In the third part of our study, we intend to show how the reciprocal aspects of the meaning of being human—responsibility and hope—become concretely manifested on the level of commitment. For this, we examine Ricoeur’s Social-Political Writings, represented not only by his well-known essays in *Histoire et Vérité* but also by his less-known, thought-provoking contributions to journals like *Christianisme social, Cité nouvelle*, and *Foi-Education*.\(^1\) In our presentation, we confine ourselves to three main topics which, we believe, both reveal what is essential in Ricoeur’s social-political thinking and give an idea of its wide scope.\(^2\) Thus, we discuss in the first chapter, Ricoeur’s critique of civilization and culture; in the second chapter, his reflection on the Christian and society; lastly, in the third chapter, his view on politics and the State.

1. RICOEUR’S CRITIQUE OF CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

We elaborate Ricoeur’s critique of civilization and culture in three stages. In a first stage, we give his analyses of the phenomena of civilization


\(^2\) For the essays in English translation, see PSE. (For list of abbreviations, see p. 66).

To indicate the superior quality of these writings, we cite here Burgelin’s high esteem for them: “... (A) great number of essays, unfortunately scattered in many journals, of which some are a bit confidential, give witness to and constitute one of the finest examples that we have of a reflection on the level of the concrete.” See Pierre Burgelin, “La philosophie de la volonté “ (1961), p. 150 (translation mine).
and culture; in a second stage, his description of the crisis and challenge besetting the present Western civilization; and in a third stage, his reflection on the Christian involvement in civilization.

A. The Meaning of Civilization and Culture

Let us begin by understanding the spirit in which Ricoeur embarks on his “critique of civilization.” According to him, the urgent task is to exercise a kind of “discernment” of civilization. This difficult “discernment” should not be a way of shunning the pressing problems of our time but a means of strengthening the motivation behind our social and political commitment. For to be socially and politically committed is “to choose, in a global fashion, a model of man, a way of living, of owning, of earning and spending one’s money, of working and distributing the product of labor, of obeying and commanding, of enjoying oneself and annoying oneself.” We must therefore discern in order to act. But in turn, we must act in order to be able to discern.

3Ricoeur employs the expression “critique de civilisation” in several instances. See “Pour la coexistence pacifique des civilisations,” Esprit (La paix possible) 19 (March 1951), p. 409. In the “Preface” to the first edition of Histoire et vérité, Ricoeur traces the link between his “critique of civilization” and Mounier’s “political pedagogy.” He writes: “The studies of the second part pertain to what I would call a critique of civilization. In this part there is an attempt to reach a reflective awareness of certain civilizing drives which are characteristic of our era. All of these essays are oriented toward a political pedagogy, the meaning of which is clarified in the pages devoted to Emmanuel Mounier.” See “Préface de la première édition (1955)” in HV, 7; “Preface to the First Edition (1955)” in HT, 3-4.


5“Pour la coexistence pacifique des civilisations” (1951), p. 409 (translation mine).

1. ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF CIVILIZATION

What is the meaning of civilization? This is the question that interests us in this analysis. We find Ricoeur’s first attempt to answer this question in his earliest essay on civilization written in 1946—“Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale.” Here, he reflects on the values that constitute a civilization and inquires on how these same values are maintained in history. Ricoeur does not at all open his analysis with a preconceived and rigid definition of civilization. On the contrary, he allows the vague and global pre-comprehension of this notion to lead him towards the fundamental discovery of our existence as incarnate and historical.

A. THE ADVENTURE OF CIVILIZATION

According to Ricoeur, we participate in a certain adventure, with historico-geographical limits, that promotes certain values. These values “all at once permeate us, support us, limit us, and yet subsist only by our consent and our action.” If we now look more closely into this global lived experience, we perceive these basic aspects: first, civilization as a situation; second, the relativity of a civilization with regard to other civilizations; third, the historicity and transcendence of the values of a civilization; fourth, the exigency for the creative renewal of these values; and fifth, the reciprocity between the values of civilizations and the values of religion. Let us briefly take these up one by one.

First of all, civilization manifests itself as my situation. I am originally bound to my civilization in the same way that I am linked to my body. In this sense, civilization is a social extension of my body. It plays the same equivocal role as my body—I obey it and I command it; my civilization is both a hindrance and a chance, “a nature and a task”

7Published in Christianisme social, Revue Sociale et Internationale pour un Monde Chrétien 54 (October-December 1946), pp. 423-436. What gave rise to this meditation on civilization? After having been forced to spend years in the concentration camp of “a highly civilized yet warlike and confused enemy,” Ricoeur felt himself invited “to make a new examination of what is termed civilization and its basis in experience and thought.” See Edward G. Ballard, “Translator’s Foreword” (1967), in HAP, XIII.


9Ibid., p. 424. See also VI, 119; FN, 125: “Just as I have not chosen my body, I have not chosen my historical situation but both the one and the other are the locus of my responsibility.”
Secondly, my civilization is relative to other civilizations. Although there is but one single humanity, there are many diverse civilizations. The awareness of the relativity of civilizations, cultures, and traditions is even more pronounced in the present time. It is no longer possible to adhere to a tradition without introducing into one's own allegiance a critical consciousness of its relativity with regard to other traditions.\(^\text{10}\)

Thirdly, every civilization presents certain original values. To speak of a civilization is to point to the constellation of values that gives it a unique stamp.\(^\text{11}\) Here, we notice the paradox of values—they arise in history but nevertheless transcend it. Justice and freedom, for example, are \textit{a priori} values but they only appear in history when revealed by the initiative of outstanding personalities, mass movements, or by the spirit of the age. For Ricoeur, the fascinating phenomenon is that “the dignity of \textit{itinerant} man lies in the \textit{eternal} values which he \textit{discovers} in inventing them historically.”\(^\text{12}\)

Fourthly, there is the exigency of creatively renewing the values of a civilization. For values only flourish insofar as they are nourished by

\(^{10}\) In a UNESCO-commissioned study on the conception of time in diverse cultures, Ricoeur makes these introductory remarks: “Today, the openness to the other cultures is the condition of our adherence to a center of perspective; the tension between the ‘familiar’ and the ‘foreign’ is a part of the interpretation by which we attempt to apply to our own selves the singular sense of a given tradition. This tension between the familiar and the foreign does not imply any dominant englobing view.” See “Introduction” to \textit{Les cultures et le temps}, études préparées pour l’UNESCO, Bibliothèque scientifique, Au carrefour des cultures (Paris: Payot/Les Presses de l’UNESCO, 1975), p. 41 (translation mine).

\(^{11}\) According to Ricoeur, the core of a civilization is “a global will-to-live, a way of living; and this will-to-live is animated by judgments and values.” See “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 88 (first published as “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire: Progrès, ambiguïté, espérance” in \textit{Christianisme social} 59 (April 1951), pp. 261-274); “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1965), in HT, 87 (another earlier translation entitled “Christianity and the Meaning of History: Progress, Ambiguity, Hope” in \textit{The Journal of Religion} 21 (1952), pp. 242-253).

\(^{12}\) “Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale” (1946), p. 426 (Ricoeur’s emphases; translation mine). Ricoeur speaks of a “concrete ethics” in the sense that “value does not appear to a timeless conscience alien to the struggles of the century but to a combatant who is oriented in the crisis . . . .” See “Emmanuel Mounier: une philosophie personnaliste” (1950), in HV, 149; “Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher” (1965), in HT, 146.
the “voluntary memory” of a people. This “voluntary memory” (to which we will come back again) does not safeguard the past passively but renews it creatively. In a way, it is absurd to defend the past or that which has been acquired. What one defends is the future or a project that will be.

Lastly, there is a reciprocity between the values of civilizations and the values of religion. One can even go as far as to say that the values of a civilization, which are also moral values, are “guaranteed” by religious values, in the sense that the latter animate the former. Of course, these moral values in themselves are “neutral” with regard to religion. But their true nature does not exclude a relationship with religious values. Hasn’t history particularly shown us that moral values wither away when they no longer have the “horizon” of a greater hope which goes beyond the individual and the common good? Religion prevents moral values from perishing away by giving us a superior motive of dedication and fidelity to the values of civilization. We may speak then of a dialectic relationship between moral values and religious values. On the one hand, moral values need to be related to religion in order to endure. On the other hand, religious values need to be manifested in the world through moral values.

We have made this brief excursion to show that many of the themes subsequently treated on by Ricoeur regarding civilization and culture already find expression in this essay of 1946. As we go along, we see these themes become elaborated with greater detail and more nuance. Here,

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13Ricoeur considers the heritage of a civilization only alive so long as it can be creatively reinterpreted in new situations. In his own words, our “heritage” is not “a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living.” See “Structure et herméneutique” (1963), in CI, 31; “Structure and Hermeneutics” (1974), translated by Kathleen McLaughlin, in CINT, 27.

14In a recent interview, Ricoeur reaffirms his belief in the possibility of rejuvenating the traditional heritages of Antiquity by means of philosophy: “One cannot have hope if one does not have a memory. But we must make a memory that is no longer repetitive but creative. That is one of the goals of philosophy.” See “Entretien” (1975), p. 21 (translation mine).

15According to Ricoeur, “it is always an eschatology that is the soul of a social message.” See “Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale” (1946), p. 427 (translation mine); also p. 434.
we notice that Ricoeur's analysis stays exclusively on the level of values. In a later essay that will now occupy us, he differentiates three varied levels in the phenomenon of civilization.

B. THE THREE LEVELS OF CIVILIZATION

Nearly twenty years later in a 1965 talk entitled “Tâches de l'éducateur politique” addressed to “all those who feel responsible for the transformation, the evolution, and the revolution of their countries by an act of thought, of speech and of writing,” Ricoeur takes up again the analysis of the phenomenon of civilization.16 This time, his method is analytic which he qualifies as proceeding “by means of a series of divisions, determining a series of levels and provisionally unconcerned on articulating these levels.”17 As will be pointed out later, the advantage of this analytic approach lies in bringing out “what is irreducible in politics in relation to economics and techniques.”18 It is important to realize that the word “civilization” is used here in its largest sense which covers the three levels of industries,19 institutions, and values. Let us follow the description of these three levels.

1) THE LEVEL OF INDUSTRIES

By the first level of industries, Ricoeur refers to a very vast aspect of civilization which does not only go beyond the level of tools and machines but also of techniques. In a general way, “industries” may be applied to

16See “Tâches de l'éducateur politique,” *Esprit* (Amérique latine et conscience chrétienne) 33 (July-August 1965), Nos. 7-8, pp. 78-93, see p. 78; “The Tasks of the Political Educator” (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 271-293, see p. 271 (same translation first published in *Philosophy Today* 17 (Summer 1973), No. 2, pp. 142-152).

17My translation for: “... par une série de coupes, déterminant une série de niveaux, sans souci, provisoirement, d'articuler ces niveaux”; Stewart’s translation, which changes Ricoeur's meaning, reads: “... by means of a series of divisions only provisionally determining a series of levels and articulating these levels.” See “Tâches de l'éducateur politique” (1965), p. 78; “The Tasks of the Political Educator” (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 272.


19We prefer to abide by Stewart's translation of “industries” for “outillages” to emphasize the broad sense of the term. Ricoeur juxtaposes “outillages” with “outils” which is translated by Stewart as “tools.” See PSE, 293 note 1.
“everything which can be considered as the accumulation of experience.” This phenomenon of accumulation is at once evident on the level of tools and machines. With their conservation, particular historical inventions become the universal acquisition of humanity. Ricoeur broadens next the meaning of “industries” to include the “whole network of organized mediations which are put into the service of science, politics, economics, and even of ways of living and means of leisure.”

In this sense, the level of techniques taken as “collective experience” can be regarded as the level of “industries” crystallized into disposable goods. Finally, Ricoeur extends the meaning of “industries” to cover not only technical inventions but also intellectual, moral, and artistic achievements. Thus, documents, monuments, actions, and works of art (insofar as they represent the crystallized forms of these experiences) figure as “industries.” In the widest sense, “industries” therefore refer to every human experience to the extent that it leaves traces. On this first level, civilization assumes a singular form—there is a civilization. From the viewpoint of technological history, there is but one global civilization. Ricoeur points out that this awareness of belonging to a single universal civilization is only recent. For the first time in history, we “experience ourselves as a single humanity which enlarges its capital, its instruments and means of working, living and thinking.”

2) **THE LEVEL OF INSTITUTIONS**

With this second level of institutions, civilization takes on a plural form—there are several civilizations. Now, we are made aware that humanity “only realizes its consciousness through closed figures which are those of multiple institutional systems which regulate its historical experience.”

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23Ibid., p. 81; ibid. in PSE, 275.
In this sense, we may look upon each civilization as “a historico-geographical complex which covers a certain domain and which, although it may not be rigidly defined, has its own peculiar vital cores and zones of influence.”

But what does Ricoeur understand by “institutions”? From a static viewpoint, he means those forms of social existence in which the relations between persons are regulated by rights (constitutional, public, civil, penal, commercial, social, etc.). From a dynamic viewpoint, he means politics taken in the broad sense as “the sum total of activities which have for their object the exercise of power, therefore also the conquest and preservation of power.” At this point, Ricoeur justifies the analytic method he employs. The advantage of this method consists in focusing on the originality of politics. By distinguishing the level of industries from the level of institutions, Ricoeur emphasizes the irreducibility of politics to economics and techniques. Politics is to be identified with the history of power, “which not only does not pose the same problems but neither arouses the same maladies nor exhibits the same pathology and consequently, is not relieved by the same therapeutic.” The level of institutions does not display the phenomenon of accumulation that characterizes the level of industries. While the history of technology is characterized by progress, the history of power is characterized by ambiguity.

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26 “Tâches de l’éducateur politique” (1965), pp. 81-82; “The Tasks of the Political Educator” (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 276. In this connection, Ricoeur is especially critical of Marxism-Leninism for reducing political alienation to economic alienation. This is what he affirms: “I believe that the great error which assails the whole of Marxism-Leninism and which weighs upon the regimes engendered by Marxism is this reduction of political evil to economic evil. From this springs the illusion that a society liberated from the contradictions of the bourgeois society would also be freed of political alienation.” See “Le paradoxe politique” (1957), in HV, 272; “The Political Paradox” (1965), in HT, 258.
3) THE LEVEL OF VALUES

By the third level of values, Ricoeur does not mean the abstract values that are the object of philosophical speculation. "Values" here have to be understood as the "concrete valorizations" that can be apprehended "in the attitudes of men in regard to other men—in work, property, power, temporal experience, etc." 27 These concrete values constitute no less than "the very substance of the life of a people." 28 At a superficial level, these concrete values are expressed in their customs and traditions. Beyond these, they are manifested in the traditional institutions which reflect the thought, will, and feelings of a people at a particular time. But if one wants to contact the "creative nucleus" of a civilization, one has to penetrate "that layer of images and symbols which make up the basic ideals of a nation"—"the awakened dream of a historical group." 29 These images need to be authentically deciphered and methodically interpreted.

