological check on this wish marks a second level in this "little ethics" in which the idea of justice is linked procedurally to normative structures and rules. The third level crowns the dialectic in which the aim of the good life, having been submitted to the test of the moral norm, culminates in those situations calling for prudential wisdom (*phronesis*). In each case where a novel ethico-practical or political problem, dilemma, or crisis arises, words, deeds, and acts that reply to exigencies and demands in singularly fitting ways exemplify those instances of practical reason when the good, the right, the just, and the true prevail.

By setting the good within the ambit of a liberatory project that eschews totalizing pretensions, I mean to emphasize again how the capacity to reply to moral and political exigencies, dilemmas, and crises is the spring of exemplary words, deeds, acts, and lives thanks to the ability to apprehend the demands of the situation and to respond in singularly fitting ways. The spring of reason's inscription in history, this ability—this virtue—is one that according to Aristotle cannot be taught. The "sense *hic et nunc* of what obviously fits"[37] animates the force of conviction borne out by an action taken in answer to the demands of the situation as apprehended by an individual, a community, or a group. Gadamer in this regard stresses that the highest awareness that the "Greeks called '*nous*' (intellection)"[38] is equally attributable to *phronesis*. For in each instance, practical reason (*phronesis*) "is conscious of the rightness of its choice and decision."[39] In rejecting

[33] Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

[34] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 172; see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 178.

[35] Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 253; see Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1968), 91–94.

[36] Paul Ricoeur, *The Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xxii.

[37] Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*, 70; see Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. In reminding us that attestation first presents itself "as a kind of belief" (21), Ricoeur underlines how this conviction draws its force from our confidence in the truth stemming from our certitude of this fittingness. Attestation, he thus explains, takes the form of an assurance that, "without being a doxic certitude, (…) [is] always bound to acts" (Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995], 117) in which the force of this conviction is borne out.

[38] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 171.

[39] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 171.

the Platonic postulation that founds the good on the doctrine of ideas, Aristotle accordingly confines the question of what is good for us to the realm of politics. That is not to say, Gadamer adds, "that Aristotle did not have to raise the *metaphysical* question about the good and the best,"[40] which is implied in his question about being. The immutable being that in the theoretical realm is the good in itself, he points out however, "is quite different from the right thing to do (*to deon*) at which the practical rationality of human beings aims."[41] Furthermore, whereas in the technical realm subsuming the particular under the universal serves the rational co-ordination of means and ends, in the practical realm "knowing how to find the right means (…) [and] holding to the right ends"[42] in each case finds its practical application in the way that an act exemplifies the universal manifested by it. By showing "that something can be done (πρακτάον ἀγαθόν),"[43] *phronesis* accordingly liberates reason from congealed ways of thinking to set the good at which our deeds and acts take aim at the heart of the freedom inhering in our capacity to begin something new.

The question posed earlier thus returns with redoubled force: How can we be sure that the good we seek in surpassing the given order from within is good for all?

Aesthetic Experience, Exemplarity, and *Phronesis*

By attributing the exemplary value of works, words, deeds, and acts to the fittingness of each in response to a problem, question, or crisis, I want to draw out how the solution singularly manifested by each is the spring of its prospective and even prophetic dimension. Following Ricoeur, I have argued elsewhere that aesthetic experience's lateral transposition onto the planes of ethics and politics rests on the conjunction of singularity and universality that in aesthetic experience is the condition of the work's communicability. The enigma of artistic creation is instructive in this regard. This enigma stems from the fact that the artist's naked experience is incommunicable. The "irrational moment"[44] of the artist's inspiration, idea, or vision acquires its aesthetic justification when, in answer to a question, problem, or difficulty as the artist apprehended it, the work brings the meaning that it bears within itself to a stand. By drawing a temporal succession of incidents and events or tonal, rhythmic and contrapuntal, harmonic, or heterophonic elements, a novel or a piece of music, for example, renders the solution constituted by the work communicable. In the case of painting, we could say that Claude Monet's depictions of the Rouen Cathedral in different seasons and times of day do justice to the inimitable problem and challenge of capturing the impressions created by the textural play of color and light by rendering these impressions in precisely these ways. According to the classical concept of beauty, nothing can be added to or taken away from a work without damaging the ideal of perfection

[40] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 157; original emphasis. Gadamer accordingly remarks that "Aristotle isolates practical philosophy for the decisive reason that what we find to be good in the theoretical realm—'good' here meaning immutable being—is something quite different from the right thing to do (*do deon*) at which the practical rationality of human beings aims" (160).

[41] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 160.

[42] Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good*, 165.

[43] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. J. Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 30.

[44] Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*, II, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 81.

intrinsic to its success. In the case of these paintings by Monet, the faithful renderings to which we credit their truth is evidenced not by the quality of their likeness or verisimilitude to the original but by their suitability or fittingness with respect to the feeling or atmosphere that each conveys. If we can therefore speak of the truth of a work in terms of its regenerative powers, as Ricoeur maintains, it is only insofar as the work augments the real by exemplifying the thought, idea, or mood expressed by it. The work's power to refigure the real thus stands as the mark of the truth to which it singularly attests. This concurrence of the work's singularity and exemplarity crowns the enigma stemming from the artist's courage and audacity in doing justice to the thought, idea, or feeling to which their work gives a figure and a body. In turn, the reader, listener, or spectator resolves this enigma each time they grasp the meaning intended by the work and rendered communicable by it.

In authorizing transposing aesthetic experience laterally onto the planes of ethics and politics, the conjunction of the work's singularity and universality points to a way out of the difficulty to which setting the good within the practical domain gives rise. When I asked how we can be sure that the good projected by our words, deeds, and acts is good at all, I wanted not only to acknowledge how competing and conflicting systems of values and beliefs impact multicultural societies today but I wanted also to keep sight of how our capacity to respond to exigencies and demands redresses the totalizing ambitions both of "grand" historical narratives and of critiques that, in claiming to be absolutely radical, offer no practical way out. Thanks to the "originarily dialectical structure of human reality,"[45] words, works, deeds, and acts that surpass the given order augment our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting from within the historical realities in which we are caught up. The wager that I once attributed to the imagination's operative role in works, words, deeds, and acts that refashion the real in accordance with the truth to which they singularly attest stands as the riposte both to totalizing pretensions and to all *amor fati*. In this regard, good judgment—that is, *phronesis*—has as its demonstration and proof the suitability of a course of action that, given the intermediacy of the being that we are, is taken in response to a moral or political exigency or crisis.

Aesthetic experience's lateral transposition onto the planes of ethics and politics here runs up against a limit. Freed from everyday mores and constraints, fictive explorations of alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and conducting our lives constitute an ethical laboratory for experimenting with values that govern our actions. Poetics, Ricoeur reminds us, never stops borrowing from ethics.[46] Far from exchanging ethical determinations for aesthetic ones, literary fictions, for example, revalue and even devalue precepts, customs, beliefs, and habits of thought that order our manners and styles of living. Conversely, unmerited suffering, which in fiction occurs in the realm of the *as if*, is the real material and spiritual consequence of the evil stemming from the power one individual or group exercises over another. "Act[ing] solely in accordance with the maxim by which you wish at the same time that what *ought not to be*, namely evil, will indeed *not exist*"[47] thus stands as the test of the moral imperative to treat oneself and others as an end and not as a means. The heart of the poetics of the will, this maxim is at the same time the inspiriting

[45] Paul Ricoeur, *Philosophical Anthropology: Writings and Lectures*, Volume 3, ed. Johann Michel and Jérôme Porée, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 3.

[46] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 59.

[47] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 218.

principle of an eschatology of freedom. Ricoeur reminds us that the connection between *phronesis* and the *phronimos*—the individual who follows the path of practical wisdom as the guide to the "good life"—"becomes meaningful only if the man of wise judgment determines at the same time the rule and the case, by grasping the situation in its singularity."[48] Ethics, the teleological dimension of which he opposes dialectically to morality's deontological one, is consequently inseparable from the aim that in these singular judgments acquires its concrete specificity in the historical circumstances in which we take the initiative to act. Like the beautiful, the good shines forth in words, deeds, and acts in which it appears. Could we then say that this good is the manifest sign of our capacity to act in response to the exigencies and demands of the situations in which we are caught in a manner that augments the rule of justice in promoting the reign of freedom?