It is on this deep level that we perceive the diversity and plurality of civilizations. Yet these historical civilizations, far from being completely shut off from one another, have the capacity to enter into "communication." 30 Ricoeur charges this word with a new meaning. By "communication" is meant "a dramatic relation in which I affirm myself in my origins and give myself to another's imagination in accordance with his different civilization." 31

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF CULTURE

What is the significance of culture as a humanism? This is now the question that concerns us. To answer it, we draw principally from Ricoeur's essay of 1956—"Que signifie 'humanisme'?" 32 We feel justified in iden-

27 "Tâches de l'éducateur politique" (1965), p. 83; "The Tasks of the Political Educator" (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 279.
28 Ibid., p. 84; ibid., in PSE, 280.
29 "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales" (1961), in HV, 296; "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" (1965), in HT, 280.
31 "Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales" (1961), in HV, 300; "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" (1965), in HT, 283.
32 Published in Comprendre, Revue de la Société Européenne de Culture, L'humanisme d'aujourd'hui (March 1956), No. 15, pp. 84-92; "What Does 'Humanism' Mean?" (1974); translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 68-87.
tifying culture with humanism because Ricoeur himself views the latter as the preliminary effort of discriminating meanings which he considers as the most significant contribution and justification of the person of culture. For this section on the significance of culture, we limit ourselves to three themes: first, culture as the recollection of our heritage; second, culture as our defense against “objectification” in work and in leisure; third, culture as the anticipation of our project of humanity.

A. CULTURE AS THE RECOLLECTION OF OUR HERITAGE

In this first sense, culture as a humanism is identified with the struggle of modern man to preserve his ancient heritage. It is the “resistance to forgetfulness” of man’s cultural past.\(^{33}\) This resistance is justified by the essential function of memory in culture. As early as his book on Jaspers, Ricoeur already dwells on the importance of remembering the past in order to invigorate the present: “The recovered past is the living source of the present; there is no existence without tradition, no boldness without piety, no freedom, without fidelity.”\(^{34}\) In remembering the history of humanity, one also unfolds the future.\(^{35}\) To become a self, one must have a memory and a fidelity to listen and to learn from others.\(^{36}\)

Against those who cling to “nihilism”—the conviction that the ancient cultural heritage is dried up or that its symbolic force is worn out, Ricoeur holds that this heritage can still be reactivated.\(^{37}\) Precisely, it is the task of philosophy to engage in this battle of forgetfulness.\(^{38}\) The

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\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 85; ibid., in PSE, 70 (Ricoeur’s emphases).

\(^{34}\)J., 312 (translation mine).

\(^{35}\)See “La question de l’‘humanisme chrétien’” Foi et Vie 49 (1951), p. 324 (translation mine): “All these men must rise up in us: they are our memory and by that itself, something of our project of being-man; our human nature is, in a certain way, our history of humanity; we cannot do otherwise than be born after all these men, to work at the end of history, after their pretension and audacity.”


\(^{37}\)“Entretien” (1975), p. 16.

work to be done will be extremely costly. For it no longer has to do with the passive preservation but with the creative reinvention of a whole cultural heritage.\(^{39}\) A heritage only lives on by grace of interpretation.

**B. CULTURE AS OUR DEFENSE AGAINST “OBJECTIFICATION” IN WORK AND LEISURE**

We come to the second sense of culture as the reply to the peril of the “objectification” of human beings in their work and well-being.\(^{40}\) The evolution of technology itself has made us realize the need to delay specialization as a way of adjusting to the modern world.\(^{41}\) In fact, this adjustment requires a kind of professional mobility, flexibility, and coordination between special techniques.\(^{42}\) Here appears the role of culture as “unadaptation.” Culture as “unadaptation” provides us with the capacity to avoid the danger of “objectification” that threatens the human

\(^{39}\)To speak of culture as a heritage is to stress that culture is a way of assuring the continuity of human generations by an historical memory. To talk of transmission is to point out that this continuity of the generations is assured through institutions by the “documents” of the culture which are offered to the reinterpretation of later generations. To speak of tradition is to bring out our dependence on a specific authority—the authority of the past. See “Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue” (1973), translated by David Pellauer, in PSE, 245-246 (first published in *Philosophy Today* 17 (Summer 1973), No. 2, pp. 153-165).


\(^{41}\)In this connection, Ricoeur holds that the University—insofar as it transmits a living culture—should not give in to the “technical temptation,” that is to say, “the temptation to hasten the adaptation of the individual to his future profession” for technical as well as ethical reasons which lead back to the traditional service rendered by the word (parole). See “La parole est mon royaume” (1955), p. 195 (translation mine). See also “Comment respecter l’enfant?” *Foi-Education* 18 (October 1948), p. 8.

\(^{42}\)See “L’enseignement des humanités dans le monde moderne,” *Foi-Education* 29 (January-March 1959), No. 46, p. 25. Concerning this “mobility,” Ricoeur distinguishes three kinds of culture: first, an “encyclopedic” culture that is the simple accumulation of knowledge; second, a “structural” culture that is the mastery of cultural vehicles like languages, mathematics, etc., and third, an “analogical” culture that consists in the aptitude to grasp interrelations of advanced disciplines—their lines of convergence and exchange, at the point of their development. See “L’université nouvelle,” in *L’éducation dans un Québec en évolution*, Publications de la Faculté des Sciences de l’Education de l’Université Laval (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1966), p. 233.
being as worker. In Ricoeur’s own words, culture is that which “unadapts man, keeps him ready for the open, for the remote, for the other, for the all.”43 Herein lies the *raison d’être* of the humanistic disciplines.

However, we would be missing Ricoeur’s whole point if we took him to be totally against technological adaptation and specialization.44 Adaptation is an essential aspect of the cultural venture. But in tension with this, the cultural enterprise must also enable man to distance himself from the technological civilization—“to root him in his historical memory, to counterbalance the future with the past, the useful with the true, the knowledge of things with the consciousness of self.”45 Culture should aim at no less than that taut equilibrium pursued in true education. Ricoeur reminds us:

*Education*, in the strong sense of the word, is perhaps only the just but difficult equilibrium between the exigency for objectification—that is, adaptation—and the exigency for reflection and unadaptation.46


44Early in his philosophical career, Ricoeur criticizes Marcel for his lack of a positive appreciation of technology, law, and institutions. See MJ, 175-177. Further on, in this same work, Ricoeur states his own position more clearly: “...for my part, I would say that a more positive evaluation of the material and juridical conditions of our age could alone guarantee that the eulogy of fidelity be not linked to any decrepit conservatism; I would even add that only a keen sense of the technical and abstract substructures of a modern society is capable, in contrast to justify the transcendent character of fidelity in relation to the historical forms of the social bond, and in particular, in relation to feudality. ...” See MJ, 300 (translation mine). In relation to this question, Ihde shows that not all philosophies of existence (he specifically cites Mounier and Ricoeur) are open to Harvey Cox’ charge of being antitechnological, romantic, and individualistic. See Don Ihde, “The Secular City and the Existentialists,” in *Technics and Praxis: A Philosophy of Technology*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 24, Synthèse Library, 130 (Dordrecht-Boston-London: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 141-150 (article first published in *The Andover Newton Quarterly* 7 (March 1967) No. 4, pp. 188-189).


46“Travail et parole” (1953), in HV, 227; “Work and the Word” (1965), in HT, 213-214. (Ricoeur’s emphasis). In his book on Jaspers, Ricoeur also makes some percep-
Culture is not only a defense against the “objectification” of the human being in work but also in leisure. At present, the problem of leisure is more prominent not only because of its growing importance in modern life but also because man as worker tends to attach more significance to his leisure. How does culture prepare us for leisure? By arming him “against distractions that are as easy, mechanized, and deadening as the most segmented work.”\textsuperscript{47} In the sphere of leisure, there is no longer a technical problem of adaptation but an ethical problem of mastery. For this mastery, we need culture to teach us a kind of detachment from the desirability of the immediate goods offered for our satisfaction by the consumer society.\textsuperscript{48} To culture then belongs the obligation “to safeguard the quality of our leisure.”\textsuperscript{49}

C. CULTURE AS THE ANTICIPATION OF PROJECT OF HUMANITY

Finally, we tackle the third sense of culture as the anticipation of our project. In place of the “memory of humanity,” Ricoeur now stresses the “elan of humanity” in the ethico-cultural sense.”\textsuperscript{50} This is exemplified by the preliminary conviction in the efficacious activity of the person of culture. But this efficaciousness is exactly proportioned to its disinterestedness. This belief is qualified as “preliminary” because it can not be verified by science. It is on the order of a wager or an initial


\textsuperscript{49}“L’enseignement des humanités dans le monde moderne” (1959), p. 24 (Ricoeur’s emphases; translation mine).

investment; it is a risk and a gamble. It can only be practically justified. But nevertheless, this belief is "rational" in its content. For it affirms that in every civilization, one can recover those values which gives this civilization an option. These values constitute what Ricoeur calls "the open direction of this civilization."51

One should not lose sight of the intimate bond between the first theme of culture as a recuperation of our history and this third theme of culture as an anticipation of our destiny. A nation delves into a past heritage in function of a future project. If life is both memory and project, then "creative projects emerge from a faithful memory."54 The quest for origins pursued through the "images of man" is also a quest for the visions of man.55 Culture then is the constant oscillation between retrospect and prospect. In this regard, the person of culture is one who arbitrates between different temporalities — "the times of acquisition and progress, the times of creation and memory."56

In working for the renewal of humanity, the person of culture fulfills a twofold function: a "critical" function and a "poetic" function. Under the first aspect, the man of culture practises that same "discernment" that we have already been made aware of. He becomes the critic

51In an essay on Ricoeur's hermeneutics, James F. Brown relevantly comments: "To a greater extent, a culture is its posture toward learning and truth, and how it goes about trying to explore and live by that truth." See James F. Brown, "Culture, Truth, and Hermeneutics," America 138 (January 28, 1978), No. 3, p. 57.

52"Que signifie 'humanisme'?" (1956), p. 88; "What Does 'Humanism' Mean?" (1974), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 77 (Ricoeur's emphases). In another work, Ricoeur refers to these values as the "civilizing drives" of our time. See "Préface de la première édition (1955)," in HV, 7; "Preface to the First Edition" (1955), in HT, 3.

53According to Ricoeur, the essence of a people is never objectively known "like a 'lesson in history' because the choice itself of true ancestors is in function of a project, a task; as long as a history remains unfinished, its meaning is held in suspense . . ." See "La culpabilité allemande," Christianisme social 57 (March-April 1949), Nos. 3-4, p. 151 (translation mine).


56"'Tâches de l'éducateur politique" (1965), p. 92; "The Tasks of the Political Educator" (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 292.
of protest and denunciation who believes in his own efficaciousness. But the critic who denounces already announces the “poetic” aspect of the humanistic function. Under this second aspect, the man of culture—precisely because of his disinterestedness in immediate efficaciousness—becomes even more efficacious on the deeper level of guiding images. By his disinterestedness, the person of culture “opens up the horizon of possibilities” of humanity. 57 In this way, he collaborates in the creation of a new human being by renewing the humanity of being human. 58

According to Ricoeur, the distanciation from immediate political efficaciousness brings about the kinship of the poet and the philosopher. In many instances, Ricoeur repeatedly makes a plea for the cause of the artist who is often accused of being “uncommitted.” 59 Why must the artist be more concerned with understanding the internal problems of his art? It is because he serves society best when he remains faithful to the inner impulse of his art:

For the total significance of an epoch has more profound roots than social or political utilitarianism will ever suspect. It may be that the so-called “uncommitted” literature will have better expressed (because more secretly and more radically) man’s needs in a given epoch than a literature anxious to have a “message” immediately understood and eager to exercise an immediate influence on its time. Perhaps it will have expressed only the most superficial, trite, and hackneyed aspect of the consciousness of an epoch. 60

The creative artist then is not the one who repeats what is already known but who heralds a new epoch.

60 “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV 97; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1965), in HT 96. See also “Discerner pour agir” (1950), pp. 451-452.
From the belief in the efficaciousness of culture, Ricoeur draws three practical consequences in ethics, politics, and philosophy. In ethics, this conviction in the efficaciousness of culture restores the intellectual's power and dignity. In politics, it implies a "true liberalism" which refuses the purely apologetic function of culture and a demand for its freedom from State control. In philosophy, it indicates in humanism a "philosophy of limits" which poignantly sums up our human situation:

Man is man when he knows that he is only man. The ancients called man a "mortal." This "remembrance of death" indicated in the very name of man introduces the reference to a limit at the very heart of the affirmation of man himself. When faced with the pretension of absolute knowledge, humanism is therefore the indication of an "only": we are only men.63

Up to this point, we have examined Ricoeur's analyses on the meaning of civilization and culture. From these, we may retain three practical guidelines. First of all, we must learn to discern the authentic values of our civilization in order that we may renew them by our active dedication. We have to achieve always a reflective awareness of the impetus of our civilization. Secondly, we must make our responsibility manifest in history. For this, we have to take care not to juxtapose but to conjugate together the necessity of history with personal responsibility. Thirdly, we must constantly reflect—as Christians—on the significance of our commitment.

B. The Crisis and Challenge of the Present Civilization

Let us now take up Ricoeur's reflection on the present Western civilization. Here, we hope to clarify two crises that beset us in the present time. The first crisis manifests itself in the confrontation of the "person" with the "masses," and in the clash of "national cultures" with a "universal civilization." This crisis, provoked by our adjustment to the technologi-

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61 See "La crise de la vérité et la pression du mensonge dans la civilisation actuelle," Vie enseignante, Pour les instituteurs (November 1953), No. 83, p. 11.
cally advanced society, poses the challenge of the unification of humanity. The second crisis presents itself no longer as a problem of adjustment but as a radical putting into question of the meaning of the advanced society itself. It is this crisis which poses the challenge of the restoration of meaning. As we will see, the two crises and challenges are intimately related.