The injunction issuing from an exemplary act or life and the truth to which a work lays claim differ in this regard. By equating the "effect of being drawn to follow"[49] the example set by the act with the work's communicability, Ricoeur highlights the kinship between them. In the case of the work, its power to refigure dimensions of experience that previously did not exist is the measure of its truth. The experience occasioned by the work thus augments the practical field through surpassing it from within. In a similar vein, acts and lives that we admire renew the field of our experiences through providing models that we can follow after. At the same time, exemplary moral or political acts impact our ways of conducting our lives through their appeal to conscience. The "moment of otherness proper to the phenomenon of conscience,"[50] which as the vis-à-vis of the virtue of justice underscores the pairing of the phenomenon of injunction with that of attestation, accordingly sets aesthetic and moral and political considerations apart. Being-enjoined in response to the injunction coming from the Other consequently marks out the moral-political horizon of the good—and more especially, the "highest good"— of our most deeply held convictions.

The notion that "in the order of *Nachfolge*, (…) communicability by means of extreme singularity"[51] reigns thus brings the question concerning a work or act's exemplarity more sharply into focus. That the work or the act replies to an exigency or demand as apprehended by the artist or agent in a singularly appropriate way lays the stress on the capacity to invent or discover a solution that did not exist prior to the work or the act. If as Plato says "the cause of anything

[48] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 175; see Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 92.

[49] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 182–83. Kant's subjectivization of aesthetics saves the judgment of taste's transcendental universality at the cost of divorcing judgments of taste from the knowledge of reality. At the same time, the communicability of the feeling of pleasure in the case of the beautiful, and of the admix of pleasure and displeasure in the feeling of the sublime, founds this subjective universality on the free play of the faculty of understanding and that of imagination. Only this play is communicable. Gadamer's admirable analyses of the phenomenon of play is instructive in this regard: in the same way that play has its being in presenting itself, the work occasions an experience that it renders communicable by structuring it in accordance with the manner in which it unfolds. The work accordingly has its being in setting truth to work (see Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], 39).

[50] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 351.

[51] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 184.

whatever that emerges from non-being into being is always an act of creation,"[52] this capacity is at the same time the spring of the work or act's augmentation of the practical field. By highlighting the conjunction of the work's singularity and universality, the notion that the work of art provides a model for thinking about testimony consequently sets in relief the prospective and even prophetic dimension of the "rule" that in reflective judgment is summoned by the individual case. There is for Ricoeur therefore "no equivalent to the iconic augmentation performed by the beautiful"[53] in expressions of evil, since only those deeds, acts, and lives attesting that evil has been overcome here and now stand as promissory signs of humanity's reconciliation.

Arendt's transposition of aesthetic judgment to singular historical events highlights how the French Revolution here relates to the "general problem of the destination of humanity."[54] By standing as "testimony relative to the destination of the human species," [55] this event engenders its normativity by reason of the ideal to which it singularly attests, the violence of the Terror notwithstanding. Ricoeur remarks that Arendt's wager—that it is "more profitable to attempt to disengage a conception of political judgment from the theory of the judgment of taste than to bind this conception to the theory of teleological judgment *via* a philosophy of history"[56]—privileges the spectators' retrospective view over the historical actors' prospective one in this regard. Conversely for him, reflective judgment "prevents the Kantian philosophy of history from tipping over into a philosophy of a Hegelian type"[57] owing to the prospective dimension of exemplary events, acts, and lives. For a critical philosophy, exemplarity reconciles reflective judgment with the "rule of practical reason"[58] by giving "a point of futurity to communicability and, in this way, a 'prophetic' dimension to reflective judgment itself."[59] Could we then say that by exemplifying the "rule" summoned by it, *this* event, *this* act, or *this* life also manifests an idea of reason in historically concrete situations? Thanks to the "power of imagination 'to present' (*Darstellung*) (…) [such] ideas (…) for which we have no concept,"[60] singular events, acts, and lives confer reason's demand for totality on the normative claim that each makes. Creative imagination, Ricoeur therefore tells us, "is nothing other than this demand put to conceptual thought"[61] by an idea of reason's sensible presentation.

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[52] Plato, cited in Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 10; see Plato, "Symposium," in *The Collected Dialogues Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, trans. Michael Joyce (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 557.

[53] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 184.

[54] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 183.

[55] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 183.

[56] Ricoeur, *The Just*, 101.

[57] Ricoeur, *The Just*, 108.

[58] Ricoeur, *The Just*, 108.

[59] Ricoeur, *The Just*, 108. Ricoeur stresses that the "Doctrine of Right" provides the requisite mediation for reconciling reflective judgment with the rule of practical reason.

[60] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics: Writing and Lectures, Volume 2*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 151.

[61] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello S. J. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 303.

We could accordingly ask how the good projected by the examples that we choose as our guides commends itself to us.[62] Thanks to the exemplification of the idea manifest by a deed, act, or life, the good to which it attests enjoins us to heed the injunction issuing from it and to follow after. "Sell all you have and come,"[63] St. Francis commands the wealthy young bourgeois of Assisi. This command, Ricoeur explains, passes from one individual to another through this singular example. This example of selflessness and humility in a life devoted to the service of others seeks its universality in accordance with the good manifest by it. Those who follow this example participate in one of the "tasks of supra-personal works"[64] that provide ideas of reason with their horizons of meaning. Ricoeur stresses that we only participate in the realm of interhuman affairs through "taking part in a creative theme that gives the general drift of its meaning to the community and thus endows it with a bond and a goal."[65] Our participation in various forms of interpersonal relations and tasks consequently schematizes the fundamental feeling that for Ricoeur is symbolized by Eros.[66] Mutual esteem, he tells us moreover, is Eros's best ally inasmuch as it "schematizes itself in a common task that is both inhabited by an Idea and creative of a We."[67] Hence, in taking the side of reason, "*θυμός* [*thumos*; the heart] (…) overspills itself in an ardent quest for recognition by means of another esteem."[68] Could we then say that the totality demanded by reason, which spiritual—that is, non-vital—feelings anticipate through offering the assurance that the objective we seek is also the good that we desire to be, has its manifest expression in the ways in which the good to which exemplary deeds and acts attest gathers the We together?

Affirmation and Justification

By asking what the good projected by the initiatives we take owes to the freedom to begin something new, I mean now to relate the role imagination plays in an eschatology of nonviolence to the possibility of consenting to an existence marked by the absence of aseity. Contra the anthropological illusion, which raises humankind to the level of a new absolute, the avowal that existence is in some ways given to us engenders the feeling of absolute dependence that places its mark on the element of passivity at the heart of the phenomenon of being-enjoined. For a philosophical anthropology instructed by the *pathétique* of human misery, the notion of being as power and act gains its practical foothold in our intermediary condition. By setting the capacity for surpassing the given order from within against the fact that we stand neither at the beginning or

[62] See Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. Volume One, Thinking* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1978). By insisting that since "thought's quest is a kind of desirous love, the objects of thought can only be lovable things—beauty, wisdom, [and] justice" (179), Arendt highlights how moral and political exemplars manifest the ideas to which they singularly attest. Accordingly, for her, we can only judge right from wrong "by having present in our mind some incident and some person, absent in time or space that have become examples" (Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn [New York: Schocken, 2003], 145).

[63] Mark 10:22, cited by Ricoeur et al. in *Critique and Conviction*, 183.

[64] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 103.

[65] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 103. Ricoeur notes that here, the heart and its fundamental availably as regards the inter- and supra-personal schemata of being-with and being-for is the opposite of care (104).

[66] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 82.

[67] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 121.

[68] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 122.

at the end but are always *in medias res*, I accordingly want to highlight how the transcending of finitude that Ricoeur opposes to our finite limitations reserves a place for the freedom inhering in the gift of power. This gift, Ricoeur tells us, is the root of our effort to exist.[69] For an eschatology such as he espouses, the power to act in response to exigencies and demands therefore stands as the riposte to the Hegelian temptation to raise thought of history and time to the level of the absolute.