1. Toward the Unification of Humanity

A. THE "PERSON" AND THE CHALLENGE OF A "MASS CIVILIZATION"

To find out what is at stake in the confrontation of the "person" with the "masses," we must go back to the essay "Masse et personne" that Ricoeur co-authored with Jean-Marie Domenach in 1951. In this essay, the two members of Esprit seek to gauge the consequences of a mass civilization on the personalist movement. It is to discern then both the values created and destroyed by the entry of the masses in history. This task of discernment is to be exercised on two levels. A first level, more sociological in nature, describes the factors that bring about this new "mass-consciousness." A second level, more ethico-pedagogical in nature, evaluates this movement of the masses from the viewpoint of personalism.

Three factors have greatly contributed to the passage of an élite civilization into a mass civilization. On the technical level, the successive industrial revolutions have enabled whole masses of people to pass a certain threshold of humanity. On the socio-economic level, the structure of bourgeois civilization has given rise to a mass civilization "as its own requirement in a competitive system, as its partial effect through world-wide raising of living-standards, (and) as its antagonist through

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64Published in Esprit 19 (January 1951), pp. 9-18; "Mass and Person," translated by Joseph L. Caulfield, Cross Currents 2 (Winter 1952), pp. 59-66, This is the first article of Ricoeur to be made available to the English-speaking public.

65In his admirable essay on Mounier, Ricoeur notes that personalism first arose from an awareness of a crisis in civilization. The adjective "personalist" designates a civilizing task. See "Emmanuel Mounier: une philosophie personnaliste" (1950), in HV, 137; "Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher" (1965), in HV, 135.
class warfare.” On the cultural level, bourgeois culture has engendered mass culture by initiating popular education. But what is the significance of this mass consciousness for our civilization? Here, description gives way to evaluation.

The description of mass civilization has to submit itself to “the requirement that the person be the very aim of the whole civilizing will.” In this way, mass civilization will not only be examined to find out whether it promotes the primacy of the person but, will also provide the occasion to grasp the justification of this claim. What justifies then this claim of the primacy of the person? Following Mounier’s line of thinking, both Domenach and Ricoeur affirm that it is primarily justified by the ascetic experience in all its forms—intellectual, moral, aesthetic, spiritual—insofar as this experience introduces a qualitative order which goes from anonymity to personality.

Applying this exigency of “personalization” on mass civilization, we may distinguish two movements in the complex phenomenon of the “masses”: the one promoting the person, the other degrading it. Though these two movements may merge together in the same historic reality, it is important to distinguish them in order to determine our authentic task toward the masses. The first movement is called “becoming a mass.” This positive and active way of being a collectivity is exemplified by the proletariat’s consciousness as a class. Here, we see the proletariat’s collective protest as an advancement of man’s consciousness as a person. But there is also a second way of being a collectivity that makes us witness the collapse of man’s consciousness as a person. Unlike the first, this movement of “being massified” is experienced in a negative and passive way. It is exemplified by the techniques employed by the totalitarian State and the consumer society to level down personality by substituting sterile conformity for original creativity. In the first sense, the “masses” acquire a certain collective personality and become capable of directing history. In the second sense, the “masses” abdicate their personality and thus, their claim on history.

67 Ibid., p. 12; ibid., p. 61.
68“La crise de la vérité et la pression du mensonge dans la civilisation actuelle” (1953), p. 11.
In the face of this two-levelled analysis, what is our task before the masses? This task presents itself as a tension between consent and vigilance. On the one hand, we must consent to mass civilization, not only for its quantitative but also for its qualitative benefits. On the other hand, we must remain vigilant to the exigency of personalization. Although the harmonious synthesis of these two demands escape us, the dynamism of our civilization impels us to pursue it. Both Domenach and Ricoeur exhort us to stay creatively faithful to our “memory of humanity”—"to continue the ancient culture in all that it may possess of value, and at the same time to search for a new culture which will issue from the very effort of mass liberation."69 This creative fidelity consists in resisting both the process of “massification” and the temptation of an anti-mass personalism.70 More positively, it means helping the movement of personalism radiate out to the masses and supporting these, in turn, resist “massification.” This involves a participation in their plight and the determination “to adhere sincerely enough to them in order to share their hope and to feel in their revolt the fundamental need of leaving an inhuman condition. . . .”71

b. National cultures and the challenge of a universal civilization

For the second crisis posed by the advent of a “universal world civilization,” we turn now to the essay “Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales.”72 If we are to appreciate the problematic at hand, we must not ignore Ricoeur’s preliminary remarks. First, the problem raised by the confrontation of a national culture with a universal civilization is common to both “highly industrialized” and “developing” countries.

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70 In Ricoeur’s view, one ought never to separate the personalist revolution from communal life “for communal life alone brings us back again toward totalitarian peril, and the personal by itself brings us back again to the illusion of individualism.” See “Tâches de l’éducateur politique” (1965), p. 91; “The Tasks of the Political Educator” (1973), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 290.
Second, the resolution of the problem is not to be found in suppressing one of the two terms. Ricoeur makes it very clear that his reflection is in no way motivated by a “contempt for universal modern civilization.” In his view, the problem precisely exists because we experience, at the same time, the exigency to accede to the level of a universal civilization and the necessity to preserve our traditional heritage.

As before, the analysis here is of two levels. In a first level, there is a description of the phenomenon of the “universal world civilization,” and in a second level, an inquiry into its significance for the traditional cultural heritage. For now, we give a sketch of the first level.

According to Ricoeur, the universal civilization may be characterized as the application of rationality in the following domains: science, techniques, politics, economics, and lifestyle. As a first source of rationality, science provides a purely abstract unity of mankind which leads to all the other manifestations of modern civilization. The second source of rationality is to be found in the development of techniques understood as a revival of traditional tools. The third instance of rationality is attested by what Ricoeur cautiously speaks of as “the existence of rational politics.” Certainly, he does not mean to minimize the diversity and multiplicity of political regimes. But he holds that in the midst of all these, there is the unfolding of a single experience of mankind. Venturing even farther, Ricoeur asserts that in the end, all regimes have the same basic aspiration—the synthesis between authority and freedom, between autocratic planification and democratic participation. The fourth instance of rationality is attested by “the existence of a

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73 Ibid., in HV; 286; ibid., in HV, 271.

74 This level of techniques belongs to the level of “industries” (outillages) that we have discussed above. See pp. 6-7.

75 “Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales” (1961), in HV, 288; “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965), in HT, 273. In the same place, Ricoeur notes that the rationalization of politics is exemplified by the modern State qua State.

76 As Ricoeur sees it, this is also the problem of socialism. He has brought out this problem many times. See “La crise de la democratie et de la conscience chretienne,” Christianisme social 55 (May 1947), No. 4, p. 328; In this connection, see the series of articles written by Ricoeur after his trip to China: “Questions sur la Chine,” Christianisme social (Planisme et liberté) 64 (1956), pp. 330-331; “Enseignement dans la Chine nouvelle,” Foi-Education 26 (January-March 1956), No. 34, p. 25 (first published under the title “Ecoles de Chine,” Paris-Pekin, La Revue des Amitiés Franco-Chinoises (March 1956), pp. 11-16).
rational, universal economy” about which Ricoeur speaks with even
greater caution.\textsuperscript{77} Despite the oppositions of capitalism and authori-
tarian socialism, he foresees the universal convergence of different eco-
omic techniques. As the fifth and last instance of rationality, there is
the common lifestyle which has resulted from the standardization, not
only of lodging and clothing but also of culture and leisure.

In the second level of Ricoeur's analysis, one is struck by the \textit{ambi-
guity} of the universal civilization. On the one hand, it manifests a real
progress. But on the other hand, it also represents a destruction of the
creative nucleus of great civilizations and great cultures. Let us inspect
the positive side of this universal civilization. One may speak of progress
when two conditions are fulfilled: there is a phenomenon of accumu-
lation and there is a phenomenon of improvement. We have seen the
phenomenon of accumulation when “industries” in the broad sense
form a deposit capable of being transformed anew. One can certainly
agree with Ricoeur that this universalization of civilization has brought
solid gains for the whole of mankind. The awareness of belonging to a
single humanity, the consciousness of the masses regarding their active
role in history, their leap over a certain economic and cultural thresh-
hold—all these are to be reckoned as good.

Yet there is a negative side to universal civilization insofar as it viti-
ates that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life.\textsuperscript{78} For the “de-
veloping” countries, the dilemma is even more dramatic: “... how to
become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dor-
mant civilization and take part in universal civilization.”\textsuperscript{79} For the “in-
dustrialized” countries, the conflict arises in the confrontation with
other cultures. In the discovery of the relativity of cultures, one faces
the danger of falling into skepticism and nihilism.

\textsuperscript{77}“Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales” (1961), in HV, 289; “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965), in HT, 273.

\textsuperscript{78}On the one hand, the nation may be viewed as an obstacle to “mondialization.”

\textsuperscript{79}“Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales” (1961), in HV, 293; “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965), in HT, 277.
Before this ambiguous significance of universal civilization, two questions demand our consideration. First, under what conditions may the "creative nucleus" of a civilization be pursued? Second, how is an encounter with different cultures possible? Let us look at the first question. As we have seen, the "creative nucleus" of a civilization is to be found in a deposit of values that has to be sought out on several levels. We have also seen that a culture is kept alive by its constant renewal.\textsuperscript{80} For this end, we need sometimes "a writer, a thinker, a sage, or a religious man to rise up in order to start a culture anew and to chance it again with venture and total risk."\textsuperscript{81} The first question then is raised for we are only too aware that not all traditional cultures are capable of absorbing universal civilization. For his part, Ricoeur lays down these conditions as \textit{sine qua non}: first, the capacity to assimilate scientific and technical rationality, and second, the appreciation of temporality and our responsibility over history.

We come to the second question: How is the encounter with different cultures possible? We have already been impressed with the plurality of cultures. Yet despite this diversity and multiplicity, we experience the sentiment of the unity of humanity. This sentiment, however, has to be raised to the level of a wager and a voluntary affirmation. One can do this "by means of sympathy and imagination" and the reason for this possibility lies in the nature of man: "To be a man is to be capable of this projection into another center of perspective."\textsuperscript{82} This sympathetic understanding of other cultures does not entail a repudiation of one's own culture. There is a kind of understanding which respects the diversity of cultures but, at the same time, grasps a kind of unity in their very diversity. Thus, the solution is not a vague syncretism but that same "communication" which we have already encountered.\textsuperscript{83} Accord-

\textsuperscript{80}According to Ricoeur, a cultural being is not a \textit{mens instantanea}. One should not therefore surrender oneself to the tide of contradictory influences of the modern world without re-rooting oneself in their origins. See "Que signifie 'humanisme'" (1956), p. 85; "What Does 'Humanism' Mean?" (1974), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 70.

\textsuperscript{81}"Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales" (1961), in HV, 297; "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" (1965), in HT, 281.

\textsuperscript{82}\textit{Ibid.}, in HV, 299; \textit{ibid.}, in HT, 282.

\textsuperscript{83}See p. 353 For Ricoeur, this "communication" is a structure of true knowledge. See "L'histoire de la philosophie et l'unité du vrai" (1954), in HV, 55; "The History of
ing to Ricoeur, we are only now embarking on this formidable task of “communication.”

Our civilization, we have seen, presents a twofold crisis. We have focussed our attention on the first pole which we have delineated as the confrontation of the person with a mass civilization, and of national cultures with a universal civilization. By discriminating the two movements in the masses—”becoming a mass” and “being massified”—we brought out the challenge that mass civilization addresses to the person. This challenge is none other than the delicate balance of consenting to mass civilization without neglecting the demand of personalization. Again, by discerning the significance of the universal civilization on the “creative nucleus” of a nation, we brought out the challenge thrown by the former on the latter. This challenge consists in the difficult equilibrium of assimilating the progress in rationality without forgetting one’s ethico-mythical memory. Our grand task, therefore, is to work towards the unification of humanity—a unification which takes into account the singularity of each human being and the totality of all human beings.

2. TOWARD THE RESTORATION OF MEANING

It is time to look at the second crisis in the present civilization. Here, we move from a reflection on the level of means to a reflection on the level of ends. It is no longer a matter of awakening one’s awareness to the changes imposed by the technologically advanced society. It is now a matter of critically reflecting on the new modes of alienation that arise from this same society. In a radical way, we put into question its basic goals for “we are responsible with regard to the fundamental motives which move our society.”84 As Ricoeur sees it, our modern society is faced with four problems that are closely related.85 First, there is a problem

84See “Notre responsabilité dans la société moderne,” Les Cahiers du Centre Protestant de l'Ouest (July 1965), No. 4, p. 16. See also HF, 117; FM, 153-154.

85Among the many essays in which Ricoeur discusses this set of problems, we find the best formulation in the following articles: “Prospective et utopie: Prévision économique et choix éthique” (1966); “Prospective du monde et perspective
of autonomy. We have discovered that the scientific and technological adventure unfolds itself as a process of "secularization." In this process, there is not only the conquest of rationality but also the conquest of man's autonomy through his elevation as an agent of history.\textsuperscript{86} This drives us then to ask: What is the significance of autonomy? Secondly, there is a problem of desire. For when we become autonomous, we also become fascinated with our needs. We are held captive by our own endless craving for satisfaction. Thus, we ask ourselves: What is the meaning of this frenetic pursuit of well-being? Thirdly, there is a problem of power. For ultimately, what interests us in the conquest of autonomy and the desire for total satisfaction is power.\textsuperscript{87} In a way, the technical adventure incites us not only to dominate things and nature but also our fellows. Herein lurks the temptation of reducing all our relationships to the instrumental level. By succumbing to this temptation, we render our whole existence as meaningless.\textsuperscript{88} Fourthly then, there is the problem of meaninglessness. In a way, this last problem of the absence of meaning is "the most disquieting problem of our epoch."\textsuperscript{89}

Ricoeur warns us against the illusion of viewing our society exclusively on the basis of a growing rationality. Our modernity is also marked by an increasing absurdity. To comprehend our time then is to link these two phenomena—the progress of rationality and the regress of meaning. In a society characterized by an increasing rationality of means, it is precisely the marked absence of goals that becomes a deep

\textsuperscript{86} Ricoeur views "secularization" as an "institutional phenomenon," that is to say, "the emancipation of most human activities from the influence of ecclesiastical institutions." See "Urbanisation et sécularisation," *Christianisme social* 75 (1967), pp. 331-333; "Urbanization and Secularization" (1974), translated by Hoke Robinson, in PSE, 182-184. See also "En écoutant Paul Ricoeur: l'homme à l'âge de la ville" (exposé of Ricoeur as reconstructed by R. Crespin), *Cité nouvelle* No. 466 (9 March 1967), p. 4.