By asking how we can justify consenting to an existence on which the absence of aseity places its stamp without also passing judgment on the totality of the universe's suitability for a specifically human freedom, Ricoeur lays the ground for a sustained reflection on the role imagination plays in an eschatology of nonviolence. Eschatology, he points out, is the operative counterpart of a historical project aimed at realizing a condition of freedom that brings the evil of violence and unmerited suffering to an end. Eschatology's temporal character is discontinuous with the time of myth in this regard. Where apocalyptic "myths of the End are symmetrical to the myths of the Origin,"[70] eschatology maintains the connection between the future anticipated in stories or prophesies of deliverance, for example, and the course of historical events in which we are caught up and that we bring about through the various ways that we insert ourselves in the world. Prophecy, Ricoeur reminds us, "stands in relation to historical time as turned toward *imminent* events coming from an impending future."[71] The horizon of hope projected by this sense of imminence accordingly "merits the name eschatology, inasmuch as it implies something like a (…) denouement that will be a deliverance, hence a salvation."[72] Whereas a system of thought for which only reminiscence and recapitulation remain destroys the spring of action, the passion for the possible here animates as yet unfulfilled expectations, demands, and claims. Hegel's philosophy consequently stands in marked contrast to one that acknowledges reason's renunciation of its absolute claim to "fulfill the thought of the unconditioned"[73] by means of empirical determinations. As an "infinite force (…) that produces the circumstances for its own realization,"[74] Reason in Hegel's speculative system obviates the work of the negative by taking it up in its self-consummating process. Contrariwise, the *not yet* that Ernst Bloch identifies with utopian longing, together with the *much more* that for Ricoeur bears the stamp of a superabundance of meaning in opposition to the profusion of senseless destruction and failure, acquire their concrete specificity only in those events, acts, and lives testifying to the good that we desire to be. Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) suffuses these events, acts, and lives' prophetic dimension. The good to which each attests owing to its exemplary value thus marks out the eschatological horizon of the directive ideal resounding in it.

The distinction between the utopian thrust of social and political alternatives and the prospective and even prophetic character of exemplary events, acts, and lives sets the compact between the imagination's operative role and the hermeneutics of testimony in relief. Previously, I noted how responding to exigencies and demands sets the imagination to work. Aesthetic

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[69] Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 467.

[70] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 158.

[71] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 158.

[72] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 158.

[73] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 213; see Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 105.

[74] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, 194.

experience's lateral transposition onto the planes of ethics and politics highlights the kinship between the work's and the act's fittingness in response to a problem, dilemma, or crisis as apprehended by the artist or agent in this regard. In each case the work or the act exemplifies the idea expressed by it. Hence, in each case, the work or the act summons the "rule" to which it singularly attests. Here, in the domain of reflective judgment, the work or the act's exemplarity is the fruit of the capacity to reply to exigencies and demands in singularly fitting ways. Thanks to the work of imagination, the gift of power acquires its concrete specificity in deeds and acts that, in illumining new ways for conducting our lives, manifest the freedom incarnate in them. Freedom, Ricoeur thus reminds us, would be a mere chimera if "it were not a kind of causality that produces effects in the world."[75]

Setting the originary character of the primary affirmation of the being that we are against the "nothingness of finitude"[76] ties the transcending intention animating the originary dialectical structure of our intermediary conditions to the will, desire, and effort to exist in this critical respect. Ricoeur stresses that "primary affirmation (...) is primordially lost"[77] due to the fact that our incarnate existence as flesh forever dissimulates the thought of any origin. The affirmation of our part in being justifies saying yes to an existence on which the absence of aseity places its seal only because of our capacity for surpassing the given order from within. Negativity, Ricoeur accordingly explains, is the privileged road leading to the discovery of primary affirmation via the negation, for example, of the narrowness of our perspective owing to the finitude of one's own point of view. Liberated from the tutelage of totalizing systems of thought, the work of the negative is consequently the conditio per quam of freedom's actualization within the history of humankind.

Comparing utopian alternatives with the promissory character of singular acts consequently brings the compact between imagination and the hermeneutics of testimony more clearly into view. Utopia's temporal noncongruence with ideologically congealed systems and habits of thought delineates the interval in time in which agents take the initiative to act. Imperfect mediations between the space of our experiences and the horizons of our expectations preserve the tension between them thanks to these initiatives' temporalizing force. Nothing, however, prevents us from distinguishing the utopias espoused by some from the testimony proffered by deeds and acts. George Taylor's remarks on the National Socialist program is instructive in this regard. He points out that "[f]rom the perspective of their adherents, (...) political movements such as Nazism offered a utopian form of productive imagination that (...) sought to displace the then current political reality."[78] Arendt's incisive analysis of systems of totalitarian evil and their mindlessly criminal processes stands as a cautionary reminder that the inability to think for oneself and to judge right from wrong paves the way for the failures leading to the wanton destruction of the body politic and its world. Margaret Atwood's dystopian *The Handmaid's Tale* moreover depicts how the alleged "good" of trafficking surrogates in the name of a theocratic dictatorship strips the novel's protagonist Offred (the protagonist's patrionymic, which combines the preposition "of" with the first name of the Commander that she services to reproduce the species) of her rights, her

[75] Ricoeur, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 138.

[76] Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 324.

[77] Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, 327.

[78] George H. Taylor, "Editor's Introduction," in Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Imagination*, ed. George H. Taylor et. al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2024), xxxv.

dignity, and even her place in the world.[79] How, then, can we justify interpreting this imaginative variation as dystopic if not for the fact that the portrayal of evil institutionalized for the purpose of securing the perverse "good" of those responsible for it is ultimately unjustifiable?

We could accordingly ask whether dystopian portrayals of the unjustifiable in their own ways confer the sanction of reality on the ideals to which they negatively attest. Our encounter with evil in the world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the perverse underside of the promissory character of an act or life redressing those of cupidity, avarice, theocratic malevolence, and naked violence, for example. By insisting that the term "testimony" "should be applied to words, works, actions, and to lives which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience and history which nonetheless transcend experience and history,"[80] Ricoeur highlights the prophetic dimension of such exemplary words, works, acts, and lives. For him, "[o]nly those events, acts, and persons that attest that the unjustifiable is overcome here and now can reopen the path toward [an] originary affirmation"[81] of the freedom won by divesting consciousness of the claim to found itself as absolute. That the "hermeneutics of testimony can no more be separated from the problematic of the unjustifiable and of justification than this problematic can be unfolded outside of a hermeneutics of testimony"[82] places the accent on the eschatological impetus of historically contingent acts, signs, and works. For how, as Ricoeur claims, does the "testimony given by exemplary lives (...) attest by a sort of short-circuit to the absolute, to the fundamental, without there being any need for them to pass through the interminable degrees of our laborious ascensions"[83] if not by reason of these lives' justification of the hope for which they are promissory signs? Even if the source of evil comes from elsewhere, Ricoeur remarks, "this other source would still be accessible to us only through its relation to us, only through the state of temptation, aberration, or blindness whereby we would be *affected*"[84] by it. Radical evil consequently is not only inscrutable, since as Kant says "there is (...) for us no conceivable ground from which moral evil in us could originally have come,"[85] but it also has no root. Radical evil's inscrutability notwithstanding, the violence that commences with each evil act thus also lies within our power, constantly re-creating the "unity of moral evil and suffering"[86] that is the source of the contagions it spreads.

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[79] See Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Ricoeur emphasizes that naming someone singularizes "an unrepeatable indivisible entity" (29) that is *this* person. The name given at one's birth accordingly inscribes the "I" by means of which each person refers to herself in the public space in which she appears as irrevocably unique. Far from augmenting the sphere in which the dignity of each individual is borne out by the freedom to exercise the capacities inscribed in the human condition, the perverse "good" that authorizes the handmaids' sexual and political subjugation is instead itself the pathogen that infects the social order, contaminating everyone it touches.

[80] Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis Seymour Mudge (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 78.

[81] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 147.

[82] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 118.

[83] Ricoeur et al., *Critique and Conviction*, 182.

[84] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, xlvi.

[85] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and John R. Silber (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 38; cited by Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 258–59.

[86] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 259. Ricoeur accordingly remarks that "[l]ike Augustine and also perhaps like mythic thought, Kant caught sight of the demonic aspect of the ground of human freedom" (259).