\textsuperscript{87} It must be noted that Ricoeur's critique against a consumer society is not really a critique of pleasure but of power. It is a critique of pressure devices that impose certain models of consumption of material as well as cultural goods. See "La crise des rapports hiérarchiques," *Cité nouvelle* No. 495 (5 October 1968), p. 1.


\textsuperscript{89} "Notre responsabilité dans la société moderne" (1965), p. 17 (translation mine).
source of anxiety. It would seem that after having satisfied the basic needs of food, lodging, and leisure, one enters into what Ricoeur calls "a world of caprice, of the arbitrary, of the gratuitous gesture."90 Here, we make the crucial discovery that "what men lack the most is indeed justice, certainly love but above else, meaning: the meaninglessness of work, the meaninglessness of leisure, the meaninglessness of sexuality—these are the problems to which we awaken."91

In the face of this meaninglessness affecting our society, the challenge for us is to join in the struggle for meaning. The task is to restore the ground—to reconstitute the space of interrogation" in which the essential questions on human being may be posed anew.92 For Ricoeur, this is the proper function of the philosopher—to wage a battle against the forgetfulness of the origin and destiny of being human. This restoration of meaning as a counterthrust to the abundance of meaninglessness especially concerns the Christian insofar as he gives witness to the overabundance of meaning. It is this role of the Christian as "the adversary of the absurd, the prophet of meaning" that we will now try to understand in the following section.93

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90 "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 312 (translation mine).
91 Ibid. (translation mine). In this regard, the pursuit of eroticism is a compensation for the insignificance of work, politics, and speech. See "La sexualité. La merveille, l'errance, l'enigme," in HV, 198-209, esp. pp. 205-207 (article first published in Esprit (La sexualité) 28 (November 1960), pp. 1665-1676); "The Dimensions of Sexuality. Wonder, Eroticism, and Enigma," Cross Currents (Sexuality and the Modern World. A Symposium) 14 (Spring 1964), No. 2, pp. 131-141, esp. pp. 139-140.
C. The Christian Involvement in Civilization

With this section on the significance of the Christian involvement in civilization, we bring to a close our presentation of Ricoeur's critique of civilization and culture. This brief sketch also serves as a point of transition to the second chapter where we will work out the more intricate details of Ricoeur's reflection on the Christian presence in society. For now, we simply indicate the general orientation that distinguishes the Christian involvement in the adventure of civilization.

What are the implications of the analyses of civilization and culture, and more particularly, of the present Western civilization on the Christian's social and political commitment? To answer this question, we have to recall Ricoeur's remarks on the role of "guarantee" that religious values exert over the moral values of a civilization. Although the Christian faith is not primarily a civilizing factor, it nevertheless concerns my civilization in a twofold manner. First of all, it urges me to express what is most human in my civilization insofar as it is the social extension of my body. Secondly, it inspires me to give witness to the Kingdom of God in my civilization insofar as it already proclaims God's presence in this world. This Christian belief is shared by Ricoeur himself when he affirms:

I believe that inspite of the appearances, Christ already rules over this promotion of values, inspite of the demonic that disfigures it and beyond this demonic that hides it. I believe that Christ comes at the end of history and my civilization, and that his coming will be the revelation of his present reign.  

To express what is most human and to symbolize the hidden Kingdom—such is the "charter of life" designed for the Christian. It is this unique course between humanism and prophetism that we explore further.

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94 See above, p. 5.
95 "Le chrétien et la civilisation occidentale" (1946), p. 432 (translation mine).
96 "Faith and Culture" (1957), in PSE, 126.
Between humanism and prophethood

According to Ricoeur, the Christian commitment in civilization is experienced as a *living tension* between the two poles of humanism and prophethood. This tension, more lived and acted upon, is often anguished but always fecund. Let us grasp the meaning of Christian humanism. It consists in the assumption and transformation of human values, recreating them from within with the eternal motive of the love of neighbor in Christ. What Christianity offers to the Christian who may succumb to the disquieting malady of the times—"the powerlessness to invent"—is, above all, the courage and the audacity to discern the novel expressions of values in the modern world.

Christian humanism presents itself as "the greatest chance for the unfolding of the values that are most treasured by modern man." But this affirmation has to be understood in a correct context. One has to renounce a double "naïvete" with regard to it: first, the notion that Christian humanism adds a superior sense that perfects the "natural" humanisms, and second, the notion that Christian humanism fills a lack in the other humanisms. Only after the conversion of this "naïveté" into a "critique" do we rightly understand Christian humanism as a combat on two fronts. It annihilates the other humanisms only insofar as they manifest the "passion of the extreme," that is to say, the human pretension at a total self-sufficiency. It animates these very humanisms insofar as they point to a certain promise—"the destination of man and the positive sense of his technical, political, scientific, ethical

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97 *Ibid.*, p. 130; "La question de l‘*humanisme chrétien*" (1951), p. 324. Although some moral values did not originate from Christianity, they are nevertheless worthy of being assumed by Christians, following St. Paul’s example.


99 *L‘*Evangile et les intellectuels" (1951), p. 489 (Ricoeur’s emphases; translation mine).

100 "La question de l‘*humanisme chrétien*" (1951), pp. 323-325; "Faith and Culture" (1957), in PSE, 129-130: In his very engaging article on Ricoeur’s humanism, David Stewart remarks: "No humanism can be worthy of the name ‘Christian’ unless it sees man engaged in a struggle ‘in situation’ (cultural, political, technological, philosophical, and so forth), a struggle that will remain ambiguous and can express its meaning only eschatologically.” See Stewart, "Existential Humanism" (1979), in *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 29.
adventure.”101 In sum, Christian humanism is the twofold movement of “breaking away” and of “reconciling” with other humanisms.

As regards Christian prophetism, this consists in “the will to be sensitive to the possibilities of our time.”102 In a “post-Christian” era characterized by the “death of God” and the corruption of moral values, the task of Christians is to build anew “original communities”—”small communities that will be witness-cities” to a new way of life.103 In protest against the present lifestyle, this new way of life will not be based on profit, exploitation, and violence.104 In these communities, one strives in the here and now to live in a symbolic way the ultimate values of the Kingdom of God.105 This tentative to anticipate the Kingdom of God may appear to be immediately inefficacious. But in the long run, it is efficacious insofar as it serves as a radical reminder of the ultimate horizon of the humanist enterprise.106

101“La question de l’‘humanisme chrétien’” (1951), p. 328 (Ricoeur’s emphasis; translation mine).
104 This necessary protest does not have to entail a refusal of “modernity.” See the manifesto co-signed by Ricoeur, “Faire une nouvelle société,” Christianisme social (Imagination et Pouvoir. Réflexions et Documents mai-juin 1968) 76 (1968), Nos. 3-4, p. 226.
105 According to Ricoeur, the irreplaceable function of such a “confessing community” (communauté confessante) is to constantly pose the question of ends—the question of perspective in a society which is rather prospective. See “Tasks of the Ecclesial Community in the Modern World” (1968), pp. 243-244. See also “Sciences humaines et conditionnements de la foi” (1965), p. 140; “Etre protestant aujourd’hui” (1968), pp. 2-3.
106 Ricoeur considers the Collège Cévenol, where he taught for three years after his release from imprisonment during the Second World War, as an ecumenical endeavor that gives witness to the prophetic character of the “Church universal.” See “Allocution prononcée à l’occasion de l’inauguration du nouvel internat des filles (Pentecôte 1959),” Nouvelles du Collège Cévenol 7 (April-May 1960), p. 3. He also sees the Community of Taizé as “an advanced sign of the ‘Church universal’ which seeks to find its way through the Churches.” See “Postface” to J.-M. Paupert Taizé et l’église de demain, Le Signe (Paris: A. Fayard, 1967), p. 247 (translation mine).
In sum, the Christian vocation in the present civilization is to wrest the positive from the negative, the human from the inhuman, the sacred from the profane. It is to root the human in the divine, to illumine us in the darkness of despair with the light of hope. In this fecund interplay between humanism and prophetism, we glimpse the paradox of the Christian situation in civilization—to transform with responsibility its most human elements from within by anchoring them from above in hope.

II. RICOEUR'S REFLECTION ON THE CHRISTIAN AND SOCIETY

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the Christian commitment sketched above by elaborating in detail Ricoeur’s reflection on the Christian and society. We examine in succession: how the Christian responds to the present time—a time marked by both rational progress and existential ambiguity, how the Christian confronts the present world—a world regulated by economic prevision and calculation, and how the Christian lives the Christian message—a message charged with social as well as political implications. Hence, the division of this chapter into three sections: first, the Christian meaning of history; second, the Christian perspective of world prospective; and third, the Christian project of a social ethics.

A. The Christian and the Meaning of History

In this section, we seek to answer the question: What is the meaning of history for the Christian? Fortunately for us, Ricoeur himself devoted an entire essay exclusively to this question. We shall have recourse to this essay entitled “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire.” At the outset of this essay, the general presupposition exists that there are several ways of interpreting history, and consequently, several levels of replying to the question of the meaning of history. Furthermore, the firm conviction also exists that a Christian interpretation of history provides “the underpinnings for other interpretations which remain true at their levels.” Ricoeur employs then a differentiated approach which enables

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1See “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 81-98; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1952), in HT, 81-97.
2Ibid., in HV, 81; ibid., in HT, 81.
him to unfold in depth the various levels of the meaning of history, and
to locate the particular level wherein the Christian task may be inserted.

Three levels of understanding the meaning of history are distin-
guished by Ricoeur: the abstract level of progress, the existential level of
ambiguity; and the mysterious level of hope. We analyze here the first two
levels, reserving the third level to a separate analysis.

1. PROGRESS AND AMBIGUITY OF HISTORY

On the first level of progress, we have to do again with the realm of “in-
dustries” that we encountered in the analysis of culture. This level, as
we have seen, is characterized by the accumulation of all human traces—
not only material tools and technical inventions but also intellectual,
cultural, and spiritual achievements. However, this level of progress is
“abstract” because it “brackets” the dramatic events and unique person-
alities that gave rise to these works. Tradition is only approached here
as an anonymous deposit of human traces. The anonymous character of
this level explains the reason for its failure to accommodate the Chris-
tian message. For Christian revelation, above all, disrupts this im-
personal history in introducing a schema of events, crises, and decisions.

Yet we talk of “progress” and not simply of “evolution,” “change,” or
“development” on this level for we observe not only a phenomenon of
accumulation but also a phenomenon of improvement. In this way, we
give a value to the cumulative history of human traces. This value is the
very conviction that mankind fulfills its destiny through the technical,
intellectual, cultural, and spiritual experience. As Ricoeur rightly points
out, Christianity is not opposed to this conquest of human autonomy.
However, Christianity is not fundamentally interested in the anonymous

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3See above, p. 35.

4See “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 84; “Christianity and
the Meaning of History” (1952); in HT, 83-84: “There is a moral and spiritual ‘exper-
ience’ of mankind which is put aside like a treasure. Works of art, monuments, litur-
gies, books on culture, spirituality, and ethics form a ‘world’ within the world and pro-
vide us with stepping-stones similar to objects or things outside ourselves.”

5According to Ricoeur, it is important to understand the unique resources offered
by the present “technical adventure.” In a twofold way, man’s understanding of him-
self has changed: first, he now perceives himself as worker; second, he sees the world
around him as a nature to be dominated. This stance of domination and possession
over the world gives us a reason to rejoice. For it is part of man’s vocation to rule over
progress of mankind’s achievements but in what the concrete individual does with them for his salvation. Once this first level is related to the concrete individual, the rational progress that we observe becomes ambiguous. The benefits gained from this progress breed new forms of alienation:

The same mechanism which lightens our burden, which broadens human relationships, and which bears witness to our dominion over things also inaugurates new evils: specialization, consumer slavery, total war, the impersonal justice of bureaucracy, etc.  

The appearance of these new conflicts obliges us then to move from the abstract level of progress to the existential level of ambiguity.

On this second level of ambiguity, we still continue to reflect historically with categories like “period,” “rise,” “fall,” “crisis,” etc. But this time, we touch upon the realm of “values” that we have also encountered in the analysis of culture. We have seen that these concrete values alone are capable of bringing out the significance of “industries” in the widest sense. What impresses us on this existential level is the joint phenomena of progression and regression. In this connection, we have historical “periods,” indicated by the “rise” and “fall” of civilizations. However, mankind endures in the midst of the rise and fall of civilizations. It is possible then to subscribe at once to a cyclical view of historical periods and to a linear view of progress. These two views are on different levels—the linear view of progress is on a more “technical” level while the cyclical view of historical periods is on a more “ethical” level.

creation. (In the Bible, Psalm 8 associates the glory of man the dominator to the glory of God the Creator). However, this attitude of conquest smothers another attitude that is essential to man—admiration. We see then that the more technical power man acquires, the more urgent the significance of this power. In Ricoeur’s view, it is less a question of the quantitative limitation of man’s technical power but more a question of the measure of this power. The sole measure of power is not on a quantitative but on an interior level—the love of God and the service of man which is its exterior sign. When man forgets these interior limits of his technical power, then his power turns to madness. See “L’aventure technique et son horizon interplanétaire,” Christianisme social (Cosmos et technique) 66 (January-February 1958), pp. 20-33, especially pp. 28-31; “Vers une éthique de la finitude: quelques remarques,” Christianisme social (Devenir de la nature—devenir de l’homme . . .) 78 (1970), Nos. 7-8, p. 395.

66“Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 86; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1952), in HT, 86.

7See above, p. 9.
To judge this concrete level as "ethical" is to introduce the category of "crisis." This notion of "crisis" is the first manifestation of the ambiguity of history. It makes us aware that the survival of a civilization depends upon the decision of a people. To recall, a civilization only endures insofar as it is able to surmount "crises" which offer the opportunities for its creative renewal. In this context, a civilization shows "suspensions of consciousness and awakenings, declines and renaissances, restorations and resistances, inventions and survivals." 

The concrete character of this level is further shown in significant historic events and personalities. Although it is useful to survey history as a series of movements, it is worthwhile remembering that history is historical because "... there are unparalleled actions which count and others which do not count; men who carry weight and others who do not; a lost battle, a leader who dies too soon (or too late!), the result being a changed destiny.”

The "event-aspect" of this concrete history leads us to its "political aspect." Although these two aspects do not fully coincide, the "crises" in politics are doubly privileged. First, they affect the physical destiny

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8Ricoeur takes over this notion of "crisis" in civilization from the historian, Arnold Toynbee. According to Toynbee, each civilization is defined by situations (like coldness, overpopulation, religious rift, linguistic division, class conflict, etc.) which pose "challenges" for it. A civilization survives when it is able to answer these challenges; it stagnates or dies when it merely repeats its old answers or when it is unable to invent new answers to new difficulties. See “Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 88; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1952), in HT, 88; “L’homme non-violent et sa présence à l’histoire” (1949), in HV, 244 (first published in Esprit (Révision du pacifisme) 17 (February 1949), pp. 224-234; “Non-violent Man and His Presence to History” (1965), in HT, 232 (another earlier translation published as “The Historical Presence of Non-violence,” translated by Al Lingis, Cross Currents 14 (Winter 1964), No. 1, pp. 15-23).

9Ricoeur is careful to nuance his remarks on this concrete history of "crises." There are many ways in which a civilization undergoes crises in such different domains like technology, economics, politics, culture, etc. Furthermore, the word "crisis" does not carry the same resonance of meaning in all these domains. Here, one notices a recurrent trait of Ricoeur’s way of thinking—the sensitive respect and appreciation for the diversity and discontinuity of problems. This attitude is crucial in the comprehension and resolution of crises.

10"Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951) in HV, 89; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1952), in HT, 88.
11Ibid., in HV, 91; Ibid., in HT, 90.
of civilizations as well as their intentions. Second, they reveal a basic trait of the human being—guilt. This bond between greatness and guilt is the second manifestation of the ambiguity of history. Thus, the reflection on the notion of "crisis" leads us to the discovery of "guilt" which can only arise on the level of an ambiguous history. In Ricoeur's words:

Fault (only originates) in the universe of the event; only an ambiguous history, a history which may always be lost or gained, an open uncertain history wherein the chances and risks are linked together, may be guilty. A natural being cannot be guilty; only a historical being can become guilty.  

It is this concrete but ambiguous history, where guilt appears, that may be related to Christianity.

We have just presented two ways of "reading" history: a first "reading" of history as a continuous movement toward progress, and a second "reading" of history as a discontinuous configuration of persons and events, imbued with ambiguity. In the former, we find breadth and system while in the latter, depth and singularity. Furthermore, the first "reading" points up to an optimistic horizon while the second "reading" looks down on a pessimistic view. It would seem then that history is a "paradox" in that "it becomes incomprehensible if it is not a unique history unified by a sense; yet it loses its very historicity if it is not an unforeseeable adventure." But in talking of history in this way, we have not yet clarified the "Christian meaning of history." In what way then does the Christian understanding of history distinguish itself from the meaning of history just elaborated? For Ricoeur, the essential

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., in HV, 93; ibid., in HT, 92. We make a slight change in the HT translation which is faulty, rendering "la faute ne surgit que dans l'univers de l'événement" as "(f)ault does not originate in the universe of the event."


\textsuperscript{14}"Objectivité et subjectivité en histoire" (1953), in HV, 40; "Objectivity and Subjectivity in History" (1965), in HT, 36. See also Louis Althuser, "Essais et propos: Sur l'objectivité de l'histoire (lettre à Paul Ricoeur)," Revue de l'enseignement philosophique 5 (April-May 1955), No. 4, pp. 3-15.

\textsuperscript{15}"Husserl et le sens de l'histoire" (1949), p. 310; "Husserl and the Sense of History" (1967), in HAP, 170 (Ricoeur's emphases).
difference lies in Christian hope. Let us now focus our reflection on this.

2. CHRISTIAN HOPE AND HISTORY

Christian hope is best expressed by two contrasting words: meaning and mystery. The relationship between these two words may be succinctly formulated as follows:

Meaning: there is a unity of meaning; it is the fundamental source of the courage to live in history. Mystery: but this meaning is hidden; no one can say it, rely upon it, or draw an assurance from it which would be a counter-assurance against the dangers of history. One must risk it on signs.\(^{16}\)

Understood in this way, Christian hope neither renounces the tragic ambiguity of concrete history nor reduces itself to the optimistic rationality of abstract history, This urges us to pose the crucial question: How then does the Christian go beyond the ambiguity and discontinuity of concretely lived history? To come to the point, what enables the Christian is the firm belief in the Lordship of God over history: "If God is the Lord of individual lives he is also Lord of history: God directs this uncertain, noble, and guilty history toward Himself."\(^{17}\) Implied in this belief is also the hope that the secular history of humanity participates in sacred history, that there is ultimately one history revealed by the Lordship of God. This Christian meaning of history is only accessible through an act of faith. It is "eschatological" in the sense that the Christian believes that the oneness of meaning of the secular and sacred histories will become clear on the "Last Day."\(^{18}\)

\(^{16}\)"Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire" (1951), in HV, 94; "Christianity and the Meaning of History" (1952), in HT, 93 (Ricoeur’s emphasis). For a helpful essay on the articulation of hope and history in Ricoeur’s thought, see David Stewart, "In Quest of Hope: Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Moltmann," Restoration Quarterly (Abilene, Texas) 13 (1970), No. 1, pp. 31-52.

\(^{17}\)"Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire" (1951), in HV, 94; "Christianity and the Meaning of History" (1952), in HT, 93.

\(^{18}\)"Note sur le vœu et la tâche de l’unité" (1952), in HV, 197; "Note on the Wish and Endeavor for Unity" (1965), in HT, 196.
Our presentation remains incomplete if we fail to show how Christian hope inserts itself in history. To locate this point of insertion, we must look at the Christian stance in history. This stance manifests itself as a double refusal of absurdity and fanaticism.19

First of all, the Christian would be one who has the courage to live the ambiguity of history and to refuse its absurdity. If it is a sign of Christian hope to accept a situation as it presents itself, it is even more so to believe that something can always be done about it.20 Christian hope affirms the “possibility” of the human being for to declare his “impossibility” is already to recapitulate before absurdity.21 It exorcises absurdity by “the grace of imagination, the grace of the possible, the grace of upheaval.”22 Christian hope also exorcises despair which “cannot be ultimate but only penultimate.”23 In refusing to take absurdity and despair to be the last word, the Christian breaks away from the existentialist.24 Beyond this refusal, the Christian discerns the projects to be

22“Tasks of the Ecclesiastical Community in the Modern World” (1968), p. 251. We must pause to note the intimate bond between the “imagination” and Christian hope. Let us consider, for instance, a passage like this: “To listen to the Parables of Jesus, it seems to me, is to let one’s imagination be opened to the new possibilities disclosed by the extravagance of these short dramas. If we look at the Parables addressed first to our imagination rather than to our will, we shall not be tempted to reduce them to mere didactic devices, to moralizing allegories. We will let their poetic power display itself within us.” See “Listening to the Parables of Jesus: Text: Matthew 13: 31-32 and 45-46,” Criterion 13 (Spring 1974), No. 3, p. 21.
24“Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire” (1951), in HV, 96; “Christianity and the Meaning of History” (1952), in HT, 95. In another essay, however, Ricoeur places the accent on the “therapeutic significance of French existentialism,” in the fact that it is “animated by a sort of courage before the uncertainty of the meaning of history.” See “Vraie et fausse angoisse” (1953), in HV, 327; “True and False Anguish” (1965), in HT, 297.
done, the chances to be seized, the risks to be taken.\textsuperscript{25}

Secondly, the Christian would also be one who has the courage to refuse fanaticism or the "spirit of system." This "spirit of system" is finally incompatible with Christian hope.\textsuperscript{26} In face of the hidden meaning or mystery of history, the Christian attitude is to maintain a sense of the multiplicity of interpretations, a sense of the discontinuity of problems, and a sense of the diversity of the historical vocations of civilizations and persons.\textsuperscript{27}

B. The Christian Perspective of World Prospective

We ended the foregoing section with a note of hope—the hope of the Christian who affirms the mysterious meaning of history. Yet Christian hope, as an intention, is not enough. It must embody itself in a series of limited tasks which aim to approximate it. For too long, many Christians have been culpable through omission in the task of building a society that promotes the utmost possibilities of being human. One cannot but note that the periods of revival of individual piety are doubly marked by an excessive concern with personal guilt and a "sovereign disinterest of social injustice."\textsuperscript{28} It would seem that a certain pessimism concerning history accompanies the striving for individual salvation.\textsuperscript{29}

But do we not presently live in a time when all the dimensions and implications of the Christian Gospel are being rediscovered and

\textsuperscript{26}"Discerner pour agir" (1950), pp. 435, 437, 445, 447.
\textsuperscript{27}"Le christianisme et le sens de l’histoire" (1951), in HV, 97; "Christianity and the Meaning of History" (1952), in HT, 96; "Vérité et mensonge" (1951), in HV, 191; "Truth and Falsehood" (1965), in HT, 189-190; "Les conditions de la coexistence pacifique. Conditions de la paix," \textit{Christianisme social} 61 (1953), p. 306.
practised anew? Christian preaching unfolds to us the manifold tasks, awaiting to be undertaken in our present world. One task of extreme priority is to meet the socio-economic demands of mankind. The awareness of this immense task obliges us to place our world under the sign of "prospective." It is the meeting of this world prospective and Christian perspective that we present in this section. First, we show how "prospective" not only relates to choice but also causes a new kind of choice to emerge—collective choice. Second, we show in what manner the Christian gives a "perspective" to "prospective."

I. Prospective and collective choice

Here, we base ourselves on Ricoeur's essay "Prévision économique et choix éthique." It is important to take this essay as issuing neither from an economist nor a sociologist but from a philosopher, or better still an "educator" who is desirous of helping others change their situation by understanding it. For this reason, Ricoeur here invokes Emmanuel Mounier, for whom no "personal awakening" occurs without "communal pedagogy."

"What do we mean by "world prospective"? To speak of "prospective" is simply to acknowledge a dominant feature of our present world—the existence of highly advanced technological societies which aim to regulate their development through planning and calculation. These societies, which "prospect" their future through long-range

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30To judge from Ricoeur's remarks, it would seem so. We cannot but agree with him when he exclaims: "The first thing I want to say is how glad I am to be alive at a time when Christian preaching has rediscovered all the dimensions of the Christian message: historical, geographical, social and political, a time when Christians feel concerned for everything that happens to men. ‘Nothing human is foreign to me’ has now become a Christian slogan, not merely a Stoic one." See "Ye Art the Salt of the Earth" (1958), in PSE, 105.

31See "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 301-316 (article first published under the title "Prospective et utopie. Prévision économique et choix éthique," Esprit (Prospective et utopie) 34 (February 1966), No. 2, pp, 178-193). We deal with this essay in great detail because it is a fine example of Ricoeur's style of reflection which articulates the technical with the ethical.

32"Emmanuel Mounier: une philosophie personneliste" (1950), in HV, 139; "Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher" (1965), in HT, 137. See also "Dimensions d'une recherche commune" (1948), p. 838.
programs, are dominated by "the will to assure a calculated, continual, regular growth of the entire economic and social life."\textsuperscript{33} The extension of rationality to these sectors of human activity constitutes what we call "prospective" or "planning." However, this rationality involves a more primordial factor—the factor of choice. This is where the educator exercises the task of making himself and others aware of the implicit as well as explicit choices implied by social and economic planning. In Ricoeur's judgment, it would be the worst illusion to view the development of advanced technological societies as an automatically functioning mechanism, to which we must all submit.

"Planning" not only presupposes choice but also makes us confront a completely new kind of choice—collective choice.\textsuperscript{34} For us, this is a novel phenomenon because our entire philosophical and moral formation has been principally geared to "individual choice." Furthermore, our social ethics has merely confined itself to "problems of disorder" like poverty, injustice, colonialism, etc. Advanced societies pose, however, a "problem of order." The task in collective choice is "to restore and express our responsibility on the level itself of prospective, that is to say, to insert it in all the zones of incertitude, in the knots of decision where choices, of an ethical nature, may be incorporated with the collective decision."\textsuperscript{35}

To be adept at collective choice, we have to abandon a certain model of freedom that is based on economic competition. This individualistic model of freedom properly belongs to a liberalist society without prospective. We must forge a new idea of freedom and choice. Towards this end, we need to reflect on this fundamental proposition: Planning multiplies choice. Here, the educator's task of "conscientization" becomes pressing—to make us fully conscious that "the more we multiply the zones of intervention, the more we multiply the zones of responsibility

\textsuperscript{33} "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 302 (translation mine).
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., in HV, 302, 304-305; "Prospective du monde et perspective chrétienne" (1964), in L'église vers l'avenir (1969), p. 128.
\textsuperscript{35} "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 303 (translation mine). In another essay, Ricoeur speaks of a "strategy of breaches" (stratégie des brèches)—a differentiated course of action which locates points of interventions, discerns dangerous alternatives, and sketches out creative attitudes. This "strategy of breaches"—would be "hope at work." See "Il faut espérer pour entreprendre" (1970), p. 19, also pp. 24-25.
retrieved from chance and disorder, and also the more broadened the keyboard of alternatives." We become aware then that every choice made in social and economic planning has ethical implications. What is ultimately at stake in the debate on the priority of human needs is the image of being human itself. Which sector should we choose to develop: infra-structure, luxury, culture, or leisure? Behind this question, we are really asking: What is the humanity of being human that we finally want to promote?

"Prospective" or "planning" opens up then a whole new dimension of collective choice. In turn, collective choice launches us into the consideration of the novel task of education. Ricoeur attaches great importance to this task which is exercised by cultural and intellectual groups, and by "confessing communities." As he envisions it, the educator’s task in the prospective society is threefold. First of all, it consists in an effort of "conscientization" on the level of the individual. Secondly, it consists in working to establish a "democratic economy" on the level of society. Thirdly, on a long term basis, it consists in drawing up social structures and organizations that would favor the utmost pluralism in society. Here, Ricoeur vigorously opposes the Marxist identification of social competition with class struggle. In his standpoint, it is the pluralistic society that ensures collective responsibility.

Thus far, we have been reflecting from within the prospective society. We have accepted its hypothesis of an irreversible ordered growth.