Is the demand for justification apart from which Ricoeur maintains "evil cannot be taken as unjustifiable"[87] consequently the distinguishing feature separating declared utopias from the economy of superabundance that characterizes the logic of hope?[88] This demand for justification stands at the heart of moral conscience, delineating the height of moral conscience in its protest against the unjustifiable. Moral conscience's exteriority, Ricoeur moreover explains, "lies in the testimony of those acts whose ethical significance results from their position on the trajectory of 'approaches to justification.'"[89] Defining the notion of testimony in accordance with these attributes of exteriority and height consequently sets the demand for justification under the aegis of the absolute. This avowal of the absolute is not Kantian, since Kantian philosophy would not incline us to look "for *testimonies*, understood as accounts of an *experience* of the absolute."[90] Nor is it Hegelian, since this recourse to testimony eschews the hubris of the claim to a sovereign mastery. Rather, the absolute is given only in those signs assuring us that the struggle against evil is not in vain. Since evil is "above all what ought not to be, but what must be fought against,"[91] the demand for justification that places its seal on the hope of humanity's liberation thus at the same time sets us on the path toward making freedom a reality for all.

How, then, can evil be said to be overcome here and now if not for the ways that certain acts and lives also make present a future for which they stand as the demonstration and proof? By emphasizing their proleptic character, I mean in this way to highlight how such deeds, acts, and lives confer the sanction on reality of the ideals to which they singularly attest. The radicality of an act that is contingent upon the circumstances in which the agent is caught up is borne out by the way that this act prefigures the reign of freedom by realizing it *hic et nunc*. Such an act is radical not because it is historically contingent but because in making this freedom from oppression, exploitation, subservience, and moral, social, and political harm a reality it testifies to the absolute. We therefore cannot lose sight either of the hermeneutical condition where such testimony can be controverted only by other testimony or of this condition's anthropological vis-à-vis, namely, that we stand neither at the beginning nor the end but are always already *in medias res*. Reason's repudiation of its absolute claim to fulfill the thought of the unconditioned places the task projected by its demand for totality under the aegis of the horizon reason assumes in the constitution both of knowledge and of action. In both fields, Ricoeur explains, "reason means, first, the requirement of a totality of meaning, and second, the impossibility of achieving any given totality."[92] The sanction of reality conferred on ideals manifest by exemplary acts and lives thus vests them with their regulative significance. Such ideals can neither be verified nor falsified. Rather, their value rests on the force they have as directive ideas that set us on the paths we follow. The task projected by reason's demand is therefore perhaps the last word in distinguishing between utopia and hope. Should we therefore not also acknowledge that if "being is 'beyond essence,' if it is horizon, (...)

[87] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 118.

[88] See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974. According to Ricoeur, "there would be no eschatology (...) if the novelty of the new (...) [was] not verified in the 'seriousness' of an interpretation which incessantly separates hope from utopia" (411).

[89] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 118.

[90] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 146; original italics.

[91] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 259.

[92] Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 209.

'[m]oods' alone can manifest the coincidence of the transcendent, in accordance with intellectual determinations, and the inward, in accordance with the order of existential movement"?[93] Hence, among the "feelings that most radically interiorize the supreme intention of reason,"[94] only Joy attests to our part in being thanks to the freedom manifest in the gift of power.

Concluding Remarks

These brief references to the place of feeling in a philosophical anthropology that raises the *pathétique* of the human condition to the level of a rigorous discourse not only serve as a reminder of the conflict between vital and spiritual demands within the human heart but they also highlight how feelings manifest our inclinations toward persons, objects, and ideas. By designating "qualities felt *on* things, *on* persons, *on* the world,"[95] feelings unite an "intention directed toward the world with an affection of the self."[96] Thanks to feeling's strange intentional structure, the good we desire and the evil we eschew enter regions of our experiences through our engagement with the world and the people and things in it.

Identifying the loveable with the good we seek and the hateful with the evil we flee in this way sheds some further light on the prospective dimension of ideas exemplified by individual acts and lives. These acts' and lives' prophetic dimension, I suggested previously, acquire their eschatological bearing as demonstrations and proofs that evil is overcome here and now. Through attesting that evil is unjustifiable, these acts and lives symbolize a manner of living and leading one's life in light of the hope for which they are promissory signs. The freedom to live in light of this hope is accordingly the wellspring of the feeling that crowns the negation of finitude's limitations. As the only "affective 'mood' worthy of being called *ontological*,"[97] Joy, Ricoeur tells us, affirms that we have a part in being through participating in those ideas that we make our own. Arendt here reminds us that since "thought's quest is a kind of desirous love,"[98] only beauty, wisdom, justice, and the like can be its objects. Since for her evil "is never 'radical' (...) [but] is only extreme,"[99] there is nothing in evil deeds and acts of which thought can take hold. For her, the real scandal of the thoughtlessness behind the "horror and, at the same time, the banality of evil"[100] lies

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[93] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 105–106.