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36."Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 304.
37.Ricoeur has always shown an abiding interest in education. In an essay of 1948, he maintains the possibility and the necessity of the Christian educator to give a sign of his faith, "not necessarily in the ideas of his teaching but in its intention or allure. See "Comment respecter l’enfant?" (1948), p. 11.
38.The task of these groups would be to link together the evangelic motivation based on Christian preaching, technical information drawn from the human sciences, and daily action exercised by trade unions, political-educational movements, etc. See "Les formes nouvelles de la justice sociale," Christianisme social 67 (1959), pp. 463, 467; "Bilan et prospective," (XXXVth Congress of Christianisme social on the theme: "De la nation à l’humanité: tâche des chrétiens," Paris 1965), Christianisme social 73 (1965), p. 598.
39.This "democratic economy"—understood as "the participation of the greatest number of individuals in economic decisions"—is also the goal of socialism on the social and political levels. See "Le socialisme aujourd’hui" (1961), p. 454 'Socialism Today' (1974), translated by Françoise Bien, in PSE, 234.
However, one must also practise a "second degree" reflection which puts under suspicion the profound motivations of the prospective society. What humanity of being human does this advanced society ultimately propose? What subtle perils lurk behind the new conquests of autonomy and responsibility? The ambiguities of the prospective society demand that we introduce the question of perspective.

2. PERSPECTIVE OF PROSPECTIVE

Let us begin by attending to our experience of the ambiguities of the prospective society. First of all, there is the ambiguity of autonomy. Certainly, the conquest of human autonomy signifies the abolition of an infantile dependence on God and the promotion of an adult responsibility. But there remains the question of the meaning of this autonomy. How do we bear witness to God in a world where He seems to be absent and silent? Secondly, there is the ambiguity of desire. We experience a collective fascination with ordered growth. But ordered growth is not only a blessing but also a danger in that it leads to the endless craving for satisfaction. The prospective society seeks the well-being and the happiness of man. But what is real well-being and true happiness? Thirdly, there is the ambiguity of power. The prospective society contains the danger of being dominated by the will to manipulate everything at hand. All of these trace for us the ambiguities in our present world—an advance on the level of means but a downfall on the level of ends.

40The point is not that greater responsibility is a fault but that this same responsibility "tends to exile the Lord in an abstract transcendence, with neither sign nor expression." See "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966) in HV, 309 (translation mine).

41Man as consumer is characterized by both a growing satisfaction and a growing dissatisfaction. There is a growing satisfaction insofar as the prospective society fulfills his increasing needs but there is also a growing dissatisfaction insofar as this same society creates new needs beyond the acquired satisfaction. See "La crise du socialisme," Christianisme social 67 (1959), p. 696.

42In later essays, Ricoeur prolongs his reflections on the prospective society. He speaks of the "neo-conflicts" of advanced societies expressed in a threefold way: the absence of a collective project coupled with the fading away of norms and the forgetfulness of the traditional heritage, the dying out of the technological dream expressed in the "myth of the simple," and the dying out of representative democratic forms of government expressed in the "myth of direct democracy." See "Le conflit: signe de con
Before the ambiguities of the prospective society, what must the Christian do? To be Christian is to believe in the overabundance of sense over the abundance of nonsense. Christian hope, we recall, is the capacity to "read" our society from the angle of the awakening of creation.\(^{43}\) What Christianity offers to the world of prospective is "a certain vision of man, capable of bestowing a meaning to our action in the world."\(^{44}\) This vision is the *utopia* of the humanity of being human, taken "by its two extremities, the aspect of human totality and the aspect of human singularity."\(^{45}\) The Christian Gospel helps us to recover "an *epical* sense of our existence situated again within the perspective of a vaster epic of mankind and creation."\(^{46}\) It enables us to view humanity as one single man that is "the subject of one unique history and one unique destiny."\(^{47}\) This fundamental vision is grasped in and through the "pathology" of humanity.\(^{48}\) At the same time, the Christian perspective encourages us not only to affirm and realize a collective project for humanity but also to personalize as far as possible the relations that become inhuman and anonymous in the prospective society. This is where small groups can become efficacious in the struggle to humanize the institutions created for the service of humanity. These groups in the advanced technological societies would devote their energy to the "new class of the poor" represented by the aged, the discriminated, and the underprivileged.\(^{49}\) In sum, we see the paradox of the Christian perspective. It aims at the utopia of the humanity of being human, both in its universality and singularity.

\(^{43}\) "Il faut espérer pour entreprendre" (1970), p. 19.
\(^{44}\) "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 312.
\(^{46}\) "L'image de Dieu et l'épopée humaine" (1960), in HV, 114; "The 'Image of God' and the Epic of Man" (1961), in HT, 112 (Ricoeur's emphasis).
\(^{47}\) "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 312.
\(^{48}\) See "Tâches pour la paix" (1951), p. 374.
How can we bear witness to the utopia of the humanity of being human in the prospective society of today? For his part, Ricoeur supplies us with some general guidelines. In everything we do, we must strive to develop a *creative* rather than a *consumptive* attitude. In our work, we must resist the temptation of seeing it simply as the necessary cost of leisure. It is incumbent upon us to restore the proper value of human work. In our leisure, we must resist the lure of falling victims to organized and mechanized distractions. Here, it is incumbent upon us to restore the spontaneity and joy of personal cultivation. In all our relationships, we must take care that the desire to know prevails over the desire to dominate. We must strive to "... rediscover the profound dependence of all creative activity—the intimate necessity that is more profound than any free choice; simply rediscover the path of the gift, of generosity."

With this invocation to generosity, we end this examination of the Christian perspective in the prospective society.

**C. The Christian and the Project of a Social Ethics**

Let us now attend to the Christian project of a social ethics as it is elaborated in Ricoeur's thought. The guiding essay for this section will be "Le projet d'une morale sociale." Two points need to be highlighted here: first, the dual motivation—communal and personal—of a social ethics, and second, the convergent tasks of a social ethics.

For many Christians, a social ethics still brings to mind a systematic, coherent doctrine that would bridge the gap between Christian preaching and social-political decisions in daily life. Conceived in this way, a social ethics would comprise three stages: first, *the social teachings of the Bible*—the derivation of moral precepts from the Scriptures; second, *the social doctrine of the Church*—the amalgamation of various

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50 This theme of the emancipation of human work is also one of the earliest themes of socialism, much cherished by its founders. See "Le socialisme aujourd'hui" (1961), p. 458; "Socialism Today" (1974), translated by Françoise Bien, in PSE, 238.

51 "Prévision économique et choix éthique" (1966), in HV, 316 (translation mine).

conceptual systems with major concepts borrowed from diverse sources, primarily social philosophy; and third, the confrontation of global systems—the evaluation of social ideologies like socialism, capitalism, liberalism, etc.

This project of a coherent social ethics, however, has been shattered due to the following reasons. First of all, biblical theology and exegesis have made us aware that, although it is possible to extract universal principles and values from the Scriptures, it is impossible “to combine the kerygmatic proclamation with the concepts of political and social philosophy.” Furthermore, the metaphysics and the ideologies that served to support this unified structure of social ethics have fallen into disrepute. Finally, our technologically-oriented society has learned to solve its problems more on the basis of a reasonable empiricism rather than from overriding principles and values. In Ricoeur’s view, it would be deceptive to present a total synthetic picture of a Christian social ethics. For the present, the only feasible approach would be a “method of approximation and convergence” which aims to locate in social life “the discontinuous, unstable, and varying points of insertion for Christian preaching.” At the same time, this “method of approximation and convergence” would bring out the concrete affinities of definite social issues (based on the researches of specialists) to biblical teaching.

1. THE DUAL MOTIVATION OF A SOCIAL ETHICS

To present a social ethics in the form of a closed system is a deception. For a social ethics arises from a paradox:

It aims at two opposed things: human totality and human singularity. ... Their full and non-contradictory realization will be the kingdom of God. From that social ethics receives its dual motivation—communal and personalistic.


55Ibid., p. 289; ibid., in PSE, 166.
At one extreme, we are aware today that not only can we affirm a project of humanity considered as a whole but also that "we are the first epoch that can give content and meaning to this project."\textsuperscript{56} Now, this theme of humanity as the unique subject of history is very much present in the Bible. For the Scriptures—when it speaks of the human and events that ultimately concern him like the creation, the fall, and redemption—always take up the human being as one generic being. This unity of humanity, as Ricoeur perceptively points out, has to be \textit{voluntarily} pursued through the "pathology" of this generic being. We must endeavor then to make this value of humanity as a whole prevail over our particularisms and egoisms.

At the other extreme, we must also strive to personalize to the maximum all the relations that become anonymous and inhuman in the highly advanced technological society. This is where small groups become effective in the combat against the dehumanization in such places as urban ghettos, psychiatric hospitals, homes for the aged, etc. Again, this theme of the singularity and uniqueness of the person is a biblical one. The Bible ignores the individual, in the sense of the modern consciousness. The Bible addresses the human as indivisibly personal and communal, as a unique person related to a community of other persons. Here, there is no distinction between a private ethics and a social ethics. In this connection, Ricoeur fully subscribes to Spinoza's dictum: \textit{Quo magis res singulares intelligimus eo magis Deum intelligimus.}\textsuperscript{57}

The dual motivation of social ethics helps us to delineate the ethical good as that which promotes intersubjective communication and collective responsibility.\textsuperscript{58} It also supplies us with a preliminary criterion in judging global social systems like socialism, capitalism, etc. The important point to remember here is not to separate the ideological theory from the effective practice of these systems. As for definite social sectors like business, industry, information, the task is to pinpoint the intersection of the technical and the ethical. For Ricoeur, this junc-

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 288; \textit{ibid.}, in PSE, 165.

\textsuperscript{57} In \textit{Histoire et vérité}, Ricoeur cites Spinoza's theorem at least four times. He uses it as an epigraph to one essay. See "L'histoire de la philosophie et l'unité du vrai" (1954), in HV, 45; "The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth" (1965), in HT, 41.

\textsuperscript{58} "Le projet d'une morale sociale" (1966), p. 290; "The Project of a Social Ethic" (1974), translated by David Stewart, in PSE, 168.
tion is found in the heart of decision. In the end, a decision in socio-
economic planning makes a wager on a certain conception of being
human and society. The project of a social ethics, however, does not
exhaust itself in determining the points of insertion of Christian preching
in social-political commitment. A social ethics must also undertake
the sustained coordination of specialized researches. Without having a
complete picture on how these varied and discontinuous researches are
finally linked, we must continually work towards their convergence.

2. THE CONVERGENT TASKS OF A SOCIAL ETHICS

What are the convergent tasks that would permit us “to place the biblical
concrete in direct contact with the social exact?”59 According to Ricoeur,
these convergent tasks may be placed under four headings which stand
for different groups of investigations: a) biblical theology, b) investiga-
tions on being human in industrial society, c) critique of global social
systems, and d) studies on units of production like business. We must
appreciate here the programmatic character of this interdisciplinary
enterprise involving such disciplines as theology, philosophy, sociology,
political science, economics, etc.

a) In the domain of biblical theology, what is most relevant is not
the extraction of abstract universal principles that would guide our
action in the world but a heightened awareness of the historic context
and concrete meaning of such notions as the Kingdom of God, the New
Man, world, sin, law, the life according to the flesh, and life according
to the spirit. We must not look for didactic devices or moralizing alleg-
gories in the Bible but rather approach it on the level of “motivation,
exemplification and analogy.”60

b) In the second group of investigations on man in industrial society,
Ricoeur sees four sub-groups: studies on 1) work, 2) human needs, 3)
property and socialization, and 4) techniques and technology. There is
a prevalence of the problem of meaning in all these studies. 1) In the
studies on work, we have discontinuous and multiple points of view
which converge together. Included here are biblical researches on the
significance of human work as well as sociological inquiries on the

59Ibid., p. 288; ibid., in PSE, 165.
60Ibid., p. 292; ibid., in PSE, 170.
evolution of work in industrial societies.\textsuperscript{61} One speaks of a convergence of these contributions insofar as they bring out the criteria which make work meaningful. 2) In the researches on human needs, we have concrete studies that deal first with non-satisfied needs like hunger, and then with needs that correspond to the particular situation of advanced societies. We also have studies that try to determine the priority of human needs.\textsuperscript{62} Here, the question of finality takes precedence. We have to ask: What idea of well-being or happiness do we really aim at? 3) Under the third sub-group of property and socialization, we have studies that take into account the changes brought about by the socialization of property. We also have studies on the evolution of legal systems in the world as well as concrete investigations concerning the exercise of power, pressure groups, business groups, etc. 4) In the fourth sub-group of techniques and technology, we find reflections which are called for insofar as we are the first historic society that is marked by technology.\textsuperscript{63} Here also, we have to reflect on the consequences of a mass society which has the propensity to dominate nature, life, even the psychic, and to apply techniques even in culture and leisure.

c) The third group of investigations have to do with the critique of global social systems. Here, we have to take into account both the

\textsuperscript{61}In another essay, Ricoeur remarks that "it is the lasting task of a Christian theology of work constantly to reconsider the Marxist theses on alienation and de-alienation and to integrate them into a larger modern anthropology." See "Le socialisme aujourd'hui" (1961), p. 458; "Socialism Today" (1974), translated by Françoise Bien, in PSE, 239. See also "Vraie et fausse angoisse" (1953), in HV, 325 note 2; "True and False Anguish" (1965), in HT, 295 note 2.

\textsuperscript{62}Ricoeur himself has done this type of research. See "Les formes nouvelles de la justice sociale" (1959), pp. 462-471. In this essay, Ricoeur regards the task of Christians as the application of a recuperative reflection on the dynamics of human needs. He proposes five points to be considered in this reflection. First of all, it is the task of Christians to show that there is a hierarchy of human needs and that the purpose of a human economy is to keep the range of "human" needs wide open. Second, we have to prefer that economic system which aims to equally satisfy the needs of the great majority of the people. Third, we must be aware that global policies entail an ethical decision on the conception of being human opted for. Fourth, we must humanize the institutions that were created to render service to humanity. Lastly, we must be in solidarity with the new class of poverty in the advanced society.

ideological and practical aspects of systems. In the evaluation of social regimes, we have to consider the dialectic of theory and practice:

There is, on the one hand, the ideology of the systems; that is, the manner in which they are represented theoretically in the thought of their founders, apologists, and theoreticians. On the other hand, there are the practical aspects of systems, which are the effective social relations of a capitalistic or socialistic regime.64

d) In the fourth and last group of studies, we have researches focusing on the unities of production, especially in business. Here, one inquires into the ethical aspects of business: What does the reform of business mean? How can the human prevail in it? What is human in business?

From the convergence of these concrete studies, we realize that a social ethics defines "a level of judgment much more than a system constituted or to "be constituted."65

III. RICOEUR'S VIEW ON POLITICS AND THE STATE

Although it is not to be found in the volumes forming Philosophy of the Will, Ricoeur’s reflection on politics has always adhered closely to his lifetime project of comprehending the integral meaning of human existence.1 Political questions (and the same goes for educational, social, and economic ones) are taken up by him, not as a secondary interest but as comprising "the nervure of his own philosophy."2 A continuity runs then from his reflection on our finitude and desire for infinitude to the reflection on our involvement in the political sphere.

65Ibid., p. 295; ibid., in PSE, 174.

1In a perceptive essay, Secrétan makes a similar remark: "If it is true that Paul Ricoeur’s political thought follows a lateral or marginal course, at no moment has it dissociated itself nor distanced itself from his grand project of an ethics and an ontology of the person; for a philosophy of the person, polity (le politique) imposes itself at once as a source of inquiries that touch on different levels, until the essential questions that ‘religious development’ lays down for the Christian.” See Philibert Secrétan, “La pensée politique de Paul Ricoeur,” in Vérité et pouvoir (1970) p. 117 (translation mine).
We present Ricoeur’s view on politics and the State in three stages. In a first stage, we consider the double biblical “readings” of the State. Here, the two interpretations—Pauline and Johannine—comprise the two possibilities simultaneously present in every State. In a second stage, we seek to understand the double history of power as it unfolds in the modern State. Here, we are confronted with the political paradox for the State holds, at the same time, the promise of rationality and the threat of violence. In view of this, there is a double political duty of Christians. In a third stage, we sketch this double political duty which consists in the promotion of rationality and in the exercise of critical vigilance with regard to the State.

A. The Double Biblical “Reading” of the State

According to Ricoeur, it is highly instructive to realize that the New Testament offers us not one but two interpretations of the State: St. Paul’s “reading” in terms of a “difficult justification” which sees the State in the figure of the “magistrate,” and St. John’s “reading” in terms of an “obstinate mistrust” which sees the State in the figure of the “beast.” Our task is to understand these two interpretations that make up the two possibilities simultaneously present in every State.

1. THE PAULINE INTERPRETATION OF THE STATE

In Chapter 13 of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul exhorts his Christian listeners—who are subjugated citizens in an ordered and relatively just State—to obey their lawful authorities, not out of fear of punish-

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2See Manuel Maceiras-Fafián, “La antropología hermenéutica de P. Ricoeur,” in Antropologías del siglo XX, dirigido por Juan de Sahagún Lucas, Hermeneia, 5 (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigüeme, 1976), p. 126. Maceiras-Fafián continues in the same passage: “His work bears witness to a responsible modernity that only acquires significance in the intention of understanding personal existence, absolutely involved in the world.” (translation mine from the Spanish). For Ricoeur’s plea for a type of philosophy wherein a political reflection is not an optional detour but an obligatory route, see “Le philosophe et le politique devant la question de la liberté” (1969), p. 41.

ment but by reason of conscience: He tells them: “For the magistrate is God’s minister for thy Good... ruling justly... when he faithfully fulfills his duty” (Romans 13: 1-7). This appeal sounds paradoxical immediately coming after St. Paul’s celebration of the love which creates reciprocal bonds, forgives, and returns good for evil. For the State, seen in the figure of the magistrate, does not create reciprocal bonds, does not forgive, and returns evil for evil. The magistrate punishes those who do wrong. His task is not the salvation of humanity but the maintenance of “institutions”: “Through him, one might say, a violent [pedagogy, a coercive] education of men as members of the historical communities that the State organizes and directs, is carried out.”

Here, we are clearly confronted with “two pedagogies of humankind, that of love and of justice, that of non-resistance and that of punishment, that of reciprocity and that of authority and submission, that of affection and that of fear.” How then are these two pedagogies connected? How is the pedagogy of coercion related to the pedagogy of charity? On this point, St. Paul does not enlighten us. He only knows that a tranquil and stable State is the necessary condition for Christian preaching. Thus, he makes the wager that the State realizes an intention of God and functions for the “good” of the citizens. One must admit that St. Paul has won his wager: “Mankind is not only preserved

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7“Etat et violence” (1957), in HV, 250; “State and Violence” (1965), in HT, 238.
through the medium of the political sphere, but is also established, elevated, and educated by it.”

While affirming the divine institution of the State, St. Paul makes room for another “reading” of the State. This time, he imagines a more or less personalized demon or “power” (puissance) dominating each State from behind. What is the value of this Pauline demonology? It points toward a very important intuition: the “powers”—which are also admitted by popular Judaism—have already been conquered on the Cross but are not yet annihilated. [The demonological myth manifests the ambiguity of the State—it belongs to the economy of salvation without belonging to it.] By means of this Pauline demonology, we are made aware of another aspect of the State. As “institution,” the State is not only a stable “order” but a dangerous “power.”

2. THE JOHANNINE INTERPRETATION OF THE STATE

In Chapter 13 of Revelation, St. John speaks of a “beast” wounded, probably mortally, but whose wound is temporarily healed. It is the figure of this “beast” which St. John uses to symbolize the State as evil power. This aspect of the State comes as no surprise if we recall the lessons of history: “The State is that reality which up to now has always included murder as the condition of its existence, of its survival, and first of all, of its inception.” What is the remarkable power wielded by this “beast”? It is not so much its irresistible force but its captivating power of seduction. Its sly charm, of course, masks its violence. It performs marvels by which it enslaves men who succumb to its lies, flattery, and mystification.

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9“Etat et violence” (1957), in HV, 252; “State and Violence” (1965), in HT, 240.
10Ibid., in HV, 255; ibid., in HT, 242. Ricoeur remarks that this is the bitter truth taught by Machiavelli in The Prince: To found a State, one must equip himself with the strength of the lion and the cunning of the fox.
11According to Ricoeur, the connection here between power and untruth brings to mind the Platonic critique of the “tyrant” in the Gorgias. The “tyrant” reigns only through the “sophist” who deforms language and debases the truth. See “Le paradoxe politique” (1957), in HV, 270-271, 283; “The Political Paradox” (1965), in HT, 256-257, 268-269.
What is the significance of this double biblical “reading” of the State? Ricoeur sums it up neatly:

... we henceforth know that it is not possible to adopt for ourselves either a religiously motivated anarchism under the pretext that the State does not confess Jesus Christ, or an apology for the State in the name of “Be obedient to the authorities.” The State is this dual-natured reality, simultaneously instituted and fallen.  

B. The Double History of Power

Of what use is the double biblical “reading” of the State? It can be of immense service in orienting ourselves politically. The modern State simultaneously advances on two fronts: that of the “institution” and that of “power.” It holds, at the same time, the promise of rationality and the threat of violence.

1. THE PROMISE OF RATIONALITY

One can say that the State progresses as an “institution” in history: “Inspite of their violent nature, empires have been influential in advancing law, knowledge, culture, the well-being of man, and the arts.” Beyond the decline and fall of empires, the whole of mankind continues “as one single man who constantly learns and remembers,” to use the words of Pascal. In a way, this promotion of humanity, brought about


by the State as "institution," historically confirms the wager [of St. Paul] that the state is instituted by God for the good of the citizens.

What are the signs of the institutional growth of the State through history? Ricoeur shows us the growth of rationality on four levels—legal, technical, civic, and socio-economic.

A. ON THE LEGAL PLANE

A first sign of institutional growth is the evolution of the State from an autocratic to a constitutional phase. All regimes seem to follow this common pattern. As soon as certain levels of material comfort, education, and leisure are reached, all regimes inevitably evolve from a dictatorial to a democratic form.16 We see them all searching for a balance between the necessity of concentrating power in order to make a decision possible, and the necessity of distributing power in order that the largest possible number of persons can participate in this decision.17 It is true that all regimes arose in violence. But we see force tending toward form, making itself durable while making itself legitimate: "Constitutionality is the legal expression of the movement by which the will of the State stabilizes itself in a law which defines power, distributes it, and limits it."18 It is also true that States fall into violence through wars and dictatorships but the legal heritage is passed on to another State who continues it. To sum up this first level, power is rationalized through legality expressed in the constitution.

B. ON THE TECHNICAL PLANE

A second sign of the institutional growth of the State is the rationalization of power by means of an administration. This important feature of the modern State should not be underestimated. We are confronted with a modern State when we see it, equipped with "the power capable of effecting a public function, a body of civil servants who prepare deci-

16"Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales" (1961), in HV, 288; "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" (1965), in HT, 273.
sions and enforce them without being themselves responsible for the political decision.”¹⁹ Politics has been radically altered by the appearance of the public administration as a neutral political body. Its development is an extension of technical rationality, more precisely, of the organization of labor in the industrial enterprise. To sum up this second level, power is rationalized through technicality expressed in the public administration.

C. ON THE CIVIC PLANE

A third sign of institutional growth is the organization of public discussion in modern societies. Discussion is a vital necessity for the modern State which receives its orientation and impetus from it. By means of discussion, its tendency to abuse power is curbed. For Ricoeur, the essence of democracy is discussion.²⁰ In this sense, he esteems that the term “democracy” be especially reserved to designate the degree of the participation of citizens in power by means of organized public discussions rather than using it to designate the constitutional phase which comes after the autocratic phase.²¹ Closely related with the organization of public discussion is the formation of public opinion in the strict sense, that is to say, “a public which has opinions and an opinion which is given public expression.”²² What this, of course, entails is a free press that belongs to its readers, that is not controlled by the State—a press whose freedom of information and expression is constitutionally and economically assured.

¹⁹“Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales” (1961), in HV, 289; “Universal Civilization and National Cultures” (1965), in HT, 273. The modern State, qua State, has a recognizable universal form. According to Ricoeur, Hegel is the first philosopher to have reflected on this form of universality. In the Philosophy of Right, he shows that one of the aspects of human rationality, and of universality, is the growth of the State which institutes laws and develops the means for enforcing them by means of an administration. See also “Ye Art the Salt of the Earth” (1958), in PSE, 111.


²¹“La crise de la démocratie et de la conscience chrétienne”(1947), pp. 320, 322.

D. ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PLANE

A fourth sign of institutional growth is the appearance of large-scale planning in the modern State. The rejection of chance and fatalism in favor of planning and calculation manifests the triumph of rationality in the social and economic sectors of the life of the community. In this connection, Ricoeur attests his preference for a brand of “socialism” that brings about the transition from a “market economy” to a “planned economy.”

In contrast to a “market economy” wherein economic units compete for their individual profit, a “planned economy” is managed by “organizations representing the common interest whose fundamental purpose is the maximum satisfaction of real needs in the order of urgency.”

A “planned economy” is thus more responsive to human needs. In planning for the common good, socialism manifests rationality in the economic sphere.

2. THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE

At the same time that one brings out the institutional progress of the State, one must also point out another aspect which bares the deep-seated ambiguity of political reality: “All growth in the institution is also growth in power and in the threat of tyranny.”

The same State, viewed under the sign of rationality, can also be viewed under the sign of violence. What are the signs of the threat in violence and tyranny of the State?

A. ON THE LEGAL PLANE

As proven by the events in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, constitutions can serve as subterfuges for despotic rule. The modern despot does not abolish the constitution but rather bends it or “interprets” it to suit his own designs. He draws from it the legal resources of justifying and consolidating his corrupt regime: special powers, special legislations,
plurality of offices. Although authority is not culpable in itself, it can be the occasion of unleashing the “passions of power” by which the tyrant exercises a unifying function.26

B. ON THE TECHNICAL PLANE

For the unscrupulous tyrant, the public administration provides the technical means for a long-lasting and organized exploitation of the people. The central administration of the modern State is transformed into a tyrannic bureaucracy. It is a fact that whenever an oligarchy—be it technocratic[al], political, military, or ecclesiastic[al]—establishes itself, it tends to make the administrative apparatus a means of domination and not an instrument of service.27 In this way, the functionaries of public administration become imbued with an inhuman mentality, administering things to people in an anonymous, objectified, and abstract way.

C. ON THE CIVIC PLANE

The violence of the State is seen in the temptation to obscure truth in its elaboration and to enforce falsehood through techniques of manipulation of public opinion.28 This is done by exposing the public to “ideologies” that are rational in their outlines but extreme in their themes.29 Before this ideological onslaught, the citizen retreats into his refuge of

26“Vérité et mensonge” (1951), in HV, 177, 191; “Truth and Falsehood” (1965), in HT, 176, 189. In another essay, Ricoeur makes the observation that “the universe of concentration camps in our day has carried the alienation of the passion whose theme is power to the dimensions of a caricature.” See “Méthodes et tâches d’une phénoménologie de la volonté” (1952), p. 137; “Methods and Tasks of a Phenomenology of the Will” (1967), in HAP, 230.
28“La crise de la vérité et la pression du mensonge dans la civilisation actuelle” (1953), p. 11.
private comfort, failing to protest against the abuse of power and to stand up for his rights. This surrender of the active responsible citizen enforces the centralization and personalization of power. This personalization of power finds expression in the well-known "one-man rule" or "one-party rule" which distorts public opinion by a whole array of mass-media propaganda and by blocking the citizen's free access to sources of information.

D. ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PLANE

Large-scale planning gives to the central power methods of pressure on the individual that no bourgeois State has succeeded in accumulating: the monopoly of ownership of the means of production, monopoly of employment, monopoly of provisions, monopoly of financial resources and therefore of the press, culture, scientific research, art, and thought. It is even more disquieting when the State, as sovereign power, assumes the monopoly of the interpretation of history and ends all discussion on truth by a decree of orthodoxy. When the State becomes the be-all and end-all of everything, the caricature of religion that is demonization begins. Inasmuch as history and the reason of history are for it, the State begins to practise what Ricoeur calls a "short totalization" (totalisation courte) or the "premature violent syntheses."  

30Ricoeur does not advocate the abolition of the State. He is well aware that there will always be the need for the social organization that can only be provided by the State. He believes then in strengthening the authority of the State but not its power.