[94] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 105; see Ricoeur, *History and Truth*. According to Ricoeur, by manifesting "itself as a singular power of negation" (305), the being that we are raises the question that governs a philosophical style of thought that he suggests could be "characterized by joy and not by anguish" (305).

[95] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 84.

[96] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 89.

[97] Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, 106; original emphasis.

[98] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. Volume One, Thinking*, 179; see Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9.

[99] Hannah Arendt, "Letter to Gershom Gerhard Scholem," in *Correspondence—Scholem, Gershom Gerhard—1963-1964* (Series: Adolf Eichmann File, 1938-1968, n.d.). Accessed May 15, 2021: https://www.brainpickings.org/2017/02/07/hannah-arendt-the-banality-of-evil/; see Bethania Assy, "Eichmann, the Banality of Evil, and Thinking in Arendt's Thought," *Contemporary Philosophy*, 2021. Accessed October 10, 2021: https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Cont/ContAssy.htm.

[100] Arendt, *Responsibility and* Judgment, 146.

in the fact that evil "possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension"[101] but rather commences with each evil act that brings it into the world. Like Ricoeur, Arendt similarly maintains that evil has no root. Hence, whereas the love of beauty, wisdom, and justice directs thought toward those ideas of reason exemplified by individual works, deeds, acts, and lives that augment the field of our experiences, the rootlessness of the violence that lays waste to the world only perverts the freedom inhering in our power to begin something new.

Could we then finally say that resisting the idea that evil gives rise to a summons safeguards the idea of humanity? The "*no* of morality"[102] that responds to all the figures of evil in the intersubjective realm suggests as much. Interdictions against stealing, lying, torture, and murder, for example, are only the negative forms of this deontological directive's emancipatory impetus. Interdictions in defense of the integrity, including bodily integrity, of persons promote the respect owed to all by reason of the humanity of each. Ricoeur reminds us that the ethical aim's primacy over moral prohibitions makes "solicitude, as the mutual exchange of self-esteems"[103] the affirmation that vests moral interdictions with their significance and force. This original affirmation of our and others' inestimable worth is the "hidden soul of the prohibition"[104] against the evil perpetrated through acts of violence. *Sittlichkeit*, Ricoeur once remarked, "did not prevent the advent of Nazism."[105] Rather, only "the upright *Moralität* of some people, like [Dietrich] Bonhoeffer and others, [who] based on a certain idea of human beings"[106] kept faith with this idea through their words, deeds, and acts stood against it. In Bonhoeffer's case, this testimony came at the price of his life. Such testimony, Ricoeur stresses, no longer belongs to the witness. Rather, by proceeding "from an absolute initiative as to its origin and its content,"[107] it gives the measure by which the world is to be judged.

Wanton cruelty and idolatrous injustices are therefore not the final words. By reopening the path toward the primary affirmation of an origin that is forever beyond our grasp, deeds, acts, and lives that vanquish evil here and now testify to the good that vests the idea of humanity with its liberatory force. The vision of a reconciled humanity that for Ricoeur is the object of the poetics of the will here gains its practical foothold in this liberatory project. The enlargement of the sphere of human rights is one of this project's aspects; the recognition, respect, and regard for others whose traditions, aspirations, and ways of living differ from our own is another. Under the aegis of the idea of humanity, the demand for justification in each case confers the sanction of reality on the good manifest in response to current or historical circumstances or exigencies. Inasmuch as moral instruction proceeds by example, this demand stands at the heart of an education to freedom that promotes the rights, dignity, and humanity of all.

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[101] Arendt, "Letter to Gershom Gerhard Scholem."

[102] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 221.

[103] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* 221.

[104] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 221.

[105] Paul Ricoeur, *Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics*, ed. Catherine Goldstein, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 9.

[106] Ricoeur, *Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics*, 9.

[107] Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 86.

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