31"Le paradoxe politique" (1957), in HV, 283; "The Political Paradox" (1965), in HT, 268: "The independent exercise of justice and the independent formation of opinion are the two lungs of a politically sound State. Without these, there is asphyxiation."


It also pays to realize that the improvement in the administration of things is [also] a reinforcement of the governing over persons. The allocation of great financial resources on a plan entails a series of global decisions which bear on individuals and the meaning of their lives. Planning implies a choice with regard to the satisfaction of human needs and the utilization of resources at hand. But this choice is much more than a matter of economies. It is also an ethics in action, involving “a wager on a conception of man, his needs, and his destiny.” It implies a general politics—a long term project on the orientation of the human community: “A plan is a technique serving a global project, a civilizing project animated by implicit values, in short, a project which in the last analysis pertains to man’s very nature.”

C. The Double Political Duty of Christians

In elaborating the Christian task in politics, it is imperative to observe two essential rules. First, one cannot legitimately disengage a political course of action from the Bible. As we have seen, a more refined biblical exegesis has made us aware that it is impossible to link the kerygmatic proclamation with the concepts of political philosophy. Why is this the case? It is because every political commitment results from the confluence of “a religious or ethical conviction with information of an


38“Le paradoxe politique” (1957), in HV, 279; “The Political Paradox” (1965), in HT, 265.
39See above, p. 43.
essentially profane character, with a situation which defines a limited field of possibilities and available means, and with a more or less hazardous choice." The confrontation of these factors gives rise to tensions which are inherent to political action. On the one hand, when the ethical conviction is not counterweighted by a consideration of means, it inevitably leads to purism which demands nothing else short of perfection. For the law of ethical conviction is the law of all or nothing: "If thou art not perfect in every respect, thou art not perfect at all." On the other hand, when the consideration of means is not counterbalanced by a meditation on ends, it easily leads to cynicism. Political action, in charting its course, must avoid these two pitfalls of purism and cynicism. Second, one must get rid of the illusion that the Church exercises a direct political function in society. In Ricoeur's opinion, political action undertaken by the Church only prolongs the death throes of a clerical Christianity which is a scandal to both believers and unbelievers.

Under the working hypothesis of the political responsibility of the individual Christian, Ricoeur then delineates the course of action from the double biblical "reading" of the State. According to him, we have to acknowledge a double political duty for ourselves as Christians if we accept the double "reading": "... we ought simultaneously to improve the political institution in the direction of greater rationality and to exercise vigilance against the abuse of power inherent in State power."

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41 Ricoeur remarks: "Politics is never subject to this law; its achievements can never be more than relatively good. That is why the politician is faced by a terrible problem; it is not the problem of maintaining his innocence, but that of limiting his culpability." See "Ye Art the Salt of the Earth" (1958), in PSE, 121 (Ricoeur's emphases).


1. THE TASK OF PROMOTING RATIONALITY IN THE STATE

What kind of institutional reforms must we implement to promote rationality in the State?

First of all, we have to bring about constitutional reforms which take into account the emergence of a "planetary consciousness"—the awareness of belonging to a single human experience.44 We have to create new structures which adapt "the constitutional reality to the historical, cultural, human reality of the modern world."45 These new structures would enable us to move from the multiplicity of sovereign nations to a universal State—an educator-State geared toward freedom—which would pursue the global interests of mankind.

Secondly, we have to revitalize the parties. Here, one should not be too hasty in dismissing the experiment of multiple parties.46 The system of the pluralism of parties does not only reflect the tension between social groups, which is determined by the division of society into classes, but enables citizens to hold public discussions in order to formulate their opinions.47 For after all, politics has to do with opinions.48


46Ricoeur attributes the practice of the monopolistic party as one of the factors in the petrifaction of Marxism: "The idea that there exists a group of men who hold a monopoly on the interpretation of history in its entirety, the idea that this group of men constitutes the sole perspective on the totality—such ideas are the source of all the dogmatism that has congealed Marxism." See "Du marxisme au communisme contemporain," Christianisme social (où va la classe ouvrière?) 67 (1959), p. 158; "From Marxism to Contemporarism" (1974), translated by Kirk Augustine, in PSE, 226-227. For Ricoeur’s more recent critique of Marxism, see "Le ‘Marx’ de Michel Henry," Esprit (October 1978), No, 10, pp. 124-139.

47"Le paradoxe politique" (1957), in HV, 284; "The Political Paradox" (1965), in HT, 270.

48According to Ricoeur, the idea of politics as science must be exposed as false: "The level of this fundamental political function remains ‘opinion’ in the Platonic sense, or better, the probable, as Aristotle viewed it; there is never but a political ‘probabilism.” See "Vérité et mensonge" (1951), in HV, 192; "Truth and Falsehood" (1965), in HT, 190.
Indeed, a "right to error" is an indispensable political function.\textsuperscript{49} It is therefore in the interest of democracy that multiple parties exist.

Thirdly, we have to invent new ways of getting the people to participate in power or to influence the division of power within the State. The key problem of democracy concerns the control of the State by the people.\textsuperscript{50} This democratic control is not exhausted by the system of the pluralism of parties, the practice of "free elections" and parliamentary representations. We have to create a network of liaisons between the State and associations representing the diverse interests of workers: "If an economy of work is intended which makes work the dominant economic category, only a politics in which workers were represented as workers would make of that economy of work a civilization of workers."\textsuperscript{51}

Fourthly, we have to strengthen the authority of the State.\textsuperscript{52} By this, one should not understand "increasing the indirect power of various pressure groups on a weak State with an unchanged centralizing structure resting on artificial parties without substance or internal democracy."\textsuperscript{53} More positively, strengthening the authority of the State means that the civil power has authority over the military force, the police agency, and the administration, and that the power of decision belongs to the executive who is accountable only to the representatives of the people and to special interest groups. The task then is to let the State

\textsuperscript{49}"Travail et parole" (1953), in HV, 230; "Work and the Word" (1965), in HT, 216. On the risk involved in a political commitment, see "Socialisme et christianisme," Etre 1 (1936-1937), No. 4 (10 March), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{50}See "Le philosophe et le politique devant la question de la liberté" (1969), p. 63.


\textsuperscript{52}In this connection, the Marxist-Leninist substitution of the problem of the withering away of the State for the problem of State control is disastrous: "The thesis of the future withering away of the State serves as a cloak and an alibi for the perpetuation of terrorism." See "Le paradoxe politique" (1957), in HV, 276; "The Political Paradox" (1965), in HT, 262.

be—direct, organize, and make decisions so that we may realize our humanity—but not be too much, not lead to tyranny.  

2. **THE TASK OF EXERCISING VIGILANCE**

The task of promoting rationality in the State goes hand in hand with the task of exercising vigilance against the abuse of power inherent in the State. This alert vigilance must be put to work on different levels.

First of all, we have to exercise a *critical* vigilance on the level of thought. The Platonic, Machiavellian, and Marxist critique of power has made us only too aware of the possibilities for perversions in political power. Our critical vigilance slackens then as soon as we reduce political alienation to economic exploitation. For it is not enough to eliminate economic evils in order to have a good politics. An appreciation of the originality of political evils is a prerequisite in the vigilance against the abuse of political power.

Secondly, we have to exercise a *moral* vigilance. Here, we awaken and challenge the State to be faithful to the very ideals and values on which it is founded. As citizens, we have the duty not only to serve these ideals but also to denounce the actions of the State that betray these ideals. These protests—like protests against torture, discrimination, war—may appear "illegal" but ultimately, they reaffirm the "good" on which the State is founded.

Thirdly, we have to exercise a specifically *political* vigilance which rejoins the institutional reforms previously mentioned. We have to *limit* the power of the State at the same time that we strengthen its authority. In advancing towards a *socialist State*—wherein the State plays a preponderant role in socio-economic matters—we must also move towards a *liberal politics* which has always consisted of two essential things:

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the division of power among powers, and the control of executive power by popular representation.\(^{57}\)

The division of power among powers involves the insurance of the independence of the judicial branch.\(^{58}\) It also involves the guarantee of the cultural sector which includes the university, the press media, scientific investigation, and literary-artistic creation.\(^{59}\) However, the division of power implies the control of the executive power. Here again, it is necessary to expose the illusion of the withering away of the State. If it is desirable that the repressive military and police apparatus of the bourgeois State disappear, it is not desirable that the State qua power of organization and decision must wither away. As the State cannot wither away, the task is to limit its power when its authority is being strengthened. This can be done through control by the citizens. Instead of a downward movement of sovereignty from above, there is an upward movement from below—the popular base. For a liberal politics, this upward movement from below "must be willed, prepared, defended, and extended against (the) tendency of power to eliminate the forces from which it comes."\(^{60}\)

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this consideration of the thought of Paul Ricoeur, we set out to answer the question: What is the meaning of being human? We proceeded to answer this seemingly simple question by putting ourselves before two sets of texts—the *Philosophy of the Will* and the Social-Political Writings. Patiently and carefully, we worked ourselves through these texts instead of merely skirting around them. For we believe that these texts have not been given the attention and importance due them in the growing scholarship on Ricoeur's thought in English. As a consequence, the global philosophical message of Ricoeur fails to come across the piecemeal discussions on the various (and perhaps, too numerous) investigations or "detours" in which Ricoeur has involved himself.

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\(^{57}\)See "Note critique sur 'Chine ouverte,'" *Esprit* 24 (June 1956), p. 910.

\(^{58}\)"Le paradoxe politique" (1957), in HV, 282; "The Political Paradox" (1965), in HT, 267-268.


We also made the wager—in what we hope to have been a *creative repetition* of Ricoeur's thought—that a vital bond unites the *Philosophy of the Will* and the Social-Political Writings. Our "reading" in terms of the conjoint theme of responsibility and hope represented the effort to win this wager. It is our task now to see whether this wager has been won.

There are two movements, which have to be distinguished and then conjugated, in the sources studied here if they are to bestow us with Ricoeur's global vision of the meaning of being human: the one designated by the expression "first Copernican revolution," the other by the expression "second Copernican revolution." In a key passage in *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, Ricoeur clearly states:

The beginning of philosophy is a Copernican revolution which centers the world of object on the Cogito: the object is for the subject, the involuntary is for the voluntary, motives are for choice, capacities for effort, necessity for consent. The whole is the horizon of my subjectivity in the sense of this *first Copernican revolution*.\(^{61}\)

The "first Copernican revolution" signifies then the *centering of the world of objects on subjectivity*. Ricoeur, however, quickly adds in the same key passage:

But the deepening of subjectivity calls for a *second Copernican revolution* which displaces the center of reference from subjectivity to Transcendence. I am not this center and I can only invoke it and admire it in the ciphers which are its scattered symbols.\(^{62}\)

The "second Copernican revolution" thus means the *decentering of subjectivity* or its *recentering on Transcendence* which nourishes it. This "decentering" demands a radically new approach. It involves the shattering of the sterile circle that the self makes with itself—the "death of Self" and its receptivity to the "gift of being."\(^{63}\)

In the *Philosophy of the Will*, we discern these two movements—the *centering* of the world of objects on subjectivity and the *decentering* of

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\(^{61}\)VI, 443; FN, 471-472.  
\(^{62}\)VI, 443-444; FN, 472.  
\(^{63}\)VI, 32-33; FN, 30.
subjectivity on Transcendence. On the one hand, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, a whole work accomplished under the sign of the “first Copernican revolution,” takes up the movement of rooting consciousness to the body. On the other hand, *L’homme faible* and particularly *La symbolique du mal*, which inaugurates a rupture in method, takes the movement of opening consciousness to Transcendence.

It is of utmost importance not only to distinguish but also to conjugate these two movements. For Ricoeur insists that these two movements imply each other and only make full sense when taken together. To quote another key passage:

... in breaking up the narrow circle which the self tends to close with itself and in revealing an ability not only to posit, but also to receive at the heart of freedom, our meditation on incarnation prepares the conception of a far more intimate reception which freedom achieves in its power of positing acts. Perhaps the body is an insecure form of Transcendence and the patience which leans on the insurmountable bodily condition is a veiled form of yielding to Transcendence.  

The very movement then of immersing myself in my incarnate situation is the counterpart of the movement of surging towards Transcendence. In this sense, my incarnate situation is like the jumping board towards transcendence from above, the only one which, according to Ricoeur, finally merits the name of Transcendence.

What the Philosophy of the Will thus unfolds is a global vision of being human as the point of convergence of two movements—the movement of consenting to a necessity that limits us and the movement of affirming an origin of meaning that promotes us in our desire to be and effort to exist. In our study, we name the first movement the movement of responsibility, and the second the movement of hope. Conjugating these two movements, we uncover what we take to be the meaning of being human according to Paul Ricoeur. The meaning of human existence is to be found in the creative interplay between responsibility and hope—Responsibility as Consent to Necessity and Hope as Affirmation of Transcendence. In these capital themes are summed up what we would

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64VI, 36; FN, 34 (emphases added).
like to safeguard and to share—to act on and to reflect upon—as the philosophical message of Paul Ricoeur.

If we turn to Ricoeur’s Social-Political Writings, we also discern the two movements of responsibility and hope—centering and decentering—being held in dynamic equilibrium. Is it indeed more than a happy coincidence that he constantly refers to the dialectic between the “ethics of responsibility” and the “ethics of hope” in his reflections on civilization and culture, on the Christian and society, and on politics and the State?

The Ricoeurian reflection on responsibility understood as consent to necessity masterly resumes what may be the lesson to retain from the thinkers of modernity—Spinoza’s understanding of necessity, Marx’ celebration of reality, Nietzsche’s love of destiny, and Freud’s resignation to life. And yet, there is something novel in Ricoeur’s philosophical enterprise. For although it assumes what is truly “modern,” it goes beyond it and in a sense, even against it. It brings to the sadness of the finite the Joy of Yes, to the resignation to the necessary the passion for the possible, to the radical negation the vehemence of the primary affirmation. At the root of Ricoeur’s philosophical enterprise is a metaphysical decision on the being of being human and consequently, on the being of Transcendence: “Here lies the most fundamental choice of philosophy: either God or I”65

The global project of Ricoeur is nourished by the experience of a participation in a creative source of meaning. It is, for us, the philosophical approximation of what is said in the Gospel: “Who would save his life must lose it.” The great task for it remains to decenter the self—to effect that conversion by which we may be able to recover that second naïveté “to believe that God Himself, wishing to be known and loved freely, ran this risk which is named Man.”66

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65VI, 449; FN, 477.
List of Abbreviations


